

The Finger of God

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[0 : 00] we're going to read now from two passages in the Bible. These will be projected up on screen because I'm changing these passages.

So the first is in Exodus chapter 8. Exodus chapter 8. Seven days passed after the Lord struck the Nile.

Then the Lord said to Moses, Go to Pharaoh and say to him, This is what the Lord says. Let my people go so that they may worship me.

If you refuse to let them go, I will plague your whole country with frogs. The Nile will teem with frogs. They will come up into your palace and your bedroom and onto your bed, into the houses of your officials and on your people and into your ovens and kneading troughs.

The frogs will go up on you. Pardon me. Don't get worried. The frogs will go up on you and your people and all your officials.

[1 : 13] Then the Lord said to Moses, Tell Aaron, Stretch out your hand with your staff over the streams and canals and ponds and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.

So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt and the frogs came up and covered the land. But the magicians did the same things by their secret arts. They also made frogs come up from the land of Egypt.

Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, Pray to the Lord to take the frogs away from me and my people and I will let your people go to offer sacrifices to the Lord.

Moses said to Pharaoh, I leave to you the honor of setting the time for me to pray for you and your officials and your people that you and your houses may be rid of the frogs except for those that remain in the Nile.

Tomorrow, Pharaoh said. Moses replied, It will be as you say, so that you may know there is no one like the Lord our God.

[2 : 14] The frogs will leave you and your houses, your officials and your people. They will remain only in the Nile. After Moses and Aaron left Pharaoh, Moses cried out to the Lord about the frogs he had brought on Pharaoh.

And the Lord did what Moses asked. The frogs died at the houses, in the courtyards and in the fields. They were piled into heaps and the land reeked of them. But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and would not listen to Moses and Aaron just as the Lord said.

Then the Lord said to Moses, Tell Aaron, Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the ground and throughout the land of Egypt the dust will become gnats. They did this and when Aaron stretched out his hand with the staff and struck the dust of the ground, gnats came upon men and animals. All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats. But when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not. And the gnats were on men and animals.

The magicians said to Pharaoh, This is the finger of God. But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen just as the Lord had said. Then the Lord said to Moses, Get up early in the morning and confront Pharaoh as he goes to the water and say to him, This is what the Lord says, Let my people go so that they may worship me.

[3 : 41] If you do not let my people go, I will send swarms of flies on you and your officials, on your people and into your houses. The houses of the Egyptians will be full of flies and even the ground where they are.

But on that day, I will deal differently with the land of Goshen where my people live. No swarms of flies will be there so that you will know that I, the Lord, am in this land.

I will make a distinction between my people and your people. This miraculous sign will occur tomorrow. And the Lord did this. Dense swarms of flies poured into Pharaoh's palace and into the

houses of his officials and throughout Egypt, the land was ruined by flies. Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, Go, sacrifice to your God here in the land. But Moses said, That would not be right. The sacrifices we offer the Lord, our God, would be detestable to the Egyptians. And if we offer sacrifices that are detestable in their eyes, will they not stone us? [4 : 47] We must take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord, our God, as he commands us. Pharaoh said, I will let you go to offer sacrifices to the Lord, your God, in the desert.

You must not go very far. Now pray for me. Moses answered, As soon as I leave you, I will pray to the Lord and tomorrow the flies will leave Pharaoh and his officials and his people. Only be sure that Pharaoh does not act deceitfully again by not letting the people go to offer sacrifices to the Lord. Then Moses left Pharaoh and prayed to the Lord and the Lord did what Moses asked.

The flies left Pharaoh and his officials and his people. Not a fly remained. But this time also Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go.

And then we shall read in Philippians chapter 4. Philippians chapter 4.

[6 : 00] We'll read from verse 4 to verse 13. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all.

The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally brothers, whatever is true whatever is noble whatever is right whatever is pure whatever is lovely whatever is admirable if anything is excellent or praiseworthy think about such things. Whatever you have heard whatever you have sorry whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me put it into practice and the God of peace will be with you.

I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me indeed you had been concerned but you had no opportunity to show it.

[7 : 15] I'm not saying this because I'm in need for I've learned to be content whatever the circumstances I know what it is to be in need I know what it is to have plenty I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation whether well fed or hungry whether living in plenty or in want I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Amen and may God bless that reading of the word. Let's join together in prayer. Our loving God we thank you that you are sovereign God who in grace and in mercy God who in sovereign power and with great grace directed toward your people made a distinction between them and the Egyptians. Lord we thank you for the grace that you have poured out upon us through your son the Lord Jesus Christ. we thank you that he heals all our diseases and binds up our broken hearts.

We come to you today oh Lord in the name of Jesus Christ remembering that the main things are always the main things. Lord we ask and pray that you would help us to focus our minds not on the anxiety and panic of the world around us but upon the peace that the gospel brings us that in Jesus Christ we could not be more loved than we are.

We could not be more righteous in your eyes than we are. We could not be more justified than we are. Our loving heavenly father we come to you and pray that you would help us to rejoice in you and at this time we pray Lord that you would help us to let our gentleness our meekness be evident be evident to all to our neighbours and to our friends and to our family perhaps others around us are panicking help us oh Lord to keep our head in all situations because our minds are focused on you.

[9 : 37] We pray that you would take away our anxiety oh Lord and you redirect it so that by prayer and petition with thanksgiving we would present our requests to you and we also pray that your peace which transcends all understanding will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

At this time oh Lord when our minds are tempted heather and thither we pray that you would help us to think about what is true noble right pure lovely admirable things excellent and praiseworthy we pray that you the God of peace would be with us Lord we ask and pray that you would help us even in this situation to learn how to be content in these circumstances we pray Lord that you would help us to realise that through you yes we can do everything because you give us strength even if that everything is being calm when everyone else around us is going mad we pray for our health services oh Lord we thank you that in our country we have dedicated health professionals and a

health system oh Lord which will deal with anyone at their point of need Lord we pray that you would help those working in the health sector as they're going to have to work long hard hours and make difficult decisions that you would guide them and give them strength oh Lord we pray we pray for decision makers in public health we ask oh Lord that you would give them wisdom and strength we pray for those who have been affected by the coronavirus either directly or indirectly Lord we ask and pray Lord we ask and pray that again through this situation you would help us to depend not upon the science of man but upon the grace of God we recognise oh Lord that even this smallest organism organism this prokaryote this most simple and undifferentiated organism can bring a whole can bring the whole of humanity to its knees Lord we pray for those scientists working feverishly to develop a vaccine against coronavirus we ask that you would guide them oh Lord and give them the skill that you gave to scientists throughout the generations and you gave to your people in scripture Lord we pray and ask oh God that you would help us as a church to be a beacon of light and calm at this time Lord we ask and pray for our our nations our nations which in times of prosperity laugh at you mock you and in times of great need seek you Lord we think of how in the last analysis the problem of the human heart is our problem we think of the shelves in our supermarkets emptied of essential goods by the selfishness of some and Lord we ask and pray that you would help us oh God as we don't just minister to our own needs and to the needs of those that are close to us but as we minister to the needs of those who perhaps live beside us or those known to us in this congregation or in other places who might need to be given food and who might need a roll of toilet paper Lord we ask that in all these things you would draw glory to yourself through the actions of your people now Lord we pray that you'd be with us protect our people in this congregation we pray protect your people everywhere protect our nation we ask in Jesus name we pray these things

Amen I'm going to read now from Psalm 78 all my people hear my teaching parables I will unfold give attention as I utter dark and hidden things of old things that we have heard and known by our fathers they were shown we will tell them to our children generations yet to come we will show the Lord's great power and the wonders he has done laws for Israel he made statutes firm to be obeyed these he ordered our forefathers to their families to tell so the coming generation not yet born would know them well and their children in their turn God's commands and laws would learn turn with me to Exodus chapter well turn with me to Exodus chapter 8 verses 19 when I was going through Edinburgh

[14:46] Theological Seminary I spent six weeks learning how to preach and at that time we studied all the different techniques that preachers use to be interesting and to make sure that what they say is relevant and that everyone listens carefully to what they say so we had to set exams in this and we had to do all these kind of things and I remember at the end of this six week course going to a church in a part of Edinburgh where my wife's uncle happened to be preaching Murdo Matheson from Oban and he was a very old man and being of good free Presbyterian stock he would read a Spurgeon sermon from the pulpit now bear in mind I just sat through six weeks of some of the best teaching in the free church the free church of Scotland had to offer on how to preach well and here's an old man with an old copy of Spurgeon sermons talking in a West Highland accent and reading very boringly

I've got to tell you I sat there and I thought to myself oh my word I left that day my heart was so lifted by the truth that Murdo spoke as he read that sermon and I remember thinking to myself at the time never judge a book by its cover so what I'm going to do today is something very different I have never done this before and I hopefully I will never do it again in 1865 Britain suffered from two devastating epidemics an outbreak of cholera killed 15,000 people and cattle disease a cattle disease called Rinderpest destroyed 42,000 cattle or 7% of the national herd now at that time John Charles Ryle J.C. Ryle was the Anglican vicar of a rural parish in Suffolk and addressing in the main the agricultural situation he wrote a pamphlet with the title

The Finger of God these words are taken from Exodus 8 verse 19 and are the acknowledgement of the Egyptian priests that the plagues which had befallen their nation were indeed the finger of God so what I want to do this morning is I want to read you his sermon I want to read you his pamphlet and one of the reasons I want to do this is because here's a man who lived nearly 200 years ago one of the greatest ministers Britain has ever been privileged to have and he says these things an awful lot better than I ever could just when you hear the word cattle change it to people okay here we go look at the words which form the title of this booklet and consider them well this is the finger

of God they were spoken by heathen men more than 3000 years ago they fell from the lips of Egyptian magicians when one of the famous plagues came on the land of Egypt then the magicians said unto Pharaoh this is the finger of God

Exodus 8 verse 19 it would be well if all Englishmen were as wise as these Egyptians there is an evil among us that demands our serious attention it forces itself on our notice whether we like it or not it has seized the nation by the throat and it will have a hearing that evil is the foot and mouth epidemic coronavirus it is a heavy calamity that is hardly in England which is not suffering there is not a family which sooner or later will not suffer the meat on the rich man's table and the cheese in the cottage the milk and the butter which form so large a portion of our food will all be affected by it it will reach every home and come home to all it is a perplexing calamity no medicines or remedies or modes of treatment appear to have any effect on the disease after all the discoveries of science after all that has been written by our learned doctors the skill of man is completely baffled even our statesmen and rulers seem at their wits end with all the accumulated wisdom of the 19th century we have found no foe that entirely beats us but the curse of helplessness seems on our land now I wish to speak of the cattle plague as a minister of Christ

I wish to draw attention to one or two things which amidst the anxieties of the crisis now upon us appear likely to be forgotten let members of the parliament view the cattle plague from the political side let physicians and men of science propound their theories of prevention and cure I only ask leave to offer a few thoughts on the whole subject as a believer of the bible and as a Christian let us consider in the first place whence doth the cattle plague come from I answer unhesitatingly unhesitatingly it comes from God he who orders all things in heaven and earth he by whose wise providence everything is directed and without who nothing can happen he it is that hath sent this scourge upon us it is the finger of

[21 : 30] God I shall not spend time proving this point I refer anyone who asks for proof to the whole tenor of God's word I ask him to mark how God is always spoken of as the governor and manager of all things here below from the very least to the greatest who sent the flood on the world in the days of Noah it was God who sent the famine in the days of Joseph it was God who sent the plague on Egypt and especially the moraine the illness on the cattle it was God I count it mere waste of time to dwell much on this point I cannot understand how anyone can be called a believer of the Bible who denies God's providence over this world for my own part I believe thoroughly that God has not changed

I believe that he is governing all things on earth as much now as he was in Old Testament days I believe says Ryle that wars famines pestilences cattle plagues are all his instruments for carrying on his government of the world and therefore when I see a scourge like the cattle plague I have no doubt as to the hand that sends it shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it Amos 3 verse 6 it is the finger of God can anyone give a better account of the cattle plague if he can let him speak out like a man and tell us why it has come to say that it has originated in another land that is that it's not a new but an old disease that it's done great harm in days gone by all this is evading the question I ask to be told why it has come upon us how and in what way can the outbreak be accounted for at this particular period what possible causes can be assigned for it that have not existed for hundreds of years

I believe these questions cannot be answered I believe that the only cause that we must come to at last is it is the finger of God does anyone regard my assertion as absurd or unreasonable I have no doubt that many do so many I suspect think that God never interferes with the affairs of this world and that pestilences and cattle plagues are only the result of certain natural laws which are always producing certain effects I pity the man who thinks so is he an atheist does he believe that this wonderfully designed world came together by chance and had no creator if so he is a very credulous person that word I think means gullible but if he does believe that God made the world where I ask is the absurdity of believing that God governs the world if he allows that God frame the universe why not allow

God manages it away with this modern skepticism 1865 he wrote these words it is offensive and revolting to common sense they are not to be heard who would shut out the creator from his own creation he who made the world at the beginning by the finger of creating wisdom will never cease to govern the world by the finger of his providence until Christ comes again this is the finger of God does anyone pretend to say that God is too loving to send us such a scourge as this and that it is wrong to suppose that anything evil can come from him I pity the man who can argue in that way

has he children does he never correct them if a wise and sensible man I have no doubt he does but does he hate them because he just eyes them does he not show the highest love by checking them when they do wrong and shall not our father in heaven do the same yes indeed

God does not hate us he is a God of mercy and love and therefore he keeps up his providential government of all mankind there is love even in this fell scourge which is now upon us the cattle plague is the finger of a wise and loving God let us consider in the second place why has this cattle plague come upon us I answer that without hesitation it has come upon us because of our national sins God has a controversy with England because of the many things among us which are displeasing in his sight he would fain awaken us to a sense of our iniquities this cattle plague is a message from heaven the sins of individual men and women are often not reckoned for while they live but this is because there is a judgment day yet to come in that day every one of us shall give an account of ourselves to

[27 : 06] God Romans 14 verse 12 for nations there can be no future judgment day the sins of nations are reckoned for in time special sins and corruptions in a nation call for special chastisements I believe that this cattle plague is a special national chastisement on England because of our special national sins remember he wrote this in 1865 the teaching of the Bible on this point is to my mind plain distinct and unmistakable let anyone who doubts it read what God says about Babylon Tyre Damascus Egypt Moab Edom Ammon and Nineveh in Isaiah let him read such texts as these Amos 9 verse 8 the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful nation and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth Job 12 verse 23 he increases the nations and destroy them he enlargeth the nations and straightened them again let them study such chapters as

Daniel 4 and 5 surely if a man believes the Bible these passages should set him a thinking the God of the Bible is still the same he never changes does anyone ask what the national sins of England are I will mention some which appear to my eyes to stand out prominently in this country at this present time I may be quite wrong I only give my judgment as one who looks on attentively and marks the signs of the times the first national sin I will name is covetousness the excessive love of money and the desire to be rich in this world are what I mean never surely was there such a race for riches as at the present day to make money and die rich seems to be thought the highest virtue and the greatest wisdom yet

God has said covetousness is idolatry Colossians 3 verse 5 and the love of money is the root of all evil 1 Timothy 6 verse 10 the second national sin I will name is luxury and love of pleasure never surely was there a time when people ran so greedily after excitement amusement and gratification of their senses the many are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God 2 Timothy 3 4 the third national sin I will name is neglect of the Lord's day that blessed day is rapidly becoming in many quarters the day for visiting and pleasure and not the day of God yet Sabbath desecration was specially one of the sins which brought down God's judgment on the Jews my Sabbaths they have greatly polluted Ezekiel 20 13 the fourth national sin

I will name is drunkenness the quantity of intoxicating drink needlessly consumed every year in England is something frightful the number of public houses gin palaces and beer shops in our large towns is a standing proof that we are an intemperate people there are more people every Sunday night in some London parishes in gin shops than there are in churches and chapels we are worse in this respect than either France or Italy yet God has said no drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of God 1st Corinthians 6 10 the fifth national sin I will name is contempt of the seventh commandment thou shalt not commit adultery Exodus 20 14 in town and country among rich and among poor the tone of feeling about purity among the young is at its lowest ebb yet

God has said let no man deceive you with vain words because of these things cometh the wrath of God Ephesians 5 6 the last national sin I will name is the growing disposition to skepticism and infidelity little by little men in high places are ceasing to honor God yet after here the Bible is more openly impugned and its authority impaired to believe the Bible was once a mark of a Christian in the present day an English divine dares to call himself a Christian and yet boasts that he thinks much of the Bible is not true nothing I am thoroughly persuaded is so offensive to God as to dishonor his written word I believe firmly that these things are crying to God against England they are an offence against the king of kings for which he is punishing us at this very day and the rod he is using is the cattle plague the finger of

[32 : 31] God I believe is pointing at our six great national sins to say that we are not so bad as some nations and that the sins I have named are far more abundant in other countries than in

England is no argument at all we have had more privileges than other countries and therefore God may justly expect more at our hands for unto whomsoever much is given of them much shall be required Luke 12 48 I might easily enlarge on all these points I have mentioned I purposely abstain from doing so I am anxious to make this booklet as short as possible to effect this I content myself with supplying little more than seeds of thought which I hope may spring up and bear fruit in many minds it only it only remains to offer a few practical conclusions third what does the cattle plague summon us to do what does the cattle plague summon every one of us to do in answering that question the reader will distinctly understand that I only write as a

Christian minister let politicians make the best laws they can to meet the present emergency let medical men use every possible means to arrest the disease and patiently try every remedy let practical agriculturalists neglect nothing that may be available to prevent contagion to diminish the liability to infection and to stamp out that plague when it comes but my standpoint is that of the Bible in the light of that book I raise my concluding question what shall we do for one thing let us all consider our ways this is such a wonderful paragraph from J.C.

Royal listen really carefully to this please let us consider let us all consider our ways in an age of hurry bustle restlessness and fast living railways and telegraphs keep everyone in a state of unhealthy excitement now surely it would be well when the hand of God is stretched out against us if we were all to sit down and think a little are we not all over England living too fast would it not be well if there was more Bible reading more Sunday keeping more calm quiet effort to serve God and honour him happy is that man and happy is that nation that begins to think for another thing let us all humble ourselves before

God and acknowledge his hand alas we are a proud self conceited nation we are apt to think that we English people are the wisest and greatest and richest and bravest people in the world nothing changes huh we are sadly blind to our many faults and sins surely when God's hand is so plainly stretched out against us it is high time to give up this boastful spirit if there is anything God hates it is pride pride I do hate Proverbs 8 13 pride goeth before destruction Proverbs 16 18 I am against thee oh thou most pride Jeremiah 50 31 those that walk in pride he is able to abase Daniel 4 37 he that exalteth himself shall be abased and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted Matthew 23 12 for another thing let us each individually endeavor to break off our own besetting sins and to amend our ways it is easy work to find fault with the government and to blame others when we are in trouble the better course is to look within ourselves and try to do our own part to make things better the sins of a nation are made up of the sins of a great number of individuals now if every individual tries to amend his own life and to do better the whole nation will soon improve the city is soon clean when every man sweeps opposite his own door for another thing let us each use the influence we have to check sin in others the power that parents masters mistresses and employers have in this respect is very great if all such would exert themselves to check sabbath breaking excessive dress idleness drunkenness and breaches of the seventh commandment it would be an immense gain to the general condition of the nation influence over others we must never forget is a talent for which we must one day give account there are thousands of parents and employers

I fear who completely bury this talent in the ground they allow those under them to run into sin and like Eli they never reprove them it is written his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not 1st Samuel 3 13 for another thing let us each lay ourselves out more heartily to do some good in the world it is a melancholy fact that the increase of arms giving in England of late bears no proportion whatever to the increase of wealth in other words how much money people were taking in bore no relation to how much charity they were engaged in the trade and commerce of this country have probably doubled within the last 25 years yet the incomes of most of our large religious societies are almost at a standstill if English people will not remember that their gold and silver is only a loan from God and intended to be used for him they cannot be surprised if God reminds them of it by such visitations as the cattle plague the hand that gives a nation wealth [39 : 19] Ryle says is the hand that can take it away last of all but not least let us each resolve to offer special prayer to God for the removal of the judgment now upon us whatever else we do let us pray the word of God encourages us to it in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known to God Philippians 4 6 if any is afflicted let him pray James 5 13 if I send pestilence among my people if my people which are called by my name shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways then I will hear them from heaven and I will forgive their sin and I will heal their land 2nd Chronicles 7 13 through 14 the presence of our Lord Jesus

Christ in heaven at God's right hand invites us to it he that died for sinners on the cross is sitting there to be the sinner's advocate and friend he can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities and he knows the trials of our earthly condition examples of scripture warrant us the men of Nineveh humbled themselves and cried mightily to God and God heard their cry shall I not spare Nineveh that great city wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left and also much cattle Jonah 4:11 the character of God himself makes it folly not to pray he does not afflict willingly lamentations 3:33 he is the Lord God merciful and gracious showing mercy unto thousands Exodus 34:6 call upon me he says in time of trouble and I will deliver thee Psalm 50 verse 15 Ryle closes his booklet there but he offers a prayer at the end and that's how we're going to end our service with the prayer that Ryle himself offered let us pray Almighty

God who ordered us all things in heaven and earth and in whose hand is the life of man and beast have pity on us miserable sinners who are now visited with great sickness and mortality among our cattle we have nothing to say for ourselves we humbly confess that we deserve thy chastisement because of our many national sins but spare us good Lord according to thy many mercies deal not with us according to our sins withdraw from us this grievous plague and restore health above all stir up among us true repentance and increase true Christianity in this land we ask all in the name and through the mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost we all honour and glory now may grace mercy and peace in God the Father Son and Holy Spirit one true and living God rest with each one of you known always
Amen Thank you