



## Exodus - Chapter Twenty Four

### **II. Exodus 19:1-40:38 - The Covenant at Sinai (continues)**

#### Summary of Chapter Twenty Four

God called Moses and other senior leaders to him. Only Moses was allowed near to God; the others stood at a distance. Moses told all the people what the ordinances of God were and they agreed to them. Altars were built at the mountain, sacrifices made and the blood from these was splashed equally on the altars and on the people.

God then called Moses and the senior leaders into his presence and they beheld God. After they had their meal, God summoned Moses up onto the mountain to receive the stone tablets of the covenant and God's glory settled upon the mountain. Moses remained with God on the mountain for forty days and nights.

#### **II.c Exodus 24:1-18 - The Covenant Confirmed**

This section describes three different aspects of the covenant being confirmed:

1. Moses leads the people of Israel in sacrificing to the Lord and reconfirming the covenant with them (vv.3-8).
2. Moses, Aaron and his sons, and the elders worship the Lord and eat before him (vv.1-2 and vv.9-11).
3. Moses and Joshua go further up the mountain in order for Moses alone to enter the cloud of the Lord's presence (vv.12-18).

#### **II.c.i Exodus 24:1-8 - The Blood of the Covenant**

Following a reading of the law, the people agree to the terms. Altars are built, sacrifices made and the covenant confirmed with the sacrificial blood.

<sup>1</sup> Then he said to Moses, 'Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship at a

distance. <sup>2</sup> Moses alone shall come near the Lord; but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.’

#### Exodus 24:1-2

Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. Here is a reminder that, until now, God had spoken with Moses alone. He now invites those who would play a major role in leading the people to worship at a distance. Aaron and his sons Nadab and Abihu, along with his other two sons Eleazar and Ithamar, would soon be called to minister as priests in the Tabernacle. However, it was only Moses who shall come near the Lord.

Therefore, the distinctions explained in relation to the Lord’s presence on Mount Sinai are preparing Israel for the Tabernacle. The three groups of people represent three different levels of proximity to the Lord’s presence:

1. The people shall not come up.
2. Moses, Aaron and his sons, and the elders will worship from afar.
3. Moses alone shall come near the Lord.

<sup>3</sup> Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, ‘All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do.’ <sup>4</sup> And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and set up twelve pillars, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel.

#### Exodus 24:3-4

Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances. When the people heard the law of God they responded with complete agreement (all the people answered with one voice). Then they verbally agreed to obey the Lord (all the words that the Lord has spoken we will do). Israel here was perhaps guilty of tremendous over-confidence. The way they seemed to easily say to God, ‘We will keep your law’ seemed to lack appreciation for how complete and deeply comprehensive God’s law is. They were probably genuine in their belief that they would be obedient to God’s covenantal laws. However, a nation that had been terrified by God’s awesome presence at Sinai was in no state of mind to do anything but agree with God.

Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. This is one of three references in Exodus to Moses writing (34:28), or being commanded to write (17:14); as is also the case in Deuteronomy 31:9. In v.3 Israel verbally agreed to a covenant relationship with God; but there is a sense in which this is simply not good enough. They must do specific things to confirm their covenant with God. First, the Word of

God must be written. God's word is important enough that it was not to be left up to human recollection and the creative nature of memory. It had to be written down in all its fullness of detail.

God did not make an individual covenant with its own arrangement for each Israelite. There was one covenant. The same is true today under the New Covenant. A believer does have a personal relationship with God; they do not have their own private agreement with him that contradicts the revealed words of the Lord. With the same intention, God spoke through his prophet: <<*Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it*>> (Habakkuk 2:2).

<sup>5</sup> He sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt-offerings and sacrificed oxen as offerings of well-being to the Lord.

#### Exodus 24:5

He sent young men of the people of Israel. This is a primitive touch, coming from before the time of a specialised priesthood. There is nothing special in the choice of young men for the task: it is purely a practical consideration. To bind cattle to a stone altar required strength and agility. A young man was a natural warrior, so he was a natural choice for 'priest' in this context.

The narrative of Exodus has already referred to burnt-offerings (10:25 and 18:12) and peace or offerings of well-being (20:24), but the Lord had not yet prescribed their practice or described their function for Israel. While Israel likely had some familiarity with the function of sacrifice, the people manifest their need for the Lord's further instructions when they offer burnt offerings and peace offerings to the golden calf (32:6).

<sup>6</sup> Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he dashed against the altar. <sup>7</sup> Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.' <sup>8</sup> Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, 'See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.'

#### Exodus 24:6-8

The reasons for the covenant-confirming actions of blood thrown against the altar and on the people are not made explicit, but they probably signify the cleansing and atonement aspects of each. The blood links the altar and the people, symbolising the union of God and Israel in the covenant. The Lord had called Israel to keep his covenant as the means to serving as a kingdom of priests and a holy

nation (19:4-6), and here he anoints and inaugurates them to live as such: *<<Hence not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment had been told to all the people by Moses in accordance with the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people, saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you.' And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins>>* (Hebrews 9:18-22).

Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people. The covenant is made when God's word is heard and responded to. The covenant with God is based on his words and his terms, not on a believer's own words and terms.

The book of the covenant most likely refers to both the Ten Commandments (20:1-21) and the commands and rules that followed them (20:22-23:33). It was the foundation of the Pentateuch and, indeed, of the whole OT.

All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient. There must be a response to God's word. Just as much as God would not negotiate his covenant with Israel, neither would he force it upon them. They must freely respond.

The blood of the covenant. Blood represents the outpouring of life, of one life being given for another: *<<For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement>>* (Leviticus 17:11). Almost a thousand years later, God did not forget the blood of this covenant: *<<As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit>>* (Zechariah 9:11). When Jesus uses this phrase of the cup in the Last Supper in Matthew 26:28 and Mark 14:24, he is likening the Christian communion meal to the OT peace offering. Paul gives this understanding when he writes: *<<Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar?>>* (1 Corinthians 10:17-18).

The blood of Jesus' covenant is also the foundation for all growth and maturity in Christ: *<<Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen>>* (Hebrews 13:20-21).

## II.c.ii Exodus 24:9-18 - On the Mountain with God

Following a meal in the presence of God with the other senior leaders of Israel, Moses is called up onto the mountain to be with God for forty days and nights.

<sup>9</sup> Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, <sup>10</sup> and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. <sup>11</sup> God did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; also they beheld God, and they ate and drank.

### Exodus 24:9-11

Moses, Aaron and his sons, and seventy of the elders participate in what the peace offering signifies: fellowship and communion in the presence of God. The description focuses on the fact that the men saw the God of Israel and remained unharmed, i.e. God did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel. According to Exodus 33:20b <<*for no one shall see me and live*>>, so the ‘seeing’ here was something different from that of 33:20; as confirmed by 33:23, which perhaps denotes a partial, as opposed to a full and complete, vision of God. Refer also to the comments made on Matthew 5:8, John 1:18 and Revelation 22:4 on the website. The description of the clear surface they saw under his feet may indicate that this is all they saw of God. Their vision of God is likely similar to that described in Isaiah Chapter 6, Ezekiel Chapter 1 and Revelation Chapter 4, where it is the surrounding aura of God that is described.

They beheld God. God allowed the elders of Israel to see such a spectacular vision to impress on them the reality of God’s presence. After this experience they would be more likely to trust God when he spoke to them through Moses.

They ate and drank. God wanted them to eat and drink in his presence because he wanted to communicate a sense of fellowship with these leaders of Israel. This is something that John so eloquently addresses in his epistle: <<*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ*>> (1 John 1:1-3 NIV).

<sup>12</sup> The Lord said to Moses, ‘Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.’ <sup>13</sup> So Moses

set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. <sup>14</sup> To the elders he had said, ‘Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them.’

#### Exodus 24:12-14

Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there. Moses went up at God’s invitation and he also brought with him his assistant Joshua. This same Joshua became the great leader God used to bring Israel into the Promised Land, but he began as Moses’ assistant. Firstly, he helped Moses in battle (17:8-16), then by assisting him here in spiritual things. The Israelites were assembled at the foot of the mountain. Aaron, his sons, and the seventy elders of Israel were half-way up the mountain. Joshua and Moses went up further, but Moses alone met with God.

This is the first time Joshua is referred to as Moses’ assistant; he will be mentioned again in this capacity in Exodus 33:11 and Joshua 1:1. Hur helped Aaron hold up Moses’ hands during the battle with Amalek (17:10-12). Moses had good reason to believe that these two men could supervise the camp of Israel. They had already proved themselves as men capable of assisting Moses in prayer. Yet Aaron and Hur did not do a good job guarding the camp, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters.

<sup>15</sup> Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. <sup>16</sup> The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. <sup>17</sup> Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. <sup>18</sup> Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

#### Exodus 24:15-18

The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. The Hebrew verb is ‘dwelt’. It is used in a technical sense later of God’s *shekinah*, the outward manifestation of his presence to men.

On the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. It appears to be God’s way to allow a period of time to elapse before he takes action. This can sometimes be a period of testing for the believer, a time when they can allow their faith to grow as they wait. It can also be a time for prayerful reflection and thanksgiving in the knowledge that God will do what is right in the situation that is being faced.

He called to Moses out of the cloud. When the glory of God settled on the mountain, the same word *sakan* is used as the *shekinah* glory: <<***The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth***>> (John 1:14 NIV). The ancient Greek word for dwelling used by John sounds very much like the Hebrew *sakan*.

The appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire. God's presence is often signified in Exodus by fire, as seen in 3:2, 13:21-22, 19:18 and 40:38; it is also referred to in Deuteronomy 4:24 and 9:3. Moses enters the cloud as the one with whom the Lord has chosen to meet, and therefore he is not destroyed.

Moses entered the cloud. This was not a welcoming place; the harsh and dangerous environment said, 'Stay away.' But God called to Moses and told him, 'Come close to me.' As harsh and as dangerous as the environment was, there was something of the glory of God in it. These images of the cloud, the smoke and the fire are all Biblical images of God's revealed glory. They are connected to his cloud of *shekinah* glory, and also with Jesus' presence among men. In all of this God said to Moses, 'You can draw near. I will keep you safe and reveal myself to you.' Under the New Covenant, in light of the Word of God, and under the sacrifice of Jesus, God dares believers to draw near to him.

Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights. This period of time is repeated in Scripture on many important occasions:

- The rains of the great flood (Genesis 7:12).
- Jacob's embalming (Genesis 50:3).
- Moses' second period on the mountain (Exodus 34:28).
- The time the spies spent in the Promised Land (Numbers 13:25).
- The period of taunting by the Philistines before David slew Goliath (1 Samuel 17:6).
- The time it took Elijah to travel to Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:8).
- The amount of time Nineveh was given to repent (Jonah 3:4).
- Jesus' period of fasting (Matthew 4:2, Mark 1:13 and Luke 2:20).
- The time Jesus remained on earth after his crucifixion (Acts 1:3).