

CONFIRMING THE COVENANT CODE

EXODUS 24:1-18

This chapter represents the ratification ceremony of the Covenant Code and the acceptance of the code by the people. As we know from subsequent revelation, accepting the Code and actually living in obedience to its stipulations were two entirely different matters. The ratification ceremony took place in three stages: approaching the Lord, the consent of the people to the Covenant Code stipulations, and the appearance of the Lord.

It begins with the command to come up to the Lord although that didn't actually happen until after the reading of the Code to the people.

Exodus 24:1–2 ¹Then He said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall worship [הִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה] at a distance. ²“Moses alone, however, shall come near to the LORD, but they shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him.”

There is one interesting fact here that very few commentators note and that is only two of Aaron's sons were invited up on the mountain to meet with Yahweh. Presumably, this was because Nadab and Abihu were the oldest sons and in line to inherit the office of High Priest from their father and therefore represented the line of high priests to follow, but even Aaron had yet to be appointed to that position. Certainly, the Lord knew Nadab and Abihu were going to lose their lives and never assume the office, so why didn't He have Eleazar and Ithamar go up since He knew they would serve their father as priests? They were not any less in the line of succession than their older brothers although hav-

ing two older brothers may have indicated they would never assume the office of High Priest, at least as long as the older two were living. The younger brothers were not any less priests than the elder two because Exodus 28:1 indicates all four sons served as priests under Aaron and the consecration ceremony (Leviticus 8:1-36) was for Aaron and his sons, which presumably refers to all four of them. The bottom line is, the text never does provide an explanation. All we know is that only Nadab and Abihu were allowed to go up with the others.

Nadab and Abihu died after violating the Tabernacle protocols by offering what the Bible called "strange fire."

Leviticus 10:1-3 ¹Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. ²And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. ³Then Moses said to Aaron, "It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.'" So Aaron, therefore, kept silent.

Numbers 3:4 ⁴But Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD when they offered strange fire before the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests in the lifetime of their father Aaron.

Apparently, Yahweh made an example of these two because by violating the commands for dealing with the Lord, they were not treating Him as holy and that was not going to be tolerated; therefore, they were put to death. Later in Israel's history, that became a problem and both the Northern and Southern kingdoms were destroyed including the Temple in which the priests had been worshiping pagan gods.

Of the remaining two sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, Eleazar succeeded Aaron as High Priest.

Numbers 20:25–28 ²⁵“Take Aaron and his son Eleazar and bring them up to Mount Hor; ²⁶and strip Aaron of his garments and put them on his son Eleazar. So Aaron will be gathered *to his people*, and will die there.” ²⁷So Moses did just as the LORD had commanded, and they went up to Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. ²⁸After Moses had stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on his son Eleazar, Aaron died there on the mountain top. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain.

Ithamar never became High Priest and none of his sons assumed that position until Eli was appointed High Priest and you can read about him in 1 Samuel 1-4. How the priesthood departed from the line of Eleazar to the line of Ithamar at that time is not explained, but we do know it went back to Eleazar’s line when Zadok was appointed to be the High Priest by Solomon in place of Abiathar who was in the line of Eli that had been marked for removal from the line of High Priest succession. Zadok was the faithful priest who succeeded the line of Eli.

1 Samuel 2:34–36 ³⁴“This will be the sign to you which will come concerning your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: on the same day both of them will die. ³⁵“But I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and in My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always. ³⁶“Everyone who is left in your house will come and bow down to him for a piece of silver or a loaf of bread and say, “Please assign me to one of the priest’s offices so that I may eat a piece of bread.””

1 Kings 2:35 ³⁵The king appointed Benaiah the son of Jehoiada over the army in his place, and the king appointed Zadok the priest in the place of Abiathar.

The line of Zadok will also be the line of faithful priests during the Messianic Kingdom.

Ezekiel 48:11¹¹ "It shall be for the priests who are sanctified of the sons of Zadok, who have kept My charge, who did not go astray when the sons of Israel went astray as the Levites went astray.

Seventy is considered by some to be a perfect number relating it back to Exodus 1:5 where it is recorded that seventy persons "came from the loins of Jacob." Others consider it to be a perfect number because it is a multiple of seven. Unger related the Jewish thought that the number seventy was related to the to the genealogy of Noah's sons: fourteen descendants of Japhet, thirty from Ham, and twenty-six from Shem.¹ He also admits the meaning of the number has been the subject of "considerable speculation." It is wise to be a bit circumspect about assigning meaning to numbers because it can be somewhat to very speculative.

The timeline here is not specifically revealed. Moses had been on the mountain receiving the revelation of the Covenant Code and brought it back down for presentation to the people. It is possible these first two verses were given to him while he was still up on the mountain after receiving the Code.

At any rate, when he went back up, he was to take with him Aaron and his two oldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders and once up there they were to worship Yahweh. Worship, *הִשָּׁתַּחֲוֶה*, variously means to bow down, to prostrate oneself, to crouch, to fall down, to humbly beseech, to do reverence, and to worship. Its primary meaning is to bow down which refers to bowing down before a superior of some sort and paying homage to him. Our English

¹ Merrill F. Unger, s.v. "seventy disciples of our Lord" *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, rev. and updated, ed. R. K. Harrison, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 1164.

translations translate this as “worship” with the exception of the HCSB which translates it “bow low in worship.” The TANAKH translates it “bow low.” The Jewish commentator Cassuto translates it “prostrate yourselves.”

Only Moses could come near to the Lord, the rest had to maintain a respectful and therefore safe distance because no one can come into close proximity to God, see His face, and live. We are not holy and He is which is something we would all do well to remember.

Exodus 33:20 ²⁰But He said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!”

At that point in history, people were not just granted access to God. Only a very select few Jews were ever granted any kind of access to Him. They were never allowed into the Holy of Holies with the exception of the High Priest and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement. No one was allowed to take it upon himself to approach God in any way. The only way to approach Him was the way He specified in that time. Today, we have access to God through Christ Jesus who is our High Priestly intercessor and advocate. When we pray, we pray to the Father through the Son who is now in the throne room of God sitting at the right hand of the Father and we have access to the throne of grace through Him.

Acts 2:33 ³³“Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

Hebrews 4:16 ¹⁶Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Then Moses spoke all the words he received from the Lord and the people proclaimed their intention to do all the Lord had commanded them to do.

Exodus 24:3 ³Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!"

This was the second time the people proclaimed their intent to obey the commands of the Lord. The first time was upon their arrival at Sinai when God told them they would be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation if they were obedient (Ex. 19:5-8). Throughout the nation's history, Israel had its ups and downs in terms of obedience and faithfulness, but it was essential that each succeeding generation completely embrace the words of the Lord and they never completely did. In fact, it didn't take long after entering the land for the Israelites to forget God's commands in order to go their own way. Actually, we will soon see in Exodus 32 it didn't take them long to rebel; it happened right at the base of Mt. Sinai.

Moses apparently recalled the words of Yahweh from memory aided, I'm sure, by the Holy Spirit. It was only after this that he committed those words to writing and we obviously read them to this very day. The words needed to be preserved for future generations. Future Israelites would need to know the commands of God just as much as the Israelites in the Exodus needed to know them. As an even larger issue, these words became part of the permanent, Spirit inspired record we study today in what we call the Bible. Moses, of course, didn't

know that at the time, but God knew it and He wanted His words preserved for the world in perpetuity.

1 Peter 1:25 ²⁵BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." And this is the word which was preached to you.

Isaiah 40:8 ⁸The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.

Luke 21:33 ³³"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

We also know the Israelites were to study and know the Law themselves so they could teach it to their children, and once the Israelites became a monarchy, the kings were supposed to read the Law in order to govern the Israelites according to the written commands God provided them to follow. If the Law wasn't written, they couldn't do that; the Law was too complicated and voluminous to remember down to the last detail. Even the smallest part of the Law was very important because to violate one part of the Law was to violate the whole.

Deuteronomy 11:18–21 ¹⁸"You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. ¹⁹"You shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up. ²⁰"You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, ²¹so that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied on the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens *remain* above the earth.

Deuteronomy 17:18–20 ¹⁸"Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. ¹⁹"It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing

all the words of this law and these statutes, ²⁰that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.

James 2:10 ¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all.

We should probably understand their promise to obey to refer to the laws and ordinances Moses related to them up to that point, but there is little reason to doubt their promise to obey God should extend to whatever other commands He issued to them that were yet to come. It would be unreasonable to suggest they committed to following laws and ordinances they had yet to know, but it would not be unreasonable to suggest they were agreeing to obey God under all circumstances present and future wherever that leads and whatever that entails.

After Moses proclaimed God's Word to the Israelites and they committed themselves to obedience, he wrote the words and preserved them. This consisted of the words of the Book of the Covenant we have been discussing in chapters 21-23.

Exodus 24:4–6 ⁴Moses 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. ⁵He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings [עֹלֹת] and sacrificed young bulls [פָּרִים] as peace offerings [שְׁלָמִים] to the LORD. ⁶Moses took half of the blood and put *it* in basins, and the *other* half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar.

After reciting the words of the Covenant, he built an altar which was needed for sacrifices because sacrifice and blood were essential elements of this covenant ratification ceremony.

The altar was made of earth per the instructions set forth in Exodus 20:24 and the pillars were set up representing the twelve tribes. Pagan pillars were forbidden, but when they were representing Yahweh and His relationship to the Israelites, they were permissible. The pillars represented one covenant party, Israel and the Israelites, and the altar represented the other covenant party, Yahweh, both of whom were committing themselves to keep the Covenant. Presumably, the pillars would be left there as a memorial after the Israelites left the area.

The young men who offered the burnt offerings may have been the ransomed firstborn sons because the priesthood had yet to be established and the firstborn belong to God, or they may simply have been young men representing the twelve tribes used by Moses to perform the work necessary to erect the pillars around the altar. Moses obviously acted in the role of priest by officiating the ceremony and sprinkling the blood. One commentator claimed that Aaron and his sons had already been designated as priests to Israel;² therefore that can't be the reason other young Israelite men were used for this task, but that is false. Aaron had been designated Moses' prophet before Pharaoh, but he and his sons were not appointed to the priesthood until after the time before us in this Scripture.

² Duane A. Garrett, *Kregel Exegetical Library: A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2014), 543.

Exodus 7:1 ¹Then the LORD said to Moses, “See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet.

Exodus 28:1 ¹“Then bring near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel, to minister as priest to Me—Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s sons.

The number of bulls sacrificed was not specified. Whether it was a bull from each family or a lesser number sufficient to provide the blood and the meat necessary to ratify the Covenant is unknown. It was probably a lesser number because one simple altar in the wilderness would not have been sufficient to handle a large number of sacrificial oxen that had to be completely burned to ashes. They may not have had that many animals with them at that early point in the Exodus either, but that is educated speculation. The text simply doesn't specify the number of bulls sacrificed, but the word is plural, פָּרִים, so we know it was more than one. We also know it had to be more than one because two different offerings were made with one of them being completely consumed on the altar and the other eaten.

The burnt offering, עֹלָה, means to go up, to ascend. The concept is the burning of the offering causes smoke to ascend to God which was a pleasing odor acceptable to Him. The whole animal was consumed on the altar in the burnt offering. The details of the burnt offering were revealed in Leviticus 1. It is a substitutionary sacrificial offering.

Leviticus 1:3–8, 13 ³If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it, a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD. ⁴He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his

behalf. ⁵He shall slay the young bull before the LORD; and Aaron's sons the priests shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar that is at the doorway of the tent of meeting. ⁶He shall then skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces. ⁷The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. ⁸Then Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head and the suet over the wood which is on the fire that is on the altar.... ¹³ And the priest shall offer all of it, and offer it up in smoke on the altar; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD.

Peace offering, *שְׁלֵמִים*, was a voluntary offering meaning a thanksgiving, fellowship, or peace offering the details of which were revealed in Leviticus 3. In this offering, some of the fat was burnt on the altar and the rest was eaten by both the priests and the one bringing the sacrifice. There were three primary reasons for offering it. One was in thankfulness for a blessing received, another was in response to making a vow to God, and the third was a voluntary offering simply as an expression of gratitude to God on the part of the offeror. "The primary focus of this particular offering seems to be the communal celebration supplied by the meat of the offering. It was a fellowship or communion offering that indicated and enacted the fact that there was peace between God and his people and that the person, family, or community was, therefore, in a state of well-being."³ That perfectly describes the relationship between Israel and Yahweh at this point in time. We also know that as time went on and Israel's eventual rebellion grew, God rejected their offerings and imposed temporal discipline on them by removing them from the land.

³ Willem A. VanGemeren, gen. ed., s.v. "שְׁלֵמִים," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 4:135.

Amos 5:21–22 ²¹“I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. ²²“Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept *them*; And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings.

The sacrificial blood was collected for pouring on the altar and sprinkling on the people.

Exodus 24:6 ⁶Moses took half of the blood and put *it* in basins, and the *other* half of the blood he sprinkled [זָרַק] on the altar.

The NASB translates the Hebrew זָרַק as “sprinkle,” but when it refers to the placement of blood on the altar, “pour” is probably a better translation. The word means to toss, throw, or scatter. The Septuagint translates the word as “pour” when it refers to the blood of the sacrifices on the altar. A problem in understanding how to translate this word—pour, dash, or sprinkle—is in Leviticus 16 in the Law of Atonement where the blood is clearly sprinkled on the Ark in the Holy of Holies with the finger which is how we would ordinarily understand the word “sprinkle,” but the same word wasn’t used there. The Hebrew word used there is נָזַף which means to spatter, but formally to sprinkle referring to a relatively small amount of liquid being cast upon an object in a random manner due to force. In other words, the picture is flicking the finger towards an object in order to splatter or sprinkle it with liquid. This word is not used in Exodus.

Blood is the life of a body and it played an important role in the theology of the sacrificial system for without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin and forgiveness is impossible without it.

Genesis 9:4 ⁴“Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, *that is*, its blood.

Leviticus 17:11 ¹¹‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.’

Hebrews 9:22 ²²And according to the Law, *one may almost say*, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Before reading the Book of the Covenant to the people, Moses poured half of the blood he collected on the altar. The other half of the blood was designated for sprinkling on the people. The order is first the blood on the altar, then the reading of the book, then the blood on the people.

By reading the Book of the Covenant to the people, the proceedings to formally ratify the Covenant began.

Exodus 24:7 ⁷Then 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!”

This is the third time the people affirmed their intention to obey all the commands of the Covenant and this time it seems to be the formal acceptance of Yahweh’s commands. They obligated themselves to obey all the Lord commanded, not part of it, all of it. Whether or not this included the Ten Commandments alongside the Covenant Code is not stated, but some commentators assume they were included. The text says he read the Book of the Covenant which seems to restrict it to the commands in chapters 21-23. Some commentators also believe he surely didn’t read all the particulars of the Book of the Covenant to them after just reciting the commands to them shortly before, but that assumption should not be entertained. This was the formal reading

of the Book of the Covenant for ratification and it seems highly unlikely that it would only be summarized instead of being read in its entirety and that is what verse 7 suggests. The text does not say he summarized it, it says “he took the book of the covenant and read it ...” Unlike the Abrahamic Covenant that was unilateral in nature, that is, only God was obligated to keep the stipulations, this covenant was bilateral because both God and the Israelites were obligated to perform their stipulated duties.

After the people assented to the commands contained in the Book of the Covenant, Moses sprinkled the remaining blood on the people. This presents a practical difficulty because there were hundreds of thousands of Israelite men present. Did he sprinkle blood on all the people or was the blood sprinkled on only a few people, namely Aaron and his sons and the seventy elders as representatives of the entire population of Israelites, or did he pour it on the pillars also serving as representatives of the entire population, or did he throw the blood on to the crowd sprinkling whoever happened to be close enough to get sprinkled with it? The text doesn't say and there are commentators who represent all three positions. It doesn't seem likely that blood would have been poured on people as it was poured on the altar; they would have been inundated with it, so sprinkling seems more likely in that case. It could have been poured on the twelve pillars. My position would be the blood was sprinkled on the men who were going to go up the mountain with Moses as the representatives of God's people in the ratification ceremony. That is not an issue we should get dogmatic

about because we aren't sure what it meant to sprinkle the blood on the people other than the fact that act, in conjunction with pouring blood on the altar, formalized the ratification of the Covenant Code.

This wasn't just any blood, this was the blood of the sacrifice and it was divided between the two parties to the Covenant: Yahweh and the Israelites. It also signified their unity because the blood from the oxen was shared between those two parties. Moses called it the blood of the Covenant. During the Lord's Supper, the Lord referred to the third cup, the cup of redemption, as the blood of the covenant.

Matthew 26:27–28 ²⁷And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.

In Exodus, the blood was the imperfect blood of bulls, but in Matthew the blood was the pure, undefiled blood of the perfect sacrifice, the blood of the Messiah.

Hebrews 10:4 ⁴For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

We also know the blood represents the sacrificial, redemptive work of Christ on the cross. According to Peter, we have been figuratively sprinkled with His cleansing blood the moment we place our faith in Him.

1 Peter 1:1–2 ¹Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens ... who are chosen ²according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood ...

Moses and the men appointed to represent the Israelites went up the mountain to partake of the Covenant meal. They “saw” God while they were up there.

Exodus 24:9–11 ⁹Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, ¹⁰and they saw the God [אֱלֹהִים] of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement [לְבִנְיָה] of sapphire, as clear [טָהוֹר] as the sky itself. ¹¹Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God [אֱלֹהִים], and they ate and drank.

They didn't go all the way up the mountain because only Moses could come close to God, but they went up some unspecified distance where they would worship or prostrate themselves before God and eat the Covenant meal. In these two verses, the name used for God is Elohim and not Yahweh. According to Cassuto this is “the generic appellation that denotes any Divine phenomenon ...”⁴ They saw the glory of God on that mountain bright and magnificent. This view of the Lord is similar to Isaiah and Ezekiel when they saw visions of the Lord and/or His surroundings.

Isaiah 6:1 ¹In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.

Ezekiel 1:22, 26 ²²Now over the heads of the living beings *there* was something like an expanse, like the awesome gleam of crystal, spread out over their heads.... ²⁶Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, was a figure with the appearance of a man.

It is impossible to describe in words to those who are locked into time and space what these glimpses of God's glory really looked like. It must be incredibly

⁴ U Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1967), 314.

awesome even though no one is allowed to see the totality of God's appearance. Those men were able to clearly see what appeared to be a transparent floor or pavement that resembled a sapphire sky blue in color. Pavement, לְבִנָּה, simply means a brick, pavement, or flooring. The word clear, טָהוֹר, refers to brightness and clarity of color, in this case, sky blue. The men had this vision of God that made Him look to be standing on a paved, sky blue, transparent floor. These men were privileged to be in this proximity to God and He had no intention of destroying them for violating His holy space. There was no conversation at this time; enjoying their proximity to and fellowship with God was sufficient. This scene is in contrast with the fire, smoke, lightning, and tremors that characterized earlier manifestations of God's presence on Mt. Sinai. It is a more peaceful scene.

They must have brought with them some of the meat from the peace offering and some wine and they ate the Covenant meal on that mountain. Some commentators believe they returned to the base of the mountain to eat. Eating a meal together was a sign of acceptance and fellowship. One of the criticisms leveled against the Lord was the fact He ate meals with sinners (Mt. 9:10-11; 11:19). At the conclusion of the meal, they definitely went back down the mountain to the camp with the rest of the Israelites.

Yahweh ordered Moses to come back up the mountain to meet with Him.

Exodus 24:12-14 ¹²Now the LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction." ¹³So Moses arose with

Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God. ¹⁴But to the elders he said, "Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a legal matter, let him approach them."

The specifically stated purpose for Moses to go back up the mountain to meet with God was to receive the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments inscribed on them by Yahweh Himself. In his absence, he appointed Aaron and Hur to maintain order and act as judges mediating any disputes that arose.

Moses wrote the Pentateuch under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit, but God Himself inscribed His words on these tablets of stone. He also provided the tablets; Moses did not cut them out himself. However, after the first set was shattered by Moses over his anger concerning the sin of the Israelites (Ex. 32:19), he did have to cut out the replacement set of stone tablets himself (Ex. 34:1) and present them to Yahweh for engraving.

Exodus 32:16 ¹⁶The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing engraved on the tablets.

Deuteronomy 4:13¹³"So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, *that is*, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.

Deuteronomy 5:22²²"These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly at the mountain from the midst of the fire, of the cloud and of the thick gloom, with a great voice, and He added no more. He [Yahweh] wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me [Moses].

Moses went back up the mountain with Joshua, but only Moses was allowed to ascend to the top surrounded by the glory of God. What Joshua did up there is never revealed. It is very strongly implied in verse 14 in the words

when Moses appointed Aaron and Hur to act in his stead until both of them returned, that Joshua stayed in one place and waited for Moses to return to his position and get him before going back down. Beyond that we are told nothing about Joshua's stay on the mountain and we are not told the purpose for his presence. He certainly could not go up to the top of the mountain to meet with God as Moses did. Some commentators believe Joshua went up with Moses as his assistant in order to serve him and minister to him, but Joshua was not allowed to enter the sphere of God's glory on that mountain. Moses was in that sphere for forty days separated from Joshua; therefore, it seems impossible for Joshua to tend to any needs Moses might have had. Besides, God saw to Moses' needs while he was in the Lord's presence. In my opinion, Joshua was taken up there to observe first hand, but from a short distance, the glory of God in order to strengthen him and fortify his faith for the work he was going to do for God after Moses' death. God knew what no one else yet knew and that was the fact Joshua was going to be the man who would lead Israel into the Promised Land.

Some commentators believe Joshua was beside Moses the entire time, but that seems unlikely since Moses alone was allowed to come near to God and only Moses was allowed to speak to God face to face.

Exodus 24:2 ²"Moses alone, however, shall come near to the LORD, but they shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him."

Exodus 33:11 ¹¹Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend....

The glory of the Lord the covered the mountain.

Exodus 24:15–16 ¹⁵Then Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. ¹⁶The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud.

In the Exodus narrative, God is present in this cloud and in this cloud Moses would meet with Him. The cloud of God's presence guided the Israelites during the daylight hours on their journey through the wilderness and it indicated God's presence on the top of Mt. Sinai. Later, it indicated God's presence in the Tabernacle (Ex. 40:35).

Many theologians want to connect the six days and the seventh day with the creation week, but if that is the case, the connection escapes me. One commentator believes it simply took Moses six days to climb the mountain.⁵ Another believes this represents a common biblical scenario in which there is some sort of continuing activity for six days culminating in a final outcome on the seventh day which is the way the creation week worked out.⁶ Both of these seem to be a stretch in an attempt to find an explanation when there may not be one. It is possible Yahweh simply allowed Moses to sit with Joshua for six days observing the glory of the Lord before calling Moses into His presence. His ways are not our ways and His timing is not our timing.

⁵ Douglas K. Stuart, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Exodus* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 560.

⁶ U Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1967), 316.

From the base of Mt. Sinai, to the Israelites who encamped at the base, the top of the mountain looked like it was on fire.

Exodus 24:17 ¹⁷And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top.

This must have been an awe-inspiring sight to the Israelites. Yet, even the visible presence of God on the mountain for all to see would not keep them from rebelling against Him. I don't think we can imagine how awesome this sight must have been. On the other hand, it makes one wonder how they could so quickly rebel with the glory of the Lord manifested right beside them while Moses was up there. After all the miracles they had seen from Egypt to that time, how could they possibly rebel? The answer is the sin nature. People today would be no different.

Moses entered the cloud on the seventh day and his total time on the mountain was forty days and forty nights.

Exodus 24:18 ¹⁸Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

During those forty days on the mountain with Yahweh, Moses did not eat nor did he drink. Obviously, the God of Israel was, and still is, able to sustain human life in all circumstances according to His will.

Deuteronomy 9:9 ⁹“When I went up to the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the LORD had made with you, then I remained on the mountain forty days and nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water.