

Date: 24 Tevet 5786 (January 13, 2026)

Torah Portion: Va'era

Topic: When Power is Exposed

This week's Torah portion presents a paradox at the heart of biblical redemption: divine revelation intensifies opposition before producing freedom. Exodus 6 opens not with deliverance but with a redefinition of divine identity—YHWH as the Elohim Who fulfills rather than merely promises. Instead of softening Pharaoh's will, this revelation provokes further resistance. This pattern recurs in Ezekiel's oracles against Tyre and Mitzrayim and in Yehoshua HaMoshiach's teaching on divided power in Luke 11. Across these texts, resistance is neither incidental nor accidental. Rather, it becomes the means by which false claims to sovereignty are exposed and displaced. The rabbis' interpretation provides a coherent framework for understanding this phenomenon, especially through the doctrines of free will, judicial hardening, and divine kingship.

In Exodus 6:2–3, Elohim declares, “Ani YHWH,” distinguishing this mode of revelation from that known to the patriarchs as El Shaddai. Rashi interprets this distinction as experiential rather than ontological: the patriarchs received promises, but Yisrael witnesses fulfillment (Rashi on Exo. 6:3). The revelation of the divine name signals not a change in His essence but a shift in historical manifestation. The Zohar deepens this claim by identifying divine names as modalities of presence. El Shaddai signifies containment and sufficiency, while YHWH represents unbounded divine action within time (Zohar II:25b-26a). Such revelation destabilizes systems built on static power and self-sufficiency. Redemption thus begins not with escape but with confrontation.

Rabbinic tradition resolves the repeated hardening of Pharaoh's heart by locating hardening within the framework of free will. The Talmud states, “In the way a person wishes to go, he is led” (Yoma 38b). Divine hardening follows sustained refusal; it does not initiate it. Midrash Shemot Rabbah (9-10) presents the plagues as a systematic dismantling of Egyptian ideology, each plague corresponding to a deified force or societal foundation. The Nile, Egypt's life source, is struck first, followed by economic, bodily, and environmental systems. Judgment escalates not in cruelty but in clarity. The Zohar (II:34b) describes this process as *birur* (בִּירּוּר)—clarification through separation. Illusion is stripped away so that reality may be seen. This is most explicit in Exodus 9, where warning precedes destruction and distinction is introduced between Egypt and Goshen. The Talmud characterizes such judgment as *din melumad* (דין מלומד), pedagogical judgment intended to instruct rather than annihilate (Avodah Zarah 4a).

Ezekiel 28–29 extends the Exodus paradigm to an international scale. The prince of Tyre declares himself divine (Eze. 28:2), while Pharaoh claims authorship of the Nile (Eze. 29:3). These assertions represent what may be termed political theologies of self-origin. The Zohar explains that when power claims itself as source, it severs itself from *shefa* (שְׁפָחָה), the divine flow of life (II:35a-36b). The very symbols of power become instruments of judgment. Like Exodus, Ezekiel emphasizes delay and exposure rather than immediate destruction, culminating in promises of restoration (Eze. 28:25–26). Judgment thus functions as a means of reestablishing rightful order.

In Luke 11:14–22, accused of casting out demons by demonic power, Yehoshua responds with a principle consistent with rabbinic logic: a divided kingdom cannot stand. Liberation requires the binding of the “strong man” by one stronger. Midrash Tanchuma (Bo 4) characterizes Pharaoh as a national manifestation of the yetzer hara, resistant to persuasion and requiring displacement. Luke's “stronger one” reflects the same redemptive logic: freedom is achieved not through negotiation with illegitimate authority but through its removal. This aligns with rabbinic conceptions of *malkhut shamayim* (מלוכה שמיים), the Kingship of Heaven, which must replace false rule rather than coexist with it (Berakhot 13a).

Our Torah portion reveals an emergence of unified theological trajectory. Divine judgment is not blind force but truth rendered unavoidable. Resistance delays redemption but simultaneously exposes false sovereignty. Hardening of heart confirms rather than negates human responsibility. Liberation, therefore, is not merely release from oppression but the restoration of divine kingship over creation, nations, and hearts. Therefore, judgment is a revelation and through it, the kingship is restored.

Shalom.