

Grace Bible Church
Robert R. McLaughlin Bible Ministries

**The Tree of Life is a weekly teaching summary.
The Tree of Life from the week ending 05/10/09
God permits the worst so that the best can come from it.**

What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. 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 then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?” On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. (Rom 9:14-24)

As we have seen, God used Pharaoh’s negative volition and his arrogance to demonstrate His omnipotence. The ten plagues (sometimes are called the ten miracles) demonstrate divine power in an empirical way. Empiricism cannot see God, but empiricism can definitely understand the power of God in these manifestations. We see a change after the first six plagues. When you get to plague number seven we read that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart, which simply means He permitted him to continue to live, and continue to say no. Many Egyptians had responded to the demonstration of divine power in the first six plagues. In fact we read, **The one among the servants of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD made his servants and his livestock flee into the houses; but he who paid no regard to the word of the LORD left his servants and his livestock in the field (Exo 9:20-21).**

Here we see that one of Pharaoh’s administrators had become a believer. The word “fear” really means respect that is produced from faith.

Now the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that hail may fall on all the land of Egypt, on man and on beast and on every plant of the field, throughout the land of Egypt.” And Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very severe, such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. And the hail struck all that was in the field through all the land of Egypt, both man and beast; the hail also struck every plant of the field and shattered every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the sons of Israel were, there was no hail. Then Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “I have sinned this time; the LORD is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones. Make supplication to the LORD, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail; and I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.” And Moses said to him, “As soon as I go out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease, and there will be hail no longer, that you may know that the earth is the LORD'S. But as for you and your servants, I know

that you do not yet fear the LORD God.” (Now the flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. But the wheat and the spelt were not ruined, for they ripen late.) So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh, and spread out his hands to the LORD; and the thunder and the hail ceased, and rain no longer poured on the earth. But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again and hardened his heart, he and his servants. And Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not let the sons of Israel go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses. (Exo 9:22-35)

Let's note some principles:

1. The demonstration of divine power became the means of releasing the Jews from slavery. This was the birth of the first priest/client nation in history. The evangelisation of Egypt was another result, in fact, the evangelisation of the entire world. Any Jew, any Egyptian, Ethiopian or Canaanite who wanted salvation had a clear picture of the source of salvation from the manifest power revealed by means of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.

2. If God had not permitted Pharaoh to live he could not have said no in those final four confrontations.

3. It was not until plague number six that we read the phrase **“God hardened Pharaoh's heart.”** The hardening of Pharaoh's heart was the removal of all restraints on his negative volition, plus keeping him alive.

4. Pharaoh's free will moved him, without any restraint from God, on a collision course with historical disaster.

5. Just as God turned the heathen over to their vile lusts, affections, and reprobate minds, so God turned Pharaoh over to his negative volition, his arrogance, his jealousy, his pettiness.

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper. (Rom 1:21-28)

6. The impact of all of this is obvious. Paul is comparing the Jews of his day, the contemporary Jews, with Pharaoh. This was the greatest insult of all.

7. As Pharaoh hardened his heart through maximum negative volition at the time of the Exodus, so the legalistic Jews of Paul's day had hardened their hearts through maximum negative volition toward doctrine.

The application to contemporary history

To be compared to Pharaoh Amenhotep II was as insulting to the Jews as their negative volition was insulting to God. The Jews of Paul's day had violated their magnificent spiritual heritage. The unique origin of the race of the Jews through positive volition toward Christ, and doctrine resident in the soul on the part of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, had not alerted the Jews to their failure; a failure stated in the promise, **“All**

Israel is not really Israel.” The unique origin of the nation with the contrast between the positive volition of Moses and the negative volition of Pharaoh, plus the fact that Israel was the first client nation to God in history, should have alerted the Jews in Paul’s time to the importance of positive volition toward Christ – believing in Him for salvation. The “hereditary” people of God had become “heretical” – heretical in the pattern of Ishmael, Esau and Pharaoh, three Gentiles the Jews detested. Note that the function of God does not rob man of his free will; he is still a creature of self-determination. God uses the free will of Pharaoh to liberate His people from slavery. Man is not robbed of his self-determination by the omnipotence of God, but actually is provided with greater historical opportunity to express non-meritorious free will to enter the plan of God. Paul’s epistle to the Romans makes a grace appeal to Israel in chapters 9 and 10. God the Holy Spirit uses the genius of Paul to relate historical disaster to a skilful presentation of the panacea of the Jewish problem – rejection of Jesus Christ who is the God of Israel, Jehovah Elohim, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Shekinah glory.

The opposition of mankind to God becomes a monument to the power of God. The more Pharaoh resisted God by saying no from his free will, the greater became the manifestation of divine power. The fact that God permitted the free will operation of the fall of Adam so that He might redeem mankind through the work of Christ on the Cross is a similar principle. God permitted Adam’s sin in order that He might present to the world the redeemer of mankind in the person of Christ – His work on the Cross in receiving the imputation of our sins. Now God permits the free will of Pharaoh to operate to the maximum in a negative way so that the people of Egypt, and the entire world in that generation, might have the opportunity to receive Christ as Saviour. God permits the worst so that the best can come from it. This means that the plan of God continues whether it is a negative period of history, or a positive period of history. The fact of the divine decree, and resultant election, foreknowledge and pre-destination of the believer in Christ describes all the glory of eternal salvation to the person, to the plan, to the grace of God.

This principle of doctrine does not detract from the fact that mankind is a free agent, responsible for his own actions and his own decisions. The highest freedom man has is the utilization of the grace of God to completely triumph over evil. There no divine foreordination of sin, human good and evil, even though it was known by the Omniscience of God in eternity past. Election demands adoption, therefore Paul’s great burden for Israel. The Jews do not inherit from God through natural birth even though they are the legitimate sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They possess the genes of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but they do not possess the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who is the Lord Jesus Christ. The unique origin of the race of the Jews through positive volition toward Christ, and doctrine resident in the soul on the part of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, had not alerted the Jews to their failure.

We must understand that our own will is not the best thing for us if there is in that will any deviation from the perfect will of God. We must turn to the Word of God to know His will in order that we may be obedient to it. Our prayer must be the prayer of David when he cried:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way. (Psa 139:23-24)

So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. (Rom 9:18)

God desires to show mercy to those believers who appropriate grace blessing through non-meritorious perception and the accumulation of doctrine in the soul. God is not choosing one for mercy, and condemning another arbitrarily. God functions in compatibility with His perfect integrity. His integrity is made up of His +R and +J (Righteousness and Justice). God functions in compatibility with His perfect plan of grace. God’s Son, in His sacrifice, has been manifested since the beginning of time. To those, like Cain, who tried to have a relationship with God from his own fruit possesses man’s righteousness, which to God in Isa 64:6 are filthy rags. To those, like Able who believed in the Gospel, possess the righteousness of God, and therefore become compatible with the perfect integrity of God and qualify, under God’s Justice, to be recipients of

God's plan of grace. These are the "on whom" God desires to show mercy.

Every printout in the divine decree which is to your advantage is based upon the fact that you learned that doctrine was the most important thing in your life, and therefore you persisted on a daily basis taking in this doctrine. This eventually ended up as maturity adjustment to the Justice of God. Once you have attained that particular stage God is free to start pouring blessings to you, and prepares you for historical disaster which occurs in every generation.

So man continues to be a free agent in history, responsible for his own decisions, thoughts, actions, and motives. God in grace has found a way to take the life of man that can do nothing, and from His omniscience in eternity past related positive volition to the function of His grace.

God found a way for your choices to appropriate grace and mercy from Him. Find that way, and you'll find His grace and mercy.

"And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." (Jer 29:13)

But if you are the unbelieving, like the Pharisees and religious crowd of our Lord's day:

Jesus therefore said, "For a little while longer I am with you, then I go to Him who sent Me. 34 "You shall seek Me, and shall not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come." (Joh 7:33-34)

God uses the free will of man to accomplish His will or purpose. God knew billions of years ago that man was going to do certain things. He knew all about Pharaoh and his scar tissue. All scar tissue is developed from free will. Remember that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. He had maximum scar tissue in his soul by the time he came to plague number seven. At that time God would have normally removed him from life because he was so removed from reality that he was dangerous to the survival of his nation. Pharaoh faced the issue with full information and from his own free will he kept saying no. In fact, no one had more information to say yes than Pharaoh, but he always said no. God was not willing that Pharaoh should perish, the decision was Pharaoh's, not God's.

Furthermore, Pharaoh's sins were imputed to Christ on the Cross and judged. The hardness of Pharaoh's heart actually originated with his own negative volition. Pharaoh had said no repeatedly. Then the Lord gave him the opportunity of saying no beyond the world's record. That is called hardening Pharaoh's heart. God hardened Pharaoh's heart by giving him more opportunity to say no in the face of more facts. Scar tissue means that you still have your freedom but it is now totally disassociated from reality.

Understanding history from the divine viewpoint demands understanding the attributes of God. We should understand that God never tampers with human freedom. Certain attributes are pertinent to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and/or scar tissue of his soul. Omniscience knew in eternity past that Pharaoh would not only say no six times, but would persist in negative volition as the scar tissue of his soul or the blindness of his heart developed. The sovereignty of God made a decision to afford maximum opportunity for Pharaoh to experience the omnipotence of God in action, and to continue to refuse from his free will and arrogance. Scar tissue of the soul always means an expansion of human arrogance. God had the eternal and infinite power to perform those miracles which would intensify and increase the stubbornness of Pharaoh.

Pharaoh's negative volition combined with his scar tissue persisted in refusal to free Israel so that greater and greater manifestation of the omnipotence of God occurred. The greater the function of omnipotence, the greater the evangelism in the land. The integrity or holiness of God includes both His perfect righteousness and absolute justice. In judging Pharaoh God was fair, completely compatible with His own righteousness and the plan of grace.