

PASSOVER

Passover is a Jewish holiday. It celebrates the end of slavery for Jews in Egypt. It is observed in the spring. Passover is a *movable feast*, which means that it is celebrated on a different calendar day every year.

Over three thousand years ago, Jewish people lived in Egypt as slaves. They were not treated very well, and it was a very difficult and sad time for them. They had a leader, Moses, who spoke to the *Pharaoh*, or king, many times and tried to persuade him to let the Jews leave Egypt. Moses asked the Pharaoh to “let my people go” but the Pharaoh was unyielding.

Since the Pharaoh wouldn’t change his mind, Moses prayed and asked God to help him. God sent *plagues*, or sudden disasters, such as disease, insect infestations, and terrible weather, to Egypt. The plagues were meant to punish the Egyptian people, and to make the Pharaoh change his mind. There were ten plagues, but after each one the Pharaoh still wouldn’t let the Jewish people go.

The last plague was the death of the first-born son in every house. God warned the Jewish people about this plague so that they wouldn’t be hurt. They put lamb’s blood on their doors, so that their houses would be “passed over” by the plague. After the last plague, the Pharaoh finally *relented*, or gave in.

The Jews were freed. But they had to leave Egypt in a terrible hurry. They didn’t have time to pack or prepare food for their journey. If they were baking bread, they didn’t have time to wait for it to rise. They had to bake the bread without using yeast, using just the heat of the sun to make cracker-bread. They ran from Egypt. But the Pharaoh’s soldiers chased them. It was very scary, and when they came to the Red Sea, they didn’t know what to do. They had to cross it, but they couldn’t.

Moses raised his *staff*, or walking stick, and the Red Sea divided. The Jewish people ran through the parted sea to the other side. They were finally away from the Pharaoh and free from Egypt.

Passover is a celebration of this story. It is an eight day holiday, and has many traditions involved. The first two nights of Passover have meals called *Seders*. The Seder meal is eaten with special plates. At Seder, particular foods are eaten to *commemorate*, or help remember, the escape from Egypt. For example, families celebrating Passover eat *matzoh*. Matzoh is a kind of *unleavened* bread, or bread without yeast. This helps the celebrating families remember how the Jewish people in the story didn’t have time to let their bread rise. They eat foods dipped in salt water, to help them remember the tears of their ancestors. They eat horseradish or other bitter herbs, to help them remember the bitter times in Egypt. They eat eggs and parsley to commemorate the arrival of spring and to celebrate a new beginning. They drink four glasses of wine, each of which represents a stage in the escape from Egypt. All of the food must be *kosher*, or prepared in a way that is acceptable under Jewish rules.

There are many other important parts of Passover. One of the most important is that Passover is a time for children. It is especially a time for children to ask questions, so that they understand traditions. It is also a time for children to have fun, playing special games and helping their families.

Name _____ Date _____

ANSWER THE QUESTIONS ABOUT PASSOVER

1. How did Passover probably get its name?
 - a. It's a kind of bread.
 - b. It commemorates the Jewish word for Egypt.
 - c. Because the plague passed over the Jewish people.
 - d. From a sport played on all Jewish holidays.
2. Passover is observed in all of these ways EXCEPT
 - a. eating special foods
 - b. asking questions
 - c. drinking wine
 - d. decorating eggs
3. Who was the leader of the Jewish people in Egypt?
 - a. Moses
 - b. Pharoah
 - c. Jacob
 - d. Matzoh
4. Unleavened bread means
 - a. bread without yeast
 - b. bread that is baked outside
 - c. bread that is eaten for Passover
 - d. uncooked bread
5. Kosher food is food that
 - a. is delicious and hot
 - b. is prepared according to Jewish laws
 - c. does not contain yeast
 - d. is only for children
6. A plague is
 - a. a disease
 - b. a swarm of insects
 - c. bad weather
 - d. all of these

MARK THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES T for TRUE, OR F for FALSE

7. ____ Passover is a Jewish holiday
8. ____ Passover is celebrated in the summer.
9. ____ Passover is a special holiday for friends.
10. ____ A movable feast is celebrated at the same time every year, in a different place.
11. ____ Passover foods are dipped in salt water to remind people of the Red Sea.
12. ____ Passover foods are eaten off everyday plates.
13. ____ Asking questions is an important part of Passover.