

# The God who keeps his promises

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] It is, as Jonathan said, a great story. So as we make our way through it, we'll be reading some quite long passages, but hopefully it is kind of gripping as we look through it together. But it does mean if you've got your Bibles, it would be worth keeping them open in front of you as we make our way through those first couple of chapters.

And we'll just jump straight in to these two chapters, which, as I said, has kind of set the scene for all that's going to follow in this incredible book. One of the things we mentioned is that in getting to grips with the book of Exodus, actually that's going to help us understand the whole of the Bible better.

It's going to help us understand what follows on in the Bible. But actually the first few verses also point us back. They help us see that we actually need to understand a little bit of what's already happened in the first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis, to fully make sense of where we start from in Exodus.

The second book of the Bible. In fact, if you are reading this morning in a Hebrew Bible, which I don't think anyone is likely to be doing, but that's the kind of original language that the book, the Old Testament, was written in.

If you're reading in the Hebrew Bible, you'd find actually the book of Exodus starts with the word and. So verse one should literally be, and these are the names. I think every single English translation leaves that out, because, you know, who starts the book with the word and?

[ 1 : 2 6 ] Well, Exodus starts with the word and. And the point is really that these events are continuing on from where Genesis left off.

This whole book is more like a second chapter than a separate story. So what is it that's happened so far? Why is it important to kind of get to grips with that?

Well, the big thing that's happened in Genesis that we need to know is that God has made promises. God has promised that he's going to make Jacob and his sons into a great nation, more than anyone can count, he said.

He's promised he's going to give them their own land. He's promised that he's going to bless them and that in turn there'll be a blessing to others. And we're deliberately reminded of these promises in the opening verses of Exodus.

They give us the names of those who'd come down to Egypt, Jacob and his household. The point is these are the people that God has made these promises to.

[ 2 : 2 8 ] And then we see that while there were 70 of them in total when they arrived, well now verse seven, they were fruitful and increased greatly and they multiplied. And again, this language of being fruitful, of multiplying, of increasing, is the language that God has made in making these promises to Jacob and to Abraham, his kind of ancestor, that their people would increase, that their people would multiply.

And we see that that is starting to happen here just as God has promised. But look at what else we see. Where are they? Well, they're not in their own land as had been promised.

They're in the land of Egypt. Are they being blessed? Well, no, we're just about to see that they're being oppressed. And so in some ways, while we can start to see these promises being fulfilled on one hand, they seem a long, long way away on the other hand.

Now one of the big questions of Exodus is, is God going to keep those promises? Talk about it helps us get to know God better. Well, is he that sort of God?

Is he the sort of God who's faithful to do what he said he's going to do? Is he the sort of God who's able to do what he said he's going to do? And so again, this isn't just a history book telling us about something that happened.

[ 3 : 47 ] This isn't just a book about the Israelites and what they did. It's not really even a book about Moses and what a great leader he was or what an example he might or might not be.

It's a book about God and what he's like. It's a book about how God acts on behalf of his people and how he does that. And so that's kind of the scene where we land at the beginning of Exodus.

Those are the questions to have in mind this week as we dig in. Does God, can God keep his promises? And with those kind of questions in mind, with that scene set, it leads us into the first of two major sections that we're going to look at this morning.

We're going to see in the rest of chapter one, God's people are oppressed. And then into chapter two, that God provides a rescuer. So first, and really this is the whole of chapter one, God's people are oppressed.

A new king comes to the throne in Egypt. And we read it, a king who didn't know Joseph. That means he was a king who didn't remember the incredible way that Joseph had saved Egypt from famine.

[ 4 : 53 ] And all those years before, a story again we read about in the book of Genesis that Exodus follows on from. This new king didn't remember or perhaps had chosen to forget how really the whole nation of Israel owed its existence to what Joseph had done.

Instead, all he sees is Joseph and his family's descendants, the people of Israel, as this huge nation living within his country, living within his borders.

And he's scared of that. Have a look at verse nine, he says, Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. And his solution there, you see, is to enslave them.

He puts taskmasters over them. They're conscripted to forced labor, to building things for the Pharaoh. And it's important we just pause again here for a second to get the full picture of what's going on.

Now remember, most of all, we'll keep saying this, Exodus is a book about God and what he's like, shown by what he does. And so the question is, well, where does God fit into the picture here?

[ 5 : 58 ] And the point is this, the king of Egypt is not just opposing the people of Israel. He's actually, knowingly or unknowingly, he's opposing the promises of God.

So remember what we said so far about Genesis. God has promised these people they're going to multiply to be a vast number. He's promised them they're going to have their own land. He's promised them that they'll be blessed and in turn bless others.

Well, what is the king of Egypt trying to do? Have a look at verse 10. He doesn't want them to multiply or grow too many in number. He doesn't want them to escape from his land.

And he certainly doesn't want to see them blessed. He wants them enslaved. He wants a life of toil for these people. And so really at every turn, he's directly opposing the promises that God has made.

Is it going to be this vast people in their own land enjoying blessing? Or is it going to be this kind of crushed people in the land of Egypt undergoing slavery?

[ 7 : 01 ] Who's going to win out? Is it going to be the greatest superpower really of the day in the history of mankind up to this point? Or is it going to be God who's made these plans, who's made these promises, and yet who in so many ways at the beginning of the book of Exodus seems kind of distant, seems kind of absent?

Who's going to win this battle? Well, in this opposition to God's people, I think we see really three rounds. And round one is this, the king's plan to reduce the Israelites by enslaving them, by afflicting them.

But what happens? Well, verse 12, that the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel.

We see here, God turns the tables. What was supposed to suppress the people, well, actually it's had the opposite effect. They grow. It's round one to God.

And so then the king escalates his plan. Round two, verse 15, sort of downwards, he tells these midwives of the Israelites to kill any male children. It's horrendous.

[ 8 : 08 ] But again, this plan is thwarted. Why? Well, verse 17, the midwives feared God, not the king. They do what he wants, not the king. I love this.

They have this great excuse they give. Basically, you know, these Hebrew women don't hang around. They don't even wait for a midwife. You know, what are we supposed to do? Our second daughter, Louisa, almost arrived in the car on the way to the hospital.

That would have been awful for me and Julie and the car as well. But, you know, and we certainly didn't make it into the birth suite. But that's what these midwives are saying. You know, these Hebrew babies, they come fast.

We're not able to carry out this plan. And actually, in doing this, these seemingly insignificant midwives, they thwart the all-powerful, seemingly all-powerful king of Egypt.

And yet again, God is behind this. Verse 20, he deals well with them. He gives them families of their own. They are blessed because they bless God's people.

[ 9 : 07 ] Once again, round two goes to God as well. And so then round three, the most terrible yet, the most extreme action you can perhaps imagine. No longer is this a kind of undercover oppression.

No longer is this secret, verse 22, that the king of Egypt commands all his people that any son born to the Hebrews should be killed, should be destroyed by being thrown into the River Nile.

It's terrible. And yet we're going to see, in chapter 2, we're going to see how actually even this is turned around by God for his purposes. And so time after time, God shows his power over the king.

God shows that he will not be stopped. But I want us to make sure that we're really clear here that even though we see God in control, this doesn't mean that things are all kind of happy and smiley for the Israelites.

What's their experience here? Well, it is not a positive experience. For them, God is very much kind of in the background. For them, it is very hard to see anything positive happening here.

[ 10 : 14 ] Verse 14, that their lives are bitter with hard service. There would have been baby boys. There would have been sons killed, cast into the Nile. And so the point in this opening chapter isn't that God's always in control and makes things easy.

The point is that even in the darkest of times, even in the bleakest of times, even in the times which feel so, so, so far away from what God has said he will do, that actually God is still at work and God will still keep his promises.

God still works to bring these promises into fruition. However the Israelites felt, and despite their circumstances, as we read the first chapter of Exodus, we see that God is working to fulfill those promises he'd made years and years before.

He's not forgotten. And he will defeat those who oppose his promises. And I think this is such a helpful lesson for us because just like the Israelites, it's so easy for us to think that how active God is, how faithful God is, is basically shown by how comfortable our life is.

And we see here, don't we, that that is not the case. The Bible never promises us a kind of a smooth ride, an easy life where nothing goes wrong, where there's no pain or hardship.

[ 11 : 38 ] But what the Bible does promise is that God is at work for our ultimate good and for our eternal good in all things. That he is working out his purposes, that he is working out his promises.

And if you're here this morning, and I suppose you're at that stage where you're perhaps just wondering, well, what is Christianity really all about? I think it's so important that you hear this this morning. Because you will find plenty of places which will kind of sell a version of Christianity, which is kind of like this magic pill that if you would just say this prayer, or if you would just believe this, well, all of your difficulties will be kind of washed away.

You will find plenty of people who tell you that if you're a Christian and you're suffering, that if you're a Christian and you're struggling, or somehow you're not doing it right, there's something wrong with you.

Well, actually, none of those pictures of Christianity match up to the Bible's picture. The Bible's picture of what it looks like to be God's people, it includes suffering.

It includes hardship. It includes bleak times. But it offers the promise of eternal joy, of eternal peace, a promise that one day all that is wrong with the world that we see around us, all that is wrong with ourselves and the things that we do, all of that will be removed.

[ 12 : 57 ] And the Bible says that God has promised that and it shows us a God who keeps his promises, a God who cannot be stopped, who will do all that he's said he will do, and that's true however we're feeling here and now.

Frequently, God's people are repressed. Frequently, we all go through difficult times. And yet we see here in Exodus chapter one, and we're going to see it throughout the book, confirm to us that God keeps his promises.

God is always at work to do that. So in a way, I suppose we could stop there, couldn't we? We could go home, we'd say, that's good, you know, God's people are oppressed, but God keeps his promises.

That would be a really encouraging message for us to go with. And yet actually, it would only get us halfway through these introductory couple of chapters, and it would only give us half the story. Because we get shown here, and again, the rest of the book is going to build on this, how God ultimately keeps his promises.

And that's what we see in chapter two, that God keeps his promises by sending a rescuer. Exodus chapter two, God sends a rescuer. The focus really here zooms in from what's happening to kind of all the people, and what's happening on this national scale, it zooms into one family, to one child in particular.

[ 14 : 13 ] Look, chapter two, verse one, a man and his wife have a son, obviously a son born in great danger, a son who is supposed to be, by the letter of the law, thrown into the river, and yet his mom hides the baby, hides him for three months.

That's quite good going, isn't it, with a little baby, but cannot hide him forever. And so after three months, he's put into a basket, and just like the other children, he is sent out into the Nile.

Imagine if he can, just how heartbreaking that would be for his mother. What's going to happen to him? Of course, the chances are, they've sent him off to his death.

When we see this in children's Bibles, Moses is all kind of snugly wrapped up in this little boat, it looks like it would make it down the most kind of extreme waterfall you could imagine, but actually, Moses' mother must have thought, this is the last time I'll ever see this child.

Even if he somehow makes it to dry land, well, the chances are, as soon as he's found, he's just going to be thrown back in, like the king had ordered. And yet, miraculously, again, we see here God at work.

[ 15 : 18 ] Again, miraculously, we see actually God turning the king's plans around against him. And so the Nile, which is supposed to spell the end for this boy, well, it actually ends up transporting him to probably, I would think, the one person in the whole of the country who's going to be able to protect him and look after him.

It takes him right to the feet of the daughter of Pharaoh the king. And so again, God is at work keeping his promises, and that work focuses in on this one boy, this boy who is set apart, this boy who, right from the beginning of Exodus, is given real significance.

That name, Moses, which we read, it means to be drawn out. Given by Pharaoh's daughter, she draws him out the water, but also kind of symbolic of how Moses is drawn out from among his people.

He's special among his people. He's set apart from the beginning as someone with a special task. He's a rescuer. And we see that a couple of times in chapter 2, verses 11 and 12.

He beats this Egyptian who is attacking an Israelite. He kills him. And in pretty much every kind of commentary on Exodus that you read, this is put down as some kind of mistake by Moses.

[ 16 : 32 ] He's a bit rash. He's a bit hasty. But hey, God uses rash and hasty people. And that's true. But actually, if you look at what the Bible says about this event, it's a bit different. We could kind of zoom forward to the book of Acts.

Again, after Jesus' birth and death and life and resurrection and all that in the New Testament. The book of Acts describes this event as a sign of God giving the Israelites salvation through the hand of Moses.

The book of Acts really says that Moses defeating this Egyptian to save the Israelite is a kind of a little preview of what he's going to do, what God is going to use him to do on a national scale.

And it's God choosing to side with his people, the oppressed people of God, rather than maintain his privilege of someone brought up in the palace. It's Moses as a rescuer.

And yet we see, don't we, that the people reject that rescue. The people reject Moses. Verse 14, he says, who made you prince and judge over us? And so Moses has to flee.

[ 17 : 37 ] He flees to a place called Midian, kind of out in the middle of nowhere really, but even here he's shown as a rescuer. Verse 17, he saves these women from some shepherds.

It's a good way to impress a girl, to save her from an angry shepherd. So impressive, he ends up marrying one of these girls. And yet the point is the same, that this character, this individual Moses, is presented as, is shown to be a rescuer provided from God.

He is, throughout the book of Exodus, he is someone special. He is someone who's set apart. And yet the other emphasis here is that he's a rescuer who identifies with his people.

And so we've already seen that. He sides with the Israelite over the Egyptian who's attacking him. Even bigger than that, really kind of his experience in chapter 2 matches the experience of God's people.

Just as the Israelites are in Egypt, this place far from home, well Moses ends up in Midian, far from home. Just as the Israelites are in a foreign land, well Moses has a son, verse 22, he calls him Gershom, for he said, I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.

[ 18 : 49 ] And so as Moses is introduced, he's really deliberately introduced as someone who's set apart from his people, he's drawn out, who's a rescuer, and yet at the same time who is like his people, who identifies with them, who experiences what they experience.

He's provided by God as just the right person. It's through Moses that God is ultimately, sorry, it's through Moses that God is ultimately going to keep these promises that he's made.

And that's what we see in verse 23 and 24 and 25 at the close of chapter 2. They remind us that it's God who's behind all of this. It's God who hears, it's God who remembers, it's God who sees, it's God who knows.

It's God who acts because of that covenant, because of those promises that he'd made. It's God at work to keep his promises through this rescue, and nothing will stop that.

And really the point of us looking at Exodus as a church together at the moment is that that is exactly the same for us. We're going to finish with this this morning and really this gets us right to the heart of Exodus and how it helps us to understand the Bible and the gospel and God himself.

[ 20 : 05 ] And we said, you know, we see here in Exodus a God who keeps his promises. He does that in all sorts of different ways. He does that even when things are seeming bleak and when things are difficult, but most of all, he has done that through sending a rescuer.

And for us, that is not Moses, but that is the ultimate rescuer, Jesus Christ. And that is who Moses is constantly going to be pointing us forwards to. That's how the great rescue of Exodus is a model, it is a preview of the greatest rescue of the Bible, the gospel.

And so all the way through Exodus, we're going to see with Moses, not particularly just kind of an example for us to follow, but more than that, Moses is going to show us what Jesus is like.

Moses is going to show us what Jesus has done. Moses won't be perfect, that picture will be incomplete, but he's going to show us that pattern of the ultimate rescuer, Jesus Christ, who God has sent to keep his promises.

And already we see something of that. Just like Moses, Jesus is different from us, he is the son of God, but just like Moses, he identifies with his people. Just like Moses, Jesus Christ has experienced what we experience.

[ 21 : 23 ] For Christians, our hope is not in someone who is kind of distant and vague, a God who is kind of out there somewhere, but that we don't really know. For Christians, our hope is not in someone who would say, well, yeah, God says this, but how would he really know?

How would God know what I'm going through? As Christians, our hope is in that rescuer, Jesus Christ, who came to us, who was fully human, who lived in this fallen world, who went through all that we go through, and actually far, far more than we'll ever go through.

A man who knew pain, a man who knew suffering, a man who knew sorrows, a man who knows and understands us. In the New Testament, the book of Hebrews, it says, Jesus is able to sympathize with our weakness.

It says, just like us, he was tempted in every way. And when we turn to Jesus, that Jesus who offers us rest, we turn to one who knows what we're going through.

And we turn to someone who understands what life is like because he was just like us. and yet because he lived that perfect life, because he was unlike us in that crucial way that he is able to forgive, he's able to be this rescuer sent from God.

[ 22 : 42 ] We see again that pattern between Moses and Jesus in that just as Moses was rejected by those Israelites when he first came to offer them rescue, well, Jesus too was rejected by those who he came to save.

He was turned away by the very people that he'd come to rescue. And yet again, we see, don't we, it's through that rejection, it's through that death on the cross that he made it possible for us to be reconnected with God.

And that's the rescue that we all need. We're not being kind of put into forced labor by a foreign king, but the Bible makes it very clear that each and every one of us is under the grip of evil.

That we're not free to live the lives God designed for us. That because of the wickedness in the world that we're not enjoying the blessing that God's promised us. But that through Jesus and only through Jesus God has acted, God has kept his promise.

He has provided that rescue so that we can be forgiven. We can be free to serve God, to follow him, to have that relationship with him and all the blessing that comes with that. we can be free to ultimately take our place in that eternal promised land of a new creation and a new heavens and a new earth where there will be none of the brokenness that we see around us.

[ 24 : 07 ] And really, this is how we can have the ultimate confidence that God will keep his promise. Because we look at Jesus. We look at the rescuer who God has sent and through whom he has achieved that rescue.

And that's why Christianity can give us hope, even in dark times. That's how we know that God can keep his promises even when things feel tough for us.

Because it has happened, it is done. Through that rescuer, through Jesus, God has fulfilled his promise that we can be his people now and that we can look forward to a perfect eternity with him and forevermore.

We can look forward to all of those good promises. And we do that because he's a God who keeps his promises and a God who has sent that rescuer, Jesus Christ. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you.