

The Heart of Pharaoh in Exodus 4–15

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The exegetical problems surrounding the hardening of Pharaoh's heart motif in Exodus 4–15 have long been noted by scholars. In one's attempt to grapple with the interpretive issues that arise from this familiar episode, it is expedient that one's efforts are firmly anchored in the grammar and syntax of the text itself. The following study attempts to analyze the heart-of-Pharaoh motif in light of three concerns: lexical, grammatical, and contextual. The aim of a threefold approach such as this is to offer a reanalysis of this text for the purpose of further elucidating the hardening of Pharaoh's heart as presented in the Exodus narrative.

Key Words: Exodus, Pharaoh, heart, hardening motif, חזק, כבד, קשה, Hebrew stative, Hebrew factitive, Hebrew causative, grammatical subject, narrative commentary, divine commentary

INTRODUCTION

The hardening of Pharaoh's heart has been the subject of many commentaries, articles, and monographs as scholars have sought gains in the questions about human culpability and divine sovereignty. For the most part, the common view is that the problem in Exod 4–15 is a theological one—did Pharaoh harden his heart, did God harden Pharaoh's heart, or both? Countless pages have been written in an attempt to answer these questions, often with less than satisfactory results.¹ A number of discussions

1. The following is a selective list of recent treatments of the hardening motif in Exod 4–15: Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*: (OTL; Louisville: Westminster, 1974), 173–74; Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (trans. Israel Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1974), 55–58; Robert R. Wilson, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," *CBQ* 41 (1979): 18–36; J.-L. Ska, "La sortie d'Égypte (Ex 7–14) dans le récit sacerdotal (P^s) et la tradition prophétique," *Bib* 60 (1979): 18–36, 191–215; G. K. Beale, "An Exegetical and Theological Consideration of the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus 4–14 and Romans 9," *TJ* 2 (1984): 129–54; John I. Durham, *Exodus* (WBC 3; Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 99–130; Nahum N. Sarna, *Exodus* (JPS; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 64–65; Lyle Eslinger, "Freedom or Knowledge? Perspective and Purpose in the Exodus Narrative (Exodus 1–15)," *JSOT* 52 (1991): 43–60; J. K. Currid, "Why Did God Harden Pharaoh's Heart?" in *BRev* 9/6 (1993): 47–51; John Van Seters, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus–Numbers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 87–91; Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Divine Hardening in the Old Testament," *BSac* 153 (1996): 410–34; William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18* (AB 2; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 353;

have attempted to provide answers to the problem through source critical methodology, identifying the proposed sources behind the appearance of the three distinct roots that describe Pharaoh's hard heart.² Indeed, these discussions have been useful in drawing attention to the Hebrew text's nuanced presentation of the hardening activity within the heart of Pharaoh.³ However, perhaps a reexamination of this exegetically difficult text from a different vantage point might prove useful in lending additional interpretive clarity to this issue.

One of the hurdles to overcome in revisiting this overworked literary piece is to provide enough justification that more needs to be said. It is my opinion that after surveying the secondary literature up to date, there remains the need for clarification in three areas: lexical, grammatical, and contextual. One example serves to illustrate the problems in each of these three areas. Many scholars highlight the fact that in the first five plagues Pharaoh hardens his heart, while in the last five plagues Yahweh hardens Pharaoh's heart.⁴ Yet, this an assessment is an oversimplification of the narrative structure, because the first two occurrences of this motif come from the mouth of Yahweh as a prediction of what he is about to do, before the arrival of the plagues. Furthermore, this observation largely ignores the fact that in the instances in which Pharaoh is claimed to be the subject of the verb, the verb is often a Qal stative. It would seem that the stative verb is employed by the narrator to provide a description of the condition of Pharaoh's heart that is consistent with the words that Yahweh had spoken to Moses previously (7:13, 14, 22; 8:19[15]; 9:7), not to mention the fact that *heart*, not *Pharaoh*, is the subject of these verbs. Rashbam, on the

Pierre Gilbert, "Human Free Will and Divine Determinism: Pharaoh, a Case Study," *Direction* 30/1 (2000): 76–87; Mathews McGinnis, "Teaching Exodus as 'Problem Text,'" *Teaching Theology and Religion* 5/2 (2002): 71–79; Nili Shupak, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus 4:1–15:21," in *Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World: Studies in Honor of Donald B. Redford* (ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Antione Hirsch; Brill, 2004), 389–403; Dorian G. Coover Cox, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Its Literary and Cultural Contexts" *BSac* 163 (2006): 292–311; Walter Brueggemann, "Pharaoh as Vassal: A Study of a Political Metaphor" *CBQ* 57 (2006): 27–51

2. The classic presentation of this theory can be found in S. R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus* (Cambridge Bible; Cambridge University Press, 1911), 55–56, where he outlines the following sources: P = 7:19–20a, 21b–22; 8:5–7, 15b–19; 9:8–12; 11:9–10; J = 7:15, 17b, 20b; 9:22–23a, 31–32 (perhaps), 35a; 10:12–13a, 14a, 15b, 20, 21–23, 27; 11:1–3; and E is hardly traceable.

3. This theory, at least in its classic representation, has been questioned by some scholars and revised by others. For a critique of this approach, see J. K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt* (Oxford University Press, 1997), especially pp. 135–63. See also his discussion on pp. 3–24, for a summary of recent scholarly discussion about Israel's early history. See also idem, *Ancient Israel in Sinai* (Oxford University, 2005), 45–109. Note also Shupak, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," 393, where she comments that source criticism is well able to explain the usage of different expressions to convey Pharaoh's obstinacy, "but it is unable to elucidate the appearance of different agents in the action of hardening Pharaoh's heart." For the most recent discussion of the hardening motif from a source critical approach, see Wilson, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," 18–36. The current discussion does not attempt to provide an analysis of the historical development of this tradition but instead deals with the text in its final literary form.

4. Sarna, *Exodus*, 23.

other hand, does not see the usual progression of Pharaoh hardening his heart here, that is, that initially Pharaoh hardens his heart and afterwards God hardens Pharaoh's heart. Instead, Rashbam construes this progression on the basis of the interchange of the Qal and Hiphil verbal forms. In chap. 7, Pharaoh's heart naturally stiffens itself in that he was not moved by the miraculous events that he witnessed. In chap. 8, he is moved by the miracles but he forces himself to stiffen his heart.⁵ Rashbam's interpretation is moving in the right direction, yet his analysis is an oversimplification of the data, because the Qal is interspersed with the Hiphil and Piel in chaps. 7–10. In fact, contrary to Rashbam's assertion that the Hiphil is used after chap. 7, the first hardening in chap. 8 employs a Piel. Additionally, these observations usually refer to the process in view as "hardening" in spite of the fact that the text contains three distinct roots to explain the situation in Pharaoh's heart.⁶

The following discussion does not attempt to provide an exhaustive treatment of the hardening of heart motif in Exod 4–15, but instead attempts to address the three areas just outlined. Of course, one should not be so presumptuous to think that one article could clear the clutter of the discussion entirely; yet on the other hand, it is my hope that the following treatment of the lexical, grammatical, and contextual issues discussed below might lay some more groundwork to clarify further the implications of this motif in the broader context of OT theology.

THE ROOTS DESCRIBING THE HARDENING MOTIF

קח

The most frequent root used to describe the heart of Pharaoh in the Exodus narrative is קח (12×). This stative root is glossed in the Qal "to be or grow firm, strong, strengthen."⁷ In addition to the sense of strength, in the corpus of Hebrew inscriptions this root can also indicate the more figurative sense "to be courageous."⁸ Particularly, Dennis Pardee suggests that in the factitive stem, Piel, the root means "to strengthen."⁹ In Jewish Aramaic, קח means (1) "to be thick, solid, strong" and (2) "to take possession."¹⁰ Though the idea of grasping seems to appear in the G-stem of Aramaic, in Biblical Hebrew this notion seems to be limited to the Hiphil "to take," or "to keep hold of, seize."¹¹ Aramaic also uses this word to mean "to tie up"

5. Rashbam, *Rashbam's Commentary on Exodus* (trans. Martin L. Lockshin; BJS 310; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 73.

6. Unlike source critics who have made serious attempts in explaining the significance of these distinct roots.

7. BDB 304.

8. DNWSI 361.

9. D. Pardee, *Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Letters* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1983), 132, cited in DNWSI 361.

10. Jastrow 445.

11. BDB 305.

(Peal) or “to fasten” (Pael).¹² Arabic *ḥazaqa* means “to tie up, bind with a rope.”¹³ Attempts have also been made to see a connection with Akkadian *ešqu*, “strong, massive,”¹⁴ though this seems doubtful etymologically.¹⁵ As it stands, outside the Hebrew Bible this root is only attested in Aramaic and Arabic and most likely originally meant “to be/become strong.”¹⁶

The Hebrew Bible employs the Qal stative of this root to denote a state of strength or occasionally an increase in strength, depending on the syntactical context.¹⁷ There are several instances in which the imperative commands one to be courageous.¹⁸ For example, Moses instructs the Israelites: *חזקו ואמצו אל-תיראו* “Be strong and courageous; do not fear” (Deut 31:6). In the majority of cases, this usage is accompanied by the Qal imperative of the root *אמץ*.¹⁹ Of interest here are two instances of the Qal imperative that occur in connection with heart: *חזק ויאמץ לבך* (Ps 27:14) and *חזקו ויאמץ לבבכם* (Ps 31:25), “Be strong that your heart might exhibit strength.” The Piel stem communicates the idea of causing someone or something to enter into a strengthened state.²⁰ More specifically, this stem can mean to fortify, repair, maintain, encourage, support, assist, tie, fasten, or hold fast to something.²¹ Rehoboam strengthens the fortified cities in Judah by increasing the troop levels and by dispatching more weapons and general supplies: *ויחזק את-המצרות*, “He strengthened the fortified cities” (2 Chr 11:11). When the Piel stem takes *יד* as its object, “strengthen the hands,” it likewise means “to sustain, encourage.”²² In a reflexive sense, the Hithpael relates the military operations Jehoshaphat carries out in preparation for a possible skirmish with his northern neighbor: *ויתחזק על ישראל* “and he strengthened himself against Israel” (2 Chr 17:1). A military operation is definitely in view as the narrative of Joshua speaks of Yahweh inciting the Canaanites to fight against Israel: *כי מאת יהוה היתה לחזק את-לבבם לקראת המלחמה את-ישראל*: “For it was from Yahweh to strengthen their hearts to meet Israel in battle”

12. Jastrow 445.

13. Lane 2:560. There seems to be some confusion over this root, which HALOT (p. 302) lists as *ḥazaqa*, but according to Lane, the Arabic root is *ḥazaqa*.

14. CAD E 367. Cf. also HALOT 302.

15. See Albachten F. Hesse, “חזק,” TDOT 4:301, which expresses misgivings about this connection. The etymological data indicate that the root must be from proto-Semitic *h^h-dz-k’ because /ḥzq/ is the attested root in both Hebrew and Arabic. As for the Akkadian connection, it is highly unlikely that the {š} of *ešqu* would have developed from proto-Semitic *dz, which normally goes to {z} in Akkadian. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that the Akkadian form *ešqu* “solid” is not etymologically related to the Hebrew root *ḥzq*.

16. Ibid.

17. E.g. the occurrence of *הולך וחזק מאד* “it grew much louder” (Exod 19:19). For a discussion of stativity and fientivity as it relates to this root, see discussion below, pp. 340–343.

18. Deut 31:6, 7, 23; Josh 1:6, 7, 9, 18; 10:25; 23:6; 2 Sam 10:12; 13:28 1 Kgs 2:2; 1 Chr 19:13; 22:13; 28:10, 20; 2 Chr 15:7; 19:11; 32:7 Ezra 10:4; Pss 27:14; 31:25; Isa 35:4; 41:6; Hag 2:4 (3×); Dan 10:19 (2×); 2 Chr 25:8.

19. See BDB 304 I 2c.

20. See Bruce Waltke and Michael O’Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §24.1.

21. Robin Wakely, “קחז,” NIDOTTE 2:68.

22. Judg 9:24; Jer 23:14; Ezek 13:22; Isa 35:3; Job 4:3; Ezra 6:22; Neh 2:18, 6:9; 2 Chr 29:34

(Josh 11:20). Here, this root is used in conjunction with **לב** to indicate a call to military action, much like the sense of Exod 14:8. One further use is worth noting, though the form of **חזק** is adjectival rather than verbal. In Ezekiel, **חזק לב** appears in parallel with **קשה לב** **אני**: **קשה לב** **אני** **וחזקי-לב** **אני**; **שולח אותך אליהם** and strong hearted” (Ezek 2:4). In the preceding verse, Yahweh explains to Ezekiel that the Israelites are rebellious (**מרד**) and that they have transgressed against God. They are hard faced in that they are not pliable to the ways of God and stand stubbornly opposed to him; they are strong hearted in that they are boldly entrenched in their position of resistance.

This sense of courage or strength may provide insight for understanding the use of this root in the Exodus narrative. It should be noted that, for the most part, the use of this kind of idiom denotes something positive, or at the least expedient, though Ezek 2:4 is clearly negative. It is undeniable that **חזק לב** is meant to indicate something negative in this context, at least from the perspective of the Israelite reader. However, the fact that **חזק** appears elsewhere with **לב** to indicate strength or courage makes it possible to see a similar meaning here. In this context, Pharaoh strengthens his position of hostility in deliberate defiance of the request from Moses and refuses to concede to the wishes of his deity. From the beginning of the conflict, the narrator presents him as strong, creating a tension between two perspectives: the Egyptian and the Israelite. As early as Exod 3, the text relates the divine description of Pharaoh’s strong will: **ואני ידעתי כי לא-יתן** **ואני ידעתי כי לא-יתן**; **אתכם מלך מצרים להלך ולא ביד חזקה**, “I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go, not even by a strong hand” (3:19). The strong position of this Egyptian king is about to encounter the strong hand of Yahweh, leaving the reader to wonder about who will prove to be stronger.

The fact that Pharaoh exercises this resolve to resist the wishes of a foreign deity may best be interpreted in the religio-political setting of a deified king. From the Egyptian point of view, the actions of Pharaoh are no doubt to be viewed in a positive way as a demonstration of great courage that should be expected of a ruling god.²³ In fact, Nili Shupak attempts to demonstrate the Egyptian flavor of this narrative, since the most common term for hardness of heart in the larger context of the Hebrew Bible is **קשה**, not **חזק** or **כבד**. Shupak makes the case that, unlike the Hebrew Bible, in the Egyptian sources “strength of heart” and the “weight of the heart” are

23. For a discussion of Egyptian kingship, see Donald B. Redford, “The Concept of Kingship during the Eighteenth Dynasty” in *Ancient Egyptian Kingship* (ed. David O’Connor and David P. Silverman; *Probleme der Ägyptologie* 9; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 168–69. Ronald J. Leprohon, (“Royal Ideology and State Administration in Pharaonic Egypt” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* [ed. Jack Sasson; vol. 1; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000], 275) cautions against the god incarnate reading of Pharaoh: “The evidence shows that the living Pharaoh was not, as was once thought, divine in nature or a god incarnate on earth. Rather, we should think of him as a human recipient of a divine office. Any individual king was a transitory figure, while the kingship was eternal.”

more common for describing the hardness of heart.²⁴ Specifically, the connotation of קוזק as it is used here in an Egyptian context would exemplify courage and strength.²⁵ She writes:

There, the quality of stout heartedness, and consistency of character attributed to someone who practices restraint, who exercises self-control and who shows courage in the hour of need—this quality is highly esteemed. This same quality is conveyed in collocations similar to those of the Bible, and which are also composed of words indicating heaviness, strength, hardness and the term, “heart.”²⁶

If she is correct in her assertions, the irony of the story from the Israelite perspective is that the courage and strength of Pharaoh is the very thing Yahweh uses to bring about his own downfall. At an important juncture in the story, the narrative even portrays Yahweh strengthening the resolve of Pharaoh to his own demise. However, it appears as though she may be pressing this point a bit too much, because קוזק לב appear in concert four times outside the Exodus context.²⁷ If this idiom were dependent on an Egyptian connection, it is more difficult to account for these independent occurrences. It seems best, then, to maintain that the קוזק לב combination denotes a demonstration of strength or courage that can be either positive or negative, depending on the perspective. Certainly, in 14:8 (cf. Josh 11:20) the military sense of this word comes to the forefront as Yahweh moves Pharaoh’s heart to muster his troops and pursue the escapees. This final feat of strength broadcasts loudly to the reader that the strength of Pharaoh has met its match.

When the full sense of this root is brought into the analysis of Pharaoh’s heart, it demonstrates the richness of the narrative’s colored portrayal of this famous contest between Egypt and Israel, Pharaoh and Yahweh. The tendency among translators and commentators alike is simply to gloss each of the three roots as “hard” in analogy with קשה. Carl Weber states: “There is no discernible difference here in the usage of these words.”²⁸ However, it

24. Shupak, “The Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart,” 394–96; contra Beale, “An Exegetical and Theological Consideration,” 131, where he states: “In contrast to *qasa*, *hazaq* and *kabed* are used abundantly throughout the OT and are fluid terms.” It seems that both Shupak and Beale overstate the situation with this idiom.

25. This is contrasted with the negative connotations of a “heavy” heart as discussed below.

26. Shupak, “The Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart,” 395. Subsequently in her discussion, she explains that, in addition to the god-king conception, from early times the Egyptians believed in “the existence of the will of god and his inspiration of the human heart” (p. 398). In late periods this thought developed into the idea that “the way of god” was somehow imprinted in the human heart. She thus concludes: “This formulation undercuts the credibility of the Egyptian belief. Not only is Pharaoh not omnipotent; neither is his heart, wherein resides the spark of god in man—it is nothing but a tool in the hands of the God of the Hebrews to do with as he pleases” (p. 399).

27. Josh 11:20; Prov 27:14, 31:25; Ezek 2:4. The occurrence in 1 Sam 6:6 is undoubtedly connected to the Exodus context.

28. Carl Weber, “קוזק,” TWOT 1:276.

is my opinion that there are discernible differences if these three roots are allowed to speak for themselves. In a similar vein, Pierre Gilbert agrees:

There are no compelling reasons here to translate *hʾzq* by the verb “to harden.” Since the usage of this verb in the Exodus narrative is unambiguously set in the context of a military conflict, it is preferable to retain its usual meaning, i.e., “to make strong,” “to strengthen,” “to fortify,” or “to resist.” If this translation is correct, it would imply that the author does not wish to communicate that Pharaoh “hardened” his heart after each of the first five plagues, but that he remained firm in the face of Yahweh’s threats and actions. Pharaoh takes courage! He remains strong in the face of this formidable enemy.²⁹

Gilbert’s sensitivity to the meaning of *חזק* is to be preferred over interpreters’ tendency to translate it simply “harden.”³⁰ With this root, the narrative presents a strong and defiant king who strengthens his position, whom Yahweh strengthens to become even more resistant, and who finally crumbles under the strong hand of the God of the Hebrews.³¹

כבד

The second most common word used to describe the heart of Pharaoh is the root *כבד*. This stative root means “to be heavy, weighty, burdensome, honored.”³² It occurs in all the Semitic languages with the meaning “to be heavy” or figuratively “to be important”: Babylonian *kabātu*, Akkadian *kabātu*, Old Canaanite *yu-ka-bi-id*, Ugartic *kbd* I/III, Arabic *kabada*, Ethiopic *kabda*, Phoenician *kbd*, and Punic *kbd*.³³ Aramaic is much the same, except for two further uses: (1a) “to keep clean” (Pael); (1b) “to be swept” (Hithpael); and (2) “to irritate, grieve” (Apel).³⁴ Conversely, Aramaic uses the more common root *יקר* to denote “to be heavy, precious,” possibly making the rarer Hebrew root *יקר* an Aramaism.³⁵ In the broader analysis of the ancient Near East, *kabid*-(at-), “liver,” appears in all the languages.³⁶ It is

29. Gilbert, “Human Free Will and Divine Determinism,” 80–81.

30. Yet, Gilbert’s comment would lead one to believe that *חזק* occurs with each of the first five plagues, overlooking the fact that the first five plagues instead interchange *כבד* and *חזק*: plague 1: *כבד* (7:22); plague 2: *חזק* (8:15[11]); plague 3: *כבד* (8:19[15]); plague 4: *חזק* (8:32[28]); plague 5: *כבד* (9:7). Furthermore, the stem of *חזק* in the first five plagues is stative (Piel in plagues 6, 8, 9, and 10), while the stem of *כבד* is either factitive or causative (Piel or Hiphil).

31. See 3:19; 6:1; 13:3, 14; 14:16.

32. BDB 457.

33. “To be important”: See discussion of C. Dohmen, “כבד,” *TDOT* 7:13. Akk. *Kabātu*: CAD K 14. Old Can. *Yu-ka-bi-di*: DNWSI 484. Ug. *Kbd* I/III: Gregorio Del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition* (trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson; vol. 1; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 424, only attested in the D stem “to honor, pay homage to, welcome.” Arab. *kabada*: Lane 7:2584. Eth. *kabda*: Wolf Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez (Classical Ethiopic)* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1987), 273. Phoen. *kbd*: DNWSI 484. Pun. *kbd*: *ibid.*, substantive meaning “glory, honor.”

34. Jastrow 607.

35. BDB, 429, 1096; cf. Dohmen, “כבד,” *TDOT* 7:13.

36. *TLOT* 2:590.

possible that there is a connection between the noun meaning “liver” and the verb meaning “heavy,” perhaps on the basis of etymology or in light of the various meanings of *kbd* that could be derived from the noun “liver.”³⁷

The factitive and causative stems Piel and Hiphil can demonstrate the literal action of making something heavy, in addition to the more figurative connotation “to make honorable” or “to glorify,” though a couple of instances of this meaning are found in the Qal stem.³⁸ Generally, it appears that the literal meaning of *כבד*, “to be/make heavy,” is most often of inanimate objects, while the figurative sense of “to be honored/make honorable” is usually of animate objects.³⁹

In certain contexts, there appears to be a further sense attributed to this root when it is used to describe the characteristics of various body parts. This is especially important for the current discussion concerning the heart of Pharaoh. In several instances, *כבד* describes the hand as being heavy, as, for example, in Job 23:2 where the expression *ידי כבדה על-אנחתי* “my hand is heavy on account of my groaning” may denote a sense of weariness and oppression. Similarly, the hand of God is often described as being heavy in the sense of delivering oppression, misfortune, or punishment.⁴⁰ Closer to the context of Exodus are the uses of *כבד* that describe body parts associated with perception. In Gen 48:10, the Qal stative describes the eyes of Jacob as *כבדו מזקן לא יוכל לראות*, “heavy from old age, not being able to see.” Here, the meaning of *כבד* indicates a dullness of the eyes’ perception. Likewise, Isa 59:1 describes the ear of Yahweh as not being insensitive: *ולא-כבדה ואזנו משמוע*, “his ear is not heavy from hearing.” In a couple of instances, the causative stem (Hiphil) of this root is used to describe the process of making the ear insensitive: *ואזניו הכבד ועיניו*, “and make its [the people’s] ears and eyes heavy,” (Isa 6:10) and *ואזניהם הכבידו משמוע*, “they have made their ears dull of hearing” (Zech 7:11).⁴¹

These usages are particularly important in understanding the subtlety of *כבד* as it relates to the heart of Pharaoh. It is overwhelmingly recognized that the Hebrew concept of *לב* encompasses all aspects of a person’s identity. H. J. Fabry outlines the following aspects of the Hebrew conception of the human heart: personal identity, vital center, affective center, noetic center (that is, sense perception), voluntative center, and the religious and ethical realm of experience.⁴² It is not always necessary to analyze every occurrence of *לב* in view of each of these components, because the Hebrew view of humanity perceives the whole. Nevertheless, from the context of the Exodus story at least, there is no doubt that the narrative unabashedly

37. Dohmen, “כבד,” *TDOT*, 7:13. Dohmen posits that if there is such a connection, *כבד*, “liver” must derive from *כבד* “be heavy,” since *כבד* is a stative verb and not a denominative.

38. See Job 14:21; Ezek 27:25; Isa 66:5.

39. See BDB, 457–58 for the distribution of these meanings.

40. *Ibid.*

41. The Piel stem is used with the heart as its object to indicate its insensitivity: *ולמה תכבדו את לבבכם* “Why do you make your heart heavy?” However, this text should not be considered independently from the Exodus story, since in this context the Israelites are being compared with Egypt and Pharaoh.

42. H. J. Fabry, “לב,” *TDOT*, 7:412–34.

presents a battle of the wills—the will of Pharaoh versus the will of Yahweh. In this sense, כבד demonstrates the disposition of a king bunkered down in his position, that is, his entire being exhibits insensitivity to the demands Yahweh imposes on him. Because this root is capable of carrying this particular meaning, it is not altogether accurate to simply gloss this term *hard* as many translations and commentators tend to do.⁴³ The unresponsiveness of Pharaoh’s heart plays an important role in the narrative’s refined presentation of his exchange with Yahweh and is lexically distinguished from חזק and קשה. J. K. Currid places the exegetical weight of this motif on a possible allusion to the Egyptian postmortem practice of weighing the heart and a feather in a balance—if the heart outweighs the feather it is a sign of noble character.⁴⁴ Even this connection, though, has been disputed by some scholars who think it is unlikely that the Exodus narrative would have this Egyptian background in mind.⁴⁵ That being said, Currid proceeds to suggest that, because the roots כבד, חזק, and קשה appear to be used interchangeably, they should thus be translated uniformly “to make his heart heavy.”⁴⁶ This interpretation, regardless of whether or not one accepts his thesis on the Egyptian connection, does not adequately account for the fact that three *different* words show up in the narrative.⁴⁷ It is the contention of this essay that the nuance of insensitivity or dullness should be maintained alongside the others in one’s analysis of Pharaoh’s heart.⁴⁸

קשה

Surprisingly, קשה is the least common root employed in the description of Pharaoh’s heart in the Exodus story (1×).⁴⁹ This stative root is commonly glossed as “hard, severe, fierce.”⁵⁰ Beyond Hebrew, this root only occurs in Aramaic and Arabic.⁵¹ In Jewish Aramaic, this root primarily means “to be hard, difficult,” and in the Apel “to harden, make difficult.”⁵² A secondary

43. See RSV, NRSV, ESV.

44. Currid, “Why Did God Harden Pharaoh’s Heart?” 48–49. See also Shupak, “The Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart,” 395ff. for an alternative explanation of the possible Egyptian background.

45. *Ibid.*, 399–401.

46. Currid, “Why Did God Harden Pharaoh’s Heart?” 48.

47. If anything, one would be better suited contextually to gloss every description of Pharaoh’s heart as “strong/strengthen,” because it occurs the most frequently.

48. This idiom is also attested in a Hebrew ostracum from the Shephelah: *wtʿzr wšwtk ʿl tkbd lbk ky ʿny ʿmrty*, “Get going! I command you! Don’t make your heart heavy, for I myself have spoken” (*Shephelah* 1.3–4). In this instance, the root *kbd* could be read as a Piel or Hiphil imperfect. Here, the idiom simply means, “Don’t disregard what I am instructing you to do.” On this inscription, see André Lemaire and Ada Yardeni, “New Hebrew Ostraca from the Shephelah” in *Biblical Hebrew in Its Northwest Semitic Setting: Typological and Historical Perspectives* (ed. Steven E. Fassberg and Avi Hurvitz; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 197–224, esp. pp. 197–200.

49. 2×, if one considers 13:15, which contains this root without לב.

50. BDB 904.

51. *TLOT* 3:1175.

52. Jastrow 1430.

use of this root indicates “to find a thing difficult to understand,” or in the Apel, “to argue against, dispute.”⁵³ Also, Imperial Aramaic attests קשי in the Pael, “to strive.”⁵⁴ Arabic *qasā* (*qsw*) means “to be hard, strict, cruel.”⁵⁵ Of note also is the root קשה which appears to be a by-form of קשה, appearing only twice in Scripture in the Hiphil meaning “to make hard, stubborn” (Isa 63:17), and “to treat hardly, roughly” (Job 39:16).⁵⁶

Throughout Biblical Hebrew, this stative root is commonly used to describe a stubborn and unyielding disposition, most usually as it relates to the will of God. Several idioms express this stubbornness in contexts similar to the one here in the Exodus narrative. The Qal stem of this root regularly appears with “neck” (עֶרֶף) to describe an unmovable will, commonly rendered “stiff-necked”: ויקשו את-ערפם הרעו מאבותם: “Their necks are hard; they have committed more evil than their fathers” (Jer 7:26).⁵⁷ Here, “hard-necked” seems to indicate a state that is characterized by gross evil-doing. In one instance, the Hiphil of this root takes the word *spirit/breath* as its object in reference to the spirit of Sihon king of Heshbon: כִּי-הִקְשָׁה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת-רוּחוֹ, “for Yahweh your God has hardened his spirit” (Deut 2:30). Interestingly, this phrase is parallel to וְאִמַּץ אֶת-לִבּוֹ, “he will make strong his heart.” The hard heart idiom appears two times in the Hebrew Bible in circumstances independent of the plague narratives of Exodus. In Ps 95:8, the psalmist warns his listeners: אַל-תִּקְשׁוּ לִבְכֶם, “Do not harden your heart,” a phrase that is subsequently explained by the phrase עַם תְּעִי הֵם לִבְבָם, “They are a people erring of heart” (Ps 95:10). The hard-hearted Israelites are characterized by an internal proneness toward error. In Prov 28:14, the sage writes: אֲשֶׁר יִפּוֹל בְּרַעַה יִפּוֹל בְּרַעַה וּמִקְשָׁה לִבּוֹ יִפּוֹל בְּרַעַה, “Happy is the man who trembles continuously, but the one who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.” This text informs us that the act of hardening one’s heart will ultimately lead to calamity.

It is significant that this root only occurs twice in the Exodus narrative, only once with the word לֵב. This leads Shupak to ask questions about possible Egyptian origins behind the other two idioms, “strong heart” and “heavy heart.”⁵⁸ Undoubtedly, outside this tradition these two idioms are almost nonexistent in Biblical Hebrew and therefore require special attention as well as a clear distinction from the usual expression “hard heart,” as argued above.

GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS

The Hebrew Stative

The text of Exod 4–14 supplies an interchange of stative, factitive, and causative stems describing the Egyptian king’s heart in his relentless re-

53. Ibid.

54. DNWSI 1038.

55. Wehr 763.

56. BDB 905.

57. See also Jer 17:23; 19:15; Deut 10:16; 2 Chr 30:8; 36:13; Neh 9:16, 17, 29; Prov 29:1.

58. Shupak, “The Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart,” 390ff.

sistance to Yahweh's will. Commentators have wrestled with the meaning and significance of this interchange, focusing the brunt of their efforts on the subjects of the verbs in question. In other words, the discussion rarely moves beyond the usual questions about whether it is Yahweh or Pharaoh acting, neglecting to consider the kind of action in view.

The Qal stem distinguishes stative verbs from fientive verbs by demarcating a distinct vowel pattern for the stative. For example, the typical theme vowels for the stative verb are /i/ or /u/ in the perfect (כָּבַד/קָטְנָהּ) and /a/ in the imperfect (יִכְבֹּד), as opposed to the fientive /a/ for the perfect (בָּתַב) and /u/ for the imperfect (יִבְתֹּב).⁵⁹ In the current discussion, two of the three hardening-motif verbs are stative in form, exhibiting both the /i/ and the /a/ theme vowels respectively: וַיִּהְיוּק (7:13; 7:22; 8:19[15]; 9:35); כָּבַד (7:14); וַיִּכְבֹּד (9:7).⁶⁰ A total of six times, the narrative uses one of the Qal stative forms to describe the condition of Pharaoh's heart as he resists the will of Yahweh.

The question remains as to whether or not the narrator wishes to view the condition of Pharaoh's heart descriptively, dynamically, or ingressively.⁶¹ There are certain syntactical environments within Biblical Hebrew that warrant converting a stative verb into its corresponding dynamic sense. F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp identifies a number of "pragmatic contexts" that might warrant "non-standard dynamic readings" of certain stative verbs.⁶² He identifies the following contexts: various kinds of syntactic collocations (for example, the infinitive absolute or participle of הֵלֵךְ + stative verb, הָיָה + participle or verbal adjective), special subclasses of verbs, affected objects, control frames (imperatives, instrumental, and purpose clauses), and participial forms and other "active derivational morphology."⁶³ In other words, for a stative to be used progressively or dynamically, there must be some kind of marker (contextual/syntactical) in the larger pragmatic context. As

59. For a discussion of the various stative vowel patterns, see Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §22.3. Waltke and O'Connor delineate six vowel patterns for the Qal stem: (1) *qātal/yiqṭōl*, (2) *qātēl/yiqṭal*, (3) *qātōl/yiqṭal*, (4) *qātal/yiqṭal*, (5) *qātal/yēqṭēl*, and (6) *qātēl/yiqṭōl*. See also Michael Rand, "Fientivity, Transitivity, and Stem Vowel Variation in Byzantine *piyyuṭ*," *JQR* 93 (2003): 471–75.

60. The root קָשָׁה, on the other hand, is stative semantically: "to be hard."

61. *Descriptively*: see 7:13, NLT: "Pharaoh's heart, however, remained hard. He still refused to listen, just as the LORD had predicted," thus indicating that Pharaoh remained in a state of stubbornness. *Ingressively*: see 7:13, NIV: "Yet Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said." Here, the translators highlight the fact that at this moment Pharaoh entered into a hardened state, thus placing the focus on the entrance into that state. Cf. also the passive translations of RSV, NRSV, NASB, AND ESV, where they uniformly translate the phrase "Yet/still Pharaoh was hardened." This translation suggests that despite the works that God demonstrated, Pharaoh's heart was hardened, presumably by an outside agent (that is, God). These translations are entirely inaccurate because they render a Hebrew stative as a passive! Furthermore, as will be discussed below, neither is Pharaoh the subject of these stative verbs.

62. See F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Biblical Hebrew Statives and Situation Aspect" *JSS* 45 (2000): 35.

63. *Ibid.*, 43–44. See also Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §22.2.1; T. O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1971), §170.

it relates to the plague narrative, the environment of the Qal statives חזק and כבד do not necessitate dynamic readings:

7:13: וַיִּחְזַק לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֱלֹהִים כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה

The heart of Pharaoh was strong, and he did not listen to them as Yahweh had spoken.

7:14: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה כִּבְד לֵב פַּרְעֹה מֵאֵן לְשַׁלַּח הָעָם:

Yahweh said to Moses: "The heart of Pharaoh is heavy; he refused to set the people free."

7:22: וַיִּחְזַק לֵב-פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא-שָׁמַע אֱלֹהִים כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה

The heart of Pharaoh was strong and he did not listen to them as Yahweh had spoken.

8:19[15]: וַיִּחְזַק לֵב-פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא-שָׁמַע אֱלֹהִים כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה

The heart of Pharaoh was strong, and he did not listen to them as Yahweh had spoken.

9:7: וַיִּכְבֵּד לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁלַח אֶת-הָעָם:

And the heart of Pharaoh was heavy, and he did not set the people free.

9:35: וַיִּחְזַק לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁלַח אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה בְּיַד-מֹשֶׁה

The heart of Pharaoh was strong and he did not set the sons of Israel free, as Yahweh had spoken through Moses.

In each of these cases, the Qal statives do not bear the contextual indicators that would suggest reading a "non-standard/dynamic" increase in strength or weightiness.⁶⁴ Dobbs-Allsopp also posits the possibility of "change-of-state" stative readings that specify ingressivity (the initiation of a state) or egressivity (the end of a state). He outlines two primary contexts that require a change-of-state interpretation: when the stative is in narrative sequence, and when the stative is accompanied by a punctiliar frame.⁶⁵ He explains further: "Since states lack change, if the pragmatic context implicates the presence of change, then reference must necessarily

64. BDB only lists two possible dynamic meanings for the verb חזק: (1) to grow louder, as in the sound of a trumpet, indicated by the presence of הוֹלֵךְ (Exod 19:19); and (2) to grow rigid or stout, referring to Pharaoh's heart (Exod 7:13, 22; 8:19[15]; 9:35). The first example contains a clear contextual marker (הוֹלֵךְ), while the second does not. They also list Mal 3:13 as a possible comparison: חזקו עלי דבריכם, though the context here simply describes the disposition of the people as being against Yahweh without necessarily indicating an increase in hostility contextually. The only transitive use indicated is 2 Chr 28:20: לא חזקו, "strengthened him not," though they concede that the text here is dubious. See BDB 304–5.

65. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Biblical Hebrew Statives," 45. Cf. Stuart Creason, *Semantic Classes of Hebrew Verbs: A Study of Aktionsart in the Hebrew Verbal System* (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1995), 75, where he similarly specifies that (1) the clause may contain the momentary adverbial expression, and (2) the clause may occur in a narrative sequence.

be either to the entrance or exit of the State in question.”⁶⁶ In the case of Pharaoh, one might surmise from context that Exod 7:13 demonstrates the initiation of Pharaoh’s strong condition, because in 4:21, Yahweh relates to Moses *ואני אחזק את-לב*, “I will make his heart strong.”⁶⁷ According to this interpretation, one might argue that Yahweh relates to Moses that he will bring Pharaoh into a strengthened state and that 7:13 provides its initiation.⁶⁸ However, as will be argued below, it is more plausible literarily to see the fulfilment of 4:21 in 9:12 due to the parallel usage of the Piel stem of *חזק* with Yahweh as subject.

In short, when these six Qal statives are analyzed within their respective syntactical environments, the evidence for a nonstandard dynamic or change-of-state reading is not at all compelling. This is especially evident when one considers the fact that the narrator paints the picture of a stubborn Pharaoh long before his contest with Yahweh actually begins. Furthermore, the appearance of *קָבַד* in 7:14, whether analyzed as a verbal adjective or a Qal stative,⁶⁹ affords the reader a divine description of the unyielding attitude that persists in Pharaoh, despite the actions of Yahweh. Thus, 7:14 may best be taken as simply describing the event of 7:13.⁷⁰ If this is correct, then it is exegetically sound to interpret these verbs as stative, both morphologically and syntactically. Consequently, its meaning needs to be distinguished from that of a progression, because nothing in the text suggests anything other than a stative verb.⁷¹

The Grammatical Subject

On this point, there seems to be a bit of confusion among commentators who simply describe the hardening motif in light of the subject of the verbs in question. The most common observation permeating much of the secondary literature on this issue is that, initially, Pharaoh is the subject of the hardening activity and that, subsequently, God is the subject of the activity. For example, McGinnis suggests that these verbs are neutral: “Thus, the sign cycle presents the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart in a variety of ways, attributing it sometimes to Pharaoh, sometimes to YHWH,

66. Ibid.

67. Cf. Beale (“Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart,” 139–41), who sees 7:13 as a specific fulfillment of 4:21 and 7:3. He argues, however, that 7:13 describes a state that is the result of a prior action, rather than the initial entrance into that state. He traces this hardened condition back to “the first historical instance of Yahweh’s hardening of Pharaoh, discussed in chap. 5” (p. 139), though Beale does not provide solid textual evidence for this literary connection.

68. For the Piel as an action that brings about a state, see Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §24.1.

69. *Verbal adjective*: BDB, 458. *Qal stative*: The occurrence of *וַיִּקְבַּד* in 9:7 may lend weight to reading *קָבַד* as a perfect here.

70. Again, the translations are divided on their rendering of *קָבַד*: “is hardened” (passive), RSV, NRSV, KJV, ESV; “is stubborn/unyielding,” NASB, NLT, NIV. A passive translation such as “is hardened” misrepresents the true meaning of the Hebrew stative.

71. Joüon §41b.

and sometimes in what I have described as neutral ways."⁷² The fact that the text simply describes the status of Pharaoh's heart would not necessitate seeing this sort of description as neutral. One cannot deny the fact that the stative possesses a semantic ambiguity that is not characteristic of an event,⁷³ but this is not the issue raised by McGinnis and others who appeal to the so-called neutrality of the text. On the contrary, it would seem that the narrator would have his reader view the situation in a much more negative fashion: Pharaoh is characterized as stubbornly opposed to the word of Yahweh. Some scholars make reference to the presence or absence of agency⁷⁴ and therefore assume a quasi-fientive reading of these verbs. For example, Shupak describes the hardening activity as it relates to Pharaoh by explaining, "The agent of the action is always Pharaoh or his heart."⁷⁵ William H. C. Propp describes 7:13, 7:14, 7:22, 8:15, 9:7, and 9:35 as the first of three levels of hardening: "it becomes hard with no indication of agent."⁷⁶ However, this "agency" terminology is not entirely helpful or accurate in describing the situation here. If the term *agent* is used to refer to someone other than the grammatical subject carrying out the action in question, one might conclude the reference is to a passive verb. Unfortunately, the Niphal only occurs once in these texts, and even in that case the so-called "agent" is not stated.⁷⁷ Instead, these statements ought to be viewed as adjectival descriptions of Pharaoh's heart without necessarily commenting on a process of hardening. Similarly, Dorian G. Coover Cox cautions that "the references to Pharaoh hardening his own heart (8:15, 32; 9:34) and observations about hardness where no agent is mentioned should not be used to downplay the reality or the seriousness of God's action in hardening Pharaoh's heart."⁷⁸ Interpretively, it seems that the problem Cox attempts to avoid is already resolved by the fact that the initial references to Pharaoh's heart employ Qal stative verbs, that is, the text simply describes the status of Pharaoh's heart. Brevard S. Childs, however, gets it right when he describes the adjectival nature of these verbs, stating: "The hardening is not a definite reaction to the plagues, but the description of a state."⁷⁹ This conclusion seems to be the most natural reading of the text,

72. McGinnis, "Teaching Exodus as 'Problem Text,'" 72.

73. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Biblical Hebrew Statives," 33.

74. By "agency," it is assumed that these authors are making reference to the fact that someone other than the grammatical subject is carrying out the action.

75. Shupak, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," 393.

76. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 353.

77. See Waltke and O'Conner, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §23.2.2f, where they discuss the so-called "lamed of agency" for Niphal verbs. Pardee, however, has argued that the Semitic languages do not express agency. See Pardee's comments in his review of Josef Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik, AfO* (on-line version only, 2004), 266–67, 375 [cited October 2008]. On-line: <http://www.univie.ac.at/orientalistik/?page=Archiv%20f.%20Orientforschung&m=7&PHPSESSID=66234a3eb0dd4908605f4b5a5a98ec18#pardee>.

78. Cox, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," 308. On the other hand, Cox attempts to avoid the interpretation that would make the hardening of Pharaoh's heart God's doing from the start, contra Beale, "Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," 140–41.

79. Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 173–74.

allowing the narrator's use of Qal statives to do their job in illustrating the strong and stubborn character of an Egyptian king.

Returning to the issue of grammatical subject, there seems to be a great deal of confusion about subjects and verbs throughout these texts. When one takes a closer look at these statements of hardening, the narrative clearly demarks two kinds of situations: (1) intransitive verbs (that is, Qal statives) with "heart" as their subject; and (2) transitive verbs (that is, Piel [factive] and Hiphil [causative]) with Pharaoh or Yahweh as their subject and "heart" as their object. Table 1 maps the distribution of these intransitive and transitive verbs. It should be noted there that transitive action does not occur until 8:15[11], where Pharaoh is the subject of the verb. Prior to this point in the narrative, the debate about Pharaoh's hardening activity versus Yahweh's hardening activity is a moot point, especially in light of the fact that in the three previous hardening references the subject of the verb is לב, "heart," not Pharaoh.⁸⁰ It is not until 8:15[11] that hardening activity actually takes place, where the narrator explicitly states: "He [Pharaoh] weighed down his heart." In terms of what actually appears in the narrative, 9:12 signals the first installment of Yahweh's strengthening activity, followed by a Pharaoh-intermission of sorts: Pharaoh again weighs down his heart (9:34); the heart of Pharaoh is strong (9:35). From here on out, the narrative unveils the relentless hardening activity that Yahweh unleashes against the recalcitrant king of Egypt.

THE NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HARDENING MOTIFS

The first two occurrences of the hardening motif fall outside the plague narrative itself (Exod 4:21, 7:3) and provide the narrator's record of Yahweh's direct speech to Moses about what he should expect in his confrontation with Pharaoh. It is important to keep in mind that the hardening motif of Exodus consists of both direct speech from the divine voice and his representative Moses, as well as comments from the perspective of the narrator as he describes the actions of Pharaoh with regard to his heart. Table 2 shows the distribution of these comments. The narrator makes an assessment of Pharaoh's heart 13 times by describing either its condition or an action carried out by Pharaoh or Yahweh. A total of 6 times the narrative records the direct speech of Yahweh, predicting what he is about to do or what he is in the process of doing. In one of those instances, Yahweh describes the actual condition of Pharaoh's heart (7:14) and may serve to

80. This factor poses the most difficulty for Beale, ("Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," 141), and his insistence on the fact that, in 7:13, Yahweh should be "viewed as the ultimate cause of the hardening in this verse." He does admit, however, that Pharaoh's heart is already in a hardened condition before the signs of the narrative but then surmises, "This still leaves us with the problem of whether Pharaoh or Yahweh previously caused this subsequent condition" (p. 139). He then argues that the condition of 7:13 "should probably be traced back to the first historical instance of Yahweh's hardening of Pharaoh" in chap. 5, while at the same time acknowledging that Exod 5:2 does not "contain an explicit hardening statement" (p. 135).

Table 1. *Transitive and Intransitive Verbs in Exodus 7–14*

Intransitive: Heart = Subject	Transitive: Heart = Object
	4:21, Yahweh subj. (prediction)
	7:3, Yahweh subj. (prediction)
7:13, heart of Pharaoh (description)	
7:14, heart of Pharaoh (description)	
7:22, heart of Pharaoh (description)	
	8:15[11], Pharaoh subj. of Hiphil (event)
8:19[15], heart of Pharaoh (description)	
	8:32[28], Pharaoh subj. of Hiphil (event)
9:7, heart of Pharaoh (description)	
	9:12, Yahweh subj. of Piel (event)
	9:34, Pharaoh subj. of Hiphil (event)
9:35, heart of Pharaoh (description)	
	10:1, Yahweh subj. of Hiphil (acknowledgment)
	10:20, Yahweh subj. of Piel (event)
	10:27, Yahweh subj. of Piel (event)
	11:10, Yahweh subj. of Piel (event)
	14:4, Yahweh subj. of Piel (prediction)
	14:8, Yahweh subj. of Piel (event)
	14:17, Yahweh subj. of Piel (acknowledgment)

provide divine verification for the description that the narrator has already provided in the preceding verse (7:13).⁸¹ One time the narrative relates the words of Moses making a retrospective comment about the hardening activity that Yahweh has already carried out (13:15).

The Divine Commentary

Yahweh's predictions serve an important role in the overall development of the narrative plot, preparing the reader for the impending conflict that is about to unfold in order for both Israel and Egypt to witness his own supremacy.⁸² In 4:21, Yahweh tells Moses that he is going to strengthen the heart of Pharaoh, using the imperfective Piel stem to describe an incomplete act⁸³ that will bring Pharaoh's heart into an emboldened state.⁸⁴ This

81. Eslinger ("Freedom or Knowledge?," 49 n. 1) rightly bemoans the fact that most commentators ignore the existence of a distinct narrative voice in Exod 1–15. However, Eslinger presses his case too far by making the divine voice at odds with that of the narrator. He states: "With this glimpse into the divine character's intention and motivation for hardening the heart of Pharaoh, the narrator has discarded the possibility of telling a tale of real triumphs over the Egyptian king. After this, any conflict or victory can only be seen as a sham" (p. 57). For Eslinger, the absence of "explicit narratorial commentary" actually signals a pessimistic interpretation of God's activity throughout the Exodus (p. 59). In essence, Eslinger builds his entire case on what the narrator does not say, rather than what he says.

82. See 5:2; 6:7; 7:5, 17; 8:10, 22; 9:14, 29; 10:2; 14:4, 18.

83. Pardee ("Biblical Hebrew Verbal System in a Nutshell" unpublished paper, 28 n. 25) defines the *yqtl* forms as marked for nonperfectivity. The imperfective form, then, expresses acts that are thought of as incomplete, including acts that are future and frequentative (*ibid.*, 2). Context determines the intended sense of any given imperfective form.

84. See Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §24.1.

undefined action is temporally marked as a future event by the comment immediately preceding: בלכתך לשוב מצרימה “when you return to Egypt.”⁸⁵ It is important to notice the verbal syntax here: the prepositive first person independent pronoun breaks the verbal chain allowing for the true imperfective instead of a WQTL form.⁸⁶ The presence of this pronoun no doubt places the spotlight on the direct activity of Yahweh in the heart of Pharaoh. In the previous chapter, Yahweh tells Moses that Pharaoh will not allow the Israelites to leave except under compulsion (lit., “with a strong hand”). In light of this, God declares that he is going to stretch out his hand against him, performing wonders in Egypt and in effect, forcing the release of Israel (3:19–20). Here, however, God adds to the equation his active role in strengthening Pharaoh’s heart, indicating that at some point in this process, he himself will strengthen Pharaoh in his own stubbornness. The next comment from the mouth of God concerning the hardening of heart comes after the failed negotiations of 5:1–9: ואת-מופתי בארץ מצרים ואני אקשה את-לב פרעה והרביתי את-אתתי “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and I will increase my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt” (7:3). Note that the syntax here is identical to 4:21 (*waw* + first-person pronoun + imperfective), though the root and stem are not. This is one of only two appearances of the root קשה, both of which are in the Hiphil stem (7:3 and 13:15). This time, God predicts that at an unspecified time he will directly cause Pharaoh to be hard. This stative root in the Hiphil may highlight the ingressive nature of this event, describing the object entering into a hardened state.⁸⁷ Some translators have rendered the second clause in 7:3 as subordinate to the hardening statement, but one must acknowledge here that such subordination is not marked in the text.⁸⁸ The narrator simply asserts two consecutive clauses: (1) I will harden Pharaoh’s heart; and (2) I will increase my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. It is worth noting here that this prediction indicates an *increase* in signs and wonders after making Pharaoh’s heart hard. It is not until the fifth plague that the narrative provides the first disclosure of Yahweh’s direct hardening activity (9:12), only halfway through the total number of signs performed in Egypt. The narrative, then, places the fulfil-

85. Beale (“Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart,” 134) follows earlier grammarians who explain the fundamental meaning of the Piel stem as an intensification or iteration on the basis of its characteristic doubled middle radical (e.g., Gesenius §52f). Recent grammarians have since abandoned this explanation of the Piel, though it is still admitted that certain types of verbs express a frequentative notion in this stem. Waltke and O’Connor (*Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §24.5) suggest the following types of verbs that commonly exhibit iteration in the Piel: Qal stem intransitive verbs of physical movement or effort, voice projection, or expectation.

86. See Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, §98b, where he notes that when the negative particle is inserted into the verbal sequence, obviously the verb is no longer first.

87. Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §27.2d.

88. E.g., “and though I multiply my signs and wonders” (ESV, NIV, TNIV, RSV), “that I might multiply my signs and wonders” (NASB), and “so I can multiply my miraculous signs and wonders” (NLT). Noel D. Osborn and Howard A. Hatton (*A Handbook on Exodus* [New York: United Bible Societies, 1999], 153–54) similarly propose that this clause is most likely subordinate to the former, citing the options that various translations have adopted. None of these readings, however, are explicitly marked in the text.

ment statement at the central point in the plagues, preparing the reader for the ensuing multiplication of Yahweh's work.

Both of these predictions take place before the sign (7:8–12) and subsequent plagues (7:14–12:32) get underway. Once the plagues begin, there are no further divine predictions recorded in the narrative until after the final plague (14:4). The divine prediction of 14:4 is specifically tied to the fact that God is the one emboldening Pharaoh to muster the troops in pursuit of Israel as a final demonstration of his glory. The final word from Yahweh as it relates to Pharaoh's heart in 14:17 consists of a Piel participle, providing reassurance to the grumbling Israelites that he is the one currently strengthening Pharaoh and his army to pursue them so that he might be magnified in their destruction.⁸⁹ One might argue that the predictions of 4:21 and 7:3 were intended to find their fulfillment in each of the descriptions of Pharaoh's stubborn heart, already suggested by some commentators.⁹⁰ However, as argued below, 4:21 may find its best contextual realization in 9:12. Concerning 7:3, the absence of the root קשה until 13:15, where Moses declares what Pharaoh has done demands consideration. The words of Moses employ the Hiphil perfective of the root קשה to summarize the act Pharaoh committed that caused him to enter this hardened condition, eventually leading to the worst and final plague—the death of the Egyptian first-born.

The Narrative Commentary

One of the first issues that needs to be dealt with in terms of the narrative's description of Pharaoh's heart is the phrase "as Yahweh has said." Does this phrase refer to the act of hardening, or could it perhaps refer to the defiance of Pharaoh? Beale argues that it is the most significant phrase in the whole plague narrative and proceeds to argue that one should trace this statement to the hardening activity of Yahweh.⁹¹ In 3:19, Yahweh describes Pharaoh as a stubborn individual long before the plague cycle begins: וַאֲנִי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי לֹא־יִתֶּן אִתְּכֶם מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לְהֵלֶךְ וְלֹא בִיד חֲזָקָה (3:19). "I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go except by a strong hand" (3:19). In this description, Yahweh prepares Moses for the worst by revealing that Pharaoh will not be easily convinced of the need to release the people of Israel from bondage.

89. Waltke and O'Connor (*Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §24.5c) suggest that the Piel participle is used for designating professional activity.

90. Cf. Chisholm, "Divine Hardening in the Old Testament," 415ff.; Beale, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," 133ff.; Cox, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," 297ff.

91. Beale ("The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," 140–41) surmises that when one refers back to 4:21 and 7:3, there are three essential details that signal fulfillment: (1) the heart of Pharaoh was to be hardened; (2) this hardening was to result in Pharaoh "not listening" or "letting Israel go;" and (3) the subject of this hardening act was to be Yahweh himself. Though Yahweh is not explicitly mentioned in 7:13, Beale still insists that contextually Yahweh must be viewed as the ultimate cause of the hardening in this verse. But this interpretation is unlikely, because the text does not present actions per se but describes the status of Pharaoh's heart (see discussion on grammatical subject above).

The intensity of Pharaoh's obstinate heart is something that Yahweh acknowledges beforehand to Moses, disclosing to him that this proud king will be most unwilling to release Israel. Furthermore, the distribution of the phrase **כאשר דבר יהוה**, "as Yahweh had spoken," throughout the plague cycle also suggests that Pharaoh's stubbornness is in view, rather than Yahweh's hardening activity foretold in 4:21 and 7:3. Each time **כאשר דבר יהוה** occurs it is preceded by two clauses:

7:13, **ויחזק לב פרעה ולא שמע אלהם כאשר דבר יהוה**

The heart of Pharaoh was strong and he did not listen to them, as Yahweh had spoken.

7:22, **ויחזק לב-פרעה ולא-שמע אלהם כאשר דבר יהוה**

The heart of Pharaoh was strong and he did not listen to them, as Yahweh had spoken.

8:11[15], **והכבד את-לבו ולא שמע אלהם כאשר דבר יהוה**

He weighed down his heart and did not listen to them, as Yahweh had spoken.

8:15[19], **ויחזק לב-פרעה ולא-שמע אלהם כאשר דבר יהוה**

The heart of Pharaoh was strong and he did not listen to them, as Yahweh had spoken.

9:12, **ויחזק יהוה את-לב פרעה ולא שמע אלהם כאשר דבר יהוה אל-משה**

Yahweh made the heart of Pharaoh strong and he did not listen to them, as Yahweh had spoken to Moses.

9:35, **ויחזק לב פרעה ולא שלח את-בני ישראל כאשר דבר יהוה ביד-משה**

The heart of Pharaoh was strong and he did not set the sons of Israel free, as Yahweh had spoken through Moses.

It is important to consider that the phrase **כאשר דבר יהוה** never directly modifies the sentence describing the heart of Pharaoh. On the contrary, this phrase always follows the statement about Pharaoh not listening to the word of Yahweh or not releasing the people of Israel, both of which are the result of the Egyptian king's stubborn heart. The most likely antecedent for **כאשר דבר יהוה** is found in 7:4, where Yahweh specifically states **ולא-ישמע אלהם** "Pharaoh will not listen to you."⁹² The overwhelming majority of the **כאשר דבר יהוה** occurrences immediately follow the statement **ולא שמע אלהם**, "He did not listen to them" (5 out of 6), making this connection undeniable. Furthermore, in three of these instances the Masoretes place a disjunctive accent at the end of the hardness of heart statement (7:13; 9:12, 35), indicating that they view **כאשר דבר יהוה** as a modifier of Pharaoh's stub-

92. See Osborn and Hatton (*A Handbook on Exodus*, 161), who also make this syntactical connection.

bornness.⁹³ This is especially significant in 9:12, because a break in thought is intended after Yahweh strengthens Pharaoh's heart, seemingly for the first time. At this point in the conflict, the narrator reiterates the fact that Pharaoh still refuses to listen to the word of Yahweh. The close connection between *כִּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה* and the king's refusal to listen points the reader's attention to the fact that Yahweh has already said as much and that Pharaoh would only release the Israelites *בְּיַד חֲזָקָה*, "with a strong hand" (3:19; 6:1; 13:3, 14; 14:16).⁹⁴

In chaps. 9–10, a major development in the storyline unfolds as the divine word intersects with that of the narrative itself. As mentioned above, in 4:21 and 7:3 the narrative records Yahweh's prediction to Moses that he will strengthen (*וְאֲנִי אֶקְשֶׁה אֶת-לֵב פַּרְעֹה*) and harden (*וְאֲנִי אֶחְזַק אֶת-לֵבּוֹ*) the heart of Pharaoh, which are factitive and causative stems (Piel and Hiphil). In the first seven descriptions of Pharaoh's obstinacy, one finds four descriptions of the Egyptian king's heart ("the heart of Pharaoh was strong/stubborn"), as well as two records of his own explicit hardening activity ("Pharaoh strengthened/weighed down his heart").⁹⁵ In 9:12, however, for the first time, the narrative describes the hardening activity of Yahweh himself in the statement: *וַיַּחְזַק יְהוָה אֶת-לֵב פַּרְעֹה*, "Yahweh made the heart of Pharaoh strong." Chapter 9 proceeds to demonstrate a transition from the stubbornness of Pharaoh to the explicit hardening of Yahweh.⁹⁶ This transition is interrupted by yet another description of Pharaoh's own hardening activity in 9:34: *וַיִּכְבַּד לֵבּוֹ הוּא וְעַבְדָּיו*, "He weighed down his heart, he and his servants." It should not be viewed as coincidental that the verbs in 9:12 and 9:34 are in the Piel (factitive) and Hiphil (causative) stems, respectively.⁹⁷ Yahweh makes Pharaoh's heart even stronger and Pharaoh causes his heart to become even duller. It would seem that the narrator emphasizes here the interplay between human volition and divine intervention. It is not until 10:1 that the narrator offers a divine word indicating the explicit strengthening activity of Yahweh.⁹⁸ The prediction of 4:21 finds its realization here in the divine revelation that he has indeed made the heart of Pharaoh dull and insensitive by strengthening his stubborn disposition. This connection is even more explicit when one considers that both 4:21

93. Cf. 7:13: *וַיַּחְזַק יְהוָה אֶת-לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם*; 9:12: *וַיַּחְזַק יְהוָה אֶת-לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם*; 9:35: *וַיַּחְזַק יְהוָה אֶת-לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם*.
 94. For a discussion of this phrase and its Egyptian background, see Hoffmeier, "The Arm of God Versus the Arm of Pharaoh" *Bib* 67 (1986): 378–87.

95. See 7:13, 14 (Yahweh's description), 22; 8:15[11], 19[15], 32[28]; 9:7.

96. In fact, Osborn and Hatton suggest that 9:34–35 should be viewed in contrast to the activity of Yahweh in 10:1. See their comments in *A Handbook on Exodus*, 235.

97. See Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §24.4 on the Piel as an action that brings about a resulted state, that is, factitive.

98. Yahweh's statement in 7:14 (stative perfect *קָבַד*) provides a divine description of Pharaoh's stubborn condition that coincides with the descriptions that the narrator has already been relating. Note that Yahweh simply describes Pharaoh's condition without commenting on his own hardening activity. Consequently, it seems less likely that 7:13 should be interpreted as a fulfillment of the divinely predicted hardening in 4:21 and 7:3.

and 9:12 are Piel stems of the root *חזק*. The only difference between these two forms is that the former is imperfective while the latter is perfective. Yahweh's prediction in 4:21 expresses an undefined action that will be realized at an unspecified time in the future. By using the perfective form in 9:12, the narrator seems to imply that the prediction has now become reality in this unfolding conflict. This point is underscored by the fact that, from 10:1 until the end of the plague narrative, the exclusive hardening force, at least from the perspective of the narrative, is none other than Yahweh himself (10:20, 27; 11:10). Moshe Greenberg seems to agree with this assessment, stating:

This fluctuation in verse 9:35 and 10:1 would have sufficed by itself to cast doubt on the significance of the shift in the expressions—it being arguable that “self-motivation” was illusory, the facts being governed by 7:3 and 10:1. But the distribution of expressions is otherwise so markedly unequal that it strongly indicates the narrator's preference for self-motivation during the first half of the plague series and for divine compulsion during the second half.⁹⁹

SUMMARY

The above discussion has attempted to provide needed clarifications in the areas of lexical meaning, grammar, and contextual development. By way of summary, the following conclusions can be extrapolated from this study:

1. The three roots as they appear in the narrative provide lexically distinct descriptions of the state of and process within Pharaoh's heart. In light of the semantic distinction of these roots in their use throughout the Hebrew Bible, it seems best to maintain such a distinction here.
2. The two dominant roots *חזק* and *כבד* are statives, as well as the less frequent *קשה* (though unmarked morphologically); therefore, when they occur in the Qal stem they are describing the status of Pharaoh's heart rather than an action that he is performing. On the other hand, when these roots appear in the factitive and causative stems Piel and Hiphil, they describe the process whereby Pharaoh or Yahweh makes/causes the heart to become strong/stronger, heavy/heavier, or hard/harder.
3. The narrative development of Pharaoh's resistance to the will of God may be outlined as follows:
 - a. Yahweh tells Moses that Pharaoh will be unwilling to set the Israelites free. In fact, he will only do so by the strong arm of God.

99. Moshe Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus* (New York: Behrman House, 1969), 139.

- b. Yahweh tells Moses that at an unspecified time he will strengthen Pharaoh's heart (4:21, 7:3a) and subsequently multiply his signs and wonders in Egypt (7:3b).
- c. As the contest between Yahweh and Pharaoh unfolds, the narrative describes the heart of Pharaoh as strong and heavy/stubborn.
- d. At an important juncture (9:12), the narrative reveals Yahweh directly strengthening the heart of Pharaoh. Yahweh then acknowledges his responsibility (10:1) for hardening the heart of Pharaoh (9:12).
- e. In the final stage of hardening, the narrative subsequently describes the exclusive strengthening activity of Yahweh.
- f. The final stage of Yahweh's strengthening activity motivates Pharaoh and his army to pursue the Israelites to the Sea of Reeds, where they are dealt the final blow.