Sea Dragons, Frogs, Gnats, Flies – and Other Unpleasant Things (Exod. 7:8–11:10)

Questions and Suggestions for Discussion

Anti-creational Forces

1. In oppressing the Israelites and seeking to thwart God’s blessing of their fruitfulness, Pharaoh becomes an anti-creational force that promotes darkness, chaos and death instead of light, order and life. It’s for this reason that the forces of nature are unleashed against him.

- Can you think of any anti-creational forces in our world today?
- Does God engage such forces? If so, how?
- Do we, as Christians, and does the church have any role to play in engaging these forces? What might that role look like?

A Dependent God?

2. Terence Fretheim concludes that, while ‘Moses and Aaron would not be effective without God’s power working in and through them’, God similarly depends on Moses and Aaron for his strategy to succeed.

- What do you make of that conclusion? What does the book of Exodus suggest? It may be helpful also to bear in mind the story of Moses’ call.
- Can you think of other biblical stories that may have a bearing on this question?
- What about us? Is it possible that God has chosen to limit himself in a way that would make him dependent upon us? If so, what does that mean?

Knowledge of God

3. A central aim of the signs and wonders was for the Egyptians to come to an increased knowledge of God, of his presence and involvement in Egypt, of his incomparability and of the fact that the entire earth belongs to God.

- How might all this be applied to our context today?
- What might it mean for the world or the society in which we find ourselves to have an increased knowledge of God? How can we or the church facilitate such knowledge?
- What, in particular, does it mean to say that the entire earth belongs to God? Reflect on the consequences of this conclusion for life in the twenty-first century. How can we or the church promote that concept?
Salvation

4. Israel’s deliverance or salvation is for the sake of the entire creation.
   - What do you make of this? What did that mean for Israel?
   - What about our own salvation? Is it possible that God may have delivered us for the sake of the entire creation? What would that mean?

God and Nature

5. The signs-and-wonders narrative demonstrates that God controls the natural world in order to effect his own divine purposes.
   - Do you believe that God controls the natural world in order to effect his own divine purposes today?
   - What are we to make of natural events? Are we meant to see God at work in them? Is God in total control of natural events? Is he the only factor to be reckoned with?

Divine Punishments or the Consequences of Oppression

6. It’s been pointed out that the oppression of the Israelites leads to the oppression of the Egyptians by means of the plagues. Israel’s losses are now similarly experienced by the Egyptians. The deaths of Israelite boys are matched by the deaths of the Egyptian firstborn. The cries of the Israelites are echoed in the Egyptians’ cries.
   - Are we here dealing with divine punishments, or is it true that ‘Pharaoh has set in motion the violence that finally takes the sons of oppressed and oppressor alike’, that, as Desmond Tutu says, unjust regimes ultimately must fall? In other words, are we dealing with divine punishments or with the natural consequences of unjust, oppressive actions? And is it necessary to choose between these options?
   - What image of God does the text promote?

Hardness of Heart

7. According to Nahum Sarna, the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart ‘connotes the willful suppression of the capacity for reflection, for self-examination, for unbiased judgments about good and evil’.
   - The biblical text invites us to take a dim view of Pharaoh’s actions. But what do you make of Sarna’s quote? Are there any areas in our lives, or that of our church, culture, nation, that are characterised by a similar hardness of heart?
   - What can we do to keep our hearts soft?
   - In which areas of life may we be called to invite, encourage or challenge others – once again, our church, culture, nation – to keep their hearts soft?