

Open your Bibles to Exodus 8:16-19.

- We're back to our study of Exodus for this week.
- And our subject today is Owing the Hand of God.

A question to begin:

- How often do you think about God?
- I assume you do each day, as you spend time in Scripture and prayer.
- But what about outside of that?
- How "God-conscious" are you throughout the day?
- How often do you attribute things to His doing and will?
- How often do you see through the ordinary events of life and behold His Hand?

I think you can answer that question by asking yourself some other questions:

- How often do you thank God throughout the day?
- How often do you call upon Him for help?
- How often do you smile to yourself and say, "OK, Lord. Apparently that's how you want this to go."
- Or how often do you find yourself thinking, "There is no way that God does not exist!"
- The answer to these questions will probably indicate how often you think about the Lord and see Him at work in everyday life.

But I'd bet that many professing Christians float through the day just like unbelievers.

- I don't mean that we live outwardly like them. I'm not talking about our words and deeds.
- Rather, I'm talking about our inward life.

- Aside from “quiet times” of personal devotion and family worship, a lot of us probably tend to view the world like everyone else:

- “Things just happen. People are the root causes of things. And other things are simply random occurrences. Things just ARE.”

But that’s not biblical. And that’s not godly.

- The godly person has a God-ward mind, and sees His Hand at work all day long.

In our text this morning, God strikes Egypt with the Third Plague: Gnats.

- And, as usual, the Egyptian magicians will attempt to imitate God’s work and fail.

- But this time, the magicians will confess something very important: **“This is the finger of God.”**

- For the first time, they will acknowledge that a God greater than their false gods was at work.

This was a big moment in the Exodus.

- Remember, God’s goal in striking Egypt and bringing Israel out was so the Egyptians would **“know that there is none like me in all the earth.”** (Exodus 9:14)

- And **“to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in ALL THE EARTH.”** (Exodus 9:16)

- God’s goal was to demonstrate that He alone is God, and He alone rules over all things.

- And in our text today, that truth began to dawn upon the Egyptians.

God was revealing His sovereignty over all, so that

all the earth would see and worship Him.

- So, this morning we'll walk through the account of the Third Plague.

- And then we'll spend the rest of our time thinking through what it means to recognize "the finger of God."

- May God help us to learn this, as He blesses the preaching of His Word.

If you would, and are able, please stand with me for the reading of the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God.

Exodus 8:16-19

[16] Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt.'"

[17] And they did so. 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 in all the land of Egypt.

[18] The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce 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 would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

(PRAY)

Our Heavenly Father,

- Your Word is glorious. It's a sure guide. It's heavenly wisdom. It's your own self-revelation.

- In it we behold your Person and works. So we love it.
- But we are slow to understand, and slower to believe, and still slower to apply and obey.
- So we are at your mercy to work in us today.
- Please, Lord, speak to us by your Holy Spirit through the Word, give us understanding, give us faith, and change our hearts and wills to submit to you.
- Please, for your glory, and according to the covenant that you've made with us through the blood of your Son, Jesus Christ, do these things in us today.
- Make much of yourself. And help us to SEE YOU.
- We ask these things in Jesus' Name and for His sake.
- Amen.

1.) You'll remember that at the end of the account of the Second Plague (frogs), Pharaoh had lied to God.

- He had promised that if the LORD would take away the frogs, he would let the Israelites go sacrifice to God.
- God relented and took away the frogs. But Pharaoh changed his mind and wouldn't let them go.

So, God moved to strike once again.

•V16 says, Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt.'"

- Notice that there was no warning for this Plague. In the first two, God called Pharaoh to repent or prepare for judgment.
- But now God gives no warning at all. He just strikes.

- Surely, Pharaoh didn't think that the God of Israel would allow such insolence and lying to go unpunished.

NOTE: This reminds us that God is not obligated to warn sinners before He judges them.

- That He does so is a revelation of His great kindness and goodwill toward even the wicked. But He doesn't have to do it.

- This also reminds us that if God disciplines or judges us and we don't repent, we can expect more to come.

- Friends, learn from your past sins, that you might not repeat them. If you don't learn the first time, the Lord will keep teaching you. It just may be a very painful lesson until you repent.

But God told Moses to command Aaron to take the staff and strike the ground with it, so the dirt/dust would become gnats in all the land of Egypt.

- And the obedience of the two men was immediate.

- V17 says that they did exactly as God said: "And there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats in all the land of Egypt."

Now, let's consider the Plague itself.

- The dust became "gnats," according to our translation.

- Now, maybe I'm weird, but I've always heard the word "gnat" being used to describe a tiny fly.

- But that's not what our text is describing.

- A gnat is a two-winged insect that bites.

- The Hebrew word rendered "gnats" in the ESV seems to indicate some kind of tiny, stinging or biting insects

that are barely visible to the naked eye.

- The KJV renders it “lice.” And other translations say “mosquitoes.”

But no matter what the insect was, this would've been terrible to endure.

- Just try to imagine this! This would've been terrifying to witness, even before the suffering began.

- Aaron struck the ground and instantaneously the dirt turned in all of Egypt turned into swarms of gnats.

- This had to have looked like something of a bomb going off. The staff hit the ground and BOOM, an eruption of insects began to cover every living thing.

- Imagine realizing what you now had to deal with. We try to avoid bugs most of the time. But in an instant, they covered the land and there was no escape.

Think about the suffering this would've caused.

- Gnats in your eyes, up your nose, in your ears, all over your skin, in your hair.

- There were gnats in your food. Gnats in your mouth when you try to speak or breathe through the mouth.

- Gnats on you as you try to go to the bathroom. Gnats on you as you lay down to try to sleep.

- Gnats on your children. And on your babies that can't swat them away themselves. (Imagine their cries.)

- And they BITE or STING. Even a small sting, over and over, all day long, would be a true Plague to deal with.

And there would've been nowhere you could go to escape this.

- There were no windows as we know them, or sealing

doors and things like that.

- Furthermore, there was nowhere in the country you could go to avoid this.
- You would've had to leave Egypt in order to get away from the gnats.
- As with the Final Judgment, there was no escape for God's enemies in this Plague.

Now, why gnats? There are a few possible reasons:

1. God might have been taking a shot at the Egyptian god Geb.

- Geb was the god of the ground.
- And what do we have here? We have the ground turning into biting insects.
- And we have worshippers of Geb dealing with a Plague from the ground. And Geb was powerless to help them.
- God triumphed over this false god and made a total mockery of him. "See if Geb can help you now!"

But, it must be noted that while some Plagues seem to correspond quite clearly to a particular Egyptian god or goddess, they don't have to.

- God's judgments on Egypt were a slap in the face of ALL their gods, not just ten particular ones.

2. From what I can gather, it seems that Egyptian priests didn't touch insects.

- They were considered unclean.
- In this Plague, therefore, the priests would've been rendered religiously impure.

- Religious activity in Egypt would've come to a screeching halt because the work of the True God.
- God was making a mockery of their religion as a whole by taking down the entire priesthood of every god.

3. God had struck the Nile with blood, the land with frogs, and now everything between water and land with gnats.

- God was demonstrating that He is Lord over land, air, and sea.

- He's not like the Egyptian gods that have one domain to rule. He is God over all.

4. Lastly, once again, God was demonstrating His might.

- He used an something incredibly small and insignificant to bring down the greatness nation in the known world.

- Truly, His power knows no bounds. And the Egyptians were to see it.

Now we come to v18 and the attempt of the magicians:

- “The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast.”

- They simply couldn't do it.
- Apparently, God had withdrawn His permission that allowed Satan to empower them to imitate the Plagues.
- God had set a limit to their abilities. He had set a limit to their power, as He does with all His enemies. For He will conquer every one of them.

- No longer could the magicians deceive Pharaoh.
- God brought that to a grinding halt in order to shame them, make them confess their impotence, and humble them in the eyes of everyone.

Behold, the gods of Egypt!

- They can't even create gnats. Some power, huh?
- Behold, the magicians of Egypt!
- They can't even conjure an insect.
- They are nothing. And their gods are nothing.
- Yahweh reigns in all the earth. And no one can challenge Him.

And this leads the magicians to make a confession in v19: "Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God.'"

- Now, what does that mean?
- "The finger of God"** is a figure of speech that refers to God's power and/or the work of God.
- There are many references in Scripture to God's arm and hand. And these all clearly refer to His ability to act and His mighty works of judgment and salvation.
- His "finger" is just another way of saying the same thing.

The magicians were confessing, "God has done this. This is His work. This is His power."

- They were confessing that they had officially encountered a God before whom their gods could not stand.
- The God of the Hebrews, not the gods of Egypt, has power over Egypt.

And this has some implications:

- God must not be a territorial or tribal God. For He has “invaded” Egypt and taken over.
- Yahweh, then, is the one true and living God.
- Now, I doubt that they came to this conclusion on that day. But this is what the text is telling God’s People.
- And they would indeed eventually have to own this truth.

God was at work in Egypt.

- God stood behind all of it.
- So Pharaoh’s resistance was foolish and futile.

Now, Pharaoh didn’t believe that yet.

- It seems that the magicians got there before he did. They never again tried to imitate the Plagues.
- They knew it was a losing battle.
- And the fact that they said this Pharaoh seems to indicate that they were urging him to recognize that a force greater than himself was at work AGAINST THEM.

But, as God had said, Pharaoh didn’t care.

- v19 says, “But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.”
- In his stubbornness, he would not acknowledge God. He wouldn’t recognize the “finger of God.”
- He wouldn’t even listen to his own advisors.
- But even his rebellion reinforced the supremacy of God. It was all “as the LORD had said.”

Once again, Pharaoh is an example of unbeliever.

- No matter the evidence set before them, they won't submit to and believe in Jesus Christ.
- The godless will not own the hand of God. And they will not submit to Him, no matter the evidence.
- And that's because sin is a heart issue, not an intellectual one. It's about submission, not facts.

But, as with every man, woman, and child who has ever lived, Pharaoh would one day yield to God.

- It was just a matter of time.

2.) Now, what can we take away from all of this?

- This passage is brief. And it's brevity highlights the confession of the magicians: "This is the finger of God."
- They recognized that the Plague was God's doing.
- As I said in the introduction, it was God's intention in the Exodus that all the world would know that He is God.
- God did all these things so that He would be acknowledged and praised by all.

This is God's goal in all He does. Everything He does is for His glory.

- And because of that, it is the duty of man to recognize His works and give Him praise for them.
- So we're going to now think on what our forefathers called "Owning the Hand of God."
- We'll be considering the importance of recognizing God's work in the world.

A lot of professing Christians are functionally

godless in their day-to-day lives.

- I don't mean that they're terribly immoral. I mean they are "God-LESS" in their thinking. They don't think about Him much.

- His Hand is not seen by them throughout the day because they functionally believe that God is not active in all things.

- So they go about the day without giving Him much thought or seeing what He's doing.

And that's not the way we should live and think.

- This world is God's world. It's all about Him.
- He stands behind everything. He is always working.
- He's intimately involved in every single thing that is, or that comes to pass, in one way or another.

- So then, we must be a People who have an eye toward the Lord at all times, being quick to own His work.

- This is an absolute MUST for all people, for God works all around us and in each of our lives.

- But this is especially true for the People of God, in whom He loves and works in a special way.

The magicians in our text recognized God's work of judgment.

- But there is more to recognize than just that:

1. How often do you look out at the created world and say, "This is the finger of God"?

- That's one of the reasons that God created the universe, you know.

- Romans 1:20 says, "For His invisible attributes,

namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made...”

- God has revealed Himself in the creation. That He is God. That He, the Creator, exists. That He has done all of this glorious work you see each day.

- As Psalm 19:1 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork.”

Every day, when you see the sun rising and light bursting into the world, God should be your first thought.

- As you see animals, their beauty, how they instinctively know what to do, how they are perfectly designed for where they live, you should recognize the work of God.

- When you hear of pregnancy or the birth of a child, and are put in mind of how the mother’s body adapts and changes for the process, and how the child comes together in the womb, your first thought should be, “God.”

- Looking out at mountains, forests, flowers in bloom, how each season has it’s own beauty, the greatness of the ocean, how all of it is glorious and wonderful and works in harmony, all of that should make you say, “This is the finger of God.”

The sun doesn’t just rise.

- The world doesn’t just exist.
- The life around us didn’t create itself.
- The beauty around us is not eternal.
- God is the cause of it all. And we are to recognize

that.

2. God's finger is not just seen in creation, but also in Providence.

- All that comes to pass each day, moment by moment, details great and small, the good and the bad, the happy and the hard, are all under the direction of God.

- Ephesians 1:11 says, "In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works ALL THINGS according to the counsel of His will..."

- Did you hear that? "ALL THINGS."

Friends, the events of life are not random.

- They may seem that way to us. But they are under the direction of God.

- If it rains, that's God's hand.
- If the sun shines, that's God's doing.
- If you're sick or well, that is from the Lord.
- Your furnace goes out? That's God's hand.
- You've got a pest problem in your house? God's hand.
- The day went smoothly? God's hand.
- You got the job or didn't get the job. That's from God.
- You have much or little. That's the Lord's doing.
- You slept well or the baby kept you awake. God's hand.

- A child is born or a miscarriage occurs. That's also from the hand of the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, every single event, every circumstance, every everything is under God's direction.

- So all throughout the day, whether with smiles or with tears, we ought to look up to the heavens and say, “This is the finger of God.”

- And we do so because God governs His creation.

3. More specifically, we should own God’s hand in salvation.

- I’m referring now to the personal conversion of sinners.

- There is something that I see online and sometimes hear in person that makes my skin crawl.

- Someone makes a profession of faith, or receives baptism, and what do people say? “I’m so proud of you! Well done!”

- But really they should say, “This is the finger of God!”

Who converted the sinner?

- Who gave them eyes to see?
- Who convicted them of sin?
- Who caused them to see the crucified Christ, dying in their place, suffering God’s wrath in their place?
- Who caused them to see their need for the perfect righteousness of Christ?
- Who convinced them that the only way to receive the atoning work and righteousness of Christ was by faith?
- Who gave them the gift of faith?
- Who changed their heart to make them willing and able to believe?

God alone stands behind all of these things. It is His doing.

- As Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are HIS

WORKMANSHIP...

- By the grace of God alone we are what we are. By His work and power, not ours.

- So when you hear the glorious news of a sinner coming to Christ, your heart should rise to heaven, saying, “God did this for them.”

4. The Christian should own God’s Hand every day as they consider their own sanctification.

- When you overcome sin, when you choose righteousness, when you honor the Lord instead of gratifying your flesh, your mind should go straight to Him.

- Why? Because, as Paul says in Philippians 2:13, “for it is GOD WHO WORKS IN YOU, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

God is the One who gave you the will to choose godliness.

- He is also the One who gave you strength to do what you ought to do.

- It wasn’t by your own might that you said “No” to sin.

- It wasn’t in your strength that you overcame.

- It was the finger of God pointed at you.

Even when you don’t overcome, but sin, and then later REPENT, that’s also God’s work.

- 2 Timothy 2:25 says, “...God may perhaps grant them repentance...”

- Repentance is, therefore, a GIFT FROM GOD! God works repentance in the heart of His People.

- You don’t even repent on your own. So even when

you're confessing your sin to God, you ought to own His Hand in graciously working repentance in you.

Brothers and sisters, as you see holiness in yourself and others, you should be compelled to say,

- "This is the finger of God."

5. Lastly, our text today reminds us that we are to own God's Hand in judgment.

- I'm talking about earthly, temporal judgments.
- We see this in our text today. That's the context in which the magicians confessed God's work.

This may be a bit harder at times, because not all misfortune is God's judgment.

- But the Scriptures do teach us that God judges people and nations on this earth for their sins.
- And the Scriptures do recognize that God did it and calls us to praise and fear Him for it.

So as we see the evil that a sinner planned for others coming back on his own head, we should see God at work.

- Or when we see a nation eating the fruit of its wickedness, we should remember the LORD.
- Even when we see ourselves sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind, we ought to be drawn to consider the God of justice.
- His wrath is not asleep. And the Final Judgment is not the only judgment.
- So when we see these things, we ought to, with fear,

confess, "This is the finger of God."

3.) Now, why is it so important for us to own God's Hand in all things?

- For starters, it's just basic godliness to do so. It's part of true religion.

- Psalm 143:5 says, "I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands."

- The godly man remembers and considers all that God has done. And the only way to do that is to first RECOGNIZE what God has done.

Or listen to Psalm 111:2: "Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them."

- Do you delight in God's works? If you delight in the God who works, then you'll delight IN HIS WORKS.

- So, if you love the Lord, you will STUDY, think on, all that He has done and is doing.

- And, again, you have to first SEE in order to study.

- So recognizing God's work is part of basic godliness.

And there are many practical benefits and graces that flow from owning God's Hand:

- When you're able to see God's work of discipline or judgment, you will be quick to repent and also to call others to repentance.

- When you see that hard times come from His Hand, you'll be quick to go to Him in prayer for help.

- When you see that He is behind every blessing, you'll be quick to rejoice and praise Him.

- When you're able to see that He is working all things

for His purposes, you'll praise Him for His wisdom and might.

- When you understand that your salvation and sanctification, and that of those you love, are the work of God, you will glory in Jesus Christ all the more.

- And when you begin to see that all of life is really about Him, you will bow before Him in submission, in holy fear, and in God-inspired awe in every aspect of life.

BUT you will only do these things IF you can look at life and say, "This is the finger of God."

- Why? Because until you recognize His works, He will not be in your thoughts.

- And if He's not in your thoughts, your heart will not burn for Him with affection.

- And without love for God, there is no true religion.

Brothers and sisters, we simply MUST train ourselves to look and see God's work in the world.

- We must be mindful of Him. We must look at life as CHRISTIANS.

- We cannot compartmentalize life into categories of secular and sacred.

- If all of life is for the glory of God, then we ought to see His glory in all of life.

But to deny God's Hand is a horrible sin.

- It's characteristic of the unbeliever.

- Psalm 28:5 says, "Because they do not regard the works of the LORD or the work of His hands, He will tear them down and build them up no more."

- The wicked are those who do not regard, pay attention to, consider, think on, or own the work of God.

- And God says that He will judge such people.

- Why? Because it's functional atheism. To disregard His works is to live as if He doesn't exist.

- And, as Romans 1:21 says, "For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him..."

- And that, says the Apostle, is why God judges.

Brothers and sisters, THINGS DON'T JUST HAPPEN.

- Things don't just exist. Life doesn't just come.

- The LORD reigns.

- I beg you, don't be a functional atheist. Honor Him.

And don't be outdone by pagans!

- If the magicians could recognize the Hand of God, then surely God's People can!

4.) There is a sad reality in our world:

- Many people profess belief in God and will even acknowledge His works of creation and providence.

- But they don't KNOW Him.

- Many people will acknowledge that God is the Almighty who reigns over all things.

- But they don't KNOW Him. They don't love Him. They don't praise Him. They don't trust in Him.

- The magicians in our text are an example of these.

Such people are just as lost as the most hardened, self-deceived atheist.

- To merely believe that God exists, to merely recognize His works in the world, is nothing.

- Such a person is headed to the same Hell as the atheist.

- Why? Because even Satan himself believes that God exists and knows for a fact that God reigns.

- As James 2:19 says, “Even the demons believe—and shudder!”

Believing that God exists and works in the world will not take away a single sin or make a sinner righteous in His sight.

- The only way for a sinner to be reconciled to God is to acknowledge God and COME TO HIM in faith for salvation.

- To be saved from his sins, to be saved from Hell, a sinner must, by faith, recognize that, just as God works in the world, God was at work in Jesus Christ, saving sinners.

- As the Apostle says in 2 Corinthians 5:19, “...in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them...”

The sinner must own God’s Hand in Jesus Christ, or there is no hope for him.

- You must believe that God sent His Son into the world, according to His promise to save sinners.

- And that He laid your trespasses on Him, making Christ your Substitute, to suffer for your sins, so that, by faith in Him, your sins would no longer be counted to you. For He has suffered and died for them to satisfy God’s justice.

- You must recognize that God has accomplished salvation in Jesus Christ, for all who will believe on Him.
- And you must turn from your sin and trust that God has done it for you.
- Just as you believe that God exists and works in the world, you must believe that God has worked redemption for you through His Son, Jesus Christ.

This, and this alone, will result in your salvation.

- That is to say, Christ alone can save you. And His salvation is received by faith alone.
- You must KNOW God, not just believe in Him.
- And only through Jesus Christ does any sinner come to know God.
- Apart from Christ, you're no better off than the Egyptian magicians, or even Satan himself.

Bare recognition of God is nothing by itself.

- You must have Jesus Christ!

5.) Those of us who have received Christ by faith, let me encourage you:

- Though we do not see it now, the day will come when all will own the Hand of God.
- Everyone will one day recognize and publicly acknowledge that God has created and ruled all things.
- And on that day, all will confess that God was in Christ reconciling sinners to Himself.
- “for it is written, ‘As I live says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’” (Romans 14:11)

We gladly own His Hand. We gladly praise Him for His work in Jesus Christ.

- And the world mocks Him and us. And it pains us to see and hear it. And we fear for their eternal souls.
- But the rebellion will not last forever.
- Like the magicians in Egypt, everyone will one day say, **“This is the finger of God.”**

And when that day comes, our joy will have just begun.

- For we, for all eternity, will own His Hand in praise and thanksgiving.
- All eternity will be one unending celebration of the wonderful works of God as we cry out:
 - “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created... Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”** (Revelation 4:11, 5:12-13)
- Amen and amen! This is our future.

6.) In conclusion, my dear brothers and sisters, be mindful of the LORD.

- Think on Him daily and all the day long.
- Own His works. And let them lead you to pray, repent, praise, rejoice, fear, and do every other good thing He calls you to.

Live a God-ward life.

- Be sensitive to the act that He can be seen everywhere and in everything around you.

- You need only to look with the eye of faith.

And remember, all of life is about Him.

- And all eternity will be about Him.

- So start now and consciously seek to own His Hand.

May God give us eyes to see His wonderful works.

- And may He use that to lead us to greater godliness,
for the glory of His Name.

- Amen.