

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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Exodus 24:1-11 “A Covenant Relationship with God”

Intro. Have you ever made a commitment to the Lord that you did not keep? The apostle Peter said in Matthew 26:35, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” He really meant it. But he denied Christ before the sun rose the next day. Perhaps you have some sins that keep cropping up in your life, and you have told the Lord you were going to stop doing those things. Perhaps you have a problem with explosive anger. Perhaps you have a problem with lying. Perhaps you have an addiction to pornography, or immorality, or alcohol, but you find yourself doing the same sins, in spite of your best intentions.

Well twice in our text today the people of Israel told God that they would do “all the words which the Lord has said” (vv.3, 7; cf. 19:8). They promised to keep the 10 Commandments, and the other laws given in chapters 21-23. They were very self-confident. They really thought they could keep God’s law. But their enthusiasm was short-lived. It wasn’t long before Israel broke God’s law in a big way in chapter 32. They worshipped a golden image, and committed immorality & drunkenness. They couldn’t even keep the 10 Commandments, much less all the other laws. Just about every adult who spoke those words died in the wilderness, and never entered the Promised Land due to sin & rebellion. Good intentions are rarely carried out, especially from people who are unconverted. Israel’s failure was a sad witness to human weakness.

Let’s face it, we are sinners. If you doubt it, just look around the world and note the lawlessness and the godlessness on every hand. Our sin problem is not primarily due to our environment. We are sinners by nature. We are born that way. No one has to teach us to lie, or be self-centered. It comes quite naturally. So don’t try to deny that you are a sinner, or that you are part of a sinful race of men. 1 John 1:8 says, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

Exodus 24 gives us hope regarding this problem we have with sin. Even though the final solution to sin is not found here, our text at least points to the final solution. Now the first thing I want to ask you to think about is this:

I. THE PROBLEM SIN CREATES

Our sin creates a lot of problems for us. For example:

A. Our Sin Separates Us from God – Notice what God said to Moses in vv.1-2, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu,¹ and seventy of the elders² of Israel, and worship from afar. And Moses alone shall come near the LORD, but they shall not come near; nor shall the people go up with him.”³ Because God is holy, and man is sinful, the vast majority

¹ Both afterwards met with a terrible end. They “offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them; and they died before the Lord” (Lev. 10: 1, 2).

² The seventy elders may have been the product of Jethro’s advice in 18:17-23.

³ The action depicted here echoes 19:12-24, which contains the rather complicated set of instructions regarding who may and may not approach the mountain and ascent it (Enns).

of the Israelites could not draw near to God at all. They had to stay away from the mountain, where God manifested His presence. Only a few priests and elder representatives of the people were permitted to approach God on the mountain. And even then, they could not get very near God. They had to “worship from afar.” Only Moses was permitted to draw near to God, and that was only because He served as the Mediator between God and man.

The fact that fewer and fewer people are granted access to Mount Sinai the closer we get to the top is reflected in the construction of the tabernacle. Only priests could enter the holy place of the tabernacle, and only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and then only once/year. All the others had to keep their distance from the dwelling place of God. So these two verses are a fitting opening to the chapter that will lead us to the final main section of the book, the building of the tabernacle.

Friend, you need to realize that your sin separates you from God. Until your sins are forgiven, you are separated from God just as surely as we are separated from the moon.

B. Our Sin Creates Enmity towards God – This is implied in one of the sacrifices that was offered in v.5. Notice that they also “sacrificed peace offerings.” That is from the Hebrew word *shelem*, a peace offering, or sacrifice for alliance & friendship. If there is a need to offer sacrifice to establish peace & friendship between two parties, then that implies prior separation & enmity. And that is certainly true of us and God.

Romans 5:10 says that “we were enemies” of God at one time. Colossians 1:21 says that we were once “alienated and enemies” in our mind by wicked works.

C. Sin Creates Guilt – We have all sinned. We have rebelled against the will of God, and thus we are guilty. Our objective guilt usually produces the subjective feelings of guilt.

What is your spiritual condition today? I know you have sinned against God. And if you have not received God’s forgiveness, you are separated from God, you are an enemy of God, and you are guilty before God. The vast majority of people in our world are still in such an unfortunate spiritual condition. But there is hope. So I want to move from the problem sin creates to:

II. THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION WITH GOD

Whenever two parties are at war, peace is established with the signing & keeping of a covenant of peace. Even so, one thing that is very clear in the Bible is the fact that God relates to us on the basis of covenant. He made a covenant with Noah & his descendants. He made a covenant with Abraham & his descendants. Here in our text today, He is making a covenant with Israel, whom He had just redeemed from Egypt. The general idea of a covenant is that of a binding agreement between two parties, each of whom comes under the obligations of the covenant. One important point to make is the fact that God takes the initiative to offer this covenant to His people. He sent Moses down the mountain, to give the terms of the covenant with Israel. If they would accept & keep the covenant, then He would be their God, they would be His people, and God promised to bless them. So basically, the way to gain access to God, end the guilt, and be at peace with Him, is to accept God’s offer of a saving covenant. Let’s look into our text and see what all is involved in God’s covenant offer to us.

As Moses arrived at the foot of the mountain to where the people were gathered, I can imagine that all eyes were upon Him. Moses proceeded to inform the people of the Lord’s offer

to establish a covenant with Israel. Now there are many similarities between the process of God's covenant with Israel, and God's covenant with us today. First:

A. The Terms of the Covenant Are Written for Us – In v.4 we read, “And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD.” His first step was to prepare a written copy of the laws to which the people had sworn.

Even so, the New Covenant, promised by Jeremiah the prophet, and fulfilled by Jesus, was written down for us in the Bible. We have no excuse for not knowing about the New Covenant. It is written. You do not have to rely upon getting it by word of mouth. You can read it for yourself.

B. We Must Hear or Read the Terms of the Covenant – In v.3 we read, “So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the judgments.” “Words” (*dabarim*) introduces the Ten Commandments in 20:1 and “judgments” (*mishpatim*) introduces the Book of the Covenant in 21:1. Likewise, in v.7 we read, “Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people.” It seems that Moses repeats verbatim the content of these legal requirements. I believe the people listened to Moses quite intently.

Even so, we need to hear the Word of God in order to be saved. Romans 10:17 says, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” 1 Peter 1:23 says, “having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.” When the Word of God is read, taught, or preached, you need to listen. Your eternal destiny could be at stake.

A preacher was giving a sermon one Sunday, and he heard two teenage girls in the back giggling and disturbing people. So he interrupted the sermon and announced sternly, “There are two of you here who have not heard a word I've said.” That quieted them down. When the service was over, he went to greet people at the front door. Three adults apologized for going to sleep in church, promising it would never happen again.⁴

Church is not the place to sleep, or daydream, or disturb & hinder others from hearing the Word of God.

There is another common characteristic in the ratification of a covenant with God:

C. A Sacrifice for Sin Must Be Made – In vv.4-5 we read, “And 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. Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen [or bullocks] to the LORD.” The altar represents the divine presence; and the encircling stones, Israel gathered around its God. Both the written law & the monument of these stones bore lasting witness to the covenant they were making. The “young men” performed this priestly work because the Levites had not yet been set apart to that office. After all, according to Ex. 19:6, all Israelites were to be priests unto God. They probably acted as servants of Moses. It would take young, strong men to handle oxen or bulls.

Here we see that man cannot approach unto God on the ground of his own works. Therefore, it was necessary to seal the covenant with blood. Sin is so offensive to a holy God, that a substitute without blemish must be sacrificed before sin can be forgiven. In Hebrews 9:19-20 the author referred to this incident in Exodus, and then he said in v.22, “And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no

⁴ William Russ, *Reader's Digest*.

remission.” For the writer of Hebrews, the shedding and sprinkling of blood in Exodus 24 foreshadows the work of Christ. The former is temporary and incomplete; the latter is permanent and complete. For he goes on to say in v.28, “Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.” So for any man to come unto the Father, the work of Christ was indispensable. Jesus understood this truth. When He instituted the Lord’s Supper, he said in Matthew 26:28, “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

Let me try to illustrate the relationship between animal sacrifice, and the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Paper money is intrinsically worthless, but at one time it represented payment in gold. Even so, the blood of slain beasts had no real value, but it represented “the precious blood of Christ.” And just as in a single day paper money may raise a poor man from poverty to affluence, even so blood of Christ lifts us from spiritual poverty to become children of the King through the forgiveness of sins.

Consider once again Jesus dying for you on the cross. See in your mind his life’s blood flowing from his hands and his feet. He did not deserve to die. Yet He offered His life in your place. He paid the penalty of your sin.

Since atonement has been made by blood sacrifice, the hindrances to the nation’s entering into covenant are removed. Therefore follows in logical order the next step:

D. We Must Accept & Keep the Terms of the Covenant – Twice, in vv.3 & 7, the people affirmed their acceptance of the covenant. That was an essential part of ratifying a covenant.

Even so, before you can benefit from the promises of the New Covenant, you must accept the terms of the covenant. What does God require of you? Well the covenant that was given by Moses said, “do and live.” However, the New Covenant simply requires us to believe in Christ. We must not trust in our own works, but trust in Christ alone for our salvation.

There was one final step in the process of ratifying the covenant:

E. The Blood of the Sacrifice Must Be Applied – The sacrificial blood was divided into two parts, corresponding to the two parties to the covenant. Part of the blood was sprinkled or poured on the altar, satisfying the wrath of God against sin. In v.8 we read what Moses did with the remainder of the blood, “And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words.’” This blood sprinkled on the people indicates that the fellowship between them and God has just been confirmed.

In Isa. 52 we read about the servant of the Lord. Based on the context of what follows in chapter 53, it is clearly a reference to Jesus. What is amazing is the fact that the prophet predicted that He shall “sprinkle many nations.” The blood of Jesus is not just for Israel, but for all nations. All may be saved (cf. Isa. 49:6). The universal dimension of God’s redemptive plan, announced as far back as Genesis 12:3, is now coming to light.

Even so, the sacrifice of Jesus will not avail for you until it is applied to you personally. 1 Peter 1:2 says that we are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” The recipients of Peter’s letter were saved because the blood of Jesus was in a figurative sense sprinkled upon them. They had personally applied the benefit of the death of Christ to their hearts.

When you receive Christ as your Savior you receive a wonderful benefit. Hebrews 10:22 says, “let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled

from an evil conscience....” The writer of Hebrews is encouraging his readers to have confidence to draw near to God now. On what basis do they have this confidence? Their hearts have been sprinkled, thus cleansing them from a guilty conscience. This sprinkling is a once-for-all act. It is Christ’s death and the shedding of His blood that is continually at work in us.

The significance of this for Christians today is to realize that they are finally, truly, “OK” with God. Being a Christian means being fully liberated from any sense of guilt before God, not because we are somehow good enough, but because of Christ’s blood. And this is a once-for-all act, a favorite theme in the book of Hebrews (Heb. 7:27; 9:26; 10:10). Our guiltlessness is a fact that should dictate our perceptions and self-image. It is true, of course, that our society makes far too little of guilt. On the other hand, it is possible to make too much of it, to dwell on it. Guilt can cause neurotic behaviors and tendencies. Christians should not have a persistent, nagging, guilty conscience. In Christ we should enjoy our freedom from guilt.

There is another benefit of applying Christ’s blood to your life. Under law man must worship afar off, but today Ephesians 2:13 tells us, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

Only after this confirmation of the covenant can we proceed to the next scene where we see illustrated for us:

III. THE POTENTIAL OF COMPLETE RECONCILIATION WITH GOD

The little company that climbed the mountain represented the whole people. Their on that mountaintop experience with God teaches us some of the results of entering into a saving covenant with God. First:

A. We Have Access to God – It seems clear to me that in v.9, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel had greater access to God after the covenant was established and confirmed, for they saw God. They were in His presence on the top of the mountain.

Even so, because of what Christ did, we have access to God even *now*. Romans 5:2 says that through Jesus “we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand.” Likewise, Ephesians 2:18 says, “For through Him we ... have access by one Spirit to the Father.” God is now accessible to us! He invites us to go to Him in prayer in the name of Jesus at any time.

In May of 2007 the Queen of England came for the celebration of the 400th anniversary of Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement in America. In preparation for her visit, someone was interviewed on WRVA regarding protocol for those who would see the queen. She said that one is not to speak to the queen unless she speaks first. Very few had access to the Queen, and among those who did, you could not speak to her unless you spoke to her first! I’m glad that believers have access to the throne of grace at any time. We do not have to wait on an invitation to speak to the King of kings. We have a standing invitation!

B. We Shall See God – Notice what we read in vv.9-11, “Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity. But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So they saw God....” At first glance, it is difficult to know what this means precisely, especially since 33:20 seems to say the opposite: “No one may see me and live” (cf. Gen. 32:30). Yet in v.11, the author goes out of his way to point out the fact that God did not strike them dead, even though

they saw God in some sense of the word.⁵ Actually no one has seen God (John 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:16; 1 John 4:12) because He is Spirit. What they saw was a representation or visible manifestation of God. Furthermore, the author doesn't even attempt to describe God. He just describes what was under His feet. When meeting the heavenly King, they probably bowed in worship, and their gaze did not rise higher than His feet. And since God was manifested with feet, perhaps what they saw was a pre-incarnate manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ. So what did they see? It was like "a paved work of sapphire stone." Sapphire is a striking gem of opaque blue, which was used for a variety of decorative purposes in the ancient Near East. Thus, "it was like the very heavens in its clarity." It was as bright blue as the cloudless sky gleaming above Sinai. God resides in the heavens, so that which is under His feet is blue, even in this vision on the mountain.

The sight of the God of Israel was a foretaste of the blessedness of the sight of God in eternity. Don't you want to see God some day? The day is coming when we shall be privileged to have a more complete view of God than even Moses had. When we pass through death's door, we shall see God. Rev. 7:14-15 says, "These... washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple." Notice that accepting God's provision of sacrifice is a necessary pre-condition to seeing God. Furthermore, when Jesus comes again, we shall see God. 1 John 3:2 says, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." The sight of Jesus will complete the transformation of becoming like Him.

C. We Shall Have Eternal Fellowship with God – In the last of v.11 we see an amazing statement of what they did on the mountain in the presence of God. We would expect that they would only worship in His presence. Instead, they also "ate and drank." Not only are we told that "He laid not His hand on them," but they were thoroughly at ease in His presence, for they did "eat and drink" before Him! This meal was probably a "covenant" meal. In the world of the Old Testament, a meal was often served to solemnize and ratify an agreement between two parties. The treaty that Abimelech, king of the Philistines, proposed to Isaac was sealed with a meal, thus signifying there would be peace between them (Gen. 26:26-31; cf. 18:12, when Jethro meets Moses and the Israelites in the desert). In fact, a meal is already in view in the fellowship offering mentioned in v.5. Here then was a blood-sprinkled people, who had not yet broken the covenant, in communion with God. Partaking of a meal in God's presence is an intimate and friendly image used in Scripture to describe the bond between God and His people.

This was an unusual event. Israel's history continued for almost fifteen hundred years after this memorable occasion, but never again did their elders "see God," and never again did they eat and drink in His presence.

Does this scene remind you of any other covenant meals in Scripture? The Passover and the Lord's Supper are other examples of a covenant meal eaten before the Lord, so to speak. Both meals occur at the brink of a climactic redemptive event, the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and the death and resurrection of Christ. They also occur in intimate settings, with the people of God grouped together apart from the world in preparation for what is about to transpire.

⁵ One difference is the fact that at this point, sacrifice for sin had been made, and they had accepted the terms of the covenant.

The prophet Isaiah looked forward to a time when the God of Israel will hold another meal, this time inviting the people of the nations to enjoy His presence. We read about this in Isa. 25:6-8. There we read, “And in this mountain The LORD of hosts will make for all people a feast.... He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces....” This is reminiscent of Exodus 24, but this time believers from all nations are invited. Likewise in Mt. 8:11 Jesus alludes to an end times feast such as what we see in Isaiah 25. He says, “And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down [literally recline] with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus makes another reference to this future meal during the Lord’s Supper, when He said in Luke 22:16, “for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” He clearly implies that once the Kingdom of God is established here on earth, we will sit down with Jesus and enjoy a meal together.

The final reference to the eschatological meal is found in Rev. 19:9, where we read about “the marriage supper of the Lamb!” This is an image that combines the theme of eating with that of marriage. This intensifies the concept of a covenantal meal.

We continue this biblical tradition today without even understanding why. When two people are about to enter into the marriage covenant, they bring the two families together for the rehearsal dinner as a gesture of fellowship & peace between the two families. The intimacy Adam and Eve enjoyed before the Fall will be fully restored in Christ, the second Adam.

How unspeakably blessed to remember that what Israel (through their official heads) enjoyed for a brief season, is now ours forever! A way has been opened for us into the very presence of God.

Conclusion: Don’t you want to know that your sins are forgiven, and that you have access to God, and peace with God? Don’t you want to see God some day, and live forever in His presence? Then you must enter into a covenant relationship with God. But these covenant blessings will never happen with the covenant of law. Israel failed throughout their history to keep that covenant. That’s because the Law doesn’t address our sin nature. So Jesus came to establish a New Covenant, whereby God promises that He will forgive all your sins, and change you from the inside by writing His law on your hearts. He will give you the Holy Spirit to enable you to live right. And you will have access to God, see God, and live in fellowship with Him forever. All of these blessings are possible because Jesus shed His blood on Calvary, and died for your sins. All you need to do to accept God’s New Covenant is repent of your sins, and place your faith in Jesus as Savior. Then, in response to so great a salvation, let us dedicate ourselves completely to God. This is pictured in the burnt offering referred to in v.5. Will you accept God’s covenant today?

Sources: Peter Enns, *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Stephen Felker, [*Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible*](#) (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2007; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978 reprint); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 1 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1981); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Exodus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972); Warren Wiersbe, *Be Delivered: Exodus* (Colorado Spring: Chariot Victor Books Publishing, 1998). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).