

Exodus 24 “The Blood of the Covenant in Accordance with All These Words” June 11, 2017
Psalm 66
Revelation 4-5

Among all the strange practices that you hear about in the Bible,
one of the strangest is one that you hear about here in verse 8:
“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.’”

Yeah, I went to church today and the pastor threw blood on us.

What?!

Now do you understand why no one ever sits in the front row at church?!!

But seriously, the sprinkling of blood on the people is *really important* in worship.
Hebrews 12 tells us that we have come
not to the earthly Mount Sinai,
but to the heavenly Mount Zion –
not to a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken,
but to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

How does God bring people near to himself?
Sprinkled blood.

Hebrews 10:22 says that we draw near to God
“with a true heart in full assurance of faith,
with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience
and our bodies washed with pure water.”

Hebrews 10 helps us learn how to think about Exodus 24.
We need to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus.

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 66 –
a song that connects the crossing of the Red Sea
with the importance of drawing near to God through the sacrifice.

Sing Psalm 66
Read Revelation 4-5

Revelation 4-5 echoes the opening scene in Exodus 24.
Jesus *is* the Lamb of God – the Lamb who was slain –
so that by his blood he might ransom people for God.

Here in the book of Revelation
we see the heavenly worship –
we see the heavenly pattern which all earthly worship should follow.

Starting in Exodus 25, we are going to hear about that pattern that God gave Moses.
(25:9 – “Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle,
and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.”)

When Moses is on the mountain,
God shows him a pattern for the tabernacle.
And Hebrews tells us that the pattern was modeled after Christ.

The earthly tabernacle was a copy and shadow of the heavenly pattern.
What Moses saw on the mountain was a reflection of Christ.

As Hebrews 8:5 says regarding the priests:

*They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.
For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying,
See that you make everything according to the pattern
that was shown you on the mountain.*

So it is useful for us to examine OT worship
and see how it shows us Christ.

Introduction: “Worship from Afar” (v1-4a)

*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. ² Moses alone shall come near to the LORD, but the others shall
not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.”*

God’s purpose is to bring a people near to himself.
But he is a holy God.
How can sinful people draw near to a holy God?

Israel’s worship at Mount Sinai is the first example of corporate worship in the Bible.
We hear of various sacrifices being offered in the book of Genesis,
but never before have we seen the whole people of God
gathered for worship together.

Part of the reason for this is throughout Genesis God dealt with the patriarchs
as representative heads of their people.
Think of Abraham,
or Jacob at Bethel,
even Moses and the burning bush.
In each of those instances the covenant mediator speaks with God one-on-one.

But now, God has done something new.
God has chosen a whole nation to be the covenant mediator.
God said to Moses:
Israel is my son, my firstborn (Ex 4).
And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19).

Israel is to be the mediator of the covenant blessings and curses to all nations.
Those who bless Israel shall be blessed.
Those who curse Israel shall be cursed.
And so like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
Israel, as the son of God, may now enter the very presence of God.

But there is still a problem.

Israel is a sinful people.

The son of God is a rebellious son.

And so we heard back in chapter 19, verse 12 –

“Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death.”

In chapter 19,

the people must sanctify themselves in order to come even “afar off” from God.

But now in chapter 24, God calls 70 elders to come part way up the mountain.

How can this be?

God says “don’t do it!” in chapter 19,

but then says “come on up” in chapter 24.

Why?

Why the difference?

How can a sinful people draw near to God?

The difference between chapter 19 and chapter 24
is the sacrifice.

In chapter 19, Israel cannot draw near.

But in chapter 24,

the representatives of Israel draw near through the Blood of the Covenant.

But even then, they can only “worship from afar.”

I think that sometimes we get so used to “drawing near” to God
that we forget what a big deal it is!

But the reason why it’s a big deal is found in verse 3:

³ *Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules.^[a] And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.”*

At Sinai God is establishing his covenant with Israel.

And as we have seen several times in Exodus,
it is *God* who establishes his covenant.

There are no “negotiations”!

God is sovereign – and he establishes the terms of the covenant.

But now he calls for his people to heed his voice.

And so Moses comes down the mountain and tells the people all the words of the LORD.

In other words, he summarizes Exodus 20-23.

If you are going to be the people of God,
then you need to live according to the pattern of life that your God requires.

And when the people hear the rules of chapters 20-23,
they respond by saying, “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.”

And so:

⁴ And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD.

This is an important point.

From inscriptions in the wilderness of Sinai,
we know that an early form of the Hebrew alphabet was being used at this time –
so it is not surprising to hear that Moses would be writing this down.

But this is important in showing us the importance of the written word of God.

We will see in just a moment that Moses will *read* this the following day.
Here at the first public worship service ever recorded in scripture,
we also have the first reference to the written word of God. –
thereby showing us that the reading of the scriptures
is an essential part of corporate worship.

Why is this essential?

Why do we read and expound ancient texts in our worship?

Because the written word of God is what provides meaning for everything else.

1. At the Foot of the Mountain: The Pattern of Worship(v4b-8)

a. Worship Begins with a Sacrifice (v4b-5)

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. ⁵ And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD.

Moses builds a stone altar (according to Ex 20) with 12 stone pillars (to represent the tribes).

Then he sent the young men (note that the priesthood is not yet established)
to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings.

Burnt offerings are designed to enable the worshiper to draw near to God.

Peace offerings then communicate the resulting fellowship between God and man.

With a burnt offering, you burn the whole animal in the fire.

With a peace offering, you burn the fat, the liver, and the kidneys,
then you cook the rest –

the priest gets part, and the worshipers share the rest.

Worship starts with a sacrifice.

This is the big difference between chapter 19 and chapter 24.
In chapter 19, Israel cannot touch the mountain.
In chapter 24, Moses and Aaron and 70 of the elders of Israel
come part way up the mountain.

And the reason why they can touch the mountain is because of the *blood* of the sacrifice.

b. The Blood of the Covenant and the Book of the Covenant (v6-8)

⁶ *And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against 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 *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."*

Moses then takes the blood from the sacrifices,
and sprinkles half on the altar—the other half he reserves in basins.
Then after he reads the Book of the Covenant,
the people declare “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient”
Then he sprinkles the blood on the people,
saying “Behold, the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you
in accordance with all these words” (24:8)

It's important for us to think about the relationship
between the book of the covenant and blood of the covenant –
because this is at the heart of what worship is all about.

The Book of the Covenant sets forth the *duty* that God requires of his people.
But as we have seen repeatedly, grace is embedded
within the very structure of the Mosaic Covenant.
If we see the call to obedience apart from the grace of redemption,
then we will forget the whole point of the Mosaic Covenant.

The Mosaic Covenant could be summarized simply in the Ten Commandments,
but its exposition in the Book of the Covenant (chapters 20-23)
is essential for understanding its context.

The very first item that God declares after the Ten Commandments is the law of the altar.
Israel is going to fail.
Israel will sin.
And therefore, right up front, at the very beginning of the Book of the Covenant,
God provides the way of dealing with sin—through the sacrifice.
The rest of 21-23 is mostly focused on life in community:
setting forth the basic principles of justice that Israel must follow.
God expects Israel to follow his law perfectly.
This doesn't mean that he expects Israel to be sinless.
Rather, he expects Israel to repent when he sins!
The law of the altar makes it clear that sinless perfection
is not an expectation of the Mosaic Covenant.

Indeed, according to Hebrews, this is one of the problems of the Mosaic Covenant!
The priests themselves have to offer sacrifices for their own sins!
How is this ever going to accomplish the salvation of God's people?

So the Mosaic Covenant did not set forth the expectation of sinless perfection.
Rather, the Mosaic Covenant sets forth the pattern of the New Covenant.

But the book of the covenant cannot be divorced from the blood of the covenant.
The book of the covenant is central.

This is where we hear the content of the covenant.

Without the proclamation of the word of God,
we have no clear idea what we are to believe concerning God,
or what duty He requires of us.

Indeed, the blood of the covenant is meaningless
apart from its connection to the book of the covenant.

If Moses had neglected the reading of the Book of the Covenant,
and merely sprinkled the people with blood,
what would it have meant?

It would have meant that they smelled REALLY BAD!!!
[and indeed the "worship" of the golden calf involved the blood
of the covenant without—and indeed against—the book of the covenant]

Hear Moses when he says:

"Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you
according to all these words."

The blood of the covenant has meaning
only through its connection with the Book of the Covenant.

This is why we say that the Lord's Supper only has meaning
through its connection with the Word.

But the book of the covenant, by itself, only condemns.

The Word of God, apart from the sacrifice, can speak only judgment.

All the words in the world will do nothing to save the people of God,
So long as they remain only words.

The Word of God—apart from the sacrifice—condemns us.

The reason why the Word of God is powerful to save us is because
God's words are not empty speech.

When God speaks, things happen!

Recall Paul's reminder to the Corinthians,

"And my speech and my preaching were
not with persuasive words of human wisdom,
but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." (1 Cor 2:4)

Therefore our worship IS centered on the Word,
because in Jesus Christ, the Word has become flesh.

He has given his own blood as the blood of the covenant.

In Christ, the book of the covenant and the blood of the covenant
have come together in one person.

c. The Covenant Meal on the Mountain (v9-11)

So now we are ready to watch
as the 70 elders of Israel gather together with Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu,
eating and drinking in the presence of God.

What are they doing here?

God had commanded that no one was to come up the mountain.
But now he allows these 70 to come with Moses.

Why?

Because of the blood of the covenant.

The proclamation of the covenant is not enough.

The enactment of the covenant, through the death of the sacrifice,
MUST happen before Israel may come up the mountain.

And of course, here it only happens in a representative way.

Only 70 Israelite elders are allowed to see God.

And these 70 “worship from afar”.

Only Moses and Joshua are allowed to approach God himself.

But through these representatives, Israel comes into the presence of God,
because God has looked upon the blood of the covenant,
and his justice is now satisfied.

Now there is peace between God and man,
and so the elders partake of the covenant meal on the side of Mt Sinai.

Think back to Revelation 5 – where Jesus is revealed as the Lamb of God who was slain,
reconciling us to God through his blood.

2. They Went Up: The 70 Elders Beheld God, and Ate and Drank (v9-11)

⁹ Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, ¹⁰ 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.

Notice what they see:

“They saw the God of Israel.”

Later in chapter 33, we will hear God say,

“Man shall not see me and live.” (33:20)

So what exactly did they see?

Pay attention to verse 10:

“And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone,
and it was like the very substance of the heavens in its clarity.” (V10)

They are looking up, and they see a clear blue pavement above them.

And they see God’s feet standing on that pavement.

The pavement is said to be “like the very substance of the heavens in its clarity”.

In other words,

it looks like a piece of the sky has come down from the heavens,

and God has ridden it down to Mt Sinai.

(You see the same thing in Revelation 4.

The difference is that in Revelation 4, you see it from above.

In Exodus 24, you see the “paved work of sapphire stone” under his feet.

In Revelation 4 there is a “sea of glass, like crystal” before the throne.)

In other words, they see this blue pavement – under God’s feet,

God wants Israel to understand that heaven is his throne, and earth is his footstool.

When you look up to the peak of that blue dome above you,

he wants you to remember that he dwells enthroned in the heavens.

In other words, he is sovereign over the whole of creation (19:5).

But at the same time, he is a God who draws near to his people.

He is a God who rules over all,

And he is a God who comes near to His people.

The sovereign God of the universe desires to be near to YOU.

He *wants* to have fellowship with you.

You are not some tiresome pest that God begrudgingly saves.

NO!

You are a special treasure to him.

Because, in Christ, you are his child.

Verse 11 says this in a particularly interesting way:

¹¹ And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.

God is holy.

And yet his holiness is not designed to drive people away from him –

rather, his holiness is what drives him to humble himself

so that he might bring us to himself.

This is why Exodus 19-23 is incomplete without Exodus 24.

The proclamation of the Covenant is incomplete without the blood of the covenant.

And the blood of the covenant allows us to draw near to God,

and to partake of the covenant meal before him.

3. Moses Went Up: The Glory of God at Sinai (v12-18)

¹² 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.” ¹³ So Moses rose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. ¹⁴ 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.”

Verses 12-18 then speak of how Moses alone continues to go up into the mountain with Joshua.

He leaves Aaron and Hur in charge.

We'll hear over the coming weeks what God says to Moses on the mountain.

The focus in these verses is on the glory of God that is revealed at the mountain:

¹⁵ Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

Paul will reflect on this in 2 Corinthians 3:7-11,
saying that the glory of Sinai was a fading glory.
Compared with the glory revealed in the face of Jesus,
the glory of Sinai was as nothing!

“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’
has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God
in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Cor 4:6)

Conclusion: The Pattern of Worship

It is interesting to note that every biblical worship service is consistent with this pattern.

Throughout the OT, you see a consistent movement,
starting with the slaughter of the burnt offerings and peace offerings,
followed by the proclamation of the Word (the meaning of the sacrifice),
and the response of the people,
concluding with the covenant meal.

NT worship has the same focus.

Christ is our once-for-all sacrifice,
but you see the same twin focus on word and sacrament in the NT.
The Book of Revelation even sees the history of redemption in liturgical terms.
It starts with the sacrifice of Jesus (chs 4-5),
moves to the proclamation of the Word (the various sevens),
each concluded with the response of the saints,
and concluding with the wedding supper of the Lamb.

This is why Christian worship has always followed the same pattern as that of Exodus 24.

We come into the presence of God on the basis of the sacrifice.

Without the sin offering, the Word of God can only bring judgment.

But then, having received the forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ,
we may hear the Word of God—the Book of the Covenant—read and preached.

And in response to that Word, we profess our faith and obedience,
asking in our prayers that God will continue to be faithful to His Word,
and declaring in our confession of faith that we believe his promises.

And finally we come to the covenant meal—the Lord’s Supper,
where we partake of the same blood of the covenant that has washed us.
We eat and drink before God.

We do this because in our worship we are reminded of our true identity—
our true place in redemptive history.

Redemptive history moves from the sacrifice (Jesus)
to the Word (the apostolic preaching)
to our response (faith and obedience—the spread of the church)
to the covenant meal (wedding supper of the Lamb).

And our worship every Sunday participates in this.