



## THE BATTLE OF THE GODS

Exodus 7:3–8:32

The Pharaoh of Egypt was afflicted by a hardened heart and an impotent religion. Though at the height of human power and prestige, he was spiritually and morally weak and a perfect illustration of the truth that no one can defy God without suffering devastating consequences.

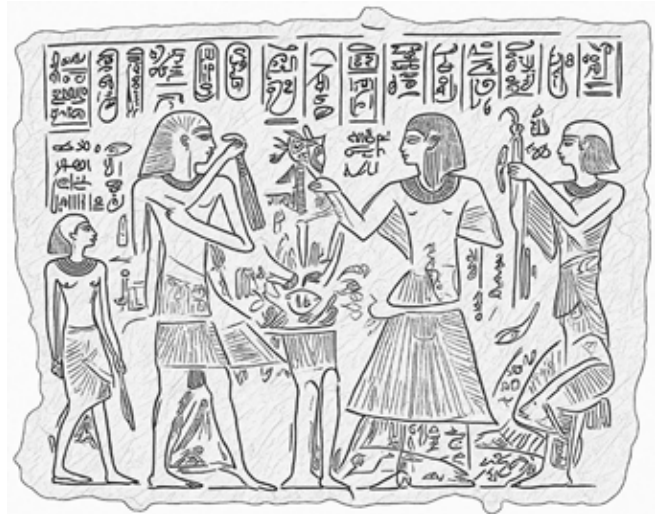
A church leader centuries ago made this observation: “The sun moistens the wax and dries the clay; softening one but hardening the other.” Well, the “sun” of God’s power is about to shine on the land of Egypt, and while many hearts will melt in submission, Pharaoh’s heart will harden in defiance.

Now let me address something that bothers many Christians. Here in Exodus chapter 7 and verse 3, God says to Moses, “But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you.”

People have asked me about this because they assume Pharaoh had no choice in the matter—he didn’t stand a chance. Repeatedly in these chapters we read that Pharaoh’s heart was *hardened*. Sometimes it says *God* hardened his heart, and several times it says Pharaoh hardened his *own* heart.

Here in verse 3, the Hebrew word used for hardening refers to pressure, or even twisting. We might picture the twisting of a mop to wring the water out of it. In other words, you wring that mop, and the water that’s already inside it comes out.

That seems to be the idea here. Pharaoh has already hardened his heart against God. God is now going to wring out Pharaoh’s heart, so that all the rebellion



Seti I is portrayed here with his son, Ramesses II

that is on the inside comes out into the open. <sup>1</sup>

Pharaoh is going to be held responsible for choosing to defy and deny the creator God, just as Romans chapter 1 tells us every human being will one day be held accountable for rejecting the evidence of God in creation. Since God knows the future, He can tell Moses before any of this happens that when Pharaoh’s heart is wrung out, it will reveal nothing but stubborn defiance.

Now with that, let’s move to the royal palace in Egypt, where we’re told here in verse 7 that “Moses



was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh.” Just try to imagine this encounter. This is going to become nothing less than an epic battle between the gods of Egypt and the God of Israel. And it starts off with a battle in the palace of Pharaoh. God says to Moses here in verse 9:

*“When Pharaoh says to you, ‘Prove yourselves by working a miracle,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.’”*

Now the word translated “serpent” here isn’t the same Hebrew word used back in Exodus chapter 4 at the burning bush, when Moses’ staff became a serpent. The Hebrew word there is *nabash*, and it’s the common word for serpent, used more than thirty times in the Old Testament.

But the word used here, in the court of Pharaoh, is *tannin*, a word that is most naturally translated, “crocodile.” Over in Ezekiel 29:3, this same word is used in reference to the crocodile that lived in the Nile River. And remember, the crocodile was considered the servant of the Egyptian Nile god.

I think translators must have thought this was a little too crazy to translate it normally, and so most translations use the word *serpent*. But that’s not what happens here.

Suddenly on the palace floor is a crocodile. And Pharaoh calls on his magicians, and they throw their rods down, and they also become crocodiles. By the way, Satan doesn’t have any power to create or manipulate anything without the permission of God. God allows them to imitate the miracle of Aaron’s rod—and there’s a good reason for it, by the way.

What’s taking place on the palace floor is a battle between these crocodiles. We don’t know how long it lasted, but verse 12 tells us Aaron’s staff (crocodile) swallowed up those of the Egyptian’s. In other words, Aaron’s crocodile killed all the others.

Pharaoh can’t miss the significance of this battle; he is effectively defeated before the battle even gets started. The sun of God’s power should have melted Pharaoh’s heart right then and there. Instead, verse 13 reads, “Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them.”

*Satan doesn’t have any power to create or manipulate anything without the permission of God.*

With that, God begins sending a series of plagues upon Egypt. And it’s important to understand that each plague will confront one of Egypt’s false gods (see Exodus 12:12).

Here in verses 14-25, the first plague attacks the Nile River, which the Egyptians considered the source of life. We read in verses 20-21:

*Aaron . . . lifted up the staff and struck the water in the Nile, and all the water in the Nile turned into blood. And the fish in the Nile died, and the Nile stank, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile.*

The Egyptian sorcerers again are able to imitate this miracle, but what they cannot do is turn the Nile back into clean water – they can only add *more blood* – and more death. God is essentially saying, “Your false god is not the source of life.”

Pharaoh refuses to surrender, and after seven days, the second plague demonstrates God’s supremacy



over the Egyptian goddess Heqet, the goddess of fertility. This goddess had the body of a woman and the head of a frog—not exactly Cinderella.

It's as if God says, "You want to worship a frog? I'll send you some frogs." And so, frogs swarm the land of Egypt.

Again, the Egyptian sorcerers are allowed by God to produce more frogs, but they can't get rid of them. It's almost comical that these sorcerers do their little magic tricks, but instead of frogs disappearing, they're multiplying.

Now in chapter 8 and verse 16, the Egyptian god Geb, the god of earth, is going to be defeated. God tells Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt.'"

Suddenly the top layer of dust on every square inch of Egyptian soil becomes a swarm of insects stretching for hundreds of miles in every direction. The land is supposedly under the power of Geb, but now it's obviously under the control of Israel's God.

Pharaoh's magicians can't replicate the miracle this time. In fact, they tell Pharaoh, in verse 19, "This is the finger of God." But instead of his heart melting, we're told in verse 19, Pharaoh's heart was hardened.

And now the fourth plague begins. This one is directed by God against the Egyptian god Khepara, represented by the beetle, or scarab, to which the "flies" refer. This god was supposed to represent blessings in life. Gold and silver scarabs have been found in the tombs of Egypt.

This was their lucky charm. The God of Israel says, "Well, I'll send you swarms of them, and see just how blessed you feel."

By the way, neither this plague nor any of the remaining plagues will affect the Israelites. They apparently had suffered through the first three plagues, which no doubt served to remind them that their God was the true and living God.

And this particular plague seems to get Pharaoh's attention—finally. He tells Moses the people can take some time off work and sacrifice to Yahweh.

So, God removes these beetles, and immediately after, we read in verse 32, "Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go."

Four miraculous plagues, four Egyptian gods defeated, and Pharaoh's heart is repeatedly wrung out. And each time, nothing but the dirty water of stubborn defiance spills out.

And with that, we're out of time; when we meet again, Lord willing, we'll return to this epic battle of the gods.

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What have the challenges you've faced in life revealed about you? How has this been, or how should it be, helpful to you?

What are some of the "gods" that people today cling to? How can you effectively show them the supremacy of the true God?

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<sup>1</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, volume 1 (Thru the Bible Radio, 1981), 223.

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