



The Passover Experience

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LESSON 1

God Sends a Deliverer

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Through these three lessons, students of the Bible will understand the underlying principles of the Jewish celebration of Passover which are:

1. **That God hears the cries of His people;**
2. **That God is present in human life; and**
3. **That God intervenes in history to deliver man from affliction and to redeem him from oppression.**

KEY BIBLE VERSE

The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey..." — Exodus 3:7-8



SCRIPTURE
TO READ

Exodus 3:1–4:31

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

The story of the Exodus has its roots in Genesis. Four hundred years earlier, Jacob and his sons had settled in the land of Goshen because of the famine in Canaan. There they prospered, thanks in large part to Joseph (Genesis 46:28–47:27). Eventually, Joseph died, as did the Pharaoh whom he served. That is when life began to change for the Israelites.

We pick up the story in Exodus 1. The population of the Israelites had grown to such proportions that they posed a perceived threat to the new Pharaoh (Exodus 1:9–10). To deal with this growing problem, Pharaoh enslaved the Israelites and forced them to build his great cities. When that proved ineffective, Pharaoh took more drastic measures, ordering the Hebrew midwives to kill all the male babies at birth.

When the midwives refused to obey the Pharaoh, he issued another edict to his people: throw all the Hebrew male babies into the Nile River. Yet, God overturned the Egyptian’s final scheme in a most unusual way, through the birth and divine deliverance of a particular Hebrew boy, Moses (Exodus 2:1–10). The story of Moses is a familiar one. The Pharaoh’s own daughter discovered Moses floating in a basket in the Nile River and, having compassion on the baby, adopted him as her own. Moses grew up with all the privileges of an Egyptian prince, yet apparently never forgot his Hebrew roots.

When he was 40, Moses killed an Egyptian for his brutal treatment of a Hebrew slave. When Moses discovered that there were witnesses to his crime, he fled the country to Midian. Our study picks up when Moses is a shepherd, tending his flocks.

THE CALL OF MOSES

1. Where was Moses and what was he doing when the angel of the Lord appeared to him? (Exodus 3:1–2)



This bush at Mt. Sinai is said to be similar to the burning bush from which God spoke to Moses. It is believed that this type of bush lives for hundreds of years.

2. Who called Moses from the burning bush and how did He identify Himself? (3:4–6)



Mt. Sinai in the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt.

3. Why did God say He was appearing to Moses in this way? (3:7) What reassurances does this offer in your own situation right now? What does this tell you about God’s character?

4. What did God tell Moses He had come to do for His people? (3:8) Through whom was God going to bring His people out of Egypt? (3:10)

5. In verses 3:11– 4:16, Moses raises several objections to God’s command to him. Complete the chart below, identifying Moses’ objections and God’s responses to him.

Scripture	Moses’ Objection	God’s Response
3:11-12		
3:13-15		
4:1-9		
4:10-12		

6. After all that, Moses still pleaded with God to send someone else. How did God respond? (4:14–17) What does this reveal about Moses? What does this reveal about God?

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

It might be easy to sit back and criticize Moses for his “lack of faith” and reluctance to obey God. Yet, consider your own situation today. In what areas is God calling you to obey Him? How would you describe your willingness—or reluctance—to obey Him right now? In what ways can you have confidence that God will enable you to obey Him?

The good news for Moses, and for ourselves, is that our ability to carry out a God-given assignment does not depend upon ourselves, but wholly on the One who is all-powerful, all-loving, and all-knowing. Keep your eyes focused on God and His resources, not your own.

EXTRA CREDIT

Read Psalm 73. Reflect on how Asaph’s experience parallels that of the Israelites in Egypt. How does his situation help him to focus on God? How did the Israelites’ situation help them to understand their need for God?

The sense of helplessness that comes from suffering can often be a first step toward freedom. The truth for the Israelites, for Asaph, and for us is that we can never find spiritual freedom from within. We, like Israel and Asaph, need to look away from ourselves and focus on God.

7. In 3:16–22, God gives Moses His plan for delivering His children. What response did God say the following groups would have to Moses’ message?

Scripture	Response to Moses’ message
<p>The Israelites (v. 18)</p>	
<p>The King of Egypt (vv. 19-20)</p>	
<p>The Egyptians (vv. 21-22)</p>	

8. How does knowing their responses beforehand help Moses? How does it hinder him?

9. When Moses and Aaron meet with the leaders of Israel, what is their response? (vv. 29-31) What is your response to knowing that God cares deeply about you?

10. What truths do you learn about God from this study? What encourages you for today? For the week ahead?

Sources

Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, *How Firm a Foundation*, Paraclete Press, Brewster, Massachusetts, 1997
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LESSON 2

Pharaoh's Hardened Heart

KEY BIBLE VERSE

But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said.

— Exodus 7:22, after the first plague



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Exodus 7:14–11:10

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Even prior to appearing before Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron already were well aware of how difficult the task ahead of them was. God told them, “*But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go*” (3:20). Indeed, before God sent the first plague, Pharaoh had been warned of the ultimate stakes (Exodus 4:21–23).

There is a distinct pattern to the plagues that God brings upon the Egyptians. First, God employs the forces of nature to demonstrate His power over His creation. Second, the plagues are designed to mock the gods of Egypt, showing that God is in control over aspects the Egyptians believed only their gods controlled. Third, the plagues increase in intensity as Pharaoh's heart continues to harden—and be hardened by God.

At first Pharaoh's magicians are able to mimic the miracles of the plagues. Eventually, they concede defeat. As the plagues become more severe, Pharaoh begins to bargain with Moses. But once the plague is removed, Pharaoh stubbornly refuses to let the people go.

The first three plagues cause discomfort. The second three are more than just irritating — they are personally painful and destructive. The plagues hit closer and closer to home, especially for Pharaoh, and they also become specific and discriminative. From the fourth plague on, God distinguishes between the Israelites and the Egyptians. The Egyptians suffer, but the Israelites are exempt. The third series of plagues not only produces selective destruction, but a growing sense of dread on the part of the Egyptians. With the last plague—

which strikes at the very heart of Pharaoh and his family— God struck his final blow. Pharaoh’s will was broken, and the Israelites were released from their suffering and bondage.



The pyramids at Giza, on the outskirts of Cairo, Egypt.

THE PLAGUES

1. Look up the following Bible verses and fill in the chart below.

Scripture	What happened and to whom?	Pharaoh’s response
7:14-24		
8:1-15		
8:16-19		
8:20-32		
9:1-7		
9:8-12		
9:13-35		
10:1-20		
10:21-29		
11:1-12:30		

2. After the fifth plague, something changes in Pharaoh’s response. What happens, and what do you think is its significance?

3. What does it mean to have a hardened heart?



The Sphinx of Giza.

4. Watch "A Hard and Heavy Heart" video clip, from *Returning to Zion* at ifcj.org/learn/resource-library/returning-to-zion/. Based on the video, in what respect did God harden Pharaoh's heart? In what respect is Pharaoh responsible for his hardened heart?

5. According to the *Torah*, we have the ability to choose good or to choose evil. How important is this concept to our faith?

YOUR RESPONSE

6. What would be some warning signs that your heart is becoming hardened?

7. Read Hebrews 3:12–13. What is one cause of a hardened heart according to this passage?

8. How would you describe the “deceitfulness of sin”?
Why would that cause a heart to harden?

9. According to the passage, how can we avoid a hardened heart?
How can we help each other avoid being deceived by sin and
having our hearts hardened?

Sources

Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, *How Firm a Foundation*, Paraclete Press, Brewster, Massachusetts, 1997
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 Bob Deffinbaugh, *Moses and the Exodus*, 2007, Biblical Studies Press, bible.org
 Crickett Keeth, *A Journey in Faith*, Lesson 3, 2006, Biblical Studies Press, bible.org
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SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

A hardened heart prevents us from listening to God and obeying Him. Is your heart hardened in any way to prevent you from listening to God’s prompting and believing in Him? Take a few moments this week to reflect on the status of your heart.

In Hebrew, “to pray” means “to judge oneself.” True prayer always must involve introspection, meditation, and self-scrutiny. Dedicate your quiet time this week to those activities, as well as adoration, confession, and thanksgiving.

EXTRA CREDIT

Read Psalm 51, the story of David’s confession after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. In what ways was David’s heart also hardened during this episode with Bathsheba? How did David soften his heart? How did God respond to David? What is it that God desires most from us?

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LESSON 3

Remember This Day!

KEY BIBLE VERSE

This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD—a lasting ordinance.

— Exodus 12:14

“Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.’”

— Exodus 12:24–27



SCRIPTURE TO READ

**Exodus 11:1–10;
12:1–30; 13:1–16**

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

In the past two studies, we have reviewed how God responded to the cries of His people by sending deliverers, Moses and his brother Aaron, and how God intervened in human history to deliver his people from affliction and oppression by sending a series of plagues on Pharaoh and the people of Egypt. This study concludes with the tenth and final plague and the institution of the Passover.

The last plague, in which the firstborn males of every family in Egypt would die, and which would finally compel Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave Egypt, is announced in two phases. The first announcement is to Pharaoh from Moses, who warns Pharaoh of the plague that was about to come on all Egypt (Exodus 11:4–10). The second is for the Israelites, and includes God’s instructions for them regarding the Passover, which outlines the means through which God will protect them from the devastation of this plague (Exodus 12:1–30).

These instructions—sacrificing a young lamb without blemish, smearing its blood on the lintels and doorposts of each Israelite household, baking bread without yeast so as to leave quickly, and eating this final meal while wearing traveling clothes—are the basis for the Passover, or the Feast of Unleavened Bread. When the final plague struck, and the “angel of death” came upon Egypt, it would see the blood on the door frames and “pass over” those homes. As God promised the people of Israel, “*When I see the blood, I will pass over you. This plague of death will not touch you when I strike the land of Egypt*” (Exodus 12:13, NLT).

In the Jewish tradition, Passover is the first of the Pilgrim holidays, known as *Pesach* in Hebrew. It commemorates the seminal event in Jewish history—the Exodus of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. It was at this juncture that the national identity of the Jewish people was born.

Today, Jews recall the Exodus daily in their morning and evening prayers and in the Grace After Meals, thereby fulfilling the biblical command to “*remember the day in which you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life*” (Deuteronomy 16:3, NKJV).



The Israelites applied the blood of the lamb to their doorposts and frames.



Unleavened bread, or *matzah*, is an essential element of the Seder meal.

PHARAOH IS WARNED (EXODUS 11:1–10)

1. What was the tenth plague God said He would bring against Egypt? (11:5)

2. What was Pharaoh’s reaction to the announcement of the last and final plague? What was Moses’ reaction? (11:4–10)

3. Why do you think Pharaoh still refused to listen to Moses and Aaron even after all that his country had suffered through?

4. Why do you think God hardened Pharaoh's heart?
(5:2; 7:3-5; 11:9)

5. What was the lesson that the Egyptians were to learn from this final plague? (11:7)

THE PASSOVER (EXODUS 12:1-30)

6. When does God say the New Year begins? (12:2)

7. Why do you think each family had to follow the instructions to sacrifice a lamb and put its blood on their doorposts? What does this tell you about God and our relationship with Him?

8. What did the blood of the lamb represent? (Leviticus 17:11)

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Freedom is a key underlying theme in the Passover celebration. Passover is to remind us that true freedom involves an inner, spiritual realm, as well as physical liberty. In what ways did the Israelites find this inner freedom through the events of Passover? In what ways has God provided true freedom for you?

EXTRA CREDIT

Psalms of praise are traditionally read during the Passover meal and throughout the celebration. Read Psalms 105, 135, and 136 — each recounts God's many acts of compassion, deliverance, and protection for the people of Israel.

Take time this week to create your own psalm of thanksgiving for how God has protected and delivered you throughout this week, this month, and this year.

9. What do you think was the significance of the Israelites eating their meal with their traveling clothes on? What did this show about the people's faith in God? (12:11)

A DAY TO REMEMBER (EXODUS 13:11-16)

10. Why did God tell the Israelites to dedicate their firstborn sons and every firstborn animal to Him? (13:1; 14-15)?

11. Why did God say to keep the Passover as a memorial? What were the people supposed to remember? (12:26-27; 13:3, 8-9)

12. What impact do you think looking back and reliving these events each year through the Passover celebration has had on the Jewish people's faith?

13. What do you need to remember about God through the events of Passover and the Exodus?

Sources

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