

The Book of Exodus, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 17: The Covenant Confirmed at Sinai

Exodus 24:1–18

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson stands on a doctrinal hinge: the difference and the continuity between the covenant sealed at Sinai and the new covenant sealed in the blood of Christ. What is at stake is the gospel itself. If a student does not see that the Old Covenant was a real, binding, blood-sealed relationship that God Himself instituted, the New Testament's language about 'the blood of the covenant' will fall flat. If the student does not see that Sinai was always pointing beyond itself, he may either bind the old law on Christians or treat Christ's blood as a mere repeat of Moses' basin rather than the once-for-all, sin-cleansing, conscience-perfecting sacrifice Hebrews 9 and 10 declare it to be. Teach both: the covenant at Sinai was genuine and gracious, and it has been fulfilled and surpassed by a better covenant in Christ.

But this chapter is not only about doctrine; it is about nearness. Notice what God does after the law is given. He does not merely command from a distance; He invites the elders up the mountain to see Him, to eat and drink in His presence, and to live. The covenant was for fellowship, not just for rules. That is the heart God has always had toward His people, and it reaches its fullness in Christ, who brings us near by His blood (Ephesians 2:13). Aim, then, at the student's heart: the same God who ratified a covenant with blood and shared a meal with His people now calls you to His table and into His presence through a better Mediator.

So the formation goal is this: that the student would stop treating the word of God lightly and stop treating the presence of God casually. Israel said 'we will do,' and we must press the gap between our easy promises and our real obedience. And Israel ate before God and lived, and we must recover the astonishment of being welcomed into God's presence ourselves, sealed by a blood far more precious than Moses sprinkled at Sinai.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 24:1–3. Moses tells the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules, and the people answer with one voice, 'All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.' What does this exchange reveal about how a covenant relationship with God is meant to work, and about the place of God's revealed word in it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Exodus 24 is the climax of the Sinai law-giving that began in chapter 19. The 'Book of the Covenant' (24:7) refers back to the laws of chapters 20–23, beginning with the Ten

Commandments and extending through the ordinances. The structure of the chapter is deliberately liturgical: a summons (verses 1–2), a reading and response (verse 3), a written record and altar (verse 4), sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood (verses 5–8), a covenant meal (verses 9–11), and Moses' ascent into the glory-cloud (verses 12–18).

Verse 3 is the people's verbal acceptance: 'All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.' This echoes their earlier pledge in 19:8. A covenant in the ancient world was a binding relationship with stipulations, and Israel here freely consents. Teach this as genuine consent, not coercion. God revealed His will, and the people agreed to it. That a covenant runs on God's revealed word is the foundation: there is no relationship with God on terms other than His own.

The repeated 'we will do' (verses 3, 7) is sincere, yet the rest of Exodus and the wilderness wanderings show how quickly Israel failed. This is not hypocrisy so much as the perennial human condition of promising more than we perform. It is worth letting the class feel that tension honestly without sneering at Israel, because we do the same.

Note that the elders' covenant meal (verses 9–11) was a normal part of covenant-making in that culture: parties to a covenant ate together to seal the bond. What is not normal is the partner: they ate in the presence of the living God and were not destroyed. This is grace on display.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A covenant with God is built on His revealed word, not on human preference or invention.
- God's word read aloud to the gathered people calls for a wholehearted response.
- Genuine consent, not coercion, marks Israel's entry into the covenant.
- Easy promises ('we will do') reveal the gap between intention and obedience that runs through all of us.
- The covenant was always relational, aimed at fellowship, not merely at rule-keeping.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter that the covenant began with God speaking and Israel responding, rather than the reverse?
- How is our relationship with God today still grounded on His revealed word?
- What is the difference between agreeing to obey God and actually obeying Him?

Question 2

Student Question:

Read 24:3 again. The people promised wholehearted obedience before they had truly been tested. Where have you made a sweeping promise to God in a moment of conviction, and what does this passage teach you about the distance between saying 'we will do' and actually doing it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the doctrine of verse 3 onto the student. The point is not to mock Israel but to recognize ourselves in them. We make sweeping promises in moments of conviction (after a stirring sermon, a crisis, a funeral) and then drift back into old patterns.

The text does not yet condemn Israel; the failure comes later. So the teaching here is preventive and self-examining. The student should ask: do I make promises to God as a substitute for the slow work of actual obedience? Saying 'I will do' can become a way of feeling spiritual without changing.

Connect this to the New Testament call to count the cost (Luke 14:28–33) and to the danger of being hearers who deceive themselves and are not doers (James 1:22–25). The cure is not to stop making commitments but to make them soberly and then to keep them by God's help.

Be gentle here. The aim is honest self-examination, not despair. God knows our frame, and the same grace that welcomed Israel to His table welcomes us when we fail and return.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Conviction can produce promises we do not intend, in advance, to keep.
- Saying the right words can substitute for the harder work of obedience.
- Hearing without doing is self-deception (James 1:22).
- We should count the cost before pledging (Luke 14:28–33).
- God's grace meets us when we fail and return, but presumes on genuine intent to obey.

Discussion Prompts

- What is a promise you made to God that you have not kept, and why?
- How can we make commitments to God soberly rather than emotionally?
- What practical step would let your obedience this week catch up to your words?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 24:4–8. Moses wrote down the words, built an altar with twelve pillars, offered sacrifices, and sprinkled blood on the altar and on the people. Why was blood necessary to confirm this covenant, and what does the divided blood (half on the altar, half on the people) say about the relationship being sealed?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 4–8 are the heart of the chapter and the doctrinal center of the lesson. Moses built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars representing the twelve tribes: the whole

nation is party to this covenant. Young men offered burnt offerings (signifying full surrender to God) and peace offerings (signifying fellowship and communion).

The blood is then divided. Half is dashed against the altar, which represents the Lord, and half is thrown on the people (verse 8). This dividing of the blood pictures the two parties to the covenant, both bound by the same blood. The covenant is sealed not with a handshake but with sacrificial blood, because the relationship between a holy God and a sinful people requires atonement.

Hebrews 9:18–22 reflects on exactly this scene and draws the principle: ‘without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.’ Blood is the divinely chosen means by which a covenant with God is ratified and sins are covered. Teach that this is not arbitrary or primitive; it is God’s own design, declaring that life must be given for sin to be dealt with.

Moses’ words in verse 8, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant,’ are deliberately echoed by Jesus in Matthew 26:28. The student should see that the whole sacrificial apparatus of Sinai was a shadow whose substance is Christ. Save the fullest development of that for question nine; here, establish clearly why blood was necessary and what the divided blood signified.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The twelve pillars show the whole nation as covenant party.
- Burnt offerings signify surrender; peace offerings signify communion.
- The blood, divided between altar and people, binds both parties to the covenant.
- Blood was necessary because sin against a holy God requires atonement (Hebrews 9:22).
- The covenant is sealed by God’s design, not human ingenuity.

Discussion Prompts

- Why was a mere verbal agreement not enough to seal this covenant?
- What does the dividing of the blood teach about the two parties bound together?
- How does Hebrews 9:22 help us understand why blood matters to God?

Question 4

Student Question:

Read 24:7. When the Book of the Covenant was read aloud, the people again said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.’ How seriously do you take the public, read-aloud word of God when you gather with the saints, and how would your week change if you treated it as a covenant word spoken to you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question presses the public reading of God’s word into the student’s gathered worship life. When the Book of the Covenant was read aloud, the people responded with commitment.

There is a parallel in our assemblies when Scripture is read and taught: it is not mere information but a covenant word spoken to us.

Many believers passively let the public reading of Scripture wash over them. The challenge here is to listen as Israel listened, as those addressed and called to respond. The reading of God's word is meant to summon obedience, not just to inform the mind.

Connect to 1 Timothy 4:13, where Paul charges that public reading of Scripture be a fixed part of the church's gathering, and to Nehemiah 8, where the reading of the law moved the people to weeping, worship, and reform. The word read aloud has power when received as God's voice.

The application is concrete: what would change in your week if you treated Sunday's text as a word spoken personally to you, requiring a response by Friday?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Public reading of Scripture is a covenant word, not background noise.
- God's word read aloud calls for active response, not passive hearing.
- The New Testament commands public Scripture reading in the assembly (1 Timothy 4:13).
- Receiving the word as God's voice produces obedience and reform (Nehemiah 8).
- Hearing should change how we live the following week.

Discussion Prompts

- How attentively do you listen when Scripture is read aloud in worship?
- What is one text you have heard recently that you have not yet acted on?
- How could you build a habit of responding to the word read each Lord's Day?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 24:9–11. The leaders went up, 'saw the God of Israel,' ate and drank, and God 'did not lay his hand' on them. What is remarkable, even astonishing, about sinful men eating and drinking in the presence of God, and what does this fellowship reveal about what the covenant was ultimately for?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 9–11 are among the most striking in Exodus. Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders 'saw the God of Israel.' Under His feet was something like a pavement of sapphire, clear as the sky. They 'beheld God, and ate and drank.' The wonder is stated in verse 11: 'he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel.'

Elsewhere Scripture says no one can see God's face and live (33:20). So this vision is partial and gracious, a glimpse of His glory and a manifestation of His presence, not an exhaustive sight of

His essence. Yet the point stands: sinful men came near to the holy God, ate a covenant meal in His presence, and were not consumed. That is astonishing grace.

The meal seals the covenant in fellowship. The whole arc of the chapter moves from word to blood to table. This shows what the covenant was ultimately for: not distance but communion, not merely rules but relationship with God Himself.

Point ahead carefully. This foreshadows the fellowship secured in Christ, who by His blood brings us near (Ephesians 2:13) and who shares a table with His people. We come to God's presence not through our worthiness but through a Mediator, and we are welcomed and not consumed because of the blood of the covenant.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The vision of God was real but partial and gracious (compare 33:20).
- Sinful men ate in God's presence and were not destroyed, which is pure grace.
- The covenant meal shows that fellowship, not mere obedience, was the goal.
- The chapter moves deliberately from word to blood to table.
- This foreshadows the nearness to God secured in Christ (Ephesians 2:13).

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it so remarkable that these men ate in God's presence and lived?
- What does the covenant meal reveal about what God wanted with His people?
- How does Christ make it possible for us to draw near and not be consumed?

Question 6

Student Question:

Read 24:11 again. These men beheld God and ate before Him and lived. When do you treat coming into God's presence (in prayer, in worship, at the Lord's table) as something ordinary rather than astonishing, and how might recovering the wonder of it change the way you draw near?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question targets a quiet danger: familiarity with holy things. The elders trembled, beheld God, and ate before Him as men who knew they should not have survived it. We, by contrast, can pray, sing, and come to the Lord's table on autopilot.

The Lord's Supper especially parallels this covenant meal: we eat and drink in remembrance of the blood of the new covenant, in fellowship with God and one another. To do so thoughtlessly is to miss the wonder that Israel's elders felt on the mountain.

First Corinthians 11:27–29 warns against partaking in an unworthy manner, without discerning the body. The remedy is not fear that drives us away but reverent wonder that draws us near with seriousness and gratitude.

The application invites the student to name where worship has become routine and to recover the astonishment of being welcomed into God's presence by the blood of Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Familiarity can dull our sense of the holiness of God's presence.
- The Lord's Supper is a covenant meal to be received with discernment (1 Corinthians 11:27–29).
- Reverence is the proper response to nearness to a holy God.
- Wonder draws us nearer rather than driving us away.
- Gratitude flows from realizing we are welcomed, not consumed.

Discussion Prompts

- Where has coming into God's presence become routine for you?
- How could you approach the Lord's table with renewed wonder?
- What is the difference between casual worship and irreverent fear, and where is the healthy middle?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 24:12–14. God calls Moses higher up to receive the tablets of stone, 'the law and the commandment.' What does it tell us about God that He puts His covenant words in writing, on stone, by His own giving, and how does this shape the way we ought to regard Scripture?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 12–14 record God's call for Moses to come up higher to receive 'the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment.' This is the giving of the written, permanent record of the covenant, inscribed by God's own action (31:18). God does not leave His will to oral tradition or human memory; He writes it down.

This teaches us something about God and about Scripture. The covenant is fixed, objective, and external to us. We do not get to renegotiate its terms or remember them selectively. The written word stands over us as God's authoritative voice.

Apply this to our regard for Scripture as a whole. The same God who wrote on stone has given us a written word for our instruction (Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16–17). We treat the Bible rightly when we treat it as God's fixed, authoritative covenant word, not as a flexible suggestion to be adjusted to our preferences.

Note also Moses' arrangement of leadership in verse 14, which the next question takes up: he provides for the people's needs in his absence rather than leaving a vacuum.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God commits His covenant to writing, on stone, by His own act.
- The written word is fixed and authoritative, not subject to our editing.
- We do not renegotiate God's terms or remember them selectively.
- Scripture is God-breathed and given for our instruction (2 Timothy 3:16–17; Romans 15:4).
- Right regard for the Bible flows from recognizing it as God's covenant word.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter that God put His covenant in writing rather than leaving it oral?
- How does the permanence of the written law shape how we treat Scripture?
- Where are you tempted to adjust God's word to your own preference?

Question 8

Student Question:

Read 24:13–14. Moses left Aaron and Hur in charge and went up with Joshua, trusting others to lead in his absence. Where is God asking you to shoulder responsibility, or to trust others with it, rather than insisting that everything wait on you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question draws on Moses' practical wisdom in verse 14. Before ascending, he appointed Aaron and Hur to handle disputes. He did not assume the work would collapse without him, nor did he refuse to delegate it. He trusted others with responsibility.

The application cuts two ways. Some students need to step up and shoulder responsibility they have been avoiding, leaving the work to others. Others need to learn to trust and delegate rather than insisting everything wait on them personally.

Connect to the broader biblical pattern of shared leadership: Jethro's counsel in Exodus 18, the appointment of the seven in Acts 6, the plurality of elders in the New Testament church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). God's work is meant to be carried by many faithful hands, not one indispensable person.

The heart issue is often pride or fear: pride that thinks no one else can do it, or fear that avoids the weight of responsibility. The gospel frees us to serve and to share the load.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faithful leaders provide for the work in their absence rather than leaving a vacuum.

- Some must step up to responsibility; others must learn to delegate it.
- God's work is designed to be shared among many (Exodus 18; Acts 6).
- Pride or fear often keeps us from healthy shared service.
- Trusting others with the work is itself an act of faith.

Discussion Prompts

- Are you more tempted to avoid responsibility or to hoard it?
- Where is God calling you to step up in service right now?
- Who could you trust with a task you have been holding too tightly?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read 24:8 with Matthew 26:28 and Hebrews 9:18–22. Moses said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you.' Jesus said, 'this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.' How does the blood of the covenant at Sinai point forward to and find its fulfillment in the blood of Christ, and what does Hebrews 8–10 teach us about the difference between the two covenants?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest block of the lesson, and rightly so, because here Sinai meets the cross. Moses said in verse 8, 'Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you.' At the Last Supper Jesus took the cup and said, 'this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Matthew 26:28). The verbal echo is unmistakable and intentional. Jesus is presenting His death as the inauguration of a new covenant, deliberately recalling Sinai.

Hebrews 9:18–22 makes the connection explicit: the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood, and 'without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.' The blood Moses sprinkled was the blood of calves and goats; the blood Jesus shed was His own. Hebrews 9:23–26 argues that the heavenly realities required better sacrifices, and that Christ appeared 'once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.'

Hebrews 8–10 develops the difference between the two covenants. The old covenant was a real covenant, but it was a shadow (Hebrews 10:1), unable to perfect the conscience or take away sins permanently (Hebrews 10:1–4). It was always pointing forward. The new covenant, mediated by Christ (Hebrews 8:6), brings real forgiveness ('I will remember their sins no more,' Hebrews 8:12) and an internalized law written on the heart (Hebrews 8:10). The old is declared obsolete by the coming of the new (Hebrews 8:13).

Teach the continuity and the contrast together. Continuity: both covenants are sealed in blood, both bind God to a people, both create a relationship. Contrast: the blood of Christ is infinitely

superior, His sacrifice once for all, His covenant better and eternal. We are not under the law given at Sinai (Colossians 2:14–17; Galatians 3:23–25); we are under the new covenant in Christ's blood. Be careful not to bind the old law on Christians, and equally careful not to flatten the wonder of Christ's blood into a mere repetition of Moses' basin.

Practically, this means the student's hope rests not on his own covenant-keeping (Israel's 'we will do' that they could not perform) but on the blood of the better covenant. We come, as Hebrews 12:24 says, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus deliberately echoes Exodus 24:8 in Matthew 26:28, presenting His death as the new covenant.
- Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22).
- The old covenant was real but a shadow, unable to perfect or permanently cleanse (Hebrews 10:1–4).
- Christ's sacrifice is once for all and infinitely superior (Hebrews 9:25–26).
- The new covenant brings real forgiveness and the law written on the heart (Hebrews 8:10–12).
- Christians are not under the Sinai law; it is fulfilled in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17).
- Our hope rests on Christ's covenant-keeping, not our own (Hebrews 12:24).

Discussion Prompts

- How does Jesus' echo of Moses' words at the Last Supper shape your understanding of the cross?
- What is both continuous and different between the blood at Sinai and the blood of Christ?
- How does resting on a better covenant free you from trusting your own performance?

Question 10

Student Question:

Read 24:15–18. Moses entered the cloud and the glory of the LORD, and remained on the mountain forty days as mediator between God and the people. Looking back across this whole chapter, name one specific way the Lord Jesus, our greater Mediator (Hebrews 12:24), is forming you to live as a person sealed by His blood and invited into God's very presence.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 15–18 close the chapter with Moses entering the cloud and the glory of the Lord, which 'dwelt on Mount Sinai,' appearing to Israel below 'like a devouring fire.' Moses remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights as the mediator who would receive the pattern for the tabernacle (chapters 25–31).

Moses functions here as the covenant mediator, standing between the holy God above and the trembling people below. He goes where they cannot go and brings back God's word and will. This office of mediator is essential to the whole Sinai arrangement.

Hebrews 12:18–24 sets Sinai's terror against the new covenant. We have not come to a mountain that burns and to a voice that made the people beg it would stop; we have come to Mount Zion, to the church of the firstborn, and to 'Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.' Moses points to a greater Mediator who does not merely carry messages but who, by His own blood, opens the way into God's very presence (Hebrews 10:19–22).

As a capstone, this question asks the student to look back across the whole chapter (the word, the blood, the meal, the glory-cloud, the mediator) and name one concrete way Christ is forming him. The forty days of glory foreshadow the lasting glory we behold in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:6), being transformed into His likeness.

Aim the application at identity and practice: you are a person sealed by the blood of a better covenant and invited into God's presence through a better Mediator. How will that truth shape one specific area of your life this week?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moses serves as covenant mediator between the holy God and the people.
- The glory-cloud reveals both God's nearness and His holiness ('a devouring fire').
- Christ is the greater Mediator of a better covenant (Hebrews 12:24).
- Through Christ's blood we have confidence to enter God's presence (Hebrews 10:19–22).
- Beholding God's glory in Christ transforms us into His likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Discussion Prompts

- How does Moses' role as mediator help you appreciate Christ's mediation?
- What does it mean for your daily life that you are sealed by the blood of a better covenant?
- Name one specific way the Lord is forming you through this chapter.