

The Pattern of Hardening

A Plague-by-Plague Analysis

HUMAN RESISTANCE

EVENT	SCRIPTURE	HEBREW WORD	AGENT	MEANING
God's Warning	Exodus 7:3	<i>qāšāh</i> קָשָׁה	God	Stubborn / Hard
Rod to Snake	Exodus 7:13	<i>Hāzaq</i> הִזְקַח	Passive	Was strong
1. Blood	Exodus 7:22	<i>Hāzaq</i> הִזְקַח	Passive	Was strong
2. Frogs	Exodus 8:15	<i>Kabad</i> כָּבַד	Pharaoh	Made heavy
3. Gnats	Exodus 8:19	<i>Hāzaq</i> הִזְקַח	Passive	Was strong
4. Flies	Exodus 8:32	<i>Kabad</i> כָּבַד	Pharaoh	Made heavy
5. Livestock	Exodus 9:7	<i>Kabad</i> כָּבַד	Passive	Was heavy

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DIVINE JUDGMENT

EVENT	SCRIPTURE	HEBREW WORD	AGENT	MEANING
6. Boils	Exodus 9:12	<i>Hāzaq</i> הִזְקַח	The LORD	Strengthened
7. Hail	Exodus 9:34	<i>Kabad</i> כָּבַד	Pharaoh	Made heavy
8. Locusts	Exodus 10:20	<i>Hāzaq</i> הִזְקַח	The LORD	Strengthened
9. Darkness	Exodus 10:27	<i>Hāzaq</i> הִזְקַח	The LORD	Strengthened
10. Firstborn	Exodus 11:10	<i>Hāzaq</i> הִזְקַח	The LORD	Strengthened
Red Sea Crossing	Exodus 14:8	<i>Hāzaq</i> הִזְקַח	The LORD	Strengthened

Three Hebrew Words for “Harden”

חֲזַק

HĀZAQ

(haw-zak')



To strengthen, make firm, encourage, or hold fast.

כָּבַד

KABAD

(kaw-bad')



To make heavy, dull, insensitive, or unresponsive.

קָשָׁה

QÂŠĀ

(kaw-shaw')



To make stubborn, severe, difficult, or stiff-necked.

Alan Ordway

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Pharaoh, the Hardened Heart, and the Justice of God

An iconic account in the Old Testament is in Exodus of Israel being led out of Egypt. Most of the time, the main focus is on the plagues that God brought upon Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea. This paper will focus on Pharaoh and the occurrences of his heart being hardened. There are three different Hebrew words that are used throughout the account of plagues, and looking at each one gives an insight into what is really happening with Pharaoh and God's divine justice.

Sometimes Pharaoh hardens his own heart, and sometimes we see that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Looking at the Hebrew words used, this paper will delve into how and why Pharaoh's heart was hardened. This account isn't just about Pharaoh but is about how hearts respond to God. Each of the three words describes a stage or type of resistance, and understanding them resolves the theological tension of divine sovereignty vs. human responsibility. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart goes through a process, and the different Hebrew words will reveal this process. The account starts with Pharaoh hardening his own heart and ends with God's judicial hardening of Pharaoh's heart.

The three Hebrew words that are translated as hardening in the account regarding Pharaoh's heart are ḥāzaq (חָזַק), kabad (כָּבַד), and qâšâ (קָשָׂה). The definition of each Hebrew word is the first step to understanding the process of Pharaoh's progression.

Ḥāzaq is defined by Strong's (H2388) as "to strengthen, make firm, encourage, or hold fast." Ḥāzaq is used 290 times in the Old Testament, and only thirteen of those times is it

translated “harden.” Of those thirteen times, twelve of them are in the account of the plagues in the book of Exodus. The one other time is in Joshua when referring to the Lord hardening the hearts of the people of the cities, other than Gibeon, to come out and fight against Israel so that Israel would have victory. The majority of the time it is translated as “strong” or “repair.” In the book of Joshua, *ḥâzaq* appears eight times, and six of those times it is translated as “strong.”

Joshua 1:6 *Be **strong** (ḥâzaq) and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them.*

It seems that there is a relationship between the translation of *ḥâzaq* to harden and the heart. All thirteen times that *ḥâzaq* is translated to harden, it has to do with the heart. The other two hundred and seventy-seven times, there is no mention of a heart, but there are other body parts. For example, in Ezra, three of the times that *ḥâzaq* is used, it is in conjunction with “hands” and it is translated “strengthened.” When *ḥâzaq* is used in conjunction with heart, it does not appear to be the literal body part that we know today pumps blood throughout our body; rather, it is referring to the seat of the will where choices are made, the moral control center. Hardening of the heart then refers to the firming (or strengthening) of Pharaoh’s chosen moral direction. Hardening is not emotional coldness or intellectual ignorance; it is strengthening of that settled moral orientation. When Pharaoh’s heart is hardened (*ḥâzaq*), his chosen direction becomes firm and unyielding. When God hardens Pharaoh’s heart, He is confirming the moral trajectory already embraced, which is judicial confirmation and not psychological change.

The second Hebrew word that is translated hardened in the Exodus account is *kabad*, which is defined by Strong's (H3513) as “in a bad sense burdensome, severe, dull or in a good sense numerous, rich, honorable; causatively, and in both senses to make weighty.” *Kabad* occurs

one hundred and sixteen times in the Old Testament, ten times in Exodus, and five of those times are about Pharaoh's heart. The five times that kabad is used to describe Pharaoh's heart, it is translated "hardened." One of the times it is translated "laid" in Exodus 5:9 when Pharaoh said, *Let there more work be **laid** upon the men, that they may labour therein; and let them not regard vain words.* The other four times kabad is translated "honour(ed)," 14:4, 7, 18; 20:12. Exodus 14:4 says, *And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be **honoured** upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD. And they did so.* The word translated "hardened" in this verse is the Hebrew word *hâzaq*, and the Hebrew word kabad is translated "honoured." The way that Young's Literal Translation (YLT) translates this verse sheds more light upon the means of these words, *and I have **strengthened** the heart of Pharaoh, and he hath pursued after them, and I am **honoured** on Pharaoh, and on all his force, and the Egyptians have known that I [am] Jehovah;' and they do so.* God confirms Pharaoh's previous moral choices by strengthening Pharaoh's heart so that Pharaoh would pursue after the Israelites after Pharaoh had not let them go, but expelled them from Egypt so that the complete destruction of Pharaoh and Egypt's army would show the gravity and weight, the honor of who Jehovah is. There is no other God.

There is another Hebrew word translated "hardened" in Exodus 7:14 and the word is *kâbêd* (H3515) from H3513. In this verse *kâbêd* is an adjective, where the previous Hebrew word kabad is an adverb. A majority of the time this adjective is translated as great or heavy, but in Ezekiel 3:5 and 6 it is translated as hard in reference to "hard language." Including both verb and adjective form of kabad, Pharaoh's heart is hardened 6 times in Exodus.

A majority of the time Pharaoh kabad's his heart but there is one time that scripture indicates that God kabad's Pharaoh's heart. Exodus 10:1 *And the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh: for I have **hardened** his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might shew these my signs before him.* Looking at YLT helps understand this verse, *And Jehovah saith unto Moses, `Go in unto Pharaoh, for I have **declared hard** his heart, and the heart of his servants, so that I set these My signs in their midst.* The reason this helps is because the previous verses Exodus 9:34-35 say *And when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and **hardened** his heart, he and his servants. And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, neither would he let the children of Israel go; as the LORD had spoken by Moses.* These verses show that Pharaoh kabaded his heart and in verse 10:1 God is in a sense telling Moses "all the plagues I have brought upon Egypt has made Pharaoh harden, weigh down, and dull his heart in response to Me and I declare that Pharaoh's heart is kabad."

It is interesting that this heaviness of heart is an attack upon the Egyptian belief that Pharaoh was revered as the son of the sun god Ra and the earthly embodiment of Horus, responsible for upholding and embodying maat (truth, order, and justice). Maat was often called the "daughter of Ra," making her a divine principle the Pharaoh protected. Egyptians believed in many gods, but Osiris, Lord of the Underworld and just Judge of the Dead, was the final arbitrator of one's eternal destiny. After death, one's heart was weighed against a feather of Maat, the feather of truth, and if the heart was lighter than the feather, then one could pass on toward the bliss of the Field of Reeds, but if the heart was heavier than the feather, then it was devoured by Amenti (also known as Amut), a god with the face of a crocodile, the front of a leopard, and the back of a rhinoceros, known as "the gobbler". Once Amenti devoured the person's heart, the

individual soul then ceased to exist. (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3960665/>, <https://egypt-museum.com/the-weighing-of-the-heart-ceremony/>, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/42/the-egyptian-afterlife--the-feather-of-truth/>)

Pharaoh made his heart heavy, and then in Exodus 10:1, Jehovah declared that Pharaoh's heart was heavy, and he would cease to exist.

The third Hebrew word that is translated "harden" in Exodus is qâšâ (qasa), which is defined by Strong's (H7185) as "To be hard, severe, sharp, difficult, or obstinate." Qasa is used twenty-eight times in the Old Testament, and a majority of the times (12) it is translated "harden," two times "hard," and two times "stiff-necked." This word is probably what most English speakers think of when thinking about a hardened heart, and yet it is only used two times in Exodus and only once in reference to Pharaoh's heart, Exodus 7:3 *And I will **harden** Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt.* Here in this verse, God is speaking to Moses. This is after Moses and Aaron went into Pharaoh the first time and told him that "Here is what ADONAI, the God of Isra'el, says: 'Let my people go, so that they can celebrate a festival in the desert to honor me.'" (Complete Jewish Study Bible, Ex 5:1). Pharaoh commanded that no more straw be provided for the children of Israel to make bricks, but they needed to gather their own and not let the quota fall. (Ex. 5:6-9). When Exodus 7:3 says that God will harden Pharaoh's heart, it is a prophecy of what will happen. God will bring plagues upon Egypt, and still, Pharaoh will not recognize Him as God and obey His voice. Pharaoh will kabad and hâzaq his own heart until the second time that qasa is used in Exodus 13:15 *And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would **hardly** let us go, that the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I*

sacrifice to the LORD all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem. This time Pharaoh's heart is not referenced, but it can be inferred that Pharaoh's heart was hardened/stubborn, even though God had brought nine plagues upon Israel, he would not let Israel go. It took the last plague, the death of the firstborn, for Pharaoh to relent.

While *qasa*, or stubborn, is what most English speakers would relate to a hard heart today, it is not the word that is used to describe Pharaoh's hard heart. Today, when the phrase is used "that man has a hard heart and will not listen," the meaning is that man is stubborn or obstinate. Studying the hardening of Pharaoh's heart led to his heart being in a state of stubbornness at the very end, before his firstborn son was killed.

Now that the three words have been defined, this paper will take a look at the progression of Pharaoh's hardening of heart.

Starting in Exodus 7:13 *And he **hardened** (hâzaq) Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.* This is right after Aaron's rod turned into a snake, and the magicians were able to copy this by having their rods turn into snakes as well. The KJV seems to say that God hardened (strengthened) Pharaoh's heart, but according to KJV Strong's, the word *he* is not in the Hebrew. Since the author is not a Hebrew scholar, the author looked at other translations to try and get a fuller sense of this verse.

- ▶ Exodus 7:13 (NKJV) And Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the LORD had said.
- ▶ Exodus 7:13 (YLT) and the heart of Pharaoh is strong, and he hath not hearkened unto them, as Jehovah hath spoken.
- ▶ Exodus 7:13 (LSB) Yet Pharaoh's heart was hardened with strength, and he did not listen to them, as Yahweh had spoken.

- ▶ Exodus 7:13 (ESV) Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.
- ▶ Exodus 7:13 (ASV) And Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as Jehovah had spoken.
- ▶ Exodus 7:13 (JPS 1917) And Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken.

Looking at these other translations, the conclusion is that neither God nor Pharaoh actively hardened Pharaoh's heart. This is describing a passive or state of being, condition of Pharaoh's heart.

The next hardening of Pharaoh's heart is in Exodus 7:22 *And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments: and Pharaoh's heart was **hardened** (hâzaq), neither did he hearken unto them; as the LORD had said.* This is the first plague where the water turned into blood.

Again, Pharaoh's heart was passively hardened or perhaps saying it remained fixed or hard. Once again, looking at other translations may help form a clearer picture.

- ▶ Exodus 7:22 (NKJV) Then the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments; and Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the LORD had said.
- ▶ Exodus 7:22 (YLT) And the scribes of Egypt do so with their flashings, and the heart of Pharaoh is strong, and he hath not hearkened unto them, as Jehovah hath spoken,
- ▶ Exodus 7:22 (LSB) Yet the magicians of Egypt did the same with their secret arts; and Pharaoh's heart was hardened with strength, and he did not listen to them, as Yahweh had spoken.
- ▶ Exodus 7:22 (ESV) But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts. So Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.
- ▶ Exodus 7:22 (ASV) And the magicians of Egypt did in like manner with their enchantments: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as Jehovah had spoken.

- ▶ Exodus 7:22 (CJB 2016) But the magicians of Egypt did the same with their secret arts, so that Pharaoh was made hardhearted and didn't listen to them, as ADONAI had said would happen.

The end of Exodus 7:22 is the most interesting, *as the LORD had said*. Got had told Moses that Pharaoh would not let Israel go until all the mighty works had been shown, and this verse is confirming that what the Lord had said was coming to pass. Pharaoh's heart remained hard. Pharaoh was already in a position of believing that he was the son of a God (Ra) and that Yahweh was just another god. Why should he listen to what Moses had to say from Yahweh when his magicians could replicate turning water into blood? Pharaoh did not believe he needed to change his heart or, as is said today, change his mind.

The plague of the frogs is the first time that an active hardening of the heart occurs. Exodus 8:15 *But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he **hardened** (kabad) his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said*. The Hebrew word kabad is used to show that Pharaoh actively made his heart heavy. In the context of the Egyptian religion that was presented earlier, Pharaoh tipped the scale to the negative. Back in Exodus 8:8 Pharaoh had said he would let the people go, but once the Lord removed the frogs, then Pharaoh went back on his word and hardened (kabad, made heavy) his heart. Looking at other translations reveals no differences that expand the understanding of this verse and the fact that Pharaoh actively hardened his heart.

The next hardening of Pharaoh's heart occurs in Exodus 8:19 *Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was **hardened** (hâzaq), and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said*. The voice and grammar indicate that this was a passive hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Neither God nor Pharaoh actively strengthened the heart of Pharaoh. A passive verb in Hebrew narrative does not name the agent but signals one of three

ideas: the state that exists; the natural outcome of prior choices; or both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. A person can reach a point where their direction is so set that it no longer feels like an active decision but it has become their nature. Pharaoh had a choice to make and he defaulted to what he had done in the past, disregarding the voice of God.

This is plague number three and the first that Pharaoh's magicians could not duplicate. The magicians recognized that God (elôhîym) caused *all the dust of the land (to) become lice throughout all the land of Egypt*. They recognized it was a god but not the God of Israel, Jehovah, that brought the plague upon Egypt. They told Pharaoh they tried but could not copy this plague, yet Pharaoh did not listen and still his heart was strengthened.

Looking at other translations may help form a clearer picture of Pharaoh's heart being strengthened.

The way the translators of the Legacy Standard Bible (LSB) translated the passage is interesting. They say *Pharaoh's heart was hardened with strength*. They qualified or explained the word *hardened* as to be with strength.

- ▶ Exodus 8:19 (NKJV) Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the LORD had said.
- ▶ Exodus 8:19 (YLT) and the scribes say unto Pharaoh, 'It [is] the finger of God;' and the heart of Pharaoh is strong, and he hath not hearkened unto them, as Jehovah hath spoken.
- ▶ Exodus 8:19 (LSB) And the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hardened with strength, and he did not listen to them, as Yahweh had spoken.
- ▶ Exodus 8:19 (ESV) Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

- ▶ Exodus 8:19 (ASV) Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as Jehovah had spoken.
- ▶ Exodus 8:19 (CJB 2016) Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh was made hardhearted, so that he didn't listen to them, just as ADONAI had said would happen.

The next hardening of Pharaoh's heart is after the plague of the flies in Exodus 8:32 *And Pharaoh **hardened** (kabad) his heart at this time also, neither would he let the people go.*

Pharaoh actively makes his heart heavy after lying about allowing the people of Israel to go into the wilderness to sacrifice unto the Lord. As soon as the plague of flies was removed, Pharaoh recanted his promise in Exodus 8:28 *I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness.* It is interesting that a majority of the time that Pharaoh says he will let the people go and then changes his mind after relief from the plague is when Pharaoh makes his heart heavy.

Looking at other translations does not shed any further light on this hardening; however, the LSB translators once again define the type of hardening that is occurring. Exodus 8:32 (LSB) *Then Pharaoh hardened his heart with firmness this time also, and he did not let the people go.* They use firmness instead of heavy to describe the hardening, which does not align with Strong's definition of kabad. While one can appreciate the translators showing the different kinds of hardening, in this case, they missed the mark. The LSB translators made a similar translation of kabad in Exodus 8:15 *...hardened his heart with firmness.* Strong's does not indicate that firmness is a part of the understanding of kabad. However, in the LSB note on "hardened," it does say "lit. made heavy." It could be that the LSB translators shied away from the use of heavy because in modern English, a heavy heart tends to mean emotional sadness, burdened, or

depression. Perhaps dullness would have been a better word for the LSB translators to use.

However, it is the opinion of this author that the word heavy carries a more accurate thought of what is happening to Pharaoh's heart as well as implications to the Egyptian understanding of the heart. Or perhaps it is best as the other translators decided and just translate to the word hardened.

The next plague was that of livestock being killed. This is the first plague that does not affect the land of Goshen, where the Israelites lived. Pharaoh's heart was hardened again, and in this instance, the Hebrew word *kabad* is used in the passive voice. Exodus 9:7 *And Pharaoh sent, and, behold, there was not one of the cattle of the Israelites dead. And the heart of Pharaoh was **hardened** (kabad), and he did not let the people go.*

One translation that might shed light on this passive voice is YLT. Exodus 9:7 (YLT) *and Pharaoh sendeth, and lo, not even one of the cattle of Israel hath died, and the heart of Pharaoh is hard, and he hath not sent the people away.* Young's literal translation indicates that Pharaoh's heart remained in the state it was in. The other translations use "was hardened" to describe Pharaoh's heart. YLT is harder to read but might be more accurate. In any case, the heart of Pharaoh was weighing down the scale and out of balance. He still would not listen to the Word of the Lord that Moses was proclaiming to him.

Starting with the plague of boils, we see the judicial hardening of Pharaoh's heart by Jehovah. Exodus 9:12 *And the LORD **hardened** (hâzaq) the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken unto Moses.* God does not force Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go. God does not force a heart to follow Him. Pharaoh always has a choice. When God hardens Pharaoh's heart, He is confirming the direction that Pharaoh has chosen.

The full Strong's definition for ḥâzaq is *to strengthen, prevail, harden, be strong, become strong, be courageous, be firm, grow firm, be resolute, be sore*. Jehovah does not change Pharaoh's heart but strengthens it in the path that Pharaoh has chosen.

Young's Literal Translation gives a literal translation of ḥâzaq in Exodus 9:12 (YLT) *And Jehovah **strengtheneth** the heart of Pharaoh, and he hath not hearkened unto them, as Jehovah hath spoken unto Moses*. Other translations use hardened to translate ḥâzaq. While YLT may be hard to read at times, the first part of this verse is very clear and easy to read and understand what is happening with the heart of Pharaoh. It may be the best translation.

Plague seven is the last time that Pharaoh hardens his own heart. Once again Pharaoh makes his heart heavy (kabad). Again this word is used in conjunction with Pharaoh breaking his word. In Exodus 9:28 Pharaoh says to Moses *Intreat the LORD (for it is enough) that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail; and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer*. Moses says to Pharaoh that he would entreat the Jehovah to stop the hail and fire, but Moses knows Pharaoh will renege and in Exodus 9:30 Moses says to Pharaoh *But as for thee and thy servants, I know that ye will not yet fear the LORD God*. Then in Exodus 9:34 Pharaoh went back on his word, *And when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and **hardened** (kabad) his heart, he and his servants*.

This plague is the only time that two different words are used for hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Exodus 9:34 uses kabad for what Pharaoh did to his own heart, and then in 9:35 the word ḥâzaq is used in a passive sense to show the state of Pharaoh's heart. Exodus 9:35 *And the heart of Pharaoh was **hardened** (ḥâzaq), neither would he let the children of Israel go; as the LORD had spoken by Moses*. Pharaoh made his heart heavy (kabad) when he lied and went back on his

word, but Pharaoh did not waffle in his stance. He was firm and strong (*hāzaq*) in his decision to keep the children of Israel enslaved and not allow them to leave.

Now Pharaoh has set his course, and Jehovah will bring judicial judgement upon Pharaoh. Regardless of what plagues Jehovah brings upon Egypt, Pharaoh will not change course. In Exodus 10:1, God passes judgement upon the heart of Pharaoh, *And the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh: for I have **hardened** (*kabad*) his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might shew these my signs before him.* Pharaoh's heart is become too heavy to respond to God's call. God is telling Moses that Pharaoh is not going to change course so that God will be glorified, and all the world will know for generations to come that Jehovah is God and there is no other.

The remaining times that Pharaoh's heart is hardened, the scripture says *the LORD hardened (*hāzaq*) Pharaoh's heart.* Again, this is Jehovah strengthening Pharaoh's heart in the path that Pharaoh has chosen.

The eighth plague is of locusts. Pharaoh calls Moses and Aaron to him and asks them to entreat Jehovah to take away the locusts but does not promise to let the children of Israel go. Moses asks God to remove the locusts and God does so, but God also hardens (*hāzaq*) Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh does not let the children of Israel go.

The ninth plague is darkness for three days. After three days, Pharaoh tried to bargain with letting the children of Israel go. He said they could go but they had to leave their livestock behind. Moses told Pharaoh that they needed to take the livestock to perform sacrifices. Exodus 10:27 says *But the LORD **hardened** (*hāzaq*) Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go.*

Pharaoh had time and time again hardened his heart, and Jehovah strengthened Pharaoh's heart

in Pharaoh's chosen direction. Not only would Pharaoh not let the children of Israel go, but he told Moses he would kill him if he saw him again. Exodus 10:28 ...*Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die.*

Exodus 11:10 is a synopsis of the last nine plagues, *And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh: and the LORD **hardened** (ḥāzaq) Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go out of his land.* If one were to take Exodus 11:10 on its own, out of context of the previous hardening of Pharaoh's heart, one might conclude that Pharaoh had no choice and his heart was hardened by God. One might say there was no free will involved. One must look at the entire context to rightly divide scripture and come to the conclusion that God's divine sovereignty uses man's free will to accomplish His purpose. Exodus 11:10 functions as a retrospective theological summary of the plague narrative. Rather than introducing a new act of hardening, the verse interprets the preceding confrontations as instances of divine strengthening (chāzaq) that confirmed Pharaoh's established moral disposition. The statement frames the entire cycle of wonders within the sovereignty of Yahweh and prepares the reader for the climactic act of redemption.

The next occurrence of ḥāzaq is not translated hardened, but is translated *urgent* in Exodus 12:33 *And the Egyptians were **urgent** (ḥāzaq) upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men.* A literal translation might be *They strengthened themselves upon the people* or more naturally *They pressed strongly upon the people.* To see ḥāzaq used in other contexts helps us to get a clearer picture of what is happening when ḥāzaq is paired with the heart. The Egyptians were too passive and they did not let the people go, they were forceful and urged the children of Israel to leave. The Egyptians so wanted

them to leave that the end of Exodus 12:36 says *And they spoiled the Egyptians*. A more modern word for spoiled would be plundered. So when ḥāzaq is used to describe the state of a heart it is not a weak word or half-hearted, it is strong, it is set firm in resolve. When applied to the heart it means resolve solidified.

Chapter 14 of Exodus uses the Hebrew word ḥāzaq three times. Twice in reference to the heart of Pharaoh and once for the hearts of the Egyptians. A surface reading of this chapter may bring a conclusion that God caused Pharaoh and the Egyptians to pursue Israel and the destruction of the army in the Red Sea. However, one must look at what does God strengthening of Pharaoh's heart indicates. It is judicial strengthening of an already chosen direction. God strengthened Egypt's pride after devastating judgment so that their already-set opposition would culminate in decisive defeat. He did not create rebellion. He completed the trajectory. Why would God complete the trajectory? Exodus 14:4 tells us *And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured (kabad) upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD. And they did so*. God will receive the weight of who He is, he will be honored, and all Egyptians will know that He is Jehovah, God above all.

Let us walk through the progression of hardening Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh repeatedly refused to let the children of Israel go. He had been told all his life that he was the most important person; he was the son of the most important god, Ra. Everyone in Egypt worshiped him. Why should he listen to a Hebrew shepherder that his sister/mother/aunt took pity on and brought home like a stray, was raised in the king's house, and turned his back on all that he was given? While the Bible does not tell us the relationship between Pharaoh and Moses, nor the names of the Pharaohs of Moses' time, using extra-biblical sources it would appear that the

Pharaoh reigning during the time of the exodus would have known of Moses and could have possibly known him when Moses was a royal prince of Egypt. (Who Was the Pharaoh of the Exodus? By Christopher Eames: <https://armstronginstitute.org/882-who-was-the-pharaoh-of-the-exodus>). Pharaoh saw no reason that he should listen to a traitor to all that Egypt stood for. It is quite possible that Pharaoh took it as a personal insult that Moses standing before him would say “The LORD God of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let my people go...Exodus 7:16.” Pharaoh very well could have thought that this god of the Hebrews, Yahweh, was an impotent god since the Hebrews were slaves.

Pharaoh’s heart was first strengthened in his own self. He refused to see that Yahweh was the God. He refused to listen to Moses and the message that Yahweh had given him to give to Pharaoh. Step one in hardening of Pharaoh’s heart is Repeated Refusal.

Step two is Moral Heaviness, heart weighed down by indifference (kabad). Time and again Pharaoh repents during a plague and once Moses asks God to stop the plague he goes back on his word and his heart is made heavy (kabad).

Step three is fixed resistance as God had foretold in Exodus 7:3. Pharaoh had chosen his path and he was going to continue that direction regardless of what miracles that God wrought through Moses.

The last step is judicial strengthening where God confirms the chosen path (ḥāzaq). In response to prior moral actions of Pharaoh, God confirms and fortifies the direction he has already chosen as an act of judgment. Judicial strengthening is not God inserting sin into a neutral heart; God forcing Pharaoh to desire obedience but preventing it; or God overriding repentance. There is no textual evidence Pharaoh ever desired genuine submission. He desired

relief. He did not desire obedience. Judicial strengthening is removal of restraining fear; reinforcement of pride; stabilization of resolve; and confirmation in chosen rebellion. In Exodus 14, Egypt has been devastated and humanly speaking, fear might have paralyzed them permanently, but God strengthens their courage to pursue “So that I may get my honour...” Pharaoh’s and the Egyptians’ long-standing pride is brought to its full and final expression. Pharaoh has already rejected God repeatedly before judicial hardening begins. God’s strengthening reveals what was already in Pharaoh’s heart.

The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart in Exodus demonstrates the concurrent operation of human responsibility and divine sovereignty. Pharaoh acts freely according to his own moral disposition, yet God sovereignly declares, governs, and confirms those actions so that His redemptive purposes are accomplished. The narrative presents no coercion of Pharaoh’s will, but rather a judicial strengthening of a heart already set in opposition, ensuring that human rebellion ultimately serves divine glory. The account in Exodus shows that God is absolutely sovereign and Pharaoh is absolutely responsible.

The account of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart teaches us that every “no” makes the next one easier and delayed obedience dulls conviction. Hard hearts are formed over time. God will confirm, through judicial strengthening, the choices that man makes.

Hebrews 3:15 gives an apt application to guard our hearts, *While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.*

The story of Pharaoh is not isolated theology. The New Testament teaches the same pattern of the human heart, but now in doctrinal language rather than narrative form. The same three phases that Pharaoh showed us appear in the New Testament.

First is resistance to truth, which corresponds to qâšâ (H7185). At the end of Stephen's speech in Acts 7:51, he describes the resistance of the high priest and the council, *Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye*. The leaders of Israel were not ignorant; rather, they were confronted by Stephen and they refused to hear; they resisted the truth. They did not resist because of a lack of knowledge, but because that knowledge confronted them and challenged them to change their ways, to repent. The Greek word for resist is ἀντιπίπτω (antiptō).

It means: to oppose, to push back against, to set oneself against. Stephen is saying that the leaders of Israel are actively opposing the work of God's Spirit. This is voluntary resistance. Just as Pharaoh was shown that Jehovah is the God of the Hebrews, He is God alone, so the leaders of Israel were shown that Jesus is the Messiah and they rejected him and continue to resist the Holy Spirit.

Next is a heart that becomes heavy, which corresponds to kâbêd (H3513). When a heart continually resists the prompting of the Holy Spirit, it becomes spiritually dull. This is not merely stubbornness. It is a loss of spiritual sensation and perception. An example of this is given by Jesus when his disciples ask why he continues to speak in parables. In Matthew 13:15, he says *For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them*. The people's heart had become dull and insensitive to God. They were following Jesus to see the miracles that he would perform, whether that be healing the sick or multiplying loaves and fish. They were not interested in the bread of life. Pharaoh's heavy heart is not an ancient curiosity,

but it is a warning about what the human heart becomes when truth is resisted. The people's heart had become as Pharaoh's heavy heart.

Paul gives an example of a heart that has resisted the truth and become dull in Ephesians 4:17-19 *This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.* Paul is describing people that have resisted so long that their heart has become dull and are past feeling.

The last is a condition that becomes confirmed, which corresponds to *hâzaq* (H2388). The prime passage is Romans 1:24, 28 *Wherefore God also gave them up...And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.* Just as God strengthens Pharaoh in the direction Pharaoh has chosen. Paul describes the same reality using judicial language. This is not the start of rebellion, but the judicial confirmation of it. The pattern of resistance, dulling, and then judicial confirmation continues. Pharaoh's story is therefore not merely ancient history but it is theology illustrated.

Probably one of the strongest verses in the New Testament of judicial hardening is in 2 Thessalonians 2:11 *And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.* Paul is referring to the last days when people are continually rejecting the truth and prefer to listen to lies. God will judicially strengthen their hearts with strong delusions. This is what happens when truth is persistently rejected.

Exodus and Pharaoh show the danger of the hardened heart. The previous New Testament passages confirm that the danger continues into the dispensation of grace. Pharaoh becomes the visible historical example of this inward reality. When God reveals truth, the natural human response is often resistance. External miracles do not soften a heart, as Pharaoh showed. Even Jesus said in the account of the rich man and Lazarus that the rich man's brothers would not believe even if Lazarus came back from the dead. Luke 16:31 *And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.* The human heart is not transformed merely by evidence. Something deeper must happen. That something deeper is what Jesus accomplished on the cross by taking our punishment for sin, dying, and raising again to new life the third day. That something is grace. Ephesians 2:8-9 *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

Grace is the opposite of judicial hardening. If judicial hardening means God confirms rebellion, saving grace means God overcomes resistance. Ephesians 2:1 *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.* The substitutionary death of Jesus Christ does what no law, no seeing of miracles, nor any work of man could do, give new life to all through faith in His completed work.