

Beit Chachamin

PARSHAT VAERA

16TH JANUARY, 2026

COME & LEARN

THE BIG RECAP [PARSHA SUMMARY]

1 – God speaks to Moses, telling him to tell the Israelites that He has heard their cries and will free them from bondage. The Israelites do not believe Moses. God commands Moses to go to Pharaoh, but Moses doubts Pharaoh will listen because he is “tongue-tied.” God tells Moses to go with Aaron.

2 – God tells Moses about the leaders of each tribe and reveals the family tree of Moses and Aaron, concluding that Aaron and Moses are the brothers will free the Israelites.

3 – God commands Moses to speak with Pharaoh. Moses replies that he is “tongue-tied,” but God insists that He has chosen Moses to free the Israelites. God repeats that He will harden Pharaoh’s heart and perform signs to show the Egyptians that He is the true Lord.

4 – Moses and Aaron appear before Pharaoh, who demands a sign of their power. Aaron throws down his staff, and it turns into a serpent. Pharaoh’s magicians do the same with their staffs, but Aaron’s serpent swallows theirs. Pharaoh remains unmoved. God instructs Moses to meet Pharaoh by the Nile in the morning, take the staff that turned into a serpent, and strike the river. God turns the Nile into blood, killing the fish and ruining the drinking water. Pharaoh’s magicians replicate the feat, so Pharaoh does not listen. After seven days, God tells Moses to return to Pharaoh and warn him that if he refuses to let the Israelites worship, God will send frogs upon Egypt. Moses and Aaron obey, and frogs cover the land, but Pharaoh’s magicians do the same. Pharaoh then summons Moses and Aaron, asking them to pray for the frogs’ removal, promising to let the Israelites worship in the desert.

5 – Moses prays, and God removes the frogs, leaving them dead and stinking throughout Egypt. Once relieved, Pharaoh remains stubborn. God tells Aaron to strike the ground, and lice swarm over the land. Pharaoh’s magicians attempt the same but fail. God then commands Moses to warn Pharaoh that if he does not let the Israelites worship, He will send swarms of insects over Egypt, sparing only Goshen where the Israelites live.

6 – God fulfills His word, filling Egypt with insects. Pharaoh summons Moses and Aaron and tells them to worship within Egypt, but Moses explains they must go three days into the wilderness. Pharaoh agrees but warns them not to go too far. Moses prays, and God removes the insects, yet Pharaoh remains stubborn. God then tells Moses to inform Pharaoh that if he refuses again, all Egyptian livestock will die, though Israelite livestock will be spared. Pharaoh witnesses this but remains obstinate. God next instructs Moses and Aaron to toss soot into the air, causing boils to break out among the Egyptians, and they do. God sends Moses and Aaron again to Pharaoh, telling him that just as He killed the livestock, He could have struck down the Egyptians, but He spares them so that they may recognize Him as Lord.

7 – Moses warns Pharaoh that God will strike Egypt with hail that will kill anything left outside. Some of Pharaoh’s servants fear God and bring their slaves and cattle inside. Hail falls throughout Egypt, destroying people, animals, and crops—except in Goshen. Pharaoh calls for Moses and Aaron, asking them to stop the hail. Moses prays, and God halts the storm, but when Pharaoh sees the rain and hail stop, he hardens his heart once more and refuses to let the Israelites go.

PARSHAT VAERA

Through analysis of the verbs used in Pharaoh's reaction to each divine action we can understand his true nature as a stubborn leader.

First Pharaoh's reaction is passive, as if something is happening to him.

BLOOD (EXODUS 7:23)

וַיִּחְזַק לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵיהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה'

Yet Pharaoh's heart stiffened and he did not heed them, as God had said.

Then he is active in his reaction making a choice in his reaction, choosing stubbornness.

FROGS (EXODUS 8:11)

וַיֵּרָא פַּרְעֹה כִּי הִיטָה הַרְוָחָה וַהֲכִבֵּד אֶת־לְבָבוֹ וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה'

But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he became stubborn and would not heed them, as God had said.

However he reverts to a passivity made clear by the language.

LICE (EXODUS 8:15)

וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַחֹרְטָמִים אֶל־פַּרְעֹה אֲצַבֵּעַ אֱלֹקִים הִוא וַיִּחְזַק לֵב־פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא־שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה'
and the magician-priests said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God!" But Pharaoh's heart stiffened and he would not heed them, as God had said.

But as the insects come he take action in his response and chooses to become stubborn, an attitude that remains throughout the next plague.

INSECTS (EXODUS 8:24)

וַיִּכְבֵּד פַּרְעֹה אֶת־לְבָבוֹ גַם בַּפְּעַם הַזֹּאת וְלֹא שָׁלַח אֶת־הָעָם:

But Pharaoh became stubborn this time also, and would not let the people go.

PESTILENCE (EXODUS 9:7)

וַיִּשְׁלַח פַּרְעֹה וְהִנֵּה לֹא־מָת מִמִּקְנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד־אֶחָד וַיִּכְבֵּד לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁלַח אֶת־הָעָם:

When Pharaoh inquired, he found that not a head of the livestock of Israel had died; yet Pharaoh remained stubborn, and he would not let the people go.

It is only in the plague of boils in which divine intervention is required to keep Pharaoh stubborn

BOILS (EXODUS 9:12)

וַיִּחְזַק ה' אֶת־לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה:

But God stiffened the heart of Pharaoh, and he would not heed them, just as God told Moses.

And as the hail stops, Pharaoh reverts to his stubborn self, refusing to let the Israelites leave.

HAIL (EXODUS 9:12)

וַיֵּרָא פַּרְעֹה כִּי־חָדַל הַמָּטֶר וְהַבָּרָד וְהַקִּלְתַּת וַיִּסֹּף לַחֲטֹא וַיִּכְבֵּד לְבָבוֹ הִוא וְעַבְדָּיו:

But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he became stubborn and reverted to his guilty ways, as did his courtiers.

Pharaoh's repeated response shows how stubbornness starts as a choice but turns into a fixed pattern; by the boils plague, God's intervention seals a path he already chose, teaching that unchecked resistance limits future options.