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Why Would God Harden Pharaoh's Heart against the Israelites?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about why God would harden Pharaoh's heart against the Israelites and how to reconcile what modern science says about human nature being inherently good with the Bible's claim that we're born inherently evil.

* Why would God harden Pharaoh's heart against the Israelites?

* Is there a way to reconcile what modern science says about our being born good with what the Bible says about our being born inherently evil?

Transcript

[Music] [Bell rings] You're listening to Stand to Reasons #strskpodcast with Greg Kockel and Amy Hall. Hi. Hi, Greg.

Alright. Here's a great question, Greg. This one comes from Jacob.

Why would God harden Pharaoh's heart against Israelites? You know, when you say this is a great question, it kind of implies all the rest of the bumper's, right? Now, this is not a lame one like the last five that we've done. This one's really good. I know you're hard, Amy.

And this is great because it is enigmatic, okay? Why would God harden Pharaoh's heart? I'll give you my speculation. When you read the account, God tells Moses that Pharaoh's going to reject what he has to say. He got a sending Moses on a mission.

And God tells Moses, you're not going to fare well. I'm just kind of going by memory of Exodus 3 or 4 where Moses is commissioned for this enterprise, right? And then he talks, I think in there he talks about hardening. But the important thing about the hardening part is that Pharaoh is already hard against God.

And it's very clear Pharaoh's going to rebel. God says that. And he does rebel.

He continues in his rebellion against the Hebrews and Moses and the God that they represent. And Moses warns him. And a series of plagues ensue.

At some point in the process of the plagues, Pharaoh begins to relent. I remember the frogs, for example. Okay, I've had enough of the frogs.

Call the frogs off. I think it's interesting, by the way, what Moses asks him. He asks Pharaoh, when should I call the frogs off? Don't remember, it's that in the text that the frogs were in their kneading bowls.

In other words, they're trying to make bread, right? And the frogs are jumping in the dough. And they were in their blankets and they're covering, you know, their sheets and stuff, right? So they're like everywhere and really annoying. And when Moses asks Pharaoh, when do you want me to call him off? He says tomorrow.

Why not yesterday kind of thing, you know, immediately? And I wonder if that just gives a hint a little bit of the obstinants of Pharaoh. But anyway, at some point you see Pharaoh beginning to relent. And then it begins to, you see these phrases, but God hardened his heart.

God hardened his heart. Now, I've heard Dennis Prager talk about this. And the way he characterizes it is that God, and he says the word means to strengthen him.

And what God is doing is giving him strength to continue his pattern of rebellion, even in the face of the opposition and the miracles. So he's invigorating the free will of Moses to continue to rebel, which would justify God's continuous punishment. I don't know about that personally, but it's something to think about.

And it wouldn't be totally inconsistent with my point. Even if God were to harden Pharaoh's heart, in other words, he acted to keep Pharaoh from repenting, as it were. Keep in mind that the reason Pharaoh is repenting is not to turn to the God of the Hebrews and bend his knee and obey him.

It is because he's getting troubled by the plagues. I want to stop the plagues, but God's not done yet. Because there are 10 plagues in view, and each of the plagues was an assault directly against an Egyptian deity.

And so as the plagues are playing out, what God is telling this ancient Near Eastern people is, "I am bigger than every one of your gods." And he is making a statement. And by the way, this statement has salutary effect because the other nations in the region, find out what the God of the Hebrews did against the powerful Egyptians and how they decimated the Egyptians. And also plundered the Egyptians as the Egyptians gave them all their gold and silver and everything and said, "Get out of here." And we know this because half a century later, almost, we have Rahab telling the spies under Joshua, "We know what you guys did."

I know what you guys did, what your God did. And therefore, I'm with you." And so Rahab's converted as a result of what God did to Israel, or rather that God's continuous plagues against the Egyptians. And she is actually on the lineage of Jesus, the Messiah.

So God has a plan, and he's working that plan out. And he is going to run the distance with it, and he's not going to let Pharaoh stop what he wants to do just because Pharaoh is tired of getting beaten up. Now, if Pharaoh would have genuinely relented spiritually and humbled himself before God, like by the way Nebuchadnezzar did in the book of Daniel, we have a record of that, God's response would have been entirely different.

We read in Psalm 51, for example, David's penitential poem about turning from his sin and turning back to God and beating his breast. And in that Psalm towards the end, he says, "You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it. You are not pleased with bird offerings." I mean, ultimately, that's not what this is all about, he's saying.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Had Pharaoh been broken and contrite, God would have responded differently. Pharaoh wasn't broken.

He wasn't contrite. He just wanted to be left alone. And at this point, then God hardens his heart so he continues his rebellion that is already in his nature, that he'd already been doing.

And God finishes the course of the plagues, finally has the people released with a much bigger destruction of Egypt than would have been the case. So now it is known all over the ancient Near East what God had accomplished in the Exodus. Yeah, I think that's the key thing to keep in mind here, Greg, that he's not stopping Pharaoh from repenting.

He's just stopping him from letting them go because he's trying to get them away because they're causing so many problems. But I think it's also important to remember, you know, we are all born, we're by nature, children of God's wrath. We're in rebellion against him.

God has to act to change our hearts. He doesn't have to act in the same way to make us rebel to make us rebel. We're already rebelling.

Yeah, the action when God is changing our hearts is in the direction of repentance. It's it's never in the other way in the sense that that we didn't start off that way. So that is important to keep in mind.

But Greg, what I did was for this question, since the question is why would God, hard and Pharaoh's heart against Israelites, the text actually says many, many times why God did it. So I just want to read through, I might not read all these, but I'm going to read through some of these here. So Exodus 4 21, he hardens hearts so that he will not let the people go.

7 3 that I may multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt. 9 12 so that Pharaoh would not listen to Moses again so that it would continue on until God was done with all of his his plagues. 10 1 that I may perform these signs of mine among them and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them that you may know that I am the Lord.

10 27 so that Pharaoh would not be willing to let them go. 14 4 so that Pharaoh would chase after them and God quote will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord. 14 17 so that they will go in after them and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army through his chariots and his horsemen.

Then the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I'm honored through Pharaoh through his chariots and his horsemen. So all of these things indicate what God was doing was revealing himself so that they would recognize his authority and his power and his his sovereignty his greatness over all the other gods so that they would know he was giving them evidence of who he was and revealing himself and his power to to everyone and not just the Israelites to the whole area as you mentioned before. And so finally there are some final things in Romans 9 where Paul explains even more of this and here's what he says for the scripture says to Pharaoh for this very purpose I raised you up to demonstrate my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth so he's quoting some of the things I said earlier.

And he also says so then he has mercy on whom he desires and he hardens whom he desires and finally he says he did so to make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy. So ultimately even beyond all of these these ways that he was revealing himself so that they would know that he was the Lord ultimately what his his goal was was to through the Exodus which was you know part of the plan of redemption part of the history that is leading up to the cross. He wanted to make known the riches of the glory of his mercy and his grace and the way we see that is by God fully revealing himself to us and also fully revealing his wrath against sin because that's how we understand better the grace that he's shown to us.

Right right I like the vessels of mercy because that shows that the long run isn't just to squash a bunch of people but to manifest mercy or to demonstrate mercy whereas the mercy well it wasn't to those particular rebellious people but it was a mercy manifest to others who who benefited from that mercy. Now I can imagine Amy as we give this explanation a skeptic saying well I can't follow what God liked that. Okay you're just like Pharaoh that's what Pharaoh said and what I am not going to try to do is I'm not going to be tempted to try to sanitize God by taking by trying to oh well you know it wasn't quite like that.

This is exactly what the text says about God and that's who God is and he has morally

sufficient reason for doing what he did and like we've described people who are genuinely repentant. He loves the broken hearted or rather the the repentant. The broken and contrite heart he will not despise and if that isn't there then God does what he is appropriate for his glory to advance his purposes with those who continue to rebel.

If you find if you don't like that if you don't if you find fault with that all right well nevertheless it doesn't change God doesn't change anything that is the God you're going to face. And I think where people get confused is that they forget that all mercy is a matter of grace. So it's not that God owed mercy to any of the Egyptians or to the Israelites for that matter.

He didn't owe mercy and grace to any of them because they all deserved the judgment that the Egyptians received and I think like I said before I think that reveals to us what we deserved and so that we can understand his grace. But I think we start to think God owes grace to everyone and he doesn't and this is this is where we have to we really have to think carefully about justice and about grace because the two are so different and we get very confused in our society today about that. By the way the Jews who got rescued there got the same judgment when they did the same thing.

Just as God warned them he would. Exactly and all through their history this turns out but because they continued to model the same vices of the pagan nations around them and consequently brought but God brought the exact same judgment on them. Right because it wasn't just a matter of of I just prejudiced on God's part.

He was he made it very clear I didn't choose you because you were better than everybody else and if you do the same things this is this is a matter of moral justice then I will do the same to you and I will punish you in the same way. And the history of Israel is a history of that happening. Well thank God for his grace that's all I could say.

All right let's go into a question from Jake. The Bible says that we are born inherently evil with a sin nature whereas modern science would lean that we're born good but learn immoral behavior. It's been very discouraging and made my walk with Christ harder.

Is there a way to reconcile what modern science and the Bible say about our nature? How does modern science teach that we are born morally good and learn morally bad behavior? How does this is a very important question. What science does is it looks at molecules in motion. The being born with morally good behavior which and morally bad behavior we learn are all statements that make moral judgments that have nothing to do with the molecules.

So on what basis will they say that? Now observation will demonstrate that people can learn certain wicked behaviors in their environment of the Proverbs say bad company corrupts good morals for example. So we know there's a dynamic there but that's not modern science that's weighing in like that. That's just reflection on humanity.

But the question is where is it that the moral for one the moral standard by which we judge comes from to begin with. If modern science is based on a materialistic view of the universe there is no place to find any moral standards. Even the that's moral law even the so-called scientific law are not laws in the way we think of them.

The on their view the molecules are not being driven by these invisible laws. Those are called occult forces and science has nothing to do with occult hidden forces like that. What science does is it observes patterns of behavior so to speak.

I mean behavior of molecules and stuff like that and sees patterns and then they identify the patterns with what we call laws and that seem to operate in a uniform fashion. But strictly speaking they can't make appeal to these occult forces that are driving things. Gravity is not an occult force.

It's an actual physical attraction. The question is what is it that drives gravity? Well that's the law of gravity. Well there's the word law in that case just simply means we identify a pattern that seems consistent and uniform.

That's all. There's nothing for molecules to obey is kind of the point I'm making. So on a materialistic view of the universe upon which science now operates there can't be any laws of any kind especially moral laws.

Okay and moral laws are completely outside of its purview because moral obligations and concepts of good and bad are descriptives that we apply to certain behaviors based on an invisible moral standard which science can't speak to. Okay it's not even capable of speaking to it. It's outside of its purview.

And so I can't make sense of this claim. I don't know what scientist makes this claim. But I would guess maybe he's thinking of social scientists making this claim.

Well maybe. Okay. As to whether humans are born good if you have children you know otherwise.

You know I mean this is just a common sense observation about the nature of reality here. Kids don't need to be taught to be bad. But of course if you employ the notion of bad then you're already employing a moral standard which you have to account for.

Yeah kids don't need to be taught to disobey their parents but that it presumes that obeying the parents is a moral obligation and disobeying is bad. Where does the moral obligation to obey parents come from? We have it explicitly in the Ten Commandments that's one source but that's a religious source. If you get all the religious sources out why ought morally ought children obey their parents such that if they don't then do something bad.

Why ought anyone do anything such that their behavior encourages younger kids to

adopt that behavior? I actually don't have any reason to believe what the claim here modern science is even social science that that that's the claim because I'm not. Yeah if it is it's an accurate characterization of the claim that the kids are born good and we teach them to be bad. Well it's hard to understand where evil came from if we began good.

How did anybody get bad? Yeah who is influencing anyone for bad? That doesn't even make sense to me. I mean I think what we're seeing here is a very deeply divided philosophical divide in our culture right now because whether you think the evil is coming from us and therefore it needs to be managed this would be like say the system of government that we have now was built on the idea that we need to manage people's evil and it's responsible for their behavior. Right so you have to give you have to divide up power because power corrupts and you have to take into account that it's not that we're going to find these perfect people who are going to rule us perfectly.

We actually have to have things in place to protect us from the evil that's in everyone but if you think some people are good and then some people are evil now you have to eradicate the people you have to get rid of the people or you have to tear down the institutions that you think are causing the evil rather than managing the evil in on an individual level and I always think about that was it GK Chesterton who wrote that I guess some news I hope it was him if I'm thinking the right person maybe this will sound familiar to you but the newspaper was asking people the question what's wrong with the world and he said his whole thing was just I am. Oh yeah yeah and then Solzhenisyn didn't he talk about the line between good and evil goes through every heart. I think when you deny that at least it leads to all sorts of problems and I think it goes against all observed reality with children because nobody is teaching them to be bad.

Right so I other children I think in any I think in any way you look at this whether it's observation whether it's looking at how that philosophy plays out in various different political views it doesn't play out well. That's right it just doesn't because I don't think it matches reality. Yeah it's inconsistent with the way the world actually is when you look closely at it.

I can't remember who said power corrupts and that was Lord Acton. Lord Acton that's right I knew I started with an A but I was getting like alphabet soup in my head and so thank you for that Lord Acton. And absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Now I would be interested I'm very comfortable with that phrase but if we're really going to be more precise about it what power does is it allows the corruption that's in the soul to be expressed in a more efficient fashion and when absolute powers in play then you have the corruption in a human soul to be expressed in its most extensive fashion. The corruption isn't in the power the corruption is in the individual which access to power allows to come out in various degrees. And I'd be curious I don't know what Lord Acton's

background is you know but if he's coming from a Christian or a Christian theistic world view basically.

I think he was Catholic. Okay well then he probably if push came to self-ignology yeah that's actually what's going on. Right.

So I don't have trouble with the phraseology the aphorism is a fair one and but really what's going on it isn't just like you have this pristine individual who gets power. The sinless person and then is corrupted by power. The person who was like that is Jesus of Nazareth and ironically here's a man that had the ability to do all the things that he did but was not corrupted by it.

Okay and this is at the heart of the book of our friend who wrote "Too Good to Be False" the story about Tom Gilson. Thank you. "Too Good to Be False" because that's his point.

You look at Jesus who had all of this power and he among anyone in history did not use it for his own benefit but for others you know and he was even willing to be executed and not use the power to save himself. And of course we know there's a greater purpose that he had in mind there but so power doesn't actually always corrupt the person who had the most power was encrypted at all by it but it trades or leverages on the corruption that's already in the heart. It's like when Paul says the problem was not with the law that they couldn't follow it.

The problem was with their sin. Their sin is what made it impossible for them to follow the law. The law was still good so the problem is with us and I think observation shows that so I would reject any anyone who says differently and I would be interested in see how they would even try and prove that.

All right that's all we have for today. Thank you Jake for your question and thank you Jacob. Actually we had a Jacob and a Jake.

How about that? I didn't even notice that until just now. Well thanks for listening. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cockel for Stand to Reason.

(upbeat music)

(upbeat music)