



Exposition

EDITOR: Eric Marshall, The White House, Lynn Road, Castle Rising,
King's Lynn, Norfolk, PE31 6AA. Tel./Fax 01553 631279; e-mail
testimony@marshalle.co.uk

The Exodus

A commentary on Exodus 1–15

F. The first nine plagues (Exodus 7–10)

Part 3: The first three plagues (ii)

Mark Vincent

The format of the commentary

The narrative has been broken down into several **major sections**, of a chapter or two each; some of these will be covered in one month, others will take longer. An **Introduction** is provided for each of these major sections, which sets out the major events and themes dealt with in those chapters.

Each major section is broken into **sub-sections** or **episodes** (these are typically between five and twenty verses each). For each the **AV text** is followed by a **Comment**, which draws out the major lessons and items of interest from the text. The AV text also contains **Footnotes**, in which additional 'one-off' points are made for those wanting to work through Exodus more slowly.

THIS ARTICLE completes the study of the first cycle of three plagues with a consideration of the plagues of frogs and lice.

Plague 2: Frogs

- 8:1¹ And the LORD spake unto Moses, Go unto Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Let My people go, that they may serve Me.
- 8:2 And if thou refuse to let them go, behold, I will smite all thy borders with frogs:
- 8:3 And the river shall bring forth frogs abundantly, which shall go up and come into thine house, and into thy bedchamber, and upon thy bed, and into the house of thy

- servants, and upon thy people, and into thine ovens, and into thy kneadingtroughs:
- 8:4 And the frogs shall come up both on thee, and upon thy people, and upon all thy servants.
- 8:5 And the LORD spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch forth thine hand with thy rod over the streams, over the rivers, and over the ponds, and cause frogs to come up upon the land of Egypt.
- 8:6 And Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up, and covered the land of Egypt.
- 8:7 And the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt.
- 8:8 Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, Intreat 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 do sacrifice unto the LORD.
- 8:9 And Moses said unto Pharaoh, Glory over me: when shall I intreat for thee, and for thy servants, and for thy people, to destroy the frogs from thee and thy houses, that they may remain in the river only?
- 8:10 And he said, To morrow. And he said, Be it according to thy word: that thou mayest know that there is none like unto the LORD our God.
- 8:11 And the frogs shall depart from thee, and from thy houses, and from thy servants, and from thy people; they shall remain in the river only.²
- 8:12 And Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh: and Moses cried unto the LORD be-

cause of the frogs which he had brought against Pharaoh.

8:13 And the LORD did according to the word of Moses; and the frogs died out of the houses, out of the villages, and out of the fields.

8:14 And they gathered them together upon heaps: and the land stank.³

8:15 But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.

Comment

This plague once again takes a conditional form: 'Let My people go . . . or else . . .'. No response from Pharaoh is recorded—not even a negative one—so God again commands that Aaron stretch out his rod to produce the frogs. The Egyptians worshipped a frog-headed goddess called Heqt, associated with fertility and thought to help women at childbirth. This aspect has already figured in the Exodus story (chapters 1-2).

There seems to be a deliberate perversion of Genesis Creation language in the account. It is the river (the waters) that is to "bring forth . . . abundantly" (v. 3), just as the waters had brought forth teeming fish and whales in Genesis 1. But this time it is only one species of creation which is to be brought forth, and in ridiculous quantities. God is showing that He is not obliged to keep the wonderful processes of nature in check, with all their diversity and order. Other processes and organisations, hideous to man, are quite within His power—but by His grace mankind is generally spared such spectacles. Now Egypt must learn of God's power and of the fine balances of nature that are in God's hands. Things do not have to continue as they always have. God can intervene at any moment.

The frogs come up out of the waters and cover the land (v. 6) in a way which also has something in common with the description of the Flood. Like a huge wave sweeping over the land, so the frogs come up from the water and submerge it. There is no place where they are not. They are no respecters of persons, for both the great house of Pharaoh and the lowly quarters of the servants are afflicted. They come into the ovens and the kneading troughs, into the very food chain itself; they come into the bed, so man can take no rest. From the Egyptians' perspective, nature and its processes of reproduction have gone mad, and there is nothing they can do except appeal to Moses to take the frogs away.

Or rather, there is something they can do, and do in fact do. They can make the problem worse! In a somewhat comic turn, Pharaoh's magicians try to prove they are Moses' match. But instead of taking the frogs away (which would have been far more helpful), they exacerbate the problem by generating more (v. 7). How they do this is once again unspecified, but to the more perceptive eye their inadequacy and even stupidity in making the problem worse would have been apparent. It shows that, while man can certainly make his problems worse, he cannot solve a problem of this magnitude without God's help.

So Pharaoh must negotiate with Moses. He asks that Moses intreat the Lord for him, and in his response Moses uses a strange expression: "Glory over me: when shall I intreat for thee . . . to destroy the frogs from thee and thy houses . . . ?" (v. 9). There are two possibilities as to what this might mean. The first is that Moses, with an excessive and sarcastic politeness, is asking, "And (pray tell me!) when exactly would you like the frogs to be gone?", as though Pharaoh might miss them and fondly wish them to stay around for a couple more days before they finally take their leave. Of course Pharaoh would want no such thing, and on this interpretation Moses is making Pharaoh acknowledge his desperation and lack of manoeuvrability.

The other possibility takes Moses' words as a sincere polite enquiry—allowing Pharaoh the dignity and self-respect of having some say in the matter through the selection of the time when the ordeal will finally be over. On this reading we would take the point that we should be polite and respectful to others, even if they do not deserve it. Pharaoh is allowed to save face before his people, and meanwhile God demonstrates that the frogs are completely at His disposition and not a random phenomenon.

The time period Pharaoh selects is "to morrow". There will be a new beginning, a frog-less dawn, although the effects of the infestation will be felt for a good while after as the stinking carcasses are heaped up and finally cleared away. The longer-term consequences of Pharaoh's stubbornness are therefore not so easily removed.

The sad fact is that, although tomorrow will be a new day as far as the frogs are concerned (it will be their last), Pharaoh's attitude will remain all too recognisable and unrenewed. As if to point to this fact, that date of "to morrow" is constantly repeated throughout the remaining plague narrative:

- “I will put a division between My people and thy people: *to morrow* shall this sign be” (8:23; cf. v. 29)
- “And the LORD appointed a set time, saying, *To morrow* the LORD shall do this thing in the land. And the LORD did that thing *on the morrow*, and all the cattle of Egypt died” (9:5,6)
- “Behold, *to morrow* about this time I will cause it to rain a very grievous hail” (v. 18)
- “If thou refuse to let My people go, behold, *to morrow* will I bring the locusts into thy coast” (10:4).

The point seems to be that, if Pharaoh chooses a new day yet does not change, then a new day of plague and pestilence is precisely what he will get—again and again. By repeatedly bringing the plagues “to morrow” God is constantly reminding Pharaoh of the choice he was given, and that he broke his side of the bargain. Whereas Pharaoh was faithless, God was constantly faithful to the time frame that Pharaoh had been allowed to choose; ironically, God repeatedly brings about new plagues tomorrow, the very time on which Pharaoh wanted the plague of frogs to stop. God’s faithfulness is contrasted with the changeable Pharaoh.

There is a powerful contrast with all this when we come to the tenth and ultimate plague, the destruction of the first-born. This final plague also involves a time frame, but crucially God changes the time. Whereas all the other plagues which involved a time frame were performed “to morrow”, the tenth plague is different. God brings it about at midnight—at a time of His own choosing. Pharaoh has had his opportunity, his chance to determine how the events would unfold and to liberate the Egyptians. Now God will impose His own time frame upon Pharaoh, specifying that the plague will strike at midnight.

The scene of Moses intreating the Lord for the removal of the frogs is a powerful one. God does not just stop them Himself as soon as He hears Pharaoh’s repentance; instead Moses must intercede for his enemy, praying to the Lord for him that the frogs might depart. That the Lord responds to Moses’ cry is a wonderful comfort; how much more will He do so for those who are His own?

Plague 3: Lice

8:16 And the LORD said unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch out thy rod, and smite the

dust of the land, that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt.

8:17 And they did so; for Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod, and smote the dust of the earth, and it became lice in man, and in beast; all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt.

8:18 And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not:⁴ so there were lice upon man, and upon beast.

8:19 Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.

Comment

For the final plague of the three no warning is given. Aaron must stretch out his rod at the outset to bring about this climactic plague. Lice were often troublesome in Egypt around October/November, but this particular manifestation was beyond anything they had seen before.

Whereas the first two plagues affected the waters, the third plague affects “the dust of the land” (v. 16). This phrase seems to provide another echo of Genesis. It was from the dust of the ground that man had been created, but in this horrific twist it is lice which are formed from it to plague man and beast.

The attempt of the wizards to replicate the miracle turns out to be abortive in this instance, and they recognise at last that “This is the finger of God” (v. 19). They know when they are defeated and they are prepared to stand down. If this is what God can do with His finger, just imagine what He can do with His hand or arm! Just think what the use of the totality of God’s power might portend! Such reasoning proves too subtle for Pharaoh, however, who parts company with his magicians and does not hearken to them. The first cycle of plagues is complete, and to those with open eyes it has been an astonishing display of God’s power. But Pharaoh has closed his eyes and hardened his heart, giving God further opportunities to display His awesome might.

1. v. 1. The numbering of verses is different in the Hebrew and English versions from this point on until 9:1, at which point identical numbering resumes. English 8:1 is Hebrew 7:26; English 8:5 is Hebrew 8:1. There are further

- differences in that some of the English verses constitute two verses in Hebrew.
2. **v. 11 they shall remain in the river only.** The text stresses this point in verse 9 and again in verse 11; the frogs are out of place, but they can be returned to the place where they belong (in the river) if Pharaoh behaves in the appropriate way. Israel too are out of place (in Egypt), and Pharaoh must do the right thing by sending them on their way to a place where they do belong, the place that God has marked out for them.

3. **v. 14 the land stank.** So do dead fish from the first plague in 7:18,21.
4. **v. 18 they could not.** The magicians attempt to keep up with God by copying this miracle, but they are unable to do so with their enchantments. God plays along with them so far, and then moves up a gear. We sometimes behave like the magicians, thinking we can keep up with God, or match Him or beat Him in some way, and sometimes He may let us deceive ourselves for a time. But in the end that is all we shall be doing—deceiving ourselves.



Principles, Preaching and Problems

EDITOR: Trevor Maher, 5 Birch Court, Doune,
Perthshire, FK16 6JD. Tel. 01786 841830;
e-mail: tam@doune5.fsnet.co.uk

The symbol of the cross

Trevor Maher

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God . . . For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:18,22-24).

This article considers the use of the symbol of the cross in Christendom and elsewhere, and examines whether it is appropriate for those who accept the true Bible teaching of salvation through Christ to use it.

THE GIANT cross stands over 280 feet high, and is constructed from what looks like metal scaffolding. During the last week in August 2002, Macedonian Orthodox believers gathered around it for a sanctification ceremony. Built on the top of Mount Vodno, just above Skopje, the capital of Macedonia, it is meant to symbolise 2,000 years of Christianity.

This monument is just one more case of the use of this symbol around the world, the most well known perhaps being the statue representing Christ with arms outstretched to form the shape of the cross high on a mountain above Rio de Janeiro. The symbol of the cross can be found in virtually all churches that claim to be Christian. It is incorporated in the design of priests' garments, used in the decoration of buildings

and as jewellery, illustrated in Bibles, hymn books, prayer books and in literature, and in various shapes and sizes it is paraded at many forms of services. It has become a religious icon recognised around the world, but it is one that Christadelphians have consistently refused to use. Is this the right attitude?

What are the benefits?

The arguments advanced in our community for using the symbol are that it

- identifies us as Christians
- encourages us to think about the suffering of Christ
- reminds us of the love and mercy of God in providing a way for forgiveness of sins.

By using it, it is argued, we will be able to worship and serve God more sincerely, and our behaviour in our daily discipleship will be improved.

But what brings about this desire to use the symbol of the cross? The simple answer is that individuals probably look at what religious bodies around them are doing and think there is