

THE HARDNESS OF PHARAOH'S HEART

Written and assembled by Gary Kukis

Refer to Zodhiates and Hebrew dictionary for the final draft; there is also a more than passing reference to this in Exodus 10 introduction

At some point, I need to spend more time on this doctrine and insert doctrines from other studies in Exodus.

1. It is important to realize that God did not dig deep into Pharaoh's heart and change his positive volition to negative. He did not finally win Pharaoh over, and then slip His hand into Pharaoh's heart and turn the repentant heart to negative. God is not willing that any should perish. God is not looking to sacrifice any persons eternal salvation in order to save someone else. This does not square with God's character. Because Pharaoh changed his mind (or appeared to), this looks as though God did something to cause Pharaoh to go from positive to negative. This is incorrect. God did not turn Pharaoh's positive volition to negative. What God did was to strengthen Pharaoh's heart enough to continue to express his negative volition toward God. Our problem is that the KJV has taken three unrelated words and has indiscriminately translated all of them "to harden."
2. The first word is châzag (כָּזַג) and its root means "to fasten upon." It can mean variously "to strengthen, to fortify, to be obstinate, to bind, to restrain." It means "to brace up or to tighten." It is the exact opposite of "to relax." This is used both of Pharaoh strengthening his own heart and God strengthening his heart. Pharaoh was negative toward the gospel and toward JHWH. He had no interest in salvation. He allowed certain Jews to have audience with him on a regular basis (very likely, the foremen or overseers; and possibly the elders; and there could be a lot of overlapping in the two groups). When he spoke with Moses and Aaron, after a couple of miracles, he could, as did the Jews, believe in Jesus Christ; believe that Moses had the power of God with him, or not. Because of the Exodus, people all over the earth believed in Jesus Christ for centuries afterward. At no time in the narrative do we come across a verse which Pharaoh says, "You have almost convinced me." (as happened with Felix or Festus in Acts???) When you are in opposition to something, whether you are right or wrong, it requires strength. Noah preached for 120 years without a convert, save his own family. That took strength of heart. He built an ark to sail in on dry land in a world where it had never rained before. That took strength of heart. He went against everything that society had deemed correct and stood against it. Pharaoh, although he was wrong, showed similar strength of heart. When it came to believing in JHWH or not, he already had his mind made up. He will spend eternity in hell for that decision (although it is not impossible or unimaginable that he could have, at the end, believed in Jesus Christ). What occurred when he faced off Moses and Aaron was that he was under a great deal of pressure. He was the most powerful man in his country. As a powerful man, you must exude confidence and strength. Weak men do not make it into positions of power, and when they do, they are destroyed. However, Pharaoh faced the living God, His power working through Moses. With each succeeding sign or wonder, Pharaoh was staggered or weakened. Examine the analogy of a boxer; each punch weakens him. As the fight continues, each succeeding blow threatens to land him on the canvas. He requires strength to go on. Each miracle staggered Pharaoh; he required the strength to express his negative volition toward God. At times, he had the inner resources to strengthen himself against God; at other times, God had to give him the strength to oppose Him. God did not have to give Pharaoh the volition to be negative toward God's plan; he gave him the ability to express the negative volition which he possessed. There are people, who when faced with crisis after crisis, will finally give up and believe in Jesus Christ. Many of us have to be hurt and broken and knocked down before we will allow God to become involved in our lives through positive volition. Others of us, no matter what pressures that we face in life, refuse to believe in Jesus Christ. We may reach a point where we cannot continue in this life; but we "curse God and die." Pharaoh was backed into a corner and beaten again

and again. If he could not stand up again on his own and express his negative volition toward God, God gave him the strength and fortitude of heart to oppose Him.

3. Châzag is the word used most often and translated (incorrectly) *to harden*. It is found in the Piel future in Ex. 4:21 9:12 10:20,27 11:10 and 14:8. The Piel denotes intensity and/or repetition. The most common example given is the word for *to kill* means *to murder* in the Piel. The Hebrew future tense is not equivalent to our future tense. It is a tense of unfinished results; of continuing action and for that reason is often called the imperfect tense.. It can stand for what will come to pass but it also refers to action which is unfinished and continues in any point of time, including in the past. God tells Moses, in advance, in Ex. 4:21 that He will "harden [or, strengthen] his [Pharaoh's] heart so that he will not let the people go." This is a future tense as we commonly understand it. The result of this action will be that the Pharaoh will not let the people go. We must be clear to understand that the scenario was not that Pharaoh really wanted to let the people go but God kept filling his soul with negative volition; but that Pharaoh opposed God and opposed Moses, but did not have the strength to fight anymore. Let me return to the boxer analogy. A boxer may be floored; but if he has the ability, if he has the strength, he will stand up again to fight his opponent. That requires strength; either his own or strength poured into him from elsewhere. Pharaoh was floored and broken many times. He did not need God's help to have negative volition toward God's plan; HE NEEDED GOD'S HELP TO EXPRESS HIS NEGATIVE VOLITION. The result of this negative volition and his strengthened will was that he could once again refuse to let Moses take the Jews out of Egypt. What were Pharaoh's options? Suicide, nervous breakdown, an inability to function. God gave him the strength and ability to get up off the canvas and fight another round. We forget that for many of our actions and choices there are natural results. People who engage in sex outside of marriage cover their souls in scar tissue. People who continually harden themselves against God will find it more and more difficult to back down from that position. People who incorporate some kind of sin or evil into their lives as an integral part of their persona have a very difficult time relinquishing that sin or evil. As a man sows, so shall he reap. When someone like Pharaoh is so close to God and God's truth and yet he fights it, there are natural results. In Ex. 9, Pharaoh had witnessed several miracles and plagues. Pharaoh's magicians had come close to duplicating the miracles done by Moses; however, when Moses caused boils to break out on the skin of men and beast, the magicians could not come to Pharaoh and duplicate this miracle because they were covered with boils. They were his strength and comfort; they allowed the Pharaoh to continue in his negative volition. Without them, God had to strengthen Pharaoh's heart to continue to oppose Him. In chapter 10, Moses brings on the plague of the locusts, which eat every plant and cover the earth. To continue the analogy of the boxer, Pharaoh is down on the canvas; he has not the ability to stand and he gives in to Moses and Aaron and tells them to remove the plague and to take the Jews out of Egypt. However, when they do this, God gives Pharaoh the strength to continue his negative volition in 10:20 where it reads, "But the Lord continued to strengthen Pharaoh's heart and he did not let the sons of Israel go." Then the Lord struck Egypt with a thick, eerie darkness over the land (I say eerie, because this darkness could be felt—v. 21). Pharaoh was about to give up and let the people go and Moses required animals to take with them and sacrifice. Pharaoh's heart was strengthened by JHWH in v. 27 and Pharaoh both refused to let the people go and he threatened Moses life. Ex. 11:10 uses châzag in the Piel future again as a summary verse and it is used once more of God strengthening Pharaoh's heart in Ex. 14:8 when Pharaoh is given one more chance to express his hatred of the Jews and his vicious negative volition toward God when he pursues the Jews to kill them as they are leaving. In Ex. 14:4, châzag is found in the Piel preterite, which is the normal intensive case usually used for action in past time. However, it is also used of action to occur in the future, but so fully certain that it is spoken of as already occurred. Therefore, 14:4 should read, Thus I have already strengthened Pharaoh's heart so that he will chase after them [the Jews during the Exodus]. The Piel participle form of châzag is found in Ex. 14:17 and, again, this is God strengthening the heart, not of the Pharaoh, but of all the Egyptians, to give them enough strength to chase down the Jews as they are leaving Egypt. They have just suffered plague after plague and most men would be too beaten down to seek revenge, even though they desired to. God gave them the strength to chase the Jews.

4. Châzag is found in the Kal future in Ex. 7:13, 22 8:19 and in 9:35. The Kal is the simplified use of the verb. The Piel is the intensive use of the verb. What Pharaoh can do in strengthening his own heart, God can do much better. Therefore, what God does is in the Piel and what Pharaoh does is in the Kal. In Ex. 7:13, we have in the NASB "Yet Pharaoh's heart was hardened..." after the miracle of the staff turning into a serpent. However, this is not the Hebrew equivalent of the passive voice (and the previously cited passages were not in the passive voice either).. The ultra literal *Emphasized Bible* reads "Then waxed bold the heart of Pharaoh..." It is unclear as to what the subject of the sentence is here (possibly "heart" or Pharaoh; I don't know enough Hebrew to determine that), but it is not used as an adjective. Nor do with have causative, reflexive, or passive sense (at least, not according to the verb construct). 7:22 is similar. In Ex. 8:19, the magicians of Pharaoh finally relented and said that what Moses and Aaron did was through the "finger of God." However, his heart was strengthened and he continued to oppose God. Again, there is no passive, reflexive or causative sense in this usage. Ex. 9:35 gives us no new information.

5. The word next used is kâbêd (כָּבֵד) [the only difference is the vowel points. In its most basic form, it means *to be heavy* but it can mean that in a good sense (as in numerous or rich) or in a bad sense (burdensome, severe, dull). It is used of the ear when it is *not duly impressed with sounds* {from Wilson's} or of the eye which has become dim. Here it is the heart which has refused to perceive the full impact of what is occurring. This is closer to the concept of scar tissue and hardening as we understand it. However, it is not equivalent to the hardening of one's heart and the formation of scar tissue on same. It is the picture of a man who is observing God's work and judgement all around him and he is refusing to perceive it. Almost every occurrence of this word is in a different verb form. This word first occurs (in the contest of the Exodus) in Ex. 7:14. Pharaoh's heart was strengthened in v. 13 after witnessing the staff of Moses being turned into a snake and later, the Lord tells Moses that "Pharaoh's heart is heavy; he refuses to let the people go." This is one of the few times where this word (or any one of these words) is actually an adjective. The Pharaoh has seen a sign that Moses is speaking on behalf of God and he refuses to believe it. Therefore, just as a blind eye cannot see, Pharaoh's heart does not perceive that this is God. In Ex. 8:15, the Pharaoh has just witnessed the miracle (or the plague) of the frogs. When the frog proliferation stopped, Pharaoh hardened (made heavy) his own heart. The Hiphil infinitive is used here and that is the causative use of the Kal stem. Pharaoh caused his heart to become heavy. Then Moses brings on the plague of the locusts (or insects). The Hiphil future is used in Ex. 8:32 and the verse read, "But Pharaoh caused his heart to become heavy this time also, and he did not let the people go." The next plague, the dying cattle, occurred, but Pharaoh's heart remained hardened (heavy). This is the Kal future, meaning that this was an ongoing occurrence. Neither the passive nor the reflexive concepts need be applied here. Again, in Ex. 9:34, the plague of the hail had been removed and the Pharaoh "sinned and hardened [made heavy] his heart.." This is the Hiphil imperfect, causative ongoing occurrence again. The next use is the only difficult use. In context, we have the Pharaoh sinning and making his own heart heavy; in v. 35, his heart is strengthened. In the next verse. 10:1 JHWH tells Moses, "I have made heavy his heart and the heart of his servants." God gave the Pharaoh strength to keep going and the Pharaoh was able to express more negative volition than most men would have been allowed to. This is also the Hiphil preterit. This is also, the last use of this Hebrew word.

6. The last Hebrew word used is qâshâh (קָשָׁה) and this word means *to be severe, cruel, obstinate, intractable*. It is used in Ex. 1:14 to mean *hard* labor. In our context, this is first used in Ex. 7:3 and here we have God telling Moses what will happen. The word is used in the causative sense and God says, "But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt." We, by examining the use of the other words, have seen how God will cause this hardening. God will allow the Pharaoh to express his negative volition; and when the Pharaoh lacks the internal strength, God will give him strength so that he can express his negative volition again. In this way, God causes the Pharaoh to cover his heart in scar tissue and obstinacy. In this context, this word is used only one more time in Ex. 13:15 and it is hidden in the KJV (of all versions). Here, it is translated, "And it came to pass when the Pharaoh would *hardly* let us go..." The Hiphil (causative) preterit (which is often used for completed action) is used. The NASB is a bit better as it reads, "And it came about,

when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go..." Better yet would be, "It came to pass that when the Pharaoh had caused himself to become hardened about letting us go."

7. A point of interest. When a translation is made of the Bible, the translators face several problems: Should idioms be translated as they are found, or should be interpreted and translated to what they mean? If one Greek (or Hebrew) word can have two different meanings in the English, should it be translated with the same English word throughout the Bible, or should it be translated by two or more different English words? How important is word order in the original languages as opposed to English understanding? What about an unusual use of tense? For instance, what if a future event is given a completed tense form in the original language to emphasize its future reality; how should that be translated? Rotherham's *Emphasized Bible* is often called slavishly literal. He attempts to be consistent with the translated words and attempts to preserve the accurate tense and word order. However, this portion of God's Word even caused Rotherham some problems. As I have taught in this doctrine, God did not change Pharaoh's positive volition to negative. Pharaoh was not finally convinced that Yahweh was the God of the universe so God reached into his volition and caused him to believe otherwise. This is one of the areas where Rotherham does not translate every verse completely literally. Some of the important points of Rotherham's dissertation: (1) In historical reflection, the external event leading to an action and the underlying cause of that action are often intermingled, although, at the time, they were totally separate. (2) Prior to almost every plague, Moses came to Pharaoh and said "Tomorrow..." such and such a plague would occur. This gave Pharaoh time to reflect and to change his mind and course of action, It also gave him the occasion to harden his heart even more. I would add at this point that these events gave Pharaoh the occasion to express his negative volition toward God. In this sense, God is said to be the cause of his hardness of heart. (3) Rotherham did not want to present God to the unknowing as the author of wickedness. (4) A verb which ordinarily means a command in Hebrew grammar can also express permission. Examples from Gen. 8:7,8 Ex. 1:17,18,22 Dt. 8:3 SOS 2:14 Isa. 55:6 are all quoted as examples. See the Old Testament appendix in *The Emphasized Bible* for further reflection.
7. God clearly explains why He strengthened Pharaoh's heart and the mechanics are even implied in Ex. 9:14-16: "For this time I will send all My plagues upon your heart and your servants and your people **so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth.** For had I put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been quietly cut off from the earth. However, instead, **"for this purpose I have allowed you to stand in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name throughout all the earth."** God has established His power before the Pharaoh. He could have easily killed the Pharaoh, and all of his people, in order to bring the Jews out. This was not God's only purpose in the Exodus. This was a testimony to the entire earth that the God of the Hebrews was the God of the universe and that there is no God like Him. The mechanics are implied when God says, "I have allowed you to stand." Pharaoh was given the strength to stand against God and against all the plagues which God brought on Egypt. This is what God did; He did not reach into Pharaoh's heart, a heart filled with positive volition toward God, and change it to negative. He did not take a man who has finally decided, "You know, I think that I will believe in Yahweh and join with His people," and change those thoughts to negative.
8. In conclusion, we find that too much has been made of this hardening by God of Pharaoh's heart. There is only one passage which actually states that, and the other passages prior to it explain how and why. Up to that point in time, the Pharaoh (and the Egyptians) were allowed—in fact, encouraged—to express their negative volition to the maximum. In fact, when they lacked the ability to express it any more; when their heart and strength were dissipated, God gave them the strength to continue to oppose Him. Normally, under these circumstances, the Pharaoh would have reached his limit and had given in. It was not a matter of he would finally see the light and believe in Jesus Christ (because God is not willing that any should perish) but that he would have been beaten down to a point where he had no more strength to oppose God. It was at these various points that God gave the Pharaoh strength to go on.

Additional Material

The following are notes taken directly from the exegetical study of Exodus:

From Exodus 4 ([HTML](#)) ([PDF](#)) ([WPD](#)).

Exodus 4:21d [However, I, \[even\] I, will strengthen his heart...](#)

This is one of the great topics of exodus, and one of the most difficult topics of this book. God says that he will give Pharaoh strength; that He, God, will strengthen Pharaoh. I think that we should understand it in this way. Pharaoh is going to be operating on negative signals throughout this whole ordeal. God is not going to reach into Pharaoh's volition and change his positive pole to negative or vice versa. What God is going to do is give Pharaoh the strength to act on his own volition.

Let's look at it this way. Some people, often as a result of their own bad decisions, get pushed to a very bad place in their lives. They struggle to continue on this same road, this road paved with their own negative volition towards God. There can come a point where, some people are so knocked back by life (again, usually the result of their own bad decisions) that they just give up and die. God will not allow Pharaoh to reach this point. God will give Pharaoh strength to act on his own convictions. Whereas, under normal circumstances, Pharaoh might roll into a fetal ball on the palace floor and just cry and shake; God will see to it that he never gets to that point.

Moses likely recorded all of this years later. It is possible that he recorded his conversation with God at Mount Horeb, and as he records his steps from Midian to Egypt, he recalls other things which God had said to him. It is also possible that God had again appeared to Moses, possibly several times, reassuring Moses in little steps.

Then we come to the place which most people find confusing. God hardens Pharaoh's heart. The only people not confused by this are the hyper-Calvinists who do not believe that we have the free will to act apart from God's plan. I should rephrase that. When it comes to salvation, there are the chosen and there are the damned. The chosen believe in God because God turned on their positive volition. They see *faith* as being the *gift of God* in Eph. 2:8,9¹. We are all corrupt; none of us has enough positive volition to chose God; and if we did, that would be works. That would imply some goodness in us which we do not possess. God foreknew those He would save—those who's volition He would turn to positive—and therefore, Christ only died for those people. God is glorified in all of this. Therefore, the hyper-Calvinists see nothing unusual about God "hardening Pharaoh's heart."

What is wrong with the hyper-Calvinist view of hardening Pharaoh's heart?

The problem with their position is this:

1. Man is corrupt and totally negative toward God.
2. Pharaoh is not only all of those things, but he will die an unbeliever.
3. Therefore, why would God have to do anything to Pharaoh's heart? It would be natural for Pharaoh to react negatively toward God's plan in the first place.
4. Hyper-Calvinists believe in the total depravity of man.
5. It is illogical for God to do inside Pharaoh what he would do out of his own depravity.

So, you observe that the people who do not have a problem with this passage are the ones who theology is overturned by what they believe.

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¹ It is not; not according to Eph. 2:8–9; *faith* is feminine and *it is* is in the neuter

When we get further along in this, we will examine God hardening Pharaoh's heart. At some point in time, we will cover **the Doctrine of The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart**. A problem with the Calvinists, as it is with many theological positions, is this "all or nothing" mindset. On the one hand we have the Armenian way of thinking, which emphasizes man's free will as overruling God's sovereignty; and the hyper-Calvinists on the other hand seeing God's sovereignty as overruling man's free will. Furthermore, they see man's free will as being illusionary at best when it comes to things spiritual. The theological conclusions of both positions are dangerous. The Armenian believes that everything depends upon them. However, everything depends upon God. The hyper-Calvinists become fatalistic. However, the Bible asserts our free will throughout the Old and New Testaments. Both positions are theological ones and it may not seem to be that important to the reader, but that theological position seeps into their Christian life and into their way of thinking. Their participation in God's plan is confused and contradictory. Their motivation is confused and their actions are confused. However, when the time is right, we will straighten all of this out.

Armenians, by the way, believe that we can lose our salvation by sinning enough. TULIP Calvinists believe that God sovereignly chooses those who will believe and He condemns those He has not chosen.

What might help to allay your troubles temporarily is that the Hebrew sometimes has a verb denoting action which expresses not the doing of the thing, but the permission to do so.² Bullinger points out several passages where this is done: Gen. 31:7 Jer. 4:10 Ezek. 14:9 20:25 etc. God is not forcing Pharaoh to harden his heart, but He is permitting him to do so. More of that later.

...so that he will not send the people away.

God is warning Moses, "Listen, Pharaoh is not going to cooperate. He is not going to agree to send the people of Israel away. Be prepared for this."

God tells Moses a little about what is going to happen when he arrives there.

I was a real estate agent for many years, and I found out that it was beneficial to know the entire process of the purchase of the house, from the first offer to closing, and to be able to anticipate the problems and the various actions of the transaction. At that time, there might have been 30-35 people involved in the sale of a house, but your client or customer primarily interacts with you, the real estate agent. If anything goes wrong—even if it has nothing whatsoever to do with you, the agent—you are the person who will receive the blame if anything goes wrong. So, part of the duty of the real estate agent is not just to call your people and say, "Okay, such and such is now scheduled for Monday." It is the job of the real estate agent to warn the buyer (or seller) of the various things that may occur along the way. Personally, I always insisted that a buyer have a house inspected (even if the house is brand new), but at the same time, I prepared the buyer for the fact that a good inspector is going to find 10 or 15 things wrong with the property, some of them serious; and that a \$5000 repair bill (at that time) is not unusual; and it is not unusual for the seller to refuse to pay for the entire set of repairs. This approach was very helpful. The buyer understood what was going to happen. They were not shocked or surprised. If the seller said, "I am not doing a thing here," the buyer was prepared for that. They had time to let that idea digest before it even happened. As a result, I had very few sales that busted out.

This is what God is doing for Moses. God is going to tell Moses what is going to happen. God does not want Moses to be doing this or that before Pharaoh, and then become shocked when Pharaoh says, "Yeah, no; I am not going to let the people go." Moses does not need to go into some sort of tailspin because everything does not work out easily.

Application: Our lives are the same way. Being a believer in Jesus Christ does not mean that you will not have pressures and difficulties. In fact, if you go for a long period of time, and life is fairly easy, *that* is an unusual circumstance. Jesus has warned us that in this world, we will have tribulation, but He has overcome the world.

² Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*

So, when we reach these points of difficulty, we do whatever Bible doctrine tells us to do, but our faith in Jesus Christ.

Application: I write this in 2016,³ and the presidential election has not yet occurred. With the Supreme Court the way that it is, whoever appoints the next Supreme Court justice will just about change America forever. If Hillary Clinton is elected, abortion will become a basic constitutional right, but possessing firearms will not. There is no doubt about this. Many Americans, if they actually understand what is at stake, might be panicked. However, as believers in Jesus Christ, we need to understand that, even if Clinton is elected, and even if she continues to pull our country far, far left, by means of the courts, this is a part of the plan of God. We may be facing a cleansing in the future as a result of how many people have turned against God. The believer needs to take this in stride. We have enjoyed great prosperity; **client nation** U.S.A. has enjoyed a wonderful history and great freedoms; but that nation, because of the population, may go by the wayside (as happens to many client nations to God). The believer is to view all of this with a relaxed mental attitude, and move forward in his own spiritual life.

Back to the context: God warns Moses of what is going to happen, so that Moses is not shocked and surprised when it happens. This is quite important. What Moses faces is unlike anything any man has faced before. God allows Moses to know some of what is coming, so that Moses does not become too discouraged along the way. At the same time, God does not tell Moses everything that is coming, otherwise, he might point his donkey in the opposite direction.

Exodus 4:21d-e **But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.** (NKJV)

This is Moses recalling what God has said to him. He is pondering these words. The Hebrew word here for *harden* is *châzaq* (חָזַק) [pronounced *khaw-ZAHK*], and it means, *to make strong, to strengthen*. Strong's #2388 BDB #304. God is going to provide Pharaoh with the resolve (or strength) that he (Pharaoh) needs and desires. God is not determining what Pharaoh will do. God is not reaching into Pharaoh's soul and turning his positive volition into negative. God is giving Pharaoh the ability to express his volition, despite the tremendous pressure which is placed upon him. Throughout, I believe that Pharaoh always acts according to his own volition.

Throughout Scripture, God appears to take our volition very seriously and I do not believe that He messes with it. He does bring situations and circumstances to bear on what we are doing and thinking at any given time, but these situations still allow our volition to act freely.

It ought to be clear that two people can face the exact same set of circumstances, and one person will go left and the other person will go right. Many people spend their last hours of life on a deathbed (they realize that they are going to die), and some commune with God in those hours and some continue to reject God in these final hours, even cursing God with their final breath.

Little else is more integral to life than free will. It is my opinion that God does nothing to change Pharaoh's free will; God just gives him the ability to exercise it to the fullest extent.

From all that I have read in the Bible, I believe that God's sovereignty and the free will of men and angels coexist. God's sovereignty will win out in the end; but that God allows for us to make whatever decisions we make; and He does what He does (which often includes **divine discipline**, to guide us away from sin).

Children are quite helpful to the person who tries to understand God's sovereignty versus man's free will. If you have children, then very likely you have disciplined them not to do X. They might do X several times, and each

³ I do not do the entire chapter all at once. I first do the basic Hebrew exegesis (which may take a week); then I add in the various translations (I may do this a year later and it takes around 3 or 4 days). At some time in the future I will look to add my commentary from the basic exegesis of this chapter (which I will send out as weekly Bible lessons); and after that, I will check out the works of other people and see if I have missed anything. So, I may spend several years on this chapter before I consider it to be complete.

time, you impose whatever discipline you believe is appropriate to stop them. The normal parent does this because he (or she) believes that *X* is wrong for a person to do and/or that the child will end up being led astray in his life for doing that. As every parent knows (and dreads), their imposition of discipline may or may not curtail a child from doing *X*. And often, what works with one child may not work with his younger brother. That is because children have free will and as much as we might want to guide them in the right direction, our enactment of discipline does not always work.

So, around the house, the parent has sovereignty. Simultaneously we have these children in our care from the moment that they are born, so that we are able to exert our will over theirs from the earliest age. However, as any parent can tell you, even when that child is 2 feet tall, they might not obey you. The parent does everything that they can to guide the child in the right direction, and some respond positively and some do not—even if we are talking about siblings. Sometimes a child, with his free will, responds to our sovereignty in a way that is pleasing to us; and sometimes he does not.

My point being, we have free will and God has sovereignty. God guides and disciplines us, but that does not mean that we always obey Him.

From Psalm 105 ([HTML](#)) ([PDF](#)) ([WPD](#)):

As most believers know, from studying the book of Exodus, during some of the plagues, *God hardened Pharaoh's heart*, which has been a struggle for many believers. The idea that God changes the volition of anyone, no matter how evil or good, is a viewpoint that most believers do not subscribe to.

An Hypothesis Concerning God Hardening Pharaoh's Heart

As I write this, one thing occurs to me: maybe God did reach into the soul of Pharaoh and turn his volition to negative. Now, I know that runs counter to a lot of what I believe. I believe that, for the most part, God allows the free function of our free will. However, God no doubt has the ability to affect our freewill decisions, both directly and indirectly. God's plan calls for 10 plagues against Egypt in order to bolster up the strength of Israel to move out as a solidified group. Perhaps the miracle was, God reached into the soul of Pharaoh and switched him over to negative on a couple of occasions. Now, we know that, even after Pharaoh lets the Jews go, he will change his mind and gather up his armies to pursue the Jews, to kill them. So, the negative volition is clearly there. It may be festering and it may require some times to surface to the point where Pharaoh would act, but it is clearly there. Let me go off on a tangent here: have you ever considered a sin, and you thought about it, and you thought about it some more, and finally you gave in to the sin? When you first began to think about it, you did not commit the sin; however, as you thought more about it, you finally committed to doing the sin. This could be Pharaoh's volition; his volition was always on negative, but he was not quite ready to act on his negative volition when God needed him to. Therefore, God reached into his soul and moved Pharaoh from atop the fence to the side of negative volition, knowing that Pharaoh would eventually go to that side of the fence anyway. I am not 100% sold on this thought; however, I am ruminating on these things.

I think the key here is not the volition of Pharaoh, but the volition of the 2 million Jews (or, however many), who had to make the choice to exit Egypt. This is what God has to effect. It should be clear that God does have an effect on our volition, at least indirectly, through that which happens in our lives. When I first heard the gospel, it made absolutely no sense to me, as the person relaying the gospel could not explain it. However, I did understand that I had some sort of a decision to make. When I later was at a very low point in my life, I recognized again, I had a decision to make. Somehow, when I got to the Bible and opened it to the book of John, and read, then it became clear what that decision had to be. The witness, the difficult circumstances, and turned to the book of John were all things which affected my decision. These were not random events, but events which God orchestrated.

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So there is no misunderstanding, I don't believe that these events manipulated my decision to believe in Jesus Christ; they simply brought me to the point where I understood the gospel and responded to it. However, God certainly brought specific things to pass in order for me to stop my life for a moment and to consider Who and What Jesus Christ is.

On the other hand, I am suggesting here that, God did reach into Pharaoh's volition and that He turned it negative to the point where Pharaoh responded more quickly than he would have, left to his own devices. I offer these thoughts not as a solidified view, but simply as manna for thought. If we allow for this, then it explains a great deal, and we no longer have to do any kind of a dance around Pharaoh's volition and God's involvement here during the time of the plagues.

Just so I am making myself clear: I am not suggesting absolute Calvinism, where we are simply pawns in a game where God moves the pieces all over the board for His own purposes. That is, I am not suggesting for a moment that our volition is an illusion, or that we are saved or not saved based upon God's whims. I am simply suggesting that, on this occasion, in order to bring about His purposes, God did directly speed up the decision-making process in Pharaoh.