

Third Plague – Gnats

By Mark E. Benjamin

In my studies, I have found a slight discrepancy in what actually was the third plague of Egypt. It may not be much of a difference but still a difference is present and I want to be upfront about it. In fact, the difference might be so minor that it is only in my own mind that it is seen, but here it is. The Hebrew word for the description of the third plague found in **Exodus 8:16 – 18** is *Kinnim*. The only other place in the Bible that this word can be found is in **Psalms 105:31**. My question is what does this word mean. I have found the interpretation as either Lice or Gnats. In fact out of the nine different versions I looked in; the score is 5 to 4 – in favor of gnats. Like I already said it's a small difference – and one that has no bearing on the plague and its scourge on Egypt – but in my mind it still is a difference.

The difference that I see is that lice are more of a crawling type insect, whereas gnat are a flying one. And I suppose that if lice had wings and flew, we might call it a gnat. In the end, I'm sure everyone could agree, that both are an annoyance and unwanted. Anyhow, for the sake of this VoydPhil-ing I'm going to go with the version of a gnat. After all it won by one vote.

Fourteen Serving Twelve

In my teenage days, my friends and I would play volleyball from time to time. During the hot and moist days out in the fresh cut yard, the competition would be fierce. Not between the two sides of the net, but all of us pitted against a thick cloud of gnats. They engulfed us as we did our best to return a volley, although most of the time we just tried to keep the tiny insects out of our eyes, ears and nose. No matter how much we swatted and waved, the annoying creatures were tenacious to keep us from just playing our game.

Only one thing would ever work, but it was only temporary. We found that the gnats would congregate to the highest part of our bodies; so if we would hold our hands high above our heads, we would enjoy a relatively bug free moment. We could focus our attention on the game, all the while a cloud of bugs hovered above our heads, pelting against our hands. Unfortunately, it was far too short term of a solution. As soon as we dived for the ball, went down for a dig, or simply just lowered our tired arms, the gnats were back in our face again. Surely not a plague of Egypt, but it did give us an inkling into what it must have been like.

All we wanted to do was to play our game, have some fun, and crush the other team. That isn't too much to ask is it? Our efforts were interrupted by the distraction of tired raised arms and bugs in the eyes when we let our limbs fall. How most inconsiderate. No wonder they are called "Bugs".

Raising An Army Or Me Arm

Thinking about the concept of tired raised arms, I'm reminded of the historical account we find in **Exodus 17:8-16**. This is the commentary of the battle between the wondering Israelites and the Amalekites. The battle was in the hands of God, and His servant Joshua had the day won; that is as long as Moses remained faithful. Moses watched the action from high upon a hill with Aaron and Hur. Was Moses' only part in the battle like some desk jockey General pointing at a map and giving orders? Not likely. Although Moses may not have been in the midst of the fighting, his one and only job was just as important as Joshua's. If he did only this one thing, the battle was in the favor of the nation of Israel. If he didn't, the tide turned against them. He had to keep his hands raised above his head.

Moses focused on the carnage below him. He saw that the deadly game was going his way. He did the only natural thing to do, lower his tired arms. Distraction over came him. He saw his people become unbalanced and fall. The visible key for all to see was him raising or lower his arms. It was a simple act but one that can get quite tiresome if done for any length of time, and he had to do it through out the entire battle.

What was so special about Moses and his raised arms? It has nothing to do with the physical location of his arms or even if it is his own strength doing the act. For we see **Exodus 17:12 (NIV) When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up-- one on one side, one on the other-- so that his hands remained steady till sunset.** What close friends and followers Aaron and Hur must have been? To be where they were needed the most and all day long too.

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A side but powerful lesson to be learned in that. Sometimes we need help in what God has for us to do. It might be our God given quest but He may not want us to do it alone. We all have a job to do for the LORD, even if we don't yet know what that is. Sometimes the job we have been assigned might seem a bit mundane, useless, or even strange. Rest assure that if God has commanded us to do it, it is something that needs to be done. Furthermore you can be confident that He does not mean for us to go it alone. We need to have an Aaron and Hur by our side when our arms get too weary from doing the will of God.

Anyhow, back to Moses and his worn out arms. What was so special about the act? There certainly wasn't any covert direction given to the men on the field of battle like a coach on the sideline of a big game. There was no extra power in the elevated limbs. It comes down to two basic aspects that God commands to have from us – worship and obedience.

I'm sure the reasons to obey the LORD are uncountable but I'll list just a very small amount of them. First off, God is a powerful ally. In **Exodus 23:22** we see that He says, **I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries.** To have God on your side while fighting your foes sure would make the battle go a lot easier. Moses and Joshua definitely needed that while in the midst of the many conflicts they faced. As we also do. It might not be an enemy on a battleground, but we all face fights that need to be won. If it's a sin that needs to die, overcoming wrong, or an opponent with a sword, all can be overcome with obedience to the Lord. Up stretched arms is a wonderful way to show that.

Forgiveness is another good reason for obedience. See **Deuteronomy 4:30 (KJV)** ... **if thou turn to the LORD thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice; 31 (For the LORD thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he swore unto them.** Or how about an example of what will happen if we don't obey God. **Joshua 5:6 (KJV)** **For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD...**

Moses showed us that even when it might not make sense or can be tiresome, obedience to God still must be observed.

All I want To Do Is Worship

Raising your arms in worship can be quite inspirational. Although I tend not to raise my arms all that often in praise, the times that I have were very spiritual in nature. I deeply felt the closeness of God, and the sense of giving and wanting to please our Lord was never higher. Perhaps that is why I don't lift up my hands to the heavens every time I am in worship; it is only for those more rare and special occasions. Moses didn't raise his arms at every turn in the long road to the Promise Land, but he did do it when the time called for it. Those were the times that monumental events and worship took place.

All who have accepted the God of Israel as the one true God long to worship in this way. We look forward for such moments and yearn earnestly for when we can stand in reverence and praise our Lord. Not only is this what we want most in our lives, but it is what we have been designed by God to do. To be denied a chance to praise and worship our Lord is more than our souls can bear.

We are to **Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Exodus 20:8 (NAS).** This command isn't just so God can **receive** worship from us; it's so that we can **give** worship to God. **Mark 2:27 (NIV)** **Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.** The Sabbath is to be a time of worship. If it wasn't something we needed then God would not have made it for us. He created air because we need it to live. Water, food, land, everything; he created because we need them to live. The Lord created the Sabbath because we need it as well to live. It fills our void and maintains our existence.

Not only does worship help to fill the void in us; it also takes our focus off ourselves and our surroundings. When not just our hands, but also our eyes, heart and thoughts are raised in godly worship, then how can we see the troubles, distractions and sin that engulf us? Nothing will matter except for God. Only He will be the center of our

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attention. For as soon as we get tired of praising God, our arms fall and the battle will turn against us. We fall victim to the gnats (sin) that wish to cloud our sight, choke our spirit (breath) and buzz lies in our ears.

The priests of Egypt also wanted to worship, but they felt that because of the uncleanness of the gnats, they were unworthy to enter before their gods. If only they would have allowed the gnats to work on them and do what was natural. Raise their arms to the God that sent them. Remove the distraction of Egyptian gods and praise the God of Israel. Then they might have been able to see what was at stake for their people, their country and most importantly their souls.

Gnats Of Love

The third plague of Egypt – like the other nine – was God not just showing His power, but also giving the Egyptians the chance to repent and turn towards Him. To have a chance to worship the one true God instead of their false gods, and to be able to save themselves from destruction. The gnats were a physical sign to try to persuade the Egyptians into holy worship. It is unfortunate that God must resort to such means to get our attention. To place a cloud of gnats around us until we can do nothing but raise our arms in holy worship and obedience to Him. However, how fortunate we are to have a God that loves his people so much that he would send gnats to get our attention and force our arms upwards.