

The Glory of the Lord

Exodus 24:12-18

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

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If you have your Bibles, please open to Exodus 24, as we continue to examine the book of the covenant, that application of the Ten Commandments to Israel, and the general applications that are universally applicable. The covenant code of laws is found in Exodus 20-23. The Ten Commandments give us the fundamental legal principles for Israel's society, and the book of the covenant applies those fundamental principles to specific contexts of law and society and religion.

Exodus 24 is a transitional passage that shows the great covenant confirmation ceremony. Israel has now received the Ten Commandments from God's own mouth, and Israel responds, now confirming for the third time that she would indeed embrace God in covenant, in obedience, and follow in His ways and be loyal to Him. There were several things emphasized in verses 1-11. God's holiness was emphasized by the fact that Moses alone was allowed to approach Him, not even the rest of the elders were allowed to come into the presence of God. We also saw the significance of the law highlighted by the fact that Moses recounted and wrote down all the laws of the Lord that had been recorded for us in Exodus in 20-23. Then, we saw Israel's understanding of God's grace in the Exodus placed a requirement upon them to be holy, to be set apart. The very fact of God's grace claimed an obligation from Israel to be uniquely loyal and faithful to Him. We saw something of the binding fellowship and obligation of the covenant expressed in the sacrifices that were offered up in Exodus 24, and Moses' words of institution in Exodus 24:8 indicated the sacramental nature of the sprinkling of the blood on the altar and people. A divinely instituted ritual, an outward action designed to illustrate and confirm an inward spiritual reality, the union between God and His people.

Finally, in verses 9-11, the amazing theophany, that vision of feet of God, as it were, sitting on the heavens of the earth, was designed to illustrate the kind of awesome God in which Israel enjoyed an intimate communion, even being invited to bring their knees up under the table for fellowship with the living God. Above all, that covenant made there, confirmed in Exodus 24:1-11, serves as a vehicle for our worship of the living God, and worship entails both communion, that is meeting with God, and adoration, or giving to God the glory due His name,

praising His name. And the rest of the book of Exodus is really given over to that very theme, of meeting with God, and giving to Him the glory due His name. Communion and worship, communion and praise, fellowship and adoration, for the rest of the book of Exodus, we are on those themes. So, especially in chapters 24-31 we will see how Israel does that through grace and promise. Let's turn now to Exodus 24 beginning with verse 12, this is God's word:

Now the LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction." So Moses arose with Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God. But to the elders he said, "Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a legal matter, let him approach them." Then Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

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

Our Lord and our God, we bow before You, sensing again that we are hearing displayed to our ears and hearts, a glorious encounter that by Your grace You granted to Your people representatively in Moses. We pray that we would learn what You would have us to be and do from this Your word, spoken so many thousands of years ago, but fresh as today. And we ask Your blessing on our hearing and obedience in Jesus' name, Amen.

Exodus 24 is the swing chapter in the book of Exodus. On the one hand, it records for us the people of God's response to the law which had been given in Exodus 20-23. We see there the response of the people of God to God's giving of the law. They agree to embrace the covenant and be loyal to Him. But on the other hand, we see in Exodus 24, a preparation for everything else that happens in the Book of Exodus. Specifically, in the text before us, we find the hints of two themes that will preoccupy the remainder of the chapters of Exodus. First, the theme of the building of the tabernacle is hinted at in Exodus. In fact, the reason for the building of the tabernacle is explained by two things that happen here, and secondly, even the incident of the golden calf, which is going to be recorded in Exodus 32-33, and which will interrupt the focus of the rest of Exodus, just on worship positively, and illustrate negatively how not to worship, even that incident is hinted at here in Exodus 24. So Exodus 24 looks back at everything that has happened so far in Exodus, and looks forward to everything that will happen in the remainder of Exodus.

Now you say, "Wait a minute, I'm not sure I've seen that yet in Exodus 24." Well, let me give you a few examples. In Exodus 24:12, the stone tables of the covenant are mentioned, sometimes called the ten words, the Ten Commandments, the tablets of the covenant; they are mentioned. Now, these necessitated the building of the Ark of the Covenant to house them. So when you get to Exodus 24:10-22, and there is this long description of the building of the ark of the covenant, that was necessitated by these stone tablets that were given by God to Moses to be permanently kept for the people of God. They also figure into the golden calf rebellion. Do you recall what Moses did when he came down the mountain with those tablets and saw the people of God breaking the first and second commandments, before he had even delivered them from God to them? And then again, if you look at verse 18, Moses' long stay on the mountain, 40 days and 40 nights, is going to be appealed to later by the sinning people of Israel as their excuse for why they built the golden calf. "We didn't think that this man Moses was going to come back to us," they said. He's been up there 40 days and 40 nights, so we felt we needed to move on. Even there, we're seeing a hint of what is to come in the book of Exodus. If you look at verse 16, the mention of God's glory, and especially the mention of God's glory resting on Mt. Sinai, is going to factor in later in Exodus 25 and 40 with regard to the tabernacle. Remember, the Shekinah glory of God will rest upon the tabernacle as well. And the divine presence, which is recorded in verses 16 and 17 of Exodus 24, will there again be on the completed tabernacle. The cloud that covers the mountain will again figure in the covering of the tent of meeting in Exodus 24, and even Joshua's partial ascent up the mountain in Exodus 13-14, is going to factor into the rest of the story of Exodus. Joshua is going to come down from the mountain and see the people of God committing idolatry, and he's going to be flabbergasted. If he had been there seeing it, he wouldn't have been flabbergasted. He had been up on the mountain out of range, and when he came down and saw what the people of God were doing, he was absolutely puzzled. So, Joshua's partial ascent explains why he was so surprised by the clamor of worship of the assembly of Israel around the golden calf. So, in all these ways, Exodus 24 foretells and prepares for things that will come after it in the book of Exodus.

But, more than that, Exodus 24 tells us something vital about what it is to be in a covenant relationship with God and to meet with Him and commune with Him. There are two things to note here. In verses 12-14, Moses is summoned into the presence of God, and in verses 15-18, Moses actually enters into the presence of God in order to receive the law of God, the instruction of God. In these two parts we need to note verses 12-14, where we see Moses as the mediator of the new covenant, summoned into the presence of God in order to receive these tablets of stone which had the words of the Ten Commandments, the tables of the covenant.

I. God, not Moses, is the source of all law and instruction for His people.

This passage teaches us that Moses, now serving in the role of the mediator, just as the people had requested, but God Himself, not Moses, is the source of the instruction of those Ten Commandments. He's the source of the instruction to Israel, He's the source of the Law, the Torah. In verse 12, now that the covenant has been sealed, the Lord calls Moses to the top of Mt. Sinai, and we're told in verse 12 that it's expressly to receive these tables of the law written by the hand of God Himself. It's interesting that we know other near eastern cultures almost always wrote important documents on imperishable materials, and this fits the pattern. You want to write something that will last in the near east, you better write it on stone, because most everything else will not last. And we're told that the laws and commandments which God had written, God wrote for Israel's instruction. We've said over and over that Law, in the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, especially refers to not what we would refer to as civil, codified law, but it refers to household instruction. It is the instruction of God to His own family. So, it not simply, "Don't do this," or "Do do that," but it provides principles, it provides exhortations, it provides promises and warnings. It is household instruction, and we're told that these things had been written for Israel's instruction. It reminds you of what Paul will say about the Exodus, that "these things were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." The point is that God's word is written for our instruction as Paul will emphasize in his letter to Timothy, when he says that "All Scripture is given by inspiration and is profitable for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." Well, that same principle is being enunciated right here in Exodus 24:12.

In verse 13, Joshua is mentioned for the second time in the book of Exodus. The first time we found Joshua was in Exodus 17:9. His role will become even more important in the immediate future in the event of the golden calf, when he reappears in Exodus 33:11. Here, he is called the servant or the attendant of Moses. Joshua will hold that title until Moses dies.

In verse 14, Moses shows his concern for the people of Israel by leaving Aaron and Hur and the elders close enough to the people, that if the people have judgments that need to be made, decisions that have to be handed down from the elders, they can still get to Aaron and Hur and the elders and get their answers. He leaves Aaron and Hur and the elders in a position on the mountain where they can be reached by the people, and that too will play a role in the golden calf incident to come, because you will remember that it will be Aaron who is close enough to be reached by the people, though he is on the mountain, who will play a central part in the sin of the golden calf.

Moses and Joshua and the elders ascend, apparently, to different and successively higher stations on the mountain. Moses goes right to the top, Joshua goes further than the elders. Aaron and Hur and the elders are further down so the people can reach them without violating God's word of not touching

the mountain. And there is a sense, you understand, in which this whole scenario is necessitated by the people's own request to Moses to mediate for them. When God had spoken to them the last time their response had been, "Please don't speak to us again or we'll die." And they literally begged Moses to mediate for them, and that is precisely what is happening. Moses is now going up to the mountain to receive what God would have given to them directly, and so there's a sense in which this whole scenario is necessitated by the people's own request for Moses to mediate for them. But it's also necessitated because God is a holy God. And the people perceive that; it's even going to be reiterated in the next verses, but one great point gets through here: behind the law of Israel, behind the instruction of Israel lies, not Moses but God. It is divine authority, it is transcendent authority, that lies behind the instruction that Moses gives to Israel simply as a messenger. We may call it The Law of Moses because he was the delivery system, but it's not the Law of Moses in terms of origins. Its author is God and that's made crystal clear. Moses must come to God in order to go back with the instruction to the people, because that instruction comes from God, not Moses. So Moses must first meet with God before he can serve as mediator to give God's word, God's instruction, God's law, God's commands back to his people. That comes through very clear in Exodus 24:12-14.

II. Without the presence of God in worship nothing else matters.

In verses 15-18, Moses enters into the presence of the glory of the Lord in order to receive the law. Now, that succession of phrases itself is mysterious, isn't it. The presence of the glory of the Lord. What does that mean, to enter into the presence of the Lord? Our language strains even to begin to describe it. Moses' experience, however, on the mountain serves to remind us that it is precisely the presence of the Lord that is the great blessing for the people of God. The great blessing of worship is the presence of God. The great blessing of worship is meeting with God. The great blessing of the Christian life is knowing and meeting and fellowshiping and communing with the living God. And all through these verses we have intimations of the presence and the glory of God. In verse 15, for instance, this verse points to the presence of the Lord's glory by mentioning the cloud. When Moses went up to the mountain, we read, the cloud covered the mountain. Well, the cloud had been one of two symbols of God's presence with the children of Israel in the wilderness: the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. And right here in Exodus 15, when we're told that Moses went up the mountain and the cloud covered the mountain, we're being reminded by Moses of the presence of God at the mountain. The cloud had been the symbol of the Lord's presence in the wilderness wanderings, and it now symbolized the presence of God with His people at Sinai again.

In verse 16, we're told that the glory of the Lord took up residence on Mt. Sinai. "The glory of the Lord rested on Mt. Sinai." Now, the English translation *rested*, is the precisely the same original word that will be used to talk about the *indwelling*

of God's presence in the temple and the tabernacle when they are completed. God dwelt with, He tabernacled with, He rested with, He came to, He drew near to His people. That's the point of the resting of the glory of God at Sinai. It's an amazing thing, this theme of God dwelling with His people, drawing near to His people, is one of the fundamental themes of the book of exodus, and this may be the most important thing we learn in Exodus 24. That the great blessing of life is for God to draw near to us in favor.

And it's interesting that John picks up on this very theme in John 1:1-18. You are right to think that behind John 1 is Genesis 1. The language is so similar. "In the beginning God created, In the beginning was the Word." But also behind John 1 is Exodus 24. Both Genesis 1 and Exodus 24 are impacting what he records under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in John 1. Listen to God's word:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.

There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

Now, in verses 14-18, you hear Exodus 24 in John's words. Here are the people of God in Exodus 24, they look up and what do they see? The presence of God in cloud and fire, and they say, "Our God is a consuming fire," because they've seen the glory of God. Here's John saying, "You see Jesus, you've seen the glory of God."

Here's Moses saying, "God has come and tabernacled, He's dwelt with His people, He's come down to Sinai and drawn near to them with His presence," and here is John saying, "God became man," and as one translator said, "And

moved into your neighborhood.” He drew near to you. The presence of God, God in the flesh, “And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, He has explained Him.” And so we see something here of the foreshadowing of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, even in the tabernacling of God with His people at Sinai. In verse 16, paralleling the original creation week, for seven days Moses sits on the mountain in the midst of the cloud of glory. Six of those days there is silence; on the seventh God speaks to Moses.

In verse 17, we see the cloud and fire again, the twin manifestations of God's presence in the wilderness, and they are present again at Sinai. To the eyes of the sons of Israel, the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. So there's not only the cloud there's the fire, and the people perceive the fire, and don't think their reaction is just an Old Testament reaction, because at the end of the glorious description of Mt. Zion in Hebrews 12, the author says, “Our God is a consuming fire.” The same thing the children of Israel had perceived at Sinai.

In verse 18, Moses enters the cloud into the very presence of the Lord and communes with Him for forty days and forty nights. Don't miss what the New Testament authors are doing, don't miss what the gospel authors are doing when Matthew in Matthew 4:1-11, and Mark in Mark 1:12-13, and Luke in Luke 4:1-13 tell you that when Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan, He was in the wilderness forty days and forty nights. They're telling you that He is the new Moses. They are telling you that He is the new Mediator, the better Mediator, He's the better Moses. That's what the author of Hebrews will tell you explicitly. Jesus is the new Mediator for His people, and He's being tested in the wilderness. And it will not be until Exodus 32 when Moses comes back down from the mountain. A quarter of the book later it will be before he comes down. What's the point? The point is the presence of God is the central reality and the central blessing of the book of Exodus, and Moses is representatively as the mediator, coming into the presence of God. And without that presence of God, nothing else matters. Without communion with God, without fellowship with God, without the presence of God, without the favor of God, without meeting with God, nothing else matters.

Now God has, in the flesh, Immanuel, dwelt with us. Is the most important thing in the world to you communion with Him? Is the most important thing in the world meeting with Him? In some cultures today that will cost you. Here are your options: commune with God or be ostracized. Commune with God - be thrown out of your family. Commune with God - lose your job. Commune with God - lose your children. Commune with God - die. And Moses is saying that you can have all those other things, but without meeting with God, without communing with God, you've lost the one thing that matters. The children of Israel will learn that in Exodus 32-33, but Moses is setting us up to understand that right here in Exodus 24. His being allowed into that glory cloud into the presence of God as the representative of God's people, and it not only represents the children of Israel's

communion with God, but it foreshadows the day in which we as the people of God, through the priest who has gone into the inner veil, into the holy of holies, in that heavenly tabernacle, brings us into the very presence of God without the mediation of an earthly priest.

Every day, every Lord's Day, when we gather as the people of God, we have the privilege and opportunity of entering into the presence of almighty God, and that is the one thing that matters more than anything. Do you really believe that? If you really believe that, everything else that God says about worship in the book of Exodus and everything else that God says about worship in the Bible, falls into place. If you don't believe it, then nothing else works. So let's pray that that would become for us the thing that we desire more than anything else, the favorable presence of communion and fellowship with the living God in worship. That's what you were made for. Let's pray.

Lord and God, hear our prayer and give us the desire of our heart, which is You. Make us to be those who know that You are the only refuge, the only fortress, the only strength, the only might, the only protection, the only home worth having, and help us to live for You, and die for You, in Jesus' name, Amen.

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