

27 What The Ten Plagues Of Egypt Have To Do With You

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Last week we read about Moses standing before Pharaoh and hear something he was not expecting.

Things had gotten worse, not better.

And God's only response was: *Now you shall see.*

This week I want to look at what came next.

A series of "plagues" that escalated each time Pharaoh declined to let God's people go.

In all, God sent ten plagues upon Egypt or more specifically the Egyptians as each time the Hebrews were spared.

Why Ten?

Numbers are a fascinating thing in the Bible and clearly used to identify certain patterns.

God doesn't do anything randomly. There is always purpose, even when we can't fully trace it. Scripture tells us plainly:

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares Yahweh. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9, LSB)

So why ten?

Why not one devastating plague and be done with it?

I believe the answer is mercy wrapped in escalation.

God was giving Pharaoh chance after chance to turn – and each refusal made the next consequence heavier. Not because God was cruel. Because Pharaoh kept choosing the same thing, and the natural weight of that choice kept increasing.

If Pharaoh had unhardened his heart early, it would not have gotten so bad.

It rarely does.

The first three plagues – blood, frogs, and gnats – were about establishing something basic.

Moses turned the Nile to blood. Egypt's magicians replicated it, so Pharaoh dismissed it.

Frogs overran the land. Again the magicians managed a small imitation, and Pharaoh's heart stayed hard.

Then came gnats. This time the magicians could not reproduce it. They told Pharaoh plainly: **“This is the finger of God.”** (Exodus 8:19)

Even his own advisors could see it.

Pharaoh still would not yield.

Notice something in these first three plagues – every time, the text says Pharaoh hardened his own heart. This was his choice, made three times in a row, each time with more evidence in front of him.

I think there is something to this worth digging in a little deeper.

We’re all familiar with the phrase “three strikes and you’re out”, I think this is similar because each set of three mark an escalation that could have been avoided with repentance.

Has God been warning you about something?

I want to encourage you to not take the path Pharaoh did – don’t allow your sin to embitter you against the good the Lord desires for you.

Stop justifying your behavior and confess what you’ve been doing then ask forgiveness, this is what repentance looks like.

The next three plagues – flies, the death of livestock, and boils – escalated further.

Flies swarmed all of Egypt but never touched Goshen, where the Israelites lived. God was making a distinction. This was not random suffering. It was targeted, intentional, directed at Pharaoh’s refusal specifically.

Then Egypt’s livestock died – the animals many Egyptians literally worshiped as gods. God was not just punishing. He was dismantling the things Pharaoh trusted in, one by one.

Then boils broke out on man and beast, so severe that even Pharaoh’s magicians could not stand before Moses.

And here is where the passage shifts in a way that has always challenged me.

Starting with the plague of boils, the language changes. It no longer says Pharaoh hardened his own heart. It says **God** hardened Pharaoh’s heart.

Pharaoh had chosen the same response so many times that the choosing became the condition.

He had trained his own heart into a place it could no longer easily leave.

That is not God being unfair. That is what repeated refusal eventually does to a person. Romans 1 describes something similar – a point where God “gives people over” to what they have already, repeatedly, chosen for themselves.

Can you identify here?

Have you trained your own heart into a place that is difficult to leave?

I call this “the rut”, if you’ve every driven or ridden a bike on a dirt road you will know what a rut is, a channel cut into the dirt usually when the ground is wet and when it dries, if your tire enters in, it is very difficult to get out without stopping and course correcting.

The final three plagues before the last one – hail, locusts, and darkness – were no longer subtle at all.

Hail destroyed crops and livestock left in the fields, but not in Goshen.

Locusts devoured whatever the hail had left, until nothing green remained anywhere in Egypt.

Then three days of total darkness fell over the land – a darkness so complete that the Egyptians could not leave their homes. But in Goshen, the text says, the Israelites **had light**.

By now Pharaoh was making empty confessions. More than once he told Moses, “**I have sinned this time. Yahweh is righteous, and I and my people are wicked.**” (Exodus 9:27, paraphrased from LSB)

But the moment relief came, so did the reversal.

Sound familiar?

Have you ever made that same promise? Genuinely meant it in the moment – I’ll stop, I’ll change, this is the last time – only to return to the exact same place once the pressure lifted?

I have.

In my book I write about what I call the Dark Halls – the corridors of addiction that connect every other room in the castle.

I know this pattern intimately.

There was a season of my life where I knew, with complete clarity, that something I was doing was wrong.

Not confused about it. Not uninformed.

I knew.

But the need to fix something, or numb something, or mask something, felt bigger in the moment than the consequence I was risking.

So I convinced myself.

I told myself it was manageable. I told myself I was in control. I told myself this was different, this time, this circumstance.

Pharaoh's confessions, over and over, followed by a hardened heart the moment pressure lifted – I understand that pattern from the inside, not just as a Bible story.

The pull to justify what we already know is harmful is not unique to ancient Egypt.

It is remarkably, uncomfortably human.

And for me, that pattern did not stop on its own.

It nearly killed me before it finally broke... literally.

Have you ever held onto something you knew, somewhere in your heart, was not good for you?

Not something you were ignorant about.

Something you had already been shown was harmful, more than once, and justified anyway.

A relationship. A substance. A habit. A way of numbing pain instead of processing it. A grudge you have nursed long past its usefulness. A sin you have confessed a hundred times in the exact same words, meaning it each time, and returning to it anyway.

If so, you know something of what was happening in Pharaoh's heart.

The tragedy is not that he was confronted.

The tragedy is that he was confronted ten times, and each confrontation deepened the very thing he refused to release.

The final plague was different from all the others.

It did not target crops or animals or convenience.

It targeted the firstborn of every household in Egypt that had not covered its doorframe with the blood of a lamb.

That night, a great cry went up across the land.

The firstborn of every Egyptian had died that night (apparently Pharaoh was not a firstborn which is an interesting topic for another day).

Every heir in every Egyptian household gone.

Pharaoh had kept saying no to God, he felt he himself was a god and that the God of the Hebrews was certainly not as powerful as the gods of the most powerful nation on earth.

It is said that pride comes before the fall... well so does arrogance, and I suppose in a way, arrogance is a form of pride isn't it.

Pharaoh could handle the previous nine plagues, but this one could not be overcome – for anyone who has experienced the death of their child I'm sure you can relate.

Pharaoh, finally, let the people go.

Nine plagues of escalating consequence. One final plague that could not be negotiated, minimized, or waited out.

Why so many chances?

I believe because that is who God is. Patient beyond what we deserve. Giving opportunity after opportunity to turn before the full weight of a choice comes due.

But patience is not the same as absence of consequence.

Nine warnings preceded the tenth plague.

Grace extended is not grace forever withheld from justice.

What This Means for You and Me

If you are holding onto something right now that you already know, somewhere honest inside you, is not good for you – I am not writing this to shame you.

I am writing this because I have been exactly where you are.

And I want you to hear something Pharaoh never seemed to learn:

The way out gets harder to find the longer you wait to take it.

Not because God stops offering it.

Because your own heart, like Pharaoh's, can grow so accustomed to refusing that refusing becomes the default.

Ten plagues were not God being excessive.

They were God being relentlessly patient with a man who kept proving, chance after chance, exactly how hard a human heart can become.

Don't wait for your tenth chance.

Whatever it is you already know needs to change – bring it into the light now. Confess it to someone safe. Stop managing it alone in the dark halls where it has been quietly killing you.

God's ways are higher than ours.

But so, thankfully, is His mercy.

The Pattern We All Know

Looking back over these three sets of plagues you'll notice something.

They weren't really about Egypt.

They were about a heart given chance after chance to turn, and choosing instead to dig itself deeper into the rut.

It's the sin you've confessed a dozen times in the same words. The relationship you know isn't good for you but can't quite leave. The way you numb what you haven't dealt with instead of bringing it into the light.

Every time we choose the familiar wrong over the harder right, we're not just repeating a mistake.

We're carving the rut a little deeper.

Pharaoh's story isn't a warning about ancient Egypt.

It's a mirror.

And mirrors are only useful if we're willing to look and actually change what we see.

So look.

Then move.

Don't wait for the tenth plague to convince you what the first one tried to show you.

You're not alone. Paul reminds us of this in Romans 7:

"For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want."
(Romans 7:19, LSB)

Sometimes it's one and done, but more often than not it is a daily battle – to choose to rise above and change.

Maybe it's time to accept the need to change – not because judgment is coming, but because freedom is waiting on the other side of it.

If you're struggling:

- Christian Faith-Based Resources: <https://mentalhealthhotline.org/christian-faith-resources/> or call 1-866-903-3787 (24/7)
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988 (call or text)

You matter. Whatever pattern you are caught in right now – you do not have to wait for it to nearly break you before you bring it into the light. Please stay.

William James Meyer is the author of “Do You Live in a Castle? Breaking Free from the Walls That Hold You Hostage.” He writes from a Christian perspective as a fellow traveler – someone who knows the dark halls from the inside and learned, the hard way, not to wait for the tenth chance.

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