

EXODUS: The Person, Promise, and Power of God

Exodus 8: The Hardened Heart

Pharaoh – Hardened and Hardening

G.K. Beale provides contextual exegesis of every hardening passage in Exodus 4-14 in his article: “An Exegetical and Theological Consideration of the Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart in Exodus 4-14 and Romans 9,” *Trinity Journal* 5 (1984): 129-154.

In his essay, Professor Beale asks four questions, and then after the detailed exegesis of these passages he offers his conclusions. I’ve reproduced below the questions, followed by the answers he provides.

(1) Who is the ultimate cause of Pharaoh’s hardening?

First, our study has shown that God was the ultimate cause of all of the hardening actions throughout Exod 4-14 so that at no time was Pharaoh’s volition independent of Yahweh’s influence when he hardened his heart. This may be especially significant since the hardening may be viewed as a polemic against the Egyptian idea of Pharaoh’s deity and the belief that Pharaoh’s heart was the all-controlling factor both in history and society.

(2) If the hardening is at all associated with God, is it an unconditional or conditional judgment with respect to Pharaoh’s sin?

[I]t is never stated in Exod 4-14 that Yahweh hardens Pharaoh in judgment because of any prior reason or condition residing in him. Rather, as stated in the exegetical conclusion, the only purpose or reason given for the hardening is that it would glorify Yahweh. Therefore, the divine hardening of Pharaoh was unconditional. All that can be said is that Yahweh deemed it necessary to include Pharaoh’s disobedient refusal in the historical plan, which was to glorify himself ...

(3) When Paul refutes the idea that God is unjust [Rom. 9:14] in rejecting Esau rather than Jacob before they were born [Rom. 9:10-13], does he give an understandable explanation for this refutation (*gar*, [Rom. 9:17]), or does he merely refute the idea without offering any rationale in defense of God’s rejection?

Neither Moses nor Paul leaves room for the possibility that God was unjust or immoral in his dealings with Pharaoh or Pharaoh had a *peccatum alienum* [alien guilt]. Paul alludes to Exod 9:16 in affirming the justice of God: “For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.” ... Paul seems to be alluding to Exod 9:16 as a summary of the purpose of the hardening throughout Exod 4-14—that God’s name should be *proclaimed* “in all the world.” If God had not repeatedly hardened Pharaoh, there would have been no drawn-out series of plagues and there would have been no proclamation of God’s omnipotence. Thus, *Paul sees hardening as the key to the proclamation of the divine name*. That Paul understands Exod 9:16 in terms of hardening is clear from his summary of this allusion in Rom 9:18b (“he hardens whom he wills”).

(4) Does the hardening involve God’s dealing with certain individuals or nations only on the plane of history or does it have reference to a general principle concerning God’s eternal rejection of man from salvation?

God’s hardening and rejection of Pharaoh (and the Egyptians) does not appear to be limited to divine dealings only on the temporal, historical level, but appears to have a continuity with a rejection from eternal salvation. This may be evident from the following considerations in Exodus:

(1) hardening of the heart probably has implications in the spiritual realm affecting Pharaoh’s eternal destiny, since in the OT *leb* (“heart”) refers very often to the inner, spiritual center of one’s relationship with God, as is also true of “heart” in the Egyptian literature;

(2) this is supported by observing that Pharaoh’s hardening of his heart is referred to as “sin against the Lord” for which he needs “forgiveness” (10:16-17; cf. 9:34). Therefore, the hardening does not merely concern Pharaoh’s intellectual-volitional faculty, but also the spiritual center of his being, since he repeatedly disobeyed God’s command and deserves judgment. This is significant in the Exodus account, since the Egyptians viewed Pharaoh as divine and sinless while living, and believed at death he was exempt from judgment but became the god (Osiris) presiding over judgment after his death. In addition to this, other terms in the immediate context of the Rom 9 hardening statement are used there and elsewhere in the Pauline corpus with reference to the eternal destinies of people, so that it would appear likely that Paul has the same concerns in Rom 9:17 and that he likewise understood the Exodus hardening. The context also points to a concern for eternal destinies in Rom 9, since Rom 8:29-39 refers to assurance of eternal salvation and Rom 10-11 focus on the problem of why national Israel is not in such a salvific condition.

Could Paul have expressed such grief about his hardened brethren and wished himself “accursed” on their behalf if issues of eternal destinies were not at stake? Therefore, the hardening is not limited to unique historical situations, but is an expression of a gnomic principle of God’s eternal dealings. The principle of such dealings is based on God’s unconditional nature, as Paul’s use of Exod 9:16 has shown. That such a principle is in Paul’s mind is apparent from Rom 9:18, where he generalizes the individual OT examples of the divine dispensing of mercy and hardening; the former explains God’s dealings with the Israelite remnant and Gentiles, while the latter explains the present rejection of the majority of the Jewish nation.

The Second Plague: Frogs – 8:1-15

8 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. 2 But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will plague all your country with frogs. 3 The Nile shall swarm with frogs that shall come up into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed and into the houses of your servants and your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls. 4 The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your servants.”’”

The first three plagues make up a cycle of _____ upon the Egyptians, focused primarily on their everyday activities.

God was turning their world upside down:

- 1) The befouling of the Nile deprived them of _____ ...
- 2) The invasion of frogs disrupted their _____ ...
- 3) The infestation of lice denied them their cultic _____ ...

The **significance** of the frogs:

If we are to understand the full significance of this plague, we must recognize that a goddess of Egypt was involved in the judgment – the goddess Hekt, who was always pictured with the head and often the head and body of a frog. Since Hekt was embodied in the frog, the frog was sacred in Egypt. It could not be killed, and consequently there was nothing the Egyptians could do about this horrible and ironic proliferation of the goddess. They were forced to loathe the symbols of their depraved worship. But they could not kill them. And when the frogs died, their decaying bodies must have turned the towns and countryside into a stinking horror. (James Montgomery Boice)

The Egyptians relied on Hekt (also *Heqet*) for two things:

- To control the frog population by protecting crocodiles, the frog's natural predators.
- To assist women in _____.

Remember how Exodus begins (1:15-16) ...

When that failed, Pharaoh ordered ... (1:22)

*"The very river that Pharaoh used as an instrument of genocide was turned to blood, and the first goddess to be humiliated was the one who governed labor and delivery. There was a connection between Pharaoh's crime and God's punishment." (Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, p. 228-229)*

Pharaoh's response:

His magicians conjure up _____ frogs! (Not the solution Pharaoh hoped for)

In desperation, he asks for _____!

Note He now knows God's _____.

He now recognizes God's _____.

He knows what God _____.

But in his prayer, Pharaoh wants _____ without _____.

And when they momentary _____ from God's judgments came, Pharaoh misinterpreted God's _____ as _____ for his sin and hardens his heart.

"Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4)

Why does God sometimes delay His judgments?

The Third Plague: Gnats – 8:16-19

¹⁹ Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, **“This is the finger of God.”** But **Pharaoh’s heart was hardened**, and **he would not listen to them**, as the Lord had said.

Natural disaster or supernatural judgment?

“The third plague may have been intended to humiliate the earth-god Geb. By turning the dust into bugs, God was claiming AUTHORITY over the very soil of Egypt and thus over the god of the ground. God’s strategy for gaining glory over the gods of Egypt was to defeat them one at a time by demonstrating his control over the creatures that the Egyptians worshiped.” (Ryken)

This is the first plague the magicians/sorcerers of Egypt cannot _____. As a result, they are both _____ and _____. They know they serve an inferior power.

But they don’t yet know WHO is behind the power. (It’s quite possible that they are actually saying, “This is the finger of the gods”). Or. They may be recognizing the power of an UNKNOWN deity. Whichever the case, this is beyond their experience and control.

But Pharaoh, in his fallen, broken state remains HARDENED (passive).

The Fourth Plague: Flies – 8:20-31

²⁹ Then Moses said, **“Behold, I am going out from you and I will plead with the Lord that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, tomorrow. Only let not Pharaoh cheat again by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the Lord.”**

³⁰ So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the Lord. ³¹ And the Lord did as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; not one remained.

³² **But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go.**

This was the _____ time that Moses told him to let God’s people go, and for the _____ time Pharaoh refused to submit to God’s authority by obeying Him and giving the Israelites their freedom.

And although Pharaoh has gone back on his word and persists in his rebellion and defiance against the Lord, God continues to deal with him in _____.

Pharaoh – despite the devastation of the plague – does not _____, but instead offers a _____: **“Go, sacrifice to your God within the land.”**

Pharaoh: You can worship your “god”, but under my authority and control.

Moses: _____ obedience is _____.

What’s significant about the flies?

As we have been discovering, the plagues were designed to defeat the gods and goddesses of Egypt. The Lord God of Israel used these signs and wonders to demonstrate his power over Pharaoh’s idols, sometimes in very specific ways. By turning the Nile into blood, God triumphed over the river god Hapi, the plague of frogs meant the demise of Heqet, the goddess of fertility, and so forth.

But what about the flies? How were they related to the Egyptian gods?

John J. Davis connects the fourth plague to the ichneumon fly, which desposits its eggs on other living things, and which the Egyptians considered a manifestation of the god Uatchit. Others argue that the flies were really flying beetles, also known as scarabs. Scarabs appeared frequently on Egyptian monuments, mummies, charms, and amulets. The scarab was sacred to the Egyptians. They had observed industrious beetles forming animal dung into round spheres that they then rolled back to their holes in the ground. As Donald Grey Barnhouse writes, "They soon made a connection in their minds between the spheres of dung and the sun in the sky and conceived the idea that a giant beetle rolled the sun from evening until morning through the underworld until the sunrise brought it back into the sky once more."⁴ Thus the scarab became an emblem of the sun, which for the Egyptians represented eternity, the abiding life of the soul. Not surprisingly, the god of resurrection – who was called Kheprer – was depicted as a beetle.

Another possibility is that the plague of flies was directed against Beelzebub ("the lord of the flies"). Some Egyptians worshiped Beelzebub as their protector and guardian. Since his role was to protect their land from swarms of flies and other natural disasters, he functioned as a sort of insurance policy. But like the rest of Egypt's gods and goddesses, Beelzebub actually was a tool of the devil. This is confirmed by the Gospel of Luke, in which he is identified as the "prince of demons" (Luke 11:15). Beelzebub was one representation of Satan's power over Egypt. (Philip Graham Ryken, Exodus: Saved for God's Glory, p. 249-250)

What is unique about this plague?

⁶ "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷ It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸ but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. ⁹ Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, ¹⁰ and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face. ¹¹ You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today. (Deuteronomy 7:6-11)