

# Romans 9... 10... 11

Paul is in the middle of a dialog with the Jews to show them that God is not unrighteous in His dealings with the nation of Israel. To them it seemed as though God had abandoned them in favor of the godless Gentiles. That didn't seem right.

He must prove it to them from their Scriptures. He had been using examples from the patriarchs. From the patriarchs, Paul moves to Pharaoh.

Romans 9:17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth."

Again we want to discover the primary meaning. Paul brings up Pharaoh as an illustration. Every Jew knew the story of Pharaoh's refusal to let the Israelites go. Even after the many miracles Moses performed Pharaoh continued to harden his heart.

What was Paul saying to the first century Jews by appealing to Pharaoh in this context?

- being changed to bring change -

Pharaoh was a Gentile who persecuted God's people, the Jews. He held a privileged position but hardened his heart so that God could be glorified in delivering His people.

Centuries later, in the first century, it was the nonbelieving Jews who were persecuting God's people, the Church. They held a privileged position but hardened their hearts at the preaching of the gospel. God was being glorified in delivering His people, the Church.

You read in Romans 11:25, in the NIV,

"...Israel has experienced a **hardening** in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in."

The nonbelieving Jews were acting and reacting to the mercy of God upon Gentiles exactly as Pharaoh had acted and reacted when God wanted to show mercy to His enslaved people in Egypt.

God is perfectly justified in showing mercy towards the Gentiles while the Jews are further hardened.

Romans 9:18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

Just as God had shown mercy on the Jews, He now was showing mercy on the Gentiles who were swelling the numbers in the Church on earth.

Let's say we understand and agree with the use of Pharaoh as an illustration. It brings up another problem. What does it mean "whom He wills He hardens?" Did God harden Pharaoh's heart? Was Pharaoh a puppet who had no choice but to refuse Moses?

Alfred Edersheim has done an extensive study of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. I'm in debt to him for the following insights.

He points out that the phrase is used of Pharaoh twenty times. In those uses three different Hebrew words are employed:

1. One means *to make hard*, as in insensible (Exodus 7:3).
2. Another means *to make heavy*, as in unimpressionable (10:1).
3. Another means *to make firm* or *stiff*, so as to be immovable (14:4).

Of the twenty passages, ten are ascribed to Pharaoh himself and ten are ascribed to God. In both cases all three terms are used.

The hardening is predicted to Moses by God but it works itself out in the story as Moses asks Pharaoh to let God's people go. It is Pharaoh who makes hard, heavy, and then firm his heart to resist God in the face of miracles and wonders.

The Scripture, then, is careful to ascribe just as much responsibility to Pharaoh for the hardening of his heart as it does to God. We would say one of three things about God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart:

1. God hardened Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh hardened his own heart. In other words, they are simultaneous actions so that Pharaoh is not absolved of responsibility.
2. God confirmed what He foreknew Pharaoh would do. He gave him over to the hardening of his heart.
3. God hardened Pharaoh's heart to reveal His glory and Pharaoh had no real choice about it.

We need not conclude is that Pharaoh was predestined to harden his heart. We need not conclude that he was predestined for evil and for Hell.

I say "we need not conclude." We can conclude it; but why would we want to?

Here's what I mean. Yes, it is possible to argue from Scripture that God hardened Pharaoh's heart from start to finish and that it somehow magnifies the grace of God that He did so.

But it is just as possible, and just as biblical, to argue from Scripture that Pharaoh hardened His own heart and God merely confirmed Pharaoh's free will.

It's sad that some people are actually excited about the hardening of Pharaoh's heart as a proof text that their theology of selective salvation is true.

If I have to choose one or the other, I choose the one that I believe is most like the God revealed to me in the Bible. The God who saved Rahab and the Gibeonites. The God who accepted Caleb the Kennizite into the nation of Israel. The God who is love and must

therefore act to save mankind - not reprobate most of them to Hell with no possibility of eternal life.

It's interesting that Paul was talking to a group of people, Jews, who were God's chosen people. They were God's elect nation. But Paul was describing to them how God was going outside of the elect nation and opening-up salvation to whosoever would believe on Jesus Christ.

If we need not reduce the grace of God, let's not. Let's proclaim a "whosoever will" message of salvation.