



[Exodus 4:21](#)

(21) And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.

[Exodus 7:3](#)

(3) And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.

[Exodus 14:4](#)

(4) Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I *am* the LORD." And they did so.

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[God](#) makes some people very difficult to deal with. "And the Lord said to [Moses](#), 'When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go'" ([Exodus 4:21](#)). It was not mere happenstance that this Pharaoh was particularly hardheaded, nor was he merely reacting to circumstance. God caused him to be intractable. God did a similar thing to Ezekiel before Israel:

Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads. Like adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house. ([Ezekiel 3:8-9](#))

If God will do this for one of His servants, a prophet, why can He not do it to Pharaoh, who, though an enemy of His people, is also serving God's purpose?

Exodus says Pharaoh hardened his heart nineteen times, and of that total, ten say God hardened Pharaoh's heart and nine that Pharaoh hardened it. This shows a balance. Undoubtedly, Pharaoh had a proclivity toward stubbornness, but God helped him along whenever necessary.

This suggests that on occasion God will disregard free moral agency to suit the purpose He is working out. If life and our destiny to be in the [Kingdom of God](#) is all a matter of free moral agency, then free moral agency is supreme God, not the Creator God. But it is true, the Potter has power over the clay to do with it as He pleases ([Romans 9:21](#)). Ultimately, God's power of choice trumps man's.

This is further underscored on other occasions revealed in the Exodus events. The sovereign God's power, when combined with Pharaoh's God-aided stubbornness, produced a calamity of monumental proportions for Egypt and glory for the eternal God. God says in [Exodus 7:3-5](#):

And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them.

He was producing yet more because He makes a similar statement in [Exodus 14:4](#), as Israel was about to be confronted with crossing the Red Sea with Pharaoh's army not far behind: "'Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord.' And they did so."

Where was the Egyptians' free moral agency throughout this entire affair? The Egyptians who died—in many cases, violent deaths during the destruction of Egypt's power—had little or no choice in the matter. In addition, they came to comprehend God's power only for a brief period of time, which did them no good and brought Him precious little honor. He may have received honor in the form of terror, and little or none in the form of grateful appreciation, admiration, and obedience from them. God, however, has a longer-range view: The time is coming when they will remember and give true honor to Him in thankfulness.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

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