

**Exegetical Notes, Exodus 8:16-32**  
**“The Humbling Hand of God! Part #3: Gnats & Flies”**

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**Exodus 8:16-32**

**Verse 16**

*Then YHWH 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.”*

- God has brought two humbling curses upon Pharaoh and, with him, all of Egypt. First, God turned the water of the Nile to blood. Second, God brought frogs on the land. While Pharaoh had refused to acknowledge that YHWH was God, and would not honor God’s request by allowing the Hebrews to go free, he agreed to let the people go if YHWH would lift the second curse. However, when YHWH did so, Pharaoh changed his mind and would not let the Hebrews go. So now, God prepared to bring a third curse against Pharaoh and Egypt. YHWH is about to curse Egypt with gnats.

**Verse 17**

*They did this, and when Aaron stretched out his hand with the staff and struck the dust of the ground, gnats came upon men and animals. All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats.*

- Moses and Aaron were again obedient to the word of God. They did as they were instructed and the curse of gnats came upon Egypt.
- Notice that they are not told to go to Pharaoh before they initiate the curse. The gnats come on Egypt without explanation from God to Egypt.

**Verse 18-19**

*But when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not. And the gnats were on men and animals. The magicians said*

***to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not listen, just as YHWH has said.***

- Unlike the first two, the magicians of Egypt were unable to reproduce the curse. Their powers are limited.
- They assumed that their inability to duplicate this curse or, more likely, their limited power is a sign from God. They reported this to Pharaoh.
- But Pharaoh refused to listen and still would not honor YHWH by granting His request.

### **Verse 20-21**

***The YHWH said to Moses, “Get up early in the morning and confront Pharaoh as he goes to the water and say to him, ‘This is what YHWH says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. 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 houses of the Egyptians will be full of flies, and even the ground where they are.’”***

- Without ending the curse of gnats, a new curse is proclaimed. This time God will plague Egypt with flies.
- Moses is to meet Pharaoh as he goes to the Nile for his bath. See notes on Exodus 7:15.

### **Verse 22-23**

***“But on that day I will deal differently with the land of Goshen, where my people live; no swarms of flies will be there, so that you will know that I, YHWH, am in this land. I will make a distinction between my people and your people. This miraculous sign will occur tomorrow.”***

- Apparently, all of the other curses that God brought on Egypt affected the Hebrews as well as the Egyptians. No distinction was made. However, not so with the curse of flies. This time, the flies would bother only Egyptians. The flies would not bother the Hebrew slaves at all. God made this distinction to show Pharaoh that he was present in Egypt.

### **Verse 24**

***And YHWH did this. 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.***

- Again, the curse came just as God had said through Moses.

### **Verse 25-27**

***Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Go, sacrifice to your God here in the land.” But Moses said, “That would not be right. The sacrifices we offer YHWH, our God, would be detestable to the Egyptians. And if we offer sacrifices that are detestable in their eyes will they not stone us? We must take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to YHWH, our God, as he commands us.”***

- Stunned by the flies, Pharaoh tries to reach an acceptable deal with God through Moses. He will agree to allow Israel to offer sacrifice and worship YHWH as long as they remain in Egypt. However, he will not let them go into the desert to do so as YHWH commanded.
- Moses points out that this compromise is unacceptable for two reasons: first, the Egyptians will be offended if the slaves attempt to worship YHWH in Egypt; and second, this will not please YHWH who said they were to go three days into the desert to worship him.

### **Verse 28**

***Pharaoh said, “I will let you go to offer sacrifices to YHWH, your God, in the desert, but you must not go very far. Now pray for me.”***

- For the second time Pharaoh agreed to honor YHWH’s request. See Exodus 8:8. Pharaoh has agreed to let the Hebrews go into the desert to worship God as long as they agree not to go far into the desert.
- He then asks Moses to ask YHWH to take the flies away.

### **Verse 29**

***Moses answered, “As soon as I leave you, I will pray to YHWH, and tomorrow the flies will leave Pharaoh and his officials and his people. Only be sure that Pharaoh does not act deceitfully again by not letting the people go to offer sacrifice to YHWH.”***

- Moses agreed to pray that the flies would leave Egypt. He promised that God would lift the curse exactly 24 hours from the time when he promised to pray. See Exodus 8:10.
- Moses also warned Pharaoh not to change his mind after the curse was lifted as he had done before. See Exodus 8:15.

### **Verse 30-32**

***Then Moses left Pharaoh and prayed to YHWH, and YHWH did what Moses asked: The flies left Pharaoh and his officials and his people; not a fly remained. But this time also Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go.***

- Moses prayed and the flies went away at the exact time he said they would go.
- But, again Pharaoh decided not to honor YHWH's request. When the flies were gone he, again, changed his mind and would not allow the Hebrews to go into the desert to worship God.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *The Humbling Hand of God! Part # 3: Gnats & Flies*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)