

Let the Plagues Begin: Blood and Frogs (Exodus 7:14-8:11)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Exodus

I. Review from Previous Lessons

- a. Moses (at age 80) has returned to Egypt with his brother Aaron. They show the miraculous signs to the Hebrew elders, who rejoice that the Lord has seen their affliction and plans to deliver them from Egypt.
- b. When they ask Pharaoh for permission to take their people for a 3-day journey into the Wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord, Pharaoh refuses. He increases the burden on the Israelite workers, telling them they now have to find their own straw to make bricks, however the brick-making quota is not relaxed.
- c. The Israelite workers are flogged when they cannot keep up with the quota, and they blame Moses and Aaron for their situation getting worse.
- d. Aaron throws down his staff, which turns into a snake, as a sign to Pharaoh. Pharaoh's then calls on his sorcerers, who somehow do the same thing. However, Aaron's rod/snake *swallows up* theirs!
- e. Pharaoh hardens his heart, and still refuses to let the Israelites go to worship their God.

II. Water to Blood

- a. Moses brings the first of 10 Plagues upon Egypt. The Ten Plagues, in order of their appearance, are:
 - i. Water to Blood
 - ii. Frogs
 - iii. Gnats (or Lice)
 - iv. Flies (or Dog-Flies)
 - v. Diseased Cattle
 - vi. Boils
 - vii. Hail (perhaps also with Fire)
 - viii. Locusts
 - ix. Darkness
 - x. Death of the Firstborn (Passover)

b. Read **Exodus 7:14-25**.

c. Storyline:

- i. The Lord tells Moses to rise early in the morning, stand on the bank of the Nile River, and meet with Pharaoh there.
- ii. Moses and Aaron are to warn Pharaoh that since he has been unwilling to listen to the Lord, Aaron will strike the river with his staff, and all the water will be turned to blood.
- iii. The fish in the river shall die, the river shall stink and the water will be undrinkable. This will be the case for all the surface waters of Egypt: the river, irrigation canals, and standing water. It will happen even to water that is in the wood and stone containers.
- iv. Aaron strikes the river with his staff in the sight of Pharaoh, and everything happens just as Moses and Aaron said it would.
- v. However, Pharaoh's sorcerers were able to do something similar, and Pharaoh's heart was hardened. He still refused to let the people go.

d. **Question:** Why do you think the Lord chose to have *this* as the *very first plague* brought by Moses against Egypt? Why did he select *the river* (and other standing water of Egypt), and why did he turn it to *blood*?

- i. One reason you might think of is that in a desert land like Egypt, *water is life*. Striking the water supply would be a very hard-hitting opening salvo from the Lord!
 1. My own professional background is as an environmental engineer with decades working in the areas of water quality and treatment. As a "water engineer" I have dealt with algae blooms in water supply, treating water to make it safe to drink, etc.
 2. In one company I worked for I was told an interesting story by a colleague who had worked in Egypt, that underscores the importance of water in that arid land.
 - a. While my colleague was inspecting along one of the irrigation canals he was approached by a very agitated local farmer who appeared to be very threatening. (Bear in mind that the farmer's livelihood depended on the irrigation canal).

- b. My engineering friend had to think fast. He knew very few phrases in Arabic, but fortunately one of the few things he knew how to say was, “*water engineer*”.
 - c. As soon as my friend said those words, the farmer’s demeanor immediately changed, and he showed great reverence and respect toward my friend (even bowing down).
 - d. That story illustrates the extraordinary importance of water in a desert county like Egypt (something most of us take for granted, in water-rich New England).
- ii. A second compelling answer to why God chose *this* (river water to blood) as the first miracle can be found in the **Wisdom of Solomon**, also called the **Book of Wisdom**. This book was likely composed in the first or second century BC. This book is included in the Old Testament used by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. It also was contained in the original King James Version, and was found commonly in KJV translations well into the late 1800’s.
1. “They thirsted and called upon You, and water was given them from a flinty rock, and a quenching of thirst from a hard stone; for through the things by which their enemies were punished, they themselves when in need had kindness shown to them. In place of a spring of an ever-flowing river, troubled and defiled with blood, in rebuke of the decree to slay the infants – you gave them abundant water unexpectedly, showing through their thirst at that time how you punished their enemies. For when they were tested, though they were disciplined in mercy, they learned how the ungodly were tormented when judged in wrath.” (**Wisdom of Solomon 11:4-9**, LXX, OSB)
 2. Points that the author of **Wisdom of Solomon** is making here:
 - a. The writer is drawing contrast between how the Lord treated the Israelites traveling through the Wilderness, versus how He treated the Egyptians back in Egypt.
 - b. Both groups thirsted, and the Lord did something miraculous *related to water* for each group.
 - i. He miraculously answered the thirst of Israel in the Wilderness by providing a spring of *drinkable water*, from the rock (referring to the events of **Exodus 17:1-7**).

- ii. However, in contrast, the Lord punished the Egyptians by making the water of their river *defiled and undrinkable*, turning it to blood.
 - c. It says the Lord turned the river in Egypt to blood “*in rebuke of the decree to slay the infants*”.
 - i. This of course refers back to the edict of Pharaoh in **Exodus chapter 1**: “Every male born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the river...” (**Exodus 1:22**, LXX, OSB)
 - ii. This is God’s justice. It is *payback* to the Egyptians for casting the Hebrew babies into the river. His first plague *turned the water of that river to blood*.
 - d. Let us remember that *no one gets away with anything* before God. He brings appropriate judgement upon the wicked, regardless of whether that is years or decades later!
3. (For those interested in background information regarding the **Wisdom of Solomon** book, see the online *Catholic Encyclopedia* article on the **Book of Wisdom**.)
- iii. A third important reason why this water-to-blood transformation was the first public miracle performed by Moses: *the similarity to Jesus’ first public miracle*.
 - 1. Recall that Peter explained to the Jews in Jerusalem: “For Moses truly said to the fathers, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet *like me* from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you.” (**Acts 3:22**, NKJV; where Peter is quoting from **Deuteronomy 18:15-19**)
 - 2. Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, writing c. 320 AD, commented on this prophecy:
 - a. “Moses... by wonderful works and miracles authenticated the religion that he proclaimed. Christ likewise, using His recorded miracles to inspire faith in those who saw them, established the new discipline of the Gospel teaching.... (*Eusebius then explains several parallels between Moses and Jesus, and continues...*) And you will find other works done by our Savior with greater power than those of Moses, and yet resembling the works which Moses did.”

- i. (Source: Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel*, book 3, chapter 2)
 - ii. According to Eusebius, since Jesus had to be a prophet “like Moses”, we should expect to see the miracles of Jesus resembling (but also greater than) the miracles of Moses.
3. **Question:** What was the first *public miracle* performed by Jesus?
- a. Read **John 2:1-11**, from the story of the wedding in Cana.
 - b. In **John 2:11** it says this was “the *beginning of signs* Jesus did in Cana of Galilee”. Therefore we know this was the first public miracle of Jesus that is recorded in Scripture.
 - c. While Moses changed water to blood in his first public miracle/sign, Jesus changed water to wine!
 - i. This is one more great example of the fulfillment of the prophecy of **Deuteronomy 18:15-19**, that Jesus would be the Prophet who would be “like Moses”.
 - ii. Certainly Jesus could have made wine appear miraculously in *empty* containers. However, notice that instead of doing that, He had the stone containers filled with water first, and *then transformed the water into wine*. Why do you think He did it *that way*?
 - iii. Just as Eusebius said, the works of Jesus *resembled those of Moses*; yet demonstrated *even greater power*.
 - iv. Note also even the “minor” details of the miracle. The water Jesus turned to wine was contained in six “water pots of stone” (**John 2:6**). It mentions in the account of Moses that even the water in the wooden water containers and *in the stone water containers* was changed (**Exodus 7:19**)!
 - v. The miracle performed by Jesus at the Cana wedding feast was both similar to and *greater than* the miracle of Moses.

1. While Moses made the river water *unpalatable*, Jesus turned the water into wine that was so good to drink that the wine steward at the wedding was amazed and remarked how the best wine of the feast had been reserved for last!
 2. It is much easier to pollute water that is drinkable than it is to create something that is even better to drink (excellent wine) from plain water!
- e. **Question:** Why was Moses told specifically to strike the river *with his staff*?
- i. As we discussed in the prior lesson, early Christians like Justin Martyr (in his Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew) saw the wood staff of Moses as foreshadowing the cross of Christ.
 - ii. Notice the importance of the staff throughout the story, and in particular how many stories in the Old Testament feature wood and water, with the wood (combined with faith) somehow changing the properties of the water.
 1. Here, in **Exodus 7**, the wooden staff changes the biochemical properties of the water, transforming it into blood.
 2. Later, in **Exodus 14**, Moses will lift up his rod and the water of the Red Sea will part, with a wall of water on the right and left, defying the normal laws of physics.
 3. In **Exodus 17**, when the people have no water to drink in the Wilderness, Moses is told to strike the rock in order to produce a stream of drinkable water.
 4. Other unusual 'wood + faith = *water properties being transformed*' include:
 - a. Noah's ark story of **Genesis 6-8** (water of the flood able to save the lives of Noah's family and those within the wooden ark).
 - i. Consider also what it says about wood in **Wisdom of Solomon 14:1-6**. It alludes to the story of Noah, when "the hope of the world took refuge in a boat...for *the wood was blessed through which righteousness comes*".

- ii. This reminds me of some passages in the New Testament regarding righteousness coming through the cross.
 1. For example, Peter speaks of Christ, "...who Himself bore our sins in His own body *on the tree*, that we, having died to sins, might *live for righteousness....*" (**1 Peter 2:24**, NKJV)
 - b. In **Genesis 30**, Jacob peels tree branches and puts them in the water troughs by where the sheep and goats mate, which miraculously alters the appearance of the animals conceived nearby.
 - c. In **Exodus 15**, the bitter water is rendered sweet and drinkable after Moses casts a tree into the waters of Marah.
 - d. In **2 Kings 6** (designated **4 Kingdoms 6** in the LXX), Elisha casts a stick of wood into the river, making a lost iron ax head float.
- iii. **Question:** If the wood foreshadows the cross, *what do you think the water in these stories* (which is transformed by the combination of faith and the wood to accomplish something miraculous) *might represent or foreshadow?*
 1. **Obvious Answer:** Christian baptism in water. According to the New Testament Scriptures, in baptism we:
 - a. die and are buried with Christ (**Romans 6:3-5**);
 - b. are born again (**John 3:3-5**);
 - c. enter into a saving relationship with Christ (**Mark 16:15-16**);
 - d. have our sins are forgiven (**Acts 3:38, Acts 22:16**);
 - e. are added to the body of Christ, the church (**1 Corinthians 12:12-13**); and
 - f. receive the Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:38**).
 2. So *keep your eye out* when reading in the Old Testament Scriptures, for instances where 'wood + faith + water' bring about something extraordinary. It just might be foreshadowing

something that would be fulfilled later, under the new covenant!

- f. A few general comments about the miracles performed by Moses.
 - i. In preparation for this series, to get more background information on ancient Egypt, I have been reading through the book *Israel in Egypt* by James K. Hoffmeier. The author is considered to be a relatively conservative scholar (he respects the Biblical account). However, throughout the book he surveys the range of work done by modern “Bible scholars”, who tend to fall into one of two camps when looking at the story of Moses and the exodus from Egypt.
 - 1. One group (extreme liberals) deny the the story ever took place. They question whether the Israelites were ever in Egypt at all, whether Moses existed, etc. They look at the whole account as a fable, a fictional account to provide a more glorious identity for the Jewish nation.
 - 2. The second group (more conservative) believes that the stories in Exodus are based in fact (Israel truly was in Egypt and departed from there, led by Moses), however they hold that the story was embellished and added to over time. Some insist that the story we have was cobbled together from multiple sources at a much later date. (Actually, this was the general perspective I was taught in my religion class at the Roman Catholic high school I attended, back in the late 1960’s.)
 - a. General attitude of many in this “more conservative” group is that the “miracles” were in fact naturally occurring events that can be explained by the normally occurring laws of nature.
 - b. For example, some hold that the water-to-blood was from red soil particles in the water that occurred during a certain time of the year. Others think it might have been caused by the effects of red microorganisms growing in the river water during stagnant conditions. This would similar to a condition we sometimes find in salt-water bays, called “red tide”. The presence of certain microorganisms could make the water undrinkable, and turn it red in color. Then at night, when the algae were respiring (literally breathing without sunlight) they would draw all the oxygen out of the water, killing the fish, and everything would stink.

- c. They propose that a natural ecological chain of events followed, for instance:
 - i. Frogs breeding and being driven out of the water as a result of the presence of these red microorganisms.
 - ii. Then after the frogs died suddenly of some disease, gnats would breed on the dead frogs and infest the land.
 - iii. Then flies would come after the gnats, etc.
 - iv. They further propose that the three days of darkness in Egypt (the 9th plague) could have been caused by a *bad sandstorm*.
 - v. Crossing the Red Sea is explained as simply wading across on an extreme *low tide type event*; or immediately after a natural disturbance such as an *earthquake*.
- ii. There are some obvious problems with even this (relatively) more conservative view of people who are trying hard to reconcile the story with a non-miraculous possible account.
 - 1. This is the same attitude that some try to take with the New Testament account of Jesus. They try to accept the moral teachings yet reject the accounts of Jesus' many miracles.
 - a. **Questions:** Did Jesus rise from the dead on the third day? Yes or no? Did He change the water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana? Yes or no? *Either He did, or He did not.*
 - i. John, an eyewitness, wrote that Jesus actually changed water to wine. Was the apostle John telling the truth, or was he a liar?
 - ii. And if Jesus said He would *rise from the dead on the third day* but did not, then *He would a liar, and not a good moral teacher!*
 - b. If God can raise Jesus from the dead, then changing water to wine is no stretch of the imagination. If God could change water into fine wine instantaneously and miraculously, He certainly could turn the Nile River to blood under Moses.

2. Jesus taught that He is our ultimate Teacher.
 - a. “One is your Teacher, the Christ” (**Matthew 23:10**).
 - b. As our authoritative Teacher, *Jesus confirmed that the Lord spoke to Moses from the burning bush*. Jesus also confirmed that Moses was the author of the **Exodus** account.
 - c. “But even *Moses showed in the burning bush passage* that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’” (**Luke 20:37**, NKJV)
 - i. Jesus confirmed that God did, in fact, speak to Moses from the burning bush.
 - d. “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Are you not therefore *mistaken*, because *you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?* For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read *in the book of Moses*, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”?’” (**Mark 12:24–26**, NKJV)
 - e. “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; *for he wrote about Me.*” (**John 5:46**, NKJV)
 - i. Jesus confirmed Moses as the author of the first (five) books of the Bible, the Law of Moses. (Consider also what Jesus said in **Luke 24:27** and **Luke 24:44**.)
 - f. Jesus asserted that the miracles of Moses actually did happen!
 - i. Who has the authority to challenge Jesus on this? (Obvious answer: *No one does!*)
3. Also, according to the New Testament writers, both Jesus and Moses performed genuine miraculous signs.
 - a. Peter began his preaching in Jerusalem, to the Jews at Pentecost: “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you *by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your*

midst, as you yourselves also know—” (**Acts 2:22**, NKJV)

- b. Likewise Stephen, a man filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke of Moses: “He brought them out, *after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.*” (**Acts 7:36**, NKJV)
4. Even the scholars who want to try to come up with a Moses who did not perform genuine miracles cannot pull that off. There is no way to explain some of the events by the natural laws of science, especially when you consider the details of the stories.
- a. Nothing is impossible for the God who spoke the universe into existence. He created all the laws of physics, chemistry and biology under which the universe normally operates; and He can suspend or change those laws at any time.
 - b. The “red tide” type explanation falls apart when you realize the water was turned to blood not only in the river, but also in all the standing water, even in the stone and wooden water containers.
 - c. There is no way to explain the Passover miracle (death to the oldest son in each family, except for the Israelites).
 - d. And how can one explain, using only natural phenomena, how the Egyptians *drowned* in the Red Sea when trying to pursue Israel; whereas the Israelites crossed the same immediately prior, *on dry land*?
- g. Further thoughts from my background as an environmental engineer (a water quality and water treatment engineer).
- i. You don’t get “red tide” type algae blooms in standing water alongside a river, nor in stone containers or in wooden water containers, etc. when an algae bloom occurs in a river.
 - ii. Three days with no water and people will die; this lasted for seven days. From my perspective as a water treatment engineer, the account of the Egyptians digging alongside the polluted river to get drinking water is very realistic detail. One of the most effective means of treating polluted surface water is to put it through what we call a “slow sand filter”, to filter out the contaminants and produce purified

water. The polluted river water was purified as it passed underground through the sandy layer of soil adjacent to the river.

1. Since you can't live for seven days without water, this is a very plausible approach for the Egyptians to have taken to survive during this plague.

III. Plague of Frogs

a. Read **Exodus 7:26-8:11**.

b. Storyline:

i. Frogs *everywhere!*

1. Bedrooms, food, ovens, fields, etc.
2. They will cover the land.

ii. The river literally "*vomits up*" frogs. A rather graphic description!

1. Word in **Exodus 7:28** in the LXX (corresponding to **Exodus 8:3** in Bibles based on the Masoretic Text), ἐξερεύγομαι (exerevgomai) literally means "to vomit".
2. This is the same Greek word used when the story of this plague is recounted in **Wisdom of Solomon 19:10**.

iii. The Egyptian sorcerers somehow are able to produce a similar miracle (or perhaps the illusion of that).

iv. Pharaoh calls for Moses and asks him to pray to the Lord to remove the frogs. He promises to let the people go to worship the Lord.

1. Moses responds respectfully, "*You tell me when to pray to the Lord, and then He will get rid of all these frogs.*"
2. Pharaoh says: "*Tomorrow.*"

v. Frogs die, stink, heaped up in piles; remain only in the river.

vi. When Pharaoh is relieved from the plague of frogs, his heart is hardened and he reneges on his promise. He will not let Israel go.

c. **Question:** Is there anything *new or different* that we see in this plague (versus the first one)?

- i. For the first time, *Pharaoh seems to believe in the Lord*. He seeks Moses and asks him to pray to have the frogs removed.

- ii. Also, for the first time *Pharaoh says he is willing to let the Israelites go.*
 - iii. Pharaoh does not keep his promise. His word is meaningless. His “yes” does not mean “yes”. Like Satan, he is a liar who holds out empty promises.
- d. **Question:** When Moses asks Pharaoh to name the time for removing the frogs (so that it will be done exactly at that time, to show it was from the Lord), Pharaoh says, “Tomorrow”. Why not “Right now!”?
- i. Years ago I recall how Jim Condon, a preacher in the Churches of Christ, used this story effectively to convict people of their need to become urgent when they knew in their hearts that they needed to get baptized.
 1. Often those who knew they needed to make this decision would respond, “I know I need to do this, but I’m not quite ready.” Or perhaps they would say, “Not today...*maybe tomorrow.*”
 2. My friend Jim would read this story and then ask the question, “Do you (like Pharaoh) really want to spend *another night with the frogs?*”
 - ii. When a person is convicted that they need to humble themselves before God (repent of their sins, get baptized, etc.), *after they have been broken with a godly sorrow they should respond immediately.* Some examples from the Scriptures:
 1. “Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham...’” (**Luke 19:8–9**, NKJV)
 2. I think of the Ethiopian eunuch: “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” (**Acts 8:36**)
 3. I also think of the story of the conversion of the Philippian jailer.
 - a. “Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and

washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.” (**Acts 16:29–34**, NKJV)

4. Paul speaks of what Godly sorrow looks like, in **2 Corinthians 7:8-11**.
 - a. It produces diligence, alarm, a vehement desire to clear ourselves before God.
5. **Question/ Challenge:** Is there something that you know in your heart God wants you to do or change, but you would rather deal with it “tomorrow”?
 - a. Is there any sin you want to hang on to for one more day?
 - b. Or are you willing to make the change right away, today. Take inventory, consider, and don’t delay for even one more day!
 - c. Don’t spend one more night with the frogs!