

September 6, 2009

NOBODY VS. SOMEBODY (ROUND I): The Seven Stages of the Hardened Heart

A Study of Exodus 4:21 – 14:17; Matthew 13:10-15 (by Dr. Stan Reeder)

INTRODUCTION:

Moses is Mr. Nobody; Pharaoh is Mr. Somebody. To study Exodus 4-14 is to have a ringside seat for NOBODY VS SOMEBODY.

Today is round one of “Nobody versus Somebody”; we are going to come to an understanding of what Scripture means when it talks of the “hardened heart.”

Scriptural definition of the “hardened heart”:

1. The hardened heart becomes UNFEELING (Isaiah 6:10a).
2. The hardened heart becomes incapable of UNDERSTANDING (Isaiah 6:10b).
3. The hardened heart becomes UNYIELDING (Isaiah 6:10c).

Between Exodus 4:21 and Exodus 14:17 the hardened heart is mentioned over 20 times. Throughout this sequence of passages on the heart we can see seven stages of the hardened heart. As we go through these stages, you will know exactly what the Word is referring to because you have seen people go through these stages.

I have seen people, due to the hardened heart . . . Throw away their career, their marriage, their family, their heritage, their convictions, their integrity, their reputation....everything they once valued... All because they did not take heed to the warnings, they did not put a halt to the Seven Stages of the Hardened Heart. God raises Pharaoh up for several reasons . . . one of the important reasons is to show us the devastation that comes from the hardened heart.

THE SEVEN STAGES OF THE HARDENED HEART:

The first stage is found in Exodus 7:21-23. Moses has just struck the Nile with his staff and the river turned to blood. It was the first plague:

The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water. Blood was everywhere in Egypt. But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said. Instead he turned and went into his palace, and did not take even this to heart. And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile to get drinking water, because they could not drink the water of the river. Seven days passed.

1. UNACCOUNTABLE to the pain of others (7:21-24).

Even with the stench, even with the food supply of fish dying, even with no water for his people, even with the people desperately digging for water, Pharaoh is completely unaffected by the pain of his people . . . *Instead, he turned and went into his palace, and did not take even this to heart.* His heart became cold . . . he did not care of the suffering of others.

Oh, how often do we see a man in the midst of an affair, be completely unaffected by the suffering of his wife and children. He is capable only of thinking of himself, he is accountable to no one. Pharaoh has hardened his heart only once. This is the first stage of the hardened heart.

Just as we cannot understand how a person can be so unaffected by the suffering of others, the second stage is equally mystifying.

2. UNABLE to see beyond the short term (8:13-15).

Exodus chapter 8 details the second plague; the plague of the frogs. There were frogs everywhere: *They will come up into your palace and your bedroom and onto your bed, . . . into your ovens and kneading troughs. The frogs will go up on you and your people* (8:3-5). It was frogs everything . . . frogs in your soup, frog legs in your bread, You'd have a frog in your throat. Pharaoh was hopping mad! He was ready to croak!

Pharaoh begged Moses *Pray to the Lord to take the frogs away from me.*

Moses prayed for the frogs to stop. They did. *They were piled into heaps, and the land reeked of them. But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and would not listen to Moses and Aaron* (Exodus 8:14-15).

Moses was unable to see beyond the short term.

How many times have you seen it?... The hardened heart is unable to see that there is no future in the current direction. A woman is steeling from her company, a man is giving up his family for a fling. The hardened heart cannot see there is no future in its direction.

The third stage of the hardened heart leaves it

3. UNANSWERABLE to counsel (8:19).

The third plague was the plague of gnats. Talk about a “gnatsty” plague!! The Scripture says: *gnats came upon men and animals. All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats.*

You've heard of a “stretch break”. I think we need to take a little “scratch break”.

Reminds me of the pastor who went to the pet store. He filled out a special order for 10,000 cockroaches, 10,000 ants, 1,000 centipedes and 100 mice. Not wanting to be

nosey but unable to contain his curiosity, the owner of the pet store asked: “This is a very unusual order, can you tell me what you are going to do with all these insects?”

“Well, you see, I’m pastor of the local church down the street and I’ve been called to another church. When I told my church board about my resignation, they warned me that I’d better leave the parsonage in exactly the same condition as when I moved in.”

We lived in a parsonage in our first church. The previous pastor’s wife was an incredibly optimistic person and a good friend. On the day we moved in she said to us: “Now this is a lovely parsonage, but it is a bit ‘buggy.’”

Several weeks later we noticed that Reed, just a baby, broke out in a rash. He was so miserable we brought him into our bedroom for a few nights and it cleared up. We put him back in his own room and the rash reappeared. We were totally mystified, until one of us happened to notice that the sheets on Reeds crib seemed to be moving. We got out a magnifying glass. The good news was that his sheets weren’t moving; the bad news was that the 100’s of 1,000’s of gnats crawling all over his sheets were. His room was infested with gnats that were finer than dust. Reed’s little body wasn’t covered with a rash, he was covered with 1,000’s of gnat bites.

Our gnat experience was like a little ant farm compared to what was happening in Egypt. Exodus 8:18 records: *The magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not. . . . The magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not listen.*

Even his magicians are giving him counsel . . . “Stop Pharaoh, this is way beyond us, this is a God thing. Don’t go any further!”

How many times has the hardened heart been confronted? Stop what you are doing. Don’t go any further. Ask the Lord for forgiveness and live for Him.” The hardened heart becomes “Unanswerable to wise counsel.”

Plagues four and five; stage 4. The hardened heart becomes . . .

4. UNMOVABLE in the face of facts (8:32 and 9:7).

God does a new thing in plagues four and five. He sends them only on the Egyptians. The Israelites, living in the section of Egypt known as Goshen, are completely protected from the plagues.

God sent swarms of flies all over Egypt but there isn’t one in Goshen. *But this time also Pharaoh hardened his heart (Exodus 8:32).*

Plague five is a plague on the livestock. The livestock in Egypt are dropping like flies so, *Pharaoh sent men to investigate and found that not even one of the animals of the*

Israelites had died. Yet his heart was unyielding and he would not let the people go (Exodus 9:7).

Pharaoh had all the facts . . . the evidence was right in front of him . . . but his hardened heart made him “unmovable in the face of the facts.”

5. UNCONTROLLABLE in decisions (9:11).

The whole scenario is about to take on a totally new dimension as we enter into the plague of boils. This is the 5th stage of the hardened heart. These boils were so painful the magicians could not even stand in front of Pharaoh to give any more counsel . . . exit the magicians.

But in this 5th stage, Pharaoh didn't harden his heart. The scripture says: *the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart*. Pharaoh has lost personal control of the situation. It is now beyond Pharaoh. His heart has been hardened to the point where his personal choice has been taken away. It's now like a person with an addiction. He is doing stuff he doesn't even want to do. He has been given a taste of what it is to be out of control.

In the New Testament Paul describes this state in Romans 7:14b-19: *I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. . . . it is sin living in me . . . the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.*

God has given him a taste of what it is like to be totally out of control. But, in the 6th stage God gives him one last chance to make his own decision. The plague of hail is Pharaoh's last chance to repent, but he has no idea. He has hardened his heart to the point that he has stage 6 . . .

6. UNREASONABLE before impending destruction (9:14, 34).

God in his grace says: *this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people, so that you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth.*

This is your last chance Pharaoh, you don't know it now but if you harden your heart one more time, it is all over. Your day of salvation will be past. There will not longer be any hope for you.

...hail fell and lighting flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. . . . The only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were. Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. “This time I have sinned.”

Oh thank God, Pharaoh, you have a small ray of light left. You can still turn this around. But look what happened: *When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had*

stopped, he sinned again: He and his officials hardened their hearts. So Pharaoh's heart was hard.

Oh, Pharaoh, you don't realize it, but that is the last decision you will make. Sin has so filled your life, it is now in control. You have just now entered your destiny of stage 7 . . .

7. UNCHANGEABLE destruction: the ultimate destiny of the hardened heart (10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8, 17).

Never again does Pharaoh have a choice. There is one phrase that weaves its way through the last three plagues: *The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart*. Egypt lay in ruins, they were devastated by the death of the first born, they had been totally disarmed in the Red Sea. His chances had run out. He was no longer capable of turning to the Lord. His destiny of destruction is sealed.

“Oh, that is just in the Old Testament Pastor . . . that can't happen to anybody today.”

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul warns the Christians: *For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction.*

APPLICATION REGARDING THE HARDENED HEART:

1. It's PREDICTABLE (Exodus 4:2, 7:3):

The sequence is always the same . . .

- a) Our **DESIRES** determines . . . *Who is the Lord that I should listen to him - PRIDE*
- b) Our **DECISION**; our decision determines . . . *I will not let the people go*
- c) Our **DIRECTION**; our direction determines . . . *And Pharaoh hardened his heart*
- d) Our **DESTINY** . . . *the Lord hardened his heart*

2. It's PREVENTABLE (2 Peter 3:9b).

God gave Pharaoh warning after warning. He tried to save Pharaoh from a destiny of destruction. Time after time, Pharaoh said no to God and hardened his heart.

3. It's IRREPARABLE (Matthew 13:10-12).

In the passage that we read together during the service we see the Pharisees enter stage 7. Jesus begins telling these hard-to-understand parables as he teaches the Pharisees. The disciples come to Jesus and ask: *Why do you speak to the people in parables? He replied . . . This is why I speak to them in parables . . . this people's heart has become calloused .*

. . . otherwise, they might . . . understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.

Is there something in your life about which you are saying “no” to God? A habit? Is there sin? Is there something that needs to be given up? Something he is calling you to do?

Every time you say no . . . your heart hardens. You are moving through the 7 stages. For some here this morning you may be at stage 6 . . . it is your last opportunity. There is one remedy . . . it would have worked for Pharaoh, it will work for you today . . .
OBEDIENCE.