

BREVARD S. CHILDS

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OF
EXODUS

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In sum, the Bible used its own theological criticism in taking an ancient Hebrew tradition and transforming it to become a far truer testimony to God's purpose with his world.

Excursus I: The Hardening of Pharaoh

H. EISING, 'Die Ägyptischen Plagen', *Lex Tua Veritas. Festschrift für H. Junker*, Trier 1961, pp. 75-87; J. GNILKA, *Die Verstockung Israels*, Munich 1961; F. HESSE, *Das Verstockungsproblem im Alten Testament*, Berlin 1955; E. JENNI, 'Jesajas Berufung in der neueren Forschung', *TZ* 15, 1959, pp. 321-39; CORNELIUS A LAPIDE, *Commentaria in Scripturam Sacram I, Exod. ch. 16*; M. LUTHER, *Auslegungen über das zweite Buch Moses*, WA XVI, 1899; O. PROCKSCH, 'Verstockung', *RGG² V*, 1931, cols. 1573ff.; G. VON RAD, *Old Testament Theology II*, 1965, pp. 151ff.; K. L. SCHMIDT, 'Die Verstockung des Menschen durch Gott', *TZ* 1, 1945, pp. 1ff.; with M. SCHMIDT, 'μαρτύρω' *TWNT V*, pp. 1024ff. = *TDNT V*, pp. 1022ff.; I. L. SEELIGMANN, 'Menschliches Heldentum und göttliche Hilfe', *TZ* 19, 1963, pp. 385ff.; P. VOLZ, *Das Dämonische in Jahwe*, Tübingen 1924; W. ZIMMERLI, *Erkenntnis Gottes nach dem Buche Ezechiel*, Zürich 1954, pp. 22ff. = *Gottes Offenbarung*, pp. 61ff.

The difficulties connected with the subject are well known. In spite of the repeated efforts to illuminate the concept of hardness the results have been less than satisfactory. Much of the problem, of course, lies with the subject matter. Although there are some general parallels in the rest of the Old Testament, the problem of hardening is unique in Exodus. It emerges as if from nowhere and then vanishes. But it has become a gigantic stumbling block which has rendered the whole plague narrative opaque. With the introduction of the source critical method, it was once felt that the key to the problem of hardening had been discovered. Indeed, there is by and large a distinctive vocabulary which can be assigned to the different sources. But the hope has been frustrated and no major breakthrough has emerged (cf. Hesse).

One tendency of scholars is to turn to psychological ploys by which to solve the problem. Hardening is only an idiom used to describe the inner human reaction of resistance which once begun could no longer be reversed by the individual will. Another tack is to approach the issue as an expression of a theological or philosophical position. Hesse speaks of 'the almighty power of Yahweh and the sinful action of man in an unrelievable tension'. The difficulty of this approach is that the problem becomes immediately burdened by the history of the later discussion, which usually conceals the primary

meaning of the text. Therefore it will be our endeavor to limit the investigation as closely as possible to the problem of the Exodus text. If we are successful on this level, the wider implications can be easily pursued in a suitable context.

The statistics of the hardness terminology have been treated so often by commentaries and monographs (cf. Hesse) that a repetition hardly seems necessary. However, a brief resume may be in order for this discussion. The verb *kābēd* to express hardness appears usually in the hiphil with Pharaoh as the subject and *libbō* 'his heart' as the object (Ex. 8.11, 28; 9.34), one time in the qal with the 'heart of Pharaoh' as the subject (9.7), and once as a verbal adjective referring to the 'heart of Pharaoh' (7.14). Only once does *kābēd* appear in the hiphil with Yahweh as the subject (10.1). The verb *hāzaq* usually occurs in the piel with Yahweh as the subject, or 'the heart of Pharaoh' (4.21; 9.12; 10.20, 27; 11.10) or 'heart of the Egyptians' (14.17) as the subject. The verb also appears in the qal with 'the heart of Pharaoh' as the subject (7.13, 22; 8.15; 9.15). In 7.3 the hiphil *'aqšeh* appears with Yahweh as the subject, in 13.15 with Pharaoh as the subject.

A rather clear picture of distribution among the sources also emerges. The Yahwist always uses *kābēd*. The Priestly writer normally chooses *hāzaq*, but once *hiqšāh*. The E source choice is parallel to P. There are several redactional passages whose usage varies from these patterns and which will be discussed below (7.14f.; 10.1).

We turn first to the use of the verbs in the J source. It is significant to notice the position of the hardening phrase in the J pattern. One might have expected it to come after the threat of the plague, and as such to be the cause of the ensuing plague. However, the hardening phrase comes consistently at the end of the episode, in fact after the plague has been removed through Moses' intercession. This means that for the J writer the hardening does not function as the direct cause of the plagues. Rather, the hardening appears as a reaction to the plagues, or more specifically, to the removal of the plagues. This connection is made explicit in 7.11, 'When Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart'. However, it is implicit in the other examples by virtue of its position in the narratives.

Because of the hardening, the plagues did not produce the response which was intended. However, the writer specifies repeatedly what reaction is expected. The signs function in order to reveal the knowledge of Yahweh to Pharaoh. In 5.1 this motif is introduced by

Pharaoh's failure to recognize Yahweh: 'Who is Yahweh? I do not know Yahweh.' The function of the plague is to make him known. The formula is 'that you may know that . . .'. On the one hand, the function of making known Yahweh is connected with the manner in which the plague is executed, and comes before the plague (7.17; 8.18; 11.7). The special treatment of Israel is the peculiar feature which reveals Yahweh at work. On the other hand, the special manner in which the plagues are removed also functions to make Yahweh known (8.6; 9.29). Here the specific time and unusual circumstance of the removal serve this purpose. The hardening serves to prevent the proper function of the plagues as a means for knowing Yahweh. One could perhaps infer that the sudden respite from the plague gave Pharaoh a reason for equivocating (7.11). Could the plague have been by chance after all? However, the writer attributes the failure of the plague to produce true knowledge to Pharaoh's being hardened. Hardness for J is not a state of mind, but a specific negative reaction to the signs from God.

We turn next to the P writer. Some very distinctive features emerge in his use of the hardening terminology. First of all, the parallelism of phrases is significant. The sentence pattern of 7.3, 4 is that of ab-abc. The two cola of v. 3 parallel the first two cola of v. 4. For this writer the expression 'I will harden Pharaoh's heart' is closely akin to 'Pharaoh will not hearken'. The closeness of meaning is further confirmed by a comparison of 11.9 with 7.3. In both verses, and only here, Pharaoh's resistance serves to 'multiply signs in Egypt'. However 7.3 describes the resistance as 'I will harden Pharaoh's heart' while 11.9 expresses it 'Pharaoh will not hearken'. Finally, it is significant to note that these same two phrases consistently make up the concluding formula for P: 'Pharaoh's heart is hardened, nor will he listen' (7.13, 22; 8.11, 15; 9.12).

Now the fact that two phrases occur in parallelism does not justify one's assuming that the phrases are identical in meaning. What is the nature of their similarity? The first suggestion would be that they are related in terms of cause and effect: 'Because I am hardening the heart of Pharaoh, he will not hearken to you.' But this relationship is not supported by the above parallelism, nor is it attested to elsewhere. Again, a proposal has been made to see the relation of the phrases in terms of objective and subjective effects. The one phrase is theological in character, the other psychological. But this sort of polarity is totally foreign to P. The two phrases function on the same

level as grounds for multiplying the plagues. This means that for the P writer the plagues are not the result of Pharaoh's being hardened, but rather the reverse. Pharaoh is hardened in order to effect plagues. His refusal to hear results in the multiplying of the signs.

There is another aspect in P by which the motif of hardening is connected with the giving of signs. It is indicated by the position of the expression within the narrative pattern. The formula follows the contest of Moses with the Egyptian magicians, and concludes a unit. The hardness prevents Pharaoh from reacting positively to the signs. In P the role of the magicians parallels in function the concession motif in J. Both are means by which Pharaoh avoids the full impact of the signs. The signs fail in their function, but by design. Because Pharaoh does not hear, the plagues continue.

There is another peculiarity to P's use of the motif which differs strikingly from that of J. The plagues do not function to reveal to Pharaoh the knowledge of Yahweh as in J. However, the same idiom 'that you may know' does occur in P, but in connection with the crossing of the sea. This is all the more striking since the terminology of J in this section is totally different from that of his plague narrative. The P writer appears to distinguish sharply between the function of the plagues and the catastrophe at the sea (7.5). The hardening allowed the plagues to be multiplied as a great judgment. The crossing served to make Yahweh known to the Egyptians (14.4).

In the light of these differing usages of the hardening motif, it is of interest to turn to the several secondary passages in the narrative. 10.1b-2 is usually attributed to the Deuteronomic redactor. The choice of the verb stems from J's use; the form and theology of the passage are however much more influenced by the P narrative. Yahweh is the agent of the hardening and he proposes to multiply the signs. Also parallel to P is the knowledge of Yahweh which Israel receives through the signs (6.7).

The interpretation of 7.14 is more difficult. Usually the entire verse is treated as belonging to the Yahwist. However, the second half of the verse which contains the phrase 'the heart of Pharaoh is hardened', has several peculiarities which would raise questions about its belonging to J. Formally the verses seems to be an interpolation when compared with the usual pattern of J (7.26; 8.16; 9.1). Again, the adjectival form is unique in the plague stories, and functions differently both in form and position from anything else in J. The hardening is not a definite reaction to the plagues, but the description of a

state. Therefore, the suggestion seems possible that the phrase entered as a redactional connection with the fusion of the sources and has been influenced by the hardening formula of P in v. 13.

The important implication for our analysis of the two sources is in seeing that in both the hardening terminology is closely connected to the giving of signs. In J hardness prevents the signs from revealing the knowledge of God; in P the hardness results in the multiplication of signs as judgment. This means that all attempts to relate hardness to a psychological state or derive it from a theology of divine causality miss the mark. The motif of hardening in Exodus stems from a specific interpretation of the function of signs. Again, hardening did not function as a technical means to tie together originally independent plagues. Rather, the motif sought to explain a tradition which contained a series of divine signs but which continued to fail in their purpose. Hardening was the vocabulary used by the biblical writers to describe the resistance which prevented the signs from achieving their assigned task. The motif has been consistently over-interpreted by supposing that it arose from a profoundly theological reflection and seeing it as a problem of free will and predestination. It is clear that the P source extended the origin of hardening into the plan of God and thus went beyond J. But the polarity between hardening as a decision of Pharaoh and as an effect of God never was seen as a major issue. The occupation with this problem by commentators has contributed to their failure to determine its major role within the passage.

The only explicit reference to the hardening of Pharaoh in the rest of the Old Testament occurs in I Sam. 6.6 and supports its close relation with signs. The Philistines have been plagued by the ark and are confused as to what to do. The priests and diviners advise returning the ark with a guilt offering in order to determine why the God of Israel continues in anger. The problem for the Philistines is to determine whether the plagues came by Yahweh's power or by chance (v. 9). The reference to 'hardening your hearts as the Egyptians' (v. 6) refers to their refusal to learn from the clear divine signs.

Of course, the larger theological problem of divine causality did emerge in Israel. I Sam. 2.25 speaks of the will of Yahweh to slay Eli's sons, and the prophet in II Chron. 25.16 knows of God's determination to destroy Amaziah. I Kings 22 and Isa. 6 both testify to the prophet's task of closing men's minds to the will of God. Again, a later theological generation made use of the Exodus passage in their

reflections on the wider problem, as Romans 9 demonstrates. Certainly the LXX translation had already moved in this direction. Nevertheless, this history of theological development must not obscure the sharp profile of the hardening motif as it first emerged in the plague narratives.

Excursus II: The Despoiling of the Egyptians

A. CALMET, *Commentaire littéral sur tous les livres de l'ancien et du nouveau Testament I*, Paris 1724, pp.398ff. on Ex.3.21; G. W. COATS, 'Despoiling the Egyptians', *VT* 18, 1968, pp.450-7; D. DAUBE, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible*, London 1963, pp.55ff.; S. GOLDMAN, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 1958, pp.194-206; E. W. HENGSTENBERG, *Genuineness of the Pentateuch II*, ET Edinburgh 1847, pp.417-32; B. JACOB, *Das zweite Buch der Tora Exodus* (Microfilm, Jerusalem), dritter Teil, pp.495-7; J. MORGENSTERN, 'The Despoiling of the Egyptians', *JBL* 68, 1949, pp.1-28.

There are three passages within Exodus which record the tradition of Israel's despoiling of the Egyptians before the departure of the nation (3.21-22; 11.2-3; 12.35-36; cf. Ps.105.37). The very close conceptual and linguistic formulation of the tradition lends itself to treating the passages together. Accordingly, Israel was commanded by God to 'ask' of their Egyptian neighbors on an individual basis objects of silver and gold. Then God caused the Egyptians to respond favorably to the Israelite's request. Two of the Exodus passages summarize the event as a 'despoiling' of the Egyptians (3.22; 13.36).

Few passages have provoked such an obvious embarrassment both to Jewish and Christian expositors as has this one. It is amazing to see the vigorous apologetic in defense of the tradition which began in Hellenistic times and continues up to the present. Of course, it should not be forgotten that the apology was often called forth by scurrilous attacks against the Jews (cf. Augustine's defense, *Contra Faustum* XXII.71; Lessing's *Wolfenbüttel Fragments*, Berlin 1786, p.53). The issue at stake turns on whether or not Israel was guilty of deception in gaining an advantage, and how one is to explain the explicit command of God in effecting the despoiling. Since the attack on Israel's behaviour involved invariably an attack on the Old Testament and the God of Israel, Jews and Christians generally found themselves waging a common battle against agnostics and heretics. Only occasionally - at least until the nineteenth century - did Christians such as Marcion exploit the passage in order to contrast the 'higher ethics' of the New Testament.