



The Passover Experience

Rabbi Eckstein's Biblical Teachings on the Jewish Roots of Christianity



Something to Think About

A hardened heart prevents us from listening to God and obeying Him. Is your heart hardened in any way to prevent you from listening to God's prompting and believing in Him? Take a few moments this week to reflect on the status of your heart. In *Ask the Rabbi*, Rabbi Eckstein explains that "to pray" in Hebrew means "to judge oneself." True prayer always must involve introspection, meditation, and self-scrutiny. Dedicate your quiet time this week to those activities, as well as adoration, confession, and thanksgiving.

Pharaoh's Hardened Heart

Lesson Two

Lesson Objectives

Through these lessons, students of the Bible will understand the underlying principles of the Jewish celebration of Passover which are:

- That God hears the cries of His people;
- That God is present in human life; and
- That God intervenes in history to deliver man from affliction and to redeem him from oppression.

Key Bible Verses

"But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said." (Exodus 7:22, after the first plague)

"The LORD had said to Moses, 'Pharaoh will refuse to listen to you—so that my wonders may be multiplied in Egypt.' Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh, but the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go out of his country." (Exodus 11:9–10, before the tenth and final plague)

Scripture to Read: Exodus 7:14—11:10

Before You Begin

Even prior to appearing before Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron already were well aware of how difficult the task ahead of them was. God told them, *"But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go"* (3:20). Indeed, before God sent the first plague, Pharaoh had been warned of the ultimate stakes (Exodus 4:21–23).

There is a distinct pattern to the plagues that God brings upon the Egyptians. First, God employs the forces of nature to demonstrate His power over His creation. Second, the plagues are designed to mock the gods of Egypt, showing that God is in control over aspects the Egyptians believed only their gods controlled. Third, the plagues increase in intensity as Pharaoh's heart continues to harden—and be hardened by God.

At first, Pharaoh's magicians are able to mimic the miracles of the plagues. Eventually, they concede defeat. As the plagues become more severe, Pharaoh begins to bargain with Moses. But once the plague is removed, Pharaoh stubbornly refuses to let the people go.

The first three plagues cause discomfort. The second three are more than just irritating—

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P.O. Box 670, Station K, Toronto, ON M4P 2H1 | 888.988.4325 | info@ifcj.ca | ifcj.ca

Pharaoh's Hardened Heart—Continued

Lesson Two

they are personally painful and destructive. The plagues hit closer and closer to home, especially for Pharaoh, and they also become specific and discriminative. From the fourth plague on, God distinguishes between the Israelites and the Egyptians. The Egyptians suffer, but the Israelites are exempt. The third series of plagues not only produces selective destruction, but a growing sense of dread on the part of the Egyptians. With the last plague—which strikes at the very heart of Pharaoh and his family—God struck his final blow. Pharaoh's will was broken, and the Israelites were released from their suffering and bondage.

The Plagues

1. Look up the following Bible verses and fill in the chart below.

Reference	What happened and to whom?	Pharaoh's response
7:14–24	_____	_____
8:1–15	_____	_____
8:16–19	_____	_____
8:20–32	_____	_____
9:1–7	_____	_____
9:8–12	_____	_____
9:13–35	_____	_____
10:1–20	_____	_____
10:21–29	_____	_____
11:1–12:30	_____	_____

Pharaoh's Response

2. After the fifth plague, something changes in Pharaoh's response. What happens, and what do you think is its significance?
3. What does it mean to have a hardened heart?
4. Watch Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein's "A Hard and Heavy Heart" video clip, from *Returning to Zion* at ifcj.ca/returning01. Based on Rabbi Eckstein's talk, in what respect did God harden Pharaoh's heart? In what respect is Pharaoh responsible for his hardened heart?
5. Rabbi Eckstein says that according to the *Torah*, we have the ability to choose good or to choose evil. How important is this concept to our faith?

Your Response

6. What would be some warning signs that your heart is becoming hardened?
7. Read Hebrews 3:12–13. What is one cause of a hardened heart according to this passage?
8. How would you describe the "deceitfulness of sin"? Why would that cause a heart to harden?
9. According to the passage, how can we avoid a hardened heart? How can we help each other avoid being deceived by sin and having our hearts hardened?

Sources

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The pyramids at Giza, on the outskirts of Cairo, Egypt.

Extra Credit

Read Psalm 51, the story of David's confession after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. In what ways was David's heart also hardened during this episode with Bathsheba? How did David soften his heart? How did God respond to David? What is it that God desires most from us?



The Sphinx of Giza, has come to symbolize strength and wisdom.