

The Purpose of the Plagues

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While we are experiencing significant relief from covid, only 20% of the world is partially vaccinated. More people have died from the virus in 2021 than all of 2020. Today, we're looking at the plagues. Ten, twelve, if you count the rod and the hand. Either way there are a lot. And they're sweeping, devastating. Why the plagues? *Let's take a look at three and see.*

Three Plagues

Moses makes his way to a place in the Nile where Pharaoh frequently went in the mornings. Perhaps to bathe but more likely to stand in awe. The Nile was the federal reserve of Egypt. It irrigated crops, sustained life, was the power of the kingdom. Standing on the bank Moses says, [The LORD the God of the Hebrews says, Let my people go, that they may serve me...or else.](#) A warning repeated with the plagues. Pharaoh refuses to *obey*. So Aaron stretches out his rod out over the **Nile** and turns all the water in Egypt to blood, even the water in vessels of wood and stone. Why? Numbers 33:4, ["the Lord executed judgments against their gods."](#) This particular judgment is probably against Hapi, god of the Nile or Khnum, guardian of the water. Why was Pharaoh there in the mornings? Most likely to venerate this god, as the Egyptian hymn says, *"Hail to thee, O Nile, that issues from the earth and comes to keep Egypt alive!"* But now the Nile is bleeding out, lifeless. So Pharaoh's magicians come to his aid, reproduce the miracle, but are cannot reverse it. So, the *Egyptians* dig trenches for fresh water. Who's the slaves now? The mighty Nile god upended by YHWH. *Pharaoh turns and goes into his house, and he did not take even this to heart.* The god of his life, his kingdom, his success is overthrown in a single act, and *he didn't even take it to heart.* We have more in common with him than we want to admit. Digging ditches in Auschwitz, watching the bodies pile up around him, Victor Frankl came to the conclusion that suffering is a moral task. That there's some good to be grasped, some thing to be learned, something to take to heart in suffering. When you encounter hardship, when you're in trial, what do you want most? The pain to stop or *to take to heart what God is teaching you?* The second plague is prefaced with the same warning: let God's people go that they may worship him, but Pharaoh refuses and the country is filled with **frogs**. It's comical. Thousands of frogs everywhere, but uncomfortable, even in their beds! This plague is against Heket, goddess of childbirth represented by a frog. So the magicians step up again to replicate the miracle, but cannot reverse it. So Pharaoh calls Moses and Aaron in and asks them to *plead with God* to remove the frogs, and he'll let them go. They comply. Dead frogs are gathered and piled up in heaps, and the land stank. Earlier Moses was accused of making Israel stink before Pharaoh, but who stinks now? How does Pharaoh respond? [but when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the LORD had said \(8:15\).](#) Pharaoh reneges on his promise, again. Why? He saw a respite. The word means a break from hardship, *relief*. When he saw relief, he hardened his heart. As we emerge from our own plague, we too face this temptation. As things open back up, will you go back to life as normal or will you bring the lessons of your suffering with you? What did you learn during COVID? For some, the absence of people made us yearn for their presence. I remember one Sunday turning off the recorded church service and feeling blue. I sang, and listened to the Word, but we were still locked down and alone. Then, I heard a honk and ran to the balcony. A family spilled out of their van and yelled up. We thought we would come

see you. I was moved to tears. But now as things open back up, if I'm not careful, I'll begin to see people as an inconvenience. As we emerge, will you prioritize people, bring the lessons of COVID with you? Will you meet in person in CGs, Sundays, spontaneously visit and encourage others or will you opt for a sequestered selfishness? If we're not deliberate, we'll commit Pharaoh's folly: *see the respite coming and harden our hearts to the Lord's lessons*. In the third plague Aaron stretches out his staff and strikes the dust of the earth, and **gnats** fill the land. They were probably mosquitos, on man and beast. You think the last couple sultry weeks have been bad?! Insufferable. The magicians *can't reproduce* this miracle. They say to Pharaoh, "[This is the finger of God. But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them...](#)" (8:19). The most noteworthy thing here isn't the god YHWH challenged *but the magician's response*. Finally they give in and recognize God's power—*this is the finger of God*. It's a compliment. All it takes is a flick of his finger to reduce a superpower to its knees *with mosquitos*, a virus, a snowstorm, an internet outage. The finger of God. When we encounter adversity often our first response is to troubleshoot. Fix the internet, find some heat, develop a vaccine, which has its place, but we're meant to get beneath all that. The magicians didn't acknowledge YHWH *until they reached the end of their resources*. Only when their power was stripped, did they realize how powerless they truly were and how powerful YHWH really is. **Desperation is meant to yield dependence.** It wasn't until Frankl suffered in the death camp that he realized suffering is meant to be a tutor. But it's not enough to simply learn. Life is not about learning lessons. It's much more profound. It's not about doing good, becoming cultured, or even making a difference. It's deeper, much deeper. The magicians urged Pharaoh to join their discovery—he refused to listen—but they were onto the meaning of life. Their power structure, their way of life, their fix-it mentality had been exposed, stripped away, by the finger of God. One day Jesus cast a demon out of a mute man. Some marveled but others scoffed saying he casts demons out by the prince of demons. Jesus responded, "[But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you...whoever is not with me is against me](#) (Lk 11:20). What happened? He challenged the power structure of the Pharisees, their religious elitism, their kingdom. And he challenges ours. Calvin says, Every man carries a kingdom in his breast." What's your kingdom? Take it to the extreme. Comfort? I'll participate *if I feel like it, serve if it's convenient*. Comfort makes us selfish. Education? I don't watch movies; I read books. I know better. Education makes us elitist. Duty? I'll do it because it's the right thing. If duty is all we've got, it will leave us cold. Community? I prioritize people. I care about relationships. People will fail you. When your kingdom crumbles, when your power structure is dismantled, when what you worship is taken away, what do you have? Don't settle for the gods of Egypt. Jesus is saying, God's finger is my finger, his power is my power, his kingdom my kingdom. It's not enough to make me one among the gods; I'm the only God. It's inadequate to attend the kingdom; either you're in or you're out; it's not even enough to learn from me; you're either with me or against me. Life isn't about learning lessons, you see; it's about *kneeling before the true King*. Living under his rule, allowing him to shape everything. In the face of that power, in the presence of that King, Pharaoh became hard not soft. *But the magicians kneeled*. They came to the end of themselves and learned to worship. *Desperation yielded dependence*. Which leads us to the whole point of the plagues.

One God

Why did YHWH send the plagues? Was it to deliver Israel, yes. Was it to expose Egypt's gods, yes but...The ultimate reason comes in 9:14 when YHWH says, [For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth...so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth](#)" (9:14-15). *None* like me. Every once in a while someone comes along who's in a class all their own. The GOAT. Michael Jordan or LeBron James. Roger Federer or Novak Djokovic. Tom Brady or... The greatest of all time. Each of the GOATS are on the end of a spectrum, weigh the most on the scale. But the real GOAT isn't even on the scale, doesn't belong on the spectrum. Why? There is none like him, and because of that it's *his name* that should be most famous. Why? Saint Paul wrote a hymn to tell us why, [Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name](#). What name? Lord, the translation of YHWH. Jesus has that name. He is inscribed in the very identity of YHWH, and YHWH exalts him, lifts him up. He's off the scale, and he's got a name to go with it! So Paul says that [at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord/YHWH](#) (Php 2:9-11). But why? Did you notice he said, [Therefore God has highly exalted him](#)? Therefore what? Because Jesus Christ humbled himself becoming obedient to the point of death—the greatest plague—born on a cross *for us*. *Therefore* God highly exalted him. He's the anti-Pharaoh, the Lord of lords, the king of Kings and he dies to unseat the kingdoms in our chests! So, don't refuse to take things to heart; don't see relief and harden your heart, don't be stripped of your power, only to look for power somewhere else. Take a knee and KNOW that there is *none* like God in all the earth.