

*Journeying through the scriptures in our Daily Bible Reading at Prevailing Word Church, we have come across some surprising, if not troubling, passages. From time to time, we are going to attempt to answer some of the questions that might arise from these verses. God bless you as you pursue a deeper understanding of God's Word.*

## **God Our Righteous Creator**

Question: "Why would God kill or command the killing of children as sometimes seen in the Old Testament?"

Each year observant Jews and many Christians celebrate the feast of Passover as instructed by the Lord in Exodus 12, Leviticus 23 and elsewhere in the Bible. The Passover celebration, or seder, remembers how God delivered the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt and includes a recounting of the 10 plagues God used to judge the Egyptians. The 10<sup>th</sup> plague was the killing of the firstborn son of Pharaoh as well as the firstborn of every Egyptian household (son most likely but not explicitly stated). So, why would God take the lives of innocent children?

*A little background information:* a previous Pharaoh had ordered all Egyptians to drown the male babies of the Hebrews (Israelites) at the time that Moses was born because he was afraid that the people of Israel were outnumbering the Egyptians and would take over his land. That is why Moses was put in the small ark and sent down the river in hopes of being rescued. In addition, Pharaoh had forced the Israelites to be slaves and to labor under very harsh conditions and abusive treatment. This slavery was still the situation when Moses as a grown man carried out God's powerful judgment on Egypt under a different Pharaoh.

God had told Moses about the 10<sup>th</sup> plague in Exodus 4:22-23 – *And you shall say unto Pharaoh, Thus says the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: and I say unto you, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your son, even your firstborn.* (Keep in mind that a number of Israelite male babies had been killed by the general population of Egyptians.) Because Pharaoh continuously hardened his heart, God eventually carried out the final judgment. The beliefs of the Egyptians were also a factor: God said in Exodus 12:12 that He was going to execute judgment against all the gods of Egypt, which apparently had something to do with the 10<sup>th</sup> plague as well.

We must note that this was a one-time event for a specific purpose in a particular time and place. Similarly, on a few occasions for a specific time and purpose, God commanded the Israelite armies to destroy a nation, which would seemingly include the children.

Deuteronomy 12:29-31 reveals why this was the case for Canaanite nations: *"When the Lord your God shall cut off the nations from before you...you shall inquire not after their gods...for every abomination to the Lord, which he hates, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods."* The word "destroy" is used in the full passage but does not necessarily mean to kill, although it was typically carried out in

that way. The actual meaning is to devote or consecrate. So, it is not certain that children were even killed in these cases.

Often, if we read more deeply, there is a warning and a way out for even non-covenant people groups in the Old Testament to escape God's judgment. For example, before Saul kills the Amalekites in I Samuel 15, he warns the Kenites to leave. (Amalek had attacked all the weary Israelites at the end of the procession coming out of Egypt and continued to attack the Israelites for no reason for hundreds of years. I Samuel 15:33 implies that women and/or children had been killed in those attacks on Israel. As descendants of Esau, any of them could have chosen to be part of God's people.) The people of Noah's time had years to repent; the Amalekites themselves were most likely warned when their Kenite neighbors evacuated the land, and they too could have fled. Nowhere does the Bible command this type of killing to be repeated as a permanent directive or carried out as a usual practice. Some people have tried to use these incidents to justify abortion, saying that God apparently does support the taking of a child's life for certain reasons. However, this argument is thoroughly false since the situations discussed above have absolutely nothing to do with circumstances surrounding abortions – the decision of human beings, not God, to kill pre-born children.

Finally, in both the Old and New Testaments, God demonstrates His love for children and their great value. He takes very seriously how we treat them and how we train them in His ways. Again, the few situations in which children's lives were not spared were very specific, one-time events that He determined, not human beings. God is God, the Life-giver, the Creator of all; we are not. Many scriptures refer to His righteous judgments and I John 4:8 says God is love.

When Jesus died on the cross, He took upon Himself the wrath of God on behalf of all mankind for all time so that we could put our faith in Him for the forgiveness of our sins. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and who delivers us from judgment. For God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life!