



Exodus - Chapter Eight

I. Exodus 1:1-18:27 - The Exodus of Israel from Egypt (continues)

I.d. Exodus 7:8-15:21 - The Plagues and the Exodus (continues)

Summary of Chapter Eight

This chapter deals with plagues two, three and four. The second plague saw the entire land and all dwelling places inundated with frogs, a phenomenon that the magicians of Egypt could replicate but not resolve. Pharaoh pleaded with Moses to pray to the Lord to remove the frogs, which he did and the following day all the frogs were dead.

Plague three was a total infestation of gnats formed from the dust of the earth that settled on people and livestock. The magicians could not replicate this and exclaimed that it must be the work of God but Pharaoh took little notice.

The fourth plague saw flies or biting insects swarm in all the houses of the Egyptian people but not in the land of Goshen where the Israelites lived. Thus God showed the distinction he was making between his people and the people of Pharaoh. At this, Pharaoh gave permission for Moses to take the people out a short distance to worship God but Moses explained that there must be a three day separation between the Israelites and the Egyptians, who would find this worship to God abhorrent. Moses again prayed to God for the plague to be lifted and Pharaoh again hardened his heart.

I.d.iii Exodus 8:1-15 - The Second Plague: Frogs

After Pharaoh's refusal to heed the sign of the water of the Nile turned to blood, the Lord commands Moses and Aaron to perform a second plague, also from the Nile: frogs will come up to cover the land (vv.1-7). Although Pharaoh recognises

the power represented in the plague and pleads with Moses, he further hardens his heart when there is relief from its effects (vv.8-15).

¹ Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh and say to him, “Thus says the Lord: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. ² If you refuse to let them go, I will plague your whole country with frogs. ³ The river shall swarm with frogs; they shall come up into your palace, into your bedchamber and your bed, and into the houses of your officials and of your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls. ⁴ The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your officials.”’

Exodus 8:1-4

Go to Pharaoh. This series of plagues will end with death coming to almost every home in Egypt. God could have brought that terrible last plague early in this series, but did not and did not for a determined purpose. God used this series of plagues to glorify himself, especially above the gods of the Egyptians, and to give Pharaoh chance to repent.

I will plague your whole country with frogs. God threatened a plague of frogs for a specific reason. The Egyptian goddess Heqet or Heket was always pictured with the head of a frog. Among the ancient Egyptians, frogs were considered sacred and could not be killed. Egyptians worshipped the frog as a female goddess because frogs were common around the Nile, because they reproduced rapidly, and because being amphibians they are part of two worlds, creatures of both land and water.

An interesting contrast can be drawn between the plague here and the vision received by John for a future time: <<And I saw three foul spirits like frogs coming from the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet>> (Revelation 16:13).

The account of the second plague emphasises that the effects will extend beyond the water of the Nile: the frogs will come up into the houses, bedchamber, and bed, into the ovens and kneading bowls, and even on all of the inhabitants of Egypt.

⁵ And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Say to Aaron, “Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, the canals, and the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.”’ ⁶ So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. ⁷ But the magicians did the same by their secret arts, and brought frogs up on the land of Egypt.

Exodus 8:5-7

Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters. Once again God uses one of his servants to achieve his work, showing that his power can be manifest through those who are obedient to his call upon their lives.

The frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. Since the Egyptians worshipped the frog, God gave them a plague of frogs: <<***Their land swarmed with frogs, even in the chambers of their kings***>> (Psalm 105:30). This reveals both God's determined plan and his sense of humour.

This is the third time that the magicians observed the sign Aaron performed and then did the same by their secret arts, refer to the comment made on 7:11-12. In each case of these secret arts being referred to, the narrator offers no further comment or qualification of the magicians' work but instead focuses on how the following events illustrate the supremacy of the Lord's power. Part of the narrative tension is that Pharaoh and his court begin to recognise some of what is being revealed, although Pharaoh will never fully relent even in light of all the plagues and even after the death of his own firstborn son.

⁸ Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron, and said, 'Pray to the Lord to take away the frogs from me and my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord.' ⁹ Moses said to Pharaoh, 'Kindly tell me when I am to pray for you and for your officials and for your people, that the frogs may be removed from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile.' ¹⁰ And he said, 'Tomorrow.' Moses said, 'As you say! So that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God, ¹¹ the frogs shall leave you and your houses and your officials and your people; they shall be left only in the Nile.'

Exodus 8:8-11

Pharaoh's request that Moses and Aaron pray to the Lord to take away the frogs represents a tacit admission that the magicians of Egypt were powerless to do this. Pharaoh acted as if it were his prerogative to keep Israel or to let the people go, but his request to Moses is also an implicit admission that this power belonged to the Lord alone.

Such petitions for prayer are common in Scripture. For example: <<***The people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.'***>> **(Numbers 21:7)**, <<***All the people said to Samuel, 'Pray to the Lord your God for your servants, so that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of demanding a king for ourselves'***>>

(1 Samuel 12:19), <<The king said to the man of God, ‘Entreat now the favour of the Lord your God, and pray for me, so that my hand may be restored to me.’ So the man of God entreated the Lord; and the king’s hand was restored to him, and became as it was before>> (1 Kings 13:6), <<Then all the commanders of the forces, and Johanan son of Kareah and Azariah son of Hoshaiiah, and all the people from the least to the greatest, approached the prophet Jeremiah and said, ‘Be good enough to listen to our plea, and pray to the Lord your God for us – for all this remnant. For there are only a few of us left out of many, as your eyes can see’>> (Jeremiah 42:1-2), and: <<Simon answered, ‘Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may happen to me’>> (Acts 8:24).

¹² Then Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh; and Moses cried out to the Lord concerning the frogs that he had brought upon Pharaoh.

Exodus 8:12

Moses cried out to the Lord on Egypt’s behalf, in accord with the stipulations he had allowed Pharaoh to set (vv.9-11). Moses’ intercession for Egypt here and in v.29, 9:33 and 10:18 prepares for and prefigures the way that he will intercede on Israel’s behalf once they have gone out of Egypt; refer to 15:25, 17:4, 32:11-14, and 33:12-16.

¹³ And the Lord did as Moses requested: the frogs died in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields.

Exodus 8:13

The fact that the Lord did as Moses requested stands in distinct contrast to the inefficacy of the magicians of Egypt. It also demonstrates how God answers the prayers of those who have faith in him and pray according to his will: <<*Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest*>> (James 5:16-18).

¹⁴ And they gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank. ¹⁵ But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart, and would not listen to them, just as the Lord had said.

Exodus 8:14-15

But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart. Pharaoh thought the punishment was over and the danger had passed, not realising that

judgement was yet to come: <<*Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the human heart is fully set to do evil*>> (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

Although Pharaoh hardened his heart in light of the relief from the frogs, it is the people of Egypt who must clean up the mess, just as they had to dig for water after the first plague.

The land stank would have been a potent reason to question whether their king had made the right choice. The disastrous effects of Pharaoh's refusal to heed the warnings of the plagues become gradually more evident to those who are suffering because of his disobedience.

The narrative of each plague opens with the phrase <<*and the Lord said to Moses*>>; the fulfilment of the plague or the hardening of Pharaoh's heart is often followed by the phrase as the Lord had said, further underscoring that the events are governed by the word of the Lord.

I.d.iv Exodus 8:16-19 - The Third Plague: Gnats

The description of the third plague is sparse and similar to those of the sixth (9:8-12) and ninth plagues (10:21-29), which are also brief and begin with the Lord's instruction to Moses about the plague itself. The brevity of this section brings the response of the magicians into sharp focus.

¹⁶ 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 gnats throughout the whole land of Egypt.'" ¹⁷ And they did so; Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and gnats came on humans and animals alike; all the dust of the earth turned into gnats throughout the whole land of Egypt.

Exodus 8:16-17

Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth. This plague came unannounced. This time God did not show Pharaoh the mercy of a warning and an invitation to repentance. One should never consider that God is unfair when he does not appear to show mercy. If someone were totally fair, they would never show mercy!

Aaron struck the dust of the earth, and gnats came on humans and animals alike. Although it is written elsewhere simply that: <<*He spoke, and there came swarms of flies, and gnats throughout their country*>> (Psalm 105:31), this plague actually struck at the heart of all Egyptian worship, especially at their priests. The Egyptian priesthood was extremely careful about hygiene and ritual cleansing; an infestation of gnats made them unable to worship their gods. The plague of gnats was also upon every beast. The gods of Egypt would not receive

the sacrifice of lice-infested animals, so this stopped their sacrificial system. Some commentators believe the plague of gnats to be lice. The outcome would be the same whether they were gnats or lice.

¹⁸ The magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, but they could not. There were gnats on both humans and animals. ¹⁹ And the magicians said to Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God!’ But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, just as the Lord had said.

Exodus 8:18-19

The magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, but they could not. Up to this point the magicians of Egypt had been able to use their secret arts to replicate the signs done by Aaron. In each case they had been unable to overpower the sign (the snakes of 7:8-12) or reverse its effects (water to blood in 7:14-24, or frogs on the land in vv.1-8). But now that they are unable to produce gnats from dust they say to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” The narrative of the plagues highlights the way that some of Pharaoh’s servants begin to recognise what he fails to see: the God who sent Moses and Aaron has shown that he has power over Egypt and that Pharaoh’s persistent defiance is harming his own people.

There are other occasions where the wise men or magicians were not able to achieve what a representative of God could do, such as in the time of Joseph: <<And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.’ Joseph answered Pharaoh, ‘It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favourable answer’>> (Genesis 41:15-16); and in Babylon with Daniel and the ‘writing on the wall’: <<The queen, when she heard the discussion of the king and his lords, came into the banqueting-hall. The queen said, ‘O king, live for ever! Do not let your thoughts terrify you or your face grow pale. There is a man in your kingdom who is endowed with a spirit of the holy gods. In the days of your father he was found to have enlightenment, understanding, and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods. Your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, made him chief of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and diviners, because an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation’>> (Daniel 5:10-12).

Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them. The hardness of Pharaoh’s heart is shown when he would not even listen to the analysis of his own advisers. There was no rational reason why he insisted on resisting and rejecting the Lord God.

I.d.v Exodus 8:20-32 - The Fourth Plague: Flies

The fourth plague is the first to focus on the distinction between the effects on Egypt and on Israel (vv.22-24). Although Pharaoh has been reluctant to acknowledge either the damage caused by the plagues or what they represent, he begins to plead with Moses more often in order to gain relief while still refusing to listen to the command to let Israel go.

²⁰ Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Rise early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, “Thus says the Lord: Let my people go, so that they may worship me.

²¹ For if you will not let my people go, I will send swarms of flies on you, your officials, and your people, and into your houses; and the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies; so also the land where they live.

Exodus 8:20-21

Let my people go, so that they may worship me. There is no record of a specific reply from Pharaoh to this request, but since the plague came, he obviously did not soften his heart towards the Lord God or Israel. Perhaps the reaction was not described because there was no reaction; perhaps he ignored Moses’ message.

In the Lord’s message to Pharaoh he refers to Israel as my people and to Egypt as your people and prefigures the distinction he will make between Israel and Egypt in the fourth plague.

²² But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people live, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I the Lord am in this land. ²³ Thus I will make a distinction between my people and your people. This sign shall appear tomorrow.” ²⁴ The Lord did so, and great swarms of flies came into the house of Pharaoh and into his officials’ houses; in all of Egypt the land was ruined because of the flies.

Exodus 8:22-24

The land of Goshen, which is perhaps the area of the eastern delta in Egypt, was originally given to Jacob and his family by the pharaoh who had known and honoured Joseph; refer to Genesis 45:10, 46:28 and 47:4-6. He had given the Israelites this territory in part because they and their means of livelihood were abhorrent to the Egyptians (Genesis 43:32 and 46:34). The distinction that the Lord will make between Goshen and Egypt would have seemed entirely contrary to what the Egyptians considered to be the worth of each nation.

I will set apart the land of Goshen. This is the first mention of the idea that the land of Goshen, where most the Israelites still lived, was spared in the plagues. It seems likely that the people of Israel suffered at least somewhat under the previous plagues. To a large extent, they would be spared in this fourth plague.

That you may know that I the Lord am in this land. The Lord states repeatedly that the plagues have the purpose that Pharaoh, and therefore the Egyptians, would know who he is.

Thus I will make a distinction between my people and your people. God wanted Pharaoh to know that there was something special about the people of Israel. Pharaoh refused to recognise this, so the plagues continued.

Great swarms of flies came into the house of Pharaoh. Literally, it says God sent a swarm, Hebrew *awrob*, upon Egypt; it does not specify what the swarm was. It may have been a variety of insects. Psalm 78:45 says these swarms devoured them, and this indicates that there were biting insects in the swarm.

In all of Egypt the land was ruined because of the flies. This shows that the point of this plague was probably the same as the plague of gnats. The Egyptian gods could not be worshipped amidst this uncleanness. Like the gnats, this infestation of flies would also have made life almost unbearable for both people and livestock.

²⁵ Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron, and said, ‘Go, sacrifice to your God within the land.’ ²⁶ But Moses said, ‘It would not be right to do so; for the sacrifices that we offer to the Lord our God are offensive to the Egyptians. If we offer in the sight of the Egyptians sacrifices that are offensive to them, will they not stone us?’ ²⁷ We must go a three days’ journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God as he commands us.’

Exodus 8:25-27

Go, sacrifice to your God. When Pharaoh offers the qualified response that Israel may go and serve God **within the land**, Moses responds first with the social problems that should have been obvious to Pharaoh before he gives the reason that really governs his inability to accept the lesser offer: Israel must go out to serve the Lord **as he commands us**.

If we offer in the sight of the Egyptians sacrifices that are offensive to them, will they not stone us? Moses reminded Pharaoh of the social uproar this would cause, and held to the original request, refusing to compromise. Moses’ character has grown strong before Pharaoh.

As demonstrated by the account of Joseph, who was held in the highest esteem by the Egyptians, they still would not share a meal with him: <<*They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians*>> (Genesis 43:32). Therefore, they certainly would not tolerate the Israelites sacrificing to God in their presence.

²⁸ So Pharaoh said, 'I will let you go to sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness, provided you do not go very far away. Pray for me.'

²⁹ Then Moses said, 'As soon as I leave you, I will pray to the Lord that the swarms of flies may depart tomorrow from Pharaoh, from his officials, and from his people; only do not let Pharaoh again deal falsely by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the Lord.'

Exodus 8:28-29

I will let you go to sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness. This was a clear promise, and one that Pharaoh did not live up to. It cannot be determined whether Pharaoh deliberately lied to Moses or simply changed his mind once the plague of flies was gone. Many people turn to God in a time of calamity, and when things get better, they almost immediately turn their hearts back in hardness towards God. Pharaoh was not an unusual example of humanity; he was like many or most people, ancient or modern. I will let you go carries the tone that Pharaoh believed that he owned or controlled Israel.

Despite the ruin that the flies had brought on Egypt (v.24) and what it represented about the Lord's power, Pharaoh still seeks to govern the extent to which he would let Israel go, i.e. provided you do not go very far away, before he asks for Moses to intercede for him, that is, Pray for me, which shows Pharaoh knew exactly who the plagues came from, and the only way they could be stopped - by humbly appealing to the Lord God Almighty.

Only do not let Pharaoh again deal falsely. God, of course, knew that Pharaoh would go back on his word once the plague had been lifted but clearly wanted to warn Moses that he must keep up the pressure on Pharaoh in order that he would eventually succeed in his mission. God knows the trickery of such people when grace is bestowed upon them: <<*If favour is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness they deal perversely and do not see the majesty of the Lord*>> (Isaiah 26:10)

³⁰ So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the Lord. ³¹ And the Lord did as Moses asked: he removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his officials, and from his people; not one remained. ³² But

Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and would not let the people go.

Exodus 8:30-32

After Moses' intercession brought relief from the flies, Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, just as he had after the relief from the frogs. This is a demonstration of how deep and severe the gradual hardening of a heart may become.