

THE HARDNESS OF PHARAOH'S HEART

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

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* (חָזַג) 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 (חֲשָׁה) 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.