Noon Bible Study: Exodus 8

Exodus 8:1-7 - Frogs

Plague #2 is an infestation of frogs throughout the land of Egypt. Moses tells Pharaoh in no uncertain terms that Egypt will be struck with frogs if he refuses to let the children of Israel go. He refuses, and in hop the frogs. They are all over the place.

In another strange twist, Pharaoh's magicians are able to replicate frogs coming into the land (v. 7). However, as we will see in the next section, they are unable to remove the frogs the LORD has sent. This will be the final time that the magicians will be able to pacify Pharaoh's angst with a sign of their own.

This plague, like the Nile turning to blood before it, affects all of the land, including the land of Goshen. In fact, the first three plagues affected not only Egyptians but also the land of Goshen where the Israelites lived.

As we have said before, the plagues that Yahweh sends upon Egypt aren't simply attacks on Egypt's resources or economy. They also demonstrate Yahweh's superiority over the gods of Egypt. For example, the Egyptians worshiped a goddess named Heket, who was associated with fertility and childbirth and was often depicted with the head of a frog. The Egyptians also worshiped Hapi (not *hoppy)*, a god associated with the flooding of the Nile and fertility of the land. Now Egypt is being overwhelmed by frogs, & the only one who can bring relief is Yahweh.

Exodus 8:8-15 - Pharaoh asks for frogs to stop

Pharaoh can't take the frogs and their *ribbits* anymore and calls for Moses and Aaron and agrees to let the Hebrews go. Pharaoh's request for the frogs to stop indicates

that his magicians, who were initially able to replicate the plague, are powerless to stop it. Pharaoh's only chance to stop it is to turn to the LORD!

Moses agrees to intercede for Egypt for the removal of the frogs. In an interesting exchange he allows Pharaoh to pick the day that the frogs will go away (Pharaoh picks "tomorrow", v. 10). It is possible that Moses does this to show Pharaoh that the LORD is the one in control. The NET Bible note adds this:

> "Moses is doing more than extending a courtesy to Pharaoh; he is giving him the upper hand in choosing the time. But it is also a test, for if Pharaoh picked the time it would appear less likely that Moses was manipulating things. As scholar Umberto Cassuto puts it, Moses is saying "my trust in God is so strong you may have the honor of choosing the time" (*Exodus*, 103). (NET Bible, Exodus 8:9).

The end goal of all of this is illustrated in this exchange:

> **Exodus 8:10 (NLT) -** "Do it tomorrow," Pharaoh said. "All right," Moses replied, "it will be as you have said. Then you will know that there is no one like the LORD our God.

However, this will be a short-lived realization as Pharaoh will change his mind after the frogs stop. We will begin to see this pattern run throughout the rest of the back and forth with Pharaoh and Moses.

Moses asks for the people to be released → Pharaoh will refuse → plague will come → Pharaoh will change his mind → plague will end → Pharaoh refuses after all.

Remember, we as readers understand that God is hardening Pharaoh's heart so that the LORD may show His power to Pharaoh and Egypt - oh, and to Israel too.

Exodus 8:16-19 - Gnats

The third plague is tiny in size but mighty in irritation. Gnats (KJV "Lice") cover the land. If you or your children have ever had lice, can you even imagine this moment? And with this plague we see a shift in the spiritual landscape.

> **Exodus 8:18-19a -** The magicians tried with their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not; so there were gnats on man and beast. 19 Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God."

The magicians begin to see what Pharaoh can't – they are up against something they have never faced before.

Exodus 8:20-24 - Insects

God sends Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh and instructs them to tell him that the next plague is coming if he does not let his people go. The next plague is a swarm of insects (ESV: "flies"). Similar to the frogs and gnats/lice, these insects will infest the land from head to toe. However, something new happens in this 4th plague.

The insects will invade the land and homes of Egypt, **but they will not enter the land of Goshen**. God tells Pharaoh that He is going to "set apart" his people as another instance of Yahweh declaring that He is God and in the "midst of the land" (**v. 22**)

And sure enough, that is what happened, just as the LORD said.

Exodus 8:25-27 - Pharaoh Tries To Compromise

Pharaoh calls for Moses and Aaron again and hints at a little moment of breaking. Pharaoh agrees to let the Hebrews sacrifice to Yahweh as Moses had requested, but he says they must stay in the land and do so. Moses responds that this is an unacceptable compromise for the Israelites will likely offend their Egyptian neighbors with the celebration to Yahweh and it would cause great conflict in the land. More specifically, Israel would sacrifice animals to Yahweh that the Egyptians worshipped as gods and this probably wouldn't go well. Moses reiterates that the command from Yahweh is that they travel "three days' journey in the wilderness (**v. 27**)."

Exodus 8:28-32 - Pharaoh Agrees! (Until He Doesn't)

Pharaoh appears to agree to let Israel go on the condition that Moses intercedes for him and asks the LORD to remove the insects from the land. Moses agrees, but tells Pharaoh that he can't change his mind again. Sure enough, what we have already seen plays out once again: Pharaoh agrees to let them go if the flies fly away, yet as soon as the insects flee, Pharaoh changes his mind and does not let the people go.

We will see this back and forth and indecision play out a few more times in the story, but for now we'll rest here.

It is sad to observe that many of us are like Pharaoh more than we'd ever like to admit. Pharaoh had no need for God, couldn't care less about God's word regarding the Hebrew slaves under his hand. And yet, when in a tough spot (aka frogs, gnats, flies) he runs to the LORD for help. That's a good move! That's the *right* thing to do in these situations. However, as soon as the LORD stops the plague and Pharaoh's life is easy again, he has no need for the LORD.

God is too often sought after for a "bailout" by humanity. When we're in trouble, we cry out for help and he responds to such prayers. But then too often humanity quickly turns away from God when they don't "need" him anymore. How sad. We look at this cycle in Pharaoh's life and recognize what a fool he is. Yet, do we see areas of our own lives where we have hardened hearts toward the LORD which cause us to be hesitant to fully and continually surrender to him?

- We're sick, and so we cry out to heaven for healing. We receive healing and then use our new lease on life to live for ourselves.
- We're in financial trouble and we cry out to the LORD for help. In His mercy he sends us help, blesses us, takes care of our need. And then when the crisis is averted, we go back to spending our money on ourselves and our pleasures.
- We have relational challenges and we plead with God to help our loved ones and relationships. And then God brings peace and reconciliation! But then we slowly return to the patterns that led to those problems in the first place.
- We are in legal trouble and in handcuffs we tell God if He gets us out of this jam, we'll serve Him. And he gets us out of the jam and we forget the words we said faster than we forget the feeling of the cold steel on our wrists.

All of these situations (and the countless others) are no different than Pharaoh's behavior in our text today.

And maybe as a Christian you aren't asking for a bail out like maybe you did before you turned your life to Christ. However, the temperature of our faith can wane between hot and cold during times of trial and blessing. Many Christians lack the consistency that ought to mark disciples of Jesus. Notice what the text says about what caused Pharaoh to change his mind and no longer plead with the LORD:

Exodus 8:15 - “But when Pharaoh saw that there was **relief**, he hardened his heart…”

When the “relief” came, Pharaoh’s awareness of his need for God disappeared. Merriam-Webster defines “relief” like this: *“removal or lightening of something oppressive, painful, or distressing.”* When what was troubling him was gone, he was confident in his own ability again. When the distressing stuff left his soul, he changed. God didn’t change, but Pharaoh’s need for God seemed to change. How foolish.

God isn’t looking for sinless perfection or people who never make mistakes. But he is looking for a relationship with us based on mutual love and faithfulness. The LORD isn’t an idol like the frog gods of Egypt who we only pray to when there are too many frogs in the swamp and then when the frogs go away we have no more need of him. He’s your maker. He’s your creator. He is the sustainer of life and the only true God. He offers forgiveness for sin and everlasting life in his new world for those who turn to him and love him. He is not a God of bailouts, who we then bail on.

The remedy for this kind of fickle life is to have a “soft heart,” as opposed to the hardened heart we see on display in Pharaoh. A soft heart recognizes its need for help and its need for God. A soft heart doesn’t think it can make it on its own. A soft heart doesn’t think they are good on their own. A soft heart is a dependent heart. A dependent heart is one that never moves away from their need for the LORD. A hardened heart drifts back and forth in their need for God because they jump between doing their own thing and needing saving. Jumping back and forth and back and forth only makes one tired. There is rest for the heart of the one who stays dependent on God, every day, for better or worse, no matter what comes.

So as we read and see the foolishness of Pharaoh, we are called to reject hard-heartedness and embrace a life that is moment by moment dependent on, loved by, and devoted to Yahweh Most High.