

WOVEN & KNOWN

BIBLE STUDY • THEOLOGY • FORMATION



MOSES SERIES - PART VI

The Burning Bush

MOSES SERIES

Part Six of Thirty

The Burning Bush

A deeper study guide for Exodus 3-4: the holy ground encounter, the divine name, the five objections, Aaron, and the God who speaks from ordinary mornings.

"I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned."

Exodus chapter three, verses three to four

Designed with a light sage palette to echo desert stillness, holy ground, and contemplative study.

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How to Use This Study Guide

This companion guide takes Part Six beyond the article into slower study, theological depth, critical reflection, and discipleship application. The article introduces the scene; this guide helps you inhabit it. Use it as a printable workbook, a small-group study, or a self-paced deeper dive alongside the Moses Series.

STUDY RHYTHM

Suggested rhythm for study

1. Read Exodus chapters three and four slowly before touching the commentary.
2. Track Moses' five objections and God's five provisions.
3. Use a pen to underline repeated words: see, call, holy, I will be with you, sign, believe, go.
4. Complete the reflection and journalling sections prayerfully rather than quickly.
5. Finish with the self-quiz and word finder to review what you have learned.

Contents

- 1. Biblical text and learning objectives
- 2. Part Six at a glance
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- 4. Holy ground and the theology of attentiveness
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- 7. Moses' five objections and God's five provisions
- 8. Aaron, reconciliation, and shared calling
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- 10. Critical thinking and seminar lab
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- 12. Self-quiz
- 13. Word finder activity
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1. The Biblical Text and Learning Objectives

Read first

- Exodus 3:1-22
- Exodus 4:1-31
- Optional comparison texts: Isaiah 6:1-8; Jeremiah 1:4-10; Judges 6:11-24; Acts 7:30-35; Hebrews 11:24-27

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

- ☐ Explain why the burning bush occurs in the context of ordinary shepherd work rather than religious spectacle.
- ☐ Describe the theological meaning of holy ground and why Moses is told to remove his sandals.
- ☐ Outline the major interpretive options for the symbolism of the burning bush, including the bush-as-Israel reading.
- ☐ Summarise the significance of the divine name “I AM WHO I AM” within both philosophy and covenant theology.
- ☐ Analyse Moses’ five objections and show how each one reveals a deeper fear or wound.
- ☐ Compare Moses’ call narrative with those of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Gideon.
- ☐ Articulate how God’s answer to inadequacy is not flattery but presence: “I will be with you.”
- ☐ Apply the burning bush narrative to modern discipleship, vocation, attentiveness, and fear.

THE BIG IDEA

Key thesis of Part Six

The burning bush is not just a miracle story. It is the moment where ordinary faithfulness, human attentiveness, divine holiness, covenant memory, and missional calling collide. Moses’ calling begins not with confidence but with fear, and God answers fear not by magnifying Moses but by revealing Himself.

2. Part Six at a Glance

Part Six is the hinge of the Moses narrative. The fugitive shepherd becomes the commissioned deliverer. The silent decades of Midian suddenly open into the most concentrated theological conversation in the Pentateuch.

Movement	Key Text	Meaning
Ordinary route	Exodus 3:1	God often meets people inside ordinary faithfulness.
Turning aside	Exodus 3:3-4	Attentiveness becomes the

		threshold of encounter.
Holy ground	Exodus 3:5	Divine presence transforms common space into sacred space.
Divine name	Exodus 3:14-15	God reveals Himself as self-existent and covenantally present.
Objections and provision	Exodus 3:11-4:17	Calling includes fear, but grace answers fear with presence, signs, words, and community.
Aaron meets Moses	Exodus 4:27-31	Mission becomes shared, embodied, and believed.

3. The Forty-Year Context and the Ordinary Morning

The burning bush matters more when we remember how ordinary the morning was. Moses was not climbing a mountain for a mystical retreat. He was taking the flock along a route he knew, to a landscape he knew, in a job he had done for decades. The miracle arrives in the grain of routine.

The daily world of a shepherd

- Before dawn: watering the flock, preparing for movement, scanning weather and terrain.
- Morning: leading the flock along familiar circuits between grazing and water sources.
- Midday: resting lightly in shade, alert to predators and weak animals.
- Late afternoon: grazing again as heat falls, then moving back toward water or enclosure.
- Long-term formation: reading landscape, carrying responsibility, and keeping fragile life alive in difficult terrain.

FORMATION NOTE

The spiritual force of the ordinary

One of the great lessons of Exodus three is that God does not wait until Moses leaves ordinary life behind. The holy appears inside the ordinary. The route is familiar. The mountain is familiar. The bush is familiar. Only the fire is new. The question is whether Moses will notice.

1. Why do you think Scripture stresses the ordinariness of Moses' morning before the encounter?

2. What part of your ordinary weekly life might be more spiritually significant than you usually assume?

4. Holy Ground and the Theology of Attentiveness

Moses says, "I will turn aside to see this great sight." The text then says that when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him. The encounter does not begin with spectacle alone. It begins with attention. Moses slows down, notices, and turns.

Why remove the sandals?

Removing sandals in the ancient Near East could signify reverence, vulnerability, and recognition that one stands in a place made different by divine presence. The holiness is not an aura inside the dirt. It is relational. The ground is holy because God is there.

Holy space is presence-defined

- The ground was not permanently holy by geography alone; it was holy because God manifested Himself there.
- Holiness exposes the person who approaches it. Moses is told how to stand before God before he is told what to do for God.
- The first demand of vocation is not performance. It is reverence.

3. What is the difference between curiosity about God and reverence before God?

4. How might “turning aside” function as a spiritual discipline in a distracted age?

5. The Burning Bush: Symbolism and Theological Meaning

Jewish and Christian interpretation has long lingered over one question: why a bush? Why a low desert thornbush rather than a majestic cedar or temple object? The narrative offers no explicit explanation, but tradition has proposed several deeply coherent readings.

Major interpretive possibilities

- The bush as Israel: lowly, afflicted, surrounded by the fire of oppression, yet not consumed.
- The bush as paradoxical holiness: divine fire that does not destroy what it inhabits.
- The bush as the pattern of vocation: ordinary created matter made radiant by God’s presence.
- The bush as a Christological shadow: God present in suffering, and ultimately entering the fire Himself in the cross.

DID YOU KNOW

Rabbinic insight

Early Jewish interpreters often saw the bush as a deliberate identification of God with a lowly, thorny plant rather than a grand tree. The point is theological humility: God chooses to reveal Himself in what looks insignificant, just as He identifies Himself with an enslaved people.

Christological extension

If the bush represents Israel burning in affliction yet not consumed, the New Testament intensifies the pattern in Christ. He enters the fire of judgment itself. The God who once spoke from the fire later bears the consuming fire of the cross for the sake of His people.

- 5.** Which interpretation of the bush do you find most compelling, and why?
- 6.** How does the bush-as-Israel reading deepen the emotional power of the scene?

6. The Divine Name: “I AM WHO I AM”

Exodus chapter three, verses fourteen to fifteen, contains one of the most theologically dense moments in Scripture. God answers Moses’ authority question by revealing His name and nature. The phrase ehyeh asher ehyeh is often rendered “I AM WHO I AM,” though “I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE” also reflects the Hebrew verbal possibilities.

Three dimensions of the name

- Self-existence: God depends on nothing outside Himself for His being.
- Dynamic presence: the One who is also the One who will be with His people.
- Covenant continuity: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the same God speaking to Moses now.

Philosophical and pastoral force together

The name is not abstract metaphysics detached from history. It is given in the middle of a rescue mission. The God whose being is absolute is also the God whose compassion is active. His transcendence does not remove Him from history; it guarantees that no empire, no idol, and no human collapse can limit His ability to act.

THEOLOGY

Why the name matters for discipleship

When God says “I will be with you,” that promise is grounded in who He is. Divine presence is not a mood. It is an extension of divine identity. Because He is the I AM, He can be truly, fully present to His people without depletion or change.

7. Why is it significant that God gives both a name of being and a name of covenant memory?

8. How might the divine name challenge modern ideas of God as merely therapeutic or symbolic?

7. Moses’ Five Objections and God’s Five Provisions

The extended dialogue of Exodus chapters three and four is not a sign that Moses is faithless in a shallow sense. It reveals a man shaped by failure, delay, memory, fear, and

genuine humility. Each objection shows a deeper wound. Each divine response gives provision, not mere correction.

Objection	Reference	What is underneath it?	God's answer
Who am I?	3:11	Loss of confidence; true humility after failure.	I will be with you.
What is Your name?	3:13	Need for authority and genuine desire to know God.	I AM WHO I AM.
They will not believe me.	4:1	Fear of rejection based on past trauma.	Three signs.
I am slow of speech.	4:10	Fear of inadequacy, exposure, and failure in public speech.	I will be with your mouth.
Please send someone else.	4:13	Terror laid bare; refusal after arguments run out.	Aaron will go with you.

PASTORAL NOTE

Critical pastoral insight

God's answer to Moses is not "you are secretly amazing." God's answer is Himself: My presence, My name, My signs, My words, My people. This is a crucial correction to modern self-esteem readings of calling narratives.

9. Which of Moses' five objections feels most familiar to you, and why?

10. What does this passage teach about the difference between humility and disobedience?

8. Aaron, Reconciliation, and Shared Calling

Exodus chapter four, verse twenty-seven, is one of the most emotionally compressed verses in the narrative. Aaron goes into the wilderness, finds Moses at the mountain of God, and kisses him. After forty years, the brother he left behind walks into the new call.

Why Aaron matters

- Practically: Aaron will speak publicly where Moses feels unable.
- Relationally: the lonely fugitive is restored to family connection.
- Theologically: calling is not always solitary; God often answers fear through shared vocation.
- Narratively: Moses does not return to Egypt with only a revelation. He returns with a brother at his side.

11. Why do you think the kiss between Aaron and Moses matters so much in the story?

12. How does shared calling protect us from isolated heroism?

9. Comparative Call Narratives: Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Gideon

Biblical call narratives share a recognisable grammar: divine appearance, commission, objection, reassurance, and sign. Moses stands in that pattern, but his narrative is unusually extended and psychologically detailed.

Figure	Text	Main objection	Sign/response	Missional direction
Moses	Exodus 3-4	Five objections	Bush, name, signs, Aaron	Return to Egypt
Isaiah	Isaiah 6	Unclean lips	Coal from altar	Speak to Judah
Jeremiah	Jeremiah 1	I am only a youth	God touches mouth	Speak to nations
Gideon	Judges 6	My clan is weakest	Fire/signs	Deliver Israel from Midian

BIBLICAL PATTERN

Pattern recognition

Seeing these call narratives together helps us recognise that objection is not abnormal. Biblical vocation regularly begins in inadequacy. What distinguishes a genuine call is not the absence of fear but the presence of divine reassurance and commission.

10. Critical Thinking and Seminar Lab

Discussion prompt A: Is attentiveness a moral duty?

13. The text says God called when Moses turned aside to see. Does this imply that attentiveness is a spiritual responsibility? Build an argument from the text.

Discussion prompt B: Does God accommodate fear too much?

14. Trace the point where God's patience shifts toward anger in Exodus chapter four. What does this reveal about grace, limits, and divine accommodation?

Discussion prompt C: Is the burning bush mainly about holiness or mission?

15. Make a case for one of the following: the centre of the passage is holiness, compassion, identity, or mission. Then explain how the other themes still remain essential.

Mini research task

Compare the verb “to see” across Exodus chapters two and three: God sees Israel’s affliction; Moses sees the bush; God sees that Moses turns aside; Moses is sent so that Pharaoh may see who YHWH is. The entire narrative moves through acts of seeing.

16. What theological importance does “seeing” carry in the burning bush narrative?

11. Journalling Workbook

Ordinary Morning

Describe a part of your routine life that feels unremarkable. What would it mean to believe that God can meet you there?

Turn Aside

What do you usually do when something interrupts your schedule? Resist it, ignore it, or investigate it? How might God meet you in interruption?

Holy Ground

Where have you sensed that a place, conversation, or moment became “holy” because of God’s presence?

Who Am I?

Write honestly about one assignment or burden that makes you feel inadequate. Then rewrite the page in light of “I will be with you.”

Send Someone Else

What is one place in your life where your most honest prayer is still “please send someone else”?

Brother at the Mountain

Who has God given you as Aaron-like support? Who might need you to become that support for them?

12. Self-Quiz

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

1. What was Moses doing when the burning bush appeared?

- A. Fasting on a mountain
- B. Leading Jethro’s flock
- C. Speaking with Aaron
- D. Praying in a shrine

2. What triggers God's call from the bush in the text?

- A. Moses cries out first
- B. Lightning strikes
- C. Moses turns aside to see
- D. Aaron arrives

3. What makes the ground "holy"?

- A. Its geology
- B. Ancient tradition alone
- C. Divine presence
- D. Moses' faithfulness

4. Which answer best reflects the force of ehyeh asher ehyeh?

- A. A hidden tribal password
- B. I AM WHO I AM / I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE
- C. God of storms only
- D. The mountain spirit

5. How many major objections does Moses raise?

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

6. Which provision is given after Moses says, "Please send someone else"?

- A. A new staff
- B. Aaron as companion and spokesman
- C. A different mountain
- D. A written scroll

7. In one paragraph, explain why the ordinariness of Moses' morning matters theologically.

8. Give two reasons the bush may symbolise Israel in affliction.

9. Explain the difference between Moses' first objection and his fifth objection.

10. In your own words, explain why God's answer to calling anxiety is fundamentally about presence.

13. Word Finder Activity

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

Words: BUSH, HOLYGROUND, HOREB, SANDALS, MIDIAN, AARON, MOSES, JETHRO, SIGNS, SERPENT, BLOOD, PHARAOH, EHYEH, PRESENCE, OBJECTION, SHEPHERD, ATTENTIVE, CALLING

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

14. Answer Keys and Further Reading

Self-Quiz Answer Key

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

Suggested themes for the short answers: the ordinariness of the morning shows God meets faithful people in daily life; the bush can symbolise Israel, lowliness, paradoxical holiness, and divine solidarity; the first objection is humble inadequacy while the fifth is near-refusal; God answers calling anxiety with presence, provision, and companionship rather than mere reassurance about self-worth.

Word Finder Answer Key

BUSH: (18,14) → (18,11)

HOLYGROUND: (3,1) → (12,10)

HOREB: (1,15) → (5,11)

SANDALS: (11,18) → (11,12)

MIDIAN: (8,18) → (3,18)

AARON: (9,15) → (5,15)

MOSES: (8,16) → (4,16)

JETHRO: (1,6) → (1,1)

SIGNS: (14,3) → (18,3)

SERPENT: (8,2) → (14,2)

BLOOD: (3,6) → (3,10)

PHARAOH: (18,10) → (18,4)

EHYEH: (14,11) → (14,7)

PRESENCE: (10,11) → (3,4)

OBJECTION: (1,17) → (9,9)

SHEPHERD: (16,6) → (9,6)

ATTENTIVE: (2,12) → (2,4)

CALLING: (10,4) → (16,4)

Suggested bibliography for going deeper

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

- Nahum M. Sarna, Exodus (JPS Torah Commentary).
- Walter Brueggemann, Theology of the Old Testament, sections on divine name and liberation.
- Terence E. Fretheim, Exodus.
- Richard E. Averbeck, “The Burning Bush and the Call of Moses” studies in Pentateuch theology.
- Selected rabbinic readings in Exodus Rabbah on the bush and the divine name.

FINAL THOUGHT

Closing encouragement

The great surprise of the burning bush is not only that God speaks from fire. It is that He speaks into fear, into ordinariness, into reluctance, and into the life of a man who thought his most important years were behind him. If God met Moses there, He can meet us in our own ordinary fields too.