

Exodus 24:4-11

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/exod/exod-24/exodus-244-11/>

Moses and the elders are called to come before the LORD for worship. The covenant of the LORD is ratified.

In verses 1-4, the people accepted God's proposal to enter in to His covenant. They agreed to obey *all the words* spoken by the LORD, and do their part, in exchange for the promised blessings. Now it was time for the ceremony to formalize the covenant. The ceremony started when Moses *arose early in the morning*. He did this because there was much to do. There were many activities involved in the ceremony.

First, Moses *built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel* (v. 4). The altar represented the presence of the LORD, one of the parties in the covenant. It also served as a memorial to the place where the LORD revealed Himself to His people ([Genesis 8:20](#), [12:7](#), [26:24f](#), [33:20](#); [Exodus 17:15](#)). The *twelve pillars*, which represented the twelve tribes of Israel (the other party to the covenant), were probably not part of the altar but instead faced it.

Then *He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord*. The *young men* were probably the firstborn who were dedicated in [Exodus 13:1 – 16](#). The Levitical priesthood did not exist at this time, so these men might have served as priests in their stead. They offered burnt sacrifices and *young bulls* as part of the ceremony.

Both the *burnt offerings* and *peace offerings* were to be given from unblemished animals. God gave specific instructions regarding various parts of the animals that were to be completely burned (usually entrails and fat, see [Leviticus 1](#) and [3](#)). The meat of the offerings was to be used in a communal meal by the LORD's covenant people to celebrate fellowship with one another and with their LORD.

During the sacrifices, *Moses took half of the blood of the animals and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar* (v. 6). This was done in preparation for the formalizing of the covenant (v. 8). The sprinkling on the altar (which represents the presence of the LORD)

symbolizes His commitment to the covenant as well as His acceptance of His people ([Deuteronomy 9:4-6](#)).

Now turning to the other party of the covenant, *Moses took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people*. The *book of the covenant* probably refers to what is in [Exodus 20:22 – 23:33](#).

The *people* probably had heard some of the *book* before, but it was read to them again as a part of this ceremony to make it official. Though the people had agreed to the covenant earlier ([Exodus 19:8](#)), they reaffirmed their commitment here by saying *All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!* Then, to formalize the people's commitment to the covenant, *Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."*

Moses likely did not sprinkle blood on 1.5 million people; instead, he probably sprinkled the sacrificial blood on the leaders (Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders—see v. 9) as representatives of the people. The phrase *Behold the blood of the covenant* is very similar to Jesus' words in the Upper Room Discourse ([Matthew 26:28](#); [Mark 14:24](#)), where the New Covenant was formalized. Note that both covenants are established with the blood of sacrifices. This Mosaic covenant was initiated with blood, and looks forward to the New Covenant which will be initiated with the blood of Jesus, who shed His blood once, for all ([Hebrews 9:12-14](#)).

Verses 9 – 11 contain the conclusion of the covenant ceremony. This final part of the ceremony involved the two parties of the covenant meeting to share a covenant meal. So, *Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel*. These seventy-four men, representing the people, *went up*. This probably refers to going up part way on Mount Sinai, since only Moses was allowed to go to the top ([Exodus 24:2](#)). There, on Mount Sinai *they saw the God of Israel*.

According to Biblical teaching, no one can see God and expect to live ([Exodus 33:20](#); [Isaiah 6:5](#); [1 Timothy 6:16](#)). But in v. 11, in an act of grace, the LORD *did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God*. The phrase *stretch out His hand* means that the LORD did not kill the men. The act of not stretching out *His hand* allowed the men to see God. Whatever it was they saw did not lead Moses to believe He had seen God fully.

Moses will later ask to see God, and God will tell him that he can't see His face and live. God will however allow Moses to see His back, but will cover Moses' face when His glory passes by ([Exodus 33:20-23](#)). Although [John 1:18](#) says that no man has seen God, it also says that Jesus explained God. Jesus was God in human flesh. But His glory was shielded that we might see Him.

It seems likely these men saw a manifestation of God, similar to what others have seen throughout Scripture. Isaiah, in a vision, saw "the LORD sitting on a throne" ([Isaiah 6](#)). Ezekiel too had a vision of the LORD, seeing "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord," where there was radiance and rainbow colors around the LORD on His throne ([Ezekiel 1:26-28](#)). Peter, James, and John saw Jesus in His glorious (transfigured) state ([Matthew 17:1 – 8](#)). Also, John saw the risen Christ after He ascended to heaven ([Revelation 1:10 – 20](#)).

On the other hand, the Bible speaks of those who expect to see God. Job proclaimed that "in my flesh I shall see God" ([Job 19:26](#)). And Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, said "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" ([Matthew 5:8](#)). These passages likely speak of understanding God rather than seeing Him physically.

Here, there are no details about God's appearance. Other than mentioning what was under His feet, the passage does not describe God. It only describes what the LORD was standing on. To the seventy-four men, *there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself*. This *sapphire* was under His feet. The image of *sapphire* might represent the heavens ([Ezekiel 1:22](#)) or a foundation, as in [Revelation 21:19](#), where the foundation of the New Jerusalem contains *sapphire*. Or perhaps both, as it likely represents the sovereignty of God over the heaven and the earth.

The men *saw God*, and they *ate and drank*. The clear implication is that the men ate and drank in the presence of God. Though it does not say that the LORD *ate and drank*, God's presence seems to clearly be involved. Eating and drinking was a gesture of fellowship, and here God is entering into an intimate fellowship with Israel, a covenant fellowship. Here, the leaders of Israel *ate, drank*, and fellowshiped with the LORD after the ceremony ratifying the covenant between them. This fully cements the agreed upon covenant between the parties.

Biblical Text:

⁴ Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. Then he arose early in the

morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord. ⁶ Moses took half of the blood and put *it* in basins, and the *other* half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. ⁷ Then he took the book of the covenant and read *it* in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" ⁸ So Moses took the blood and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."

⁹ Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, ¹⁰ and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. ¹¹ Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank.