

WOVEN & KNOWN

BIBLE STUDY • THEOLOGY • FORMATION

MOSES SERIES

Part Five of Thirty

Midian: The Desert School of God

A deeper study guide for forty years of hiddenness, desert formation, Jethro, Horeb, and the God who calls ordinary Tuesdays holy.

"Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro... and came to Horeb, the mountain of God."

Exodus 3:1

Includes Hebrew word study, historical geography, theological reflection, journalling space, self-quiz, and a word finder activity.

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How to Use This Study Guide

This companion guide is designed to take Part Five deeper than the article itself. The article gives the narrative arc; this guide slows down over the text, historical setting, theology, spiritual formation, and Christological connections. Use it alone, in a small group, or as a printable workbook alongside the Moses Series.

DEEP STUDY

Recommended rhythm

1. Read the assigned Scripture before reading the commentary.
2. Underline one phrase in Scripture that unsettles, surprises, or comforts you.
3. Work through one section of the guide at a time; do not rush.
4. Complete the reflection and journalling pages honestly, not perfectly.
5. Finish with the self-quiz and word finder as a memory-and-review activity.

Contents

1. The biblical text and learning objectives
2. Part Five at a glance
3. Historical geography: Where was Midian?
4. Verse-by-verse study: Exodus 2:15b-3:1
5. Jethro, Reuel, Hobab, and the Midianite connection
6. What forty years of shepherding actually trained
7. The number forty as biblical formation
8. Desert theology: hiddenness, stripping, and vocation
9. Moses, Elijah, and Jesus at the mountain
10. Seminar lab: timing, calling, and the ordinary Tuesday
11. Journalling workbook
12. Self-quiz and answer key
13. Desert School Word Finder
14. Bibliography and further reading

1. The Biblical Text and Learning Objectives

Read first

- Exodus 2:15-25
- Exodus 3:1
- Numbers 10:29-32
- Exodus 18:1-12
- Hebrews 11:24-27
- Optional: 1 Kings 19:1-18; Matthew 4:1-11; Numbers 14:26-35; Genesis 25:1-6

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

- ☐ Explain why Midian matters for the location of Horeb/Sinai and the theology of the burning bush.
- ☐ Trace the movement from failure to hidden formation in Moses' life without flattening the pain of exile.
- ☐ Identify key Hebrew terms in Exodus 2:15b-3:1 and explain how they shape the narrative.
- ☐ Compare the traditional Sinai location with the Arabian/Midian location with scholarly humility.
- ☐ Describe why Jethro is more than a side character in Moses' development.
- ☐ Connect Moses' forty years with the wider biblical motif of forty as testing, preparation, and transition.
- ☐ Articulate how hiddenness forms leadership, vocation, humility, and dependence on God.
- ☐ Read Moses, Elijah, and Jesus together through the mountain/Horeb/Transfiguration pattern.

THE BIG IDEA

Key thesis of Part Five

The desert did not cancel Moses' calling. It corrected the way he carried it. Midian was not wasted time; it was the curriculum God used to strip palace confidence, teach wilderness wisdom, and prepare a man who could lead living things through a landscape designed to kill them.

2. Part Five at a Glance

Part Five covers the longest quiet stretch in Moses' life: the forty years between his flight from Egypt and the burning bush. The article rightly frames this not as dead space, but as

formation. The central interpretive question is not “Why did God waste forty years?” but “What could only be formed in Moses through forty years of hidden faithfulness?”

Movement	Text	Formation Meaning
Flight	Exodus 2:15	Moses loses palace safety, public status, and assumed authority.
Well	Exodus 2:15b-17	At his lowest, he still acts as a deliverer.
Family	Exodus 2:21-22	Zipporah and Gershom mark exile as both lament and future.
Shepherding	Exodus 3:1	Ordinary work becomes the training ground of vocation.
Horeb	Exodus 3:1	The place of hidden labour becomes the place of divine encounter.

3. Historical Geography: Where Was Midian?

The location of Midian matters because Exodus 3:1 places Moses' shepherding work and the mountain of God in the same narrative world. If we misunderstand Midian, we may flatten the geography of his formation. The goal here is not to force certainty, but to learn how to hold competing possibilities responsibly.

The two main location questions

1. Where was Midian? The biblical data connects Midian with lands east/southeast of the Gulf of Aqaba and northwest Arabia, while traditions surrounding Sinai have also located Moses' later encounters in the southern Sinai Peninsula.
2. Where was Horeb/Sinai? Jebel Musa in the southern Sinai has a strong late antique and monastic tradition. Some modern researchers argue for a northwestern Arabian setting, often discussing Jebel al-Lawz or nearby Jabal Maqla. Many academic scholars remain cautious because the archaeological and textual evidence does not settle the question with certainty.

METHOD NOTE

Scholarly humility matters

A faithful study does not need to pretend certainty where the evidence is debated. The point of Exodus 3 is not the modern GPS coordinate; it is that the place where Moses spent years doing ordinary shepherd work became the place where God revealed Himself. Geography matters, but theology does not collapse if the map remains debated.

Qurayyah, Midianite pottery, and the archaeology of Northwest Arabia

Archaeologists often connect the ancient oasis of Qurayyah in northwest Arabia with the broader world of Midian. Qurayyah Painted Ware, sometimes called Midianite pottery, has been found beyond Arabia and is often discussed as evidence for Late Bronze and Early Iron Age contact between the Hejaz and the southern Levant. This does not "prove" the Exodus route, but it does show that northwest Arabia was not an empty cultural blank. It was part of a network of oasis settlements, trade, craft production, and regional movement.

The important correction for modern readers is this: Midian was not simply "the middle of nowhere." It was desert, yes, but desert with wells, clans, priests, trade routes, pottery traditions, and local wisdom. Moses was not simply hiding in empty sand. He was being absorbed into a functioning pastoral and kinship world.

Study task: geography without overclaiming

1. Why do you think Christians are often drawn to finding exact locations for biblical events? When does that desire help faith, and when can it distract from the theological message of the text?

2. If the exact location of Horeb cannot be proven, what can still be known from Exodus 2-3 with confidence?

4. Verse-by-Verse Study: Exodus 2:15b-3:1

Exodus 2:15b - “He sat down by a well”

Hebrew focus: vayeshev al-habe’er. The verb yashav can mean to sit, remain, dwell, or settle. The sentence is intentionally quiet. After the crisis of murder, rejection, and flight, Moses’ life narrows down to one human action: he sits. The man who had acted too quickly is now brought to a place of stillness.

BIBLICAL PATTERN

The well as a biblical meeting place

In Genesis 24, Rebekah is encountered at a well. In Genesis 29, Jacob meets Rachel at a well. In Exodus 2, Moses meets Zipporah’s family at a well. In John 4, Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at a well. Wells in Scripture are not only water sources; they are places of transition, covenant, marriage, revelation, and new beginnings.

Exodus 2:16-17 - Moses saves the daughters

Hebrew focus: vayosha Moshe - “Moses saved/delivered them.” The verb yasha is the same root behind the name Yeshua/Jesus. Even in exile, with no office and no authority, Moses still acts as a rescuer. This is not yet the Exodus deliverance, but it shows what is still alive in him: he cannot watch the vulnerable be driven away and do nothing.

3. What does Moses’ rescue of the women at the well reveal about his character after his failure in Egypt? What remained unbroken in him?

Exodus 2:18 - “An Egyptian man delivered us”

This is one of the deepest ironies in the passage. Moses killed an Egyptian while identifying with the Hebrews. But when he arrives in Midian, the daughters identify him as

Egyptian. Exile does not immediately resolve identity. Sometimes it makes the contradictions more visible.

Exodus 2:21-22 - Zipporah, Gershom, and exile as a family story

Moses becomes willing to dwell with Reuel/Jethro and receives Zipporah as wife. Their son Gershom carries a name of displacement: "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land."

Moses names the ache. He does not pretend he belongs. But he also does not refuse a future. Naming Gershom is both lament and hope.

4. What is the difference between naming your exile honestly and allowing exile to become your whole identity?

Exodus 3:1 - The ordinary Tuesday of the burning bush

The hinge verse says Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law. This is ongoing, ordinary work. He is not on a spiritual retreat. He is not at a conference. He is not fasting on a mountain. He is doing his job. The burning bush interrupts ordinary faithfulness, not religious performance.

FORMATION NOTE

The pastoral force of Exodus 3:1

God does not wait for Moses to climb back into importance before calling him. He meets him while Moses is tending someone else's sheep. This detail matters for everyone who feels hidden, under-used, or far from the "main story." The main story may be forming in the hidden place.

5. Jethro, Reuel, Hobab, and the Midianite Connection

Jethro is often treated as a background character, but Part Five rightly treats him as one of the most important secondary figures in Moses' formation. He is priest, host, father-in-law, theological witness, desert guide, and later leadership consultant.

Names and identities

Name	Possible meaning/role	Why it matters
Reuel	Friend of God / family name	Used in Exodus 2; signals a hospitable household, not a random pagan household.
Jethro	Possibly "his excellence"; priestly or honorific title	Used in Exodus 3 and 18; the name by which he is most remembered.
Hobab	Related family name in Numbers/Judges tradition	Raises questions about clan naming, father-in-law/brother-in-law terms, and ancient kinship precision.

Jethro the priest

The phrase "priest of Midian" opens several interpretive possibilities. He may have preserved knowledge of the God of Abraham through Midian's descent from Abraham and Keturah. He may represent a righteous Gentile figure whose knowledge is incomplete but genuine. Some scholars also discuss the Midianite-Kenite hypothesis, which argues that early Israelite knowledge of YHWH may have been mediated through southern/Midianite traditions. This theory is debated, but it forces readers to take Jethro's theological role seriously rather than treating him as decorative.

LEADERSHIP FORMATION

What Jethro gave Moses

A household when Moses had none.

A place to be ordinary after public failure.

A trade: shepherding and desert survival.

A wisdom tradition outside Egypt's palace system.

A leadership correction later in Exodus 18: Moses cannot carry everything alone.

5. Who has been a "Jethro" in your life - someone who was outside the original story but became essential to your formation?

6. What would Moses have lacked as a leader if he had never lived under Jethro's roof?

6. What Forty Years of Shepherding Actually Trained

Shepherding in the ancient Near East was not sentimental. It required stamina, terrain knowledge, conflict management, animal care, water logistics, weather reading, predator defence, and patient attention to weakness. The shepherd had to learn the needs of the flock before the flock could explain them.

The skills Moses learned with sheep

Navigation: He learned paths, wadis, shade routes, seasonal grazing, and water points.

Patience: Sheep move at the pace of the weakest animals. A shepherd cannot lead only for the fast.

Protection: A shepherd defends against predators and thieves, but also against the flock's own panic.

Provision: The shepherd does not create grass or water, but knows how to lead the flock toward them.

Attention: The shepherd notices sickness, injury, straying, exhaustion, pregnancy, and danger before they become disaster.

Embodied leadership: Leadership becomes physical: walking, watching, sleeping lightly, carrying, counting, and returning again.

KEY INSIGHT

The leadership irony

Moses thought Israel needed an Egyptian-trained liberator. God knew Israel would need a desert-trained shepherd. The palace taught Moses how power works. Midian taught him how living things survive.

7. What "shepherd skills" might God be forming in you through work that feels unrelated to your calling?

7. The Number Forty as Biblical Formation

The number forty appears at major moments of testing, waiting, transition, judgment, preparation, and covenant formation. In Part Five, Moses' forty years in Midian are not merely biographical data. They place him inside a biblical pattern: forty marks a complete season of formation before a new stage begins.

Person/Event	Forty Pattern	What follows
Noah	Forty days and nights of rain	Judgment and new creation
Moses in Egypt	Forty years	Privilege and identity tension
Moses in Midian	Forty years	Hiddenness and preparation
Moses on Sinai	Forty days and nights	Law, covenant, and glory
Israel	Forty years in the wilderness	Testing and generational formation
Elijah	Forty days to Horeb	Despair, provision, recommissioning
Jesus	Forty days in the wilderness	Testing before public ministry
Post-resurrection	Forty days of appearances	Preparation for witness and Pentecost

8. Why might Scripture repeatedly associate forty with preparation rather than instant arrival?

9. When have you wanted God to shorten a “forty” season? What might have been lost if He had?

8. Desert Theology: Hiddenness, Stripping, and Vocation

The desert in Scripture is a place of danger and encounter, lack and provision, silence and speech. It is not automatically holy. It can be a place of temptation, rebellion, death, and confusion. But again and again, God uses wilderness as a place where false supports are removed and deeper dependence is formed.

What Midian stripped from Moses

- Palace identity as the basis of authority
- The assumption that urgency equals commission
- Confidence that moral passion is enough
- The illusion that leadership is proven by force
- The need to be seen in order to be useful

What Midian built in Moses

- Knowledge of wilderness terrain
- Capacity for solitude and silence
- Humility that was no longer performative
- Patience with slow-moving living things
- A family and ordinary responsibilities
- A leader's ability to be interrupted by God

SEMINAR PROMPT

University-level discussion prompt

Is hiddenness best understood as punishment, preparation, protection, or participation in the pattern of Christ? Build an argument from Moses in Midian, Elijah at Horeb, Jesus in Nazareth, and Paul in Arabia/Galatia if desired. Identify where the analogy is strong and where it may become pastorally dangerous if over-applied.

10. What is one “Egyptian layer” God may have stripped from you in a hidden season?

11. What has the hidden season taught you that visible success could not have taught?

9. Moses, Elijah, and Jesus at the Mountain

Part Five's mountain theology reaches forward to the Transfiguration. Moses and Elijah both have Horeb/Sinai-shaped stories: flight, wilderness, provision, mountain encounter, and recommissioning. In the Gospels, they appear with Jesus as representatives of the Law and the Prophets, speaking of His "departure" - His exodus - which He would accomplish in Jerusalem.

Moses and Elijah: parallel formation

Pattern	Moses	Elijah
Flight after conflict	Flees Pharaoh after killing Egyptian	Flees Jezebel after confronting Baal
Desert provision	Well, Midian household, shepherd life	Angel's food and water
Forty	Forty years in Midian	Forty days to Horeb
Mountain	Horeb/burning bush	Horeb/still small voice
Commission	Return to Egypt	Return with renewed mission

Jesus and the fulfilled Exodus

Luke 9:31 says Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus about His "departure," using the Greek word exodos. The earlier Exodus freed Israel from Egypt through Passover blood and the sea. Jesus' Exodus frees His people through His death and resurrection. Moses' story is therefore not only biography. It becomes a template for recognizing the greater Deliverer.

12. How does the Transfiguration change the way you read Moses' forty years in Midian?

13. Why do you think the voice says, "Listen to Him," when Moses and Elijah are present?

10. Seminar Lab: Timing, Calling, and Ordinary Tuesdays

Use this section for a small-group session, a teaching workshop, or deeper personal analysis.

Case study A: right calling, wrong timing

Moses' calling as deliverer was real. His first attempt was not. Distinguish between calling, method, timing, and commission. All four matter.

14. Where in Moses' life do you see calling without commission? Where do you see commission without confidence?

15. What safeguards help a person distinguish God-given urgency from self-managed urgency?

Case study B: ordinary work as holy ground

The burning bush appears while Moses is tending a flock that is not even his own. This is the shock of the narrative: holiness is not waiting for Moses to regain visibility.

16. What ordinary responsibility in your life might be closer to holy ground than you have realized?

17. What would it look like to "turn aside and see" without abandoning your ordinary faithfulness?

11. Journalling Workbook

My Midian

Describe a season where you felt hidden, delayed, displaced, or under-used. What did it feel like? What did it teach you?

The Well

Where did God provide a meeting place or unexpected relationship after a failure or ending?

Gershom

If you had to name your current season honestly, what would you call it and why?

Jethro

Who has given you wisdom from outside the circle you expected God to use?

The Flock

What “small” responsibility has been teaching you how to care, lead, wait, or endure?

The Bush

What might it mean for you to watch more carefully for God in ordinary Tuesdays?

12. Self-Quiz

Use this quiz to review the major ideas from Part Five. Try answering without looking back, then check the answer key.

1. Which verse describes Moses keeping Jethro’s flock and coming to Horeb?

A. Exodus 2:11

B. Exodus 3:1

- C. Exodus 12:1
- D. Numbers 20:8

2. What does Gershom's name communicate?

- A. Victory in battle
- B. A stranger/sojourner there
- C. God has healed
- D. The Lord provides

3. Which Hebrew verb behind "Moses saved them" is related to the name Yeshua?

- A. shamar
- B. yasha
- C. qara
- D. halak

4. What is the main theological point of the desert in Part Five?

- A. God abandons people who fail
- B. Hiddenness can be formation
- C. Egypt was better than Midian
- D. Shepherding was punishment only

5. Which figure parallels Moses by fleeing to Horeb after conflict?

- A. Elijah
- B. Solomon
- C. Jonah
- D. Nehemiah

6. What does Luke 9:31 say Moses and Elijah discussed with Jesus?

- A. His exodus/departure
- B. The Nile
- C. The Ten Plagues only
- D. Jethro's family tree

7. In one paragraph, explain why Midian was not wasted time in Moses' life.

8. Name two things Jethro gave Moses that the palace could not give him.
9. Explain the difference between being hidden and being useless.
10. Write one sentence that captures the devotional meaning of “ordinary Tuesday.”

13. Desert School Word Finder

Find the key words from Part Five. Words may go forwards, backwards, up, down, or diagonally. This is designed as a gentle review activity for readers, small groups, or younger participants following along with the deeper study.

Words: MIDIAN, HOREB, JETHRO, REUEL, ZIPPORAH, GERSHOM, SHEPHERD, DESERT, HIDDENNESS, FORTY, BURNINGBUSH, ELIJAH, JESUS, FORMATION, ORDINARY, TUESDAY, WELL, FLOCK

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

C	Q	N	V	J	E	S	U	S	D	I	U	F	V	W	B	K	R
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14. Answer Keys

Self-Quiz Answer Key

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

Suggested short-answer themes: Midian was formation rather than cancellation; Jethro gave Moses family, desert wisdom, and later leadership correction; hiddenness is not uselessness when God is forming character, skill, and humility; ordinary Tuesday means God can call us from within faithful daily work.

Word Finder Answer Key

MIDIAN: row 15, column 3 to row 10, column 3

HOREB: row 10, column 14 to row 14, column 18

JETHRO: row 10, column 13 to row 5, column 18

REUEL: row 18, column 18 to row 14, column 14

ZIPPORAH: row 8, column 13 to row 1, column 6

GERSHOM: row 5, column 8 to row 11, column 8

SHEPHERD: row 10, column 9 to row 17, column 16

DESERT: row 10, column 10 to row 15, column 5

HIDDENNESS: row 17, column 11 to row 17, column 2

FORTY: row 12, column 9 to row 16, column 5

BURNINGBUSH: row 6, column 16 to row 16, column 6

ELIJAH: row 6, column 1 to row 1, column 1

JESUS: row 18, column 5 to row 18, column 9

FORMATION: row 12, column 7 to row 4, column 7

ORDINARY: row 5, column 17 to row 12, column 17

TUESDAY: row 3, column 17 to row 9, column 11

WELL: row 2, column 12 to row 2, column 9

FLOCK: row 11, column 6 to row 7, column 6

15. Sources and Further Reading

This guide is based on the Woven & Known Moses Series Part Five article/study draft supplied by the author, with additional historical, geographical, and theological context. Scripture references are drawn from Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, 1 Kings, Matthew, Luke, Acts, Hebrews, and related passages.

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PRAYERFUL CLOSE

Closing blessing

May the God who formed Moses in Midian teach us to honour the hidden years, receive ordinary faithfulness as holy ground, and trust that the bush will burn when the time is right.