

"THE LORD OF LIFE"

I. Introduction

- A. We come today to the first three of the ten plagues that God sent upon Egypt, plus the sign that preceded those plagues.
1. A close examination of the ten plagues indicates that they are structured in three sets of three, with the tenth and final plague standing as the climactic event in the entire sequence.
 2. This structure is made evident by the fact that the third, sixth, and ninth plagues happen without any warning, while all the others are announced to Pharaoh beforehand.
 3. Another thing to note is that all of the plagues affected areas of life that the Egyptians thought were protected by the various gods that they worshipped.
 4. By sending these particular plagues, the Lord demonstrated his superiority over Egypt's false gods.
 5. As God says in Exodus 12:12, "on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments."
- B. The main theme in this first set of plagues is God's total sovereignty over Egypt.
1. As we study this passage today, we will consider four ways in which this idea is expressed in these verses.
 2. First, God demonstrates his sovereignty over Pharaoh, Egypt's king.
 3. Second, God demonstrates his sovereignty over the Nile, Egypt's source of life.

4. Third, God demonstrates his sovereignty over fertility in Egypt.
5. And fourth, God demonstrates his sovereignty over the actual land of Egypt.

II. Egypt's True King

- A. When Moses and Aaron appear before Pharaoh this second time, Pharaoh asks them to prove themselves by working a miracle.
 1. The Lord instructs them to perform the first of the signs shown to the elders of Israel: the turning of Moses' staff into a serpent.
 2. That miracle was enough to convince Israel's leaders that the Lord had appeared to Moses, but it was not enough to convince Pharaoh.
 3. He simply summoned his magicians and had them work the same miracle themselves.
 4. By doing this, Pharaoh was saying that he was not impressed by Aaron's sign.
- B. Magic was very popular in Egypt at this time.
 1. In all likelihood, the magicians in our text were similar to magicians in our day.
 2. They were not able to perform actual miracles.
 3. They were merely skilled at sleight of hand tricks and illusions.
 4. When they turned their staffs into serpents they were not actually reproducing Aaron's miracle but were only counterfeiting it.

5. Nevertheless, their apparent ability to duplicate the miracle supplied Pharaoh with an excuse for refusing to listen to Moses and Aaron.
 6. As far as he was concerned, they had not done anything out of the ordinary.
 7. The fact that his own magicians could do the same thing made it easy for him to suppress the truth.
 8. This is something that fallen man is always trying to do.
 9. We are always looking for some reason to support our refusal to submit to God.
- C. This initial sign performed by Aaron is like a shot across the bow of a ship.
1. It marks the beginning of the great conflict that is about to take place over the next few chapters: the conflict between God and Pharaoh.
 2. God is warning Pharaoh what he is up against.
 3. And by choosing this particular sign, God is making a powerful point.
 4. In ancient Egypt, serpents were used as symbols of the king's power.
 5. Pharaoh's headdress was even made to look like a cobra, which you know if you have ever seen a picture of King Tut.
 6. And even though Pharaoh's magicians were able to copy this miracle, Aaron's staff swallowed up the other staffs.
 7. This demonstrated that the Lord is sovereign over Pharaoh.
 8. God, not Pharaoh, is the true king of Egypt.

9. We need to remember that this is just as true today.
10. Regardless of how things may appear at any given moment, our God rules over all world rulers and all world powers.

III. The Source of Life Dies

- A. This brings us to the first plague: the turning of the Nile River into blood.
 1. It has become popular among commentators to try to explain the plagues as if they were merely extreme instances of phenomena that occur naturally.
 2. When it comes to the first plague, such commentators will argue that the Nile did not literally turn into blood but that it was made to look like blood as a result of an overabundance of reddish mud in the river.
 3. The main problem with this explanation, apart from its clear anti-supernatural bias, is that verse 19 says that even the water in wooden and stone vessels turned into blood.
 4. If the reddish color was merely caused by mud, then how did the mud find its way into those vessels?
 5. This makes it clear that the best way to understand what happened here is to read it in a straightforward manner: the Nile was literally turned into blood.
- B. By bringing about this plague, God was striking a powerful blow against Egypt.
 1. The Nile was Egypt's source of life.
 2. It was the reason for her economic prosperity.
 3. The annual flooding of the Nile protected the nation from the kinds of famines that sometimes afflicted surrounding

lands.

4. Because the Nile was so important, the Egyptians worshipped gods who were closely associated with it.
5. The river itself had a divine quality for the people of Egypt.
6. But in this miracle, the Lord demonstrates that he has complete power over the Nile.
7. It is as if he has plunged a sword into the river and killed it.
8. What was once Egypt's source of life has now been made into something vile and repugnant.

C. There is a profound irony to this first plague.

1. Remember what Pharaoh did at the beginning of Exodus.
2. He tried to use the Nile to destroy the people of Israel, ordering that all male Hebrew infants be thrown into the river.
3. What was a source of life for the Egyptians became a source of death for God's people.
4. In this first plague, the tables are turned.
5. God brings about a great reversal by taking the Nile and making it into a curse for the Egyptians.

IV. Too Much Life

A. The first plague lasts for seven days, but Pharaoh refuses to relent.

1. As a result, God sends a second plague upon Egypt: the plague of frogs.

2. Frogs may not seem all that bad, but we have to take into account the sheer quantity that is described here.
 3. Imagine what it would be like to have frogs everywhere.
 4. You can't walk anywhere without stepping on them.
 5. You open up your cupboard and they leap out at you.
 6. When you check on the bread dough that you have rising you discover a couple of frogs in it.
 7. When you lie down to rest, you find that you have squished a small family of frogs.
 8. And to top it all off, there is the tremendous noise that so many frogs would make.
 9. It might not have been a matter of life and death, but make no mistake: this was a terrible plague.
- B. We might wonder why God would choose to afflict the Egyptians with frogs.
1. The reason becomes clear when we realize that the Egyptians worshipped a fertility goddess that was represented by a frog.
 2. It is as if God is telling Pharaoh, 'So, you think that frogs can bring you fertility, do you? Well, let me show you what I can do when it comes to frogs and fertility.'
 3. God gave Egypt more fertility than she ever bargained for.
 4. He gave them so much life that it became a curse to them.
 5. In this plague, he literally made life stink for the Egyptians.

- C. Nevertheless, Pharaoh's magicians were again able to copy Aaron's feat by using their sleight of hand tricks.
1. As it says in 8:7, they "made frogs come up on the land of Egypt."
 2. Moses must have had a smile on his face when he penned those words.
 3. Think about what this verse is saying.
 4. The magicians only added to Egypt's woes.
 5. They produced more frogs.
 6. That was the one thing that they most definitely did not need.
 7. If the magicians had really wanted to display their power they would have made the frogs go away.
 8. The fact that they did not do so further proves that their power was not real.
- D. In the face of all of this misery, Pharaoh makes a show of repenting of his stubbornness.
1. He tells Moses to pray for God to take the frogs away and promises that he will then let the people of Israel go.
 2. Notice that Pharaoh uses the name "the LORD" here.
 3. Previously, he said that he did not know the LORD.
 4. He knows him now.
- E. Moses responds to Pharaoh's request by telling him to specify when he wants him to intercede to the LORD for him.

1. This further emphasizes God's power over what is taking place.
 2. He can end it at any time.
 3. When Moses prays for the frogs to be taken away, that is exactly what happens.
 4. The frogs die, and the land is made to stink.
 5. Notice the eyewitness touch there.
 6. Because Moses was there, he remembers the stench.
- F. Once the frogs are gone, Pharaoh goes back on his word.
1. He refuses to let Israel go.
 2. His repentance was only temporary.
 3. It was only brought on by the trouble that he was facing.
 4. When that trouble went away, he reverted to his true self.
 5. The same thing still happens today.
 6. People sometimes turn to God in times of crisis but then forget all about him when the crisis subsides.
 7. When that happens, it is not repentance and faith but desperation.

V. **The Dust of the Earth**

- A. We turn now to the third plague: the gnats that came up from the dust of the earth.
1. The first thing to note about this is that, unlike the first two plagues, this one comes without any warning.

2. This is God's response to Pharaoh's duplicity.
 3. Because Pharaoh went back on his word, God sends this plague without any advanced notice.
 4. God causes the dust to turn into gnats, a Hebrew term that can refer to a variety of tiny insects, including mosquitoes.
 5. I think we all know firsthand how much misery insects like black flies and mosquitoes can inflict upon people.
 6. As with the frogs, it was not a matter of life and death, but it certainly had a negative effect upon the quality of life in Egypt.
- B. It may also be significant that these insects came from the dust of the earth.
1. This is the same Hebrew word that is used in Genesis 2 to describe how God created man from the dust of the ground.
 2. This may very well suggest that God can take the very matter that he used to bring man into existence and turn it into a source of misery for man.
 3. In the beginning, life was brought forth from the dust.
 4. Here, the dust is used to bring torment on man.
 5. It is as if God is undoing his work of creation, which is a theme that we will continue to explore as we study the plagues.
- C. Unlike the first three signs in this passage, the Egyptian magicians are unable to duplicate this one.
1. At this point, Pharaoh no longer has an excuse for refusing to submit to the Lord.

2. There is no doubt about it now.
3. This is no trick.
4. It is not an illusion.
5. This is God's handiwork.
6. Still, Pharaoh refuses to listen.
7. His persistent rebellion only demonstrates that the reasons that he previously gave for not relenting were mere excuses.
8. The real problem is not that there is not enough evidence to convince him that he is dealing with the living God here.
9. The real problem is his corrupt and rebellious heart.

VI. Conclusion

- A. This passage clearly shows us that God is the Lord of life.
 1. And in making this point, it issues a clear warning.
 2. It tells us that, sooner or later, those who persist in ignoring or rejecting God's Word will discover that life falls apart.
 3. Those who place their confidence in the things of this world will eventually find that God is the one who holds all of these things together.
 4. To reject him is to reject life.
 5. This is why it is so important for us to listen to everything that God says to us in his Word.
 6. If we fail to listen to him, then we too will fall under his judgment.

- B. At the same time, this passage offers us more than just a word of warning.
1. It also assures us that our God is powerful enough to save us from all of the woes that we experience in this evil age.
 2. Pharaoh was standing in the way of the fulfillment of God's promise.
 3. He was preventing the covenant people from entering the Promised Land.
 4. And remember, this was not just a matter of geography.
 5. The Promised Land was a typological picture of something far more significant.
 6. It represented the promise of eternal life in God's kingdom, the same promise that is the basis of our hope.
 7. There are many things in our lives that seem to be standing in the way of the fulfillment of that promise.
 8. There is the sin that continues to dwell within us.
 9. There are our infirmities, our weaknesses, and our burdens.
 10. There are our sorrows, our disappointments, and our frustrations.
 11. But if our God did not allow Pharaoh to prevent him from fulfilling what he promised to do for his people, we can be confident that he will overcome every obstacle that we face.
 12. If the Lord of life is for us, then who indeed can be against us?