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## How Could God Kill All the Firstborn Babies in the Tenth Plague?

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### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how God could kill all the firstborn babies in the tenth plague, how to respond to someone who says God committed genocide when he destroyed the earth during the flood, and whether God still creates calamity today as it says in Isaiah 45:7.

- \* How could God kill all the firstborn babies in the tenth plague?
- \* How should I respond to someone who says God committed genocide when he destroyed the earth during the flood?
- \* Does God still create calamity today as it says in Isaiah 45:7?

### Transcript

This is Amy Hall and you're listening to Stand to Reason's hashtag, S-T-R-S podcast featuring Greg Koukl. All right, Greg, in the last episode, we talked a lot about the glory of God and worshipping God. And I wanted to lay that foundation before we got to this episode.

Okay. And we're going to start with a question from Jenna. I have a teenage daughter who asked me how God could kill all the firstborn babies in the tenth plague.

I tried to answer, but I don't think my answer was sufficient. I was hoping you and Amy had a clear cut approach that a younger person could understand. Well, I'm not sure I can satisfy that requirement.

And because the requirement is to offer an answer that's a clear cut approach that a younger person can understand. And in fact, some things are not easy or comprehensible or make sense from the perspective of a younger person who has a very limited understanding of the nature of reality, of life, et cetera. And I think this is one of them.

I mean, there's a lot of things that can be said here. And for some people, even adults, no answer is going to be adequate. Okay.

Let me back up and offer an intuition. Okay. An intuition that's, I think it's useful in this circumstance, but even so, it may not be adequate.

And the intuitions expressed when people are having a discussion about capital punishment and those who are opposed to capital punishment will often oppose it in this way. They say human beings should not be playing God. Okay.

Now, actually, I don't think that's a good response regarding the capital punishment issue because sometimes God can delegate authority or prerogatives that belong to him alone natively in a native fashion, but then could delegate to others to carry out according to his principles. But I want you to notice the intuition that is expressed there, and that is that God has prerogatives that human beings don't. God has prerogatives actually with regards to taking life because he's the giver of life.

And so it's his job to be able to decide who lives and who dies. Okay. That's the intuition in the objection or in the point that's being made there.

Now, I think that's a fair intuition, and I think it does apply here. If God is God, then he can create life and he can take life and he needs no further moral justification for it. The moral justification is he's the giver and taker of life.

He's the sovereign God. Okay. Now, I think the temptation is to believe that God is punishing these children.

Well, no, it's not a punishment on the children. It's just taking their life. Okay.

And the punishment is on others, the adults who are responsible and the children are part of those families. So the main thing that I would say is that God is the giver of life and God can take life whenever he wants. All right.

And those, there's another element here. It's a theological one that that's in play and that is what is the eternal fate of those children whose lives God takes in any situation in any act of judgment. See, because the children died not just on Passover night.

They died in every single judgment that God brought against Israel, characteristically at the hands of other armies, but not always. Sometimes it was a plague. Sometimes it was a famine.

And, and so children died because the judgment is on the nation. And you don't, in those circumstances, you don't do a surgical strike. You're going to just, we're just going to kill the moms and dads and leave all the babies.

I mean, there's, you can see the practical problem, who's going to take care of those

babies once the moms and dads are dead. No, the judgment comes in the nation and the fact is that that innocent suffer for the, for the crimes and sins of the adults. So, but nevertheless, so even in that circumstance, you have multiple layers of justification.

For one, you have God taking life because he's a giver of life and he doesn't need any more justification. But sometimes he has more and he's bringing judgment on a nation for the evil they've committed. And when the judgment falls, it falls in everyone.

That's just the way it is. When we, when the Allies landed on the beaches of Normandy, June 6, 1944, 30,000 civilians died, 30,000, including children, because that was the price that was to be paid. Wegy warfare.

And the French understood that they were glad when the allies were landing, even though they're bombing their homes. Now, they weren't glad to die per se, or the children died, but they realized this was a cost. This is the way war works.

And explaining that to a child is really hard because they don't understand. That's how war works. A lot of adults don't understand that even today.

We have current events right now that reflect that concern. They're just confused about this. And so I think that's going to be difficult to explain this to a child.

But I think my main response, and even for my own concerns, in my own mind, I'm thinking, God is God. God gives, he takes. He gives life, he takes life.

That's a prerogative only God has. Unless the taking life is delegated by him, say, in legitimate capital punishment circumstances. Greg, I think that is a really simple way of putting it that God is the giver and taker of life.

So I'm going to add some more ideas. And Jennifer, I don't know. You can sift through these and try and help your daughter understand, but this is not a quick answer.

You can't answer this quickly. But I think we need to start with the idea that it's hard for people to grasp the idea that this creation is about God. And we talked about this in the worshipping questions from the last episode.

We tend to think that all creation is about us. And in reality, God is working out a plan to reveal himself fully to his people. And the purpose of that, I mean, this is from Ephesians 2, God made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved and raised us up with him and Jesus in Christ Jesus so that in the ages to come, he might show the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

So he is working out a plan through all of history so that ultimately he can reveal his grace in Christ and shower that grace on us forever. And then we return with glory to God. This is the big picture of what's happening.

And here's a key moment in history that plays a part in this bigger story. The exodus is the Passover that launches the exodus. And the first thing to understand here is I don't think it was just babies.

There's nothing in here saying these were just children. This is the first born. There were adults who were first born too.

And the first born were the heirs. So why is God killing all of their heirs because they have enslaved his heir? The Jews are the heirs of God. And so here God is stepping in and saying, you won't let my heir go and you are going to lose all of your heirs.

So that's what's happening here. That's one of the things that's happening. God's also revealing his power over the Egyptian gods.

He's judging their gods. Here's something that it says explicitly. And this is from Romans 9 17 quotes, Exodus 9 16, about all the plagues.

For this very purpose, I raised you up speaking to Pharaoh to demonstrate my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth. So another thing God's doing here is revealing his reality and his power and his judgment. And this was the basis that Rahab, you know, 40 years later, maybe I'm jumping on your lines here.

No, you saved the spies because of what she saw God do to the Egyptians. That's exactly right. And I was going there because what this did was it caused the other nations to fear the Jews, respect them and to not put up as much of a fight.

And it was just establishing God as being powerful and sovereign. And this was key to what he was doing right then, which was bringing the Israelites into the land. So again, and again, it says God says during the plague so that they will know.

Yes, 10 times in that from Exodus, what, 4 to 14, 10 times he makes that statement, 10 plagues. And this is evidence of God working and speaking against the gods of Egypt. And also it was so that he could rescue the Israelites from slavery.

So he's saving his heirs, he's revealing himself to all the nations. He's putting the fear of God into them. He's using this as a key moment in their history.

And also it's so that the Israelites would fear and respect him because remember, it's only because of his grace that their firstborn don't die. They have to put the blood of the lamb over their door so that they don't lose their heirs. But ever after this, they have to redeem their firstborn.

They have to sacrifice animals in the place of their firstborn because God is declaring his ownership over all the people. Because he didn't take their firstborn, their firstborn still

belonged to him. So he's showing the Israelites that he's to be respected and feared and that they owe their lives to him since they were saved from that judgment only by his grace.

So there's a lot going on here. There's one thing that I hinted at, but I didn't carry through so I'll finish the thought. And that is, what about the eternal disposition of these children that died for those firstborn who were children? And it was a very good point, firstborn is firstborn.

They could be 50 years old, you know, but they're still the heir. And my answer regarding the children, there are very good reasons to think. We don't have to go into the details.

We've talked about this in the past. That those children, infants, youngsters that die before the age of any kind of moral accountability, those go right to be with the Lord. Okay, they are saved as it were.

So it isn't like that they're all these poor kids who had no choice in the matter, no opportunity or whatever and didn't do anything wrong are now going to be, you know, in perdition forever. No, we think we, I think you and I both agree that they go to be with the Lord. There's not an explicit statement in scripture to that effect, but there is a scriptural argument that I think is pretty strong.

Another verse that comes to mind, they're in the history of the kings, and I can't remember which one it is, but there's one king, it must be of Judah, who's a very bad king, and he has a son. And God says something like, I'm going, your son's going to die because he's the only one I see any good in. And he's not going to see the destruction that you have brought on this land.

Oh, that's interesting. So even an act of mercy. It was an act of mercy.

So you can't assume that it wasn't an act of mercy in some of those cases also. All right, Greg, let's go on to a question from summer. I often hear it claimed that God committed genocide when he destroyed the earth during the flood.

How should one respond to this statement? Well, I have a response to try to put this whole issue in perspective, and the difficulty here is with the word genocide. It's a very, very negative connotation, okay, because we think of genocide like what the Germans did to the Jews, for example. There are other examples of genocide even happening today that are not being heralded as genocide.

There's non genocide that's being heralded as genocide as it turns out. But there are massive destructions of whole peoples that are happening in Africa, for example, millions genuine genocide. And so the word has appropriately a very negative connotation.

All right, but this is where the clarification needs to be made. Because now you have a very negative connotation word applied to something that God did, making God look bad. Okay, so I deal with this issue somewhat in the book street smarts.

But I thought of a question that should precede the discussion I offered as street smarts. But I thought about it after I published street smarts, and it has to do with the use of the word genocide. So the question I ask then is what is genocide? And I want people to think about what that is.

Now generally the response is going to be something like, well, one group of people kills a whole bunch of another group of people. Okay, it's the death of a genius, a general side killing of this whole group of people. Okay, and then my response is you mean like what the Germans did to the Jews.

Six million over like six or seven years, all right, during the war. Yeah, that was genocide. Okay, yeah, I agree with you with that.

Now let me ask you a question. You said it's genocide when the Germans killed millions of Jews. Okay, what about when the allied armies invaded the continent and eventually got to Germany? And with their bombings and warfare killed millions of Germans.

So was it genocide when the allied armies killed millions of Germans who were killing millions of Jews? Now I think most people are going to say, no, that wasn't. That was war. That was justified.

So therefore, here's the key. Therefore genocide isn't just killing a lot of people because there was killing a lot of people in both occasions. The Germans killing the Jews, the allied soldiers killing the Germans.

Genocide is when you kill a bunch of people for the wrong reason. That's the key. When you kill a bunch of people for the wrong reason.

Unjustly. Unjustly. And the Germans were unjustly killing millions of Jews.

But the allied armies were not unjustly killing German soldiers and of course collateral damage German civilians as well. It's the nature of the war to stop the actual real genocide. So then the question becomes with God.

Sure, lots of people were killed, not just in the flood. Of course, virtually everybody separate, but in the conquest of the land by Joshua at all. And also in the book of Revelation, we see there's a lot of a lot of people die there too.

And during the history of Israel, you have massive destruction of the Jewish people ordained by God as judgments against them. So there are lots and lots of occasions of this kind of thing, not just these isolated cases that people point out. The question here

is not whether a lot of people died.

The question is whether God had a good reason to essentially kill all those people. That's the real issue. And that's the difference between justified judgment and mere genocide.

And in the case of the flood, we have the reasons that are given. Every intent of every person was evil all the time, I think is the way the text says it. And so God starts over.

He wipes a lot, then he kind of starts over with the aid. So that's the point I think that needs to be made. I know we've talked about this before, but I think that approach is so brilliant.

I wanted to ask this question again, because I think it's so helpful for people to see the difference and that just makes it so clear. And once again, this goes back to the idea of there's a big picture of what God's doing here. God has a goal.

He's not just creating the world and seeing where it goes randomly here and there. His goal is to have Jesus die on the cross for our sins so that he can show us grace and shower that grace on us forever, just as we've been saying. And this is where he's heading.

So right here at the beginning, he's saying, I care, first of all, I'm in charge. I'm the sovereign. I care about morality.

You can't just do whatever you want. And he's eventually going to call Abraham and create a nation. If he has, if the whole earth is so saturated and evil, his plan cannot go forward.

So there's a lot going on here beyond just this one story. And I just wish people had a better big picture view of what's happening in the Bible here. Yeah, I might recommend a book that will help you with a big picture view.

It's called the story of reality. Yes. It doesn't go into all of these details, but it's meant to give that larger picture.

Yeah. And God's appropriate sovereignty over and how God is working to solve the problem of evil essentially because this is what we're talking about. And another one that's really helpful when it comes to God's judgment is the Holiness of God by R.C. S-P-R-O-U-L is how he spells his name.

All right. We are close to the end, but I'm still going to ask this last question. Oh, here you go.

Okay. It just goes too well with the other ones. Greg, I can't leave it.

All right. This one comes from Jeremy. Does God still create calamity today in the context

of Isaiah 45-7? Sure.

I have no reason to think that that's not the case because God uses certain means to certain ends. Now, that particular passage unfortunately is translated differently in different translations and sometimes God creates evil. But the New American Standard says calamity.

I think that's the point when you read the larger context. It's the calamity that God brings in judgment on others that subjectively they understand as evil to them, but it's not morally evil. It's only as evil as an electric chair is to a criminal who's being executed.

Oh, that thing's bad. Yeah. Well, or those that go to hell, hell is bad subjectively to them because of what they experience, but it's morally good place.

And when God brings the kind of calamity that's described in this passage, he is bringing appropriate judgment on people and on nations. Now, I have no reason to believe that this was like Old Testament. Now, New Testament, that doesn't happen because obviously the book of Revelation identifies events that are still future.

And those entail God bringing that kind of calamity on nations, on whole massive groups of people. Romans 1, giving people over to their... There would be an individual example. You know, he gave them over.

He gave them over. Now, that could be a group of people, it could be individual people, whatever. He gives them over.

So we have those examples in the New Testament. And I think it's sometimes a mistake to say, oh, that tragedy, that hurricane over New Orleans, that was God's judgment upon the sin of New Orleans, you know? And all the French Quarter, et cetera, the irony about that claim is that the French Quarter was actually spared because it was high ground. It was the low ground that got destroyed.

And so I think it's a mistake to try to, or let me put it this way, it's hazardous to try to look at any natural disaster and say this is the hand of judgment of God upon these people. Characteristically, in scriptures, those judgments were heralded. People were told in advance that these judgments were coming.

And this was the point of Jonah going to Nineveh to declare the judgment of God that was going to come. And this is the Hebrew prophets declaring the judgment of God that was going to come. So characteristically, the message of judgment is there's a herald to that before judgment descends.

And I don't see any legitimate or, say, believable, bona fide, whatever examples of that in cultures today, true prophets rising up and saying, oh, God, there are people who



have risen up and called judgment on America. And this is going to happen to this date. I just ignore those because the date passes.

Nothing happens, you know. And one just passed recently. I'm not sure which date that was, but something was supposed to happen in some significant date.

And there were Christians who were making claims about that, but nothing, of course, took place. So I think it's hazardous to identify any particular thing as a judgment of God. However, I have no reason to believe that God has stopped doing that.

And he certainly will, it seems, in the future do that book of Revelation. So that's still an open possibility. One reason why we can't declare this is a judgment on so and so is because sometimes calamities come not for the sake of judgment.

And Job is a perfect example of that. God brought calamity on Job, not for the sake of judgment, but for other reasons. You know, he was, he was revealing Job's love for God, revealing that his love didn't depend on what God was giving him.

So he was bringing glory to himself through Job, through this calamity. So I don't think, in fact, actually there was a verse I saw. I just yesterday, I was reading in Job and I wrote it down here because it kind of speaks to this.

He's talking about, here's what it says, also with moisture, he loads the thick cloud. He disperses the cloud of his lightning. It changes direction, turning around by his guidance that it may do whatever he commands on the face of the inhabited earth.

Whether for correction or for his world or for loving kindness, he causes it to happen. So here we've got a storm, sometimes it's for correction, sometimes it's for his world, sometimes it's for his loving kindness. And we can't always tell what God is doing in any one situation.

But the point that Isaiah is making is that he's sovereign over it all. And that's why he uses these opposites. He says light and darkness, well-being and calamity.

Job in this case, right? So, he creates, or he gives, he creates a light and darkness calamity. So he's basically giving these opposites to show that God is sovereign over everything. And Job's just an example where another text that makes the same thing.

Exactly, exactly. So, yes, God does still get calamity today. And he could use the calamity for judgment, he could use it to accomplish a different good.

Exactly. All right, Greg, we knocked that last one out. We're not too far over.

Thank you so much for your questions. You can send us your question on X with the hashtag STRAsk. Or if you go to our website at [str.org](http://str.org), just look for our hashtag STRAskPodcast page.

And you'll find a link there and we'll take you right to where you can give us your question. And we'd love to hear from you. If you've got a question that you've been thinking about for a while, send it in.

You might hear it on hashtag STRAsk. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cocle for Stand to reason. Thank you.