

# It Is Written

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## Does God Harden People's Hearts?

By Ken Weliever

Does the sovereignty of God override a person's personal decisions?

Our Bible reading this week covers the first 15 chapters of Exodus that describe Israel's descent into Egyptian slavery. The birth of Moses. God's call for him to lead Israel out of Egypt to the promised land. And God's message to Pharaoh "Let my people go."

As God predicted, Pharaoh refused and the 10 plagues were brought upon the Egyptians before the King finally relented and allowed them to leave. Challenging our thinking about the character of God are the passages that say, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart."

When we read descriptions about God's nature in the Psalms, we are struck by multiple references to his goodness, mercy, and loving-kindness. Hardening Pharaoh's heart seems inconsistent with God's character.

Furthermore, it raises questions about our own salvation and eternal destiny. Is it out of our control? Has God already predetermined whether or not we will be saved or lost? Does God today harden people's hearts so they will not obey Him?

A further investigation of the narrative and the ten plagues provides further insight.

1. Blood: Pharaoh's heart "became hard" (7:22)
2. Frogs: Pharaoh "hardened his own heart" (8:15)
3. Gnats: Pharaoh's heart "was hard" (8:19)
4. Flies: "Pharaoh hardened his own heart" (8:32)
5. Livestock die: Pharaoh's heart "was hard" (9:7)
6. Boils: "The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart" (9:12)
7. Hail: Pharaoh "hardened his own heart" (9:34)
8. Locusts: God announces that he has "hardened Pharaoh's heart" (10:1,10:20)
9. Darkness: God "hardened Pharaoh's heart" (10:27)
10. Death of the firstborn: God "hardened Pharaoh's heart" (11:10)

So, the text says "God hardened Pharaoh's heart," But it also says, "Pharaoh hardened his heart." As my Bible professor, E. V. Sygley, used to say, "It's a seemingly apparent contradiction." Actually, both God and Pharaoh are involved in the hardening of his heart.

It's noteworthy, that five times after it says that God hardened his heart, the text tells us that "Pharaoh did not listen." Three times it says, "he sinned." Pharaoh is a conflicted and confused man. Here's why. The Egyptians were polytheists. They had major and minor deities. Some sources suggest they had over 2,000 gods. The major ones are well known. Osiris, Horus, Amun, Ra, Hathor, Bastet, Thoth, Anubis, and Ptah.

Moses' claim that Jehovah was the one true God was a threat to their pantheon of gods. Furthermore, each one of the plagues was an attack on their pagan deities. Their gods were impotent to block Jehovah's offensive power. And Pharaoh was unable to intervene.

At times it seemed Pharaoh would relent, yet each time he renewed his opposition to God and Moses' request and refused to release the people. He hardened his heart. God hardened his heart. But how are both possible?

There's an old illustration that preachers of bygone years used that seems appropriate here. If you place a block of butter in the sun, it will soon melt the butter. However, if you fashion a clay pot and subject it to the sun's powerful rays, it will harden the clay. You have the same source, but two different results because of two vastly different materials.

So, it is with God's Word. Depending on the substance of the heart, God's Word will either soften or harden it.

A soft and pliable heart is receptive to God. To His Word. His guidance. His desire to draw you close to

Him. However, a heart that is prideful, stubborn and self-centered is resistant to God and spiritual matters.

God hardened Pharaoh's heart through His word and His works. The more he saw God's mighty power, although he admitted, "I have sinned," he could not let go and give in to accept this One and True Deity. He hardened his heart.

When you read the New Testament book of Acts with the preaching of the gospel message, some hearers were "cut to the heart" and obeyed the gospel (Ax 2:37-42). However, others who heard the same Word were also "cut to the heart" but opposed both the message and messenger (Ax 7:54-60). The same Word. But two different results. Because the substance of the heart was different.

What about you? And me? Are we receptive to God's call? To His revealed Word? To His message of salvation? Depending upon the nature of our heart, we will either be receptive or resistant.

The wise man admonished, "Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). Keep it pure. Keep it tender. Keep it open. Keep it from stubbornness.

You have a choice. Keep your heart from being hardened. Listen to the Lord. And obey His voice.

## Get Thee Behind Me Satan...

*by Aubrey Belue*

Full of enthusiasm and passion, devoted to his Lord, willing to "take a chance", you've got to love Peter. But Peter made some big mistakes! Seeing himself as the Lord's protector, anxious to prove his love, quick to jump to His defense, humble to make correction when wrong, sometimes too confident in his own abilities, sometimes too ready to inject his own notions into God's plan -- we identify with him, because we see a lot of "us" in him.

In fact, our usual thinking is to "go easy" on him, because his "boo boos" were matters of the head, and not of the heart. Even here (Matt 16:21-23) his mistake came from his great love for Jesus. (After all, "loving God" is the "main" thing, and God's grace covers your imperfections if you do.)

Jesus did not go easy on Peter! At this moment, the Lord identified him with His "Adversary", and reacted accordingly. Would "Satan" be welcome in heaven? Why did Jesus react so strongly? Because, in effect, Peter was challenging God's own plan. For God, Jesus had to die... To Peter, "Lord, be it not so unto Thee"...He looked at it as men do, and questioned God's wisdom and will. Setting aside the logical disconnect – Peter had just finished confessing that Jesus was the Son of God (who cannot die) – in that moment, because his way (the "things of men") was contrary to God's way, Peter "stood on the other side" (Obadiah 1:11)! Attitude did not enter into it! Jesus did not judge his intentions, but what came out of his mouth. Do you imagine he regards us any differently, or lets our intentions override the plain truth? Later, Jesus indicated He could not use Peter, until he was "converted" - Lk 22:31.