

DEVOTIONAL 1



# GOD IN OUR MIDST

# EXODUS 24:1-11

<sup>1</sup> Then he said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar.

<sup>2</sup> Moses alone shall come near to the LORD, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.”

<sup>3</sup> 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.”

<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. <sup>6</sup> And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. <sup>7</sup> 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.” <sup>8</sup> 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.”

<sup>9</sup> Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.



# DAY 1

EXODUS 24:1-2

<sup>1</sup> Then he said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. <sup>2</sup> Moses alone shall come near to the LORD, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.”

As we begin this new series in Exodus it would be good to remind ourselves of where we are in the story. Israel, a slave nation, has been remarkably delivered from the world superpower, Egypt, by the mighty hand of YHWH. They have been brought to the foot of Mt. Sinai where God will meet with them and lay out the shape that their life together as God and people will take. But the people are terrified:

*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 and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” (Exodus 20:18–19)*

And so Moses steps into his role as mediator between God and his people. He ascends the mountain. He alone stands before God. Here he represents God to the people and the people to God.

We too have a mediator. One who has ascended Mount Calvary in order that we might come to Mount Zion without fear. Here is how the writer to the Hebrews captures the work of this New Testament mediator:

*For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews 12:18–24)*

## PRAYER

*Thank you, Jesus, for ascending the mountain on our behalf. Thank you that we stand sprinkled by your blood and can come without fear before you. Help us to live out of this good news. May the reality of who we are in you give us courage and determination to show forth your kindness to the nations. We pray all this in Jesus's name. Amen.*

# DAY 2

EXODUS 24:3-7

<sup>3</sup> 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.” <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. <sup>6</sup> And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. <sup>7</sup> 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.”

“Israel’s obligation to keep the law is not to form a relationship with God, but rather to show gratitude to and maintain the relationship it already enjoys with him.” Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Exodus*

Ostensibly, we are firm believers in grace. Our doctrinal statements affirm those beliefs. Our communion services are explicit in their presentation of the gospel of grace. The hymns we sing each week reinforce the concept. We acknowledge God’s grace in our prayers. Yet do we linger in a kind of performance mode where we think or operate with the idea that we can win favor from God by obeying the ten commandments? If so, the law becomes kind of checklist, and we’re out to get stars that signify our accomplishments keeping the law. We know there are important relationship understandings in there somewhere, but somehow we don’t quite get to them. Fully grasping those understandings firmly is often a slippery process.

Think of all the times the New Testament writers declare to the people of the church, “Be Who You Are.” This wasn’t a kind of newfangled idea. Because of what God had done in delivering them from Egypt, the Israelites had a relationship with God. The primary dynamic of that relationship was gratitude, not keeping a checklist. Remember one of Paul’s primary points in Romans 1:21. The lack of gratitude is where things start falling apart.

As a teenager, I often went to a church where the law was read every Sunday as a part of the liturgy. I never picked up on this idea of gratitude. I’m not sure if it was mentioned much. It is a walk of thanksgiving that God is after not an effort at some certificate of achievement. At Sinai, the people said the right things. But as the story plays out, they didn’t do the right thing, namely, be thankful in the covenant relationship that God had established.

## PRAYER

*Father, show us every day how to be grateful. Remind us of what you have done, how you have delivered us, how we have new eternal life now and in the future. May we always remember that we have been made to be a covenant people by your great grace. Make our hearts overflow daily with a gratitude that shapes our very walk with you. Amen.*

# DAY 3

EXODUS 24:6-8

<sup>6</sup> And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. <sup>7</sup> 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.” <sup>8</sup> 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.”

What is so significant about blood? In the first place it represents or symbolizes life. As the book of Leviticus explains:

*“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.”*

Leviticus 17:11

The cost of sin is death. Therefore the blood and life of a sacrificial animal is used to exchange one life for another. The animal’s life is used to replace the sinner’s life so that they may be atoned for. Through the life of the animal the sinner became externally or ritually pure and it restored their relationship to God.

In the second place, and not without reference to the first idea, the blood and sacrifice could consecrate a covenant between God and his people. In Genesis 15, God forged a covenant with Abraham wherein animals were cut in pieces, representing the punishment that would come upon the lesser or vassal participant if they were to violate the covenant. In the Abraham story, God walks between the halves of the animals thus taking on the responsibility for Abraham’s obedience. The covenant was only made in terms of the bloody sacrifice that was offered to inaugurate the covenant.

In the case of Exodus 24, the blood is split into two basins, likely one representing God’s participation through the altar and the second representing the people’s participation. The blood is used to accomplish several things. First, it consecrates the altar. Before the construction of the tabernacle, the altar is the place where God offers forgiveness to his people so that he can meet with them. It represents God’s participation in the covenant.

Second, the book of Hebrews tells us that even the book of the covenant was sprinkled with blood. The blood acts to consecrate and ratify the covenant between God and the people. A covenant to which they had enthusiastically agreed to follow after Moses had read it to them.

Third, the blood was used to consecrate and purify the people so that they could participate in a covenantal relationship with God. The blood of the animals represents the life of the people given over to God. As Hebrews reminds us, both the inauguration of the covenant and the purification of sins were done through blood.

*Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you." And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.*

Hebrews 9:18-22

However, Hebrews also reminds us that the Mosaic covenant was just a shadow and would not last nor make anyone perfect; instead, it pointed towards Jesus. In Jesus we have a great high priest who fulfilled the obligations to the covenant and became perfect for us being obedient unto death. For by his own blood have we been saved.

*But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but **by means of his own blood**, thus securing an eternal redemption.*

Hebrews 9:11-12

And by his own blood he has inaugurated a new covenant that our sins might be forgiven. As he told the disciples at the last supper,

*And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Matthew 26:27-28*

So we should take hope for the blood of Jesus frees us from sin so that we can be a covenant people called to serve the Lord until he returns.

## PRAYER

*Lord you have called us to be a covenant people through your blood. Give us the wisdom through your eternal Spirit that we may minister in this world as a new priesthood offering sacrifices of praise and good works. Thank you that through your blood we can have eternal salvation.*



# DAY 4

EXODUS 24:9-10

<sup>9</sup> Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, <sup>10</sup> 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.

From time to time in culture there are humorous pieces that are meant to depict God. Perhaps they are poking fun at humanity, highlighting how different God is than us? But what would you do if you saw God for real?

We have already seen earlier in the week how Israel responded when they saw God thundering from Mt. Sinai. They were afraid, they trembled, they called on Moses not to let God speak to them lest they die (cf Exodus 20:18–19). Later God will tell Moses that no one can see God's face and live (Ex. 33:20). Clearly to see God is not merely a light concept.

Yet the picture that we have here in these verses offers a contrast to the thunderings and lightnings of chapters 19 and 20. Here we see God inviting Moses and the leaders into the heavens as it were, and gaining a much more specific, yet no less glorious, view of who God is. Peter Enns in his commentary on Exodus puts it this way, “Even this low view of God is startling: ‘under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself.’ Even this vision of God's feet and the ground under his feet is too much for words. The best the writer can do is say ‘it is something like’ a pavement.” (p.491)

Do you know God in this varied way? Do you know the one who thunders and flashes? Do you know the one enthroned above the heavens? Have you stopped to consider the ways that his glory is displayed? What would it be like to gaze at his feet?

## PRAYER

*Lord enlarge our minds and hearts to realize that you are so much bigger than we ordinarily reckon. Thank you that you are not only the one who thunders and flashes, but also the one who portrays peace and power. As our vision of you expands may our humility grow, along with our trust in you. We pray all this in Jesus's name. Amen*

# DAY 5

EXODUS 24:11

And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.

Welcoming people into our homes, offering food and drink, and eating together is a sign of safety and friendship. As Moses and the chiefs of Israel ascend the mountain they are invited into the presence of God and offered this heavenly hospitality. As we noted yesterday, this scene is such a contrast from the thunderings and lightnings of 19 and 20. This invitation to a meal signified hope for the people and the promise of friendship with this God who has so dramatically shown his might. The people knew that no one could see God and live (cf. Ex. 33:20), but now God has invited them in and “he did not lay his hand” on them.

This is the promise that continues for the people of God. Every time we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we are reminded that God offers us the hospitality and safety of his presence. Every time we eat at the table with him, we are given a foretaste of the marriage supper of the lamb (Rev. 19) that is on our horizon. As we come to him by faith, we rest in the fact that he does “not lay his hand” on us because he has smitten his own son on our behalf and now we have peace with our God.

*Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,*

*“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.  
Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory,  
for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready;  
it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”—  
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*

*And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.”  
(Revelation 19:6–9)*

## PRAYER

*O Lord we pause today to humbly thank you for the promise of shelter and safety within your house. We thank you for Jesus who was stricken and smitten on our behalf, so that you would not lay a hand on those who have put their faith in his finished work. As we live out our days may these “true words of God” be our strength and our motivation to live for you. This we pray in Jesus’s name. Amen.*