

The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

Tyrants never surrender power willingly. The idea that God hardened the Pharaoh's heart expresses the reality that even the Pharaoh cannot control his tyranny. It is as if it came from outside of him. Because there was little even he could do to control. No half-measure could cause Pharaoh to have a change of heart. It took the destruction of the first born to cause him to loosen his grip long enough for the people to get away from him. The Pharaoh never really changed his mind permanently. The people, by God's grace, got away from him. After the Red Sea, the Pharaoh could no longer act upon his bloodlust. Evidently, even after the slaves were free, the Pharaoh wanted them back.

Acts of cruelty and ruthlessness, which bring people to the brink of despair, must be brought to justice and publicly exposed for what they are, so that the world will know that such anti-creation deeds will not be tolerated. Unless there is judgment, the creation that God intends will be turned into chaos.

1. Theorists of revolution and commentators on Exodus can generally be divided into two groups—those who believe that the liberation of the oppressed will always be a sheer gift from God; and those who believe that liberation must be to some degree the work of the oppressed themselves. In our contemporary need for liberation, which group is closer to the truth?
2. Are the plagues necessary? Is there not a non-violent, non-destructive road to liberation?
3. Is the Pharaoh's refusal to permit the people to go a good thing or a genuine discouragement?
4. The plagues become more intense. Does Pharaoh become more resistant or hardened?
5. Do you see a relationship today between injustice in the social sphere and disruption in the natural sphere?
6. Give an example of a form of bondage or restricted freedom in your own experience. How did you escape it? Was God necessary?
7. What kinds of disruption of peace and quiet in your own life might be necessary in order for you to be delivered from whatever limits your freedom to be your best self?
8. Write a prayer of thanksgiving for disruptions or plagues in your own life today.