

Timeline for understanding the origins of the Passover tradition

According to traditional belief:

Between 15th and 13th
centuries BCE

Exodus from Egypt and wandering in desert for 40 years
(generally considered by most historians and archaeologists to be mostly
mythological, based on seeds of actual historical events that differ greatly from the
story)

Torah (“Five Books of Moses”, including the Book of Exodus), traditionally believed
to have been dictated by God to Moses on Mount Sinai following the exodus.

According to historical evidence:

13th century B.C.E.

Origins of Israelites tribes in the highlands of Canaan
– separated from other Canaanites, rather than (as told in the Bible) arriving from
outside and invading Canaan
(Note also that Canaan was largely under Egyptian control / dominance at the
time)

Very roughly 10th
century B.C.E.

The Passover festival had its origins in a pagan pastoral springtime ritual of the
early Israelites, having nothing to do with any story involving an exodus from
Egypt. With the development of a centralized state it turned into a pilgrimage
festival to make a sacrifice in the Jerusalem temple.

Between 9th / 8th and 6th
centuries B.C.E.

Place: Israelite kingdoms of Israel (north) and Judah (south).
Book of Exodus and other books of the **Torah** were written, in stages.
(as well as the other books of the Tanakh, of which the Torah is only one part. The
Torah consists of the Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers,
Deuteronomy. The rest of the Tanakh consists of the books of the Prophets and
other Writings)
– The Torah is the work of many persons over many centuries. Its components
appear to have been combined gradually over time by the slow accumulation of
fragments of text, or by additions to basic texts by later authors/editors.
An origin-of-our-people myth involving an exodus from Egypt had incorporated
strands of oral tradition that had been much transformed over centuries of pre-
literacy among the early Israelites. The exodus myth now became part of the
scriptures and became merged with the Passover spring festival and its temple
sacrifice pilgrimage. The sacrifice would be followed by festive meals.

The Torah was Probably repeatedly edited over time, by priests and scribes of
Judahite kings, particularly under King Hezekiah (Hizkiyyahu) (c. 715-686 BCE)
and King Josiah (Yoshiyahu) (641–609 BCE)

The Northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria in 722 BCE (dispersal of the “ten
tribes”)

The Southern kingdom of Judah survived but fell to Babylon in 586 BCE
(destruction of 1st temple)

6th century B.C.E.

The scriptures were developed further and edited in Babylonian exile (586-536
BCE) after the destruction of the 1st temple. In 538 BCE the Persian king Cyrus
conquered Babylonia and permitted the Jews there to return to Judah. Many
returned to Zion (Judah) to rebuild the temple, but many others remained in
Babylonia and Persia.

The idea of loss of freedom and exile, followed by return to the promised land

became an important theme in the national psyche.

Between 5th and 2nd
centuries B.C.E.

Parts of the Tanakh are thought to have been edited still later, when Judah/Judea was under Persian rule (538-332 BCE) (perhaps by Ezra the priest-scribe, c. 458 BCE) and then Greek rule (332-167 BCE).

Many aspects of the Torah / Tanakh reveal strong influences of the earlier Babylonian, Persian-Zoroastrian, and Greek beliefs and mythologies.

Commandments to tell the Passover story:

Haggadah means "telling". There are several **commandments in the Torah** (in the books of Exodus / Shemot and Deuteronomy / Dvarim) to tell the story of the Exodus during the Passover festival, e.g:

"You shall tell your son on that day: it is because of what the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt...".

"Your children may [then] ask you, 'What is this service to you?'; You must answer, 'It is the Passover service to God. He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians, sparing our homes.'"

You must tell him, 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, but God brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.'"; Deuteronomy 6:22 - "God directed great and terrible miracles against Pharaoh and all his household before our very eyes."

Early 1st century C.E.

Place: Judea, under Roman occupation.

The Passover meal following the temple sacrifice could plausibly have been the early 1st century C.E. setting for Jesus's Last Supper, to the extent that the historicity of Jesus as a rebel preacher can be verified. The massive influx of Jews to Jerusalem during the Passover pilgrimage was also a reason why the Roman authorities would have been particularly uneasy and ruthless about anyone they perceived as a rabble-rouser in the city during the festival.

70 C.E.

Destruction of Jerusalem and the 2nd Temple by the Romans during the First Jewish–Roman War. Temple pilgrimages and sacrifices are no longer possible. New ways of observing the Passover festival must be devised.

late 1st or early 2nd
century C.E.

First mention of a Seder service was in the Mishnah, in about 90 C.E., by Rabbi Gamaliel the Elder (or Rabbi Gamliel I). The Mishnah is the first compilation of the Talmud (the Talmud is the huge encyclopedia of oral Jewish law and commentary – discussed below). Rabbi Gamliel was President of the Jewish legislative body in Jerusalem known as the Sanhedrin (which moved to Yavneh and other locations after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E.). Rabbi Gamliel declared: "One who has not said (i.e. not understood the spiritual implications of) these three words, Pesah, Matzah, and Maror has not done his duty"

Seder means order. An ordered way of discussing the Exodus was developed by the early rabbis in the period after the destruction of the temple by the Romans. Over time, the narrative to the meal - the Haggadah - grew larger and more varied, reflecting different rabbinical streams of thought and cultural influences in the Jewish religion.

The written Passover Haggadah is based on an initial version of a Passover Seder as outlined in a section of the Talmud. This is a description of a Seder conducted in Bnei Brak, where Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaryah, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon are described as reclining and discussing the Exodus from Egypt.

2nd century C.E. or later

The **Haggadah text** is thought to have been written around the same time as the Talmud, possibly as part of the larger process of writing the Talmud. Earliest

	possible date: 170 CE (Since Rabbi Yehudah bar Elai, who lived at that time is the last of the Talmudic scholars to be mentioned in the teachings of the Haggadah)
Between 2nd and 5 th centuries C.E.	<p>writing of the Talmud (meaning “teaching”) (first the Mishnah, then the Gemorah) – this is the writing down of the oral law and the explanation of the Torah traditionally believed to have been handed down by word-of-mouth from Moses. The oral law probably originated mainly with the Pharisees during the Hasmonean (Maccabean) dynasty (140-37 BCE). Writing of the Mishna began after destruction of the 2nd temple by the Romans in 70 CE.</p> <p>There are two versions of the Talmud: the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds.</p> <p>Interpretation of the oral law is open to debate by the rabbis. This has led to endless interpretations of interpretations, from Talmudic times onward.</p> <p>Place: Judea (under Roman rule) (renamed Syria-Palaestina after 135 C.E.) and Babylonia (a thriving, well-established Jewish Diaspora)</p>
9 th century C.E.	<p>Earliest version of the Haggadah that is still in existence, is the Haggadah contained within one of the first Jewish prayer books, by Rabbi Sa’adia Gaon, religious leader of Babylonian Jewry. The written text that is supposed to guide the oral telling of the story of the Exodus from Egypt was far from uniform and omits certain parts that are now part of the Haggadah used by Jews today</p> <p>Place: Sura, Babylonia (under Islamic Caliphate rule)</p>
13 th to 14 th centuries	<p>Earliest known Haggadot produced as works in their own right (separate books) are manuscripts from the 13th and 14th centuries, including the "Golden Haggadah" (c. 1320) and the "Sarajevo Haggadah" (late 14th century).</p> <p>Place: Barcelona, Spain</p>
1486 C.E.	<p>First confirmed printing of the Haggadah by the printing press of the Italian-Jewish Soncino family</p> <p>Place: Soncino, Italy.</p>
Present day	There are over 3,000 different types of Passover Haggadahs in existence today