

Exodus
Covenant Relationship with God
Lesson 36 Exodus 24:1-18
011021

- 1 Seven weeks ago we restarted our study in the book of Exodus by turning our attention to a section of Exodus immediately following the Ten Commandments called the Book of the Covenant.
- 2 Together the Ten Commandments and Book of the Covenant were God's terms of how his people, the Israelites, were to live in relationship with him. Basically, God was saying I have redeemed you now here is how I want you to live before me.
- 3 Today we come to the end of this section with an elaborate ceremony in which the Book of the Covenant was ratified between God and the Israelites.
 - a It was the climax of the epic adventure that begin with God calling Moses out of the burning bush to deliver the children of Israel from Egyptian slavery, followed by the ten plagues of judgement, the crossing the Red Sea and finally meeting with God at Mt. Sinai and receiving his law or the terms of the covenant.
 - b God had saved his people out of Egypt not just to free them from them from physical and spiritual slavery, but to bring them into a sacred relationship with him called a covenant. And in order for a covenant to be properly established, it had to be ratified or confirmed.
 - c The terms of the covenant are Exodus 20-23. Now in chapter 24 we have the Israelites gathering at the foot of Mount Sinai for ratification of the covenant as the redeemed people of God.
- 4 Now the first thing required for ratification was the reading of the terms of the covenant, agreement with the terms and recording the terms. (v3-4a). *When Moses went and told the people all the Lord's words (Ten Commandments) and laws (Book of the Covenant), they responded with one voice, "Everything the Lord has said we will do."* ⁴ *Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said (v3-4a).*
- 5 But for an ancient covenant to be actually formalized, the two parties have to meet. And for sinful human beings to *actually* meet with Holy God has always required two things; atonement (cleansing) of sin and a mediator (someone to be a go-between God and man) to officiate atonement.

- a For atonement Moses built an altar at the foot of Mt. Sinai and made sacrifices (4b-8).
 - b As the mediator, Moses offers the sacrifices on behalf of the people and then goes up Mount Sinai along with Aaron, his two sons and the seventy elders of Israel to formalize the covenant (v1-2; 9-11).
- 6 What we are going to learn or be reminded of from this passage is that it is impossible to approach God, have a covenant relationship with God or experience even one second of fellowship with God without atonement of sin and a mediator.

^{4b} He (Moses) got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord. ⁶ Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, “We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.” ⁸ Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.” Exodus 24:4–8

- 1 Moses built an altar at the foot of Mount Sinai according to the instructions God had given earlier in chapter 20, an altar of earth. In addition to the altar, he set up twelve stone pillars which represented the twelve tribes of Israel. Then burnt offerings and fellowship offerings were made.
- 2 The burnt offering or whole burnt offering was an offering in which the animal that was sacrificed was completely consumed by fire.
 - a Nothing was left; the whole offering was given over to God.
 - b It represented the complete atonement of sin and the full dedication of the worshipper to God. Nothing was left unatoned by God and nothing was held back by the worshipper. (See Rom 12:1).
- 3 The second offering, the fellowship offering represented having peace, fellowship or communion with God. And therefore, the fellowship offering was not entirely burned but rather cooked and served for a meal.
- 4 But before the meat was cooked and served the blood was collected in bowls and then sprinkled on the altar and then after reading the covenant a second time, sprinkled on the people. Now why did Moses do this sprinkling of blood?

- a Ancient covenants demanded a “loyalty unto death” and therefore were often sealed with the blood of an slain animal to show what would happen if either party failed to be loyal to the terms of the covenant.
 - b This is why making a covenant was often referred to as cutting a covenant. A covenant involved an unconditional pledge to loyalty with serious consequences for disloyalty.
- 5 The covenant God made with his people at Sinai was similar but with one incredible difference.
- a The blood of the covenant not only held the threat of divine judgement for everyone who was not loyal to the covenant, the blood also a guarantee of God’s mercy for everyone who was not loyal to the covenant.
 - b Therefore, God was not simply showing his people what would happen if they failed to be loyal to the covenant or keep his law, he was also showing that there was a way for them to remain in his favor, even though they broke his law, were disloyal to the covenant or sinned.
- 6 This was visibly portrayed through the sprinkling of the blood on both parties; on the altar which represented God and on the people which was probably what the 12 stone pillars were used for.
- a Hebrews 9 refers to this very moment and adds that the blood was also sprinkled on the scroll of the covenant and then why the blood was sprinkled ... *for without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Hebrews 9:22b.*
 - b So, first Moses sprinkled the blood on the altar to make atonement for the people’s sin. The people’s guilt was removed through the substitute animal and God’s justice was satisfied because the people’s sin was punished in the substitute.
 - c Then the blood was sprinkled on the people to show its benefits were applied directly to them ... that God had cleansed them by, they belonged to God and that there were in covenant with God.
 - d Therefore, God’s relationship with his people was maintained on the basis of a sacrifice. By the blood of the covenant, they were bound to keep God’s law, and by the same blood their sins were forgiven.
 - e And to maintain this ongoing forgiveness they would have to repeat this sacrifice over and over each year on what would become known as the Day of Atonement.

- 7 Why is this important to understand? Because it shows us that what is required to have a relationship with God has never changed ... atonement of sin through sacrifice and a mediator. And we see this by comparison.
- a Like the Israelites in Egypt, we have been freed from the slavery of sin in order to become God's own covenant people. And like the Israelites at Mount Sinai, we stand in the presence of a holy God who calls us to live before him and be totally loyal to the covenant he has made with us.
 - b However, we cannot keep our covenant with God any better than they did. But like the Israelites, we can be continually forgiven and remain securely in covenant with God on the basis of sacrifice ...
 - but not the sacrifices of the old covenant made at Mount Sinai ... rather a single sacrifice of the New Covenant made on Mount Golgotha
 - And this New Covenant sacrifice was not made with blood of bulls and goats but with the precious blood of Jesus ...
 - And this precious blood was not sprinkled on the altar but rather shed on the cross ...
 - And this shedding of blood not offered every year but once and for all ...
 - And this once and for all sacrifice was not offered by a mere man Moses but by the One and Only ultimate Mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus our Great High Priest. ...
 - And this Great High Priest offered his own blood not only for the forgiveness of sin but eternal right standing with God.
Righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. ²⁵ *God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. Romans 3:22,25a*
- 8 There is no approaching God, relationship with God or fellowship with God, even for one second that is not entirely dependent upon the one and only Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, and the offering of his own blood as the ultimate and final sacrifice to atone for our sins.
- Therefore:
- a We have now been justified by his blood (Rom 5:9).
 - b We have redemption through his blood (Eph 1:7).
 - c We ... have been brought near through the blood of Christ (Eph 2:13).
 - d We have ... peace through his blood, shed on the cross (Col 1:20).
 - e He has freed us from our sins by his blood (Rev. 1:5b).

- 9 It is by the sacrifice of Jesus, aka the blood of Jesus, the blood of the covenant, that we are justified, redeemed, reconciled, forgiven, and made free and have the assurance that we will live forever with the Lord in heaven
- a It is by the blood of Jesus that we will one day be citizens in the New Jerusalem with all the redeemed ... from Adam and Eve all the way to the very last person who believes that Jesus Christ is the One and Only Mediator who sacrificed himself to atone for our sin.
 - b If not for Jesus we would still be at the foot of Mount Sinai separated from the presence of God. We need to think about that every time we pray, Father, I come to you in Jesus Name.
 - c He is my sacrifice of atonement. He is my Mediator and Great High Priest. And through him I have access and fellowship with you and came come confidently to the Throne of Grace.
- 10 The last half of Exodus 24 concludes with two trips made up Mount Sinai.
- a The second one was made by Moses and Joshua to receive the Ten Commandments inscribed by God on two tablets of stone and instructions for the Tabernacle which we will start to study next week in the 8 week series SEE(K).
 - b The first trip was made by Moses, Aaron, his two sons and the seventy elders of Israel in order to solemnize the covenant with a covenant meal between the two parties.

¹ Then he said to Moses, “Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance, ² but Moses alone is to approach the Lord; the others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him.” ⁹ Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up ¹⁰ and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. ¹¹ But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank. Exodus 24:1-2; 9–11

- 1 God comes down to the people to make covenant on an altar and now the people represented by Moses, Aaron, his two sons and the seventy elders of Israel go up to God to eat a meal.
- a This seems a bit strange unless you know that covenants in the ancient world were often celebrated with a meal.

- b Perhaps the meal included the meat that was cooked from the fellowship offering. Nevertheless, this meal was about fellowship or communion with God that was made possible through atonement of sin.
- 2 What makes this covenant meal so astonishing is that it involved God, even more it involved actually seeing God which was supposed to be fatal.
 - a Later God says to Moses, no one may see my face and live (Ex 33:20). Yet here we are told twice that the leaders of Israel “saw God” and then lived to talk about it.
 - b The amazement of all this is expressed in verse 11 when it says ... God did not raise his hand against these leaders. In other words, under normal circumstances these leaders would have perished in the presence of God.
 - 3 So the text says that they “saw God” but what, exactly, did they see?
 - a Strangely enough, the Bible does not describe their vision of God at all. Nothing is said about his divine appearance.
 - b The only thing that is mentioned is what was under his feet. And even this was virtually unexplainable within the boundaries of human language. *Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself (v10b).*
 - 4 But why doesn't the Bible say more about what God looked like? Maybe because the elders never looked much higher than the floor that was under God's feet which suggests that they were not allowed or unable to look at God's face just like Moses in Exodus 33 who was only allowed to see God's backside or the after trail of his glory.
 - 5 Nonetheless, they ate a covenant meal with God. And this covenant meal is the backstory to our covenant meal with God, the Lord's Table.
 - a At Mount Sinai Moses said this is the blood of the covenant. But at the Last Supper in the Upper Room Jesus took the cup and said, this is *my* blood of the *new* covenant (Matt 26:28).
 - b Jesus was taking the disciples back to Sinai to the first covenant mediated by Moses through the blood of animal sacrifice. He was in essence saying that covenant is over.
 - c The book of Hebrews tells us that the Old Covenant made at Sinai was temporary and it's sacrifices never really took away sin. It was only a picture or foreshadowing of a greater covenant and an ultimate sacrifice made by an ultimate Mediator that would take away sin forever.

- d Jesus is that sacrifice and the mediator of the new covenant made with his blood which is to be celebrated by a new meal, the Lord's Table. In other words, communion is a meal ... like the meal on the mountain ... that celebrates covenant loyalty. God's loyalty to us and our loyalty to God.
- 6 We modern Christians don't often think of our relationship with God in terms of a covenant. To us it is kind of an archaic term. But in the Bible covenant is central and the New Covenant is the focus of all that Jesus came to accomplish. And the New Covenant, just like the Old Covenant, just like any covenant calls for loyalty.
- a When the Israelites heard the terms of the covenant read by Moses they responded with a pledge of loyalty, *everything the Lord has said we will do (v3) and we will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey (v7)*.
 - b No doubt this pledge of loyalty was a bit presumptuous but nonetheless it communicated how they and we should view our covenant with God ... as something that calls for our loyalty to God.
 - c This is what Jesus was getting at when he said, *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me (Mark 8:34)*. What was he saying ... loyalty at all cost.
 - d Think about it in terms of a human relationships; love is impossible without loyalty. The same is true in our relationship with God. This is why when Jesus speaks of loving God, he said it is something that is done with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.
- 7 Our covenant with God calls for our loyalty to God. But ultimately our covenant with God is dependent upon the loyalty of Christ ... the only human being who was ever perfectly loyal to God and loved his neighbor as himself but who was treated as a disloyal covenant breaker on the cross so that we could be treated by God as if we were perfectly loyal.
- a Because of Christ's loyalty and faithfulness nothing will ever separate us from the loyal love of God. And if we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny who he is (2 Tim 2:13 NLT).
 - b And if we get that ... that even in our unfaithfulness he remains faithful, it fuels our pursuit of covenant loyalty to God.
- 8 God's covenant loyalty to us will eventually bring all the redeemed to the last major covenant meal in scripture. The first at Mt. Sinai in the Arabian desert, the second in the upper room on Mount Zion in Jerusalem and the

third again on Mount Zion. It is spoken of in the Old Testament as well as the New.

On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples ... he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples ... ⁸ he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; Isaiah 25:6a,7a,8a

- a Isaiah prophesied that this meal would be prepared by God himself in order to celebrate the full arrival of his kingdom, when people from every nation would find a place at his table and death and pain would be no more.
 - b Jesus spoke of the same meal when he said *Many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (Matt 8:11)*
 - c So his covenant meal isn't just for Moses and the elders anymore, or even for the Israelites. It's for people all over the world from east to west. Revelation calls this meal "the wedding supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9).
 - d One day God will welcome everyone who trusts in Jesus to sit down at the feast that will never end. And every time the gospel is preached another invitation goes out to this meal. And every time the gospel is believed another RSVP is received in heaven.
- 9 There is only one way to get to this meal (the forever celebration of the redeemed) and that is to be in covenant with God.
- a And there is only one way to get into covenant with God, by salvation through atonement and a mediator.
 - b And there is only one atoning sacrifice and one Mediator by which we can be saved, Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions

- 1 God saves us not just to free us from the consequences and slavery of sin but also to bring us into a covenant relationship with him. How would you define a covenant? What does it mean for you to be in a covenant relationship with God? (*A covenant is a solemn agreement between two parties that involves loyalty to the terms of the covenant.*)
- 2 Is it possible to have a relationship with God without atonement or a mediator. Why or why not?
- 3 How do you think seeing the Lord's Table as a covenant meal can help your walk with God?
- 4 Read Revelation 3:20. In the light of the covenant meals at Mount Sinai, in the Upper Room and at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb what is Jesus saying in this verse? How have you responded to his invitation? How are you responding to his invitation?