

Lesson 4 – 20 February 2011

Pharaoh Defies the Lord

Lesson Scope: Exodus 4:29-7:13

Lesson Focus

Jacob and his family located in Egypt at the direction of God (Genesis 46:1-4). At the same time, God made it clear that, after Jacob's descendants had multiplied and become a great nation, He would bring them back to their own land again. God had not forgotten that promise, and He began to move to bring about His purposes for the children of Israel.

God was also dealing with Pharaoh and the Egyptian people for their oppression of His people. He saw the hard labor and the injustices inflicted upon the children of Israel.

God was able to work through Moses to show His great power to Pharaoh and his people (Exodus 9:13-16). God made Pharaoh an object lesson for the nations, showing that He is the sovereign Lord, who can accomplish His purposes despite opposition from the great and powerful king, of Egypt.

This lesson graphically portrays the results of defying God. If we take the course Pharaoh took, the results will be the same for us. Pharaoh found that he could not manipulate God, and neither can we.

Pharaoh's rebellion did not pose a dilemma for God. He who knows all things could fulfill His plan and purpose, and even use Pharaoh's defiance to do it. But it was not for Pharaoh's good. God desires to work with mellow hearts, which He can bring to Himself.

Man's determined opposition can never affect God's sovereignty. A man who chooses to defy God is also choosing the divinely appointed outcome of such a course.

Lesson Aim: To see the hardening process that results from defying the Lord.

Theme Verses: [Hebrews 3:12-13](#).

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing, from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called today lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

Lesson Text

"I Know Not the LORD"

Exodus 5:1-2

“And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness. ²And Pharaoh said, Who *is* the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.”

"Pharaoh ... Hath Done Evil"

Exodus 5:4-9

“And the king of Egypt said unto them, Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works? get you unto your burdens. ⁵And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now *are* many, and ye make them rest from their burdens. ⁶And Pharaoh commanded the same day the taskmasters of the people, and their officers, saying, ⁷Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore: let them go and gather straw for themselves. ⁸And the tale of the bricks, which they did make heretofore, ye shall lay upon them; ye shall not diminish *ought* thereof: for they *be* idle; therefore they cry, saying, Let us go *and* sacrifice to our God. ⁹Let there more work be laid upon the men, that they may labour therein; and let them not regard vain words.”

Exodus 5:22-23

“And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou *so* evil entreated this people? why *is* it *that* thou hast sent me? ²³For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all.”

"I Will Harden Pharaoh's Heart"

Exodus 6:1-2

“Then the LORD said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh: for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land. ²And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I *am* the LORD:”

Exodus 7:1-4

“And the LORD said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. ²Thou shalt speak all that I command thee: and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh, that he send the children of Israel out of his land. ³And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt. ⁴But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt,

and bring forth mine armies, *and* my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments.”

Exodus 7:8-13

“And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, ⁹When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying, Shew a miracle for you: then thou shalt say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and cast *it* before Pharaoh, *and* it shall become a serpent. ¹⁰And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the LORD had commanded: and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent. ¹¹Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. ¹²For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. ¹³And he hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.”

Questions for Study

"I Know Not the LORD"

1. In what ways did Pharaoh not know the Lord?
2. Why do those who hate God also oppose His people?

"Pharaoh ... Hath Done Evil"

3. Trace Pharaoh's hardening process.
4. How does God receive glory even when evil men defy Him?

"I Will Harden Pharaoh's Heart"

5. Why was God justified in hardening Pharaoh's heart?
6. What are some initial symptoms of the hardening process we may detect in ourselves or others?
7. How can we help hardhearted people today?

Analyzing the Passage

The chapters included in our lesson scope depict an earthly king who resists the work of a sovereign God. The Pharaohs of Egypt were honored as gods along with numerous other gods including the sun, the life-sustaining Nile River, and various animals.

When Moses and Aaron confronted Pharaoh with the words "Thus saith the LORD" (Exodus 5:1) Pharaoh professed ignorance of Him and therefore declared his Unwillingness to obey (Exodus 5:2). But in the events that transpired soon afterward, Pharaoh had an opportunity to see God at work and to observe His great power. In this process, the children of Israel also came to know God in a way that the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and

Jacob, had not known Him (Exodus 6:3).

In Pharaoh we see a man who was cultured, clever, and calculating refusing God's way, he defended his own way, only to fall under God's divine judgment. Pharaoh's hard heart is mentioned more than a dozen times in this account. By choosing to defy God, he set himself on a course toward a catastrophic confrontation with the true God.

Principles and Applications

"I Know Not the LORD"

1. The hardening process is marked by a rejection of God's Word (Exodus 5:2). Pharaoh's refusal to obey God's Word started the hardening process that then led to active defiance. Closing our ears to God's message to us will have the same effect.

2. The hardening process is marked by animosity toward God's messengers. Those who defy God oppose all who are associated with Him, because they do not like to be reminded of their accountability to God. Jesus said, "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20).

"Pharaoh ... Hath Done Evil"

3. The hardening process is marked by falsehood and wrong reasoning. (Exodus 5:4-5). Like Pharaoh, defiant persons can manufacture excuses to creatively reason their way around true obedience. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). We must carefully examine our motives, actions, and beliefs. We must constantly guard our hearts against the enemy's deception and remain firmly anchored in truth.

4. Oppression and cruelty spring from the hardened heart (Exodus 5:6-8). Pharaoh's unreasonable demands simply reflected his self-will and defiance of God. Combined, these two become a force that will propel a man to unspeakable atrocities.

5. The hardening process is enhanced by repeated denunciations of God's Word (Exodus 5:9). By calling God's message "vain words" Pharaoh exhibited his continuing disdain for God. His heart was becoming harder. We should tremble at the prospect of our standing against the convicting voice of God's Word in any area of our life.

6. The persecution of God's people springs from the perverted heart of those who have rejected truth (Exodus 5:22-23). Proud Haman, moved by his hatred for one man, determined to destroy a whole population. It should not surprise us that rejection of truth leads to such ends. Satan, the father of

lies, is a 'murderer' from the beginning.

"I Will Harden Pharaoh's Heart"

7. When one hardens himself against God, he will do things he never wished or expected to do (Exodus 6:1). How could Pharaoh foresee that he would carry out God's purpose in spite of his efforts to do otherwise? Although each person is allowed the privilege of choice, God's purposes will be done in the end.

8. In the hardening process, there comes a point of no return (Exodus 7:3-4). God moves in response to man's rejection. He knows at what point a man's closed mind has made him insensitive to the message of truth.

9. Rebellious sign seeking is a sure way to be deluded. (Exodus 7:8-12). When rebellious persons ask for a sign, they are not seeking confirmation of God's power but they are looking for ways to discredit Him. Satan may give them signs to lead them further astray, and he will most certainly keep them blinded to the truth. Abraham told the rich man in hell that, even if someone came back to earth from the place of torment, unbelievers would not repent.

10. Repeated rejection of God culminates in His sending strong delusions than they should believe a lie (Exodus 7:13). "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Proverbs 29:1).

Important Teachings

1. The hardening process is marked by a rejection of God's Word (Exodus 5:2).

2. The hardening process is marked by animosity toward God's messengers (Exodus 5:4).

3. The hardening process is marked by falsehood and wrong reasoning (Exodus 5:4-5).

4. Oppression and cruelty spring from the hardened heart (Exodus 5:6-8).

5. The hardening process is enhanced by repeated denunciations of God's Word (Exodus 5:9).

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Answers to Questions

1. In what way did Pharaoh not know the Lord?

He did not know God, because he did not have a relationship with Him. He could have come to know God by obeying the Word of God from the mouths of Moses and Aaron. He knew not the Lord because of his deliberate choice to disobey. Also, he truly did not know the Lord in His power or in His covenant relationship with His people.

2. Why do those who hate God also oppose His people?

God's people make the ungodly aware of their own accountability to God, which they would rather ignore.

3. Trace Pharaoh's hardening process.

First he rejected God's Word and His messengers. Second, he reasoned his way around personal obedience and opposed God's people. Finally God hardened Pharaoh's heart after he had repeatedly proven that he would never yield to the Lord.

4. How does God receive glory even when evil men defy Him?

God receives glory by displaying His sovereignty in the midst of man's defiance. God is never outmaneuvered by the craftiness of His opposers. He is glorified most, however, when men choose of their own free will to serve Him.

5. Why was God justified in hardening Pharaoh's heart?

God was just in doing this, because Pharaoh rejected the opportunity he had to know truth. Pharaoh was not interested in serving or obeying God. Therefore God hardened him and used him as a display before the nations, showing them His great power.

6. What are some initial symptoms of the hardening process we may detect in ourselves or others?

It may be a lack of appreciation for the spiritual benefits we have received. We may develop a complaining attitude about the church or allow the appeal of the world to influence our practice. We may defend wrongdoing and work against the discipline of the church.

7. How can we help hardhearted people today?

We should reach out to such persons in compassion and desire to help them to see their true condition. We should understand that the course of the hardhearted becomes more difficult to change as time passes. We must let them know the danger of continuing on such a course

Summarizing the Lesson

The hardening process often begins with slight omissions of duty to God and a careless attitude toward full obedience to His Word. If unchecked, this course will continue with greater deviations and an increasing disregard for the Word of God and for God's faithful messengers. It ends in a state of strong delusion where one is forsaken by God and headed for eternal destruction. We can avoid this tragedy by a prompt and full-hearted obedience to God's Word.

Research Guide

1. Read Moses' prophetic warnings in Deuteronomy 32:15-43, which foretell of Israel's future apostasy. Hardness of heart also happened to Israel because they failed to learn from Pharaoh's experience.
2. Study Romans 1:18-32, which traces the downward course of those who know the truth but refuse to obey it.