

Passover (Pesach)

In the story of Exodus, you will recall how the Israelites smeared lamb's blood on their doorposts on the night of Passover. They did this to avoid the tenth plague God sent to Pharaoh, the death of all first-born Egyptian children. Seeing the sign, God literally "passed over" their houses.

The Festival of Passover, or *Pesach*, as it is called in Hebrew, falls in the Hebrew month of Nisan (see page 39 for a list of Jewish months and holidays) in late March or April. It commemorates freedom from slavery and the Exodus from Egypt. Families and friends gather to share a special meal called a *Seder* and to tell the story of Passover from a special book called a *Haggadah*. Special foods are also eaten that remind them of the hardship of slavery and the miracle of being taken out of Egypt.

At the center of a Seder table is a special plate known as a Seder plate, containing five (or sometimes six) items of food.

Maror: a bitter herb, usually horseradish, representing the bitterness of slavery

Charoset: a mixture of apples, walnuts, cinnamon, and wine, resembling the mortar which the Israelites used to build the Egyptian cities

Z'roah: a roasted bone, often a shankbone of a lamb, representing the Passover offering

Beitzah: a roasted egg representing the new life of springtime

Karpas: a green vegetable, usually parsley, representing spring and eaten dipped in salt water, representing the tears of slavery

Hazeret: Some Seder plates have a sixth place for another bitter vegetable, usually romaine lettuce, also representing the bitterness of slavery.

You also find the following items on a Seder table:

Matzah: unleavened bread representing the bread which did not have time to rise when the Israelites left Egypt in a great hurry (Matzah also represents bread of poverty, reminding Jews of the hardship of slavery.)

Wine or grape juice: Each person drinks four cups, representing God's promise to the Jews to take them out of slavery.