*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

June 22 - 27

*Exodus Chapters Seven and Eight*

**Monday, June 22 Exodus 7:8-13**

*“Show me a miracle”*

Changing his staff into a snake is one of the three signs that God showed to Moses during their first conversation on Mount Sinai. Aaron casts his staff before Pharaoh and it turns into a snake. Pharaoh’s magicians duplicate the feat, but Aaron’s snake swallows those of the magicians. The overarching point of this sign is clear. This encounter is an initial sparing between rival gods. This one brief incident embodies the main elements of the ten plagues that follow: God shows his power and Pharaoh resists the obvious conclusion that he is no match for the God of Israel. He should concede victory to Yahweh. But he does not, which will yield disastrous circumstances.

The significance of Aaron’s staff *swallowing* those of Pharaoh’s magicians points to the final victory that God will win for his people. The Hebrew word translated “to swallow” is used in Exodus only here and in 15:12, where the sea swallows up the Egyptian army. The final demise of the Egyptians is already hinted at in 7:12. Pharaoh does not heed the warning now, nor will he later.

*Your power, Lord, cannot be overcome by worldly power. Amen.*

**Tuesday, June 23 Exodus 7:14-25**

*“The river will turn to blood”*

A question that surfaces with each of the ten plagues, indeed, with any miraculous event in Scripture: Did this really happen, or, if so, was it an act of God or simply a natural occurrence? While some dismiss outright an event such as water turning to blood as mere fantasy, others admit to its historicity but attribute to it a naturalistic explanation. A common approach is to see the blood of the Nile as an interpretation of the sediment of red earth that occasionally discolors the water.

Perhaps the most straightforward response to this question is to acknowledge that even if the blood can be explained as a natural phenomenon (itself a debatable point), the fact that this phenomenon happened at *God’s command* is the central concern of the Bible. The point is not so much what happened to the Nile, but that it happened as an explicit act of judgment by God on the Egyptians. The purpose of the plague – indeed, the entire confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh – is so that Egypt will know that “I am the Lord.”

*You, Lord, use both miracles and natural phenomena to accomplish your purposes. Amen.*

**Wednesday, June 24 Exodus 8:1-7**

*“I will send a plague of frogs”*

Once again Moses goes to Pharaoh fully armed with God’s power in order to announce the coming of the second plague: “This is what the Lord says.” One distinctive mark of the frog plague when compared to the first plague and the preceding snake sign is that here Moses warns Pharaoh of the coming catastrophe if he does not heed the command to let the people go. Turning the Nile into blood should have convinced Pharaoh to comply.

This is also the first of several plagues that involve the animal kingdom. Turning the animal kingdom against humanity is a reversal of creation. In the ideal pattern of creation, humanity is to have dominion over the animals. The “chaotic” behavior of animals in these plagues is God’s measured unleashing of “anti-creation” forces on the helpless Egyptians. In this respect, the use of the Hebrew term for “teem” calls to mind creation in Genesis where the “teeming” of God’s creatures was originally something good, something that exhibited God’s creative work. But now this chaotic, *teeming* mass of frogs is a destructive abundance.

*Disobedience of your commands, Lord, leads to disorder in our world. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

June 22 - 27

*Exodus Chapters Seven and Eight*

**Thursday, June 25 Exodus 8:8-15**

*“Pharaoh hardened his heart”*

With the second plague we see the first sign of Pharaoh’s weakening. He sees that Israel’s God, despite his magicians’ ability to mimic the plague, is a power to be reckoned with. But if Pharaoh is now convinced by the plague of God’s might, why does he capitulate only after his magicians produce frogs on their own? It may be that Pharaoh has recognized not only that God has the power to produce frogs but that only God has the power to get rid of them. We should note that in the plagues narrative, the cessation of the plagues is as much a sign of God’s power as the plagues themselves.

God hears Moses’ prayer for relief from the frogs and they die more or less right where they are. They are piled into heaps and begin to stink. This should be a lesson for Pharaoh, but once again he hardens his heart. He stubbornly ignores God’s salvation from the frogs, and as soon as the plague is out of sight, it is also out of mind. Breaking his promise, he refuses to let the people of Israel go.

*It strengthens our obedience, Lord, when we remember the pain of disobedience. Amen.*

**Friday, June 26 Exodus 8:16-19**

*“Gnats infested the entire land”*

This plague differs from the previous two in that it comes upon us abruptly. This is the first plague without any sort of introductory conversation between Moses and Pharaoh; it simply happens. As with plagues 6 and 9 still to come, there is no forewarning, time of implementation, or instruction of what Pharaoh must do to avoid it.

This is the first plague that Pharaoh’s magicians are unable to reproduce. They recognize that they are in over their heads by confessing, “This is the finger of God!” The Hebrew is somewhat ambiguous, however. It may simply mean, “This is the finger of a god.” In other words, this is not necessarily a confession on their part that the God of Israel has done this. In any event, this plague does represent a movement toward recognition of the Lord as the mighty God, which is one of the central purposes for the plagues (e.g., 7:5). This is also the first plague with no mention of the cessation of the plague. How long it lasted we are not told, but it could be that it is longer in duration that the others.

*We cannot re-create your creation, Lord, which confirms that only you are God. Amen.*

**Saturday, June 27 Exodus 8:20-32**

*“A thick swarm of flies covered Egypt”*

There are a couple of “firsts” that occur in the fourth plague. (1) As distinct from the first three plagues, no staff is involved in bringing about the swarm of flies. Remembering that the magicians used staffs as well, perhaps the significance of this is to give a direct display of God’s power that does not have to be “conjured up” (from the perspective of the Egyptian magicians) by the use of a staff. This truly is a more potent display of God’s creative powers. He merely speaks and it is so (as he did in creation – Genesis 1).

(2) This is also the first plague to make an explicit distinction between God’s people and the people of Pharaoh. God makes it clear that the Israelites are “my people,” whereas the Egyptians are “your [Pharaoh’s] people.” This distinction between the people is repeated throughout the remainder of the plagues (except for the locus plague), either explicitly or implicitly, and culminates in the tenth plague, where the “destroyer” sees the blood of the Passover lamb on the doorframes of the Israelites and passes them by.

*We are your people, Lord, even as we live among those who are not. Amen.*