

DID GOD HARDEN PHAROAH'S HEART?

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A. What Is the Real Story?

1. Pharaoh was a proud and stubborn man long before he ever interacted with God.
 - a. He was brutal in his treatment of the Israelites... (Exodus 2:23-25; 5:4-23)
 - b. He was obstinate in his view of God... (Exodus 5:1-2; 7:8-14)

Word Study...

"Harden" (hazaq, kabed, qashah): all three Hebrew words are used and are translated as "to harden." The three Hebrew words can be used in a positive or in a negative context. Positively, they can mean "to strengthen, to be resolute, to be determined, to be firm." Negatively, they can mean "to be stubborn." Essentially, to be "hardened in your heart" is "to have or be given the willpower to do what you have decided to do."

Key understanding: This word is not describing the process of making a person do something that is against their will. It is describing the process of enabling a person to do as they will.

2. God did not "harden" Pharaoh's heart until after Pharaoh had already hardened his own heart... (Exodus 7:13-14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34-35)
3. The change of heart between 9:12 and 9:34-35 shows that Pharaoh was not being controlled by God but was in control of his own heart.

A Clue That is Hidden in the Hebrew Text...

The oft repeated goal of this divine interaction was so that the Israelites and Egyptians **"will know that I am the LORD."** He challenged and overwhelmed this ancient superpower and its gods on their own turf. And he did it directly through their tough-minded, hard-hearted ruler.

One of the Hebrew words for **"harden"** (kabed) often means "make heavy." It is related to the word for **"glory"** (kabod). Early on in Exodus, Moses said he was "slow/heavy" (kabed) in speech and tongue (4:10). Pharaoh "made heavy" Israel's brick-making load (5:9) so God sent the Egyptians "heavy" plagues: a "heavy" swarm (8:24), "heavy" pestilence (9:3), "heavy" hail (9:18), "numerous" (literally: "heavy") locusts (10:14). And in this "heaviness," God would be "glorified" and "honoured" (kabed) before Pharaoh (14:4, 17-18). This is exactly what happened in the final scene of Pharaoh's hardening his heart at the Red Sea, when the Egyptian chariot wheels "became heavy" (kabed - 14:25).

(Source: **"Is God a Vindictive Bully?"**, page 98.)

B. How Does God Harden a Heart?

1. Strictly speaking, God doesn't add something; God removes something.
2. There are two stages to the "hardening" process:
 - a. **Stage One:** humans harden (make stubborn) their own hearts by rejecting and resisting God's gracious activity in their lives. The term "*the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit*" describes the willful decision to live in this state. (Proverbs 28:14; Hebrews 3:7-15; Acts 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9; Acts 7:51)
 - b. **Stage Two:** God (for His own purposes and according to His own knowledge) sometimes chooses to temporarily withdraw and withhold the work of His grace and He "gives someone over" to their sinful desires. By doing so, God is "hardening their heart." When he does this, He is not making them do something they do not want to do, He is allowing them to do what they already desire to do, (Romans 1:24-28).
3. Some examples of this dynamic in Scripture:
 - a. Psalm 81:10-16
 - b. Mark 3:5; 4:12;
 - c. John 5:34 – 40; 10:38

C. How To Keep Your Heart Soft

1. Respond quickly to God's voice... (Hebrews 3:15)
2. Choose to remain humble... (James 4:6)
3. Guard against the deceitfulness of sin... (Hebrews 3:13)
4. Remain in God's Word... (Isaiah 55:10-11; Jeremiah 23:29)
5. Make it a matter of prayer... (Psalm 51:10)