

Challenge

Did God Really Harden Pharaoh's Heart?

When Pharaoh refuses to release God's people from slavery, most English translations say that "the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen" to Moses' demand for freedom.

Exodus 9:12



The Hebrew for “hardened” here is חזק (*hazaq*) and “heart” is לב (*lev*).

When we read that the Lord “hardened Pharaoh’s heart”, we think of God forcing Pharaoh to act a certain way; it sounds like Pharaoh would let the Israelites go, but God stops him by overriding his autonomy.

From the Hebrew:

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However, rather than “harden”, *hazaq* literally means to “strengthen”, and along with “heart”, *lev* can also mean “desire” or “will”.

Thus, an equally valid translation is that “the Lord strengthened Pharaoh’s will.”

Do you see the difference here?



From the Hebrew:

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For God to strengthen Pharaoh's will does not mean that God forced him to do something against his will, but just the opposite: it was already Pharaoh's will to keep the Israelites enslaved. So, God strengthened Pharaoh's will that was already there.

Analogy:

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It's like a parent dealing with a young child they catch smoking.

Do they take the cigarette from them? Or, encourage them to smoke the whole pack so they become sick?

With the latter way they learn from the heart through experience not to smoke.



The full outcome:

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God says to Pharaoh, “So you refuse to let my people go? OK, then I’m going to reinforce your stubborn will and watch you go through an entire series of plagues! That way you will learn about resisting me.”

The Lord doesn’t take away Pharaoh’s free will when he refuses to let the people go; rather, he reinforces or strengthens that will.





WARNING

Watch how you attribute characteristics to God from English translations.

Watch how you regard yourself and others in relation to hard-heartedness

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So, the challenge is for you to come to grips with this information

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