

CHAPTER EIGHT
(Second, Third & Fourth Plagues)

The Plague of Frogs:

As chapter 8 opens – probably soon after the 7 days of water turned to blood – Moses is once again instructed to go to the Pharaoh with an ultimatum. And if he refuses to let the people go this time, the Lord said... “ ... *I will smite all your territory with frogs...*”

Notice the details he’s given: these frogs will “*go up and come into your house, into your bedroom, on your bed, into the houses of your servants, on your people, into your ovens, and into your kneading bowls. And the frogs shall come up on you, on your people, and on all your servants.*” ’ ’ (Ex. 8:3-4). In other words, “Ahmose...we’re talking *frogs everywhere!*” The actual conversation between Moses, Aaron and the Pharaoh isn’t recorded, but since Aaron “*stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land ...*” we must assume that the Pharaoh shrugged off this threat. Then, ever the skeptic, he called on his magicians to replicate the act and, “*the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt.*” Whether these “enchantments” were nothing more than sleight of hand, we’re not told. Some commentators have speculated that perhaps God granted these sorcerers some small amount of “magic powers” here at the beginning of the series of plagues so, when the time came, He could emphasize how puny their power was in comparison to His. We just don’t know, but I do have to wonder, since Aaron had already stretched out his rod and brought up enough to “*cover the land of Egypt*” (verse 6) ...how could Pharaoh tell Aaron’s frogs from theirs?

Many would say that frogs are a peculiar choice for a plague intended to send a message to a non-believing Pharaoh. I remind you that the particular plagues inflicted upon the Egyptians were by no means random. One of God’s purposes was to belittle the false gods worshiped by these people who refused to acknowledge Him. On the next page you will see an illustration of the Egyptian goddess **HEQET**. According to the Egyptian history website, ancientegyptonline.co.uk, she was the goddess of childbirth and fertility and was depicted either

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completely as a frog, or more commonly, as a woman with the head of a frog. She was said to be the wife of **HEH**, whom the Egyptians believed was the “*newborn craft god*,” meaning he “crafted” the body of each newborn person. According to their folklore, after HEH had fashioned each newborn child-to-be, the goddess HEQET would bring the crafted body to life by breathing into its nostrils. Then she would place the living body into the mother’s womb. Remember, God told Moses these plagues would “*show that Jehovah was the one true God.*” How better to do that from the very beginning than by sending something they actually revered, but in such a way that this very thing would make them suffer. It turns out “**The Lord**,” which Ahmose admittedly didn’t know, could control the natural world **and** the many gods of the Egyptians.



Can you think of another instance in which this type of mockery was used? Jehovah does something similar in 1 Kings 18 when He has his prophet Elijah go head to head against ALL the prophets of Baal to show that He was the only true God. When they prepared their sacrifice on the altar and called on their god Baal to set it on fire...and he didn’t answer, “*Elijah mocked them and said, ‘Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.’*” How ridiculous to place one’s trust in ANYTHING except He who has power over all things – Jehovah.

The first plague lasted for seven days. When Pharaoh saw that all the water of the land had become blood, his heart grew hard and “*he turned and went into his house.*” (7:23)...and apparently just waited it out. This time, though, he called for Moses and Aaron and said, “*Entreat the Lord that He may take away the frogs from me and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice to the Lord.*”

We don’t know how long it was until Ahmose called for Moses and Aaron but, just imagine: frogs in every dish in your house, under your feet with every step you take, in your clothes, in your hair, in your bed. No doubt many were eaten by snakes and birds, or crushed beneath chariot wheels or killed by the people who had just “had it” with the infestation. But,

there was no escaping them. The ones that died were replaced by others, rising from the Nile. My guess is, it didn't take Ahmose too much time to cry "uncle."

I can't help but wonder what was going through Moses' mind when he got the summons to report to Pharaoh: "Is this it? Do the people get to leave Egypt now? Is our work here done?" Moses says to him, without hesitation, ***"You tell me... When shall I entreat the Lord for you and your servants and your people, that the frogs be destroyed from you and your houses that they may be left only in the Nile."*** I imagine Pharaoh's quick reply, ***"Tomorrow!"*** may have brought a small smile to Moses' face.

We are not told of any agreement between Jehovah and Moses on how to respond to the Pharaoh each time he made his fake promises, but we do know Moses said: ***"Tomorrow. May it be according to your word that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God! And the frogs will depart from you and your houses, and your servants and your people. They will be left only in the Nile."*** Then Moses left the Pharaoh's presence and verse 12 says he ***"cried unto the Lord concerning the frogs."*** The Hebrew word translated "cried" is "Tsaq" which means to *"cry out, shriek, or proclaim."* I imagine Moses' cry to be one of excitement, or perhaps relief. When Aaron's rod turned the water to blood, the Pharaoh had walked away and more or less shut the door in Moses' face; but this time, he had agreed to release the Israelites! Moses had been warned that the Pharaoh's heart would be hardened, but that doesn't mean he wasn't hopeful for this quick resolution. So, ***"the Lord did according to the words of Moses..."*** and the frogs died out and were piled everywhere: evidence that as quickly as the Lord could make the frogs appear, He could also take them away... ***"and the land stank."***

Pay attention to verse 15: ***"But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not heed them, as the Lord had said."*** It says **he** hardened his heart. Back in Chapter 7:3, before the plagues began, God said **He** would harden the Pharaoh's heart in order to ***"multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt..."*** In verse 14 of that same chapter the Lord said, ***"Pharaoh's heart is hardened..."*** which means God has done what He said He would do. Throughout this chapter, it is said that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Then, after

the sixth plague, and also after the eighth, ninth and tenth, we're told that God hardened the Pharaoh's heart. As we previously discussed, God's hardening of a person's heart is His "judgment" of them. The Hebrew word "judgment" is "**Shephet**" and Strong's Hebrew Dictionary describes it as "*a sentence or infliction*" a "*final judgment.*" Therefore, God enhanced the stubbornness already in the Pharaoh's heart to accomplish His purpose.

The plague of frogs is an interesting, almost humorous bible class story that makes children squirm as they imagine frogs all over their house and their yard, but beneath that surface, we are meant to see God's supreme power at work.

We already discussed how the use of frogs was a direct "shot" at their worship of HEQET, a goddess of fertility and childbearing (depicted as a squatting frog or a woman with the head of a frog), but consider this: perhaps the plague of the frogs was an even more pointed message than that. Think back to how the book of Exodus began: the Pharaoh, so alarmed by the Hebrews' number and strength, that he called for the death of all new-born male children to reduce them. Could it be that God was saying "You can't mess with the fertility of My people?" Could God be "repaying" the Pharaoh by using the symbol of his "goddess of fertility" as His instrument?

And of course, how appropriate that God shows His power and authority by taking something weak, small, and wretched, and using it to foil the wise and strong of this world. The Pharaoh certainly wasn't exempt from the frog infestation, you know. They were in his bed and on his throne and at his dinner table, too. And like before, though his magicians did manage to replicate the feat to some undisclosed degree... they did not seem to be able to remove it.

Plagues 1-9 follow a repetitive pattern: first, the plague is threatened, then it is implemented, a hollow promise is made by Pharaoh, and the plague is removed. On several occasions, Moses is directed to tell the Pharaoh "***Thus says the Lord***" before outlining the details of the plague He is about to inflict. It is a divine formula, and highlights the fact that God is in control every step of the way. Don't forget, the Pharaoh of Egypt was often called 'the

lord' by his people. So, when Moses tells him what the real Lord has in store – then makes it happen just as he said it would – it further undermines Pharaoh's authority and places him in subjection to the Lord of all, Jehovah.

The plagues of Gnats/Lice:

“So the Lord said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your rod, and strike the dust of the land, so that it may become lice all the land of Egypt.’” First, let me say that, in regard to exactly which insect is being talked about here – we're not sure. The Hebrew word used is “*Kinnim*” and according to Spence is only found here and in two passages in the Psalms which celebrate the Exodus. Some manuscripts put forth the word “*Kane*” and translate it as “*gnat*.” It is rendered in most bible versions as either “*lice*,” “*gnats*,” or simply “*insects*.” Josephus believes it to have been “*lice*” as do the translators of the 1611 KJV. However, several authorities (Philo, Artapanus, Origen, Rosenmuller, among others) favor “*gnats*” or lean toward “*mosquitos*”. The only thing we can know for sure is that it was terrible. Verse 17 tells us Aaron struck the “*dust of the earth*” and “***all the dust of the earth became lice (mosquitoes?) throughout all the land of Egypt.***” Think about that for a second: every grain of dust.

And it affected both man and beast, of course. Kalisch, a respected commentator, notes that mosquitoes are especially hard on cattle and horses. They fly into their eyes and nostrils, driving them to madness or even death. Many of us have had countless summer evenings on the porch cut short by mosquitos – too much swatting to be relaxing. And that is a small irritation in comparison to these which came forth as “all the dust of the earth”.

Notice that this third plague comes with an interesting change: “***Now the magicians so worked with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not... Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.”***” I'm not sure the word God should be capitalized in this verse, because it doesn't seem probable that the magicians believed in a single omnipotent God. However, they did admit to the Pharaoh that this was beyond their capabilities. Could it be that they recognized that this God that Moses and Aaron worshiped was superior? If so,

capitalizing His name is warranted. It's interesting that the Pharaoh's heart was hardened even to them, for when they stepped back, shook their heads, admitted defeat and said, "*This is the finger of God,*" Pharaoh still turned away.

The Plague of Flies:

This time, as He did in the first plague, God instructs Moses to rise early and go down to the river to meet the Pharaoh there. Again, he is told to repeat the phrase, "*Thus saith the Lord*" so Pharaoh hears yet another time that the real Lord is behind all that his people have and will endure. "*Behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants, on your people and into your houses. The houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand...*" Just like before, he's forewarned and given some specifics. So, when it all happens — when everything goes just as predicted — he will see that the real God is SO much in control that he is Master of every single detail.

First, let's deal with the phrase "*swarm of flies*". The actual word used here comes from the Hebrew word "**ereb**," usually translated as "*mingled*," therefore indicating more than just one type of insect. There are commentators who insist that the insect in question here is the dog-fly — particularly hateful to the Egyptians since they held dogs in the highest reverence and in fact worshiped ANUBIS, sometimes pictured as a Jackal, but more often presented in the form of a dog as shown at left. However, I agree with Adam Clarke who favors the literal construction of the word "**ereb**:" As he explains, we see that exact word used later in Exodus 12:38, where it expresses a "*mixed multitude of different kinds of people*" accompanying the Israelites as they left Egypt. Since the word "*ereb*" is used in both places, to refer to the swarm of insects and to a mixed multitude of people, I don't believe we're talking about one species of fly. I imagine this swarm was, in fact, made up of many insects like flies, wasps, hornets, etc.



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In the last plague, the magicians acknowledged the power of Moses' God and declared themselves "out of His league." They were unable to replicate the gnats (or lice) and were past trying to match God's power. This time, a couple more "firsts" happen. For one, the Lord says He is going to "***set apart the land of Goshen***" so that God's people will not endure this plague. Have you always assumed the Israelites did not suffer the lack of clean water, the abundance of frogs or the multitude of lice or gnats? Apparently they too were subjected to those plagues. But in this instance, there will be NO swarms of flies in Goshen, where the Israelites dwell, so "***in order that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the land. I will make a difference between My people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall be.***"

Also on this occasion, Pharaoh makes a counter offer to Moses. After suffering the effects of the flies, Ahmose calls for Moses and offers to let them go worship their God...as long as they stay within the borders of Egypt. Moses quickly says that is not possible. "***It is not right to do so, for we would be sacrificing the abomination of the Egyptians to the Lord our God. If we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, then will they not stone us?***" In other words, they would be sacrificing the very animals that the Egyptians not only held sacred, but also protected by laws and customs so that they could not be slain.

We tend to forget just how far reaching the Egyptian gods were: the sun, moon, planets, stars, the river Nile, dogs, cats, and believe it or not – even onions and leeks from the garden were worshiped! According to Eusebius, the Egyptians believed certain giants made war on the gods, and the gods took refuge in Egypt and assumed the shapes of different kinds of animals to disguise themselves should the giants return. This may explain why their list of "deities" is so lengthy.

Of course, the God of Moses – our God – will not bargain with Pharaoh, so Moses stands firm on His original terms: "***We will go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God as He will command us.***"

Surprisingly, Ahmose agrees, in part, to Moses' request: ***“So Pharaoh said, “I will let you go, that you may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only you shall not go very far away. Intercede for me.”*** In other words, speak to your God on my behalf.

Moses agrees to “make it stop,” in this case – to ask God to call off the swarm of insects – and gives one rather bold warning to Pharaoh: ***“Then Moses said, “Indeed I am going out from you, and I will entreat the Lord, that the swarms of flies may depart tomorrow from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people. But let Pharaoh not deal deceitfully anymore in not letting the people go to sacrifice to the Lord.”***

If only the Pharaoh had listened.