

A month has passed since the last plague. A month since Moses intercepted Pharaoh at the river. It's around March. The hail had destroyed the barley and flax but the wheat was maturing in the fields when the Word of the Lord came to Moses once again. READ Exodus 10:1-20

Scripture said, "God was making Pharaoh stubborn." Was Pharaoh like a pawn in God's hands? Was God sadistically torturing this poor man? What does it mean that God hardened his heart in order to show God's signs?

"Stubborn as a mule." Have you ever had a friend or a family member you said that about? It means to be determined not to change your decision or opinion about something, even when it is wrong. Do you know anyone who gets locked down in a particular way of thinking or doing something? I know none of you ever do that!

Pharaoh had become completely locked down in the battle with Moses and thus with God. He was stubborn. And God met him there, so to speak. Stubbornness; being unmoved by God has its consequences.

Jesus talked about that. He advised the disciples: Pay attention to how you listen; for to those who have, more will be given; and from those who do not have, even what they seem to have will be taken away" (Lk 8:18).

Another time Jesus explain it this way: " This people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look and listen and understand and turn—and I would heal them" (Mt 13:15).

There are consequences for hardening your heart against God; for not listening.

Pharaoh had been given chance after chance to let God's people go. But Pharaoh had ignored God. Pharaoh had insisted upon his own way; Pharaoh had continued to tyrannize the people. So God took all that stubbornness and turned it right back on his own head. God let Pharaoh feel the effects of his own decisions. He would suffer punishment. Pharaoh's stubbornness led to calamities for Egypt.

Our thinking can become deluded when we insist that things be a certain way, but when we allow our thoughts to be captured by God, the apostle Paul says, our minds can be renewed and even transformed. How liberating that God offers that kind of healing. But it takes the willingness to listen and take God's words to heart. God will not force you.

This week I received a prayer request from one of our missionary families in the field. They said, "A lady has many fears that the Lord would love to help her with, if she is willing." I loved that. It's true. God wants to help us overcome ill thinking. But we must be willing to listen and trust. Pharaoh did not do that. Pharaoh was not open to God. So God allowed his stubbornness to take over.

So God, through these signs punished Pharaoh and made a mockery of the Egyptian gods. The plagues were beyond all natural events, and greater than the power of any magician. Only God could do the signs that God did.

God shows by these signs that God is totally unlike his creation. God is completely separate and different. And, the signs broke down the enemies of God's kingdom.

If you talk to others about spiritual things, if you have a "holy conversation" as we call it, it won't be long before someone will question you about the evil in the world. Most people think God should do something to set things right. Most people think God should stop injustice now. You may wish for this yourself. It's a common charge against God, even in the Bible. For example:

- Habakkuk said, "How long, O Lord, will you let our enemies triumph?"
- The Psalmists constantly call for the defeat of the wicked.
- King Hezekiah cried to God to save Israel from an oppressive regime (2 Kgs 19)
- The disciples' last word to Jesus was *when are you going to come back and restore Israel, that is, get us out from under Rome's thumb?* They wanted God's kingdom to come right then.

One day that will happen. All God's enemies will be defeated. It happened here; the plagues soundly defeated Egypt and Pharaoh. And, in the future there will be a day when Jesus will come back and God's enemies will be defeated once and for all. Rest assured.

God hardened Pharaoh's heart to defeat him. In that way, God showed His power over all other gods, who are really powerless. He made fools of them and other nations began to dread Israel and their God. This will become very important in the future as they enter and become established in the Promised Land.

Do you feel a sense of confidence that you too, as God's child, will one day live in a place where God's will is done? You will. God built the faith of Israel by overcoming this oppressive enemy. Let your faith be built too.

One way faith is built is to look for signs. The Israelites had no Bible and only one leader. They only knew the stories about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But now they had these signs of God, the plagues that showed God was with them and God was fighting and defeating their enemies. And God uses signs still to this day. But how do you see them?

You've got to look and listen for God.

Here's how one man did it. There was a woman named Monica Doddridge who lived a couple of centuries ago. Eighteen out of 19 of her children died in infancy. When her 20th child was born, he appeared to be stillborn. But as he was laid aside, he suddenly cried out. His mother believed it was a sign. So she devoted herself to raising her little son for the Lord. She taught Philip

Scripture from a very young age. The tile surrounding her fireplace had pictures illustrating Bible stories and using those, she taught him.

A few years later Monica's husband died and the family became destitute. But Philip longed to become a pastor. But he had no money to go to seminary. Others advised him to give up and pursue another profession. But he decided to set aside a day to earnestly pray about it. That very day while he was praying, the postman brought a letter from a wealthy benefactor offering to fund his entire education. Philip saw this as a sign.

A successful minister, he was later asked to head a seminary. But health problems made him doubt he could do it. As he passed a house one day, he heard a child reading Deuteronomy 33:25: "As your days, so shall your strength be." He took that as a sign from the Lord that God would help him and accepted the call.

Students flocked to his seminary because of his powerful sermons and devoted prayer life. God used him to train hundreds of men to be pastors. He was a popular Christian writer and wrote over 400 hymns. He lived believing God fights for us, frees us from things that hold us back, and opens the way for us to be a blessing to others.¹

This kind of success does not happen through lethargy. It takes someone who looks for God's signs, and who believes God goes to war for us against enemies who would hold us back.

Are you looking for signs? It takes faith and listening. It also takes commitment.

Pharaoh offered Moses a treaty when the pressure of the locusts got too great. "You can go," he said, "but only the guys. Mothers and children must stay here."

"No way," said Moses. "This is all out commitment."

Pharaoh broke off the treaty. He said, "That'll never happen. You are not going."

But Moses insisted. All children and even their animals must go. It was full participation; no halfway or token commitment.

The Marine Corps has a slogan that says: "We Don't Accept Applications . . . Only Commitments."

How is your commitment? Are you able to see God clearly? That happens through time in prayer, reading your Bible, seeking God. Your passion and commitment will impact your children, as well as all those around you, who will notice whether your faith is alive or not. It will even be evident to those who visit this church and sit beside you in worship.

This story of God's going to battle for God's children is the defining story of Scripture. We are still telling the story to our children today. Through all these events Israel learns the power and

¹Robert Morgan, *Then Sings My Soul*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 63.

glory of their God. That call is extended to you and me. Moses calls for “all out” commitment to God. All out commitment is what speaks to the world today.

How do you increase your confidence in God? Look for signs of God’s presence and direction. Go deeper into your faith. Tell others wherever you go that your God is with you, opening the way to victory.

AMEN