

Blood of the Covenant

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[0 : 00] Hi everyone, my name is Linda if you haven't met me. Reading from chapter 24 of Exodus from verse 3 to 12. 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. 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 12 pillars according to the 12 tribes of Israel.

And he sent young men of the people of Israel who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins and half of the blood and he threw against the altar.

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. 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.

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and 70 of the elders of Israel went up 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.

[1 : 25] And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel. They beheld God and ate and drank. 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.

Good morning, everyone.

Just quickly, if anyone's looking for me over lunch, I'm feeling a bit off today, so I'm not going to spread my germs over lunch. Fortunately, the first two rows basically are free.

But, yeah, just if you're looking for me, you won't find me. I'll hopefully be at home in bed. Let me pray as we come to God's word.

Father, I ask for your help. Such an important passage and topic today. I ask that you would help me to be clear and truthful. And, Lord, I pray for all of us that you would just give us a deeper pause and we just lose interest.

[2 : 58] But here in chapter 24, we have had one of the most important concepts that Scripture gives us for understanding relationship with God.

If you've noticed, our subheadings, they're human subheadings of the Scripture, Old Testament, New Testament. Testament's just a different term for covenant. Covenant.

Covenant. Here we see God entering into a covenant with Israel.

Here's what one commentator says, Leon Morris. No idea is more fundamental to the Old Testament than that God has in love chosen a particular people and has brought them into covenant relationship with himself.

However else you read the Old Testament, you read Scripture, no idea is more fundamental than this. Covenant is the goal of salvation.

[4 : 12] Covenant is how we are to think of our relationship with God. Here's an ancient Babylonian text of a covenant being made with someone called Mati-ilu.

I don't know if that's how you pronounce his name. But a goat is sacrificed. And here's what the text says. This head is not the head of the goat. It is the head of Mati-ilu.

If Mati-ilu breaks this oath, as the head of this goat is cut off, so shall the head of Mati-ilu be cut off. Sorry, kids. This might be a bit of an understatement, but covenants in ancient times were very serious.

Very binding. The most common way of describing what was happening wasn't make a covenant.

[5 : 17] The most common phrase that we have recorded is cut a covenant, pictured of the animals. We saw that earlier this year with the covenant with Abraham, the Lord passing through the cut pieces.

This is way more than an agreement that I'll do this, you'll do that. This is loyalty. This is you're loyal to the whole person.

Loyalty to the king. The closest we've got today is the marriage covenant. It's not just an agreement, I'll do this, you do that. It's I'm loyal to you, fully intending to do you good.

This is binding with witnesses. This is a very serious thing to enter. And there's every reason to assume that Israel knew what they were doing.

They knew what a covenant was. The Hittites at that time were a powerful nation. They would create covenants with less powerful nations. And there's lots of features that we find similar here.

[6 : 29] We see here the five main features of the ancient covenants. There's agreement of the terms. There's swearing and oath. There's offering a sacrifice. There's the witnesses.

It's not quite the human witnesses. It's the pillar and the altar and the 12 pillars. They act as a visible witness to what's being created.

And then there's the feasting, eating and drinking in peace. Israel knew what they were entering. And God is the greater party.

He initiates the covenant. He sets the terms. Human beings, we can't negotiate with God. He's the greater party in the covenant.

People can only accept or reject the covenant. We can't bargain with him. So that's ancient covenants.

[7 : 28] But here in Exodus 24, we find a few unusual things. The first unusual thing is that usually it's the representative of the people who enter the covenant on behalf of the people.

So you see that with Noah. God enters the covenant with Noah, and that represents the whole earth, all people from then on. Abraham enters a covenant.

That represents all his descendants. Here, it's not Moses. Moses is more like the minister at a wedding, bringing the two parties together. Obviously, he's part of Israel too, but the focus isn't on Moses.

So the strange thing here is that it's all the people. God is creating a covenant with the whole nation directly.

I think I struggle to grasp the privilege of this. It's like all, like you think of the greatest empires in the world in history. Israel alone was in covenant with the one true God.

[8 : 46] It's incredible. And all the Old Testament from here on is all about God's blessing and his cursing based on Israel being his covenant people.

So that's the first strange thing. It's the whole nation, not just the representative. And the blood is a little bit different. Verse 8 highlights the blood.

Behold the blood of the covenant. It's not like that Babylonian Mati-Elu. It's not even like God passing through the animals with the Abrahamic covenant.

The blood's a bit different. Half of it is thrown against the altar and half of it is thrown against the people. There's only two other times in God's law that blood is put on people directly.

One is for cleansing. And the other is for priests. When they enter, when they're consecrated to God, when they enter that high calling to be in service of God.

[10 : 00] So I think the blood here, we're meant to see Israel is cleansed. They can be close to a holy God. And they're consecrated.

They are now a kingdom of priests in service to God. So the blood is a very positive thing.

The third different thing is when we compare the emphasis here with, say, the covenant with Abraham. If you recall the covenant with Abraham, the main thing was about God.

Actually, the whole thing is about God and what he would do. I will bless you. I will give you offspring. I'll give you the land. I'll make you into a great nation.

All the world will be blessed through you. Nothing at all about Abraham. But here in the Mosaic covenant, very little is said about what God would do.

[11 : 06] The main thing is about the people. You've got the Ten Commandments as the foundation. And then you've got all the law code of chapters 20 to 23.

It's what the people must do. The promise in chapter 23 of God sending his angel to guarantee that they'll make it to the promised land.

It's conditional on their obedience. If I just read verse 21 and 22. Pay careful attention to my angel and obey his voice.

Do not rebel against him for he will not pardon your transgression for my name is in him. But if you carefully obey his voice. And do all that I say.

Then I will be an enemy to your enemies. And an adversary to your adversaries. It's based on their obedience. That they'll make it to the promised land.

[12:01] In the ceremony itself. Twice the people solemnly agree. After reading the book of the covenant. All that the Lord has spoken we will do.

We will be obedient. There's no mistaking is there. The focus is on. Obedience. Obedience is the decisive thing.

Now it wasn't obedience to a law code that was burdensome. I think we can read it today and think oh it's such a burdensome law. It wasn't. It's redemptive.

Israel would have stood out from their neighbours as such a different good nation if they obeyed. We might find some of it. We didn't read it. And I encourage you to read it at home. But we might find some of it strange. Like the very last command in chapter 23.

[13:10] You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk. Okay. But if we understood that the Canaanites, the land they were entering, that was part of their corporate worship of false gods.

It was to bring fertility to their crops, to their animals. They're saying don't do that. It's quite a disgusting practice if you think about it.

The milk that was meant to give life to the kid is used to boil it. God's saying don't be distinct. Worship the true God. Realise that life comes from Yahweh. The law code, it's not burdensome. It would have made Israel a shining light. I think we may struggle with the laws on slavery in particular.

[14:25] But again, it was radical. To give slaves a day... Now, I don't have time to go into it, but very different idea to slavery than we picture.

But people would give themselves as slaves to pay a debt. It's not the ethnic type of slavery that we imagine.

But it would have been radical if Israel obeyed this. Giving slaves a day off. That is so... You imagine what Israel were like under Pharaoh.

And they gave all their slaves the Sabbath rest. That would have been very different. They would have let them go after six years.

Whatever the debt was, there is a limit. You can go. Slave and master together would have gone to worship God at the altar, side by side as brothers.

[15:34] Whatever we react against when we read the laws about slavery, it's the fuller revelation in Christ that turns the world upside down.

It's not some other culture that changed the world. It's the fuller revelation we see in Christ. When Christ says, whoever would be great among you must be the servant, the slave of all.

Whatever disgust we might feel reading those laws, it's only because the fuller revelation that God has brought totally torpedoes slavery.

There was an image used in America with a slave on his knees and the caption read, Am I not a man and a brother?

Am I not a man and a brother? Am I not a brother? Do you hear what undermines slavery? It's, I'm a man in the image of God. I'm a brother in Jesus Christ.

[16:48] The law code was redemptive for its time. But it was never meant to be God's final word. The laws always prepared us to understand Christ.

So obedience is the main thing and it would have created a wonderful light to the surrounding nations.

Don't you love how the covenant finishes?

We've seen already that when the Lord came down on Mount Sinai, there were limits. And they weren't to come up the mountain when the people heard the voice of God directly commanding the Ten Commandments.

They said to Moses, you speak to us and we will listen, but do not let God speak to us lest we die. The holiness of God was terrifying.

[17:52] But look at what the blood of the covenant results in. Verses 9 to 11. Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and 70 of the elders of Israel went up.

They went up. They went up. The mountain. 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.

I don't know what they saw, but all we get the description is what's under his feet. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel.

They beheld God and they ate and drank. That's what the blood of the covenant achieves. Being in fellowship, feasting with God.

Well, as the people of God today, I think the burning question in our mind is, are we to obey the Mosaic covenant?

[19 : 12] I'm going to be terribly unsatisfying in my answer. But I want to point out some main problems I think we can often run into.

We can answer this question in wrong ways. We can answer it saying we are about grace, not obedience. But that's the fail to see that Israel was saved by grace.

Obedience is the proper response to a God who has saved you by grace. It is a privilege to obey and the high calling of being in special relationship with God.

I think another wrong turn we can make is we're like in an ethical supermarket and we just, I like that bit, take it off the shelf.

Oh, courts not taking bribes? Fantastic. Let's keep that. Not charging interest to make a profit? I'd rather make a profit.

[20 : 17] I'm going to just leave that one. I think we can just be judges ourselves, I suppose. I think we can just be judges ourselves. I think we can just be judges ourselves. We can just be judges ourselves. We can just be judges ourselves.

We can just be judges ourselves. Or are we to obey the Mosaic covenant? We need to follow where scripture pushes us.

We too quickly make the Mosaic covenant about the church, Israel and the church. That's not where scripture pushes us primarily.

Not even Israel obeyed the covenant. Just think how outrageous it is that within 40 days, this same Aaron, these same elders of the people, within 40 days as Moses was getting the two stone tablets, they broke the covenant so grievously that they make a golden calf and say, this is the God who saved us from Egypt.

This is Aaron. This isn't the riffraff of society. These are the leaders. They just saw whatever they experienced of God, eating and drinking in his presence.

[21 : 37] If we follow scripture itself, Psalm 78 recalls all God's goodness and then says, verse 10, they did not keep God's covenant but refused to walk according to his law.

And verse 37, their heart was not steadfast to him. They were not faithful to his covenant. Or we read Ezekiel 16, The question, should we obey the Mosaic law?

Well, it's not the best question. Here's a better question. What does a covenant-keeping God do with a covenant-breaking people?

He's faithful to his covenant. What does he do? Well, most important for our understanding is Jeremiah 31.

If you've got a Bible, you might want to flip there with me. Jeremiah 31, verse 31. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord.

[23 : 28] For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

And no longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord.

For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. When Jesus took the Passover with his disciples, and he instituted a new feast to remember him, and surely Moses' words are very close to his mind when he says, this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Behold the blood of the new covenant. I think we too quickly try to compare Israel to church today. Scripture pushes us to go, Israel failed.

Jesus is the true Israel. The covenant points to Jesus. We read the Gospels.

[24 : 56] Matthew, in his birth narrative, they go to Egypt, and Matthew says, Scripture is fulfilled. Out of Egypt I called my son.

He's talking about Jesus. When Jesus is tempted in the wilderness, instead of grumbling and putting the Lord to the test, he's faithful. He's the faithful son.

When he's on top of the mountain and he's transfigured and he's speaking with Moses, Luke 9.31 says, they're talking about his exodus. He's the obedient, covenant, faithful son.

That Israel failed to be. And he creates a new covenant.

He fulfills the covenant with Israel. And he creates a new covenant. The prophets and New Testament describe it as an everlasting covenant.

[26 : 07] You can't get better than everlasting. It's based on better promises, Hebrews tells us. As we've seen, the blood of the Mosaic covenant, the people's obedience was the decisive thing.

In the new covenant, forgiveness is the decisive thing. That's the basis. The word remember is a covenant term.

When Noah is at the height of the flood, God remembered Noah. He acted on his covenant promise. When Abraham, when Israel are in slavery, they're crying out.

We already saw this earlier. God remembered his covenant with Abraham. And here in the new covenant, I will remember their sin no more. That's the basis of the new covenant.

That's the decisive thing. The blood, we're going to share the Lord's Supper later.

[27 : 17] And it reminds us that this blood really deals with sin. We have that cleansing, that full cleansing.

But it also reminds us that we're consecrated to the Lord as well. As we share the Lord's Supper, we're pledging afresh that we're going to live as a church in a manner befitting as the people of the new covenant.

The new covenant, Jesus, maybe I should say cut, has cut in himself, is more power to obey, better power.

Mosaic covenant, the laws were written external on stone by the finger of God. But in the new covenant, God writes the laws on our heart. It's transformed by Jesus' spirit.

It's transforming us from within. The laws aren't this code on the external that we have to conform to. It's so a part of us. His spirit creates a people desiring to put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

[28 : 43] Romans 13 talks about. Love does no wrong to a neighbour. Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. We have better power to obey.

And we have better feasting with God. Very few people in the Old Testament were said to have known the Lord. It was an aspiration to know the Lord, but very few people.

Moses is described as knowing God face to face like with a friend. And he would come down from meeting with God and his face was glowing. But it faded.

But we're told in 2 Corinthians, as we behold God in the face of Jesus Christ, the glory that changes our character bit by bit, it will never fade.

It's just going to increase the more we behold God in the face of his son. Can I suggest that whatever the leaders of Israel experience up that mountain seeing God, we all know the Lord.

[29 : 50] We see him more clearly in the face of Jesus. In the new covenant, as we're going to share the Lord's Supper, we have better feasting.

It's representing the fact that we're not just sharing a meal horizontally. We're spiritually feasting with God.

We're at peace with him. And it's also reminding us that's our hope. We're going to see him face to face. And we're going to be feasting forever. We are the people.

If you have faith in Jesus Christ, we are the people of the new covenant. Why don't you pray with me? Let's pray. Lord Jesus, I pray that you would help us understand our relationship with you based on the new covenant that you have established.

Our minds and our hearts so quickly go back to our own performance when you've established such a better covenant for us.

[31 : 26] Father, also pray for us as a church. I pray that you would help us live in a way that's befitting as people of the new covenant. And I pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.