

UNIT 12: THE SECOND BLOW

THE PLAGUE OF FROGS

(Exodus 7:25–8:15)

INTRODUCTION ¹

Text and Textual Notes

7:25 Seven full days passed² after Yahweh struck³ the Nile. **8:1**
Then

¹The attempt to connect this plague with the natural phenomena of Egypt would say that because of the polluted water due to the high Nile, the frogs abandoned all their normal watery homes (seven days after the first plague) and sought cover from the sun in the homes wherever there was moisture. Since they had already been exposed to the poisonous water they died very suddenly. The miracle was in the announcement and the timing, i.e., that Moses would predict this blow, and in the magnitude of it all which was not natural (Hort, "Plagues," p. 95-98).

It is also important to note that in parts of Egypt there was a fear of these creatures as embodying spirits capable of great evil. People developed the mentality of bowing to incredibly horrible idols to drive away the bad spirits. Evil spirits are represented in the Book of Revelation in the forms of frogs (16:13). The frogs that the magicians produced could very well have been in the realm of evil spirits. Knowing how the Egyptians thought about this is hard to determine; but there is enough evidence to say that the plague would have made them spiritually as well as physically uncomfortable, and that the death of the frogs would have been a "sign" from God about their superstitions and related beliefs. The frog is associated with the god Hapi. And there was a frog-headed goddess Heqet who was supposed to assist women at childbirth. This all would have been evidence that Yahweh was controlling their environment and their religion, for His own purpose.

² The text literally has "and seven days were fulfilled." Seven days gave Pharaoh enough time to repent and release Israel. When the week passed, God's second blow came.

³ This is a temporal clause made up of the preposition, the *hiphil* infinitive construct of *nakah*, *hakkot*, followed by the subjective genitive *YHWH*. Here the verb is applied to the true meaning of the plague: Moses struck the water, but the plague was a blow struck by God.

Yahweh said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says Yahweh, “Release my people in order that they may serve me. **8:2** But if you refuse to release [them], then I am going to plague⁴ all your borders⁵ with frogs.⁶ **8:3** And the Nile will swarm⁷ with frogs, and they will go up and enter your house, and your bedroom, and your bed, and into the houses of your servants and your people, and into your ovens and your kneading trough.⁸ **8:4** Frogs⁹ will go up against you, and against your people, and against all your servants’.”¹⁰

⁴ The construction here also uses the deictic particle and the participle to convey the imminent future: “I am going to plague/about to plague.” The verb *nagaph* means “to strike, to smite,” and its related noun means “a blow, a plague, pestilence” or the like. For Yahweh to say “I am about to plague you” could just as easily mean “I am about to strike you.” That is why these “plagues” can be described as “blows” received from God.

⁵ The term is figurative for all the territory of Egypt and the people and the things that are in those territories (also used in 10:4, 24, 29; 13:7).

⁶ This word for frogs is mentioned only in the Old Testament in conjunction with this plague (here, Ps. 78:45, and 105:30). Cole suggests that the word “frogs,” *ts^epard^e’im*, may be an onomatopoeic word, something like “croakers”; it is of Egyptian setting, and could be a Hebrew attempt to write the Arabic *dofda* (*Exodus*, p. 91).

⁷ The particular choice of this verb *sharats* recalls its use in the creation account (Gen. 1:20). The water would be swarming with frogs in abundance. There is a hint here of this being a creative work of God as well.

⁸ This verse enumerates the places the frogs will go. The first three are for Pharaoh personally--they are going to touch his private life. Then the text mentions the servants and the people. The ovens and kneading bowls or troughs of the people would be accessible because they were out in the open.

⁹ The article again is the generic use of the article, designating the class--frogs.

¹⁰ The word order of the Hebrew text is important because it shows how the plague was primarily directed at Pharaoh: “and against (on) you, and against (on) your people, and against (on) all your servants frogs will go up.”

8:5¹¹ And Yahweh spoke to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the canals, and over the ponds and bring up the frogs over the land of Egypt.’” **8:6** So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and frogs¹² came up and covered the land of Egypt.

8:7 But the magicians did the same¹³ with their secret art, and brought up frogs.¹⁴ So frogs¹⁵ went up over the land of Egypt.

8:8 Then Pharaoh summoned¹⁶ Moses and Aaron, and said, “Pray¹⁷ to Yahweh that he may take away¹⁸ the frogs from me and from my people, and I will release¹⁹ the people that they may sacrifice²⁰ to Yahweh.”

¹¹ After the instructions for Pharaoh (7:25--8:4), the plague now is brought on by the staff in Aaron’s hand (8:5-7). This will lead to the confrontation (vv. 8-11) and the hardening (vv. 12-15).

¹² The noun is singular, a collective. Jacob notes that this would be the more natural way to refer to the frogs (p. 260).

¹³ The text uses *ken*, “thus, so.”

¹⁴ In these first two plagues the fact that the Egyptians could and did do them is also very ironic. By duplicating the experience, they added to the misery of Egypt. One wonders why they did not use their skills to rid the land of the pests.

¹⁵ Literally, “the frogs”

¹⁶ The verb *qara’* followed by the *lamed* preposition has the meaning of “to summon.”

¹⁷ The verb *ha’tiru* is the *hiphil* imperative of the verb *’atar*. It means “to pray, supplicate,” or “make supplication”—always addressed to God. It is often translated “entreat” to reflect that it is a more urgent praying.

¹⁸ This form is the jussive with a sequential *waw* that provides the purpose of the prayer: pray . . . that he may turn away the frogs.

This is the first time in the conflict that the Pharaoh even acknowledged that Yahweh existed. Now he is asking for prayer to remove the frogs, and promising to release Israel. This result of the plague must have been an encouragement to Moses.

¹⁹ The form is the *piel* cohortative (*wa’ashal^pkhah*) with the *waw* continuing the sequence from the request and its purpose. The cohortative here stresses the resolve of the king: “and (then) I will release.”

8:9 And Moses said to Pharaoh, “You may have the honor over me²¹-- when shall I pray for you, and for your servants, and for your people, that the frogs be cut off²² from you and from your houses, so that²³ only in the Nile will they be left?”²⁴ **8:10** And he said, “Tomorrow.” So Moses said,²⁵ “It will be²⁶ according to your word, that you may know that there is no one like Yahweh our God. **8:11** And the frogs will depart from you, and from your house, and from your servants, and from your people; only in the Nile will they be left.”

8:12 Then Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh; and Moses cried²⁷ to Yahweh because of²⁸ the frogs which He had brought on²⁹ Pharaoh. **8:13** And Yahweh did according to the word of Moses--³⁰the

²⁰ Here also the imperfect tense with the *waw* shows the purpose of the release: “that they may sacrifice.”

²¹ The expression *hitpa’er ‘alay* is problematic. The verb would be simply translated “honor yourself” or “deck yourself with honor.” It can be used in the bad sense of self-exaltation. But here it seems to mean “have the honor or advantage over me” in choosing when to remove the frogs. The LXX has “appoint for me.” 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 Cassuto puts it, Moses is saying my trust in God is so strong you may have the honor of choosing the time (p. 103).

²² Literally, “to cut off the frogs”

²³ “so that” supplied

²⁴ Or, “survive, remain”

²⁵ Literally, “and he said”

²⁶ “It will be” supplied

²⁷ The verb *tsa’aq* is used for prayers in which people cry out of trouble or from danger. Cassuto observes that Moses would have been in real danger if God had not answered this prayer (p. 103).

²⁸ Literally, “over the matter of”

²⁹ The verb is an unusual choice if it were just to mean “brought on.” It is the verb *sam*, “place, put.” Driver wants to make it “appointed for Pharaoh” as a sign (p. 64). The idea of the sign might be too much; but certainly the frogs were appointed for the stubborn king.

³⁰ Literally, “and the frogs died”

frogs died out of their houses, out of their villages, and out of their fields.
8:14 The Egyptians³¹ piled them together in heaps,³² and the land stank.
8:15 But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief,³³ he hardened³⁴ his heart and did not listen to them, just as Yahweh had said.³⁵

EXPOSITORY DEVELOPMENT

It is interesting to note also that in some parts of Egypt there was a fear of these creatures as spirits of evil. The mentality arose that pagans would bow to the most incredibly horrid idols in an order to drive away the evil spirits (a practice continued through Medieval Europe). St. John, in the book of Revelation, represents the evil spirits in the forms of frogs (Rev. 16:13). The frogs that the magicians brought forward could very well have been within the realm of spirits of devils. However the Egyptians viewed the frog, force of bounty or evil spirit, is rather complicated to determine. But there seems enough evidence to say that this marvelous plague was a judgment against their miserable superstition, and a sign that they could scarcely fail to understand. Fond as they were of strange deities from the animal world, here was more than they could handle (cf. Ps. 78:45).

The plague was brought on through the means of the rod in Aaron's

³¹ The text simply says, "and they piled them." But for clarity this translation has inserted "The Egyptians" who were piling the frogs.

³² The word "heaps" is repeated: *khomarim khomarim*, "heaps. heaps." The repetition serves to intensify the idea to the highest degree— "countless heaps" (see GKC, par. 123e).

³³ The word *r^owakhah* means "respite, relief." BDB relate it to the verb *rawakh*, "to be wide, spacious." There would be relief when there was freedom to move about.

³⁴ *w^ohakbed* is the *hiphil* infinitive absolute, functioning as the finite verb. The meaning of the word is "to make heavy," and so stubborn, sluggish, indifferent. It probably means that he denied his promises, and refused to make good on them.

³⁵ The end of the plague revealed clearly God's absolute control over Egypt's life and deities--all at the power of the man who prayed to God. Yahweh had made life unpleasant for the people with the plague, but He was also the one who could remove it. The only recourse anyone has in such trouble is to pray to the sovereign Lord God. Everyone would know that there was no one like Yahweh..

hand again. The land was covered by the wretched creatures that the Egyptians knew so well (8:5-7).

The plague brought on another confrontation between Pharaoh and Moses (8:8-11). This time Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and asked them to entreat the LORD. His promise is the imperfect tense: "I will send them out" that they may sacrifice to the LORD.

Moses' response is to grant Pharaoh the advantage of choosing when he should call upon the LORD. "Have this glory over me" means "have the advantage" (you pick the time that you may know). This will be a test of the divine source of this plague, that the servant of the LORD can ask for the removal when Pharaoh desired (Pharaoh, of course, was powerless). Moses actually prophesies in v. 11 that they would be removed on the next day, adding the point of it all: "that you may know there is no one like the LORD our God."

The final part reports the aftermath of the event and meeting (8:12-15). There are three points to stress here: the intercession, the clean-up, and the hardening. Moses cried to **the LORD** and the frogs died. Here was that absolute control over life and over deity—all at the power of the man of God who prayed to God. Then, there was the gathering of the dead frogs into heaps, and as a result the place stank again (death and stink are in both the first two plagues). Finally, when Pharaoh saw there was respite, he hardened his heart (here *kabed* stresses the idea of stubbornness).

Again the LORD troubles the Egyptians with his control of their life, this time making it very unpleasant with an abundance of frogs from the Nile. The only recourse one has in such a pestilence is through prayer to the LORD. Israel had much to learn in this discipline, and would have to learn it through repeated inconveniences. Egypt would learn that the LORD God was superior to their life forces. Everyone would "know" that the LORD was sovereign.