

Exodus 8:1-19

Introduction

This morning, we will all *witness* together the second and third plagues (or signs) in this opening *set* of three.

I. Exodus 8:1–2 — Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will plague [smite] all your country with frogs.”’”

Frogs? Why frogs? That seems a very strange choice for the second plague. Frogs (at least the non-poisonous variety) are harmless. They don’t bite; they don’t sting; they don’t attack or destroy; they don’t eat the crops. And yet if Pharaoh will not let Yahweh’s people go, then He will strike all of Pharaoh’s country with *frogs*.

Remember that last week we were introduced to the Egyptian god of the Nile, *Hapi*. Well, another god of the Egyptians was named *Khnum*, and this god was originally said to be the god of the *source* of the Nile River. Remember how the Nile would flood its banks every year? “Since the annual flooding of the Nile brought with it *silt and clay*, and its water brought life to its surroundings, [Khnum] was thought to be the creator of the *bodies* of human children, which he made at a potter's wheel, from *clay*, and placed in their mothers' wombs.” (Wikipedia) But what are bodies without breath and life? Well, one of the things that accompanied the annual flooding of the Nile River was a mass proliferation of – *frogs!* And so frogs came to be associated with fertility – with the ability to produce healthy and abundant offspring. As a result, we end up with a *frog goddess* named *Heqet* who now represents this power to reproduce, and to have many healthy children. Heqet is often pictured as a human female with a frog’s head. (See p.9) So in Egyptian mythology, it was this frog goddess *Heqet* who was married to *Khnum*, and who would breathe life into the bodies that her husband had formed from the clay on his potter’s wheel. (see p.9; cf. Motyer; Currid) Heqet, the frog goddess, came to be especially associated with the final stages of childbirth, and so she was given the title, “She who hastens the birth.” “Some claim that... [Egyptian] midwives often called themselves the *Servants of Heqet*, and that her priestesses were trained in midwifery. Women often wore amulets of her during childbirth, which depicted Heqet as a frog, sitting in a lotus.” (Wikipedia) So you get the picture. Heqet was intimately connected with the Nile River, and represented very vividly the powers of fertility and childbirth.

So now in light of all this, we can ask the question again: Why frogs? Why “smite” all of Pharaoh’s country with frogs? Moses is to go on now to describe for Pharaoh exactly what this plague of frogs will look like.

II. Exodus 8:3–4 — “The Nile shall swarm with frogs that shall come up into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed and into the houses of your servants and your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls. On you and on your people and on all your servants shall the frogs come up.”

We may think of a lot of frogs as an annoyance, or even a major annoyance. But what do we mean by “a lot of frogs”? This is not Egypt’s normal annual proliferation of frogs. These frogs are “*swarming*,” and they are swarming *everywhere*. People in Egypt didn’t have raised beds and high countertops; and neither did they have, or normally need doors for the entrances to their houses. So now when laid down on your bed at night, you laid down with frogs; and if you rolled over, you rolled over on frogs. When you were kneading the dough for bread, there were frogs in your dough, and then there were frogs in the clay ovens when it was time to bake the bread. When you walked you could hardly avoid stepping on frogs. Everywhere you went, and affecting every part of life, from the “bathroom,” to the kitchen, to the work place, were frogs. I think it’s safe to call this not just a major annoyance, but even an *unbearable* annoyance.

So what does it mean when the land and the people of Egypt are overrun with frogs from the Nile? It means that that which symbolizes for the Egyptians the gift and the blessing of fertility has now been turned into a *curse*. In essence, *fertility itself*, represented by the frog-goddess *Heqet*, has become a curse and a plague on all the land of Egypt. When we come to the plague of gnats in just a few minutes, we’ll explore this idea a little more, so make sure to keep this in mind.

For right now, we need to see that another *main point* of these verses is how this plague will *personally affect* Pharaoh. When the Nile River was turned into blood, Pharaoh could turn and go into his house (7:23) and let his servants bring him water from the holes they dug along the banks of the Nile. But with the plague of frogs, he couldn’t go into his house and try to pretend it didn’t exist. Listen again to what the Lord told Moses to tell Pharaoh: “The Nile shall swarm with frogs that shall come up into **your** house and into **your** bedroom and on **your** bed... and into the houses of your servants and your people, and into **your** ovens and **your** kneading bowls. **On you** and on your people and on all your servants shall the frogs come up.” The normal word order in Hebrew is verb, subject, object, but in this last sentence the object is put *first* (“*on you*”) in order to emphasize, as one commentator says, that “the frogs will even climb up onto [Pharaoh’s] royal person.” (cf. Currid) Pharaoh was used to being insulated and protected from the things that commonly caused trouble for everyone else. Pharaoh was used to being treated as a god. He was no “mere mortal,” and everyone around him treated him accordingly. But here in these verses, the only true God makes it clear that there is no respect of persons with Him. I was impacted recently by what Elihu said to Job:

✓ Job 33:6 (cf. 31:13-15) — Behold, I am toward God as you are; I too was pinched off from a piece of clay.

Proverbs 22:2 says:

✓ Proverbs 22:2 — The rich and the poor meet together; the LORD is the maker of them all.

And then again, Elihu:

✓ Job 34:17–19 (cf. 31:13-15) — [The one who is righteous and mighty] says to a king, “Worthless one,” and to nobles, “Wicked man.” [He] shows no partiality to princes, nor regards the rich more than the poor, for they are all the work of his hands.

Because God has cut out every single human being from the same, common lump of clay, there *obviously* can't be any one of us who in God's eyes is any better than, or different than, or more than anyone else. But I wonder how often we *instinctively*, and therefore even *unconsciously* and unknown to ourselves — how often do we view ourselves in some subtle way as better than, or superior to any other human being on the face of this earth? Or how often are we even unconsciously inclined to court the favor of the wealthy or the influential more so than the poor and the socially insignificant. (cf. James 2:1-5; Acts 10:34-35) Will we all welcome equally and with complete and total impartiality anyone at all who walks through our doors on a Sunday morning *because* we are deeply aware of the fact that we have all been pinched from the same common lump of clay? Of course, one thing all of this means is that in the end, there is *no one* — no matter how wealthy, or influential, or great in this world — who can ever escape, or who will ever be in the slightest bit exempted from God's righteous judgment. Moses says in Deuteronomy:

- ✓ Deuteronomy 10:17 (cf. 2 Chron. 19:7; Rom. 2:5-11; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25) — The LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.

Pharaoh stands before God no less vulnerable and no less exposed than the lowest born slave in all of Egypt. In the eyes of Yahweh, there is no difference at all. *Therefore*, the frogs that come up on Pharaoh's people and on all Pharaoh's servants will also come up on the royal person of Pharaoh himself. (cf. 8:4) This strengthens and encourages us in a world where the wealthy, and influential, and the "great ones" of the earth are often the ones who persecute and attack God's children. But this should also remind us of Peter's exhortation to us:

- ✓ 1 Peter 1:17-19 — If you call on him as Father who judges *impartially* according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

God has told Moses what to say to Pharaoh, and now that the warning has been given, Moses recounts how God's word was fulfilled.

III. Exodus 8:5-6 — And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the canals and over the pools, 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 of Egypt.

See how once again, what is stressed is the simple obedience of Moses and Aaron. Aaron's obedience is described in basically the exact same language as the command. "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the canals and over the pools, 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 of Egypt."

Remember that the point isn't to draw attention to Moses and Aaron, but rather to the *God* who does great and wondrous things when all His servant does is obey – when all Aaron does is stretch out His hand over the waters of Egypt *because that's what God said to do*. If only our obedience to God's revealed will in the Scriptures could always be described so *simply*! What are the great and mighty things that *GOD* might then graciously accomplish through us? When we understand that Moses and Aaron are just two ordinary men who simply obey, then we're ready for verse seven.

III. Exodus 8:7 — But the magicians did the same by their secret arts and made frogs come up on the land of Egypt.

Once again, these men are supposedly no “ordinary” men; they're *magicians*. And theirs is not a simple, ordinary act of obedience, but rather the application of hidden and mysterious “*secret arts*.” We need to make sure we see the obvious distinction here between the awesome power of God which *He works* through the simple obedience of His servants, and the very *real*, but yet *counterfeit* power of the magicians which can only imitate and copy the original. Signs and wonders may be false and deceitful signs and wonders. (cf. 2 Thess. 2:9-10) Miracles, *in and of themselves*, never prove anything. (cf. Mat. 24:24)

So why does God allow these false and deceitful signs? Sometimes God does this in order to confirm the wicked *in their unbelief*, “because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.” (cf. 2 Thess. 2:10) As Paul says:

- ✓ 2 Thessalonians 2:11–12 — God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Because it was God's will that Pharaoh should *remain* hardened in his *own* sinful unbelief, God allowed these counterfeit signs and wonders; and that was all Pharaoh needed to *strengthen* and *fortify* his already stubborn heart. (cf. 7:11-13; 7:22) The Apostle Paul draws this lesson from God's dealings with Pharaoh:

- ✓ Romans 9:18 — So then [God] has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

Since we are those who have received *mercy*, shouldn't we be full to overflowing every day with thanksgiving?

But I think there's another reason that God allows these false and deceitful signs. I believe God allowed the miracles of Pharaoh's magicians so that He might *reveal* them, and expose them to His people for what they really are – empty, deceitful, counterfeits. As the Apostle Paul says:

- ✓ Romans 15:4 — Whatever was written in former days was written for *our instruction*, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

IV. Exodus 8:8 — Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, “Plead with the LORD to take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.”

Pharaoh’s magicians can make the plagues *worse* by turning even *more* of Egypt’s water into blood, and bringing up even *more* frogs on the land of Egypt; but for some reason, they can’t turn the blood back into water, or make the frogs go back into the Nile! The only thing the magicians can accomplish by their secret arts is to *confirm and establish* the plagues of Yahweh, only *adding* to the woes of their own people.

He who sits in the heavens laughs at the futility of these imitations. (cf. Ps. 2:4). Even the supernatural, miraculous powers of the enemy can only serve His *own* sovereign purposes. What assurance, and what comfort, and what strength for obedience should this truth be always producing in us!

So now the Pharaoh who first said to Moses and Aaron: “Who is YAHWEH,” and “I do not know YAHWEH,” (cf. 5:2) is forced to say to Moses and Aaron: “Plead with **YAHWEH** to take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to **YAHWEH**.” (cf. Ps. 66:3; Mic. 7:17)

V. Exodus 8:9–11 — Moses said to Pharaoh, “Be pleased to command me when I am to plead for you and for your servants and for your people, that the frogs be cut off from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile.” And he said, “[By¹] tomorrow.” Moses said, “Be it as you say, so that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God. The frogs shall go away from you and your houses and your servants and your people. They shall be left only in the Nile.”

Can you see, here, the change that God has worked in Moses? Moses isn’t content simply to go out and pray that the Lord would remove the frogs – he wants Pharaoh to name the time for the frogs to be removed. God didn’t tell Moses to do this, but Moses is coming now to *share* in Yahweh’s own zeal and passion for his own glory. So when Pharaoh names the unreasonable time of “*tomorrow*” for all the millions of frogs in Egypt to be “cut off” and left only in the Nile, Moses doesn’t flinch or hesitate: “Be it as you say, so that you may know that there is no one like YAHWEH our God.” (cf. 7:5, 17)

For how long in the first six chapters of Exodus did Moses seem to be only aware of himself? But now see how his growing awareness of the worthiness and greatness of Yahweh has produced in him an unbelievable “fearless boldness” that he never had before. Moses’ challenge to Pharaoh is not presumptuous, because rather than being self-seeking or self-serving it flows *wholly* and *only* from Moses’ zeal for the display of God’s *incomparable* greatness (“There is no one like YAHWEH our God”).² The more aware we are of the worthiness and the greatness of Yahweh, the more “fearless boldness” we will have in our witnessing, in our standing for

¹ Hamilton; Currid; Enns; cf. Stuart

² Moses’ challenge to Pharaoh was also rooted in his general understanding of the program for the plagues that God had already laid out. (cf. 7:1-4)

righteousness, in our times of suffering, and really in every possible circumstance of life. May God truly *change* each one of us, even as He changed Moses.

VI. Exodus 8:12–13a — So Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh, and Moses cried to the LORD about the frogs, as he had agreed with Pharaoh. And the LORD did according to the word of Moses.

Once again, we can see that Moses wasn't being presumptuous because when He went out from Pharaoh, he "*cried*" earnestly to the Lord about the frogs. We can safely assume that this is something like what he prayed: "O Lord! Please, I beseech you, remove the frogs from the land of Egypt so that Pharaoh might know that there is no one like You, whose name is Yahweh!"

And then we hear these astonishing words: "The LORD did according to the word of Moses." I just have one simple question: I wonder how many more answers to prayer we would see if our prayers were truly and honestly *motivated* by a selfless zeal for God's greatness and glory?

The Lord did according to the word of Moses, and therefore according to Moses' agreement with Pharaoh, and yet Pharaoh had never been allowed to dictate *how* the frogs would be removed.

VII. Exodus 8:13b — The frogs died out in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields. And they gathered them together in heaps [upon] heaps, and the land stank.

The land stank of what? The land stank of *death*. Which reminds us of the first plague when God specifically told Moses to say to Pharaoh:

✓ Exodus 7:18 — The fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile will *stink*.

And then Moses describes what happened:

✓ Exodus 7:21 — And the fish in the Nile died, and the Nile *stank*.

The Nile stank of what? The Nile stank of *death*. And now there are rotting heaps upon heaps of frogs causing the whole land of Egypt to *stink* of death.

Remember how the river god, *Hapi*, was associated with the fertility and abundance of the land? And remember how the frog goddess, *Heqet*, was associated with the fertility and reproductive powers of the Egyptian people? And now can you see how in these first two plagues, God takes the very things that were most associated with life, and fertility, and abundance, and turns them into stinking, rotting, ominous reminders of death? Only it's interesting that in the second plague, *before* God overwhelmed the Egyptians with the stink of death, He overwhelmed them with life and fertility – with unbearable "*swarms*" of frogs. There seems to be a theme running through this first set of three plagues. Will it continue in the third?

VIII. Exodus 8:15–17 — But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the LORD had said. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become [stinging?]"

gnats in all the land of Egypt.’ ” And they did so. Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and there were [stinging?] gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became [stinging?] gnats in all the land of Egypt.

This time, there’s no connection with any specific Egyptian god. But the one thing that especially catches our attention here is what God tells Moses to tell Aaron to do. “Stretch out your staff and strike the *dust of the earth*... Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the *dust of the earth*... [and] all the *dust of the earth* became gnats in all the land of Egypt.” We might not have made much of this except for the obvious theme of fertility and abundance that we’ve already seen in the first two plagues.

When God caused the symbol of fertility in Egypt to reproduce until it became an unbearable annoyance, He described this in terms of causing the Nile to “swarm” with frogs. (8:3) That’s a very rare word in the Old Testament. In Genesis 9:7, the Lord said to Noah after he came off the ark:

- ✓ Genesis 9:7 — And you, be fruitful and multiply, *increase greatly* [swarm] on the earth and multiply in it.

But even here in Exodus, there’s *one* other time that we find this word, and that’s in chapter one:

- ✓ Exodus 1:7 — But the people of Israel were fruitful and *increased greatly* [swarmed]; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, *so that the land was filled with them*.

In a different Pharaoh’s attempt to counteract this fertility and “swarming” of the Israelites (which was the result of both God’s *creation* and His *covenant* blessing), he had commanded that all their baby boys be thrown into the Nile River. And now out of this same Nile River, it’s the *frog*—the Egyptian symbol of *fertility*—that “*swarms*” across all the land of Egypt until *the land was “covered” with them* (8:6) and Pharaoh begged that they be taken away. (8:8)

In light of all this, it hardly seems insignificant that in the last plague in this first set of three, we should hear Aaron being told to strike “the *dust of the earth*,” and then see Aaron striking “the *dust of the earth*,” and then learn that “all the *dust of the earth* became [stinging] gnats in all the land of Egypt.” As the Israelites listened to Moses tell the story of this third plague, how could they have missed this last connection with the theme of fertility and blessing? The Lord said to Abraham:

- ✓ Genesis 13:16 (cf. Num. 23:10) — I will make your offspring as the *dust of the earth*, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.

And to Isaac:

- ✓ Genesis 28:14 (2 Chron. 1:9) — Your offspring shall be like the *dust of the earth*, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south.

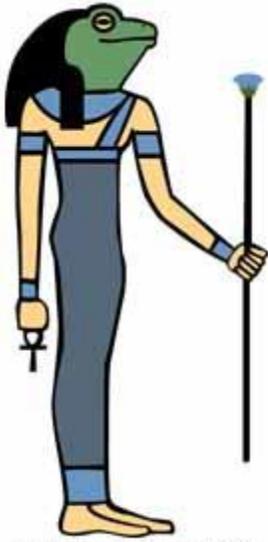
Pharaoh brags that the Israelites are now “many,” (5:5; cf. 1:9) and so he exploits their fertility and abundance to his advantage. Therefore, God will plague Pharaoh with *fertility* (with “*swarms*” of *frogs*) and overwhelm him with *the dust of the earth*.

IX. Exodus 8:18–19 — The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast. Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

Conclusion

And so we see that the first three plagues are a sign not only for Pharaoh, but also for the people of Israel – and so also for us. God is sovereign over Egypt’s gods. God is sovereign over all that this world worships. God is sovereign over fertility and childbirth. God is sovereign over the spiritual *new* birth and *regeneration*.

And so therefore, God is able to keep His promise. One day, from all the multitudes of the children of Israel there will come a Savior. And through this Savior, the Gentiles will be joined with Israel, and this new Israel will increase greatly and swarm like the dust of the earth until one day there will be “a great multitude that no one [can] number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb... and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ ... He who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Rev. 7:9-10, 15-17)



©2001 NEFERCHICHI.COM

