

BUS TICKET TO REDEMPTION

A Devotional Meditation on Bo (Go)

Exodus 10:1-13:16; Jeremiah 7:1-20; 46:13-28;
Matthew 15:15-20; John 10:16; 1 Peter 4:17; Hebrews 8:8-12

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A friend of mine transports people to medical and social services appointments. These are underprivileged people who receive government support. Many have criminal records. My friend tries to help his clients understand their poor life choices, and figure out what to do differently. Unfortunately, by the time they come to him, his clients are nearly incapable of making better choices. He will offer to buy them a bus ticket to another city where they can make a fresh start, far away from the toxic environments that keep them chained in a cycle of addiction, abuse, violence, and hopelessness. Most refuse, but occasionally someone accepts his offer. Even then, it's unlikely they will change for the better. Taking the bus ticket is the easy part; the hard part is changing a lifestyle of poor choices.



Bus Ticket. Photo by Hornbeam Arts, September 11, 2013, [via Flickr](#).

We describe people like this as a permanent underclass. They have been with us from the beginning of civilization. Kings and presidents count on their existence as an endless pool of expendable labor and useful criminals. Those who profit from the underclass keep them satisfied with bread and circuses and just enough social welfare to prevent an uprising that would bring down the whole system. However, they never allow a genuine solution that will bring an end to the underclass by helping them understand their worth in the eyes of their Creator. That would be just as dangerous as an uprising because it would require the overlords to acknowledge their own wrongdoing and change the system.

If the oppressors won't allow change, and if the oppressed aren't capable of change on their own, then do we conclude that God has locked everyone into this dismal human reality? That's why we have trouble with Bible passages like this:

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, and so you may tell your son and your grandchildren what I have done in Egypt, as well as My signs that I did among them, so you may know that I am *ADONAI*."

Exodus 10:1-2 TLV

We read this and wonder if God is unjust, and if Pharaoh and Egypt were hapless victims. Did God also harden the hearts of my friend's clients? Did He harden the hearts

of government, law enforcement, and religious leaders who seem incapable of addressing the plight of the perpetual poor?

These are not academic questions. We have to ask because we live in a society of oppressors and victims similar to Egypt, where God intervened to deliver His people.

Considering the dismal record of history, it seems God has hardened the collective heart of humanity so that we have no choice but to continue in our evil ways. Actually, we have been making that choice on our own ever since our first ancestors pointed the way. That's why the Creator destroyed the first global civilization with a flood after He concluded that every inclination of the human heart is only evil. The human condition didn't change after that, as Messiah Yeshua testifies:

But the things that proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and those things make the man unholy. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander.

Matthew 15:18-19 TLV

This human condition would never change if God had not intervened. We like the idea of His intervention to save us, but we have some issues with the way He intervenes. His goal is to change our hearts, which is why the New Covenant is all about giving us new hearts to obey Him and live as He intends. Yet we would rather have Him take all the consequences of our poor choices on Himself, and then let us continue as we please. That's called "cheap grace." It's the kind of divine intervention that doesn't require us to take responsibility for our actions. Ancient Israel, the very people God delivered from Egypt, developed their own version of cheap grace:

"Look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are empty. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and perjury, and offer incense to Baal and walk after other gods whom you have not known—and then come and stand before Me in this house that bears My Name, saying, 'We are saved!'—so that you may keep doing all these abominations? Has this House, which bears My Name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Look, even I have seen it!" It is a declaration of *ADONAI*. . . . "As for you, do not pray for this people. Do not offer any supplication or petition for them, nor entreat Me, because I will not hear you."

Jeremiah 7:8-11, 16 TLV

What is more difficult to hear: that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, or that He told His prophet not to pray for His own people?

The better question is, why did God do these things? The answer is just as troubling: because both the Egyptians and the Hebrews had made their choices, consistently over generations, to the point that God had to let them experience the consequences. He didn't have to do much to harden Pharaoh's heart, or even the hearts of the Hebrews who believed they could do whatever they wanted as long as God's Temple was standing as a sign of His favor on them. All God had to do was stop trying to convince them otherwise.

So, then, what hope is there for humanity? If that's what God does, even with His chosen people, is there any chance that anyone will be redeemed?

Yes, there is. The answer involves a national redemption that provides context for our individual salvation:

“But you, fear not, Jacob My servant, nor be dismayed, O Israel. For behold, I will save you from afar, your offspring from the land of their exile. And Jacob will return and be at peace and secure, no one frightening him. Fear not, Jacob My servant”—it is a declaration of *ADONAI*—“for I am with you. I will make a full end of all the nations where I have driven you, but I will not make a full end of you. I will discipline you with justice, but will not utterly destroy you.”

Jeremiah 46:27-28 TLV

This is why God chose a people and a nation as His own, and why He declared that all who desire to change their eternal destiny become part of that nation. It's why the Savior of the world was born a Jew of the Hebrew nation of Israel, and why His death and resurrection opened the way for all people to be adopted into that nation. But even then, the process involves correction and refinement, as Peter explains,

For the time has come for judgment to begin with the house of God. If judgment begins with us first, what will be the end for those who disobey the Good News of God?

1 Peter 4:17 TLV

The House of God has always been the whole House of Israel. Redemption began in the Exodus from Egypt, and continues as Israel's Messiah seeks and saves the lost sheep to bring them all into the same fold. Redemption is our bus ticket out of this toxic environment. The easy part is accepting that ticket. The hard part is staying on the bus all the way to the final destination.