

Exodus 8

This chapter is focused on three plagues and on the slowly changing power struggle between Moses and Pharaoh. The three plagues follow the pattern mentioned in the last lesson. The first plague, frogs, has Moses and Aaron go to the palace and warn Pharaoh of the coming plague. The second has Moses and Aaron initiate a plague without any warning to Pharaoh. The third plague has Moses and Aaron meeting Pharaoh as he sets out for his day.

The first plague of the chapter is the second plague in the series of ten plagues. It concerns frogs. Though we are not privy to the conversation between Moses, Aaron, and Pharaoh, it is implied that Moses and Aaron passed on God's command to let God's people go along with the threat of a plague if Pharaoh did not comply. When Pharaoh fails to comply, the frogs are unleashed. At the same time Pharaoh's magicians were able to perform the same feat. But in what follows, Pharaoh asking Moses and Aaron to remove the frogs, implies that while the magicians could bring frogs, they could not make them leave...thus we have begun to see the limitations of magic as compared to the power of God.

It is at this point that Moses takes a tremendous risk. His risk is that when Pharaoh asks for Moses to remove the frogs, Moses asks him to name the time the frogs need to be gone. Moses does this trusting that God will accomplish the frog-ectomy on cue. Notice that Moses has not checked in with God, but we would assume that this risky request is based on Moses' deepening faith in God, that God is the one who hears and answers. Pharaoh asks, Moses prays, and God removes the frogs on schedule. Even so, Pharaoh hardens his heart, which makes sense because to give in at this point would be to admit weakness before a foreign god.

We come now to the plague of gnats, or perhaps lice (the Hebrew is vague). With this plague we have reached the limits of the power of magic as Pharaoh's magicians are unable to duplicate this feat. We also witness the magicians admitting that what Moses is doing comes from the "finger of God." This admission is the beginning of Pharaoh's people turning on him. Even so, Pharaoh has made his decision to resist and he will not deviate from it.

The third plague of the chapter has always been known as the plague of the flies, though the Hebrew merely says "horde." The King James was the first translation to make this into a plague of flies. Two things to note about this plague. First it is only a plague on the Egyptians (Pharaoh's people) and not on God's people. Second, When Moses and Aaron negotiate with Pharaoh for a three-day release, Moses agrees to pray to God once again, even though I would argue that he and Aaron knew that Pharaoh would not give in. And notice that Pharaoh and not God is hardening Pharaoh's heart.

Reflection: In this chapter we are watching the development of a leader in Moses' interactions with Pharaoh, as he develops skills necessary to lead a bunch of former slaves. We watch him deepen his relationship with God through listening, faithfully following God's commands, trusting in God, and having infinite patience when things do not turn out the way he might like. At the same time, we are watching what happens to a self-absorbed political leader who finds himself getting backed into a corner, which is to negotiate, lie and resist. Self-centered leaders often do these three things because their ego is so insecure that to give in, is the same as to die. In a sense Moses/Aaron and Pharaoh represent the two ends of the spectrum with God on one end and ego on the other. On the God end, one finds true courage, patience and ultimately freedom. On the other end, one finds disaster and death. We all operate somewhere on this spectrum, but hopefully closer to the God end.

Questions:

1. Which of these plagues resonates the most with you and why?
2. Has your impression of Moses and Aaron changed over the last several chapters?
3. Where do you find yourself on the God/Ego spectrum and has your place changed over time?