

# Ministry of Grace Church

## Exodus 8 - Speaker Notes

As we have been going through the book of Exodus, we have begun to see the battle between Pharaoh and Moses over the release of the Israelites who were living as slaves in Egypt. However, even though it appears so on the surface, this is not really a battle between Pharaoh and Moses, but a battle between Pharaoh and *Yahweh*. As we get into this battle, we will see more of the subtleties between Pharaoh hardening his heart, that is, getting more stubborn and Pharaoh strengthening his heart, that is becoming more bold to stand up against *Yahweh*. Remember, Pharaoh believes himself to be a god, and in Egypt whatever he says is the law of the land. Because of this, he can do whatever he wants with no repercussions from anyone. That is, unless there is someone, or something, greater and more powerful than he is. Up to this point, he does not believe that *Yahweh* is greater and more powerful than he is. To him, *Yahweh* is just another god.

There is another subtlety that we will focus on during this battle, power versus precision. As with any war, the weapons of war will often determine the outcome, and there are two characteristics of the weapons that determine their effectiveness. These two characteristics are power and precision. In early warfare a very effective weapon was the phalanx. This consisted of hundreds of soldiers lined up side to side 10 to 15 rows deep. As it approached the enemy, the winner was always determined by who had the stronger phalanx. There was no need for precision, just power. Power ruled the day. However, once the bow and arrow became widely used, the phalanx could be decimated while it was a great distance off because of the precision of the attacks of the archers. Precision ruled the day.

With the invention of gunpowder, the power of a weapon fired from a distance became even more critical and these weapons could be used over longer distances. Power ruled the day. When gunpowder and guns were first invented, however, the projectiles were simply lead balls which seldom went precisely where they were aimed. Even a slight cross-wind could change the course of the projectile. With the invention of rifling, however, the bullet would spin as it left the barrel because of the rifling grooves in the barrel. This caused the projectile to fly straight and true. Precision ruled the day. Even in modern warfare, in this day of intercontinental ballistic missiles, there is a constant advancement in both power and precision. Both are important.

As we go through the battle between Pharaoh and *Yahweh*, we'll notice how the precision of the plagues, both in time and place, was as effective in breaking down Pharaoh's defenses as was the power of these plagues.

### Exodus 7:25; 8:1-4

**Seven full days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will plague all your country with frogs. The Nile shall swarm with frogs that shall come up into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed and into the houses of your servants and your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls. The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your servants.'"**

## **Egyptian Plague #2 – Frogs**

We can see from the last verse of the preceding chapter that this event took place a week after the river was turned to blood. Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh giving him a message directly from Jehovah, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me,” along with a warning if he refused, “if you refuse to let them go ... I will plague all your country with frogs.”

Frogs were a common occurrence in Egypt. The frog was connected with the most ancient forms of nature-worship in Egypt. In fact, the Egyptians worshipped a female deity named *Heqet* who was depicted with a frog’s head. However, the thought of frogs likely produced no fear in Pharaoh’s mind. What possible threat could there be from a few little frogs! After all, the common frog is a timid creature and naturally avoids interaction with humans. Obviously, these were a different kind of frog, in that they seemed to have no fear of people – and they were everywhere! All Egyptians would quickly recognize that these frogs were more than just a nuisance, perhaps brought on by the gods. Pharaoh, however, saw this simply as a parlor trick and directed his magicians to do the same, just to prove that this did not have divine origins.

### **Exodus 8:5-7**

**And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the canals and over the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt!’” So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. But the magicians did the same by their secret arts and made frogs come up on the land of Egypt.**

We are not specifically told that Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go, but this can be inferred from the action that *Yahweh* commanded Moses and Aaron to take. Then they left Pharaoh and Aaron stretched out his hand with the rod and brought on the plague.

As with the turning of water into blood, the magicians of Pharaoh’s court were somehow able to duplicate the bringing of frogs on the land. Apparently, however, the magicians were not able to get rid of the frogs and this caused him to seek relief from Moses and Aaron.

Once again, with our sanctified imaginations, let’s listen in on the conversation between Pharaoh and his magicians.

Jannes and Jambres – *As with the other tricks, my Lord, we counsel you not to fear. This is just another magic trick. We will reproduce the same effect with our magic.*

Pharaoh – *Well done, you two. You have once again duplicated the sorcery of the Hebrew magicians. Now that you have proven that it is just a magic trick, make all the frogs go away.*

Jannes and Jambres – *Weeeell -- we have tried to rid the land of these frogs, my Lord, but we are currently unable to! I fear that we will have to just wait until they all die. Even the Hebrew magicians won’t be able to make them go away completely.*

### **Exodus 8:8-11**

**Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, “Plead with the LORD to take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.” Moses said to Pharaoh, “Be pleased to command me when I am to plead for you and for your servants and for your people, that the frogs be cut off from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile.” And he said, “Tomorrow.” Moses said, “Be it as you say, so that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God. The frogs shall go away from you and your houses and your servants and your people. They shall be left only in the Nile.”**

## **Precision is the key**

This is a plague of nuisance, not a plague of pain, injury, or death. The ubiquitous presence of the twitchy, croaky, slimy amphibians would be such a constant irritation and provocation as to cause severe mental anguish for all Egyptian people if it were to continue much longer. There are historical examples documented by the historian Justin and others of entire cities being permanently evacuated because of similar plagues of frogs.

Since the Egyptian people see Pharaoh as not just their ruler but their god, they expect him to rid the land of the plague. And, since his own magicians are unable to get rid of the frogs, Pharaoh has no recourse other than to ask for relief of Moses and Aaron. Notice that Pharaoh says, “Plead with *Yahweh*.” This is the first time that Pharaoh has given credit to the self-existing one for what has happened. This is also an indication that Moses was clearly giving credit to *Yahweh* for all that was happening.

In both an act of respect for Pharaoh and a demonstration of God’s complete sovereignty, Moses requests that Pharaoh choose the time when the plague is to be ended. Though Pharaoh previously claimed that he did not know *Yahweh*, he is now beginning to know Him in an intimate, experiential way!

## **Exodus 8:12-15**

**So Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh, and Moses cried to the LORD about the frogs, as he had agreed with Pharaoh. And the LORD did according to the word of Moses. The frogs died out in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields. And they gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank. But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.**

After leaving Pharaoh, Moses apparently called out-loud to God for deliverance from the frogs at the time specified by Pharaoh, and God got rid of the frogs at that exact time. Not only was this a demonstration of the power of *Yahweh*, but by asking Pharaoh to name the time when the frogs were to be taken care of, it also demonstrates the precision of the working of our God. Incidentally, the gods of Egypt were not known for precision. When they caused a plague to happen, they did it when and where they wanted to. They never responded to a request from a mere mortal as to when it would happen or when it would go away.

As the frogs died off, the Egyptian people gathered them into piles and the rotting animals caused a foul smell throughout the land. One can only imagine all the places where frogs might have penetrated where they were difficult to get to. As they died off and began to stink, there would have been a lingering reminder to all Egyptians of *Yahweh*’s power, both to bring such a plague and to cause widespread death to the frogs.

Although the English translations write this as “he hardened his heart,” it should have been noted that the proper translation should be “he strengthened his heart” because it is, once again, the words, *chizuk halev*.

Now let’s listen in on the possible discussion between Pharaoh and his magicians once again.

Pharaoh – *I’m beginning to lose some confidence in you two. You couldn’t get rid of the frogs, but the god of the Hebrews seems to have been able to cause all of them to die off. And – Yahweh was able to perform this trick exactly when I asked him to. None of our gods can do that, can they?*

Jannes and Jambres – *Of course, my Lord. We should have known that in the heat of the second day, without enough food in all of Egypt to feed these frogs, they would naturally die off. This is not a demonstration of the power of the Hebrew god, it is simply how our goddess, *Heqet*, works. The fact that it occurred the next day is simply a coincidence.*

Pharaoh – *I suppose that makes sense. Well, I guess we will just have to bear down and work a little harder. Surely, we aren't going to let this Hebrew god get the better of us. Not in our own country!*

### **Exodus 8:16-18**

**Then the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt.’” And they did so. Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats in all the land of Egypt. The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast.**

### **Egyptian Plague #3 – Gnats**

Notice that Pharaoh was not given a warning of this plague. A careful reading of Exodus will reveal that Pharaoh also was not given any warning for the sixth and ninth plagues either.

The Hebrew word translated “gnats” is *kenim*, meaning gnats or lice. This has been described by one ancient historian as “a species of gnats; very troublesome on account of their stinging; found in the marshy districts of Egypt.”

Others say that this gnat was, “so small as to be hardly visible to the eye, but with a sting which causes a most painful irritation of the skin. They even creep into the eyes and nose.”

Still others have described this creature as, "having wings and flying in the air, but so subtle and minute as to escape the eye, unless very sharp sighted; but when it lights upon a body, it stings most bitterly, so that what a man cannot see flying, he feels stinging."

This insect was the source of a constant annoyance to the Egyptians. Obviously, this was a plague of power. If these insects were so small that they could scarcely be seen yet their sting was very grievous, they would strike fear in the heart of everyone who was stung by them, not knowing when the next painful sting would come.

However, unlike the previous two plagues, Pharaoh's magicians were not able to duplicate this plague. This undoubtedly opened Pharaoh's eyes even more regarding the power of Moses' God, *Yahweh*.

### **Exodus 8:19**

**Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.**

OK, let's listen in on Pharaoh and his two magicians once again.

Pharaoh – *These bugs are terrible! You can hardly see these little things, but their bite is very painful. What are you two going to do about this?*

Jannes and Jambres – *We have tried, my Lord. First, we tried to duplicate the plague but we were unable to. Then we tried to get rid of them, but even with our strongest magic neither can we duplicate this trick, nor can we get rid of them. But, don't worry, my Lord, this is not the work of the Hebrew god, this is truly the finger of our gods! We're sure that if we can figure out the proper sacrifice, we can get rid of these pesky bugs.*

Pharaoh – *Look, you two. You have lost faith and I have lost faith in you. This can't be from our gods, otherwise you would be able to duplicate it. I'm through listening to you two, leave me! I guess that I will just have to try harder to outwit these Hebrews and their little god.*

Although the magicians recognized that this plague was due to a higher power, they attributed it to *elohim*, meaning “gods,” not to *Yahweh*. And, the magicians were not willing to admit that Moses and Aaron were more capable than they were. Therefore, they attributed the plague to the gods. Apparently, Pharaoh was not convinced by the magicians that this was the work of the gods. So, once again, as with the first plague, we see that Pharaoh’s heart became *strengthened*. He encouraged himself to stay in the battle.

And, apparently Pharaoh didn’t believe that this was from the gods. As a result, he lost confidence in his own magicians. Consider what this means. When we abandon the advice of our most trusted counselors we are treading on very thin ice, indeed.

While Pharaoh and his magicians were trying to figure out where this plague had come from, our God, *Yahweh*, knew exactly what was happening. He even predicted it ahead of time. He had planned this entire series of events and all was proceeding precisely according to His plan. Not only had He planned this out completely, but He had already communicated to Moses that this was going to happen.

### **Exodus 8:20-23**

**Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and present yourself to Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. Or else, if you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people, and into your houses. And the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand. But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth. Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen.”””**

### **Egyptian Plague #4 – Swarms**

The Hebrew word translated “swarms” is *arōb*, which according to Gesenius, one of the greatest Hebrew scholars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, refers to: “a species of fly or gad-fly. It is very troublesome to persons, so called from sucking blood, like a mosquito.” Others, however, adopt the opinion that the insects were a species of beetle, which was revered by the Egyptians as a symbol of life. The sun-god, who bore the name *Khefri*, is represented in the form of a beetle. Still others claim the word simply signifies a swarm or large collection of animals of unspecified type. It seems most reasonable to me to interpret this as swarms of flies or beetles.

This plague does not appear to be one of power, but of precision. This time the precision is not just in the timing of the plague, but in the placement of it also. This precision in both time and space is a clear indication that *Yahweh* is master of both realms. And *Yahweh*, Himself even declares the significance of this; “that you may know that I am *Yahweh*!”

This is the first of the plagues that is given to the Egyptians only and not to the Israelites. From this point on, the plagues strike only the Egyptians, with the exception of the last. With the last plague, only those who believed God and followed His direction were protected from the death angel.

But, consider this: all the previous plagues, the turning of water into blood, the plague of frogs getting into everything, then dying off and stinking, and the plague of the painfully stinging gnats, were all experienced by the Israelites! How do you think they felt about Moses, and *Yahweh* for that matter. If Moses really knew what he was doing wouldn’t he protect the Israelites from these plagues. Do you think they murmured against Moses and Aaron about this? They were about to gain intimate experiential knowledge of their God, and they were going to be thankful! One has to admire Moses’ faith and fortitude in the face of what surely was the grumbling of the Israelites.

### **Exodus 8:24-27**

**And the LORD did so. There came great swarms of flies into the house of Pharaoh and into his servants' houses. Throughout all the land of Egypt the land was ruined by the swarms of flies. Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God within the land." But Moses said, "It would not be right to do so, for the offerings we shall sacrifice to the LORD our God are an abomination to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice offerings abominable to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us? We must go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as he tells us."**

This new plague happened, apparently, without any action on the part of Moses or Aaron. This would serve as a reminder to Moses and Aaron that they were not in charge and they were not the source of the plagues. God wanted them, more than anyone, to keep their focus on Him.

In response to this plague, Pharaoh finally agreed to let the people sacrifice, but he specified that they must stay in the land of Egypt. Moses responded that, 1) It would be an abomination to the Egyptian people if the Israelites performed the sacrifices that God had prescribed, and 2) In order to be completely obedient to *Yahweh*, the Israelites had to go into the wilderness to perform the sacrifices.

### **Exodus 8:28-29**

**So Pharaoh said, "I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you must not go very far away. Plead for me." Then Moses said, "Behold, I am going out from you and I will plead with the LORD that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, tomorrow. Only let not Pharaoh cheat again by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD."**

Realizing that his options were limited, Pharaoh agreed to let the children of Israel go into the wilderness to sacrifice, but he insisted that they not go very far into the wilderness. He still did not have a complete grasp on the fact that *Yahweh* was in charge. Instead, Pharaoh still clung to the belief that he was in charge of Egypt.

Moses agreed to intercede for Pharaoh but warns him not to renege on his promise of letting the Israelites go. And – notice the time precision of this plague was not just in its commencement, but in its completion; both exactly as Moses indicated.

### **Exodus 8:30-32**

**So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD. And the LORD did as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; not one remained. But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time, and did not let the people go.**

Once again, we see Moses intercede for the Egyptians and God responded by removing the swarms. Upon seeing that the plague had been removed, Pharaoh hardened his own heart and would not let the Israelites go into the wilderness to sacrifice. Wait, Pastor, you mean he strengthened his heart, right? No, actually, this time the text says that Pharaoh hardened his heart. Can't you just hear him muttering to himself as Moses and Aaron leave to end the current plague?

### **So What?**

We, like Pharaoh, are often brought to our knees before the Lord as a result of difficult situations in our lives. At these times we are often inclined to make promises to be more obedience and to make a change in our ways. But, these promises are often subsequently ignored and forgotten when the calamity is past. As

we saw in the previous chapter, Moses has learned to submit his will to that of the Father. He is filled with courage and conviction and is not disturbed by apparent set-backs, because he knows that God is in control. Pharaoh, on the other hand, is not submitted to God. He is self-assured and self-centered, believing that he is the ultimate ruler of all that happens in Egypt. His decisions are based on what he wants for himself, whereas Moses' decisions are based on God's direction. Pharaoh's resistance to God's will begins to develop a hardened heart toward the things of God. As a result, he not only misses the blessings of God, but he becomes a partaker in the chastening plagues. He refuses to admit the truth and tenaciously clings to his false reality.

Are you suffering from difficulties and hardships right now? I've been asking that question at the end of each message for the past few weeks, because I think I know the answer. If you are a genuine Christian, then I suspect the answer is a resounding, "Yes!" We're all going through difficulties; that's how God helps our faith to grow. Perhaps, what you're going through doesn't really hurt, but is some kind of constant irritation, like croaking frogs or buzzing flies? Are you listening to God or are you resisting God? Like Pharaoh, if you continue to resist the gentle prodding of the Holy Spirit you will gradually become insensitive to his prodding. If you are a true child of God and you are outside of His will, when His prodding doesn't work, He will follow it up with chastening. As you refuse to yield, you harden your own heart. If things are not getting any better for you, perhaps that's why.

Let me challenge you to assess your situation right now! I want you to know that I am preaching to myself as well right now. Do you have the peace of God that passes all understanding, even in the midst of trials? I didn't ask if you have comfort, I asked if you have peace, for you can have the peace of God even in the midst of suffering. But, if you don't have peace, then you are not submitted to His will. You are resisting the prodding or the chastening that comes directly from the One who loves you the most. Quit denying the truth! Quit trying to be in control! Instead, fall at the feet of our loving Heavenly Father and confess your sinful selfishness. Submit to Him and seek His direction for your life, then follow His direction.

Don't make promises while the flies are buzzing around you that you will forget as soon as they are gone. Instead of praying for relief, do as both James and Peter advise us:

But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. (James 4:6-8a)

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. (James 4:10)

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7)

Let us all humble ourselves right now. Let's get our hearts right with God, and let's quit swatting flies!

Let's pray.