

## Golden Nuggets from Really Old Books:

### The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

*But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go. (Exodus 10:27; King James Version)*

In a number of places within Scripture God is said to harden people's hearts and then punish them for having committed those sins that comes as a result of such hardening. Some men, especially those of the Calvinist persuasion, claim that God does this *efficaciously* (the belief that God *sovereignly* and supernaturally produced the hardness in Pharaoh's heart. It is the false idea that Pharaoh had no ability to resist God's hardening).

Bible passages of this nature lead some people to believe that God controls all events, to include the sinful acts of men, for mysterious divine purposes. Only recently I have discovered that there is another group of people who profess Christianity but deny the divine inspiration and/or infallibility of God's Word because of passages of this nature.

As a resolution to both erroneous extremes stated above, I and many others over the years have suggested that this "hardening" was *permissive* rather than *causative*. What we mean is that there is a principle in the Bible in which God is said to do that which He merely allows, permits or does not prevent from occurring. There are some Bible translations that recognize this truth and have interpreted the Scriptures to reflect it. For example, here are two Bible translations of our opening passage:

*And Yahweh **let** the heart of Pharaoh wax bold, - and he was not willing to let them go. (The Emphasized Bible by J. B. Rotherham)*

*But JEHOVAH **permitted** Pharaoh's heart to be hardened, so that he would not send them away. (A Translation of the Old Testament Scriptures from the Original Hebrew By Helen Spurrell)*

Just recently I found another translation by a Jewish Rabbi, Dr. A. Benisch published in 1852. Here is how he renders the passage:

*But the Eternal **allowed** Pharaoh's Heart to be hardened, and he would not let them go (Ex. 10:27; Jewish School & Family Bible, Volume I by Dr. A. Benisch)*

It would appear that interpreting God's role of hardening in a permissive rather than in a causative sense is nothing new or novel. However, those who desire to maintain a view of God's sovereignty that make Him the author and distributor of evil strongly and vehemently oppose this view. Those who believe that God is good but that the passages above do not reflect this truth,

thus, believing that the Bible is uninspired and full of contradiction, also argue against understanding the Bible in this sense.

While there is nothing we can do to change the perspective of those who have closed their ears to our proofs, we can continue to present evidence to encourage those who know that God is good in every sense of the Word, who believe that the Bible is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God, but often struggle with how it depicts God in several places as one who hardens hearts, sends evil and lying spirits, inflicts sickness and disease, and other acts that fail to demonstrate the natural understanding of a benevolent deity.

Citing from some *really old books* helps us in this faith building endeavor. Most men of those times, unlike our superficial single focused theologians of today, took time to investigate these Biblical issues and found that God can indeed be vindicated upon the established truth that the Bible is only stating a principle in which God is said to do what He merely permitted. In his 1867 book on Bible Illustrations James Lee (M. A.) helps to clarify this matter for us:

V. 10. '*The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart.*'—These words have not a little perplexed many a reader of the Bible. God is often said in Scripture *to do* what He only *permits* to be done; *e.g.*, 'The Lord said unto Shimei, Curse David,'—meaning, the Lord permitted Shimei to curse David. 'Is there evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?'—and the Lord hath not permitted it. Nor is this style of speaking unpracticed by ourselves. How common is it for people to say of an over-indulgent parent, 'He—she—ruined the children.' How? By not restraining them; and as the *result* (though not inevitably) the children ruined themselves. So, not softening Pharaoh's heart, the Lord hardened it; Pharaoh doing *really* what the Lord did *consequentially*.

To this explanation, however, two objections will be raised: 1st. That if Pharaoh only did what he was permitted to do, how could he in equity be punished for it? This objection takes for granted either that the Lord was under *obligation to prevent* Pharaoh, or that the Lord permitting, *necessitated* Pharaoh to do as he did; both which must be denied. For while *men* are bound to hinder sin all they can, and their not hindering it when it is in their power to do so, is a crime of greatest magnitude; *God*, on the other hand, is bound to none, and therefore may give men or withhold from them His restraining grace, as His wisdom sees best. We must here recognize His uncontrollable, unimpeachable, and most righteous sovereignty. And so far from the Lord's permission *necessitating* Pharaoh, that surely is against all reason. When a parent permits his child to have his own way, no one will say that the parent *necessitates* the child to *take* his own way.

The second objection is, that the Lord 'raised up' Pharaoh to do as he did, ch. ix. 16; Rom. ix. 17. But the reply to this is obvious. For God's 'raising up' Pharaoh refers not to his creation, but *preservation*. Pharaoh *fell down* under

Divine judgment, and the Lord 'raised him up'; *i.e.*, permitted him to stand or continue the adversary of His people. And is there aught in this to exonerate Pharaoh, by *shifting the cause* of his rebellion from himself to God? God did not *make* Pharaoh rebellious; He only *forbore* to make him obedient, giving him up to his own wicked heart, so that he became more and more hardened, until he was destroyed.— *Anon.*

Lee, James **Bible Illustrations: Consisting of Apothegms, Maxims and Proverbs, Volume 1** (James Lee (M.A.), 1867), pp. 168, 169

We certainly don't expect the above to change the heart of those people who use Bible passages that appear to teach that God efficaciously hardens hearts as proof of their view that God controls every single event, be it good or evil. Neither do we expect it to change the heart of those who use such passages to question the inspiration, inerrancy and infallibility of the Scriptures. But we do believe that it should bless those of us who believe that God is very good, that the Bible is indeed the inspired and inerrant Word of God, but that it requires some passages to be interpreted in a *permissive* rather than in a *causative* sense. Be blessed.

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