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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

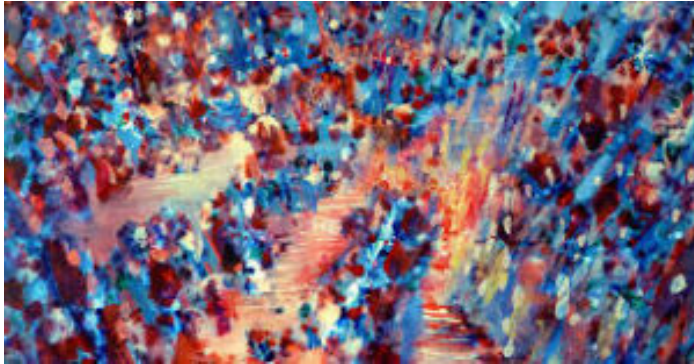
solemn oath was taken, invoking **God** as witness and judge. Because the name of **ADONAI** was invoked in the covenant rite, a sacrifice was made. Finally, the completed covenant was celebrated and concluded with a shared meal. In keeping with these elements in mind, we will examine the covenant at 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