

Messianic Rabbi: God Is Not a Bitter, Hateful Old Man

As I travel around the world teaching, it always amazes me how many Bible believers think that G-D is a vindictive, hateful ogre who sits up in heaven waiting for men to do something wrong so that He can shoot fire out of His fingers and destroy them. And if men were not sufficiently sinful, G-D would manipulate them until they did evil so that He could zap them.

These beliefs are largely based upon really bad understandings of the Scriptures resulting from poor translation of the text. I am often asked, "We have the Bible in English. Isn't that good enough?" I answer that question in a very Jewish way by asking, "Good enough for what?"

Almost any translation of the Bible will allow someone to find Yeshua (Jesus) and learn how to be born again. But being born again is the beginning of the relationship, not the end. So, if your goal in reading the Bible is simply to "be saved," then any translation will do. But we are commanded this in 2 Timothy 2:15 (TLV):

"Make every effort to present yourself before God as tried and true, as an unashamed worker cutting a straight path with the word of truth."

We have been commanded to cut a path with the Word of truth. Another translation says, "rightly dividing the Word of Truth." This requires more than surface reading. It requires diving deeper into the text so that we not only know how to be saved, but we also know the One who saved us. The Bible introduces us to our G-D and lets us know about Him.

The trouble we come to is that much of that is lost in translation. Let me give you one example that will help you to understand what I am trying to say. Look at Exodus 10:1:

"Then Adonai said to Moses, 'Go to Pharaoh, because I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, so that I might show these My signs in their midst.'"

This verse and other verses like it in English would lead us to believe that G-D caused Pharaoh's heart to be hardened so that Pharaoh would not let the children of Israel go. In other words, when we read this verse in English, we conclude that had G-D not forced Pharaoh to have a hard heart, Pharaoh would have released the children of Israel and the destructive plagues would not have come upon Egypt.

Or said another way, G-D was mean and cruel simply to show how strong and powerful He is.

But this is not what the text in Hebrew says at all. The word that is translated "harden" in this verse in Hebrew comes from the root word כבוד *kevod*, which means glory. In context, we find G-D not forcing, but allowing Pharaoh to glorify himself instead of giving glory to the G-D of Israel. What we really see is a series of events taking place in Pharaoh's life to lead him to a place where he would know that there is only one G-D and only that one G-D deserves glory. The word *kevod* doesn't simply mean glory, at least not in the terms we generally use it to mean. *Kevod* describes glory as a weight or burden to be carried, hence the phrase, "Let the weight of Your glory fall." Glory involves carrying the burden or weight of responsibility.

So, what we see here is a Pharaoh who believed himself to be a god, being shown that he is not. Pharaoh is not forced to be hardhearted. Pharaoh chooses to be hardhearted each time even though, by G-D's mercy, Pharaoh is given the opportunity to humble himself before G-D. We know this by reading Exodus 10:3:

"So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, 'This is what Adonai, the God of the Hebrews, says: How long would you

refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, so they may serve Me.'”

G-D's goal is not the destruction of Pharaoh and Egypt; it is the redemption of all mankind, including Pharaoh and Egypt. If G-D was forcing Pharaoh to be rebellious, G-D would not ask him “how long?”

To further make this point, let's look at Exodus 14:18. This is when the Red Sea is about to part and Pharaoh and the Egyptian army are about to be destroyed when the waters return:

“Then the Egyptians will know that I am *Adonai*, when I have been glorified over Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.”

The word translated *glorified* here is the same word translated as *hardened* in Exodus 10. G-D is not a bitter, hateful, old man being mean and vindictive to men simply in order to show His power and might. G-D didn't force Pharaoh to be hard-hearted just so G-D could destroy Pharaoh and his people. No, not at all! That is not the nature and character of the G-D of the Bible. The truth is G-D tried over and over to convince Pharaoh to humble himself and be saved. But Pharaoh refused over and over to realize that he was only human and only the G-D of Israel could carry the weight of His glory.

As we read these words today, I hope each of us takes a moment to check ourselves. Are we being like Pharaoh and trying to be the G-D of our lives? Or have we humbled ourselves before Him, realizing that the weight of that responsibility, “that glory,” is too much for any of us to carry, and given those burdens to Him? {eo}

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