

The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

By
Kyle Pope



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Guardian of Truth Foundation
PO Box 9670 • Bowling Green, Kentucky 42102
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So the LORD said to Moses: "See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you. And Aaron your brother shall speak to Pharaoh to send the children of Israel out of his land. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them. Then Moses and Aaron did so; just as the LORD commanded them, so they did" (Exod. 7:1-6, NKJV).

The Bible teaches that when God brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, in order to demonstrate his power, he "hardened Pharaoh's heart," so that he would not let the Israelites go. This has been a very controversial and misunderstood doctrine. Some have argued that this teaches that God actually made Pharaoh do all that he did in opposing Moses and God himself:

Martin Luther, in his *Bondage of the Will* claimed...
"God *made* Pharaoh wicked; that is from a wicked seed"
(Section 83).

John Calvin, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in speaking of Pharaoh, and others who rebelled against God, said that God...

"...bends them to do his judgements, just as if they carried their orders engraved on their minds...all the counsels and actions of men must be held to be governed by his providence, so that he not only exerts power in the elect...but also forces the reprobate to do him service" (Bk 1, 18.2).

Conclusion

What have we seen?

- God allowed Pharaoh to **“exalt himself.”**
- He did so **to demonstrate His power** and show Israel and the Egyptians that He is God.
- Pharaoh **“hardened his heart”** by failing to “regard” God’s word.
- The effect which God’s word had on Pharaoh is what is called God **“hardening”** his heart.
- God **did not cause Pharaoh to sin**, but used Pharaoh’s rebellion for his own purposes.

These conclusions are not “ new interpretations” of the text. In fact, early Christian writers drew many of the same conclusions:

A. Early Christian Writers:

1. Clement of Rome (ca. 96 AD): “Pharaoh and his host and all the rulers of Egypt, their chariots and their horsemen, were overwhelmed in the depths of the Red Sea, and perished for none other reason but because their foolish hearts were hardened after that the signs and the wonders had been wrought in the land of Egypt by the hand of Moses the servant of God” (*To the Corinthians*, 51).
2. Irenaeus (c. 130-200 AD): “God, knowing the number of those who will not believe, since He foreknows all things, has given them over to unbelief, and turned away His face from men of this stamp, leaving them in the darkness which they have themselves chosen for themselves...He did also at that time give over to their unbelief, Pharaoh, who never would have believed, along with those who were with him” (*Against the Heresies*, Bk. 4, 29.2).
3. Origen (ca. 185-254 AD): Showing the foolishness of the view that holds that God’s hardening made Pharaoh sin writes: “For if he is hardened by God, and commits

sin in consequence of being hardened, he is not the cause of sin to himself; and if so, then neither does Pharaoh possess free-will. And some one will say that, in a similar way, they who perish have not free-will, and will not perish of themselves” (*De Principis*, Bk. 3, 1.7).

Writing later, explaining how God’s word can effect a hardening on some, he writes: “And as if the sun, uttering a voice, were to say, ‘I liquefy and dry up,’ liquefaction and drying up being opposite things, he would not speak falsely as regards the point in question; wax being melted and mud being dried by the same heat so the same operation, which was performed through the instrumentality of Moses, proved the hardness of Pharaoh... the result of his wickedness...” (*De Principis*, Bk. 3, 1.11).

B. Scriptural Principles.

1. James 1:13-14 teaches us—“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.”
2. Habakkuk 1:13a declares of God—“You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness” The God whose pure eyes do not behold evil and who tempts no man—did not, does not, and will not harden anyone directly so as to cause him to sin!
3. Pharaoh’s words were right when he said in Exodus 9:27, “I have sinned...The LORD is righteous...”

May we always be diligent to carefully and accurately examine the text of God’s word, and always reject theories of men which would claim God as the cause of any sin!

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Kyle M. Pope (1963-) has been preaching the gospel since 1987 in local works in Missouri, Arkansas, Alabama, Kansas and Texas. He and his wife Toni have three children, Torhi, Caleb and Nathan who are all faithful Christians. He currently conducts a preacher training program in connection with his work with the Olsen Park church of Christ in

Amarillo, Texas. Kyle earned his B.A. from the University of Alabama (1997) in Humanities and his M.A. from the University of Kansas (2000) in Greek & Latin. His Masters work involved the translation and examination of Justin Martyr's *Second Apology*. While at the University of Kansas he taught Greek, Latin and Classical mythology. He has written for *Guardian of Truth*, *Truth Magazine*, *Christianity Magazine* and *Biblical Insights*, in addition to featured articles in *The Kansas City Star* and *Amarillo Uptown*. He maintains his own website *Ancient Road Publications*[™] and has written numerous tracts, and books including: *How We Got the Bible*; *A Harmony of 2 Samuel, Kings and Chronicles*; *The Christian and Islam* and *The Book of Romans* in the *Bible Text Book* series. He is currently working on a commentary of the Gospel of Matthew for the *Truth Commentary* series.



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