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HARDNESS OF THE KARDIA

The action of hardening one's heart or the state of hardness of heart is the action or state of persistent and sometimes hostile rejection of the Word of God. This involves not simply a refusal to hear the Word but a refusal to respond in submission and obedience.

The rejection may also extend to those who convey the Word, whether prophets, apostles, or the Logos himself, Jesus Christ. The objects of hardening may be individuals (like the case of Pharaoh in Exodus 4:21; 7:13, 22; 8:15, 19; 10:1) or whole communities of peoples or nations (most importantly Israel in Isaiah 6:10-11; 29:9-14; Romans 11:7-25; 2 Corinthians 3:14; but also Gentiles in Joshua 11:20; Ephesians 4:18). There is no one technical word or phrase for hardening in Scripture; rather a variety of words and phrases are used to describe the same phenomenon. Most theological discussions are concerned with identifying the agent of the hardening, and opinion is divided between God as the sole agent and man as solely responsible. Variations would be that God provides the opportunity for hardening or that He hardens on the basis of His foreknowledge of man's sin.

In Scripture both God and man are listed as agents of hardening. In the case of Pharaoh, he is said to harden his own heart (Exodus 8:15). But God is also said to harden Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 4:21; 10:1), and Paul's comment on the incident is that God hardens whom He will and has mercy on whom He will (Romans 9:18).

Hardening, therefore, is a complex phenomenon involving both divine and human agency. But instead of being the manifestation of predetermined reprobation, hardening is primarily presented in Scripture as a means of God's accomplishment of His purposes for history. Such can be seen in the case of Pharaoh through which God accomplished Israel's deliverance (Joshua 11:20). It is also the case in the present hardening of Israel (Romans 11:7-25) through which God is bringing salvation to the Gentiles. In such activity God's sovereignty must be clearly seen. In each case, hardening results in a manifestation of mercy and grace. God alone has the power to lift the hardening of the soul (2 Corinthians 3:15-16; 4:3-6). Scripture expects the present hardening of Israel to be followed by new covenant ministries of the Spirit in which the hard heart of the nation is replaced by a new heart of faith and obedience (Jeremiah 31:33-37; Ezek.36: 26-37:28; Romans 11:25-32).