

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 267

Exodus 7:1-13

April 14, 2019

Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)

Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)

Episode Summary

Aside from the date of the exodus event and the revelation of the divine name, one of the most frequently discussed issues in the book of Exodus is the hardening of pharaoh's heart. The narrative affirms that both God and pharaoh are the agents responsible for the hardening of pharaoh's heart. How do we understand this in light of moral human responsibility, human free will, and the righteousness of God? This episode focuses on this topic.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 267: Exodus 7:1-13. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing?

MH: Well, I'm doing pretty good, but I imagine you're still in pain because of the NCAA Basketball tournament.

TS: Yeah, shout out to my Red Raiders (Texas Tech). We made it all the way to the Finals. Lost to Virginia. It was a close one. We had it there, and they tied it up with 12 seconds left to go in the game, on a three-point shot in the corner, and took it to overtime. We didn't quite pull it out, but I'm super-proud of Texas Tech University, and it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. It was exciting.

MH: In case anybody is wondering, no, I did not watch the game. I don't watch basketball. But I did follow it, in terms of the news. So I knew where your heart was, Trey. But that happens.

TS: Yeah, it was rough. But man, it was fun. I couldn't believe that there's only been one Texas team in the whole state of Texas to win the championship game, and that was UTEP before it was UTEP, in 1966. Western Texas, or something like that. I'm not sure what it was. But I didn't know that. It sure would have been bragging rights if Texas Tech had pulled that out.

MH: But you got to feel for a day (or a few days) the way I've been feeling since the start of the Major League Baseball season, because my Red Sox honestly look bad. They just look terrible. [laughs] I don't know how that happens. I don't know how you win the World Series one year, then you look like garbage the next. But hopefully they'll pull out of it.

TS: Yeah, my thoughts are not even in baseball. We have NBA play-offs coming up, and hockey play-offs coming up.

MH: Yeah, baseball is to you like basketball is to me. [laughs]

TS: Yeah, we're on different gears here. But switching gears, we're in chapter 7.

MH: We're almost into the plagues. I guess I'm a plague kind of guy. I've been looking forward to it. [laughs] We have a little bit of a stop here. Exodus 7:1-13. We're going to stop this episode right before we hit the plagues. So we're almost there.

Alright, Exodus 7:1-13... What we're really going to camp on today is the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. This chapter isn't the first time we run into that phrase—that language. It has occurred up to this point. But this is where it kicks in. So I'm going to read the first 13 verses. There's going to be one thing I want to comment on before we get to the hardening, but that's basically where we're going to be camping out today. So this is Moses and Aaron meeting with Pharaoh. So they're before Pharaoh. The first verse says:

And the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. ²You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land. ³But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, ⁴Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. ⁵The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them." ⁶Moses and Aaron did so; they did just as the LORD commanded them. ⁷Now Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

⁸Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 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.'" ¹⁰So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron cast

down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. ¹¹ Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. ¹² For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. ¹³ Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

So that's the first 13 verses. We've commented on a few things in there already about this confrontation. The one new thing (before we get to the "hardening" topic) is in verse 1.

5:00 **The Lord said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet."**

Now some people—I'll use the word "foolishly"—presume this wording means that *elohim* are men. In other words, they'll use this verse as a justification for the notion that, "Well, see, *elohim* can be people, and then we take that back to Psalm 82," blah blah blah. Of course, they never turn to Psalm 89, where the Divine Council was in the skies, you know, and a bunch of men ruling nations in the skies. They forget about Psalm 89 and other passages. But we know the drill here on the podcast. If Divine Council stuff is new to you, watch the videos on the podcast website, where it says, "If you're new, start here." Go to my website "thedivinecouncil.com" and you can get up to speed there. This verse doesn't support that notion at all. That's not the point at all. Moses is not really an *elohim*. The point is one of analogy. God here is making an analogy for and about Moses in relation to Pharaoh. So let's go back to Exodus 4 to get the point of the analogy. In Exodus 4:14-16, we read this:

¹⁴ Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses [MH: You know, Moses says he doesn't want to go to Egypt.] and he said, "Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. ¹⁵ You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do. ¹⁶ He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him."

So that's the other part of this analogy. Think of it this way: There's God, and when God calls a prophet—when God picks a spokesperson—God speaks to that person, and then that person speaks to other people. So God has called Moses. Moses is the mouthpiece of God to other people. He is to speak God's words. But what we have going on here is that Moses is speaking to... whom? Well, it depends on the passage. When Exodus 7:1 says,

God said to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet...”

...it's as though Moses is sort of in the God slot, and then Moses gives his word to Aaron, and Aaron speaks to Pharaoh. So in Pharaoh's perception, Moses is sort of playing the role that the deity would normally play. The deity would normally tell the spokesman what to say, and then he would say it to somebody else. Well, here what you have going on is Moses is telling Aaron what to say, and of course Moses is getting it from God. But now we have this one step removed, because Moses doesn't want to talk to people (or he can't talk, or he stutters, or whatever it is). So Aaron is brought into the picture. And the whole point is one of analogy. It's not that God says, "Hey, Moses, you're an *elohim* now." No, he says, "You're going to play this role. In Pharaoh's eyes, you're going to be like a deity because you're the one dispensing the revelation (as it were) to your brother Aaron. Aaron will be your prophet. And then Aaron will do things and say things to Pharaoh.

So that's all that's going on here. It's just a point of analogy. And it was something that God telegraphed back in Exodus 4 when Moses just didn't want to go to Egypt. So God has to bring Aaron into the picture as this intermediary figure—this spokesperson figure. That's all that's going on here. So we don't need to complicate it and say silly stuff. That's what I'm trying to say here.

Now let's go down to verse 3. Verse 3 is where we get this line about God saying,

“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.”

That's verses 3 and 4. Now we've already hinted at this, because the phrase about hardening shows up in other places. And I had said that we would get to it. This is the point that we want to camp on the whole issue. And I'm going to be referencing an article here. I will put it in the protected folder, in case some of you want to read the whole thing, although I think with this one you can find it just freely accessible online on the internet anyway. But I'll stick it in the protected folder for newsletter subscribers. So the article is by Robert Chisholm. And it's entitled "Divine Hardening in the Old Testament." It's Dallas Seminary's journal, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (1996):410-434. And the whole article is not just on the Exodus passage. It's on some other Old Testament instances, where we get the same language. But we're basically going to just focus on Pharaoh here because we're doing this through Exodus. So Chisholm writes at the beginning of his article... He sets the whole subject up this way. So Chisholm writes in his introduction:

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The Old Testament sometimes pictures God as “hardening” the human heart or spirit. The plague narratives recorded in the Book of Exodus attribute Pharaoh’s obstinance, at least in part, to divine hardening. Deuteronomy 2:30 and Joshua 11:20 speak of divine hardening in the context of Israel’s conquest of the Promised Land, and Isaiah 6:9–10 and 63:17 seem to indicate that God hardened His own covenant people.

You can see that Chisholm there loops in some other examples of hardening, but for our use of his article we’re going to focus obviously on the Exodus material. We may return to Isaiah 6:9-10 before we’re all done, though, because I think there’s something in that passage worth mentioning, if I remember it. Back to Chisholm:

These passages disturb many people, for they raise questions about God’s fairness and goodness. Why would God cause someone to resist His will and then hold that person accountable for the sin He prompted? In an effort to preserve human moral responsibility and to avoid the conclusion that God would override the human will or manipulate free moral agents like puppets, some argue that the objects of divine hardening first hardened themselves. Others say the biblical statements, because they reflect ancient Hebrew idiom, cannot be taken at face value. According to this latter explanation, the biblical text replaces the immediate agent (the individual himself) with the ultimate agent (God). God simply allowed individuals to resist His will, but the Old Testament idiom bypasses the human subject and describes what God allowed as if He actually initiated and directly caused the action.

A close reading of the texts, a reading that includes being sensitive to literary features and genre considerations, allows one, however, to give the biblical references to divine hardening their full force, while preserving human moral responsibility. Divine hardening took either a direct form, in which God supernaturally overrode the human will [MH: To me, “overrode” is a bit too strong, but we’ll just go with what Chisholm says for this point.], or an indirect form, in which He used intermediate causes to “harden” the object. Whether accomplished directly or indirectly, this hardening was an element of divine judgment whereby God exhibited His justice and sovereignty. The objects of such judgment were never morally righteous or neutral, but were rebels against God’s authority. Divine hardening was never arbitrarily implemented, but was in response to rejection of God’s authoritative word or standards.

So that’s the end of Chisholm’s introduction. For our purposes, we’re going to be sticking with where he focuses on Exodus, which is most of the article. If you want the article, you can either find it online, or if you subscribe to the newsletter, you’ll find it in the protected folder. So the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart runs the gamut. It actually runs the spectrum of causalities, direct and indirect (to use

Chisholm's terminology). He, in his article, breaks down the data of the book of Exodus into three categories. I'll give you these three categories.

His category A is a group of texts in which Yahweh is the subject of some verb of hardening. There are ten of these, so this is ten times in which you have texts in which Yahweh is the subject of some verb of hardening. In other words, God is the agent—the one performing the action. So there are ten of those.

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And then his category B is texts in which Pharaoh is the (or at least a) subject of a verb of hardening. So that's three times. So there are three instances where Pharaoh is the one doing the hardening. At least one of the subjects. There's one in Exodus 9:34 that says "he and his officials hardened their hearts." So that's why we're wording it the way we are. So there are three instances of those.

And then lastly, Chisholm has a category C in which no source or agent is specifically mentioned. There are six of these. So this would be verses like "Pharaoh's heart was hard." That doesn't really tell you who's doing the hardening. Is it Pharaoh or is it God? It just doesn't say. So there are six of those that are neutral.

Now Chisholm notes that Driver, in his old classic commentary on the book of Exodus, suggested that in Hebrew idiom "God hardened Pharaoh"... Driver is one of these writers that angles for some idiomatic language here. And what he writes here, quoting Driver... I'm actually going to quote Driver here. Driver believes that God hardened Pharaoh...

...in so far as he [Pharaoh] hardened himself.... But even supposing that the passages mean more than this, we must remember that, especially in His dealings with moral agents, God cannot be properly thought of as acting arbitrarily; He only hardens those who begin by hardening themselves....[Pharaoh was] a self-willed, obstinate man who persistently hardens himself against God, and resists all warnings: God thus hardens him only because he first hardened himself.

Now that's the end of the Driver quote. There are a couple of important things in there. There's this notion that God doesn't act arbitrarily, which of course Chisholm said as well. And then Driver is following the trajectory where God hardens people who had already begun to harden themselves. Now I think this is really important—really worth consideration. But you will not find this point if you only look at verbs of "hardening" in the book of Exodus. That's an important distinction. I'll be honest with you. There are places in Chisholm's article where he seems to latch on to that, and there are other places where he seems a bit too fixated on the hardening vocabulary and maybe... I don't want to say that he misses it. He doesn't miss it. But I think the way he crafts his article doesn't allow people to see this as clearly as I think they ought to. So this trajectory is one we're going to follow here—ultimately about Pharaoh being, like Driver says, a

self-willed, obstinate man who persistently hardens himself against God. Chisholm has a footnote at this Driver quote where he says this:

Driver correctly affirms that God would not arbitrarily cause someone to disobey Him, and he rightly observes that Pharaoh was obstinate from the outset. It is also true that Pharaoh's obstinance prompted divine hardening. However, Driver downplays Yahweh's sovereign involvement in the drama and fails to note that hardening terminology is used primarily of Yahweh's acts, not Pharaoh's, and that the divine hardening both precedes and follows that of Pharaoh.

So let me try to look at this in a bit of a different way. We've seen what Driver says. I think Driver is on to something. Chisholm responded to that. I think he's trying to be fair. But I think Chisholm is a little too fixated on the hardening vocabulary. So let's try to capture a little bit about the chronology of the hardening. Because this is going to be where Chisholm tracks on... how he essentially thinks that Driver is downplaying God's role. So if you actually look at Chisholm's list (you can look at the article), he has these three categories we just talked about. You could use those three categories to reconstruct a chronology. As far as a chronology goes, you have the first occurrence of a verb of hardening back in Exodus 4:21. So let me read that to you:

²¹ And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go."

This is part of the burning bush episode. God tells Moses what's going to happen. God, of course, can see into the future. When Moses and Aaron are going to go talk to Pharaoh, God is just telling them, "Here's the outcome. I will harden Pharaoh's heart."

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Now we get (in the chapter we're in today) in Exodus 7:3 hardening language. We get hardening language in verses 13, 14, and 22. Because it starts to kick up here. But Moses and Aaron have actually talked to Pharaoh already and their conversation with Pharaoh was subsequent to (obviously) the conversation Moses has with God in Exodus 4:21. And I want to try to help you understand how I come down closer to Driver than I do to Chisholm, even though they're very close, actually. But I think that the way that Chisholm wants to emphasize God's role, and then he looks at Driver as de-emphasizing God's role... To me, there's a fundamental question here. When God tells Moses in the burning bush episode... He says look, "I'm going to send you to Egypt. You're going to have a conversation with Pharaoh, and I will harden his heart." Does that mean that in that scene (when Moses and Aaron go before Pharaoh) that when Pharaoh rejects their request it's at that moment that Pharaoh's heart becomes hard? It's a fulfillment of what God said to Moses at the burning bush episode? Is that how

we're supposed to read it? If you read it that way, then it's like, here's Pharaoh just kind of doing what pharaohs do, and Moses and Aaron show up. He says, "Hey, what do you guys want?" And they say, "Well, we've met with Yahweh, and Yahweh wants you to let the Israelites go." And then boom, God steps in, touches Pharaoh's heart, and makes it a heart of stone, and Pharaoh says, "Forget it!" Okay, I think that's really dubious. I think that Pharaoh is that guy for a long, long, long time preceding. I think Pharaoh already has a hardened heart—is already predisposed not to listen to God. I think he was already predisposed against listening to God before God ever even had a conversation with Moses at Sinai. I do not think we can take Exodus 4:21 as a prophecy and then view its fulfillment in their first conversation, which is actually Exodus 5:1-2. Let me just read it to you.

Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'" ² But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD [YAHWEH], that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD [YAHWEH], and moreover, I will not let Israel go."

I don't think that verse (Exodus 5:2) is a fulfillment or the outworking of Exodus 4:21. I think the Pharaoh we see in chapter 5 was that guy *years* before. So why do I even mention this? I think, to me it's plain that Pharaoh's heart is what it is long before God ever says to Moses, "You're going to go to Egypt, and I'm going to harden Pharaoh's heart." So regardless of the chronology of the verbs of hardening... And this is where Chisholm is at—he's doing this chronology thing. I think that skips or doesn't pay enough attention to the kind of person that Pharaoh already was. As Pharaoh, he thinks he is the Horus incarnate. Of course he's not going to listen to Yahweh. He's been taught this since he was a kid. "When you get on the throne, you're a deity. You're it. You're the one that regulates the Nile. You're the one that does this, that, and the other thing." He doesn't have to wait for this conversation for God to zap him with hardness.

So I actually think that the hardness of Pharaoh's heart... that's where it begins with Pharaoh. I think Driver is correct here. Even though, if you want to do a strict chronology of the verbs of hardening of Exodus, the first comes from God's mouth, in Exodus 4:21. But Pharaoh is already in that condition. I think that is a much more coherent way to look at things, as opposed to, "Up until the time Moses and Aaron got into the throne room and asked Pharaoh to let Israel go—at that moment, God fulfilled his words of Exodus 4:21, and so it starts with God." I think that is a very poor reading of what's going on here. And I'm not saying Chisholm does that. I'm saying that the way Chisholm articulates what he's doing with the verbs and the verbal chronology and the categories... I think that Pharaoh's condition (who he was) gets... It's harder to see it, because Chisholm doesn't really ask you to think those thoughts. He doesn't really bring it to the

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fore as forcefully as he could. That's just my opinion, even though I think the article is really quite good. I just think that we need to be reminded of who this guy was, and not just get fixated on verbs and where they fall, if I can say it that way.

So Chisholm actually says elsewhere in the article... I do think he actually is mentally tracking on this, but I don't think the article brings it to the forefront like it really ought to. But elsewhere in his article, he makes comments that indicate that what was in play was a lot wider than the chronology of the verbs. There are just other things going on. So I don't think he's lost this. I just wish the article would bring it out a little bit more. So he writes this in his section about literary analysis. He says:

The narrative does not resolve the tension at this point [MH: When we're having the conversations between Moses and Aaron and Pharaoh], but one suspects that the Lord's agenda included more than just saving His people from slavery.

So what Chisholm is going to do here is go into a literary analysis that... I recommend you get the article and look at this because it really is worth looking at—where he shows how these narratives (the sections of the book of Exodus, leading up to the plagues and then with the plagues), how there's just a little bit more going on than Yahweh-versus-Pharaoh in this whole matter of hardening. There's a little bit more going on than just saving Israel from Egypt—just getting them out of there. It's just bigger than that.

It is revealed later that He wanted to display His power to the watching world so that all observers, including the Israelites and Egyptians, might recognize that He is indeed Yahweh (6:7; 7:5; 9:16; 10:1–2; 11:9; 14:4).

You get this notion that God is doing what he's doing, not just to extract Israel, not just to win a debate or battle with Pharaoh. He's doing what he's doing, and part of that is the hardening—stringing it out, stringing out Pharaoh's obstinacy. God is doing that not because he wants to play "Pharaoh Puppet." God is doing that so that the episode cumulatively becomes more dramatic, so that all of the events therein spread far and wide—so God's own reputation will expand well beyond Egypt and well beyond the Hebrews. He's doing this for the whole world to see, in effect. That's why in the Exodus narrative, as it's laid out, this becomes apparent (as Chisholm's article shows you) that Pharaoh's getting hardened and strung along just to make it bigger. Just to make it more spectacular. Just so that God can not only prove his case that he's bigger and badder than Pharaoh, but to do it on such a scale that people for miles and miles hear about it. It's to overly dramatize the whole thing.

We know that this actually happened, because when Joshua gets into Jericho, Rahab tells him, "We heard what went on in Egypt. Good grief! We know that

we're not going to be able to stand up to you." So what happens in Egypt does get spread abroad. That wouldn't have happened if Pharaoh had yielded at the first plague—when he sees the Nile turn to blood, if he were like, "Oh! Okay! We're done here! You can go!" No, it has to get to the level of the death of the firstborn and the parting of the Red Sea and all that stuff so that people outside of Egypt hear what happened. And God is magnified through this.

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So if you want to look at Chisholm's article, if you're interested in how the narrative itself builds this idea, reaches this crescendo... And I read you the string of verses there that Chisholm has in that little paragraph about God wanting to display his power. That line (or some line thereof) about God wanting to be magnified... so he strings Pharaoh out again. God basically says, "Well, I'm going to harden Pharaoh's heart so that we do something else here." That whole stringing along process... Those statements get seeded throughout the narrative and it actually builds to a climax. It's very intelligently done to capture this building drama. And it's all for the sake of God's wanting to be known as Yahweh (the God of all the earth) outside Egypt. So a quick capitulation does not accomplish that. A lengthy, drawn-out drama with a final cataclysmic capitulation, and then a final deliverance at the Red Sea—that'll do the trick. News of that will travel. That's part of this whole picture. So it's a lot wider than just trying to get Israel out of Egypt and get the people relief and put Pharaoh in his place. It's a little bit of a bigger stage than that.

Now having said all of that, I would say, as we think about this... I've already telegraphed where I'm at on this. I think Pharaoh was just as Driver described. He's that guy. He is the rebellious, he is the hard-hearted, he is the disobedient, he is the obstinate person. He is this way long before God ever has a conversation with Moses at the burning bush. The hardness is already resident in Pharaoh before God ever says to Moses, "I'm going to send you to Egypt and this is what's going to happen. You're going to do miracles there. I'm going to wield my power through you. But I'm going to harden Pharaoh's heart." And he doesn't just spill the beans as to why he's doing this to Moses—this whole notion of stringing Pharaoh out so that God's reputation can expand beyond the borders of Egypt. He doesn't tell Moses that in one fell swoop. But the point is that God doesn't pick an innocent guy. He doesn't pick a neutral guy. He doesn't pick a guy who would say, "Well, I'll listen to reason. Give me a few days and I'll think about letting Israel..." No. God does not pick someone that would have made a different decision. God already know what Pharaoh's decision is going to be, because he already knows who Pharaoh is long before he ever converses with Moses at the burning bush.

So I think it's really wrong-headed (and, frankly, incoherent) to say that God just sort of changed this person's heart to make it hard. He didn't. His heart was already there. And God is doing what he's doing to magnify himself beyond the borders of Egypt. So I would say that the real questions we need to be thinking about when we read through the hardening passages (all the way back to

Exodus 5, where we are now in Exodus 7, and as we proceed forward)... I think the real things to think about are these:

1. Is Pharaoh's response in Exodus 5:2 the outworking of God's statement in Exodus 4:21? I've already said, I don't think it is.

Just to talk about this a little bit more, is the response in Exodus 5:2 ("I don't know who Yahweh is. Who's that?")... Is Pharaoh's response the outworking of God's statement in Exodus 4:21? Is it God hardening Pharaoh in Exodus 5:2, right on the spot? Or is that defiance something that has already taken root in Pharaoh's heart? To me, this is obvious. To me, Pharaoh's is already that guy. Here's what Chisholm says, just to give Chisholm some credit here.

When Moses confronted the Egyptian ruler and demanded that he allow Israel to celebrate a festival to Yahweh, Pharaoh answered, "Who is Yahweh that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know Yahweh and I will not let Israel go!" (5:2). Does this response mean the divine hardening had already begun?

Now, see, it's a little hard to know what Chisholm means by that, "already begun." Does this response mean that the divine hardening was beginning now? Is that what he means? Or when he says "already begun," does it mean, "Pharaoh's already that guy." It's actually not clear to me in Chisholm's article which one of those he means. So I'm just going to read it for you and let you chew on it. If you want to get the article, you can. So he says,

Does this response mean the divine hardening had already begun? Probably not. Six times after this (9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8) the narrative notes that Yahweh had hardened Pharaoh's heart. (In 9:12 allusion is made to 4:21.) Four other times (7:13, 22; 8:19; 9:35) the observation is made that Pharaoh's heart was hard and this condition is attributed to Yahweh by alluding back to 4:21 and 7:3 (note also 8:15). However, 5:2 makes no mention of God's involvement [MH: and that's true], so it is better to view Pharaoh's action as autonomous.

I still don't like the wording of that. What does "autonomous" mean? It means that God isn't causing it there. I get that. But I'd still like it to be clearer that Pharaoh is deciding what he decides because he's just that guy. And he's been that way. His heart has been hardened, or his own opinion of himself has been so bloated for years. Again, I just wish it was stated a little bit differently.

Furthermore 4:21 clearly relates divine hardening to the signs Moses would perform before Pharaoh.

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That's true. It relates them, whatever that means. All that's happening here sets the scene. It doesn't track on the reality that Pharaoh has been who Pharaoh is for a very long time. I keep repeating it, but I want to repeat it for emphasis. I just don't think we can lose sight of that—that Pharaoh wasn't neutral. His heart is hard before Moses and Aaron ever show up, before God has ever had a conversation with Moses. This is who he is. I think Chisholm is sort of tracking on this, but I wish the wording was a bit different. But there you go. You can get the article and read through it yourself. If I were the journal editor, I would have said, "Can you throw something in here, or change the wording here? Is this what you mean as opposed to that?" I just wish it was a little bit different, a little bit clearer, at least to me, anyway.

2. Is the allegedly deterministic language (this is the language where Yahweh is the one doing the hardening) direct or indirect? That is, is Yahweh creating an emotional, psychological, and spiritual condition in Pharaoh, or is he steering the circumstances for Pharaoh, knowing that defiance has already taken root in Pharaoh's heart?

So you can have Yahweh be the agent of the verb either way. It just depends on what you mean. And I think when people see God as the subject of hardening verbs they assume the former—that God is creating an emotional, psychological, spiritual condition in Pharaoh (or in a person). We don't have to read it that way at all. God is the agent, sure. But maybe what's meant is that God is steering the circumstances so that this individual that God knows really well is going to choose to do X and not Y. Because God knows what the response is going to be in this set of circumstances that he (God) is creating. Those are two different things. The former is quite deterministic. The latter is not. The latter is God acting on his wisdom to put a free-will agent in a situation where God knows what the outcome here is going to be, because he knows that person. He already knows the condition of their heart. He isn't giving them the condition of the heart (the hardening), he already knows who they are. Those are quite different things. I just think we need to stop a moment and think about how God can be the agent of the hardening, but it can actually go in two different directions. It doesn't have to go in one direction. This is beyond the scope of Chisholm's article, to be honest. I just think this is something we, as students, need to think about. After all, the first two chapters of Exodus make it clear that the Egyptians are hostile toward the Israelites. But there's a wild card here. I don't want to miss this verse. In Psalm 105:25, it says:

[God] turned their hearts [the Egyptians] to hate his people, to deal craftily with his servants.

40:00

It was God who instigated the hostility of the Egyptians against the Israelites (his own people). You say, “Well, isn’t that deterministic?” Well, you could read it that way. You could also read it this way, for example: God sees what’s going on in Egypt. He sees his people multiplying. He knows that the Egyptians feel very threatened by this. But God continues to bless his people, knowing that as they grow, as they multiply, as they become a people in Egypt, that that is going to instigate the Egyptians to be hostile toward them. But nevertheless, God is doing that. Why? Because God is creating a set of circumstances where the behavior of the Pharaoh (the guy sitting on the throne in Egypt) is going to be quite predictable. It’s not that the guy sitting on the throne is like, “Man, I love these Israelites, and boy, I love their babies! They’re just wonderful people!” And all of a sudden, he just turns on a dime, like God has to touch him and turn his like of the Israelites into fear. It doesn’t just happen on a dime. It doesn’t just turn that way.

But this is the impression, I think, that deterministic thinking often puts in our heads when we read certain passages. We assume that circumstances just change (“click”) like that. And when they change like that, it’s because God pushed a button in heaven that says, “Okay, now I want all the Egyptians to hate the Israelites. There’s the button, right there. I can get them all with one button,” like it’s not a natural thing that develops over time just as a result of very human propensities. This behavior is very human. We don’t need God to push a button and make human behavior turn contrary to—in a totally different direction than—what it would naturally go to anyway, given the set of circumstances.

But God, nevertheless, is behind the scene. He’s the unseen hand in all of this. This is Providence. God is blessing his people in Egypt. They’re multiplying. And God knows the Egyptians well enough. He knows human behavior well enough to know that this is going to be at some point perceived as a threat. God doesn’t have to sit up in heaven and say, “Hey, hand me the ‘perceived threat’ button. I’m going to push it now, and I’m going to change the hearts of all the Egyptians, because they’re really my puppets anyway.” This is how deterministic thinking really is cartoonish. I’m just going to be blunt here. I think when deterministic thinking takes over passages like this, we don’t realize that this is actually what we’re doing—that everything would just go on fine until God asked some member of the heavenly host for the panic button. “And now I’m going to change all the hearts of the Egyptians. Give me the button. <Click.> There we go.” No. What you see happening in the book of Exodus is very human. You’re the people in control. It’s your country. You’re an Egyptian. It’s your country. And these people in the delta are just starting to get really large, numerically. And you start to wonder where their loyalty might be, because you have an empire. And when you have an empire, you know that people are out to undo it. People are going to act in self-interest. We’ve got masses of people up here in the delta. What happens if one day they just decide, “We don’t want to do these jobs any

more!” These are very human impulses in very human circumstances with very predictable human propensities and behaviors and thought patterns. You don’t need to make God look like a puppet master to understand Exodus 1 and Exodus 2. But this is what we get. We get hardening language and we strip the humanity right out of it. These people are humans. We almost have to make them less than human and have God pushing buttons to parse the passages. And what I’m suggesting to you is you don’t need to do any of that. You don’t need to turn God into a puppet master to understand what’s going on in Exodus 1 and 2. And God is still in it. Psalm 105:25 says that God is still in it. He (God) knows that by continuing to multiply his people in Egypt, at some point (because he knows humanity very well) they’re going to turn. He doesn’t need to turn them. They’re just going to do it, because it’s a human thing to do. And at that point, God is going to see that and he’s going to raise up someone called Moses and he’s going to act, because God has deemed that it is *now* time (it wasn’t before) to judge the gods of Egypt and to judge Pharaoh (because he thinks he’s one of these gods). It’s now time to judge. God gets to decide when he will intervene and judge evil. God gets to do that, because he’s God. And that brings us to the third thought to think.

45:00

3. Is God allowed to directly harden someone for the purpose of judgment?

Let’s say that... I’m not suggesting that the hardening starts with God. I’ve already told you that I don’t think it does. I think Pharaoh is just that guy. But if God wants to string Pharaoh out, is God allowed to do that? [laughs] It’s kind of a dumb question. Of course God’s allowed to do that, because he’s God! But just think with me here. Is God allowed to harden someone for the purpose of judgment? Why would we conclude that the person being hardened and becoming the focus of God’s judgment activity wasn’t already there—wasn’t already hard? Why would we conclude that? Well, because we’re taught to think deterministically in some contexts, that’s why. Why not say that God knows this person (Pharaoh) and the person deserves the hardening? He deserves to get strung along. Perhaps he would relent after one plague or two plagues. God decides, “No. I’m now going to step in and I’m going to harden him. He’s already been hard. He’s been this guy for decades. We all know who this dude is. But now I’m going to string him along, because I not only want to judge evil, I have not only decided now is the time to judge this guy and his wickedness and the gods of Egypt along with him (because the plagues are going to be aimed at the gods)... I’m not only going to do that, but I want to do it in such a way that people for miles around hear about it. We’re not going to let this just settle in the borders of Egypt. We’re going to take this fight and magnify it. And to do that, I’m going to harden this guy. I’m going to make him resist now.” Is God allowed to do that?

We could also even ask, “Might we presume that God knows when a person has crossed a line?” In other words, God knows Pharaoh. It would actually take a divine intervention... It would actually take God changing Pharaoh from

a free-will agent to shutting off his freedom—turning him into a robot for a few seconds—to get him to move the other way and repent. God is not going to do that. We’ve already had a lot of these conversations in *Unseen Realm* and other places. God is not going to step in and trample on a person’s free will. Because if he did, that person would no longer be an imager of God. Being an imager of God is a complete package. We do not get to say, “Well, yeah, imaging is a status, and to accomplish this status, God shares his attributes with us. And he shares all of his attributes with us except freedom. Because if we let people have human free will, then that ruins our theological system. So we’re going to pull that one out...”

No, you can’t do that. Because you can’t parcel out God’s own attributes. God is the complete package. When he shares his attributes with his intelligent creatures, whether it’s supernatural beings or us... And we have them to a lesser degree. We have life, we have ability, we have power, we have the ability to think, we have self-awareness... All these things. These are part and parcel attributes of God. When God shares his abilities with his intelligent beings who are like him so that we can function as him, as it were, in his place (we can image him, we imitate him), that requires thinking. It requires free-will decision-making. It requires certain creative abilities to do things. We can’t just say we’re pulling the free will out of that, because then God wouldn’t... It’s actually an indispensable attribute. Because otherwise, we would not truly be like God. God is not a robot. Neither are we. Neither are the members of God’s spiritual world who are also like him.

50:00

I realize it’s convenient to withdraw free will for the sake of a theological system. I’m not interested in theological systems. This is one of the reasons why. I think it’s cheating. So God is not going to go to Pharaoh and dispense with his free will or shut it off for a few seconds to get him to do something. God is going to be setting circumstances, knowing if a person has crossed a line. I mean, there is a sin unto death, folks. The New Testament actually does talk about this. There is a point when God will act, and there’s no longer the ability to turn around and go the other way. If God knows that in the New Testament (in 1 John)... It has nothing to do with salvation; it just means that you can’t turn from your course. This is a sin now that is going to be... You’re either going to do something self-destructive and you’re going to die, or God’s going to step in and judge you, or whatever. There is a point when God knows there is a point of no return for that person. God knows these things. So we have to give this latitude that God possesses. We have to let him have it. [laughs] We have to let him be who he is. And what he’s not going to do is turn people into puppets now and then just to cheat—just to game the system. What he is going to do is he’s going to engineer and steer circumstances. And people are going to react the way people do predictably. That ship has already sailed for some people. That is who they are now.

And I think Pharaoh, with his hardness, his bloated sense of his own divinity, and his hardness against other gods (basically anything that would lessen his own glory)... This is who he is. So I don't think we can really coherently say God is doing something against Pharaoh's will. It's quite in concert with Pharaoh's will what's going on here. And God is creating a set of circumstances with his own people, knowing that his own people are going to suffer as things start to turn. But this is God's mechanism to call Moses, to send Moses back to Egypt, and to judge the wickedness of the Egyptians.

Could God step in and make sure that none of the righteous ever suffer? That's like asking, "Could God do something where no one ever suffers today and there is no evil?" Yeah, he could. He could just wipe everybody out or turn them all into robots and then turn off the electricity, and there we go. God doesn't do that. He has made us who we are. We are like him. And God essentially plays within the sandbox that God has created for himself. Because to change the rules would be to admit a boo-boo, or "I must have lacked wisdom here or I would have made the sandbox differently." No, God is going to operate within the parameters that God himself has set up in creating us as we are, creating humanity as humanity is. And God is big enough to get the job done. And we need to trust him in knowing that he is not just going to shut off people's free will. People will suffer. The innocent will suffer. The righteous will suffer.

But if we're believers, this world is not our home. We have to trust the sovereignty of God, that God knows what he's doing. He is steering all things to the end to which he wants everything to go. And in the end, we (the redeemed) will be blessed. Maybe not in this life, but in the life to come. This is just all big theological stuff, and it's actually all consistent. It does work coherently together, even though it's not always comfortable. What we want is we want biblical theology to work out where we're always comfortable, where we never suffer, we never have pain and things like this. We live in a fallen world. That's not going to be the way it works. And the only way it can work a different way is for God to undo the image and make us into something we're not—to reverse what he's already done. And then God admits, "I made a huge mistake."

55:00

We have to be theologically consistent. We have to trust God that things are going to operate the way he has intended them to operate. Ultimately, he's going to get the outcome he wants, but he has to play within the parameters that he himself has created. I've lectured about this a lot of times—that God deemed this preferable to creating robots. Because robots can't... There's no free will there. That's not the only thing you lose. You lose love. It can't be genuine if you're a robot. You lose an awful lot the other way. But what comes with it is the propensity for evil. Because all of God's free will beings, all of his imagers... We may be like him, but we are not him. We lack his perfect nature. We are lesser. And it's just not going to work out perfectly because we

are not perfect. God knows this, but he deems that preferable to not having us at all.

So this is big-picture theological stuff. I've lectured a lot on this kind of thing on YouTube, so I'm sorry for the rabbit trail here. But I think it's essential that when we look at hardening, it's still the same picture. We do not have to look at the text and be driven to God being a puppet master now. It doesn't have to work that way, and in fact I think in Pharaoh's particular instance, that's really incoherent because God isn't changing him. He is who he is, and God is steering circumstances to exploit Pharaoh's own hardness—his own condition. And yes, God does harden him to string him out for God's own purposes. So one of the questions is, "Is God allowed to do that?" He's God. He can judge evil in any way he wants to judge it. And this is how it worked out with Pharaoh.

Another thought...

4. Must we take a direct view of God's hardening as indicative of how God works in *every instance* in *every person* who does not believe or who does not obey?

That is deterministic thinking. And it's silly. Think about it. I don't want to... I *do* want to pick on systems, but I'm not going to call any particular systems out here. But there is a propensity to take what God does in one case (Pharaoh) and say, "Well, this is what God does everywhere. This is what God does in the heart of every person who doesn't believe. God makes them not believe. He makes them so they can't believe." In other words, we take this one instance (and I think ignoring the earlier context of who Pharaoh is, but for the sake of the discussion) we look at God doing something with one guy, and then we assume that it works this way—that God does it this way with every last person who has ever lived. Why? Why do we make that jump?

Do you realize, if you're in this group (if you have this theological bent) that "Yes, I'm going to use this verse, and I'm going to extrapolate it to all humanity. Anybody who doesn't believe couldn't ever believe, because God had already decided that. And God turns every heart one way or the other way, and that person can't resist. They don't have real free will..." If that's what you're going to do, then realize what you've done. Good luck with people who are really thinking about this under your care or in your church, because then you can have someone say, "Well, I wouldn't have cheated on my wife if God had intervened in my heart and taken my lust away. But God didn't intervene in my heart and take my lust away, so I had to cheat on my wife. Didn't I?" Really? See then you're going to have people who want to say, "Yep, that's true, but we're still going to..." Then they're going to make some stand-on-the-head argument about how you're still morally responsible.

Look, if the person can't do anything else... I know you can construct an argument that somehow, in some convoluted way, makes the person morally responsible. But that is sophistry. That's what that is. It's sophistry. And that might sound harsh, but I really believe that's what that is. Because you don't want people to apply your own system in other ways, so you have to find escape valves. You have to build escape valves into your system. And that's the problem. We need to get away from systems that need escape valves, and so on and so forth, and try to look at how God can be the ultimate agent behind things without the deterministic thinking. This is just the way a lot of people within the evangelical world think. And they really don't want people to apply their own thinking—their own system—in all sorts of ways. But they could, and they would be consistent in their application. It's just a shame.

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Let me look at two other passages real quickly before we wrap here. I think passages like Judges 14:4 and, of course, the old familiar one in 1 Kings 22 kind of help here. Let's take the 1 Kings 22 instance, because that's the most familiar from Divine Council stuff. This is Micaiah's vision with Ahab, where God has decided it's time for Ahab to die and the prophet has this vision of what's going on in heaven. God is having a Divine Council meeting. And the spirits there (the heavenly host, who are called "spirits" in the passage) are debating. One says one thing; another says another because God has let them participate in the decision of how Ahab is going to die. We already know Ahab is going to get judged. God says, "Okay, how do we want to do this?" He lets them participate. So one spirit steps forward and says, "I got it. I'll be a lying spirit in the mouth of his prophets." That'll get Ahab to go up to remote Gilead, and then he'll bite the dust there. So God says, "You're going to succeed. Go out and do that." So God allows (in this case) freewill beings of his heavenly host to participate in a decision. God knows that the right set of circumstances are created and Ahab will behave predictably. And God will use that set of circumstances and Ahab's predictable behavior to judge Ahab.

Judges 14:4. This is Samson. It's a little less familiar. I'll just start at the first verse:

Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. ²Then he came up and told his father and mother, "I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife." ³But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes."

⁴ His father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.

Now it was “from the Lord.” If you’re the deterministic... “God made Samson choose a wife outside of the Israelites, so God made Samson sin, and he did that so that God could justify beating up on the Philistines. And Samson couldn’t do any other choice, because there’s no such thing as real free will, so God made Samson sin, and we know that for sure because Samson could not *not* sin.” [Sighs.] It was “from the Lord.” Why can’t we say, “God knows Samson really well. He knows how Samson’s mind works.” Why can’t we have God behind the circumstances of Samson’s little trip to Timnah and behind the circumstances of Samson laying eyes on this babe, knowing what Samson’s going to do and how that is going to be another little wheel behind a whole set of other circumstances. The wheels are going to start turning and God is going to use Samson’s own decision in a specific set of circumstances to judge not only the Philistines, but to judge Samson, too. Because Samson suffers for his own decisions. He reaps what he sows, but ultimately, to judge the Philistines and deliver his people from the Philistines. Why can’t we have God behind the scenes steering circumstances in accord with the propensities of human behavior, which God knows really, *really* well? And again, God knows Samson is not innocent here. Samson has chosen a path. Samson has made a series of bad, flawed decisions. Samson’s character has been formed by Samson. And God knows all of this very well. God can still be in charge of what’s going on without going down an absurd (and I think, frankly, self-contradictory and theologically contradictory) deterministic trajectory.

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See, this is part of the problem. For those committed to a deterministic view, they seem to assume that God can’t be in charge of things without one-to-one direct causation. And I would submit to you that God can be in charge. God will have his way. He doesn’t need to flip switches. “Today, you have free will, except for a few seconds, because I need you to do...” God doesn’t need to do that. He will get his way in the end, one way or the other. But we sort of assume certain things about how this would work. And I’m just trying to get you to think about... “Well, do we really need to go down this road when there’s this other road over here that might work just fine?”

So by way of summary, this is the way I just approach the whole subject. When God does things, he doesn’t do things to shut people’s free will off. In the case of the Israelites in Egypt, he doesn’t do things just to make things worse for the righteous. There is a whole set of things going on. And God is putting things into motion. God creates circumstances. He puts circumstances in motion to vindicate or deliver the righteous through the judgment of his and their enemies. And since we live in a fallen world, the righteous will suffer along the way. That will happen, because we’re living in a fallen world, but the free will, imaging box

that we talked about earlier... We could ask, "Why doesn't God just strike the wicked dead? Why doesn't he just clean house?" Well, to get rid of all evil, we know what he'd have to do. The consistent pattern of Scripture isn't that sort of behavior. Rather, God works through boots-on-the-ground circumstances. He works through people whom he knows will act and behave in certain ways, on both sides. This is the interplay of a sovereign mind and freewill beings. God steers people via events and relationships and circumstances and those sorts of things. He does things that prompt the need for the person under judgment to make a decision, and then their decision is predictable.

One could ask, "Why doesn't God try to influence people to make a right decision, contrary to their ingrained free will propensity?" Answer: Because God has decided to judge them. God is allowed to judge evil. He's allowed to judge evil. If we don't honor God's... If we don't let God be allowed to judge evil... If we don't honor that... If we don't just live with the fact that God has a right to judge evil... If we expect God to steer everyone toward righteousness and repentance instead of judging evil, then we're saying that we are more moral than God. We're saying God is morally wrong to judge sin. "Well, if I were God, I'd give them a chance..." How do we know how many chances God already *has* given the person? God is allowed to judge sin. He is not morally suspect if he decides to judge sin. We just don't know what God has been doing in a person's life, and that that person has just shut off God—that they've chosen their own path. God knows the direction of a person's heart. If he decides to judge them, he will steer the circumstances toward that end, knowing that a person will follow course. Sometimes, God does do something dramatic to invade a person's life. That does happen, too. And that's up to God to decide. Like Paul. He directly encounters Paul on the Damascus road.

But here's a question. On what basis is God obligated to do that for everybody? What's the basis for that? If you say, "Well, he *is* required to do that for everybody," then you've just said that God has no right and no authority to judge evil. That's what you've said. The result of all of that is a theology that says God isn't allowed to judge wickedness. He is. God has chosen to create freewill beings (the whole imaging idea). He's not going to reverse that decision. It's his own decision. He did things that way, or else he'd be incapable of creating an intelligent creature (humanity) that's truly like him.

God will, therefore, use human will to set people up for judgment. That's what we learned in Exodus here, with the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. He may intervene dramatically, which would be a special act of grace for his own reasons, but he's not obligated to do that for everybody because that would mean that God is not allowed to judge evil. Could Paul have refused to obey the call? That's a debate. How about Moses, though? How can we say that Moses could not have disobeyed God's call? Moses tried to disobey God's call, and even after the burning bush, Moses returns to Jethro's house and God meets him again. Remember that? Moses could have said no, but God stays with him. Does God

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have to do that? No, God doesn't *have* to do anything, but he chooses to do that. He even graciously gives Moses a back-up visitation after Moses goes back and returns to Jethro's place. God isn't required to do that kind of stuff for everybody. And not everybody will need it. At any point, we all (think of it this way)... We all deserve alienation from God, because of our sin. None of us deserve salvation. God is never in our debt. He may choose to judge. He may not. He knows the circumstances. He knows what is the best thing to do for his own purposes. He is allowed to make either decision. For us to judge God is, frankly, arrogant. It's hubris in every way. God seeks to persuade people to do this or that. He uses other people as his agents of persuasion. He uses a whole bunch of other things to create circumstances. But God is allowed to intervene or not at his own discretion.

And in Pharaoh's case, Pharaoh already was who he was. God steps in to string him out for God's own purposes. Frankly, we should be grateful that God persisted with each of us in the ways that he did. Because he didn't have to. God could have just said, "Alright. It's time to judge." And for a lot of us, God did judge us. He did judge sin, but he didn't do it in a final way. There was no finality to it. But with some people, that happens. God knows the whole set of circumstances of everyone's life. And I think the big lesson here is not to presume (and I'm using that word very deliberately, because I think it is quite presumptive) that we need or must go down the path of this total determinism to understand what's going on between God and Pharaoh in these passages. We don't. So just a caution there. I hope you will take a look at Chisholm's article. I think it's really worth a look. And my only gripe with it is that I think we need to just more intentionally think about where Pharaoh was already at. God is not flipping switches in the sky. He is already who he is, so we do not need to have a switch-flipping deity. We can have a God who decides to judge and sets up circumstances whereby judgment will happen. And also, in Israel's case, deliverance. God is ultimately in control, but that does not have to mean direct deterministic thinking.

TS: Alright, Mike. Well, that takes us to our plagues. Any idea how you're going to tackle all of the plagues coming up? Are you going to go one by one...?

MH: I don't know. I think I'll probably group them. I just don't know what the groups will look like yet.

TS: We're getting ever so close to the Passover and the Red Sea and all of the good stuff. I guess it's all good, though, huh?

MH: [laughs] All the good stuff...

TS: All of the action.

MH: All the stuff we remembered from the movie? [laughs]

TS: Right, the movie.

MH: All of the places where we needed a cast of thousands, right? [laughs]

TS: Exactly. So I guess... Easter is coming up, so they'll probably be playing it on the networks. I'm going to have to record it so that way I'll have it.

MH: [inaudible] timing. [laughs]

TS: We need to prepare some kind of group Naked Bible watch party or something. Everybody on Twitter watching it live together. I don't know. I'll have to think about that.

MH: Yeah. I've seen it so many times. And I still like to watch it.

TS: Yeah! I like it. I love it. Alright, Mike, sounds good. We'll be looking forward to the plagues next time. And with that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.