

The Testimony Of A Man With A Hardened Heart

By Dr. Gary M. Gulan, ©1984 (Rev. 90, 00)

Introduction: Approximately fourteen hundred and fifty years before Christ there was a great ruler in Egypt named Amenhotep II. He was a tall man of six feet towering over others when the height of most men was five foot five inches. He was also known in history as being a very formidable warrior and sportsman, achieving a winning reputation in rowing, horsemanship and archery. In fact he boasted of a famous bow that no other man could draw. (The above was taken from, Moses and the God's of Egypt, by John Davis, pages 44 and 105).

Amenhotep II was called a "pharaoh" and reigned for twenty six years during the zenith of Egypt's glory as a nation. The account of his life is found in the Old Testament book of Exodus. It was this pharaoh who encountered God and God's man named Moses. It was this man whose testimony is recorded of a "hardened" heart.

What is a "hardened" heart?

A "hardened" heart is a heart that is, "insensitive, slow to respond, strongly resistant, unyielding, very difficult and very stubborn toward God and His plans."

What can we learn from Pharaoh Amenhotep's testimony of a "hardened" heart?

1. THE SEVERITY OF A HARDENED HEART

There were three Hebrew words used for a "hardened" heart in the story of pharaoh's life. This helps us to understand the concept of a "hardened" heart.

A. "To be insensitive, to be slow to respond, to be dull or implacable" (Hebrew "kabad," Exodus 7:14; 8:15,28; 9:7,34; 10:1; 14:17). (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Harris, Archer, Waltke, Vol. 1, page 426)

B. "To have strong resistance, unyielding, to be bull headed" (Hebrew "hazaq," Exodus 7:13,22; 8:19; 9:12,35; 10:20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8). (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Harris, Archer, Waltke, Vol. 1, page 277)

C. "To be hard or severe, to be cruel, to be difficult, to be obstinate, to be stubborn" (Hebrew "qasha," Exodus 7:3; 13:15). (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Harris, Archer, Waltke, Vol. 2, page 818)

2. THE SOURCE OF A HARDENED HEART

Within Pharaoh's life there were three sources that caused his "hardened" heart.

A. Pharaoh hardened his own heart,
(Exodus 7:13; 8:15,32; 9:34; 13:15).

He was a sinner and insensitive to spiritual things like all of mankind is. He made a conscious choice to resist God and refuse to follow God's plan.

B. Pharaoh's heart hardened itself, (Exodus 7:22; 8:19; 9:7,35).

The sinful heart will urge us to make sinful choices. The sinful nature (i.e. the heart) of Pharaoh strengthened him against all fear and alarm of the results of disobedience. The great prophet Jeremiah stated, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

C. The "LORD" hardened Pharaoh's heart, (Exodus 4:21; 9:12; 10:1,20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8,17).

Pharaoh was an unrepentant sinner at the start. He sinned freely and therefore was held guilty before the Lord. It was only after repeated offers to Pharaoh to change and Pharaoh's repeated refusals did the Lord harden his heart. It was after the sixth plague that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. The Lord's hardening of an obstinate sinner was judicial and was done to accomplish God's plan of deliverance for God's people.

3. THE SERIOUSNESS OF A HARDENED HEART

Pharaoh could have changed but did not. What were the factors surrounding his hardened heart that kept him from changing?

A. He refused to stop and consider what was at stake, (Exodus 7:23).

Right after the first plague, Pharaoh went into his house as though the results of refusing to obey God were not worth his consideration.

B. He made a choice not to respond to relief, (Exodus 8:15).

After the third plague was over, Pharaoh had an opportunity to submit to God's plan. However, he made a choice not to respond probably knowing that if there were three plagues there could be a fourth.

C. He rejected God's working around his life, (Exodus 8:19).

It was obvious to those who worked for Pharaoh that God was behind the plagues. They told pharaoh that it was God. But Pharaoh rejected the observation.

D. He reversed his course of repentance, (Exodus 9:27 and 34).

Pharaoh made overtures of repentance by stating he had sinned, (Exodus 9:27). He let Moses and Israel go to worship. When the effects of the seventh plague were over, he changed his mind and sinned more, (Exodus 9:33-35). Moses knew that Pharaoh could not fully repent until he totally feared the Lord, (Exodus 9:30).

E. He refused to be humble before the Lord, (Exodus 10:3).

Moses told Pharaoh just prior to the eighth plague that Pharaoh's problem was one of pride. He refused to humble himself before God.

4. THE SOFTENING OF A HARDENED HEART

In Pharaoh's life there were several influences that could have made the difference if he allowed them to soften his heart. What were these influences?

A. Prayer, (Exodus 8:8,28; 9:28; 10:17)

Moses prayed a number of times on behalf of Pharaoh.

B. Testimony, (Exodus 8:15,19)

Pharaoh's own men testified that it was "God" that was working behind these plagues. There were enough testimonials of God's working around the life of Pharaoh for him to respond in repentance.

C. Personal entreaty, (Exodus 8:25-28; 9:27, 34; 10:3,24)

Moses met with Pharaoh on 15 occasions, when finally Pharaoh softened his heart and compromised his position.

D. Consistent pressure, (Exodus 12:31)

God uses 12 miracles and 10 plagues to get Pharaoh to soften his heart enough to conform to God's plan and let God's people go.

5. THE SPARING OF A HARDENED HEART

Many times God would take someone in death after a few times of "hardening" of the heart. In the case of Pharaoh, God delayed judgment after so many opportunities for him to repent. We know that God spared Pharaoh with his "hardened" heart for at least four reasons.

A. To show God's "signs," (Exodus 10:1)

All of the plagues the Egyptians experienced were called "signs," (Hebrew "mopet"). These signs were unusual events to give a message. God wanted Pharaoh to get the message that the True and Living God wanted something from Him.

B. To bring God the honor due Him, (Exodus 14:4;17)

Because Pharaoh resisted God after so many opportunities for repentance, God wanted Pharaoh and Israel to know who was really in charge.

C. To bring judgment, (Joshua 11:20)

Though Pharaoh himself was spared death, many people died within his kingdom because of his hardened heart. Many people in Egypt, both innocent people of the country and servants of Pharaoh in the military died through the miraculous signs of God directed toward Pharaoh.

D. To show God's power and reveal God's character to the world, (Romans 9:17-18)

God knew Pharaoh would harden his heart. God used Pharaoh to show his power and reveal who God really was. Through this demonstration the testimony of God would spread through the world. The people of Gilgal had heard of what God did to Egypt, (Joshua 9:6-9).

Conclusion: It is easy for us to harden our hearts like Pharaoh, (1 Samuel 6:6). Israel adopted many of the same characteristics of Pharaoh as they wandered in the wilderness, (Hebrews 3:16-19; 4:7). The challenge to the Christian today is, do not harden your hearts like Pharaoh and like Israel!