

The Judgement of God

By

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“So the LORD said to Moses: ‘Pharaoh’s heart is hard; he refuses to let the people go. ‘Go to Pharaoh in the morning, when he goes out to the water, and you shall stand by the river’s bank to meet him; and the rod which was turned to a serpent you shall take in your hand. ‘And you shall say to him, ‘The LORD God of the Hebrews has sent me to you, saying, ‘Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness’; but indeed, until now you would not hear! ‘Thus says the LORD: ‘By this you shall know that I am the LORD. Behold, I will strike the waters which are in the river with the rod that is in my hand, and they shall be turned to blood. ‘And the fish that are in the river shall die, the river shall stink, and the Egyptians will loathe to drink the water of the river.’ ’ ’ Then the LORD spoke to Moses, ‘Say to Aaron, ‘Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their streams, over their rivers, over their ponds, and over all their pools of water, that they may become blood. And there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in buckets of wood and pitchers of stone.’ ’ And Moses and Aaron did so, just as the LORD commanded. So he lifted up the rod and struck the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants. And all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. The fish that were in the river died, the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink the water of the river. So there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt. Then the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments; and Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the LORD had said. And Pharaoh turned and went into his house. Neither was his heart moved by this. So all the Egyptians dug all around the river for water to drink, because they could not drink the water of the river. And seven days passed after the LORD had struck the river.”

-Exodus 7:14-25

Now that God has laid out a credible threat to Pharaoh and demonstrated His divine authority, we now move into the famous 10 plagues of Egypt. In order to make this flow a little more smoothly, we will take this paper to go over the next four chapters of Exodus. I think that in viewing the plagues as a whole, they make a lot more sense and help us understand God’s divine purposes. So in this paper we will discuss God’s judgement and the purposes of that judgement, and next week we will look at Pharaoh’s response and the nature of his hard heart.

The Plagues

Before we dive into the divine purpose of these plagues, it would probably help us to have a brief overview of the 10 plagues of Egypt. The first thing to understand about these plagues is that they are organized in groups of three, and so you have three groups of three plagues followed by the ultimate tenth plague that finally settles the issue and causes Pharaoh to relinquish the people of Israel. Below I have written out a brief explanation of the plagues:

1. Nile to blood, and other water sources, Pharaoh is warned at the Nile river by Moses and Aaron, done with Aaron's rod, Pharaoh's magicians are able to replicate the miracle by turning small amounts of water to blood, no special protection is given for the Jews, and Pharaoh is completely unmoved.

2. Frogs, Pharaoh is warned by Moses and Aaron, they come out of the waters, done with Aaron's rod, Pharaoh's magicians are able to replicate by bringing a small amount of frogs forth, no special protection for Jews, Pharaoh says he will let them go to sacrifice, God then causes the frogs to die, but when he is given relief, he hardens his heart and recants on his offer.

3. Lice, no warning given, Aaron's rod strikes the dust, turning it into lice, Pharaoh's magicians can't replicate this or any future plague, no special protection for the Jews, Pharaoh makes no move to change, and it says that his heart grew hard. The habit seems to have formed and his heart hardens reflexively. Also, the plague is never said to be removed.

4. Flies, Pharaoh is once again warned in the morning by the river, God seems to directly manifest the judgement, special protection is given for the Jews for this and all future plagues, Pharaoh says they can sacrifice to God in Egypt, when Moses objects, Pharaoh seemingly agrees to let them go into the wilderness, but Pharaoh hardens his heart when the plague is gone.

5. Virus for livestock, Pharaoh is warned by Moses and Aaron, God seems to directly manifest this judgement, Pharaoh's heart becomes hard, and he makes no move to let them go, but we are specifically told that his heart becomes hard when he learns that the Israelites are spared.

6. Boils, no warning given, Moses scatters ash from the furnace to "spread" the boils across the land, no attempt from Pharaoh to stop the plague, and we are told that God hardens his heart.

7. Hail, Pharaoh is warned early in the morning, Moses stretches out his rod to start the hail, provision is given to the people of Egypt to avoid the plague if they bring their animals and servants inside, most animals are killed, and most crops, minus the barley

which hadn't fully sprouted yet. Pharaoh fakes repentance, and then when the plague is removed, once again hardens his own heart.

8. Locusts, Pharaoh is given a warning and seems to soften to the warning, but refuses to let the children go, Moses stretches out his rod to begin the plague, the east wind brings the locusts into the nation, Pharaoh fakes repentance again, God sends a western wind to drive the locust into the Red Sea and God hardens Pharaoh's heart.

9. Darkness on the land, no warning given, Moses stretches out his hand, three days of total, "thick" darkness, Israelites are said to have light specifically in their dwellings, Pharaoh agrees to let the people go, but not the livestock, Moses rejects the offer, and God hardens Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh declares this would be the last time he would speak with Moses.

10. The death of the firstborn. The Angel of the Lord does this, Pharaoh finally lets them go.

That is a brief run down of the 10 plagues, hopefully the pattern becomes clear as we look at it. Each set of three plagues begins with a warning from Moses and Aaron "early in the morning" and ends with a plague that comes with no warning. Each one gets progressively more severe and alternates between Pharaoh faking repentance and refusing to give repentance. We also see interesting things happen with Pharaoh's heart hardening, as well as some interesting other patterns that we can derive from the specific plagues that God chooses, but we will talk about all this later on. For now, let's dive into God's role as judge of the earth and how He manifests this role.

God and Judgement

"Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord."

-Romans 12:19

I think one of the most difficult aspects of God for modern people to accept is His role as the judge of the earth. In our modern world we have so prioritized the virtues of love, acceptance, tolerance, and mercy that we have forgotten about the virtue of justice. In the ancient world this was not the case. The concept of justice was on the minds of ancient peoples all the time and formed the basis for their most profound works, both artistic and philosophic. This is the theme of Plato's masterpiece "The Republic" and the ancient playwright Aeschylus wrote his most famous work "The Oresteia" on this very topic.

Even within the Scriptures, one of the most famous books of our Bibles, Job, has at the center the nature of God's justice. And the majority of the prophets wrestle with God's justice and speak extensively about it.

*"God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the gods. How long will you judge unjustly, And show partiality to the wicked? Selah
Defend the poor and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy; Free them from the hand of the wicked."*

-Psalm 82:1-4

Some might argue that the large presence of passages like the one above are the result of God's early covenant with His people dependent on the Law and not on grace. But this isn't true. The first quote that I used was from the book of Romans and the apostle Paul declares that vengeance indeed belongs to God. But more than this, the final book of the New Testament, the book of Revelation, equally deals with this same issue, and we even see a recapitulation of the same plagues of Egypt thrust upon a non-believing world.

"When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed."

-Revelation 6:9-11

Notice that these saints are not condemned for requesting judgement from God, but are instead assured that God will avenge them. So if this is true, why has there been such a strange modern aversion to justice in our current culture? The answer is a little more complex than what I am about to say, but in broad terms, the cause of our modern aversion to justice has a lot to do with our modern prosperity. In a world of scarcity and constant brutal crime and tribal warfare, which is the world that most people have lived in for the majority of human history, the topic of justice becomes very important. But in a world of prosperity, stability, and, relatively, low crime, the topic of justice becomes less and less important. I love how the Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf put this point:

"My thesis that the practice of nonviolence requires a belief in divine vengeance will be unpopular with many Christians, especially theologians in the West. To the person who is inclined to dismiss it, I suggest imagining that you are delivering a lecture in a war

zone (which is where a paper that underlies this chapter was originally delivered). Among your listeners are people whose cities and villages have been first plundered, then burned and leveled to the ground, whose daughters and sisters have been raped, whose fathers and brothers have had their throats slit. The topic of the lecture: a Christian attitude toward violence. The thesis: we should not retaliate since God is perfect noncoercive love. Soon you would discover that it takes the quiet of a suburban home for the birth of the thesis that human nonviolence corresponds to God's refusal to judge. In a scorched land, soaked in the blood of the innocent, it will invariably die. And as one watches it die, one will do well to reflect about many other pleasant captivities of the liberal mind."

-Miroslav Volf - "Exclusion & Embrace"

That final paragraph is such an indictment of our modern moment, I particularly like that line: *"it takes the quiet of a suburban home..."* We take our modern moment of relative peace for granted, and we forget that throughout the world, this is not the way that most people live. It is actually a result of modern prosperity to ignore a topic as important as God's wrath and divine judgement.

But when we read the text of Exodus, such modern delusions should be dismissed for the folly that they are. The Israelites have been brutalized in horrid slavery for generations at this point. Their children have been drowned in the Nile and their torment is so severe that they willingly sided with their captors to gain "peace". In the face of such terrible atrocities, it would be impossible to accept a God that could simply ignore these evils and instead extend infinite amounts of grace and understanding to the people of Egypt. Because, even though it was the Pharaohs who were chiefly responsible for these evils, the people of Egypt have been complicit in these actions. I like how the early church father, Gregory of Nyssa puts this point:

"When Moses saw that all the subjects were in agreement with the prince of evil, he made a general plague come upon all the Egyptian people, without anyone escaping from the experience of evil."

-Gregory of Nyssa - "About the Life of Moses"

While there wasn't equivalent guilt there was a general agreement about the treatment of the people of Israel. Also, this is just the nature of authority. A parent's sin necessarily affects their family most severely, and a leader's sins do reign down on their subjects. But the reverse is also true. A parent's virtues bless their children and a leaders' wise decisions prosper their people, through no merit of their own. We may not like this is our reality, but it remains true.

This all reminds me of some of the writings of our presidents in regards to slavery in our own nation. Although many write off Thomas Jefferson for being a hypocrite, since he owned slaves, while we certainly can't excuse his behavior, I think that a measure of grace can be given to the man considering the world he was brought up in. But his own conscience condemned him for his behavior, take this quote from a letter he wrote about the state of Virginia:

"And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with his wrath? I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just that His justice cannot sleep forever."

-Thomas Jefferson - "Notes on the State of Virginia"

Jefferson trembled because he knew that God was not mocked. A nation that tolerated the slavery and oppression of another group of people would have to eventually answer for their sins. In the same vein, consider what Abraham Lincoln said in his second inaugural address during the Civil War:

"If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which in the providence of God must needs come but which having continued through His appointed time He now wills to remove and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him. Fondly do we hope ~ fervently do we pray ~ that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword as was said three thousand years ago so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'"

-Abraham Lincoln - "Second Inaugural Address"

The fact of the matter is that God cannot be said to be loving unless He is also just. For what loving Father could possibly tolerate evil committed against their children without demanding justice? God as our Father in heaven will demand recompense for those who commit evil against His children. This provides assurance for the victims of evil, but also a warning for those who would flaunt God's laws. While God is patient and kind, eventually His patience comes to an end and He will judge every wrong.

Even for the believer, we must understand that we are not immune to this principle. For while God has protected us from His divine wrath through His Son, He remains a good

Father. And every good Father must discipline the children that they love lest they languish in the pain of wrongdoing:

“And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.”

-Hebrews 12:5-6

Poetic Judgement

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.”

-Galatians 6:7-8

But that leads to an obvious question, if God judges all sin, either as a judge punishing a rebellious soul, or as a Father trying to correct a wayward child, how does God judge us while we are on this earth? When we read the fantastic plagues of Egypt, it would be easy to think that God simply doesn't judge nations in the same way that He judged the nation of Egypt. In one sense this statement is correct, but in another sense, it is misguided.

To be sure, what we read in the book of Exodus is a one of a kind sequence of events in which God demonstrates His divine power and providence through the plagues. But, there is also a pattern to these judgements that reveals to us the way that God continues to judge sin to this day. One of the principles of true justice is that it has to “rhyme”, this is where we get the phrase “poetic justice”. What this means, is that just as in a poem where one line must rhyme with the following line, so justice meets a particular sin directly, it mirrors the transgression and therefore brings harmony to the affected community. We have different phrases that capture this sentiment like “the punishment must fit the crime” or “you reap what you sow”, but they all convey the same idea.

At a distance, it can seem as though the plagues lack this poetic element to them, but at closer examination we can see that they all make a lot of sense. The first plague is to turn the Nile River to blood. This makes complete sense since the Nile River had been used to drown the Hebrew babies, and so it is just that God would make the Nile River reveal the blood of all the drowned Israelite children. Pastor Joseph Excell explains this point this way in his “pulpit commentary”:

“There was something peculiarly appropriate in the first judgment falling upon the Nile. The Nile had been made the instrument of destruction to the Israelites by the first tyrannical Pharaoh (probably Seti I.). It had been defiled with the blood of thousands of innocent victims. Crocodiles had in its waters crushed the tender limbs of those helpless infants, and had stained them with a gore that in God's sight could never be forgotten. The king, and the persons who were his instruments, had in so doing polluted their own holy river, transgressed their own law, offered insults to one of the holiest of their own deities. And all for the destruction of God's people. So, now that destruction was coming upon themselves, now that the firstborn were doomed (Exo. 4:23), and the catastrophe of the Red Sea was impending, the appropriate sign, which threatened carnage, was given—the Nile was made to run with blood. The Egyptians had among their traditions one which said that the Nile had once for eleven days flowed with honey. As this supposed miracle indicated a time of peace and prosperity, so the present actual one boded war and destruction. Again, Pharaoh's especial crime at this time was, that he despised God. God therefore caused his own chief deity to be despised. There are indications that, about this period, a special Nile-worship had set in. Hapi, the Nile-god, was identified with Phthah and Ammon—he was declared to stand "alone and self-created"—to be "the Father of all the gods," "the Chief on the waters," "the Creator of all good things," "the Lord of terrors and of choicest joys."

-Joseph S. Exell - "Pulpit Commentary Book 2"

Later on in the book of Revelation, God uses this same judgement and notice the heavenly response to this judgement:

“Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying:

“You are righteous, O Lord, The One who is and who was and who is to be, Because You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, And You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due.” And I heard another from the altar saying, “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.”

-Revelation 16:4-7

Next, God plagues the people with frogs. As early pagans, the Egyptians believed in a type of mystical participation between nature and the supernatural. As such, they saw the divine essence in material things and worshipped these things as divine. We will talk more about this concept later on, but for now it is important to note that they saw frogs as particularly divine entities and even associated the frog with certain deities. What does this mean? The Egyptians had callously drowned the Israelite children, who bore the image of their Creator. Now God is plaguing the nation of Egypt with an animal that

they find divine, which means that they wouldn't kill the very things that were plaguing them. The irony here can't be missed. The Egyptians casually murdered innocent infants who weren't harming them, but wouldn't raise a finger to kill a lowly animal that was plaguing them. I think that Joseph Excell puts this point fairly well in his "Pulpit Commentary":

"Frogs were among the Egyptian sacred animals. One of their deities, Heka, was a frog-headed goddess; and they seem to have regarded the frog as a sacred emblem of creative power. The great multiplication of frogs, whereby they became an annoyance and a curse, was a trial and strain to the entire Egyptian religious system. The Egyptians might not kill them; yet they destroyed all their comfort, all their happiness. Their animal-worship was thus proved absurd and ridiculous. They were obliged to respect the creatures which they hated—to preserve the animals they would fain have swept from the face of the earth."

-Joseph Excell - "The Pulpit Commentary"

And after Pharaoh "repents" God strikes the frogs dead, filling the nation with the smell of rotting flesh. This same idea is repeated when God curses the nation with flies. Flies are drawn to corruption and death, so it is fitting that the Egyptian people, who had embraced death and oppression and had never really been confronted with the depravity of their actions, had to see the blood of the infant children displayed in the Nile, had to smell their rotting flesh coming from their "divine" frogs, and be plagued by flies as a symbol of their corruption. Notice how the author of Exodus describes the plague of flies:

"And the LORD did so. Thick swarms of flies came into the house of Pharaoh, into his servants' houses, and into all the land of Egypt. The land was corrupted because of the swarms of flies."

-Exodus 8:24

I also think that there is significance in that it is specifically in this plague that God makes a special provision for His people, since they were the victims of Egyptian corruption and not the perpetrators:

"And in that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there, in order that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the land. "I will make a difference between My people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall be." ' ' "

-Exodus 8:22-23

I want to quickly note that Gregory of Nyssa saw a different interpretation to the plague of the frogs which I thought would be interesting to include here. Like most of God's symbols, God is communicating something beyond words, but the spirit of what He is communicating is fairly easy to discern if we are willing to look:

“Strictly speaking, in his lifestyle, he does not belong to either nature, for he is a man according to his nature, but he was transformed into a beast by his passion. For this reason she shows in herself that amphibious and ambiguous way of life. And so you will find in this life the signs of this plague, not only on the beds, but also on the tables, in the dispensaries and in the whole house. Such a man leaves, wherever he goes, the trail of his dissolute life, so that everyone can easily distinguish the life of the licentious man from the life of the pure man, even in the decoration of the house.”

-Gregory of Nyssa - “About the Life of Moses”

Gregory of Nyssa relates the frogs' amphibious nature to the beastly behavior of the Egyptians. Just as the frogs emerge from a river that is now made of blood, so the Egyptians appeared clean and sophisticated, but they had engaged in a level of barbarity that would make even the most vicious animals blush. And he warns that this can be the case for all of us who fall prey to our carnal nature, indulging our flesh at the expense of the spirit. That we too would fall into this ambiguous nature. That we would merely appear as “men” in our flesh, but really be as beasts in our spirits.

There is more that I can say about the plagues, but I think that you get the point. Each plague was crafted by God to specifically harmonize with a particular atrocity committed by the Egyptians, either against the Jews, or against God. This is why the plagues become more and more cosmic as they go along. Starting with the waters, moving to the earth, then the heavens themselves begin to assault the nation of Egypt, until finally the Angel of the Lord comes to personally kill the firstborns of the nation.

There is another symbol of “uncreation” contained in these plagues. In the book of Genesis God fashions the world in order to support the chief of His creation, mankind. He begins by drawing land out of the water, He fills the heavens with light and celestial bodies, He fills the earth with all sorts of life, and then He finally places man in charge of His creation.

But in this story, He almost “uncreates” the habitable world making it more and more hostile to human life. Instead of the waters bringing forth dry land and life, they are filled with death. Instead of God making animals from the earth to serve man, frogs plague the Egyptians, Moses forms parasitic lice from the dust and flies and locusts come to oppress them. This continues with the animals dying, the plants being destroyed until

finally even light itself is turned off to spite the rebellious Egyptians. And instead of creating man and giving him the ability to bear life in accordance with his image through marriage and child birth, God instead takes the firstborn of the nation.

Doesn't all of this teach us the same lesson that we learned at the start? That we reap what we sow. God has created the universe in accordance with His nature. This means that when we violate God's natural order, when we commit sin, we will incur natural consequences. If we lie or steal, the result will be that we lose trust, if we are cruel and judgemental, people will be less gracious towards us, and if we have no self-control, we will always find ourselves indulging our appetites against our higher aspirations.

Once again, in our modern prosperity we are able to insulate ourselves from many of the natural consequences that would literally kill people who lived in less affluent circumstances. So while a person might lose friends by being dishonest, they can cultivate online communities or simply move with relative ease through modern technology. Someone might gain weight through their bad eating habits, but they can always take weight loss pills. But at bottom, this is actually not a good thing. Why? Because, like the Egyptians, the lack of natural consequences for what they had done didn't erase the stain of guilt that their behavior left on their nation.

When God judges sin through these natural consequences, He is not doing this to be cruel, but that we might learn that any natural consequence that we might suffer in the flesh is symptomatic of a greater cost that is being paid by our souls. God's desire is that the natural consequences bring us to repentance. Just as God tells the prophet Ezekiel:

"Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" says the Lord GOD, "and not that he should turn from his ways and live?"

-Ezekiel 18:23

What seems like cruelty, is actually God's love. God wants the Egyptians to learn from these plagues and repent. This is why the Egyptians are given provision to avoid these plagues later on:

"He who feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his livestock flee to the houses. But he who did not regard the word of the LORD left his servants and his livestock in the field."

Exodus 9:20-21

God used the pain of His earthly judgements to preserve the souls of the Egyptians and the nation of Israel. This is one of God's great purposes in judgement. I think that C.S. Lewis made this point excellently in his book "The Problem of Pain":

"The human spirit will not even begin to try to surrender self-will as long as all seems to be well with it. Now error and sin both have this property, that the deeper they are the less their victim suspects their existence; they are masked evil. Pain is unmasked, unmistakable evil; every man knows that something is wrong when he is being hurt... And pain is not only immediately recognisable evil, but evil impossible to ignore. We can rest contentedly in our sins and in our stupidities; and anyone who has watched gluttons shovelling down the most exquisite foods as if they did not know what they were eating, will admit that we can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world... as a friend of mine said 'we regard God as an airman regards his parachute; it's there for emergencies but he hopes he'll never have to use it.' Now God, who has made us, knows what we are and that our happiness lies in Him. Yet we will not seek it in Him as long as He leaves us any other resort where it can even plausibly be looked for. While what we call 'our own life' remains agreeable we will not surrender it to Him. What then can God do in our interests but make 'our own life' less agreeable to us, and take away the plausible sources of false happiness? It is just here, where God's providence seems at first to be most cruel, that the Divine humility, the stooping down of the Highest, most deserves praise..."

-C.S. Lewis - "The Problem of Pain"

Though God does not delight in judgement, He knows that we cannot be content apart from Him, and He will use even pain in order to help us see the folly of our own behavior, as well as our desperate spiritual need for Him.

Divine Authority

"Now the magicians so worked with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not. So there were lice on man and beast. Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God.'" But Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the LORD had said."

-Exodus 8:18-19

The final intent of God's judgement that we will talk about here is to show His divine authority. We constantly labor under the delusion that we are in control of our own lives, and that if we know the right people and practice the right techniques we can stabilize our own lives and find our own prosperity and happiness. The plagues of Egypt were designed to wipe away that illusion.

Like all of us, the Egyptians had developed a system of control that made them feel as though they really did have ultimate authority over their own lives. This is what the pantheon of gods represented for the Egyptian people. They depended on the flow of the Nile river, and so they created guardian gods that protected the Nile. And if they were faithful in sacrificing to these gods and appeasing them, they would be immune to drought and flooding.

They had gods of the earth that protected them from insects and calamity, they had gods of healing that would guarantee that they would be healthy and vibrant, and they had gods that controlled the heavens themselves assuring good weather. Their chief deity was the sun god Ra, who the Pharaoh usually believed the avatar of. The plagues demonstrated in no uncertain terms God's sovereignty over every aspect of nature. I like how this one article gives a brief rundown on each of the plagues and the Egyptian god that was being targeted by the plague:

First Plague: Water turned to blood



Hapi was a twin deity, the spirit of the upper and lower Nile.

Aaron's staff turned the Nile River to blood, but the Egyptian magicians were able to replicate the miracle to some extent, so Pharaoh was not overly impressed by the Hebrew God. Nevertheless, there was no drinking water for seven days, and all the fish died. Imagine the stench.

Second Plague: Frogs



Heh was the frog-headed goddess of fertility.

Aaron's staff again brought about this plague. There were frogs everywhere: in houses, in beds, in food, getting squashed underfoot. Gross! Again the Egyptian magicians were able to produce frogs, but unlike the God of Moses, they could not make them go away.

Third Plague: Lice/gnats



[Geb](#) was the god of the earth. The lice were made of the dust that rose when Aaron struck his staff against the earth, so this would have fallen in Geb's jurisdiction. This is last time Aaron's staff is used and the first time the magicians could not match the plague. "This is the finger of God," they said. Yet Pharaoh remained unmoved.

Fourth Plague: Flies



This one's not so black-and-white. The best answer I've seen is that it was a mockery of [Khepri](#), a beetle-headed god who moved the sun.

The fourth plague marks the first that affects Egypt but not the Hebrew slaves. It also is the first that brings destruction. Pharaoh begins to plead and bargain with Moses, he even relents and grants the slaves permission to leave, but when the plague is lifted, he reneges on his word.

Fifth Plague: Cattle



There were lots of gods associated in some way with cows or bulls: [Hathor](#), Amon, Bat, Apis, Buchis, Mneuis, Ptah, and Ra.

This plague came with a grace period. Moses warned Pharaoh a day before the plague occurred, offering a chance to avoid this economic disaster, but Pharaoh's heart remained hard.

Sixth Plague: Boils



[Isis](#), the goddess of medicine and peace, would have been called upon to relieve this plague. This unannounced plague becomes even more personal, effecting the very bodies of the Egyptians. It takes out the Egyptian magicians, who are now “unclean” and unable to stand before Pharaoh or their gods for the remainder of the plagues. But it is not enough to move Pharaoh.

Seventh Plague: Hail



[Nut](#) was the goddess of the sky and should have been able to contain what fell to earth.

This plague is unique in that it allows the Egyptian people to make their own choice. They are warned in advance what would befall, and some chose to believe Moses and take shelter. Others, like Pharaoh, remained loyal to the gods. Interestingly, the hail destroys flax, which the Egyptians used in the making of clothing, and barley, used primarily in fermented drinks. It did not destroy their food crop of wheat.

Eighth Plague: Locust



[Osiris](#), god of the underworld, was credited with the growth of vegetation and crops. Also, Senehem was a minor god with a locust head and was supposed to protect from pests. Having still not heeded Moses's call to repent, Pharaoh now dooms the Egyptian's wheat crop. There is now no meat, nor is there bread.

Ninth Plague: Darkness



[Ra](#) was the most powerful god of all, the sun god; [Horus](#) was another major god whose right eye was the sun and his left was the moon. Here God demonstrates his power over the most worshipped object in the Egyptian religion—the sun—proving even the strongest of Egyptian gods futile, weak, and false. By now, God has completely devastated the Egyptian economy and their religion. These three days of darkness must have been terrifying on both a psychological and spiritual level.

Tenth Plague: Death of the firstborn



[Anubis](#) was the god of the dead. [Osiris](#) was considered the giver of life; Pharaoh, the ultimate power in Egypt, was worshiped as a god, yet he could not save his own son."

-Michelle Isenhoff - "Egyptian gods and the Ten Plagues"

As you can see, the plagues of Egypt were anything but random. God was systematically working up, through the Egyptian pantheon, showing Himself to be God of all the earth. This lesson was made available even to the Egyptians who were willing to take notice. This is why, starting with the hail, the Egyptians are given a way to avoid the plagues, and they even begin to yell at Pharaoh for his obstinance:

“And they shall cover the face of the earth, so that no one will be able to see the earth; and they shall eat the residue of what is left, which remains to you from the hail, and they shall eat every tree which grows up for you out of the field. ‘They shall fill your houses, the houses of all your servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians—which neither your fathers nor your fathers’ fathers have seen, since the day that they were on the earth to this day.’ ” And he turned and went out from Pharaoh. Then Pharaoh’s servants said to him, “How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?”

-Exodus 10:5-7

These plagues are so targeted and harsh, that I would even say that God was “mocking” the gods of Egypt and Pharaoh himself. This does not make God cruel, but it does mean that He will show forth His power at the expense of our pride. The poet Thomas Moore once said:

“The devil...the prowde spirite...cannot endure to be mocked.”

-Thomas Moore

Not only can we see this mockery in plagues like the frogs, but I think we can see it most clearly in the plague of the boils. This would not only be painful, but embarrassing. Notice what we are told about the magicians in this particular plague:

“And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians and on all the Egyptians. But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh; and he did not heed them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses.”

-Exodus 9:11-12

The magicians, who enjoyed so much prestige in the nation of Egypt, who represented the “mysteries” of the Egyptian faith, are now shown to be utterly powerless to help themselves. Out of their embarrassment, they can’t stand before Moses and instead we are simply told that the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh.

But more than the Egyptians, this message is aimed at the people of God. I think it is easy to anachronistically look back on the Israelites and assume that they held the

same monotheistic beliefs about the creation that we do today. The Israelites, particularly at this point in their history, acknowledged, and even worshipped other gods. The constant temptation and fall of the Israelites is not to stop worshipping God, but instead it is to incorporate other deities into their worship of God.

In fact, their first big sin after leaving Egypt is the construction of the golden calf. When Aaron builds this calf notice how he introduces it to the people of Israel:

“And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, “This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!”

-Exodus 32:4

The calf was made to represent the god “that brought you out of the land of Egypt.” So when God demonstrates His power over nature and reality itself, it is to reveal Himself to His people. To show that He alone sits enthroned in the heavens, and that His will is the only sovereign will in the universe. This is why Job’s friends are not as wrong as we might think. What they got wrong, in a massive way, was to presume that Job’s troubles were the result of his sin, what they were right about though was that God was ultimately sovereign over Job’s life. They, wrongly, inferred from that fact that God would have no other cause for allowing suffering in the life of Job aside from judgement. But ultimately, what is the point that God is trying to convey to His people?

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. “You shall have no other gods before Me.”

-Exodus 20:2-3

While we will always have other priorities and authorities within our life, God alone is worthy of our ultimate love and devotion. In fact, everything that we do ought to be for the purpose of honoring and serving God. So, for instance, I have responsibilities in my marriage towards my wife. But ultimately my devotion to my wife is under the umbrella of my ultimate devotion to God and His calling on my life to be a husband that glorifies His image in my marriage. If I mix that up, I might see God as one who merely supports my marriage. That if I get into marital difficulty, God is One resource I can call upon to help me set my marriage in order.

The opposite is true. God is not a means to an end, He is the ultimate end. It is so easy for us to fall into the error of the Egyptians or the Israelites, to see God as a means to our prosperity. And therefore we develop our faith as a means of controlling our life and guaranteeing health and prosperity, but this isn’t the case. This is why it is so important

that God *doesn't* protect His people from the first couple plagues, and that in the latter plagues, especially in the death of the firstborn, God requires obedience from His people in order to avoid judgement. This is also why the call to freedom is actually articulated as a call to sacrifice to God in the wilderness.

God is revealing to His people that He doesn't exist to serve their desires, we exist to serve Him. And like Job, we know that while it is wise and just for us to act in ways that please God and demonstrate sound wisdom, this is not an inoculation from suffering and trial. We seek righteousness and wisdom because we desperately want to honor God and not in order to serve our own interests. And as Job tells his wife:

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD."

-Job 1:21

I wanted to end today's study with a beautiful prayer that I read today from a Puritan prayer book, I hope you enjoy it as I did:

"To Thee I come in my difficulties, necessities, distresses; possess me with thyself, with a spirit of grace and supplication, with a prayerful attitude of mind, with access into warmth of fellowship, so that in ordinary concerns of life my thoughts and desires may rise to thee, and in habitual devotion I may find a resource that will soothe my sorrows, sanctify my successes, and qualify me in all ways for dealing with my fellow men. I bless Thee that Thou hast made me capable of knowing Thee, the Author of being, of resembling Thee, the perfection of all excellency, of enjoying Thee, the source of all happiness."

-“The Valley of Vision”