

THE PLAGUE

by Albert Camus



THE AUTHOR

Albert Camus (1913-1960) was born in Algeria, which was then a French colonial possession. His father was killed in battle in World War I a year after Albert's birth, leaving his family in poverty. Camus worked his way through the university of Algiers by doing odd jobs, but dropped out after a severe bout of tuberculosis. He then turned to journalism, writing for an anti-colonial newspaper in Algeria, and briefly turned to communism, with which he quickly became disillusioned, before moving to France. During World War II, he served as part of the French Resistance against the Nazi occupation forces, editing the underground newspaper *Combat*.

It was during his years in the Resistance that he developed his philosophy of the absurdity of life, which he expressed clearly in his first novel, *The Stranger* (1942). Soon after he published *The Myth of Sisyphus*, expounding further on the ideas presented in the novel. Later novels, including *The Plague* (1948) and *The Fall* (1957), also met with widespread success, leading to his being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957. Throughout his career, Camus was also fascinated with the theater, and wrote several plays and translated and adapted numerous works by others for the French stage. He was killed when he wrecked his sports car in 1960.

PLOT SUMMARY

PART I

The story takes place in Oran, a sun-baked port on the coast of Algeria, in the 1940s. The narrator describes the town as dull, boring, and lifeless – a place where boring people work at boring jobs only for the money they bring, meanwhile making perfunctory love or living in boring marriages, spending their leisure time going to movies and gambling, and dying with no one around them to care.

One morning in April, Dr. Rieux leaves his apartment and stumbles on a dead rat on the landing. He thinks nothing of it, and prepares to send his wife, who is ill, to a sanatorium, then pick up his mother at the train station to keep house for him while his wife is away. Within days, thousands of dead rats are found all over town in the streets, gutters, and buildings, causing a mild panic. The panic subsides in about a week, however, when the number of dead rats decreases dramatically. The next day, however, people begin to show signs of illness; the first one to die is M.

Michel, the concierge in Rieux's apartment house. Meanwhile, Jean Tarrou, a visitor in Oran, is compiling a quirky diary of his observations, while a mysterious stranger named Cottard attempts to hang himself, and is very upset when a policeman comes to interview him.

As more and more people die of the same symptoms, the experienced physicians in the town become convinced that they are seeing an outbreak of the plague. Rieux, however, has difficulty grasping the magnitude of the threat, believing that the plague will end after no more than a few deaths. He fights to retain his rational mindset and focuses, not on speculation, but on what must be done to address the immediate problem. When Joseph Grand, a minor government functionary, informs him that eleven people have died in the last forty-eight hours, he determines to go to the laboratory and run some tests and discovers evidence of the plague bacillus. The next day he calls a meeting of physicians in the Prefect's office, since only the Prefect can dictate measures such as isolation or quarantine of patients. The other doctors advise caution to avoid panicking the populace, and Rieux finally advocates treating the disease like plague without *calling* it the plague. Meanwhile, they send to Paris for serum, of which they have none in Oran.

The Prefect orders mild measures, but still no public announcements are made, and the deaths continue to accumulate. Cottard, who passes himself off as a traveling salesman, changes dramatically from a recluse to one who strikes up conversations and seeks to befriend everyone he meets courting goodwill for some unknown reason, though he gets into a quarrel at the tobacconist's when the clerk suggests that the perpetrator of a recent murder should be clapped in jail and the key thrown away [an inside reference to the murder at the center of *The Stranger*]. He professes conservative beliefs he never held before and is generous to a fault. As deaths mount, the Prefect finally stiffens isolation measures, but when the serum arrives, it is nowhere near enough to meet the need. Then a telegram arrives from Paris ordering the authorities to close the town of Oran, allowing no one to leave and insisting that any who entered must stay.

PART II

With the closing of the town gates, fear descends on the town. People who are separated from family members ask special permission to leave Oran, but are refused. Even letters are forbidden, and communication is restricted to telegraph and, in emergencies, telephone. The people of the town soon descend into feelings of isolation, abandonment, and futility. They also become prisoners of their own minds, alone with their thoughts and unable to communicate these meaningfully to others. In a way this is a blessing, because when death comes suddenly upon them, their minds are fixed upon the missing objects of their affection.

As the quarantine of Oran stretches on week after week, commercial activity shrinks away to nothing, with the exceptions of the movie houses and cafes. The numbers of deaths, published in the newspapers, increase weekly, but most of the citizens are in denial, refusing to recognize the seriousness of the situation. Rieux is working long hours at a temporary hospital set up in an abandoned schoolhouse, and becomes a sort of confessor to many in the town. Cottard becomes cynical, M. Grand rambles on about the wife who had left him after becoming bored with their marriage, while Rambert the journalist schemes to escape the doomed city to return to his wife; none seems to know or care that Rieux, too, is separated from his wife, who is mercifully away at the sanatorium. The doctor, meanwhile, ponders the impact of the plague on his own outlook on life.

As the plague worsens, the church calls for a Week of Prayer, which is to climax with a service in the cathedral. Father Paneloux, the Jesuit, gives the sermon, the thrust of which is that, while the plague is surely the judgment of God against the sins of the people, it is also an ultimate

act of mercy from the God who is able to bring good out of evil; he then exhorts the congregation to repentance and tries to give them hope in their suffering. At this point, however, many of the people remain skeptical, though the cathedral is filled for the service. Responses to the sermon vary, but for many it engenders a panic that drives them to seek to resist the quarantine and leave the city. Some, like Rieux and Grand, get lost in their work; in Grand's case, he devotes himself with painstaking attention to his book. Rambert, meanwhile, pesters every official he can find, but does not succeed in gaining permission to leave; he finally settles down to a life of daily boredom.

When the heat of summer arrives, deaths increase to more than seven hundred per week, and people largely keep to themselves indoors. Violence increases as more try to escape the city, and police are dispatched to kill all cats and dogs as potential carriers of the plague. The radio now begins to announce deaths on a daily basis rather than weekly so the numbers will sound smaller. A new newspaper, the *Plague Chronicle*, appears, devoted entirely to information about the plague. Meanwhile, the restaurants are full, as people spend lavishly, turning to pleasure rather than to religion. Tarrou, continuing to write his diary of the plague, visits Rieux and suggests that a group of volunteers be gathered to fight the plague, which in his view would be preferable to the conscription intended by the city authorities. As the conversation continues, Tarrou asks the doctor if he believes in God. Rieux says that he does not, and argues that, if he did, he could not fight the plague, but would be compelled to stand by in silence and allow God to carry out His will. Instead, he fights on against perpetual failure, and Tarrou determines to join the fight despite the fact that such activity will expose him to greater danger of contracting the plague. The next day, the sanitary squads begin their work, led by Tarrou, who is soon joined by Grand, who keeps records of the activity of the squads in the few hours each day he does not devote to his book, on which he is still agonizing over the first sentence.

Rambert is becoming increasingly desperate to leave Oran, and is willing to circumvent the law in order to do so. Cottard hears of his desire and tells him that an organization exists that might be able to help him. Cottard has been making a small fortune selling smuggled black-market goods at inflated prices, and has the necessary contacts. That evening, Cottard introduces Rambert to Garcia at a dingy café, who then introduces him to Raoul, who introduces him to Gonzales, who promises to send him to corrupt sentries, Marcel and Louis, who will allow him to escape the city for ten thousand francs. However, they fail to show up at the appointed time, and Rambert begins the process all over again, but with less hope than before. He finally volunteers for work on the sanitary squads until escape becomes possible.

PART III

The short third part of the novel describes the conditions in Oran as the plague worsens. People lose all sense of individuality and are absorbed by the common obsession; arson is common as citizens try to purge infection by burning homes – often their own; burials become increasingly frequent, rapid, and impersonal, finally resulting in bodies carried in streetcars to a crematorium at the edge of town; and a sense of alienation kills all love and friendship.

PART IV

As fall arrives, and with it a break in the heat, Rambert is now running a quarantine station, Rieux is working twenty-hour days, and Tarrou continues his diary. He gives increasing attention to Cottard, the fugitive criminal, who seems happier and more content than anyone else in the city.

One who has spent years avoiding human contact and suffering from loneliness now finds that all around him know that same feeling. They, too, are cut off from close human relations and are suspicious that at any time the person next to them might infect them with the deadly disease. People continue to spend money lavishly and frequent the available entertainments; at one point, the opera company trapped in the city gives a performance, at the end of which Orpheus, stricken with plague, collapses on stage.

Another date is set for Rambert's escape, and he moves in with Marcel and Louis in preparation for the big day. Paneloux is to take over his quarantine station, but when he goes to say goodbye to Rieux, he changes his mind and decides to stay; he is convinced that choosing happiness for himself apart from others is wrong. Meanwhile, serum to treat the plague has been prepared by old Dr. Castel, and Rieux prepares to use it. M. Othon's son shows plague symptoms, and the doctors choose him for the first injection of the serum. He fights harder and lasts longer than other victims, but in the end succumbs. Rieux is furious at Paneloux's indifference, insisting that the child is innocent and undeserving of God's judgment, but the priest simply argues that we must love what we do not understand, and sees that as the true nature of grace. Rieux cannot accept this, but recognizes that he and Paneloux can continue to work together to save the victims of the plague despite their differences.

As the citizens of Oran increasingly turn to superstition and wild speculative prophecies while at the same time neglecting religion, Father Paneloux struggles mightily with the contradiction between submitting to God's will and fighting the plague. One day, he tells Dr. Rieux that he plans to preach a sermon on the topic, "Is a Priest Justified in Consulting a Doctor?" In the sermon, Paneloux admits that his first attempt to address the problem of the plague had lacked charity, though he still stood by its conclusions. Nonetheless, the Christian must believe that God intends all things for the good of His people, even cruel trials of faith, thus people should seek to understand what the plague has to teach them. In the face of inexplicable evil like the suffering of a child, the Christian must trust God. He plans to issue a pamphlet arguing that priests should not avail themselves of doctors, but he never gets the chance. Soon thereafter, he falls ill of a fever, though he displays no symptoms of the plague. In accord with his convictions, he refuses to summon a doctor, but soon his landlady takes him to the hospital, where he dies several weeks later.

November arrives, but no one feels like celebrating All Saints' Day, since every day is now the Day of the Dead. The number of deaths levels off, indicating that the plague has probably reached its high-water mark. Food supplies are down and profiteers are charging exorbitant prices, meaning that the rich can get all they want while the poor starve, and in the process become increasingly restless. When Tarrou, Rambert, and Gonzales visit the city stadium, now turned into a quarantine camp, Gonzales can think of nothing but his love of football. The people in the camp, however, seem dull and without feeling of any kind, convinced that they have been forgotten by their fellow men.

Rieux and Tarrou have been so busy fighting the plague that they have had little time for conversation, but one evening they sit on the terrace and Tarrou tells the doctor his life story. He grew up in a well-to-do household; his father was the town prosecutor. He admired his father until one day he took him to court, where he saw a poor man condemned to death and witnessed the execution. After that, he could no longer stand to be near his father, and soon left home. He became convinced that society itself was afflicted with a type of plague that forced it to kill its own citizens, and that, he along with everyone else, was complicit in such murders. He became a rebel against society, determined to fight this plague and become complicit in life rather than death. He realizes the irony of seeking sainthood without believing in God, but is determined to pursue it even though

he knows it is hopeless. When the conversation ends, the two men engage in the minor rebellion of going to the beach and taking a forbidden swim in the ocean, then return to the endless task of fighting the plague.

The cool air of December brings some comfort, but no apparent abatement in the plague. M. Othon is released from quarantine, but the stiff magistrate wants nothing more than to return to the camp in order to serve there. Grand, meanwhile, contracts the plague and is near death. He tells Rieux to burn his manuscript, which by now is fifty pages long, but contains nothing but various wordings of the same opening sentence. By the next morning, Grand has revived, and soon is out of danger. More and more cases of recovery come to the attention of the doctors, and soon the death count begins to decline.

PART V

As the number of deaths continues to decline, people prepare for the end of the plague, imagining what life will be like afterward. Some rejoice, while others continue to live by the mandated restrictions because they cannot imagine life being otherwise. More escapes are attempted, and most succeed, and prices unaccountably begin to fall. Still, a few succumb, including Othon. On January 25, the authorities announce that the plague has been stemmed and the gates will be opened in two weeks. Cats and rats, not seen since the plague started, begin to reappear in the streets. Cottard, however, responds badly to the news of the probable end of the plague. He had found meaning in its shared isolation, and now feared being dropped by everyone and forced to resume his life of hiding from the authorities. One day after the announcement of January 25, two officials appear asking for him, and he flees into the darkness.

A few days before the gates are to be opened, when everyone is waiting in joyful anticipation, Tarrou contracts the plague. Rather than putting him in quarantine, Rieux cares for him in his own home with the help of his mother. The next day Tarrou dies, and Rieux is struck by the impossibility of really expressing the love we feel, even for those closest to us. This conviction is strengthened the next day when he receives a telegram notifying him that his wife has died in the sanatorium. Finally, on a sunny day in February, the gates are thrown open to almost universal jubilation and celebration, largely among those who are finally reunited with loved ones, including Rambert and his wife. Only those who arrive in Oran to find that their loved ones have died fail to share the joy of the moment. Few realize, however, that the plague has changed them more than they know, and that they can never return to the days before the plague had altered them forever.

At the end of the book, Rieux reveals that he is the thus-far-unnamed narrator, and explains that he has written the book to bear witness on behalf of the victims and to show that men, in general, are more admirable than otherwise. One strange incident remains: Cottard is unable to cope with the end of the plague and goes mad, firing his gun at revelers in the street, shooting a dog, and finally being subdued and led away in shackles by police. That evening, officials set off a massive display of fireworks.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Dr. Bernard Rieux – The narrator of the story, he is the leading physician in Oran who fights the depredations of the plague.

- Mme. Rieux – The doctor’s wife, she is ill and leaves Oran to go to a sanatorium as the plague is just beginning, but dies shortly before the plague ends.
- M. Michel – The concierge in Rieux’s apartment house and the first to succumb to the plague.
- M. Othon – The police magistrate, a strict man whose son dies in the plague despite the use of a serum prepared by Dr. Castel. He later succumbs himself.
- Dr. Castel - An elderly physician who formulates a serum to protect against and combat the symptoms of the plague.
- Raymond Rambert – A journalist with a Paris newspaper, he tries everything to try to leave the city and be reunited with his wife, but when the opportunity finally presents itself, he decides to stay and help fight the plague, though the two are reunited when the gates of Oran finally open.
- Jean Tarrou – A visitor to Oran who keeps a diary of the events of the plague, works hard to organize sanitary squads, and succumbs days before the plague ends.
- Father Paneloux – A Jesuit priest in Oran, he preaches that the plague is God’s judgment against the sins of the people, but fights it nonetheless, and finally dies at its hands.
- Joseph Grand – A clerk in the Municipal Office; a minor government functionary, who struggles to put his ideas into words. He has been working on writing a book for six years, but has not yet satisfactorily completed the first sentence. He works hard to fight the plague, almost dies of it, but eventually recovers
- M. Cottard – Grand’s neighbor, a criminal on the run from the police who tries unsuccessfully to hang himself, but later pitches in to help plague victims, meanwhile engaging in profiteering. The plague gives meaning to his life, and he goes mad when it finally ends.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“I’ve no use for statements in which something is kept back.” (Rieux, Part I, p.11)

“There have been as many plagues as wars in history; yet always plagues and wars take people equally by surprise.” (Part I, p.34)

“In this respect our townfolk were like everybody else, wrapped up in themselves; in other words they were humanists: they disbelieved in pestilences.” (Part I, p.35)

“You can’t understand. You’re using the language of reason, not of the heart; you live in a world of abstractions.” (Rambert, Part II, p.79)

“Calamity has come on you, my brethren, and, my brethren, you deserved it.” (Paneloux, Part II, p.86-87)

“Paneloux is a man of learning, a scholar. He hasn’t come in contact with death; that’s why he can speak of such assurance of the truth – with a capital T. But every country priest who visits his parishioners and has heard a man gasping for breath on his deathbed thinks as I do. He’d try to relieve human suffering before trying to point out its excellence.” (Rieux, Part II, p.116)

“Rieux said that he’d already answered: that if he believed in an all-powerful God he would cease curing the sick and leave that to Him. But no one in the world believed in a God of that sort; no, not even Paneloux, who believed that he believed in such a God. And this was proved by the fact that no one ever threw himself on Providence completely. Anyhow, in this respect Rieux believed himself to be on the right road – in fighting against creation as he found it.” (Part II, p.116)

“Since the order of the world is shaped by death, mightn’t it be better for God if we refuse to believe in Him and struggle with all our might against death, without raising our eyes toward the heaven where He sits in silence.” (Rieux, Part II, p.117-118)

“The evil that is in the world always comes of ignorance, and good intentions may do as much harm as malevolence, if they lack understanding. On the whole, men are more good than bad; that, however, isn’t the real point. But they are more or less ignorant, and it is this that we call vice or virtue; the most incorrigible vice being that of an ignorance that fancies it knows everything and therefore claims for itself the right to kill.” (Part II, p.120-121)

“No, you haven’t understood that [the plague] means exactly that – the same thing over and over and over again.” (Rambert, Part II, p.148)

“There is no denying that the plague had gradually killed off in all of us the faculty not only of love only but even of friendship. Naturally enough, since love asks something of the future, and nothing was left us but a series of present moments.” (Part III, p.165)

“That sort of thing is revolting because it passes our human understanding. But perhaps we should love what we cannot understand.” (Paneloux, Part IV, p.196)

“Appearances notwithstanding, all trials, however cruel, worked together for good to the Christian. And, indeed, what a Christian should always seek in his hour of trial was to discern that good, in what it consisted and how best he could turn it to account.” (Part IV, p.201)

“My brothers, a time of testing has come for us all. We must believe everything or deny everything. And who among you, I ask, would dare to deny everything?” (Paneloux, Part IV, p.202)

“Nobody is capable of really thinking about anyone, even in the worst calamity. For really to think about someone means thinking about that person every minute of the day, without letting one’s thoughts be diverted by anything – by meals, by a fly that settles on one’s cheek, by household duties, or by a sudden itch somewhere. But there are always flies and itches. That’s why life is difficult to live.” (Tarrou, Part IV, p.217)

“Thus I came to understand that I, anyhow, had had the plague through all these long years in which, paradoxically enough, I’d believed with all my soul that I was fighting it.” (Tarrou, Part IV, p.227)

“I have realized that we all have plague, and I have lost my peace. And today I am still trying to find it; still trying to understand all those others and not be the mortal enemy of anyone. I only know that one must do what one can to cease being plague-stricken, and that’s the only way in which we can hope for some peace or, failing that, a decent death.” (Tarrou, Part IV, p.228)

“Each of us has the plague within him; no one, no one on earth is free from it. And I know, too, that we must keep endless watch on ourselves lest in a careless moment we breathe in somebody’s face and fasten the infection on him. What’s natural is the microbe. All the rest – health, integrity, purity (if you like) – is a product of the human will, of a vigilance that must never falter.” (Tarrou, Part IV, p.229)

“Can one be a saint without God? – that’s the problem, in fact the only problem, I’m up against today.” (Tarrou, Part IV, p.230-231)

“Perhaps we can only reach approximations of sainthood. In which case we must make shift with a mild, benevolent diabolism.” (Tarrou, Part V, p.248)

“The doctor could not tell if Tarrou has found peace, now that all was over, but for himself he had a feeling that no peace was possible to him henceforth, any more than there can be an armistice for a mother bereaved of her son or for a man who buries his friend.” (Part V, p.261)

“All a man could win in the conflict between plague and life was knowledge and memories.” (Part V, p.262)

“He realized the bleak sterility of life without illusions.” (Part V, p.263)

“If others had got what they wanted, this was because they had asked for the one thing that depended on them solely.” (Part V, p.271)

“But what does that mean - ‘plague’? Just life, no more than that.” (Asthma Patient, Part V, p.277)

“There are more things to admire in men than to despise.” (Part V, p.278)

“He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know, but could have learned from books: that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen-chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city.” (Part V, p.278)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. In Albert Camus' *The Plague*, the narrator does not identify himself until near the end of the novel. Why do you think Camus uses this approach? What could Dr. Rieux hope to have gained by concealing his identity?
2. Discuss the extent to which Dr. Rieux, the narrator in Albert Camus' *The Plague*, is an objective observer. In what ways does his own perspective on the events in Oran shape his description of those events? How does his perspective influence that of the reader?
3. Critics of Albert Camus' *The Plague* have expressed a variety of ideas about the symbolic significance of the disease that afflicts the city of Oran. Some have argued that it represents the apathy and indifference of the people. Do you agree? How would this interpretation fit what you know of the Existentialism promoted by the author?
4. Critics of Albert Camus' *The Plague* have expressed a variety of ideas about the symbolic significance of the disease that afflicts the city of Oran. Some have argued that the plague represents the German occupation of France during World War II, against which Camus fought as part of the French Resistance. Do you agree? How would this interpretation fit what you know of the Existentialism promoted by the author? Which characters represent members of the Resistance and which represent collaborators with the Germans, and why?
5. Critics of Albert Camus' *The Plague* have expressed a variety of ideas about the symbolic significance of the disease that afflicts the city of Oran. Some have argued that it represents the ultimate hopelessness of the human condition. Do you agree? How would this interpretation fit what you know of the Existentialism promoted by the author?
6. Critics of Albert Camus' *The Plague* have expressed a variety of ideas about the symbolic significance of the disease that afflicts the city of Oran. Some have argued that it represents death, the ultimate enemy of the human race. Do you agree? How would this interpretation fit what you know of the Existentialism promoted by the author?
7. Existentialists asserted that life ultimately had no meaning, but Albert Camus was not in all ways a typical Existentialist. While he affirmed meaninglessness, he also believed that decisive action in the face of that meaninglessness could give people hope. How is this philosophy found in Albert Camus' *The Plague*? Use specific examples to support your argument.
8. A major theme of twentieth-century Existentialists was alienation. How does this theme appear in Albert Camus' *The Plague*? What does the author believe is the cause of alienation? What is its nature? Is there any way of overcoming it? Support your discussion with details from the novel.

9. In Albert Camus' *The Plague*, the disease has the effect of breaking down social distinctions. In what sense does the novel serve as a commentary on the absurdity of such distinctions? How does the author communicate this message? Be sure to cite specifics from the novel to support your argument.
10. In Albert Camus' *The Plague*, Cottard, a convicted criminal, finds something of value in the plague that others do not find. What is it? Why, in the long run, is he unable to live without the plague?
11. In Albert Camus' *The Plague*, Father Paneloux represents the difficulty faced by Christians who must confront the reality of evil in the world. What does the character of the Jesuit tell you about the author's understanding of that problem and the Christian response to it? Be sure to consider Paneloux's sermon as well as his later actions.
12. At one point in Albert Camus' *The Plague*, several of the characters attend a performance of the opera *Orpheus*. What is the significance of this performance, including the unusual things that happen there and the relationship of the myth behind the opera to the plot and themes of the novel?
13. Discuss the view of human suffering found in Albert Camus' *The Plague*. Does the author see suffering as having any useful purpose? Compare and contrast his approach to the subject with that found in Scripture.
14. Discuss the view of love and its importance to human life found in Albert Camus' *The Plague*. Is his understanding of the necessity and importance of love biblical? Why or why not? Be sure to cite specific incidents or quotations in the novel and in the Bible to support your conclusions.
15. To what extent can the plague itself be considered the main character in Albert Camus' *The Plague*? Would you consider it the antagonist, or does another character fill that role? Support your argument by discussing specific events and themes in the novel.
16. In Albert Camus' *The Plague*, the author has much to say about the pain of separation, as many in Oran are separated from loved ones by the plague. To what extent are these passages a commentary on the alienation that Existentialists believe to be central to human experience? Does Camus see any hope of overcoming this alienation?
17. The problems of alienation and meaninglessness figure strongly in Albert Camus' *The Plague*. How would a Christian respond to these burdens that so afflict the characters in the novel? Choose one dialogue in the book that deal with these subjects and indicate what input a Christian might have into the discussion.
18. Compare and contrast the two sermons given by Father Paneloux in Albert Camus' *The Plague*. How do these sermons show the effect of the plague on the Jesuit priest? Which of the sermons reflects a more biblical understanding of suffering? Why?

19. In Albert Camus' *The Plague*, Father Paneloux preaches a sermon in which he portrays the plague as God's judgment on the sins of the citizens of the city. In recent years, some Christians have spoken in similar terms about AIDS or the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers. Is such a judgment legitimate? From a biblical perspective, to what extent are we able to ascribe motives to God for disastrous occurrences in human history?
20. While Albert Camus' *The Plague* deals on a large scale with the human condition, it also contains more directly-focused social criticism. One of the targets of his satire is government bureaucracy. Describe how he makes fun of bureaucrats and evaluate the effectiveness of his criticism.
21. Existentialists believe that life is meaningless and deny the existence of the afterlife, yet in Albert Camus' *The Plague*, the protagonist argues for the sanctity of human life and the importance of doing one's best to help those who are suffering. Are these ideas contradictory? Why or why not? How would you respond to an Existentialist who is struggling with these seemingly-competing sets of beliefs?
22. In John 15:13, Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." In Albert Camus' *The Plague*, several characters do just that. What motivates them to do so? To what extent does the novel demonstrate a longing for Christian values in the context of the rejection of Christianity itself? How would you explain this strange phenomenon biblically?
23. In Albert Camus' *The Plague*, the death of Philippe Othon leads Dr. Rieux to throw the problem of evil in the face of Father Paneloux. How, he asks, can God's judgment be the reason for the horrible suffering of an innocent child? Is Father Paneloux's answer a good one? How would a Christian respond to Rieux's questions?
24. Evaluate Tarrou's comparison of the plague to the death penalty in Albert Camus' *The Plague*. How valid is his comparison? What does the comparison tell us about the author and his view of life and death? Evaluate Tarrou's discourse on the subject from a biblical perspective.
25. In Albert Camus' *The Plague*, Rieux describes Tarrou as a person seeking sainthood apart from belief in God. What does he mean by this assertion? How can such a thing be possible? Evaluate the concept of sainthood in the novel in relationship to the biblical teaching that people have an innate knowledge of God, which they in their rebellion reject, yet cannot overcome.
26. To what extent does Albert Camus' *The Plague* espouse a philosophy of *carpe diem*? What about the worldview of the author would lead him to such a conclusion? Support your arguments with specific incidents and quotations from the novel.

27. In Albert Camus' *The Plague*, Father Paneloux argues that we must love what we cannot understand, and in the process recognize that God is behind even the suffering of a child. He then claims that we must "believe everything or deny everything." Is he right? Does one hole in the edifice of faith bring the whole building toppling down? Evaluate his assertion from Scripture. Be sure to include specifics from the novel in your assessment.
28. Critics often point out the almost total absence of women in Albert Camus' *The Plague*. Aside from a few cameo appearances such as those of Dr. Rieux's wife and mother, women are mostly noted by their absence from the characters at the center of the story. Why do you think Camus chose to do this? Relate his choices in this area with the central themes of the story, and be sure to use specifics from the novel to support your argument.
29. In Part I of Albert Camus' *The Plague*, the people of Oran are described as follows: "In this respect our townsfolk were like everybody else, wrapped up in themselves; in other words they were humanists: they disbelieved in pestilences." Would you consider the author to be a humanist? In what sense? Defend your conclusion with specifics from the novel.
30. In Part II of Albert Camus' *The Plague*, Rieux claimed "that if he believed in an all-powerful God he would cease curing the sick and leave that to Him. But no one in the world believed in a God of that sort; no, not even Paneloux, who believed that he believed in such a God. And this was proved by the fact that no one ever threw himself on Providence completely. Anyhow, in this respect Rieux believed himself to be on the right road – in fighting against creation as he found it." What understanding of the Providence of God is revealed in this quotation? Is it true, as Rieux asserts, that one who really believed in God would repudiate medicine? Why or why not? Defend your conclusions from Scripture.
31. In Part II of Albert Camus' *The Plague*, the narrator assesses good and evil in the following terms: "The evil that is in the world always comes of ignorance, and good intentions may do as much harm as malevolence, if they lack understanding. On the whole, men are more good than bad; that, however, isn't the real point. But they are more or less ignorant, and it is this that we call vice or virtue; the most incorrigible vice being that of an ignorance that fancies it knows everything and therefore claims for itself the right to kill." How does the novel support this belief? How would you assess it from the standpoint of Scripture?
32. Existentialists believe that life is ultimately meaningless, but teach that most people cannot live with this hard truth, and therefore create for themselves comfortable illusions like religion to avoid the true nature of the world. In Part V of Albert Camus' *The Plague*, Rieux "realized the bleak sterility of life without illusions." Is this the conclusion that Camus reaches about the true character of human existence, or does he believe that the possibility of relieving the bleakness exists? Support your conclusions with specifics from the novel.
33. Albert Camus' *The Plague* ends with the assertion that the plague never really dies, but simply becomes dormant, only to return without warning to disrupt human happiness. What does this final sentence tell you about the symbolic significance of the plague in the story? What does it tell you about the author's view of human life?

34. At one point in Albert Camus' *The Plague*, one of the characters alludes to the incident that serves as the central plot point of *The Stranger*. Compare and contrast the two Camus novels, both in terms of their expositions of Existentialism and in their views of the human condition. Do you see any evidence that the author's perspective changed during the five or six years between the writing of the two books?
35. In Albert Camus' *The Plague* (1948), the author argued that people contained more of good than of evil inside them, while in *The Fall* (1957), his last novel, he sees man as irredeemably evil. What might explain the change in his understanding of human nature in the decade between the two works? What is the significance of the fact that, in the earlier work, he pictures evil as something essentially outside of man, while in the latter work it is clearly something within?