

Text: Exodus 8:16-19

Title: "Lice and the finger of God"

Time: 7/12/2020 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: When we moved to New Hampshire almost thirteen years ago now, I began to learn some terminology that I had not been exposed to before. Traveling down the road in my car, I soon saw a sign warning me about the term *frost heaves*. I had no idea what a frost heave was, but I soon found out having failed to slow down.

In their book on New England weather and climate, authors Gregory Zielinski and Barry Keim explain that in our region, we do not talk about the seasons as winter, spring, summer, and autumn. Instead, according to these authors, our seasons are ski season, mud season, beach and lake season, and foliage season. They also explain that within mud season and extending somewhat into beach and lake season, black flies give us fly season.

My appreciation for the worthiness of the black fly to have a whole season named for it grew at a funeral I attended years ago in Burnham, ME. Unfortunately, the outdoor part of that service was visited by a swarm of black flies so thick that it darkened the summer sky above us. They were everywhere, and I cannot help thinking of that day when I read this short passage of the third plague.

The insect mentioned in this passage is only mentioned here in the Bible. Our KJV translators call it *lice*, and some of the newer translations call it *gnats*. The Egyptian word for *gnat* or *mosquito* sounds like this Hebrew word, but the text emphasizes that the insect was on both man and beast, an infestation of very close contact, so if we are to think of

the gnat here, it has to be one that bites like a mosquito. The New England black fly would have been perfect, I think.

But as much as we might think that this third plague is primarily about the irritation of an insect infestation, the magicians of Egypt come to understand that it is really about something far more significant – the finger of God. They say that because they are not able to imitate the plague the way that they had caused a paralyzed snake to look like a rod that turns into a snake, or the way they had turned water into something that looked like blood, or the way that they had appeared to summon frogs from the Nile with their mastery of the art of illusion.

I have titled the message this morning, “Lice and the finger of God,” and I want us to see three things about God’s finger this morning.

I. God’s finger belongs to the mighty Creator (vv. 16-17).

Illustration: Whether we are dealing with lice or gnats or New England black flies, what God has done in this passage to turn dust into insects is supernaturally amazing.

The University of New Hampshire published a fact sheet on the New England black fly. It mentions that there are around 40 species of this creature in New Hampshire alone. It turns out that only female black flies of about 5 of these species bite. They lay their eggs in freshwater streams and ponds, and the larvae that hatch feed themselves by filtering the water for tiny bits of organic matter. Once they become a pupa, they float on an air bubble to the service of the water, emerge, and fly away.

Insects like the black fly have intricate body parts and advanced machinery that enable them to fly. One very simple diagram listed the body parts of this little creature as eyes, both simple eyes and compound eyes, forelegs, midlegs, hindlegs, proboscis, antenna, head, wings, thorax, halter, and abdomen.

The compound eyes of a fly were described this way: “On the head is a pair of large compound eyes. Each of these eyes is composed of thousands of small units, called ommatidia (singular: ommatidium). The part of the ommatidium that forms the surface of the eye is the lens. The lenses near the midline of the head are slightly larger than those at the sides of the head. The compound eyes of some species are said to be able to detect moving objects at 137 metres (150 yd)” [<http://www.fao.org/3/p5178e/P5178E02.htm>; 7/9/20]. One could spend a lifetime studying the fly at this level of anatomical detail.

But then there are the millions of individual cells that each fly contains. Listen to a description from an article about the function of the cells involved in forming a fly’s egg: “Adult female flies have two ovaries. The ovaries are made up of clusters of ovarioles. There may be up to 15 ovarioles per ovary. Each ovariole resembles something like beads on a string as each developing egg is contained within its own egg chamber, and several chambers are connected by a stalk (Figure 2). Initiation of egg formation begins in the germarium, which is the beginning ‘bead’ at the anterior end of an ovariole. Each chamber along this string of beads contains 16 cells: 15 nurse cells and one oocyte [ō-ə-sīt] (Figures 3a and b). A stem cell in the germarium begins the process by undergoing mitosis; however, the two daughter cells retain a cytoplasmic connection, called a ring canal, whereby they can communicate with each other. Mitosis

continues until a group of cells buds off from the germarium as a cyst. The cyst remains connected to the germarium via a stalk. Eventually, 16 cells are formed, and all retain cytoplasmic connections with one or more cells. The cell that is connected to at least four other cells becomes the oocyte while the other 15 cells become nurse cells. Retention of ring canals is very important, as we will see later. The follicle cells that surround the nurse cells and oocyte are somatic cells from the mother's gonads, yet they play a very important role in helping to set up the A-P and D-V (dorsal-ventral) axes of the developing egg and thus the embryo" [<https://answersingenesis.org/creepy-crawlies/insects/development-fruit-fly-evidence-design/>; 7/9/20].

And we have not even begun to speak about the engineering and mathematics that are required for this thing we glibly call "a fly" to fly. "Flies can hover, move vertically, and even fly backwards, tantalizing you with your inability to catch the little buggers. Most flies flap their wings over 200Hz, or 200 cycles per second. A tiny fruit fly beats its wings once every 4 milliseconds – faster than neurons can fire" [<https://www.wired.com/2015/01/flies-fly/>; 7/9/20].

Application: And so our text tells us that the Lord told Aaron to strike the dust of the land, and that when Aaron did so it became this kind of insect all over Egypt. It tells us that unsurprisingly, the magicians of Egypt could not mimic this feat of creation with their tricks. They had it right when they explained to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God."

But many in our day read a passage like this with disbelief. They will ask why God would make a black fly when it is biting them on the face, but they will deny the possibility of this event ever happening in Egypt as described here. I will only point out that in the argument between creationists and evolutionists, the question is not really whether flies

came from dust. Both say they did somehow. Rather, the question is simply – who do you believe did it? The creationist says the Creator did. The evolutionist says time, chance, and natural process did. The creationist's best proof is God's Word in the Bible. The evolutionist's best proof is his scientific determinism, his philosophical idea that believes that all reality is natural process that can be discovered by science.

So who will we believe? Will we say that the Creator is the one who brought flies from dust, or will we say that it was time, chance, and natural process? Will we say that an omniscient Mind gave us the design of the fly, or something we might call omnipotent mindlessness? Either way, we are exercising faith, not the scientific method.

The magicians of Egypt answered this way: "This is the finger of God." So does the Psalmist David, contemplating in Ps. 8:3 not the fly but the celestial bodies of outer space: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man that thou visitest him?" What indeed? Who are we to say that the finger of the mighty Creator cannot do what we read here?

II. God's finger belongs to the author of truth (vv. 18-19, "as the Lord said").

Illustration: Joni Mitchell wrote a song about Woodstock (1969) that has been described as the song that defined a generation. It spoke of "a child of God" traveling to Woodstock to get his soul free by joining a rock-n-roll band. Those, of course, were the days of the Vietnam War, and the song talks about dreaming that bombers overhead turn into butterflies. The song urges its hearers to "get back to

the garden," a metaphorical reference to Eden, but the garden she sang about was one filled with golden stardust. She sang: "We are stardust/Billion-year-old carbon. We are golden/Caught in the devil's bargain, And we've got to get ourselves/Back to the garden."

Application: For the sorcerers of Egypt to say that the lice coming from dust are the finger of God is as radical a change for them as it would be for the generation defined by this song to say we are not billion-year-old stardust, but sons of Adam, whom God formed from the dust of the ground and then breathed into His nostrils the breath of life, making Adam a living soul. The magicians of Egypt grew up without the Word of God written by the finger of God, and so have the last few generations in our time.

In this noisy world of messages, this passage reminds us that what God says will happen happens as He says (v. 19b). In fact, the Bible tells us that it is the finger of God that authors Truth. Exod. 31:18, "And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God." Deut. 9:10, "And the Lord delivered unto me two tables of stone written with the finger of God; and on them was written according to all the words, which the Lord spake with you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly."

Whether rock-n-roll songs, mainstream media, political pundits, or academia, everyone has something to say to us about what is true and what is not. How many of their messages agree with what the finger of God has written? We must weigh everything in the balance of the scales of God's truth in Scripture, His writings, written with the finger of God.

III. God's finger belongs to the one who defeats Satan (Luke 11:14-23).

Illustration: An arrogant young Rehoboam succeeded his father Solomon to the throne of Israel with the boast, "My little finger shall be thicker than my father's thigh" (1 Kings 12:10). He was certainly wrong about that, as the northern ten tribes rebelled against the throne of David.

Application: Jesus speaks of the battle between God and Satan in this passage, of which the battle between Moses and Pharaoh was a part. Jesus describes this battle as Beelzebub, the Lord of the flies, on one side, and God's finger on the other side (v. 20). I think Jesus was referring to God's little finger, His pinky if you will, in this case. Simply put, it is not a fair fight. The Egyptian magicians of the Exodus passage had to come to the point of saying, "God's finger wins." The demon of the Luke passage understands immediately, "God's finger wins." Someday, even Beelzebub himself, will come to understand once and for all, "God's finger has won, and it was his little finger, his pinky."

Illustration: Martin Luther's "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," verse 3:

"And though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us,

We will not fear for God has willed His truth to triumph through us.

The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure,

For lo, his doom is sure; one little word shall fell him."

Conclusion: After Jesus ends his characterization of this battle of the ages as between God's finger and Beelzebub, He asks the question, "Whose side are you on?" (verse 23).

That is the question graciously posed to Pharaoh in the third plague of the lice: “This is the finger of God, now whose side are you on?” Pharaoh’s answer, of course, will prove tragic for both him and those who follow him. We read of his heart hardening, stiffening, or strengthening (v. 19). Man wants to be strong enough to explain how flies can come from dust without the power of the Creator’s finger, without the truth of the finger of the author of Scripture, and without the victory won by the finger of God over the destroyer of souls. How can this be?

We cannot answer for Pharaoh or others, but each of us must answer for our own heart. Will we confess that we are weak and sinful and unbelieving and in need of a gracious and merciful Savior, whose death was in our place, and who lives again to make us alive spiritually. Or will we keep faith in our own strength and harden our heart?

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*