

The Book of Exodus, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 2: The Burning Bush and the Name of God

Exodus 3:1–4:17

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this is the theological summit of the early chapters of Exodus, and the teacher should treat it that way. At the burning bush God reveals His holiness (the fire, the holy ground, Moses hiding his face), His compassion (I have seen, I have heard, I know), and above all His name, I AM WHO I AM. This name is the self-disclosure of God as the eternal, self-existent, uncaused Lord who depends on nothing and who keeps His covenant across the centuries. Help the class grasp that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not one deity among the gods of Egypt but the only One who simply is. When Jesus says in John 8:58, before Abraham was, I AM, He is deliberately taking this name to Himself, and the hostile crowd understood the claim perfectly. Handle this connection plainly but without anachronism: the point is the identity and deity of the eternal Lord, revealed at the bush and made flesh in Christ.

Watch the pastoral edge of the call narrative. Moses' string of objections is not merely a character flaw to be scolded; it is a window into how God deals with reluctant, frightened servants. God answers each excuse with patience, and almost every answer comes back to one promise, I will be with you. The teacher should hold together two truths the text holds together: God is gracious toward honest weakness, and yet the anger of the LORD is kindled when weakness hardens into a refusal to obey a clear command. Be careful not to flatten either side.

Beyond the doctrine, this lesson aims squarely at the formation of the student. Many in your class feel like Moses on the back side of the desert, too old, too ordinary, too unqualified, their best days behind them. This passage was written to teach them that God's call rests not on their adequacy but on His presence, and that the great I AM still meets people in the middle of ordinary days. Help your students leave not merely informed about a famous bush, but steadier in worship before the holiness of God, warmed by His compassion, and willing to lay down the excuses they have hidden behind.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 3:1–6. God called the ground around the bush holy and told Moses to remove his sandals, and Moses hid his face, afraid to look at God. What do the fire that did not consume the bush and the command about holy ground reveal about the holiness of God and how we ought to approach Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the scene. Moses has led the flock to Horeb, the mountain of God, and the angel of the LORD appears in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. The marvel is not merely that the bush burns but that it is not consumed. Fire normally devours what it touches; this fire does not. Many teachers see here a fitting picture of the God who is present in glory yet does not destroy, who can dwell with His people without consuming them.

Stress the holiness of God. God calls to Moses by name and immediately commands, do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. Holiness was not a property of that patch of desert; it became holy because God was present. Moses had likely shepherded across that ground for years. The lesson is that the presence of the holy God transforms ordinary space, and the only fitting response is reverence.

Note Moses' reaction. He hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. This is the right instinct of a creature before the Holy One, the same trembling we see in Isaiah (Isaiah 6:5) and in Peter (Luke 5:8). Guard the class against a flippant familiarity with God. He is our Father in Christ, and we may come boldly (Hebrews 4:16), yet He remains the God of the fire, holy and to be revered.

Help the class connect reverence and approach. We do not earn nearness to God by our worthiness; God Himself draws near and invites. Yet drawing near is never casual. The same God who said take off your sandals later spelled out, through Moses, exactly how Israel was to approach Him, and in Christ He has opened a new and living way (Hebrews 10:19–22) that we should never treat lightly.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The holiness of God as the central note of the burning bush (Isaiah 6:3; Leviticus 11:44).
- Reverence and fear of the Lord as the right response to His presence (Proverbs 9:10; Hebrews 12:28–29).
- Holiness located in God's presence rather than in places or objects.
- The privilege and seriousness of approaching God, opened fully in Christ (Hebrews 10:19–22).

Discussion Prompts

- What does the unconsumed bush suggest about how God can dwell with His people without destroying them?
- Why did ordinary ground become holy, and what does that teach about where we meet God?
- How do we hold together boldness to approach God in Christ with reverence before His holiness?

Question 2

Student Question:

Moses was simply tending sheep when God broke into an ordinary day, yet he had to turn aside to truly see. Where might God be present in the routine corners of your life that you are too busy or distracted to notice, and what would turning aside look like for you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This first self-examining question turns the scene onto the student. God did not interrupt Moses in a temple or a moment of prayer; He came while Moses was working, tending sheep on an ordinary day. God specializes in breaking into the routine.

Press the small but crucial detail that Moses had to turn aside. The bush was burning whether he looked or not, but the voice came only after he turned to see. Distraction and busyness can keep us hurrying past the very places God is present. Many of us would have noted the odd bush and kept walking, eyes on the flock and the schedule.

Apply this warmly. Invite students to name the ordinary corners of their lives, the commute, the kitchen, the cubicle, the waiting room, where God may be quietly present. Turning aside might mean a habit of attentiveness, unhurried prayer, or simply slowing down enough to notice. The point is not to manufacture mystical experiences but to cultivate a heart that does not rush past God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's habit of meeting people in ordinary work and routine (Luke 2:8–11; 1 Kings 19:19).
- The danger of busyness and distraction crowding out attentiveness to God.
- The discipline of turning aside, slowing down to notice God's presence.
- Cultivating a reverent, watchful heart in everyday life (Psalm 46:10).

Discussion Prompts

- Where in your ordinary week is God most likely present and most likely overlooked?
- What practical habit would help you turn aside and notice rather than hurry past?
- Why does God so often come in the routine rather than the spectacular?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 3:7–10. God said He had seen the affliction, heard the cry, and known the sorrows of His people, and so He had come down to deliver them. What does this tell us about the heart of God toward those who suffer, and about how His compassion moves Him to act?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here the heart of God is laid open. He says, I have surely seen the affliction of my people, and have heard their cry, and I know their sorrows. Three verbs, seen, heard, known, sweep up the

suffering of the slaves into the attention of God. He is not distant or indifferent. The groaning that closed chapter 2 has reached Him, and now He acts.

Stress the word come down. God says, I have come down to deliver them. The eternal, self-existent One stoops to enter the misery of His people. This is the consistent pattern of Scripture, culminating in the incarnation, where God comes all the way down in Christ to deliver us from a deeper bondage (Philippians 2:6–8). The compassion at the bush is the same compassion that hung on a cross.

Note that God's compassion is not mere sentiment; it moves to action and it works through a sent deliverer. Verse 10 turns immediately to, come, I will send you to Pharaoh. God's tenderness toward suffering does not bypass human instruments; it commissions them. Help the class feel both the comfort of God's compassion and the call it places on those He sends.

Guard against two errors. Do not let the class conclude that God ignores suffering when deliverance is delayed; Israel had groaned for generations, yet God had seen all along and was acting in His time. And do not reduce God to a vague benevolence; His compassion is covenantal, rooted in His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (3:6, 3:15).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The compassion of God who sees, hears, and knows the suffering of His people (Psalm 34:18; Exodus 3:7).
- God coming down to deliver, the pattern fulfilled in the incarnation (Philippians 2:6–8).
- God's compassion moving to concrete action rather than mere sentiment.
- God's deliverance working through sent human instruments (Exodus 3:10).
- Compassion rooted in covenant faithfulness, not vague benevolence.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the significance of God saying I have come down to deliver them?
- How does the compassion of God at the bush point forward to the cross?
- Why does God so often work His deliverance through people He sends?

Question 4

Student Question:

God told Moses, I have seen, I have heard, I know. Think of a burden you have carried quietly, assuming no one noticed. How does it change you to know that the God of the burning bush sees, hears, and knows your sorrows too?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses the three verbs of verse 7 into the student's own experience. God told Moses that He had seen, heard, and known the sorrows of an enslaved

people whom the world had written off. The same God sees, hears, and knows the burdens His people carry today.

Invite honest reflection. Many carry quiet sorrows, a wayward child, a lonely marriage, a hidden grief, a chronic pain, assuming no one notices and no one would care. The promise of this text is that the eternal God is not aloof from such things; He bends His full attention to them.

Be tender and avoid cheap comfort. To say God sees is not to promise that every hardship will be lifted on our timetable; Israel waited generations. But it is to anchor the suffering in a Person who knows by name and acts in faithfulness. Encourage students that being seen by God is itself a profound comfort, and that He is never indifferent to His children's pain (1 Peter 5:7).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The comfort of being seen and known by God in our suffering (Psalm 56:8; Hebrews 4:13).
- Casting our burdens on God who genuinely cares (1 Peter 5:7).
- The difference between God's awareness and our timetable for relief.
- Resisting the lie that our pain goes unnoticed by God.

Discussion Prompts

- What burden have you assumed went unnoticed, and how does this text speak to it?
- How does being seen and known by God comfort us even before circumstances change?
- How can the church embody God's attentiveness toward those who suffer quietly?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 3:11–12. When Moses asked, Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, God did not answer the question he asked but promised instead, I will be with you. Why does God so often answer our fear about our own inadequacy not by boosting our confidence in ourselves but by pointing us to His presence?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Moses' first objection is, who am I that I should go to Pharaoh? It is a reasonable question. He is a fugitive shepherd, eighty years old, with a price once on his head. Notice carefully that God does not answer the question Moses asked. God does not say, you are stronger than you think, or here is a list of your qualifications. He says, but I will be with you.

This is one of the most important turns in the whole passage. God redirects Moses from himself to God. The decisive issue is never the size of the servant but the presence of the Lord. This is why Scripture can take ordinary people, fishermen, tax collectors, a shepherd, and use them for enormous purposes; the credential is God with them, not native ability (1 Corinthians 1:26–29).

God also gives a sign that requires faith: when you have brought the people out, you shall serve God on this mountain. The confirmation lies on the far side of obedience. Moses must step out before he sees the proof. Faith often works this way; we obey the God who promises His presence and find the assurance as we go.

Apply this to the perennial human fear of inadequacy. The cure for I am not enough is not you actually are enough but God is with you. That shift moves the weight off our shoulders and onto the only One strong enough to bear it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God answering our inadequacy with His presence rather than our self-confidence (Joshua 1:9; Matthew 28:20).
- God's pattern of using the weak and lowly to shame the strong (1 Corinthians 1:26–29).
- Faith that obeys before it sees the full confirmation (Hebrews 11:8).
- Moving the weight of the call from our ability to God's presence.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God redirect Moses from who am I to I will be with you?
- How does God's presence change what it means to be qualified for His work?
- Where do you need to obey before you can see the confirmation?

Question 6

Student Question:

Moses' first excuse was, Who am I? Where in your own life has a sense of being unqualified or insignificant kept you from stepping into something God may be calling you to do?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes Moses' who am I and makes it personal. A sense of insignificance or disqualification is one of the most common reasons people resist God's leading. They feel too ordinary, too flawed, too late, too small.

Help students see that Moses' self-assessment was, in human terms, accurate. He really was an aging shepherd with a checkered past. The error was not in his low view of himself but in stopping there, as if the conversation were only about him. God's answer reframes the whole question.

Encourage honest naming. Where has who am I kept a student from teaching a class, mending a relationship, speaking a word of witness, taking a step of service? The goal is not to inflate self-esteem but to relocate confidence in the God who promises to be present. Let students leave with a concrete area where they will stop hiding behind who am I.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Insignificance and disqualification as common barriers to obedience.
- An accurate low view of self that must not become an excuse before God.
- Confidence relocated from self to the present, promising God (2 Corinthians 3:5).
- Naming a specific area where fear of inadequacy has held us back.

Discussion Prompts

- Where has a sense of being unqualified kept you from something God may be calling you to?
- How is biblical confidence different from worldly self-esteem?
- What would change if you truly believed God's answer, I will be with you?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 3:13–15. God revealed His name as I AM WHO I AM, the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, His name forever. What does the name I AM teach us about God's eternal, self-existent nature and His unchanging faithfulness to His covenant, and how does Jesus' claim in John 8:58 connect to it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal summit of the lesson, and it deserves the most careful and the fullest teaching. Moses asks for God's name, anticipating that Israel will ask, and God answers, I AM WHO I AM, and adds, say this to the people of Israel, I AM has sent me to you. Then He gives the covenant name, the LORD (Yahweh), the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, declaring, this is my name forever.

Unfold the meaning of I AM. The name declares that God simply is. He has no beginning and no cause; He depends on nothing outside Himself; He is the eternal, self-existent, unchanging fountain of all being. Every idol of Egypt had a story and a need; this God has neither. He is not a higher creature but the uncreated Lord. This is the doctrine teachers sometimes call God's self-existence, and it stands behind everything Scripture says about His sovereignty and His faithfulness. Because He never changes, His promises never fail (Malachi 3:6).

Tie the name to covenant. In the very next breath God binds I AM to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The eternal One is the covenant-keeping One. His changelessness is not cold abstraction; it is the guarantee that the promise made centuries earlier will be kept now. The same point grounds our hope: the unchanging God keeps His word.

Now make the connection to Christ, plainly but carefully. In John 8:58 Jesus says, before Abraham was, I AM, and the crowd immediately takes up stones to kill Him for blasphemy,

because they understood He was claiming the divine name and therefore deity. The I AM of the bush is revealed in the New Testament to be one with the Son. Teach this as the deity and eternal identity of the Lord, fulfilled in Christ, not as something Moses or Israel grasped in full at the time. The bush points forward; the cross and the empty tomb reveal who was speaking.

Keep the Old Covenant rightly placed. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was keeping covenant with national Israel under the law that would soon be given through Moses. That covenant finds its fulfillment in Christ and His church (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8), not in any future earthly political program. The timeless truth for us is the unchanging, self-existent, promise-keeping character of the great I AM, who is our God in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The name I AM as the revelation of God's eternal self-existence (Exodus 3:14; Psalm 90:2).
- God's unchangeableness as the guarantee that His promises never fail (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8).
- I AM bound to the covenant God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; eternity and faithfulness joined.
- Jesus' claim before Abraham was, I AM (John 8:58) as a claim to the divine name and deity.
- The deity and eternal identity of Christ, one with the LORD of the bush.
- The covenant with Israel fulfilled in Christ and His church, not a future earthly political restoration (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8).

Discussion Prompts

- What does the name I AM teach us about God that no creature could ever say of itself?
- How does God's self-existence and changelessness make His promises certain?
- What is Jesus claiming in John 8:58, and why did the crowd react the way they did?

Question 8

Student Question:

The God who met Moses is the eternal I AM, who does not change and never fails. Where do you most need to rest in the truth that God simply is, steady and unchanging, when so much around you and within you keeps shifting?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes the doctrine of the divine name and lands it in the student's heart. The God who met Moses is the I AM, eternally the same, never failing, never shifting. Our lives, by contrast, are full of change, in circumstances, in health, in relationships, in our own moods and resolve.

Help students feel the pastoral weight of God's changelessness. Because He is the I AM, He is not the God who was, conveniently in the past, nor merely the God who might be, anxiously in the future, but the God who is, fully present and unchanged. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). When everything else moves, He does not.

Invite honest naming. Where is a student's footing shifting, a diagnosis, a job loss, a season of doubt, a family in flux? The unchanging I AM is exactly the rock such a person needs. Encourage them to rest their wavering hearts on the One who simply, steadily, always is.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's changelessness as a refuge in a shifting life (Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17).
- Resting present faith on the God who is, not merely who was or might be.
- Stability of the soul anchored outside ourselves in God's nature.
- Naming a specific area of instability and bringing it to the unchanging Lord.

Discussion Prompts

- Where in your life is the ground shifting most, and how does the unchanging I AM speak to it?
- Why is God's changelessness a comfort rather than a cold abstraction?
- What would it look like to rest your wavering heart on the One who always is?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read 4:1–9 and 4:10–17. Moses raised objection after objection, that they would not believe him, that he was slow of speech, and finally, please send someone else, until the anger of the LORD was kindled. How does God's patient answering of each excuse, and yet His displeasure at Moses' final refusal, teach us the difference between honest weakness brought to God and stubborn unbelief that resists His clear call?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question covers the long stretch of Moses' remaining objections and the signs God gives. Moses says they will not believe me; God answers with three signs, the staff that becomes a serpent, the hand made leprous and restored, and water from the Nile turned to blood. Moses says, I am slow of speech and of tongue; God answers, who has made man's mouth? I will be with your mouth and teach you what to say. Finally Moses drops every excuse and simply says, please send someone else, and the anger of the LORD is kindled against him.

Draw out the patience of God. He answers excuse after excuse, providing signs, promising to be with Moses' mouth, even appointing Aaron as a spokesman. God is remarkably gracious toward

an honestly frightened servant. Many of our objections God meets with similar patience, providing what we need to obey.

But mark the turning point carefully. The anger of the LORD is kindled not at Moses' weakness but at his refusal. There is a line between bringing our honest inadequacy to God and using it as a shield to disobey a clear command. Up to verse 13 Moses is wrestling; at verse 13 he is resisting. God's displeasure teaches us that there comes a point where continued objection is no longer humility but unbelief.

Hold both truths together for the class. God is gracious toward weakness; God is grieved by stubborn refusal. The same God who patiently answers our fears also expects us, finally, to trust and obey. Note too that even in His displeasure God provides Aaron and does not revoke the call; His grace persists, but Moses forfeits something by his reluctance.

Be careful here to teach genuine human responsibility. Moses was truly able to obey or to refuse, and he is held accountable for his resistance. God's call was real and Moses could genuinely respond; this is no scene of a man coerced against his will. The gospel call comes to us the same way, real and answerable, and we are accountable for how we respond (Acts 7:51).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's patience in answering the honest fears and weaknesses of His servants (Exodus 4:11–12).
- The line between honest weakness brought to God and stubborn unbelief that resists His call (Exodus 4:13–14).
- God's provision of what we need to obey, including helpers like Aaron.
- Genuine human responsibility: Moses truly able to obey or refuse, and accountable for it (Acts 7:51).
- The cost and forfeiture that can follow reluctant obedience.
- God's grace persisting even amid His displeasure, without revoking the call.

Discussion Prompts

- Where is the line between bringing honest weakness to God and using it to avoid obedience?
- Why was God's anger kindled at Moses' last objection but not his earlier ones?
- What does Moses' accountability teach about the reality of our own ability to respond to God?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this whole encounter, from the burning bush to a hesitant man finally going at God's word. Name one specific excuse or fear you have been hiding behind, and one concrete

way you will trust the I AM who promises His presence, so that this passage shapes you into the kind of person Jesus can use.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question gathers the whole encounter into one personal response. The arc has moved from a burning bush, through a revelation of the holy, compassionate, eternal I AM, through a string of excuses, to a man who finally goes at God's word, equipped not by his own ability but by God's presence.

Help students name something specific rather than settle for a vague resolve. The goal is transformation, not just information: one excuse or fear they have hidden behind, and one concrete step of trust they will take because the I AM has promised His presence.

Point them to Christ as the ground of that trust. The same God who said I will be with you at the bush says to His people in Christ, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). The eternal I AM took on flesh, bore our weakness, and now sends and accompanies His people. Close by inviting students to lay down their excuses and step forward, trusting the One who simply, always, is.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from information to personal transformation (James 1:22).
- Laying down a specific excuse or fear before the God who calls.
- Christ's promise of His abiding presence to those He sends (Matthew 28:20).
- Trusting God's presence rather than our adequacy as the basis for obedience.

Discussion Prompts

- What specific excuse have you been hiding behind, and what will you do about it this week?
- How does Jesus' promise to be with us always make obedience possible?
- What is one concrete step of trust this passage is calling you to take?