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Then Moses Took the Book of the Covenant and Read It to the People
24: 4-8

Then Moses took the book of the Covenant and read it to the people DIG: Who makes this covenant between the people and God? What did the blood on the altar signify? The blood sprinkled on the people?

REFLECT: Is God's covenant with His people, then and now, sustained by their obedience, or by His grace? Why do you think so? How will that affect your promise-making today?

When **Isra'el** stood under the mountain on the first day of Shavu'ot, **they** were there to make a covenant with **ADONAI**. It meant that **He** might become **their God** and **they** might become **His people**. Part of the process of ratifying a covenant in the ancient Near East entailed putting an agreement down in writing. Therefore, when compared with Suzerainty Treaties of the day, **the Torah** of **Moses** would have a **formal ceremony**. **Exodus 24** tells the story of the covenant rituals which served to ratify the Sinai covenant. It is one of the most crucial passages in all the Scriptures; filled with depth, mystery and Messianic significance.

In the days of **the Torah**, there were different types of covenants and covenant obligations. Among the different forms of covenanting in the ancient Near East, none was more sacred and binding than a **blood** covenant. It was the deepest and strongest of all relationships. The commitment of a blood covenant was absolutely binding on the parties entering that covenant. It was a **blood** covenant that **ADONAI** sought to make with **His people**. The following rituals reflect the rituals of **blood** covenanting.

From within the biblical narratives we can observe several rites and rituals which are involved in covenant making. Of course, a covenant implies terms and conditions, and the responsibilities of both parties. **Genesis 31** provides an excellent model of early Semitic covenant rites (**to see link click Hs – So Jacob Took a Stone and Set It Up as a Pillar, and He Called It Galeed**). In **Jacob's**

covenant with **Laban**, stone monuments were set up as a token and reminder of the covenant. The conditions of the covenant were expressed, a solemn oath was taken, invoking **God** as witness and judge. Because the name of **ADONAI** was invoked in the covenant rite, a sacrifice was made. Finally, the completed covenant was celebrated and concluded with a shared meal. In keeping with these elements in mind, we will examine the covenant at Sinai as it is related in **Chapter 24**. There were six rituals: **an altar**, **standing stone**, **terms and conditions**, **a sacrifice**, **invocation of a Deity**, and **a shared meal**. We see all of these in **God's** covenant with **the Israelites** at Mount Sinai.

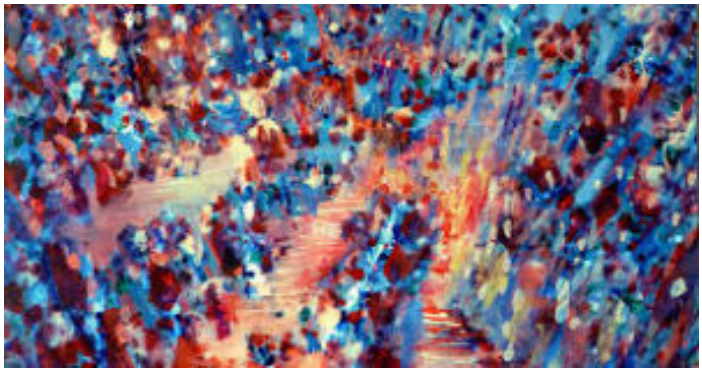
An Altar: Moses then wrote down everything ADONAI said then **got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of** Mount Sinai **(24:4a).**

Standing Stone: And set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Isra'el (24:4b). Pillars often served as testimonials of covenants in the Bible (see **Genesis 31:45-54; Joshua 24:27**). So physical signs represented both parties of **the covenant** – **God** by the **altar** and **Isra'el** by the **pillars**.

Terms and Conditions: What **Moses wrote down** became known as **the Book of the Covenant,** and it was to **be read in the hearing of all the people** in order that they might respond to the challenges of **God**. And **they** respond by saying: **We will do everything ADONAI has said. We will obey (24:7).** These **Israelites** certainly did not lack confidence. In fact, **they** were overconfident. **They** actually thought **they** could keep the commandments of the Torah. But **they** were only fooling **themselves**. The natural man believes he can please **God**, but he cannot. You and I cannot please **God,** because no one can meet **God's** high, perfect standard. We forget that we are actually members of a totally fallen race as far as **God** is concerned. If you don't think so, just look at the news tonight. There is sin, confusion, violence and godlessness at every turn. As the New **Covenant** says: **There is no one righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10).** We live in a time when evil is called good, and good is called evil.[458] The prophets said that such a day would come and we are surely living in it.

A Sacrifice: Since the Levitical priesthood had not yet been organized **(19:22)**, **young Israelite men** from among the people **offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to ADONAI (24:5). The burnt offerings** (see **Fe – The Burnt Offering**) atoned for sins and guilt, while **the peace offerings** (see **Fg – The Peace Offering**) reflected peace between **God** and **the Israelite** community. These two sacrifices demonstrated that, of the two

parties to the treaty, **God** was the suzerain and **Isra'el** the vassal. In ancient Near-Eastern covenants, the vassal was required to pay homage and honor to the suzerain.[459]



Invocation of Deity: Then **Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls** after **he** had read **the Book of the Covenant** to **the people.** Then **he** took **the blood** from both the sacrifices, **the blood** from **the burnt offering** and **the blood** from **the peace offering**, and **he** mixed **them** together. Half of **it** was **sprinkled** on **the base of the altar**, which symbolized **the presence of God (24:6)**, and the other half was **sprinkled it on the people**, which became an official sign of the covenant.[460] Because there were several million **people**, **Moshe** couldn't have sprinkled the blood on everyone; therefore, most likely, he sprinkled the blood on the representatives of the people: **Himself**, **Aaron**, **Nadab and Abihu**, **and the seventy elders of Isra'el**. Sealing a covenant with **blood** was a common custom **(Genesis 15:9-13, 17; Jeremiah 34:18-20).** This is the only time in the TaNaKh that **the people** were sprinkled with **blood**. Later, the New **Covenant**, established by **Jesus** was also ratified by **His** own **blood**.[461] **Moses** said: **This is the blood of the covenant that ADONAI has made with you in accordance with** the Torah given at Mount Sinai **(24:8). The people** were **sprinkled** with **blood** to let **them** know that there must be a sacrifice. In all such ceremonies, the oath of obedience implied the participants' willingness to suffer the fate of the sacrificed animals, if those who took the oath violated the conditions of **the covenant**.[461]

A Shared Meal: Just as **Jacob** and **Laban** sat and ate together when they entered into covenant, **YHVH** and **Isra'el shared a meal** (see **En – They Saw the God of Isra'el**). The banquet – the **shared meal** between **God** and **His people** – is a recurring theme throughout the Scriptures. The mystery becomes clear when we realize that a **shared meal** is the final seal of the covenant. One does not sit down to eat with an enemy. It is a sign of intimacy, of mutual respect and fellowship.[462]