

The Plagues: Who is God? Yahweh or Pharaoh? AND/OR A Hardened Heart
Exodus 6:28-12:32

OPTIONAL ICEBREAKERS:

1. What is your favorite bug and why? **Connection: gnats, flies and locusts**
2. Describe one of your most stubborn moments (serious or silly) OR a time when you witnessed someone acting ridiculously stubborn. [Leader will probably need to share first.] **Connection: hardening of Pharaoh's heart.**

I. The Ten Plagues (Exodus 6:28-12:32)

Plagues in Summary: 1. Water turned to blood (7:14-25) 2. Frogs (8:1-15) 3. Gnats (8:16-19) 4. Flies (8:20-32) 5. Livestock diseased (9:1-7) 6. Boils (9:8-12) 7. Thunder and hail (9:13-35) 8. Locusts (10:1-20) 9. Darkness (10:21-29) 10. Death of the firstborn (12:29-32)

A. *Read 8:1-15 aloud

Identify the following:

1. The Plague
2. God's Words
3. Pharaoh's Response

What do you notice?

B. Reflection Questions

1. Does God's harsh way of dealing with Pharaoh and the Egyptians bother you? Why or why not? [Note: Responses may vary. It's important to allow participants to speak their minds before moving to the next question. The point of this question is to simply recognize the misgivings many people have about this particular depiction of God.]

2. What do you think is the overall purpose of God's battle with Pharaoh? ["The ten plagues are used to discredit the Pharaoh's claim to sovereignty and to establish the sovereignty of Yahweh in its place." – Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*. We are dealing with a cosmic struggle between a man claiming to be god and the true God of creation. The plagues are yet another example of God's unmatched reign on earth.]

3. What are we supposed to learn from this epic struggle? ["Egypt had developed and perfected one of the most impressive god-games of all, dominating the landscape, dominating the imaginations of people far and near, a totalitarian society ruled by a dictator whom everyone believed was also a god." "The ten plagues freed the Hebrews from this Egyptian way of understanding reality, clearing the mind to accept God's revelation reality, energizing their spirits to live in the world of salvation." - Eugene Peterson. We must allow God to break through our defenses (sin, avoidance, idol worship, etc.) so that He can occupy the very center of our lives. Exodus 8:1,

“Let my people go, *so that they may worship me.*” There can only be ONE god in our lives.]

4. Why do you think God used such harsh measures to subdue Pharaoh and free Israel? [Notes: “When Moses began his work with his Hebrew brothers and sisters, their spirits were ‘broken’ (Exod. 6:9) and the only ‘truth’ they had access to was this huge Egyptian lie.” – Eugene Peterson. Israel needed more than physical liberation. Sometimes harsh measures are required to break people free from a lie. EXAMPLE: *People who involved in a dangerous cult.* Reasoning does not work. Lawsuits, police intervention, etc. may be your only hope to save them.]

II. A Hardened Heart

***Read the following passages (Exodus 6:3; 7:13-14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34-35; 10:1, 20, 27; 14:8)**

1. Did Pharaoh harden his own heart through already established patterns of behavior? Did God predestine him to turn away? Was it a combination of both? Where should the emphasis lie? [Notes: answers may vary. It appears that it is a mysterious combination of both self-hardening and God-hardening. I personally believe that the emphasis should lie on Pharaoh hardening his own heart, but you and others in your group may think differently.]

2. Are you troubled by the statement that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart? Why or why not? [Notes: This one bugs a lot of people. It implies, of course, that Pharaoh has no choice in the matter. Even if he wants to comply he can’t because God won’t let him. Nonetheless, it does emphasize God’s authority over Pharaoh, the greatest symbol of human power at that time.]

3. Can you think of other instances in scripture where individuals or people groups were or seemed predestined for failure/destruction? [Notes: Judas (Last supper); Saul (1 Samuel 18:10); Esau (Genesis 25:19-28)]

III. Where the Rubber Hits the Road... (Growing in Christ)

1. How much control do you think we have over the condition of our heart? Can we harden or soften our hearts at will or is our heart completely God’s domain?

2. What kept Pharaoh from softening his heart? [Notes: Combination of God’s will and his own stubborn streak.]

3. What keeps us from softening or opening our hearts to God?

4. What can we do to ensure that we remain open to God?

5. How does softening your heart toward God make a difference in your life?

