

## **The Second Plague: Frogs**

**Exodus 8:1-5**

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*March 18, 2001*

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Exodus 8. For the last couple of weeks, we have been looking at this cycle of plague accounts, which begins actually with the encounter in Exodus 7, verses 8 through 13 between Moses and the magicians or sorcerers of Egypt. In that particular encounter in which the staff of God, the rod of God given to Moses swallowed up the serpent stabs of the Egyptian magicians, we actually see a foreshadowing of some of the things to come in the plague stories themselves. And last week, as we looked at Exodus 7, verses 14 through 25 and the account of the first plague, we again saw certain things portended in the very expression of the plague itself. For instance, we wondered about the Nile turning to blood, and we thought about the future in the book of Exodus in which we would see the Red Sea, red with the blood of the Egyptian army as final judgment was visited on it by God as He brought His people out of the land. So tonight we approach the second plague in Exodus, chapter 8, verses 1 through 15. This is God's word for you. Here it expectantly.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go 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 smite your whole territory with frogs. And the Nile will swarm with frogs which will come up and go into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed, and into the houses of your servants and on your people, and into your ovens, and into your eating bowls. So the frogs will come upon you and your people, and all your servants. Then the Lord said to Moses, say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the streams 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. And the magicians did the same with their secret arts, making frogs come up on the land of Egypt. Then Pharaoh called for Moses, and Aaron and said 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 the Lord. And Moses said to Pharaoh, "The honor is yours to tell me. When shall I entreat 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." Then he said, "Tomorrow." So he said, "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 and Aaron went out from Pharaoh, and Moses cried to the Lord concerning the frogs which he had inflicted upon Pharaoh. And the Lord did according to the word of Moses, and the frogs died out of the houses, the courts and the fields. So they piled them in heaps. And the land became foul. But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them as the Lord had said.

Amen. This is God's word, may He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

*Our Father, You are sovereign. You clearly intend to display that truth to us tonight. For most of us that is not a new truth. But it is a truth that we need to learn, relearn, be refreshed in and grow in our trust in. It is also a truth which, by Your spirit, we have need of having applied to our hearts in ever increasing ways as we go on in our walk with You. Where every instance of life calls upon us to trust in You. Therefore, this night, as we study Your word, we pray that You would enable us to see and to trust in Your rule, Your providential rule, Your sovereign rule over heaven and earth. And we pray as well, O God, that those who know You not, might have a glimpse of the sovereignty of Your mercy. In Jesus name, Amen.*

God's sovereignty is highlighted in three ways in this passage. It is highlighted first in God's surprising choice of means in afflicting Egypt. It is highlighted secondly in Moses' prayer, and it is highlighted thirdly in Pharaoh's own self-condemnation. You'll see God's surprising means recorded for us in verses 1 through 7. You'll see Moses' prayer in the incidents surrounding it recorded in verses 8 through 12. And you'll see Pharaoh's self-condemnation and the events attached to it in verses 13 through 15. These three parts of the passage I'd like to look with you very briefly tonight. We see in these three instances God as sovereign in His judgment, God as sovereign in prayer, and surprisingly, God as sovereign in mercy, even as Pharaoh condemns himself. But you'll have to hold that thought until the end. Let's look at the first eight verses.

## **I. The destiny of Egypt is in the hands of God.**

Verses 1 through 7 give to us this picture of God's surprising means. The second plague in these verses is threatened, it is implemented, and it is eventually imitated by Pharaoh's own magicians. We see here God humbling mighty Egypt with frogs. It's almost humorous from the beginning. The destiny of Egypt is in the hands of the Lord, the God of Israel. And the way He's going to deal with them is frogs.

Now by the way, one quick observation about the plague cycles in general. Throughout the plague stories, notice a pattern. First, the plague is threatened, then it is implemented, then it is imitated, and then it is removed. Now let me qualify that. Generally, it is threatened and inflicted. In the first two plagues it is imitated. In the third plague we are told that Pharaoh's physicians are unable to imitate. And from that time on, there is no mention of imitation. Each of the plagues is spoken of as removed, except for the tenth which involves the death, the visitation of the angel of death on the first born. There is no remedy for that plague. And so we see a pattern develop which actually ends up highlighting certain aspects of God's sovereign judgment, even in the way the plagues are laid out.

Now this plague, like so many of the others begins with God approaching Moses. In verse 1, "Thus says the Lord." This announces the beginning of the plague. It is the divine formula, and it prefaces God's next command to Moses. It highlights the fact that God is in control every step of the way. Even when God is responding to Moses' prayer in verses 8 through 12, it is in accordance with His own plan. God is in control. And that pattern of words, *thus says the Lord*, reinforces the Lord's direct assault on Pharaoh's rule. The Pharaoh of Egypt was called 'the lord' by his people, and some of the writings of this time even dared to call him the great god. Now the Lord will send Moses, His spokesman, and Aaron as Moses' spokesman to speak for Him; and to challenge Pharaoh directly, to challenge his rule.

Notice again in verse 1, the phrase is repeated. "Let My people go in order that they may serve Me, in order that they may worship me." That is a major theme and it is a repeated phrase throughout the book of Exodus, but especially in the plague stories. The first time you saw it was back in Exodus, chapter 4, verse 23. You saw it again in Exodus, chapter 5, verse 1, in Exodus 7:16, in Exodus 8:1. Here you'll see it again in verse 8 and verse 20 and in verse 21. "Let My people go that they may serve and worship Me." You'll see it in verse 1 and in verse 13, chapter 10, verse 3, and chapter 10, verse 4.

Notice that in chapter 5, verses 1 through 3 'to serve' is explicitly defined as corporate worship, sacrificing, worshiping God, observing the festival. But the broader context of worship of God, also entails serving Him as the only Lord and master. And so it's worshipping Him in all of life, as well as worshipping Him in the act of corporate praise. So both of those aspects of worship are included when God says "that My people may serve or worship Me."

Notice also that in Exodus 5, 1 through 3 when Moses and Aaron first go to Pharaoh, they say, you need to let us go to worship the Lord, or He will visit plagues against you. And so the tables are turned against Pharaoh and Egypt. Now in verse 2 we find that the Lord has decided to dismantle the rule of Egypt by means of frogs. Yes, frogs. In fact, the Hebrews didn't really know what to call

them. They didn't use an exact word for *frog* here. The word is *croaker*. You know, things that croak. You didn't have too many frogs in Canaan. Frogs are an Egypt thing. The Israelites didn't even know what to call them. God explained, He will conquer Egypt with croakers.

Now why, you may ask? Well, let me make three suggestions. First of all, the use of the frogs may well indicate God's challenge against the gods of Egypt. A challenge against the polytheism and idolatry of the Egyptians. As you may know, frogs were associated with the Egyptian gods, Hapi and Heqt. Heqt was actually considered the goddess of fertility, and she was often pictured as a squatting frog. She was supposed to be a good luck charm to increase the fertility of the people. And so the use of the frogs may well indicate a direct assault against Egyptian idolatry.

Secondly, the plague of the frogs may well be a kind, providential, judgment warning against Egypt. Perhaps it is a rejoinder to Pharaoh's schemes. If Hapt is the goddess of fertility and pictured as a frog, and Pharaoh had begun the Exodus story with an attack on the children of Hebrews, it may well be God coming back and saying, "You attempt to strike at the fertility of My people, and I will take out the god of fertility in Egypt, because I am the one who gives children. I am the one who is sovereign." It also may point to a more severe judgment to come. We're going to see in just a few moments that we are told that the frogs cover the land. Now hold that thought in the back of your mind, because it indicates that this plague not only looks back to Pharaoh's attempt to kill the children of the Hebrew, but it looks forward to a more severe judgment which God is warning Pharaoh against.

Finally, of course the use of frogs is a display of God's sovereignty. It's a surprising strategy. God takes something weak and small and wretched, and He uses it to foil the wise and strong of this world. We are told in verses 3 and 4 that the waters will swarm or teem with frogs. Now the very use of that language actually links this to Pharaoh's attempt against the children of Israel, because in Exodus, chapter 1, verse 7, we are told that the children of Israel were swarming and teeming in the land of Egypt. And that is the very first instance that scared Pharaoh about them. And so he determined to try and reduce their population. Well the frogs are said here to swarm or teem in the land, the waters swarmed, with frogs.

Notice also, verse 4 and verse 5 we are told that this plague will affect every cast of society. Three categories are used. You, Pharaoh, you and your court, your people, the higher ups in the culture, and your servants. The very lowest members of your cast. You, your people and your servants, all three of those Egyptian cast. In other words everybody in society, Pharaoh, is going to impacted by this particular judgment. In verses 5 and 6, when Aaron stretches out his staff, he stretches out his hand, and we are told that all the natural water sources in Egypt are impacted and frogs cover the land. Now as we said before,

that's very significant. It's significant and it's perhaps even pretentious, because in Exodus 10, verse 5 and 15, we are told that locusts will cover the land. And then when you move forward to Exodus 14, verse 28, and Exodus 15, verses 5 and 10, we are told that the Egyptian army will be covered by water. This word is also used graciously in the book of Exodus when Israel has escaped from Egypt, and is in the wilderness and is in need of food, we are told in Exodus, chapter 16, verse 13 that God will cover the camp with quail for them to eat.

Once again, verse 7, the Egyptian magicians spring into action, and they imitate the plague by their occult practices. And the net result is the increase in the misery of Egypt. And you can see Pharaoh saying, "Okay, that's enough." I mean, you begin to wonder if he's instrumental in their not participating in any other of the plagues. Look guys, this is the second time. This is not working. They end up increasing the misery of the Egyptians. But the long and the short of it is you would never have thought of that plan in a million years. Now I know that the naturalists say, "Well, what happened is the waters were fouled and so all the frogs came up out of the waters." There's a purely, natural examination of this. But explain the timing. It's clear that Moses has not the slightest idea. It's just merely a natural sequence of cause and effect in flooding in Egypt in the spring. Okay? But you would never thought of plaguing your enemy this way in a million years. It's almost laughable. "I'll show My sovereignty over the mightiest nation on earth with frogs." But that's exactly what God does. He has a million ways to accomplish His will. He has a million ways to get to you. And He doesn't mind using those things which are small and weak and despised in order to highlight His sovereignty. We see here God humbling mighty Egypt with frogs. And we see that his hands hold the destiny of Egypt.

## **II. Those who know God are more instrumental in His will for the future than the mighty of the earth.**

There is a second thing I'd like you to see in this passage. Not only God's sovereignty in judgment, His use of this surprising means, but in verses 8 through 12, God's sovereignty in Moses' prayer. Pharaoh, in verses 8 through 12 acknowledges the Lord for the first time in the book of Exodus. And he even manages to ask Moses to pray on his behalf to the Lord. But we see in this section that those who know God are more instrumental in the accomplishing of His will, of His decree for the future, than are the mighty of the earth. Listen to that again. Those who know God are more instrumental in accomplishing His will for the future, than are those who are the mighty on the earth. And you might think it is the heads of government. They're the ones who have the real power, they are the ones who have the real future in their hand. And God is showing you here how He exercises His sovereignty in connection with His people's prayer.

Look at verse 8. Pharaoh's magicians, and perhaps his gods have directly failed him again. And so Pharaoh comes and calls for Moses and Aaron. He

acknowledges the name of the Lord for the first time. You remember back in Exodus, verse 2, Pharaoh said, 'The Lord, I've never even heard of His name. Who's he?' Well, suddenly he knows His name. There are frogs everywhere, including his wash bowl. We're making some progress here. So he calls for Moses and Aaron, and he says, "Look, intercede for me. He asks Moses to pray, and he even promises to let the people go to worship. Again, you see God is displaying His sovereignty in compelling Pharaoh to do His will. He had told Moses before Pharaoh will not do it willingly, so I will compel him. And that's what we see happening here. This is not the willing action of Pharaoh. Pharaoh in a tight spot now turns to Moses and Aaron asks them to pray for him.

Now in verse 9, Moses turns to Pharaoh and says, "The honor is yours. You tell me, when do you want to do this?" Now the timing of the question that Moses gives to Pharaoh, too, shows the sovereignty of God. It indicates that the Lord alone has the power to send and to relieve the plague. Okay, Pharaoh, My God is so sovereign, you just name the time. When is it you want this done. And then Pharaoh responds in verse 10 with an unreasonable request. He says, "Okay, okay, you want me to name it. Tomorrow. I want them gone tomorrow." You see Pharaoh apparently thinks that the God of Israel won't be able to work that fast. Maybe Pharaoh is thinking in terms of some sort of a natural cycle or a natural phenomenon. Surely it's going to take a few weeks to get rid of these frogs. Tomorrow, you want it done tomorrow? No problem. I'll take care of that. And out of his presence, he goes. This, too, will magnify God. Pharaoh says, "Tomorrow." And God will do it tomorrow and magnify Himself in Pharaoh's eyes.

Notice explicitly in verse 10 that Moses says that He will do this, that God will do this, so that you will know that there is no one like our God. Remember back in Exodus, chapter, verse 2, when God said to Moses that he had never revealed His name Lord to the patriarchs, and you remember we said, "well, you know, the name, Lord, is used before Exodus 6, verse 2 in the Bible. What could he mean? And do you remember we said it's clear that God planned to reveal the full significance of His name, Lord, the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth in the Exodus account?

Isn't it interesting that Moses is saying, "Pharaoh, God is going to answer this for you because I want you to know, and He wants you to know that there is no one like the Lord. You're going to find some things out about the Lord that you didn't know before, and you're going to find it out in what He does in this plague." Moses tells Pharaoh that the frogs will depart, but interestingly he does not tell Pharaoh how. He simply tells Pharaoh that the only living frogs left will be the ones in the Nile. Boy, should Pharaoh have attached a caveat to that request. Moses leaves, and we're told that he cries out to the Lord in prayer. Now there again is another significant phrase. *Cry out* is used at very crucial points in the book of Exodus. In Exodus, chapter 5, verse 15, the foremen cry out to God. It's a time of great peril. When the Egyptian army is bearing down on the people of Israel at the Red Sea in Exodus, chapter 14, verse 10, the people cry out to God.

Moses leaves Pharaoh's presence and what does he do? He cries out to God in prayer? Why? What's at stake here? Well, a great deal is at stake here. The revelation, the manifestation of the sovereignty of God, and that calls for Moses to implore the God of Israel, and he cries out to Him.

Can you imagine this story being told by former slaves around fires in the wilderness? Now think about this, people who are utterly powerless, people who have been utterly powerless, they've had no say about their work, they've had no say about their wages. They have had no say about their family life, about their ability to move, about their ability to improve their own situation; and suddenly, they are being told that the most powerful man that they have ever known existed was reduced to the point that he had to go to Moses, their religious leader, to ask him to pray to God, and that the future of the nation of Egypt was not in the hands of Pharaoh. It was clearly placed in the hands of Moses, as he interceded to God. Can you imagine how they would have responded to that? "You mean to tell us, God, that our prayers are more significant in the course of Your designs in the history of nations than are the rulers of those nations?" And God is saying, "You better believe it. You are My people, and I rule the world by My word and spirit. And I choose as one of the instruments of my decree, your prayers to move the course of nations forward, and to reveal My divine plan."

Perhaps you are in a situation that makes you feel utterly powerless. Consider this scene. Whatever is powerful at a human level in your experience, cannot match the power according to God's sovereign mercy, if your prayer of intercession is in accordance with His sovereign will. God's people may look powerless in this world, but by prayer they are the chosen instruments of the future of time and history. You are never completely powerless in this world when you serve a sovereign God. I don't know where you are. I don't know what situation is totally out of your control and is driving you bananas. Maybe your health is going on you, and you feel so out of control. This is your body, you've always been in control of your body and suddenly your body is not serving you like it used to. Maybe it's a family situation. Everything you try, it doesn't work. And you feel utterly powerless and God is saying to you, "You're never powerless." I use the instrument of prayer. I hear my people. And Pharaoh can't measure up to the influence that you have with me. God is sovereign, and He's sovereign in prayer.

### **III. God's sovereignty is actually revealed in mercy in the gradualism of the plagues, but Pharaoh is reprobate.**

There's one last thing that I'd like you to see in this passage tonight in verses 13 through 17. We've seen God's sovereignty in judgment. We've seen God's sovereignty in prayer. Here we'll see God's sovereignty in Pharaoh's self-condemnation. But we'll also see God's sovereignty in mercy. The plague is relieved in verses 13 through 15. It is relieved in a manner of speaking. But

Pharaoh, as soon as there is relief in sight, steels his heart, and interestingly condemns himself. He steels his heart against the Lord just as the Lord had predicted. And you'll see that phrase repeated throughout the Exodus story, as the Lord had said. It's almost like, 'I told you so, I told you so, I told you so.' God's sovereignty, however, in this passage, is actually revealed in mercy in the gradualism of the plagues. Now what I mean by that is that God does not send the plague of death for the first plague. God visits the Nile. God sends the frogs. God sends the insects. God sends the boils. God sends the locusts. God gradually, repeatedly sends messages of warning to Egypt, and those messages themselves entail mercy. You see God's patience in His not visiting a final judgment immediately, but in sending gradual, repeated, temporal judgments designed to reveal that He is the Lord was designed to revoke repentance.

The plague is removed in verses 13 and 14, but the consequences remain. I want you to think about two of the consequences here. First of all, there was a lot of hard cleanup work of the Egyptians. Frogs everywhere. Secondly, there was a stench throughout Egypt. Cole, in his commentary on this passage says, "The man who first wrote and told this story had smelt dead frogs in tropical sunshine." You know it really is a testimony to the realism of the account. You wouldn't have thought to make up something like this, unless you had smelt it in your own nostrils.

Many of you know Dr. Douglas Kelly. There are a lot of great Doug Kelly stories. If you don't know some Doug Kelly stories you really are an impoverished human being, and you need to be refreshed with some Doug Kelly stories. Because all sorts of stuff always happens to the Kellys. A few years ago the Kelly's children acquired an iguana named Bert. And for some reason, I think it was because Bert kept getting loose in the house and scratching up the furniture, Caroline Kelly banished Bert, the iguana, to Dr. Douglas Kelly's offices at RTS, Charlotte. Unfortunately, Dr. Kelly failed to inform Dr. Rick Cannada that Bert, the iguana, was living in the offices of RTS, Charlotte. And so during summer holiday, all the of air-conditioning was turned off, and the Kellys were away on holiday, and a few days later Rick came back in to RTS, Charlotte, and the smell of Bert, the iguana, was everywhere. And if you had smelled it, you never would have forgotten it. Now Bert, I'm glad to report was still alive, barely. But imagine the stench in the land of Egypt of these carcasses of frogs. And can you see a portent here? In the plague of death, the Egyptians would not be retrieving the carcasses of frogs. But the carcasses of their first-born children. That at the Red Sea there would not be the carcasses of frogs floating in the surf, but the carcasses of the choices of Pharaoh's army destroyed by almighty God.

Now as awesome as that final scene of judgment is, my friend, do you not see the father reaching out in mercy and saying, "Don't take another step towards that judgment. I will bring it. Turn back. Repent, receive My mercy. Know that I am God. Experience the embrace of the covenant of grace. Don't walk into judgment. The dead frogs foreshadow the human carcasses of the plague of the



death angel, and the victory of the Red Sea. But Pharaoh is reprobate. And though God warns him mercifully, he hardens his own heart. It's almost a joke for you there in the text, because you've already learned that the Egyptians believe that in the afterlife the person with a heavy heart is a person who is judged as sinful. When we read that Pharaoh hardens his own heart; literally, Pharaoh makes his own heart heavy, what you are seeing here is Moses telling you that the supposed god of Egypt just judged himself to be a sinner and unworthy to enter into the blessedness of the afterlife. You see, God is sovereign in the god of Egypt judging himself.

But as you think of this sovereignty of God over Pharaoh in Pharaoh's self-condemnation; think of God's sovereignty in mercy, too, because God's patience in the covenant of grace is not only proverbial, it is a consistent reality in both the Old and New Testaments. God is more patient than we would ever be. God is more gracious than we could ever imagine. In John, chapter 13, we're told twice, it is emphasized, that it has been determined before the foundation of the world that Judas would betray Jesus. Jesus explicitly announces this to the disciples that one among them has been destined by God in the eternal decree to betray Him. In other words, Jesus is conscious of the decree of God that Judas would be hard-hearted, unrepentant and would betray Him.

And yet, do you realize in the opening verses of that great chapter that we're told that Jesus knelt to wash His feet. He knows he is reprobate, and yet He kneels to wash his feet. John Calvin has this incredible comment on that particular passage. He says that, "Jesus knelt to wash the feet of the son of Perdition, who had been doomed to reprobation from the beginning of time, that He might open the gate to repentance." And my friends, if Jesus can give the offer of the gospel to a reprobate; and if God can offer the gospel nine times to the reprobate Pharaoh, then there is nobody, nobody that we can not extend the free offer of the gospel to. Our Calvinism impels us to the free offer of the gospel. It doesn't restrict it. It impels us to the free offer of the gospel, and we see it in the example of God's dealings of Pharaoh. And we see it in the examples of Jesus' dealings with Judas. "Go, therefore, and do likewise and trust in the sovereignty of God." Let us pray.

Our Lord and our God, we are not worthy of the mercy that You show us and our minds are boggled by the wisdom of Your sovereign rule. Lead us then to true adoration for who You are and what You have done for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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