

UNIT 44

THE RATIFICATION OF THE COVENANT (Exodus 24:1-18)

Exodus 24 is the critical turning point of the book in many ways; here the LORD cuts the covenant with the people he has redeemed and inaugurates the new program. Everything before this in the book leads up to this ceremony; everything after it is based on it.

We have to look at this passage on **several levels** for our exposition. **First**, the **primary level**, that is, the historical, contextual meaning of the passage is the **inauguration of the covenant**. God establishes the covenant **with his redeemed** people. Why did they need a covenant? That is the way the promises and stipulations of the agreement are made sure. The covenant must be sealed with blood.

Second, the passage provides an **archetype for Israel's (and our) worship**. It provides a paradigm of the worship of God's covenant people. All worship will have a call to worship, a preparation by the people, the proclamation of the word, the reading of the word, the offering of sacrifices, and the eating of the communal meal in the presence of God. Thus, **every worship service** in Israel **was a covenant renewal** service for the believers.

Third, the passage is **typological of the inauguration of the new covenant**. There too the Lord Jesus inaugurated the new covenant in the upper room by actually using the words of Exodus 24:8. The wine, like the animal blood in Israel, pointed to the actual blood of Christ. And so the next day Jesus sealed the covenant with his own blood, not with the temporary means of wine to represent blood. And just as Moses went up into the clouds after the covenant was sealed, Jesus ascended into the clouds as well, leaving everyone to wait for his return. Thus, **when Christians worship with holy communion**, their service also must be a **covenant renewal** service. In part they are reliving the upper room inauguration of the covenant, as the words of our services state; but in part they are also renewing the moment that they first received Christ and made their commitment to

follow him and obey his words. Doing the ritual “in memory” of Christ means to re-activate the covenant stipulations as well as call to mind the covenant promises.

But there is also a **related application** that must be made. The covenant itself speaks of the relationship God has with people by blood, and so the exposition ultimately will also address **the way** people are **to enter into this covenant** now that it has been inaugurated. It would be the same in the Old Testament as it is now in the New. People must respond to God’s call, believe his word, trust in his provision of sacrifice, live as faithful covenant members, and look for his coming in glory. But I would not make this application until I had first made the primary application of the passage to believers who are already in the covenant.

The goal of worship and the goal of salvation will be the same—to enter into the presence of the glorious Lord God (by God’s grace, through faith, in the sacrificial atonement). Every full worship service is a rehearsal of the process of redemption from being called to being glorified. And people will join this covenant throughout time, starting at the beginning in the plan of redemption but joining the worship to commemorate that plan.

I. God calls his people to worship him with reverence (24:1, 2).

We need to allow for some differences in the Old Testament, notably the hierarchy in the community—Moses, the Priests, the elders, and the congregation (the congregation may be the family leaders and not the whole nation). Since the covenant is now going to be inaugurated, it will require the leadership's involvement first and then the people (not too unlike the LORD and the disciples first in the upper room). So this is clearly the inauguration service because the people are not drawn in, not yet. But it also is the pattern for all worship—worship is an act of obedience, a service, because God calls.

What I would stress apart from this would be “worship” as well as “from far off.” The worshipping meant bowing oneself to the ground, and this posture was consistent with keeping at a distance. This was the holy God (recall the epiphany in chapter 19) and no one could come boldly before Him. The verb “to approach” was reserved for Moses the mediator. Just as later in the New Testament, one mediator would have access into the presence of God and assure the rest that they were accepted by God.

II. *The Mediator of the covenant consecrates the people as worshipers of the covenant God (24:3-8).*

The process followed here includes several steps that have become fixed parts of worship.

A. *Proclamation (3a).*

The verb used is *waysapper*, “and he declared/ told/related” to the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments. “**Words**” refers to the ten commandments, and “**Judgments**” to the subsequent laws in Exodus 21–23. To the people, this was new revelation that Moses now proclaimed.

B. *Commitment (3b, 4a).*

The response of the people to this message was: “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do/we are willing to do.” This is not presumptuous. One could take this verb as either a cohortative of resolve--it is what they resolve to do, or as a desiderative imperfect. The latter is better, as we shall see. But the point is that there is no reason to say they were rash, or presumed they could do it all.

Then Moses wrote all the words. Here is the recording of the stipulations now agreed upon. This verse suggests that what had gone before (chapters 20-23) was not written down until now. Whether all of chapters 20-23 is meant, or an original essence of it, is hard to say.

C. *Sacrifice (4b-6).*

At the heart of worship is sacrifice. So too for the Christian, since the antitype of the sacrifices, the death of Jesus Christ, is central to worship and celebrated symbolically in worship.

Here you will have to discuss the altar and the twelve pillars, but more importantly the “burnt offerings” and the “peace offerings.” The first (Lev. 1) stresses total surrender to God and complete acceptance by God—with divine pleasure. The second (Lev. 3) celebrates being at peace with God. It is a communal meal shared by covenant people in fellowship with God and with one another. Moses collected part of the blood, but poured out the rest.

All this anticipates the legislation of Leviticus. It could be that such sacrifices were common, or that Moses knew already what to do, or that the sacrifices were general and Moses later called them what they had been.

D. Reading the Word of the LORD (7a).

Now before the consecration Moses read the Law to the people. The text is very explicit: “he read it in the ears of the people.” This is the public reading of what had been revealed, agreed to, and recorded.

E. Renewed Commitment (7b).

The people repeat their commitment, adding “and we will obey.” This verb suggests the verbs are imperfects rather than cohortatives (recall that III *he’* verbs look the same in either, but not these other forms).

F. Consecration (8).

When Moses sprinkled the blood over the people he said, “This is the blood of the covenant” This expression is almost identical to our LORD's in the upper room: “This is the blood of the New Covenant.” In each case sacrificial blood inaugurated the covenants.

*III. God accepts consecrated worshipers into
communal fellowship with him (24:9-11).*

These verses twice mention that the leaders saw God, the first time *ra’ah*, simply “to see,” is used, and the second *khazah*, a more intense and even prophetic-like seeing is used (the noun is often “vision”).

In the first seeing there is a vision of a paved sapphire stone as expansive as the heavens in clearness, (N.B. *tohar*), i.e., the clearest, bluest sky (contrast chapter 19 with the terrifying phenomena). This was under His feet. It is interesting to me that it does not describe God—only what was under His feet. Among the possible interpretations I would think would be the contrast between this serene, peaceful blue expanse and the thunderings and lightnings of chapter 19. The change, of course, has come with the bringing into covenant through sacrifice.

Because no one can see God and live, according to prevailing Old Testament ideas, the text records that God did not stretch out His hand against them (we have seen what His hand can do). This is proof that He had accepted them into His fellowship. They saw God but would not die. But what did they see? The text implies they saw more than a clear platform. It is probable that they saw some kind of a revelation of the LORD in glory (the pre-incarnate Christ), as Isaiah (6) saw,

or Ezekiel (1) saw, or even John (Rev. 1) saw. How clear the vision was, or how much of the divine person they saw is unclear; but it would not be much, judging from Moses' getting to see the back parts of a garment passing by, a man who .

Finally, the recording of their fellowship meal adds to the confirmation: "they saw God and ate and drank." This seeing can be more of a vision; but the eating and drinking was real. We could say it this way: both in the Old and New Covenants, worshippers came to see God and they came to eat with Him. To eat at the LORD's table is the ultimate sign of fellowship, for worshippers eat the sacrifice.

*IV. God grants his people a vision of glory
as he communicates his divine will (24:12-18).*

This final section instructs Moses to go up into the mount so that God would give him "tables of stone, a law, and commandments that I have written." This sounds like Exodus 20-23 had not been finalized. Perhaps the Law in chapter 20-23 had been revealed in general to Moses, who proclaimed and recorded it, but now it would be fully revealed authoritatively by God. Otherwise, it is difficult to know what is meant. *Torah* would not refer to the Decalogue, and not properly to the book of the covenant (apparently already given). Modern scholars suggest "that I have written" is out of place and should follow "tablets of stone." "A law and commandments" would not refer to the instructions for the tabernacle. Perhaps the reference is to Deuteronomy 5:31 for *torah*, and the commandments to Exodus 21:2--22:17. But none of this can be concluded with certainty. Critical scholarship rearranges the material for sources.

An interesting part of this is the purpose of the revelation: "that you may teach them." The verb is cognate to *torah*, law or instruction. While Moses is up on the mountain he leaves Aaron and Hur as "teachers," i.e., to answer questions.

The vision of the glory of the LORD confirmed the authority of the revelation to Israel. The vision was of a consuming fire. Moses went up into the cloud to receive God's revelation, and was there forty days and nights.

CONCLUSION

There are so many parts to this section that it is rather hard to account for them all in a sentence, even a full one. The subject matter is God's bringing people into covenant with Himself, but one may wish to word it with the worshippers as the subject for easier association. *Those whom God sanctifies by the blood of the covenant and instructs by the book of the covenant may enjoy fellowship with the God of the covenant and anticipate a far more glorious fellowship.*

The passage is typological also of our mediator, Jesus Christ. He too has called people to follow him and worship him; he too inaugurated the new covenant with the blood of the sacrifice (the blood in Moses' day, and the wine in the Upper Room, both spoke of the blood of Christ); he too gave instructions for his followers to obey; and he too ascended in the clouds leaving his followers waiting for his return.