

Paul and Divine Foreknowledge: Did God Determine
Pharaoh's Heart?

Joe Fleener

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By: Joe Fleener¹

I. Introduction

Does God determine or does man choose? This is a question that has plagued the minds of great theologians for hundreds, even thousands of years. One passage that has played a key role in this theological struggle has been, and still is, Romans chapter nine. This chapter, particularly the first 23 verses,² has been taken apart and put back together to help verify and validate almost every major theological position on the subject of God's sovereignty and man's free will. A central point of discussion within this chapter occurs in verses 17 and 18, where Paul looks back at the historical event of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 9:16, including the larger context.) Why does Paul quote Exodus 9:16? What is the point he is trying to make with this reference? Many have attempted to answer these questions over the years. In the last 20 years alone a plethora of articles have been published trying to 'determine' Paul's reasons.

This paper is going to pick up this subject again from a new, fresh point of view. Until about 20 years ago, most exegetes of this Exodus narrative came to their position after looking at one or two of the hardening passages then drawing their conclusions. These exegetes generally fell into one of two camps: the 'Pharaoh hardened first' camp, or the 'God determined Pharaoh's choice' camp. The former concluded that after Pharaoh had hardened his heart God, seeing what his choice was, confirmed his 'hardness.'³ The latter saw God totally responsible for the

¹ Joe is in his final semester of M.Div. studies at Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary in Lansdale, PA.

² Piper, John. *The Justification of God: An Exegetical & Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Co., 1984), 133.

hardening action and Pharaoh simply as a ‘puppet.’⁴ In 1993 Piper came out with his book⁵ which was an extensive study of the entire Exodus narrative, including all of the hardening passages. Later, G.K. Beale wrote an article in 1984 which also attempted to exegete all of the hardening passages.⁶ Piper concluded that the Exodus narrative supports Paul’s position of double predestination, while Beale concluded that the focus here is on ‘divine sovereignty and human accountability’⁷ rather than free will.

This paper proposes a fresh approach to the Exodus narrative. Instead of just focusing on one or even all of the hardening references, I propose a literary analysis of the entire narrative of Exodus 3-14 with special focus on the three Hebrew verbs normally translated ‘hardened’ (קָזַח, קָשָׁה & כָּבַד). The objective is to clarify the meaning of this passage and Paul’s understanding of it by judicious application of a comprehensive exegetical and literary methodology. Once an exegetical conclusion is made from the literary approach to Exodus 3-14, I will then apply that conclusion to the larger context of Romans nine and attempt to demonstrate that the conclusion this approach reaches aids one’s understanding of Romans 9-11.

II. Key Words and Lexical Possibilities

At this point a foundational understanding of some key terms is crucial.

⁴ Gunn, David M. “The ‘Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart’: Plot, Character and Theology in Exodus 4-14,” in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature*, ed. D. J. A. Clines, D. M. Gunn, and A. J. Hauser (Sheffield: JSOT, 1982), 72-96.

⁵ See footnote 2.

⁶ Beale, G.K. “An Exegetical and Theological Consideration of the Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart in Exodus 4-14 and Romans 9.” *TrinJ* 5:2 (Fall 1984): 130-155.

⁷ *Ibid.* 151

לֵב (Heart):

In ancient times very little was known of the actual organ that pumps blood through one's veins. In the Old Testament Scriptures, the Hebrew word לֵב is used almost exclusively to refer to "such things as personality and the intellect, memory, emotions, desires and will."⁸

חזק (strong):

Frequently, but not exclusively, translated 'harden' in this narrative. It is important to notice that this verb can carry a wide range of meaning, much of which will be essential to this literary study.

Qal Stem: be strong, grow strong, have courage
Piel Stem: harden, make firm, make strong, sustain
Hiphil Stem: seize, grasp, detain
Hitpael Stem: show oneself courageous, show oneself strong
Adjective: firm, hard, strong
Nominative: Strong⁹

כבד (heavy):

This verb is also frequently, but not exclusively, translated 'harden' in this narrative. It is also important to notice that this verb can carry a wide range of meaning, much of which will be essential to this literary study.

Qal Stem: weigh heavily upon, be heavy or dull, be weighty, be honored
Niphal Stem: be honored, enjoy honor, behave with dignity, appear in one's glory
Piel Stem: make insensitive, to honor, do honor to
Pual Stem: be honored
Hiphil Stem: to make heavy, to make unresponsive, to cause to be honored, to make numerous
Hitpael Stem: to multiply, to boast, to be honored
Adjective: heavy, oppressing, weighty, unresponsive, thick
Nominative: heaviness, vehemence¹⁰

⁸ Ryken, Leland; Wilhoit, James C.; Longman III, Tremper, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press) 2000, c1998.

⁹ Koehler, Ludwig; Walter Baumgartner *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Leiden, The Netherlands: 2000. CD-ROM Edition taken from Bible Works 5.0.

קשה (impudent):

This root is only used three times in the Exodus 3-14 narrative, one of which is in reference to Pharaoh's heart. It too plays a crucial role in understanding the text.

Qal Stem: be heavy, be hard, be difficult
Niphal Stem: be dejected
Piel Stem: have difficulties
Hiphil Stem: to make hard, to harden
Adjective: hard, difficult, strict, impudent¹¹

III. Literary Analysis of Exodus 3-14: The Power of Yahweh vs. The Stubbornness of Pharaoh – Who Will Receive Glory?

The account of Yahweh delivering the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage begins in Exodus chapter three with Yahweh calling His servant Moses at the burning bush. In verses eight and ten of chapter three, Yahweh makes it very clear that He will use Moses as His instrument to free Israel from Pharaoh's grip.

3:8 "I have come down to deliver them from the hand of the Egyptians..." (NET)¹²

3:10 "So now, go, and I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." (NET)

At this point it is understood that Yahweh has determined that Israel will be free and that He will use Moses as His spokesperson to perform this task. However, in 3:19 and 20 Yahweh gives Moses additional information clarifying that this task will not be without difficulty. The first occurrence of a key term (קשה)¹³ is in 3:19.

Verb uses in Reference to Yahweh:

¹⁰ Koehler, Ludwig; Walter Baumgartner *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Leiden, The Netherlands: 2000. CD-ROM Edition taken from Bible Works 5.0.

¹¹ Koehler, Ludwig; Walter Baumgartner *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Leiden, The Netherlands: 2000. CD-ROM Edition taken from Bible Works 5.0.

¹² All Scripture quotations are taken from *New English Translation*. www.netbible.org. extracted from Bible Works 5.0, unless otherwise specified.

¹³ See Appendix 1 for a chart of all the verb uses.

קִזַּח in Reference to Yahweh: The Power of Yahweh.

In 3:19 and 20 Yahweh reveals to Moses that Pharaoh will not allow the people to leave without resistance. However, the focus in these two verses is not the resistance of Pharaoh, but the power of Yahweh. It is in verse 19 that the adjective form of קִזַּח is used to describe the overwhelming force that will be required for Pharaoh to let the people go. In verse 20 Yahweh explains that this overwhelming force will come by His ‘hand’ as He displays His wonders. The power of Yahweh will prevail in the end. The adjective form of קִזַּח occurs one other time in the narrative (6:1) describing the strength of Yahweh’s hand which He will use to compel Pharaoh to release His people.

The noun form of קִזַּח occurs four times in chapter 13 (3,9,14,16). Each time this noun is used, it depicts the ‘mighty hand’ of Yahweh that overpowered Pharaoh. Throughout chapter 13 Yahweh tells Moses to instruct the people about the importance of this great triumph. Four times within this instruction they are told to remember that it was the ‘mighty hand’ of Yahweh that brought them out of bondage. They are to remember this by celebrating the Passover (13:5), and they are to be diligent in instructing their children (13:8,9,14) that it was Yahweh’s ‘mighty hand.’

The verb form of קִזַּח occurs exclusively in the *Piel* stem when Yahweh is the subject.¹⁴ In all eight occurrences Pharaoh’s heart is the object. With this verb Moses first states that Yahweh will ‘harden’ Pharaoh’s heart (4:21 – imperfect). This is three chapters before the first actual occurrence of this hardening. Not again until after the sixth plague (9:12) is Yahweh

¹⁴ Five imperfect (4:21;9:12;10:20;10:27;11:10;14:8), one perfect (14:4) and one participle (14:17).

explicitly mentioned as the subject of this verb. The imperfect form occurs again after the eighth (10:20) and ninth (10:27) plagues, as well as just prior to the tenth plague (11:10) and before the crossing of the sea (14:8). Each time the power of Yahweh is being displayed in His authority over the will of Pharaoh as He ‘strengthens Pharaoh’s will/resolve against Yahweh.’ The participle form of **חזק** is used just prior to the crossing of the sea (14:17). It depicts not only Yahweh’s power over the will of Pharaoh, but also the will of the Egyptians (probably, specifically the soldiers).

The only perfect form of this verb is found in 14:4. Here again, just prior to the crossing of the sea, Moses states that Yahweh has hardened the heart of Pharaoh. Some view this as a summary statement joining with 4:21 therefore bracketing off all of the ‘hardening’ passages between them, as Yahweh’s doing.¹⁵ Although this is possible, I would suggest that it would only be for those hardening passages where **חזק** is the verb. However, it will be demonstrated later that it is difficult to be conclusive with four additional occurrences of this verb.

כבד in Reference to Yahweh: The Heaviness and Honor of Yahweh.

The first occurrence of **כבד** is in chapter four verse ten. Although this is not used directly with reference to Yahweh, indirectly it is. It is here that Moses is explaining to Yahweh that he is inadequate for the job, due to his inability to speak. The adjective Moses uses to describe his mouth and tongue is **כבד**, literally he is saying that his mouth and tongue are heavy or unresponsive. By making excuses Moses does not avoid Yahweh’s call, but his objection does set the stage for the conflict which is about to begin. This conflict is not between Moses and

¹⁵ See Piper and Beale

Pharaoh but between Yahweh and Pharaoh.¹⁶ Ultimately, the outcome of this conflict reveals who is worthy of receiving glory. Interestingly, the adjective Moses uses to describe the heaviness of his mouth and tongue, has the same root as the verb used to reveal the recipient of glory later in the text, and it is not Moses. Although Yahweh is going to use Moses as His representative to lead the people out of Egypt, Moses will not be the one to receive glory for this great deliverance.

The adjective form of כבד is used three other times, twice with reference to the ‘heaviness’ of a plague. In 8:24(20) the swarm of flies Yahweh uses in the fourth plague is described as being ‘thick,’ literally ‘heavy.’ In 9:18 and 24 the hail of the seventh plague is also described as being ‘heavy.’ It is with the fourth plague that Pharaoh is humbled (at least initially) to the point of promising to let the people go without first negotiating with Moses to ask Yahweh to stop the plague (8:25)¹⁷. The seventh plague brings the first occasion of Pharaoh confessing to Moses that he has sinned (9:27). It is with these two plagues that Yahweh reveals the tangible evidence of His glory. In the Ancient Near East the value, honor, or glory of an object was proportionate to its weight. This same word כבד not only carries the meaning of ‘heavy,’ but ‘honor’ or ‘glory’ as well. This idea suggests, then, that Yahweh is purposefully bestowing glory upon Himself by demonstrating the ‘heaviness’ of His power over the gods of Egypt; of which Pharaoh represented the highest god.

¹⁶ “Egyptians considered their ruler to be divine. Pharaoh was the son of the powerful sun-god, Re, and became the god Osiris after death.” Ryken, Leland; Wilhoit, James C.; Longman III, Tremper, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press) 2000, c1998.

¹⁷ Pharaoh does offer to let the people go after the second plague but only in return for Moses asking God to cause the frog plague to end. Of course, in both cases he does not follow through, but one can see the progression in Pharaoh’s humiliation.

This is explicitly revealed in chapter 14. Here Moses uses the *Niphal* form of כָּבַד three times.¹⁸ It is with this passive/reflexive verb, as the children of Israel are preparing to cross the sea, that Yahweh tells them that the ‘hardening’ of Pharaoh and the Egyptians has been for the purpose of bringing Him honor and glory (כָּבַד).

The only occurrence of כָּבַד with Yahweh as the subject and Pharaoh’s heart as the object is in chapter 10 verse one. Here כָּבַד occurs as a *Hiphil* perfect. This is seen as especially crucial, due to the causative nature of the *Hiphil* Stem, along with the completed aspect of the perfect form. Is this verse stating that Yahweh ‘has hardened Pharaoh’s heart’ to the exclusion of Pharaoh hardening his own heart? Without question this verse is stating that Yahweh has ‘caused the heart of Pharaoh to be hard.’ However, it cannot be stating this to the exclusion of Pharaoh actively hardening his own heart as will be demonstrated later.

קָשָׁה in Reference to Yahweh: The Transcendent Power of Yahweh.

The only occurrence of קָשָׁה with reference to Yahweh is in chapter 7 verse three. This, however is also a crucial verse in the narrative. It is here that the only other *Hiphil* verb is used with Yahweh as the subject and Pharaoh’s heart as the object. Using a *Hiphil* imperfect, Yahweh declares that He ‘will cause the heart of Pharaoh to harden.’

Summary: Yahweh’s Transcendent Power Brings Him Glory.

Thus far, the evidence suggests that Yahweh’s power is supreme, His glory is preeminent in His interactions with Pharaoh, and that His transcendent power is the Agent which hardened Pharaoh’s heart. In addition, the ‘heaviness’ of Moses’ mouth and tongue precludes him from

¹⁸ Two occurrences are imperfect verbs (14:4 and 17), the other is an infinitive construct (14:18) functioning as a

receiving glory, but the ‘heaviness’ of Yahweh’s plagues and His power over Pharaoh are instrumental in bringing honor and glory to Himself.

Verb uses in Reference to Pharaoh:

קָזַח in Reference to Pharaoh: Pharaoh’s Attempt to Demonstrate His Power.

There is only one clear occurrence of this verb with reference to Pharaoh in this narrative. It is found as a *Hiphil* participle in 9:2 at the outset of the fifth plague. Here Moses, repeating the words of the Lord, accuses Pharaoh of refusing (a *Piel* infinitive construct) to let the people go and of ‘holding the people firmly’ (קָזַח). The *Hiphil* indicates the cause, in the participial form it indicates continued activity. Here then, Yahweh is accusing Pharaoh of being the agent that has been continuously causing the people to be held firmly. Is it like God to falsely accuse (Exodus 20:16; Titus 1:2)? Even though there have been four plagues displaying the power of Yahweh to Pharaoh and the Egyptians (not to mention the Israelites), Yahweh is declaring that Pharaoh has been volitionally exercising his power against Yahweh by holding the people firmly.

The *Qal* imperfect of קָזַח occurs in chapter 12 verse 33. Here the Egyptians are depicted as ‘strongly urging’ the Israelites to leave. The final plague is over, their first born are dead, now with what little power they have left, the Egyptians ‘strongly urge’ (קָזַח) the Israelites to leave. Yahweh’s power has prevailed over the power of Pharaoh.

There are four occurrences of the *Qal* imperfect of קָזַח with Pharaoh’s heart as the subject, literally ‘Pharaoh’s heart was hardening’ (7:13; 7:22; 8:19(15); 9:35). These references are less clear than any of the others in the narrative for two reasons. One, there is no agent

specified or actual cause for the hardening. The *Qal* imperfect is simply stating a fact. Secondly, each of these references is followed by the phrase, “...just as the Lord had said.” This phrase is thought by some¹⁹ to be a reference back to 4:21 and 7:3 where Yahweh declared He would harden Pharaoh’s heart. Therefore this phrase is showing Yahweh to be the agent of the hardening these four times. As was stated previously this is a possibility, but neither the grammar, syntax, nor context demands this understanding.

It could be argued that Moses specifically mentions the agent of the hardening and uses other stems (i.e. the *Hiphil*) in several other places. If he wanted the readers to understand from these references who the agent was, he could have easily used the same or similar constructions here.²⁰

In addition the phrase “...just as the Lord had said”²¹ is immediately preceded by “...and he did not listen to them”²² in 7:13, 7:22, and 8:19(15), and “...he did not release...”²³ in 9:35, both *Piel* perfects. Yahweh explicitly told Moses in 3:19 that Pharaoh would not release the people, and in 7:4 that Pharaoh would not listen to him. Although Yahweh has also told Moses that He will cause Pharaoh’s heart to become hard, as mentioned above, these four passages do not state the agent of the hardening. Syntactically it is possible for the phrase “...just as the Lord had said” to only reference the verbal clause closest to it. In each case this is not the ‘hardening’ clause. I would suggest, contextually, this is the more likely interpretation. Moses is stating that

¹⁹ See especially Piper and Beale

²⁰ He does just that in 8:15(11) when he uses the *Hiphil* infinitive absolute of כָּבַד functioning as a finite verb followed by the phrase, “as the Lord had said.” This will be discussed more later.

²¹ כַּאֲשֶׁר

²² וְלֹא שָׁמַע

²³ וְלֹא שָׁלַח

Pharaoh did not listen (7:13, 7:22 and 8:19(15)), and he did not release the people (9:35) “just as the Lord had said.”

It is evident that Moses does not specify the agent of the hardening in these four passages. He is just simply stating the fact that Pharaoh’s heart was in a process of hardening with no intention of referencing the agent or cause of such hardening.

כבד in Reference to Pharaoh: Pharaoh’s Attempt to Bring Honor to Himself.

כבד is used once as an adjective in this narrative referring to Pharaoh’s heart (7:14). In this verse it is joined to the *Piel* perfect form of נאץ, meaning to refuse. Literally, ‘Pharaoh’s heart is heavy [unresponsive], he refuses to release the people.’ Here the *Piel* perfect verb underscores the idea that Pharaoh exercises his volition in refusing to release the people. The adjective כבד to describe Pharaoh’s heart supports this idea. But why did Moses use כבד here instead of חזק which he used in the previous verse as a verb? I would suggest for the same reason he uses the adjective form of כבד in 4:10 to describe his own tongue and mouth. Notice, verse 7:14 is the first reference where the hardness of Pharaoh’s heart is clearly linked to some volitional activity of his own.²⁴ Here like 4:10 Moses is setting the stage for the conflict to follow. The heaviness of Pharaoh’s heart (כבד) will be in conflict with the heaviness of Yahweh’s power displayed through the plagues (כבד) ultimately leading to Yahweh being honored and glorified (כבד).

²⁴ See discussion above as to why 7:13 is not.

The adjective form of כָּבֵד is used again after the first encounter between Moses and Pharaoh in chapter seven. Pharaoh, after declaring he does not know who Yahweh is, punishes the Israelites by making their work harder (כָּבֵד, literally ‘heavier’) in 5:9. After being confronted by Moses to release the people according to Yahweh’s command, Pharaoh responds by asserting his strength. Pharaoh attempts to bring honor to himself (כָּבֵד) by making the work for the people even heavier (כָּבֵד) than before. Little does Pharaoh know that Yahweh is about to display His strength through the heaviness (כָּבֵד) of the plagues to ultimately bring honor and glory (כָּבֵד) to Himself.

There is one occurrence of the *Qal* imperfect form of כָּבֵד which falls into the same category of the *Qal* imperfect occurrences of חָזַק. There is no agent explicitly specified in the context, and the *Qal* stem is simply used to indicate an observable fact, that Pharaoh’s heart was ‘growing heavy/unresponsive.’

The three most important and helpful occurrences of the verb form of כָּבֵד are found in 8:15(11); 8:32(28) and 9:34. In each of these verses the *Hiphil* imperfect is used, clearly stating Pharaoh as the subject and his heart as the object. It is in these three verses that Moses makes it clear that Pharaoh has volitionally caused his own heart to become hard (literally ‘heavy’). He is the agent. Once again the real players in this conflict are seen. Pharaoh, seeking to bring honor to himself (כָּבֵד), is volitionally causing his heart to be unresponsive (כָּבֵד). At the same time

Yahweh, seeking to bring honor and glory to Himself (כבוד), will rain down from heaven His power by the heaviness (כבד) of the plagues.

קשה in Reference to Pharaoh: Pharaoh's Stubbornness in the Face of Yahweh.

In chapter 13 Moses instructs the people on teaching their children about their deliverance from Egypt and the death of the Egyptians' first born. He states in verse 15 that they should tell their children that all the first born of the Egyptians were killed because Pharaoh "stubbornly refused to let us go." This is the *Hiphil* perfect form of the verb קשה. The evidence suggests that the death of the first born resulted from Pharaoh's own volitional choice in refusing to release the people. This volitional choice on the part of Pharaoh was remembered even up to the time of King David in 1 Samuel 6:6. Here when the Philistines come to the place where they are going to return the ark to Israel, they remember the events that plagued Egypt and credit Pharaoh with the hardening of his own heart²⁵.

Summary: Pharaoh's Stubborn Attempt to Bring Honor to Himself Fails.

Viewing the narrative with Pharaoh as referent it is evident that he is the other key figure, along with Yahweh, in this epic conflict. Pharaoh is the recipient of the heaviness of Yahweh's plagues, and he exercises volition in choosing to harden (or make heavy/unresponsive) his heart toward Yahweh.

Conclusion of the Literary Analysis

So, did Yahweh harden Pharaoh's heart or did Pharaoh harden his own heart? Yes! The literary analysis of this narrative has shown that both Yahweh and Pharaoh were active agents in

the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. There were times when Yahweh explicitly caused Pharaoh's heart to become hard (9:12, 10:1, 10:20, 10:27; 11:10; 14:4; 14:8 and 14:17), just as He said He would in 4:21 and 7:3. There are other times when Pharaoh explicitly causes his own heart to harden in response to the power of Yahweh, displayed through the heaviness of the plagues (8:15(11); 8:23(28); and 9:34) attempting to bring glory to himself. However in the end, the power of Yahweh (חֲזִיק) prevails through the heaviness of the plagues (כִּבֵּד) over the heaviness (כִּבֵּד) and stubbornness (קִשְׁיָה) of Pharaoh's heart bringing honor and glory (כִּבֵּד) to Himself. Ultimately, no will can overpower God's will as He brings honor to Himself.

Analysis of Exodus 9:16 in Relation to the Entire Narrative of Exodus 3-14

Exodus 9:16 takes on significant importance since Paul quotes it in Romans 9:17, where he applies it to salvation. So, what is its immediate content, and context and how does it fit into the literary analysis given above? The verse reads as follows: "But for this purpose I have caused you to stand to show you my strength and that my name may be declared in all the earth."

Grammatically, the verb "I have caused you to stand" is a *Hiphil* perfect, and the phrase "to show you" is a *Hiphil* infinitive construct functioning substantively. From this verse it is evident that Yahweh is declaring He is the causative Agent Who placed Pharaoh on the throne and has kept him on the throne for this very purpose. The purpose stated in 9:16 is so that Yahweh's name "will be declared in all the earth."²⁶

²⁵ See also Nehemiah 9:10 where the *Hiphil* form of (רָיָה) meaning (to behave presumptuously) with Pharaoh and his servants as the subject.

²⁶ Piper and Beale have argued convincingly that Yahweh declaring His name in all the earth is equivalent to Him bringing glory to Himself, as the above analysis has shown is the ultimate purpose of the Exodus event. See Beale, pg. 153.

However, a tension is introduced in the immediate following verse. In the Hebrew text of Exodus, Yahweh declares to Pharaoh that he is still exalting himself against the people (9:17). Pharaoh's act of exalting himself is represented by a *Hithpolel* participle which indicates a volitional, reflexive/reciprocal, continuous action on his part. In other words, this text depicts Yahweh as the Sovereign who brought Pharaoh to this point in history, while also depicting Pharaoh as repeatedly exercising volition by exalting himself.

In conclusion the content and immediate context of Exodus 9:16 fits the conclusions reached in the literary analysis of the entire narrative. Both Yahweh's sovereignty and Pharaoh's volition are seen as coexisting.

IV. The Larger Context of Romans 9:17

As was alluded to in the introduction, in order to evaluate the role Romans 9:17 plays in this analysis a larger context than chapter 9 must be considered. One must consider chapters 9 through 11.

After finishing a great celebration of our victory in Christ as believers in 8:28-39, Paul opens chapter nine with a lament for his fellow brothers in the "flesh," (Jews.) An outline of Romans 9-11 follows²⁷:

Outline of Romans 9-11:

Chapter 9:1-5: Introduction

Romans 9:1-5 contains "an introduction to the issue Paul seeks to resolve: the Jews' failure to embrace the gospel (vv. 1-3) calls into question the value of the privileges and promises God has given them (vv. 4-5)."

²⁷ Adapted from Moo, Douglas. *The Epistle to the Romans, NICNT*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1996, pg. 554.

Chapter 9:6-29: God's Sovereignty

Paul proceeds with a “defense of the proposition in v. 6a – ‘the word of God has not failed.’ Paul argues that God’s word never promised salvation to all the biological descendants of Abraham (9:6b-13). Salvation is never a birthright, even for Jews, but always a gift of God’s electing love (vv. 14-23), a gift he is free to bestow on Gentiles as well as Jews (vv. 24-29).”

Chapter 9:30-10:21: Who can Question God? Each Individual Must Choose.

Paul then confronts his readers with a rhetorical question. “Connected to 9:6b-29 (and esp. vv. 25-29) with the rhetorical question ‘What then shall we say?’ Paul uses his understanding of the gospel to explain the surprising turn in salvation history, as the Jews are cast aside while the Gentiles stream into the kingdom.”

This ‘turn’ is not all that surprising since it was prophesied in the Old Testament (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 42:6; Isa. 49:6,22; Joel 2:28-32). In addition, those of Israel who are not part of true Israel (9:6) are not a part because of a lack of faith, they have not chosen to believe (10:9-13). It is evident in this section that if a Jew or Gentile is outside of Christ, it is a result of his/her lack of belief.

Chapter 11:1-10: God's Sovereignty Over Israel

In this section Paul asserts that, in fact, not all Israel is lost. Once again the focus is on God’s sovereign choice of some.

Chapter 11:11-32: Each Individual Must Chose

However, Paul states in 11:19-24 that those who are “grafted in” are so as a result of their faith. And those who are not “grafted in” are not because of their lack of faith (11:20). Furthermore, Paul states that if some of those who currently do not believe cease from continuing in their unbelief, God will graft them in as well (11:23).

Chapter 11:33-36: Paul's Reverence and Awe for God

This will be covered in the conclusion of the paper.

Summary:

The above outline and brief explanation shows Romans 9:17 falling within the immediate context of God's sovereign election of whom He chooses whether Jew or Gentile. However, the immediate context must not be interpreted without consideration of the larger context, which reveals that individuals are responsible to choose by exercising their faith in Christ (10:9).

V. How does Exodus 9:16 Fit the Larger Context of Romans 9-11?

The question still remains as to how the interpretation offered in the literary analysis of Exodus 3-14 fits into the context of Romans 9-11. Actually this question brings up another question that needs to be answered first.

Why Did Paul Quote Exodus 9:16?

In Romans 9:18, the verse following the quote from Exodus 9:16, Paul states that "God will harden whom He desires." If all Paul was attempting to illustrate was God's hardening of an individual, why didn't he quote one of the clear texts from Exodus, that explicitly state God as the Agent in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart? I would suggest that Paul's quote of Exodus 9:16 illustrates all that he is teaching in chapters 9-11 of Romans.

God's Sovereignty and Man's Volition Exist Together

As was shown previously, the internal content and immediate context of Exodus 9:16 demonstrates the sovereignty of God in bringing Pharaoh to the throne, while at the same time placing responsibility on Pharaoh for his volitional choice to exalt himself. This was seen as consistent with the overall context of the Exodus narrative which revealed that God predicted He

would harden Pharaoh's heart (which He did) while at the same time Pharaoh hardened his own heart. It is not an either or, but rather a both and.

This same twofold truth is being revealed by Paul in Romans 9-11. God is sovereign in His choosing those who will be saved, but each individual must volitionally believe in Christ. What better place for Paul to have turned to demonstrate this great truth about God and His dealing with man than Exodus 9:16?²⁸

VI. Conclusion

This study does not propose to have all the answers nor, in fact, to have even asked all the questions. However, I believe that this analysis offers something to this great issue that seems to have been overlooked. By taking a fresh look at a familiar narrative and applying the tools of literary analysis, the evidence indicates that Exodus 3-14 is demonstrating God's sovereignty and man's free will as coexisting. By stepping back and viewing the narrative as a whole, one sees Yahweh and Pharaoh, on different occasions, actively hardening Pharaoh's heart. Observing the use of the three Hebrew verbs (קשה & כבד, חזק) used throughout the narrative, reveals that there is much more to the familiar story than simply Israel's release from Egypt and the plagues. God was bringing honor to Himself (כבד) by overpowering (חזק) Pharaoh's stubbornness (קשה) with the heaviness (כבד) of the plagues.

Placing Romans 9:17 within the larger context of Romans 9-11 indicates that Paul was teaching the same coexistence of God's sovereignty and man's free will. Although God has sovereignly chosen who will be saved, He also holds each person responsible for their choice, to

²⁸ See Appendix 2 for an explanation of the text of Paul's quote from Exodus 9:16.

either accept or reject Christ in faith. Therefore Paul's quote of Exodus 9:16 in Romans 9:17 illustrates all that God is doing throughout Salvation history.

This conclusion seems to not be a conclusion at all, but a tension. However, the tension only exists, because God's sovereignty and man's free will, coexisting does not fit neatly into the majority of the various manmade Systematic Theologies; nor the human mind. However, the evidence indicates that this conclusion does reflect the mind of God as revealed in Scripture. With God, there is no tension. They do both exist, together in perfect harmony, completely understood by God, revealed in His Word and illustrated throughout history. Together they offer His people hope for the distresses of this present age, while at the same time holding every man everywhere responsible for his choices. Ultimately, taken together, they allow God to be God and reveal Him to be much bigger than man can possibly comprehend.

I can think of no better way to conclude a theological discussion such as this, that takes us near to the very mind of God, than the Apostle Paul's conclusion in the final section of Romans 9-11.

Romans 11:33-36 (NKJ)²⁹:

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!

³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?"

³⁵ "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?"

³⁶ For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.

²⁹ *New King James Version*

Appendix 1

Chart of Verb Usage in Exodus 3-14.

	GOD	Pharaoh	
	3:19 – adj. fem. sing./חזק the king of Egypt will not let you go...by overwhelming force.		
	4:10 – adj. Masc. Sing. Construct/כבד Twice describing Moses’ mouth and tongue as being heavy and unable to speak.		
Intensive; non-perfective (incomplete)	4:21 – אָחֲזֵק piel impf 1s/חֲזַק + וְאֲנִי I will harden his heart		
		5:9 – תִּכְבֵּד qal impf 3fs jussive/כָּבֵד Let the work be harder ...	Stative; non-perfective
	6:1 – adj. fem. sing./חזק depicting God’s “ strong hand” which He will use to force Pharaoh to release His people.		
		6:9 – adj. Fem. Sing./קשה Describes the harsh labor...	
Causative; non-perfective (incomplete)	7:3 - אֶקְשֶׁה hiphil Impf 1s/קשה + וְאֲנִי I will harden Pharaoh’s heart	7:13? – וַיִּחְזַק qal waw consec impf 3ms/חֲזַק subject = Pharaoh’s heart And Pharaoh’s heart hardened ...as the Lord had said	Stative; non-perfective (durative); Merwe, 145,
		7:14 – כָּבֵד לֵב פָּרְעֹה (piel perf 3ms) מֵאֵן (adj ms) “Pharaoh’s heart is hard he refuses...”	Intensive; perfective (complete)
		7:22 - וַיִּחְזַק qal waw consec impf 3ms/חֲזַק subject = Pharaoh’s heart And Pharaoh’s heart hardened ...as the Lord had said	Stative; non-perfective (durative)
		8:15(11) - וַתְּכַבֵּד אֶת־לִבּוֹ (3ms suffix) waw + hiphil inf abs/כָּבֵד he hardened his heart...as the Lord had said	Causative Inf. Functions as a finite verb; Waltke; 438,596; Merwe, 161
		8:19(15)? - וַיִּחְזַק qal waw consec impf 3ms/חֲזַק And Pharaoh’s heart hardened ... “just as the Lord had said”	Stative; non-perfective (durative)

	8:24(20) – adj. Masc. Sing. כָּבֵד Describes the swarm of flies as being “heavy”		
		8:32(28) - וַיִּכְבְּדֵהוּ hiphil waw consec impf 3ms apocopated/ כָּבֵד And Pharaoh hardened his heart	Causative; non-perfective (incomplete)
		9:2 - מִחֲזִיק hiphil part. Masc sing/ חֹזֵק Pharaoh holding firm the people	Causative; continued activity
		9:7 - וַיִּכְבְּדֵהוּ qal waw consec impf 3ms/ כָּבֵד subject = Pharaoh’s heart And Pharaoh’s heart hardened	Waltke; 364 = stative verb; non-perfective (durative)
Intensive; non-perfective (incomplete)	9:12 - וַיִּחְזַק piel waw consec impf 3ms/ חֹזֵק + יְהִיָּה And Yahweh hardened Pharaoh’s heart		
Waltke; 603 = substantival infinitive construct; causative; perfective (complete)	9:16 - הֵעַמְדַתִּיךָ (hiphil perf 1cs + 2ms/עמד) ... הִרְאֵתִיךָ (hiphil inf con. + 2ms/ראה) “I have caused you to stand...that I might show you”	9:17 - מִסְתַּוְּלֵל (hithpoel part ms/סלל) עוֹדֵךָ (adv + 2ms) “you are still exalting yourself”	Reflexive reciprocal; Waltke; 424 Continued activity
	9:18,24 – adj. Masc. Sing. כָּבֵד Describes the rain of hail as being very heavy or severe...		
		9:34 - וַיִּכְבְּדֵהוּ hiphil waw consec impf 3ms apocopated/ כָּבֵד He sinned...He hardened his heart and his servants	Causative; non-perfective (incomplete) Possibly gives credit to Pharaoh hardening the hearts of his servants??
		9:35 - וַיִּחְזַק qal waw consec impf 3ms/ חֹזֵק subject = Pharaoh’s heart And Pharaoh’s heart hardened... as the Lord had spoken	Stative; non-perfective (durative)
Waltke; 528,400 – Causative; perfective (complete)	10:1,2 - הִכְבַּדְתִּי כִּי־אֲנִי + כָּבֵד hiphil perf 1cs/ כָּבֵד + כִּי־אֲנִי For I have hardened his heart	10:3 - מֵאֲנֵת (ענה/נִפְחַל inf con/ל + לַעֲנֵת) מֵאֲנֵת (piel perf 2ms/מאן) “refuse to humble”	Passive/reflexive Perfective used to mark future time; Persistent (future) Perfective; Waltke; 485,486,489,490
	10:14 -- adj. Masc. Sing. כָּבֵד Describes the swarm of locusts as being very heavy or severe...		
Intensive; non-perfective (incomplete)	10:20 - וַיִּחְזַק piel waw consec impf 3ms/ חֹזֵק + יְהִיָּה And Yahweh hardened Pharaoh’s heart		

Intensive; non-perfective (incomplete)	10:27 - וַיִּחַזֶּק piel waw consec impf 3ms/ חִזַּק + יְהוָה		
	And Yahweh hardened Pharaoh's heart		
Stative; non-perfective (incomplete)	11:9 - לֹא-יִשְׁמַע אֲלֵיכֶם פֶּרְעֹה - (qal impf 3ms/שָׁמַע		
	"Pharaoh will not listen to you"		
Intensive; non-perfective (incomplete)	11:10 - וַיִּחַזֶּק piel waw consec impf 3ms/ חִזַּק + יְהוָה		
	And Yahweh hardened Pharaoh's heart		
		12:33 - וַתִּחַזְּקוּ qal waw consec impf 3fs/ חִזַּק	Stative; non-perfective (durative)
		The Egyptians urged the people to leave.	
	13:3,9,14,16 - חֹזֶק (noun ms construct)		
	It was God's mighty hand the brought them out of Egypt		
		13:15 - וְקָשָׁה פֶּרְעֹה - (hiphil perf 3ms/ קָשָׁה)- כִּי	Causative; perfective (complete)
		...because Pharaoh stubbornly refused...	
Intensive; perfective (complete) Passive/reflexive; non-perfective (incomplete)	14:4 - וַאֲפַבְדָּה ... וַתִּחַזְּקוּ piel waw consec <u>perf</u> 1cs/ חִזַּק ... niphil impf 1cs/ כָּבַד	14:5 - וַיִּהְפֹּךְ לִבֵּב פֶּרְעֹה - (niphil waw consec impf 3ms/הִפְךָ	Middle or Passive; Waltke; 383 non-perfective (incomplete)
	I will harden Pharaoh's heart... and I will be Honored	"Pharaoh's heart was turned"	
Intensive; non-perfective (incomplete)	14:8 - וַיִּחַזֶּק piel waw consec impf 3ms/ חִזַּק + יְהוָה		
	And Yahweh hardened Pharaoh's heart		
Intensive; continued activity Passive/reflexive; non-perfective (incomplete)	14:17 - וְאֲנִי הֵנִנִּי (ind pron 1cs) ... וַאֲפַבְדָּה (niphil impf 1cs/ כָּבַד)		
	Behold I am going to harden ...that I may be honored		
Passive/reflexive infinitive functioning as a finite verb.	14:18 - בְּהִכָּבְדִּי niphil infinitive construct + 1cs/ כָּבַד		
	An the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh when I have gained my honor because of Pharaoh...		

Appendix 2

Exodus 9:16 – Quoted in – Romans 9:17

WTT:

וְאֵלֶם בַּעֲבוּר זֹאת הָעֲמֹד־תִּיד־עַמְדָּה (hiphil perf 1cs + 2ms/ראדה) בַּעֲבוּר הַרְאָתָהּ (hiphil inf con. + 2ms/ראדה)
 אֶת־כַּחַי וְלִמְעַן סַפֵּר שְׁמִי בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ:

NET (Exodus 9:16)	LXX (Exodus 9:16)	BNT (Romans 9:17)	NET (Romans 9:17)
But for this purpose I have caused you to stand: to show you my strength, and that my name may be declared in all the earth.	καὶ ἔνεκεν τούτου διετηρήθης(aor pass ind 2s/διατηρέω) ἵνα ἐνδείξωμαι(aor mid sub 1s/ἐνδείκνυμαι) ἐν σοὶ τὴν ἰσχύν μου καὶ ὅπως διαγγελῆ τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐν πάσῃ τῇ γῆ	λέγει γὰρ ἡ γραφή τῷ Φαραῶ ὅτι εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐξήγειρά(aor act ind 1s/ἐξεγείρω) σε ὅπως ἐνδείξωμαι(aor mid sub 1s/ἐνδείκνυμαι) ἐν σοὶ τὴν δύναμίν μου καὶ ὅπως διαγγελῆ τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐν πάσῃ τῇ γῆ.	For the scripture says to Pharaoh: “*For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may demonstrate my power in you*, *and that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth*.”

Paul’s quote is close the LXX, with one significant change:

He changed:

διετηρήθης(aor pass ind 2s/διατηρέω) a second person verb meaning “to keep” used in the LXX

to

ἐξήγειρά(aor act ind 1s/ἐξεγείρω) a first person verb meaning “to raise up something or someone”.

Therefore, his use of the main verb more closely matches the MT and more clearly asserts God as the agent behind placing Pharaoh on the throne.

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