

Pharaoh's Hardness of Heart

Exodus 4:21 – 14:17

HEBR. ROOT	חזק	קשה	חזק	כָּבֵד	חזק	כָּבֵד	חזק	כָּבֵד	כָּבֵד	חזק	כָּבֵד	חזק	כָּבֵד	חזק	חזק	חזק	חזק	חזק	חזק
VERB STEM	Piel	Hiphil	Qal	[ADJ]	Qal	Hiphil	Qal	Hiphil	Qal	Piel	Hiphil	Qal	Hiphil	Piel	Piel	Piel	Piel	Piel	Piel
DFN.	Hard	Severe	Hard	Heavy	Hard	Heavy	Hard	Heavy	Heavy	Hard	Heavy	Hard	Heavy	Hard	Hard	Hard	Hard	Hard	Hard
WHO?	God	God	-	-	Pha.	Pha.	Pha.	Pha.	Pha.	God	Pha.	Pha.	God	God	God	God	God	God	God
VERSE LIST	4:21	7:3	7:13	7:14	7:22	8:15	8:19	8:32	9:7	9:12	9:34	9:35	10:1	10:20	10:27	11:10	14:4	14:8	14:17

Abbreviations: Pha. = *Pharaoh* | [ADJ] = *Adjective* | DFN. = *Definition*

The preceding chart shows the hardness of Pharaoh's heart, mapped out as it was described from chapters 4 to 14 of Exodus. In Exodus 4:21, 7:3 the hardness of Pharaoh's heart is for the most part, predicted by God. He foretells that despite Moses' and Aaron's best efforts, the Pharaoh will remain in his hardened state. Yet, some good is to come of it, for his reluctance and eventual punishment will serve to glorify the name of the Lord in all the earth. Verses 7:13 and 7:14 are simply informative, letting the reader know that Pharaoh's heart was already in a hardened condition, and is persisting in that present state, according to that which had been predicted by God.

As is apparent by the chart, it was not until Pharaoh had consistently hardened his own heart, that in verse 9:12 God begins to intervene and cause Pharaoh's heart to remain hardened. After this, Pharaoh hardens his own heart two more times in 9:34 and 9:35, after which God takes over and repeatedly causes his heart to be hardened. It is interesting that in verse 9:34, Pharaoh is specifically mentioned as having sinned. While it is not explicitly spelled out in previous verses in Exodus, it is a safe assumption that each and every time he hardens his heart, it is in a sinful response of rebelliousness, an act of non-compliance with the Lord's purposes and plans for Israel.

It is interesting that in 9:34 and 10:1, the heart of both Pharaoh and his officials are hardened, yet in 10:7 the officials have a change of heart, and plead with Pharaoh to listen to reason. His heart is considerably more hardened, and in his stubbornness, he refuses to let the people of Israel go. He flip flops back and forth multiple times, feigning repentance when it suits him. As was mentioned by Fretheim on page 97 of his *Interpretation* of Exodus, Pharaoh's heart is hardened five times while various plagues are occurring (7:22; 8:19; 9:7; 9:12; 10:27), and four times afterwards (8:15, 32; 9:34-35;

10:20). It should be noted that while God does have involvement in Pharaoh's disposition, he is not playing the role of puppet-master, orchestrating the villain.

In the free will versus determinism argument, we must realize that when God does harden Pharaoh's heart, even after having predicted the outcome, God does not take from him the ability to choose his actions. That is, up until the "point of no return" Pharaoh could have earnestly repented. After verse 9:35 however, it would seem that the Pharaoh has slipped too far down the slope. God continues to frustrate Pharaoh's judgment, causing him to stay the course in his stubbornness. God is simply intensifying what Pharaoh has already chosen for himself, an unwavering hardness of heart.

Fretheim, on page 99, points out the usage of "if" language in the initial stages of planning, in which God shares the roadmap with Moses. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart, and the judgment of the plagues is contingent upon his initial and continued stubbornness. By this refusal to release the Israelites, he is in fact signing his own warrant, turning over his rights as a free man to God, becoming a heart to be hardened. In that regard, the story begins with the possibility of Pharaoh being uncooperative, and by the end of the narrative of plagues, it is a foregone conclusion because of divine involvement on God's part, making Pharaoh impervious to reason, unable to change.

In the end, while Pharaoh was given opportunity time and again to relinquish control, it is ironically his tight fisted exertion of absolute power over the lives of the Hebrews that causes the loss of his own free will, becoming repeatedly hardened by an outside source. In the end, that which he tried so hard to prevent – the freedom of the Hebrews, is granted and own volition is overridden. While God's predictive power is impeccable, he still extends the means by which one can cooperate with his purpose.