

HARDENING AND FATTENING OF HEART: THE FULFILLMENT OF ISAIAH 6:9-10 IN MATTHEW 13:14- 15 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICAN CHRISTIANS

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Abstract

This study explores the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 6:9-10 within the context of Matthew 13:14-15. The passage in Matthew describes Jesus' explanation of why he speaks to the people in parables, citing the prophecy in Isaiah. The abstract nature of the parables is seen as a way to reveal truth to those who are open to it, while concealing it from those whose hearts have grown callous and ears have become dull of hearing. The hardening and fattening of the heart, as described in Isaiah, is interpreted by Jesus as a consequence of the people's refusal to see, hear, and understand the message of the kingdom of heaven. This study examines the historical background of the passages, as well as the literary and theological aspects, to provide a comprehensive analysis of the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 6:9-10 in the teachings of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 13:14-15. The study employs a hermeneutical approach to the biblical texts, taking into account the original languages and the historical and cultural contexts in which the passages were written. The findings of the study suggest that the hardening and fattening of the heart, as described in Isaiah 6:9-10, find their fulfillment in the response of the people to the message of Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 13:14-15. The study concludes with a reflection on the implications of the fulfillment of the prophecy for the contemporary reader, emphasizing the importance of openness and receptivity to the message of the kingdom of heaven.

Keywords: Heart fattening, Heart hardening, Repentance, and Punishment

Introduction

Isaiah 6:9-10 is one of the well-known passages in the Old Testament that describe Israel's disobedience and God's judgment for their rebellion. This passage contains a prophecy in which God commissions Isaiah to preach to the people whose hearts had become hardened, and they were incapable of hearing and understanding the message. In Matthew 13:14-15, Jesus quotes this prophecy as he makes reference to the unbelieving Jews of his time, when he states that their hearts had grown dull and they cannot hear with their ears and see with their eyes.

The means of the heart hardening and the purpose of the prophecy have remained subjects of debates. Contemporary readers have been struggling to understand why God sent a prophet to people whom he already knew have hardened their heart against the prophetic message. Does God act just to fulfill all righteousness without meaning what he is doing? Did God really send a message that will rather harden the heart of the people rather than bringing the people to salvation?

The doctrines of divine hardening and fattening of heart are challenging doctrines. Bible passages that address either subject are suitably categorized as "hard sayings" (Hartley 263). In both testaments, there are two streams: Pharaonic hardening and (Exod. 4:14) and Isaianic fattening (Isa. 6:9-10). In the Gospels, Acts, and epistolary writings, the Isaianic motif is conveyed in both explicit and implicit texts and at significant points in time (Bruce 99-103). Surface reading suggests that God is responsible for the fattening and hardening of the heart. This understanding questions the justice and love of God to mankind, suggesting that man is altogether not responsible for his actions. In view of such understanding, this paper aims at investigating four things: Firstly, why is the act of Isaianic fattening in Matthew 13:14-15 carried out, is it lawful or unlawful? Secondly, what is the purpose of this divine act in terms of mode? Is heart hardening and fattening something that a person does, or is it something that God does to maintain the human condition? In other words, is the divine act one of deprivation, one of addition that counterbalances knowledge, or one of condition perpetuation? Third, what are the implications for theology on the requirement of obeying the gospel? And fourthly, is Isaiah 6:9-10 a case of double fulfillment of prophecy? (Hartley 264). To answer these questions, this paper examines contextually the meaning of the hardening of the heart, the power behind the hardening of heart, the fulfillment of the Isaiah passage in Matthew 13:14-15, and the implication of the two passages to contemporary Christians.

Some scholars understand the three aspects of Isaiah's mission in Isaiah 6:10 negatively. They more or less agree with Delitzsch, understands the "bleary eyes" as eyeballs covered in a sticky secretion during the night so that they cannot be utilized to see God's acts, the "fat heart" as a symbol of being insensitive to God's grace, and the "heavy ears" as being deaf to God's words (Delitzsch 103).

Kellenberger points out that there is no evidence in the whole OT that fat leads to insensitivity. Oswalt writes: "The faculties of perception and response (eyes, ears, and heart) will be dulled and apathetic and "A 'fat heart' speaks of a slow, languid, self-oriented set of responses, incapable of decisive, self-sacrificial

action" (Kallenberger and Verstockung 268-75). While the concept of heart hardening appears in several passages of the scripture, the passage in Isaiah, in the view of Gunter Rohser, is a model of hardening after an event (41), God is therefore reacting on the refusal of his people to hear. In this way Rohser understands the terms in Isaiah 6:10 as making the organs of perception repellent and dull for everything which might lead to understanding and healing (Rohser 41). In all of these, there is one problem, however, that is usually not addressed by some scholars that understand the terms in this way, namely how was Isaiah to fulfil this task? What can he do to make the heart fat, make the ear dull and blind the eyes? Isaiah 6:10 presents an active part of the messenger "in hardening and dulling, so that repentance will not take place, which also gives the purpose of the heart hardening.

Context of Isaiah 6:9-10

Chapter 6 of Isaiah has been one of the difficult chapters to deal with hermeneutically. The difficulty is caused by obscurity regarding the nature of the prophet's prophecy, the time when the prophecy took place in the prophet's career, various textual and literary uncertainties, and the meaning and extent of the fate laden message itself (Evans 179). The context of the passage is the prophet Isaiah's commission to disobedient Israel around 740 B.C. Isaiah's message to Israel would not be received, and their hearts would be hardened, which eventually led to their captivity (Lottering 36). God takes Isaiah at his word and sends him on a strange errand to foretell the ruin of his people and even to ripen them for that ruin. This was to be a type and figure of the state of the Jewish church in the days of the Messiah when they should obstinately reject the gospel and should thereupon be rejected by God. The passage is a vision of God on the throne, which convicts Isaiah before he is cleansed by a coal from the altar. When Isaiah saw God, he knew what kind of man he was, and this vision did not immediately make Isaiah feel good. The more clearly he saw God, the more clearly he saw how bad his state was. It is a known fact that Isaiah's prophecy was mainly a message of doom, but it is debated whether the prophet foresaw salvation coming to Israel (139).

Analysis of Isaiah 6:9-10

Isaiah 6:9-10 is situated in the context of what some call "the prophet's Call" (Bento 2). H. Wildberger points out that, a prophet of the Lord was never

called, "one who is sent" by the Lord, because the sending is usually made for a specific task, even though this could be done within the context of a call (257). This assertion is arguable because there are instances prophets were called in the Old Testament (cf Jer. 1:5). The prophet is commissioned to prophecy to disobedient Israel around 740 B.C. Isaiah's message to Israel would not result in the nation's repentance but would result in their being further hardened (Wildberger 257).

The text is divided into two sets of imperatives. One for Isaiah, which can be seen in the second singular person pronoun inbuilt in the verb "go" in verse 9, even though it is argued that Isaiah is only a medium, and "make the people's hearts fat" (verse 10). In verse 10, "three imperatives are used (*hasmen* – "make fat"; *hak-bed* – "make heavy"; and *hasa* – "shut") to describe the effect of Isaiah's message on the people's heart, ears, and eyes. The other set of imperative involves the readers or hearers of Isaiah's proclamation, which is seen in the phrase, "hear and hear not" and "see and see not" in verse 9. The major concern of hermeneutics here is whether the imperative concerning the people is a literal command for the people to harden their heart so that they will not be saved, that would mean fatalism. Alternatively, did God condition their heart to hardness so that they will not hear and be saved? Several suggestions are given on the possible meaning of the passage.

In the first instance, this piece may be making a point by employing rhetorical language. That means Isaiah may be employing rhetoric when he instructed the people to "keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand" (Isa. 6:9). Secondly, God might be making references to idolatry. The psalmist calls idols deaf and dumb (Psalm 115:5-7; 135:16-17), and Isaiah also uses similar description of idols later in Isaiah 44:18. Isaiah might be making a remark on how idolaters might be deaf and dumb to God's summonses, just like their idols. Isaiah might be saying that "you become what you worship" in a certain way. Thirdly, Isaiah is later used by God to speak about repentance. Isaiah writes in 30:5 that, "In repentance and rest you will be saved." God begs the disobedient king Ahaz to stop from his sin and turn to him in the very next chapter (Isa. 7:4-9). These requests for remorse would therefore be ludicrous in the absence of human responsibility. The people reject Isaiah's message because they think it is too straightforward. "To whom would He teach knowledge, and to whom would He interpret the message?" Who just got off the milk? "Those taken right out of the breast?" This legislation was rejected by the populace because they

felt it was overly simple. Grogan contends that since the populace had long rejected God, this might be an example of judicial hardening (Grogan 58). Fourthly, all future events fall under God's foreknowledge. God has perfect knowledge of "the end from the beginning" for Isaiah (Isa. 46:10). God therefore knew beforehand whether or not the people would turn from their sins. But, God's understanding of these things does not absolve people of their responsibilities. Rather, only God knew what these people would voluntarily. Foreordination and foreknowledge are two different things. Fifth, Isaiah received this prophecy from God rather than the people of Israel. God was preparing Isaiah for his specific ministry commission by informing him of the people's response. Rather than attempting to be fatalistic toward the country, he was attempting to be practical with Isaiah. Before any conclusion can be reached, it is necessary to examine the quotation of Isaiah 6:9-10 by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew.

Historical and Literary Context of Matthew 13:14-15

Isaiah 6:9-10 is quoted by Jesus in each of the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 13:14-15; Mark. 4:10-12; Luke 8:9-10). The context to which Isaiah 6:9-10 is quoted in Matthew 13 comes while Jesus is sharing the Parable of the Sower. By this time of Jesus ministry, he had called his disciples, performed many miracles, had many who continued to follow him, was accused of being possessed by a demonic spirit, and explained who his family is. According to Matthew's placement of Jesus' Parable of the Sower, it occurs after he says, "For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt. 12:50). It is after this statement that Jesus went ahead to tell the Parable of the Sower. Jesus is preaching to a great multitude by the sea side, mainly speaking the kingdom of heaven. He rendered some of the messages in this context in parable, which then made his disciple to inquire why the mode of presentation (Matt. 13:10).

In Matthew 13:14-15 Jesus explains to his disciples why he teaches in parables. He quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10, saying that the people of Israel have irresponsive hearts and were dull of hearing. Hence, they will hear but never understand and see but never perceive. Jesus told parables primarily because he was speaking of God's sovereignty. To whomever He pleases, He grants revelation. Whom God would reveal the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" to was chosen. And these mysteries have to do with Jesus and salvation of mankind. These realities were not made clear by the Old Testament. Contrary to what the majority of Jews believed, Jesus taught His disciples that God's kingdom would

expand among those who embraced the gospel until the Messiah made his final appearance in judgment. Jesus is teaching in parables to keep the crowds from fully understanding, as a way of both teaching and restricting full access to the secrets of the kingdom of heaven (Lang 23). The disciples have been given this information, but because of the disobedience and stubbornness of the Jews, it is being kept from them (1677). But was their stubbornness out of their volition or their heart was condition externally for hardness? This will be understood if one has more insight on the concept of heart hardening and fattening.

The Concept of the Hardening and Fattening of the Heart

The concept of God hardening people's hearts appears fourteen times in the Scripture, and in the book of Exodus, the Scriptures mention Pharaoh's heart being hardened fifteen times. It makes it appear from the surface that God is actively involved in the hardening of men's hearts in the most extreme circumstances - usually following a protracted period of disobedience (Alcorn <https://www.epm.org/blog/2018/Jun/8/bible-harden-hearts.>). Isaiah 6:9-10 talks of the hardening of the heart of the Jews of Isaiah's day, and Jesus makes reference to this in Matthew 13:14-15. There are two major arguments regarding the hardening of the heart. Are the people hardening their heart or God causing them to harden their hearts? Wildberger says that it is apparent that Isaiah is depicting his readers' reaction just as in some other passages (Isaiah 1-12) by placing words into their mouths, which expose their innermost thoughts. Even while his message was never really stated precisely that way, he now crafts a message for the public that highlights the fact that Israel will reject it harshly (2).

This set of imperatives regarding the task of the prophet is one of much debate (Bento 2). On the one hand, it is a command for the prophet to be the agent of the hardening (McComiskey 64). Being a prophet of God, Isaiah is only an agent, whereas God is the one hardening the heart. Does God make a sinner desire or choose evil, or does He create sin or put sinful affections in a person's heart? Affirmative answer to this question conflicts with passages like Ezekiel 11:19, where God rather promised to remove the heart of stone from the people and give them a heart of flesh. Some scholars see the element of predestination in the Isaianic prophecy (Hartley 265). Within this framework, one could contend that Isaianic fattening tackles the negative aspect of predestination, which is God's predetermined decision to overlook those not chosen for salvation, thereby prolonging their incapacity to comprehend the gospel in a way that leads to

salvation (Dunn 522; Köstenberger 480).Hartley labels this “deprivation view,” which simply involves a divine perpetuation of unbelief (265). Contrary to this, at the beginning of modern age, Calvin accuses people who did not believe in God as being mentally insane and morally corrupt (Ceglie 98). If God is the one conditioning their hardness of heart, how then can such people overrule what is divinely perpetuated? In that wise, Hartley sees the doctrine of divine hardening as a difficult doctrine (263).Back in Exodus 4:21, God said that he will harden the heart of Pharaoh, so that he will not let the people of Israel to go without him being punished.

Thesecsecond part of the verbחִשְׁמֵן (hashmen), to make fat, proves to be even more difficult. If on the first part, theLord is giving the command to the prophet to harden the heart of the people, in the second part,the Lord gives the purpose for this, introduced by “lest,” so that they will not see, hear andunderstand in order to repent and be healed or saved (Bento 2). Would that mean that God does not want the Israelites to repent of their sins and be saved? To this France mentions that understanding the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven is not a natural tendency of the disciples in Matthew, but rather the result of their privileged instruction by Jesus (France 273).Barr remarks that, even within Scripture, people still find certain ideas that are generally hard to accept and would at a later time be consideredan unorthodox idea (114).¹ To him the hardness of heart should not be seen as deliberate closure of their heart against God (Barr 114).In this regards, Childs writes that the mystery of God’s hardening of their heart cannot be explained by shifting the initiative to Israel, as if hardening were only an idiom describing how Israel hardened its own heart by disobedience. Rather it is constitutive of biblical hardening that the initiative is placed securely with God in the mystery of his unexplainable will.Augustine’s idea was that nothing happens without the will of God. He went further to say that it is either God permits or he does it himself, even though when he permits it, he does so only in the justice of his judgment (Hart and Hill 7). This puts on God’s control all the activities of man, which in essence portrays the sovereignty of God. But Marius contradicts this idea when he mentions that understanding the message of the kingdom requires favour from God (Marius 275).In this regards, on the converse, those who have not understood the kingdom message have not been favoured by God.

¹ A typical example of this is Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:38-48. In verses 39-40, Jesus teaches his disciples to turn the other cheek for one to slap who has slapped the first side, and to give their coat to the one who wants to take their shirt by force.

Such conclusion would contradict the desire of God who does not want anyone to perish (2 Pet. 2:9). It would also be difficult to reconcile such conclusion with Jesus unqualified love for the world (John 3:16). It is necessary to stress that by no means will an argument be right to say that God deprives people of their opportunity to be saved, yet still holds them responsible for their disobediences. That will make God not to be God of the Bible, because all His attributes exist together to qualify the God of the Bible as a just Being.

It is important to understand how the word heart is used in this passage if proper understanding of the passage is to be achieved. The word "heart" can refer to volitional activities, emotional activity, intellectual activity, personality, or character in the Old Testament. The core of one's personality is his "heart." It illustrates the idea of will, mind, and decision in the majority of cases. In some instances it depicts the concept of will, mind and decision (Wunch 169). Another way to think of the heart as spiritual is to consider how many of its choices are related to one's moral and religious relationship with God. It is possible to view the heart as the ability that unites a person's volition, intellect, emotions, and spiritual oneness. The primary component of these is volition, or the ability to make decisions, but it is always influenced by thoughts and emotions, which have an impact on the spiritual. As a result, the heart is frequently seen to be the inward, spiritual core of a person's relationship with God (Baale 132). "To harden the heart" means to make the inward spiritual core of a person that should have relationship with God resistant to the message of God. A "fat heart" does not mean a heart that is immovable because of its unhealthy fatness. Rather it is a heart that has everything it needs and wants and therefore does not feel a need to change. There is no need of change, no need to respond positively to the call to repent. It is not because the heart simply cannot respond but because it does not want to and feels no need to (Wunch 181).

In this light, it is important that one should consider the role of the people in the hardening and fattening of their heart. However, the argument is not so easy to establish, and R. C. Clendenen argues for the reader to accept the difficulty of the text without modifying it for theological reasons (195). If the initiative of hardening of the heart is of God, alternatively, the hardening should be seen as God's punishment on the nation of Israel who would not want to repent of their sins. It would possibly re-echo God sending Adam and Eve out of the garden lest they will eat of the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). In Matthew's quotation of the Isaiah's prophecy in 6:9-10, Matthew uses *ovJti* (because) rather than *Jvina*

(in order that) in verse 13. Graham N. Stanton opines that the avoidance of Jvinawas designed lessen divinepredestinarian determination or intent, and to emphasize human responsibilityfor refusing to listen to Jesus' words in this passage (349).This makes it true that Israel's sinfulness formed the ground for the judgment, implying that the children of Israel had violated their freedom, hence did not have power to choose the nature of their punishment. Child further adds that their unrepentant sinfulness formed the basis of divine initiative of judgment as Israel's guilt remains unmoved (Childs 56).

In the view of Bento, the set of imperatives regarding the people, instead of being seen as a command for the people to hear and not understand as well as see and not perceive, should be better understood as a way to describe or characterize the people in their unwillingness to listen and to ultimately reject the message of the prophet (Bento 2). In that sense, it will be seen as prophetic proclamation based on the foreknowledge of God regarding the character of the people.Blommberg adds that the context of Isaiah does notnecessarily indicate "God's planning in advance to make his people sin." (Blomberg 47). Though the Israelites had witness the power of God right from Egypt (their deliverance, God's provision even during their wilderness journey, their victories at war despite their lack of sophisticated arms), yet they still doubted God's power and love. Turning to worship of idols that have no saving power,their stubbornness continuing through generations formed their character.

Isaiah therefore is describing the attitude of the children of Israel who would not want to repent even though they see and hear the manifestation of the signs of the son of God. In Matthew 11:2-5, John send his disciples to inquire of Jesus if he was the one expected or they should wait for another. Apparently, John's disciples were doubting Jesus as the messiah since Jesus did not come to rescue John from prison. John then sent them to find out for themselves. Jesus responded, Go and tell John that the blind has seen, the deaf hear, and the gospel is preached to the people (verse 4).² God's mighty works were to establish the existence and power of God. But since the Jews who had witnessed the works of God continued to fail in trusting God, they were left with their reprobate minds, which then formed their character. In that sense, John is describing the innate character of the Jews, who even though they see the power of God, will not

² Paraphrase is that of this author.

believe; even though they hear the warning of God against evil, they will not repent.

In a sense, the hardening of the heart occurs before death, acting as a kind of last judgment from God. It seems as though God views someone's evil heart as fixed at this moment, as it has grown throughout a lifetime. He seals the deal, so to speak, establishing the record of their own deliberate, wicked decisions, which He now views as their final state, and then compels them to act in accordance with that decision and accept the repercussions they would have otherwise sought to evade. While God never completely abandons any human being in this world, He is patient and forgiving and continues to give bad people opportunities to repent. Nevertheless, He will eventually allow those who are stubborn about their sins to be carried farther into the chosen sins of their evil souls (Heiple <https://www.placefortruth.org/blog/how-does-god-harden-hearts>).

Exodus 4:11 encapsulates the basic idea guiding the theme of heart hardness. The source of the “seeing eye” and “hearing ear” is God (Lottering 41). The optimal functioning of these two faculties occurs when one appropriately considers God's words and tremendous acts. Having eyes without seeing is seen as a Hebrew idiom, which refers to spiritual blindness (Hartley 14). This is because God reveals His grandeur in both His words (Deut. 5:24) and deeds (Exod. 16:6-7). Exodus 4:30–31 says that conviction combined with respectful worship is the appropriate response to heavenly words and deeds [cf. 14:31] (Danker 89).

It is clear from the above that a broad range of concepts are addressed by the issue of hardness of heart or rebellion against God. The greater understanding of God's words and works is characterized as seeing and hearing, while lack of such comprehension is blindness and deafness, since word and deed are apprehended by ear and eye. Since a healthy relationship with God encompasses all aspects of a person's existence, the heart can be used as an example of the nature of this kind of commitment. A person might be said to love God with all of his heart when he has complete devotion to God (Deut. 6:5). To be resistant to God is to have a stony heart (Danker 89).

Significance of the Isaiah 6:9-10 in Matthew 13:14-15

In Matthew 13:14-15 Jesus applying Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 6:9-10) to the Israelites of His generation, mentions that this was the fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah's message. He notes that their hearts have become dull and they will not understand or perceive his message. This was in response to their stubbornness

and disobedience, as they had rejected Jesus as the Messiah despite hearing His words and seeing His miracles. The application of Isaiah's prophecy to the Israelites of Jesus' generation highlights their refusal to believe, leading to God allowing their stubbornness to play out to the end in spite of Jesus teachings and miracles. The major question that stager is whether Matthew 13:14-15 is a fulfillment of Isaiah 6:9-10, or it is just a comparison of the two audiences. Or more so is it an application of Isaiah's message to the audience of Jesus time? This question has received different responses depending on one's vantage position. It is important to note that the quotation of Isaiah 6:9-10 in the Matthew 13:9-10 occurs in the context of Israel's national unbelief in Jesus as Messiah and the kingdom of God He presented as "near" (Matt. 4:17). At first look, the rejection of Jesus by His own religious system could appear to be a humiliating barrier to the spread of the Christian faith (Danker 91).

Matthew passage is applied to Israel as a corporate entity even though some Jews believed in Jesus (Vlach <https://sharperiron.org/article/significance-of-five-quotations-of-isaiah-69-10-new-testament>). Israel was being shown the nearness of the kingdom, according to Matthew 3:2, 4:17, and 10:5-7. The kingdom message at this time was exclusively for the lost sheep of the house of Israel, as Matthew 10:5-7 makes clear. Here, the emphasis was on the cities of Israel. Nonetheless, Jesus chastised the Israelite cities for their lack of faith in Matthew 11:20-24, saying, "Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent" (Matt. 11:20).

Then, in Matthew 12, the Israelite religious establishment declared their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah by attributing His miracles to Satan and thereby transgressing the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:25-32). This was a national rejection of Jesus. Therefore, Jesus links Isaiah 6:9-10 with Israel's disbelief during His earthly ministry when He references Isaiah 6 and declares in Matthew 13:14-15 that "the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled." "How can a prophecy of Isaiah be fulfilled during Jesus' day?" It should be understood that Israel is a corporate national entity with consequences for future generations. Israel's disbelief around the time of Jesus' first advent may have fulfilled their disbelief in Isaiah's day. During the times of Isaiah and Jesus, the people of Israel exhibited a stubborn disbelief. Keener notes that the Jews of Jesus' day were like the Jews of Isaiah's day, who heard the word but did not really hear and repent (Keener 82). So, Jesus compares the Jews of his day with the Jews of Isaiah's day. Just like the unbelief of Jews in Isaiah's day deafened their ears till they were taken to captivity, the same unbelief

pushed the Jews of Jesus' time to deny him and finally crucified him on the cross, receiving to themselves the condemnation of God.

Implication of the Hardening and Fattening of Heart to Present Day Christians in Africa

The hardening and fattening of the heart in Matthew 13:14-15 refers to the spiritual condition of individuals who have become obdurate, insensitive, and unresponsive to the message of God. This condition is characterized by a lack of understanding, a refusal to hear, and a closing of the eyes to spiritual truth. It signifies a state of spiritual blindness and hardness that prevents individuals from recognizing and responding to the truth of the Gospel. A fattened heart can result in a person's unwillingness to change direction or submit to God's will, as they may be content with their current situation or lifestyle. Isaiah 6:9-10 and Matthew 13:14-15 warn against the danger of becoming spiritually complacent and unresponsive to the Word of God. It highlights the importance of maintaining a soft and receptive heart towards God and His message. Christians in Africa can learn from this passage by examining their own hearts and ensuring that they remain open and responsive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and the truths of the Gospel. The hardening and fattening of the heart in Matthew 13:14-15 serve as a cautionary reminder to Christians to guard against spiritual complacency and to continually seek a soft and responsive heart towards God and His Word. The warning is all the more pertinent especially to Christians who have replaced the physical Israelites as authentic holy people of God in the world. This doctrine finds most open exposition at this point in the Gospel of Matthew 13:14-15. Failure to yield one's obedience towards God can lead to God giving up on the person (Rom. 1:24, 26), which invariably will cause the hardening of one's heart and blinding of the eyes to his/her destruction.

Conclusion

In Matthew 13:14-15, Jesus quotes the prophecy from Isaiah 6:9-10, indicating that the prophecy is being fulfilled in his time. This implies that the people's hearts were being hardened and their minds made dull against receiving the message of the kingdom, as described in the prophecy. They were therefore left for destruction since they would not accept the offer of salvation given by God. For African Christians, the fulfillment of Isaiah 6:9-10 in Matthew 13:14-15 is crucial because it emphasizes the danger of persistent rejection of the teaching of

Jesus. While God does not wish anyone to perish, He however hold everyone accountable for his or her actions. Though God's salvation is actively available to man, yet man will only access it if he is willing to response to God in obedience. Interpreted within the communicative situation of Jesus and his disciples, the prophecy reveals the fact that the disciples, who have already received some of the mysteries of the kingdom, will receive even more. The others who lack the mysteries of the kingdom will not get the opportunity to receive more. In fact they will have less and less access to the mysteries of the kingdom. African Christians who have received the message of hope from Jesus should use the opportunity to better their lives and that of others by sharing the kingdom messages far and wide.

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