

Romans 9:14-18—Is God Always Fair In His Dealings With Mankind?

Memory Verse

Romans 12:1-2 NKJV

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Revision

Last week we started to answer the question of “*What about Israel? Has God rejected them?*” We saw that this is a very important question as, “...the very character of God was at stake. If God was not faithful to the Jews, how do we know He will be faithful to the church?” (Warren W. Wiersbe). We then learned the very comforting answer to this question—God has *not* forsaken His people Israel, as Paul declares very strongly in Romans 11:1-2a (NKJV) “I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew.”

In Romans 9:1-13, Paul gave two reasons why God has not abandoned His chosen people. Firstly, some Israelites were saved, and Paul was one of them—God did save those who were truly Israel, that is, those who had soft and repentant hearts. The point Paul made is that being a physical descendant of Abraham is not enough to secure your eternal salvation, just like being a true child of God goes much deeper than simply going to church and calling yourself a Christian. However, although only a remnant or small number of Jews are saved presently, the Bible says that there will be a time when there will be a national sorrowing over sin and a national acceptance of Jesus as their Messiah (when Jesus comes back at the end of the seven year Tribulation at His Second Coming).

Secondly, Paul showed that God chose the nation of Israel to be the vehicle to bring the Messiah into the world, for no reason except that it was His choice to love this particular nation and choose them. Therefore, since the nation of Israel couldn't do anything, good or bad, to become God's special people, then they can't do anything, good or bad, to lose this special status. The nation of Israel will always be God's vehicle to bring salvation to the whole world, including both the first and second comings of Christ, simply because God chose them to be.

As an application, we saw that Paul was willing to give up his own salvation, his own place in God's family, if that would cause the nation of Israel to repent and believe. How did Paul come to love so deeply those who so bitterly persecuted and hated him? By walking closely with the Lord and praying specifically for their salvation: “*Brethren, my heart's desire and [continual] prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved*” (Romans 10:1 NKJV). The application was that; *If I am angry with someone, if I am allowing temporary problems and hurts to cause me to have a bad attitude towards them, then it's a clear sign that I need to spend more time with God in His word, and pray for them much more, especially for their salvation (unbeliever) or growth as a Christian (believer).*

A general outline of Romans chapters 9-11

Israel is the only nation in the world where God has revealed their past, present, and future.

- Chapter 9: Israel's *past* election—God is sovereign
- Chapter 10: Israel's *present* rejection—God will judge sin wherever it is
- Chapter 11: Israel's *future* restoration—God keeps His promises, He is faithful even when His people are not

Outline of Romans chapter 9

In Romans chapter 9, Paul defends the character of God. He looks at Israel's past history and shows how God's dealing with Israel actually demonstrate four attributes of God's character:

- God's Faithfulness (vs 1-13)—“Well then, has God failed to fulfill his promise to Israel? No...” (v 6 NLT)
- God's Righteousness (vs 14-18)—“What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!” (v 14)
- God's Justice (vs 19-29)—“You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault?” (v 19)
- God's Grace (vs 30-33)—“What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith” (v 30)

Romans 9:14-18—Is God Always Fair In His Dealings With Mankind?

Outline

1. Is God unrighteousness or unfair because He chose the nation of Israel over the nation of Edom to be His chosen people? (14-16)
2. God's Sovereignty in the everyday circumstances of our lives (v 17-18)
3. Man's freewill, and the danger of allowing sin to harden our hearts against God—the example of Pharaoh (v 18)

Romans 9:1-18 NKJV

I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, ² that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, ⁴ who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; ⁵ of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

⁶ But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, ⁷ nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, “In Isaac your seed shall be called.” ⁸ That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. ⁹ For this is the word of promise: “At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.”

¹⁰ And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac ¹¹ (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), ¹² it was said to her, “The older shall serve the younger.” ¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.”

¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! ¹⁵ For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.” ¹⁶ So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.” ¹⁸ Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

1. Is God unrighteousness or unfair because He chose the nation of Israel over the nation of Edom to be His chosen people?

Romans 9:14-16 NKJV

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! ¹⁵ For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.” ¹⁶ So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

v 14 **What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!**: In verses 10-12, Paul showed that God chose the nation of Israel over the nation of Edom, when He made the choice of which nation would be chosen to be the vehicle to bring the Messiah into the world. Now Paul anticipates the natural response of many people, namely that of, “*But that’s not fair*”. But Paul says that it is fair, God is never unfair or unrighteous. The explanation is given in the next verse, but for now, just remember that one of the attributes of God is that He is always fair and just and righteous.

Deuteronomy 32:3-4 NKJV

For I proclaim the name of the Lord: ascribe greatness to our God. ⁴ He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He.

v 14 **For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.”**: Paul quotes from Exodus 33:19, where God tells Moses that He reserves the right to show mercy or forgive those whom He chooses. Again, this is in the context of nations, not individuals (God promises to show mercy and forgive the sins of any individual who chooses to call upon Him, see Isaiah 53:11, John 3:16, Acts 2:21, 3:19, 13:38). The context of this quote is the the Israelites rejecting God at Mount Sinai while Moses was 40 days and nights up on the mountain (see Exodus 32). God had told Moses that He would destroy the nation of Israel and start again with a new nation made up of the the descendants of Moses. But Moses interceded for the nation, and God relented from His judgement and forgave the nation, promising to continue to use Israel as His special people.

The important point here is that the people of Israel didn’t deserve to be forgiven and have a second chance. They had spurned God and willingly rebelled against Him, despite seeing many of God’s miracles, experiencing many instances of His loving care towards them, hearing the voice of God directly, and living right next to the mountain that was burning like a furnace. Truly, with great privilege comes great responsibility. God had every right to be done with such a rebellious and hard-hearted people, but He exercised His gracious sovereign will to forgive them.

David Guzik puts it this way: “Remember what **mercy** is. Mercy is *not* getting what we do deserve. God is never *less* than fair with anyone, but fully reserves the right to be *more* than fair with individuals as He chooses.”

Again, God is never less than fair, but reserves the right to treat people differently regarding their circumstances—God is allowed to be *more* than fair. Remember that we are all sinners who are fully deserving of eternal torment in the Lake of Fire—none of us deserve any good thing while on this earth, or even in the next life—any good thing we receive is all grace (see Matthew 5:45). We see this principle of God choosing to bless certain people more than others, simply because He wants to, in the parable of the land owner in Matthew 20:1-16.

Matthew 20:1–16 NLT

“For the Kingdom of Heaven is like the landowner who went out early one morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ² **He agreed to pay the normal daily wage and sent them out to work.**

³ “At nine o’clock in the morning he was passing through the marketplace and saw some people standing around doing nothing. ⁴ So he hired them, **telling them he would pay them whatever was right at the end of the day.** ⁵ So they went to work in the vineyard. At noon and again at three o’clock he did the same thing.

⁶ “At five o’clock that afternoon he was in town again and saw some more people standing around. He asked them, ‘Why haven’t you been working today?’

⁷ “They replied, ‘Because no one hired us.’

“The landowner told them, ‘Then go out and join the others in my vineyard.’

⁸ “That evening he told the foreman to call the workers in and pay them, beginning with the last workers first. ⁹ When those hired at five o’clock were paid, each received a full day’s wage. ¹⁰ When those hired first came to get their pay, they assumed they would receive more. But they, too, were paid a day’s wage. ¹¹ When they received their pay, they protested to the owner, ¹² ‘Those people worked only one hour, and yet you’ve paid them just as much as you paid us who worked all day in the scorching heat.’

¹³ “He answered one of them, ‘Friend, I haven’t been unfair! Didn’t you agree to work all day for the usual wage? ¹⁴ **Take your money and go. I wanted to pay this last worker the same as you.** ¹⁵ **Is it against the law for me to do what I want with my money? Should you be jealous because I am kind to others?’**

A warning and application: Do not take God’s grace for granted

Remember that mercy is not receiving a punishment that we do deserve, and grace is receiving something good that we don’t deserve. David Guzik writes the following concerning Jesus’s parable in Matthew 20:1-16:

“The point isn’t that all have the same reward—though all God’s people do go to the same heaven (where they will have reward in different measure). *The point is that God rewards on the principle of grace, and we should therefore expect surprises.* He will never be *less* than fair, but reserves the right to be *more* than fair as pleases Him. God’s grace always operates righteously.

This parable is not a perfect illustration of God’s grace, because the principle of working and deserving is involved. **The grace of God does not give us *more* blessing than we deserve—it gives blessing to us completely apart from the principle of deserving.**

Living under grace is sort of a two-edged sword. Under grace, we can’t come to God complaining, “Don’t I deserve better than this”; because God will reply, “Does this mean that you really want Me to give you what you deserve?”

Grace should be especially manifested in our service; it is of grace, not works.

- All our service is already due to God; it belongs to Him.
- The ability to serve God is the gift of His grace.
- The call to serve God is the gift of His grace.
- Every opportunity to serve is a gift of His grace.
- Being in the right state of mind to do the Lord’s work is a gift of grace.
- Successful service to God is the gift of His grace.

We are in a dangerous place when we regard God’s mercy towards us as our *right*. If God is obliged to show mercy, then it is not mercy—it is obligation. *No one is ever unfair for not giving mercy.* [Remember that no-one actually deserves to be forgiven!]

v 16 **So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy:** Again, we come back to God's sovereignty and how God chooses to show grace and mercy to different degrees to different nations, and also with the circumstances of individuals, according to His own plan. It has nothing to do with what they want (**him who wills**), or how hard they try (**of him who runs**)—God decides, He is sovereign.

God's desire is that all men be saved (see 1 Timothy 2:4): Always remember, that none of us deserve mercy, but God makes salvation (the forgiveness of all sins) available to *all* individuals. Also, none of us deserve grace (for example, God's gracious gift of adoption and glorification that awaits all believers). *The only reason that God makes salvation available to all people is that God is by nature gracious, kind, merciful, and loving—God just loves to bless us because that's who He is.*

2. God's Sovereignty in the everyday circumstances of our lives

Romans 9:17-18 NKJV

For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." ¹⁸ Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

v 17 **For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.":** Although we are all free moral agents who have been created with the privilege and ability to choose or reject God's plan for their lives, and we can also choose to obey or disobey our conscience when convicted, there are many things in our lives that are beyond our control. For example, when and where you would be born, into a rich or poor family, into a believing or unbelieving family, having natural abilities for music, sports, intellectual pursuits etc, and experiencing sickness (not due to foolish choices). While God will never go against our free choice (He can't force us to do anything wrong or right), He can and does control our circumstances and place us right where He wants us to be. Remember, that God made us and therefore He owns us—we are His servants. Ephesians 2:10 tells us that "*we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*" (Ephesians 2:10 NKJV)

For Pharaoh, God raised him up to be the most powerful leader in the known world at the time. Pharaoh being born into that royal family was God's sovereign doing. God, having perfect foreknowledge, and therefore knowing the free choices that Pharaoh would make, was able to use Pharaoh's evil and rebellious choices for His own glory.

3. Man's freewill, and the danger of allowing sin to harden our hearts against God—the example of Pharaoh

v 18 **Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens:** This summary verse takes us back to verses 14 and 15, "*What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! ¹⁵For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."* Again, God is saying it is His right to be *more* than fair (more gracious and merciful) with one nation (Israel) and not with another (Edom).

Question: Did God really harden Pharaoh's heart and so force him to do the wrong thing?

This is a commonly misunderstood verse. When a quote is used from the Old Testament, it's always very important to get the full context of that verse. To understand what Paul is saying here, we must go back and see how Pharaoh's heart became hard.

Firstly, we must understand that God never forced Pharaoh to do anything. God, like the gentleman that He is, simply asked Pharaoh to let His people go. It was fully Pharaoh's decision to say yes or no, as we shall see shortly. The Scripture is clear that it was Pharaoh's choice to harden His heart—God in no way violated Pharaoh's free will. *Don't mistake God's perfect foreknowledge (where He tells Moses ahead of time what decision Pharaoh will make), with predestination (where God sovereignly declares that something will be).* Some of the verses that show that Pharaoh hardened his own heart first are listed below.

Consider that there are two Hebrew words translated “hard” or “hardened” used interchangeably in the verses below. The first means to “grow strong”, or “to be firm”, or to “strengthen”, or “prevail”—all Pharaoh was doing was strengthening himself in his personal resolve to rebel against God. In his heart and mind the decision had been made; he was so proud that he was not going to bow down to anyone, anytime—the power and prestige of his high and lofty position as the ruler of the known world, had made him so proud that he had basically lost his mind—after all, who in their right mind would continue to rebel against God as their kingdom was being destroyed by God's judgements? However, it is this same pride that keeps all unbelievers from being saved.

The second Hebrew word translated as hard or “hardened” means to become “dull”. or “heavy”, or “not easily moved”. It's like Pharaoh was searing his own conscience as he tried to silence the conviction of the Holy Spirit in His heart (see 1 Timothy 4:2).

Pharaoh exercises his free will and chooses to rebel against God and harden his heart

Exodus 7:13 NKJV—*after Moses and Aaron came before Pharaoh the first time, and all the rods became snakes and Aaron's rod ate theirs*

And Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said.

Exodus 7:22 NKJV—*after the magicians were also able to turn water to blood (first plague)*

Then the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments; and Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said.

Exodus 8:15 NKJV—*after the second plague (frogs) was lifted*

But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not heed them, as the Lord had said.

Exodus 8:19 NKJV—*after the magicians could not turn dust into lice (third plague)*

Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the Lord had said.

Exodus 8:32 NKJV—*after the Pharaoh had asked Moses to remove the flies (fourth plague) and they went*

But Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also; neither would he let the people go.

Exodus 9:7 NKJV—*after Pharaoh learned that not one of the Israelite's livestock had died (fifth plague)*

Then Pharaoh sent, and indeed, not even one of the livestock of the Israelites was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh became hard, and he did not let the people go.

Exodus 9:17 AMP—*God clearly saying that the choice was Pharaoh's*

Since you are still exalting yourself [in haughty defiance] against My people by not letting them go.

Exodus 9:34 NKJV—*after the seventh plague (hail)*

And when Pharaoh saw that the rain, the hail, and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet more; and he hardened his heart, he and his servants.

God only hardens Pharaoh's heart after Pharaoh had already chosen to harden his own heart multiple times

Now, given the fact that Pharaoh's choice was to harden his own heart on multiple occasions, God then honoured that decision and confirmed it. Notice that it wasn't until after the sixth plague (which is also the sixth time that Pharaoh had willingly hardened his own heart), that God finally "hardened" Pharaoh's heart. Remember that God hardening our hearts is just another way of saying that He gives us over to do what we want to do—*"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, **God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting**"* (Romans 1:28 NKJV).

Exodus 9:12 NKJV—*only after the sixth plague (boils)—and after Pharaoh had hardened his heart six times already*

But the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh; and he did not heed them, just as the Lord had spoken to Moses.

Exodus 10:1 NKJV—*before the eighth plague (locusts)*

Now the Lord said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him,

Exodus 10:20 NKJV—*after the eight plague (locusts)*

But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go.

Exodus 10:27 NKJV—*after the ninth plague (darkness)*

But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go.

Again, God never violates our free will to obey or disobey Him. Here we see the danger of resisting God and hardening our heart—often the worst thing that can happen to us is that God gives us what we want or crave, which is really Him just not restraining us anymore because we are screaming and kicking like a two year old having a tantrum—we just want our own way and will not listen to anything that God says to us—we are so blinded by our desires and craving for worldly pleasures that we can no longer listen to reason. Just like any parent with an out of control child, God has no choice but to let the person experience the consequences of their foolish and selfish choices (to a point).

We make our own decisions, but then our decisions turn around and make us—choices have consequences! It's basically like God is saying, "Well, if that's what you're going to continue to want, demand, and crave, then that's what you get". If we are too dumb to listen to God's *voice*, we will (or should) eventually listen to the painful consequences of our own poor *choice*. The most common way that God disciplines us is simply to let us have our own way and suffer the natural consequences of our foolish choices.

Once again, notice that Pharaoh hardened his own heart six times, after suffering through six different plagues, before God finally said, "Enough is enough, if that what Pharaoh wants, then that's what Pharaoh will get." Consider the following quotes:

"Sometimes God will glorify Himself through showing mercy; sometimes God will glorify Himself through a man's hardness.

We should not think that God persuaded an unwilling, kind-hearted Pharaoh to be hard towards God and Israel. In hardening the heart of Pharaoh, God simply allowed Pharaoh's heart to pursue its natural inclination [his own free moral choices]." (David Guzik)

“Before leaving this section, we need to discuss the “hardening” of Pharaoh (Rom. 9:18). This hardening process is referred to at least fifteen times in Exodus 7–14. Sometimes we are told that Pharaoh hardened his heart (Ex. 8:15, 19, 32), and other times that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart (Ex. 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27). By declaring His Word and revealing His power, God gave Pharaoh opportunity to repent; but instead, Pharaoh resisted God and hardened his heart. The fault lay not with God but Pharaoh. The same sunlight that melts the ice also hardens the clay. *God was not unrighteous in His dealings with Pharaoh because He gave him many opportunities to repent and believe.*” (Warren W. Wiersbe)

Application: Don’t be like Pharaoh and choose to be deceived by sin and so harden your heart against God—there will come a point of no return

For the unbeliever: As is the case with Pharaoh, the continual rebellion against God and hardening your heart will result in eternal damnation and destruction—eternity in the Lake of Fire. Remember that in John 16:8-11 Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will convict the whole world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. The sin that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of is of not believing in Jesus—“*And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin...⁹ of sin, because they do not believe in Me.*” Never forget that God “*desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (2 Timothy 2:4). John 3:16 says that all who choose to believe will receive eternal life and will not perish. However, the reverse is also true, those who do not choose to believe will perish instead.

Jesus clearly warned the people of his day, especially the leaders, that if they continue to harden their hearts to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, then one day their decision would be fixed—God would respect and confirm their free choice and give them what they wanted—their independence and eternal separation from God.

John 12:35-40 NKJV

Then Jesus said to them, “A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶ **While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.**” These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them.

³⁷ **But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him,** ³⁸ that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: “Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”

³⁹ **Therefore they could not believe,** because Isaiah said again: ⁴⁰ “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.”

For the believer: It is possible for the believer's heart to become hard towards God, but instead of choosing eternity in the Lake of Fire (hell), the believer who persists in their sin, who continues in their rebellion against God, who refuses to humble themselves when God corrects and disciplines them, is choosing to spend the rest of his life being immature or worldly. One consequence is that they never get to enjoy the conditional benefits of their salvation in the here and now. Consider the following verses:

1 corinthians 3:1-3 NLT—*what it looks like to be an immature Christian*

Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn’t talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ. ² I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren’t ready for anything stronger. And you still aren’t ready, ³ for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn’t that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren’t you living like people of the world?

Simply put, the desires and values of the immature Christian are the same as for the non-Christian. Why? Because they are both living according to the desires of their sinful nature (see Romans 8:5-6).

The next passage from Hebrews shows clearly, using the first generation of Israelites that came out of Israel as an example, that it is possible for a believer to continue in sin and rebellion against God for such a long time that they become stuck or fixed in that worldly lifestyle: *There comes a point where God says, in effect, if that's really what you want, then that's what you get.* They have refused to heed God's discipline, and have refused to trust that what God asks of them is actually possible and/or the best thing for them.

Hebrews 3:7-4:11 NKJV

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: **"Today, if you will hear His voice, ⁸ Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, ⁹ where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years. ¹⁰ Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.' ¹¹ So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.' "** [*"rest" here means entering the promised land—a picture of the victorious Christian life where the believer has overcome the world and is walking daily with God, see 1 John 2:14*]

¹² **Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;** ¹³ but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," **lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.** ¹⁴ For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, ¹⁵ while it is said: **"Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."**

¹⁶ For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? ¹⁷ Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? ¹⁹ **So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief [a lack of faith].**

4:1 Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, **let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.** ² For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; **but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.** ³ For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: "So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest,'" although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴ For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; ⁵ and again in this place: "They shall not enter My rest."

⁶ Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, ⁷ again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "Today," after such a long time, as it has been said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."

⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. ⁹ There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. [*God's sabbath rest and the Israelites promise land rest are both types of walking in the Spirit, living the Christian life by the power of God*]

¹⁰ For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His [we cease to live by our own strength and rely of God's power instead, see Galatians 2:20].

¹¹ **Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone [any believer] fall according to the same example of disobedience.**

Also, believers who continue living in rebellion against God will miss out on, or lose, their full eternal reward (but not their salvation). Consider the following verses:

2 John 8 NKJV

Look to yourselves, that we [believers] do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.

1 Corinthians 3:8-15 NKJV

Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

⁹ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

¹⁰ According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. ¹¹ For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

¹² Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴ **If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.** ¹⁵ **If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.**

Summary and Conclusion

Jon Courson does a good job in summing up what happened with Pharaoh: "In the Exodus account, Scripture records twenty times when Pharaoh's heart was hardened—ten times of which God hardened his heart and ten times of which Pharaoh hardened it himself. Understand, Bible students, that when God hardened Pharaoh's heart, He was only confirming Pharaoh's own decision. So don't feel too bad about Pharaoh, for even though he saw miracles happening and heard God's Word very powerfully presented, he hardened his own heart."

God is sovereign over the nations, and God is sovereign over the circumstances in our lives. God will get the glory and His plans will still succeed even if a person or country rebels against Him. However, our individual choice to love God is our choice: *love must be a free choice*. God invites us to draw near to Him, with the promise that if we do He will draw near to us (see James 4:8). Everyday is a choice, will I choose to love God more than I love myself and the things of this world? Will I do what He wants or what I want? Is the motto of my life, "not my will but Yours be done", or, "not Your will but mine be done"? Someone said, "We are as close to God as we choose to be". James tells us what do to if we are distant from God because we are proud and seeking worldly things:

James 4:4-10 AMP

You [are like] unfaithful wives [having illicit love affairs with the world and breaking your marriage vow to God]! Do you not know that being the world's friend is being God's enemy? So whoever chooses to be a friend of the world takes his stand as an enemy of God.

⁵ Or do you suppose that the Scripture is speaking to no purpose that says, The Spirit Whom He has caused to dwell in us yearns over us and He yearns for the Spirit [to be welcome] with a jealous love? [Jeremiah 3:14; Hosea 2:19]

⁶ But He gives us more and more grace (power of the Holy Spirit, to meet this evil tendency and all others fully). That is why He says, God sets Himself against the proud and haughty, but gives grace [continually] to the lowly (those who are humble enough to receive it). [Proverbs 3:34.]

⁷ So be subject to God. Resist the devil [stand firm against him], and he will flee from you.

⁸ Come close to God and He will come close to you. [Recognize that you are] sinners, get your soiled hands clean; [realize that you have been disloyal] wavering individuals with divided interests, and purify your hearts [of your spiritual adultery].

⁹ [As you draw near to God] be deeply penitent and grieve, even weep [over your disloyalty]. Let your laughter be turned to grief and your mirth to dejection and heartfelt shame [for your sins].

¹⁰ Humble yourselves [feeling very insignificant] in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you [He will lift you up and make your lives significant].