

Pharaoh's Hardened Heart

Ponder: Who hardened Pharaoh's heart?

Scripture: "But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go" (Exod. 4:21b, NKJV).

Did God harden Pharaoh's heart? Or did Pharaoh harden his own heart. The Biblical answer is . . . Yes!

Ten times in the book of Exodus Moses recorded that the Lord said He would harden Pharaoh's heart and that He did so. Yet in three additional places the text says Pharaoh hardened his heart, and five others simply state that Pharaoh's heart was hardened. So which is it? Actually, we don't have to choose. It's "all of the above."

At first glance we might easily view God as manipulating Pharaoh's heart, turning it hard where otherwise it would have been compliant or at least neutral. That misunderstanding produces doubts about God's justice. If God arbitrarily directed Pharaoh's heart to be hard, and then condemned him for behaving accordingly, was that really fair?

The fact is, however, that Pharaoh chose to be proud and self-willed. Though he didn't recognize it, the Lord brought him to power and "endured with much longsuffering" the king's wicked behavior (Rom. 9:22). When Moses spoke the Lord's command to him, "Let My people go," it hardened the arrogant monarch's heart. Did God harden it? Yes, but not by manipulation. He hardened Pharaoh's heart by means of His word. Then, by means of the ten plagues, He gave the king opportunity after opportunity to soften his heart and repent. Pharaoh's pride rejected these offers, as God foreknew; the king hardened his heart, and we can accurately say that God hardened him by means of the plagues. In no way did the Lord ever prevent Pharaoh from changing; the king chose to dig in his heels and refuse to submit.

Like Pharaoh, you and I decide for ourselves how we will respond to the commands of God. As the cliché says, "The same sun that melts butter will harden clay." We determine whether God's word will soften our hearts to believe and obey, or whether it will harden us to rebel and bring destruction upon ourselves.

Is your heart butter or clay? Don't blame God! It's your decision.

Song: "Have Thine Own Way, Lord"

Prayer: Righteous Heavenly Father, forgive us for hardening our hearts against your word. Help us to put away our pride and submit to You in loving obedience. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Joe Slater (Justin, TX)

jaslater1954@gmail.com