

## Pharaoh's Hardened Heart (DBR in Exodus) Pleasant Plains 3-20-2016PM NICK ANGEL

- **\*Read Exodus 7:1-14\*** A couple of weeks ago, we considered some excuses given by Moses as to why he should not be the one to go to Pharaoh and request that he should let the Hebrews leave Egypt and go to the land of their forefathers. Try as he might, the Lord answered every one of his objections, and eventually, Moses leaves to go back down to Egypt to do the will of the Lord.
- Moses and Aaron go to Pharaoh for the first time in **Exodus 5**, but nothing is accomplished. In fact, things are made worse. Pharaoh increases the hard labor on the Hebrews by making them collect their own straw for the bricks they were charged with making. They end up meeting with Moses and they complain to him that his efforts have actually made things worse on them. Things have not gotten off to a good start for Moses and his efforts to free the people.
- **Chapter 6** opens with God speaking to Moses and telling him that he is going to have to force Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go. God had plans for the people, and no one was going to stop those plans from coming to fruition. Moses tries to play the "I am unskilled in speech" a couple more times, but God pays him no attention, and lays His plan out before Moses beginning in **chapter 7** where we read earlier.
- There are a few very polarizing verses in this text and you might have even taken a little notice of them while you were doing your Daily Bible Reading in this chapter. Three times within these few verses, we read about Pharaoh's hardened or stubborn heart. That alone might not cause anyone to raise any eyebrows, but **v.3** usually causes at least a little pause when it is read. The Lord tells Moses that "I will harden Pharaoh's heart." This text has been no stranger to discussion and controversy in the past, and I would like to consider it in our study this evening.

\*\*\*\*"Who Hardened Pharaoh's Heart?" by Dave Miller & Kyle Butt of Apologetics Press was used in preparation for this lesson.

### **I. Some see this as a "problem verse" within the Bible.**

- A. This text has been a major source of ammunition for skeptics who would seek to discredit God.
  1. The argument usually centers around the accusation that God mistreated Pharaoh by personally forcing him to harden his heart. The skeptic would say that God is unjust for making Pharaoh stubborn and not willing to let the Hebrews go.
  2. Steve Wells says this concerning this situation, "God begins the process of 'hardening Pharaoh's heart', thus making it impossible for any of the plagues that God sends to have any beneficial effect. But according to **I Samuel 6:6**, God didn't harden the Pharaoh's heart; the Pharaoh did it himself." So not only do they scream cruelty and unjustness, but they would also see this as an inconsistency within the Bible.
  3. Kendall Hobbs, another skeptic, says this in his essay entitled "Why I Am No Longer A Christian", "There are plenty of other atrocities committed by God or at his command...The Exodus story when the Egyptian Pharaoh was repeatedly ready and willing to let Moses and his people go, until God hardened his heart, and then God punished him for his hardened heart by sending plagues or killing children throughout all of Egypt."
  4. Obviously, some people have some major issues with what the text says, and honestly, if these accusations are true then they might have a point.
- B. So the question is...Do these skeptics have a point with these issues?
  1. If these accusations hold water, then I think we would really have to evaluate some things concerning the text. The inconsistencies, especially, would need to be answered.
  2. But, is it possible that these accusations actually have logical explanations. Can these things be logically reconciled so that they fit in with what the Scriptures tell us concerning the nature of God? And is there an answer for these supposed inconsistencies?
  3. We will get to these answers in just a few minutes, but unfortunately, skeptics are not the only people who want to use this text as a means of proof for their stance or beliefs.

## II. Calvinist use this occasion to promote false doctrine.

- A. The worst situation we could find ourselves in would be to hear a conversation between a skeptic and someone who holds to Calvinism concerning this text.
1. The skeptic would be screaming "cruelty" and "injustice", and the Calvinist would simply respond with, "God is sovereign and He can do whatever He wants to do." In the mind of a Calvinist, this text gives them no problem because they believe that God personally overrides the free will of man whenever He so pleases.
  2. The sovereign (meaning all powerful and absolutely controlling) nature of God is a major point of emphasis within the teachings of Calvinism. It is freely accepted that God causes all things to happen and nothing happens unless God gives it the ok.
  3. For God to harden Pharaoh's heart and cause him to sin isn't much to blink at for the legitimate Calvinist. They would respond to the skeptic by simply telling them that God can do whatever He wants to a person and that they have no right to question Him.
  4. While I think we would agree that God has the right to do so, I also think we would disagree with the thought that God would actually do what is being accused and suggested by both the skeptic and the Calvinist.
- B. The logical person would see this teaching as very inconsistent with Scripture, and would take major issue with the stance of the Calvinist.
1. The sad reality is that teachings such as this by Calvinist are actually pushing people away from any interest in spiritual things. The answer of the Calvinist is absurd in the mind of the skeptic (and myself) and this "other Gospel" is hurting the true Gospel.
  2. Not every person rejects the Gospel because it demands that they refocus their life on Jesus, but some reject because they hear this charade of the Gospel and are turned off to anything religiously because of its absurdity. This is just the sad reality we face today.
  3. The skeptic and even the worst of offenders would recognize that the Calvinist's explanation of this text is completely unjust, and they would rightly understand that a loving God is fair and just in His dealings. So if both the skeptic and the Calvinist are off base, then what is the truth about this troublesome text?

## III. God did not force Pharaoh to do anything. He simply supplied him with a choice.

- A. If God had forced Pharaoh to do the things that he did, then how would Judgement Day go down?
1. On Judgement Day, every person to ever live will stand before God and give an account for the what they have done in this life. **(II Corinthians 5:10)** Nothing in this text or in any other text gives us any indication that we will be able to blame anyone else for anything that we have done in this life.
  2. However, what if God did do as has been accused by so many concerning Him making Pharaoh harden his heart? If it is true that God made Pharaoh harden his heart, then wouldn't Pharaoh be able to say that he shouldn't be punished because God made him do the bad things that he did?
  3. The sad truth is that many people have claimed that God made them commit horrible acts. Just Google "God made me do it", and you'll be shocked by some of the horrible stories that come up.
  4. "God made me do it" will not be an acceptable excuse on Judgement Day because God does not force us to ever sin. In fact, God does not even tempt us to sin, much less force us to sin. James makes this very clear in his letter. **(James 1:13-15)**
  5. If God does not tempt or force us to sin, then we must conclude that God did not force Pharaoh to disobey Him, and neither Pharaoh nor anyone else will be able to use such an excuse when they are judged in the last day.

- B. The truth is that it was God's actions that caused Pharaoh to exercise his free will to harden his heart and reject the requests of Moses and Aaron.
1. One of the things we must consider when trying to understand this difficult text is to consider all that is said concerning the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. There are three different phrases that are used to declare that Pharaoh's heart was hardened.
    - a) First, the text says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. **(7:3; 9:12; 10:1,20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8)**
    - b) Secondly, the text says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. **(8:15,32; 9:34)**
    - c) Lastly, the text simply says that Pharaoh's heart was hardened without giving indication as to how it was hardened. **(7:13,14,22; 8:19; 9:7,35)**
  2. Now, we need to reconcile all three of these statements. Either the Bible is inconsistent and Moses was mistaken, or all of these statements are true without there being discrepancies.
  3. I believe that the latter would be true based upon the use of a figure of speech called metonymy. Metonymy is used when "an action is sometimes said to have been accomplished when all that is meant by it is that an occasion was given." Some examples of metonymy in Scripture are:
    - a) Jesus is said to have made and baptized more disciples than John, but the next verse says that Jesus never actually baptized anyone. **(John 4:1,2)** It was through His teachings that Jesus made and baptized disciples.
    - b) Another example is that of Lydia. The Bible says that the "Lord opened her heart" to receive the message that Paul was preaching. **(Acts 16:14)** The Lord didn't literally open her heart, but it was through the teaching of Paul concerning the Lord Jesus that her heart was opened to receive, believe, and obey truth.
    - c) Then finally, the Bible says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, but in reality it was the actions of God that presented the opportunity for Pharaoh to either obey or disobey.
  4. It is very interesting to note that we find the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in the same places of Scripture that show that God performed a miracle through Moses and Aaron. The miracles of God caused Pharaoh to harden his heart. Pharaoh had the choice of how he could respond to the miracles of God. He chose to respond with hardness of heart.
  5. It is just the same as if I say that Katie made me mad. Does that mean that Katie forced me against my will to be made? Of course not! I had the choice and I chose to respond to whatever she did with anger.
  6. Pharaoh had his free will and it was not violated by God. He had his choice of how to respond and he responded in the wrong manner. It was his arrogance and pride that hardened his heart, not God.

Skeptics are always looking for some way to discredit the God of the Bible. Unfortunately, some religious folks hurt the cause God with the skeptics than they help by misusing the Scriptures. May we be a people who use the Scriptures accurately so that we might be able to explain the difficult portions of it and instill faith within the unbeliever. May God help us to be wise and accurate handlers of his precious Word.