

Empathy for the Wicked – Pharaoh

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MAIN VERSES

[Genesis 1](#) • [Genesis 11](#) • [Exodus 1:8](#) • [Exodus 7:22](#) • [Exodus 8:15](#) • [Exodus 9:12](#) • [Exodus 10:20](#) • [Exodus 12:4](#) • [Exodus 12:31](#) • [Exodus 14:5](#) • [Luke 22:19](#) • [1 Corinthians 10:2](#) • [Romans 1:21-24](#) • [1 Kings 9:15](#) • [Isaiah 1](#)

Do you ever find yourself searching for something bigger than you? For a community to be a part of? A place founded on truth and love. A place to worship the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, and the Son of God. Welcome to Founded in Truth, where we're more than just a fellowship. We're a family, so welcome home.

I made a promise to you guys a couple of Shabbats ago when we were going through Exodus. I said there was one villain in the Bible that I would never touch because there's no possible way that we should ever identify or empathize with him whatsoever. Today I break this promise.

This week we have a special message themed for Passover since Passover is a week away. Is everyone excited about Passover? This week, despite what I said earlier, we're going to tackle Pharaoh. I hope this series has been eye-opening—at the very least, in reading the stories of the Bible, reading about the villains, and hopefully seeing some of the author's intent in reflecting on them. What caused them to become villains, wicked? What caused them to have the reputation that's been recorded for thousands of years?

Joseph's Rise to Power

So this week we're going to look at Pharaoh. Most of you know the story. Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt. He rose to power through a pattern of divine circumstances, and he became second only to Pharaoh. Remember, he confronts his brothers who sold him to slavery when they came into Egypt to buy food due to the famine, and they don't recognize him. Joseph totally trolls them for a little while. And then he finally reveals himself to them. He reconciles his family. The entire family gets to live in the best area of Egypt. And there are many blessings. It's the end of a Disney movie—happily ever after—until a few hundred years later.

The Story of the Bible

You guys know I love approaching the Bible from a whole picture point of view. Too many times we study stories from the Bible instead of studying the story of the Bible. Genesis is the story of God engaging with his creation around him. You have the fall of man. You have [Genesis 11](#)—an important development because we see the forces and principalities of darkness fueling a world power battle. And then it continues to the development of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all with this promise that God will use this family for something that's going to bless the entire world. This is the review of Genesis. Possibly the seed of the woman mentioned early in Genesis will come through this family.

We know Jacob had how many sons? Is it 12? Is it 13? The youngest at the time was Joseph. We know that the brothers get jealous. They sell him into slavery. His boss's wife wants him to encroach on his boss's estate. He says no. Wife gets mad. He gets thrown in jail. Pharaoh at the time has a dream. Joseph interprets it. Fast forward—Joseph is the highest in the kingdom.

It's fascinating because Joseph is the most neglected and hated of all his brothers. The youngest of his brothers. And the youngest brother ends up ruling over all the older ones. That's a familiar theme throughout Genesis, right? It starts in [Genesis 1](#), actually. Mankind was the very last creature to be created after the animals, but mankind ends up ruling over all the other creatures that existed before them. That's a continual theme.

That's where the book of Genesis ends—with the entire family of Jacob thriving in Egypt. Rainbows, butterflies, green grasses of Goshen where the sons of Abraham are shepherds. They're in a place that is lush and green with the most fertile land, and they're ruling over the animals. I can't help but make a familiar connection with that. That's a great ending to the story.

A New King Arises

But the story continues. The story doesn't end there. It continues with scene two, with a "to be continued." The book of Exodus is the sequel of the story that's already being told. So we turn to the book of Exodus, [Exodus 1-8](#). How is this fantasy blessing going for this family of Jacob? How are they thriving? How are their children doing? They must be doing pretty well. And [Exodus 1-8](#): "Now there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph."

The larger story has just brought us to the edge of our seats. We just saw they're doing great, and now, boom, there's a new king. And something's different. We have a new character, a new power has risen. The power that knows nothing of this Joseph. This king exploits the people,

oppresses them, lords over them. He tells his own people to throw their baby boys into the river to drown them. This is bad. This is bad. It's supposed to make you uncomfortable the way they're telling the story. This Disney fairy tale of happily ever after has become a story of sorrow and death and exile and slavery and depression.

And we know what happens. A Hebrew woman gives birth to a son, and instead of drowning him in the river, she places him in a basket to keep him safe in the chaotic waters that are wanting to overtake him, the waters that have killed so many, the waters that are wanting to consume him. And the narrative actually calls this basket an ark that protects him from the waters.

So the baby floats down the river, is picked up by the daughter of Pharaoh. He's named Moshe, and he's raised up in Egypt. Later, he's told by God that he will lead Israel out of oppression and slavery in Egypt. Moses goes into Egypt representing Yahweh, and Yahweh unleashes this series of brutal plagues. He turns the water into blood. He overwhelms Egypt with frogs coming out of the water.

The Plagues of Egypt

Side note: If you've ever read the book of Jasher—and it's not the book of Jasher in the Bible. The book of Jasher that's mentioned in the Bible has never been found, but if you go to Amazon, you can search the book of Jasher, and you'll see a rabbinic work that was written in the 1500s. It was a midrashic work. It's an interesting commentary. It's humorous because when the rabbis wrote this book in the 1500s, they made the connection that the frogs came out of the water—they came out of the Nile in the biblical text. So they took it a step further and were like, well, any water everywhere produced frogs all of a sudden. So if you're cooking something in a pot on the stove, frogs are jumping out of it. And if you drink a glass of water, frogs start leaping around in your belly. I thought that was humorous. Apparently it wasn't.

The next plague is gnats, just swarms of gnats. And these aren't the little gnats that are flying around and bugging you. These are the gnats that fly into your eye. He sent flies on top of that, death of the livestock—big old bulls falling over dead. Boils inflict the Egyptians. Hail starts to fall from the sky, destroying the crops. Locusts come upon the land just as a second wave, destroying everything. Then the lights go out. Darkness falls upon the land.

Then there's a final plague. A messenger of death will be sent into Egypt. It will take the life of every firstborn in the land, from the rich to the poor, even the firstborn of the cattle. That first baby cow, gone. It's going to be taken. They will all die.

The Passover Covenant

Pharaoh becomes hot with anger. The Bible says that God hardened his heart and he refused to let the Israelites go. And so on the 10th of that month, God told the Israelites something a bit strange. I want you to do something. I want you to take a lamb and take care of it for a couple days, about four days—hang out with it, maybe give it a name, whatever, Fido. And in the evening of the 14th, they're to kill it. Now it's a sacrifice. It's a Shalemim offering. It's a peace offering. It's a very special sacrifice.

But killing an animal isn't the completion of a sacrifice. You guys know that, right? Killing an animal most of the time is not a complete sacrifice. No, in order for the sacrifice to be complete, they must consume its flesh. They have to eat it. And then they have to take its blood, and they have to put the blood on the doorposts of their home. The blood would be a sign that would sway or overpower the plague of death that's coming.

So just like other messages in the series, I want to dive into a storyline that's going to go into the life of Pharaoh and maybe—maybe—what was going through his mind, what was going on in the palace during this time, what he may have been thinking, what his servants were thinking.

And so if you're indulging me with that, I would like to invite you to imagine. And I would like to invite you to close your eyes just like we did last week. And I want you to imagine, as you close your eyes right now, that you're going back in time, that the world around you is changing, and all the buildings are disappearing. And I want you to go back to New Year's Eve, year 2000.

Standing in the Hot Sands of Egypt

Where were you? Maybe 1995, 80, 1950, 1930, 1900s. You weren't even born yet, maybe. What does the world look like around you? The time and culture is slipping away. 1700s, 1300s, 500s, 30 AD in Jerusalem. What was happening? 500 B.C. You're in the ancient world now. A thousand B.C., the temple is being built in Jerusalem. Going back somewhere between or around 1500 B.C.E., standing in the hot sands of Egypt. And I would like for you to open your eyes.

And I want you to imagine being in the palace of Pharaoh, and a conversation is taking place in his throne room.

"Your Highness," said Akhenaten, the king's royal advisor, "scouts say the Hebrews have commenced their ritual. They are slaughtering the lambs as we speak and are beginning to

stripe the blood on the exterior of their homes, as if making some sort of offering to a God that is not present — their Yahweh, the God who has no statue."

Pharaoh, looking down: "Their trickery won't work this time. Let them have their feast with their full bellies. Maybe they'll be ready for work tomorrow with their full bellies. Make sure the taskmasters know that I want the expansion of Ramesses to begin as soon as the Hebrews show up with their straw. We need to raise the quota on bricks. This will teach them to have hope."

"Your Highness, O gracious one, should we not be concerned?"

"Concerned," Pharaoh speaks, "about what? Akhenaten, do you believe that these myths of their god are true? That this Yahweh, this unknown God from one of their long lost ancestors, has power and might to overthrow Egypt? Do you really think that a plague of death is going to engulf Egypt, taking the oldest of all offspring? Come on, Akhenaten, my closest advisor. Don't you believe in the might that has built this kingdom? Don't be weak. You're a servant of Egypt the Great."

The Tenth Plague

Akhenaten, the servant, looks a bit confused, wondering to himself whether the king has gone mad — he kind of broke during the last plague and almost let them go. Is he missing something?

"Your Highness, we have withstood nine plagues already. You remember, my clothing still smells like dead frogs. Have you forgotten? Three days — three days darkness came over our land. I have five stitches from trying to navigate the restroom, Your Highness. And we're still attempting to dispose of all of the dead cattle spread out all over the land. You yourself were willing to let this people go just a little while ago, but retracted your offer when they wanted to take their cattle for offering to their desert god. My wise king, surely there is some merit to this. After nine plagues have come to pass, this tenth one will also come to pass."

Imagine a thick silence filling the room, a tense atmosphere. The light seemed to dim a little bit. Akhenaten looks up, and he felt the piercing stare from Pharaoh's eyes. He had encroached, speaking his mind as if to convince Pharaoh — a god over the land, a living, breathing god before him. How dare he attempt to sway his judgment?

"You... challenge my decree."

"Well, well, sir, you really didn't have a decree."

"Silence! Our magicians were able to reproduce most of the plagues. For others, a simple trickery of the nomads."

"Well, well, that was a lot of gnats, Your Highness. And those boils."

"And do not speak another word. I have spoken. I am God here. I rule this world. This is my kingdom. I reign, and you don't ever forget that. Their trickery and their fictitious deity will not conquer Egypt. This is our world. There is no doubt their magicians will produce some sort of staged display of power this evening, painting blood on their doors. Who do they think is coming? Akhenaten, stop your anxiety. We have increased guards in the elite sectors of the city to thwart any would-be terror attacks. I have my top guards in the royal stables, and I have my personal elite Kushite guards guarding my son's room. No one, not even Ra, is powerful enough to harm my son without my say-so. They will never get through my protection."

We Are the Evolution of Humanity

Akhenaten, bowing, nodding, scared to utter another word, even just to confirm what the king said.

"We are the evolution of humanity. We are the evolution of all things good for man. We, this mighty kingdom, we represent the pinnacle of what mankind can do. When we put our strength into power, might, we conquer all things before us. This is how we gain wealth, power, all things we could ever want at our fingertips. We define good and evil. Who are these people, these slaves, to tell us that their God comes against our progress, our victory, our dominion?"

Akhenaten, nervously whispering, hesitant to speak: "I know, Your Highness. We have no king but you."

Pharaoh, relaxing, resting his arms on his throne: "We have nothing to worry about. Go home to be with your family, be with your wife, have some wine. We reign here."

A slight muffled moaning could be heard in the distance. A clamor, another noise from the window across the side of the room. His eyes slowly opening, seeing the moonlight hitting his ceiling, Pharaoh attempted to make sense of what had disturbed him. Crying, screaming — his eyes open wide, he paces to the window. It seems as if the entire city was unified, as if it was a celebration in which everyone would be cheering as one, as one unit — but no one was cheering. Instead, these were cries, intense, thick cries of distress.

A Son Is Born Into Your House

He walks towards the chamber doors. Right then, the door swings open. "Your Highness, sir, my king, we have an emergency." The king pushes him aside as if portraying an unstoppable force that cannot be moved anymore. Akhenaten trips backwards, hits the wall.

Pharaoh makes his way and paces down the long hallway, screams from the servants' chambers as he passes the corridors on his left and his right. He tries not to notice, staring straight ahead. He makes a turn, undisturbed by the mother who worked in the elite quarter, holding her five-year-old in her arm, only able to let out what can be called an ocean of despair. Coming up on his son's chamber, the Kushite guard still standing at full attention, he looks down. One of them had fallen out of formation, eyes wide open, dead.

"Unlock the door." The guards turn formally. Two of them remove the beam from the door. Pharaoh pushes the doors open. The torchlight flickers from the disrupted air. The curtains that draped over his son's bed flow towards him as if long arms reaching out to embrace him. Fueled by his dread and instinct, he slowly approaches, knowing in his mind, but unwilling, unwilling to accept it. The screams that echoed in the hallways behind him become muffled in his mind.

There, looking into the eyes of his firstborn son. There, staring into the life that is no more. The life that he had so cherished. This — this was the son of a god. This is my son. He reaches down, wrapping his arms around his body. He holds him tight, almost numb. His heart won't let him feel it. It can't. There's too much despair here, too much weight of sadness, too, too much loss.

"Your Highness, Your Highness, you have a son. A son is born into your house. You have an heir. Congratulations, Your Highness. He will make a mighty ruler." He hears the almost audible voice of the midwife running from the birthing chambers. Flashing back again, he feels the touch of his son's hands holding his as he takes his first steps in the throne room. He hears the laughter as he chases him around the courts. "I love you, Daddy." He hears the voice of the son that he now holds.

A Disturbing Story

Passover is a festival of freedom from slavery, a festival of joy. Passover is a festival where we celebrate God's redemptive work. But this story, this story in Exodus chapter 12, it's disturbing. It doesn't settle with me well. I'll be honest. There are several stories in the Bible that are unsettling, and I don't think it's heresy to be able to admit that. They're written for that purpose. The emotions that you get when you read the stories of the Bible — the authors knew you were going to have them. It's intentional.

And maybe this story hits me harder now that I have a three-year-old than it did a few years ago.

See, over in Goshen, the Hebrews were cheering, smiling, while they were rushing to get all of their things to leave Egypt unharmed. In the rest of Egypt, though, it was a different sound. There was a different clamor. As the Israelites rushed, packing, dropping dishes and clothes on the ground, the Egyptians — they were dropping tears on the ground, screaming, mourning, incomplete in a world that they never thought they would live in, and in almost unimaginable pain.

Let My People Go

Now, we know the rest of the story. If you want to follow along, it's [Exodus 12](#), starting in verse 31.

"Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, up, go out from among my people. Both you and the people of Israel, go and serve the Lord as you have said. Take your flocks, all of your herds, as you have said, be gone. Leave your blessing here also, just be gone."

Verse 1: So Pharaoh was defeated. He had lost everything. Later in the story, we see him change his mind again and run after the Israelites as the Hebrews are crossing through the Red Sea — through the waters from death into life, if you will, through the waters out of slavery into freedom. Pharaoh chases them, but those same waters that provided life for Israel crash down on him and wipe him out.

So I want you to take that imagery — of the waters being an access to life and a new life out of slavery and freedom, and also the defeating of the forces of evil. Just take that and put a pin in it up here. [1 Corinthians 10](#), 2, Paul refers to that instance in Scripture as baptism. He calls it a baptism. He calls it the baptism of Moses.

So the Lamb was slain. Evil was overthrown. Israelites were freed from slavery. And they went through the waters, being raised to life as a people of God and no longer slaves to evil Pharaoh.

The Baptism of Passover

That's the baptism of Moses that Paul refers to in [1 Corinthians 10](#). If that's the baptism of Moses, then what is the baptism of Yeshua? Well, it's about a lamb that was slain. Evil was overthrown. Humans are freed from slavery. We go through the waters. We're raised to life as a people of God, and we are no longer slaves to sin. It's baptism. Christian baptism represents the

Passover story, which in and of itself is the archetype of salvation of the entire biblical narrative. It sets the standard formula used for salvation for the rest of the Bible, the Exodus account. And that's one of the reasons why we speculate why Pharaoh isn't named in the story. Anyone ever find that interesting?

Kings and Kingdoms

All through Genesis, you got kings of Canaan and Mesopotamia and all these guys are named, right? And then you go into Joshua and Judges and you got all these kings, all documented. And then you come to the pinnacle story that underlines or flows through from Genesis to Revelation, and the main bad guy, the king of Egypt.

Guys, this story is telling us about a literal account of something that happened, but it's more than that, because it's supposed to transcend what happened that long ago on the sands of Egypt. It's supposed to transcend through the entire story of Israel as they go into the land, as they go into Assyria, as they go into Babylon, as they come into the first century, as the Greeks take over. As this no-name rabbi from Nazareth is hung on a cross, this story still has as much meaning as it did the day it was first scribed. So I geek out on this stuff.

Pharaoh: The Archetypal Villain

Pharaoh is the first archetypal villain of the Bible. Sure, we've had bank robbers and thugs throughout the biblical narrative, but Pharaoh is like the Lex Luger, coming onto the scene, entering into the biblical story. This is the guy.

And if we choose not to take the Exodus story out of the larger story of the Bible, so put it back in its place as a continuation of the Genesis account and moving forward, this is what happens when the people of Babel in [Genesis 11](#), the people who wanted to rule, the people who wanted to embody what it meant to eat the tree of good and evil, the knowledge of good and evil, the people who wanted to define good and evil for themselves—this is what they do. The people who build a tower for themselves.

Pharaoh in Egypt is what happens when that people from [Genesis 11](#) evolve to their fullest wicked potential. A king rises up that knows not Joseph or God. Pharaoh becomes this standard in which all future evil kings of the Bible stand to compare to. The kings of Canaan, the rulers of Moab, the rulers of Persia, Haman, the big guy, the ruler of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar. Look at this kingdom that I have made with all of my power and my might. No one can control me. The horns of [Daniel 7](#), the rulers and the beasts of Revelation.

The Forces of Darkness

These are the people who represent and are fueled by the principalities of darkness, the forces of evil that manifest through mankind to rebel against God. You have this figure that seemingly represents the pinnacle of what it looks like when man chooses to rule the world apart from God. The pinnacle of what it looks like when we choose to define good and evil apart from God's wisdom and God's spirit and God's reign. You empathize with Pharaoh by thinking of yourself as someone who rules over, who has power, who conquers the world. A visionary, someone who has it all together, someone who really doesn't need help in any areas of their life, someone who believes that they are king of their life, but in reality is just a slave to the forces that work within sin.

Pharaoh's Hardened Heart

Let's back up a little bit. What happened to Pharaoh's heart? What happened to Pharaoh's heart on Passover Eve? So we're going to read the account in [Exodus 12](#), verse 4.

If you turn with me to [Exodus 12](#), verse 4, hopefully you brought your Bibles. We're going to read this account, and I want to take you through this account because it's important. If you have your Sharpies or whatever you use to highlight, go ahead and get those out.

So Moses said, "That you may know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. And all these servants shall come down to me and bow down to me, saying, Get out, you and all of your people who follow you. And after that I will go out." And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you, that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt." Moses and Aaron did all of these wonders before Pharaoh, and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. And as a result, he did not let the people of Israel go out of the land.

God Hardened His Heart?

So who hardened Pharaoh's heart? God did. Do we want to talk about this today? Do we really want to talk about this? I mean, are we sure? This is one of those topics. Oh man, I love the Torah portion that Johnny did. Remember that a couple weeks back? It was great. He did a great job summing up what I'm making long-winded. So we have to understand what's going on here in the larger context of the story.

When we see God hardening Pharaoh's heart a few times throughout this story, it kind of gives us the sense that maybe Pharaoh wasn't such a bad guy, right? Maybe Pharaoh would have been like, sure, Moses, I'll let your people go, right? That's my favorite song. He may have been like, hey, I'll deny all of my foreign gods. I'll take down the statues. I'll tear down the temples. Whatever you tell me to do and how to worship your god, Yahweh, I will commit my life to that, right? But instead, God intervenes, and we get the impression that God forces Pharaoh to become a monster just so he can destroy him.

No one's ever read it like that and been a little confused. Maybe this is a topic I should just not settle. Do you ever have blind spots in scriptures? I have a ton of them, and that's why we keep going back, right? It's a book of life and we continue to learn. It's amazing.

That is not what the story is saying, nor is that anything that the biblical narrative, the biblical authors would have ever wanted you to consider. Remember, Pharaoh is the biggest, baddest, most violent, abusive, and oppressive bad guy presented in the Bible so far. He's the worst of humanity in detail, in a detailed account within the biblical story. That setup is supposed to tell us something about who's being portrayed here. Here is a man who is manic in his power-hungry pursuits. He's willing to allow his entire nation to be absolutely destroyed just to raise his own pride and power upon the throne for him to worship. And it's a battle, it's a showdown. That's what the Exodus story is about. It's a showdown between this seemingly minor deity of the ancient world, Yahweh, this family god of Abraham, whose intent is simply to redeem and free his people and elevate them up versus this crazy, big, abusive, power-hungry king of the nations.

The Pattern in the Plagues

And we look at the sequence of events in this storyline and we see that God hardening Pharaoh's heart is not a complete scope of the story. In other words, when you say that phrase, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart," that's an incomplete statement of what that attributes to the story. Turn with me to Exodus chapter 7, because we're going to start there. Chapter 7, verses 13 through 14. Everybody made it? We're good? Okay. Familiar verse? "Yet Pharaoh's heart became hard, and he would not listen to them, just as the Lord had said."

So some of your NIV—I appreciate it—say "became hard." ESV does not do us any favors, or other translations. If you have a Bible that says it was made hard, that's not quite accurate. Professor Tim Mackie is an ancient languages professor who teaches Akkadian, Greek, and Hebrew. He makes the point that the word there is not passive in Hebrew. A better translation

would be that it "grew hard." So Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he would not listen to them just as the Lord had said.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened. He refuses to let the people go." Over the course of the next five plagues, we see this phrase repeated over and over again. In the first plague of blood, Pharaoh's heart was hard. [Exodus 7:22](#). The second plague, frogs, Pharaoh hardened his own heart. 8:15. Third plague, gnats. Pharaoh's heart was hard. Fourth, flies. Pharaoh hardened his own heart. You see how—so this is what I mean about this story, okay? Sure, it's talking about a literal story that really went on, but the writers took extra effort to detail and put in patterns in the narrative for you to pick up on. They wanted to tell you more. Which I think is just really cool, because it's almost like a little easy code we can break when we look at the Bible thousands of years old.

So we have: it was hard, he hardened his own heart, it was hard, he hardened his own heart, and in the fifth plague, it was hard. Off on, off on, off on. Switch, switch, back and forth, back and forth. Trying to get your attention, okay? It's Pharaoh doing this, okay? It's not until the sixth plague—this awful plague of boils—that God specifically jerks the steering wheel, okay? [Exodus 9:12](#), boils. In yellow, I tried to highlight it for you.

Color code it. The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh in 9:12. So this is God coming in and taking the steering wheel of where Pharaoh is driving his car and yanking it. God takes control of the steering wheel. The reason this shows is to demonstrate that every account before this where God's not mentioned, God wasn't doing it. Everyone keeping up with me? Great. So look what happens in the seventh plague.

Who hardens Pharaoh's own heart in the seventh plague? He and his officials hardened their hearts. God let go of the steering wheel. He kind of yanked it. I mean, that's the only imagery. It's like, you better stop. You better stop. They keep driving the same direction that they're driving. Okay, they're going the same direction whether I take control or not.

From this point moving forward, starting in chapter 10, verse 20, with the eighth plague, locusts, the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. Darkness, the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. Ten, the death of the firstborn, the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. It's fascinating. It kind of judders. And then God takes completely over.

So one last time, God gives control back to Pharaoh. It's after the Israelites leave in chapter 14, verse 5. And it says that Pharaoh changed his heart. Okay? If you have some really modern translations, it'll be like "change their mind." But it's heart. In the Hebrew, it's his heart. He changed his heart about letting the Israelites go. So he got all his guys up. We're going to get

600-something chariots, mount the guns on them. We're going to go get them. Let's go. Let's go.

And then as he left Egypt to go chase after Israel, verse 8, God hardened his heart. This is not a story about God pre-programming Pharaoh to be evil and to do bad things just so he could destroy him.

God's Line in the Sand

Now this story of Pharaoh hardening his heart with the things that separate us from God and manifesting evil in a way that seems right in his own eyes is supposed to be clear to us that this is his pursuit. God knows Pharaoh is going to resist. At some point, God draws a line in the sand, and he's going to intentionally harden Pharaoh's heart if Pharaoh steps over it.

But that's preceded by a long list of Pharaoh just acting like an absolute jerk to his own people and to the Israelites, of Pharaoh hitting the gas pedal and driving the car in that direction. Willing to kill innocents because of his own fears and insecurities. Willing to abuse and oppress the weaker people for his own gain. Willing to rule the world apart from God's grace and judgment.

And there comes a point in the story where Pharaoh crosses the line in the sand and reaches a point of no return in his pursuit of evil. He comes to a point, and we even see God yanking the steering wheel before he gets here. You're coming up on the line. Stop. Stop. No. And he crosses the line of no return in his pursuit of evil, in his thirst for power.

At that point, God then turns Pharaoh's wickedness. God takes Pharaoh's wickedness and his evil and turns it back on him. He hardens his heart, a heart that Pharaoh himself had already committed to his own hardening. And we see God taking control of an evil that believes it is in control to do its will, but provokes his plan.

This story is about how God uses the overwhelming forces of evil in the world to destroy themselves and turn it back on itself. Pharaoh leaves Egypt willing to go after the Israelites. He hardened his heart. And God says, you know what? I'm taking over the wheel and I'm hitting the gas pedal now. Full steam ahead. And he chases them into the waters. God takes the overwhelming forces of evil and turns them in on themselves so that he would free slaves from their oppression and redeem them as their own. You get it yet? You get the motive, the theme?

The Greater Passover Revealed

It's because this is the story of the gospel. That's what I mean with the Passover story being more than simply a story that happened a long time ago. It's the basis for the story of the gospel. During the Last Supper, in the synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Gospels that follow the same synopsis, you have the Last Supper specifically portrayed by the authors as a Passover meal, some way, shape, or form.

So you have bread and you have wine, and the wine specifically symbolizes the blood of the Passover. Blood that, when received, shows a commitment to God's protective and redemptive power and covenant bases.

But Matt, okay, I get it. How can you say the Last Supper was a Passover meal according to the Synoptic Gospels when there was no lamb to mention as being served on the table? Yeah, the lamb seems to be conspicuously missing from the text, isn't it?

[Luke 22](#), 19. This is my body. This is my body, which is given for you.

When we take the bread and the cup, we're not celebrating a memorial of something that happened thousands of years ago. We're living out the reality of the Passover now through Yeshua. When we take the bread, we symbolize taking part in the sacrifice of Yeshua.

It's not enough for a lamb simply to die. You must engage with the sacrifice. The flesh must be eaten. Take of this. This is my body.

Christ as the Greater Passover

Evil became so power hungry that it threw everything it had at Yeshua. Everything—the beatings, the mockery, the spitting, the stripes whipped across him, the nails driven through the flesh of his hands and his feet into the large portion of wood. Can you imagine the dense sound of the hammering as it squeezes further and further into the wood?

He was raised up, hung. Evil threw everything it had at Yeshua, and it killed him. A spear entered his side, striking his heart, just to make sure evil had done its job. His body lay in the earth like so many before him. Evil had been victorious. Evil had won. The powers of the world that fuel a pursuit of defining good and evil apart from God's reign had done what it always does. It reigned over its land, over its dominion.

Until the third day. Until the third day when something happened, a loud rumble began to be heard. The earth began to quake. The stone that was secured over the grave of the rabbi, just as a testimony that he is not coming back, rolled away. The Christ had risen.

And who was the first witness of this? A woman named Mary. A woman named Mary. A woman can't preach. The first preacher of the resurrected message of the gospel was a woman. She was the first evangelist that went and told his closest disciples about the reality. And even then they weren't like, I don't know. Oh, you're a woman. This is an old creation. This is a new way of life. This is a new creation.

Evil had not won. Evil had exhausted itself in a vain pursuit of power. It poured itself out onto Yeshua and defeated itself as a result. It was turned in on itself. This is the greater Passover. This that leads to an even greater Exodus.

The Warning Passover Gives Us

So now the story of Passover should give us a warning. I get excited about the gospel. The story of Passover and Exodus should give us a warning. Pharaoh had every opportunity to turn back, to humble himself, actually. He had about five opportunities in the narrative or in the story.

The story sets the pace for the rest of the narrative in the Bible. And look what happened. It doesn't stop when they left Egypt. Look at what happens to the Israelites after they leave Egypt. They're described as becoming like Pharaoh in the wilderness, right? The thing that God wants to free them from, they end up mimicking and becoming with their stubbornness, their complaining, their ingratitude, their selfish pursuits. No, I want it my way. No, that's not what I want to do. No.

After Israel makes it into the land, they build a temple to God at the hands of Solomon. The writer of Kings gives us a subtle hint at where they were at spiritually, right? So everything's going great. And like [1 Kings 8](#), 9, and 10, everything's going great, right? All nations are seeing the temple and seeing God as a result, testifies of that.

But Solomon uses slaves to build the temple. [1 Kings 9](#), 15. Solomon uses slave labor to build the temple to the God that frees slaves. Do you get it? And the way it's narrated, like in [1 Kings 9](#), it doesn't skip a beat. And then a few verses later, it goes on to tell you who the slaves were. Oh, it wasn't the Israelites. It was like all of the people that they were supposed to kick out of the land. They enslaved them.

So the Israelites are now the taskmasters over a weaker people since they have grown so strong. One generation. That's all it took for the infection to grow after Solomon, to grow deeper. What happened after Solomon? The kingdom splits. Evil abounds. Both Israel and Judah begin oppressing the weak for their own gain, their own power, their own vain pursuits. They become like Pharaoh.

Just read Micah or [Isaiah 1](#). [Isaiah 1](#) is so brutal, guys. My goodness. Imagine Pharaoh killing the babies and then keeping Shabbat and bragging about all of his offerings and how he keeps kosher and I keep Shabbat and I didn't mow the lawn today and I'm just so righteous.

And God's like, stop it. You are not righteous. You are not a people after my own heart. You're Pharaoh claiming that I'm raw or something. You're keeping all the commandments, but you're not. And you disgust me. [Isaiah 1](#). It's a very humbling chapter.

The human heart is always at risk, this is what the entirety of the biblical story is trying to remind us, that the human heart is always at risk in becoming infected by Pharaoh.

God's Warning on Hardened Hearts

Pharaoh didn't die in the waters of the Red Sea. And God gives us a warning here. At some point, your evil will be turned on itself. At some point, there is a line where God is going to destroy it through itself. Paul made mention of this in [Romans 1](#), verse 21. Yeah, we got it. So, you're familiar with this section of Scripture. 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. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of an immortal God for images representing mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up into the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

So there's a context to this verse, but we're not stripping it out of its context. What he's saying is what he's saying. So their hearts became darkened, which means without light, right? They became hardened to a state that was not supposed to be. And he reemphasizes what he's saying here in verse 24. God gave them over to their lusts. What does that mean? So they're jumping around in concrete, and there comes a point where God's going to stop splashing water on it. There comes a point where he's just going to take the hair dry out and say, fine, I'm turning you over, turning you over.

Reflecting on Our Own Hearts

We need to take time and reflect on our own hearts because maybe you're here today and you don't worry about your heart. Maybe you're here today and you think, man, I'm doing really good. I got this. Like, I own my world. I'm doing good. I'm not at risk at all for any type of unrighteousness. Never. Not at risk for a hardening of heart. Not at risk at all for being turned

over, for the gas pedal to be held down, for my heart being consumed with evil. Nope, not me. Maybe that's you today.

We need to take time and realize that there will come a point where God will choose to use our evil pursuits and our selfish pursuits and our energy towards those things as a means to defeat them. And we will be the carrier of that destruction. The defeat of evil comes by its own means. Right now, you could be a Pharaoh, either fully or evolving. Israel did. Nebuchadnezzar did. Haman did. Peter and Judas both did. This is something that affects us all. And we need to remind ourselves of that and keep watch and humble ourselves and be willing enough to audit our own hearts.

Choosing God's Redemption

So where are you today? Are you pursuing God to remove a heart of stone and give you a heart of beating flesh that beats for his reign and his kingdom, just like Ezekiel speaks about? Or are you ruling and reigning in your own life without God? We're in a season right now where we acknowledge the power of God's redemption. Are we going to be able to celebrate it? If not, do not keep going the direction that you're going. Do not ignore the warnings. Don't ignore the moment that God grabs the steering wheel and yanks it just to remind you that you're coming up on a line. Stop, pray, and humble yourself before the Lord.

We empathize with Pharaoh because Pharaoh is what mankind seems to evolve into when they're not focused on God throughout the rest of the story in the Bible. That's how we empathize with him. Because many of us have likely evolved into parts of Pharaoh, if not more.

Closing Prayer

Alvino Malcano, our father, our king, father, we thank you for this time together. We thank you for giving us your word that you have crafted together through the hands of man inspired by your spirit. Father, we thank you for the awesomeness of these stories told long ago that are still just as applicable today. And I ask, father, that your spirit that is already within us Father, that it would rise up, that it would remind us of the pursuits that we need to keep pursuing with all of our heart, mind, and soul, and the pursuits that we need to turn away from, so that at Passover, we can truly celebrate the festival of freedom from slavery. In Yeshua's name we pray. Amen. Shalom.

I'm Matthew Vandrells, and I hope you enjoyed this message. Founded in Truth exists to cultivate a fellowship of image bearers that live the redeemed life only Yeshua can give. If this

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