

Exodus 8:16-19

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The third plague is unannounced. It simply happens. There is no conversation between Moses and Pharaoh, nor is there any warning of its coming. This plague involves an intense swarm of gnats that caused misery to both human and animal alike. The plague begins when Aaron strikes the dust on the ground. The dust particles are immediately turned into gnats. The Egyptian magicians were not able to duplicate this plague. In spite of this, Pharaoh's heart continued to be hardened, just as the LORD predicted.

The third plague is both brief and intense. The LORD commanded Moses and Aaron to act, not talk. The LORD told Moses to tell Aaron to *stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth*. Once again, like the first plague, Aaron's staff is used to create the plague by striking something. In the first plague, he struck the water of the Nile. Here, he struck "the dust of the earth."

The result of the striking was *that it may become gnats through all the land of Egypt*. The word for "gnats" has also been translated "lice" or "mosquitoes" in other translations. The exact nature of this pest cannot be known for sure. In any case, an irritating pest is in view here. The creation of the gnats from dust, was a judgment against Egypt.

In obedience, Moses and Aaron *did so*. Specifically, *Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff, and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast*. The infestation must have been overwhelming, because *all the dust of the earth became gnats through all the land of Egypt*.

As in the previous plagues, *the magicians tried with their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not reproduce this plague nor stop it*. Despite the magicians' best efforts, *there were gnats on man and beast*. To have these pests all over one's body and not being able to do anything about it must have been terrifying to the Egyptian people. Even more disheartening was the failure of the magicians to affect this plague. All they could do was to say *to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God."* The phrase "finger of God" is used two other times in the Old Testament ([Exodus 31:18](#); [Deuteronomy 9:10](#)). Both passages have to do with the LORD writing the Law on the two tablets with His finger. In the New Testament, it is used once ([Luke 11:20](#)), where Jesus

speaks of driving out demons “by the finger of God.” All of these references relate the “finger of God” with His sovereignty over all things.

The response to this plague was like the previous ones – *Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had said.* He was not moved by the miraculous use of nature by the LORD.

There is no Egyptian god or goddess that can be associated with this plague. It might have been meant to ruin the Egyptian sense of cleanliness which was associated with the gods.

It also shows that the LORD of Israel is the one and only Creator who can, without effort, make inanimate things come to life.

Biblical Text:

¹⁶ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, that it may become gnats through all the land of Egypt.’” ¹⁷ They did so; and Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff, and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats through all the land of Egypt. ¹⁸ The magicians tried with their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not; so there were gnats on man and beast. ¹⁹ Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had said.