

-Save This Page as a PDF-

## 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.<sup>458</sup> 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.<sup>459</sup>



**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.<sup>460</sup> 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.<sup>461</sup> 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.<sup>461</sup>

**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.<sup>462</sup>