



# BITING FLIES DEVOTIONAL

JEREMIAH 46:20-21

“A beautiful heifer is Egypt, but a biting fly from the north has come upon her. Even her hired soldiers in her midst are like fattened calves; yes, they have turned and fled together; they did not stand, for the day of their calamity has come upon them, the time of their punishment.”

## EXPERIENCE

Have you ever been swarmed by biting flies? My family and I rented a party boat to enjoy a day on our favorite Adirondack lake. We spent the morning anchored just off a beautiful sand beach—we swam and splashed, we walked along the beach, and we jumped off the boat. At lunchtime we motored our way to a nearby island for a hot dog roast. I think the smoke must have kept most of the biting flies away because, while we were bit from time to time, it was not enough to detract from our leisurely lunch and conversation around the fire. But, awaiting our arrival when we returned to our boat were hundreds of flies. They were everywhere. We took towels and desperately tried to shoo them away. We quickly returned to the open water, wrongly assuming that once we were moving, we would leave the pests behind. As soon as we slowed down to troll around, they attacked! The flies looked and behaved like a common housefly. They were fast and virtually impossible to kill. The pain and

frequency of the bites made it impossible to slow the boat down, much less stop and set down anchor. We attempted at one point to anchor offshore for a swim. Everything was wonderfully peaceful, as long as we were under the water, but as soon as we would surface there were the flies in a matter of moments. After giving up on our venture for the day and heading back, my son commented, "I can't take it anymore!". He commenced covering himself from head to foot with beach towels to escape the torment of the flies.

I've heard of cattle being driven to insanity by swarms of flies. On that day, I was able to sympathize with their experience. That day the conscious torment of being swarmed and eaten alive was more than any of my family members could bear. We had to escape the hellish invasion of our boat.

## CONTEMPLATION

After docking our boat that afternoon and retreating to the safety of our cabin there was a collective sigh of relief. In the evening we meditated on the experience together. We agreed that the experience with the flies was the tiniest taste of hell. Specifically, we talked about what it felt like to be tormented so much that all you could think about was escaping. We spoke about the feelings associated with not being able to get away from our tormentors that day. We shuddered at the thought of what it would be like to be tormented by demons. We talked about being separated from God and all that is good. We pondered the punishment we deserve as sinners. We gave thanks that in Christ Jesus God has rescued us from sin and death, as well as hell and destruction. Though this topic is unsettling, it is a reality we must reflect upon. In light of its symbolism perhaps being swarmed by biting flies every once in a while, is a good thing, necessary for reminding us of the eternal implications of our sin and the price paid for us by Jesus on the cross.

Application: Interactions with horseflies, black flies, gnats, or any other swarming, biting insect are reminders that this world is not heaven and that hell is real. Eternal punishment and torment are not a morbid fantasy. As modern American Christians, we are not likely to hear to many sermons from

the pulpit on the subject of hell. Additionally, many Christians today do not have a healthy fear of God and of hell or a horror of their own sin at least in part because of their distance from direct experiences with the terrors and torments of the natural world. Jesus did not avoid the subject; he spoke about hell numerous times. On one occasion he said:

*“But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!” -Luke 12:5*

Meditation on the more horrific aspects of the natural world awaken and remind believers that separation from God for eternity is no small matter. Life’s most important matters are reckoning with sin and its consequences and coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

## PRAYER

Lord God, hell is a reality with which I must reckon. Though I do not enjoy pondering the subject, help me to never forget the eternal consequences of sin. Help me to have a healthy fear of God and to appreciate the horror of sin. Give me a soft heart toward you O Lord. Protect my heart and mind from evil. May I perceive in the frightful and gruesome aspects of nature a call to repent of sin. May I then be quick to repent and run from evil. Empower me to pursue you wholeheartedly. I ask it in Christ’s name. Amen.

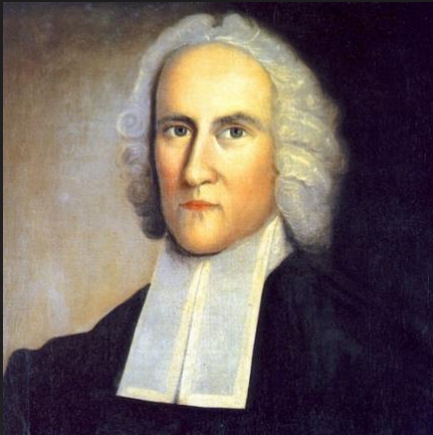
## CONFIRMATION

In Jeremiah 46:20-21 we read of a biting fly who swarmed a heifer. The heifer is symbolic of Egypt. Evidently God used biting flies from the north to punish the Egyptian nation. Even the strongest soldiers could not withstand the onslaught of these tiny pests. Like my family, they turned and fled, likely with one thought in their heads, “how can I escape this misery?” The flies in this text were an instrument of God’s wrath punishing Egypt for their sins. Of course, this wasn’t the first time God used flies to punish Egypt (see Exodus 8:20-32).



Flies were one of the plagues God used to call Pharaoh and his people to repentance. Pharaoh refused to repent. He ignored the message God was sending by way of the flies and became subject to plagues of increasing intensity and devastation. It is evident that biting flies speak a powerful sermon to all who know the experience of being swarmed by them and have ears to hear.

- *Biting flies are an emblem of torment and punishment. For those who have ears to hear, swarms of biting flies cry out a loud warning– “Repent, Repent!” – lest you face the eternal torment of the prince of demons.*



## Jonathan Edwards

FROM THE *SCRIPTURE NOTES ON IMAGES OF DIVINE THINGS*. [\[WJE 11:131\]](#)

*“FLIES represent evil spirits and wicked men. The prince of the devils is called ‘Baalzebub,’ i.e. the lord of flies [Matthew 12:24].”<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Typological Writings*, [WJE 11:131](#).