

Exodus 4:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.

Analysis

And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go (וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּלָכְתְּךָ לָשׁוּב מִצְרָיִם רְאֵה כָּל־הַמִּפְתִּים אֲשֶׁר־שַׂמְתִּי בְיָדְךָ וַעֲשִׂיתָם לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה וְאַנִּי יַחְזֶק אֶת־לִבּוֹ) —God previews the confrontation: **do all those wonders before Pharaoh**—the signs aren't just for Israel but for Egypt. **But I will harden his heart** (וְאַנִּי אַחְזֶק אֶת־לִבּוֹ, va'ani achazek et-libo)—the famous problem of Pharaoh's hardening. The Hebrew uses three verbs throughout Exodus: חָזַק (chazak, "strengthen/harden"), כָּבַד (kaved, "make heavy"), and קָשָׁה (kashah, "make stiff"). Sometimes Pharaoh hardens his own heart (8:15, 32; 9:34), sometimes God hardens it (9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10). Both are true: God's judicial hardening confirms Pharaoh's chosen rebellion (Romans 9:17-18). God will use Pharaoh's obstinacy to multiply signs, displaying His glory before Egypt and Israel (7:3-5).

Historical Context

The hardening theme raises theological questions about divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Paul addresses this in Romans 9:14-24, arguing God has right to show both wrath (Pharaoh) and mercy (Israel) to display His glory. The

multiple plagues served pedagogical purpose—demonstrating YHWH's supremacy over all Egyptian gods systematically. Pharaoh's hardening ensured full revelation of God's power.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does Pharaoh's hardening teach about the judicial consequences of persistent rebellion against God's revealed will?
2. What does God's advance warning to Moses about Pharaoh's hardening teach about trusting God's purposes when circumstances seem to worsen despite obedience?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוָה	אֶל	מֹשֶׁה	בְּלָכְתְּךָ	לָשׁוּב	מִצֵּר יִמָּה	
said	And the LORD	H413	unto Moses	H1980	to return	into Egypt	
H559	H3068		H4872		H7725	H4714	
רָאָה	כָּל	הַמִּפְתִּים	אֲשֶׁר	שָׂמַתִּי	בְּיָדְךָ		
see	H3605	all those wonders	H834	which I have put	in thine hand		
H7200		H4159		H7760	H3027		
וַעֲשִׂיתָ	לִפְנֵי	פַּרְעֹה	וְאֲנִי	אֲחַזֵּק	אֶת	לִבּוֹ	וְלֹא
that thou do	before	Pharaoh	H589	but I will harden	H853	his heart	H3808
H6213	H6440	H6547		H2388		H3820	
אֶת	יִשְׂרָאֵל	חַ	הָעָם:				
go	H853	that he shall not let the people					
H7971		H5971					

Additional Cross-References

Romans 9:18 (Parallel theme): Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Isaiah 63:17 (References Lord): O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance.

Joshua 11:20 (References Lord): For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses.

Exodus 14:8 (References Lord): And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with an high hand.

John 12:40 (Parallel theme): He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.

Exodus 3:20 (References Egypt): And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go.

Exodus 7:13 (References Lord): And he hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.

Exodus 9:12 (References Lord): And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken unto Moses.

Exodus 10:20 (References Lord): But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go.

Exodus 7:3 (References Egypt): And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt.