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MINISTRIES

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Parashah Points: Va’era – Pharaoh’s Hardened Heart

Welcome to another episode of Parashah Points—short thoughts from the weekly Torah Portion.

This week’s Parashah Point comes from Va’era (Vy-air-ah), which is Hebrew for “I appeared,” and it goes from Exodus 6:2 to Exodus 9:35.

This parashah begins with YHWH commanding Moses and Aaron to go back to Pharaoh and order him to let the people of Israel go.

The rest of the Torah Portion tells of the first seven plagues that God sent upon Egypt because of Pharaoh’s persistent refusal to obey God’s will.

There’s a lot we can talk about in this Torah Portion. Today we’re going to present just a thought concerning the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart.

Exodus 9:12

But the Lord (Yahweh) hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord (Yahweh) had spoken to Moses.

Something in the Bible that can be very confusing is the issue of God hardening Pharaoh’s heart. God sends plagues upon the land because Pharaoh consistently refuses to let the people of Israel leave Egypt. But in many of these occurrences where Pharaoh refuses, it says that God hardened his heart.

A lot of people understandably struggle with this. They look at this as God manipulating Pharaoh to disobey Him and then judging Pharaoh for disobeying. How is that just?

Well regardless of how we interpret the text, it is not our place to judge God. We need to realize that everything God does is *always* good and just even when we don’t understand it from our limited perspective. However, maybe we can maybe look at God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart from a different perspective.

For instance, just as the rays from the sun can both melt wax and bake clay, God's love can both soften a heart or harden a heart depending on the state of that person's heart. Have you ever been in an argument with someone, and the more you tried to reach out to them and reconcile, it somehow just drove them further away? The same could perhaps be said here.

From the very beginning before Moses even went back to Egypt to command Pharaoh to free the Israelites, God already warned Moses that Pharaoh wouldn't listen:

Exodus 3:19

But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand.

God already warned that Pharaoh would not let the people go unless he is compelled to do so. Hence, God sent plagues in order to compel Pharaoh to let them go. What's important to see here is that Pharaoh's heart was already in a state of resisting God's command.

Throughout the story, we see other instances where it appears that Pharaoh had the free will to make his own choices. For instance, Exodus 8:15, 19, and 32, mention occurrences of Pharaoh's heart already being hard and even Pharaoh hardening his own heart. So this appears to be something Pharaoh himself is doing over and over.

Finally, when we get to Exodus 9:12, God takes action—He is the one who hardens Pharaoh's heart. So we can perhaps understand this as God strengthening Pharaoh's resolve to do what Pharaoh already wanted to do from the very beginning.

It's important to understand that Pharaoh is not some humble sinner in all of this. There's never a time in the story when Pharaoh feels guilty and asks for mercy and then God says "nope" and just continues to toy with him. No, throughout the entire story, we see over and over that Pharaoh is the one who stubbornly resists God's will. So what can God do besides give him over to his own sin?

1 Peter 5:5

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

God gives grace to those who humble themselves. But when it comes to the proud who resist God's will, God opposes them. And one way He opposes the proud is by giving them over to their own sin. God was not toying with "poor innocent Pharaoh" and then judging him for what God Himself made him do. No, Pharaoh wanted to rebel—and God let him.

Thank you for joining us for another Parashah Point!

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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