

On August 6, 1945, during World War II (1939-45), the United States dropped the world's first deployed atomic bomb over the Japanese city of **Hiroshima**. The bomb instantly destroyed 90 percent of the city and immediately killed 80,000 people.

Three days later, the US dropped another atomic bomb on **Nagasaki** killing 40,000 people.

After a brutal war with Japan, America was convinced that decisive action had to be taken. One bomb was dropped. Japan did not immediately surrender so **3 days later** another bomb was dropped. Likely, the US was going to continue this pattern until Japan surrendered.

Many have debated... "**Did the 2nd bomb need to be dropped in order to end the war?**"

A similar question could be asked related to God's plagues on Egypt, "**Did God need to perform all 10 plagues** in order to get Pharaoh to surrender?"

Today, we will begin looking at the 10 Plagues that God brought upon Egypt. Each one a powerful disaster. Pharaoh should have been convinced by the very first one. He should have never needed the other 9. But in the text, we see that Pharaoh hardened his heart, and we see that God hardened Pharaoh's heart as well, so that Pharaoh would not let the Israelites go.

Exodus 11:9-10

⁹The LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you, that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt."

That's code for... So I can do all 10 plagues!

¹⁰Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh, and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land.

At least he didn't until after the 10th plague. We are in our series "**Let My People Go**" doing a survey of the book of Exodus. And, today we'll discuss...

Title: **The God who Hardens Hearts and Humbles False gods**

Each one of these 10 plagues was levied against one of the gods of Egypt. Yahweh showed his superiority over all of Pharaoh's gods as He displayed his love for Israel and His mighty power to the world.

Intro

In **Exodus 3**, God appears to Moses in the burning bush. He commissions Moses to go to Egypt and face Pharaoh on behalf of the Israelites.

God tells Moses that "as a sign" he will bring Moses back with the Israelites to that same mountain, **Mt. Horeb**, later to be known as Mt. Sinai.

In **Exodus 4**... God ... still speaking from the burning bush... gives Moses 3 more signs. Each sign symbolizes God's dominion.

- **Staff becomes a snake** – dominion over the **land** and the **animals**
- **Hand becomes leprous** – dominion of **humanity**
- **Water to blood** – dominion over the elements of **nature**

According to the **Washington post**, **America's top 10 fears** include flying, claustrophobia, blood/needles, drowning, bugs-snakes-other-animals, heights...and the #1 – public speaking.

Moses was also afraid of public speaking.

Exodus 4:10

¹⁰But Moses said to the LORD, “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, [I don’t speak very well] either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.”

I’m not a talker God. Then the Lord rebukes Moses...

¹¹Then the LORD said to him, “Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹²Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.”

Pray: Heavenly Father, **be with my mouth** this EVENING. Let me speak your words. Glorify your name. Oh, Lord accomplish your will in our hearts this EVENING.

Moses petrified of public speaking, begs God...

¹³ “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.”

Have you **ever felt that way?** It’s great what you’re doing God, but can’t you get someone else besides me.

God’s anger was kindled against Moses. However, he still made a concession for Moses. God allowed for Aaron to be his speaker.

Moses would have been **FAMILIAR** with a leader having another man as a speaker, for Pharaoh had such a man who was called the **“mouth of the king”**. This official spoke on behalf of Pharaoh. Similarly, Aaron would speak on behalf of Moses.

Pharaoh had his mouthpiece. **Moses** had his mouthpiece. And these 2 would square off in **one** of the most epic confrontations ever.

In **Exodus 4:21-23** God gives Moses some additional instructions

²¹And the LORD said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. ²²Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, ²³and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me.” If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill **your** firstborn son.’”

You want it to be this way, Pharaoh? You mess with my son. I mess with your son.

We see that **God threatens Pharaoh**. --- “I will kill your firstborn son.”

God’s anger is kindled against Pharaoh. He is ready to strike with his vengeance. **Why?** Because Israel is special to God. He loves them dearly. They are a first born son to him. And, **Pharaoh** has abused the people that are the apple of God’s eye.

This is Pharaoh’s last chance. Let them go, or else.

Likely, God, the king of kings, is **thinking ahead to the sacrifice** of his own first-born son. His son, Jesus, will later be sacrificed on the cross to set people free from slavery to sin.

Similarly, Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, will be forced to sacrifice his firstborn son, as God opens the door for the Israelites to be freed from slavery.

Pharaoh will not save his son. He won't comply in time. **Why?** God says because I will harden his heart. Now...**Why** would God tell Pharaoh to let his people go and then harden his heart **SO** that he won't let them go?

This is one of the great conundrums of scripture. Saints and scholars have wrestled with this question for centuries. Why would God do this? **Why would God command Pharaoh to do one thing and then harden his heart so he does another?**

A few reasons:

- **1st - God wants to paint a picture of the gospel.**
 - The firstborn son dies to pave the way for salvation from slavery
 - On the night of the Passover, God's people paint the doorposts with the blood of the sacrificial lamb – and the death angel passes over their houses. This lamb symbolizes Jesus – John the Baptist would later say of Jesus, "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." John Baptist, directly referring back to the 10th plague.

Again, why would God harden Pharaoh's heart. #2...

- **2nd - God wants to display his glory.**
 - God wanted to do all 10 plagues
 - 10 is the number of perfection or completion
 - God would pour out his **perfect wrath**. He would pour out his judgment on Egypt until it was complete.
 - He wanted to show his superiority over all the gods of Egypt
 - He wanted to put his glory on display for the world!
 - Even to this day, it's breathtaking to consider the awesome display of God's power in the 10 plagues of Egypt.

Why harden Pharaoh's heart? It's picture of the gospel. God gets to show off his glory. And #3...

- **God wants to make clear his sovereignty over salvation.**
 - Ultimately, it is **God who saves a soul**.
 - It is God who grants faith and brings people to repentance.

You say, **"John, where do you get that?** We're not talking about salvation here. We're just talking about God getting Israel out of Egypt." --- I'll tell you exactly where I get that. – Romans 9.

Romans 9 shows us very clearly that God was dealing with Pharaoh in such a way as to teach us about salvation. To answer the question:

- Who saves a soul?
- Who is sovereign over salvation?

And why are some people saved and some people are not?

Romans 9:15-18 God teaching us about salvation **goes all the way back** to Moses and Pharaoh.

¹⁵For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

Basically, I do what I want. I save whoever I want to save.

¹⁶So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. – not based on FREE WILL

If you're saved tonight, it's because **GOD SAVED YOU!!!** It's not because you tried so hard. Or because you're such a good person. Or because your smarter or somehow better than other people.

Not because you made a good choice. It has nothing to do with free will.

It is because of 1 reason alone: **God has had mercy on your soul.**

God purposefully chose **NOT** to have mercy on Pharaoh. But rather to show off his power by destroying Pharaoh.

¹⁷For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, [so I can bring you down] that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

God raised Pharaoh up. Through Joseph God made Pharaoh the richest, most powerful man on earth.

God raised Pharaoh up so that He could bring Pharaoh down...in a brilliant display of His glory.

That's why he hardened Pharaoh's heart.

¹⁸So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

He chose to harden Pharaoh's heart. God could have softened Pharaoh's heart like he did King Nebuchadnezzar and King Darius. But he doesn't. He hardens Pharaoh's heart. In so doing, he makes it very clear that he has mercy on whom he's going to have mercy. And, he hardens whomever he wills.

You may protest and say, "**That's not fair.**" If God has mercy or hardens at his own will and we can't resist his will, then how can we even be responsible. **Poor Pharaoh**, he couldn't say yes because God hardened his heart, so how is it fair to punish Pharaoh.

Paul anticipates this question. In verse 19, he says...

Romans 9:19-20

¹⁹You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?"

You're going to say "**That's not fair.**"

When I first read this scripture, that's exactly what I was thinking. "Paul, you read my mind." That doesn't sound fair to me.

Paul responds in VERSE 20.

²⁰But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?"

Basically, Paul says **SHUT IT!**

Will you question the ways of God? Will you a mere human accuse God of injustice? Or unfairness?

PAUL, before he was saved, hardened his heart and killed God's people.

Similarly, **PHARAOH** hardened his own heart and killed God's people.

God had mercy on Paul and softened his heart. God did not have mercy on Pharaoh, but rather he hardened Pharaoh's heart even more.

Here Paul employs a **POTTERY METAPHOR**. The potter owns the clay. And he can make whatever he wants with his clay. And, the clay has no right to critique the potter and say, "Why have you made me like this?"

- I didn't want to be a bowl.
- I wanted to be a vase.
- Or, why did you make me a toilet.

No, the clay has no say in the matter. The potter does what he wants with his clay.

Similarly, God will do what he wants with your life.

I see this and I'm like "Whoa! Hold the phone." God, **what are you up to?** Why do you have mercy on some and harden others?

I had to come to the realization... Life is **not all about me...** It's not all about people and how wonderful people are. Life is about the great and awesome display of the glory of God.

Let me ask another question...

Why would God make a world like this? A world with so much evil. A world with villains. A world where all people defy their creator and engage in wickedness. Why would he make such a world? I'll tell you why...

This world is the perfect showcase for God's glory!

- Without a world like this we would never see many of God's great attributes on display. For many of his amazing qualities are only seen as **God acts** in response to wicked sinners like us.
- God looks upon the **EVIL, UNBELIEVING** people of this world...AND HE ACTS **against** them... These actions showcase God's breathtaking justice, power and wrath. The fact that he does not put up with evil. He is completely righteous.
 - His character is displayed like the **ferocious crash** of a tidal wave.
 - Like the explosion of a mighty volcano.
- And...on the other hand [PAUSE] God looks upon the **HUMBLE, BELIEVING** people of this world...AND HE ACTS **on their behalf**... Thus he showcases His awesome kindness, love, mercy, grace and his salvation...virtues that we'd never understand if we didn't see **them** extended to sinners who didn't deserve them.
 - God's character is displayed like the shining of the sun.
 - And the beauty of the rainbow...which reminds us of his promises to us.

Romans 9:21-23

²¹ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? [that lump is humanity] ²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, [Pharaoh types. He's put up with them...] ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory.

Pharaoh was one of God's **vessels of wrath prepared for destruction**. God tells Moses, **I will harden his heart**. He won't listen. He won't let you go. And that's all according to plan...

And that's exactly what we see in Exodus chapters 5-12.

Exodus describes **the hardening of Pharaoh's heart** in 3 ways:

- 1) **God hardens Pharaoh's heart** – 10 times
 - Exodus 4:21, 7:3, 9:12, 10:1, 10:20, 10:27, 11:10, 14:4, 14:8, 14:17 (and the Egyptians)
- 2) **Pharaoh hardens his own heart** – 3 times
 - Exodus 8:15, 8:32, 9:34
- 3) **Pharaoh's heart was hardened** (just stating the fact, not attributing it to God or to Pharaoh himself...meaning it could have been either) – 6 times
 - Exodus 7:13, 7:14, 7:22, 8:19, 9:7, 9:35

19 times Pharaoh's heart is hardened.

Sometimes, God hardens Pharaoh's heart, and sometimes Pharaoh hardens his own heart.

Pharaoh and his people are idolaters. They worship many false gods. And, God is furious about this.

When Joseph came and interpreted Pharaoh's dreams and saved Egypt from a famine... they should have repented of their idolatry right then and there. **But they did not!** And, now there's hell to pay.

In the 10 commandments, God aims the VERY first two commandments against idolatry.

Exodus 20:3-5 - ³“You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God.

He is a **jealous God**. And there are serious consequences for those who give his glory to false gods.

The Egyptians had all kinds of gods in the form of animals or gods over certain parts of nature.

God is the creator of all mankind, including the Egyptians. Their idolatry has aroused his jealousy.

Chapter 5 – Moses delivers his message to Pharaoh – **Let my people Go**. And, Pharaoh responds by oppressing the people even more.

- He tells them to make **bricks without straw**: He takes away their straw, and forces them to go find straw and then make the same quota of bricks.

So it's very clear who the bad guy is. Pharaoh is an incredibly wicked man.

- He is an idolater.
- He kills babies.
- He is racist...anti-semitic...he looks down on and despises the **Hebrews**.
- He oppresses the people.
- He enslaves them.
- He takes away their straw, tells them to make bricks without straw...and then he punishes them because they are **unable** to meet the quota.

It is **this wicked man** and this wicked nation of Egypt, and all their false gods, **UPON WHICH** God pours out his fury.

Exodus 6 God confirms his promises to Israel and we see the genealogy of **Moses and Aaron**.

Exodus 7 Pharaoh demands a miracle.

- Moses throws down his staff and it turns into a snake.
- Pharaoh's magicians duplicate the miracle, but **Moses' snake swallows** up the snakes of the magicians.

Pharaoh won't listen to Moses, so God begins to bring down his judgment...in **10 mighty plagues**.

God gave Pharaoh many opportunities to repent.

And now it's time to face the music. ---- GOD turns the **Nile waters** to blood...



Waters Turn to Blood
Exodus 7:14-25



Amphibians (Frogs)
Exodus 7:26-8:11



Gnats (Lice)
Exodus 8:12-15



Flies
Exodus 8:16-28



Disease on Livestock
Exodus 9:1-7

The Ten Plagues of Egypt



Unhealable Boils
Exodus 9:8-12



Hail and Fire
Exodus 9:13-35



Locusts
Exodus 10:1-20



Darkness
Exodus 10:21-29



Death of First-Born
Exodus 11:1-12:36

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Darkness for 3 days.

God shows off his glory!

The message to us today: **Repent while there is still time!**

God does harden hearts. However, in scripture you never see God hardening a humble, repentant sinner. When someone cries out to God, "Woah is me a sinner. God please forgive me." You never see God say, "NOPE. I'm going to harden your heart." Never see it. When people cry out to God for help, He helps them.

So...I would encourage you...

Rend your heart. Cry your tears. Blubber before your God and beg him to have mercy on your soul.

Through Jesus, there is a way for your sin to be forgiven. He died on the cross to save sinners. He rose from the dead.

Repent of your Sin. Believe on Jesus. ***And be saved!***