



FROM SLAVES TO SINAI STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF EXODUS LESSON 6

“JUST ONE MORE NIGHT WITH THE FROGS, MOSES”

Plagues 1-4 (Blood, Frogs, Gnats, Insects) (Exodus 7:8 – 8:32)

INTRODUCTION

In response to the suffering of the Israelites (chap. 1), God has called Moses, whom He has divinely protected and prepared for the task of delivering His people from Egypt (chaps. 2-4). After considerable resistance, Moses has returned to Egypt, where he has been received by the elders and the people of Israel but rebuffed by Pharaoh, to the consternation of the Israelites. A brief interlude followed during which God reassured His chosen leaders that Israel would be delivered from their burdens (Exodus 6:1ff). The stage was then set for the continued contest with Pharaoh. This time the words of Moses and Aaron would be few and a new dimension would be added: one preliminary sign and then a series of ten terrifying plagues.

I. THE SIGNS OF GOD’S PRESENCE (EXODUS 7:8-13)

A. The Rod of God (Exodus 7:8-10)

The “rod” of Moses may have been the one which was especially blessed and empowered when God confronted him at the burning bush (Exodus 4:1ff). It is possible, however, that the rod was simply that kind of staff which hikers, young and old, have found useful in moving over rough terrain. In any case, God now instructed Moses and Aaron to work a particular miracle involving the rod. They were not to volunteer the spectacular sign, but were to wait until Pharaoh demanded it. As in the previous instances (at the burning bush, Exodus 4:2-3, and upon return to Egypt, 4:30), so also now: when the rod was thrown to the ground, it became a serpent.

The Bible does not explain why the king made this demand. It is possible that he hoped to embarrass the brothers or otherwise challenge them to show their credentials. On the other hand, he may have heard of the signs which were performed before the Israelites and he wanted to see if they could be repeated. This latter view seems to make sense, especially when we consider what happened next.

B. The Magic of the Magicians (Exodus 7:11-12)

How are we to understand the ability of the magicians to duplicate the extraordinary feat? Did Satan provide the power to exactly counterfeit it? Or was it contrived, as many magic demonstrations are? If Pharaoh and his wise men had suspected ahead of time what the sign would be, they might somehow have been prepared to create an illusion. In essence, we can only speculate. But, whatever the answer, we do discover that God was not surprised nor did He allow the Egyptians to dominate the scene. His staff, empowered beyond anything on earth, “swallowed up their staffs.”

We must come to some conclusion as to the nature of the “miracles” performed by the magicians. The first two plagues were, to Pharaoh’s satisfaction, reproduced by his magicians. There are two options in understanding what was accomplished by the magicians.

1. The “miracles” were only apparent miracles.

They were performed by some kind of illusion or sleight of hand. Either by trickery, deception, or sleight of hand, the magicians appeared to reproduce the miracles of Moses and Aaron. We are told, for example, that the cobra can be made rigid by applying pressure at the proper spot at the back of the creature’s head. Thus, the staffs of the magicians were really serpents all along, only appearing to be sticks.

2. The “miracles” were supernaturally empowered.

They were wrought by Satan or his demonic helpers. It would appear that the magicians actually did reproduce the first two plagues, but were prevented from removing any of the

plagues or of reproducing any others. In the case of the plague of the gnats, the text seems to indicate that the magicians thought they could produce gnats and tried, unsuccessfully, to do so (Exod. 8:18). There are several lines of evidence that Satan was, indeed, the means of the magicians reproducing the first two “miracles.” This is more than just a contest between Moses and the magicians; it is God challenging the gods of Egypt (Exod. 12:12), behind which is Satan and his demonic assistants. False worship is often demonically inspired (cf. 1 Cor. 10:20-21; 1 Tim. 4:1).

C. The Hardened Heart of Pharaoh (Exodus 7:13)

At this point we need to examine the refusal of the Egyptian monarch to let Israel go, because his doing so constituted a refrain which is repeated at least eighteen times before, during, and after the plagues. There is description from two points of view.

1. Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exodus 7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34, 35).

It was not the desire of the Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to depart. He did not want them to become strong enough to cause him and his people any trouble, but, on the other hand, they constituted a labor force which he needed for certain building projects. Moreover, he was completely unwilling to recognize, much less to obey, a deity unknown in Egypt, despite the accumulating evidence that the God of the Hebrews was the God. Therefore, he was disobedient to Moses’ repeated request and to the Lord Whose authority lay behind it.

2. God hardened Pharaoh’s heart (Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1,20,27; 11:10;14:4,8).

“God hardened the heart of the king only after he had first hardened it himself. (The first two references, Exodus 4:21 and 7:3, a prophetic as to what God would do after the king had first made his own choice. The King James Version translation of Exodus 7:13 is in error; it should read, “Yet Pharaoh’s heart was hardened,” as in the New American Standard Bible. (See also the Septuagint, Revised Standard Bible, New English Bible, Jerusalem Bible, the Berkeley Version, etc.) We do not read that God caused the hardness until Exodus 9:12, following the sixth plague. By that time Pharaoh had made his choice regarding God’s will (see 8:15,32 as well as 7:14,22 and 8:19).

J. Clement Connell has an informative comment on this point. “God does not positively cause men to rebel against Himself, but He has so ordered man’s heart that each time he refuses to do God’s will he renders himself less responsive to the next call or command. The conscience thus becomes less sensitive and the heart grows harder” (The New Bible Commentary, 1953, p. 110). Because God places men in circumstances which require decisions for or against Him, it may thus be said that He hardens or softens men’s hearts. The Bible warns against making those choices contrary to His will which result in a hardened heart. One’s conscience can become seared or deadened through repeated disobedience to the will of God (I Timothy 4:2). Elsewhere it is the neck which is said to be hardened or stiffened against Him and His will for our lives (Proverbs 29:1). The thought is the same.” – Stevens, Church Bible Studies

II. THE FIRST FOUR PLAGUES (Exodus 7:14 - 8:32)

A. The Nature of the Plagues

1. The Distinction of the plagues

Before we look briefly at each of the plagues individually, it will be helpful to consider all of the plagues as a unit.

The plagues were not mere myth. Any view that proposes such an idea cannot be taken seriously, for it fails to take the Bible seriously, certainly not as the inspired Word of God. The plagues indeed did occur and they were miraculous. They were not just embellished for some theological reason. The plagues did not occur as natural disasters, which were only moderately miraculous, the miracle being one more of timing. The plagues did involve nature and natural

forces, but they occurred in a way that was designed to be convincingly miraculous. As the magicians put it, “This is the finger of God.”

Joseph P. Free lists five unique aspects of the plagues which set them apart as miraculous events. These are as follows: **(1) Intensification.** *While frogs, insects, murrain and darkness were known in Egypt, these were intensified far beyond any ordinary occurrence.* **(2) Prediction.** *The fact that Moses predicted the moment of the arrival and departure sets them apart from purely natural occurrences (cf. 8:10, 23; 9:5, 18, 29; 10:4).* **(3) Discrimination.** *Certain of the plagues did not occur in the land of Goshen where Israel was living (8:22, no flies; 9:4, no murrain; 9:26, no hail).* **(4) Orderliness.** *There is a gradual severity in the nature of the plagues concluding with the death of the firstborn.* **(5) Moral Purpose.** *“These were not freaks of nature but were designed to teach moral precepts and lessons.”* Summarized by John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*

2. The epochs of miracles

The ten plagues which struck Egypt are among those extraordinary and largely inexplicable events which we usually denote as miracles. The Bible records three great epochs of miracles:

- a. Miracles preliminary to the exodus from Egypt,
- b. Miracles that were related to the activities of Elijah and Elisha several centuries later
- c. Miracles that occurred during the ministry of Jesus and His apostles early in the Christian era.

3. The grouping of the plagues

The ten plagues may be divided into three groups of three each, the tenth being in a separate class by itself. The first three fell upon both Israel (in Goshen) and the Egyptians; the last six struck the Egyptians only. The last in each of the three groups (the third, sixth, and ninth) was unannounced. Each plague was a demonstration of the sovereignty of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Beginning with the fourth plague, there was a discrimination between the Egyptians and the Israelis. Also, each was increasingly more severe than the one before.

B. Plague 1 - The Nile Waters Turned to Blood (Exodus 7:14-25)

Early one morning, Pharaoh went down to the banks of the Nile River. In obedience to God’s Word, Moses and Aaron met him there and the rod of God was used to strike the river. Immediately, all the water, including that which was in the tributaries, ponds, and pools, as well as all that had been taken from the river and put in vessels, turned to blood. Only that which was filtered through the sand and then obtained from wells was not corrupted. The Egyptians were used to a similar, though not miraculous, occurrence twice each year, in the spring and in the fall, when silt brought down from Upper Egypt discolored the water. On such occasions the fish often died. The miracle lies not only in the timing and severity but in the fact that it probably was literally blood, not just red in color.

It was singularly appropriate that the first plague should fall on the Nile. It had been eighty years since a former Pharaoh had decreed that all newborn Hebrew boys should be thrown into the river. We do not know how many actually died or how long the edict was in effect, but God had not forgotten the death of these innocent ones. Moreover, since the Nile was deified by the Egyptians; its pollution was intended to show the worthlessness of such worship and the unchallenged supremacy of God. The Egyptians used the name “Hapi” for the Nile, and a god by that name was one of their chief deities. It was no doubt for this reason that the Egyptian magicians were called to duplicate the feat. Obviously, since all the water was already blood, they had to use some that had been collected previously and was still water, or obtain some that was filtered through the sand. Whether they actually duplicated the miracle or only appeared to do so is debated. In any case, Pharaoh was satisfied with their work and his heart was hardened once again against God and His demand to let the people go. The plague then continued for a space of seven days.

C. Plague 2: Frogs (Exodus 8:1-15)

In the Egyptian pantheon the goddess Heqet had the form of a woman with a frog’s head. From her nostrils, it was believed, came

the breath of life that animated the bodies of those created by her husband, the great god Khnum, from the dust of the earth. Therefore frogs were not to be killed. - Hannah, John D. "Exodus." In The Bible Knowledge Commentary

It is normal for large numbers of frogs to appear along the Nile River as its waters recede, following the reddish coloration. On this occasion, however, they were so numerous as to invade the bedrooms and kitchens of every home. They “covered the land of Egypt”(verse 6). The frog was a symbol of fertility to the Egyptians, and they worshipped a goddess named “Heqt” or “Heka” which had a head like one of these creatures.

Pharaoh was overwhelmed at first by this miracle. He said to Moses and Aaron, “Entreat the Lord that He remove the frogs from me and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice to the Lord” (verse 8). His plea, strangely enough, followed the apparent duplication of the miracle by his magicians. It may have been sleight of hand on their part, or perhaps the frogs which they summoned from the river were among those which really responded to Aaron. But Pharaoh once again hardened his heart and paid no heed to God’s command.

It is grimly amusing that when asked when he wanted the frogs gone, Pharaoh answered, “Tomorrow.” It was as if to say, “Just one more night with the frogs, Moses.” (Beloved, life, death, events, are too uncertain. What God is calling you to do, do now!)

Only Moses could take the frogs away. I imagine that Pharaoh did not ask for the frogs to be removed immediately, hoping that they would go away by themselves, before the appointed time, thus showing that Moses was not in control of the situation.

Egypt was rid of the frogs through their death, which meant that huge heaps of frogs were piled all over the country, creating a stench that was a plague in and of itself. One can imagine that frog legs were not a delicacy offered in the fancy restaurants of Egypt for many years, due to the memory of this plague.

D. Plague 3: Gnats (Exodus 8:16-19)

The third plague was not announced to Pharaoh ahead of time. Just what form of insect pest is meant by “gnats” is not definitely known. It was perhaps some variety of ticks or lice; some feel it may have been mosquitoes. Not only the region along the Nile, but all of Egypt was infested, thus increasing the horror. The gnats plagued both men and animals. I can almost see the Egyptians (and their animals) constantly scratching themselves (or swatting away at the creatures), trying to get some relief. This time the magicians were unable to duplicate the feat, and they did not attempt to do so in any of the remaining plagues. Their advice to Pharaoh at this point was to recognize that the God of the Hebrews was indeed behind the miracle, but he hardened his heart yet another time. This time there was not just a division between two different peoples, but also between the king and his own associates.

E. Plague 4: Insects (Exodus 8:20-32)

1. The distinction between the Egyptians and the Israelites

With the second triad of plagues there began a distinction between the Egyptians and the Israelites, the latter being exempted from all the rest. The rod of God is not mentioned in this series of three nor are Moses and Aaron used at all as God’s instruments in initiating numbers four and five. Some scholars feel that the fourth visitation involved a series of beetles, rather than insects such as flies. The Hebrew word in verse 21 is simply “swarms,” without specific identification (but see Psalms 78:45).

The fact that Goshen was spared this plague must surely have impressed one and all. God was thus shown to be more involved in these miracles than may first have been supposed by the Egyptians. It was obvious that He was supreme over all the earth, able to distinguish between one place or one people and another.

The flies were so bothersome, Pharaoh was willing to negotiate with Moses. He offered to let the Israelites have time off to worship their God, but only if they were to stay in the land of Egypt (8:25). When Moses refused this offer, Pharaoh countered with an offer that they could “go into the desert, but not very far” (8:28). Pharaoh’s request, “Pray for me” (v. 28), indicates his self-centered interests.

The difference between the third and fourth plagues, between gnats and insects, is not very great. What is significant is the fact that God now drew a line between His people and the Egyptians. From this point forth, none of the adversities struck the Israelis, either because God directly protected them or because He gave instructions on how they could protect themselves. This was not capricious favoritism on His part, but rather the clear demonstration of at least two important principles.

2. To the Israelis the protection was an encouragement.

In the first three instances they had suffered along with their masters, but now there was a divine exemption.

3. To the Egyptians the special protection of the Israelis was a clear sign of God’s judgment on themselves.

During the first three plagues they were probably perplexed because of the severity of each. Perhaps there were some rumors about the real cause. Perhaps the servants, who were there when the first plague was announced (Exodus 7:20) or the magicians who were present for the first three (Exodus 7:22, 8:7, and 8:18) began to talk. It may be that Pharaoh’s concessions during the plague of insects were due to the increasing awareness among his own people that his hardened heart was causing them much grief as God brought these judgments on them.

CONCLUSION

The following Table is taken from Robert Definbaugh, Bible Studies Foundation, “Lesson 5: The Finger of God” (Exodus 7:14–10:29)”

THE PLAGUES					
Level of Pain: Discomfort					
Plague	Verses	Warning	Conditions / Details	Application to Egyptian Gods	Outcome / Responses
Nile turned to blood	7:14-25	Pharaoh as he went to get water from Nile in the morning.	“In the morning”	Hapi (Apis), the bull god of Nile; Isis, goddess of Nile; Khnua, ram god, guardian of Nile	Magicians duplicated; Pharaoh refused to listen; People dug along Nile for water
Frogs	8:1-15	Let My people go, or else ...		Heqet, goddess of birth—frog head	Magicians duplicated; Moses petitioned to remove frogs; Pharaoh to set time
Gnats	8:16-19	None		Set, god of desert	“This is the finger of God”
Level of Pain: Destruction					
Flies	8:20-32	Pharaoh as he goes to get water in early morning	“In the morning” Time specified, Goshen exempted	Re, sun god; Uatchit, possibly represented by fly	Moses summoned / Pharaoh bargains: “Don’t go far”
Livestock killed	9:1-7	If you refuse...	Israel’s cattle exempted,	Hathor, goddess with cow head; Apis,	Pharaoh informed, no repentance

			Time of plague	the bull god (fertility)	
Boils	9:8-12	None	Soot of furnace tossed in air	Sekhmet, goddess over disease; Sunu, pestilence god	Magicians afflicted, could not stand before Moses. Pharaoh hardened.
Level of Pain: Dread					
Storm	9:13-25	“Let my people go, or else... Plagues full force!”	“In the morning” worst storm in Egypt’s history. Time set. Bring in livestock.	Nut, sky goddess; Osiris, god of crops, fertility; Set, god of storms	Some officials brought in servants, cattle. Goshen exempted Pharaoh: “I have sinned—We are wrong” King & officials hardened hearts
Locusts	10:1-20	“Let my people go ... if you refuse. . .”		Nut, sky goddess Osiris, god of crops, fertility	Officials plead for release of Israel before plague. Pharaoh bargains, “Men, only” “I have sinned”
Darkness	10:21-29	None	Total darkness. Light in Israel’s homes	Re, sun god Nut, sky goddess Hathor, sky goddess	“Go, without herds” “Out of my sight” “Don’t come back”

Definbaugh concludes:

“If we think God’s judgment of the Egyptians to be severe, let me remind you of several other factors. The first is that God judged the gods of Egypt more than He did the Egyptians. Just as hell is the place prepared for Satan and his angels, so judgment here was for the Egyptian gods. But whoever chooses to serve these gods shares in their judgment. Second, God’s judgment was intended, I believe, to bring some of the Egyptians to a saving faith. The fact that some Egyptians left Egypt with the Israelites (Exod. 12:38) gives substance to this possibility. Third, God’s judgment upon the Egyptians was the means of delivering His people from terrible bondage. Finally, God’s judgment was poured out upon His own Son on the cross of Calvary, so that all men might be saved. God’s “severity” extended to His own Son. Finally, there was an alternative provided by God to suffering the plagues of Egypt, and that was believing God’s warning and doing as He commanded. God’s judgment could be avoided by faith and obedience.” - Definbaugh

Stevens sums up the lesson:

“Following the fourth plague, as after each of the first three, we see illustrated the principle that each time one says “No” to God, the easier it is to say “No” the next time, as well. His yieldedness to God during the infestation of frogs was only temporary and was based on a kind of “fox-hole” decision. That is, he relented because of the tight spot which his hard heart had caused. As soon as the frogs were gone, he resumed his obstinacy (Exodus 8:8-15). During the plague of insects he first tried one compromise (Exodus 8:25) and then another (8:28). But, again, his true feelings came out when the pests were removed (8:31-32).

Compromises, including “fox-hole” decisions, are improper in man’s relationship to God and His will. To try to water down His commandments and obey them partially or alter the intent is, in fact, to disobey. Moses, God’s ambassador to the king, refused to accept his alternative suggestions. Furthermore, he warned Pharaoh not to “deal deceitfully again in not letting the people go to sacrifice to the Lord” (Exodus 8:29). Compromise is indeed deceit.” - Stevens, op. cit

It is interesting to place ourselves in this drama. Each player has the opportunity to take notice of the difference God makes between His people and the people of the world and to acknowledge the Lord.

If we are like Moses, involved with frustrating brothers and sisters who show no apparent movement toward God, we can still say and do what God tells us to.

If we are like the Israelites, burdened by life, we can wait on the Lord and observe how he has blessed us.

If we are like the magicians, we can acknowledge the failure of our false gods and see in it all, God’s fingerprints.

And if we are like Pharaoh, utterly resistant to truth, we can acknowledge the obvious: the Lord is in control.

Who are you like?