

Today we enter a new phase. Israel is no longer the same. They are no longer in bondage. However, they have not yet operated as God's nation. But they are miraculously free by grace, and their enemies destroyed. They did nothing to earn it. God simply delivered them. Then God began to build their faith. So God begins to move them from people defined by a repressive regime and toward being God's special, chosen, and loved people who trusted God.

But it's not that easy, is it? We know the story. Over the next few weeks we'll see the people of Israel fall all over themselves as they learn this new lifestyle. When you belong to God, your life is different. It took them forty years to get it together. But lest we judge them, we might agree that sometimes it takes about 40 years to understand *how our life is different because we belong to God*. So we need to stop at this juncture, Exodus 15, and examine it closely as this is the first week of Israel's new life under God's rule.

And the Lord made a deal with them - a contract.

Contracts were common in the Ancient Near East. Tribes or people groups lived in a certain king's land by way of contract with the king. Each party had a part. The vassals paid homage and provided military service in exchange for protection and living space. Each party has responsibilities. That was normal during Moses' time.

Speaking of contracts, how many of you have a contract with someone? If you have a car payment you have a contract. Credit cards, cell phone services, and mortgages all require contracts. A contract is "an agreement between two or more parties which is enforceable by law." And, it contains a specific remedy for breach.

Marriage is a contract. And you thought marriage was simply about love – it's actually a formal agreement; a covenant. Two parties agree to "love, honor, and cherish one another until death." In that respect, our relationship with God is very much like a marriage because we commit to God in response to God's commitment to us. It's a permanent commitment.

Now in this contract or covenant with God each party has a part. There's God's part – and our part. The greater party sets the terms. The kings set the terms of the contract with those who lived on their land. Likewise, God, as Creator, has the greater authority over us. God sets the terms of the behavior expected of us. Let's read about it. READ Exodus 15:22-27.

After being on the road three days the people got very thirsty. Before, in Egypt, water had been readily available, but these circumstances were very different. Not knowing what to do, naturally they complained to Moses. He was their focal point for God – Moses, the mediator. And Moses prayed. Moses, you see, understood the contract. And God faithfully answered, purifying the water. That's great!

How do you understand your part of the contract? When you belong to God, your life is different from everyone else. There's a different dimension. You have a vertical dimension; God demands that you approach God in faith. When you take that into consideration, you reap huge blessings.

I'm convinced we don't always understand this. And because of that we frequently miss out on the power of God.

But Moses had learned that God would do God's part, and when he asked God for help, he got it. This is the first lesson of the wilderness. God knew that as life happened these people would focus on what they could see rather than relying on faith so God gave them a test to teach them that life is different for the believer.

Why do we have tests? Why must you take a driver's test? Why are pilots tested in simulators? Why do schools give tests? What is the purpose of a stress test?

- To see if you know the material; if you are competent
- To see if there are problems that need to be dealt with

It's the same with God. God gives us spiritual tests to see how we are doing in the faith department. Have you been tested lately? Tests teach us lessons about God.

This test was a test of faith; it was a challenge to believe God, to take Him to heart, to trust that God is there, cares, and will answer.

The song we sang expresses it: (*You Never Let Go* by Matt Redman)
*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
Your perfect love is casting out fear
And even when I'm caught in the middle of the storms of this life
I won't turn back, I know You are near*

God's children must learn to not turn back but rather, to look up, listen, and obey.

Do you turn to God when you have a problem? James said, "*Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven. (5:13-15).*"

Notice the total blessing for the one who obeys? Rely on God. Belonging to God changes things. God promises that when we listen and obey we will experience not judgment, as Egypt did, but forgiveness, power, and healing.

So God's part of the contract is this:
*to be present with us at all times
to provide for us when we need His power
to heal us in body, mind, and spirit*

But, it's not only about God. It's about you, too. This is not a one-sided agreement. You have a part and in this passage God spells it out.

So your part of the contract is this:

*to listen to God's voice
to trust God's judgment
to do the right thing*

I have been so inspired this week by the ladies who have been painting here at the church that I convinced my husband to go buy some paint to paint our house. A sign on the wall at the paint store said: "Choose the right product for the job."

You would agree with that, right? Who would want to use the wrong thing and mess up your project? But we live in a culture whose measure of right and wrong is not typically defined by God. In fact, Scripture talks of a time when "all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 17:6). You might say that time is now.

God says, "Choose the right thing in My sight and it will go well for you." Moses prayed, listened, and obeyed and God led Israel to a fabulously abundant oasis.

This fact means God is deserving of trust and obedience.

James says, "*The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results*" (Ja 5:16). It's God's signature to bless believers who obey. And God's blessing is beyond measure. That's what God's name "I AM" embodies. It embodies presence, power, and healing.

George Muller experienced just that when he believed, obeyed, and prayed. As a young adult, though, he was a terrible person. He was grossly immoral, and for years defrauded his own father, his landlord, his pastor, and anyone else who crossed his path. He was sent to seminary (great candidate!) but he did not know God or care about God. But he wasn't happy either.

One day he went with a friend to a home Bible study. He didn't understand that he would be welcomed; he thought he was such a terrible sinner they would hate him. But someone said to him: "Come as often as you please; house and heart are open to you." They sang, read the Bible, read a sermon, and then knelt in prayer. He was stunned because he had never seen a Christian on his knee.

Well, that evening was a turning point in his life. He changed. He didn't all at once give up his sins but he quit living habitually in sin. He gave up his "wicked companions" as he called them and his constant hanging out in bars. He began reading the Bible and praying. He loved his new friends, even though he suffered a lot of mocking from others who couldn't quite believe the change.

Later he became ill. Though weak in body he grew strong in spirit. He thought he would die but miraculously he recovered. That led him to commit his all to God.

As a pastor, he was known for prayer and unswerving commitment. Listening to God, he began an orphanage even though he had only 50 cents to his name. They never missed a meal, although at times God would test him to the very dinner hour. He never asked anyone for help, nor

borrowed money; but through faith, asking God in prayer, over the years obtained and disbursed \$7,500,000, cared for over 10,000 orphans, taught 122,000 students in Christian day schools, distributed two million Bibles and 112 million tracts. He didn't stop there. At age 70 he began traveling and over the next 20 years shared the gospel with 3,000,000 people.¹

God supplied abundantly. It's God's signature; God's distinguishing mark.

God says, "Be what you are - my child; do what I think is right; pray and trust; and you will be amazed at the blessing poured out." That's true for me and you. That's true for this church. Are you keeping your part of the contract? AMEN

¹J. G. Lawson, *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1998).