Exodus Chapter Twenty-Four

Overview of Exodus 24

Exodus chapter 24 is considered by many Bible scholars as the climax to the book of Exodus since it contains the record of the Israelites ratifying the covenant that God had established with them, which is called today “the Mosaic covenant” or the “Mosaic Law.”

In Exodus 19-23, we have presented the stipulations, which would include the Ten Commandments and various ordinances, which were to govern the conduct of the nation. These commandments and ordinances would serve as the nation’s constitution. It bestowed upon the Israelites the wonderful privilege of worshipping and serving God as well as representing Him by reflecting His perfect, holy standards before the Gentile world. Now, in Exodus 24, we have the people ratifying the covenant by agreeing to do all that God required of them.

Exodus 24 is divided into two sections: (1) Exodus 24:1-11: The Israelites ratify the covenant. (2) Exodus 24:12-18: God summons Moses to Mount Sinai in order to receive the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone.

The NET Bible has the following note, “Exod 24 is the high point of the book in many ways, but most importantly, here Yahweh makes a covenant with the people – the Sinaitic Covenant. The unit not only serves to record the event in Israel’s becoming a nation, but it provides a paradigm of the worship of God’s covenant people – entering into the presence of the glory of Yahweh. See additionally W. A. Maier, “The Analysis of Exodus 24 According to Modern Literary, Form, and Redaction Critical Methodology,” Springer 37 (1973): 35-52. The passage may be divided into four parts for exposition: vv. 1–2, the call for worship; vv. 3–8, the consecration of the worshipers; vv. 9–11, the confirmation of the covenant; and vv. 12–18, the communication with Yahweh.”

Exodus 24:1-11: The Israelites Ratify the Covenant with God

Exodus 24:1 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. 2 Moses alone, however, shall come near to the Lord, but they shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him.” 3 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!” 4 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. 5 He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord. 6 Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 7 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!” 8 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.” 9 Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, 10 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. 11 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.”

Verses 1-2 contain the invitation from God for Israel to ratify the covenant. Specifically, only the leadership of Israel was permitted to approach God on Mount Sinai. Selected by God were of course Moses but also his brother Aaron as well as his sons, Nadab and Abihu including also seventy elders. From this entourage, only Moses was permitted by God to draw near to Him while the others stayed at a distance. This restriction was to honor Moses in the site of these elders. It also demonstrated that only Moses was on intimate terms with God and was the most obedient of all the elders of Israel. It also demonstrated that Moses was the mediatorial ruler in Israel meaning that he stood between God and the Israelites and represented God before the Israelites and represented the Israelites before God.

In verse 3, we read that after hearing the covenant code of conduct repeated to them by Moses as he had heard it on the mountain, the Israelites gave their assent to it. Verses 4 and 7 indicate that this Israelite assent took place a second time after Moses had written the covenant code of conduct down and read it to the Israelites. This assent meant that they promised to obey everything in this covenant code of conduct which contained the Ten Commandments recorded in chapter 20 as well as the various ordinances recorded in chapters 21-23. The Israelites’ agreement to keep the covenant that appears here in chapter 24 echoes their statement in Exodus 19:8.

**Exodus 19:7** So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him. 8 All the people answered together and said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do!” And Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord. (NASB95)

In this verse as is the case in Exodus 24:3 and 7, after listening to the elders of Israel, the Israelites agree to do all that the Lord commanded them to do, thus they enter into the covenant with the Lord.
Some expositors have criticized this response as presumptuous and that the Israelites should have confessed their total inability to obey perfectly the Lord’s commands. They argue that they were placing too much confidence in themselves. However, Deuteronomy chapter 5 records the same event but reveals in greater detail what the Lord thought of the Israelites’ response. In Deuteronomy 5:28, the Lord says that the Israelites had done well by responding in such a fashion. Then, in Deuteronomy 5:29, the Lord also reveals that the Israelites did not have the capacity to obey Him. He bemoans the fact that they did not have the heart to do so. So these passages teach us the Lord accepted the Israelites’ response, though they were not aware of their inability to obey Him, and the covenant was ratified for the establishment of the kingdom of God in Israel.

So the Israelites’ response to God that they would obey all that He commanded expresses their desire to obey Him wholeheartedly even though they did not have the capacity to do so. They wanted what God was offering them. However, they overestimated their own ability to keep the covenant, much like Peter overestimated own ability to overcome Satan and remain faithful to the Lord during His passion. The Israelites also underestimated God’s own holy standards. This is the direct result of not appreciating their own sinfulness and God’s holiness. However, the Mosaic Law would teach about both.

Now, Exodus 24:4 records that Moses wrote down the law. This was extremely important since this would be needed to instruct future generations as well as foreigners entering into the covenant community. It would have to be written down in order to aid judges in deciding cases. Having it in writing would remove guessing or relying on one’s memory as to what the Lord said. It would provide them a reference, in which they could know exactly what the Lord required in certain cases. Also, by having it in writing, the Israelites could read it so as to keep the law fresh in their minds and ready for application.

Verse 4 also tells the reader that the following morning Moses built an altar at the foot of the mountain. He erected twelve pillars, which represented the twelve tribes of Israel. Verse 5 says that Moses directed the young men of the nation to offer burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings. The former portrayed or typified that aspect of Jesus Christ’s spiritual and physical deaths on the Cross, which would propitiate the Father (1 John 2:2; 4:10). The burnt offering in Leviticus 1:2-17 depicts the doctrine of propitiation with emphasis on the work of Christ. “Propitiation” is the Godward side of salvation whereby the voluntary substitutionary spiritual death of the impeccable humanity of Christ in hypostatic union satisfied the righteous demands of a holy God that the sins of the entire world-past, present and future be judged (1 John 2:2; 4:10). The peace offering called for the shedding of blood and taught the doctrine of reconciliation (Lev. 3). The peace offering sets forth God as propitiated and the sinner reconciled.
Later on in Israel’s history, the Levitical priesthood would have performed these animal sacrifices. Therefore, we have the young men of Israel performing this function until the Levites were chosen by the Lord to do this task. These sacrifices made clear to the Israelites that they could only approach God who is holy to worship Him and have fellowship with Him by means of a blood animal sacrifice.

Exodus 24:4-7 contains five elements, which served to direct the people’s attention to their new relationship with God. Each of these elements serve to prepare the Israelites for their verbal agreement ratifying the covenant. Their first assent was unofficial, the second would be official. These five elements were an altar, twelve stone pillars, animal sacrifices, the sprinkling of blood on the altar and the reading of the covenant. The contents of this covenant appear in Exodus 20:1-23:33.

The blood in the basins was to be sprinkled on the people as a visible sign that they were the recipients of the benefit that the shed blood provided. The blood sprinkled on the altar signified that God was the other party in the covenant agreement, which was represented by sacrifices at the altar. Hebrews 9:22 makes clear that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. The blood animal sacrifices would remind the Israelites that forgiveness and their acceptance by God was based on a sacrifice, which would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ’s spiritual and physical deaths on the cross.

Exodus 24:8 records that Moses sprinkled the blood on the Israelites which symbolized their being parties to the covenant. The blood of the animal would remind the Israelites of their oath to keep the covenant. The ceremony was designed to be memorable so that the Israelites could recall their oath to the Lord.

The NET Bible writes “The construct relationship “the blood of the covenant” means “the blood by which the covenant is ratified” (S. R. Driver, *Exodus*, 254). The parallel with the inauguration of the new covenant in the blood of Christ is striking (see, e.g., Matt 26:28, 1 Cor 11:25). When Jesus was inaugurating the new covenant, he was bringing to an end the old.”

Hannah writes “In the ratification ceremony Moses sprinkled blood ... on the altar (24:6) and on the people (v. 8) who had heard Moses read the Book of the Covenant and had promised once again to obey it (v. 7; cf. v. 3). This is the only time in the Old Testament when people were sprinkled with blood. Possibly the people were sprinkled in the sense that the stones which represented them (v. 4) were sprinkled. (On the relationship of obedience and sprinkling of blood see comments on 1 Peter 1:2.) The sprinkled blood, then, symbolized the legal transaction between God (represented by the altar, Ex. 24:6) and the people.

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(represented by the stones). Israel was thus ceremonially set apart through blood (the blood of the covenant) as the people of the true God. Later the New Covenant, established by Jesus, was also ratified by blood, His own (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25-26).”

Douglas Stuart writes “Moses sprinkled blood on the people in order to symbolize their being parties to the covenant. Some droplets would remain on their skin for days; some that fell on their clothing would be visible, if faded, for as long as the clothing lasted. The ceremony itself was so vivid and extraordinary as to be memorable, and its memory was intended to keep in the consciousness of the people the fact that God had joined with the people of Israel in a formal, official covenant to which both he and they were bound by oath. The animal’s blood recalled that oath (cf. v. 6), and therefore Moses commanded the people to take note of it and appreciate its meaning (‘This is the blood of the covenant’; ‘See the blood of the covenant’ [NRSV]). Moreover, the covenant was not merely a general concept. Rather, it was the sum of all its words, so Moses described it as ‘existing in accordance with all these words.’ Again the language emphasizes that Israelites were not free to keep only part of the covenant.”

Exodus 24:9-11 tell the reader that Moses along with Aaron and his two oldest sons and seventy elders were granted an audience in the presence of the Lord Himself in order to confirm and ratify the covenant.

Verse 10 says that these individuals saw God, which appears to conflict with Exodus 33:11, 20, John 1:18 and 1 John 4:12, which state that no one can see God and live. These verses make clear that sinful humans who are saved by grace never actually see God in His essence. This can only take place after their death or the rapture when they are minus their sin nature.

Thus, the elders saw only a vision or some sort of representation of God in which they could discern who He was. They saw some sort of shape that allowed them to see Him in a vague sense. So God lets this contingent of Israelite leaders see some kind of form that lets them known that they were dealing with a person and are in fact in the presence of God.

Exodus 33:11 says that Moses spoke “face to face” with God, which does not contradict the fact that he was not allowed to see God’s face (v. 20) as “face to face” is a figurative expression suggesting openness and friendship (cf. Num. 12:8; Deut. 34:10; and comments on John 1:18).

So in Exodus 24:9-11, we have a special ceremony that entails a meal. It was commonplace in Moses’ day and in the ancient world to ratify an agreement with a meal (cf. Genesis 31:54; Luke 22:15-20). Thus, the significance of Moses, Aaron,
his two sons and the seventy elders eating a meal with God is that it symbolized the ratification of an agreement between God and the nation of Israel. It symbolized that God had accepted the Israelites and expressed His approval of them. The Lord Jesus Christ was said to eat with sinners, which expressed His acceptance of sinners (cf. Matthew 9:10-11; 11:19; Mark 2:15-15; Luke 5:30; 15:2). So this formal meal demonstrated a mutual agreement had taken place between God and the Israelites. It expressed cooperation between the two sides and God’s acceptance of the Israelites and their respect of God.

Verse 10 says that under the feet of the God of Israel “there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself.” A more accurate translation of this phrase would “there appeared like the work of brick composed of sapphire indeed as clear as the sky itself.” This description indicates that the men on the mountain were given the impression that God was not actually standing on the mountain but was only visible there in a personal way. It indicated that God did not need any kind of footing like men or in other words that He was transcendent of creation.

Verse 11 tells the reader that God did not kill this Israelite delegation. This reflects the attitude in the ancient world that to see God meant certain death. However, God does not kill any member of this delegation to express the fact that they would be assured that God was willing to enter into this agreement with them.

**Exodus 24:12-18: God Summons Moses to the Mountain to Receive Ten Commandments on Tablets of Stone**

Hannah writes “The Mosaic Covenant had been confirmed (24:1-11) and Israel was then a theocracy, a government or commonwealth under God. Having been redeemed from bondage by God and now in a covenant under His laws, God’s people were then enlightened as to the proper way to worship Him. So Moses was called into God’s presence to receive the Decalogue in stone along with other commands (24:12) and he returned 40 days later (31:18; 34:28). In that period of time God communicated to Moses the form of Israel’s worship. The tabernacle was to become the focus of Israel’s worship of God. This lengthy section (24:12-31:18) deals with ordinances pertaining to the sanctuary and priestly ministry—ceremonial laws that undergirded the covenant.”

**Exodus 24:12** 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.” 13 So Moses arose with Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of

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God. 14 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.” 15 Then Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. 16 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. 17 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. 18 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. (NASB95)

Exodus 24:12 along with 34:28 tell the reader that while Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights he received from God on tablets of stone the Ten Commandments as well as commands related to worshipping God.

Exodus 24:12-18 assumes that the Israelite delegation composed of Moses, Aaron, his two sons and seventy elders had descended from the mountain and were back in the Israelite camp. The trip recorded in this pericope would involve only Moses and his assistant, Joshua. It would last for forty days and forty nights. The events recorded in Exodus 25:1-32:16 took place during this period of time.

Exodus 24:12 makes clear that God only wrote the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone whereas all the other commandments found in Exodus 21-23 were written by Moses according to God’s dictation (Exodus 17:14; 24:4; 34:27; cf. Deuteronomy 27:3, 8; 31:9). Furthermore, Deuteronomy 4:13, 5:22 and 10:2-4 also tell us that God only wrote down on tablets of stone the Decalogue.

Douglas Stuart has the following excellent comment, he writes “God invited Moses up the mountain with the clear instruction that he would be there a long time (‘and stay here’). A special feature of this visit to the top is the promise of receiving the tablets of stone. These function effectively as the document clause of the Sinai covenant—in part because the covenant’s totality is reflected broadly in the Ten Commandments and also because that which God himself wrote could surely be understood to symbolize his authorship of the whole, most of which was dictated to his amanuensis, Moses. For Moses to be able to receive these tablets personally and deliver them personally to the Israelites on God’s behalf would parallel the personal experience of the leaders in eating the covenant meal with Yahweh as described in the passage immediately preceding the present context. That the tablets would eventually reside in the ark itself (25:21–22) as an indicator of the permanent presence of God through his word shows their significance. But neither the tablets nor the rest of the law functions in a merely symbolic way. God’s covenant is based on stipulations—rules that must be kept, requirements that if broken would condemn Israel to great pain and misfortune. God thus insisted that Moses understand that he himself had written the commandments ‘for their
instruction.’ From the ancient world outside of Israel, all surviving written evidence indicates that laws were understood to be given by a king to his people, not a god to his people. To be sure, the king could claim that a god or gods instructed him to promulgate the laws, but no claim close to the present one existed outside the biblical covenant—that God himself provided his laws directly to his covenant people and that he actually wrote the basic ones (the Ten Words/Commandments) personally on stone as a sign that all his laws came directly from him and are not the product of human invention. Israel’s teacher was thus God himself, who gave them his covenant ‘for their instruction.’ It cannot be escaped that when Jesus issued laws—not merely as the one who wrote them down as dictated but as the actual author—he was staking a claim to divinity under the concept of Israelite covenant law, in which the author of the commands is also the divine Sovereign.”

In Exodus 24:14, Moses tells the elders to wait for his return with Joshua and delegates authority to Aaron and Hur to decide legal matters in his stead. This would indicate quite clearly to the Israelites that Moses was intending to be away for quite awhile. Thus, they would need to be patient until his return, which they were not as evidenced by the events recorded in Exodus 32 and the building of the golden calf.

In Exodus 24:15-16, we have the glory of the Lord represented in a cloud resting on Mount Sinai, covering it for six days. This is the same cloud mentioned in Exodus 19:18. Verse 17 says that the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. This indicates the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire that led the Israelites through the Sinai Peninsula to Horeb which is mentioned in Exodus 13:21-22 and 14:19-24, now resided on this mountain top.

The pillar of cloud during the day and the pillar of fire at night was a visible manifestation of the Lord’s presence in the camp of the Israelites. This visible manifestation was to guide and protect the Israelites and also would comfort them. So we have here the pillar of cloud resting on the mountain during the day and the pillar of fire appearing on the mountain at night. This was a manifestation of God’s presence. The glory of the Lord is manifestation of the presence of God or one or more of His attributes or His person. This is another theophany meaning a visible and auditory manifestation of God.

The NET Bible writes “The vision of the glory of Yahweh confirmed the authority of the revelation of the Law given to Israel. This chapter is the climax of God’s bringing people into covenant with himself, the completion of his revelation to them, a completion that is authenticated with the miraculous. It ends with the mediator going up in the clouds to be with God, and the people down below

eagerly awaiting his return. The message of the whole chapter could be worded this way: Those whom God sanctifies by the blood of the covenant and instructs by the book of the covenant may enjoy fellowship with him and anticipate a far more glorious fellowship. So too in the NT the commandments and teachings of Jesus are confirmed by his miraculous deeds and by his glorious manifestation on the Mount of the Transfiguration, where a few who represented the disciples would see his glory and be able to teach others. The people of the new covenant have been brought into fellowship with God through the blood of the covenant; they wait eagerly for his return from heaven in the clouds.” ⁷