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# EXODUS

Shemot — “Names” • An 8–Week Group Bible Study

By Greg and Kayla Gibson

WEEK 1 OF 8 • GENERAL / MIXED GROUP EDITION

## The God Who Hears — Oppression, a Rescued Child & the Burning Bush

Scripture Scope: Exodus 1:1–4:31 (ESV) • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

PARTICIPANT STUDY EDITION

Synchronized Section-by-Section with the Leader Guide Edition · Includes Group Reflection Workspace

## Exodus — 8-Week Group Bible Study (Participant Study Edition)

Week 1: The God Who Hears (Exodus 1:1–4:31)

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# Welcome to the 8-Week Exodus Study

Genesis ended with a coffin in Egypt and a promise: God will surely come to His people and bring them up out of that land. Exodus is the story of that visit. Its Hebrew title is Shemot, which means Names, because the book opens with the names of Jacob's sons who went down to Egypt. Over eight weeks we will watch God hear His enslaved people, rescue them through the sea, provide for them in the wilderness, make a covenant with them at Sinai, and finally come to live among them in the tabernacle.

Exodus moves Israel from serving Pharaoh to serving God. The Hebrew verb **עָבַד (avad)** means to serve, and it covers both forced labor and worship. The question running through the whole book is simple: whom will God's people serve?

### How This 8-Week Study Works

This study guide is supplemental to Scripture—it is designed to serve the biblical text, never to replace it. Always go to the Bible directly first, and keep your own Bible open alongside you whenever you use this guide. Designed for weekly small groups, mini-churches, and community gatherings (75–90 minutes per session) rather than daily homework checklists, each week moves through six sections: a welcome and opening question, the historical and literary setting, two teaching movements through the passage, and a closing time of application and prayer.

> **Bring Your Bible:** This study guide is a companion to Scripture, not a substitute for it—always go to the Bible directly first and keep your own Bible open beside you throughout every session. Read Exodus 1–4 for yourself before reading these notes. Key anchor verses are printed in each section for quick reference, while longer focal passages are read aloud directly from your open ESV Bible together as a group. (If you'd like an example of why translation matters, compare how different Bibles render God's name in Exodus 3:14.)

## Choosing a Bible Translation: Top 5 Translations Compared

As a kid, Greg remembers picking up the family New King James Version (NKJV) Bible and feeling like he was reading old English poetry that was difficult to understand—which is why he loves the English Standard Version (ESV) today. It stays faithful to the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek words while remaining clear, natural, and easy to read.

Every English Bible translation falls along a spectrum between two primary approaches: word-for-word translation (formal equivalence, which prioritizes literal accuracy to the original phrasing and sentence structure) and thought-for-thought translation (dynamic equivalence, which prioritizes immediate modern readability by translating idioms and ideas into natural contemporary expressions). Here is how the five most popular English translations compare:

- **1. ESV (English Standard Version) — Word-for-Word (Used in This Study)**
  - Pros: Preserves the exact wording, literary structure, and theological precision of the original Hebrew and Greek while using clean, modern English; outstanding for deep study.
  - Cons: Because it follows the original sentence structure closely, some phrasing can occasionally feel slightly more formal than everyday speech.
- **2. NIV (New International Version) — Balanced (Between Word-for-Word and Thought-for-Thought)**
  - Pros: The most widely read modern translation; strikes a smooth, natural balance between accuracy and everyday readability.
  - Cons: Because translators sometimes smooth out idioms into modern expressions, a few literal wordplays or technical nuances from the original languages can be less visible on the surface.
- **3. NLT (New Living Translation) — Thought-for-Thought**
  - Pros: Warm, conversational, and effortless to read aloud or take in over long passages; great for grasping the big picture quickly.
  - Cons: Prioritizes meaning over literal word-for-word phrasing, so it is better as a companion reading Bible than as your sole text for close word study.
- **4. CSB (Christian Standard Bible) — Optimal Equivalence (Balanced)**
  - Pros: A newer translation that stays very close to the original words whenever possible while smoothing out awkward phrasing into crisp, natural modern English.
  - Cons: Slightly less traditional cadence in well-known verses compared to older word-for-word translations like the ESV or NKJV.
- **5. KJV / NKJV (King James Version & New King James Version) — Traditional Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Deeply poetic, historic cadence that shaped English literature and church history; the NKJV updates archaic pronouns ("thee/thou") while keeping the classic rhythm.
  - Cons: Often reads like older English poetry with complex sentence structure and archaic or formal vocabulary, which can make sustained study harder to follow for modern readers.

## Greg & Kayla's Recommended Study Bibles

Because this study guide is designed to be used alongside your open Bible, having a trusted study Bible on hand is one of the best ways to go deeper as you read through Exodus:

- **Greg's Favorite Study Bible:** The MacArthur Study Bible (ESV), which contains extensive explanatory notes beneath almost every verse—ideal for detailed study.

- **Kayla's Favorite Study Bible:** The ESV Study Bible, containing over 20,000 study notes, articles, and explanations.

### The 8-Week Exodus Study Map

Exodus has three great movements: rescue in Egypt (chapters 1–15), provision in the wilderness (chapters 15–18), and covenant and God's dwelling at Sinai (chapters 19–40). The series ends when the God who heard His people comes to live among them.

| Week | Passage | Title |
|---|---|---|
| **Week 1** | Exodus 1:1–4:31 | **The God Who Hears** |
| **Week 2** | Exodus 5:1–11:10 | **Let My People Go** |
| **Week 3** | Exodus 12:1–15:21 | **The Lamb and the Sea** |
| **Week 4** | Exodus 15:22–18:27 | **Bread from Heaven** |
| **Week 5** | Exodus 19:1–24:18 | **The Covenant at Sinai** |
| **Week 6** | Exodus 25:1–31:18 | **A Dwelling for God** |
| **Week 7** | Exodus 32:1–34:35 | **The Golden Calf and the Glory of God** |
| **Week 8** | Exodus 35:1–40:38 | **The Glory Fills the Tabernacle** |

WEEK 1 SESSION GUIDE · EXODUS 1:1–4:31

# Week 1: The God Who Hears

By Greg and Kayla Gibson

Section 1.1

## Welcome, Series Launch & Week 1 Front Matter

### Welcome

If your group just finished Genesis, you remember how it ended: Joseph dying in Egypt and telling his brothers that God would surely visit them and bring them home. Exodus is that visit. If you are new to the group, here is the short version of the story so far. God promised Abraham descendants, a land, and blessing for all nations. Abraham's grandson Jacob and his family, seventy people in all, settled in Egypt during a famine, where Jacob's son Joseph had become a ruler. Exodus opens several hundred years later.

### Before We Begin

The pages at the front of this book include the Bring Your Bible notice, a comparison of five popular Bible translations, and Greg and Kayla's recommended study Bibles. Please read them at home this week. They explain why we use the ESV throughout this study.

### Big Idea

When God's people are crushed and crying out, God hears, remembers, sees, and knows. He comes down to rescue them, reveals His name, I AM, and promises a reluctant deliverer, I will be with you.

### Week 1 Learning Objectives

1. See how Exodus continues Genesis: God's blessing and His promise to Abraham are being fulfilled, and they are under attack.
2. Notice God's hidden providence through ordinary, courageous women.
3. Understand the four verbs in Exodus 2:23–25 and what it means that God remembers.
4. Explain the meaning of God's name, I AM and the LORD, in plain English.
5. Relate Moses' objections to our own reluctance, and see God's patient answer: I will be with you.

### Opening Question

**1.1 Q1:** Have you ever cried out to God and felt like no one was listening? What did the silence feel like?

Section 1.2

## From Genesis to Exodus: Blessing Under Attack (Exodus 1)

### Guided Scripture Reading

Read Exodus 1:1–22 aloud together from your open ESV Bible.

## Anchor Verses (ESV)

> **Exodus 1:7–8 (ESV):** But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them. Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.

### Teaching Narrative: A Promise Pharaoh Cannot Stop

## 1. A Book Called Names

The Hebrew title of Exodus, **שְׁמוֹת (Shemot)**, means Names. It comes from the book's first words and the list of Jacob's sons who went down to Egypt. That title fits the story well. The book begins with the names of an ordinary family and builds toward God revealing His own name at the burning bush.

## 2. The Creation Blessing Comes True

Exodus 1:7 sounds like Genesis 1:28 on purpose. The words fruitful and multiplied translate the same Hebrew verbs, **פָּרָה (parah)** and **רָבָה (ravah)**, that God spoke over the first man and woman. The promise to Abraham of descendants as many as the stars is coming true in Egypt. Then verse 8 turns the story: a new king rises who did not know Joseph. He has no memory of what God did through Joseph, and he sees Israel's blessing as a threat.

## 3. Three Attacks on God's Blessing

Pharaoh's plan escalates in three steps. First he forces Israel into hard labor making bricks and building store cities. The Hebrew word for that labor, **עֲבֹדָה (avodah)**, comes from the verb avad, to serve. In this chapter it means slavery. Later in Exodus the same word describes worship. Second, Pharaoh orders the Hebrew midwives to kill newborn boys. Third, when that fails, he commands all his people to throw every Hebrew boy into the Nile. Each attack is aimed at the very blessing God gave His people, yet the more they are oppressed, the more they multiply.

## 4. Two Midwives Who Feared God

Shiphrah and Puah refuse the king's order because they **fear God**. The Hebrew phrase, yare et-ha-Elohim, describes a reverence for God that outweighs fear of any human power. Notice that the text gives us the midwives' names but never tells us Pharaoh's. The most powerful man in the world goes unnamed, and two ordinary women are remembered for thousands of years.

## Background Box: Egypt in Exodus 1

- Egyptian tomb paintings show workers making mud bricks under taskmasters, much as Exodus 1 describes.
- Archaeologists have found evidence of Semitic peoples living in the Nile Delta, the region the Bible calls Goshen.
- Bible-believing scholars hold two main views on when the Exodus happened: an early date around 1446 BC and a later date around 1260 BC. The message of the book is the same either way.

### Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.2)

**1.2 Q1:** Why would Pharaoh feel threatened by a growing people? What does that reveal about fear and power?

**1.2 Q2:** The midwives are named and Pharaoh isn't. What does that suggest about whom God honors?

**1.2 Q3:** Where today does fearing God mean refusing to obey a powerful voice?

Section 1.3

# Drawn Out of the Water: Moses' Rescue, Failure & Flight (Exodus 2:1–22)

### Guided Scripture Reading

Read Exodus 2:1–22 aloud together from your open ESV Bible.

### Teaching Narrative: God at Work Behind the Scenes

## 1. A Little Ark on the Nile

When Moses' mother can no longer hide her baby, she places him in a basket daubed with bitumen and pitch (2:3) and sets it among the reeds of the Nile. The Hebrew word for that basket, **תֵּבָה (tevah)**, appears in only one other place in the Bible: it is the word for Noah's ark. Once again God carries a life safely through deadly waters. The very river Pharaoh meant for death becomes the place of rescue.

## 2. The Women Who Outwit Pharaoh

God's name doesn't appear in this part of the story, yet His hand is everywhere. Moses' mother hides and protects him. His sister watches from a distance and boldly offers to find a nurse. Pharaoh's own daughter has compassion on the crying child and adopts him, and Moses' mother is paid to nurse her own son. Pharaoh's decree is undone inside his own household.

## 3. What the Name Moses Means

Pharaoh's daughter names him Moses, explaining that she drew him out of the water. The name sounds like the Hebrew verb **מָשָׁה (mashah)**, to draw out. It also resembles an Egyptian word meaning born of, found in names like Thutmose. The boy drawn out of the water will one day draw Israel out through the water.

## 4. A Rescue Attempted Too Soon

Grown up in the palace, Moses sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, kills the Egyptian, and hides the body. The next day a fellow Hebrew rejects him, asking who made him a ruler and judge. When Pharaoh hears of it, Moses flees to Midian. The Midianites were distant relatives of Israel, descended from Abraham through Keturah. There Moses defends the daughters of a priest named Reuel (also called Jethro), marries Zipporah, and names his son Gershom, saying he has become a sojourner in a foreign land. He will spend about forty years there.

## 5. Looking Ahead to Christ

Centuries later, King Herod orders the killing of baby boys in Bethlehem, and the child Jesus is carried to safety in Egypt (Matthew 2). Like Moses, Jesus is rescued as an infant from a murderous king so that He can become the deliverer of His people. Hebrews 11:23–27 also celebrates the faith of Moses' parents, who were not afraid of the king's edict, and of Moses himself, who chose to suffer with God's people.

### Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.3)

**1.3 Q1:** God doesn't appear by name in chapter 2, yet everything works out. Where have you seen God at work behind the scenes?

**1.3 Q2:** Moses saw injustice and acted in his own strength. When have you tried to do God's work your own way?

**1.3 Q3:** What might forty years in Midian have taught Moses that Pharaoh's palace couldn't?

Section 1.4

# God Heard, Remembered, Saw, Knew (Exodus 2:23–3:10)

### Guided Scripture Reading

Read Exodus 2:23–3:10 aloud together from your open ESV Bible. Read 2:23–25 slowly.

## Anchor Verses (ESV)

> **Exodus 2:23–25 (ESV):** During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.
>
> **Exodus 3:5–8 (ESV):** Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

### Teaching Narrative: The Turning Point

## 1. Four Verbs That Change Everything (Exodus 2:23–25)

For two chapters God has been almost silent in the story. Now, as Israel groans and cries out, the text names Him five times in three verses and gives Him four verbs. God **heard**. God **remembered**. God **saw**. God **knew**.

- **זָכַר (zakar), remember:** In the Bible, when God remembers, it doesn't mean He had forgotten. It means He is about to act on His promise. He remembers His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that memory turns into rescue.
- **יָדַע (yada), know:** This is personal, caring knowledge, the kind that comes from being close to someone, not just information about them. The Hebrew sentence ends abruptly, with nothing after it: and God knew. The silence after that phrase is part of the message.

## 2. A Bush That Burns but Isn't Consumed

Moses is tending Jethro's flock near Horeb, the mountain of God, when he sees a bush on fire that doesn't burn up. The Hebrew word for this bush, **סְנֶה (seneh)**, means a thornbush. It sounds like Sinai, the mountain where God will later come down in fire before all Israel. What Moses sees alone here, the whole nation will see in Week 5.

## 3. Holy Ground

God calls Moses by name and tells him not to come near and to take off his sandals, because the ground is **holy**. The Hebrew word **קֹדֶשׁ (qodesh)** means set apart and belonging to God. This is its first appearance in Exodus, and it will become one of the book's key words. God is near enough to speak by name, and holy enough that Moses hides his face.

God then introduces Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus later quotes this line to teach the resurrection: God is the God of the living, not the dead (Mark 12:26–27).

## 4. I Have Come Down to Deliver

In Exodus 3:7–8 God repeats the verbs of chapter 2 in His own voice: He has seen, He has heard, He knows. Then He adds the words of rescue. He has **come down to deliver**. The Hebrew verb **נָצַל (natsal)** means to snatch away or rescue, like pulling someone out of danger. And He will **bring them up** to a good and broad land. Those two actions, rescuing out and bringing up, summarize the whole book of Exodus. In verse 10, God tells Moses that He is sending him to Pharaoh to bring His people out.

### Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.4)

**1.4 Q1:** Which of the four verbs in Exodus 2:24–25 means the most to you right now, and why?

**1.4 Q2:** God came near, yet told Moses not to come near. How do God's closeness and His holiness fit together?

**1.4 Q3:** God says He has come down to deliver. How does Jesus fulfill that?

Section 1.5

# I AM WHO I AM: The Name, the Objections & the Return (Exodus 3:11–4:31)

### Guided Scripture Reading

Read Exodus 3:11–4:31 aloud together from your open ESV Bible.

## Anchor Verses (ESV)

**Exodus 3:13–15 (ESV):** Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. (ESV Footnotes: 3:14 Or I am what I am, or I will be what I will be; 3:15 The word LORD, when spelled with capital letters, stands for the divine name, YHWH, which is here connected with the verb hayah, “to be” in verse 14)

### Teaching Narrative: The God Who Will Be With You

## 1. The Name of God

When Moses asks for God's name, God answers, **אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה (Ehyeh asher ehyeh)**, I AM WHO I AM. The phrase comes from the Hebrew verb hayah, to be, and the ESV footnote shows it can also mean I will be what I will be. In plain English, God's name tells us three things. He exists by Himself and depends on no one. He is always faithful and never changes. And He is actively present with His people.

Just two verses earlier, in 3:12, God used the same verb when He promised Moses, I will be with you. His name and His promise are the same word.

In verse 15 God gives His personal covenant name, **יהוה (YHWH)**. Whenever you see LORD in capital letters in your ESV, it stands for this name. Out of reverence, Jewish readers don't pronounce it and say Adonai, meaning Lord, instead. God says this is His name forever, the name by which He will be remembered in every generation.

## 2. Five Objections and God's Patient Answers

Moses doesn't jump at the call. He raises five objections, and God answers every one:

1. **Who am I?** God doesn't build up Moses' confidence. He answers that He will be with him.
2. **What is Your name?** God reveals Himself as I AM and the LORD.
3. **They won't believe me.** God gives Moses three signs. His staff becomes a serpent, and Pharaoh's crown featured a cobra as a symbol of royal power. His hand becomes diseased and is restored. Nile water poured on the ground becomes blood.
4. **I'm not eloquent.** God reminds Moses that He is the one who made the human mouth, and He will teach him what to say.
5. **Please send someone else.** God's anger burns, yet He is still patient. He provides Moses' brother Aaron to speak alongside him.

## 3. The Return to Egypt (Exodus 4:18–31)

Moses asks Jethro's blessing and starts back to Egypt with his family and the staff of God in his hand. God tells him what to say to Pharaoh: Israel is **בְּנִי בְכֹרִי (beni vekhori)**, my firstborn son. If Pharaoh refuses to let God's son go so that he may serve God, Pharaoh's own firstborn son will die. These words set up the Passover we will study in Week 3.

On the way, at a lodging place, comes one of the most puzzling moments in Scripture (4:24–26). The LORD meets Moses and seeks to put him to death, and Zipporah quickly circumcises their son. Moses, who is about to lead God's covenant people, had neglected the covenant sign in his own home.

Finally Moses and Aaron gather the elders of Israel and show them the signs. The people believe, and when they hear that the LORD has visited them and seen their affliction, they bow their heads and worship. The people who had been serving Pharaoh begin to serve God.

## 4. Looking Ahead to Christ

Jesus takes this name for Himself when He tells the religious leaders that before Abraham was, I am (John 8:58). And the promise I will be with you finds its fullest answer in Jesus, called Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23), who promises to be with His people always, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

### Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.5)

**1.5 Q1:** God answers Who am I? with I will be with you. Why is that a better answer than building up Moses' confidence?

**1.5 Q2:** Which of Moses' objections sounds most like yours when God calls you to something hard?

**1.5 Q3:** What does the name I AM tell you about who God is that you most need to hear?

Section 1.6

## Application, Looking Ahead & Closing Prayer

### Reflection Questions

**1.6 Q1:** Where do you need to trust that God hears, even when nothing has changed yet?

**1.6 Q2:** What is one Who am I? excuse you'll bring to God this week, and how does I will be with you answer it?

### Personal Journal Prompt

Write your own honest cry to God in a few sentences. Then, underneath it, write the four verbs from Exodus 2:24–25: God heard. God remembered. God saw. God knew.

### Looking Ahead to Week 2: Let My People Go (Exodus 5:1–11:10)

Before we meet again, read Exodus 5–11. As you read, notice who hardens Pharaoh's heart, and when.

### Closing Prayer

LORD, You are the God who hears, remembers, sees, and knows. Thank You that no cry of Your people goes unnoticed. Give us courage like Shiphrah and Puah to fear You more than any other power. When we feel small and ask, Who am I?, remind us of Your name and Your promise that You will be with us. We pray in the name of Jesus, our Immanuel. Amen.