

# Covenant Sealed with Blood (Exodus 24:1-8)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Exodus

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## I. Review from the Previous Lessons

- a. The Lord has just spoken the Ten Commandments to the Israelites gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai, about two months after departing Egypt. (**Exodus 20:1-17**)
- b. After that, people are terrified by the Lord, and insist that they do not want to hear His voice anymore. They tell Moses to approach the Lord; the people insist they will do *whatever He commands*. (**Exodus 20:18-21, Deuteronomy 5:1-21**)
- c. The Lord gives additional laws (beyond the Ten Commandments) to Moses, and now the covenant between the Lord and His people will be established (**Exodus 20:22-23:33, Deuteronomy 5:22-33**).

## II. More Laws on the Sabbath

- a. Read **Exodus 24:1-8**.
- b. Storyline:
  - i. The Lord calls Moses to come up to Mount Sinai, along with Nadab, Abihu and seventy elders of the people.
  - ii. Moses tells the people all of the ordinances that the Lord had given to him after the Ten Commandments. The people respond with one voice, "*We will do everything the Lord has commanded.*"
    1. Moses then writes down all the words that the Lord has spoken. (I assume this includes all the laws and ordinances included in **Exodus 21-23**.)
  - iii. Moses gets up early in the morning and builds an altar, with twelve stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel.
  - iv. Young men are sent out to offer whole burnt offerings, and to sacrifice calves as peace offerings to the Lord.
  - v. Half of the blood is poured out on the altar.
  - vi. Moses reads to the people all the words he has written in the Book of the Covenant.

1. The people again say that they will *obey everything* the Lord has commanded.
  2. Moses *sprinkles the people* with the other half of the blood.
    - a. Blood is something most of us find repulsive. The blood of an animal is not something I would want spilled on me nor sprinkled on me. It stains and has a smell that most people find objectionable.
    - b. This act confirms (seals, and begins) *the formal covenant* between God and His people.
- c. **Questions:** What is a *covenant*? What does this term mean, and how might that be significant to us?
- i. The word used in the LXX and the New Testament. The Greek word used in the Scriptures is διαθήκη (diatheke). The *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (compiled by J. Lust, E. Eynikel and K. Hauspie) says the primary meaning of that word is: “treaty, covenant”. Based on how it is used in the Scriptures, it can also refer to a contract, or to a will or testament (such as in someone’s ‘Last Will and Testament’).
    1. This is the same word used in **Deuteronomy 7:2** in the LXX when the Lord says, regarding the people of the land of Canaan, “You shall not make a *covenant* with them.”
    2. This is also the same word we find used in **Joshua 9:15-16** in the LXX, where it says the people made a peace *treaty* with the Gibeonites (who were deceptive and pretended to be from far away).
  - ii. The basic elements of a covenant (contract, treaty, etc.)
    1. Generally, there are two (or sometimes more) parties to the agreement.
      - a. A will is a separate case: entered into by one party, which goes into effect at that party’s death.
    2. The parties must enter the covenant voluntarily, of their own choice.
    3. There are terms and conditions that each side must follow. This indicates what each party agrees to do under the agreement.

4. Often there are consequences spelled out regarding what will happen if the terms and conditions are not followed.
  5. There is a starting date (and sometimes an ending date).
  6. There is some way that the parties formally enter the agreement (such as by signing a written contract before witnesses and a notary).
  7. The parties signing the contract must have the authority to enter into the commitment.
- iii. Examples of covenants:
1. Marriage
  2. Purchase and sale agreement for a house or a car
  3. The U.S. Constitution (which the original 13 states agreed to)
  4. *A peace treaty* between two countries that had been at war with each other
- iv. Why covenants (contracts) are important in everyday life.
1. They bind the parties to a clear agreement. It states what is included and what is not included. It also often indicates how problems are to be resolved.
  2. At my engineering job, working for a consulting firm that did work for various clients, upper management repeatedly admonished us: "NEVER do work for a client without an *executed (signed) contract.*"
    - a. Only an officer of our company could sign this, and our lawyers would review the terms and conditions first.
    - b. That is the only way we could be reasonably assured we would get paid by the client after doing the work. A properly executed contract can be enforced by a court if necessary.
    - c. It lays out the scope of work and defines the terms and conditions of payment.
- v. In the Bible, it speaks about the *New Covenant* replacing the *Old Covenant*.

1. If we clearly understand the old covenant (established in **Exodus 24**) it will help us to better understand the New Covenant.
  2. Starting from understanding the Old Covenant, we can compare the similarities and differences vs. the New Covenant.
- vi. A look at the Old Covenant.
1. The two parties (God and Israel) entered it voluntarily.
  2. The people agreed to the terms (to follow whatever the Lord said).
  3. The benefits were spelled out, as well.
    - a. They would be God's special people.
    - b. They would inherit the land of Canaan.
    - c. The Lord would protect them and fight their battles for them.
  4. The covenant "formal signing ceremony" was the people affirming their commitment, and the blood of the animal sacrificed (half on the altar of the Lord, and the other half sprinkled on the people).
  5. It commenced when the covenant was confirmed, as described in **Exodus 24:8**.
- d. **Question:** *How many covenants* did God make with His people from the beginning? (I am referring to covenants involving large groups of people, not with just a single individual such as with David. Also, please note that there may be more than one answer that could be considered 'correct' here.)
- i. Irenaeus (c. 130-200 AD), bishop of the church in Lyons (in modern-day France) counted *four* principal covenants with the human race.
    1. "Such, then, as was the course followed by the Son of God, so was also the form of the living creatures; and such as was the form of the living creatures, so was also the character of the Gospel. For the living creatures are four-fold, and the Gospel is four-fold, as is also the course followed by the Lord. For this reason were four principal covenants given to the human race: one, prior to the deluge, under Adam; the second, that after the deluge, under Noah; the third, the giving of the law, under Moses; the fourth, that which renovates man, and sums up all

things in itself by means of the Gospel, raising and bearing men upon its wings into the heavenly kingdom.”

- a. (Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* book 3, chapter 11; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 429).
2. Irenaeus saw this as foreshadowed by the fact that there also were *four* living creatures (from **Ezekiel 1** and **Revelation 4**) and *four* gospels.
3. The four covenants he counted were:
  - a. Covenant of Adam (**Genesis 3**)
  - b. Covenant of Noah, after the Flood (**Genesis 9**)
    - i. Under this covenant, the Lord said He would never destroy the whole world again...*by water*. (**Genesis 9:8-15**; consider what Peter says in **2 Peter 3:5-7**)
  - c. The Covenant of Moses, encompassing the Law of Moses (established in **Exodus 24**)
  - d. The New Covenant of the gospel, brought in by Jesus.
- ii. Many would consider the *Covenant of Circumcision* given to Abraham and his descendants in **Genesis 17** as *one more covenant* that the Lord established with his people.
  1. Read **Genesis 17:1-14**.
  2. However, since circumcision was later included under the Law of Moses (**Leviticus 12:3**), perhaps in some sense, it could be counted as part of that covenant. Consider what Jesus said in **John 7:22-23**.
- iii. However, in the New Testament, it typically addresses this in the sense that there were (only) *two* major covenants: the Old Covenant brought by Moses; and the New Covenant that replaced it, brought by Jesus.
- e. In the New Testament, it speaks of *two* (main) covenants.
  - i. Read **Galatians 4:21-31**.
    1. Note that Paul’s logic and how he reads the Old Testament are a bit different from the approach most of us typically take. While his logic might strike some of us as peculiar, this is more

typical of 'Eastern' style prophecies, which see allegorical meaning in Old Testament stories. Perhaps we can learn something here by considering his approach and how he reasoned.

2. Paul says that the two sons of Abraham foreshadowed the two covenants.
  - a. One son (Ishmael) by the natural son: the son of bondage, of slavery.
  - b. The other son (Isaac) by the son of the promise: the free man.
- ii. In **2 Corinthians 3** Paul speaks of "the new covenant" and "the old covenant"
  1. "...God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of *the new covenant*, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (**2 Corinthians 3:5-6**, NKJV)
  2. "But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the *old covenant*, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away." (**2 Corinthians 3:14**, ESV)
    - a. The Greek word is the same here; for some reason, the NKJV translators used different words in the two places (they use "Old Testament" instead of "old covenant"), which could obscure the connection Paul is making.
    - b. When I think of "Old Testament", I think of the first  $\frac{3}{4}$  of my Bible, including: all 5 Books of Moses, the Prophets, the Poetic Writings, etc.
    - c. On the other hand, when I think of "old covenant" I think specifically of the Law of Moses.
    - d. I believe the point Paul is making is contrasting the new covenant with the old covenant (based on how he uses the word 'covenant' here in parallel). That point can be hard to see in some translations that use two different terms to translate the same word in the same letter of Paul.
- f. From **Hebrews** comparing the first covenant with the new one.
  - i. The main point made throughout **Hebrews**:

1. In **1 Samuel 2:35** (designated **1 Kingdoms 2:35** in the LXX), there is a prophecy given to the priest Eli (whose sons were corrupt priests) that in the future, the Lord will raise up another priest who will be a faithful priest over a faithful house. There is also a specific reference to “My Christ (My Anointed One)” contained in that prophecy.
    - a. In **Hebrews 2:17-3:6** it explains that Jesus is indeed the faithful High Priest; and we (the church) are His faithful house “*if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end*”.
  2. That promised faithful priest is also spoken about by David in **Psalms 110** (designated **Psalms 109** in the LXX) that this would be “a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”.
  3. The Hebrews writer develops the idea that this change to a *new and better High Priest* is also associated with a *change to a new and better covenant*. Furthermore, the Jewish Scriptures (the Old Testament) foretold that all of this would happen.
- ii. Read **Hebrews 7:18-22**.
1. Jesus was the greater High Priest.
  2. He is a priest like Melchizedek, in an eternal priesthood not based on genealogy (**Psalms 110**).
  3. This new High Priest brings with Him a *better covenant*.
- iii. Read **Hebrews 8:6-13**.
1. This new, better covenant is established on *better promises*.
  2. God promised through **Jeremiah** that a new covenant would come, to replace the one given by Moses (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**, designated **Jeremiah 38:31-34** in the LXX).
  3. This new covenant would have *new laws* associated with it.
  4. Logically, introducing a new covenant would render the old covenant *obsolete*.
  5. Note that in **Hebrews** it *does NOT* say that God is simply going to do away with the old covenant, in other words that in the future God’s people *will not be under any laws*. In **Jeremiah 31** it says, “I will surely put My laws into their mind and write them on their hearts.” Here, God says *there will be new laws* to be followed, that would be known and taken to heart!

iv. Read **Hebrews 9:11-22**.

1. “Testament” = “covenant” here (from the exact same Greek word, as one can see in an interlinear Greek Bible).
2. New covenant, like the old one, is *established by blood* (and water).
  - a. The **Hebrews** writer says that the new covenant which Christ brought in is like a person who writes a will. When the “testator” (the one who writes the will for him or herself) writes a will, the will has no power or authority *until that person dies*.
  - b. Only at their death does it go into effect – the death of the testator is required. Also note that after death, a will cannot be changed.
3. The people were *sprinkled with blood* to initiate the old covenant, as also stated in **Exodus 24**.
4. If we understand the Old Covenant, we can better understand and appreciate the New Covenant that replaced it!

v. Read **Hebrews 10:19-25**.

1. We also (our hearts) have been “sprinkled with blood”. This points back to our baptism, where our bodies were *washed with water*.
  - a. It seems clear to me that this is a reference to our baptism, when we are “born again of water and the Spirit” (**John 3:3-5**).
    - i. The statement by Jesus in that passage was widely understood by Christian writers as referring to water baptism, which Christians must undergo to enter the kingdom of God.
  - b. This reference to spiritual washing with water also reminds me of what Peter said regarding a Christian who returns to the old way of life:
    - i. “But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.’” (**2 Peter 2:22**, NKJV)

- c. We enter the New Covenant by the blood of Christ (sprinkled on our hearts) and water (when our bodies are “buried with Christ” in baptism; see **Romans 6:4-5**).
  - 2. He who promised *is faithful*. (In other words, God *keeps his end* of the covenant.) Therefore, let us hold fast to our own commitment, the hope we have, without wavering.
    - a. We never have to worry about whether God will be faithful to His responsibility under the covenant. The only question is *whether we will be faithful* and uphold *our part* of the covenant!
  - 3. We are called to meet together, to stir one another up toward love and good works.
  - 4. We need to *exhort one another daily*, as we see the Day of Judgment approaching.
- vi. Read **Hebrews 10:26-31**.
  - 1. The New Covenant is a greater covenant than the Old Covenant; however, like the earlier covenant, the New Covenant *also is sealed by blood*.
  - 2. The *warnings* of the New Covenant are greater than those of the Old Covenant, as well!
- g. Why it is important to recognize that our relationship with God is in the context of a covenant:
  - i. We Christians are now under a *real covenant*.
    - 1. This is a two-way street, an agreement between two parties: God and us. Both parties have responsibilities and commitments under this covenant.
    - 2. We entered the covenant voluntarily.
      - a. Personal note: although my parents baptized me as an infant (in the Roman Catholic church), I had no part in that decision. It was not my choice. That was one of the reasons I felt it was necessary to be baptized as an adult, of my own decision, when I was in my late ‘20’s.
        - i. Also consider **Colossians 2:11-12** and **Mark 16:15-16**, which connect faith with baptism. *I did not have faith in Jesus Christ* at the time when my parents baptized me as an infant.

3. The New Covenant was sealed by blood. The blood of Jesus was shed to establish the New Covenant; and our hearts are sprinkled by blood when we enter the covenant when our bodies are washed with water.
  - a. Both blood and water involved in entering the covenant.
4. There are terms of this covenant.
  - a. The terms are written down! The Scriptures spell out the *terms and conditions* of the covenant/contract we have entered to with God.
  - b. God will keep his end. He is faithful.
  - c. Similar to the situation under the Old Covenant, God's people now are called to *obey all the teachings* of Jesus.
    - i. When we confess that "Jesus is Lord" (**Acts 2:36-38, Romans 10:9**), we are stating that He is now our ruler; we will obey whatever He commands.
  - d. We have the opportunity to become God's special people through *this wonderful covenant relationship*.
  - e. This understanding should help those Christians who struggle with "eternal insecurity" (who struggle, constantly wondering if they have done enough to be saved). I have seen that "feeler-types" (as opposed to those who are more the "thinkers-types"), especially those with more sensitive, "accused" consciences, often struggle greatly with this.
    - i. We remain in this covenant relationship *unless we deliberately sin our way out of it*, effectively trashing the covenant. (**Hebrews 10:26-29**)
    - ii. Think about a marriage covenant. A husband or wife does not wake up in the morning and wonder, "Am I *still married* to my spouse? I am not sure I am *feeling* married this morning!"
    - iii. Your marriage is the result of a covenant relationship you entered into; it is not a matter of how you happen to "feel" from one moment to the next!

- iv. Similarly, if we understand that our relationship with God is *based on a covenant* we entered into at our baptism, with one (Christ/ God) Who is *completely faithful*. Therefore, if we are keeping our end of the covenant agreement, we should not be insecure regarding where we stand.
  - f. Let us call one another higher, so we don't fall by following the bad example of most of the Jews.
- 5. When we take the Lord's Supper, we *renew the covenant* we have entered into with the Lord. The cup is the blood of the New Covenant.
  - a. At the Last Supper: "Likewise He (*Jesus*) also took the cup after supper, saying, '*This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.*'" (**Luke 22:20**, NKJV)
  - b. Paul recounts how the Lord instituted the Lord's Supper: "In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, '*This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.*'" (**1 Corinthians 11:25**, NKJV)
- 6. In the New Testament, the Jewish Christians are often turning back to the Old Covenant (or to elements of it).
  - a. How could they do this? They need to understand that we have been given a much *greater* covenant through Jesus, our *greater* High Priest.
- 7. We can be confident in our salvation (with a confidence based on the truth, not a false confidence) based on the fact that we have entered into a covenant relationship with the Lord.