

WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY - SEPTEMBER 9, 2026

Why Did God Harden Pharaoh's Heart?

A study of divine sovereignty, human responsibility, judgment, repentance, and the danger of repeatedly refusing God's voice. Based on Exodus 4-14 and taught by Pastor Henry.

THE SHORT ANSWER

Pharaoh hardened his own heart first. God's hardening was an act of judgment that confirmed the road Pharaoh had already chosen. God did not make a soft man cruel; He exposed and judged a cruel man who had repeatedly refused Him.

Three truths to hold together

1. **Pharaoh was already wicked.** Before Moses arrived, he enslaved Israel, made their lives bitter, and ordered the death of their sons. Read Exodus 1:13-22 and 5:2.
2. **Pharaoh remained responsible.** He repeatedly refused, hardened his heart, and later confessed that he had sinned. Read Exodus 8:15, 8:32, 9:27, and 10:16.
3. **God's purpose stood.** Pharaoh's resistance never endangered God's plan. God used it to reveal His name, power, judgment, and deliverance. Read Exodus 7:5, 9:16, and 10:1-2.

THE TENSION

Both things are in the text

Exodus says that God would harden Pharaoh's heart and that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. A faithful reading must allow both statements to stand instead of using one to erase the other.

GOD ANNOUNCES HIS ACTION

Exodus 4:21 and 7:3 announce the hardening before Moses confronts Pharaoh. The advance warning prepares Moses for resistance; it is not yet the first hardening action in the narrative.

PHARAOH ACTS REPEATEDLY

From the first sign through the fifth plague, the story repeatedly describes Pharaoh's heart as hard or says that he hardened it. The first explicit statement that the LORD hardened him in the unfolding narrative comes at Exodus 9:12.

THE ORDER IS PART OF THE ARGUMENT

God knows and announces what Pharaoh will do. Pharaoh then chooses rebellion again and again. God's sovereign judgment confirms that chosen direction. Sovereignty does not erase responsibility; it runs through it.

Study prompt

What changes when you read the hardening statements in their narrative order instead of reading only one verse by itself?

PASTOR HENRY'S TEACHING

Five movements through the answer

I. Pharaoh hardened himself first

The announcements in Exodus 4:21 and 7:3 tell Moses what lies ahead. The narrative then records repeated refusals before Exodus 9:12 says the LORD hardened Pharaoh. A heart can set gradually, like concrete, until the shape repeatedly chosen becomes the shape that remains.

II. Sovereignty does not erase responsibility

Pharaoh never argues that God forced him. He admits, 'I have sinned' and acknowledges that the LORD is right. Responsibility is revealed in what Pharaoh did when God spoke clearly to him.

III. God did not make Pharaoh evil; He exposed him

Exodus 1 shows ruthless oppression long before the plagues. Judgment sometimes takes the form of God giving people over to the direction they already demand. Compare Romans 1:24, 26, and 28.

IV. The command established responsibility

Every 'Let my people go' removed another excuse. A command God knows will be rejected still reveals the hearer's responsibility. Pharaoh's resistance delayed obedience but could not threaten God's purpose.

V. God was doing more than freeing Israel

God was revealing Himself to Egypt, displaying His power among the nations, and giving Israel a story to teach their children. The long deliverance served purposes far larger than Pharaoh could see.

THE IMAGE TO REMEMBER

Concrete does not harden all at once

Nobody usually decides in one moment to have a hard heart. We say no in small ways until no stops feeling like a decision. Pharaoh received warning after warning. Each refusal made the next refusal easier and true repentance harder.

THE WARNING

Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts. Read Hebrews 3:15 and Proverbs 29:1.

Relief is not repentance

Pharaoh wanted the consequences to stop, but he did not want a new heart. He confessed while the pressure was on, hardened himself when relief came, and kept negotiating the terms of obedience.

True repentance turns from the sin itself, accepts God's terms, seeks a changed heart, and responds now. Read Acts 3:19, 2 Corinthians 7:10, and Ezekiel 36:26.

THE QUESTION FOR US

When God speaks to your heart, are you obeying Him - or only asking Him to remove the pressure?

CARRY IT INTO THE WEEK

A seven-step response

1. Name the one thing

Write down one thing God has already told you to do that you have avoided.

2. Do it this week

Obey without renegotiating the terms or attaching conditions.

3. Read Exodus 5-14

Read the whole arc in one sitting and notice the repeated choices.

4. Ask for a soft heart

Pray Ezekiel 36:26 before asking for changed circumstances.

5. Confess without conditions

Name the sin plainly to God and, when needed, to the person harmed.

6. Tell one trusted person

Invite someone to ask you whether you followed through.

7. Invite someone to study

Bring another person into honest conversation around Scripture.

My immediate response

READ IT YOURSELF

Scripture path

Read these passages in context. Mark who acts, what Pharaoh knows, what he chooses, and what God says He is accomplishing.

Before the signs	Exodus 1:13-22; 4:21; 5:2; 7:3-5
Pharaoh's repeated refusals	Exodus 7:13-14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7
The pivot	Exodus 9:12, 16, 27, 34-35
Judgment and purpose	Exodus 10:1-2, 16-20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17
New Testament reflection	Romans 1:24-28; 9:17-18; Hebrews 3:15
Repentance and a new heart	Proverbs 29:1; Ezekiel 36:26; Acts 3:19; 2 Corinthians 7:10