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# Covenant Confirmation

## Exodus 24

**Introduction** Illustration: Something great lost in a tragic mistake...

Warning: Our danger in losing something great...

Transition: Against the backdrop of great glory in the Old Covenant, learn to love the stunning greater glory of what we have in the New Covenant.

The covenant was concluded in Exodus 23 with three significant Christ centered sections. They were to keep the Sabbath cycles pointing to our rest in Christ. They were to celebrate the Harvest Festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Ingathering, pointing to the work of Christ in saving His people. They were to hear and heed the Conquering Angel leading them into the land pointing to Christ who brings us to the place prepared for us and brings the new heavens and new earth to us at His coming. Hebrews concludes its exposition of these ideas with a call to draw near to see the glory of God in the person and work of Christ. Why? Because that is the movement of this text. Even at the fenced and fearful mountain, the covenant was confirmed by drawing near. Listen in the shadows and look to see if you can discern the shape and substance of the Realities.

### In Seeing the Lord their God

(v.1-11)

The covenant is confirmed before the face of God. While the people are fenced away at this fearsome mountain, a select group have the privilege of worshipping in the very presence of God.

#### The Call to Draw Near

(v.1-2)

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 from afar. <sup>2</sup>Moses alone shall come near to the LORD, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him."

Seventy-four men are invited to draw near. Through Moses the call to come up to the Lord is issued. The prophet, the priests and the elders are to come near yet to worship from afar. Moses, the mediator alone may come near to the Lord. But even those summoned to come up the mountain to the Lord must not come near like Moses can.

Here is the both the privilege and the problem of the Old Covenant. God's command is to "Come up here to me. All of you must worship from a distance." [NLT] What happens here on the mountain becomes the regular experience of the people of Israel. God met and talked with Moses face-to-face as the faithful one in the house (Numbers 12:5-9). The priests could minister inside the place of meeting. One priest, once a year was allowed in the inner room of the place of meeting. So right there God was dwelling between the cherubim on the mercy seat and yet people were kept away by the fence and by the curtain.

## The Means to Draw Near

(v.3-8)

<sup>3</sup> Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. 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 twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. <sup>5</sup> And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. <sup>6</sup> And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw 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> And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

In order for Moses, the leaders and the people to enter into the covenant, they must know the full terms of the covenant. Moses speaks for God to the people. He rehearses all God's words and rules to the people. The people agree to the covenant, affirming in one mighty national voice that "All the words of the Lord... we will do." They are accepting the covenant on the terms that God offers. If they obey in every attitude in every action at every moment what God requires, then they will receive the blessings promised in the covenant. If they fail, they will forfeit the blessings and be subject to the curses of the covenant. They did fail and God did carry out the curse.

In order for the covenant to be ratified, blood had to be shed and had to be sprinkled (Hebrews 9:15-22). So, Moses sets up an altar. He surrounds it with twelve tall pillars, one for each of the tribes. Open to the God of heaven, a simple but stately place of meeting is erected with the altar at the center. The people gather in the plains around, probably each tribe standing in order behind its pillar. Throughout the congregation, bulls and oxen were gathered and brought to the altar. There they were slain, the blood caught in basins and the carcasses placed upon the fire of the altar. Thus the burnt offerings for sin and the peace offerings for reconciliation were brought and sacrificed before the Lord. So the blood was shed and the sacrifice offered.

The blood also must be sprinkled. So Moses took half the blood from the basins and threw it against the altar. Don't let these just be words to you. Imagine the stench of the blood and burning. Can you see the red gore splashed on the mighty altar, running down its sides sizzling in the fire? So the blood is applied Godward first.

Then the Book of the Covenant is read. The people once again affirm their commitment to keep the covenant. Then an astonishing thing happens. Moses takes the basins of blood and stands before the people. See him moving to stand at the pillar before Judah. See him take up a bowl of blood and throw it on the people. See him move to the next pillar and repeat this all the way around. "Behold, here is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you." Here it is. The blood of this covenant is that of bulls and oxen. But a greater Lamb will one day stand and say, "This is the New Covenant in my blood."

## The Act to Draw Near

(v.9-11)

<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. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. <sup>11</sup> And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.

This is a most striking event. After the covenant is confirmed by the people's affirmation and the shedding of blood, the summoned men go up into the mountain and they see God. The simplicity of the sentence belies the stunning reality. In spite of Jewish<sup>19</sup> and Christian commentators' attempts to evade what is here, the text is clear and simply says, "They saw the God of Israel." They looked upon him. And as John Currid writes, "The verb translated 'beheld' is not the normal Hebrew word meaning 'to see.' It is a stronger, more intense term." These men fixed their gaze upon God.<sup>20</sup>

We know that they are in the very presence of God because of what they are described as seeing (v.10). They see what looks to them like a pavement of clear, sapphire stones. They see it running underneath His feet. It seems that they are not looking down but rather looking up. It seems that they are looking up through the pavement like one looks up through the clear blue sky. Here is the Bible's first introduction to the portable throne of God. It is prominent in Ezekiel. It is described there in words filled with awestruck beauty and brightness. We see it in the Revelation as a sea of glass before the throne.

Here is why this short paragraph is surprising. We would all expect that if they saw God, they would all be struck dead. "No one can see the face of God and live..." is familiar to all of us. And the very casualness of the statement strikes me. They see God and God does not lay a hand on them. While this is an awesome and frightening event, they seem to sitting secure and safe before the face of God.

Why is this so? Because, the covenant has not yet been broken. As we are reading our Bibles and watching the Old Covenant unfold, that comes later. Something happens between this narrative and others that follow. The Old Covenant, properly given, accepted and authenticated secured for these men a place around God's table. They not only could see God, but they ate and drank in His Presence (v.11). So, entering into and participating in the Covenant means entrée into the fellowship meal.

Once again in this narrative we have realities for the people who experienced them. This is not just a dream. This is not an exaggerated account of some mystical experience. This is a fenced and fearsome mountain, with roaring fire and smoke. This is an astonishing sight and a tangible meal. But this is still shadows of greater realities that we participate in. We actually do draw near as the daily, weekly and regular experience of gathering before the face of God and eating a fellowship meal that is an expression of the New Covenant.

<sup>19</sup> The Greek translation of the OT, the Septuagint, adds words to the text, "they saw *the place dwelt by God.*"

<sup>20</sup> Cited by Philip Graham Ryken and R. Kent Hughes, *Exodus : Saved for God's Glory*, Includes Bibliographical References (P. [1165]-1202) and Indexes. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2005), 790.

These seventy-four participants in face-to-face worship and fellowship with God become witnesses to what the privileges of the Covenant could be. Surely they would go about in the camp talking about what they had seen and experienced with those they are responsible for as elders. They had seen God. They had eaten a meal with God. Though they could not draw near like Moses, they still were allowed by the covenant to enter into unimaginable fellowship with the LORD. So Israel is being taught and we are being cued that something awful must have happened that prevents this from becoming their own regular experience.

## **In Receiving the Law of God**

**(v.12-18)**

Now that the formational portion of the national Book of the Covenant has been accepted and enacted, the next section will be given. As a part of the Book of the Covenant, this section will focus on how Israel as a nation will meet with God.

### **The Instructions from God**

**(v.12-14)**

<sup>12</sup> The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction." <sup>13</sup> So Moses rose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. <sup>14</sup> And he said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you. Whoever has a dispute, let him go to them."

Between verses 11 and 12, this troupe must have gone back down from the mountain. The instructions from God are for Moses and for the leadership. Moses is to go (back) up to the mountain to receive the tablets of stone on which God has written. We know that this is the Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments. They had received it as an integral part of the Book of the Covenant. But it had been given orally. Now, God would give them the commandments written in stone by His own hand.

Now we must remember that this event happened before it was recorded by Moses in the book of the Exodus. When this is happening, according to the Scriptures, this was the first written revelation given by God. It was written by God's own hand. It was written in stone. It was given to Moses to take down to the people. In Deuteronomy 4:11-13 and 9:9-11 Moses rehearses what happened and what God was doing. Listen to portions of Deuteronomy 4 and 9.

And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom. <sup>12</sup> Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice. <sup>13</sup> And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone. <sup>14</sup> And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and rules, that you might do them in the land that you are going over to possess. [Deut. 4:11-13, ESV]

When I went up the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that the LORD made with you, I remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water. <sup>10</sup> And the LORD gave me the two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them were all the words that the LORD had spoken with you on the mountain out of the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly. <sup>11</sup> And at the end of forty days and forty nights the LORD gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant. [Deut. 9:9-11, ESV]

Both of these texts tell the same story as we have before us. An important fact for our Biblical Theology is added. Moses clearly equates the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments with the Book of the Covenant. In both texts, the Covenant at least contains if not is equated with the Ten Commandments. I believe this makes it very difficult to try to separate the Ten Commandments from the Old Covenant and the Israel's Book of the Covenant. This was given to them. It was recorded by the finger of God on tables of stone. Why? Was it to show that the Ten Commandments are permanent while the rest are not? Not according to what Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 3:7-11:

Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end,<sup>8</sup> will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory?<sup>9</sup> For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it.<sup>11</sup> For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory. [2 Cor. 3:7-11, ESV]

I hear in this paragraph in regards to the Ten Commandments written on the tables of stone at least the following:

The Ten Commandments, which were written in stone, were a ministry of death, the condemnation that came upon disobedience.

They came with great glory, so great a glory that it transferred to Moses' face.

The ministry of the Spirit is the New Covenant ministry in which Paul served and in which all church ministry is conducted.

The ministry of the Spirit now comes with greater glory, a far exceeding glory. It is such an exceeding glory that the Old Covenant Law fades and appears to have no glory.

The Old Covenant containing the Ten Commandments, came to an end while the New Covenant ministry of the Spirit is permanent.

Does this mean then that we can disobey what the Ten Commandments required of Israel? No, every single command has its counterpart in Christ's and the Apostles teaching and commands. Even the Sabbath has its corresponding rest in the New Covenant – it is in fact how you enter the New Covenant: you believe the gospel and rest from sin, from self-righteousness, and from the works of the Law (Hebrews 4). Christ has fulfilled the Law for us (Matthew 5). It has not been abolished, remains in force in the realm of the world and the flesh (Romans 6-7) and is for unbelievers, sinners and transgressors (1 Timothy 1:8-9). The Law is no longer binding on us who have died in Christ, (Romans 7:1-7). We have been transferred from the realm where Law rules to the realm where grace reigns (Romans 6:14-15). Therefore, we are not to continue to sin but live holy lives by grace through faith as ones who are in the New Covenant, in Christ.

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As Moses goes up to receive these Ten Commandments and the rest of the Levitical Code, he leaves instructions for the leaders who remain behind. In his absence, Aaron, Hur and the seventy elders were to lead Israel. They were to

read, understand and apply the Law that they had heard to the particular problems that needed adjudication. The people were to bring their conflicts and issues to these men for them to render a decision. So, Moses does not leave Israel without leadership. That leadership has had the very same exposure and experience he has. They have a ratified covenant. They have seen God and lived. They have sat at the feet of God. They have eaten and drank in His presence. They are charged now with the responsibilities of leadership.

Moses takes Joshua with him. While not much is said about this, it is interesting that Joshua is Moses' assistant. He goes up with Moses. He is being mentored by Moses. Joshua will be appointed by God to lead in Moses place upon his death. And a greater Joshua will come later and go up to different mountain and there satisfy the demands of God's righteousness expressed in the Law for transgressors like you and me.

### **The Obedience to God**

**(v.15-18)**

<sup>15</sup> Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. <sup>16</sup> The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst 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. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

After Moses had given leadership assignments, he obeyed God's instruction to come up the mountain. Look at all the words that convey the fearsome and frightening thing Moses is about to do. The mountain is covered in cloud within which is the glory of God. That glory looks like a mighty pillar of fire going up into the heavens. After six days of waiting, God calls Moses to come up to Him on the mountain. Moses walks up the mountain side and disappears into the cloud.

One has described this in these words, "This was Moses' experience on Mount Sinai. He went farther up and farther in. God called him up the mountain. There the prophet saw God's glory, heard God's voice, and ate and drank with him. Then he entered into glory. He kept going farther up and farther in until finally he was enveloped by the luminous, radiant presence of God."<sup>21</sup>

For forty days and nights, he is there on the mountain. We have that use of forty which is normally reserved for a period of testing. This would naturally lead us to the question, "Who is being tested?" Is Moses being tested on the mountain or is Israel being tested at the mountain? It seems to me that Israel enters a period of forty days of testing, in the absence of Moses and under the leadership of others, as to whether they will obey God. Moses obeys even into entering into a dangerous delight. Israel is camped in quiet safety with manna, water and leaders who have seen and fellowshiped with God.

Will they, over these forty days, keep the covenant. Stay tuned.

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<sup>21</sup> Philip Graham Ryken and R. Kent Hughes, *Exodus : Saved for God's Glory*, Includes Bibliographical References (P. [1165]-1202) and Indexes. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2005), 798.

**Conclusion** “All the words the Lord has spoken, we will do.” This is what Israel committed to. They did so in order to be faithful to the covenant. But they failed, over and over and over again. But Christ came and did all that the Father had spoken and had given Him to do. So now, we say the same thing. We should affirm together, “All the words the Lord has spoken, we will do.” We do not say this in order to keep the covenant and thus receive the blessing. We say this because Christ has kept the covenant for us. Thus we receive the blessing of actually being able to please God and do all the words He has spoken. So, do you? Is your obedience to God complete? Is your conscience before God clear? Are you under the Spirit’s conviction for disobedience? Are you rejoicing in a growing obedience to God and walk with God that is shaped by delight in God and enabled by grace from God?

The New Covenant is in the blood of Christ. His outpoured life in His blood assures us that His sacrifice has been accepted. It signifies that the Covenant has been secured. The public outpouring of blood and water attests to the finished work. So, with blood shed on the altar, it is then sprinkled on His people. We have been saved by the blood as shed; we have been sanctified by the blood as sprinkled. [J.Owen]

As I read, study and prepare, my gratitude to God for being in the New Covenant just swells larger and larger. No fearsome and fenced mountain. No veil over the glory. No ministry of death. No “do or die”.

You have not come to a physical mountain, to a place of flaming fire, darkness, gloom, and whirlwind, as the Israelites did at Mount Sinai. <sup>19</sup>For they heard an awesome trumpet blast and a voice so terrible that they begged God to stop speaking. <sup>20</sup>They staggered back under God’s command: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death.” <sup>21</sup>Moses himself was so frightened at the sight that he said, “I am terrified and trembling.”

<sup>22</sup>No, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to countless thousands of angels in a joyful gathering. <sup>23</sup>You have come to the assembly of God’s firstborn children, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God himself, who is the judge over all things. You have come to the spirits of the righteous ones in heaven who have now been made perfect. <sup>24</sup>You have come to Jesus, the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness instead of crying out for vengeance like the blood of Abel. <sup>25</sup>Be careful that you do not refuse to listen to the One who is speaking. [Hebrews 12:18-25a, NLT]

On the mountain, the prophet, priests and leaders of Israel all gather under the sapphire blue pavement of glass at the feet of the King. Streaming from Him is glory, fire and cloud straight upon into the heavens. In that awesome and terrifying place, they see God. They eat a meal. They fellowship face-to-face with God. This is what was possible. This is what their sin cost them. It is what Adam's sin and our sin has cost us. It is what we have in the New Covenant. We now fellowship with God Himself. There will come a day when that will be lifted up out of the shadows, not just of the old, but out of this present vale of tears. We will also gather around the throne one day with a crystal sea of sapphire glass stretched out. With glorified eyes, we will gaze in wonder on the outraying of the glory of God in the face of Christ. He will be our beloved and we His bride. And we will dine with Him.

May these hopes and dreams and expectations cause us to hold fast with deep joy until we hear, "Come up here. Draw near. Dine with me."