

Series: **Exodus: Seeing God in the Journey**
Title: **Don't Harden Your Heart - Plagues**
Text: **Exodus 7:1-10:29**

Story – Mine

Hawaii – two four-year-olds. Sharing
Grandma gave a truck to my grandson.
The other boy was not happy with this – he desired it back.
Maverick had heard the word “gift” and held tight to the prize.

Story – My way

- Driving pre GPS: take this exit or that exit? ... She said, he said.
- They went his way. Wasn't long before they turned around and went the other way.

Today we are going to look at the events that took place when Moses told Pharaoh that God wanted him to let His people go. But Pharaoh said, NO! Mine... MY way!

We do, too.

God calls us to Himself and to live for Him and we say, “No! My life is mine!”

No, I want to live it my way.

I want to live by my rules, my values, my morals. My idols

Many times Moses told Pharaoh, “Let my people go!”

After the first time, Pharaoh made it more difficult on the people by keeping the quota of bricks that had to be made, but took away the straw.

The next ten times, we will see a sequence:

- the word of God proclaimed
- The word rejected
- A plague against Egypt's gods
- Either a hardening of a heart or false repentance and rejection by Pharaoh

I want us to hear two points today and take them to heart...literally.

1. God wants all of your heart and wants to be loved more than the things that are important and seemed life-giving to you.
2. Do not harden your heart to the Lord.

Let's look at the first point.

GOD WANTS TO BE FIRST IN YOUR HEART

God wants all of your heart and wants to be loved more than the things that are important and seem life-giving to you.

“Let my people go that they might serve (worship) me in the wilderness.”

Exodus 5:1

...*'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'*

- God is calling his people to a place of worship and service.
- God is calling His people to turn their hearts to Him over what they hold dear.

The whole thing was that God is worthy of our worship, and we are called to worship.
The question is, what is standing in the way?

The chapters we are looking at today are the second major reading of the Jewish calendar each year.

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Parshat – the section of the reading of the Torah

Vaera – “I am the Lord. I appeared...”

The Parshat Vaera

Exodus 6:2-4

² *God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the Lord. ³ I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. ⁴ I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners.”*

“I am the Lord. I appeared” 6:3

This story is not about Pharaoh.

It is not about Egypt.

It is not about the gods of Egypt.

It is not even about the Israelites.

It is about GOD.

He is calling us to HIM

- That we might know Him by name

Va'eira, Va'era, or Vaera (ואֶרָא—Hebrew for "and I appeared," the first word that God speaks in the *parashah*, in Exodus 6:3) is the fourteenth weekly Torah portion (פְּרָשָׁה, *parashah*) in the annual Jewish cycle of Torah readings and the second in the Book of Exodus. It constitutes Exodus 6:2–9:35.

Chapters 7-12 speak of plagues that come against Egypt. Each one of these plagues shows God standing against one of the gods or idols or deities of Egypt. He is showing that He is God over all gods and there is none like HIM.

7 – water to blood

8 – frogs, lice, and flies

9 – cattle, boils, hail

10 – locust, darkness

11 – final warning

12 – first born

God versus gods

	PLAGUE	GODS OF EGYPT
1	WATER TURNED TO BLOOD Exodus 7:14-25	• Khnum - Guardian of river's source. • Hapi - Spirit of the Nile. • Osiris - Nile was his bloodstream.
2	FROGS Exodus 8:1-15	• Hapi } Frog goddess to Egypt. • Heqt } Both related to fertility
3	LICE Exodus 8:16-19	• Seb The earth god of Egypt
4	FLIES Exodus 8:20-32	• Uatchit - The fly god of Egypt.
5	DISEASE ON CATTLE Exodus 9:1-7	• Ptah • Mnevis } Egyptian gods associated • Hathor • Amon } bulls and cows.
6	BOILS Exodus 9:8-12	• Sekhmet - Egyptian goddess of Epidemics • Serapis } Egyptian gods of healing. • Imhotep }
7	HAIL Exodus 9:13-35	• Nut - Egyptian sky goddess. • Isis & Seth - Egyptian agriculture deities. • Shu - Egyptian god of the atmosphere.
8	LOCUSTS Exodus 10:1-20	• Serapia - Egyptian deity protector from Locusts
9	DARKNESS Exodus 10:21-29	• Re • Amon-re • Aten } Egyptian sun gods. • Atum • Horus } • Thoth - Egyptian moon god.

I have placed a chart in you bulletin for your reference, but I do not want to address each one of these today.

Certainly, the plagues do show, among other things, that the true God is more powerful than idols.

- And it has become popular in recent years for teachers to connect each plague with an Egyptian false god. That's probably not an altogether bad way to approach the passage, but I'm not sure it's the best way.
- I have resisted doing this when I teach through Exodus, for a few reasons:
- It seems to me that we could take nearly any ancient pantheon of false gods and do the same thing.
 - The fact that the Egyptian idols can be made to match up with the plagues is not actually as uncanny as it appears to be, the first time you hear it done.
- God hit the Egyptians where it hurt:
 - ... In the things that were important and seemed life-giving to them.
 - It no surprise, really, that these are also things the Egyptians had idols for.
 - So God might have picked the plagues to match up with the idols, but we could just as easily say he picked the plagues to get the Egyptians' attention by striking at things that mattered, or to inflict a comprehensive punishment, or to show that he is Lord over all that gives life—and not directly to expose the false gods.
- Most importantly, the text in Exodus does not point our attention much to the Egyptians' false gods.

- There is repeated emphasis in the text on God being more powerful than Pharaoh, but only one mention of him judging the gods of Egypt (in Exodus 12:12)—even though it would have been easy to insert it more often if that were the basis for the particular plagues.
- There are only so many things I can focus on when teaching or studying a passage, and I usually prefer to emphasize the same things the author keeps mentioning.

So, the plagues matching up with Egyptian idols is probably a fair observation, and it's okay to dig into a passage and notice things beneath the surface, or to apply cultural scholarship.

But to me, this framework also sounds a bit like a scholar trying too hard to uncover a new way to look at the text when the key points are already stated for us upfront.

The narrator tells us plainly that the plagues are intended to showcase God's power.

- They are intended to show his caring devotion to his people.
- They are a demonstration of his covenant faithfulness to the patriarchs.
- They are a judgment on Egypt for its mistreatment of the Israelites.
- And they are part of a plan to harden Pharaoh's heart and end up plundering Egypt.

Rather than spend my time running through a list of Egyptian idols, which aren't even named in the text, I'd rather focus on some of those themes that very clearly are in the text and are mentioned multiple times.

The real key here is that when is calling us to Himself, God hits us where it matters so we give all to Him.

Nothing must come before Him in our lives.

Throughout this story we see negotiating going on.

- Pharaoh says “No.”
- Pharaoh repents and agrees.
- Pharaoh reneges on it and says “No” again.
- Pharaoh says they can go, but no kids.
- Pharaoh says they can go, but no cattle or sheep.
- People and advisors are begging Pharaoh to obey...but he will not.

Jer. 17:10

“I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.”

Matt 22:37

And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

What must God do to gain your attention?

What is God fighting against to get control of your heart?

The second point for us to take away today is that:

WE ARE NOT TO HARDEN OUR HEARTS TO THE LORD

God hardened Pharaoh's heart, or Pharaoh hardened his own heart?

Exodus 7:3, 4

³ But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, ⁴ Pharaoh will not listen to you...

Ex. 8:15

But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.

We see verses throughout that reveal Pharaoh's heart that is hard against what God wants. From the beginning he is against it.

We also see verses that say that God will and does harden Pharaoh's heart.

Ex. 8:19b; 8:32; 9:7; 9:12; 9:14-17; 9:27-28; 34-35; 10:16-17, 20, 27

God hardens heart, or Pharaoh hardened His own heart?

Which is it?

GOD KNOWS

Currency Illustration



God, outside the timeline, KNOWS.

- He sees all of the timeline.
- He knows who will obey and who will not.

Rom. 9:14-18

¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." ¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." [Ex. 9:16] ¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

God sees and knows.

BUT – We, inside our timeline, must make a choice – the other side of the bill!

GOD GIVES YOU OVER

Paul in Romans shows the path of the person who walks away from God to the point where God gives them over to their desires

Romans 1:18-23, 24, 25, 28

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ 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. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them up... because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator...

²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator... ²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up...

John, in Revelation, shows the hardening of the hearts of the people who are being judged in the bowls of wrath. At any point they could repent, but they do not.

Rev 9:20-21

²⁰ The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, ²¹ nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Other verses say they cursed God:

Rev 16:9, 10-11, 21

⁹ ...and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory. ¹⁰ ... People gnawed their tongues in anguish ¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds. ²¹ ... and they cursed God...

GOD IS GIVING EACH OF US A CHOICE

Hebrews 4:6-7

⁶ Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷ again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

CHALLENGE

Let us not have anything that is before Him in our hearts.

Let us not harden our heart.

Let us lean in closer and choose to worship Him.