

Date: 25 Tevet 5786 (January 14, 2026)

Torah Portion: Va'era

Topic: From Name to Kingdom

This week's Torah portion poses one of the most difficult questions in the Shemot story is why Pharaoh resists even after Elohim reveals Himself. Instead of immediate freedom, the story presents increasing conflict. This pattern continues in Ezekiel's prophecies against Mitzrayim and in Yehoshua's teaching in Luke 11. Rather than seeing resistance as a failure of redemption, these texts treat resistance as part of the process through which Elohim exposes false power. The rabbis help explain how judgment, delay, and resistance work together to reveal truth and establish divine authority.

Our portion begins with Elohim's Name and the beginning of conflict. In verses 2-3, Hashem tells Moshe that He is known as YHWH, a name the patriarchs did not experience fully. Rashi explains that the patriarchs received promises, but Yisrael would see those promises fulfilled (v. 3). The change is not in Elohim's nature but in how Elohim acts in history. The Zohar (II:25b-26a) adds that divine names represent different ways Hashem relates to the world. In simple terms, YHWH represents active involvement rather than distant promise. This kind of divine involvement challenges systems built on human control. Because of this, conflict increases rather than decreases. Pharaoh's resistance is not caused by Hashem forcing him to rebel. The Talmud (Yoma 38b) teaches that people are led along the path they choose. Pharaoh repeatedly chooses refusal, and Hashem allows that choice to become firm.

Thus, the Plagues (Chs. 7-9) are an exposure rather than revenge. The plagues are often misunderstood as acts of revenge. Midrashic tradition explains that each plague targets something Mitzrayim trusted for power or security. The Nile, for example, was the foundation of her economy and religion. When it turns to blood, her claim to self-sufficiency collapses. Later plagues affect health, food, and safety, but not all at once. The Zohar describes this as a process of clarification. Instead of destroying everything, Hashem exposes what is false step by step. Exodus 9 is especially important because Hashem warns Mitzrayim before sending hail. Some Mitzrim listen and protect their animals; others ignore the warning. This shows that judgment also involves choice. According to the Talmud, this kind of judgment is meant to teach, not merely punish.

In Shemot Rabbah (9-10), Ezekiel applies the Exodus pattern to other nations. The ruler of Tyre claims to be divine, and Pharaoh claims ownership of the Nile. Both represent leaders who believe their power comes from themselves. The rabbis explain that when rulers claim absolute power, they cut themselves off from the source of life. As a result, the very systems they depend on collapse. Like Exodus, Ezekiel shows judgment unfolding over time and leading toward restoration rather than permanent destruction.

In Luke 11:14–22, Yehoshua HaMoshiach explains that evil cannot be defeated by compromise. He uses the image of a strong man who must be overcome by someone stronger. This reflects the Exodus story, where Pharaoh cannot be persuaded and must be removed from power. The Midrash compares Pharaoh to a large-scale version of the human impulse toward domination. Liberation requires replacing false authority with rightful authority. In Biblical thought, this is described as accepting the "Kingship of Heaven."

In conclusion, across Shemot, Ezekiel, and Luke, judgment serves a clear purpose. It exposes false power, increases responsibility as truth becomes clearer, and prepares the way for real freedom. Hardening of heart does not remove human responsibility; it confirms it. Freedom in these texts is not simply escape from suffering. It is the restoration of proper authority—YHWH's authority—over human life and society.

Shalom.