

The Blood of the Covenant

Exodus 24:1-11

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If you have your Bibles, I would invite you to turn with me to Exodus 24. During the summer on Wednesday evenings, we worked through the Book of the Covenant. Now, keep your finger at Exodus 24, and turn back to Exodus 20, and look at verse 22. The Book of the Covenant begins in that verse. The Book of the Covenant contains the applications and illustrations of how the Ten Commandments apply to the daily life of Israel as individuals and as a community. It runs all the way from Exodus 20:22 to Exodus 23:33. In other words, it covers all of Exodus 21, 22, and 23, and *that* part of Exodus chapter 20 which is immediately after the Ten Commandments. The Ten Words give the fundamental legal principles for Israel's society, their community, and the Book of the Covenant applies that to the community life in specific situations. And we said as we studied through that Book of the Covenant on several different occasions, that it teaches us at least three general lessons.

It teaches us that we're all accountable to God all the time in every aspect of our life; it teaches us that we are to be concerned with the welfare of our neighbor. We were struck over and over again how the Book of the Covenant asks us to be our brother's keeper, to be that good neighbor to that neighbor in need and in distress, and to act righteously, not just in our private relationship with God, but in our public relationship with our neighbor. In other words, it stressed that if you really love God you will love your neighbor.

And that leads to the other great theme we saw stressed and it's simply this: holiness is more than personal piety; it's about public morality. It's about the way we relate in the various relationships of life that God has brought. And the subjects covered in the covenant code were extremely varied. I won't review them tonight, but there are at least 22 different applications of God's law in the Ten Commandments found in the Book of the Covenant. Everything from the death penalty to proportionate penalties to laws about the Sabbath Day—all manner of applications and though those applications are varied, they're not comprehensive. It's clear that this couldn't function as the complete civil code of a society though it gives wonderful applications of the principles of the Ten Commandments for Israel's society. Israel was clearly meant to draw deductions and conclusions from the illustrations and descriptions found in the Book of the

Covenant.

Tonight we enter into a new section of the Book of Exodus. In the passage that we start tonight, the focus of the Book of Exodus from now to the very end will be on the worship of God. Almost half of the book focused on the worship of God. We will begin tonight looking at this great covenant confirmation ceremony recorded in Exodus chapter 24. And you're going to see several things emphasized in the verses that we look at tonight.

For instance, in verses one and two, you're going to see the holiness of God emphasized by the fact that only Moses was allowed to approach Him. Though some of the leaders of Israel are called to draw near, only Moses goes up to the top of the mountain to commune with God. It speaks something about the holiness of God, doesn't it.

Secondly, in verses three and four, you're going to see the significance of the law highlighted for Israel. Moses receives the law from God; he recounts the law to the people and he will then write it down because the law is so central to this covenant relationship which God is establishing with His people.

In verse three we will also see that Israel's understanding of God's grace in the Exodus placed a requirement on them to be holy, and that's why they say, "Lord, all that You have commanded, we will do." They understood that grace constrains them to obey. Then if you look at verse 4-8, you'll find that the binding fellowship, the obligation of the covenant as well as the people's gratitude to God is expressed in these offerings, especially the peace offering that is mentioned in this passage.

Fifth, if you look at verse 8, you'll see that Moses' words of institution indicate that the sprinkling of the blood on the altar and on the people serve as a sacrament, that is, as an outward sign of an inward spiritual reality. There's nothing superstitious going on here. That is made clear by the fact that Moses doesn't sprinkle the twelve stones. There's nothing superstitious or magic going on here; Moses sprinkles the *people* with the blood. This is not superstition, its symbolism. It's an outward sign of an inward spirituality of this relationship which has been established between God and His people. But that is not all for when you look at verses 9-11, we have a visible manifestation of God—a theophany—a manifestation of God. It happens from time to time in the Old Testament, the burning bush. And here, as Moses and the leaders of Israel go up the mountain, we are told astonishingly that they see God. It's a rich passage; let's study it together to God's glory.

Then He said to Moses, Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall worship at a distance. "Moses alone, however, shall come near to the LORD, but they shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him." Then Moses

came and recounted to 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 which the LORD has spoken we will do!" Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel.

He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 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!" So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank.

Amen. This is God's word, may He add His blessing to it. Let us pray.

Our Lord, teach us from Your holy Scriptures, of Yourself and of the glory of that sacrifice which substituted for us and for our sins, that quenched Your judgment and condemnation against us, and brought us into everlasting fellowship with You. This we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Our theme in this section of Exodus has been, Glorifying God, because Exodus 24-40 is all about glorifying God. It's all about worship. And Exodus 24 itself is about worshiping God by His grace and promise. The only reason that Israel is here at Mt. Sinai, worshiping the living God, is because of His grace and promise, so beautifully set forth in this covenant which is described here. There are several things we need to learn from this passage. In verses 1-4, you will see the covenant recounted, embraced, and written down or inscripturated. And in these four verses, we learn two very important things. First, we learn about the principle of representation. If you want to worship God, you need a representative, because you're sinful, you need someone to stand in between. These four verses tell us about the principle of representation, and about the centrality of the word of God in His covenant relationship with His people.

I. The principle of representation and the centrality of the word in the covenant at Sinai.

In verse 1 the representatives of Israel are called upon to come near to Mt. Sinai and worship. Now, there's a story behind that, and for those who have forgotten,

let me refresh your memories. In exodus 19:17, 21 and 24, God will meet with Israel. The children of Israel had been waiting 430 years for this. They've been making their way across the wilderness for this, and now the time and come and God, because of the zeal and curiosity of the Israelites, has to say to Moses, "Don't let the people touch the mountain, because if they do, I'll strike out against them in My wrath because of My holiness." And He has to warn them repeatedly not to let the children of Israel break through to the mountain. You get the picture that the children of Israel are huddled in a mass around the mountain, just at the very edges, as close as they could possibly get. It's like someone at a great football game, and you didn't have tickets and you're at the gates crowding in as close as you can get to try and see what's happening on the field. And this is how the children of Israel are, they're crowding.

But then, a big change. Look at Exodus 20:18, 21. The next time you hear from Moses about the location of the people of God, where are they? They're not at the mountain. What happened? God spoke, they ran. Remember their reaction? God finally speaks to them in His own voice, and what do the children of Israel say? "Uh Moses, one small request. Would you please never have Him speak to us again." It terrified them. They were in awe. They were struck with fear. They fled. So now Moses now being asked to bring the children of Israel back, because they're far away, but they're not to touch the mountain. Only the representatives, Nadab and Abihu and Aaron, the priestly class hasn't been set apart yet, but they represent that group that will one day be the priestly class of Israel. And isn't it interesting that Nadab and Abihu, who had the privilege of going up the mountain of the Lord, will themselves violate the law of God and be judged by it. And the elders of Israel, 70 of them, the ruling elders of Israel, are called up the mountain, to represent those who lead and guide and shepherd and rule the people of God. And Moses the mediator.

But in verse 2, we see that the mediator alone is allowed to go all the way up the mountain to meet with God. The elders and Nadab and Abihu and their father, Aaron, they go up part of the way. But Moses alone draws near to God. Why? He is the representative. He's the singular representative for Israel, for Moses to go up to meet with God is for Israel to go up to meet with God, because he's the mediator. You see, God is teaching us something. In one man, all of Israel is represented. Moses. God had promised to commune with His people, and by Moses alone coming up the mountain, the people of God are communing with God, because he is the representative.

In verse 3, Moses comes down after worship and recounts to the people God's words. He tells them all of the things that God Himself had not told them with His own voice. God spoke the Ten Words. They were terrified. They begged for Moses to be the one to speak the rest of the words of God to them, so God told Moses those words, Exodus 20:22-23:33, so Moses recounts those words to them. Moses speaks out loud all the words of the book of the covenant that God had given to him. And what do they say? Verse 3, "All the words that God has

spoken we will do.” This is not the first time that they have confirmed their willingness to enter into a covenant with God. Back in Exodus 19:8, when they first got to the mountain the children of Israel say, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” So now, after having heard God speak the Ten Commandments, having heard Moses speak the book of the covenant which elaborated upon the Ten Commandments, they say again, “Yes, we are ready to enter into this covenant relationship. Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.”

And then, verse 4, what happens? Moses writes down the word of God. Friends, you are beholding in Exodus 20-24, the beginning of the inscripturation of the canon of Scripture. Notice how it begins. It begins with the “finger of God Himself writing down the Ten Commandments, and then it continues with Moses, under the divine inspiration of God Almighty writing down the words that He has spoken into his ear. This is the beginning of the canon of Scripture.

From those four verses alone we learn two glorious principles. We cannot worship God without a mediator because we are sinners. Like the children of Israel, we can't touch that mountain. We need a mediator, a mediator counted as holy in the sight of God, and Moses serves as the peoples' mediator in this place. The fact that the people themselves cannot come in behind the curtain, they cannot ascend the mountain, they cannot go up with God, shows the distance and it also shows the imperfection of that mediatorial relationship. But it does teach us clearly that you cannot worship God without a mediator because of sin. This passage also teaches that you cannot worship God without honoring and obeying His word, because what is right smack dab square at the center of this relationship? The word of God. The Ten Words, the ordinances, the application of the Ten Words, right at the heart of the relationship. You cannot worship God without honoring and obeying His words. No wonder Jesus said, “I would have you be hearers and doers of the word.” So that's the first thing we learn from this passage, the principle of representation and the centrality of the word of God in this covenant that God is making at Mt. Sinai.

II. The principle of vicarious sacrifice and duty from gratitude in the covenant at Sinai.

But there's more. In the rest of verse 4 through verse 8, here we see the reading, the embracing, and the sealing of the covenant. In verses 1-4, we saw the recounting, embracing and writing down of the covenant. Here, we see the reading, embracing, and sealing of the covenant. Moses gets up early and has an altar built. Remember, God has already told him how to build the altar. It's right in the end of Exodus 20. It must be uncut stone, not hewn. It can't be high which would expose the nakedness of the priests. No artifice of man's hand is to defile it. Moses makes this altar according to the stipulations of Exodus 20, and sets up 12 pillars, and we're told in verse 4 that the pillars represent the tribes of Israel. It's a representation of the whole people of God. The altar itself will

represent the presence of God. The stones will represent the people of Israel.

And then in verse 5, young men are sent for. There are no priests yet, so these young men are needed to help with the offerings. Both burnt and peace offerings are offered. The burnt offerings are burned completely. They're burned to cinders. The peace offerings are slaughtered. Half the blood is poured in the basin, and half is poured on the altar. Then, later, the meat from the peace offerings will provide food for a feast, a fellowship feast with God.

Notice in verse 6 and 7, half of the blood is sprinkled on the altar. The altar would have been covered with blood. And then in this very context, after pouring the blood out on the altar, Moses reads the book of the covenant, and now, for the third time, the children of Israel say, "We will do this. We will obey. We will embrace this covenant."

Then, in verse 8, this amazing scene. Moses takes the hyssop branch and dips it in the blood and begins slinging it out on the people of God until the blood has been spread on the people of God, symbolically indicating that they have been brought into a blood relationship and life and death commitment with the God of Israel.

What do we learn from this passage? We learn, first, the principle of vicarious sacrifice. Those animals symbolized the sacrifice that is necessary to establish the relationship between God and Israel. You say, "How do I know that?" I'll tell you later, but let me just say, I know it because the book of Hebrews tells me and I know it because Jesus tells it to me.

That slaughter of the animals represents the principle of vicarious sacrifice, that we cannot come into fellowship with God apart from a sacrifice on our behalf, because we're sinful and we're in need of atonement.

Secondly, we learn that duty flows from gratitude in the covenant of grace. The children of Israel, when they say, "All that the Lord has said, we will do," they do it with gratitude in their hearts because they're here only due to the grace of God. God hasn't said, "If you'll do all these things, I'll bring you out of Egypt." Where are they standing? They're standing in the wilderness of the Sinai. How did they get there? Through the Red Sea, through the plagues, through the redemptive grace of God. They're not there except by the grace of God, so their obedience is in response to the grace of God. It's not so that God will show them grace, but because God has shown them grace. We learn that right here, in verse 4 through 8.

III. The covenant is both the means and the end of God's saving design-binding relationship and fellowship.

But that's not all. We learn a third thing in verses 9-11, where the presence of God and communion with God are beautifully set forth. We learn that the covenant is both the means and the end of God's saving plan. In verse 9, all the representatives of Israel, every class of leadership, elders, priests, Moses, go up the mountain. But something astonishing happens. Something that every good child of Abraham knew could not happen without big trouble. They see God. They see a manifestation of God. Even in the next verse you find out that the expectation is that when a sinful human sees the awesome, the holy, the mighty God, it means death. It means certain death. But God in His mercy spares them.

Something very interesting happens. They see this manifestation of God and what happens? There is absolutely no description of God given. The description in Exodus 24:10 is from the feet down. Now, if someone gives a description of you from the feet down, not just from the feet down, but from the bottom of the feet down, there's not a whole lot to go on. What's the point of the passage? What are the feet resting on? What does Moses say that it looks like the feet are resting on? I know about the blue sapphire-looking pavement stuff, the lapis lazuli, but what does it say that looks like? It looks like the sky. God is not part of the earth. God is not conjoined with the earth. God is not mother-earth. God rules over heaven and earth. He makes the earth His footstool, He's the sovereign God of heaven and earth. You're seeing the Creator-creature distinction pictured in the very manifestation of God that these, the leaders of Israel, see. He's not like us; He's above us; He's the Creator that brought everything into being, but He's not part of it, or under it, or surrounded by it. He's over it all. He's God over all, maker of heaven and earth.

God spares them, and in verse 11 we're told that they sit down and they eat a meal with God. The covenant is sealed with a meal, because to be brought into the covenant is to be brought into the family of God and to slide your knees up under the table of God, to sit down at His table as His children. And that meal that they eat symbolizes the sweetness of union and communion, the enjoyment of the presence of God which the people of God enjoy because of the covenant. You see, the covenant is a relationship that's for a relationship. It's a special relationship designed to save us out of the world and into His family, to save us from our sins into holiness so that we can be in an eternal relationship with Him forever. And it's set forth right here in verses 9-11.

IV. Our Lord Himself connects and explains His saving work on the cross with Moses' words in Exodus 24:8.

But there's one last thing. Go back to verse 8. Jesus fulfills the blood of this covenant. Our Lord Jesus Himself connects and explains His saving work on the cross by using Moses' words in Exodus 24:8. When Moses confirms that God has brought His people into a saving, covenant relationship, in Exodus 24:8, he says, "Behold," as he sprinkles this blood on the people, "this is the blood of the

covenant. This is the blood that seals the covenant. This is the blood that shows that you have been brought into covenant relationship with God. This is the blood that spares your judgment. This is the blood that unites you with the family of God. And on the night that Jesus was betrayed, on the night in which He stood in that upper room and the account of it is recorded in every one of the gospels and in John, Jesus lifts up the cup to explain what He is about to do for the disciples the next day. He uses this phrase, this language from Exodus 24, and He says, "Behold, this is the blood of the covenant." No, He doesn't! He says, "Behold, My blood of the covenant." Jesus is saying that it is "*My blood* which is going to seal this covenant."

You see, the author of Hebrews, in Hebrews 10:4, explains to you that "the blood of bulls and goats cannot forgive sin and cannot cleanse the conscience." And Jesus is looking to His disciples, He's looking into their eyes, and He knows that they know this passage, and He knows that they know the significance of that blood bringing the people of God into fellowship with God Himself, and He's saying, "My friends, that blood couldn't bring you into fellowship with God, but My blood can and will. Behold, My blood of the covenant." And He adds in Mark, "which is shed for the forgiveness of your sins." You can't worship God without that Mediator. There is no way into fellowship with the God who rules over heaven and earth, but by the name and merits and blood of Jesus Christ.

Franklin Graham is exactly right. "That Name is all we've got." That's the one thing we've got. We've got one Mediator, and His blood, and His blood alone, brings us into fellowship with the living God. He fulfills this blood of the covenant, that we might worship and meet and commune and fellowship and put our knees under the table of God forever. Hallelujah, what a Savior. Let's pray.

O Lord, we cannot do justice to the awesomeness of what You displayed at Sinai but which You completely transcended at Golgotha. But we want to apprehend it and we want to glory in it, and we want to bathe in it, and we want to be strengthened in it, and we want to be changed by it, and we want to praise You for it. So grant us some inkling of a comprehension of the greatness, the height and depth and breadth of the love of God which is in Christ Jesus' blood of the covenant. This we ask in Jesus name, Amen.

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