

God's Judgment Part1: Did God Harden Pharaoh's Heart?

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | June 5, 2009



Thank you for recent blog (May 8, 2009). It answered questions I had about who will actually destroy body & soul in hell! Thank you for putting puzzle pieces together so we can better see the Big Picture. I have several unrelated questions that I'm hoping you can help me resolve.

1. Why did God claim to harden Pharaoh's heart? (Exodus 7:3)
2. What is meant in Rev. 6:10 "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"—especially the words "judge" and "avenge"
3. Rev. 14:7 "Fear God and give glory to him for the hour of his judgment is come" "Fear/respect" and "glory" seem to indicate that this is the time when God will be judging not that we will be judging (deciding for or against) Him?

I am confused about the investigative judgment and Daniel 7 ad 1844. Can you shed any light on this for me?

Great questions, we'll deal with question 1 today and your other questions in next week's blog. You asked why God hardened Pharaoh's heart. As we explore the Bible rendering of this experience we discover the Scriptures describe it in a variety of ways:

Description #1 - God hardening Pharaoh's heart

- "The Lord said to Moses, "When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go." Exodus 4:21
- "But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites." Ex 7:3,4
- "But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said to Moses." Ex 9:12

Description #2 - Pharaoh's heart became hard

- "Yet Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the Lord had said." Ex 7:13
- "Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is unyielding; he refuses to let the people go." Ex 7:14
- "But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said." Ex 7:22
- "The magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the Lord had said." Ex 8:19

Description # 3 - Pharaoh hardened his own heart

- "But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said." Exodus 8:15
- "But this time also Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go." Ex 8:32
- "When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped, he sinned again: He and his officials hardened their hearts. So Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the Lord had said through Moses." Ex 9:34,35

In order to find the right understanding of what the Bible is teaching we must develop a perspective which brings harmony to all of these inspired verses. The Bible records the fact that Pharaoh's heart was hard but then attributes responsibility to both God and Pharaoh. Somehow, both God and Pharaoh had a part to play in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. What we must do is determine which part each party played and not make the mistake of attributing to God the responsibility that was Pharaoh's.

We gain insight from another story in Scripture, what transpired after the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant in battle. They took the ark into the temple of their god Dagon. Initially, Dagon was found on his face in front of the ark – and what did the Philistines do? They ignored the evidence and put Dagon back on his pedestal in front of the ark. The next day Dagon is found on his face in front of the ark, but this time his hands and head were broken off. What did the people do? They again ignored the evidence and made the spot where the broken hands and head of Dagon were found a holy place. Then the people developed tumors, which they could not ignore, so they called a council to try and decide what to do, notice the discussion:

The Philistines asked, “What guilt offering should we send to him?” They replied, “Five gold tumors and five gold rats, according to the number of the Philistine rulers, because the same plague has struck both you and your rulers. Make models of the tumors and of the rats that are destroying the country, and pay honor to Israel’s god. Perhaps he will lift his hand from you and your gods and your land. Why do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did? When he treated them harshly, did they not send the Israelites out so they could go on their way? 1Sam 6:4-6

The wise men asked, “Why do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did?” What were the Philistines doing? What did God do? How did this result in hardening of hearts? What is similar to what happened in Egypt?

God provided evidence exposing the impotence of the Egyptian and Philistine gods. Each of the 10 plagues that fell on Egypt demonstrated the powerlessness of the gods of Egypt. Dagon prostrated in front of the ark and then having his hands and head broken off demonstrated his powerlessness. God was acting in both these countries to demonstrate He is the only true God, that the gods they worshiped were not God. God was responsible for presenting the evidence, but then God left Pharaoh and the Philistines free to decide how they would respond to the evidence. Would they repent and humble themselves before the Lord or would they reject the truth and harden their heart?

God’s role in Egypt was to present the truth to which Pharaoh had to decide how he would respond. If no truth had been presented to Pharaoh his heart would not have hardened against God as it was, but when truth is presented, and we reject it, the rejection of truth results in hardening of the heart.

So why did God present truth to Pharaoh when He, in His foreknowledge, knew Pharaoh would reject it and experience a hardened heart? Even though Pharaoh was going to reject the truth, God knew it is only by the presentation of truth that sinners can be set free (John 8:32). God would not deny Pharaoh the opportunity to be freed from sin. God would not deny Pharaoh the opportunity to be saved. Therefore God presented truth to Pharaoh in order to reach his heart and save him.

God did not force Pharaoh’s will. Pharaoh freely chose to reject the truth and when Pharaoh hardened his heart, God used Pharaoh as a powerful demonstration of the futility of worshipping false gods. The lessons of Egypt were publicized throughout the ancient world and awareness of the true God spread.

Therefore, God presents truth, which sets free all those who accept it, but God does not force the will of individuals to either accept or reject the truth. When we reject the truth our hearts harden in proportion to the truth rebuffed. The Bible record of all three descriptions of this event is accurate. God hardened Pharaoh’s heart by presenting truth in such a way that Pharaoh was forced to make a decision upon it. But it was Pharaoh who hardened his own heart by rejecting the truth and refusing to repent.

We will answer you other questions in next week’s blog.