

# THE HARDENED HEART

*“... But I will harden his heart so that he will not let his people go.”*  
—EXODUS 4:21

Pharaoh's answer to Moses' request to let his people go was forceful and unambiguous. “Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the LORD that I should obey him and let Israel go? I don't know the LORD and I will not let Israel go’.” (Exodus 5:3).

Most of us are troubled by the fact it was God who hardened Pharaoh's heart, but if we examine closely the sequence of events, we discover that for the first six of ten plagues, Pharaoh had hardened his own heart and that of his officials. Only after he had deliberately and repeatedly hardened his heart against the Lord did God hand him over to his sinful ways. By the seventh plague, God had hardened his heart for him.

Alongside the progression of plagues, is the real story which is the progression in Pharaoh's heart. Because of his refusal to let the Israelites go, God put pressure on him that was designed to break his will. Most of Egyptian life was attributed to one or another of over 700 gods. There were gods associated with the Nile, animal gods, a crop god, a sky god and various sun gods who influenced the weather. Ultimately, Pharaoh, himself, was said to be divine. The plagues God had poured down were not random attacks, but were strategically targeted to undermine the gods of Egypt in which they placed their trust.

God had stripped Egypt of what they had learned to depend on, and sometimes He will do the same in our lives. In undermining material things and our own capability, God brings us to the point where we turn

from dependence on ourselves to dependence on Him. It is our attitude, our disposition of heart that defines us, and Pharaoh's heart had been one of extreme resistance against the Lord. God has taken this story of Pharaoh and made it a mirror into which we can look and see our own hearts. Either we come to God with hearts that are soft, pliable and receptive or our hearts are hardened and we are unbending. A hardened heart becomes a bitter heart and a bitter heart becomes a destructive heart.

We cannot remain neutral with God. We either move forward or backward. The New Covenant is about taking out the heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh; a heart that is soft and pliable where Christ can enter. God is love and He does not violate His own character. His wrath and judgment are an expression of His love to bring us into conformity with Him so that we may know and experience Him and His perfect will for us.

***PRAYER: Dear Lord, I earnestly pray for everyone whose hearts are hardened. May your Holy Spirit draw them and open their eyes to Jesus, as it is only in Him we have life.***

***TO REFLECT UPON: How pliable is my heart in allowing God to work out His will for me?***