

Was it fair of God to harden the heart of Pharaoh?

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In the Netherlands, there is a Christian weekly magazine that has a regular feature interviewing an unbeliever. One of the common questions put to the unbeliever is: 'If you could ask Jesus one question, what would it be?' Usually there are the same answers, such as: 'I want to know why You permit so much injustice and suffering.' But one answer recently caught my attention with this question: 'Why do we read in the Bible that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh?'

When I read that story in the past, I found it unfair of God - Pharaoh had obviously no chance against God. But it is important with this type of question to look for an answer. God is not so unfair that He will

not give man a fair chance. He wants to give everyone a chance. So we need to take a good look at what really happened.

In the book of Exodus, Israel was oppressed in Egypt by Pharaoh. God tells Pharaoh that he should let the people go. Of course, he will not let the people go and God told Moses this in advance (Ex 3:19). God therefore punishes Pharaoh and sends plagues upon Egypt. Moses knew that Pharaoh would not receive him with open arms and that there would be difficulties. God knew the difficulties, warned Moses, and then said: 'I will harden the heart of Pharaoh' (Ex 4:21 b).

God does not set out to destroy anyone so why does he say this nonetheless?

God knew that Pharaoh would refuse to let the people go. God knew that a time would come when Pharaoh would be so cross that he would destroy himself.

The verses below come from Exodus in relation to Pharaoh and they are always the response to a plague.

1-7:22 he hardened his heart

2-8:15 he hardened his heart
3-8:19 he hardened his heart
4-8:32 he hardened his heart
5-9:7 he hardened his heart
6-9:12 The Lord hardened his heart
7-9:35 he hardened his heart
8-10:20 The Lord hardened his heart
9-10:27 The Lord hardened his heart
10-11:10 The Lord hardened his heart

God predicted how it would go and just as he predicted, Pharaoh refused to listen to God and his own heart hardened. It seems that there comes a time when God says, okay Pharaoh, you do not want to listen even though I have given you every opportunity. Now I will give you a hand. And at the end of the plagues, God therefore hardened the heart of Pharaoh. God said to Moses from the beginning that He knew Pharaoh would bring destruction upon himself.

As we can see from the list above, God gave Pharaoh every opportunity to meet His demand before enough was enough for God. Pharaoh crossed the line and in the end received the punishment for his sins.

Actually, you already see happening in this story that God predicts in Revelation 22 : 11 – He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.

Let us be alert and careful not to fall into the same downward spiral as Pharaoh, but instead become ever more sanctified and holy.

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