

Exodus 7:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring forth mine armies, and my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments.

Analysis

But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring forth mine armies, and my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. God prophetically declares Pharaoh's resistance while revealing His sovereign purpose behind it. The phrase **shall not hearken** (עַמְּדָה-אַתָּה, lo-yishma) uses the verb shama (עָמַד), meaning to hear, listen, or obey—Pharaoh will refuse to heed Moses' demands. Yet this disobedience serves divine purpose.

The crucial phrase **that I may lay my hand upon Egypt** reveals God's redemptive-judicial aim. The Hebrew **לְמַעַן** (lema'an, "that" or "in order that") indicates purpose: Pharaoh's hardness becomes the occasion for demonstrating Yahweh's power over Egypt and its gods. God's **hand** (יָד, yad) symbolizes His power—the same hand that would part the Red Sea, provide manna, and write the commandments. Here it executes judgment on Egypt's false gods (12:12) and liberates Israel.

Bring forth mine armies (אֶת-צְבָאֹתִי, et-tziv'otai) describes Israel as Yahweh's tzava'ot—His hosts or armies. This military language elevates Israel's identity: not merely escaped slaves but Yahweh's organized forces marching out in divine order (12:51, 13:18). The plural **my people the children of Israel** emphasizes covenant relationship: Israel belongs to Yahweh, not Pharaoh. Egypt's stubbornness cannot

thwart God's redemptive plan.

By great judgments (בשפטים גדלים, bishphatim gedolim) anticipates the ten plagues. The noun shphatim comes from shaphat (שפט, "to judge"), indicating these weren't mere natural disasters but divine judicial sentences against Egypt's false deities. Each plague targeted specific Egyptian gods—the Nile (Hapi), the sun (Ra), etc.—revealing their impotence before Yahweh. This prefigures God's ultimate judgment on all evil and idolatry, culminating in Christ's victory over sin, death, and Satan (Colossians 2:15; Revelation 20).

Historical Context

Exodus 7 inaugurates the plague cycle (chapters 7-12), Egypt's ten judgments. Ancient Egypt was a superpower—the dominant civilization with advanced architecture, agriculture, military might, and religious sophistication. Egypt's pantheon included hundreds of deities governing natural forces, cosmic order, and daily life. Pharaoh himself was considered divine, the living incarnation of Horus and son of Ra. For Yahweh to challenge Egypt meant confronting the world's greatest power and its elaborate theological system.

The phrase "my armies" reflects ancient Near Eastern conquest narratives where gods led their people to victory. However, Israel's exodus differed radically from typical ancient warfare—Yahweh alone fought while Israel witnessed His salvation (14:13-14). The exodus became Israel's foundational narrative, shaping national identity, worship, and theology. Prophets repeatedly referenced the exodus when calling Israel to faithfulness (Jeremiah 2:6, Amos 2:10, Micah 6:4).

The statement that Pharaoh "shall not hearken" raises the theological problem of divine hardening (explored in 4:21, 7:3, 9:12, etc.). Reformed theology interprets this as God's judicial hardening of those already resistant—God gives them over to their chosen rebellion (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). Pharaoh's initial refusals were his own (7:13-14, 22-23; 8:15, 19, 32), then God confirms him in that hardness to accomplish redemptive purposes. This mysterious interplay of divine sovereignty and human responsibility appears throughout Scripture.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does God's use of Pharaoh's hardness to accomplish redemption help us trust His sovereignty when people resist the gospel?
2. What does Israel's identity as God's "armies" teach about the church's spiritual warfare and identity as God's people?

Interlinear Text

וְלֹא יִשְׁמַע עַל־אֶלְכֶם פְּרָעָה הַיְתָמָת אֶת־יְהֹוָה אֲתָּה
H3808 shall not hearken H413 But Pharaoh H6547 unto you that I may lay H853
H8085 H6635 H5414

עַמְּךָ יְמִינְךָ מִצְבָּאת אֶת־צְבָאָתִי אֶת־יְהֹוָה אֲתָּה
my hand of Egypt and bring forth H853 mine armies H853 and my people H5971
H3027 H4714 H3318 H6635 H853 H5971

בָּנִים גָּדוֹלִים: יְמִינְךָ מִצְבָּאת בְּשֻׁפְטִים יְמִינְךָ מִצְבָּאת
the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt judgments by great H1419
H1121 H3478 H776 H4714 H8201 H1419

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 11:9 (References Egypt): And the LORD said unto Moses, Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you; that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt.

Exodus 6:6 (Judgment): Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments:

Exodus 12:51 (References Israel): And it came to pass the selfsame day, that the LORD did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies.

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