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Dense Swarms of Flies Poured throughout Egypt

8: 20-32

Dense swarms of flies poured throughout Egypt DIG: Why do you think God distinguished between the land of Goshen and the rest of Egypt? What was He trying to tell Pharaoh? The Israelites? What do you suppose was detestable to the Egyptians about Hebrew sacrifices (also see Genesis 43:32)? Was God singling out the Israelites for special treatment because they were a superior people to the Egyptians, or because God chose them?

REFLECT: In what way does God make similar distinctions today between His followers and others? How does God's favor make you feel? Which horse are you riding? The white horse or the black horse?



This fourth plague started the second cycle of three judgments, and once again the first in the triad (the blood, **the flies**, and the hail) came with a warning from **Moses** to **Pharaoh**. **Then ADONAI said to Moses His servant: Get up early in the morning and confront Pharaoh, literally, take your stand before Pharaoh, as he goes to the water. Say to him, "This is what ADONAI says, 'Let My people go, so that they may worship Me.'" Pharaoh's heart** was so hard that even though Hapi, the god of the Nile, had been humiliated when it's waters turned to blood, **Amenhotep II** returned to it. **Moses** said: **If you do not let My people go, I will send swarms of flies on you and your officials, on your people, and into your houses (the flies might have been drawn to the decaying frogs). The houses of the Egyptians will be full of flies, and even the ground where**

they are standing (8:20-21). The harshness of the plague was emphasized by the fact that not only will **the Egyptian houses** be filled with **flies**, but **the** very **ground** on which they stood will be covered with **them**. It was if a cloud of **flies** would descend upon **Egypt**.

The Hebrew text does not use the specific expression **flies**. The Hebrew word *arob* is used nine times and is always related to this plague (**Psalm 105:31**). However, using the word **flies** is not inappropriate here. This translation is suggested in the Septuagint. The seventy Hebrew scholars exiled in Alexandria, **Egypt** translated this word as *kunomuia* or *dog-fly*. Because these translators actually lived in **Egypt**, their first-hand observation was very important. The blood-sucking *dog-fly* was something to be feared because they were known for their painful bites. When enraged, **they** hurl themselves like a javelin and fasten **themselves** upon the body, especially the edges of the eyelids, disfiguring them by the swellings produced by **their** sting.¹³⁶ The psalmist said that **God sent swarms of flies that devoured them (Psalm 78:45)**.

But the Hebrews were protected from this plague. **God** spoke through **His** prophet **Moses** when He said: **On that day I will deal differently with the land of Goshen, where My people live**. The Hyksos **Pharaoh** originally gave **Goshen** to Joseph and his family (**Genesis 45:10** and **46:28**). It was there that the Hebrews settled and multiplied. But **God** said: **No swarms of flies will be there, so that you will know that I, ADONAI, am in this land. I will make a distinction between My people and your people**. So this plague was not only designed to humiliate **Pharaoh** and the gods of **Egypt**, but it was also redemption and deliverance for **the people of ADONAI**. This verse literally reads: *I will set a redemption between My people and your people*.¹³⁷ The meaning clearly states that **God** would deliver **His people** from the plague and deliver Pharaoh's **people** to the plague. Then almost as an afterthought, **He** adds: **This miraculous sign will occur tomorrow (8:22-23)**. The fact that **Moses predicted the day of the arrival** and departure of the plague sets it apart from a purely natural occurrence.¹³⁸

What we are told is that the first three plagues affected both **Jews** and **Egyptians** alike. But from this point on, the plagues would only affect the **Egyptians** and **the Israelites** would be spared. This foreshadows those united with **Christ** in the end times, where they will be raptured out of this world before the events of the Great Tribulation (**First Thessalonians 4:13-18**). **For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath (First Thessalonians 5:9)**. **Jesus Himself** says: **I will keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live upon the earth (Revelation 3:10b)**.

*In the fourth plague we are specifically told that **God** exempted **the Israelites** in the land*

of Goshen: No swarms of flies will be there; so also in the seventh plague we read: The only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen, where the Israelites lived.

There is no mention of **Moses'** staff initiating this plague, only that **ADONAI** did it. **Dense swarms of flies poured into Pharaoh's palace and into the houses of his officials, and throughout Egypt the land was ruined by the flies (8:24).** The Hebrew word **ruined** expresses continuous action. In other words, **Egypt** was in the process of being destroyed.

With **his** empire collapsing around him, **Pharaoh** did not call for **his** trusted **magicians**. He realized they were no use to him in the battle against **God**. At this point **Pharaoh** made **the first of four compromises**. Still trying to retain some appearance of control, **Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron** and said: **Go, and sacrifice to your God here in the land of Egypt (8:25).** He had not yet learned that it was in **God's** power to **let the people go** and that, when all was said and done, **his** role in **Israel's** release was not even significant. Later, **God** would harden **Pharaoh's heart** to make that point painfully clear.¹³⁹

*This is the first compromise Satan tries to make with one determined to live for **God**. He objects to separation from sin and the world, and would try to convince us that we can worship **God** just as well **in the land** without coming out and being separate, without publicly confessing Jesus before the world and taking a stand on **God's** side.*

But Moses refused **Pharaoh's** compromise and said: **That would not be right. The sacrifices we offer ADONAI our God would be detestable to the Egyptians. Moses,** who had lived in **Egypt** for forty years and was an expert in **their** culture, understood that **the Egyptians** regarded the animals **the Israelites** would sacrifice as sacred to **the Egyptians**.¹⁴⁰ To them, the god Apis represented the bull and the goddess Hathor represented the cow.¹⁴¹ Therefore, **Moses** knew that **they** would take great offense of such practices within the borders of **their** own country. So **Moses** countered: **And if we offer sacrifices that are detestable in their eyes, will they not stone us (8:26)?**

In other words, rather than doing a polite political dance with **Pharaoh**, **Moses** was saying, "Don't even try it, **Pharaoh**. You know as well as I that if we even tried to sacrifice to **God** on **Egyptian** soil, which you believe is home to your gods, **the Egyptians** would **stone us** to death. We're a little cleverer than that! You think you can give the appearance of letting **us** have **our** way, but the end result would play right into **your** hands! Forget it! No deal! We're leaving just as we said. It's all or nothing."¹⁴²

Although **Pharaoh** was beginning to compromise, **God** refused to give an inch. Therefore,

Moses said: **We must take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, as He commanded us to do (8:27).** This is a very ancient mode of estimating distances and is still in use today. The ordinary day's journey of Scripture is probably about twenty miles.¹⁴³ Nothing short of a **three-day journey into the desert** would meet the demand. But **Pharaoh**, was not willing to concede everything requested. Therefore, **he** offered a **second compromise**.¹⁴⁴

Pharaoh saw that **his** subtle maneuver had not worked. Still **he** wanted to hold on. So **he** said, "OK, **go** head. Just don't **go** too far", literally saying: **I, even I will let you go to offer sacrifices to ADONAI your God in the desert, only you must not go very far.** In other words he wanted the Israelites to remain close enough to **his** eastern border that **he** could watch them and send **his** army after them if necessary. **Now** fully realizing where the real power lay, **the king** requested: **Pray for me (8:28).**

*Satan would have **God's people** compromise their faith and live so much like the unsaved that it is difficult to determine on which side they belong, **God's** or the devil's. This suits Satan's purposes perfectly because it makes the individual worthless for the cause of **Christ**, and his example prevents others from becoming believers in **Jesus**. If we do **not go very far** away from **Egypt**, or the world, we become ineffective ambassadors for **Christ**.*

Moses didn't directly respond to **Pharaoh's** new request, but said: **As soon as I leave you, I will pray to ADONAI, and tomorrow the flies will leave Pharaoh and his officials and his people.** However, just as **Pharaoh** placed a restriction on **God's people**, saying: **Only you must not go very far,** **Moses** placed a restriction on **the king**, saying: **Only be sure that Pharaoh does not act deceitfully again by not letting the people go to offer sacrifices to ADONAI (8:29).** **Moses** saw right through **Pharaoh's** dishonesty and **he** would not stand for it.

What will you stand for? We are in a race today with two horses. One horse is black and the other horse is white. If you decide to ride them and put one foot on one horse and one foot on the other, you will make an amazing discovery. These horses run in opposite directions. You must make up you mind which horse you want to ride.¹⁴⁵ What will it be? Light or darkness? Truth or lies? Purity or evil? It's your choice, but the consequences are also yours.

Then Moses left Pharaoh and prayed to ADONAI, and God did what Moses asked: The flies left Pharaoh and his officials and his people just as the blood, frogs and insects had; not a fly remained (8:30-31). **Pharaoh**, who prided **himself** on being the possessor of ma'at in **Egypt**, could not restore order. Everyone could see that it was the

God of the Hebrews who returned **Egypt** to order after the chaos of the plagues. The **flies** had been everywhere and were considered the ears of Beelzebub, god of the air. But when the plague of swarming **flies** came, **they** bit **the Egyptians**, driving **them** to despair and instead of being a blessing, **they** became a curse. Even Hatchit, the god of protection from **flies**, could do nothing about it.

Once again **Moses** kept his part of the bargain, and after praying, the **flies** were removed. **But this**, like before, did not change the **heart** of the wicked and proud **king**. As soon as the plague was taken away, **he hardened his heart and would not let the people** of Isra'el **go (8:32)**. **Pharaoh** was hardening **his heart** and **God** was revealing what was already there.¹⁴⁶

That this plague was unique and amazing in nature is made clear by the language of **8:22**. As previously stated, **the land of Goshen** was separated from the rest **of Egypt**. Is there a separation between you and **Egypt**, or the world? Are you an alien in this world? Or is the world your home? **God's** Word is clear on this point. In Rabbi Sha'ul's second letter to the believers at **Corinth**, he wrote: **Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and idols? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said, "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be My people. Therefore, as God says, 'Come out from them and be separate' (Second Corinthians 6:14-17)."**