

# Death of the Firstborn

Scripture Reference: [Exodus 11-12:51](#)



**Suggested Emphasis:** It is important to obey God's instructions.



Background Study



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## Story Overview:

The tenth and final plague brought upon Egypt convinced Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to be released from slavery and leave Egypt. During the plague the firstborn children and even the firstborn of the livestock died as the angel of death passed through Egypt. Only those who obeyed the instructions of the Lord were safe. As the angel of death "passed over" their homes the Israelites ate the very first Passover Meal. As soon as Pharaoh finally gave his permission, all of the Israelites left Egypt quickly by night. Four hundred and thirty years of bondage were finally over.

## Background Study:

Note: This lesson covers the last of the ten plagues of Egypt. For more about the first nine plagues refer to the lesson: [Let My People Go!](#)

God's people were slaves in Egypt and had been living most of their 400 years in Egypt as slaves under the control of the Pharaoh (ruler of Egypt). God had had enough. His people have been referred to by others in many ways (Hebrews, Israelites, Jews) but, in these chapters, God describes Israel as his "firstborn son" ([Exodus 4:21-23](#)). Pharaoh, the Egyptians, the surrounding nations, Moses and even God's people themselves are being taught, through the plagues, that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the one who identified himself as Yahweh to Moses, is the true and living God who delivers his people. God takes his relationship with his "son" very seriously! Plagues of blood, frogs, gnats, flies, livestock, boils, hail, locusts, darkness are hard lessons to learn.

Now, in the tenth (and last) plague God reaches into the very heart of Egypt to mete justice. Egypt's sons will feel pain because of the pain the Pharaohs have caused his own "son".

This was not a haphazard plan. Even before Moses returned to Egypt God told him what was to happen.

*"The Lord said to Moses, 'When you get back to Egypt, do all the miracles. I have given you the power to do them. Show them to the king of Egypt. But I will make the king very stubborn. He will not let the people go. Then say to the king: 'This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son. And I told you to let my son go. Let him go so he may worship me. But you refused to let Israel go. So I will kill your firstborn son.'" Exodus 4:21-23 International Children's Bible (ICB)*

The events of this last plague and the instituting of the Passover are carefully interwoven so that two amazing aspects of God are displayed at the exact same time. They represent both God's righteous judgement on those who would hurt his "son" Israel and also his redemptive protection of his "son", Israel.

- Death passes THROUGH Egypt- "On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn- both men and animals- and I will bring judgement on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord". [Exodus 12:12](#), NIV
- Death passes OVER Israel- "The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt". [Exodus 12:13](#), NIV

This important and awe-inspiring display of God's almighty wrath on those who destroy his own and then His undeniable care and protection of those who belong to him is a foreshadowing of what is to come hundreds of years later through Christ. At the same time God triumphed over Satan through the cross he also redeemed his people through the blood of Christ.

- Our "Sonship" in Christ- [Romans 8:14-16](#)
- Redeemed through the Blood of Christ- [1 Peter 1:18-19](#) and [Ephesians 1:7](#)
- God's Triumph over Those Who Hurt His Children- [Colossians 2:15](#) and [2 Thessalonians 3:2-3](#)

Knowing this helps us understand why the details of the Passover commemoration are so carefully laid out. Even in the years to come God wants his people to continue to remember, through the Passover Meal, how God saved them. When Christ comes to save his people years later God wants the Jews to connect the events.

Jews still gather for the Passover Meal today and Christians can find it meaningful to celebrate the Passover to make the application of each part to its fulfillment in Christ. The Meal is the most memorable part of celebration and the "Sedar Plate" contains elements that help participants remember the history and significance of the Passover. With a little planning you could serve this to the children you are teaching.

- Hard boiled egg - symbol of the suffering and oppression in Egypt. Everything else in boiling water becomes soft or disintegrates. But an egg becomes hard, like the Israelites. The more it is boiled, the harder it becomes. An egg also symbolizes New Life.
- Roasted shank bone of lamb - reminds them there had to be blood sacrificed to save their lives.
- Bitter herbs - horseradish - reminds them they were servants to slavery.
- Greens - parsley, celery - symbol of coming of Spring which brings hope.
- Salt water - reminds them of the tears they cried in Egypt.
- Haroset - nut, apple, cinnamon, wine mixture which has the appearance of straw in remembrance of the mortar used to build the Treasure Cities for Pharaoh. It is symbolic of the hope of freedom that enabled their ancestors to withstand the bitterness of slavery.
- Matzah - the unleavened bread that reminds them of the haste with which they left Egypt.

*Note: The preceding list and comments were written by Jeannie Cole; West-Ark Church of Christ, Fort Smith, AR;*

*“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.’” Then the people bowed down and worshiped. The Israelites did just what the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron”.*  
Exodus 12:26-28

Placing the blood above their doors did not save the people of God that night. God saved them. Yet God required obedience. What if the Israelites had not obeyed God and did not put the blood above their doors? What if we, today, do not accept what has been accomplished by the blood of Christ?

Leaving Egypt: Up to now, the Israelites had been despised by Pharaoh and the people. After many visits to the palace by Moses and the devastating effects of the first nine plagues Pharaoh had still continued to refuse to let the Israelite people (his slaves) leave Egypt. Now, after this final plague, Pharaoh invited Moses to return to the palace. Instead of denying the request he now orders Moses and the Israelites to go and take everything with them. Even the Egyptian people begged them to leave quickly. God had planned for this. The people were dressed and ready to go. There was no time to let the bread rise ([Exodus 12:11](#)).

Moses told the Israelites to ask the Egyptians for items such as clothing and even gold and silver. Amazingly, the Egyptians gladly handed all of these things over. One day slaves and the next day wealthy, the Israelites quickly left Egypt.

Four hundred and thirty years before the Passover took place (when [Joseph Saved His Family](#)) Jacob and the rest of his family had moved to Goshen, Egypt. They numbered 70 people at that time. ([Genesis 46:26-27](#)) Now, 430 years later, when Jacob’s descendants left Egypt in the middle of the night with Moses, the men alone numbered over 600,000 according to Numbers 1:46.



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## Way to Introduce the Story:

Let the children taste and compare normal bread and unleavened bread (matzo bread from specialty shops or simply the bread we use for communion). Notice the air holes in the leavened bread that makes it light and fluffy. This happens when leaven (like yeast) is added to the recipe and the dough is allowed to rise. Read a recipe for yeast bread and discuss how long it takes to make the bread. Compare that to a simple and quick recipe for unleavened bread. “If you were in a hurry, which kind of bread would you make? Of course, we would want to make the unleavened bread because we wouldn’t have to wait for it to rise. When the Lord brought the last plague on Egypt He told the Israelites to eat a special meal and be ready to leave Egypt quickly. They did not have time to make leavened bread.”

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# The Story:

God's people, the Israelites, had been in Egypt for 430 years. They were treated badly and had to work very hard for no money. They were slaves to the king of Egypt (the Pharaoh).

God did not want his people to be slaves and stay in Egypt. He wanted them to be able to come and go as they liked so that they could be free to worship him and have their own land. God sent Moses and his brother Aaron to Pharaoh with a message. The message from God was "Let My People Go!"

Over and over Moses and Aaron took the same message to Pharaoh. But the answer was always the same. Pharaoh always said, "NO! I will not let the people go."

God even caused plagues to happen to Egypt. Nine plagues had happened so far. The Nile was turned to blood. Frogs, gnats and locusts invaded Egypt. Animals died and people got sick. There was a huge hailstorm and even three days of complete darkness. Still Pharaoh refused to let the people go.

Finally, the time had come for one last plague. God told Moses that this plague, the 10th plague, would cause Pharaoh to let the people go. In fact, this time Pharaoh and the other Egyptian people would BEG for them to leave Egypt. The people would even give them their money and jewelry so they would leave faster.

This terrible last plague would be that death would pass THROUGH all of Egypt. It would mean the death of every firstborn person and animal in Egypt. If a person was the oldest in their family then they would die. This would be the saddest plague of all.

But God gave Moses special instructions for the Israelites. If the Israelites followed God's instructions then death would pass OVER them. Their firstborn children and animals would not die. Because death would pass over them this became known as PASSOVER.

The first instruction was that the people must prepare a Passover meal. This was a special meal so there were special instructions. For instance, they could not just eat any meat for the meal. They were to prepare a perfect year-old male sheep or goat. Everyone was to kill the sheep or goat on the same day and at the same time.

Then, they were to take the blood from the animal and use a hyssop branch to spread it on top and on the sides of their door posts. This blood had a very special purpose because it showed that the people inside were God's people. On the night that the Egyptian firstborn people and animals died death would know to PASS OVER the people in that house.

There were other special instructions about the meal.

- Bread- In the seven days before the meal they were to only eat bread that did not have yeast in it. This is called unleavened bread. They weren't to even have yeast in their houses.
- Meat- The lamb meat was to be roasted over a fire along with bitter herbs.
- Clothing- They were to eat the Passover meal all dressed and ready to leave. God knew that his people would be leaving Egypt that very night so he wanted them to be able to eat the meal quickly and be ready to go.

The Israelites obeyed God. They stayed inside and ate the meal just as God told them to. They knew that they would be safe because of the blood on their doorposts. But the Egyptians were not safe. It was a terrible night for them!

This is what the Bible says about that night:

*"At midnight the Lord killed all the firstborn sons in the land of Egypt. The firstborn of the king, who sat on the throne, died. Even the firstborn of the prisoner in jail died. Also all the firstborn farm animals died. The king, his officers and all the Egyptians got up during the night. Someone had died in every house. So there was loud crying*

*everywhere in Egypt.*" Exodus 12:29-30 (ICB) International Children's Bible

The people in Egypt knew that God of Israel was angry about the way they had treated his people. They were sad and upset and they wanted the Israelites to leave. They wanted them to leave quickly.

In the middle of the night Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron to the palace. Now, after the 10th plague, he had finally changed his mind. He told Moses and Aaron that the people could leave and that they could take all of their animals with them. Pharaoh wanted the Israelites to leave immediately.

So now was the time to get moving. There were thousands and thousands of Israelites and they all packed up and left Egypt that very night. They had been working for nothing for many many years so Moses passed on God's message that they should ask the Egyptians for silver and gold and clothing. God softened the hearts of the Egyptians so that they gave the Israelites everything they asked for.

Finally, after 430 years in Egypt God's people left the country. They left quickly before Pharaoh and the people could change their minds again.

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## Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection, student interaction and/or emotion. [Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Download the slideshow](#) or [download the pictures to print.](#)

Each teacher is unique so only use the illustrations that best relate to the way YOU are telling the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

## Review Questions:

1. How many plagues did God send in all? Ten
2. What was the tenth plague? Death of the firstborn.
3. How did the Israelites' firstborn children not die? Blood from a lamb was placed above their doors and the Lord passed over their homes and no one died.
4. What is the purpose of the Passover Meal? To remember how the Lord passed over the Israelites' homes and kept their children safe. It also helped them remember how the Lord brought them out of Egypt.

## Song Suggestions:

- [My God is So Big Song](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

## Learning Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)



### Activities:

- Prepare and eat foods eaten at the first Passover meal (see notes on the Sedar Plate above).
- Books from the Public Library will show how the Egyptians would have buried their dead.
- Arrange to let your children come to the adult bible class. One of the children could tell the adult class that you are studying about the tenth plague when the firstborn in every family died if they did not put lamb's blood above their door. Tell them that you want to see how many firstborn children there are in this class. Ask if they would please stand. You could do the same with the teen class or other classes. After you get back to class apply this and talk about what would have happened if our congregation lived back then. Who would have died if we did not obey?
- Older children can discuss this parallel: The angel of death passed over the Israelites because of the blood of a lamb. Today, if we are covered by the blood of Christ then God's judgement will pass over us. Spiritually, we do not die. ([John 1:29](#); [1 Corinthians 5:7](#)). Also read [Exodus 12:24-48](#) and [1 Corinthians 11:23-26](#) comparing the reasons for the Passover meal and the Lord's Supper (to remember). Compare the events on posters for effect. Sing: "Nothing But the Blood" or "There is Power in the Blood."

### Crafts:

- Before class cut red construction paper to look like streaks of blood and blue-tac it above the door outside your class room.

Check the [Teaching Ideas](#) page on this website for ideas that are adaptable to any lesson.



[Click here for "Death of the Firstborn" printables to print \(A4 paper\)](#)  
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## Other Online Resources:

- [The first passover colouring page & puzzle worksheets \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [The Passover object lesson \(Future Flying Saucers\)](#)
- [Various activities and crafts \(Church House Collection\)](#)
- [Instructions for re-enacting the Sedar Meal from a Christian perspective \(CRI Voice\)](#)
- [Passover Meal explained by Jeannie Cole \(West Ark Church of Christ\)](#)
- [Recipe for unleavened bread \(Catholic Icing\)](#)

<https://www.pinterest.com/marynnz/moses-birth-through-leaving-egypt/>  
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