

Why you don't need to pass over the Passover with kids

Three tips for approaching difficult Bible texts

Going through the lectionary with children can be a double-edged sword. The obvious strength is that in guiding us through the whole of Scripture, it requires us to move beyond the predictable and familiar grooves of our favourite Biblical texts. The other side of this is that the lectionary inevitably leads us into stories and texts that, from virtually any other source, would carry an adult rating.

Consider, for example, how the catalytic plague for Israel's deliverance in Exodus 12:12 depicts God as flying over Egypt not unlike a fighter jet with the sole purpose of targeting the firstborn (animals, adults, and babies alike). Or a mere three chapters later in the climactic moment of Israel's Exodus, God works through Moses to supernaturally drown the whole of the Egyptian army.

Needless to say, a child being read these stories is likely, whether consciously or subconsciously, to determine that one must be on the right side of this God – or else.

And so we're faced with the question: if we're committed to reading lectionary Bible passages with kids, come what may, how do we approach these particularly thorny texts? While there is no silver bullet solution, I want to offer three tips.

First

Before reading complex Old Testament stories that risk obscuring rather than illuminating God's character, **ensure children are immersed in the knowledge of**

God's definitive self-revelation – his Son, Jesus. The author of Hebrews 1:1-3 writes that although God has spoken to their ancestors in many and various ways, now God has spoken through his Son. And, critically, Jesus 'is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being' (1:3). In other words, although God's self-revelation in Christ by the Spirit does not nullify his previous communication with us, it is *only the Son* who bears God's exact imprint. Thus, any conclusions about God we aim to draw from Old Testament stories must be considered *in light of* what God has revealed in his Son. It is not the earliest stories of the Bible, but Jesus who must function as the foundation of our knowledge of God.

Second

This might sound odd, but part of being equipped in reading to children is **the ability to say, 'I don't know' or 'I don't understand'**. In an effort to have a tight,

systematic theology, we can confidently present children with misguided answers to difficult questions. For example, with the killing of the Egyptian firstborn in Exodus, it is common to highlight that in Exodus 12:23 when God sees blood on the lintel and doorposts, God will not allow 'the destroyer' to enter their houses. And so the argument goes: ultimately it is not God, but 'the destroyer' (whomever or whatever that may be), that is murdering the firstborn. A bit of critical thinking, though, reveals that this is a grossly inadequate moral argument. Is the dog owner that intentionally releases the pit bull from its leash to harm children any less culpable because he or she is not doing the biting?

If we have determined that our kids are old enough to face these texts head on, we must allow the text to say what it is says. And we must be willing to say, 'I'm not sure I fully understand this, but...'. And, returning to point 1, '...I do know that God, in his Son Jesus, was a safe place for children, and he welcomed the children to come to him' (Matthew 19:14).

Third

In reading complex, violent Old Testament stories about God, some have found allegorical interpretation as a possible constructive

way forward with kids, especially younger children. Seen most famously in church history through Early Church father, Origen of Alexandria, an allegorical reading aims to extract a deeper spiritual meaning from the text, often grounded in the person and stories of Jesus. For example, the story of Exodus, for Origen, symbolised the Christian's process of leaving sinfulness behind and journeying through their spiritual formation towards perfection in Christ. While one might reasonably object that this fails to grapple with the original meaning of the text, the positive, here, is the foregrounding of the story of Jesus in re-reading complex Old Testament stories.

In summary, when taking children through complicated stories (like the Mosaic plagues), it is critical that Christ functions as our key interpretive framework.

My good friend, Connor Shram, and I have written a series of kids books that invite children into a playful and imaginative journey of getting to know Jesus and his core messages of peace, love, and inclusion. *Jesus vs. the Bad Guys: A Story of Love and Forgiveness* (Tyndale, 2024) and *Jesus and the Outsiders: A Story of Love and Belonging* (Tyndale, May 2026).



Further, if you'd like encouragement on peacemaking and parenting, you can sign up for our newsletter 'The Peaceful Parents Club' at jesusisforkids.com

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