

Ratifying the Covenant

We begin with Moses still on the mountain in the cloud of glory hearing God's instructions for the Book of the Covenant. God is telling Moses to go down, and bring others back up, but not all the way up. He was to bring Aaron and two of his sons, and the 70 elders (the basis for the Sanhedrin).

They are to come up and worship from afar, and yet the description sounds like God comes to meet them half way. Then, Moses alone goes all the way up to commune with God and receives the tablets of stone. God had spoken Ten Commandments to the entire nation, (Exodus 20:18) but at the time they were not yet written down.

³ 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." God must have burned those three chapters into Moses' mind, because he relayed it all by memory. Science has shown that we are devolving at a fairly rapid rate. I don't think it was as much an effort for the mind of man 3500 years ago to remember all that material. We've seen the amazing feats of memory that were possible in the first century.

Moses conveyed rules for the nation and all the people agreed to abide by them. Remember how different this is from the nations around them. In those nations the king would tell the people what they must do. They obeyed or they suffered the consequences. In the case of God with Israel, He is asking His chosen people if they will abide by these rules for daily life, including worship guidelines, cycles of feasts and rest, and all of it for their good. (Deuteronomy 10:12-13) One is a conqueror to his vassals to tell them what he will tolerate. The other is from a holy God telling the people He loves the way of righteousness. There is a vast difference. The nation responded that they would accept The Book of the Covenant as a way of life.

Now the agreement must be ratified or sealed. In that day, covenants were sealed with blood. Blood is life. (Leviticus 17:11)

⁴ 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. The Israelites had plenty of experience at cutting stone, but the altar is of uncut stone. (Exodus 20:25) Only the pillars would be cut. The remains of a large altar and the round sections of pillars are still visible at the base of one of the potential sights of Sinai, Jabel al Laws.

Then Moses had the young men offer burnt offerings and peace offerings of oxen on the altar. Some pictographs on the altar at Jabel al Laws are of oxen.

Commented [Paul Wall1]: Exodus 20:18 (ESV)
18 Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off

Commented [Paul Wall2]: Deuteronomy 10:12-13 (ESV)
12 "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,
13 and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?"

Commented [Paul Wall3]: Leviticus 17:11 (ESV)
11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

Commented [Paul Wall4]: Exodus 20:25 (ESV)
25 If you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones, for if you wield your tool on it you profane it.

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." Again, the people committed themselves to obeying God's instruction. Moses took the blood of the oxen and sprinkled it on the sides of the altar. He took the rest and sprinkled the people. Just as the death of those animals was irreversible, so the covenant was an irreversible act. This was an agreement between God and His people. It was sealed with the blood of the animals. This makes their later acts of rebellion and words about returning to Egypt a serious breach of the agreement. (Exodus 32:1)

Last week we read about the covenant of the bondservant sealed with his own blood on his master's doorpost. Did you take that as seriously? Would you have taken it a more seriously if we actually took an awl and shed a little blood from your earlobe? **You can see how blood makes an issue of greater importance.** We can only guess the difference in the human blood shed from so many lives if Israel had actually kept these laws throughout their history.

Greater still is the eternal difference that our lives can make if we take seriously our commitment to the shed blood of Jesus! Amen? It is a covenant not based on what we do, but what He has done for us on the cross. (Hebrews 9:14) Like the covenant on Sinai, it does come with some instruction for living. "If anyone loves me he will keep my commands. My command is this, that you love one another." (John 13:34; 14:23)

Drawing Near to God

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.

Here is a great mystery that the people of the Old Testament did not understand. There is what appears to be a contradiction running throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. Jacob was stunned that he did not die after seeing the face of God with whom he wrestled. (Genesis 32:30) Samson's parents expressed the same. (Judges 13:22) Isaiah saw God on his throne. (Isaiah 6:1,5) Yet, the Old and New Testament tell us that no one has ever seen God, and that no one can see him and live. He is a transcendent Spirit. To "see" then is to fully experience His presence. Jesus said He is the only one to have ever seen the Father. (John 6:46) The holiness of God eradicates evil! Jesus alone can "see" God because He alone is holy.

So just what did these people see? How is it that they survived the encounter? Jewish scholars have seen this same problem and decided to call this visible manifestation of the invisible God, the Prince of the Countenance. He is called the LORD and fully represents the LORD yet he is different from the LORD. But

Commented [Paul Wall5]: Exodus 32:1 (ESV)
1 When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

Commented [Paul Wall6]: Hebrews 9:14 (ESV)
14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Commented [Paul Wall7]: John 13:34 (ESV)
34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

Commented [Paul Wall8]: John 14:23 (ESV)
23 Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

Commented [Paul Wall9]: Genesis 32:30 (ESV)
30 So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered."

Commented [Paul Wall10]: Judges 13:22 (ESV)
22 And Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God."

Commented [Paul Wall11]: Isaiah 6:1 (ESV)
1 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Commented [Paul Wall12]: Isaiah 6:5 (ESV)
5 And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

Commented [Paul Wall13]: John 6:46 (ESV)
46 not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father.

this creates another problem. How can God share His name? His name is the sum of His character. If a being has the name of the LORD and the authority of the LORD how is he different from the LORD?

That is why the Apostle Paul said that Jesus is the manifestation of the invisible God. (Colossians 1:15) He shares God's name and God's attributes. The major difference is one is seen and the other unseen. One is called the Father and the other the Son and yet they are one. Jesus said to Thomas, *"If you have seen me, you have seen the Father."* John 14:9

Commented [Paul Wall14]: Colossians 1:15 (ESV)
15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

John the Beloved, who recorded that expression, had a revelation of the glorified Jesus on the island of Patmos. Listen to his description in **Revelation 1:12-18 (ESV)** *¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. ¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.* That is the New Testament vision of Jesus after He ascended into heaven.

Now lets compare that with what Ezekiel saw five hundred years earlier in **Ezekiel 1:26-28 (ESV)** *²⁶ And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. ²⁷ And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. ²⁸ Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.*

Why are they so similar? Did John copy Ezekiel or are they both seeing the same eternal glorified Jesus who before His ascension prayed in John 17:5 (ESV) *⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.*

They were all seeing the same being because the glorified Son of God has always been the same except for the short span of His earthly ministry in which He emptied Himself of His glory to walk among us. (Philippians 2:7-8) This is the

Commented [Paul Wall15]: Philippians 2:7-8 (ESV)
7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form,
8 he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

same One that the elders, Aaron and sons, and Moses and Joshua were seeing. Jesus veils His glory so that so that we are able to look upon Him and live. The fully unveiled glory of the Father OR the Son cannot be seen by mortal man.

Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul (Rabbi Shaul) describing Jesus in 1 Timothy 6:16 (ESV). ¹⁶ *who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.* Yet, Paul had seen Him on the Damascus road. The vision blinded Him, but He said He saw the resurrected Jesus. (Acts 22:14) You can get a glimpse of His veiled glory, but you could not withstand a full revelation of it! This is somewhat understandable, and yet a great mystery as there is so much yet for us to know.

The elders of Israel were seeing the veiled glory of Jesus. They saw the same sapphire like throne before Ezekiel saw it. ¹¹ *And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.* To eat and drink before God was to be at peace with Him. (Exodus 18:12) The covenant was confirmed and all was well. God and the people of Israel had come to an agreement on how life should be lived.

Every time we celebrate communion we are doing the same. We eat and drink in His presence. We have peace with God because of His gift of His only Son. The covenant is confirmed. We come to an agreement on how life should be lived, by faith in Jesus the Son. (Galatians 2:20)

We should notice a pattern that we will see in the Tabernacle of the coming chapters. The people were not allowed in. The priests and elders came only so far. Now Moses alone will go all the way in.

There are three depths of relationship. There is the outer court with the altar and laver. Everyone can come to the sacrifice. All are invited to partake of Jesus, but only a few will wash (Titus 3:5) and come into the Holy place and be illuminated by the light of the Holy Spirit and feast on the bread of life. Only a few will offer prayers at the altar of incense, and fewer still will enter to be in God's presence and commune with Him. (Revelation 3:20)

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."* Moses went all the way in. Before he did, he left Aaron and Hur in charge. If people needed decisions, they could go to them. Apparently Moses sensed this would take some time. He told the elders to wait and took Joshua a little further up with him.

Moses waited for six days on the mountainside with Joshua until on the seventh day the LORD invited him into the cloud of glory. It appeared to the people

Commented [Paul Wall16]: Acts 22:13-14 (ESV)
13 came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him.
14 And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth;

Commented [Paul Wall17]: Exodus 18:12 (ESV)
12 And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God.

Commented [Paul Wall18]: Galatians 2:20 (ESV)
20 It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Commented [Paul Wall19]: Titus 3:5 (ESV)
5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

Commented [Paul Wall20]: Revelation 3:20 (ESV)
20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

below as a devouring fire. Even though God called him up, he had to wait for God's timing to come in.

¹⁸ Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights. The next seven chapters are God's instructions to Moses while he was on the mountain during those 40 days. God etched into stone the two copies of the Ten Commandments. When covenants were made, each party received a copy of the agreement. We often see pictures of five commands on one stone and five on another. It's not that God couldn't find a big enough stone and had to have a page two. He made a copy for Him and for them but both would go in the Ark of the Covenant because He was coming down to live with them.

Moses also received the detailed instructions as to how the Tabernacle was to be built. God even chose the craftsmen. (Exodus 31:2-3) He showed Moses the whole, like a three dimensional blueprint that was to be copied. (Hebrews 8:5) Our next two weeks will be on the details that God ordained to be filled with meaning. It has been said that the Tabernacle is the greatest visual aid to help us understand the things of God.¹

I would like to end the message this morning by having you consider where you are in your walk with Jesus. Are you at the base of the mountain where the altar is? Are you in the outer court? That is where we first meet God. We come to the sacrifice, recognizing we are sinners and God is holy. Without a sacrifice, never the twain shall meet. Then we recognize that the sacrifice was the only acceptable one, Jesus, the Lamb of God.

That is a great place to be! If you have come there this morning, won't you enter into the covenant? Let the seriousness of the blood of God's Lamb shed for you draw you in to a lasting relationship based on that loving, sacrificial act.

Are you at the laver, being sanctified to go up to the mountain itself. John told us that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from ALL unrighteousness. (1John 1:9) He helps us clean up our act, and we must, if we are to go up the mountain and eat in His presence.

Have you put your foot on the mountain, gone into the Holy Place and let His Word and His Spirit enlighten your mind. Do you eat His word as you would your daily bread? Are you nourished by it? Are you communing with Him in prayer? Are you in awe of His presence? Have you begun to see Him? Are you amazed that you are still alive? Don't forget it is only possible because of the blood of the new covenant.

Where is all this headed? Is it a devouring fire or a cloud of glory? It depends on your point of view. If you are still at the base of the mountain, it's a devouring

Commented [Paul Wall21]: Exodus 31:2-3 (ESV)
2 "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah,
3 and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship,

Commented [Paul Wall22]: Hebrews 8:5 (ESV)
5 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."

Commented [Paul Wall23]: J.A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, p 250

Commented [Paul Wall24]: 1 John 1:9 (ESV)
9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

fire to all that must be removed from your life. If you are half way up the mountain, it's a cloud of glory.

Will you enter in? When you do, you lose all sense of time because He is timeless. (Hebrews 13:8) You'll commune with Almighty God and realize how little but how special you really are. You'll find your value is in the fact that God loves you. It's there that you receive the plans He has for your life. It's there that we find the instructions for how He would have us worship. It always seems like you are alone with Him. That is how it seems to everyone. There is intimacy. We don't want to leave, but we know we must. We have to carry out the plans He has given, and we are delighted to do so. That's because our delight is to please Him and do His will. (Hebrews 10:7)

What is your next step in the journey? You don't have to rush it, but you do need to be willing. (John 10:9) Will you remain at the altar with the masses? Or will you be satisfied to sit on the side of the mountain and wait with the elders? Or maybe nothing short of standing at the edge of the cloud with Joshua will do? Or do you have a hunger to go in and hear His voice? (John 10:3) I hope you won't be satisfied until you enter in!

Questions

- 1 What is the setting for this chapter?
- 2 Why were covenants ratified with blood?
- 3 How was the New Covenant sealed? Implications?
- 4 Give examples of seeing God in Scripture?
- 5 How are we to understand the mystery?
- 6 What two descriptions bear remarkable similarity?
- 7 What is the implication of eating before God? And for us?
- 8 What are the three depths of relationship on Sinai?
- 9 What has been called God's greatest visual aid to us?
- 10 Where are you on the mountain/tabernacle?
- 11 How strong is your desire to go to the next level?

Commented [Paul Wall25]: Hebrews 13:8 (ESV)
8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Commented [Paul Wall26]: Hebrews 10:7 (ESV)
7 Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.' "

Commented [Paul Wall27]: John 10:9 (ESV)
9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

Commented [Paul Wall28]: John 10:2-3 (ESV)
2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.
3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.