

Mark 4:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.

Analysis

Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10: 'That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.' This difficult text reveals judicial hardening—repeated rejection of truth results in God-given inability to perceive. The grammar 'that...lest' (ἵνα...μήποτε) can express purpose or result. Either reading is sobering: parables function to harden those already resistant, confirming them in unbelief. Yet this isn't arbitrary—it's judicial response to persistent rejection. The phrase 'lest...they should be converted' doesn't express divine reluctance to save but recognition that hardened hearts won't repent.

Historical Context

Isaiah 6:9-10 described Israel's hardness in Isaiah's time, when people heard prophets but refused to repent. Jesus identifies His contemporaries with that rebellious generation. Paul applies the same text to first-century Jewish rejection of gospel (Acts 28:26-27; Romans 11:8). This pattern continues—persistent rejection of light produces darkness; spurning grace results in hardening. Church history records this reality: periods of revival followed by apostasy; nations that knew gospel but abandoned it experiencing spiritual darkness.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does persistent resistance to truth produce progressive hardening, and what does this warn about your response to conviction?
2. What hope exists for those experiencing hardness, and how does it relate to God's sovereign grace?
3. How should understanding judicial hardening affect your urgency in responding to gospel truth?

Interlinear Text

ἵνα βλέπωσιν βλέπωσιν καὶ μὴ ἴδωσιν καὶ ἀκούωσιν
That seeing seeing and not perceive and hearing
G2443 G991 G991 G2532 G3361 G1492 G2532 G191

ἀκούωσιν καὶ μὴ συνιῶσιν μήποτε ἐπιστρέψωσιν
hearing and not understand lest at any time they should be converted
G191 G2532 G3361 G4920 G3379 G1994

καὶ ἄφεθῇ αὐτοῖς τὰ ἁμαρτήματα
and should be forgiven them their sins
G2532 G863 G846 G3588 G265

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 44:18 (Parallel theme): They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand.

Jeremiah 5:21 (Parallel theme): Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not:

Deuteronomy 29:4 (Parallel theme): Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.

Luke 8:10 (Parallel theme): And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

2 Timothy 2:25 (Parallel theme): In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

Hebrews 6:6 (Parallel theme): If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

Ezekiel 12:2 (Parallel theme): Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house.

Acts 3:19 (Sin): Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;