

WOVEN & KNOWN

BIBLE STUDY • THEOLOGY • FORMATION



MOSES SERIES

Part Eight of Thirty

Return to Egypt

A deeper study guide for Exodus 4:29-6:12: the first confrontation with Pharaoh, "Let My People Go," the hardened heart, brickmaking without straw, and the seven promises.

"Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Let my people go."

Exodus chapter five, verse one

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How to Use This Study Guide

This companion guide takes Part Eight deeper than the article itself. The article tells the movement of the story; this guide slows down over historical context, Hebrew word study, theological tension, critical thinking, Christological patterns, and spiritual formation. Use it alone, in a small group, or as a printable workbook alongside the Moses Series.

DEEP STUDY

Suggested rhythm

1. Read Exodus 4:29-6:12 before starting.
2. Mark every reference to speaking, hearing, knowing, and hardening.
3. Study one section at a time; do not rush the hardening section.
4. Use the journalling pages to name where obedience has made things harder before better.
5. Finish with the self-quiz and word finder as memory review.

Contents

- 1. Biblical text and learning objectives
- 2. Part Eight at a glance
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- 10. Christological connections and the New Exodus
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- 13. Self-quiz
- 14. Word finder activity
- 15. Answer keys and further reading

1. Biblical Text and Learning Objectives

Read first

- Exodus 4:29-5:23
- Exodus 6:1-12
- Exodus 7:1-7
- Romans 9:14-21
- Ezekiel 2:1-10
- Optional: Exodus 3:19-22; Deuteronomy 2:30; Isaiah 6:9-13; John 12:37-41

By the end of this guide, you should be able to:

- ☐ Explain why Moses' return is psychologically and theologically loaded rather than merely logistical.
- ☐ Analyse "Let My People Go" as a prophetic, political, economic, and worship-centred demand.
- ☐ Distinguish the three Hebrew verbs used for hardening and why they matter.
- ☐ Compare major theological approaches to Pharaoh's hardened heart without flattening the mystery.
- ☐ Describe why obedience to God can initially intensify suffering before deliverance becomes visible.
- ☐ Explain the seven "I will" promises in Exodus 6 as a covenant charter for the Exodus.
- ☐ Connect brickmaking without straw to Egyptian administrative practice and spiritual formation.
- ☐ Read the return to Egypt as part of the New Exodus pattern fulfilled in Christ.

THE BIG IDEA

Key thesis of Part Eight

The first confrontation does not immediately produce liberation. It produces escalation. Part Eight teaches that the call of God may lead first into contradiction: the Pharaoh says no, the burden increases, the people blame Moses, and Moses accuses God. Yet precisely there, before the first plague, God speaks the seven promises that will govern the entire Exodus.

2. Part Eight at a Glance

Part Eight moves from worship and belief among Israel's elders to rejection and oppression under Pharaoh. This is not a failed mission. It is the first exposure of what kind of power must be broken for Israel to be free.

Movement	Text	Meaning
The elders believe	Exodus 4:29-31	The people receive the signs

		and worship.
Pharaoh refuses	Exodus 5:1-5	The demand exposes the conflict of sovereignty.
Straw removed	Exodus 5:6-19	Egyptian oppression intensifies precisely after obedience.
Israel blames Moses	Exodus 5:20-21	Leadership becomes costly when deliverance is delayed.
Moses laments	Exodus 5:22-23	Raw prayer becomes the bridge to covenant promise.
God promises	Exodus 6:1-8	Seven “I will” statements anchor the entire story.

3. Returning to the Palace

Moses does not return to a private enemy; he returns to an institution. Pharaoh is not only a man. He is the office of Egyptian sacred kingship, the political centre of empire, and the religious embodiment of a system that believes cosmic order runs through the throne.

The psychology of return

- Moses had grown up inside the system he is now confronting.
- He returns not as prince or fugitive, but as prophet.
- The old Pharaoh is dead, but the office remains.
- The confrontation is not personal revenge. It is covenantal collision.
- God sends Moses back to the very place where his first attempt at deliverance collapsed.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Court protocol and prophetic audacity

In Egyptian court culture, audiences with Pharaoh were structured to overwhelm petitioners. Access was mediated, space was hierarchical, royal titles were elaborate, and prostration was expected. Moses and Aaron do not come as petitioners. They deliver a command introduced by the prophetic formula, "Thus says the LORD." The audacity is the point: the prophet speaks as the messenger of the true King.

1. How does reading Moses' return psychologically change the way you hear the demand to Pharaoh?

2. Why does it matter that Moses confronts an institution and not merely an individual?

4. "Let My People Go": Hebrew, Politics, and Worship

Exodus 5:1 is one of the most politically dangerous sentences in Scripture. It asserts that Pharaoh's slaves are not Pharaoh's property. They belong to YHWH.

Phrase	Meaning	Why it matters
Ko amar YHWH	Thus says the LORD	Moses speaks as divine

		messenger, not private negotiator.
Shalach et-ammi	Let go / release My people	YHWH asserts ownership against Pharaoh's ownership claim.
V'yachogu li	That they may hold a feast to Me	Liberation is for worship, not mere self-expression.
Bamidbar	In the wilderness	True worship must happen outside Egypt's control.

THEOLOGY**Liberation has a telos**

The goal of Exodus is not only escape from oppression. It is worship, covenant, and belonging to God. "Let My People Go" is not a slogan of autonomy; it is a demand that Pharaoh release what belongs to YHWH so Israel can serve the true God.

3. How does "that they may hold a feast to Me" change the meaning of freedom in Exodus?

4. What modern ideas of freedom are challenged by the Exodus definition of liberation?

5. Pharaoh's "I Do Not Know YHWH"

Pharaoh's answer is theologically honest: "Who is YHWH, that I should obey His voice?" He does not recognise YHWH as an authority inside his world. The plagues will become the answer to that question.

- In Hebrew, shama means both to hear and to obey. Pharaoh refuses both.
- YHWH has no temple, image, or recognised cult status in Egypt.
- Pharaoh's refusal is epistemological: he does not know YHWH.
- The repeated plague formula "that you may know that I am YHWH" directly answers Pharaoh's ignorance.
- Exodus is therefore a public education in divine identity.

5. Is Pharaoh's ignorance innocent, culpable, or both? Build your answer from Exodus 5:2 and the wider narrative.

6. How can "I do not know the LORD" show up today without using those exact words?

6. The Hardened Heart

The hardened heart is one of the most difficult theological problems in Exodus. The text insists on both Pharaoh's responsibility and God's sovereignty. Any serious reading must let both stand.

Hebrew Verb	Basic Sense	Typical Use	Theological Force
Chazaq	Strong, firm, strengthened	God and Pharaoh as subjects	Resolve that will not yield.
Kaved	Heavy, weighty	Often Pharaoh's own action	A heart weighed down by self-interest and injustice.
Qashah	Hard, severe, fierce	Rare, strong term	Brittleness, severity, unyielding resistance.

Five major theological readings

- Simple divine causation: God sovereignly determines the hardening.
- Divine foreknowledge and permission: God permits and confirms what Pharaoh freely chooses.
- Judicial hardening: Pharaoh hardens himself first; God later confirms the chosen direction.
- Cognitive dissonance: signs intensify resistance because they threaten Pharaoh's worldview.
- Corporate type: Pharaoh represents human empire's resistance to divine sovereignty.

DOCTRINAL TENSION

A careful conclusion

The narrative does not present Pharaoh as an innocent victim of divine manipulation. He enslaves, kills, refuses, escalates, and repeatedly hardens himself. Yet the text also says God hardens Pharaoh. The mystery is not solved by deleting either side. Exodus asks us to bow before a God who is sovereign over even human resistance, while still holding Pharaoh accountable for what he chooses.

7. Which position on hardening seems most faithful to the flow of Exodus, and why?

8. What pastoral dangers arise if we overemphasise only divine sovereignty or only human choice?

7. When God Makes Things Worse: Exodus 5 as Lament

Moses obeys God and the result is increased suffering. This is the shock of Exodus 5. The first visible fruit of obedience is not progress but pain.

- Pharaoh removes the state-supplied straw while maintaining the same quotas.
- The foremen are beaten for failing at an impossible task.
- The Hebrew community blames Moses and Aaron for making them “stink” before Pharaoh.
- Moses takes the accusation to God rather than defending himself from his own resources.
- His prayer is raw: “Why have You done evil to this people?”

PASTORAL THEOLOGY

Lament is not unbelief

Moses’ prayer in Exodus 5 is confrontational, but God does not rebuke it. Lament is the prayer of someone who believes God’s promises enough to bring the contradiction directly to Him. Moses does not walk away from God. He turns toward God with the full weight of the problem.

9. Why might God allow the first act of obedience to make the situation worse?

10. What is the difference between lament and grumbling in this section?

8. The Seven “I Will” Promises of Exodus 6

God’s answer to Moses’ despair is not a detailed explanation. It is a covenant declaration. Seven promises become the theological DNA of the Exodus.

Promise	Theme	Meaning
I will bring you out	Release from burdens	God removes Israel from crushing labour.
I will deliver you	Rescue	God snatches them from slavery.
I will redeem you	Kinsman-redeemer	God acts as go’el with an outstretched arm.
I will take you	Covenant belonging	Israel becomes God’s people.
I will be your God	Reciprocal relationship	The covenant formula begins to unfold.
I will bring you in	Land promise	Exodus is tied to Abraham’s covenant.
I will give it to you	Inheritance	The land is received as promised possession.

11. Which of the seven promises would have been most important for Moses to hear after Exodus 5, and why?

12. How does the sevenfold promise become a framework for Christian hope when circumstances worsen?

9. Archaeological Windows: Bricks, Straw, and Pi-Ramesses

The brickmaking details in Exodus 5 fit known Egyptian administrative practice with striking precision. The text understands forced labour, quotas, straw distribution, foremen, and punishment systems from the inside.

- Papyrus Anastasi III and related New Kingdom sources describe brickmaking gangs and state-controlled supply systems.
- Straw strengthens mud brick by distributing stress through the matrix, much like reinforcement in modern building materials.
- New Kingdom mud bricks regularly contain straw, chaff, or other organic material.
- Administrative texts mention quotas and punishment for failure.
- Qantir/Pi-Ramesses shows the scale of the delta building projects and the immense labour requirements behind them.

METHOD NOTE**What archaeology can and cannot do**

Archaeology can illuminate the setting, vocabulary, and plausibility of the account. It cannot replace the theological claim of the text. The point is not merely that Exodus 5 sounds historically grounded; it is that God enters a real system of oppression and breaks it from within history.

13. How does the historical grounding of brickmaking without straw affect your reading of the story?

10. Christological Connections and the New Exodus

Part Eight prepares one of Scripture's richest patterns: the New Exodus. The public defeat of Pharaoh becomes the pattern for Christ's public defeat of sin, death, and the powers.

- "Let My People Go" becomes the deeper demand of redemption from sin and death.
- Paul's language of apolytrois, redemption/release, echoes the Exodus shape of liberation.
- Colossians 2:15 describes the cross as public triumph over rulers and authorities.
- Luke 9:31 calls Jesus' death and resurrection His exodus/departure.
- John 12 uses hardening language to interpret rejection of Jesus after signs.
- The cross becomes the ultimate event where the world may know who God is.

CHRIST CONNECTION**The Gospel pattern**

Exodus is not replaced by the Gospel. It is fulfilled. In Moses, God confronts Pharaoh and liberates Israel from slavery. In Christ, God confronts the deeper enslaving powers and liberates His people through the blood of the Lamb.

14. How does the New Exodus pattern deepen your understanding of the cross?

15. What are the “Pharaoh powers” that Christ defeats in the New Testament?

11. Critical Thinking and Seminar Lab

16. Make the strongest biblical case for judicial hardening. Then identify one weakness or unresolved tension in that view.

17. Is “Let My People Go” primarily a political demand, a worship demand, or a covenant demand? Defend your answer.

18. Why does God answer Moses’ accusation with promises rather than explanation? What does this teach about how God forms faith?

19. Compare Moses’ complaint in Exodus 5 with a lament psalm. What makes complaint faithful rather than rebellious?

12. Journalling Workbook

The Palace I Left

Where have you had to return to a place, system, memory, or person you thought you had escaped? What did God ask of you there?

Let My People Go

What has a false “Pharaoh” claimed ownership over in your life that belongs to God?

The Hardened Heart

Where do you see resistance in yourself that has become heavy, firm, or severe?

The Straw Removed

Describe a season where obedience made things harder before better. What did it reveal?

The Seven Promises

Write the seven “I will” statements as personal prayers of trust.

The Middle of the Story

What would it mean to say, “I am in Exodus 5, not the final chapter”?

13. Self-Quiz

1. What is the main demand Moses and Aaron bring to Pharaoh?

- A. Give us better straw
- B. Let my people go
- C. Make Aaron high priest
- D. Release Moses only

2. What does shalach et-ammi mean?

- A. Strike the Nile
- B. Let go / release My people
- C. Harden the heart
- D. Build the city

3. Which Hebrew verb means heavy and is used for Pharaoh's heart?

- A. kaved
- B. shalom
- C. ruach
- D. hesed

4. What happens after the first confrontation with Pharaoh?

- A. Israel is freed immediately
- B. Pharaoh removes straw but keeps quotas
- C. Moses becomes Pharaoh
- D. Aaron refuses to speak

5. How many "I will" promises appear in Exodus 6:6-8?

- A. Three
- B. Five
- C. Seven
- D. Ten

6. What city/site is commonly associated with Pi-Ramesses?

- A. Qantir
- B. Jericho
- C. Nineveh
- D. Bethlehem

7. Explain why Pharaoh's "I do not know YHWH" sets up the purpose of the plagues.

8. Describe judicial hardening in two or three sentences.

9. Name two ways Exodus 5 prepares us for the Gospel pattern of redemption.

10. What does Exodus 5 teach about leadership under pressure?

14. Word Finder Activity

Find the key words from Part Eight. Words may run forward, backward, up, down, or diagonally.

Words: PHARAOH, MOSES, AARON, EGYPT, YHWH, HARDENED, HEART, STRAW, BRICKS, QUOTA, LAMENT, PROMISE, REDEEM, EXODUS, GOSHEN, PALACE, PROPHET, RAMESSES

P	H	Y	O	P	H	W	H	Y	T	T	F	D	V	L	Z	H	D
B	R	G	S	Q	T	J	A	J	N	Q	R	X	R	S	Q	B	W
N	R	O	C	H	X	K	E	E	A	M	L	O	H	E	E	T	A
B	X	I	P	T	T	P	Y	G	E	E	G	X	R	S	I	Q	E
H	C	Y	C	H	U	R	D	I	J	E	H	A	I	O	W	C	K
S	K	G	K	K	E	C	L	H	U	D	P	M	Z	M	H	G	E
M	F	A	J	I	S	T	V	L	O	E	O	S	P	V	S	Y	I
I	U	K	Y	L	N	O	R	A	A	R	C	L	A	M	E	N	T
K	V	N	E	X	O	D	U	S	P	Q	E	A	W	W	H	T	H
P	Z	T	E	D	E	N	E	D	R	A	H	X	A	F	U	L	H
A	A	N	R	H	Z	L	A	S	T	R	A	W	U	H	Q	X	T
F	F	B	N	A	S	K	N	J	S	E	S	S	E	M	A	R	B
E	J	U	L	P	E	O	P	U	V	I	M	L	O	K	R	M	B
W	C	Y	R	B	I	H	G	R	J	P	A	L	A	C	E	O	W
X	Z	Q	P	H	A	R	A	O	H	X	I	A	K	B	X	L	F
O	H	U	A	O	K	I	J	P	T	K	E	R	W	H	A	L	Y
Q	B	Q	U	O	T	A	X	J	C	B	F	U	V	G	O	H	V
X	E	V	B	Y	Y	E	L	G	H	A	L	V	D	U	N	J	B

15. Answer Keys and Further Reading

Self-Quiz Answer Key

1. B
2. B
3. A
4. B
5. C
6. A

Suggested short-answer themes: Pharaoh's ignorance becomes the stated purpose of the plagues; judicial hardening confirms a direction freely chosen; Exodus 5 prepares the Gospel pattern by showing bondage, failed human power, lament, promise, and divine rescue; leadership under pressure takes accusation to God rather than absorbing it alone.

Word Finder Answer Key

PHARAOH: (4,15) -> (10,15)

MOSES: (15,6) -> (15,2)

AARON: (10,8) -> (6,8)

EGYPT: (10,4) -> (6,4)

YHWH: (9,1) -> (6,1)

HARDENED: (12,10) -> (5,10)

HEART: (7,14) -> (3,10)

STRAW: (9,11) -> (13,11)

BRICKS: (1,2) -> (6,7)

QUOTA: (3,17) -> (7,17)

LAMENT: (13,8) -> (18,8)

PROMISE: (10,9) -> (16,3)

REDEEM: (11,8) -> (11,3)

EXODUS: (4,9) -> (9,9)

GOSHEN: (8,14) -> (3,9)

PALACE: (11,14) -> (16,14)

PROPHET: (1,1) -> (7,7)

RAMESES: (17,12) -> (10,12)

Suggested bibliography for going deeper

- Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*.
- Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus (JPS Torah Commentary)*.
- T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus (Apollos Old Testament Commentary)*.

- John D. Currid, Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament.
- James K. Hoffmeier, Israel in Egypt and Ancient Israel in Sinai.
- K. A. Kitchen, On the Reliability of the Old Testament.
- Terence E. Fretheim, Exodus.
- Christopher J. H. Wright, Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament.

FINAL THOUGHT

Closing encouragement

If you are in Exodus 5 - obedient, confused, blamed, and watching things get worse - you are not outside the story. You are in the middle of it. The seven promises have not yet become visible, but they have already been spoken.