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THE HARDENING OF PHARAOH'S HEART IN ITS LITERARY AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Dorian G. Coover Cox

IN NOTING GOD'S PLAGUES AGAINST EGYPT and His hardening of Pharaoh's heart in the Book of Exodus, readers may feel pulled in two directions. On the one hand they may feel sympathy for Pharaoh and have doubts about the Lord's justice. On the other hand they may be pulled toward allegiance to the Lord, who rescued the Israelites. The question of whether God was unfair in hardening Pharaoh's heart comes up even in Romans 9. Sternberg maintains that "of the various challenges facing the biblical narrator as ideological persuader, the most basic and formidable derives from the tension between two constraints. One is his commitment to the divine system of norms, absolute and demanding and in application often ruthless; the other, his awareness of the necessity and difficulty of impressing it on a human audience. The problem is always . . . how to get man to adopt a world-picture that both transcends and threatens man; how to win the audience over to the side of God rather than of their fellow-mortals."[1]

Sternberg is correct that this is no easy task. Eslinger, for example, contends that once the fact of God's hardening Pharaoh's heart is announced, "the narrator has discarded the possibility of telling a tale of real triumphs over the Egyptian king. After this,

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Dorian G. Coover Cox is Assistant Professor of Old Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas, and Associate Editor, *Bibliotheca Sacra.*

1 Meir Sternberg, "The Bible's Art of Persuasion: Ideology, Rhetoric, and Poetics in Saul's Fall," in *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism*, ed. Paul R. House (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 235. In this discussion he also notes the simultaneous rhetorical problem for the narrator of "how to accomplish the task of persuasion without dwarfing, betraying or compromising the object of persuasion" (ibid.).

any conflict or victory can only be seen as a sham."[2] Eslinger says that "for the reader whose knowledge is . . . of God's educative intent, and of the contrivances he uses . . . it becomes difficult to applaud the divine pedagogy of the exodus. The reader does learn a lesson about who Yahweh is from the exodus event, but the knowledge leads anywhere but to a spot in Moses' choir in Exodus 15."[3]

A speech by Edmund Burke contains arguments that further highlight this problem, though he discussed another case entirely. In 1775 Burke told the House of Commons that England should give the long-cherished privileges of freedom-loving English citizens to the freedom-loving American colonists. "Slavery," he said, "they can have anywhere. It is a weed that grows in every soil. They may have it from Spain; they may have it from Prussia; but, until you become lost to all feeling of your true interest and your natural dignity, freedom they can have from none but you."[4]

In arguing not to use force against the colonies Burke observed that the use of force is a temporary and an uncertain expedient. Force, he said, "may subdue for a moment, but it does not remove the necessity of subduing again; and a nation is not governed which is perpetually to be conquered."[5] About the uncertainty of using force, he said, "Terror is not always the effect of force; [and when you use force] if you do not succeed, you are without resource; for conciliation failing, force remains; but, force failing, no further hope of reconciliation is left."[6] "A further objection to force," he observed, "is that you impair the object by your very endeavors to preserve it. The thing you fought for is not the thing which you recover, but depreciated, sunk, wasted, and consumed in the contest."[7] Burke contended that for England to use force against the colonies would be counterproductive.

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2 Lyle Eslinger, "Freedom or Knowledge? Perspective and Purpose in the Exodus Narrative (Exodus 1–15)," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 52 (1991): 57.

3 Ibid., 58. He also says, "When [Brevard] Childs assumes that Miriam's point of view is that of the narrative, all that his reading reveals is his own preference for the theological mindset expressed by Miriam" (ibid., 49). One may suppose that Childs would differ with this assessment.

4 Edmund Burke, "Edmund Burke Makes a Case for Conciliation with America," in *Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History*, ed. William Safire, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 796.

5 Ibid., 792.

6 He added, "Power and authority are sometimes bought by kindness, but they can never be begged as alms by an impoverished and defeated violence" (ibid.).

7 Ibid.

So when the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart and used force against him, was the Lord both unjust and inept? The answer in Exodus to these charges is no. But why and how remain questions. Attention to certain literary features and to elements of Egyptian culture, however, finds reasons and means in Exodus for affirming God's justice and efficiency, which may be slighted if attention is too tightly focused on the hardening itself.

LITERARY FEATURES IN GENESIS AND EXODUS

Several events in the Book of Genesis prepare readers of Exodus to side with God against Pharaoh. First is Creation, which, among many things, shows the Lord to be immensely powerful and generous. He created without effort or assistance, and all that He made was good (Gen. 1:31). He made Adam and Eve and blessed them, gave them dominion, and provided abundantly for them (vv. 26–29; 2:9, 15–25). Later the Lord had cause to destroy all mankind, but He did not (cf. Rom. 1:20–2:4; 9:14–23). How does Pharaoh stack up against such power and magnanimity? Everything that Pharaoh had, the Lord had given, including the breath he used to say no to the Lord.

With this broad preparation Genesis also provides specific information about Abraham and his descendants, information that points to the wisdom of siding with the Lord. He promised Abraham, "I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, . . . you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse" (Gen. 12:2–3). He told Abraham that his descendants would be "enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions" (15:13–14; cf. 17:15–21; 48:21; 50:24–25). The Israelites who were a problem to Pharaoh in Moses' day were living in Egypt by divine appointment and legitimate Egyptian decrees from the time of Joseph, and they multiplied in keeping with the Creation and Flood mandates and God's promises to Israel's ancestors.[8] The fault lay with Pharaoh and his people.

In addition the kings in Genesis initiate a standard of expectation for the kings in Exodus. In Genesis, Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and Abimelech, the king of Gerar, each took Sarah to be part of his harem (Gen. 12:10–20; 20:1–18), and later Rebekah was

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[8] The terms used in Exodus 1:7 and 12 to describe the Israelite increase are also used in Genesis 1:28; 9:1, 7; 17:2, 6, 20; 18:18; 26:4, 24; 28:13–15; and 35:11.

in similar straits (26:1–17).[9] All three incidents involved danger to the future mothers of the promised descendants, and all three kings acted quickly to protect Sarah and Rebekah and the interests of Abraham and Isaac as soon as the kings learned what had happened and how the issue stood. Each king recognized that he was subject to the Lord's judgment.[10] In each case the patriarch came away with great wealth (12:16; 20:14–16; 26:12–14), as would the Israelites, even though the kings in Exodus failed to promote Israelite interests (Exod. 3:21–22; 11:2; 12:35–36). Furthermore the kings of Gerar recognized the presence of the Lord with His people to bless them—"God is with you in all that you do," they said (Gen. 21:22; cf. 26:28–29), and they concluded that a covenant with Abraham and Isaac would therefore be to their own benefit (21:23–24; 26:28–31). The concept of the Lord's presence with His people becomes even more prominent in Exodus (3:12; 4:12, 15; 17:7; 33:12–16; 34:9). Rather than respecting the Lord's presence, however, Pharaoh ridiculed the idea (10:10–11; cf. 5:3–4). Other ties between the three Genesis accounts and Exodus include the concept of the fear of God (Gen. 20:11; Exod. 1:17; 9:30), prayer for the foreign king (Gen. 20:7, 17; Exod. 12:32; 9:28–33; 10:17–18; cf. Gen. 45:10), and the use of שלח to speak of sending away the patriarch with family and goods (Gen. 12:20; 26:27, 29; Exod. 5:1–2; 3:20; 4:23; 12:33).[11]

The account of Joseph adds a fourth opportunity to observe contact between Israelite ancestors and a foreign king. As in the earlier incidents so here the theme of the presence of the Lord continues to be important. The Lord was with Joseph, prospering all

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[9] Robert Alter mentions these in his chapter on type-scenes (*The Art of Biblical Narrative* [New York: Basic, 1981], 49).

[10] In the case of the king of Egypt, "the Lord struck [נגע] Pharaoh and his house with great plagues [נגע] because of Sarai, Abram's wife" (Gen. 12:17; cf. Exod. 11:1 and its use of נגע). Nothing is said about how this pharaoh got the message of the plagues; the point is that he did and returned Sarah to freedom, so to speak, without delay. The Lord's message to Abimelech came in a dream (Gen. 20:3–7) and involved an affliction that prevented the production of children and left Abimelech and his wives needing to be healed (vv. 17–18). Abimelech "arose early in the morning" after the dream, told his courtiers about it, and returned Sarah to Abraham (vv. 8–16). (In Abraham's less-personal dealings with kings, he defeated the kings who had captured Lot and his family, and he was honored by the kings of Salem and Sodom [14:14–24)].) In the third of these incidents, when the king saw that Rebekah was not Isaac's sister, he confronted Isaac and gave orders that, on pain of death, no one should harm either of them (26:8–11).

[11] Genesis 12:20 specifically mentions sending away Abraham and his wife and all that belonged to him, in contrast to the attempts in Exodus to prevent the Israelites from leaving with all their people and possessions (1:10; 10:8–11, 24–27).

that he did, which fact his foreign superiors again quickly grasped (Gen. 39:2–6, 21–23; 41:39; cf. 46:4; 48:21). As in the first three situations, when this king of Egypt heard from God (41:25, 28, 32), he took action that benefited God's people.[12] Again a foreign king who protected God's people reaped benefits for himself and his own people. The kings of Egypt in Exodus are the first in biblical history to miss this point.

In the Book of Exodus Pharaoh's hardening may be the most scrutinized element of characterization in the lengthy conflict between the Lord and Pharaoh, but it is by no means the only one. The motif of hardening works in company with other descriptions, evaluative comments, and explanations in Exodus. Readers who examine the hardening motif alongside these other elements of characterization can better discern the narrator's skill and intentions in guiding readers' sympathies.[13] Most importantly, the matter of revealing and recognizing identities shines as one of the book's foremost unifying themes. The Lord announced repeatedly that He was acting so that various parties would acknowledge Him (e.g., Exod. 6:6–7; 7:5, 17; 8:10, 22; 9:14–16, 29; 10:2). When Pharaoh asked, "Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD" (5:2), it was, of course, not an admission of ignorance or a request for information. Personal identity and authority were at stake. When Nabal similarly asked, "Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse?" (1 Sam. 25:10), he added an insult that confirms that he knew precisely who David was but had no use for him or his request.[14] God's plan in Exodus to make Himself known worked so well that when Moses' father-in-law heard what God had done, he affirmed, "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods" (Exod. 18:11). Meanwhile, this process of God's self-revelation also gives insight into the identities of Moses, Pharaoh, and the Israelites.

Once God had dealt with Moses' objections (3:1–7:7), Pharaoh became the Lord's primary obstacle in an unusually long series of dialogues and events. The portion consisting of a preliminary miracle and nine plagues (7:8–11:10) is over three times as long as the

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[12] This pharaoh made Joseph second in command (Gen. 41:39–45), and he invited Joseph's kinfolk to occupy prime real estate in Egypt, so that they prospered as a result (47:6, 27; cf. 20:15).

[13] The following survey is selective, rather than exhaustive.

[14] While promoting his own ascendancy, Gaal, the son of Ebed, asked, "Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him?" (Judg. 9:28), knowing full well the identity of Abimelech.

account of Creation and over twice as long as the account of the Flood. Add the tenth plague and the defeat of Pharaoh at the sea, along with commemorations of these events (11:1–15:21), and the contrast is even greater. This expansive coverage gives opportunities for displaying the characters involved in the conflict. So far as the Lord is concerned, the plague narrative certainly displays His power over nature and humankind. Against the background of Genesis, however, this is not new. The Lord's power to create and judge humans was displayed in Creation, the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and even well-directed plagues. New to the conflict in Exodus 7–15 is its detailed look at a rebel. What other enemy of the Lord stands on the biblical stage as long as Pharaoh?

Though the pharaoh of the hardening is a different individual from the pharaoh in chapters 1–2, they are effectively the same. For purposes of persuasion the second carries with him the stigma of the first. Every offense committed by the first—the paranoia, the oppressive labor, the lack of wisdom and true success, the killing of babies—adds to the deficit of the second, since he continued in the same mode. While the first did not know Joseph, the second boasted that he did not know the Lord (1:8; 5:2). Both worried about the number of Israelites (1:9; 5:5) and supposed that oppressive labor would solve the problem. Against the evidence, the second said that the Israelites were lazy, and he increased the difficulty of their work (5:6–9, 17). He viewed worshiping the Lord as a waste of time and called God's messenger a liar (vv. 8–9, 17). The Israelites, for their part, were hard at work and calling for relief, both to God and to Pharaoh (2:23; 5:15–16).

Other elements within Exodus that prepare for reception of the plague narrative include the announcements that Pharaoh would refuse to let Israel go, assurances that the Lord would act, and promises about departure and a new land (3:16–22; 4:21–23; 6:2–8; 7:1–5). The Lord would win and Pharaoh would lose. The outcome was certain and desirable (in the estimation of everyone—God, Moses, the narrator, the suffering Israelites—except Pharaoh and his courtiers). After the plague narrative, persuasive features include instructions for ceremonies of remembrance, instructions to teach children about the Lord's actions, references to preserving a written record of what He had done, the declaration of Moses' father-in-law, the vindication of Moses as the Lord's representative, the inclusion of laws to follow because of who the Lord is and what He had done, and the building of the tabernacle for worshiping Him. All reinforce the thought that people ought to side with the Lord, who triumphed over Pharaoh in the course of rescuing and providing for the Israelites.

Another part of the persuasive context of the plague account is the pull of Moses' allegiance to the Lord. Moses is the one with whom readers have the most affinity (because of insight provided into his experiences, thoughts, and feelings), and he had the most contact with the Lord, both before and after the departure from Egypt. In view of Eslinger's comments about the effect on readers that knowledge of the Lord's strategy has, one should recall that Moses knew about the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, but Moses would not have agreed with Eslinger that the conflict was a sham. As events unfolded, Moses praised the Lord and wanted to continue in His presence and know His goodness more completely (15:1–18; 33:12–16). Moses was convinced that to know the Lord is a supremely good thing. Far from being a concept imposed by theological necessity from outside the book, the thought that the Lord is the righteous Ruler who displays compassion, graciousness, loyalty, and patience is both assumed and declared throughout (1:17–21; 3:6–10; 5:21; 15:11–13; 18:15–21; 22:21–27; 34:5–9).

It may also be worthwhile to mention one method of persuasion that is *not* used. The narrative argument in Exodus never builds on nationalistic fervor or ethnic pride; the Israelites are not portrayed as an exceptionally deserving or superior people. They are many but in great need (1:12–14; 2:23), without military resolve (13:17), and, at their worst, prone to angry restiveness (2:14; 5:21; 6:9; 14:11–12; 15:24; 16:3; 17:2–4) and outright disobedience (16:20, 27–28; 32:1–9). Nor is the Lord somehow sentimentally smitten with them. For example He requires them to treat non-Israelites justly, and He knows well the negative tendencies of the Israelites (16:11–12; 23:9; 32:9–10; cf. Deut. 9:4–5). Meanwhile the Egyptians as a people are not demonized as the horrible, subhuman enemy. Egyptians, at their best, rescue the infant Moses, heed warnings about coming plagues (Exod. 9:20–21; 10:7), have respect for Moses (11:3), and give plentifully to the departing Israelites (11:2–3; 12:34–35).

Certain unique or seldom-used descriptions of Pharaoh help convey what it meant for him to have a hard heart. These specifics accompany his strengthened resolve or result from it, and they are of interest partly because the Lord and Moses never spoke to Pharaoh about his hard heart as such, but they did address him with these other descriptions, as if he ought to do something about them. They warned Pharaoh that he had "not listened" (7:16); that he should not refuse to let the Israelites go (8:2); that he should not again deal deceitfully by preventing the Israelites from going to worship (8:29); that he should not continue to hold the Israelites (9:2); that he was guilty of exalting himself at the expense of the

Lord's people, even though his continued existence was allowed by the Lord (9:16–17); that he did not fear the Lord God (9:30); and that he was refusing to humble himself before the Lord (10:3). These are just as important as the notices about the hardening of his heart, if not more so, because they show Pharaoh and readers his condition in different terms, terms addressed to *his* attention, not offered first to readers as grounds for his condemnation.

Pharaoh also received six announcements that describe the Lord's actions as designed so that Pharaoh should "know," or better, that he should "acknowledge" his adversary (7:17; 8:10, 22; 9:14, 29; 11:7). In addition everything Pharaoh saw or heard from or about his servants contributes to the assessment that he was in trouble (7:12, 22; 8:7, 19; 9:11; 10:7; 11:3, 8). Even Pharaoh's own words condemn him, especially since he never took action that matched his promises or confessions. Talk is cheap. He interspersed his conditions and threats (8:28; 10:10–11, 27) among requests for intercession (8:8, 28; 9:28; 10:17), permissions to leave (8:8, 25, 28; 9:28; 10:8), and confessions of guilt (9:27; 10:16–17).

Within the account of plague seven—severe hail—the Lord made explicit to Pharaoh that he remained alive because the Lord preserved him (9:15). The Lord could at any time have stricken Pharaoh and his people with "pestilence" (דֶּבֶר) and destroyed them completely (without any hardening sequence). The two most recent plagues—"pestilence" that killed all sorts of livestock, and boils that afflicted humans—were fresh evidence that the Lord's claim was true. God's reference to Pharaoh's treatment of the Israelites—"still you exalt yourself against My people" (v. 17)—marks the continuing provocation. The Lord had both motive and power, but that power was restrained and delayed in its application.

God told Pharaoh that He preserved him "in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth" (v. 16). Again the issue is knowledge of the Lord's identity and reputation. He asserted the claim to being unequaled that Moses had made for Him earlier, and He said, "I will send all My plagues on you [literally, 'to your heart,' אֶל־לִבְּךָ, i.e., 'for your careful attention'] . . . so that you [singular] may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth" (v. 14; cf. 8:10). He added the indictment, "Still you exalt yourself against My people by not letting them go" (9:17), which uses understatement and metonymy to describe Pharaoh's exalting himself against the Lord, not just His people. Moses explained that even the cessation of the plague was meant to provide knowledge of who the Lord is—the Owner/Ruler of all: "there will be hail no longer, so that you may know that the earth is the LORD'S" (v. 29).

Before Moses prayed for the hail to cease, he told Pharaoh, "I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God" (v. 30).[15] This is yet another way of stating Pharaoh's problem. Later Moses connected the fear of the Lord with the avoidance of sin when he explained to the Israelites, "God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin" (20:20).[16] Avoidance of sin, humble obedience, and fear of the Lord are in a package that Pharaoh did not open, despite his admissions of "sin" (in some sense) and of need for Moses to pray for him.

Because the account of the plagues focuses on the conflict between the Lord and Pharaoh, it contains little about the inner workings of Moses. One glimpse in that direction, however, contributes to understanding Pharaoh. After Moses announced the impending tenth plague, "he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger" (11:8). Why in anger? Was it because he had been insulted by Pharaoh's ordering him to leave and not come back? Or was he expressing anger on behalf of the Lord about Pharaoh's refusal to submit again? The latter seems more likely. After the long silence about his personal outlook, no foundation exists for the idea that Moses was exercised over a personal affront. Rather, his anger parallels the Lord's anger toward Moses during *his* series of objections to obeying (4:14).

Whatever the reason, since Moses knew about the hardening, his anger, to be rational, must build on the belief that Pharaoh was still accountable for his attitudes and actions. People display irrational anger every day, but nothing indicates that Moses was misinformed, exhausted, sick, or self-centered. He was not blaming Pharaoh when Pharaoh had no choice. That Moses held him accountable here, so late in the course of events, tends to undermine

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15 G. K. Beale explains this statement as follows: "Moses seems finally to discern the reality of the hardening decree of Yahweh in 4:21 and 7:3, which has *now* become for him the practical basis of his expectations about Pharaoh's future negative responses" ("An Exegetical and Theological Consideration of the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus 4–14 and Romans 9," *Trinity Journal,* n.s., 5 [1984]: 145 [italics his]). In light of previous warnings to Pharaoh (8:29; 9:17), however, it is a mistake to make this statement more a comment about Moses than about Pharaoh.

16 In keeping with the hardening motif, the thought of fear is elsewhere associated with hearts that are described by the root רכך, a term for softness or tenderness (Isa. 7:4; Jer. 51:46). Psalm 55:22 (21, Eng.) uses this root to say of a traitor that "his words were softer than oil." In the case of King Josiah, when his heart was "soft" or "tender," he humbled himself, tore his clothes, and wept (2 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron. 34:27).

theories that free Pharaoh from responsibility because of the Lord's hardening his heart.[17]

Elements of Egyptian Culture

All this conflict took place in the ancient Near East, whose civilization has been described as "preoccupied with rank,"[18] and none more than the Egyptian pharaohs. As Baines puts it in a survey that covers many centuries, "The centrality of Egyptian kingship, its pivotal role in articulating the cosmos and creating order, and its religious, political, and moral authority pervade the ancient record."[19] One place to see attitudes toward kingship is in Egypt's dealings with foreign nations. Redford summarizes the meeting of Egyptian concepts of kingship with concepts elsewhere that took place as a result of Egypt's conquests in the Eighteenth Dynasty.

> Pharaoh was now classed internationally among the kings of the earth: He is referred to as a "Great King" (*šarru rabû*) . . . on a par with other world leaders such as the kings of Babylon, Hatti, and Mitanni. This had no currency at all in the traditional view from Egypt. The monarchy in Egypt constituted a unity, a single function, with universal application. There was but one *nswt*, "King." . . . Pharaoh . . . thrust as overlord into the Asiatic sphere, could not conceive of, or tolerate, degrees of kingship. All foreign heads of state, whether they called themselves kings or not, were but "chiefs" (*wrw*) to him.[20]

By Egyptian estimates Pharaoh was "the strong-man king, god's representative on earth, the image of the high-god, the superior

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[17] For example David M. Gunn, "The 'Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart': Plot, Character and Theology in Exodus 1–14," in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature*, ed. David J. A. Clines, David M. Gunn, and Alan J. Hauser, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 19 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1982), 76–78.

[18] Raymond Cohen, "All in the Family: Ancient Near Eastern Diplomacy," *International Negotiation* 1 (1996): 21.

[19] John Baines, "Ancient Egyptian Kingship: Official Forms, Rhetoric, Context," in *Kingship and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 270 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 50.

[20] Donald B. Redford, "The Concept of Kingship during the Eighteenth Dynasty," in *Ancient Egyptian Kingship*, ed. David O'Connor and David P. Silverman, vol. 9 of *Probleme der Ägyptology*, ed. Wolfgang Helck (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 168–69. This collection of essays offers a helpful orientation to the topic of kingship in Egypt, including questions about kingship, divinity, and the gods. See especially David P. Silverman, "The Nature of Egyptian Kingship" (pp. 49–94); Donald B. Redford, "The Concept of Kingship during the Eighteenth Dynasty" (pp. 157–84); and David B. O'Connor, "Beloved of Maat, the Horizon of Re: The Royal Palace in New Kingdom Egypt" (pp. 263–300).

intellect."[21] Egyptian tradition placed Pharaoh as the one real king, but the idioms in Exodus place Pharaoh not only within the common scheme of kings but also at a station below "Great King."

Exodus, in fact, casts Pharaoh in the role of a vassal rebelling against his sovereign. The Lord issues commands to Pharaoh with the expectation that he should obey because the Lord is the one with the right to command and the power to enforce it.[22] A messenger introduces the commands with a normal formula for conveying that they have the authority of the one who sent him. They come with threats of what will happen if the vassal disobeys. The words "serve" (עָבַד) and "know" (יָדַע), among others, are part of normal terminology for such cases.[23] Among the curses in suzerain-vassal treaties are ordinary ones like the locusts and hail in Exodus.[24] Treaties also contain curses tailor-made for the offending vassal nation (like the plagues associated with the Nile) and curses intended to promote respect for the suzerain's son (like the plague of death for the firstborn of Egypt and protection for Israel, Yahweh's "son").[25] Since "father" and "son" are terms used in treaties to speak of the overlord and his heir or the overlord and a favored vassal,[26] references to Israel as Yahweh's son further contribute to casting Pharaoh in the diminished role of rebel.[27] Apparently then

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21 Redford, "The Concept of Kingship during the Eighteenth Dynasty," 173.

22 "Pharaoh is addressed as one who is subject to such an imperative, and by the grammar of the imperative he is assigned a subordinate role" (Walter Brueggemann, "Pharaoh as Vassal: A Study of a Political Metaphor," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 57 [January 1995]: 34). Throughout the Bible "Yahweh's relation to non-Israelite nations was based on the assumption and affirmation that the rulers of those nations belonged to Yahweh's *imperium,* that they held power only by Yahweh's leave and on condition of practicing Yahweh's policies" (ibid., 32).

23 Ibid., 34–35.

24 John Van Seters says that "the plagues of flies, pestilence, hail and locust[s] represent rather standard types of curses" in these treaties ("The Plagues of Egypt: Ancient Tradition or Literary Invention?" *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 98 [1986]: 36). His arguments about the provenance and dating of the plague narrative are a different matter.

25 Ibid. Van Seters cites Assyrian treaties. Curses are also found in Hittite treaties from the era of the Egyptian New Kingdom (George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," in *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader*, ed. Edward F. Campbell Jr. and David Noel Freedman [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970], 3:25–53).

26 F. Charles Fensham, "Father and Son as Terminology for Treaty and Covenant," in *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, ed. Hans Goedicke (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 121–35. Fensham discusses Exodus 4:23 on page 133.

27 Pharaoh's responses are typical maneuvers for a vassal who, Brueggemann ob-

Pharaoh's rank was presented to him in terms that he and his officials could both understand and despise and with consequences to match.

The plagues sharpen the attack on Egyptian religious beliefs, particularly as they involve the status of the pharaoh. After reviewing a series of Middle and New Kingdom Egyptian texts, Hoffmeier finds that they

> illustrate that the king was closely associated with the sun and moon, the inundation [of the Nile] and the fertility of the land. Furthermore, the connection between Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt is firmly established. What the plagues of Exodus show is the inability of the obstinate king to maintain [Maat, i.e., cosmic order]. Rather, it is Yahweh and his agents, Moses and Aaron, who overcome in the cosmic struggle, demonstrating who really controls the forces of nature.
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> That the plagues were a direct challenge to Pharaoh's ability to maintain order is further supported when the significance of Moses' rod is considered from an Egyptian perspective.[28]

The shepherd's rod appears throughout Egyptian literature and art as a symbol of the king's authority. The hooded cobra, found often as part of the pharaoh's headdress and elsewhere, is likewise associated with his display of kingship.[29] In addition, scenes depicting wealthy Egyptians hunting birds show the hunters using throw-sticks that have the form of serpents.[30] But in the conflict in Exo-

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serves, "must yield to mounting political pressure, but who will yield no more—and no more quickly—than is necessary. When such established power is threatened by a determined counterpower, it becomes at least ostensibly responsive and cooperative" ("Pharaoh as Vassal: A Study of a Political Metaphor," 37–38).

[28] James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 153–54. He discusses the plagues on pages 144–55. See also his earlier article "The Arm of God versus the Arm of Pharaoh in the Exodus Narratives," *Biblica* 67 (1986): 378–87; and John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 83–121.

[29] Currid discusses many details of the Egyptian symbolism of serpents in *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament,* 83–95, and in "The Egyptian Setting of the 'Serpent' Confrontation in Exodus 7,8–13," *Biblische Zeitschrift,* n.s., 39 (1995): 203–24.

[30] Color photographs of three such scenes in Eighteenth-Dynasty paintings are available in David P. Silverman, ed., *Ancient Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 62, 63, 145. One of the photos is published for the first time in this volume. In view of the Lord's command to Moses in 4:3 to pick up the staff-turned-serpent by its tail, it is interesting to observe that the five men who grasp serpent-shaped throw-sticks in these scenes grasp the "tails" of the sticks. Comments on the command in 4:3 are sometimes unfortunate: "If the Elohist knew anything of snake-handling, he would surely have known that one grasps potentially poisonous snakes behind the head. . . . I think it more likely the author had never handled a snake" (William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* Anchor Bible [New York: Doubleday, 1999], 209). Cassuto, Durham, and others have supposed that the command to pick up the snake by its tail has significance in that it required Moses to exercise greater faith than picking it up

dus, God used both serpent and rod to show that Pharaoh and his rule were not supreme (4:1–5; 7:3–12). The conflict also demonstrates the insufficiency of resorting to the highly renowned services of Egyptian wisemen, sorcerers, and priests (1:10; 7:11, 22; 8:7, 18–19; 9:11; cf. 1 Kings 4:30; Isa. 19:3, 11–13).[31]

Awareness of certain other ideals and idioms within Egyptian culture also sheds light on the conflict between the Lord and Pharaoh. This involves the use in Exodus of the roots כבד, קשׁה, and חזק to describe the condition of Pharaoh's heart.[32] All are rendered with a form of the word "hard" in most English translations (for example, KJV, NASB, NIV, NKJV, NRSV).[33]

Expressions using כבד can describe something as being "heavy" in physical weight—a stone (Prov. 27:3), for example.[34] Sometimes כבד describes something that does not function properly. To explain his difficulty speaking, Moses said that his mouth and tongue were כבד (Exod. 4:10), and so are eyes and ears that fail to see and hear

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behind the head would require (U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967], 47; and John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco, TX: Word, 1987], 45). The views at this point of Propp and of Cassuto and Durham need to be reconsidered both because of the symbolism that may be involved and because poisonous snakes (including Egyptian cobras) can be safely caught by the tail and are so grasped when tools are not being used. Rather than accept either of those views, perhaps readers should understand that the scene shows God using a sensible instruction to calm and redirect Moses.

31 On the background of the חַרְטֻמִּים, "magicians," as lector priests who were experts in the study of ritual texts useful for magic feats, including dream interpretation, see Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 88–89.

32 The word קשׁה is used once of Pharaoh's heart (7:3) and once of Pharaoh in general without mention of his heart (13:15); כבד is used with Yahweh as subject (10:1), with Pharaoh as subject (8:15 [11, Heb.], 32 [28, Heb.]; 9:34), with "heart" as subject (7:14, in a description by Yahweh; 9:7); and חזק is used with Yahweh as subject (4:21; 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17), never with Pharaoh as subject, and with "heart" as subject (7:13, 22; 8:19 [15, Heb.]; 9:35). On the meaning of the three terms see Robert R. Wilson, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41 (January 1979): 22–23; Beale, "An Exegetical and Theological Consideration of the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus 4–14 and Romans 9," 131; and Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Divine Hardening in the Old Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (October–December 1996): 411–15, esp. 415 n. 18.

33 Even if no Egyptian cultural connection were involved in choosing the words used in Exodus to describe Pharaoh's heart, and even if their derivation were not a factor in understanding them, there would still be value in recognizing them as distinct. The use of three different terms to describe the same condition produces the effects of emphasis and comprehensiveness. Exodus 1:7 works similarly by using different terms to describe Israel's population increase; 2:23–25 and 3:7 do the same in describing the Lord's awareness of the Israelites.

34 Other examples are Absalom's hair (2 Sam. 14:26), a yoke (1 Kings 12:10–11), and a chain (Lam. 3:7).

(Gen. 48:10; Isa. 6:10; 59:1).[35] For Pharaoh's heart to be hard in the sense of כבד seems to mean that it, and therefore Pharaoh, was failing to do its proper work of receiving information and making wise choices.[36] The word "inoperative" applies.[37]

The ideal Egyptian was known, however, for listening well, and the heart was associated with hearing. "If you are a man who leads, listen calmly to the speech of one who pleads." "The heart makes of its owner a hearer or non-hearer."[38] In Exodus Pharaoh's hard heart is repeatedly associated with his failing to listen (7:13, 22; 8:15, 19; 9:12), so that in this way Pharaoh appears as unwise (cf. Deut. 30:17; 1 Kings 3:9).

The thought of physical weight associated with כבד may show that Pharaoh's heart was failing by his own standards and his expectations of judgment also. According to Egyptian belief, the gods Anubis and Thoth weighed and recorded the weight of a person's heart after death. If the heart was light, its possessor was ushered into eternal life. If the heart was heavy with misdeeds, Amemit stood by to consume the individual.[39] So the heavier Pharaoh's

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[35] The logic of this apparently depended on the thought of how difficult it can be to move a heavy object or use a heavy tool.

[36] Wilson, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," 22.

[37] The connection between hardness of heart and lack of understanding reappears in Mark 6:51–52 and 8:14–21. In Mark 8 the disciples had experienced remarkable events—Jesus feeding crowds of thousands of people—but they failed to draw the appropriate conclusions from what they had witnessed. Jesus asked, "Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart?" (v. 17), and He reminded them of what He had done (vv. 18–21). By contrast, a person who pays attention is described as setting his heart on a matter or taking the matter to heart (Deut. 11:18; 32:46; Job 22:22; 1 Sam. 21:12; Isa. 41:22; Ezek. 14:4; 44:5; cf. Exod. 9:20–21).

[38] Miriam Lichtheim, *The Old and Middle Kingdoms*, vol. 1 of *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973), 1:68, 74. "The wise is known by his wisdom . . . His ears are made to hear what will profit his son" (ibid., 73). N. Shupak traces connections between "heart" and "hearing" in both Egyptian and Hebrew texts ("Some Idioms Connected with the Concept of 'Heart' in Egypt and the Bible," in *Pharaonic Egypt*, ed. Sarah Israelit-Groll [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985], 203–6).

[39] Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament*, 96–98; idem, "Why Did God Harden Pharaoh's Heart?" *Bible Review*, December 1998, 47–51; and idem, "The Egyptian Setting of the 'Serpent' Confrontation," 216–19. A color plate showing the weighing of the heart of Ani from "The Book of the Dead" is available with discussion of the scene in E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians: Or Studies in Egyptian Mythology* (London: Methuen, 1904; reprint, New York: Dover, 1969), 2:139–47. The weighing of the heart of Hunefer is pictured and discussed in Robert K. Ritner, "The Cult of the Dead," in *Ancient Egypt*, ed. David P. Silverman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 132–47.

heart the more he was in trouble.[40]

The word חזק describes Pharaoh's heart as "strong, firm, rigid." In some instances, as Wilson points out, "the firm heart or mind is one that is steadfast, unswerving in its purpose, unchanging, and courageous (Pss 27:14; 31:25[24]; Josh 11:20). However, if the course of action being pursued by a firm-hearted and persistent person is one that ought to be changed, then the person's persistence . . . can be called 'stubbornness' (Ezek 2:3–4; 3:7–9; Jer 5:3)."[41] The phrases "to strengthen his resolve" or "to become firmly determined" convey the thought, and they too depend on the context to indicate whether the condition is positive or negative.

Egyptians prized the ability to appear strong, firm, resolute, and unmoved by events. From the Middle Kingdom "Stela of Intef Son of Sent" comes the declaration "I am silent with the angry, patient with the ignorant, so as to quell strife. I am cool, free of haste, knowing the outcome, expecting what comes."[42] "The Instruction of Ptahhotep" advises, "Conceal your heart, control your mouth, then you will be known among the officials."[43] The idea finds parallels in the British "stiff upper lip" and the Vulcan ways of Spock and Tuvok. Egyptians described it as being "hard of heart."[44] A hard heart of this sort was valuable not just at court but also at death because the heart needed to declare its owner's innocence. "In order to ensure the heart's safe arrival in the next world and its reliable performance in the dead man's trial, the ancient Egyptians would place a heart-shaped scarab on the mummy's left side of the chest.

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[40] That early readers could have recognized a connection between making Pharaoh's heart heavy and the verdict this would obtain for him seems possible even if they did not know much about Egyptian beliefs, since the ideas that sin is heavy (Isa. 1:4; 24:20) and that the Lord weighs hearts (Prov. 21:2; cf. 16:2) appear elsewhere in the Bible. That a writer could count on readers to work with more than one sense at a time for the word כבד (to speak of a thing having weight and of its being inoperative) is supported by the word's use in 1 Samuel 5 and 6 in the same account but with two different senses—to describe the Lord's hand (5:6, 11) and to describe the hearts of Pharaoh and other Egyptians (6:6). One should also note the wordplay on the notion of weight in the same context using קלל, "to be light" (v. 5).

[41] Wilson, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," 23.

[42] Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature,* 121–22.

[43] Ibid., 75. "The Instruction of Ptahhotep," dated in the Old Kingdom, is found in copies from both the Middle and the New Kingdoms (ibid., 61). In addition to the lines quoted above, it includes many admonitions that promote self-control.

[44] Shupak, "Some Idioms Connected with the Concept of 'Heart' in Egypt and the Bible," 206–7. Shupak lists the Egyptian parallels with Hebrew as follows: *dns ib* (heavy or firm of heart) parallels כבד + לב; *sḫm ib* (hard of heart) parallels חזק + לב; *rwḏ / nḫt ib* parallels קשה + לב (ibid.).

This heart, made of a precious stone, helped the Egyptians to overcome the problem of the evidence of a flesh-and-blood natural heart."[45] To have such a hard heart was certainly Pharaoh's normal intention, but when his heart was hard in Exodus, he did not remain impassive nor were his faults concealed.

Furthermore the king of Egypt's heart was held to be the locus for control of cosmic order. Dozens of scenes depict the ritual of a king[46] presenting Maat, the goddess of order, to other gods. "The offering of Maat very specifically commemorates the willingness of the king to uphold the fundamental principles of world order . . . that were established at the beginning of time."[47] It has been suggested that these presentations were important to establishing the legitimacy of the king and his reign and were "a reflection of the pharaoh's superior and sole ability to discern the true functions and value of Maat. He alone, as the divinely supported ruler, knows the values by which Egypt should be guided."[48] But when the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, Pharaoh lost control. He could not maintain the appearance of being unflappable or of controlling the elements vital to Egypt, and the truth about his sinful character came out. By both the Lord's standards and Pharaoh's own, Pharaoh was inadequate.[49]

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[45] Ibid. See also Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament,* 98–103.

[46] For example Eighteenth-Dynasty Thutmose III.

[47] Emily Teeter, *The Presentation of Maat: Ritual and Legitimacy in Ancient Egypt*, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization, ed. Thomas A. Holland and Thomas G. Urban (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 1. Of special interest in this volume are the plates with depictions of kings presenting Maat to gods and the detailed discussion of the scenes and inscriptions that refer to the ritual. The first depiction that has been found is from the time of Thutmose III (ibid., 7). Maat is included in pharaonic titles long before Thutmose III, however; Teeter names Snefru as the earliest example (ibid., 2 n. 10). Hatshepsut was crowned in the Temple of Maat at Karnak (ibid., 2 n. 11). The date of the depiction of Thutmose III presenting Maat coincides with his desecrations of Hatshepsut's monuments, and it is thought that both activities were intended to emphasize his legitimacy as king (ibid., 83).

[48] Ibid., 1, citing Jan Assmann. Teeter adds, "The associations of Maat with the ancient Egyptian state and idea of kingship are so numerous and pervasive that one could be tempted to conclude that during the pharaonic period 'l'état, c'est Maat'" (ibid., 2).

[49] Shupak observes that two of the three idioms for hardness of heart used of Pharaoh and the Egyptians (the two that employ כבד and חזק) are not common in Hebrew and occur almost exclusively in contexts that have Egyptian backgrounds ("Some Idioms Connected with the Concept of 'Heart' in Egypt and the Bible," 207–8). This tends to heighten their polemic value. They are numerous in Exodus (used a total of eighteen times) but rare elsewhere (Josh. 11:20; 1 Sam. 6:6 [referring to Pharaoh, however]; Ezek. 2:4). In Isaiah 6:10 the heart made "fat" (שמן) fails to "understand" (בין) and is parallel to ears that are "heavy" (כבד). Outside of Exodus

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Overall, Exodus presents the hardening of Pharaoh as coming about both naturally and supernaturally (see especially 9:34–10:2). It no more explains how both God and Pharaoh did this than it explains how God worked within ("gave favor in the sight of," 3:21; 11:3; 12:36) other Egyptians so that they gave valuable items to the departing Israelites. This generosity is as much a product of human will and God's will as the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and is perhaps more atypical of human behavior. Exodus issues no invitation, however, to think that the Egyptians were suddenly unwilling puppets, any more than that Bezalel and Oholiab and other Israelites were, whose hearts God gifted with skill for teaching and for building the tabernacle (cf. 28:3; 35:34–35; 36:1–2). Any theory about the hardening of Pharaoh's heart needs to fit with the other instances in Exodus of the Lord's activity within responsible humans. Meanwhile the references to Pharaoh hardening his own heart (8:15, 32; 9:34) and observations about hardness where no agent is mentioned[50] should not be used to downplay the reality or the seriousness of God's action in hardening Pharaoh's heart.[51] The

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the combination of "heart" with קשׁה or אמץ is more common (Deut. 2:30; 15:7; 2 Chron. 36:13; Pss. 27:14; 31:24; 95:8; Prov. 28:14; Ezek. 3:7), as is קשׁה with "neck" to describe stubbornness in Exodus and elsewhere (Exod. 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9; Deut. 9:6, 13; 10:16; 31:27; 2 Kings 17:14; 2 Chron. 30:8; 36:13; Neh. 9:16–17, 29; Prov. 29:1; Jer. 7:26; 17:23; 19:15). So כבד and חזק were not used with לב to describe Pharaoh in Exodus and in 1 Samuel 6:6 for lack of other ways to describe his recalcitrance, and the idioms for stubbornness that are common elsewhere are rare in Exodus or absent (which is the case for "stiff-necked" regarding Pharaoh and for לב with אמץ entirely). After examining Egyptian and Hebrew usage, Shupak concludes that the expressions using כבד and חזק "do not indicate a direct borrowing of the Egyptian terminology, but rather manipulation and adaptation of the foreign material," one of those adaptations being the change from positive to negative for the characteristic of hardness of heart (ibid., 208).

[50] That is, "Pharaoh's heart is/was hard," which is said by the narrator in 7:13, 22; 8:19; 9:7, 35, by Moses instructing for the future in 13:15 (no mention of heart), and by God in 7:14.

[51] Some interpreters, however, have taken the statements of fulfillment in 7:13 and 22 to mean that the hardness of Pharaoh's heart was God's doing from the start (for example, Beale, "An Exegetical and Theological Consideration of the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus 4–14 and Romans 9," 140–41). The theory is that "as the Lord had said" in these verses refers to "Pharaoh's heart was hard," as well as to "and he did not listen to them," that both are being labeled as fulfillments of 7:3–4, *and* that it must be that the Lord had already hardened Pharaoh's heart, since the Lord had said in 7:3 (and in 4:21) that He would harden Pharaoh's heart. Comparison with other examples seems to indicate, however, that it may be wise to limit the reference of the phrase "as the Lord had said" primarily to the clause to which it is connected and to understand the phrase as generally summing up Pharaoh's response and the situation as a whole.

To limit the reference of "as the Lord had said" in 7:13 and 22 would mean that,

inner workings of a human, created by God, are not beyond His reach.[52]

At the same time, the Lord's statement that He would harden Pharaoh's heart gives no warrant for downplaying the reality or the seriousness of Pharaoh's responsibility or for assuming that he had no opportunity to change his mind.[53] The Philistines who decided what to do with the ark of the Lord (1 Sam. 6:5–6) hardly provide a commentary on the text of Exodus. But according to their understanding of what had happened to Pharaoh, they had a choice not to imitate his tactic of hardening his heart. They took the strange afflictions that accompanied the ark as signaling the need for a new plan. They also thought that if they recognized the authority of the Lord ("give glory to the God of Israel"), He *might* (אוּלַי, "perhaps") grant them an improvement in conditions. The sailors aboard ship with Jonah and the king in Nineveh thought similarly (Jonah 1:6; 3:9). Awareness of sin and impending judgment brought the hope that God might relent if people repented (Joel 2:12–14). If an announcement of impending judgment comes from the Lord, the correct response is agreement, regardless of

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strictly speaking, only Pharaoh's not listening is "just as the Lord had said." In 8:15, for example, it would then not be correct to take this phrase (as pointing out one-to-one, detailed prediction and fulfillment) back to the first two clauses in the verse—"and Pharaoh saw that there was relief, and he hardened his heart." There is no mention that the Lord had earlier said (and no need to suppose He must have said) that Pharaoh would see relief or that Pharaoh would harden his own heart. Perhaps another indication that the phrase may be tied primarily to what immediately precedes it is in 12:31–32. When Pharaoh referred to what Moses had said, he spoke the clause "as you have said" twice, as if it may not carry back to earlier clauses than the one to which it is attached. Granted, this is represented speech, and excited speech at that, rather than narration. Yet the caution stands.

In Genesis 21:1 the words "as He had said [אמר and דבר]" are used for each finite verb clause. In Deuteronomy 11:25 the phrase "as He has said" does refer to a clause prior to the one closest to it, but in that case the closest is in a way skipped (the earlier statement had to do with God's putting fear, not with where the people tread), and so the example is not quite parallel to Exodus 7:13 and 22. In Deuteronomy 31:3 "just as the Lord has spoken" seems to refer to all the clauses in the verse and not just the closest fact, that Joshua would go.

[52] As a form of judgment, hardening a heart cannot reasonably be seen as outside the power or the rights of the one who is the ultimate judge. In a study of God's hardening hearts in Exodus and elsewhere (Deut. 2:30; Josh. 11:20; Isa. 6:9–10; 63:17), Chisholm finds that "hardening was an element of divine judgment whereby God exhibited His justice and sovereignty. The objects of such judgment were never morally righteous or neutral, but were rebels against God's authority. Divine hardening was never arbitrarily implemented, but was in response to rejection of God's authoritative word or standards" ("Divine Hardening in the Old Testament," 411).

[53] Each time the Lord issued a demand and a warning, He "gave Pharaoh a window of opportunity," which Pharaoh shut by refusing to obey (ibid., 428). Chisholm lists the following six refusals: 5:2; 8:1–4; 8:20–23; 9:1–5; 9:13–14; 10:1–11 (ibid., 428–29).

whether it is possible to avoid the consequences of an offense already committed.

Every warning and subsequent follow-through to disaster implies a recommendation to change course, especially when the issuer is not obliged to give a warning. Pharaoh's own decree offers an illustration of this; he declared that Moses would die if he came before him again (Exod. 10:28). An immediate execution would have put a sure stop to future visits. The warning, however, implicitly advised Moses to abandon the idea of Israel leaving Egypt, not just stop coming to Pharaoh with commands and plague announcements.[54] For the Lord to announce an impending punishment, to relent regarding punishment, or to postpone it is a kindness, not something that He owes an offender. The indebtedness is in the opposite direction.[55]

But is the Lord's treatment of Pharaoh a failure in regard to efficiency, if it is not a case of injustice? Edmund Burke, as noted earlier, argued that for England to use force against the American colonists would be counterproductive. She would be hurting her own interests. He also argued that peaceful relations were possible between England and the colonies and that war could be avoided. He based this possibility on the core values and goals that the colonists held in common with England. No such field of common values and shared goals existed between the Lord and Pharaoh, however. Fellowship or friendship is not possible while one denies the essence, real or imagined, of the other.

If attention turns to "Pharaoh's point of view and will" in the sense of his opinion of himself as independent of the Lord and superior to Him, rather than "point of view and will" as they concern objective physical welfare or personal benefit, it becomes apparent that when the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, He did not override Pharaoh's will in at least one important respect. Exodus gives no sign that Pharaoh longed to submit to Yahweh as his sovereign and

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54 "The intent of the plagues [as signs or portents in Exodus] is not finally to leave observers with mouths open in amazement. Having gotten people's attention, they point beyond themselves toward a disastrous future, while carrying a certain force in their own terms. They are both acts of judgment in themselves and point toward a future judgment" (Terence E. Fretheim, "The Plagues as Ecological Signs of Historical Disaster," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 [1991]: 387). He argues that the plagues each prefigure the judgment enacted in the death of the firstborn or the sea crossing or both.

55 This is as Anselm saw it, reckoning that everyone is in debt to God; so he asked, "As for obedience, what do you give God that you do not owe him, to whose command you owe all that you are and have and can do?" ("Why God Became Man," in *Readings in Christian Thought,* ed. Hugh T. Kerr [Nashville: Abingdon, 1966], 89).

was prevented from doing so; he received numerous rebukes, explanations, and commands that imply opportunity to submit. Rather, the Lord gave Pharaoh the strength of will necessary to go on opposing Him, in accord with Pharaoh's most fundamental desires, and despite what should otherwise have been effective inducements to give in based on secondary values having to do with physical welfare. His attitude of rebellion is "confirmed," so to speak, and repeatedly displayed rather than hidden or compromised for the sake of expediency.

So then, what if God and Pharaoh had not hardened Pharaoh's heart? It seems safe to answer that Pharaoh would not have been an essentially different or a better person. He would simply have experienced fewer plagues. Perfunctory acquiescence, however, was not an option that the Lord gave him, because the choice before Pharaoh and readers of Exodus is not merely whether Pharaoh ought to let the Israelites leave Egypt. At stake is the issue of identity—who the Lord is, who Pharaoh is by comparison, and who the Israelites are as the Lord's people. Once the identities are acknowledged, it becomes plain who deserves worship from all others and who by right and power commands obedience and service.[56] The plagues and the hardening serve as an opportunity for displaying who's who, with the result that if the Lord had not hardened Pharaoh's heart, readers would know less about Pharaoh and less about the Lord.

Early on, Pharaoh asked, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?" (5:2). The long conflict between the Lord and Pharaoh begins to answer that question by showing the Lord to be well worth knowing and respecting. He is the God who acts so as to make Himself known, who does what He says He will do, who protects and rescues His people, and who is so powerful that every corner of Egypt is subject to His sovereignty, including Pharaoh's own decision-making processes.

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[56] For a summary of the conflict between the Lord and Pharaoh in reference to worship see Edward L. Greenstein, "The Firstborn Plague and the Reading Process," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 563–66.