

# STUDY NOTES

## Lesson 9: Exodus 24-30

### CHAPTER 24: RATIFYING THE COVENANT WITH ISRAEL

In this chapter God ratifies, or makes binding, the covenant necessary for fellowship between man and God<sup>1</sup>. There had been covenant relationships before in the Biblical record. God's covenant with Abraham is the best known and the conditions of the Abrahamic covenant are still in effect. But Abraham was an extraordinary person whose remarkable devotion to God, demonstrated by his willingness to sacrifice his only son, brought forth God's extraordinary promises. Of Abraham, the Lord said, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." (Genesis 18:19)

The same could not be said of the nation of Israel. They, as a group, were ordinary mortals, murmuring, fallible men and women. They had already demonstrated their faithlessness at the borders of the Red Sea ("Were there no graves in Egypt?" Ex. 14:11), at the waters of Marah, and in the wilderness of Sin ("Would to God we had died in Egypt!" Ex. 16:3) But one must acknowledge that four hundred years as slaves immersed in a sinful, idolatrous culture had weakened the character of the nation, or at least prevented its growth. They were called the "children" of Israel, because they were spiritual babies, and the Lord was going to have to work with them to bring them to the kind of spiritual maturity Abraham demonstrated. Still, they were Abraham's posterity, and God had promised Abraham that he would make a great nation of them.

### MANKIND'S PREDICAMENT

You can't fully understand the importance of chapter 24's covenant between Jehovah and Israel without first acknowledging the separation that existed, and always exists, between a holy, sinless God and sin-ridden mankind. This was shown clearly in chapter 19 when God warned Moses multiple times to let no one cross the boundary into God's holy mountain or they would instantly die. God's holiness and man's sinfulness don't and can't mix. Thus God protected the people by instilling awe and fear into them so they would not try to come unbidden into His presence in their "natural man" condition, for they would have been destroyed.

It is easy to criticize the Israelites for their faithlessness and think that we would have done better in their shoes. But we should proceed with caution. We tend to forget several things when comparing ourselves with them. We can read and they couldn't<sup>2</sup>. We weren't raised in the midst of idol-worshipping orgiastic paganism. They were. The Western cultures that produced most of the early converts to the church were from countries steeped in a long history of Judeo-Christian worship. They weren't. They had never experienced the most basic human freedoms, having grown up in slavery. We easily take our freedoms for granted.

Most of what we read in the Old Testament is both *symbolic*, teaching of things we all recognize from human life, and *typical*, meaning that the stories, feasts and ceremonies are types and shadows, or mini-prophecies, of things to come. The story of the children of Israel is both a symbol and a type. As a group they represent all of us, or "Everyman" as the literary device is referred to<sup>3</sup>. We are supposed to recognize ourselves in them. They are flawed. We are flawed. They were saved from death by the blood of a spotless lamb, as a symbol of the way that all men have to be saved through the blood of the Lamb of God. They were rescued from Pharaoh (a type of Satan) by going through the waters of the Red Sea and just so all men have to be rescued from spiritual death and bondage to sin by baptism. They complained. *We* complain. They slipped backwards. We do too.

### THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

A relationship based upon awe and fear is not the ultimate goal, but it was a necessary first step to teach Israel respect for God's power and the consequences of disobeying His commands. Heavenly Father<sup>4</sup> wants all His children to be able to come close to him, to experience His guiding love and tenderness. In order for this to happen there must be some way to deal with their sinful inclinations. Remember: "no unclean thing can dwell in His presence." (Moses 6:57) God cannot wave away sin. There must be some cover or neutralizing solution to the

problem of sin that humanity inherits through their fallen-ness. **Moses 6:57** is a key part of the puzzle. We tend at first glance to focus on the words “no unclean thing” because this highlights mankind’s predicament. But the word *dwell* is also an important concept within it.

*And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. 46 And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the Lord their God. (Exodus 29:45-46)*

Sin has damaged the relationship and separated God and man. As Isaiah said, “...Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you...” (Isaiah 59:2) Without some pardon or remission in effect, mankind would remain in this state of separation from God. *But God’s desire is to be close to—to dwell with—His children*; therefore, He provides the way. The entire gospel, in one sense, is a rescue mission, undertaken because God loves His children and wants to be reunited with them. God’s answer to this separation is to provide a *covenant* that contains a means of remission, or an expiation of their sin so it does not stand in the way of a relationship between the two parties. The closeness of the relationship depends entirely on man.

### **THE COVENANT SOLUTION**

We are reading about God’s covenant with the nation of Israel, whom He calls “Israel my son.” (Ex. 4:22) In it Israel promises to obey God’s laws, which are written down in a book by Moses. God accepts their promise and agrees to provide a system of animal sacrifice that will atone for the people’s sins on a regular (daily!) basis, acknowledging that they will inevitably break the laws and need to continually repent and repair the breach that sin makes in the relationship. Basically, if the people will *try*—if they make a good faith effort and don’t go after other gods—God will provide the necessary atonement as needed for their sins when they come to Him.

Atonement is an important word to understand. When we use the word in the church today, we tend to think of Atonement with a capital “A,” meaning *the* atonement made by Jesus Christ. But in the Old Testament the word appears as atonement with a small “a.” In Hebrew the verb “to atone” is *kaphar*, meaning to appease, expiate, or cleanse. It comes from an ancient Hebrew root word that means *to cover*<sup>5</sup>, or *cover over*. This was the word used for Noah *covering* the ark with pitch. Atonement is therefore literally a “sin cover,” a way of disannulling the sin that would otherwise cause death and separation. Before the people fully understood the meaning of Atonement with a capital “A,” they would need to learn the concept of atonement with a small “a.”

### **THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT**

God’s first lesson about the blood of the covenant was Passover. God teaches Israel more about this through the all-important ratification ceremony of His covenant. Ratifying a covenant with blood was a long established way of “sealing a deal” in the ancient near east. It seems strange to us but it would not have been strange to them, for blood represented something serious and solemn, a matter of life and death. At the same time that killing a sacrificial animal showed a binding legal promise, the blood of the covenant also provided the atonement/cover needed to bring the sinful people into a closer relationship with a perfect and holy God.

Just to reiterate the technical aspects once more, atonement must be made for sin. This is an essential step before God could dwell with His people. Sin cannot just be ignored, dismissed or excused without some atonement or payment being made. Second, the atonement must satisfy or be equal to the penalty of the sin. That penalty is death. “The wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23) Luckily the ‘escape-from-death clause’ here is that a sinner can be covered by *the death of another in his place*. That’s the meaning and the point to be taken of all the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament. It’s a system whereby someone *else* pays the penalty of *your* sin. All the innocent animals that gave their lives in this sacrificial system were types of the Lamb of God whose “precious blood” (1 Peter 1:19) was the ultimate sin-cover for mankind’s transgressions.

### **OBJECT LESSONS FOR THE AGES**

All these Old Testament sacrifices, and all their blood, were types of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, which they foreshadowed. As Paul reminded the Jews: “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.” (Hebrews 10:4) Still, by acting out these animal sacrifices as the primary ritual of their worship system, God showed Israel an impressive and recurring object lesson to prepare them for the idea that 1) sin’s

wages (results) were death, and that 2) the blood of an innocent third party could be substituted for the required life of the sinner, and that 3) this blood would then make an atonement, cover over or remit the sin.

### **A BINDING LEGAL CONTRACT**

The covenant was one of obedience. Moses repeated from memory all the words of the law as they had been given to him by the Lord on the first day and “all the people answered with one voice and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do.” (Ex 24:3) Following the people’s initial promise, Moses stayed up late and wrote down all the statutes of the LORD in “the book of the covenant.” (Ex. 24:4,7) The following day the blood sacrifices were made, and the entire law was read again, from the book. This time they said, “All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient.” (Ex. 24:7) How easily they promised! It must have seemed an exciting new beginning to them at that moment when nothing was required of them but a promise.

Obedience to the written covenant was the condition upon which God agreed to act as their God, in a relationship much like a marriage<sup>6</sup>, requiring faithfulness on the part of the people. God would in return be “the God of Israel,” providing for and protecting His people, as would a faithful husband. The ceremony that sealed this new covenant relationship had two parts. Moses constructed an altar and set twelve standing stone “pillars” in a semi-circle around it. On the altar burnt offerings and peace<sup>7</sup> offerings of oxen were made, and the blood collected in basins. Moses took half the blood and sprinkled it on the altar, which signified God’s part of the covenant. The other half was sprinkled on the people, and in a detail we learn from Hebrews 9:19, was even sprinkled upon the book itself. This signified the people’s promise to obey and keep the laws in the book. Like all covenant promises between two parties, if either side failed to live up to their agreement, the other party was no longer bound to the terms of the covenant.

### **WITNESSES UPON THE MOUNTAIN**

The twenty-fourth chapter begins in a slightly confusing way, with the first two verses seeming out of place. At that point, God had just finished giving Moses the “statues and judgments” of the previous three chapters and the prophet is about to head back down the mountain to have the people ratify the covenant. Before he leaves, God lets him know that the final step after the sacrifices will be to return halfway up the mountain with Aaron, his two oldest sons and seventy elders for a special witnessing ceremony. In the first two verses of the chapter He is giving Moses the instruction to bring these people back later.

After the sacrifices are completed and the people have been sprinkled with the blood of the covenant, Moses and the other leaders go up the mountainside. This is important because they could not have gone up into God’s presence unprotected or uncovered in their human sinfulness. The atoning blood of sacrifice provided the cleansing that allowed them into God’s holy presence.

Latter-day Saints, unlike many Christians, read verse 10 of this chapter and take it at face value. They “saw the God of Israel.” Yes they did. The record even mentions specifically seeing His feet standing on a “paved work of sapphire,” much like the “paved work of pure gold” seen by Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon. (D&C 110:2) We need not speculate on exactly how Jehovah, in his pre-mortal state, showed himself to them, but they knew beyond doubt that they had seen God. Perhaps at this point, Moses felt relief like the prophet Joseph Smith after other witnesses had seen the Gold Plates. God begins a dispensation with a revelation of Himself to one man, a prophet; but He always sets upon a dispensation the seal of other witnesses to His work, as He did here.

### **INSTRUCTIONS TO MOSES ON THE MOUNTAIN**

After this witness, Moses leaves Aaron and Hur in charge of the camp of Israel and goes back up the mount. It is still covered with cloud and with a manifestation of the glory of the Lord that looked like fire to those below. For seven days he waited, and finally was called to the top into the presence of God. Chapters 25-27 are a record of the very detailed instructions Moses received for constructing a tabernacle and the pieces of furniture inside of it. This was to be a portable temple—a place where God would symbolically dwell. There is a beautiful passage in the dedicatory prayer of Solomon’s temple that expresses well the meaning of a “house” for God.

“But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heav-

ens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built! 19 Have respect therefore to the prayer of thy servant, ... 20 That thine eyes may be open upon this house day and night, upon the place whereof thou hast said that thou wouldest put thy name there; ...21 Hearken therefore unto the supplications ... of thy people Israel, which they shall make toward this place: hear thou from thy dwelling place, even from heaven; and when thou hearest, forgive.” (2 Chronicles 6:18-21)

You might say the instructions Moses received started with the holiest thing of all and worked outward. First are the instructions for making an ark, or golden box, and a mercy seat, or cover for the ark. Upon the mercy seat were golden statues of two angels, facing inward towards each other, with wings outstretched and touching tip to tip. This mercy seat was regarded as a kind of throne and was to be the place where God’s presence centered. The Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat were the holiest things of all in the worship of the Mosaic system and were the only things inside the innermost room, the Holy of Holies.

Further instructions are given in chapters 28 and 29 for clothing and consecrating Aaron as the high priest and his sons as additional priests to minister before the Lord and the congregation of Israel. Chapter 30 contains detailed instructions for the altar of incense, which was to reside inside the “holy place,” or the outermost of the tabernacle’s two rooms. The brass laver is also described, which contained water for washing the priest’s hands and feet. Instructions are given to make all these things portable, and so, for example, there are plans for carrying poles and rings to hold them. Nothing could be made so large or heavy that the Levites couldn’t carry it.

Chapter 30 also contains instructions for taking a census and raising a temple-tax at the same time as an offering to the temple. This census numbered those Israelites able to go forth to war.(Numbers 1:45) A recipe is given for holy anointing oil, which is only to be used in consecrating the priests and anointing the furniture of the temple. A second recipe for incense is also given. Strict commands are given that these recipes be followed exactly and that no one use the same recipe for any personal use.

Those interested in the specifics of the tabernacle, may see <https://www.lds.org/manual/old-testament-student-manual-genesis-2-samuel/exodus-25-30-35-40-the-house-of-the-lord-in-the-wilderness?lang=eng>

<sup>1</sup> Technically there were previous versions of saving covenants between God and man. Adam had these covenants. Enoch also. But the continuing story of these covenants is lost to Noah’s flood, or was taken off the earth with Enoch’s city. The covenant administered under Moses’ leadership was the first one administered to the whole of Israel that remained on the earth in some form until the present day.

<sup>2</sup> Consider the fascinating implications of Moses 6:5-7,46. Was the first priesthood *reading and writing*, as taught by the finger of God? It is language that separates men from the animals and thus puts them on the beginning of the path to holiness. No man or woman can grasp the iron rod if they can’t read the word. It is also worth noting that reading and writing were the prerogatives of the priestly and royal classes, or those who served them, for much of man’s history. How much we take for granted!

<sup>3</sup> In Literature Everyman refers to a character who represents an ordinary individual the audience is supposed to be able to relate to.

<sup>4</sup> Consider the Father’s yearning love demonstrated in this O.T. verse: “O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!” (Deuteronomy 5:29) The phrase “Heavenly Father,” used as a title for God or as a form of address, is not found in the Old Testament. It was Jesus who first used it, modeling for us a close parent-child relationship with God as Father. Mankind in general has grown in their understanding of God and their relationship to Him. That is one of the fascinating things about studying the Book of Exodus!

<sup>5</sup> The first time this happened was just after Adam and Eve confessed their sin in the Garden of Eden. Jehovah then killed an innocent animal, and literally provided a *covering* of animal skins for the couple. This death of an innocent living being for the sin of another was the first of many types of Christ’s Atonement. Our temple garments are also a daily reminder of the covering provided by the Atonement.

<sup>6</sup> Some of you may notice that we have talked of two different relationships, father and husband, and may wonder—which is it? It is both! Sometimes, as in Jeremiah 31:32, God says he is a husband to Israel, and sometimes, as in Jeremiah 31:9, he says he is their father. Yes, in the very same chapter! So obviously, God wants us to learn something about his tender feelings for Israel from both relationships.

<sup>7</sup> Technically speaking, there could be no official “sin offering” made yet because they hadn’t had time to break the laws they just promised to obey. But it won’t take them long!