

For This Reason They Could Not Believe

Copyright 2023 by Joseph F. Harwood

<https://www.abookofbiblestudy.net/>

[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

In John 12, beginning in verse 37 we read:

But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: “Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” *For this reason they could not believe*, for Isaiah said again, “***He has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them.***” (John 12:37-40, emphasis added.)

Within the context of this passage, we see that Jesus was speaking to a crowd. In verse 32, Jesus said to the crowd that when He was “lifted up from the earth”, which everyone at that time understood to be a reference to crucifixion, He would draw all men to Himself.

Going back to verse 20, we see that there were some Greeks present who were interested in Jesus’ message and wanted to see Him. When Jesus said that He would draw “all men” to Himself, He was teaching that He would draw not only people from the Jewish race to Himself, but also people from the Gentile races as well. And so we see that salvation through faith in Christ was not only for the Jews, but for the Gentiles as well, for “as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself”, as Peter said when he was speaking to a crowd in Jerusalem (Acts 2:39).

The Bible teaches that some from among all races of men will be saved, which is the same message that is given in Revelation 5:9 and other Scriptures as well. However, many others are *not able* to see the truth of the Gospel message, even many from among those who saw Jesus and witnessed the many signs and miracles that He had done (John 12:37).

The reason that there are some who cannot hear and understand the Gospel message, who cannot believe, who cannot “see with their eyes and perceive with their heart”, is given clearly in John 12:39-40. In these verses John quoted from Isaiah 6:10 and wrote that God Himself “has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them.”

Now there are some, who, in an attempt to substantiate the free will doctrine of salvation, will insist that this passage of John 12:37-40 speaks of a “judicial hardening” that occurs in the lives of individuals who have had their “chance” or “chances” to believe the Gospel message, but have refused to do so. The free will doctrine of salvation is a popular message, and an inclusive message, which asserts that anyone ever born can be saved by simply deciding for themselves that they will believe in Christ.

However, there are many Scriptures that refute such an understanding of salvation through faith in Christ, and how people get saved. Therefore, this idea or concept of a “judicial hardening” that at some point prevents an individual’s salvation is invalid: it is a doctrine of men, and not the teaching of God’s word. The word of God presents a quite different depiction of how people come to faith in Christ.

We can begin a brief consideration of what the Bible says about how people get saved by considering the Parable of the Sower that Jesus gave in Matthew 13:1-9. As He concluded the parable in verse 9, Jesus said to the crowd that whoever had ears to hear, meaning whoever was able to hear, then let them hear and understand His message.

As this passage continues, we see that in verse 10 Jesus’ disciples asked Him why He spoke to the crowds in parables. After all, if Jesus wanted everyone to understand His message and to believe in Him and be saved, then why did He not communicate His message more clearly and directly, instead of using parables, which used metaphors and figurative language that was often not easily understood?

Jesus answered His disciples’ question as to why He spoke to the people in parables in verse 11, when He said: “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.” So, we see that to some it has been granted to understand Jesus’ message and His teaching, but to others it has not been granted.

As the passage continues, we see that Jesus explained the Parable of the Sower to His disciples, and we learn that the only place where the “seed” of the Gospel message bore fruit, was where it fell on the “good soil”. The good soil in the parable is symbolic of God’s elect, who receive the “seed” of the Gospel message in their hearing. Because they have been given “ears to hear” and understand, they therefore come to faith in Christ and bear fruit, some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred times what was sown. (Matthew 13:23).

In John 6:37, Jesus taught that all those *whom the Father had given to Him*, (God’s elect), *would* in fact come to Him. (Also consider Ephesians 1:4-5, 11.) In John 6:44, Jesus taught that no one *could* come to Him, no one **was able** to come to Him, unless the Father draws them, and this drawing is a reference to the effectual calling of God that occurs in the lives of everyone who comes to faith in Christ. (Romans 8:29-30, others.)

There can be no better example of this effectual calling of God than the calling of Saul of Tarsus to faith in Christ on the Damascus Road, even while he was still hostile to the Gospel message and still intent on persecuting God’s people (Acts 9:1). The conversion of Saul, who would later become the Apostle Paul, is recounted three times in the Bible, in Acts 9, Acts 22, and Acts 26, and it stands as a clear example of how God intervenes in the lives of His elect to overcome their stubborn wills and bring them to faith in His Son, regardless of their hostility toward Him.

In John chapter 10, Jesus taught of the inability of unregenerate men to hear His words and come to Him, unless they are numbered among those whom He referred to as His sheep. In John 10:24-26, we read that some Jews had gathered around Jesus and asked Him not to keep them in suspense, but to tell them plainly if He was indeed the Christ.

Jesus replied to them saying that He had already told them, and that the miracles He had done in His Father’s name among them bore witness to His claim that He was in truth the Christ. Then Jesus told them: “But you do not believe *because you are not of My sheep*.” (John 10:26, emphasis added). It has only been granted to God’s elect, or those whom Jesus referred to as His sheep, to believe in Him.

Notice that Jesus did not say to them they were not His sheep because they had decided for themselves not to believe, but conversely, He said that the reason

they did not believe in Him was because they were not His sheep. Only those who belong to God, or those whom Jesus calls His sheep, will hear His voice (John 10:3-4, 10:27). *All the rest will not be able to hear* (John 6:44, 6:65, 8:43, 8:47, 10:25-26).

In conclusion, only God's elect, or those whom Jesus referred to as His "sheep", will hear His voice. These will all, in God's time, be called to faith in Christ, and they will all therefore believe in Him. All the rest will be left in their sins because it has not been granted to them to understand Jesus' message (Matthew 13:11). And the reason they cannot understand is because God Himself "has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them." (John 12:40).