



God's Justice and Mercy

Joshua 11:6-9, 16-25

For it was the LORD's doing to harden their hearts so that they would come against Israel in battle, in order that they might be utterly destroyed, and might receive no mercy, but be exterminated, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. (Joshua 11:20—ESV).

Perhaps this verse or this concept in the Bible about the LORD hardening the hearts of some people is one of the most difficult to understand because it seems to make the LORD into an unfair or unjust God. It bothers many to read about the LORD hardening Pharaoh's heart or the hearts of an entire group and then destroying them. Some have used the term "judicial hardening" to explain how and why God hardens someone's heart or mind when they refuse to do right.

In Genesis 6:5, we read, "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Right before the LORD commanded Noah to build an ark and before God sent the great flood, He saw the behavior and the heart of every person. With the exception of Noah, the LORD saw and knew they would never do right, never stop hurting others, and never stop doing evil. He knew they would only make one another suffer more and more by spreading sin forever. At some point, after much patience and the preaching of Noah, the LORD knew it was time to destroy those committed to doing evil continually before they caused any more suffering to others and themselves by inventing ever-worsening evils. To save the old world from sin and to warn later people of the consequences of persisting in doing evil (and for other reasons), God in love, mercy, grace, and justice sent the flood that killed everyone but Noah and his family. For the sake of Noah and to preserve the human race, God graciously saved Noah's family.

In Genesis 15:16, we read about God's promise to Abram (Abraham): "And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (ESV). The LORD explained to Abram why He would not give the Promised Land to the Hebrews sooner than He eventually did. The LORD waited as the Hebrews lived in Egypt partly because the "iniquity of the Amorites

is not yet full” (KJV) or “the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete” (ESV). During the centuries of God’s patience, their iniquity continued and eventually reached its fullness. Their persistent rebellion demonstrated that they had committed themselves to practicing and spreading evil. Our just God passed judgment rather than appear to condone their increasingly evil behavior. Furthermore, God did not want His people learning and practicing their perpetually evil deeds by living among them (see Deuteronomy 20:18). God hardened their hearts as part of their punishment, knowing that they had already hardened their hearts. He knew they would never stop doing evil and only get worse. Since they had committed themselves to doing wrong and never doing right, their unreasonable decisions and the suffering they brought to one another led to their eventual destruction by a merciful God. Paul explained this far better than I can in Romans 1:16-32, which I have added below for you to study.

These events serve as a warning that those who persist in doing evil and resisting God’s many efforts to show them His love, truth, grace, mercy, and justice will eventually suffer the consequences of their choices here and hereafter.

Remember Jesus: God sent Jesus into the world to save the world from sin. In John 1:29, when John the Baptist saw Jesus, he proclaimed, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” Jesus came in love, mercy, grace, and truth to help people overcome sin, stop the suffering that people caused one another because of sin, and give eternal life to all who would believe in Him and receive Him into their lives and way of life as their Lord and Savior. However, many religious leaders and others rejected Jesus. They persisted in practicing evil, even crucifying the Lord of Glory and persecuting the Christians who tried to help them. Finally, after 40 years of Christian witnessing and suffering for their faithful obedience to God, our just God dramatically reduced their unjust afflictions by sending the Roman army to destroy Jerusalem in AD 70.

Remember these words from Hebrews 13:8-9, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace.” God’s love and truth, God’s many promises and warnings, God’s power and willingness to save, God’s timely justice and mercy will never change. Consider what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 6:2, “Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” Time ran out for the ungodly in Noah’s day, time ran out for the Amorites in the day of Joshua, time ran out for those who continued persecuting Jesus’ faithful followers in Jerusalem. God revealed His mercy and justice fully by sending His only Son, Jesus Christ, to save the world. Trust in and share these good words of Jesus from John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Let us pray that many will open their ears and their hearts to hear and believe.

Romans 1:16-32

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about 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 up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.