Let My People Go



Scripture Reference: Exodus 4:20-23 and 4:27-10:29

Suggested Theme: God's ways are good and best. Have a soft heart that wants to obey God.

Memory Verse: "My God, I want to do what you want. Your teachings are in my heart." Psalm 40:8,ICB

Story Overview:

Moses and Aaron told Pharaoh that the Lord wanted His people to stop being slaves and to leave Egypt. Pharaoh became angry and treated the Israelites even more harshly. One after another, the Lord sent ten different plagues upon the Egyptian people. Sometimes, Pharaoh tried to bargain with Moses, but each time Moses caused a plague to stop, Pharaoh's heart would harden, and he would say the people could not go.

Background Study:

The "wonders" God performed in Egypt are still awe-inspiring to read about today. The children you teach will be fascinated by the overall picture and the dramatic detail of each plague.

> The Lord said to Moses…"I also did this so you could tell your children and your grandchildren. Tell them how I made fools of the Egyptians. Tell them about the miracles I did among them. Then all of you will know that I am the Lord." Exodus 10:2, ICB

God's people were living as slaves in Egypt under the control of the Pharaoh (ruler of Egypt).

God knew Pharaoh's heart more than even Pharaoh himself did. Pharaoh had chosen his destiny before Moses ever arrived on the scene. God simply allowed Pharaoh's choices to run their natural course in the drama of the plagues.

God loved the Israelite people as a father loves a son. This helps us understand His judgement. What would a father do to someone who was hurting His son?

> "The Lord said to Moses, 'When you get back to Egypt, do all the miracles. I have given you the power to do them. Show them to the king of Egypt. But I will make the king very stubborn. He will not let the people go. Then say to the king: "This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son. And I told you to let my son go. Let him go so he may worship me. But you refused to let Israel go. So I will kill your firstborn son."'" Exodus 4:21-23, ICB

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The First Meeting:

(Exodus 5:1-21) What a shock Pharaoh must have received when Moses and Aaron first came to him to say God wanted him to let the Israelites out into the desert to hold a festival and worship him. Egypt was filled with “gods”, so what possible reason did he have to listen to the one his slaves worshipped?

Clarifying Who is in Charge:

(Exodus 5:22-7:5) Pharaoh’s harsh reaction to God’s plan and his cruel treatment of the Israelites caused the leaders and even Moses himself to doubt. But God had dealt with Moses’ doubt before. God reminds Moses again by speaking the truth of what He has done and will do.

The Second Meeting:

(Exodus 7:6-13)

Despite any dark power Satan may have shown through these court sorcerers and magicians, it was clear that God was stronger. When Aaron’s snake swallowed the one they had conjured up, it brings to mind the Fall of Man and how God’s power overwhelmed the serpent’s craftiness.

The Plagues:

A common understanding of the word “plague” concerns disease, epidemic or even some types of infestation. The word can also refer to “any widespread affliction, calamity, or evil, especially one regarded as a direct punishment by God” dictionary.com. The plagues, as described in this section of Scripture, involve all of those things.

God wanted His people out of Egypt and out of bondage. Pharaoh sometimes attempted to bargain about some Israelites leaving and some remaining, but God did not want some of His people; He wanted all of them. Additionally, He did not want them to leave with nothing. He expected them to leave with the wealth they deserved.

Way to Introduce the Story:

Cut a heart shape out of a dry, flat sponge. Pass the sponge heart around to all of the children and let them feel it. They can bend it and squeeze it because it is soft. Now pass around a stone on which you have previously drawn a heart with a waterproof marker. Talk about how hard the rock is.

Place the sponge heart and the rock heart in a shallow pan on the table. Hold up a glass of water and say, “This glass of water is like God’s word. God wants to pour His word into people’s hearts.” Slowly drip one drop of water at a time and then pour faster. Compare how the soft heart soaks up God’s word while His word just slides off of the hard heart. Talk about which heart lets the word of God inside.

“What kind of heart do you want to have?” In today’s story, we are going to learn about someone who had a very hard heart.

The Story:

God loved His people, the Israelites like a father loves His son. The Israelites were receiving very bad treatment in Egypt. What do you think a father would do to people who were hurting His son?

For four hundred years, God’s people had been slaves in Egypt. Being slaves meant that even though they had to work hard and do everything that the Egyptians said, the Egyptians never had to pay them any money.

The Pharaoh, or king of Egypt, had a hard heart and was mean to the Israelites. He did not believe in the God we read about in our Bibles. The pharaoh and the rest of the Egyptian people believed in the many

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“gods” of Egypt. They made statues of these “gods.” Some were shaped like frogs, while others were shaped like crocodiles or geese. The pharaoh thought these “gods” could keep Egypt safe, but he was wrong.

God had a plan for His people. He wanted them to live in their own country where they could worship him. God sent Moses and his brother, Aaron, to speak to the Pharaoh. He chose Moses to lead His people from Egypt to a new land.

God told Moses that He had a message for Pharaoh: “Pharaoh, let my people go!”

What a shock Pharaoh must have had when Moses told him to let the Israelites leave Egypt and worship their own God. Pharaoh said, “No! The Israelites cannot leave Egypt!”

The Pharaoh was so angry about it that he made the Israelites work even harder. But remember, God loved His people like a father loves his son.

God told Moses not to worry. He would perform mighty “wonders,” and soon, everyone would know He was more powerful than Pharaoh and any of Egypt’s “gods.”

So Moses and Aaron went back to Pharaoh again. Pharaoh wanted to see a miracle. Moses and Aaron knew exactly what to do next. Aaron threw down his staff (the long stick that he carried), and the staff turned into a snake. Everyone was amazed!

Pharaoh then called his sorcerers and magicians in, and they could do the same thing using their tricks and “secret arts.”

The sorcerers and magicians thought they were clever until Aaron’s snake swallowed their snake. But even though he could see God’s power, Pharaoh’s heart remained hard, and he would not let the people go.

But that was just the beginning of God’s power! One after another, God sent plagues to Egypt.

Plague 1—Water to Blood

The next time Moses came to the Pharaoh, he repeated the same message: “Let My People Go!” He warned Pharaoh that if he didn’t agree, God’s power would make the Nile River turn to blood. In fact, all water, even water that had already been poured into jars, would become blood.

But Pharaoh would not let the people go. Aaron took his staff and stretched his hand over the Nile. All the water turned to blood, and the people around Egypt would not have had water to drink. The blood also caused the fish to die, so the air smelled like dead fish.

Pharaoh’s heart remained hard. He would not let the people go.

Plague 2—Frogs

Next, God sent a plague of frogs. Hundreds of frogs came out of the Nile River and hopped everywhere, getting into people’s beds, ovens, and tables.

Finally, Pharaoh asked Moses to stop the plague. Even after Moses made the frogs go away, Pharaoh still refused to let the Israelites leave Egypt.

Plague 3—Gnats

Next, God told Moses to tell Aaron to use his staff to strike the dust off the ground. When he did this, the dust turned into gnats, which got all over the people and the animals.

When Pharaoh’s magicians saw how many gnats there were, they said to Pharaoh, “Moses and Aaron are not doing tricks. This is really the power of God!”

But Pharaoh would not even listen to his own magicians. He would not let the people go.

Plague 4-Flies

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Once again, Moses came to Pharaoh with God's message and said, "Let My People Go!" When Pharaoh said "no", hundreds of flies invaded Egypt. Flies were almost everywhere in Egypt.

Before, when Pharaoh said "no," bad things had happened to everyone. This time, something different happened. The flies went everywhere in Egypt EXCEPT in a place called "Goshen." That is the part of Egypt where the Israelites lived. God was taking care of His people.

Pharaoh finally said he would let the people go out into the desert to worship God, so Moses prayed to God, and the flies left.

But guess what? Pharaoh changed his mind and said, "No, the people cannot leave."

Plague 5-Death of Livestock

Next, when Pharaoh would not let the people go, a terrible thing happened. The horses, donkeys, camels, cattle, sheep, and goats belonging to the Egyptians died, but not one animal belonging to the Israelites died.

Even though all of these terrible things were happening, Pharaoh's heart remained as hard as ever.

Plague 6-Boils

Then Aaron tossed soot from a furnace into the air before Pharaoh. This would spread through Egypt, causing the Egyptian people and their animals to break out in big sores called "boils." People could not even stand up because of the sores on the soles of their feet. Still, Pharaoh did not relent.

God had already sent six plagues, but Pharaoh's heart was still hard. He refused to change his mind. But God would never give up. He would ensure Pharaoh knew how powerful He was and how much He loved His people.

Plague 7-Hail Storm

When Pharaoh said "no," this time, God told Moses to stretch his hand toward the sky to bring on the worst hailstorm to hit the nation of Egypt.

Hail is like balls of ice that rain down hard from the sky. Many people and animals died when the hail hit them, and most of the food crops were destroyed by the hail. Only Goshen remained untouched.

When Pharaoh saw this, he confessed he had sinned and that he had been wrong not to let the people go. But guess what? Once again, as soon as Moses stopped the hail, Pharaoh changed his mind. He would not let the people go.

Plague 8-Locusts

Now Moses and Aaron warned Pharaoh that a swarm of locust insects (like flying grasshoppers) worse than anyone in Egypt had ever seen would eat anything that was left of the crops and trees in Egypt following the hailstorm.

Pharaoh's officials begged him to let the Israelites go, but He refused. He said, "Maybe I'll just let the men go but keep all of the women and children in Egypt." This would not do! When Moses stretched out his hand, God caused the East wind to bring in an invasion of locusts. They destroyed everything that was still growing.

Once again, Pharaoh said he was sorry but changed his mind after Moses prayed and the locusts left. Pharaoh really did have a hard heart!

Plague 9-Darkness

Now, God caused darkness to fall over all of Egypt. For three days, there was no light in Egypt. It felt like nighttime all the time. There was only one part of Egypt that had light. Guess where that was? There was light in Goshen, where the Israelites lived.

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Pharaoh tried to trick Moses again and say that the Israelites could leave but had to leave their animals behind. But Moses knew how hard Pharaoh's heart was. He told Pharaoh that God wanted all of His people (men, women, old people, children and babies) and even all of their animals to leave Egypt together.

Pharaoh became extremely angry and threw Moses and Aaron out of the palace. He told Moses that he never wanted him to come to the palace again.

Nothing else could make Pharaoh change his mind. Now, the very last and worst plague was about to happen.

Plague 10-Death of the Firstborn

Every plague had caused pain and suffering, but the tenth (and last) plague was the most devastating of all. The Egyptians would find out that, without God's protection, even their own children would not be safe from death. The oldest child in every family died. Only the Israelites who obeyed God were safe from this last plague.

The Pharaoh thought he was the most powerful, but he was not. The magicians, sorcerers, and Egyptian people thought that their gods would protect them, but they did not.

Through the 10 plagues, God showed that HE was the most powerful and that only HE could protect and save His people.

Finally, after this terrible plague, Pharaoh said the Israelites could leave Egypt.

But none of this had to happen. Pharaoh did not love his people like God loved Israel. Because of Pharaoh's hard heart, everyone in Egypt suffered.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- What did the Pharaoh do to the Israelite slaves when Moses and Aaron first asked him to let them leave Egypt? (He told them to make more bricks, but he took away the straw that they needed to make them)

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- What happened when Aaron's staff turned into a snake? (Pharaoh's magicians made their staffs turn into snakes, and then Aaron's snake ate theirs up)
- What were the 10 plagues in Egypt? (1-Water to blood, 2-Frogs, 3-Gnats, 4-Flies, 5-Death of Animals, 6-Boils, 7-Hail, 8-Locusts, 9-Darkness, 10-Death of the firstborn)
- What happened each time Pharaoh said that the people could go? (His heart hardened, and he changed his mind)
- What does it mean to have a 'hard heart'?
- Why did God want His people to leave Egypt? (He loved them and didn't want them to be slaves. He wanted them to have their own land where they could worship Him)
- What does this story teach you about God?
- What does this story teach you about people?

Reflection:

- What is something you wonder about in this story?
- Which of the 10 plagues do you think the Egyptians hated experiencing the most?
- Which of the 10 plagues would you most hate experiencing?
- How do you think the Egyptian people felt when they started experiencing the plagues? How did they feel toward Pharaoh, their leader?
- Do you think the plagues made the Egyptians believe in God?
- Why do you think Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go?
- Pharaoh was very stubborn and did not want to obey God. When have you been very stubborn? Do you ever struggle to obey God?
- What can we do to have soft hearts that want to obey God? (suggest praying for God's help, reading the Bible, serving, worshipping God, love God, etc.)

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- God is Listening When We Pray (Song) English/Cebuano
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

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Activities:

- Allow the children to make “slides” by drawing each plague on a transparency. Turn out the lights and shine a light through the transparency to project it on the wall. The children can take turns retelling the story with this “slide show.”
- Give the children chenille wire (pipe cleaners) and let them retell the scene where Aaron’s staff changes into a snake.
- Look up more pictures of Egypt in library books. If you are fortunate enough to have a museum nearby with Egyptian items, arrange a field trip.
- Play a simple word game. Bible Wordz Game is an adaptable game in which children form words from letter tiles. The words relate to those in the Bible lesson.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Let children draw each plague (one plague per paper) and blue-tac these to the wall.
- Paint hearts on stones and use a laundry marker to write: “Pharaoh had a hard heart. Exodus 4-10″
- Glue cotton wool to a heart shape. You could make a small one and attach magnet tape to the back for a refrigerator magnet. Talk about having a soft heart.
- Make any other heart craft.

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page The ten Plagues and puzzle worksheets (Calvary Curriculum)
- Colouring pages The Ten Plagues (Church House Collection)
- Craft: Pattern for Pharoah crown (Crafting the Word of God)
- Crafts: Fun activities for acting out each of the plagues (Aish)
- Other: Various activities and crafts for each plague (Church House Collection)
- Other: Telling the story using candy/lollies (Kristen Duke)
- Other: Telling the story using finger puppets (Tori Avey)
- Other: A good description of each plague (Kids Bible Maps)
- Other: A chart showing each plague (Bible Charts)

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