

When God Bugs You Without Warning
Great Tribulations #3: The Plague of Gnats
Exodus 8:16-19

Therefore, be ready, Oh people of God. For the Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect him. In the twinkling of an eye. Like a thief in the night.

If boredom starts to define your Saturday and you are too broke to afford the gas to drive across the 17th Street bridge to go to Jaycee Park on Ocean Drive, then I invite you to go on tour of retail stores in this great metroplex city of ours, Vero Beach, Florida. If you go into Harbor Freight and turn left, you'll notice an abundance of the ultimate man's tool: the 20 Volt Cordless ½ inch Compact Variable Speed Hammer Driver Drill. If you look closely at the box that says Hercules on it, you'll notice a warning label that reads like this: "This product is not intended for use as a dental drill." Whew. I'm glad they cleared that up. If, after leaving Harbor Freight, your boredom vexation has not dissipated, then head right across the street to the worst smelling retail store in America: Target. If you journey right smack dab in the center of the store, you'll notice a plethora of foldable baby strollers. Some are red. Some are blue. Some are pink. And some are black. But most all of them have a warning label that reads: "Caution! Remove child before folding." But if that still doesn't quench your boredom, then don't waste anymore gas by going to another store. All you need to do is just move from the foldable baby stroller's aisle to pillow aisle. Some are long. Some are short. Some are fluffy. Some even mold to the contour of your head. But all of them have warning labels attached to the end of them that reads something like this: "Under penalty of law, this here tag on this here pillow shall never be removed. Violators will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, perhaps even the Electric Chair."

There are some tribulations in our lives that come with warning labels. Some of them come in the form of a warning label from other people's actions; others come with the warning label of our actions. But, friend, I want to tell you unapologetically this morning that there are some tribulations that come with absolutely, positively, no warning at all; with no chance to do anything to circumvent them. In other words, there are some tribulations that you will face in life that occur when God bugs you completely and totally without warning. How do I know this? Because that's exactly what he did when he sent the third plague. It was a plague of bugs; a plague of gnats (lice in some translations) that came upon Egypt and God's people completely and totally without warning. And my objective today is to tell the reasons why God bugs you without warning. They are the exact same reasons he bugged Egypt and the people of God in the Book of Exodus with the 3rd plague. Turn we me to Exodus 8:16-19 and let's read together.

¹⁶ Then the Lord 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." ¹⁷ They did this, and when Aaron stretched out his hand with the staff and struck the dust of the ground, gnats came on people and animals. All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats. ¹⁸ But when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not. Since the gnats were on people and animals everywhere, ¹⁹ the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hard, and he would not listen, just as the Lord had said.

The Reasons Why God Bugs You Without Warning:

1. The Egypts We Create

- **Time Share Letter:** (1) As your pastor, I feel obligated to tell you that if you get a letter saying you've won a big prize and you have to go somewhere to claim it, be afraid. Be very afraid. (2) The odds are 95% that you are walking straight into a vacation time share office. (3) It's the only business I know that the more you say "no" the harder it is to leave. (4) And you've got a better chance of figured out where Jimmy Hoffa is buried than you do getting out of a time share contract. (5) What seems to be a purchase for refuge actually turns out to be a house of bondage.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** God established Egypt to be a house of refuge for his people. But when the very place of refuge becomes a house of bondage, you can expect God to initiate the process of de-creating it without warning.
- **Textual Emphasis (v16)** "Tell Aaron to take staff and strike the dust of the ground" // Not tell Pharaoh that the Nile was going to change to blood // Not tell Pharaoh that Egypt was about to be covered with frogs // He just gave them instructions that effected Egypt AND the people of God without warning.
- **Main Discussion Point: Creation of the World and DeCreation of Egypt is What's Going On Here:** (1) In Creation, God created the waters and created creatures to fill the sea; in the 1st plague the waters turn to blood and in the 1st and 2nd plagues, the fish and frogs die in the water. (2) In Creation, God created Adam from dust; in this plague dust is not being used to create life. It's being used to afflict man with pestilence (gnats) and disease. (3) God is interrupting the great and powerful Egypt to bring chaos without warning, which is what happens when what he created for a refuge (Egypt) turns into a place of oppression of God's people.
- **App:** You can always expect the God of the Bible to "de"create the Egypts we turn to for refuge without warning when those Egypts evolve into something entirely different in our lives and the world.

2. The Pharaohs We Create

- **The Hurricane Winds Tunnel Exhibit at Epcot:** (1) I stumbled across a pretty interesting thing at Epcot several years ago called the Hurricane Wind Tunnel. (2) They put you in the tunnel and lock you inside. (3) You can walk around normally for a while until the wind kicks up. (4) The only choice you have to hold your ground is the anchor in the center.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Pharaoh functioned as a “g”od in Egypt who was responsible for maintaining harmony, order, stability and security. But when God made gnats from dust, something which defies cosmic order, Pharaoh was powerless to hold Egypt together.
- **Textual Emphasis (v17):** “All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats” // The word here is the same word used in the Genesis creation account AND it’s the same word used for sand // Both of which are very important here.
- **Main Discussion Point: The Egyptian Pharaoh’s Were Considered the “g”ods of the Sands:** (1) The Egyptian “g”od *Set* was considered to be the creator of the sands; (2) The Pharaoh’s were responsible to rule over them (thus why the Pharaoh’s Seti 1 and 2 were named after him); (3) They were considered “great” Pharaoh’s if they maintained order in Kingdom of Egypt: the land of the sand. They were thought to control the seasons, major disasters and were responsible for Egypt prospering in the sands; (4) So when the dust became gnats, it was the God of the Bible’s direct assault on how Pharaoh viewed himself: the one responsible for maintaining order in the universe. (5) He sent chaos to let them know that in the day of disaster, not even Pharaoh could hold the world together.
- **App:** God sends chaos without warning, he sends bugs, to let you know that when chaos reigns supreme – in the world and in our lives – only he can hold our world together. Not the Pharaoh’s we create.

3. The Magicians We Create

- **The Boy Who Cried Wolf:** (1) One of Aesop’s Fables; (2) Shepherd boy sits on the hill board, so he cries wolf to the town to amuse himself; (3) Town comes running twice much to his delight when there was no wolf; (4) But then when a real one comes, people don’t listen. (5) That’s what happens with patterns of deceivers and purveyors of falsehood...eventually they lose face in the eyes of people.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The magicians could not even counterfeit the bug problem God had sent to Egypt. As a result, they would soon lose face in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the estimation of the people. Such is the fate of deceivers and purveyors of falsehood, especially in truth claims not grounded in the God of the Bible.
- **Textual Emphasis (v18):** “But when the magicians tried to reproduce the gnats through their secret arts, they could not” // The phrase “secret arts” evokes the idea of “deceptive” workers of counterfeit miracles and falsehoods
- **Main Discussion Point: Magicians of Egypt Were Not Abracadabra People. They Were Priests of Egyptian Religion:** (1) Through deception, they replicated the miracle of Nile to Blood; (2) Through deception, they brought forth frogs; (3) But God foreshadowed that their time of deception was coming to the end when they could bring forth the frogs but could not remove them from the land; (4) Now they find themselves absolutely positively powerless to peddle falsehood; (5) That’s exactly how God judges deceivers, particularly religious ones. (6) They lose their influence when God shines a light on them.
- **App:** We sure have a tendency to anchor our lives on falsehoods we want to be true; and take advice from deceptive people that we desperately want to believe. But when God decides to shine a light on those things we falsely believe and shine one on deceivers, the game is over. For the light has shined.

4. The Fingerprints We’ve Overlooked

- **Crime Scene Investigator Shows:** Always follow a familiar pattern: (1) First thing the FBI does in every show is pull rank and then lock the crime scene down; (2) Local deputy looks for fingerprints but couldn’t find them; (3) So the FBI CSI Investigator goes into his van and pulls out the biggest medal case you’ve ever seen with all kinds of gadgets: His blue translucent light that you can’t find in the store; his top secret dust that has the recipe locked in Fort Knox; his Camel’s Hair special brush that didn’t come from a Camel. (4) He brushes it on the door post and, viola, the biggest palm prints you’ve ever seen shows up...because he examined the scene closely.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The tribulation of gnats, which came without warning, forced the magicians to see something that requires special effort. And how we react to that discovery will define our future.
- **Textual Emphasis (v19):** “This is the finger of God” // This is an important phrase not only in Exodus, but the whole Bible// For it implies that the magicians/priests of Egypt who were peddlers of falsehood now great witnesses to the God of the Bible.
- **Main Discussion: Were the Magicians Sincere?** – (1) In a word, No. (2) The Hebrew Word for God in a general sense – Elohim – is confessed here. (3) But in Exodus, the word for God who battles Egypt is – Yahweh – which denotes is essentially: The God who is I am; the God of the Covenant. (4) They had a flash of emotion. But a flash of emotion and completely turning away from falsehood and turning to the God who made a covenant with Israel are different things. (5) They saw the fingerprints of God. But didn’t want to look at them anymore.
- **App:** Two types of people in our world right now: (1) I see the fingerprints of God, but I don’t want to see them anymore. Get them away from me. (2) I have lived in the goodness of God.