

4. No Delusion - The Real God of the Old Testament: A Promising God

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Well, do turn with me, if you would, to Exodus chapter 3. And we're especially looking today at verses 16 to the end of the chapter.

It's the last of four studies that we've had together in this wonderful chapter, this famous chapter where God meets with Moses and speaks to him from a bush that's burning, flaming fire, and yet never consumed. Extraordinary thing.

If it's your first time with us, then you might like to listen in online to the other three studies. Because what we've been doing here is seeking together to discover the truth about the real God of the Bible.

In particular, the real God of the Old Testament, as described to us, as found in the Old Testament itself. Now, we've especially been focusing on this because of, well, because of the vitriolic attacks on the God of the Bible that are all around us today.

Especially the God of the Old Testament. We've been thinking particularly about Richard Dawkins, the Oxford professor, and his book, *The Delusional God*. I don't know if it's still top of the bestseller list, but it was for a very long time.

[1 : 17] But in that book, Richard Dawkins dismisses the God of the Bible in very hostile terms, very offensive terms. A vindictive, bloodthirsty, control freak is the God of the Bible.

A sadomasochistic, malevolent bully. And many other words just like that. Well, maybe it is offensive. It is offensive, isn't it? But I'm not really that interested, actually, in protesting about being offended.

I don't think, really, in general, it matters terribly much, does it, if we as Christians are offended. Seems to me the Lord Jesus tells us to expect these sorts of things all through our lives.

I'm not sure that it's terribly wise all the time for Christians to be making great protests about things that offend us. You know, blasphemous plays and the kind of things you have on television and so on.

Whether we should be protesting that we're offended because we're not allowed to wear crosses or things like that. I'm not sure that's the most important thing. Much more important is that we should be seeking to defend our right to speak the truth, make the gospel heard.

[2 : 33] In other words, I think as Christians it's more important that we fight for our responsibilities to proclaim the gospel rather than fight for our rights not to be offended.

I'm not sure what you think about that. But anyway, at any rate, what matters more than sticking up for our feelings as Christians certainly is sticking up for the truth of God in the face of error.

And actually that's the real problem, isn't it, with Richard Dawkins' book. It's not that he's offensive. He is offensive. Sometimes gratuitously offensive. But that's not the main issue.

The main issue I have with the book is that it's wrong. It's false. But it's arrogantly peddling something that is untrue. And I suppose he's doing it for great profit, isn't he?

And at the same time he's deluding others, leading them astray, deceiving them about the God of the Bible. Now he claims, Professor Dawkins, to be a scientist, a man of evidence.

[3 : 36] But I have to tell you that at least when the subject is God, that is simply not true. He claims in his book, towards the end, that his way is the way of science. He says, the honest and systematic endeavor to find the truth about the real world.

Well, all that I'm seeking to do in these studies is to show at least that in what he says about the God of the Old Testament, he simply has not and does not honestly examine the evidence with any integrity at all.

Quite clear when you read his book. The evidence, of course, that I'm talking about is the evidence of the Old Testament itself. And as we've seen, when you do actually examine the evidence in Scripture, for example, as we've been doing in this chapter, Exodus chapter 3, well, we find that the truth is the portrait of God that we find there is very different indeed from the one Dr. Dawkins would have us believe in.

We've seen already, haven't we, this God is a personal God. He's not a blind watchmaker. He's high and holy. Yes, he is. And yet he's condescending to be approachable to sinful people. He's a God who's faithful to his people all through the ages, despite their many failings. He's still the God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob. We've seen he's a passionate God, not a distant one, not an ogre.

[5 : 01] He's a God who sees and who hears and who feels the pain of those he loves. Let's just look at verse 7 again. I have surely seen the affliction of my people. I've heard their cry. I know their sufferings.

We saw last time he's a present God. His very name, Yahweh or Jehovah, the Lord, as it's there in capital letters in verse 14. That very name declares him to be the one who is with his people forever, to be to them and for them all that they ever need him to be. And now lastly tonight, I want us to see another wonderful defining feature of this God, the true God of the Bible. And it's this.

He is a promising God. He makes promises to his people and when he does, he always, always keeps his promises. He's a God that you can trust utterly for your future.

Because he is the God who has been proved over and over again and always in the past to have been absolutely true to his word, faithful to his promises. You can trust this God.

[6 : 10] And when you do, he will never, ever let you down. And that's the message of the last section of this wonderful chapter. It's all about the promises of a promising God.

Promises with a proven history and therefore promises that give us, his people today, a present hope. Look first at verses 16 to 18 because they tell us that the promises of this God have a proven history.

His promises have been proven to be true in the past. You see? When God tells Moses to go to the Israelites with his word for their deliverance, it's not some new word that he's giving them.

It's an old promise. It's a very, very old promise. In verse 16, he reminds them this, doesn't it? He's the God of the patriarchs.

He's the God who spoke to Abraham. And this God, says verse 17, this is the God who promises now to bring them out of the affliction of Egypt and into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, and the Amorites.

[7 : 17] You see, that's very, very significant, isn't it? Because that is not a new promise. Turn back with me to the book of Genesis and to Genesis chapter 15. It's quite familiar. We've just recently studied it in our Sunday mornings, haven't we?

Look back to Genesis 15, verse 13. What God says to Abraham when he's making his covenant with him. As for yourself, he says, verse 13, the Lord said to Abraham, know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there and they will be afflicted for 400 years.

But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve and afterward they shall come out with a great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace. You shall be buried in a good old age and they shall come back here in the fourth generation.

For the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. You see that? God had promised all the way back, hundreds of years before, what he was promising again to the people of Israel that he was going to do right now in their lifetime.

500 years nearly before. That was when God made that promise first. So they had been slaves, just as he had said, for over 400 years after Abraham's death.

[8 : 46] All of that had come true. But then, when the Sin of the Amorites, that's the Canaanite peoples, that's the name that covers all that list of names there in verse 17.

When the pagan enemies in Canaan had at last reached the height of their sin, then and only then, God would bring them to judgment.

It's just what we were seeing this morning, isn't it? In Genesis 19. When God judges, he's never precipitate, he's never hasty. He allows time after time after time for people to come to repentance.

But, when the sin of the Amorites came to its climax, then God would bring his people to inherit the land that he had promised.

But do you see the point? God made that promise 500 years ago. And once this God makes a promise, he never forgets his promises. He never revokes them. Even if it might seem to us as though that promise has been long forgotten.

[9 : 50] See, we live, don't we, in a world of broken promises today. It's very hard for us to trust when people make promises.

Think of politicians. We're so used to it, aren't we? Promises and promises and more promises in their manifestos. And then after a little bit of time, promises all get forgotten, don't they?

And they're not kept. Or else, the rules are changed and things are made different so that it can seem like promises are being kept. But of course they haven't. So we become cynical.

We find it very hard to believe that anybody can keep promises, even God. Now children aren't like that though, are they? They know that a promise is a promise.

When you make a promise, you keep a promise. But Dad, you promised. You've heard that plenty of times, haven't you? But Mom, you promised.

[10 : 47] There's no argument, is there? A promise is a promise. We have lots of important promises like that in our house. Sometimes they regard sweets. Some of our kids think that sweets are some of the most important things in life, aren't they?

But there was a promise just like that today, just after lunchtime. Our kids don't always get sweets every day. They do on Saturdays sometimes if they're good. But on Sundays, they know that they always get sweets.

On Saturdays, they might get sweets if they've been very good. They don't get sweets very often on a Saturday. But on Sundays, always.

Because Sunday is the Lord's day. It's the day we remember God's gracious gift to us, even though we deserve nothing. So on Sundays, even if we're bad, we get sweets. And that is a certain promise.

It's a promise that has been proven in the past. And Dad knows when the words come, but Dad, you promised. There's nothing I can do. That's a promise that must be kept.

[11 : 54] And you see, that's the point that God is making here. I promised. 500 years ago, yes. But a mere 500 years doesn't make that promise defunct.

Of course not. And that's reinforced in what he says here about Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. You see, just like in verse 6 where he said that. Here again, you see in verse 16, he's saying the same thing.

He is their God. He's still their God. It's not that he was their God. He still is. He promised to be their God forever. And that means not even death can destroy or cancel that promise.

He's still their God because he's still living in their presence. If you don't believe that, read Mark 12 verse 27. That's exactly what Jesus tells us God is saying there.

He's the God of the living, not the dead. He's still Abraham's God because way back in Genesis, God promised he would be. He promised him an everlasting covenant.

[12 : 55] An everlasting promise. It's never going to fail. It's always going to be true. It's a promise that lasts forever and forever and forever to be God to him.

Not even death can sever God's promises to us. Just yesterday, at the wedding, we were uttering those words, weren't we? Till death us do part.

Well, alas, today sometimes there is a parting long before death, isn't there? But death does finish even that exclusive promise, doesn't it?

Even when there has been faithfulness in marriage right till the very end, death breaks that promise. Till death us do part. But not even death breaks God's promises to his people.

That's the point. Certainly not just a few centuries, 500 years or so. No, says God, I promised then and my promise stands. I will bring you out of affliction and into that land.

[13 : 57] It's a promise. The promises of God have a proven history. They last. They've never been forgotten. Isn't that encouragement to us when we read the Bible and its promises?

When we think of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ that seems so long ago to us. Lo, he says, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Do you think he's broken that promise?

Think time has just withered it. He's got to a stage where he feels, ach well, that's an old one, they'll not remember. Of course not. I go to prepare a place for you.

And I will come again and take you to be with myself. It's an old one, isn't it? But God's promises have a proven history. There's abundant testimony to that all through Scripture. Every page reveals the faithfulness of God to his promises. And if we are honest as Christians, we can bear abundant testimony to that also in our own lives, can't we?

[15:05] I could get you one after the other to come up here tonight and pay testimony to the absolute faithfulness of God to his promises to you. That's why we love to sing that hymn, isn't it? Great is thy faithfulness.

You can see you singing it with smiles on your faces. God and his promises have a proven history. And that means, therefore, that there is with this God a present hope.

You can trust this God for the future because of his proven past. even when the present situation seems very, very lacking in hope. And that's how it was for the Israelites then, wasn't it?

Look at verse 19. They're under oppression. The king of Egypt, even God says, will not let you go. He's a powerful tyrant. He's got a hold over them. They're helpless.

They're in absolute slavery. Think of what we've been seeing on our news about Burma today. Think of the land of North Korea.

[16:07] The people of Israel then were under exactly that kind of yoke. They were not free. The situation was bleak. But God has promised.

All those years ago, yes, but it still stands. And therefore, look at the very last line in verse 22. Sorry, verse, yes, verse 22.

You shall plunder the Egyptians. That seemed impossible to them. Ridiculous. But no, it shall be so because, says God in verse 20, do you see?

I will stretch out my mighty hand. I will do wonders. The NIV says, I will perform wonders. And I love that because it gives three great Ps in this passage.

Look at verse 17. I have promised, says God. So, verse 20, I will perform wonders. And therefore, verse 22, you will plunder your enemies.

[17:08] You won't get a better summary of the gospel anywhere in the Bible than that. I have promised, I will perform, and you will plunder. You can trust this God because he has a proven history.

And that means that we can have a present hope. And notice the focus here, by the way, on God's promise. It's not just on deliverance, is it? In fact, it's not even primarily on deliverance.

It's on what follows deliverance. It's on the destination, the destiny. Look at verse 17 again. There is a deliverance, a real deliverance, yes, out of the affliction. And they must never forget that.

They'll never be allowed to forget that, the people of Israel. The Passover, every year, will remind them what they've been delivered from. And it will remind them of the blood that delivered them.

But you see, it's deliverance into a destiny. I will deliver you out of affliction into the land, the land of promise, the land flowing with milk and honey, the glorious place of God's blessing.

[18:12] And it's not even a bare deliverance, is it? Not at all. Look at verses 20 and 21. You shall not go empty, he says. No, they will go laden with riches, with gold and silver and clothing, all from the Egyptians.

Remember, just like Abraham came up out of Egypt, laden with the booty of the place. And that's the present hope that belongs to the people of God.

A glorious deliverance into an abundant destiny, all because when our God promises something, he always keeps his promise. he's a promising God, he's the Lord, he's the covenant God.

And his covenant, his promise, is everlasting for those he calls his own. And what that means, friends, is you can trust our God. You can have a present hope because he has a proven past.

His promises will never fail, not ever. And the people of Israel needed to know that, didn't they? Because even at the end of the book of Exodus, they're out of Egypt, but they're not yet in the promised land, are they?

[19:22] They've got a long way to go, many, many days of hardness and struggle and toil before they see, finally, what God has promised. But they have a promising God and therefore they can have a present hope.

It's not so different really for us as followers of Jesus today, is it? If you're a believer in Christ, you know that you've been delivered. You've been delivered from the past, you know that.

Jesus' death took away all your sin and all your guilt. He destroyed the tyrant who had you in slavery under his mighty hand. He performed wonders of grace, didn't He?

At the cross in Calvary. It is a great deliverance. And when God brought you to faith, He delivered you. Now, says Jesus, the ruler of this world is cast out.

The tyrant's hold is broken. You're delivered and that's what happened when you became a Christian. And already as Christians we're laden, aren't we, with many, many riches from God.

[20 : 28] By virtue of that deliverance, we rejoice in peace with God. We share the wonderful blessings, don't we, of being intimate family. We can call God Father.

He's near us. No longer does He hold anything at all against us. No guilt. Being a Christian is truly wonderful, isn't it?

That's why Peter says we rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory. All of that. And yet still, we're not yet at our final destination, are we?

We've not yet received all that God has promised. We haven't yet received the new bodies, the resurrection bodies He's promised us. We've not yet received our eternal home in glory that Jesus promises us when He comes again.

We've not yet inherited all that the Gospel does promise to us. And what's more, it's been a very, very long time, hasn't it, since Jesus made those promises?

[21 : 33] Two thousand years. Can we really trust Him? Can we really still believe that it will be exactly as He said?

Can we? Well, that's one reason that we have the Bible. It's one reason why we have the Old Testament, isn't it? Paul says in Romans 15, all these things are written for us and for our instruction.

He says, that is so, so that through endurance and the encouragement of Scriptures, we might have hope. We might have present hope. He goes on to say, you see, that Christ came in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs and in order that the Gentiles, that's people like most of us, that we might glorify God for His mercy.

And he ends by saying, may the God of peace fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

You see that? God wants us not just to have hope but to abound in present hope. Present hope. Real peaceful assurance that all that God has promised us in Jesus will be because of the encouragement of everything that we see.

[22 : 53] He promised in the past and that came true. He's a God with a proven track record. He keeps His promises always to Abraham and all the more to us in Jesus Christ.

That's the joy of Easter, isn't it? That's why we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus because the resurrection is the great climax of all God's promises. He is risen and therefore we have unshakable hope.

First Christ, says Paul, the first fruits, the firstborn of the new creation. He rises in real human flesh never to die again.

And then His promises at His coming all, not just some, all who belong to Him. That's His promise. He's promised right from the beginning.

Promised to Abraham. Fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And He's performed His triumph over hell and death. And He's risen.

[24 : 02] And therefore we shall plunder. And we shall be with Him. And we shall be like Him as He is. It's a promise, you see, of our promising God.

And God's promises have a proven history and therefore they are certain. They give us a present hope. I suspect that if you're like me you forget that a lot of the time.

And maybe you just need to hear it again today and to be reminded of the certainty that we do have standing on the promises of God. However old those promises may be, however much it seems that God may have forgotten them.

You might be thinking tonight, well, I've still got a long journey to go with God. I'm young. Or maybe I'm just quite a new Christian. I'm just beginning to discover that well, the Christian life is really hard. The temptations all round. The struggles. There's hardship. There's mockery. When you stand up for the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, yes, it is hard.

[25 : 13] Jesus said that. It will always be so for believers. In the world, he said, you shall have tribulation. And maybe you're saying to yourself, well, I'm beginning to see this in my life. I'm just not sure I'll have the strength to make it.

Will I really be able to make another 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 years being faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ? Well, you've got promises.

Haven't you? From a God whose promises have a proven history. Listen. He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ, says Philippians 1, verse 6.

That's a promise, isn't it? And Hebrews 10, verse 23, tells us to keep going. Let us hold fast, he says, to the confession of our hope without wavering, why?

For he who promised is faithful. You can trust this God, you see, to be with you and to take you home. He's got a track record.

[26 : 18] Maybe you're a parent here tonight and you worry about your children, you worry about how you bring them up, how you prepare them for life, how you prepare them for the future. So many things are around us today, aren't they?

So many pressures on our children. So many snares and temptations that face them. It's easy to be fearful, isn't it, as a parent? It'd be something strange in a way if we weren't.

But listen, God doesn't want us to bring up our children in fear like that. No, and not at all. He wants us to bring them up with him. He wants us to bring them up in faith and we can trust him.

Listen to what the psalmist says. The loving kindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him and his righteousness to children's children to those who keep his covenant. That's why we're not just promised but we're commanded to bring up our children in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord. Don't hinder the little ones from coming to me, says the Lord Jesus, for such is the kingdom of heaven.

[27 : 29] We can bring our little ones to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith and with confidence on the strength of his promises to us. The promise is for you and for your children.

This is the God with a track record. We can trust his promises and as parents we must trust his promises. There's no hope if we don't, is there? Maybe you're somebody who lacks assurance in your faith.

You're just somebody who finds it so hard to believe that you could possibly really be accepted by God. That you could really be saved by him. And you find that so hard to believe that you worry. You really do worry that perhaps you aren't. And the more you think about yourself, well, the less worthy you feel. Isn't that right? It's always the way. The more convinced you are that, well, you just can't be assured of your salvation.

Let me tell you this tonight, if that's you, that is a terrible lie of the evil one. A filthy lie. It's never, ever, our Heavenly Father who tempts you to despair like that.

[28 : 42] That's Satan. It's Satan who lies to you, tells you of the guilt that's within. Because God has promised us that there is no guilt anymore for those who are in Christ.

No condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. So don't trust the lies of the devil. Trust the promises of God. Listen to the Apostle John in 1 John chapter 2.

Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.

and this is the promise he made to us. Eternal life. That you be worried you can really be assured of your salvation.

It's his promise to you. Stand on his promises not on your feelings. You love the Lord don't you? I know you do.

[29 : 47] Well trust him. Listen to what James says. James 1 verse 12. God has promised the crown of life to all who love him.

That's a promise. Maybe for you it's just despair at the state of the world today. You find it hard to think things will ever change. Maybe you begin to doubt that Jesus ever really will come and put things right.

Maybe you've read some books that discuss why it's so long that Jesus hasn't come and they've said well he was mistaken. He got it all wrong.

So did the apostles. Maybe you think it's all hopeless that God is finished. Maybe you wonder if the scoffers of the world are right then it is all just pie in the sky what these Christians think.

easy isn't it when everybody around you is saying that. But remember that our present hope rests on a past proven history.

[30 : 52] We can trust God. Read 2 Peter chapter 3 when you go home tonight. He prepares us for all of this. People will always be saying says Peter where is this coming that you've promised?

It's all nonsense. The world isn't going to end. It's just going to go on the way it always has. But no says Peter God is not slow in fulfilling his promise. He's patient.

There's a reason for it. He's giving time for many, many to repent and to find life. Doesn't that give us a rather different slant on life and the world and all its problems?

But don't be mistaken says Peter. Listen. According to his promise we are waiting for a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

we are waiting for that. It is coming. Jesus said fear not little flock it is the father's pleasure to give you his kingdom because it's a promise.

[31 : 55] Perhaps for some of us it is just that we know we're nearing the end of the road in this life. Maybe it's illness or just the weakness of age that's raising its head for us.

maybe the dark river of death is looming ever closer and it's not just becoming a real thing. Well friends you too can trust this God. Not even death not even death can separate you from his promises.

His promises are forever. Nothing not even death nothing says Paul in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nothing. We could just go on and on couldn't we with these promises of God because the whole Bible is full of promises from our wonderful God. Not vain promises not empty hopes not pie in the sky but promises from of old ancient promises that have proved again and again and again to be true in time and history.

And as every one of us who's a believer can testify promises that have proven true again and again in our own lives. And that's why we Christians love the God of the Bible even if poor Mr. Dawkins Dr. Dawkins seems to hate him.

[33 : 16] We love him because he is the personal God not distant. He's the passionate God not uncaring. He's the present God and he's the promising God the one whose promises all come so wonderfully together in the climax of the Lord Jesus Christ as he reveals this God to us ultimately and forever.

The New Testament says all God's promises in him are yes and amen. So that the promises we have friends as New Testament Christians in Jesus Christ they're even better promises than God gave to Moses.

They're more certain. They're more sure because in Christ all that God promised to Abraham and to Isaac and Jacob all that he promised to Moses all that he promised all the way through the Bible through his prophets and poets all of it has proved true in what Jesus Christ has now done for us. God did promise from the beginning and he has performed through the magnificent saving work of our Lord Jesus Christ in history.

And therefore we can say with absolute certainty we shall plunder. We shall be more than conquerors through him who loved us.

[34 : 39] That's the true God of the Bible. I want to say to you if you doubt that don't be don't be led astray into delusion. Don't be led into despair by deceitful people who misrepresent God so dreadfully.

But rather let God's own words about himself lead you into deliverance. Let God's promises lead you into delight. Trust this God. The only God.

The true God. The God of Scripture. Stand on his gracious promises. And friends I promise you that he will never let you down.

Not ever. Not once. Never ever ever. He's the God of promise and you can trust him. If you're in any doubt at all let me just say try him and see.

There's a money back guarantee that once you've tried him, once you've tasted and seen the goodness of the true and living God, you'll never exchange that knowledge ever again, ever for anything else.

[35 : 51] stand on the promises of our promising God and joy will be yours in abundance. Let's pray.

I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and I promise that I will bring you out of affliction into the land of promise. I will stretch out my hand with the wonders that I will perform so you shall plunder the enemy.

We thank you our God and Father for our present living hope, hope that is ours through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus from the dead. Keep us standing on your great and precious

promises, which are all that we truly need for life and godliness and keep turning us to them again and again we ask and keep turning our hearts again and again to you our promising God that our lives may be as you desire them to be filled with hope and with joy and with peace and therefore with fruitfulness for the glory of Jesus our Savior.
For we ask it through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.