

WOVEN & KNOWN

BIBLE STUDY • THEOLOGY • FORMATION



MOSES SERIES - PART VII

The Reluctant Prophet

MOSES SERIES

Part Seven of Thirty

The Reluctant Prophet

A deeper study guide for Exodus 4:18-31: the road back, prophetic reluctance, Zipporah, covenant blood, Aaron, and the first worshipful response of Israel.

“Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law...”

Exodus chapter four, verse eighteen

Includes critical thinking, journalling, self-quiz, and a word finder activity.

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How to Use This Study Guide

This companion guide takes Part Seven deeper than the article itself. The article follows the road from Midian back toward Egypt; this guide slows down over the theological tensions of that road: reluctant obedience, covenant negligence, Zipporah's decisive action, Aaron's reunion, and Israel's first response of belief and worship.

STUDY RHYTHM

Recommended rhythm

1. Read Exodus 4:18-31 before beginning the commentary.
2. Pay special attention to the strange attack at the lodging place. Do not rush past its discomfort.
3. Compare Moses with other reluctant prophets: Jeremiah, Gideon, Jonah, Paul, and Christ in Gethsemane.
4. Use the journalling pages to examine your own reluctance honestly.
5. Finish with the self-quiz and word finder as a review activity.

Contents

- 1. Biblical text and learning objectives
- 2. Part Seven at a glance
- 3. The road back: returning to ordinary obedience
- 4. The theology of prophetic reluctance
- 5. Comparative call narratives and the pattern of protest
- 6. The strange attack at the lodging place
- 7. Zipporah: covenant, blood, and decisive action
- 8. Aaron at Horeb and the kiss of reunion
- 9. Israel believes and worships
- 10. Christological reflection: Gethsemane and the willing Son
- 11. Critical thinking and seminar lab
- 12. Journalling workbook
- 13. Self-quiz
- 14. Word finder activity
- 15. Answer keys and further reading

1. Biblical Text and Learning Objectives

Read first

- Exodus 4:18-31
- Genesis 17:9-14
- Romans 8:26-27
- Philippians 2:12-13
- Jonah 1
- Optional: Matthew 26:36-46; Hebrews 5:7-9; Jeremiah 1:4-10; Judges 6:11-24

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

- ☐ Explain why Moses returns to Jethro before beginning the journey to Egypt.
- ☐ Describe prophetic reluctance as a biblical pattern rather than merely a personal flaw.
- ☐ Identify the main scholarly questions surrounding Exodus 4:24-26.
- ☐ Explain the covenantal background of circumcision in Genesis 17 and why it matters on the road to Egypt.
- ☐ Evaluate Zipporah's action as a moment of theological clarity and covenant intervention.
- ☐ Describe the significance of Aaron meeting Moses at Horeb and kissing him.
- ☐ Explain why Exodus 4:31 answers one of Moses' deepest fears from the burning bush.
- ☐ Connect reluctant obedience to Christ's prayer in Gethsemane without flattening the uniqueness of Jesus.

THE BIG IDEA

Key thesis of Part Seven

The reluctant prophet does not become un-reluctant before he goes. He goes afraid, unfinished, and still being formed. The road back to Egypt is not a pause between calling and mission; it is part of the mission's preparation.

2. Part Seven at a Glance

Part Seven occupies the narrow but crucial space between the burning bush and the public confrontation with Pharaoh. Moses has heard the name of God and accepted the call, but obedience now has to become movement.

Movement	Text	Meaning
Return to Jethro	Exodus 4:18	Calling honours ordinary obligations rather than bypassing them.
The road to Egypt	Exodus 4:19-23	The fugitive returns by divine command, carrying

		the staff of God.
The lodging place	Exodus 4:24-26	Unresolved covenant matters are confronted before public mission.
Aaron meets Moses	Exodus 4:27-28	The solitary call becomes shared obedience.
The elders believe	Exodus 4:29-31	Moses' fear of rejection is answered by worship.

3. The Road Back: Returning to Ordinary Obedience

The first act after the burning bush is surprisingly domestic: Moses goes back to Jethro. He asks permission. He gathers his wife and sons. He takes the staff. The world-changing mission begins with family conversation, practical packing, and the long road.

Why Jethro matters here

- Moses is embedded in Jethro's household; leaving without honour would be its own kind of disorder.
- The permission "go in peace" functions as a blessing on the road, not merely a polite farewell.
- Moses' return shows that divine calling does not erase human relationships; it reorders them.
- The old shepherd's staff becoming "the staff of God" shows how God often takes ordinary tools and reassigns them.

FORMATION NOTE

Formation insight

After the spectacular call, there is the ordinary road. This is how biblical obedience usually works: glory gives the command, but the next step is often packing, asking permission, taking the children, and walking.

1. Why do you think Moses goes back to Jethro first rather than straight to Egypt?
2. What ordinary responsibilities might still need honouring even when a new calling is clear?

4. The Theology of Prophetic Reluctance

Moses' reluctance is not unusual in Scripture. It is one of the major patterns of biblical calling. The person God calls often responds with inadequacy, protest, fear, or flight. This pattern should make us cautious about equating confidence with faithfulness.

Reluctance can reveal reverence

There is a form of reluctance that comes from cowardice. But there is also a form of reluctance that comes from actually understanding the weight of the task. Moses knows what Egypt is. Jeremiah knows he is young. Gideon knows his clan is weak. Isaiah knows he is unclean. Their reluctance arises from a collision between divine holiness and human insufficiency.

Three theological uses of reluctant prophets

- They protect the glory of God because the instrument is obviously inadequate by itself.
- They deepen dependence because the called person cannot pretend the mission rests on personal power.
- They expose the true scale of the task because genuine divine assignments exceed natural capacity.

3. When does reluctance become healthy reverence, and when does it become disobedience?

4. How might modern church culture sometimes confuse charisma with calling?

5. Comparative Call Narratives and the Pattern of Protest

Figure	Text	Objection/ response	God's provision	Result
Moses	Exodus 3-4	Who am I? They will not believe. Send someone else.	Presence, name, signs, Aaron.	Returns to Egypt.
Jeremiah	Jeremiah 1	I am only a youth.	God touches his mouth.	Prophet to nations.
Gideon	Judges 6	My clan is weakest.	Signs and divine reassurance.	Delivers Israel.
Jonah	Jonah 1	No spoken protest; he flees.	Storm and fish.	Preaches to Nineveh.

Paul	Acts 9	Persecutor turned apostle.	Blinding encounter and Ananias.	Sent to Gentiles.
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BIBLICAL PATTERN**The pattern**

Biblical calling narratives repeatedly place divine commission beside human inadequacy. God does not search for people who feel ready. He calls people He will make dependent.

6. The Strange Attack at the Lodging Place

Exodus 4:24-26 is one of the most difficult passages in the Pentateuch. The text is brief, ambiguous, and theologically unsettling. A good study does not pretend the passage is simple. It asks careful questions and holds certainty humbly.

The main questions

- Who is the “him” the LORD sought to kill - Moses or the son?
- Why would God threaten the life of the person He has just commissioned?
- Why does circumcision resolve the crisis?
- Why does Zipporah understand what to do?
- What does “bridegroom of blood” mean?
- How does this episode prepare Moses for confronting Pharaoh over the life of the firstborn?

Covenant background: Genesis 17

Circumcision was the covenant sign given to Abraham and his descendants. Genesis 17:14 warns that an uncircumcised male has broken the covenant. Moses is about to confront Pharaoh as the representative of the covenant God, declaring Israel to be God’s firstborn son. Yet within his own household, a covenant sign appears to have been neglected. This is likely why the episode erupts precisely on the road to Egypt.

INTERPRETIVE SUMMARY**A responsible reading**

The passage likely teaches that the deliverer cannot go to Egypt as covenant representative while covenant negligence remains unresolved in his own house. Before Moses can challenge Pharaoh’s refusal to acknowledge YHWH’s claim over Israel, Moses must submit his own household to the covenant sign.

5. Why would unresolved covenant obedience matter before Moses confronts Pharaoh?

6. What makes this passage hard to read, and why might that discomfort be part of the point?

7. Zipporah: Covenant, Blood, and Decisive Action

Zipporah is often treated as a minor figure, but in this passage she is the only one who acts rightly and quickly. She recognises the covenant issue, takes the flint, circumcises the son, touches the blood, and speaks the enigmatic words “bridegroom of blood.”

Why Zipporah matters

- She acts while Moses is incapacitated or passive.
- She performs an act that preserves Moses’ life and mission.
- She reveals that outsiders to Israel’s covenant line may sometimes see covenant realities more clearly than insiders.
- She embodies a difficult kind of grace: the person who confronts what we have neglected.

Bridegroom of blood

The phrase is difficult and debated. It may refer to Moses being restored to life through covenant blood, to the painful cost Zipporah experiences in being joined to Moses’ mission, or to a ritual phrase connected to circumcision. Whatever the exact nuance, the phrase binds marriage, blood, covenant, and mission together in a single unforgettable line.

7. How does Zipporah complicate the way we usually tell the Moses story?

8. Who has ever acted as a “Zipporah” in your life - seeing what you missed and acting where you could not?

8. Aaron at Horeb and the Kiss of Reunion

Aaron's meeting with Moses at the mountain of God is a quiet miracle of restoration. The brother Moses left behind now comes into the wilderness to meet him. He kisses him, hears everything, believes, and walks with him toward Egypt.

The kiss as covenant restoration

In the ancient Near East, a kiss between men could mark kinship, loyalty, reconciliation, and covenant solidarity. Aaron's kiss tells Moses that he is not returning alone. The brother who will become his mouth has first become his welcome home.

- Aaron answers Moses' fear of speaking.
- Aaron answers Moses' loneliness after forty years of exile.
- Aaron links the Midian wilderness back to the Hebrew community in Egypt.
- Aaron's presence turns private calling into shared mission.

9. Why does God send Aaron rather than simply making Moses more confident?

10. What does shared calling teach us about the limits of individualistic hero stories?

9. Israel Believes and Worships

Exodus 4:31 is one of the most tender reversals in the narrative. Moses had feared that Israel would not believe him. Yet when Aaron speaks the words and performs the signs, the people believe. They bow their heads and worship.

PASTORAL INSIGHT

The fear that did not happen

Moses' imagined rejection does not arrive in the way he feared. Pharaoh will be worse than Moses anticipates, and Israel will grumble later, but the first response of the elders is faith and worship. Sometimes the thing we fear most is not the obstacle God actually appoints.

Why worship matters here

The people worship before deliverance is visible. They are still enslaved. Pharaoh has not yet yielded. No plague has fallen. But they hear that God has seen and visited them, and they bow. This is faith before outcome.

11. What does it mean that Israel worships before anything has changed politically?

12. Where do you need to worship before the outcome is visible?

10. Christological Reflection: Gethsemane and the Willing Son

The deepest Christological echo of prophetic reluctance is found in Gethsemane. Jesus does not treat the cup lightly. He prays, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

The difference and the fulfilment

Moses says, "please send someone else." Jesus, in the full horror of the cross before Him, says, "not my will, but yours." He is not reluctant in sin; He is fully human in anguish. He fulfils every failed and fearful prophet by obeying where no one else could.

CHRIST CONNECTION

The ultimate Prophet

Jesus is not simply another reluctant prophet. He is the obedient Son who enters the unbearable mission willingly. Every prophetic fear finds its answer in Him, because He goes all the way into the task no one else could carry.

13. How does Gethsemane help us honour the emotional weight of calling without excusing disobedience?

14. What does Jesus reveal about obedience under anguish?

11. Critical Thinking and Seminar Lab

Seminar prompt A: Is reluctance a qualification?

15. Build a balanced argument: in what ways can reluctance qualify a person for ministry, and in what ways can it become sinful refusal?

Seminar prompt B: Covenant before platform

16. What does the lodging-place episode teach about private covenant obedience before public spiritual leadership?

Seminar prompt C: The role of women in the Moses story

17. Trace the women who preserve Moses' life and mission: Jochebed, Miriam, Pharaoh's daughter, Zipporah. What pattern emerges?

Mini research task

Compare Exodus 4:24-26 with Genesis 17:9-14, Joshua 5:2-9, and Colossians 2:11-12. How does circumcision move from covenant sign to spiritual fulfilment language?

18. Write a short theological paragraph on circumcision as covenant sign and why it matters on the road to Egypt.

12. Journalling Workbook

The Road After the Bush

What does obedience look like after the emotional high of clarity fades and the long road begins?

Please Send Someone Else

Where do you feel most like Moses - aware of the call but afraid to be the one who carries it?

Unresolved Covenant Things

Is there any area of obedience you have delayed because you assumed it was private, small, or disconnected from your calling?

Zipporah Grace

Write about someone who helped, confronted, protected, or corrected you at a moment when you could not see clearly.

Aaron at the Mountain

Who has God sent to walk with you? Who might you need to go into the wilderness to meet?

Worship Before Outcome

What would it look like to bow your head and worship before the visible deliverance arrives?

13. Self-Quiz

Try answering without looking back. Then check the answer key later in the guide.

1. What does Moses do before beginning the journey to Egypt?

- A. Confront Pharaoh immediately
- B. Return to Jethro and ask to go
- C. Build an altar at Sinai
- D. Send Zipporah ahead

2. What object does Moses carry on the road?

- A. A sword
- B. A scroll
- C. The staff of God
- D. A priestly ephod

3. What covenant sign is central to Exodus 4:24-26?

- A. Sabbath
- B. Circumcision
- C. Rainbow
- D. Passover blood

4. Who acts decisively in the lodging-place episode?

- A. Aaron
- B. Jethro
- C. Zipporah
- D. Pharaoh

5. Where does Aaron meet Moses?

- A. At the mountain of God
- B. In Pharaoh's palace
- C. By the Nile
- D. At the sea

6. What is Israel's first response after hearing the words and seeing the signs?

- A. They reject Moses
- B. They flee Egypt
- C. They believe and worship
- D. They ask for a king

7. Explain why the road back to Egypt is still part of Moses' formation.

8. Summarise one responsible interpretation of the strange attack at the lodging place.

9. Why is Zipporah essential to Part Seven?

10. How does Gethsemane complete the theme of prophetic reluctance?

14. Word Finder Activity

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

Words: RELUCTANT, PROPHET, JETHRO, ZIPPORAH, AARON, HOREB, COVENANT, BLOOD, CIRCUMCISION, FLINT, STAFF, EGYPT, GOSHEN, WORSHIP, BELIEVE, BRIDEGROOM, PHARAOH, OBEDIENCE

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

15. Answer Keys and Further Reading

Self-Quiz Answer Key

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

Suggested themes for the short answers: the road itself continues Moses' formation; the lodging-place episode likely concerns unresolved covenant obedience; Zipporah preserves Moses' life and mission; Gethsemane reveals the fully obedient Son who enters the unbearable assignment willingly.

Word Finder Answer Key

RELUCTANT: (7,19) -> (15,11)

PROPHET: (1,12) -> (1,6)

JETHRO: (10,18) -> (15,13)

ZIPPORAH: (7,14) -> (7,7)

AARON: (9,10) -> (13,6)

HOREB: (10,13) -> (14,17)

COVENANT: (11,10) -> (18,17)

BLOOD: (6,8) -> (2,8)

CIRCUMCISION: (2,5) -> (13,5)

FLINT: (19,12) -> (19,16)

STAFF: (16,10) -> (16,14)

EGYPT: (1,15) -> (5,15)

GOSHEN: (3,16) -> (8,16)

WORSHIP: (9,4) -> (3,4)

BELIEVE: (16,1) -> (16,7)

BRIDEGROOM: (18,15) -> (18,6)

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

OBEDIENCE: (2,6) -> (10,6)

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)*.

- Terence E. Fretheim, Exodus.
- John I. Durham, Exodus (Word Biblical Commentary).
- Walter Brueggemann, Theology of the Old Testament, on call, covenant, and divine freedom.
- Selected Jewish and Christian interpretations of Exodus 4:24-26, Genesis 17, and Joshua 5.

FINAL THOUGHT

Closing encouragement

Part Seven reminds us that God does not wait for reluctance to disappear before He walks with us. The reluctant ones still go. The road is still school. And grace often arrives through the people God sends to meet us on the way.