

3. No Delusion - The Real God of the Old Testament: A Present God

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[0 : 00] Well, turn with me, if you would, to the book of Exodus in chapter 3. It's our third study this week in this great chapter of the Bible, a great chapter of revelation, of revealing the nature of the God of the Bible.

And, in fact, there's no better place to go for the evidence, to examine the evidence of who God really is, the God of the Old Testament, the God of the Bible, than a chapter like this.

And we've been thinking in these last few weeks about that evidence for the God that the Bible portrays for us, particularly in relation to the wild claims of people like Richard Dawkins.

Let me quote again from his book, *The God Delusion*. This is what it says on the cover. Dawkins, it says, attacks God in all his forms, from the sex-obsessed, cruel tyrant of the Old Testament, to the more benign, but still illogical, celestial watchmaker, favoured by some Enlightenment thinkers.

That's what he does in that book. He just takes a tilt at God in all his forms. Well, we're not going to engage in wild attacks based on prejudice and ignorance, like Professor Dawkins.

[1 : 31] I'm afraid the Oxford professor, the public understanding of science, doesn't give a very good example, really, about what science is supposed to be about. As far as I understand it, science is supposed to be about looking at evidence and drawing conclusions from it.

But he doesn't seem to do that. Somebody sent me this week an internet link about a meeting that Professor Dawkins did fairly recently in Inverness. And that was quite interesting.

And he, unknown to him, I think, was asked a question by Lord Mackay of Clashfern, the former Lord Chancellor. And I didn't give a very good answer to it. And there was an interesting review of the whole meeting.

A very good review, a very fair review, I think, on the internet. But one of the things that the reviewer was pointing out was exactly what Professor Dawkins always does. And that is, point out the fact that what he is attacking when he attacks God is not at all the God of the Bible.

His enormous flaw, which is one of his presuppositions that he builds everything upon, is that all religions are pretty much the same.

[2 : 42] He lumps everybody's idea of God, every possible thing imaginable, into one, and then attacks God. Well, it's quite ridiculous, isn't it?

Many of the things that he attacks in his book, anybody with any sense would attack, because it's ridiculous and absurd and preposterous. But, you see, Professor Dawkins makes no distinction whatsoever between the most crazy and nutty possible view of God that you could have and the view of God that is clearly set out and argued and revealed in the pages of the Bible.

So what we're going to do tonight is what we've done the last couple of weeks, simply continue looking at the evidence that we actually find in the Bible, in fact, in the Old Testament, indeed, as to what the God of the Bible is really like.

We're going to look at the Bible's own claim for who God is, not some wild accusation made up out of nowhere. And we're doing it in this chapter 3 of the book of Exodus, this extraordinary chapter.

And we've already seen in this chapter that this God, the God of the Bible, is indeed a personal God. He's holy, yes he is, in a burning fire of holiness.

[3 : 56] He's unapproachable to sinful human beings. And yet, he's a God who makes himself approachable. He condescends to enable this man, Moses, to draw near into his presence.

But notice, only in a particular way, only by the command of God, only by doing it his way. Verse 5, he says to Moses, take off your sandals.

Are you going to approach me? You must do it this way, because this is holy ground. So you can't just approach the God of the Bible any old way. You can't just make up your own religion and say, well, this is how I'm going to do God.

No. This God tells you how he can be approached. He's a personal God, though, and he remains personal. He's a God who's faithful to his people, despite the many failings.

We saw that. He's the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, and the God of Moses, and his family as well. And as we saw last week, he's not, in any way, a distant God, a disinterested God.

[4 : 58] He's not an ogre, but neither is he the watchmaker, who just sets the universe in motion and spins it off. No, he's a passionate God.

We saw that last time, verses 6 and 7. He's a God who has a seeing eye and a hearing ear. And he's a God with a feeling heart. Verse 7, I've seen the affliction of my people.

I know their sufferings. And he's a God with a strong arm. I've come down, he says, to deliver them. He's a passionate God.

Not because he has to be, not because he's forced into it by us, but because he chooses to be. But in verses 11 to 15, and these are the verses we want to look at, particularly this evening, we'll discover even more about this God, the God of the Old Testament.

It comes in these words, particularly about the revelation God gives us of his own intimate, personal name, the name Yahweh or Jehovah.

[6 : 02] The four letters that you'll see in the footnote to verse 15 say is the name of God, the Lord. It's translated in capital letters in most English Bibles.

It was just the four letters, Y, H, W and H in the Hebrew that was always penned, because the name of the Lord was so holy, it wasn't ever to be even pronounced.

And whenever a pious Jew would be reading through the Old Testament scriptures and they came across the name, they would simply substitute the name, the Lord or my Lord. And that's why our translators have kept that fashion.

But what's so important about a name of God? It may be hard for us to understand, because I guess for us, names don't tend to have all that much significance, do they?

When we name our children, I suppose we just, we choose a name that we like. Or maybe sometimes we, I don't know, maybe we're afflicting them. Sometimes you hear some names and you wonder if the parents are afflicting them.

[7 : 03] Some of these ridiculous names, especially pop stars and so on. Although there's other names too, aren't there? I remember when I went to live, first of all, in England, and I suddenly started to meet people called Rupert.

I'd never met anybody called Rupert before in Scotland. And I seemed to meet, every third person I met seemed to be called Ruperts. I couldn't understand it. And they said, well, don't you have Ruperts in Scotland? I said, well, if they are, they don't seem to survive beyond nursery school. But, anyway, if there's anybody here tonight called Rupert, well done for surviving this long. But you just wouldn't do that in Scotland, really.

I've just remembered, Rupert Hunt Taylor's about to come back and join us in the next couple of weeks. So perhaps, you better look out for him, just in case. But our names don't tend to be endowed with immense amount of meaning, do they?

Although our surnames can be. I suppose, there's still something there left over often from the past, isn't there? So if you, if you meet somebody called John Baker, probably, some way back in time, he had an ancestor who was a baker.

[8 : 02] And, likewise, Jack Farmer. You'll probably find that, once upon a time, one of his ancestors was a farmer. And names do have some sort of meaning, or did more in the past. I guess with us, though, we could understand it a little better if we think about nicknames, couldn't we?

Because they do tend to have meaning. Remember when I was at school, one of my friends was called Rubik. And it was the time of Rubik Cubes being very fashionable. And he had a particularly square head. And so, he was always called Rubik.

And I met him just a few years ago, and we're still calling him Rubik. But we've got nicknames, don't we? I mean, some of my flatmates. I had a flatmate called Fat Boy. I don't have to tell you about that. It's pretty obvious, isn't it?

Another one called Ebenezer Scrooge, because he was such a humbug. If I were to say to you, there's a chap over there, we call him Chancer. Then, I guess you would have a fair idea as to his

character, wouldn't you?

And names in the Bible, not nicknames, but, they do have that sense of induing the bearer with character. And God's name is not a nickname, but it is a name full of meaning.

[9 : 12] And the name that he reveals about himself here is a personal name. It's an intimate name that he reveals to his people so that he can reveal the very essence of his being to his people.

In giving us his name, he reveals wonderful things about himself. He tells us who he is. He tells us what kind of God he is and what he's like. He tells us the kind of things he does and why he does them.

See, the word today, God, it's almost meaningless, isn't it? If you go out to Buchanan Street and you do a survey and you ask people, do you believe in God?

A very high proportion of people will say yes. That tells you absolutely nothing. The conception of God could be almost anything. The question really is, well, which God?

What kind of God? What's he like? That's the issue that Professor Dawkins just ignores in his book. He doesn't realize that's what really matters.

[10 : 14] But you see, God's name, the Lord, Jehovah, or Yahweh, however you pronounce it, his name tells us everything about himself in a very wonderful way. And knowing his name, knowing his name means not just knowing something about God, but it really means that you do know him personally.

It's just like knowing somebody's family nickname, isn't it? It might be a family that you're very close to, people you know very, very well, and that you might call their children by the kind of nickname that their parents call them.

That says that you're intimate, you're involved, you've got a deep knowledge of that family, you're on the inside in a way that other people perhaps aren't. And that's the way it is with God.

If you're somebody here tonight who's not a Christian believer, I guess it's very likely that when you speak about God, you just use that word, God. But I suspect that if you're a Christian who loves the Lord Jesus, you tend to talk much more about God using the name the Lord.

You speak about the Lord, you pray to the Lord, you talk to people, you talk about the Lord, not just God. And his name tells us about who he is.

[11 : 31] And above all, what the name Yahweh, or the Lord, tells us is that he is the God who is present. He's not distant, he's not disinterested. He's present with his people and he's present for his people.

He is present with us to be everything that we will ever need him to be. He's the God who is God with his people.

Put it all together like that. That's what his name means. That's what God tells us his name signifies. It tells us who he is. It's in his very name.

I am the God who is with my people. Put it for short, it's all in that name the Lord. God. He's the God who is present. Look first at verse 12 and you'll see this here with me.

First of all, he's present, isn't he, with his prophet. I will be with you, he says to Moses. Now Moses had said, who on earth am I to go to Pharaoh and be a great deliverer?

[12 : 39] Who am I to do something like that? It's pretty understandable, isn't it? He's just a shepherd out in the desert and God suddenly wants to make him into the great deliverer of his people. But you see, God says to Moses, it's not you and not who you are, but it's who I am and I will be with you.

See, all Moses' personal inadequacy is going to be met by God's abundant adequacy. All Moses' inability is met by God's great and infinite ability.

He's the God who's present with his prophet. He's present with his servant. And that's what guarantees the future. See in the second half of verse 12, you see, it's for certain, he says, you'll look back from this very mountain with all the people that you bring out.

You'll all be worshipping here and you'll see what it means to have had my presence with you. See what he's saying? The promise of God's presence is so powerful that absolutely nothing else is needed to guarantee the future but that word.

The sign in the future will simply testify to the power of God's very name. Now that must have been a wonderful comfort to Moses, don't you think? But you know, it's a wonderful encouragement to every single one of God's people.

[14:04] Every time when God gives you or me a task to do and you think to yourself, who am I to do that? God says, it's not who you are, it's who I am.

I will be with you. I'm sure most of us feel like that when we have a particular task to do for God, where we have some area of service that we're being called to.

We feel very inadequate, don't we? But God says, I will be with you and that's what matters. Just think of what those words mean when you're facing something difficult, something really hard, something that you fear.

It's often the case, isn't it, that when we're facing something like that personally, we say, well, I'd love to have somebody with me. Maybe it's a hospital appointment. Maybe it's somewhere where you're expecting to hear some bad news.

The most natural thing in the world, isn't it, is to say to a friend, will you come with me? Well, all the more so with God. And he says, I will be with you.

[15:08] God certainly calls us to trust him and Moses had to trust God's promise but it was his presence alone that was enough for Moses. He is sufficient, he says, for everything that you'll need.

You just need to know that I'll be with you. And every time when God calls us, you or me, to do anything in his name, like speak up for him in a hostile world, bear witness to him, just like Moses, he says to us, but I will be with you.

That's what the God of the Old Testament is like. He's a God who's present. And you see that all the way through the Bible. Remember in the New Testament in the book of Acts when Paul the Apostle was in that fearful pagan city, Corinth.

And God had sent him there to preach the gospel and he had a hard time. There were people opposing him, people against him. I think it must have been very dispiriting for the Apostle.

Remember what happened?

The Lord came and appeared to him in a vision. And he said to him, don't be afraid. Go on speaking. Don't be silent, Paul, for I am with you. And I have many people in this city.

[16:21] And on the strength of that, Paul went on for 18 months, day after day, preaching the gospel of Christ in that fearful pagan city. just because he knew that God, the Lord, was with him.

And out of that extraordinary ministry in Corinth, an amazing church was born. One of the strongest and most vibrant churches of the New Testament.

God is present with his prophet, Moses, then, way back, thousands of years ago, and with Paul in the first century. And he's still present with his prophets today with every single person who has to speak a word for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone that God commissions with a task, whatever it is of speaking up for him, he's the God, he says, who will be with us. He's present with his prophet, but more than that, if you look at verses 13 to 15, he's present with all his people.

See, another question comes from Moses. Well, what am I to say to them when they ask me, which God is this that you're speaking about, Moses? Now, it might have been that the Israelites would be testing Moses to see if he really was one of them.

[17:38] Only a true Israelite would know the sacred, holy name of the covenant God. We can't be sure, but perhaps that's what Moses was thinking. And it may be that Moses himself even knew that he didn't know that name.

Remember, he'd been brought up away from his people with the Egyptians and so on. Or perhaps it was simply that the enslaved Israelites would doubt that God even cared about them.

That he would have any power to help them at all. What's this God really like? This God who seems to have let us stay here for ages and ages as slaves in Egypt.

How do we know this God cares about our misery, our plight? How do we know that he's with us at all? You could understand it if he felt like that, couldn't you? Well, God's answer to these questions is very wonderful in verse 14.

I am, he says, or I will be what I will be. That's my name. And what he is and what he will be is with his people just as he was with Moses.

[18:46] He'll be with them to be to them and for them everything that they're ever going to need him to be. He's present with his people and for his people through all generations. Do you see that?

He'll never leave them or forsake them. This is my name that's to be remembered, verse 15, throughout all generations. You see how God keeps repeating that phrase, the people of Israel.

It's there in verse 13, isn't it? If I come to the people of Israel, there in verse 14 says God, say this to the people of Israel. Verse 15, say to the people of Israel.

You see, they're my people. That's what God's saying. I'm not going to forget them. I am what I am and I will be what I will be. I'll be the God who is present with my people forever.

That Hebrew verb, I am, isn't something that just speaks about existence. That's obviously presupposed, but it means something active and personal.

[19:50] It's an active personal presence. Tell my people I am and I will be present with them. I will be with you. That's what it means. In fact, so true is it that the very essence of who God is virtually defines his name.

You see, in verse 15, we're told the name Lord, Yahweh, Jehovah, whatever it is, however we're supposed to pronounce it. And you'll see there in the footnote, it tells you it's probably related to the verb, Haya, the verb to be.

In other words, I am Haya and the name, the Lord, Yahweh. They're related, aren't they? And it's his very name, the intimate name that God gives to his people.

It speaks of his intimate presence. My very name speaks of me being present. I will be with you.

The very essence of this God is that he's the one who's present with his people and will be through all generations.

That's the hallmark of this God. Remember the promise back to Abraham? We were speaking about it just this morning in Genesis 12. The four things. He promised Abraham people, a great nation.

[21:11] He promised him a place, the land of promise. Promised him a plan through whom he would bless the whole world through Abraham and his presence to bless him, to protect him.

I will bless those who bless you and I will curse those who curse you. That's the God we're speaking about, the God who's present with his people. We're not talking about some made-up idea of God, some kind of totally different type of God, some cruel ogre, some malevolent tyrant.

Not at all. We're talking about a God who is present, who's with his people and will be all that they ever need him to be, forever and ever.

I will be what I will be and what I will be is present with my people. And all of that meaning is squeezed into that one little word, the Lord, Yahweh, the name.

And that's, all of that implied every single time you read that name, the Lord, in the pages of scripture. The God who is with his people forever.

[22:19] Every time you read that word, the Lord, that's what it means. He's the sufficient God, he's the sovereign God, he's the saving God, he's the God who's near his people and always will be for every need that they have.

and to know and possess all of that is just what it means to know the name of the Lord. And that's why the Bible makes so much of the name of the Lord.

The psalmist says, the name of the Lord is a strong tower, I run into it and I'm safe. The name of the Lord dwells in his holy temple and where God makes his name dwell, there he himself dwells.

Read Deuteronomy chapter 12, it's all about worshipping God and rejoicing in the presence at the place where I make my name to dwell. What does that mean?

It means it's the place where God himself is, where he's present. That's why Jesus in Matthew chapter 18 says that even where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of you.

[23:30] He's present God's very name means he's the God who's present, who draws near and is always drawing near to his people. He's present with his prophet Moses, he's present with his people throughout all the generations making himself known by that name.

And that's also why when we come to the climax of the story in the New Testament we find that above all he's the God who's present supremely and perfectly in person in the person of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

He's God present with us forever. He's the unchanging God you see with an unchanging mission to be personally present among his people.

Remember how Matthew begins his gospel right back in chapter one? It's with a name, isn't it? With a wonderful name, a glorious name. Son of God conceived by the Holy Spirit, the son that's going to be given to Mary.

The angel says you shall call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins. And all this took place to fulfill what the Lord has spoken by the prophet.

[24 : 49] Behold a virgin will conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel. all. What does that mean? God with us.

He's a God who's present, who's with his people, for his people forever. And most wonderfully comes to a climax in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. God himself with us in the person of his son forever and ever.

And in Jesus Christ you see God gives us the final chapter of what began in the revelation of his name to Moses. right back then at the burning bush. But it's complete in Jesus Christ.

That's why Jesus says in John chapter 17, I have manifested your name to the people you gave me out of the world. He says I've made known to them your name and I will continue to make it known. In Jesus the name of God as the God who is with his people is made fully known. them. And John ends his gospel, you remember, in chapter 20 verse 31 by telling us that he's written all these things that he wrote about Jesus so that you might believe on the basis of all his gathered evidence about Jesus.

[26 : 08] And notice, not without evidence. Again, faith is not, as Richard Dawkins says, a leap into the dark without any facts. No, not in the Bible. Faith is based on evidence to step into the light of that which is factual and True, clear evidence and testimony.

But John writes, he says, so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that by believing, you might have life in his name.

And that's the mission, isn't it? That Jesus handed over to his followers as he ascended to heaven, to make his name known all throughout the world. And to make disciples, baptizing them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

What were Jesus' very last words? Behold, he said, I am with you always.

See, he's present with his people forever. He's the unchanging God. He's the God who's present with his people to be to them and for them. Everything that they will ever need him to be.

[27 : 25] So let me ask you this this evening. Do you know this present God? Do you know the name of the Lord?

Is he just God to you? Is he just a way out there somewhere? A thought, an abstract idea? Or is he actually to you, the Lord?

You see, to know him like that is to know his presence. To know him. Can you pray like that? Can you pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? My Lord. That's what tells you if you know God. You know his name. You call him Lord in Jesus Christ. And the message you see of the Bible and the evidence of the Bible is that you can be near to this God because because he has drawn near to you in the person of Jesus Christ.

He's the God who's present and draws near. It's his defining feature. It's all in that name, the Lord. For us, made most clear in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[28 : 36] Christ. That's a question for you and for me. That's why the Apostle Peter in Acts chapter 4 says there's no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

No other name. But why would you want to seek any other name? Any other God? Because the Bible tells us everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

You see, our God the Christian God isn't some cruel tyrant. He's not some distant ogre. He's the God who's present. He's Emmanuel.

He's the God who's with his people forever and ever and ever. Will you remember that this week? When you have to face that difficult thing that you've been dreading whatever it is you feel so alone. Or when you find yourself in a position perhaps having to stand up for the truth of God in the face of ridicule and contempt and you feel very weak you feel very afraid you feel I could never do that just like Moses felt.

[29 : 49] Or maybe when you get the chance to speak to somebody you know about Jesus you've been praying about and somebody you long to be a Christian and you just feel so inadequate you feel you can't articulate it you'll get the words all wrong.

Will you remember the name of our God I will be with you. That's what his name says. That's my name.

It's my name forever. The I will be with you God. He is what he is and he will be what he will be forever.

And what he is and what he will always be is the God who's present. Lo I am with you always. His parting word to us. let's never forget it. Let's pray. Our gracious God we thank you that you have told us your name that it is a name of wonder and of delight a name of power and authority a name of grace and mercy and a name that above all reminds us that you are the God who loves us and who is near us.

[31 : 18] So we thank you and we pray that you would keep us ever mindful of your great and glorious name for we ask it through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Amen.