

Passover, April 5th to April 13th, 2023



In Ferris Bueller's Day Off, a self-pitying Cameron sulks in bed and cries, "When Cameron was in Egypt's land/Let my Cameron go"—a riff on the African-American spiritual song "Go Down Moses." While it's one of the movie's more memorable comedic moments, the song actually references the Hebrew Bible story of Exodus—Moses' liberation of the Israelite slaves in Egypt—commemorated every year during the Jewish holiday of Passover.

The history of Passover

Jews all over the world celebrate Passover for seven days (or eight, if they're traditional Jews living outside of Israel) and, while the date varies annually, it's always the same on the Jewish lunar calendar: the 15th day of Nissan, the first month of the Hebrew monthly calendar year, typically falling in mid-spring.

According to the Hebrew Bible, Moses asked the Egyptian leader, Pharaoh, to free the Israelite slaves and was rejected repeatedly. So Moses warned Pharaoh that God would punish Egypt with 10 plagues: water turning to blood, frogs, lice, flies, livestock pestilence, boils, hail, locusts, darkness and the killing of firstborn children.

God told Moses to alert the Israelites to mark their homes so He would know to "pass over" their houses when casting down the last plague—hence the holiday's name.

The Seder Tradition

After sundown the night before the first official day of Passover, Jews conduct the Seder, a special ceremony during which they retell the story of their ancestors' liberation. During the Seder, family members read from the Haggadah, Passover's own story book, and sing traditional holiday songs.

A Seder plate containing five items—each a fundamental part of the ceremony and symbolic of an element of Exodus—sits on the table.

There is a spring vegetable, such as parsley, which is dipped in salt water and eaten to resemble the taste of their ancestors' sweat and tears.

"Maror," usually horseradish or romaine lettuce, serves as a reminder of the bitter oppression of slavery and Pharaoh's difficult-to-swallow decree to drown Israelites' male infants.

"Charoset," a mixture of chopped apples, nuts, wine, and honey, recalls the mortar Israelites used to build cities for Pharaoh.

A roasted shank bone, which represents the Passover sacrificial offering and

A Roasted egg, symbolizing rebirth and renewal, are always on the plate, though they aren't actually eaten.

In addition, four cups of wine are drunk throughout the Seder. The wine symbolizes the four stages of redemption that the Israelites experienced. A fifth cup is set aside for "Elijah" and not imbibed; this cup represents the hope for future redemption.

The Seder can last several hours, but, while lengthy, it's not intended to drag—even for those with shorter attention spans. One of the goals is to engage children in a dialogue about the meaning of the festival. There is a longstanding history of doing amusing things to keep the children interested including singing a variety of Passover songs at the end of the Seder.

The mood also lightens as the Seder progresses. At the beginning, it is serious and sombre because the participants recall the cruelty of Pharaoh's enslavement and infanticide. But as the telling of the story proceeds and the Jewish people are liberated, the mood turns happy."



The Sedar Meal

The Seder is followed by a festive Seder meal, which varies greatly among households, but may include chicken, salmon, or beef brisket. However, you'll never find challah or any other bread made with yeast on the table. Instead, Jews consume matzah, a flat, cracker-like unleavened bread.

The Israelites fled Egypt so quickly, the bread dough had not had a chance to rise," explains Steven L. Jacobs, author of *The Jewish Experience*. "Thus the matzah, or flat bread, became the staple and has evolved into all different kinds of products made with matzah meal, or unleavened dough." In fact, some Jews take it a step farther and refrain from eating any food containing grains, corn, rice, and legumes for the duration of Passover.

What is Passover?

Passover (or Pesach) celebrates when the Jews were freed from Egyptian slavery. In the Bible, God visited 10 plagues on the Egyptians, while "passing over" Jewish households.

When is Passover?

Because Passover changes according to the Jewish lunar calendar, it's on a different date every year. It's usually celebrated in March or April.

When does Passover Start and End?

Passover usually lasts for seven days, though some celebrate for eight. Passover 2023 begins on the evening of Wednesday, April 5, and ends on the evening of Thursday, April 13.

How do I send Passover Greetings?

You can start simply with a "happy holidays," "happy Passover," or just "thinking of you" or "best wishes." You could also use Hebrew greetings like "chag sameach" (happy holidays) or "chag Pesach sameach" (happy Passover).

What is Afikomen?

To help keep kids entertained during the Seder ceremony, a small piece of matzah is hidden. The lucky child who finds it gets a small gift.

What Should I Bring as a Seder Guest?

If you're lucky enough to be invited to a friend's Seder meal, a traditional host or hostess gift would be appreciated, though you may want to keep in mind the Passover traditions like not using leaveners (so skip the baked goods). Wine, which is part of the celebration, is a lovely gesture.

Pesach in the Coming Years

2023: April 5-13
2024: April 22-30
2025: April 12-20
2026: April 1-9
2027: April 21-29

When Is the Seder?

The Seder feast is held on the first two nights of Passover (just the first night in Israel), after nightfall.

2023: The nights of April 5 and 6
2024: The nights of April 22 and 23
2025: The nights of April 12 and 13
2026: The nights of April 1 and 2
2027: The nights of April 21 and 22

Note: The Jewish calendar date begins at sundown of the night beforehand. Thus all holiday observances begin at sundown on the secular dates listed, with the following day being the first full day of the holiday. (Thus, the first Passover seder is held on the evening of the first date listed.) Jewish calendar dates conclude at nightfall.

The first two days of Passover (from sundown of the first date listed, until nightfall two days later) are full-fledged, no-work-allowed holiday days. The subsequent four days are Chol Hamoed, when work is allowed, albeit with restrictions. Chol Hamoed is followed by another two full holiday days.