

The Heart Of Pharaoh

Introduction. In the first part of the Bible there are some interesting stories told, and I want you to center your attention upon Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. He lived about 1,500 years before Christ, the ruler of one of the greatest nations of the civilized world during the time that God's people were in bondage. He held under his dominion in the beginning, a body of people numbering just about seventy-five, and kept them under his control until they multiplied to approximately two million, at which time, God saw fit to call them out under the leadership of Moses so He might establish a nation pursuant to His chief purpose.

There are many aspects of the story of Pharaoh that are hard to understand, but the specific aspect which this sermon will address is the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Connected with that there is a doctrine that is considered very mysterious, but it is possible to understand. We will study the hardening of his heart and the results that came to pass, and then we will consider the ramifications of the hardening of modern man's heart.

I. ***The Hardening Of Pharaoh's Heart***

- A. First of all, we need to understand what "hardening" means.
 1. The "hardening" of the heart means that man has become stubborn and rebellious and disinclined to yield to God's commandments.
 2. In Exodus 4-14, there are twenty instances where Pharaoh's heart was hardened. Ten instances are related to God hardening Pharaoh's heart and ten instances tells us that Pharaoh hardened his own heart.
 3. There are three terms which are rendered "hardened" and one means to make hard or insensible (Exodus 7:3), to make heavy or unimpressionable (Exodus 10:1), and to make firm or immovable (Exodus 14:4). The effect of one is the hardening of man to his own destruction and the effect of the other is the hardening of man to God's glory.
- B. Nowhere in the scriptures do we have the indication that Pharaoh was an innocent victim whose heart was miraculously hardened by God. Pharaoh chose to resist God. Each refusal to obey God simply made him more stubborn and God used Pharaoh's stubbornness to demonstrate His own power (Romans 9:17-18).
 1. In the first two instances of hardening (Exodus 4:21; 7:3), God told Moses to not be discouraged because of Pharaoh's lack of cooperation. He then told Moses that He would use Pharaoh's disobedience to glorify Himself.
 2. According to the divine record, Pharaoh hardened his own heart the first seven times when he met with Moses and Aaron. He became

- stubborn and rebellious to the demands of the Lord. With each of the plagues, the hand of God became more and more clearly manifested, till at last, he was inexcusable.
- C. What was God's part in this hardening?
1. First, God made a simple demand of Pharaoh that was against his political and financial interest, and against his pride as the king of a great country (Exodus 5:1-3). It is not good politics for a king to release approximately two million people. It would not add to a man's financial standing to let two million slaves escape whose service and labor went to fill the already overflowing coffers of the Egyptian king.
 2. Second, when Pharaoh became rebellious and stubborn, God sent plagues to bring about the recognition of a Supreme Being. As Pharaoh would relent and seemingly repent, God would remove the plagues.
- D. What was Pharaoh's part in this hardening?
1. Pharaoh served self-interest rather than justice. He looked to his own interest, prominence, pride and advantage rather than the demands of justice.
 2. Because of Pharaoh's stubbornness, every demand of Jehovah to let them go aroused Pharaoh's determination to keep them.
 - a) Pharaoh knew nothing about the God of heaven, but God had a purpose to be fulfilled in him. He raised question after question as to who had spoken to Moses and made these requests.
 - b) He furthermore ridiculed the Israelites, and suggested that they were idle. God kept impressing His power upon him until at last there was nothing to be done but to accept God's declaration or else be swept off the face of the earth.

II. ***The Hardening Of Modern Man's Heart***

- A. Under the gospel dispensation the same principle prevail, and will continue to prevail as long as human nature remains the same. All throughout time the preaching of the gospel has exactly the same effect upon many souls as did the Lord's demand to Pharaoh. God made a demand upon him which was for the benefit of the Israelites. God makes a demand upon you and me today for our good, for the blessings of the world, for the benefit of humanity, and ultimately for His own matchless glory.
- B. However, that demand is contrary to our physical desires; it is contrary to the appetites and the pleasures in which we love to engage. Yet that is God's demand, and it is just as insistent as was the demand upon Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go.

1. What will be your attitude toward God's demands? Are you going to let your heart become hardened by God's wonderful appeal and demand that you forsake the passions and the lusts of the flesh?
 2. You ought to take up your cross, having denied yourself, and follow after Christ (Matthew 16:24). That is God's demand.
- C. My attitude toward this demand will depend upon whether or not my heart will be hardened or softened.
1. If I am determined to do what I want, my results will be identical with that of Pharaoh. My heart will be hardened, and it could be truly said that God did it -- not by the performance of a superhuman miracle, but by making a request that is contrary to my desires and ambitions, and if I do not yield, I am hardened every day, as I postpone, stubbornly refusing the gospel of the Son of God (Hebrews 3:13).
 2. Sin can harden our nature and cripple our consciences. At that point, the penetrating appeals of God's Son will not be effective, and we will have reached the point in a downward path where it is impossible for us to be saved. This is what is meant when it is said of those in Romans 1:28 that "God gave them over" and in 2 Thessalonians 2:11 when those people "received not the love of the truth."
- D. This is what Paul had in mind when he spoke in 1 Timothy 4:2 of certain characters having their "conscience(s) seared with a hot iron."
1. Did you ever see a branded cow or mule where the red-hot iron burns into the flesh and immediately underneath the nerve is killed and there is a scab or a sore that is left? You may touch and poke it any way you wish, but it is dead because the feeling has been destroyed.
 2. The gospel is either a aroma of life to life or of death to death (2 Corinthians 2:16).
 - a) Sadly, some people's hearts are hardened when faithful children of God tell them to repent of their sins. If we condemn people's fornication, covetousness, adultery, or cursing, their hearts will be hardened.
 - b) If you and I are determined to be guided by our fleshly passions, the gospel of Christ will be a means of condemnation and of death to us. But if, instead of following my own desires, I turn to God, the gospel will remove all stubbornness, resulting in my obedience.
- E. Heat is an element that will soften wax and harden clay. That is exactly the effect of the gospel. What effect will the gospel have upon your life?

1. If you merely appreciate it as good, common sense precepts; if you merely enjoy it and do not translate its teaching into your life, the result is that you may end up worse than if you had never heard or read it. Every soul who rejects the gospel call once becomes harder to reach next time.
2. You may hear the gospel and be convicted of the rightness of the cause presented; but if you are absorbed in worldly affairs rather than what is sacred and holy, the result will be that your hearts will become hardened, and there is a chance that you will reach the point where the gospel has lost its power upon you and you are doomed to condemnation (Proverbs 29:1).

Conclusion. So, if you will hear His voice, harden not your heart. God wants us to come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). It is within your power to determine what will be the effect of God's demand upon you. By its rejection the effect is the hardening of your conscience; but if you yield, it will have a melting effect and the ultimate conversion of your soul. The first and foremost lesson we learn from Pharaoh is that the most astounding miracles will not affect someone who is obstinate to God's will (cf. Luke 16:31). Will you obey today?