

DID GOD HARDEN PHARAOH'S HEART?

JAMIE MCNAB

9.5.20

I have been speaking for a couple of weeks about having a hard-heart.

When the Bible talks of a hard-heart ... it's referring to a spiritually dull heart ... insensitive to the truth. Not someone who is uncaring. Definitely a place that we don't want to be.

All of us need to be sensitive to truth — quick on the uptake. Tender of heart.

If not ... we can be justly rebuked.

Jesus rebuked His disciples and others for having hard-hearts.

Jesus can rebuke because a hard-heart is a choice we make. It's a wrong choice ... and we can be blamed for our choices.

We spent some time last week showing that the ability we've got ... to choose ... is a fundamental principle. **God won't override our ability or freedom to choose.**

He'll work hard to influence us to make good choices. But our choices belong to us. We're free to choose to go to hell if we wish!

We saw how often God tried to influence Israel and Judah ... "rising up early and sending prophet after prophet" ... for centuries. It did no good.

Captivity was not God's choice ... but He would not override Israel's freedom to choose!

Matthew 13:13-15

13 Therefore I speak to them in parables, **because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.** *(They were dull)*

14 And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:
Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,
And seeing you will see and not perceive;

15 **For the hearts of this people have grown dull.**
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.'

Their eyes THEY HAVE CLOSED. In essence — they didn't want the Truth.

Other translations: “their hearts are hardened” — “their heart has become calloused”.

It applied in Isaiah's day ... Jesus' day ... our day.

Their choice. They hardened their hearts. They could be held accountable and rebuked.

Matthew 11:20-22

20 Then **He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent:**

21 **“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!** For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

22 But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.

Jesus rebuked various cities. **Woe!** He cursed them.

They were at fault. Dull ... insensitive ... hard-hearted. We mustn't be!

Hebrews 3:7-15

7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says:

“Today, if you will hear His voice,

8 **Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,**
In the day of trial in the wilderness,

9 Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me,
And saw My works forty years.

10 Therefore I was angry with that generation,
And said, ‘They always go astray in their heart,

And they have not known My ways.'

11 So I swore in My wrath,

'They shall not enter My rest.' "

12 **Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;**

13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,

15 while it is said:

**"Today, if you will hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."**

Do not harden your hearts! A choice!

If anyone makes the wrong choice — won't enter God's "rest".

I doubt if we ever specifically choose to have a hard heart? It would be rare ... though someone who is proud and arrogant might?

For most ... a hard-heart would develop over time ... perhaps by neglect?

Hebrews 2:1-3

1 **Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.** (*We must pay attention! Lest we drift away.*)

2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward,

3 **how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation**, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, (*Don't neglect! Don't be careless*)

Like the frog in the water? We don't notice!

Hebrews 5:11-12

11 of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, **since you have become dull of hearing.**

12 **For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God;** and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

Become dull of hearing. Too slow on the uptake!

Hebrews 6:11-12

11 And **we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end,**

12 that you **do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**

For most of us ... a hard-heart is something that would develop over time. Just like a callous or hard skin might take time.

Maybe like a garden overgrown with weeds? We wouldn't specifically choose a "weed garden" ... but many choices over time to ignore ... be lazy ... pursue distractions ... ends up with a garden full of weeds. The end result of our choices.

We need to guard our heart with all diligence!

So: over and over we see God — and His prophets — seeking to influence peoples and nations and individuals — to make good choices.

It seems **God won't override our freedom of choice.**

Yet. What about Pharaoh?

Exodus 4:21-23

21 And the LORD said to Moses, "**When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.**

22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: "Israel is My son, My firstborn.

23 **So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn.**" ' ' "

Oops! God will harden Pharaoh's heart?

So — the death of the firstborn is definite? Pharaoh has no choice? Overridden? Was there an exception for Pharaoh?

Exodus 9:11-12

11 And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians and on all the Egyptians.

12 **But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh**; and he did not heed them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses.

The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart?

Exodus 10:19-20

19 And the LORD turned a very strong west wind, which took the locusts away and blew them into the Red Sea. There remained not one locust in all the territory of Egypt.

20 **But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart**, and he did not let the children of Israel go.

The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart?

Exodus 10:27

27 **But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart**, and he would not let them go.

The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart? There are a couple of more occasions.

So — what's going on?

Is God overriding Pharaoh's freedom of choice? No ... not really.

God has more than one objective in mind:

1. Free His people
2. Exalt and glorify the name of Jehovah above the gods of Egypt
3. Judge Egypt for its wickedness

Of course ... God knows what Pharaoh is like as a man — his nature — temperament ... weaknesses ... strengths. God knew that He didn't need to override Pharaoh's will — but He is going to "give him enough rope to hang himself".

Pharaoh was already a proud man — probably considered himself almost a god? He had the power of life and death. He lived in comparative glory. It's clear as we read through the story that Pharaoh has no intention of letting anyone push him around — not even God!!

Exodus 5:1-2

1 Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, “**Thus says the LORD God of Israel:** ‘Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.’ ”

2 **And Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go.”**

Who is Jehovah? Pharaoh was a hard guy — no one was going to change his mind.

After this ... Pharaoh commanded the Israelite slaves to be forced to work even harder.

No doubt he was a hard man! Supremely important in his own eyes.

So God started the plagues and began to show His power and His glory.

The second plagues was frogs.

Exodus 8:12-15

12 Then Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh. And Moses cried out to the LORD concerning the frogs which He had brought against Pharaoh.

13 So the LORD did according to the word of Moses. And the frogs died out of the houses, out of the courtyards, and out of the fields.

14 They gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank.

15 **But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not heed them,** as the LORD had said.

Pharaoh hardened his own heart.

Later ... there were swarms of flies.

Exodus 8:30-32

30 So Moses went out from Pharaoh and entreated the LORD.

31 **And the LORD did according to the word of Moses; He removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people. Not one remained.**

32 **But Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also;** neither would he let the people go.

Pharaoh hardened his own heart.

Multiple times we read: Pharaoh hardened his heart ... or Pharaoh's heart was hardened ... or the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart.

In reality ... Pharaoh already had a hard-heart. It wasn't something new.

God didn't have to actively "harden it" — God just needed to give Pharaoh an opportunity and his heart showed through.

God sent a plague. Pharaoh usually buckled under pressure. But ... as soon as God removed the plague ... Pharaoh reverted to type ... and his stubbornness and arrogance shone through.

God knew this would happen. It was entirely predictable.

It gave God the opportunity to reveal His power and glory (to the whole world) ... and He gave Pharaoh numerous opportunities to repent and to change his mind.

Basically ... God gave Pharaoh plenty of rope to hang himself — and he responded exactly as expected. He was free to choose differently. But ... it was not his nature.

And ... it turns out ... the English word "Harden" isn't really a good translation of the Hebrew.

There are 3 different Hebrew words translated in Exodus as "harden". We'll look at the most common — "Chazaq" (one used most frequently when it says "God will harden").

Chazaq is used over 300 times in the Old Testament. Only in Exodus is it ever translated “harden”! (And once in Joshua — but that is referring back to the Pharaoh).

So nowhere in the Bible is the word ever translated “harden” — apart from the story of Pharaoh. The Latin translation is largely to blame.

Its core meaning — used over 100 times — is to be strong ... to make strong ... to strengthen (sometimes to encourage).

That’s what was going on with Pharaoh.

God knew he was a proud ... arrogant ... man — who would never yield. He was “Mr Stubborn” ... “Mr Nobody Pushes Me Around” ... “Mr Proud”.

God didn’t override his will and freedom to choose.

But he and many of his nation were going to suffer righteous judgment. God was going to gain glory across the entire Middle East.

All God had to do was just strengthen and encourage (Chazaq) Pharaoh **to do what he always intended to do.**

God would send a plague ... but on request — would remove it. That gave Pharaoh time and space to repent and humble himself. But that never happened.

As the Bible says elsewhere: “Pride goes before destruction” and “God resists the proud”.

The other word used is: “Kabad” which means to exalt ... to glorify ... to honour — used where Pharaoh hardened his own heart. It does not mean to harden ... and is never used as such anywhere else in the Old Testament. Pharaoh simply glorified and exalted himself.

We’ve had a good look at hardness of heart over the past 3 weeks.

Something we should be careful to avoid. Anyone who doesn’t hear God ... who is dull of hearing ... is in a bad position.

It can creep up gradually ... over time ... like a neglected garden.

So ... be watchful ... let's guard our hearts and be quick to respond.

We must feed off God's Word!

We'd rather hear "Well done good and faithful servant" than hear Jesus rebuke us for having a hard-heart!