

## **BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study**

**Sermon:** “Hard-Hearted” (from the “Deliverance” sermon series)

**Scripture:** Exodus 7:1-13 (Aaron’s staff becomes a serpent)

**Main idea:** This section of Exodus, Moses and Aaron are sent back to Pharoah and are instructed by God to perform a wonder in order to convince him to let God’s people go.

### **Key take-aways from the Scripture**

- In Exodus chapter 7, we find God telling Moses that he must return to Pharoah despite Moses’ feeling of inadequacy in doing so. In the last few verses of chapter 6, Moses tells God that since “I speak with faltering lips, why would Pharoah listen to me” (Exodus 6:30).
- God tells Moses that He will make him “like God to Pharoah, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet” (7:2). In doing so, God commands Moses to go and tell Pharoah to let the Israelites leave Egypt.
- In vv. 3-7, God tells Moses that He will “harden Pharoah’s heart” and “...multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt.” Pharoah, with a hardened heart will not listen or comply with any of this, and God will “lay my hand upon Egypt and bring my people...out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgement.” The language we see in these verses is similar to what we read in Exodus 6:6.
- In verse 8, God tells Moses and Aaron that Pharoah will demand a miracle from them. In v. 9, Aaron is to throw down his staff and it will become a snake. When Pharoah demands a miracle, Aaron complies with God’s instruction and his staff turns into a snake (v.10). However, Pharoah’s wise men and magicians throw down their staff which also become snakes. Aaron’s snake then devours the other official’s snakes and is shown to be the victor of this contest.
- At the conclusion of the contest (vv.13), Pharoah’s “heart became hardened, and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.” This idea of God hardening Pharoah’s heart has become a central theme in theological debate illustrating the tension between divine and human will.
- Even though the contest demonstrated God’s power and authority over Pharoah, Pharoah (with a hardened heart) remained unimpressed and refuses to let the Israelites go.

### **Key take-aways from the Sermon**

- Obedience to God does not necessarily translate to immediate results. It does not always lead to instant peace. On the contrary, it can get you into trouble (as we see with Moses and his brother Aaron)! Also, see 1 John 1:9.
- The whole purpose of the Hebrew's existence then, and ours today, is worship. It is a fundamental human right in which the Pharaoh denied to the Hebrews.
- A troubling verse in this section is verse 3, where God hardens Pharaoh's heart. There is a similar verse in verse 13 that mentions Pharaoh hardening his own heart. Why this ambivalence?
- In this part of the scriptures, there is a definitive correlation between one who has a hard heart and one who is deaf in the ears (spiritual deafness). See v.13.
- Predestination and predeterminism: believing things are determined outside of our doing. We don't believe that everything that happens is predetermined or everything that happens is God's will (tragic events, etc.). It is important to say that God can steer evil into something good but is not the author of evil. God and evil do not mix, but God uses the debris of evil.
- See Joseph in Genesis: "What you intended for evil, God has used for good."
- As Wesleyans, we believe in free will! We have a will of our own. Where there's a will, there is a human. We each have a will of our own. We can choose to follow Jesus or deny Jesus and God will not coerce or manipulate this dynamic.
- Remember the story of the prodigal son...the father did not lock up or hold back his son. He let him go. You cannot force someone to love you. We have a choice.
- Pharaoh must have become so steeped in his own self-importance that the notion of a God supporting a minority of these "nobodies" must have been anathema to him. God was the source of hardening his heart in this regard.
- The covenant of marriage and the covenant of baptism prompt us to make a choice and say "I will."
- We have a choice to follow God. When your will begins to align with God's will, we begin to focus, and a resistant heart becomes soft and beats with new life and purpose. When we acknowledge our "chosen-ness" and respond with "I will." I will be a Christian on purpose.

**Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion**

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- How do we reconcile the idea of God hardening Pharaoh's heart (complete sovereignty) with the idea of Pharaoh, of his own will, hardening his own heart (see Exodus 8:15, 32; and 9:34)? What does this teach us about our lives and God's will for our lives?
- If God is really in control, then why is there so much evil in the world? Why is there suffering? How does this impact your faith?
- Why is Moses resistant to God's call? Do you resist God's call in your life? Why?
- Where have you seen God's signs and wonders in your life? How do you interpret these?
- In what ways can you respond to the prompt "I will" and become more proactive and deliberate in your faith?

[illegible]