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# The Ten Commandments

## Introduction Part 2

*by: Ronald L. Dart*

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Nearly everyone knows the story of the Exodus, between Charlton Heston playing Moses in the movie 'The Ten Commandments' and the animated version, the 'Prince of Egypt.' The story has been thoroughly told the masses, but there's an aspect of it that continues to trouble a lot of people who read the Bible.

### **God Hardened Pharaoh's Heart**

Pharaoh had no choice. God hardened his heart again and again. It would be one thing if Pharaoh was Hitler, a thoroughly bad man, who himself was hardhearted, started hardhearted, and stayed that way.

But the Scriptures don't say that.

The Scriptures say, categorically, that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let Israel go. I can still remember the first time that I ever encountered this idea. It was in Paul's writings and I was just a teenager.

I read in Romans 9 verse 17, "For the scripture says to Pharaoh, even for this same purpose have I raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. {18} Therefore he has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens."

We all know that God is sovereign, and we know that God can do whatever He wants to do, but it's a little chilling to learn, that God hardens one man's heart, so that he cannot relent, while another man He gives mercy to.

Paul continued, {19} "You'll say to me, "Why does God find fault? Who can resist God? Who can resist his will? {20} "No, O man," Paul replies, "Who are you to reply against God? Shall the thing formed, say to him that formed it, why have you made me this way?""

Well, yes, I would ask God that, if I were the one that He had made to destruction. I would say, "God, why did You make me this way?"

Paul says, {21} "Doesn't the potter have power over the clay?" Yes.

"Out of the same lump you can make one vessel to honor, he can make another one, to dishonor {22} What if God were willing to show his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction."

Now that's a clear reference to Pharaoh and the Egyptians, but I'll tell you, it was chilling to me as a young man reading the Bible to consider the possibility, however remote, that I might be a vessel of wrath. Someone actually created to dishonor.

### **Israel Was in Slavery**

There is no question about it, when you read the story in Exodus, God hardened Pharaoh's heart, but there's an aspect of that story that rarely gets told. Nothing I have ever seen in the movies about this event accurately portrays what the Egyptians did to the Israelites and over what period of time they did it.

There was not a man or woman among the Israelites who had known a day of freedom in their lives. They had been born slaves, their mothers and fathers had been slaves, their grandparents, their great-grandparents had been slaves. There was no one around who had talked to anyone who would ever had been a free person. And after so long of time, even the memory of freedom begins to fade.

They worked the daylight hours of every day, seven days a week, and it was hard work. They lived in wretched conditions of poverty, an entire generation of their male children had been murdered by throwing them into the Nile River.

### **God Heard Their Prayers**

They still prayed, although I can't imagine that by this time, they had very much hope in their prayers. I know they prayed, because God heard them.

### **A Matter of Justice**

And when the time had come, God sent Moses and his brother Aaron to bring them out of Egypt, but there was a small matter of justice that had to be dealt with. God could not allow the brutality, the oppression, and the murder perpetrated by all the Egyptians, not just Pharaoh, all of them, to go unpunished. To do so would have left a bitterness in the Israelites that they would never have been able to overcome in all of their generations,

God is not only a God of mercy, He is a God of justice and justice was about to be visited upon the Egyptians. You get some idea of how cruel the Egyptians had been by the series of plagues that God sent on them.

## **God Is Going to Deliver the Israelites**

But first, Moses and Aaron had to lay out God's requirements. They had to reveal themselves to the children of Israel and say, "Here's what we're going to do folks." God is going to take us out.

You will find this story beginning in Exodus chapter 4 verse 29, "Moses and Aaron went and gathered all the elders of the children of Israel. {30} And Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD spoke to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people God had given them. {31} And the people believed, and when they heard that the LORD had visited them at last, and that He had looked upon their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped in profound gratitude."

It wasn't going to be long until they would feel a little less grateful about things that happened, because some things were going to take place that were going to make them very uncomfortable.

## **An Audience with Pharaoh**

Moses and Aaron managed to get an audience with Pharaoh and they went to see him, Exodus 5 verse 1, and they said, "Thus saith the LORD God of Israel," Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness." {2} And Pharaoh said, "What do you mean, LORD? Who is the LORD that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I don't know any LORD, and I am not going to let Israel go.""

Now this all seems very predictable, here's a man, he's Pharaoh, he's in charge, and at his word people live and people die. Why in the world should he pay any attention to two bearded prophets standing in front of him saying, "Let my people go. Let all of these slaves go to hold a feast in the wilderness." He would say, "Get away from me."

Moses and Aaron said, {3} "The God of the Hebrews has met with us, let us go, we pray you, three days journey into the desert and sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword."

This is really interesting because what they are implying by this is that there was a law that said, that at this certain time of the year they had to get out in the wilderness and hold a feast. Otherwise, what's this pestilence and sword business? What's this punishment following up on it if they don't do it?

The King of Egypt said. {4} "Why do you, Moses and Aaron, let the people get off from their work? Get out there and get to your burdens. {5} And Pharaoh turned to his people and said, "Look, these people of the land are many, and these people want them to rest from their burdens." {6} Pharaoh commanded his officers and taskmasters saying, {7} "Don't give them any more straw to make bricks, like you have been doing, let them go and gather straw for themselves {8} The quota of bricks that they have had to make, lay it on them, don't diminish a single brick. They are idle. If they weren't idle, they wouldn't be asking to go out and sacrifice to

their God. {9} Give them more work. Don't let them regard these vain words," {10} So the taskmasters went out and their officers and they gave them the word. NO straw. {11} Go get it yourselves, and so, they had to work harder and longer every day and turn out the same number of bricks or else." The 'or else' was pretty severe.

{14} "The officers of the children of Israel, which Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten. The officers said, "What are you doing here? Why are we having to go through this? {15} The officers came and cried unto Pharaoh and said, "Why are you dealing this way with your servants? {16} There's no straw given to us. We can't make brick this way" and {17} Pharaoh said, "No, no, you are idle, you're idle. Why are you asking to go into the wilderness and do sacrifice to the LORD? {18} Get out now and work. There is no straw going to be given to you and you will make every brick you have made before." {19} The officers of the children of Israel saw that they were an evil case before Pharaoh because of what Moses had asked for and they were in trouble."

So, getting no relief from Pharaoh, they went looking for Moses and Aaron and they ran into them in the way and {21} "They said to Moses and Aaron, "The LORD look upon you, and judge. You made us to be hated in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all the servants and now you're about to put a sword in their hand and they are going to kill us."

Moses didn't have anybody else to talk to, so he went to God. He said {22} "LORD, why have you sent me down here if this is the way it's going to be, {23} For since I came to Pharaoh, to speak in your name, everything has gotten worse and not better."

Now up to this point, there really are no surprises. God had said He would harden Pharaoh's heart, but his response up to this point is exactly what I would've expected from any tyrant. "Do you think you're getting off work? Forget about it. Let's make them work harder. Let's extend the hours. Let's make them produce more."

Whatever it has to be, that's the typical way a tyrant would respond. But it's not over yet, there's a whole lot of karma coming down in Egypt behind these words.

### **God Said, "I Am Yehovah"**

God listened patiently to Moses with his complaint, and then He said, in Exodus 6 verse 1, "You haven't seen anything yet, when I get through with Pharaoh and the Egyptians, they are not only going to let Israel go, they are going to drive them out of Egypt." He went on to explain something to Moses. {2} He said, "I am Yehovah."

Now there is a convention here in your Bible that you may not be aware of. Everywhere in the Old Testament where you see the small caps: LORD, they are putting that in the place of the Hebrew word for the name of God, which is YHWH or something close to that in the Hebrew language. Written Hebrew has no vowels, so there is some uncertainty to the pronunciation of that name, but the reason why you find LORD, virtually in every Bible instead of Yahweh or Yehovah, or whatever particular description you might find, is because the Jews considered this the ineffable name of God. Lest they should take it in vain, lest they should somehow defile

God's name, they don't use it. They substitute 'adoni' in their language or LORD in English for it. Some use the term 'Yashem', which is Hebrew for 'the name'. They hold the name of God in great AWE and therefore they do not pronounce it, but when you come to a passage like this one, you need to understand that the name is suddenly coming into play and it's important.

"God said, {2} "I am Yehovah and I appeared unto Abraham and Isaac and Jacob by the name of God Almighty."" The Hebrew for 'God Almighty' is El Shaddai, "But by my name Yehovah (or Jehovah or Yahweh), I was not known to them."

Now the question comes, why? It's not that hard to understand if you understand a little about languages. The Hebrew language is not the language that Adam and Eve spoke in the Garden of Eden. It is not the language that Jesus and the Father speak at home in heaven. Who knows what language they speak, and they may not need a language for all we know. Hebrew is a human language like every other human language that has come along. It has evolved. Actually, Arabic is an older language than Hebrew. The problem was that Yahweh or Yehovah is the Hebrew name of God.

Abraham didn't speak Hebrew. Hebrew didn't exist in Abraham's day. Abraham therefore knew God, not as Yahweh, but as El Shaddai. But it was the same God.

### **God Wants Israel Back in The Land of Canaan**

So, the LORD said, "By my name Yehovah, I was not known to them." {4} "I have established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage. wherein they were strangers, {5} And now I've heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in captivity, and I've remembered my deal (covenant) that I made with Abraham."

Now you see, this is what the issue is, the whole land of Palestine, in fact, everything from the Nile River in Egypt all the way to the Euphrates was deeded in perpetuity to Abraham and his descendants, but they had been down in Egypt a long time and God wanted them to go back and to possess the land of Canaan because that's where He wanted the sons of Israel to be, and so, He had come down into Egypt to get them.

"The LORD says," in verse 6, "to the children of Israel, "I am Yehovah. I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will free you from out of their bondage, I will redeem you with a stretched-out arm and with great judgments."

I think most people who read through this passage overlook that little word, 'judgments,' because what He is talking about is rendering judgment on the Egyptians for all the things they have done, for all the evil, that they have perpetrated. That sort of thing cannot be allowed to stand.

Verse 7, ""I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. {8} I'll bring you into the land, concerning which I swore to give it to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, and I will give it to you for a heritage, I am the LORD. I am Yahweh."

## **God Has to Finish His Judgments on Egypt**

Continuing in Exodus 7 verse 9, "And Moses spoke to the children of Israel, but they were so hurt, they wouldn't even listen to him."

The children of Israel listened to Moses when he came down, they were encouraged, they thought this was wonderful, we will just pack up our stuff and we will migrate, but it wasn't working that way. It wasn't working that way because God had to finish His work of judgment on Egypt and they had to live through it.

"The Lord spoke to Moses saying, {11} "Go in and speak to Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, that he let the children of Israel go out of his land."

Now Moses became a little frustrated by this time and he said, {12} "Look, the children of Israel won't listen to me. Why should Pharaoh hear me? There is no reason why he should listen to me." {13} And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron and said, "You had better get in there and tell Pharaoh, king of Egypt, that you are to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt."

### **Why Is God Hardening Pharaoh's Heart?**

"And the LORD said to Moses," in Exodus chapter 7, verse one, ""Look at this, I have made you a god to Pharaoh and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. {2} You shall speak everything that I command you, and Aaron your brother shall speak to Pharaoh that he sends the children of Israel out of his land, {3} And I will harden Pharaoh's heart and multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt.""

Why is God hardening Pharaoh's heart? Is it just arbitrary? Is it because he doesn't like Pharaoh? Is it because God wants to show off? No, not hardly.

Verse 4, "Pharaoh shall not listen to you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt."

Now you think about this, Pharaoh was not the only issue here. He was not the Pharaoh that had placed Israel in bondage in the first place. He probably was not even the Pharaoh who ordered the death of all those Hebrew children. That was probably the Pharaoh before him because it was years back that that event took place. And it wasn't just Pharaoh that did it. It was ALL the Egyptians that did it and payback time had come.

God said, {5} "I'm going to do this, and the Egyptians shall know that I am Yehovah, when I stretch forth my hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them."

What's happening here? What's happening here is that Pharaoh's heart was hardened because the whole land of Egypt had to come to grips with what they had done and whose god really was God. The whole exercise was to get Israel out of Egypt, while punishing the Egyptians, all of the Egyptians, for their crimes. If Pharaoh had just let them go, justice would not have been done.

And so the stage is now set for Moses and Aaron, before God, to play out on the stage of Egypt the justice of Almighty God.

### **1st. Plague - Water Turned to Blood**

After a few preliminary miracles that didn't seem to impress Pharaoh very much, after all, God had hardened his heart. God decided it was time to start playing His trump cards.

Continuing in Exodus 7 verse 14, "The LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened and he refused to let the people go. {15} Go to Pharaoh in the morning when he goes down to the water, down by the river, and you stand right by the rivers bank where he's coming, you take the Rod that was turned into a serpent that you have in your hand {16} "You speak to Pharaoh and you say, "Yehovah, God of the Hebrews, has sent me to you, saying, "Let my people go that they may serve me in the wilderness and behold up to now, you wouldn't listen. {17} Thus says the LORD, "In this, you shall know that I am Yehovah, behold, I will smite with the Rod that's in my hand upon the waters, which are in the river, and the water shall be turned to blood {19} And the fish in the river shall die and the river shall stink, and the Egyptians shall hate to drink the water of the river," [20} So the Lord spoke to Moses, say to Aaron, "Take the Rod, stretch it out on the waters of Egypt, upon all their streams, upon all the rivers, and all their ponds, every pool of water, that they may become blood, and that there may be blood all through the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood, and vessels of stone.""

Now what is this all about? It was interesting in seeing this in the movie of the Ten Commandments, and the special effects they had, which at that time weren't that great. But why blood? And why the river? Right from the start, these are acts of justice. The Egyptians had defiled the river themselves with the blood of an entire generation of Israelite babies that they had thrown into the river. This is a highly symbolic act. You like blood, here's blood to drink.

So {20} "Moses and Aaron did what God said, Aaron lifted up the Rod and he reached out and smote the waters of the river, right in front of Pharaoh and all of his servants. As they watched, the waters of the river turned to blood. {21} And the fish in the river died, and the river started stinking, the Egyptians could not drink the water of the river or the water of the pools nor waters of the ponds. There was blood everywhere through all the land of Egypt, {22} The magicians of Egypt were able to sort of do that themselves as a sleight-of-hand. And Pharaoh's heart was hardened, neither did he listen to them, just like the LORD had said." {23} "Pharaoh turned and went to his house and he didn't worry about this either. {24} The Egyptians were digging around the river for water to drink." They had to have it filtered through the sand, they couldn't drink of the water of the river or any standing water anywhere. {25} "Seven days went by, after God smote the river, before the water ever ran clear again."

This was not just a random act. This is highly symbolic. It is a reminder of all the deaths that occurred in that river, at the hands of these people.

### **3 Plagues - Frogs, Lice & Flies**

The next three plagues were frogs, lice and flies. The frogs (Exodus 7:25 - 8:15) made the whole land stink to high heaven. The lice (Exodus 8:16-18) made their bodies itch. The flies (Exodus 8:20-32) corrupted their food, got in their face and walked on their eyeballs. These plagues created for all the Egyptians, the living conditions they had imposed on the Israelites for all of their lives. You would have to visit a slave camp to understand how bad this could be.

It wasn't anything new for the Israelites. They had to live with the stench, with the lice, and the flies all the time, while the Egyptians lived clean and dry, so it was time for the Egyptians to suffer, just like they had.

Every time the plague came, Pharaoh would relent and say, "You can go now." When the plague ended, his heart was hardened, and he would not let them go.

I suppose God could have kept the plague on until Israel was out of Egypt and that might have worked, but he wasn't through yet. The Egyptians had not learned yet. Justice had not been done yet. They had not experienced justice to the full.

#### **5th. Plague - Cattle Disease**

The next plague was a murrain (Exodus 9:1-7) disease on the cattle. It started killing all the Egyptians' livestock right and left, it didn't affect any of the livestock of the Israelites. Now there's a difference between what's happening to the Egyptians and what's happening to the Israelites. What's happening is the beginning of the end for Egypt's economy, an economy they had built on the backs of slaves. They had developed all their wealth on the back and shoulders of these people living out there in Goshen, and now it was time for all that wealth to be taken away from them and it started with their cattle. It's the next step in the justice of God.

#### **6th. Plague - Boils**

Then followed the plague of boils (Exodus 9:8-12), misery, pain, no rest. You can't sit down. You can't lie down, you can't stand up, no matter what you're doing, you are in pain. It's almost as though in these plagues God alternates between economic disaster and pain, pain and economic disaster. The Israelites had known pain, suffering and misery throughout their generations. Now it was the Egyptians turn to suffer.

#### **7th. Plague - Hail and Fire**

Next comes hail mingled with fire (Exodus 8:13-35). Hail so severe that it killed livestock. Lightning induced fire that destroyed houses and crops. Hail beat all the crops to the ground. The next step in the destruction of Egypt's slave-built economy. Pharaoh relented until the hail stopped, then his heart was hardened. The hail had destroyed parts of his crop, but they still have some hope for the wheat.

#### **8th. Plague - Locust**



The next plague was locust (Exodus 10:1-20) and ended any hope of crops that year. They stripped every tree of greenery and fruit and ate every blade of grass in the fields. They were everywhere where a man put his foot. The land was black with them. They brought total destruction to the Egyptian economy. And it was all because they had built that economy on the backs of slaves, but when the locusts were gone, Pharaoh's heart was still hardened.

It seems as though God alternated between destroying Egypt's economy and then putting them through the same kind of misery they had imposed on Israel.

### **9th. Plague - Darkness**

The next plague was darkness (Exodus 10:21-29). Moses stretched his hand to heaven and there was a thick darkness in all land of Egypt for three days. They couldn't even see one another. Nobody got up to go anywhere for three days. The children of Israel had light in their dwellings. The darkness signified the depression and hopelessness that generations of bondage had brought to the Israelites. Now it was the turn of the Egyptians.

After three days and three nights of sitting in the dark, Pharaoh finally called Moses and said, {24} "Go, get out of here and serve Yehovah, only let your flocks and your herds stay here. Your little ones can go with you, but we want all of your cattle to stay here."

Now the reason for that is fairly simple. The Egyptians had lost all their cattle. The only cattle left in the country were those that the Israelites had, so the negotiations are beginning. Pharaoh said, "Take your kids, all the adults, but just leave the cows." {25} Moses said, "No, no, you have to give us sacrifices and burnt offerings, we can't go out there in the wilderness without offerings to make to the LORD our God. {26} Our cattle will have to go. We will not leave a hoof behind, for we've got to have them. We won't know what we have to give to God until we are actually out there. We have to take them all."

Tough negotiations are going on here. {27} "But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not let them go. {28} And Pharaoh said, "Get away from me, take heed to yourself that you don't see me again, for in the day you see my face the next time, you will die." {29} And Moses said, "You have spoken well, I will see your face again, no more."

Was this enough? Had justice finally been done? No, not quite. There was still the matter of the generation of little Israelite babies thrown into the river to drown. No, there's more justice to come.

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*The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit [RLDEA.com](http://RLDEA.com) where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.*

## Discussion Questions

1. How does it make you feel to know that God purposefully hardened Pharaoh's heart?
2. Do you think that maybe it was pretty easy for God to harden Pharaoh's heart because it was pretty hardened on its own already?
3. What do you think is the one major reason God hardened Pharaoh's heart?
4. What do you think about Mr. Dart's explanation of the possible reason the name Yehovah wasn't known by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?
5. How do you think you would have responded if you were an Israelite back then, and some guy comes around and tells you that God is going to set you free?
6. What do you think about Moses reaction to God when He tells him to go again to speak to Pharaoh?
7. Doesn't this interaction between God and Moses reveal how real and human Moses was, and how, even though, we may not fully understand why God wants us to do something, it is always best to listen to Him anyway?
8. Do you find it interesting that the Egyptian magicians were able to mimic some of the plagues?
9. Why do you think the Israelites had to go through the first four plagues?
10. God destroyed Egypt's economy systematically. Do you think that the story of Egypt maybe repeated in a way on a grand scheme before the end?