

Joshua 11:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

This verse presents one of Scripture's most challenging doctrines: divine hardening of hearts unto judgment. The phrase 'it was of the LORD to harden their hearts' (ki meYahweh haytah lechazzeq et-libam, קַיְמֵת יְהָוָה הַצָּקָר אֶת-לִבָּם) attributes heart-hardening directly to divine agency. The verb chazaq (חזק, 'harden') means to strengthen, make firm, or obstinate. God actively strengthened Canaanite resistance 'that they should come against Israel in battle.' The purpose clauses reveal divine intent: 'that he might destroy them utterly...that they might have no favour...that he might destroy them.' The Hebrew lemaan (למְעָן, 'that') introduces divine purpose—hardening served judgment. The phrase 'as the LORD commanded Moses' roots this destruction in previous divine mandate (Deuteronomy 7:1-2, 20:16-18). From a Reformed perspective, this demonstrates God's absolute sovereignty including judicial hardening of sinners for just judgment. Romans 9:17-18 cites Pharaoh's hardening as parallel case, teaching that God hardens whom He wills for His purposes. Canaanite civilization had reached full iniquity (Genesis 15:16), warranting divine judgment executed through Israel.

Historical Context

The Canaanites' seven nations had occupied the land for centuries, their wickedness including child sacrifice to Molech, ritual prostitution, and pervasive idolatry (Leviticus 18:21-30, 20:2-5, Deuteronomy 12:31). God had warned Abraham that Amorite iniquity must reach full measure before judgment (Genesis 15:16)—four centuries later, that measure was complete. The hardening of Canaanite hearts ensured they would resist Israel militarily rather than surrender or flee, facilitating complete destruction as God commanded. This parallels Pharaoh's hardening (Exodus 7-14) where God strengthened Pharaoh's resolve to resist, bringing more severe judgments revealing divine glory. Ancient Near Eastern conquest narratives typically attributed victory to superior deity's power; Joshua uniquely presents God orchestrating enemy resistance to ensure judgment's thoroughness. Archaeological evidence shows widespread destruction of Late Bronze Age Canaanite cities, though debates continue regarding dating and attribution. The theological principle established here—God hardens hearts for judgment while remaining just—runs throughout Scripture: Pharaoh (Exodus 4:21), Sihon (Deuteronomy 2:30), Romans 9:18. God's sovereignty includes judicial hardening as righteous response to persistent sin.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does divine hardening for judgment challenge your understanding of free will and God's sovereignty?
2. What does God's patience in waiting for full iniquity before judging Canaan teach about His justice and mercy?
3. How should we understand God hardening hearts while maintaining human accountability for sin?

Interlinear Text

לְבָם	אֶת	לִמְזָקֵק	קִימַת הַ	יְהוָה	מִאֵת כָּ	וְ
H388	H853	For it was of the LORD	H1961	H3068		
לְקַבֵּעַ	אֶת	הַמְּלֹתָם	הַ	אֶת	לְמַעַן	יִשְׂרָאֵל
that they should come against		in battle		H853	to harden	H853
H7125		H4421			H2388	their hearts
						H3820
בְּסִירֵי	מִ	לְבָלֵת	וְ	לְבָם	לְמַעַן	יִשְׂרָאֵל
that he might destroy them utterly			H1115	H1961	H1992	
H2763						
תִּחְנַן	הַ	לְמַעַן	כִּ	בְּשִׁמְעֵךְ	מִ	
and that they might have no favour		H3588	H4616	but that he might destroy		
H8467				H8045		
פְּאֵשׁ	רָ	אֶת	מִשְׁהָ			
H834	commanded	For it was of the LORD	H853	Moses		
	H6680	H3068		H4872		

Additional Cross-References

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

Exodus 4:21 (References Lord): 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.

Deuteronomy 7:16 (References Lord): And thou shalt consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee.

Deuteronomy 2:30 (References Lord): But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day.

Exodus 14:17 (Parallel theme): And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.

Exodus 9:16 (Parallel theme): And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.

Judges 14:4 (References Lord): But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.