

## Our Yes to God's Offer

Exodus 19.2-8

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When children get their high school diploma, when a company signs a big contract, when people say 'yes' in the town hall or in church to get married, there are some similarities.

There are some similarities in those highly symbolic moments. Beside cameras being omnipresent.

Those moments are the beginning of a new phase in life. And they begin with just a word, a signature, something in itself rather insignificant. But with enduring consequences.



The few words we have heard from Exodus 19 - eight verses in total - are also not very impressive. God spoke less than 30 seconds. And Israel replied in 2 seconds.

Listen to these words as if you stood there with the people of Israel, listening to the words of Moses:

You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

The people responded with their signature, their yes. They only said: "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." In Hebrew, just 5 words.

That was all. And yet, this is the central moment in the history of the people of God. This was the moment when both parties signed their covenant.

Through our faith in Jesus Christ, the truest Israelite possible, we are connected with this solemn moment at the foot of Mount Sinai. This is also our covenant with God.

Sure, through Jesus this covenant has been renewed, lifted up to a much higher, a much better level for us. But God is the same. And we are part of the same people.

When God offers his covenant to Israel, we meet with the Father of Jesus Christ, whose relationship with us can only be in harmony with his unchanging character. He is the same, the one who spoke to Moses and the one we pray to.

## 1. Redeemed from Egypt

The first things God says to Moses, and Moses has to relay these words to the people, is “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.”

God's covenantal relationship with us begins with the reminder of God's goodness for us.



He has dealt with Egypt, He carried us, He brought us close to Himself.

St Paul would apply these words to us. He describes in 1 Corinthians 10, how all these things that occurred to Israel, happened to faithful in Corinth as a type, and it was written down as instruction for their and for our instruction.

How can that be? How can we learn from the experiences of

different people long ago? Well, here is what links us to them: Paul says, 'they drank from the spiritual rock, and that rock was Christ.'

We are one people of God, because in a mysterious way they were already related to Jesus Christ.

That is why Paul can compare their passing through the Red Sea with our baptism, and their manna in the desert and their drinking from the water that flowed from a rock, with our Eucharist.

We as the people of God have by the grace of God, been taken out of Egypt - the type, the symbol of sin and being distant from God.

And God carried the Israelites 'on eagles' wings'. He brought them to Mount Sinai in a miraculous way - through the Red Sea.

That miracle of the redemption of Israel began with the eating of the Passover Lamb, when Egypt was punished but Israel was kept safe.

We celebrated how Jesus is our Lamb, during the feast of Passover, Easter. It was God who in his grace took the initiative to send his Son, not to condemn but to save us.

And He continues to carry us as on eagle's wings. Where would we be without Him! He is with you, day in day out. Night and day. Every moment.

Through Jesus Christ, God has brought you to himself. You are reconciled to God. He is your Father. You are his child.

God's grace precedes everything. Israel had not done anything to please God. But He redeemed them out of Egypt.

The only thing the Israelites had to do, was to have faith in the words of Moses. They believed, and God saved them.

Even Christians who do nothing else but just believe in Jesus Christ, in God the Father, in the comforting Spirit, they enjoy many benefits of God's goodness.

Just the awareness of God's presence: the presence of forgiveness, of love, of goodness, is so comforting and encouraging.



## 2. Redeemed to obey

But faith wants to also express itself in deeds. And through Moses, God holds his expectation of redeemed behaviour before us.

People who are redeemed from Egypt no longer live by the laws of Egypt.

“If you will listen, yes listen to my voice and keep my covenant, then...” That is how the Hebrew Bible says it. It poetically repeats ‘listen,’ to stress the importance.

God promises great blessings to his people if they listen to his voice.

This is the same ‘listen’ that you say to your child: ‘now you listen to me!’. It means: do it.

It is the same ‘listen’ as in God ‘listens to our prayers’. His listening to us is redemptive. He acts for our sake.

And if we listen to God, we become active. We do.

Israel has been redeemed out of Egypt. By faith they are forgiven, set free by God, but there is still much to be done.

They have to listen. They need to change their lifestyle. Their heart has to be cleansed of the idols inside. After 400 years in Egypt, Egypt is still in their heart, logical.

But even as imperfect people, the only response they could give to God's fantastic covenantal offer was to embrace it.

The only thing God had said was: ‘listen to voice and obey my covenant’.

“All that the LORD has spoken we will do.”

But they did not even know yet what God was going to demand of them. He had not said anything yet.

There is something beautiful in this response of Israel. God had redeemed them, they had seen something of his goodness, and they had heard wonderful promises for their future.

To that, what else could they say but “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” They trusted in God.

They had seen something of his beauty. They knew that the laws of God would be good.

But their words sound a bit like the optimistic words of Peter, much later:

“Lord, I will never betray you.”

Israel was fully right in promising to obey. God is worth it, He will never ask from us anything that is not good for us.

But Israel was too optimistic about their own heart.

You know what they did while Moses was up Mount Sinai. God gave him the Ten Commandments, and all sorts of laws, and God showed Moses how to build the tabernacle.

And what did Israel do in the meantime?

They build themselves an idol. A golden statue of a cow. That was the Egyptian god Apis.

Apis was considered the son of the sky-god Hathor, and the worship of that cow Apis was an important part of serving that sky-god Hathor.

Did those Israelites, waiting at the foot of the mountain where thunder and lightning were overwhelming, believe that they served God by worshiping this golden calf?

Egypt was still in their heart, and the first thing they had to learn from Moses was, do not make images of God.

Life with God is always a process of learning to obey, and in this regard, Israel had a long way to go. The problem was not on the side of God, but we are the problem.

But God has lifted his covenant with his people to a much better level. It seems we are simply unable to consistently listen and obey, so what did God promise to Israel?

That He would put the laws in their hearts. That He would change that heart full of the filthy gods of Egypt, and fill it with His Holy Spirit.

When did God do this?

Yes, with Pentecost. Pentecost is the feast that is celebrated on the day of the third moon, 50 days after Easter. And that was the very day when God created his covenant with Israel in Exodus 19, 50 days after their passover feast.

With Pentecost, God gave us his new covenant, which is really a mighty renewal of the old covenant. It is much better, because God himself helps us to fulfil our part of the covenant.

God is not changed. He changed us! By giving us his Spirit. So that with Israel we can say: "All that the LORD has spoken we will do."

But we say that with thousands of years of lessons learned, about our own human frailty. In our family of the people of God we have gone through so many ups and downs.

We know that even with God in our midst, in our heart, we still often stumble. But thank God, he holds our hand. His lives in us to help us to live for Him.

### **3. Obey with a reason**

And we have good reasons to be motivated to obey our Lord. He donated to us eternal salvation. He renewed us. He supports us every day.

From the outset, God made three amazing promises.

"You shall be my treasured possession."

"You shall be a priestly kingdom."

"You shall be a holy nation."

To be owned by God as his treasure, that is amazing. That is you. You are owned by him and when He looks at you, He sees a treasure. Something He is very careful with.

If you have something of great value, you make sure all is well with it. It will not get lost, it will not become dirty, it will have a secure place in your house. You show it with pride to others.

That is how God sees you. This should make us very, very thankful and satisfied.

Among all the peoples in the world, we are God's treasured possession. That is very exclusive.



And before you now start to have negative feelings about this exclusive relationship with God, notice that God says immediately that the whole world is His.

All nations belong to God, but we are his special nation. Why? Wel...

Next God says, that we are a priestly kingdom. That is not a nation with a few priests, or a church with a few priests. It means that as a people of God together, we together are priestly.

What does a priest do? He leads people to worship. He brings people and God together.

So what does a kingdom of priests, or a priestly kingdom do? It brings outsiders to worship God. It brings God and other nations together.

From the outset of His covenant with His people, the desire of God was that those people would bring the rest of the world into this same exclusive relationship.

God loves all people and wants all people to be saved.

We can be a priestly nation if we are also a holy nation. If we reflect the character of God. If we listen to His voice.

What a fantastic covenant we have with God. If we obey His voice, He treats us as His treasure, and He uses us to be a blessing for the world.

We are one people of God, together with those Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai. The main difference: Jesus Christ has come and has given us his Holy Spirit. To help us obey God.

## **Conclusion**

St Peter, in his first letter, used these words from Israel's covenant with God, to describe how we as followers of Jesus Christ have to live:

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.

Why?

That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into this marvellous light.

With Israel we have gone through the Red Sea of our baptism. With Israel we live in the desert of life, but God feeds us with bread and wine, with the rock who is always with us, Jesus Christ.

He chose us, together, to live for Him and to make him know among the nations.

He chose us, so let us from our side, give him again our commitment.

Our 'yes Lord, we obey. We listen. We follow you.'

**Amen.**