

God Hardened Pharaoh's Heart

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BIG SANDY, Texas—Two weeks ago, we talked about how the children of Israel ended up in Egypt prior to their famous deliverance. Last week, we focused upon the lesson that Israel's deliverance from Egypt was certain.

This week, I want to talk about the concept of Pharaoh's heart becoming hardened.

Edifying interactive study

In last Saturday's Interactive Bible study before our church service, we had an interesting discussion about the concept of God "hardening" someone's heart.

- One friend noted that God can "harden" or "soften" a heart. But how does He do that?

- Another friend noted that God certainly knew how to "push Pharaoh's buttons."

The expression "push Pharaoh's buttons" got my attention. In fact, I shared an experience with the group that I had in Wisconsin when I was around 23 years old.

Remembering the nudge

A group of men were in the gym playing basketball and our wives were having a great time talking. After the game, the men came out and began talking to our wives.

In the gym was a rope hanging from the ceiling (designed to challenge students to see how well they could climb). With my friends that day I began to reminisce about climbing a rope like that in my high-school gym class—mentioning how I could climb all the way to the top.

Well, one of the ladies said that she didn't believe that I had done it. In a sense, she challenged me. So I proceeded to climb the rope and to smack the top of the gym.

To this day, I am so disappointed in myself that I allowed my friend to nudge me (manipulate me) to climb that rope. Why am I still disappointed today? I don't like people to be able to manipulate me. My friend in the gym accidentally or deliberately "pushed my buttons."

But understand that I don't blame her. I blame me.

Pushing buttons is easy

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to push the buttons of people?

- Some people push buttons in a negative way. (The apostle Paul said we shouldn't provoke people to wrath.)
- Some people push buttons in a harmless way to create humor. (Some people enjoy that kind of humor and others do not.)
- Many people seek to push buttons in an effort to edify and to inspire others.

If we as flawed people can sometimes successfully push people's buttons, can we recognize that the Creator God can perfectly push buttons?

I had free will

When Bible students discuss the subject of God hardening Pharaoh's heart, they generally get around to discussing the subject of "free will."

When God hardened Pharaoh's heart, did He take away Pharaoh's free will?

Allow me to return to the Interactive Bible study and the story that I shared. After I told my story about my friend pushing my buttons to nudge me to climb that rope in the gym, one of my friends in the study asked a good question.

My friend in the study asked something like this: "When the lady in the gym pushed your button to nudge you to climb that rope, did you give up your free will?"

I answered: No.

Did Pharaoh have free will?

When my friend nudged me to climb that rope, I had the free will to say no. When God nudged Pharaoh to respond to Moses, I don't believe that Pharaoh had the same opportunity of free will.

- It is my perspective that God does not generally micromanage a situation like He did with the Passover and the Exodus.
- But because I believe that God was determined to create the ultimate outcome of the Passover and of the Exodus, I don't see Pharaoh having the same free will that we generally have the opportunity to express.

In Exodus 9:16 (which the apostle Paul quoted in Romans 9:17), God told Moses about His purpose for Pharaoh.

Exodus 9:16—"But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth."

Determining the outcome

- God told Moses early.

Exodus 4:21—"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.' "

- Moses warned Pharaoh with words.

Exodus 7:3—"And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt."

- Moses warned Pharaoh with a miracle.

Exodus 7:13—"And Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the LORD had said.

- 1st plague—water became blood.

Exodus 7:14—"So the LORD said to Moses: 'Pharaoh's heart is hard; he refuses to let the people go.' "

Exodus 7:22—"Then the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments; and Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the LORD had said."

- 2nd plague—frogs.

Exodus 8:15—"But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not heed them, as the LORD had said."

- 3rd plague—lice.

Exodus 8:19—"Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God.' But Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the LORD had said."

- 4th plague—swarm of flies.

Exodus 8:32—"But Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also; neither would he let the people go."

- 5th plague—livestock disease.

Exodus 9:7—"Then Pharaoh sent, and indeed, not even one of the livestock of the Israelites was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh became hard, and he did not let the people go."

- 6th plague—boils.

Exodus 9:12—"But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh; and he did not heed them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses."

- 7th plague—hail.

Exodus 9:34-35—"And when Pharaoh saw that the rain, the hail, and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet more; and he hardened his heart, he and his servants. So the heart of Pharaoh was hard; neither would he let the children of Israel go, as the LORD had spoken by Moses."

- 8th plague—locusts.

Exodus 10:1—"Now the LORD said to Moses, 'Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him.' "

Exodus 10:20—"But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go."

■ 9th plague—darkness.

Exodus 10:27—"But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go."

■ 10th plague—death of firstborn.

Exodus 11:10—"So Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh; and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go out of his land."

Exodus 13:15—"And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast."

■ Heading toward the sea.

Exodus 14:4—"Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD." And they did so."

Exodus 14:8—"And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel; and the children of Israel went out with boldness."

Exodus 14:17—"And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen."