

The Covenant Charter *The Pentateuch*

The Hardening of Hearts *Thematic Study of the Pentateuch*

^{4:21} The LORD said to Moses, ‘When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but **I will harden his heart** so that he will not let the people go.

^{7:3} But **I will harden Pharaoh’s heart** that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.

^{7:13} **Yet Pharaoh’s heart was hardened**, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. ¹⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘**Pharaoh’s heart is stubborn; he** refuses to let the people go...

^{7:22} But the magicians of Egypt did the same with their secret arts; and **Pharaoh’s heart was hardened**, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. ²³ Then Pharaoh turned and went into his house with no concern even for this.

^{8:15} But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, **he hardened his heart** and did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

^{8:19} Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God.’ But **Pharaoh’s heart was hardened**, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

^{8:32} But **Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also**, and he did not let the people go.

^{9:7} Pharaoh sent, and behold, there was not even one of the livestock of Israel dead. But **the heart of Pharaoh was hardened**, and he did not let the people go.

^{9:12} And **the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart**, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses.

^{9:34} But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, **he sinned again and hardened his heart, he and his servants.** ³⁵ **Pharaoh’s heart was hardened**, and he did not let the sons of Israel go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

^{10:1} Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh, for **I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants**, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them, ² and that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I performed My signs among them, that you may know that I am the LORD.’

^{10:20} But **the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart**, and he did not let the sons of Israel go.

^{10:27} But **the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart**, and he was not willing to let them go.

^{11:10} Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh; yet **the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart**, and he did not let the sons of Israel go out of his land.

The Plagues and the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

Plague	Exodus Text	Type	Warning?	Time of Warning	Instruction Formula	Who Speaks?	Who Hardens Pharaoh's Heart?
1	7:14 – 24	Blood	Yes	In the morning	Station yourself	Aaron	Pharaoh
2	7:15 – 8:11	Frogs	Yes	None	Go to Pharaoh	Aaron	Pharaoh
3	8:12 – 15	Lice	None	None	None	Aaron	Pharaoh
4	8:16 – 28	Flies	Yes	In the morning	Station	God	Pharaoh
5	9:1 – 7	Pestilence	Yes	None	Go to Pharaoh	God	Pharaoh
6	9:8 – 12	Boils	None	None	None	Moses	God
7	9:13 – 35	Hail	Yes	In the morning	Station yourself	Moses	Pharaoh
8	10:1 – 20	Locust	Yes	None	Go to Pharaoh	Moses	God
9	10:21 – 23	Darkness	None	None	None	Moses	God
10	11:4 – 7 & 12:29 – 30	Death of Firstborn	Yes	None	None	God	God

Source: Nahum Sarna, *Exploring Exodus* (New York: Schocken, 1996), p.76; cf. Umberto Cassuto, *Exodus* (Chicago: Publisher's Row, 2005), p.92 – 93; James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.144 – 155

Other Hardenings of Heart in the Pentateuch

Ex.14:1 Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² 'Tell the sons of Israel to turn back and camp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you shall camp in front of Baal-zephon, opposite it, by the sea. ³ 'For Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, 'They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.' ⁴ Thus **I will harden Pharaoh's heart**, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD.' And they did so. ⁵ When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, **Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart** toward the people, and they said, 'What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?' ⁶ So he made his chariot ready and took his people with him; ⁷ and he took six hundred select chariots, and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. ⁸ **The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh**, king of Egypt, and he chased after the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going out boldly. ⁹ Then the Egyptians chased after them with all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon... ¹⁵ Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward. ¹⁶ As for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land. ¹⁷ As for Me, behold, **I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians** so that they will go in after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. ¹⁸ Then the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD, when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots and his horsemen'... ²² The sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. ²³ Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea.

Deut.3:30 But Sihon king of Heshbon was not willing for us to pass through his land; for **the LORD your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate**, in order to deliver him into your hand, as he is today. ³¹ The LORD said to me, 'See, I have begun to deliver Sihon and his land over to you. Begin to occupy, that you may possess his land.' ³² Then Sihon with all his people came out to meet us in battle at Jahaz. ³³ The LORD our God delivered him over to us, and we defeated him with his sons and all his people. ³⁴ So we captured all his cities at that time and utterly destroyed the men, women and children of every city. We left no survivor. ³⁵ We took only the animals as our booty and the spoil of the cities which we had captured.'

Deut.15:7 If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, **you shall not harden your heart**, nor close your hand from your poor brother; ⁸ but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks.

Later Jewish and Christian Commentary on the Hardening

Irenaeus (130 – 200 AD), the first writing theologian after the New Testament, said: ‘How, then, shall he be a God, who has not as yet been made a man? Or how can he be perfect who was but lately created? How, again, can he be immortal, who in his mortal nature did not obey his Maker? For it must be that thou, at the outset, shouldst hold the rank of a man, and then afterwards partake of the glory of God. For thou dost not make God, but God thee. If, then, thou art God's workmanship, await the hand of thy Maker which creates everything in due time; in due time as far as thou art concerned, whose creation is being carried out. [Efficeris] Offer to Him thy heart in a soft and tractable state, and preserve the form in which the Creator has fashioned thee, having moisture in thyself, lest, by becoming **hardened**, thou lose the impressions of His fingers. But by preserving the framework thou shalt ascend to that which is perfect, for the moist clay which is in thee is hidden [there] by the workmanship of God. His hand fashioned thy substance; He will cover thee over [too] within and without with pure gold and silver, and He will adorn thee to such a degree, that even ‘the King Himself shall have pleasure in thy beauty.’ [Ps.45:11] But if thou, being obstinately **hardened**, dost reject the operation of His skill, and show thyself ungrateful towards Him, because thou wert created a [mere] man, by becoming thus ungrateful to God, thou hast at once lost both His workmanship and life. For creation is an attribute of the goodness of God but to be created is that of human nature. If then, thou shalt deliver up to Him what is thine, that is, faith towards Him and subjection, thou shalt receive His handiwork, and shall be a perfect work of God.’ (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 4, chapter 39, paragraph 2)

Maximus the Confessor (580 – 662 AD) said, ‘God is the sun of justice, as it is written, who shines rays of goodness on simply everyone. The soul develops according to its free will into either wax because of its love for God or into mud because of its love for matter. Thus just as by nature the mud is dried out by the sun and the wax is automatically **softened**, so also every soul which loves matter and the world and has fixed its mind far from God is **hardened** as mud according to its free will and by itself advances to its perdition, as did Pharaoh. However, every soul which loves God is **softened** as wax, and receiving divine impressions and characters it becomes the dwelling place of God in the Spirit.’ (Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings, Chapters on Knowledge*, paragraph 12 (Mahweh, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), p.130).

The double image of wax and mud and the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (Ex.7:13) are taken from Origen (Princ.3, 1, 11) who gets them from Philo (Quis rer.div.her.181:3, 41). This usage in Philo, Irenaeus, Origen, and Maximus does not prove that Paul himself intended that meaning in Romans, or that he would necessarily have applied/extended the clay-potter analogy in the same way. However, the use of the double metaphor of wax and mud does attest to strong traditions of Jewish and early Christian belief in human free will, not divine determinism, regarding salvation.