

# The Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart

Exodus Chapter 7

Good morning saints!

This opening slide reminds me of the fact that I was forced to take Latin for four years in High School. A quote from Cicero:

*“Any man can make a mistake, but only an idiot persists in his error.”*

It speaks of **stubbornness**.

**SLIDE:** Welcome >

We’re continuing on in the Book of Exodus today and going to look at the Pharaoh, his **stubbornness** and how God – through the plagues – is going to try to change Pharaoh’s way of thinking and convince him that concept of polytheism is a big mistake with eternal consequences.

Speaking of stubbornness, I ran across a cute story...

~STORY OF MULE (STUBBORN animal)

A pastor went to his church office on Monday morning and discovered a dead mule in the church yard. He telephoned the police. Since there did not appear to be any foul play, the police referred the Pastor to the Health Department.

They explained, *"Since there was no health threat, you'll need to call the Sanitation Department."*

When the pastor called the Sanitation Department, the Manager of the Sanitation Department said, *"I can't pick up that dead mule without authorization from the mayor."*

The Pastor was not at all too eager to call the mayor, who possessed a very bad temper and was always extremely unpleasant and hard to deal with, but, eventually, he called the mayor.

The mayor lived up to his well-deserved reputation. After about 5 minutes of ranting and raving, he said to the pastor: *"Why did you call me anyway? Isn't **your** job to bury the dead?"*

The pastor paused for a brief prayer, and asked the Lord to direct his response. The lord led the pastor to the words he was seeking, *"Yes, Mayor, it IS my job to bury the dead, **BUT I always like to notify the next of kin first!**"*

stubbornness... certainly the Pharaoh of the Exodus *was* stubborn... but was that a// his fault?

**SLIDE:** God Hardens PHARAOH'S HEART >

Here's what God told Moses BEFORE sending him to Pharaoh:

"But I **will harden Pharaoh's heart**, that I may multiply My signs and marvels in the land of Egypt. When Pharaoh does not heed you, I will lay My hand upon Egypt and deliver My ranks, My people the Israelites, from the land of Egypt with extraordinary chastisements." Exodus 7:3-4

It seems that God planned **FROM THE GET-GO** to harden Pharaoh's heart so that he *won't* listen.

**SLIDE:** ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM >

So, today, I want to look at the **ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM:**

- God hardened Pharaoh's heart

<**Click:** IS THAT FAIR?>

Is Pharaoh **STILL** to blame for his actions? What might have happened if God hadn't gotten involved?

This is the *ELEPHANT in the room* regarding the Exodus story and, in truth, many people use this point as a main reason for their non-belief.

- The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart raises both a **THEOLOGICAL PUZZLE AND A MORAL PROBLEM**: What happens to Pharaoh’s free will?

According to the simple meaning of the text, it seems like God *took away* Pharaoh's free will – how could He do such a thing? Isn't it a fundamental principle of Jewish/Christian thought of that God *doesn't* deprive humans of free will?

- To the extent that Pharaoh’s free will was compromised by God Himself, how can this same God hold Pharaoh responsible for his actions?

It seems clear that people are responsible for their choices **ONLY IF THEY** are the ones **MAKING THOSE CHOICES**.

- If you take away our *independence*, and you also take away our *responsibility* – don't you?
  - So if God deprived Pharaoh of free will at one point – say after Plague #6 — **WHERE'S THE JUSTICE** in inflicting Plague #7, #8, #9 and #10 upon him?

**Furthermore:** God changing Pharaoh’s mind also DOESN’T seem to make a WHOLE LOT OF SENSE. On the one hand God is sending Moses to Pharaoh to say, “*Let My people go!*” At then, He’s making Pharaoh say “*No! No! No!*”

Why is Pharaoh punished by God for stubbornness that wasn’t really his fault?

Is this some kind of amusing game? Is ***GOD PLAYING CHESS WITH HIMSELF?***

**Point >**

Interesting questions that – if they *remain* UNSATISFACTORILY answered – flow into the common view of God in the OT that is MOSTLY TWISTED.

Bill’s message several weeks ago: ***WHEN YOU HAVE SEEN JESUS, YOU HAVE SEEN THE FATHER*** – which means that – in Jesus – you see **the Father’s** character, His holiness, His compassion, His willingness to forgive someone who is repentant.

- So, why do many people have the view that God in the OT is mostly an angry Judge – NOT the loving Father in the NT?
- “To be right with God the judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is a greater.”<sup>1</sup>
- **WHY DID JESUS SEE THAT, AND MOST PEOPLE TODAY DO NOT?**

Well – part of the answer is that Jesus was **NOT** at a language disadvantaged – He could understanding the meaning of the Hebrew text.

- I think that we’ll see that the actual meaning of the text regarding “hardening of Pharaoh’s heart” is far different that we have been led to believe.

Ok –

### ***Where we are in the Exodus story***

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Last time, Moses and Aaron go to the Pharaoh for their initial **MEET-AND-GREET** session and relay God’s message about letting the Israelites go for a 3-day trip to worship Him.

- The Pharaoh says **“NO WAY JOSE”** – and decrees that the Israelites now have to get their own straw for making but without a decrease in output quotas.
- So, the results of the first meeting is that Pharaoh **LAUGHS AT MOSES** and the people want to **SKIN HIM ALIVE!**
- Moses goes back to God and says *“See – I told You that I’m not the right man for this job – I’m unqualified.”*
- God just ignores him and tells him to go back to the Pharaoh.

OK – that’s where we are at the start of Chapter 7.

Let’s start reading in Chapter 7.

**SLIDE:** CHAPTER 7 >

“Then the Lord said to Moses, “See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land. But I will **HARDEN<sup>2</sup> (qashah)** Pharaoh’s heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders

in the land of Egypt. When Pharaoh does not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments. The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst." So Moses and Aaron did it; as the Lord commanded them, thus they did. Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "When Pharaoh says to you, 'Perform a wonder,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, and it will become a snake.'" So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the Lord had commanded; Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by their secret arts. Each one threw down his staff, and they became snakes; but Aaron's staff swallowed up theirs. 13 Still Pharaoh's heart was **HARDENED**<sup>3</sup> (**chazaq-** *khaw-zak'*) and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said."



## SNAKE

So, these two elderly men trudge back for the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting with Pharaoh with these instructions:

**SLIDE:** WORK A MIRACLE

Verse 9:

“When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, ‘**Work a miracle**,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.’”

Aaron throws the staff on the ground and the staff became a serpent – which was the 1<sup>st</sup> sign that had been given to Moses back there at the burning bush.

The text says “Pharaoh also called for the wise men and the sorcerers, and they also, the **magicians** of Egypt, did the same with **their secret arts**. 12 For each one threw down his staff and they turned into serpents.

The translation says that “*the **magicians** did the same with their **magic arts**.*” In reality, they were sorcerers, witches.<sup>4</sup> The word “*magician*” loses some of the context behind their actions. We tend to think of the party magician, slight-of-hand masters —> but these people were different, so it’s

better to call them “witches” to give the proper connotation of **OCCULT POWER**.<sup>1</sup>

- It’s interesting that the Hebrew word for “*magic arts*” is ‘lahat’, which means “*flaming*”<sup>5</sup> or “*to burn, to set on fire*,” which would suggest that they produced things out of their sorcery. We are dealing here with the occult.

**SLIDE:** WHY SNAKES?

- Question: Why snakes?

Because Pharaoh literally WORE the image of a serpent on his royal headdress; the serpent was the Egyptian symbol of *kingly authority and healing*. This was a direct insult and a questioning of Pharaoh’s authority.

Few people like snakes. Remember how Moses recoiled in horror when he first saw the miracle performed at the burning bush.

- **RATTLESNAKE IN RI**<sup>6</sup> – relate my fear of moving past it on the trail.

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<sup>1</sup> *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* : engraver, writer, only in derived sense of one possessed of occult knowledge, diviner, astrologer, magician

- I believe that it is significant that this is FIRST miracle performed before Pharaoh -> the champion of polytheism, who had all the demons behind him posing as gods - and yet, God's snake swallowed all of their snakes!
- God is in control- God's snake was overwhelming victorious!

Here was a little **PREVIEW** of **THE POWER OF GOD**:

**Point** > In Christ - "Death has been swallowed up in victory." 1 Corinthians 15:54

He will swallow up death for all time, And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the LORD has spoken. Isaiah 25:8

Pharaoh just turns his back, hardens his heart and walks out of the room. WHY? Because the witches of Egypt could also perform the miracle, and Pharaoh was thinking that Moses was probably **JUST A BETTER MAGICIAN** than his were, not that Yehovah was involved.

This would be the last warning shot fired over Pharaoh's bow.

- ***“If you want to play soft, we’ll play it soft. You want to play it hard. Let’s play it hard.”***<sup>7</sup>

We’ll get into the INDIVIDUAL plagues in the next presentation.

- What I want to do today is to put the whole *“plague thing”* and the *hardening of Pharaoh’s heart* in its PROPER CONTEXT.

Remember that we’ve discussed that there is a **HIDDEN AGENDA** going on here with God’s choice of 10 plagues, because He is evidently taking the long way around to Canaan when He could have just whisked the Israelites out of Egypt and there was nothing the Pharaoh could have done to stop Him.

- The hidden agenda was to demonstrate that there is only One God, Who is the **CREATOR**.
- And this would open up a **RADICALLY DIFFERENT** way of **RELATING TO HIM** than is possible with the polytheistic worldview.

***PHARAOH MUST AGREE***

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Rabbi David Fohrman<sup>8</sup>

We noted that God is taking the *long-way around* with Pharaoh to achieve the freedom of the Israelites – going thru 10 plagues. Being the Sovereign God of the Universe, He *could* have used a magic carpet to whisk them away, or teleportation, or He could have played **RAP MUSIC: THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN THE ONLY PLAGUE NECESSARY – AT LEAST FOR ME!**

But...

**SLIDE:** PHARAOH HAS TO AGREE? WHY? >

For some unspecified reason, there appears to be an **UNWRITTEN RULE** throughout the Exodus narrative, a rule that God is *choosing* to adhere to: the Israelites aren’t going anywhere *unless* Pharaoh says they are.

If **I** were God, they would have been singing that John Denver song – “Leaving on a Jet Plane”: *“All my bags are packed, ready to go. I’m standing here outside your door. I hate to wake you up to say goodbye. But the dawn is breaking, it’s early morn. The taxi’s waiting, he’s blowing his horn, already I’m so lonesome I could die. ‘Cause I’m leaving on a*

*jet plane, don’t know when I’ll be back again, Oh babe, I hate to go.”*

God has all the power in the world. Just declare: “*Let My people go!*” — and leave out this *silliness* about *three days*.

Why is Pharaoh’s *consent* so important to God? Why would God go to such lengths to *secure* that consent, even to the point of asking Pharaoh — **SEEMINGLY DECEPTIVELY** — for just a **THREE-DAY JOURNEY**? What was God’s agenda? What was He really after?

**Tactical problem:** From a tactical standpoint, it just doesn’t seem to make any sense to do it this way.

Why – at that very moment that Pharaoh finally says “Yes” – does God *seem to interfere* with Pharaoh’s free will and make him say no? Wasn’t this the moment we had all been waiting for?

- Suddenly, we’re all back to square one. Why would God do that?
- **Why bother asking Pharaoh for his consent in the first place?**
  - It’s a **CATCH-22**. Does God care about Pharaoh’s free-willed consent, or not?

- If He DOES, then once Pharaoh gives that consent, the game should be over.
- And if God *DOESN'T* care about that consent, why needlessly ask for it to begin with? Either way, the story as we have it doesn't seem to add up.

### WHAT'S THE PLAN?

- What if the monarch of the most powerful polytheistic society recognizes and submits to the Creator?

You have to remember that Egypt was the greatest world power in the ancient world and they were also the society most voted polytheism. They worshipped a pantheon of gods and their Ruler, Pharaoh, was convinced that he himself was a god.

- What if you get that Ruler to understand that's it's *all a lie*, that in fact there is only One God Who is in charge of all powers in the universe, including him?

What if you could get him to see that worship is not just a matter of bartering with whichever god serves your self-interest at a particular moment – but that worship involves an idea of morality – that people are duty bound to rise to the expectations of their Creator and that one of those people is Pharaoh himself?

If that happens with the chief polytheist in all the world, then polytheists throughout the centuries could never honestly doubt the idea that there is one Creator God in charge of everything; they could just look back at the historical example of Egypt. There could be no greater historical testament to the truth on monotheism than this.

- But, if Pharaoh doesn't submit to this realization, then God will still use Egypt and the Pharaoh as the stage upon which the truth of monotheism is played out.

Pharaoh will either willingly agree that Yehovah is the Creator and become a partner with Yehovah, or he will not agree and become a pawn. Either way, God will demonstrate reality to Pharaoh, the Israelites and any Egyptian whose heart is opened to see it. Pharaoh will be given every chance at redemption, but even if he refuses it, the demonstration of monotheism will occur.

- OK – let's look at the issue of free will: does God VIOLATE Pharaoh's free will along the way?



**SLIDE:** WHO DID THE HARDENING? >

That’s a good question. The text says that Pharaoh’s heart was hardened after each plague. Let’s look at WHO did the hardening – I think it will be a surprise to many.

Well, – *early on* – Pharaoh is the one making his own heart either strong or heavy. This is an indication of Pharaoh’s emotional reaction to these initial plagues.

<clicks> beginning with the incident with the *snakes* and then thru the first 5 plagues, Pharaoh is hardening his own heart.

- # 1. Blood
- # 2. Frogs
- # 3. Lice
- # 4. Flies
- # 5. Diseased Livestock

<click> But, when you get to Plague #6 (BOILS), God steps in.

Then after Plague #7, <click> we see a **COMBINATION** where Pharaoh hardening his own heart and God *also subsequently* hardens/seals it just prior to the next plague – the Plague #8 = locusts.

- Then, after plague #8, 9 and 10, it is God Who hardens Pharaoh’s heart.

- So, early on, Pharaoh did the hardening on his own, but at a certain point, God took over and did it the rest of the way.

Does this show that God is responsible for Pharaoh’s hard heart? God did *all* the hardening after Plague #7, so why blame Pharaoh for his actions?

- In order to answer the question, we need to realize that we’re missing a **VITAL PART** of the picture, because it doesn’t show **WHAT TYPE** of hardening is occurring. So, let’s look at that...

**SLIDE:** TYPES OF HARDENING<sup>9</sup>

The text in Exodus uses **TWO COMPLETELY DIFFERENT WORDS** to describe the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart: *chizuk halev* (*khaw-zak’ ha-lev*), on the one hand and *kibud halev* (*kaw-bad’ ha-lev*), on the other hand.

- (JUST A REMINDER – I DON’T PRETEND TO KNOW HEBREW MYSELF...)
- **Click>** The first one is from the root word 'kabad'<sup>10</sup> (*kaw-bad'*), which means “heavy”; insensible; *dull of the eyes*,

*so as to be unable to see.* Voluntarily stubborn – like a mule

- Click> The second is from the root word 'chazak'<sup>11</sup> (*khaw-zak'*), which means “strong”, courageous -> You convince yourself up about your chances of successfully doing something.

Most Bibles translate both words as “hardened”, although good Bibles will provide footnotes:

**SLIDE:** EXAMPLES OF FOOTNOTES

Here are two passages from Exodus containing the English word ‘*harden*’. Both passages refer to what the Pharaoh is doing to his heart himself. If you look closely, you may see that the word *harden* is footnoted in each passage. When you call-up the footnotes, you see that the actual meaning of “*harden*” in these two passages are very different – because two different Hebrew words are being used.

- In the first passage (talking about Plague #1 – the Nile River turning to Blood), the Hebrew word is 'chazak' (*khaw-zak'*) – which means “to make strong” or “to give yourself courage”.

- Pharaoh says to himself: “*no big deal – it’s not that impressive – I can continue.*”
  
- In the second passage talking about Plague #2 (frogs), the Hebrew word is 'kabad' (*kaw-bad*), which connotes “*made heavy*” or “*make hard*”. Pharaoh sees something that *begins* to unnerve him but he chooses to close off his heart and not face reality.
  - Pharaoh says to himself: “*This **IS** bad, **BUT** nobody is going to make me change my mind.*”

So, in one instance, Pharaoh is:

- ✓ Giving himself *courage* (*pumping himself up*) -> he puts on his superhero costume – he *sees* the reality but convinces himself that he *can* persevere; and in the other...
- ✓ He is making his heart *hard* – being *stubborn* – he *refuses* to see the reality of the situation > like the three monkeys: hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil.

**SLIDE:** TYPES OF HARDENING (AGAIN)

So, whenever we have two different words being used in Scripture that are **translated** as the same thing in English, it's a good indication that they *probably do not MEAN exactly the same thing*.

- **HEAVY** heart? – hear no evil, see no evil, and speak no evil. **IGNORE THE PLAIN FACTS IN FRONT OF YOU**. (Hint: think about “heavy” as in difficult to lift or move) –> **STUBBORN**
- What images are conjured up when you think of a **STRONG** heart? –> **COURAGEOUS**
  - Movie –> **BRAVEHEART**

**STRONG HEART:** Intuitively, I think many of us would gravitate towards a strong heart. The word 'chazak' (*khaw-zak*) – implies **STRENGTH** of heart – a heart that is **COURAGEOUS**. When someone gives himself a courageous heart, he is giving himself a **PEP-TALK**. *I know things are bad, but I can go on anyway.*

**HARD HEART:** A heavy or hard heart is a *stubborn heart* – IT **IGNORES THE PLAIN FACTS IN FRONT OF IT**; a “heavy heart” conveys a sort of *inability to accept the truth*, even if it's staring you in the face.

So, let's look at which word is being used when God hardens Pharaoh's heart during a particular plague.

- Is He giving Pharaoh a kind of 'chizuk ha-lev,' a kind of *courage to continue doing what he really wants to do*, or is He is closing off the heart 'kibud ha-lev,' a kind of *stubbornness where facts no longer make any impact*.

Let's look through the verses and see how these words are being used.

**SLIDE:** The PLAGUES AND TYPES OF HARDENING >

Pharaoh and Yehovah – WHO did the hardening after in each Plague?

[<click>](#) Remember – 'chazak' (*khaw-zak*) is giving the heart courage to continue, and 'kabed' (*kaw-bad*) is making it hard and stubborn and refusing to see the reality.

[<click>](#) So – we again see Pharaoh hardening his own heart thru the first five plagues but **IN DIFFERENT WAYS**.

- Sometimes, Pharaoh gives himself courage – **HE PSYCHES HIMSELF UP**.

- At other times, he harden his heart in order to **REFUSE TO SEE THE REALITY.**

- So, up thru Plague #5, God hasn’t taken *any* action regarding Pharaoh’s free-will choices.

➤ But – Please Notice THAT THERE IS A CHANGE in the TYPE of hardening after plague #2 and then after #3 & 4.

- In Plague #2 – frogs -> Pharaoh sees something that gets him *uneasy* – ‘**PRECISION**’ (I’ll explain this later – but basically, it is that God can STOP the plague at a **precise point in time**, *unlike* the normal polytheistic gods). So, the Pharaoh hardens his heart in order to ignore **THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS ABILITY.**
- Pharaoh *ignores* the impact of plague #3 – LICE/Gnats – and gives himself courage.
- But, he has a different reaction to Plagues #4 & #5 – He gets stubborn again – makes his heart heavy. Why? [<click>](#) Perhaps it was because – up to then – the plagues affected *everyone* – the Egyptians AND the Israelites.

- [<click>](#) But, starting in plague #4, however, the plagues will ONLY affect the Egyptians.
- Pharaoh probably had been thinking “*I can endure this discomfort as long as those Hebrews slaves can*” and thus only needed to “pump himself up” to continue to struggle. But... ALL OF A SUDDEN, the Hebrews are NOT being affected at all.
- Oh-Oh! Pharaoh then *loses* courage of heart and has to harden his heart, to become stubborn to reality, in order to continue his opposition to God.

[<click>](#) Then, we get to plague #6 – BOILS. The text says:

The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians as well as on all the Egyptians. And the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the Lord had spoken to Moses. Vs. 11-12

The magicians functioned in many roles, a major one was as advisors and spiritual counsellors to the Pharaoh. Up to now, they no doubt had been whispering in the Pharaoh’s ear about what to do.



- But they're covered with boils – which revealed their complete powerlessness before the Hebrew God. **So they now hide under their beds in shame.**
- Pharaoh is confused about what to do, and so God steps in.

Verse 12 of chapter 9 says that ***GOD strengthens*** Pharaoh's heart, making him more ***COURAGEOUS***.

- Ok – Here it is – for the *very first time*, God explicitly acts on Pharaoh's heart. ***IS THIS OUR SMOKING GUN?*** Have we caught God interfering with Pharaoh's free will?

### ***Pharaoh is to be given every the chance to agree***

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Well – there is a *good* reason for this encouragement by God. Remember – **It is of paramount importance in this story of the plagues of Egypt that Pharaoh should come to an understanding of who God is, so that he may make a moral choice to obey or disobey Him, and thus be held accountable for his actions.**

- There is only **ONE PROBLEM** – **PHARAOH MIGHT GIVE IN – BUT FOR THE WRONG REASONS!**

What if he lets the Jews go – *not* because he theologically gives up when he realizes that God is the Creator – but because it’s **TOO HARD** for Egypt to continue to fight the battle?

- What if he gives in for *tactical* reasons but NOT actually for *moral or theological* reasons?

Well, in those instances when he is going to give in for the **wrong** reason...

- God can give him that courage to continue a bit longer with his non-kosher mindset as He (God) continues to work.

If God gave him the strength of will and the strength of heart to be able to continue to pursue his vision, we wouldn’t consider that *taking away* Pharaoh’s free will; it’s *strengthening* his free will.

- ✓ If you talk to someone going through a hard time and you give them a pep-talk and you can give them courage, you haven’t taken away their free will, you’ve given them the power to achieve the vision they want.

So really, what God might to be saying to Pharaoh: “**Look – if you ever want to give in because you think it is too hard to**

*continue, but you would RATHER continue fighting, I will give you the courage to see your vision through. You decide. Do you think it makes **theological** sense to give up?"*

The idea that *chizuk halev* (*encouraging and strengthening the heart*) might well be an ENHANCEMENT of Pharaoh's free will. And then, over and over again, if you look at the language; what God does is this language of strengthening – **GOD STRENGTHENS HIS FREE WILL.**

#### PLAGUE 7

So, after plague #6 (Boils), Pharaoh evidently was wavering – – not because He realizes that he is up against the Creator but because this battle is becoming too much of an irritation. He's about to give in and let the Jews go *for the wrong reason.*

So God gives Pharaoh the *courage* to continue to do what he really wants to do in order to get him to the **FATEFUL PLAGUE #7** (HAIL).

- It turns out that there **IS** a point where Pharaoh actually **GETS THE TRUTH**, understands it and, strangely, it's NOT after the tenth plague; it's after the **SEVENTH** one.

- This is THE WHOLE POINT of the plagues to date – to get the Pharaoh to this very point!
- This is the **TIPPING POINT!**

- We’ll get into the reasons *why* this plague opened Pharaoh’s eyes next time, but just know that it is *this* plague that causes Pharaoh to finally realize that – by opposing Yehovah – he is actually sinning.  
--- You don’t sin against a polytheistic god because there’s no morality involved, just a bargaining of self-interest. But you CAN sin against your Creator!

AND – Pharaoh **ADMITS** that he has sinned (verse 27 of ch. 9).

God used this 7<sup>th</sup> plague to **SOW A SEED** in Pharaoh’s heart – Pharaoh has a flash of realization regarding the truth.

But – as Jesus said in the **PARABLE OF THE SOWER** (Matthew 13:5–6) – this seed was sown “...on the rocky place, where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.” (note: substituted “it” for “they”)

The seed was planted, but when the plague is over – *when the sun came up* – <click> the Pharaoh hardens his own heart in **two** ways –

- first by a self-imposed **rocky** stubbornness (9:34) in order to block out the reality that there is only One God – and then,
- he **PSYCHES HIMSELF UP** with the courage to continue on (9:35).

<click> This was the **FINAL STRAW** in God's patience with this man – the final chance for the Pharaoh. The Scripture says that God will not strive with man forever (Genesis 6:3).

God seals Pharaoh's heart in its rocky stubbornness. The Pharaoh had kept God's chosen people in a cruel slavery for years – but God *still* gave him a chance at redemption – and Pharaoh has now seen the truth and turned his back on it. There was no going back now.

- Pharaoh made this choice of his own free will. What little opening for repentance that did remain, Pharaoh *voluntarily* sealed it off, and God reinforces his free-will decision. -> If that's what you want, that's what you'll get.

- <click> From now on, the plagues are meant to demonstrate to the world and to Israel Who is in charge – God only has to give Pharaoh the courage to *persist* in his error to the final end. And as Cicero said – only an idiot does that!

**SLIDE:** AGAINST YOUR FREE WILL? >

So – to answer the question about God taking away Pharaoh's free will, let's go thru a logical progression of thought: <clicks>

- Suppose that you **REALLY** want to do something.
- But you're **AFRAID** to do it (because of consequences – jail, getting beat up, losing your job, etc.)
- But then God gives you the **COURAGE TO DO IT** (so that you no longer worry about any consequences) – **and you make the choice without any pressure from Him.**
- Is that really **AGAINST YOUR FREE WILL?**

I would say that the answer is NO! God never forced Pharaoh to do anything that he really –deep down – didn't want to do.

- Me dreaming as a teenager – ***THE TWILIGHT ZONE – A KIND OF A STOPWATCH***,<sup>12</sup>  
Stopwatch that freezes time. Man uses the stopwatch to break into a bank vault, but while carting out a pile of cash, he drops the watch. It breaks, leaving time permanently frozen

God was giving Pharaoh a chance to repent.

You see – God 'is not wishing that any should perish,' nor has he any 'pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live ...'<sup>2</sup>

The only thing that God does to Pharaoh is strengthen his heart, giving him *more courage* and determination to **stick to his vision** – if deep-down – that's what he really wanted to do.

- If anything, by lending Pharaoh more courage, God is ***INCREASING PHARAOH'S FREE WILL***, to choose to continue fighting.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 33:11

**SLIDE:** SUPPRESSED THE TRUTH

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth [in unrighteousness]...

Therefore...”

**SLIDE:** GAVE THEM OVER

*Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.*

*Romans 1:22-24*

*“Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts – God gave them up or God gave them over.” He gave them then exactly what they wanted. God was not forcing something on them from the outside. God wasn't saying “Poof, I'm making you impure.” Rather... **THE JUDGMENT OF GOD WAS; YOU MAY HAVE WHAT YOU WANT.** Do you understand that the very worst thing God could ever do to us is to give us what we want? That constitutes the judgment of God, that He withdraws His hand that restrains us and gives us over to what we want.*



So people need to stop looking at God as giving to Pharaoh a hardened heart, as if He came to Pharaoh, who really wanted a soft heart, then God forced on him by a direct internal act a hard heart. No, that's not the case. This was no act of God against Pharaoh's will. God gave to Pharaoh what he wanted to be. He chose to be in opposition to God and so God gave him what he wanted.

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## ***Believe vs Commitment***

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### **SLIDE:** BELIEF VS COMMITMENT<sup>14</sup>

This brings us to a question that is less difficult when applying it to Pharaoh, but much MORE difficult when we apply it to OUR OWN LIVES, and it is this:

- WHAT DOES A PERSON GAIN FROM:
  - 1) Believing that God, Yehovah, exists and is powerful;  
and
  - 2) By complying with God's instruction?
  
- Well – Pharaoh most certainly ***BELIEVED***, even before the final plague, that Yehovah was a real god, and very powerful.
  
- He also, in the end, ***COMPLIED*** by letting Israel go, knowing it would mean the end of Egypt as a power.

QUESTION: Does that mean that *Pharaoh* was now *righteous* before God Almighty?

We could pretty easily answer, NO.

**But, how about us....you and me?**

- what if we believe that God exists, and we comply with most of the instructions He has given us, **ARE WE THEREFORE RIGHTEOUS BEFORE GOD?**

Depending on which Christian denomination you adhere to, the answer could differ. We have here, in the Exodus story of Pharaoh, the **FRIGHTENING AND PERFECTLY CLEAR ANSWER** to the question:

- Simply *performing* whatever act that God has commanded of you, either thru legalistic motives or from fear of punishment, does NOT bring righteousness.
- *Believing* that God exists does not bring righteousness.

One of the worst words ever chosen to explain a righteous relationship with God is the word "belief" or "**BELIEVE**".

➤ How often I have heard an evangelist call unbelievers to belief in God that they might be saved.

➤ **WELL, PHARAOH BELIEVED, DIDN'T HE?**

**RIGHTEOUSNESS IS NOT ACQUIRED** by adherence to God's commands, nor to the doubtless belief that He exists.

**RIGHTEOUSNESS IS ACQUIRED BY TRUSTING GOD**, and then Yehovah in turn **DECLARING** one to be righteous.

➤ **DECLARING** us righteous

➤ Pharaoh believed, but he didn't TRUST God.

Jesus said that **EVEN IF ONE WERE RAISED FROM THE DEAD**, still they would not believe. (Luke 16:31)<sup>3</sup>

➤ **MIRACLES DO NOT CAUSE REPENTANCE**. I can see a hundred miracles, but unless I yield to the **GOD of the miracles**, I'm in a worst state at the end than I am at the beginning.

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<sup>3</sup> But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"

The difference between the heart and the intellect is seen in Proverbs 3:5–6...

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

The great issue of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century was, *How is a person justified?* Luther's controversial position was that we are justified by faith alone.

The crucial, most vital element of *saving faith* in the biblical sense, is that of PERSONAL TRUST.

- The final term is *fiducia*, referring to a fiduciary commitment by which I PUT MY LIFE IN THE LAP OF JESUS.

***I TRUST HIM AND HIM ALONE*** for my salvation. That is the crucial element, and it includes the *intellectual* and the *mental*.

- But it goes beyond it to ***THE HEART*** and to the will so that the whole person is caught up in this experience we call faith."<sup>15</sup>

### MY BACKGROUND

I have mentioned numerous times that I grew up Catholic and went to Catholic schools from the 7-12 grades.

When I look back at the good teachers I had – and there were many – I realized that Catholic instructors assume that you have accepted Christ as Lord and Savior, and therefore the rules seem to make sense.

- BUT THEY NEVER TOLD YOU THAT STRAIGHT OUT – or if they did, I didn't hear it.

So, what you often end up with is a bunch of kids trying to follow rules that you believe will make you a good person and liked by God. And when you can't keep up – over and over again – you get discouraged and eventually walk away.

For the seventh and eighth grades, I attended St Mary's School in Providence RI. Transportation got me there 45 minutes before school started, so I had the habit of waiting/attending daily mass each day for two years – actually that got me thru my 4<sup>th</sup> year Latin final in Catholic High School

- The Latin final was based on the translation of the mass in the *Roman Missal* prayer book – which had Latin on one page and the English translation on the

opposite page. After two years of daily following the mass based on this book, I knew it by heart. I consciously **MISTRANSLATED** three words on the Latin final so that the priest would not think I was doing this my memory – another thing I probably should have brought to confession!

During those two years at daily mass, I never took communion – the reason being that I knew that it was against the rules if you had not been completely honest in confession. I hated the idea of stripping my soul bare to another person because what would they might think of me – so I fudged the truth.

- Now – mind you – I abstained from communion because I *just a conscious kid* – a **non-believer** but someone who was consciously true to the rules I *could* keep.

I believed that I had to become worthy on my own merits. I knew that I was unworthy according to their rules.

- It wasn't until I was 30 years old that the Holy Spirit touched my heart and made it soft to the Gospel of Christ.

You see, all our efforts gain us nothing toward our salvation unless we respond to Him out of a type of love that can't even exist within us **UNLESS HE PUTS IT THERE HIMSELF.**

- If He hasn't done that for you yet, ask Him to today!

The principles we find in the OT are surprising aren't they? Genesis 15 said that **Abraham** was seen as righteous ONLY because he **trusted God**, so **God credited that trust as righteousness.**

- And, now we see here in Exodus that acknowledging that God exists, and legalistically or fearfully following His commands, does NOT bring righteousness. **Principles that we typically always thought only came into existence during NT times.**

**SLIDE:** TRUST

*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in  
God, Trust also in Me*



## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*
- <sup>2</sup> Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Hebrew #7185 'qashah', pronounced 'kaw-shaw', definition: make hard, stiff, stubborn, figurative of obstinacy
- <sup>3</sup> Strong’s Hebrew #2388 'chazaq', pronounced *khaw-zak'*, definition: to be or grow firm or strong, strengthen
- <sup>4</sup> Strong’s Hebrew # 2748. 'chartom', Phonetic Spelling: (*khar-tome'*), magicians;
- <sup>5</sup> Strong’s Hebrew # 3858. 'lahat', pronounced *lah'-hat*, definition: flaming, enchantment
- <sup>6</sup> My encounter in western RI was around 1971. According to the RI Department of Environmental Management, the non-poisonous Timber Rattlesnakes (*Crotalus horridus*) were once found in Rhode Island, but disappeared over thirty years ago. There are still rattlesnake populations in Connecticut and Massachusetts. <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/fishwild/pdf/risnakes.pdf>
- <sup>7</sup> From movie *The Fifth Element*, Bruce Willis as Korban Dallas.
- <sup>8</sup> Rabbi David Fohrman, *The Exodus You Almost Passed Over*, Chapter 2, Alpha Beta Press, 2016
- <sup>9</sup> AlephBeta Premium, Va’era Parsha Guide
- <sup>10</sup> Strong’s Hebrew #3513 'kabad', pronounced *kaw-bad'*, heavy, insensible, dull of the eyes, so as to be unable to see
- <sup>11</sup> Strong’s Hebrew #2388 'chazaq'
- <sup>12</sup> Season 5, Episode 4, 1963
- <sup>13</sup> Ovadiah Sforno, *Commentary to Exodus 7: 3*; Yosef Albo, *Ikkarim, IV, 25*.
- <sup>14</sup> Thoughts taken from Tom Bradford’s *Torahclass*, Exodus Lesson 7 Chapter 7 <https://torahclass.com/teacher/35-old-testament-studies/old-testament-studies-exodus/126-lesson-7-chapter7>
- <sup>15</sup> R.C. Sproul, *What Does It Mean to Believe?*, Sep 24, 2016, <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-faith/>