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Strike the Ground and the Dust of Egypt Will Become Gnats **8: 16-19**

Strike the ground and the dust of Egypt Will Become Gnats DIG: Why do you think ADONAI now begins doing things the magicians of Egypt could not do? What does the finger of God imply (Luke 11:20)?

REFLECT: Is the finger of God pointing out any sin that needs changing in your life? What *swarm of insects* in your life is preventing you from drawing closer to the Lord?

The third plague arrived without warning to **the Egyptians**. There was no audience before **Amenhotep II** as there had been for the previous two plagues. There was no need for it. **Pharaoh** was deserving of the disaster because he had just lied to **Ha'Shem** and also hardened **his** heart. This plague receives the shortest account. It is brief and direct.



Then ADONAI said to Moses, “Tell Aaron, ‘Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the ground,’ and throughout the land of Egypt the dust will become gnats” (8:16). Some translations use the word lice, while others use vermin, or maggots, or fleas, or sand flies, or mosquitoes, or **gnats**. But the Hebrew word *kinnim* simply means *mixture*, and refers to *a swarm of insects*. Not any one particular insect, but *swarms of many kinds of insects* so small as to be hardly visible to the eye but with a very irritating and painful sting.

They would even creep into the eyes and nose.¹³⁰

But why **the dust of the ground**? This is a common Hebrew expression that reflects a very large number. For example, when **God** promised Abraham that his offspring would be so numerous that they could not be counted, **He** said that they would be like **the dust of the earth (Genesis 13:16)**. That same promise was made to Jacob (**Genesis 28:14**). The point is that the *swarm of insects* that descend upon **Egypt** was so large they could not be counted.

They did this, and when Aaron stretched out his hand with the staff and struck the dust of the ground, a swarm of insects came upon men and animals. The third plague was so great that neither **people** nor **animals** were spared. **All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became a mixture of insects (8:17-18)**. Small *insects* have always been a problem in **Egypt**. Fleas, aphids, lice, mosquitoes and gnats abound in great numbers in certain areas. **The ancient Egyptians** constructed many devices in an attempt to get relief from them such as ostrich plumes on the end of a stick that would be waved by servants to keep insects away from the faces of the king and lords. Floors and walls were often washed with a solution of soda. In one medical papyrus, cat grease was said to be effective in combating rats, and fish spawn against fleas.¹³¹

But when the magicians tried to produce a mixture of insects by their secret arts, they could not. By slight of hand, **the magicians** were somehow able to make it seem that **they** could turn **their** staffs to snakes, to make water turn to blood, and to produce frogs. But the third plague was beyond **their** capacity of deception. Hardly visible to the eye, they were too delicate to be caught and impossible to counterfeit. **Their** utter failure led to a very startling confession.

The magicians were put to shame and said to **Pharaoh**, "**This is the finger of God.**" In other words, **they** were saying that only **the LORD Himself** could make a *swarm of insects* out of **dust**; therefore, admitting that there was a power that was greater than **their** slight of hand. **They** referred to **Him** as **God**. **The magicians** knew **they** were in over **their** heads. From that point forward there would be no opposition from these **magicians** because **they** had been defeated (**8:19a**). Although **they** appear again in **9:11**, **they** never again attempt to duplicate one of the miracles of **ADONAI**. **God** used the smallest of things to bring **them** to their knees.

The phrase, **the finger of God**, is an excellent description of a miracle. In the book of **Dani'el**, **the finger of God** wrote a message of doom for King Belshazzar on the wall of his temple (**Dani'el 5:1-31**). Later, we are told that **the hand of ADONAI** would bring a

terrible plague on the livestock of Egypt (9:3). Also, **when ADONAI finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, He gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God (31:18).** God uses **His fingers** when **He** creates (**Psalm 8:3**), reminding us of *The Creation of Man*, Michelangelo's painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. And on one occasion, **Jesus** drove out demons by **the finger of God**, that is, with **God's** help (**Luke 11:20**).¹³²

But there is another striking similarity between this third plague and what is recorded in **John 8:11**. There we find a similar contest between **God** and **His** enemies. The Scribes and the Pharisees, using the woman caught in adultery as their bait, tried to trick **Jesus**. **His** only response was to bend **down and write on the ground with His finger**. After saying to them: **If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her**, we read **that again He stooped down and wrote on the ground**. The effect was startling: **Those who heard began to go away one at a time until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there**. What was this but the enemy of **ADONAI** acknowledging that this was **the finger of God**, as **He** wrote in **the dust!**¹³³

*There is an interesting introversion here with the eighth plague. In the third plague, **the magicians** were forced to exclaim: **This is the finger of God**; while in the eighth plague **Pharaoh** said: **I have sinned against ADONAI your God (10:16)**.*

The Egyptians worshiped the earth-god Geb. But **all the dust throughout the land of Egypt became a mixture of insects**. That which was sacred to Geb was then despised. **Pharaoh** did not ask that the plague be taken away, and **the Egyptian magicians** could not reproduce the *mixture of insects*. They seemed to acknowledge that **the One** who brought this plague was supreme over the gods of **Egypt**.¹³⁴ In addition to Geb, Set was the god of the desert, storms and chaos. He was regarded as a fierce warrior, and thus became the patron god of soldiers who often wore Set amulets, hoping to acquire his destructive force, or Set's infinite protection. But when **God** turned **all the dust of Egypt** into a *swarm of insects*, even the god of the desert could not protect **them**.

The *swarm of insects* not only humiliated the gods **of Egypt**, it also humiliated the priesthood. The priests **of Egypt** were noted for their physical purity. Daily rites were performed by a group of priests known as *the Uab* or *the pure ones*. Their purity was basically physical rather than spiritual. They were circumcised, shaved the hair from their heads and bodies every three days (even their eyebrows), washed frequently, and were dressed in beautiful linen robes. In the light of this, it would seem rather doubtful that the priesthood **of Egypt** could function very effectively having been polluted by the presence of

these *insects*.¹³⁵ Furthermore, this plague extended to the animals, preventing any of them from being sacrificed to their gods because they were unclean. Thus, **the entire Egyptian** religious system began to buckle under the weight of the plagues.

Although **the magicians** were convinced that they were losing the spiritual battle, **Pharaoh** continued to respond in the same way he did to the earlier plagues. **But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen, just as God had said (8:19b).**

We look at **Amenhotep II**, and we almost have to express a sense of amazement that after seeing all that **God** had done, that **he** could be so stubborn. Then later, **the children of Isra'el**, even after the miracle of the **Exodus**, would rebel against **God** in their wilderness wanderings. So we are startled by **Pharaoh's** stubbornness on the one hand, and **the Israelites** subsequent unbelief, on the other. Yet as we do that, I wonder how many of us are in an even more embarrassing predicament than **they** were. We are stubborn and rebel against **God** when we have the Bible to teach us and **the Holy Spirit** to guide us! How headstrong can we sometimes be, when **He** is trying to speak to each one of us?