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God, Pharaoh and Moses

Explaining the Lord's Actions in the Exodus Plagues Narrative

William A. Ford


Foreword by R. W. L. Moberly

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excursus in commentaries through articles to a monograph.¹⁷ Therefore we will begin our consideration of the portrayal of YHWH with a summary of representative discussions on the hardening.

1.2 Different Approaches to the Issue

1.2.1 Previous Approaches to the 'Hardening'

A caveat is necessary at this point. As this study will not focus exclusively on the issue of the 'hardening', this summary is intended to be representative of general positions on the issue of the hardening, rather than exhaustive of all scholarly work thereon.¹⁸ The discussions have been grouped into different approaches to the issue for ease of reference. However the lines are necessarily arbitrary, and some works may fall into more than one category or on the borderline of two.¹⁹ The intention of this section is to summarise the different positions here, and in this short space it will not be possible to do justice to all of the arguments.²⁰

1.2.1.1 DIFFERENT SOURCES WITH DIFFERENT POSITIONS

The most common approach, certainly until recently, was to approach the problem of the hardening through historical critical methods. The different hardening vocabulary and phraseology were investigated as deriving from different sources, building up a composite picture of how the present text came to be. The most detailed example of this is the monograph by Franz Hesse.²¹

¹⁷ This having been said, there are fewer detailed discussions than one might expect.

¹⁸ The discussions mentioned are primarily modern ones. For summaries of early interpretations see Benno Jacob, 'Gott und Pharao' *MGWJ* LXVIII (1923): 118-124; Theresia Heither, *Schriftauslegung – Das Buch Exodus bei den Kirchenvvätern*, *NSKAT* 33/4 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2002), 85-93; and Lester J. Kuyper, 'The Hardness of Heart according to Biblical Perspective,' *SJT* 27 (1974): 459-474, 465-468.

¹⁹ For example Hesse's discussion deals primarily with the different sources but sees them all, ultimately, as portraying YHWH as the cause.

²⁰ The issue of the hardening will be considered in more detail in chapter 3.

²¹ Franz Hesse, *Das Verstockungsproblem in Alten Testament: Eine Frömmigkeitsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, *BZAW* 74 (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1955), henceforth 'Hesse'. To this we could add, for example, the articles by Wilson, Deist, and Räisänen, as well as a number of commentaries: Robert R. Wilson, 'The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart', *CBQ* 41 (1979): 18-36, henceforth 'Wilson'; F.E. Deist, 'Who is to blame: The Pharaoh, Yahweh or circumstance? On human responsibility and divine ordinance in Exodus 1-14.', in *Exodus 1-15: Text and Context*. Edited by J. J. Burden. *OTWSA/OTSSA* 29 (1986): 91-112, henceforth 'Deist'; Heikki Räisänen, *The*

Hesse's comments on the hardening of Pharaoh form part of his overall study of the theme of hardening, considering the possible Old Testament origins of the New Testament issue, considering the hardening both of non-Israel (including Pharaoh) and also of Israel (especially Is. 6).

Although Hesse splits the hardening passages into J, E, P and redactional elements, he still finds tension between divine and human hardening within these individual sources. Thus while J leaves YHWH out of consideration, according to Hesse it is obvious to J that YHWH, who removed the plague, is ultimately involved with the hardening. 'In my opinion, one cannot speak of a relationship of tension between 'self-hardening' and hardening by God in J. For this narrator Jahwe is the secret subject of the apparent self-hardening.'²² This of course is rather difficult to sustain. Räsänen comments that one 'could just as well claim that J regarded Yahweh as the actual cause of the Fall (Gen. 3).'²³ Hesse finds this tension also in E, and supremely in P.²⁴ 'In respect of the problem which he faces, P does the only thing that is possible for the theologian: He puts two propositions dialectically next to each other. In this respect theology has not gone beyond him to this day, and will not go beyond him.'²⁵ Finally he argues that redactional elements such as 4:21 and 3:19 do not progress the matter beyond P at all.²⁶

This approach raises the questions of the possible relationships between the assumed sources, and how this may make sense of the text.²⁷ Thus

Idea of Divine Hardening. A Comparative Study of the notion of divine hardening, leading astray and inciting to evil in the Bible and the Qur'an, Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 25 (Helsinki, 1976), henceforth 'Räsänen Hardening', 53-56. The detailed work by Edgar Kellenberger (*Die Verstockung Pharaos: Exegetische und auslegungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Exodus 1-15*. BWANT 171 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006)) was published as this book was going to press and therefore too late for any engagement.

²² Hesse, 45. 'Von einem Spannungsverhältnis zwischen »Selbstverstockung« und Verstockung durch Gott kann bei J m. E. keine Rede sein. Für diesen Erzähler ist Jahwe das heimliche Subjekt der scheinbaren Selbstverstockung.' (Unless otherwise stated, translations from the German are my own. I am grateful to Jenny Moberly for her help with my German.)

²³ Räsänen *Hardening*, 54.

²⁴ Hesse, 46-51.

²⁵ Hesse, 48. 'P tut also in der Aporie, in der es steht, das einzige, was dem Theologen möglich ist: Er stellt zwei Sätze dialektisch nebeneinander. In dieser Hinsicht ist die Theologie bis heute nicht über ihn hinausgekommen und wird nicht über ihn hinausgekommen.' He notes Abot. 3:15 in support of this. Cf. Räsänen's rejection of this view as too modern for P (55).

²⁶ Hesse, 51-52.

²⁷ For example, many recent studies explore the model of the later sources (especially the Priestly source) working with earlier sources and adapting the overall picture. The most detailed discussion is found in Fujiko Kohata, *Jahwist und Priesterschrift in*

Childs' excursus on the hardening is structured around J and P, and he concludes that in both cases the hardening is linked to the signs. For J the hardening prevents the signs from revealing the knowledge of God. For P the hardening results in the multiplication of signs.²⁸ However Childs himself sees source criticism as unable to provide a breakthrough in the problem of the hardening.²⁹ This, however, has not stopped other discussions. For example Wilson responds to Childs by investigating the function of the different narrative strands of J, E, and P. In J the motif has a literary function but does not give a reason for the plagues, only the next request to Pharaoh. E attributes Pharaoh's actions to YHWH by placing 4:21 at the beginning. Finally P adds 7:3 with הַקֹּלֶךְ, encouraging the reader to interpret all of Pharaoh's actions negatively.³⁰ Wilson notes the lack of agreement of scholars on any overall function, and the difficulty of generalising on the use of the hardening motif.³¹ These warnings, both implicit and explicit in the source critical approach, need to be heeded.³² An explanation needs to deal with the variances in form, vocabulary and phraseology to be successful.

1.2.1.2 ONE OVERALL POSITION – YHWH OR PHARAOH

An alternative to the above position is to attempt to find one overall understanding of the hardening, generally with regard to the author or cause of the hardening.

On the one hand, it is argued that YHWH is always responsible for the hardening. Appeals are made primarily to YHWH's initial statements concerning the hardening in 4:21 and 7:3 before the encounters begin, and the concluding phrase 'as YHWH said'. These are seen as indications that while the text may say 'Pharaoh hardened his heart', the reader is to understand that YHWH is ultimately responsible. This then becomes clear at 9:12. The most detailed recent discussion of this is the article by G.K. Beale, which seeks to discuss the hardening in context in a final form approach.³³ In summary his argument has three points at its heart: YHWH

Exodus 3-14. BZAW 166 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986), henceforth 'Kohata', who discusses the question of whether P knew the earlier sources. Another recent approach that diachronically considers the changing portrayal of YHWH and divine power in the plagues narrative, is that of Dozeman.

²⁸ Childs, 170-175.

²⁹ Childs, 170.

³⁰ Wilson, 24-27, 27-29, and 29-35 respectively.

³¹ Wilson, 19 and 35 respectively.

³² This is the case even when, as here, one is looking at the final form. Our approach will be discussed at the end of this section.

³³ G. K. Beale, 'An Exegetical and Theological Consideration of the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus 4-14 and Romans 9', *TrinJ* 5 (1984): 129-154, henceforth 'Beale'. Cf. Martin Noth, *Exodus*, trans. J.S. Bowden, OTL (London: SCM Press, 1962),

foretelling his hardening of Pharaoh in 4:21, the phrase 'as YHWH said' referring back to 4:21 and 7:3, and the 'transitive/intransitive' pattern that he identifies in the hardening statements.³⁴

Conversely it is argued that Pharaoh is always responsible for the hardening. It is suggested that the attribution of the hardening to YHWH is due to the mindset of the writers who would attribute everything ultimately to YHWH, but in such a way as not to deny the reality and efficacy of proximate causes through human agency.³⁵ Alternatively 'YHWH hardened' is understood in a permissive sense: YHWH *allowed* Pharaoh to remain hard-hearted rather than *causing* him to be hard-hearted.³⁶

The problems with these positions are similar, in that one has to decide which statements to read at face value, and which to 'interpret' in light of the 'face value' statements. That is not to say that the interpretations are not, at least in some cases, subtle. If we had to make a choice one way or the other, 4:21, 7:3 and 'as YHWH said' would favour YHWH as being ultimately responsible. However in light of the issues raised by the source

henceforth 'Noth', 68; G. Warshaver, "'The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart", in the Bible and Qumranic Literature.' *BIJS* 1 (1973): 1-12, 2-3. More famously see Luther's 'The Bondage of the Will', in *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings*, John Dillenberger ed. (New York: Anchor, Doubleday, 1962), 192, 196-98, and Calvin, 101-102, 194. The discussion is quite subtle, speaking of YHWH using Pharaoh's evil will against him, but Luther notes that the 'as YHWH said' rules out any freewill, and Calvin dismisses the view that the hardening was in any way permissive.

³⁴ He has other arguments, but these three appear to underpin other discussions. For example in discussing 8:11 [15], he notes the phrase 'Pharaoh hardened' but in view of 'as YHWH said' Pharaoh 'must be viewed as YHWH's agent, who truly hardens himself - however, never independently, but only under the ultimate influence of Yahweh.' (143) cf. 144 on 8:28 [32] and 145 on 9:12, 30 and 9:34-35. While I will be disagreeing with several of his conclusions, it is refreshing to find such a detailed contextual approach. As his approach is both detailed and (to anticipate) comparable to ours, we will interact with it in our discussion of the hardening in chapter 3.

³⁵ See especially U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1974), henceforth 'Cassuto', 55-57. Cf. S. R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus*, CBSC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), henceforth 'Driver *Exodus*' 53-54. This causes a problem if the principle is extended to other acts of YHWH, where 'YHWH our God who brought us out of Egypt' becomes 'we brought ourselves out of the land of Egypt' and so forth. Von Rad, commenting on Is. 6, warns against such a move to a general religious truth, asking why Isaiah would be needed (Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, D.M.G. Stalker trans. from German of 1960 (London: SCM, 1965), Vol II, 152-153). Moreover one could use this point to argue the reverse, that YHWH was indeed seen as behind everything. For different examples of the latter see Hesse, 52-53 and Beale, 143-49.

³⁶ See especially Benno Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible. Exodus*, trans. Walter Jacob (New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House Inc, 1992), henceforth 'Jacob *Exodus*', 244-245, 280, 286, 290, 384, 391.

critical approach, we will attempt to find an approach which preserves these differences while remaining one narrative.

1.2.1.3 A CHANGE IN THE POSITION – PHARAOH THEN YHWH

In another approach it is noted that the initial hardening refrains state that Pharaoh hardens his own heart, and then subsequently that YHWH starts to harden at 9:12.³⁷ This approach can then turn into a variant of one of the two positions in the previous approach. Thus one can understand the progression not as a change of authors of the hardening, but rather as a change of understanding on the part of the reader. Pharaoh's obstinacy becomes more and more outrageous, until it becomes obvious that this unbelievable behaviour must have a cause other than Pharaoh. Probably the most detailed recent discussion of this is found in the article by David Gunn.³⁸ He sees 4:21 and 7:3 together with the 'as YHWH said' as the hints of divine activity which become explicit at 9:12: 'what was previously implicit has become explicit. Pharaoh's obstinacy makes sense.'³⁹ Gunn's article is an interesting reading of the encounters, focussing on the richness of the narrative, discussing ambiguity and progression within it, in an approach similar to ours, albeit with different conclusions.⁴⁰

Alternatively the progression is understood as a change in Pharaoh's will or psychology. Initially he starts to harden himself and this self-hardening can be reversed. However at a certain stage he reaches the point of no return. His intransigence has become so habitual and irreversible that he is unable to reverse it even if he wished. This is indicated by the change to 'YHWH hardened Pharaoh's heart'. YHWH is simply using Pharaoh's own wilfulness against him.⁴¹

³⁷ The transition is not totally smooth with 9:34 coming after 9:12, but the overall pattern is reasonable.

³⁸ David M. Gunn, 'The "hardening of Pharaoh's heart": Plot, character and theology in Exodus 1-14', in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature*. David J. A. Clines, David M. Gunn, and Alan J. Hauser eds., JSOTsup19 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1982): 72-96, henceforth 'Gunn'.

³⁹ Gunn 77; cf. Propp, 336, 353; John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC 3 (Waco: Word, 1987), henceforth 'Durham', 96-97, 122.

⁴⁰ His summary that '“Pharaoh's heart was hardened” thus becomes a kind of shorthand for “Yahweh caused Pharaoh's heart to harden”' (79) unfortunately loses the subtlety in the rest of his discussion. To anticipate our comments in chapter 2, it would be interesting to see how he would discuss the explanation in 9:13-19 or the remonstrative comments in 9:17 and 10:3, which might argue against such an approach.

⁴¹ Cf. Sarna *Exodus*, 23, 36, and Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), henceforth 'Sarna EE', 64-65. Childs, in particular, is opposed to such a position, seeing it as burdening the text with later discussions (170f).

Fretheim offers a position that comes between these two, albeit somewhat favouring the second.⁴² He rejects any attempt at psychologising which aims to 'get God off the hook', but also does not see any glory for YHWH if Pharaoh is an automaton. He prefers a position of limited determinism. YHWH acts and brings in the word of God, and he makes Pharaoh's obduracy of such a character that he is driven to the point of no return, using the image of someone on the river fighting against the pull of a waterfall, and losing.

God as subject intensifies Pharaoh's own obduracy. While initially this does not result in a numbing of Pharaoh's will, it begins to have that effect as events drive toward final disaster. Both need to be said: Pharaoh hardens his own heart, and so does God.⁴³

Keil and Delitzsch offer another variant on this approach.⁴⁴ They understand the change from Pharaoh to YHWH as YHWH's response to Pharaoh's initial actions. The one who refused to listen to YHWH and learn from him leads himself into judgement, which is expressed by YHWH hardening him as he has hardened himself.

Overall the variants on this progressive approach are more nuanced than the previous one. Once again, the strength of 4:21, 7:3 and 'as YHWH said' would suggest that if one had to make a choice then the change of perceptions might be preferable to the change in psyche. Nevertheless one would still have to explain why the phrase 'Pharaoh hardened' was used at all, and why YHWH interacts with Pharaoh in the way that he does.

1.2.2 An Alternative Approach to the 'Hardening'?

All of the above approaches to the theological issue of the hardening have both strengths and weaknesses, although not all in equal proportions. Another point that most, if not all, of these approaches share to some extent is the tendency to abstract the 'hardening' as a theological issue which needs to be solved. In particular it seems that the author or source of the hardening needs to be defined: is it always YHWH or always Pharaoh, or both (at the same time or consecutively)? This does not mean that they pay no attention to the text in which it is found. For example, Beale is concerned to understand the hardening in context.⁴⁵ However while he is

⁴² Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), henceforth 'Fretheim', 96-103.

⁴³ Fretheim, 98.

⁴⁴ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament. Vol I: The Pentateuch*, trans. James Martin, CFTL XXII (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1864), henceforth 'Keil', 453-457.

⁴⁵ Beale, 130. He does state his surprise that 'apparently no writer in the history of this discussion [on the hardening in relation to predestination and Rom. 9] has ever

interested in context, he is still concentrating on the issue of 'the hardening', due in large part to his interest in Rom. 9:17, rather than the larger issue of YHWH's acts in the plagues narrative.

In light of the above, and the difficulties arising from the various different understandings of the hardening, this work will attempt to approach the issue in a different way. We have noted that the hardening is one of a number of theological issues in respect of YHWH's actions in the plagues narrative. Therefore instead of considering the 'hardening' as a separate issue, we will consider the wider theological issues involved with the portrayal of YHWH in this text. The hardening statements will form an important part of this, but will be considered in relation to the wider issue. Our passage is by far the greatest concentration of references to the hardening of the heart in the Old Testament, but there are other issues present in the text that need to be taken into account as well. While this assertion needs justification, a substantive justification can only be made heuristically by discussing the other elements and showing their relevance. However at this point we can provide one example of how the hardening fits into a wider context, by consideration of the vocabulary used to describe the act of hardening.

1.2.2.1 חִזַּק, כָּבֵד, AND קָשָׁה IN EX. 1-15

There are three words used in Ex. 4-14 to describe the phenomenon of the 'hardening': כָּבֵד, חִזַּק, and קָשָׁה.⁴⁶ Pharaoh's heart (לֵב) is often the object of these. We do not need to discuss the meaning of לֵב as the centre of a person's will or resolve, except to note that the modern idiom 'hard-hearted' in the sense of 'cruel' or 'pitiless' is not an appropriate understanding here. The three terms have been discussed in relation to Pharaoh's heart. Hesse especially discusses the three terms and other comparable terminology in detail.⁴⁷ To avoid going over the same ground, we can note that the nuances of meaning are that חִזַּק indicates a heart that is firm or strong, כָּבֵד suggests a heart that is heavy or unresponsive, and קָשָׁה indicates a heart that is stubborn. There does not appear to be any

attempted to exegete all of the hardening predictions as they appear in consecutive order throughout their context in Exod 4-14.' (129)

⁴⁶ Hebrew citations and transliterations are taken from BibleWorks version 5 (Online: <http://www.bibleworks.com/>). When discussing the general sense of a Hebrew word, the pointing given will be that of the heading in BDB, excepting verbs only found in a stem or stems other than the Qal. (Citations of specific instances will follow the forms in the text.)

⁴⁷ Hesse, 7-14 and 14-20. On the wider use of the terms see e.g. A.S. van der Woude 'חִזַּק' *TLOT* 1, 403-406; C. Westermann 'כָּבֵד' *TLOT* 2, 590-602; A. S. van der Woude 'קָשָׁה' *TLOT* 3, 1175-1176; Hesse 'חִזַּק' *TDOT* IV, 301-308; Stenmans 'כָּבֵד' and Weinfeld 'כָּבֵד' *TDOT* VII, 13-22 and 22-28; Zipor 'קָשָׁה' *ThWAT* VII 1/2, 205-21.

obvious reason as to why one word is used rather than another in the different hardening statements, and thus there appears to be no material differences between the terms.⁴⁸ However the heart is not the only object of these words in our passage, although it is probably the most discussed. In particular there are two other repeated uses that between them pick up all three words. These are the description of Pharaoh's actions in respect of Israel, and the description of YHWH's actions in respect of Pharaoh and Egypt.

Pharaoh, who does not know YHWH (or Joseph), sets work upon Israel. The first Pharaoh sets hard work upon them (קָשָׁה 1:14) to prevent them leaving. The second Pharaoh tells his men to make the work heavier (תְּכַבֵּד 5:9) so that they do not listen to Moses' 'lies'. This policy proves successful, as the people do not listen to Moses because of the hard work (קָשָׁה 6:9).⁴⁹ In all three cases, the main reason for, or result of, this action is to act against Israel's release from Egypt.

The link between these words and Pharaoh's policy towards Israel becomes even clearer in the plagues narrative and beyond. YHWH threatens Pharaoh with a plague, if he keeps 'grasping' Israel (מִחֲזִיק 9:2) and refusing to send them. The institution of the sacrifice or redemption of the firstborn is to be explained by YHWH's actions when Pharaoh 'stubbornly refused to let us go' (הִקְשָׁה 13:15). Finally in the last plague, Egypt press Israel to leave quickly (וַתִּחְזַק 12:33, contrast 9:2).

This theme continues when we turn to YHWH's acts. YHWH's first comment to Moses about Pharaoh is that he, YHWH, knows that Pharaoh will not allow Israel to leave except by a mighty hand (וְלֹא בְיַד חֲזָקָה 3:19).⁵⁰ This theme is repeated in 6:1 where YHWH says that now Pharaoh will send them and drive them out because of/with a mighty hand. This phrase becomes epigrammatical for the exodus, remembered as YHWH bringing Israel out of Egypt with a 'mighty hand' (בְּיַד חֲזָקָה). In 13:14 YHWH's 'strength of hand' is contrasted directly with Pharaoh being 'stubborn' in 13:15.

Moreover, as the plagues progress they begin to be defined as 'heavy' or 'very heavy' (כָּבֵד – swarm 8:20 [24]; murrain 9:3; hail 9:18, 24; locusts

⁴⁸ Perhaps we should restate this in terms of a lack of illumination of the final form of the text. One could explain the different words, as many have, in terms of different sources. However in the final form they appear to be largely interchangeable. There are slight differences in use; thus one could note that the narratorial refrain tends to use a form of כָּבֵד for 'Pharaoh hardened (dulled?) his heart' and חֲזָקָה for 'YHWH hardened (strengthened?) Pharaoh's heart'. However this does not lead to any firm conclusions.

⁴⁹ The full phrase includes מִקְצֵר רוּחַ 'shortness of breath', which is an idiom for impatience or depression (cf. Mic. 2:7; Job. 21:4; Prov. 14:29; Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, Translated by Sierd Woudstra, HCOT, (Kampen: Kok, 1993, 1996), henceforth 'Houtman', I 56; Cassuto, 82).

⁵⁰ The exact meaning of וְלֹא בְיַד חֲזָקָה will be discussed in chapter 3.

10:14. Cf. *חֶזֶק* – ‘strong’ wind 10:19). As with 13:14-15, in 9:2-3 this heavy plague (*כִּבְדָּר*) from YHWH is contrasted directly with Pharaoh’s action. If Pharaoh continues to ‘grasp’ Israel, then YHWH’s hand will come upon Egypt’s livestock, with a very heavy plague. Pharaoh will not act to send the people without this heavy-handed treatment from YHWH, so YHWH will act accordingly. If Pharaoh’s hand is heavy upon Israel, then YHWH’s hand will be heavy upon Egypt.

Finally, in the Red Sea encounter, YHWH will glorify himself over Pharaoh and his army as they are vanquished and destroyed in the Red Sea (*וַאֲכַבְדֵּהוּ* 14:4, 17, cf. v18).

It seems unlikely that these ‘other’ uses of *כִּבְדָּר*, *חֶזֶק* and *קִשְׁיָה* bear no relation to their use in respect of the ‘hardening’. It seems more probable that a deliberate wordplay is intended.⁵¹ In our passage these three words are used primarily for Pharaoh’s actions with regard to Israel (grasping, increasing work, hardset against ‘sending’); and for YHWH’s actions in relation to Pharaoh and Egypt (mighty hand, heavy plagues, hardening Pharaoh, ‘glory’ over Egypt). Pharaoh’s heart is hard or heavy, but so are a number of other things and it forms part of a larger pattern.⁵² Thus it becomes more difficult to abstract the ‘hardening’ as a separate issue. In order to retain these resonances the ‘hardening’ needs to be read as one element of the ongoing narrative. To this point, and to our approach to the text, we now turn.

1.3 The Approach of this Study

1.3.1 General Approach - Narrative Theology

Our approach to the theological issues concerning the portrayal of YHWH in the plagues narrative will take the form of a narrative theological approach to the final form of the text. It is important for this study that both the theological content and also the narrative form of our passage are interlinked and mutually dependent. The story is more than *just* a story, because of its content, referent and significance. However it is important to recognise that it *is* a story, and not just a series of theological propositions that can be abstracted from their setting. We are concerned with the theology in the story, and thus are seeking to take the story seriously as story. There will be excursus at relevant points where a particular issue needs to be outlined and discussed in detail. However the intention will

⁵¹ Cf. Dennis J McCarthy ‘Plagues and Sea of Reeds: Exodus 5-14’, *JBL* 85 (1966): 137-158, henceforth ‘McCarthy ‘Plagues’’, 141.

⁵² Moreover Pharaoh’s state (i.e. his ‘hardness of heart’), is only of interest inasmuch as it affects how he responds to YHWH’s demands concerning Israel. Cf. Hesse, 31.

then be to understand the various occurrences of that issue in its narrative context. Therefore, as regards the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, one key difference in our approach to many of those mentioned earlier is that we will not be attempting to find 'an answer' to the question of who is causing the hardening. Instead we will be trying to understand how these references can be sensibly understood within the narrative of which they form a part. To put it another way, we will not be abstracting the hardening as a separate theological theme; discussing issues of theodicy; or considering discussions of the hardening in post-biblical theology.⁵³ Our focus is on the text and the role of the hardening within it.

The main focus in the study will be on passages that appear to be giving a rationale for what is going on, will go on, or has gone on in respect of YHWH's actions in the plagues narrative. Its intention is to read these 'explanations' in the plagues narrative in context. Reading them as part of the narrative will involve paying particular attention to where and when they arise, to whom they are addressed, to what they respond, what their function appears to be in that context and how they are received.⁵⁴ In the remainder of this introduction we will set out the specifics of our approach,

⁵³ While not wishing to downplay these enterprises, a concentration on the text seems to be the best place to start (cf. Childs, 170-171; Propp, 353). This concentration may yield some insights that can form part of such wider discussions.

⁵⁴ Eslinger 'Freedom' also advocates looking to the text and to the explanations and comments within it (47). He argues that the narratorial comments in the text are the best place to start, as the narrator is the one who stands above all the characters in the text (48). The reader should not carelessly assume that the authors voice their opinions through the principal characters in the text, and should be aware of the possibility that the authors might not uphold Israel's views themselves (51ff). Thus his article concludes: 'We can understand why they [Israel] celebrated God's mighty acts in song (Exod. 15); we should also understand and allow that the narrator and the narrative do not.' (59) His article raises questions over our use of two speeches from YHWH as our key texts in the following two chapters.

However Eslinger also points out the lack of any explicit evaluation of the events by the narrator (51). He sees this as leaving the reader to work out the authors' views. Yet while one should not assume that the speech of any principal character is expressing the narrator's views, one might expect a reasonably explicit sign that this is not the case, especially when the character is YHWH. Otherwise the burden of proof must lie on the one who would see the narrator disagreeing. His example of *עֲצוּמִים* and *רַב* in 1:7-9 with the precedents in Genesis, and of Gen. 15:13-14 does not necessarily imply that Pharaoh and his reasoning 'are only cogs in the machine engineered and run by God' (53). Moreover the use of the hardening motif in YHWH's messages to Moses (56-58) does not necessarily show that the narrator disapproves of YHWH's actions, however problematic they may be for modern readers. Therefore in this chapter and the next, we will continue with our investigation of statements on the lips of YHWH, as a reasonable way into the theology of the text.

before returning to a couple of more general issues that need to be addressed.

1.3.2 Specific Approach – Chapter by Chapter

1.3.2.1 CHAPTER 2: 9:13-19

Notwithstanding the interest in YHWH's acts in the plagues narrative, one of the longest explanatory passages therein has received very little detailed consideration: the speech of YHWH in 9:13-19, which introduces the seventh plague of hail, thunder and fire from the skies. The reasons for such lack of consideration are uncertain. However, if one wished to speculate, there are two possible reasons that present themselves. Firstly, there is no explicit mention of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in this speech. Therefore any approach that restricts itself to, or focuses predominantly on, the hardening will not give much attention to this speech.

Secondly, this speech has been viewed as fragmentary from a historical critical perspective. In particular, vv14-16 are seen as a secondary insertion, interrupting the speech that previously would have flowed from v13 to v17. Hyatt comments that 'verses 14-16 constitute a passage curious in its present context. It is too reflective for J, and it comes in awkwardly at this point, since this is not the last plague. Here someone explains the purpose of the plagues, and apparently he has in mind 'all my plagues' (14). We may attribute these verses to a late strand of P.'⁵⁵ Noth sees these three verses as corresponding to the whole plagues narrative, but appearing 'too early, for we would now expect it to be followed by the final decisive act of Yahweh.' He also notes the secondary character of the passage in 'the reference to the 'pestilence' in v. 15, i.e. to the secondary section 9.1-7.' However he does continue by noting that 'even if vv. 14-16 are cut out as secondary the announcement of the plague still remains unusually lengthy', referring to vv19-21.⁵⁶ Childs puts 9:14-16 together with 9:19-21, 31-32 and 10:1b-2 as sections considered to be 'later than the three sources, often designated as glosses'. 9:14-16 contains 'a theological reflection on the basis of the JE material which is concerned to explain why God has allowed the plagues to continue so long.'⁵⁷ He notes that although there is 'rather widespread agreement among the critical commentators' that these passages did not belong to the major literary strands, yet 'there is little consensus as to how to interpret these verses since no one set of forces

⁵⁵ J. P. Hyatt, *Exodus*, NCB, (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971), henceforth 'Hyatt', 117-118.

⁵⁶ Noth, 80.

⁵⁷ Childs, 141. Cf. Houtman, II 82.