

The Creepy-Crawler Pestilence

Crazy Ants

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When God through Moses told Pharaoh to humble himself and let His people go—or else, He promised certain plagues against Egypt if Pharaoh would not comply. Because of Egypt's hard-heartedness and disobedience, God sent ten plagues; three of them were lice, flies and locusts. It makes your skin crawl just to hear those words.

Chapters 8 and 10 of the book of Exodus describe these three plagues. The Lord told Moses to have Aaron stretch out his rod to turn the dust of the land to lice, "and it became lice on man and beast. All the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt" (Exodus 8:17).

Then, the Lord said He would send flies:

Exodus 8:21 I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants, on your people and into your houses. The houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand.

Since that wasn't enough to soften them, and their sins were great, He sent locusts:

Exodus 10:6 They shall fill your houses, the houses of all your servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians

Exodus 10:14-15 And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt and rested on all the territory of Egypt. They were very severe; For they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they ate every herb of the land and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left. So there remained nothing green on the trees or on the plants of the field throughout all the land of Egypt.

What do those three pestilence-plagues have in common? Lice, flies, and locusts, at the very least, make you feel like your skin is crawling—and so do ants. Imagine the feeling of such things crawling all over your body, how itchy, repulsed, and miserable the Egyptians must have felt. Although it was not life-threatening (although it was destroying all of their crops), it was still a miserable pestilence.

In Jon Mooallem's article, "There's a Reason They Call Them 'Crazy Ants'," published December 5, 2013, we find a skin crawling story of a present day creepy-crawler pestilence that helps us picture, even feel—in a much lesser way—something similar to what Pharaoh and the Egyptians experienced. It is a plague for a sinful nation.

Mooallem writes,

The first time Mike Foshee noticed the ants, they were piled outside his cardiologist's office. This was two summers ago, in Pearland, a suburb of Houston. There was a forbidding, fibrous heap of dead ants on either side of the building's double doors, each a couple of feet long.

And there were also legions of living ants shuffling over the dead ones—though Mike had to bend down to see these. Otherwise, so many individual ants were moving so chaotically, and so fast, that the entire reddish-brown tangle at his feet looked as if it were shimmering.

[The ants] arrived at Mike's house a few months after he first saw them at the cardiologist's office. One day his air conditioning stopped working. A musty smell seeped from the vents in his living-room floor. So he powered up his Shop-Vac to clear them. By the time he was done, he'd sucked out five gallons of ants.

Soon he and his wife were waking up to find vast, frantic networks of ants zipping around the kitchen floor in all directions. When the

picture on their 50-inch box television started flickering, Mike took off the back panel and found the guts throbbing with ants. He got rid of the television.

Outside, dead ants began pooling around the base of the house in heaps so high that they looked like discarded coffee grounds.

(It's common in Texas these days for a person who is shown one of these heaps of dead ants to take several seconds to realize that the solid surface he or she is scanning for ants actually is the ants.) Mike laid out poison, generating more heaps of dead ants. But new ants merely used those dead ants as a bridge over the poison and kept streaming inside.

Recently, he and his wife were sitting outside, ...when Mike looked down and saw one of his bare feet overtaken by ants. He remembers thinking, No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, running inside and running back out with his AR-15, the assault rifle he uses to take out hogs. He was about to open fire on the ants until his wife chuckled and he realized how ridiculous the situation had become.

Mike said, "The distressing part is having the feeling of something always crawling on you. Like, if you get around somebody who has lice, and now you're always itching because you know they have lice. It's psychological. And yet, you actually do have them on you."

He tried leaving different foods on his floor overnight, to figure out how he might bait and kill the ants, as he did with the feral hogs. He claims they touched none of it. He can't fathom what the ants want—why they've come. They are frightening because they make no sense, because of the utter disarray of their existence. "They run around the floors like they're on crack, and then they die,"

The ants are called crazy ants. That's their actual name. Many people call them Raspberry crazy ants, and some people call them Tawny crazy ants.

Entomologists report that the crazy ants, like other ants, seem drawn to electronic devices: car stereos, circuit boxes, machinery. But with crazy ants, so many will stream inside a device that they form a single, squirming mass that completes a circuit and shorts it.

Crazy ants have ruined laptops this way [David, your work is about to begin, I think] and, according to one exterminator, have also temporarily shut down chemical plants. They are most likely climbing into these cavities to investigate possible nesting sites.

Crazy ants don't have a painful bite, but they effectively terrorize people by racing up their feet and around their bodies, coursing everywhere in their impossibly disordered orbits. (They're called crazy ants because their behavior seems psychotic.)

Crazy ants decimate native insects. They overtake beehives and destroy the colonies. They may smother bird chicks struggling to hatch. In South America, where scientists now believe the ants originated, they have been known to obstruct the nasal cavities of chickens and asphyxiate the birds. They swarm into cows' eyes. So far, there is no way to contain them.

Crazy ants were first discovered in Texas by an exterminator in 2002. Within five years, they appeared to be spreading through the state much faster than even the red imported fire ant has. The fire ant is generally considered one of the worst invasive species in the world. The cost of fire ants to Texas has been estimated at more than \$1 billion a year.

Crazy ants are now in 27 different counties in Texas and have also been spotted in Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida and Georgia.

The Cornell University ecologist David Pimentel and his colleagues have estimated that invasive species cost the nation \$120 billion a year. The federal government spent \$2.2 billion in 2012 trying to control them and fortify the native ecosystems they trample.

Other invasive species can also make life pretty miserable: from brown marmorated stink bugs that destroy apple crops; to dense armadas of coqui frogs, whose pterodactylish screeching goes on all night and gets so loud that they've lowered property values in Hawaii; to the hundreds of thousands of giant African land snails skulking around Florida, slowly eating through the stucco walls of houses and puncturing car tires with their shells. They are the size of rats.

In another case: One evening, Melvin and Sharlene Duke's iron stopped working, then sparks shot from the appliance and a tide of crazy ants came rushing out. In other neighboring houses, they all had similar stories.

The ants had caused \$1,600 of electrical damage to one woman's car; infiltrated the "glass break" detector of one house's alarm system, causing the alarm to blare; and just the previous night, shut off the water at another house by disabling the pressure switch on his well.

Dead ants puddled under the doorframe and behind the tires of the Duke's Toyota Camry—thick, tapering drifts of them, two or three feet across, like sawdust or snow.

Wherever they pointed, there were ants: under the door of a microwave oven, crawling out of the electrical outlets, heaped in the flower beds where they looked like fresh topsoil.

Sharlene Duke was walking around barefoot and in shorts, and you could see ants trickling across her feet and ankles and legs, spelunking between her toes.

Mooallem wrote,

. . . Soon ants were spiraling up the tongues of my sneakers, onto my sock. I tried to shake them off, but nothing I did disturbed them. Before long, I was sweeping them off my own calves. I kept instinctively taking a step back from some distressing concentration

of ants, only to remember that I was standing in the center of an exponentially larger concentration of ants.

There was nowhere to go. The ants were horrifying—as in, they inspired horror. Eventually, I scribbled in my notebook: “I can’t concentrate on what anyone’s saying. Ants all over me. Phantom itches. Scratching hands, ankles, now my left eye.” It’s the quantity of crazy ants that’s so destabilizing.

This story makes your skin crawl, doesn’t it? And, this is merely a predictive warning of worse things to come.

These types of pestilence-plagues will increase in number and intensity and duration because we live in an obstinate, hardhearted culture—much the same as the attitude of Pharaoh—a sinful society.

Here is what God promises in Deuteronomy 28 to such people, especially to the descendants of the Israelites:

Deuteronomy 28:58-59 If you do not carefully observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, THE LORD YOUR GOD, then the LORD will bring upon you and your descendants extraordinary plagues—great and prolonged plagues—

Deuteronomy 28:21 The LORD will make the plague cling to you until He has consumed you from the land . . .

We have not yet experienced the full brunt of God’s wrath as a society, and we certainly don’t want to. But this small feel for what is in store for flagrant sinners should, at the very least, make us squirm! But more importantly it should make us thankful that God promises that if we submit to Him, “Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out” (Deuteronomy 28:6), and part of that blessing is not having these things crawling all over you.