

## THE PREREQUISITE FOR FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

*24 Then he said to Moses, "Come up to Jehovah—you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel—and worship at a distance. <sup>2</sup>Moses alone shall approach Jehovah, but the others must not come near; neither may the people go up with him." <sup>3</sup>When Moses came and told the people all Jehovah's words and all the decrees, all the people responded with one voice and said, "We will do everything that Jehovah has spoken." <sup>4</sup>Moses then wrote down all the words of Jehovah. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. <sup>5</sup>Then he sent young Israelite men who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed bulls as peace offerings to Jehovah. <sup>6</sup>Moses took half of the blood and put it into bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. <sup>7</sup>Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it for all the people to hear. They responded, "We will do all that Jehovah has spoken; we will be obedient." <sup>8</sup>Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that Jehovah has made with you in accordance with all these words."*

*<sup>9</sup>Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel went up [the mountain], <sup>10</sup>and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement made of sapphire stones, as clear as the sky. <sup>11</sup>He did not lay his hand upon the leaders of the children of Israel; they saw God, and they ate and drank [before him.] (Ex. 24:1-11)*

### **Introduction**

The Book of Exodus comes to a climax with the people of Israel gathered together in the presence of the LORD at the foot of Mt. Sinai, the mountain of God. The LORD has brought Israel out of Egypt in order to bring them to His holy mountain, intending for them to there enter into a covenant of peace and blessing with the LORD their God. As the LORD describes it through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 2:1-2,) He wooed Israel out into the wilderness in order to make His proposal of covenantal commitment to her. The LORD reminds His people that out of love for Him, they willingly accompanied Him into the wilderness of Sinai.

Now here in Exodus 24 the people of God are made to understand the terms of the covenant that the LORD their God is graciously offering to them. (We shall also have to look into the New Testament in order to understand how those terms are realized and fulfilled.) Just as He has pledged Himself to be wholly committed to them, so they must be wholly committed to Him.

Here in Exodus 24 the LORD is teaching the people of Israel that the prerequisite for fellowship with Himself is the sacrifice of wholehearted devotion to Him. A sacrifice that He by His grace has provided for us in the person of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ and that He by His grace works within us by uniting us to Christ in His death and resurrection.

If you want to live in fellowship with God, you must recognize and accept the required sacrifice offered by Christ, trusting in His sacrificial death on your behalf and by faith being united to Him in His sacrificial death and resurrection.

## **I. To Live in Fellowship with God, You Must Depend upon Christ's Sacrificial Death**

As Exodus 24 opens, we find the LORD extending an invitation to the people of Israel to come into His presence for worship and fellowship. Moses, Aaron and seventy elders of Israel (as the representatives of the whole nation) are invited to ascend the mountain of God to worship the LORD and be received by Him (vs. 1.) At the conclusion of this passage (vs. 9-11,) we find Moses, Aaron and the seventy elders actually coming into the presence of the LORD. They saw the God of Israel in His glory: under His feet there was bright sapphire and the very clearness of heaven itself. God did not lay His hand upon them; on the contrary, they beheld God and held fellowship with Him.

Between the opening of this passage, (with the divine invitation to approach God,) and the conclusion, (where they actually experience life in the very presence of God,) there is described for us the great sacrifice that made this communion with God possible. With regard to the ratification of the covenant at Mt. Sinai, it is of utmost importance to note the order of events as well as the significance of the shed blood sprinkled upon the altar and upon the people.

First, Moses reported to the people the stipulations of the covenant (vs. 3a,) and the people responded by indicating their willingness to accept the terms of the covenant: *"We will do everything that Jehovah has spoken"* (vs. 3b.) Moses then proceeded to write *"all the words of the LORD;"* that is to say, he produced a written document of the covenant (vs. 4a.) Second, early the next morning Moses built an altar at the base of the mountain (i.e.; in God's presence) and twelve pillars, representing the twelve tribes of Israel (vs. 4b.) He then instructed the young men, who had been previously chosen, to now offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings to the LORD (vs. 5.) (Note: The burnt offering symbolized complete devotion and dedication to the LORD on the part of the worshiper.) Moses then took the blood of these sacrificed animals and sprinkled half of it on the altar (vs. 6.) Third, the people reaffirmed their acceptance of the covenant (vs. 7.) Fourth, Moses then took the rest of the blood and sprinkled it upon the people, declaring, *"[This is] the blood of the covenant that Jehovah has made with you in accordance with all these words"* (vs. 7-8.)

At this point we must pause in order to rightly appreciate the meaning of the blood sprinkled upon the altar and then upon the people. When we have grasped the meaning of the sprinkled blood we can then appreciate the fact that the covenant of Mt. Sinai was enacted upon the principle of grace. The Old Testament commentators Keil & Delitzsch provide the best explanation of the meaning of the sprinkled blood. We quote them as follows:

The only reason for dividing the sacrificial blood into two parts was the fact that the blood sprinkled upon the altar could not be taken off again and sprinkled upon the people. The two halves of the blood are to be regarded as one blood: first sprinkled upon the altar, then sprinkled upon the people. In the blood sprinkled upon the altar, the natural life of the people is portrayed as being given up to God. Then, by means of the blood being sprinkled upon the people, what is being portrayed is that same life being restored to the people as a life renewed by the grace of God (Keil & Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, Vol. 2, p. 158.)

Now we are in a position to understand the significance of the order of events as they occurred at the foot of Mt. Sinai. First, the people consent to accept the LORD's terms of the covenant. But notice that they are not required to fulfill those terms in reliance upon their own strength. On the contrary, what immediate happens next is the sprinkling of the blood upon the altar. In light of Keil & Delitzsch's interpretation, this actually represents an act of faith whereby the people entrusted themselves to the LORD their God. In New Testament terms, it is the equivalent of being joined together by faith to Christ in His death, as described in Romans 6:3, "*Or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?*" When the people reaffirm their intention of accepting the covenant as presented by the LORD, the remainder of the blood is then sprinkled upon them. As previously noted, the sprinkling of the blood upon the people is symbolizing (and provisionally procuring) the life renewed by the grace of God being bestowed upon the people. Again, in New Testament terms, it is the believer's participation with Christ in His resurrection life, ("*We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life*" Rom. 6:4,) a life lived unto God, ("*The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.*" <sup>11</sup>*In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus*" Rom. 6:10-11.)

Although the covenant ratified at Mt. Sinai was in fact a covenant founded upon the principle of grace, the people accepted it as a covenant of works. By their re-affirmation, "*We will do all that Jehovah has spoken; we will be obedient,*" (vs. 7,) they were expressing their intention to comply with the requirements of the covenant by taking upon themselves the covenant obligations. Thus, contrary to the LORD's intention, they received the covenant as a covenant of works. (But by the sprinkling of the remainder of the blood upon the people [vs. 7-8,] bearing in mind what that act represented, Moses once again re-iterates the gracious character of the Mt. Sinai covenant.)

Exodus 32 will record Israel's breaking of the covenant by the making of the golden calf and worshiping it as a substitute for the LORD Himself. On that occasion the people were spared only because of the intercession made by Moses on their behalf:

*The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to Jehovah; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." <sup>31</sup>So Moses went back to Jehovah and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. <sup>32</sup>But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written." (Ex. 32:30-32)*

The LORD spared the people—by Moses' act of intercession—and in the course of time promised to establish a new covenant with them:

*"The time is coming," declares Jehovah, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. <sup>32</sup>It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt; because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares Jehovah. <sup>33</sup>"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares Jehovah. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. <sup>34</sup>No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know Jehovah,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares Jehovah, "for I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jer. 31:31-34)*

The New Covenant (Jer. 33) does not replace the Mt. Sinai covenant as something of an altogether different nature; rather, the New Covenant replaced the Mt. Sinai Covenant in the sense that the Sinai Covenant was provisional and the New Covenant contains the promised substance and fulfillment of the original covenant.

At the time He instituted the Lord's Supper, Jesus distributed the cup of wine and spoke these words, *"He said to them, 'This is [i.e.; this wine represents] my blood of the covenant, that is poured out for many'"* (Mk. 14:24.) Jesus' shed blood was fulfilling the demands of the old covenant. He offered His blood (His life) unto God the Father as a sacrifice of complete obedience, (which was the requirement of the covenant,) and at the same time, He offered His blood unto God as a sacrifice of atonement, bearing the punishment of disobedience that His people deserved,

*... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment was laid upon him for our peace, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup>We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but Jehovah has laid upon him the iniquity of us all. (Isa. 53:5-6)*

Jesus' shed blood was at the same time establishing the new covenant. Referring to the night Christ instituted the Lord's Supper, the apostle Paul writes, *"After supper [Jesus offered] the cup, saying, 'This cup [represents] the new covenant [ratified] by my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this in memory of me'"* (1 Cor. 11:25.) The new covenant, just like the old, requires the shedding of blood—representing death to self and the offering up of the life unto God in devotion and

commitment to Him, (*“The death [Christ] died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.”* Rom. 6:10.) But this time it is the Lord Himself who sheds the blood and provides the necessary sacrifice; the Lord Jesus Christ is the one true “burnt offering” of which all the Old Testament burnt offerings were representative. He is the One who is wholly devoted unto God with a life of active obedience and a death of passive obedience to the Father’s will.

To live in fellowship with God, you must depend on Christ’s sacrificial death.

## **II. To Live in Fellowship with God, You Must Be Joined to Christ in His Sacrificial Death**

In the old covenant ratified at Mt. Sinai, the people of Israel had provisionally surrender their lives unto the LORD, (as symbolized by the sprinkling of the blood upon the altar.) You and I must do the same by means of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament informs us that what was provisionally accomplished by means of the Old Testament sacrifices is ultimately accomplished by means of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and the believer’s union with Christ in His death and resurrection:

*I have been crucified with Christ: it is no longer I who live, but Christ living in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me* (Gal. 2:20)

As Galatians 2:20 indicates, 1) depending on Christ’s sacrificial death and 2) being joined to Christ in that death are in fact two inseparable dimensions of one great spiritual experience; namely, true saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Trusting Christ’s death on our behalf and entrusting ourselves to Christ, allowing ourselves to enter into His death/resurrection, this is true faith in Christ.

To live in fellowship with God, you must join Christ in His sacrificial death. By way of illustration: Suppose you live on the tenth floor of a high-rise apartment building. One day there is a fire in your apartment. The fireman climbs up the extension ladder and reaches the balcony of your apartment. On your behalf he enters the apartment to rescue your possessions. Then he takes you personally into his arms and carries you down the ladder to safety—you both trust the fireman to rescue your possessions and entrust yourself to him to rescue you. So, too, must we both trust the Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation and entrust ourselves to Him. When you put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, passively trusting in Him and His substitutionary atonement and actively entrusting yourself completely to Christ alone for salvation, you discover not only that He died in your place at Calvary, but that He has received your very soul into His death and resurrection.

## **Conclusion**

At the foot of Mt. Sinai the LORD made it emphatically clear to the people of Israel that the prerequisite for fellowship with Him is nothing less than the offering up of unreserved devotion to Him—the offering up of our life and soul to Him. But it is impossible for us to make that necessary sacrifice by ourselves: it can only happen by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ. If you want to live in fellowship with God, you must recognize and accept the required sacrifice offered by Christ: ever depending on His sacrificial death and once-for-all being joined with Him in His sacrificial death.

Don't try to make that sacrifice by yourself, (seeking by your own efforts to put your own will to death,) and don't shrink back from that required sacrifice of your soul and your life, (by seeking to withhold yourself and your will from Christ rather than surrendering to Him in true faith.) Look to Christ in true faith: trusting in His sacrificial death on your behalf for the forgiveness of your sins, and at the same time entrusting yourself into His hands to become spiritually joined to Him in His death and resurrection.