

Moses' ascents of Sinai

• Approaches the cloud – the law

• Into the cloud – the highest privilege

The Covenant-Making Ceremony

• Ten commands and ordinances

• Offerings – blood on the altar

• The people swear obedience

• Blessings follow obedience

Christian parallels

• Blood of Christ for God and sprinkled on men

• Obedience to the Holy Spirit

In Exodus 24:1, at a time when Moses is still approaching (but has not reached) the thick darkness at the top of the mountain, Moses is told that he must ascend the mountain yet higher. The people will be furthest away. The elders and four leaders will be nearer. Moses alone is to go to the top of the mountain. There is some significance in the various ascents and descents of Moses; it is worth noting where he is at any given time.

The Ten Commandments were given directly by God to the whole people, Moses included. After the Ten Commandments had been given, Moses 'approached the thick cloud where God was'¹. This must have involved a further ascent of Sinai. It does not say Moses 'entered' the cloud, only that he 'approached' it. God spoke to him there, and the whole of the Book of the Covenant was given to Moses at that point.

In Exodus 24:1 Moses is invited to come yet higher on Mount Sinai. It repeats the invitation of 19:20. Again God says 'Come up to me on the mountain'¹. The people are at the foot of the mountain. The elders are part-way up the mountain. Moses and Joshua go yet higher², and Moses alone goes into the cloud at the top of the mountain³. For the first time, 'Moses entered the midst of the cloud'. It was the highest privilege of all, and was something experienced by Moses alone. So seventy elders, Aaron, two sons of Aaron, Joshua⁴ and Moses himself – seventy-five in all – are invited to ascend Sinai. Moses alone is to go higher than the others⁵.

First Moses goes down to tell the people what has happened. He tells them 'all the words of Yahweh' (that is, the Ten Commandments) and 'the ordinances' (that is, the substance of Exodus 21:1–23:19). The people once again promise obedience; they are giving the covenant oath (24:3 repeats 19:8). Moses writes out the commands of God¹ and the next day performs the covenant-making ceremony². The altar represents God; the twelve pillars represent the people³. There are various offerings: burnt offerings expressing consecration, peace offerings expressing fellowship⁴. There is no need of any sin offering; the Passover lamb which had just redeemed them was the sin-offering. Moses gave some of the blood for the altar⁵. He got the people to swear obedience to the written law of the covenant⁶. Then he sprinkled the other half of the blood upon the people⁷. 'The blood of the covenant' or 'blood for the covenant' is a short expression meaning 'the blood which comes from sacrifice which inaugurates and sustains a covenant'.

The covenant was fully set up when the people's oath was taken. It was arranged upon the basis of shed blood. The first party that needed the shed blood was God. The second party needing the shed blood was the people. The blessings of the covenant would come to them as they obeyed the written law.

There are parallels for the Christian in all of this. There is no relationship with God unless He, first of all, receives the blood of Jesus Christ. But equally, the blood of Christ has to be sprinkled on believers also. God needs the blood for atonement. Men and women need the blood sprinkled on them for the receiving of a good conscience¹. Covenant relationship goes forward on the basis of blood given to God, blood sprinkled on men and women.

The blessings of the covenant come by obedience, not so much obedience to the Mosaic law, but obedience to the 'law of Christ', obedience to the Holy Spirit.

¹ 20:21

¹ 24:12

² 24:13

³ 24:18

⁴ see 24:13

⁵ 24:2

¹ 24:4a

² 24:4b-8

³ 24:4b

⁴ 24:5

⁵ 24:6

⁶ 24:7

⁷ 24:8

¹ see Heb 9:14

• *God's oath – not man's*

• *Obedience to the Spirit*

At the top of Mount Sinai

• *Forty days*

• *Tabernacle instructions*

• *Worship is higher than law-keeping – brings fellowship*

• *The law abolished, not because worthless but because fulfilled in a higher way*

For the Christian the oath comes not when he or she gives it, but when God gives it. In a covenant of generosity (unlike a covenant of law) God gives the oath. When we persist in faith, eventually God completes the covenant when He takes an oath and says 'I will indeed bless you.' By faith and patience we inherit the covenant promise. The blessings of the covenant would come to the people of Israel as they obeyed the written law. The blessings of the new covenant will come to us as we obey the Spirit, as He speaks to us in and around the words of Jesus and His apostles.

Moses then proceeds to do as God had told him. He makes his way to the lower slopes of Sinai with Aaron and his two sons^{□1}. There they have amazing fellowship with God. God appears in visible form. Beneath His appearance is a kind of pavement of bright sapphire stone. They are seeing a representation of God enthroned in heaven^{□2}. Because of the blood that has been shed they are able to have fellowship with God. He does not need to strike them in anger, because atonement for sin has been made^{□3}. They have rich fellowship with God, expressed in a fellowship-meal^{□4}.

Then Moses goes to the top of Sinai and stays there for forty days^{□1}. It is during this time he is given the instructions for the tabernacle. It is notable that Moses was at the bottom of the mountain to receive the law, but is at the top of the mountain to receive instructions concerning the tabernacle. The system of worship is more important than the system of legislation. God did not say 'When you have brought the people out you will receive my law on this mountain.' Instead He said 'When you have brought the people out you will worship God on this mountain'^{□2}. Fellowship with God at its best will not come by law-keeping; it will come by worship. They have recognised God as their over-lord, their treaty-partner, their 'great King'. Now tabernacle worship will be the way in which they give recognition to their King.

For the Christian the law is part of a system that has been abolished. But he does not throw it away as uninteresting or unimportant. He is not under it; but he fulfils it. He is not under the law; he is under Christ. When he reads the law he sees it as a signpost pointing to Jesus. He sees it as a shadow, sketching for him a higher level of living. Certainly the law is abolished for the Christian. But it is not abolished because it is thrown away as worthless. It is abolished because it gets fulfilled in another way. Does the Christian despise the law? Not at all. He fulfils it by the Holy Spirit. He fulfils its call for righteousness. Then he enters into the tabernacle and even presses on to enter into the holy of holies. Worship is again the way in which he gives recognition to his King.

□1 24:9-11

□2 24:10

□3 24:11

□4 24:11

□1 24:12-18

□2 3:12



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