

YAHWEH, PHARAOH, AND THE GODS OF EGYPT

Exodus

(Adapted from Various Articles)¹

PLAGUE	EGYPTIAN DEITY	YAHWEH'S POWER	PHARAOH'S HEART
Nile turned to blood (7:14-25)	Hapi: The River god; the river and it's god could no longer supply the Egyptians' needs.	Yahweh has power over the sources of life.	<i>kābēd</i> [כָּבֵד] (7:14) "Pharaoh's heart was hard" <i>hāzaq</i> [חָזַק] (7:22) Pharaoh's heart was stubborn"
Frogs filled the land (8:1-15)	Kekhet: Represented fertility; guardian of pregnant women.	Yahweh has power to create pestilence and reverse it through intercessory prayer.	<i>kābēd</i> (8:15) "he hardened his heart"
Gnats (8:16-17)		Yahweh has power over religious sources of life and worship.	<i>hāzaq</i> (8:19) Pharaoh's heart was stubborn"
Stinging Flies (8:20-32)		Yahweh has power to inflict suffering on the lives of the wicked.	<i>kābēd</i> (8:32) "he hardened his heart"
Killed Livestock (9:1-7)	Apis: Bull (fertility); Isis: Queen of the gods had cow horns; Hathor: protected the king had cow ears; animals provided food, milk, clothing, and transportation.	Yahweh has power over the venerated animals seen worshipped as sources of life.	<i>kābēd</i> (9:7) "Pharaoh's heart was hardened"
Boils (9:8-17)	Sekhmet (possibly Amen-Re)	Yahweh has power over the physical health .	<i>kābēd</i> (9:12) "The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart"
Hail (9:13-34)	Probably the heavenly deities (Nut: person-ification of the vault of heaven; She: supporter of heavens; Tefnut: goddess of moisture).	Yahweh has power over the forces of nature .	<i>kābēd</i> (9:34) "he hardened his heart" <i>hāzaq</i> (9:35) Pharaoh's heart was stubborn"
Locusts (10:1-20)	Senehem: protector from pests.	Yahweh has power over the all creatures .	<i>kābēd</i> (10:1) "I myself have hardened his heart"
Darkness (10:21-29)	Amen-re: the person-ification of the sun, their main diety.	Yahweh has power over the religious forces .	<i>hāzaq</i> (10:27) " the Lord increased the stubbornness of Pharaoh's heart"
Death of Firstborn (11:1-10;12:29-32)	Probably against Pharaoh who was thought to be god over Egypt	Yahweh has power to take human life .	<i>hāzaq</i> (11:10) " the Lord increased the stubbornness of Pharaoh's heart"

¹ The primary resource used was Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Divine Hardening in the Old Testament" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (October-December 1996): 410-434.

Four times in Exodus 4-14 Yahweh declared that He would harden the heart(s) of Pharaoh and/or the Egyptians (4:21; 7:3; 14:4, 17); and six verses describe Him as having done so (9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8). On the other hand three verses state that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (8:15, 32; 9:34), while six verses attribute hardness to his heart with no direct reference to a source or agent (7:13, 14, 22; 8:19; 9:7, 35).

- A. Texts in which Yahweh is the subject of the verb and **Yahweh hardens Pharaoh's heart**.
- 4:21 "I will harden [*hāzaq*] his heart"
 - 7:3 "I will harden [*qēšeh*] Pharaoh's heart"
 - 9:12 "Yahweh hardened [*hāzaq*] Pharaoh's heart"
 - 10:1 "I have hardened [*kābēd*] his heart"
 - 10:20 "Yahweh hardened [*hāzaq*] Pharaoh's heart"
 - 10:27 "Yahweh hardened [*hāzaq*] Pharaoh's heart"
 - 11:10 "Yahweh hardened [*hāzaq*] Pharaoh's heart"
 - 14:4 "I will harden [*hāzaq*] Pharaoh's heart"
 - 14:8 "Yahweh hardened [*hāzaq*] Pharaoh's heart"
 - 14:17 "I will harden [*hāzaq*] the Egyptians' hearts"
- B. Texts in which Pharaoh is the (or a) subject of the verb and **Pharaoh hardens his own heart**.
- 8:15 "he hardened [*kābēd*] his heart"
 - 8:32 "Pharaoh hardened [*kābēd*] his heart"
 - 9:34 "he and his officials hardened [*kābēd*] their hearts"
- C. Texts in which no source or agent is specifically mentioned and is simply **stated as fact**.
- 7:13 "Pharaoh's heart was hard [*hāzaq*]"
 - 7:14 "Pharaoh's heart is unyielding [*kābēd*]"
 - 7:22 "Pharaoh's heart was hard [*hāzaq*]"
 - 8:19 "Pharaoh's heart was hard [*hāzaq*]"
 - 9:7 "Pharaoh's heart is unyielding [*kābēd*]"
 - 9:35 "Pharaoh's heart was hard [*hāzaq*]"

The two primary words used above are close in meaning, however, they can be distinguished. In general when the word *hāzaq* (חָזַק) is used to indicate a will or attitude that is unyielding and firm. Generally, it means "to be strong". In a positive sense it means someone has courage but in the negative sense, the person is obstinate and unmovable. The word is describing more the state of the person who is "locked in". When *kābēd* (כָּבֵד) is used, it stresses the will as being slow to move, unimpressionable, slow to be affected. In general this word means "to be heavy". This can be positive or negative as well. This is more the lack of responsiveness of a person who is unable or unwilling to be influenced.

A few conclusions can be drawn. First, and most importantly, from the outset *Pharaoh was an obstinate, stubborn rebel whom Yahweh kept alive so that He might reveal His greatness and power through humiliating and overcoming him six times*. Yahweh gave Pharaoh a window of opportunity to change his mind by issuing a demand and warning, but each time Pharaoh closed the window by refusing to be changed or influenced. In the middle of this process, Pharaoh even hardened his own heart (8:15, 32; 9:34). When he closed these windows, he placed himself in a position to be hardened by Yahweh. His first refusal (5:2) brought two rounds of divine hardening (7:13, 22), his second refusal (8:1-4) brought two more rounds of divine hardening (8:15, 19), his third and fourth refusals (8:20-23; 9:1-5) brought one more divine hardening, (9:12), his fifth refusal (9:13-14) brought one more (9:35). The sixth refusal (10:1-11) brought three rounds of divine hardening (10:20, 27; 14:8). Yahweh was overwhelmingly patient with him.

Second, though Pharaoh did harden himself (8:32; 9:7), it is not correct to say he initiated the hardening process. Yahweh was the first to harden him (in response to his already present rejection of Yahweh's authority) and this hardening activity continued throughout the narrative in response to Pharaoh's rejection of Yahweh's command. Nine times the hardening prevented Pharaoh from responding positively to a sign or plague.