

“Lord, Give Me a Tender Heart!”

Exodus 7:1-25

November 3, 2024

Announce **Broc and Angela’s** move! (Dec 1 start date).

Well, the time has finally come! Let’s get out there and vote on Tuesday! It is especially important for Christians to vote in this election because the realm of politics has increasingly moved into the realm of theology. The kinds of issues that are before us are not only the economy and the border but theological issues like the sanctity of life, the sanctity of marriage, the sanctity of gender, the sanctity of manhood and womanhood.

Many of us are hoping for change in this election and at the same time fearing change from this election. But I want to remind us that however things turn out, it doesn’t change our primary purpose as believers to love and honor God, and to be salt and light in our nation. And lest we be consumed with anxiety, let me also remind us that no one comes to power apart from God’s providential hand which is working out divine purposes in the course of history beyond what we can presently see.

- Daniel 2:21—“...it is He who changes times and seasons; He removes kings and establishes kings...”
- Daniel 4:17, 32 – “The Most High is the ruler over the realm of mankind, and He bestows it on whomever he wishes.”
- Psalms 75:7~ “But God is the Judge; He puts down one, and exalts another.” Sometimes God even raises up godless, ruthless leaders for His purposes. For example, in Exodus 9:16 God said to Pharaoh, “For this purpose, I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that My name may be proclaimed in all the earth.” That purpose was to glorify God through judgment.

If we are happy with the results of the election, we have no less reason to pray for our nation to repent and return to the Lord. If we are disappointed in the results of the election, we need not despair because no world leader can go beyond what God allows for His greater purposes.

Proverbs 21 says, “The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes.” We are going to see this in Exodus 7 today. Pharaoh was a godless, ruthless, and wicked leader. Despite his power and seeming sovereignty, Pharaoh’s heart was subject to God’s invisible hand bringing judgment upon his wicked ways. Church, the world may rage, but God’s purposes will not be thwarted.

We’re going to break down chapter 7 into 3 sections. And the pressing application of this text is best expressed in the words of Hebrews 3 & 4: “**Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts**” (Heb 3:7, 15; 4:7).

1. **God’s Word is effective to both save and judge** (Exodus 7:1-7).

[vs. 1-7] What does vs. 1 mean when God says, “I have made you like God to Pharaoh and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet?” Aaron would speak on Moses’ behalf, but Moses would be God’s representative to Pharaoh. The Hebrew literally reads, “You will be God to Pharaoh.” That is, Moses would have divine authority in that God Himself would speak and act through Moses. This means that the way Pharaoh responds to Moses will reveal Pharaoh’s heart toward God.

Moses’ authority to represent God is especially important in light of the fact that Pharaoh considered himself to be an incarnation of the Egyptian gods. The significance of Aaron speaking as Moses’ mouthpiece or prophet is that it is parallel to how Pharaoh himself used other spokesmen to issue his commands as a way of creating distance between common people and his ‘divine’ status. So when Moses shows up as God’s representative with Aaron his prophet, it is clear that Pharaoh’s authority and status as well as his gods are all being challenged.¹

There’s a key truth we are going to see in vs. 1-7: **God’s word is effective even when it doesn’t seem to be successful** (Ex 7:1-7). Chapter 6 closed with Moses again complaining to God that Pharaoh would not listen to him. And now chapter 7 opens with God basically saying, “That’s right! He won’t listen. So tell him all that I have told you to say.” In other words, “Moses, success is not determined by what you see but by what I purpose to do.” As

¹ Philip Ryken, Exodus (Preaching the Word), pg. 172-174.

we will see throughout the book of Exodus, God's word is *always* effective. For those who respond in faith, the outcome will be life and salvation. But for those who reject God's word, the outcome will be a hardening of their heart. When someone rejects God's word with defiant unbelief and disobedience, it's not because the Word of God is not effective. Rather it means that the word of God is having the alternative effect of hardening the heart of unbelief rather than converting the heart of faith.

We see this same phenomenon in Isaiah 6 when God commands Isaiah to preach in order to "render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, And return and be healed." In other words, God's purpose in Isaiah's preaching was to render judgment rather than repentance. And this is precisely what God has called Moses to do with Pharaoh.

In vs. 3, God says that He will harden Pharaoh's heart through signs and wonders. Pharaoh will not listen to God's word through Moses and Aaron. And then God will deliver His people through mighty acts of judgment. So the only way for us to understand the effectiveness of God's word in Exodus, is to understand the purpose God is accomplishing through it. God's purpose is to harden Pharaoh's heart as an act of judgment to deliver God's people from bondage so that He can display His glory to the world—vs. 5: "*The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord when I stretch out My hand against Egypt.*" You may recall from a few weeks ago that this is the core message of Exodus stated 14 times throughout the book—to reveal God's glory to the world, that Yahweh is the Lord!

To drive home the effectiveness of God's word, let me point something out. We know from vs. 4 that God's posture toward Pharaoh and Egypt is that of *judgment*. We know from 6:6-7 that God's posture toward the Hebrews is that of *mercy or deliverance* [6:6-7]. Notice that both God's judgment of Egypt and God's deliverance of Israel are for the express purpose of making

it known that Yahweh is the Lord! God's word to Pharaoh will effectively accomplish all three simultaneously—deliver the Hebrews, Judge Pharaoh and glorify God.

Judicial Hardening

Let's pause for a moment and think about God hardening Pharaoh's heart. What's really going on here? There are 19 verses in the book of Exodus that address Pharaoh's hardness of heart. In 10 of those 19, God is the one who is hardening Pharaoh's heart.² In 3 of those verses Pharaoh is said to harden his own heart.³ Two verses simply say his heart was hardened⁴ and four verses say that his heart was hardened "as the Lord had said."⁵ In addition to these 19 verses, in one verse we are told that Pharaoh sinned.⁶ So, more than 2/3's of the verses about hardening refer to what God is doing with Pharaoh's heart.

It's also worth noting that the first mention of this progressive hardening of heart begins not with Pharaoh, but with God. [4:21] This does not mean that before God took action, Pharaoh had an innocent heart. Pharaoh is a pagan, ruthless oppressor of God's people who turns to demonic powers for influence and guidance. So, when God's word comes to Pharaoh, it will not have a softening effect, but rather a hardening effect. *God is not so much overruling Pharaoh's desires, but rather giving him over to his own desires.* God is not the author of sin. He doesn't put sinful desires in Pharaoh. He simply does two things. First, He makes rightful demands of Pharaoh that offend Pharaoh's pride: "Let My people go that they may serve Me." And then He uses miraculous wonders to reveal His glory and authority to Pharaoh which further hardens Pharaoh's rebellious heart of unbelief.

God's role in hardening Pharaoh's heart is what theologians call a *judicial hardening* of heart. In other words, God is bringing judgment against Pharaoh by progressively hardening his heart to the point that final judgement is certain.

² 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17

³ 8:15, 32; 9:34

⁴ 7:14; 9:7

⁵ 7:13, 22; 8:19; 9:35

⁶ 9:34

God still works this way today. Romans 1 speaks of those who had a knowledge of God yet refused to honor him or give thanks to Him. In other words, there was a rejection of God's rightful authority in their lives and therefore God did three things: 1) "God gave them over" in the lusts of their hearts to impurity. 2) God "gave them over" to the degrading passions of homosexuality. 3) He "gave them over" to a depraved mind to do those things which are not proper (Rom 1:18-32). This 3-fold giving them over is judicial hardening. In other words, the rampant homosexuality of Paul's day was God's judgment on at least some who had rejected Him as Lord. This does *not* mean that anyone who struggles with homosexuality cannot be saved. In 1 Corinthians 6 Paul addressed some in the church who had been formerly engaged in that lifestyle but were now cleansed and reconciled to God through the gospel. But for some, it is the result of a judicial hardening of heart. In other words, not all judgment comes solely on judgment day. Some of it begins progressively in this life as people refuse to yield their hearts to the Lord.

So what is Pharaoh's role in hardening his own heart? This is really insightful. Of the 19 verses that speak of Pharaoh's hardening of heart, 7 of them reference his refusal to let the people go. That is, his refusal to obey Yahweh. Another five of the 19 verses simply state that he "would not listen."

Let me offer a sober caution here. Hardness of heart is not only possible for unbelievers. It is also possible among God's people. Writing to believers, 3 times the author of Hebrews says, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me" (3:7, 15; 4:7). In Heb 3:12 he exhorts us, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God." Rebellion and disobedience is a form of unbelief that hardens the heart.

Take this to heart. Whenever we are unresponsive to a clear understanding of God's word or whenever we knowingly disobey the Lord, there may be a hardening effect on our heart that will make it progressively easier for us to refuse the conviction of the Holy Spirit resulting in God's discipline in our

lives. For the Israelites it meant dying in the wilderness. And Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11, warned the church about judging one another improperly resulting in many who were weak and sick, and some who had even died as a result of God's discipline (1Cor 11:30). *Oh, how we must pray that God would give us a tenderness of heart that is quick to trust and obey the Spirit's leading through the word.*

2. God is Supremacy Over the Agents of Darkness (Ex 7:8-13).

[vs. 8-13] This is not just some random miraculous sign to demonstrate God's power to Pharaoh. Like all the miracles in Exodus, it is strategic to send a clear message.

God used a serpent because the serpent was the symbol of Pharaoh's authority. The Egyptians were not only fascinated and fearful of snakes; they also worshiped snakes and had built a temple for the snake-goddess Wadjet. Furthermore, Pharaoh's headdress was crested with a fierce female cobra symbolizing how he would terrorize his enemies like a cobra strikes fear in her prey. The Pharaohs believed that wearing the cobra over their heads secured protection from their gods and symbolized the king's power, sovereignty, and magic which the gods endowed the king with.⁷

So when Moses and Aaron threw down the staff to become a snake, it was a way of demonstrating God's power over Pharaoh's gods, a direct challenge to Pharaoh's authority and Egypt's belief system. So, what does Pharaoh do? He calls in his magicians or sorcerers to mimic Moses and Aaron's sign by turning their staffs into snakes as well. How did they do it? How did they copycat a miracle? Well, keep in mind that Pharaoh's magicians were more than mere illusionists. There were involved in the "secret arts" (11). These are occult practices dabbling in demonic powers.

Yet no sooner had the magicians turned their magic wands into snakes, but Moses's snake swallowed up theirs. It's almost humorous to think about Moses grabbing his snake by the tail, turning it back into a staff, and then walking out the door leaving them empty-handed.

⁷ Ryken, pg. 183-184.

Don't miss the point. When Moses' snake swallowed up the sorcerers' snakes, it sent a clear message that the God of Moses was supreme over Pharaoh's impotent gods and Satan's demonic powers.

Yet vs. 13 concludes by revealing that nevertheless, "Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said."

God's sovereign power and judgment reveal the vanity of false gods (Ex 7:14-25).

[vs. 14-25] This is now the first of the 10 great plagues that the Lord would bring upon Egypt. The earlier miracle of turning Moses' staff into a snake was just done before Pharaoh and his attendant, but now the plagues begin in which all of Egypt will be affected.

This first plague not only turned the Nile River into blood, but also the canals, ponds, and pools; even water stored stone and wooden vessels. The only way for the Egyptians to get clean water was to dig in the sand for ground water. Had this plague lasted more than seven days it would have become a severe national crisis. The Egyptians were absolutely dependent on the Nile River. It was not only their water supply, but provided for the transportation of goods, and irrigation for their crops. The fish that died were the main staple in their diet and the annual flood provided rich, fertile topsoil for farming.⁸

Yet this plague was not just about getting the Egyptians' attention. Like the sign of the snake and like all of the plagues to follow, this attack on the Nile was deeply theological. The Egyptians worshiped approximately 80 major deities that were associated with either the Nile River, the land, or sky. So it's not surprising that as we move through the story there will be 3 plagues associated with the river, 3 plagues associated with the land, and 3 plagues associated with the sky (chart next week).⁹

This is the first plague associated with the river. There were at least 3 Egyptian gods connected to the Nile River, the most prominent being the god Hapi (also Osiris and Nu). This god was depicted as a man's bearded head on a pregnant female body—a fertility god thought to give life to Egypt by virtue of the annual flood season that sustained their crops.

Yet this single plague brought Egyptian life to a halt for an entire week, demonstrating that Yahweh was supreme over Egypt's god and that the River could not sustain the nation apart from the true God of heaven.

Once again Pharaoh called for his magicians with their secret arts, and they were able to replicate some version of the plague. But take note they were not able to reverse the plague. They could only add to its misery. And so, pacified with the sorcerers' performance, Pharaoh proudly refused to take to heart what Yahweh had done.

Let's pause, now, and make sure we don't miss a major theme from Exodus 7. Five times this passage draws our attention to Pharaoh's hardened heart (3, 13, 14, 22, 23). He had been given the miraculous sign of Moses' staff being turned into a snake, yet Pharaoh hardens his heart. Then Moses turns the Nile River into blood in response to Pharaoh's failure to listen and obey. Yet even then, Pharaoh refused to take to heart the display of Yahweh's power and to acknowledge Him as Lord.

Perhaps we need to take a step back and ask ourselves, "How do I respond to God's word? Do I have a tender heart? Or am I allowing my heart to grow hardened by dismissing God's word and God's commands as insignificant?" In Exodus 7, God was bringing judgment against Pharaoh's hardened heart with further hardening. But is there a way for hardened hearts to be made tender again?

When we turn forward a few pages to the gospels, we discover a mercy for hardened sinners that leaves us speechless. God sent His Son to this earth with a pure heart to stand in our place and take upon Himself the wrath our hardened hearts deserved. At the cross, God's judgment for our hard hearts

⁸ Ryken, pg. 195-196.

⁹ James Boice per Philip Ryken, pg. 192.

fell on Christ so that through faith in Jesus we could receive a new tender heart inhabited by the Holy Spirit. In the words of Ezekiel, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek 36:26). The only hope for a hard heart is God’s provision of a new heart through Jesus.

The blood of the Nile River was a sign of judgment for Egypt, but it was a sign of salvation for God’s people. The blood of Christ is a means of salvation for the those who believe, but it is a means of judgment for those who refuse the mercy of His Lordship. We know from the book of Revelation that there is yet a future plague of blood for those who refuse to repent and give God the glory He deserves. God will send 7 angels to pour out seven plagues, seven bowls of wrath, on the earth. The second angel will pour out his bowl in the sea and it will become like the blood of a corpse. The 3rd angel will pour out his bowl into the rivers and they will become blood. These are holy and just judgments against those who refuse to repent and give God glory (Rev 16:3-9).

But there is a way to be saved from God’s judgment and that is to repent, trust in Jesus whose death was sufficient to pay for your sins, and receive a new, tender heart from God.

As we prepare for the Lord’s table, we come examining the condition of our hearts. Is your heart tender and sensitive to the Spirit’s conviction? Or is it dull and desensitized to the Spirit’s promptings? The good news is that Christ has come, and His mercy awaits you. There is nothing worth holding onto that will only harden your heart: an idol (something that you love and must have to be satisfied apart from God); an habitual sin that you have been unwilling to forsake; a bitter grudge toward another person that you have been feeding; resentment toward God for not getting what you want; pride that says you are justified in blaming your anger another person or circumstance; pride that says you are justified in not surrendering your heart to Jesus.

Holy Spirit, show us any hidden agents of hardening in our hearts. Lord, we plead with you, give us a tender heart that is quick to seek Your mercy and longs to be restored to You and to each other. As we take these moments to

wait on You, give us faith to trust in Your mercy to heal and restore our hearts to the tender place that welcomes Your loving reign in us. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Communion:

- Bread: Psalm 51:1-4, 10-12
- Cup: *Rejoice in God’s mercy!*