

The Hardening Of Pharaoh

How do you understand God hardening Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh hardening his heart? Is there a contradiction here? This is a good case for understanding the divine sovereignty of God and the human responsibility to God. Let us consider what the Bible teaches.

Three times God declares that He will harden Pharaoh's heart (**Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 14:4**). Six times God hardens Pharaoh's heart (**Exodus 9:12; 10:1; 10:20; 10:27; 11:10; 14:8**). Seven times the hardening is expressed as a divine passive with God as the implied subject, i.e., Pharaoh's heart "was hardened" by God (**Exodus 7:13; 7:14; 7:22; 8:19; 9:7; 9:35; 14:5**). And three times we are told that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (**Exodus 8:15; 8:32; 9:34**).

Pharaoh asked the question, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?" (**Exodus 5:2**). God said to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth" (**Exodus 9:16**). In time Pharaoh would say that the Lord is righteous and that he and the people were wicked, but still was not willing to change (**Exodus 9:27**). Pharaoh would find out that the gods he worshiped in Egypt were no match for the God of the universe.

The Divine-hardening and self-hardening are interwoven. God's action is primary. The first five citations (in **Exodus 4 and 7**) all focus on God's action. Pharaoh's self-hardening appears in the three verses of **Exodus 8 and 9**. We still have free will to choose who we will follow. There is no "irresistible" force for good or evil (i.e. **Jeremiah 6:16-17; James 4:7**).

Paul reflected on the implications of this in **Romans 9**. He used it to demonstrate the power of God's mercy over the human will. Paul's discussion in **Romans 9:14-18**, included this quote from **Exodus 9:16** on God's purpose in hardening Pharaoh's heart. It does not depend not on human will, but on God, who has mercy. He has mercy on whomever He wills, and He hardens whomever He wills.

We are given opportunities and choices are made (i.e., **Romans 1:18-32**). God knows (i.e., **Psalms 139:1-4**) but still one's own free will (i.e., **Genesis 4:6-7; Acts 5:1-11**). Pride goes before destruction (**Proverbs 16:18**). Naaman had to humble himself if he wanted to be healed (**2 Kings 5:1-14**). Remember, nothing is hidden from God's sight (**Hebrews 4:13**).

What about our day and age? Do we allow our heart to be harden? How many copies of the Bible are printed every year? It is said that over 100 million are sold or given away every year. How many do you personally have? Yet, how many will take the time to study the Bible to learn what the will of God is for them and do it?

We are warned not to harden our hearts against God (**Hebrews 3:12-15**). We can repent and change but then harden our hearts again. We harden our heart when we know and yet choose not to obey. The soul that sins will die (**Ezekiel 18:20**). The Bible describes this last state as being worse than the first (**2 Peter 2:20-22**).

We want to say that God's ways are not fair, but it is our ways that are not fair (**Ezekiel 18:25-32**). We must remember that God's ways are not our ways nor are God's thoughts our thoughts (**Isaiah 55:8-9**). We may call Him unjust and unloving because He keeps His word and punishes. We need to be reminded of the consequences (**2 Thessalonians 1:6-9**).

"Who is the Lord that I should obey Him?" is a haunting question. The unclean spirits asked Jesus if He was going to punish them before their time (**Matthew 8:29; Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34**). The demons believe in God and tremble, and yet are not saved (**James 2:19**). Why would we call Jesus "Lord, Lord" and not do what He says (**Luke 6:46**)?

Something to think about!

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