

THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP IN EXODUS 24

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Worship is a subject of immense importance. A considerable mass of Biblical text is occupied with instructions, patterns and source material for worship, and worship encompasses a great deal of what faith communities do.¹ Within the context of the OT and the worshipping community of ancient Israel, Exodus 24 holds a prominent place for understanding worship. This is due to the climactic function of Exodus 24 in the tradition of the Sinai covenant and the close connection between covenant-making and cult.² This paper considers the exegesis and theology of worship in the covenant ratification ceremony of Exod 24:1–11.³

I. THE CONTEXT OF EXODUS 24

1. *Covenant and divine presence.* Exodus 24 is the climax of the covenant-making experience that was formally initiated when YHWH descended on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19).⁴ But the making of the covenant between YHWH and Israel has roots in the exodus experience and encompasses the entire book of Exodus. In this context the centrality of the divine presence to the covenant is seen in many passages: YHWH's promise to "come down" to deliver his people (Exod 3:8); his presence "with" Moses and Israel during the exodus (3:12; 13:18–22); his promise to make the nation's inheritance the place of his dwelling (15:17); the withdrawal of divine presence as a

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¹ C. E. B. Cranfield observes three uses of the word: "(i) to denote a particular element of what is generally referred to as worship, namely, adoration; (ii) to denote generally the public worship of the religious community gathered together and also the private religious exercises of the family and the individual; and (iii), in a still wider sense, to denote the whole life of the community or of the individual viewed as service of God" ("Divine and Human Action: The Biblical Concept of Worship," *Int* 12 [1958] 387).

² For a summary of opinion on covenant-making and cult see D. J. McCarthy, "Covenant in the Old Testament: the Present State of Inquiry," *CBQ* 27 (1965) 240.

³ I am indebted to my good friend and colleague Steven G. Vincent whose thesis research under the supervision of Allen P. Ross was formative to many of the ideas in this paper.

⁴ The sealing of the covenant, first announced in Exod 19:3, is brought to consummation in Exodus 24, and the response of the people in 19:8 is reaffirmed in 24:3, 7 (B. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974] 502–503). N. M. Sarna observes how the sevenfold use of the stem *dbr* in chap. 19 and again in chap. 24 forms an inclusio, as well as the sevenfold employment of the stem *yrđ* in chap. 19 matching the use of its antonym *'ly* in chap. 24 (*Exodus* [The JPS Torah Commentary; New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1991] 150).

consequence of breaking covenant (33:3, 14–15). Moses' own exposition reveals the importance of divine presence to the covenant (Deut 4:7; Num 14:13–14). Along with the giving of law, the most conspicuous theme of the Sinai experience is the theophany on the mountain and the response of the people to God's presence (Exod 19:9–25; 20:18–21). Much of the book of Exodus concerns preparation for the tabernacle, the residence of God with his people, which follows the covenant inauguration in Exodus 24. This context supports the exegesis of 24:1–11, which will stress the centrality of God's presence to the covenant as it is symbolized and experienced in worship.

2. *Covenant and worship.* YHWH told Moses that upon departure from Egypt Israel would “worship God on this mountain” (Exod 3:12). The activities anticipated by this promise of worship are described as (1) a religious pilgrim-feast (*hāgag*, *hag*),⁵ (2) sacrifices, burnt offerings (*zābah*, *ōlā*),⁶ and (3) service (*ābad*).⁷ The word *ābad* can have covenant implications,⁸ and in the context of Exod 3:12 the choice of *ābad* for “worship” anticipates the covenant-making events of chaps. 19–24, which climax in the ratification ceremony of 24:1–11. The tension between “serving” YHWH and “serving” Pharaoh (12:31; 14:5, 12) supports the suzerain/vassal relationship implied by the word *ābad*, as does the “sonship” terminology.⁹ The references to “sacrifice” and “burnt offerings” anticipate the actual covenant ritual in 24:5. Therefore before Israel reached Mount Sinai and experienced the promise of Exod 3:12 (“worship God on this mountain”), worship as an enactment of covenant through sacrifice is already anticipated.

When the nation encountered YHWH on Mount Sinai, the worship promised in Exod 3:12 and anticipated throughout the exodus experience was realized. Exodus 24:1 recalls the promise of 3:12 when YHWH called Moses to worship. But this time YHWH uses another general term for “worship” (*hištahāwā*).¹⁰ In short, the covenant ratification ceremony of 24:1–11 is the concrete description of what YHWH intended as worship. Even the instruction immediately following covenant inauguration in Exodus 24 pro-

⁵ Exodus 5:1; 10:9. The use of the term “pilgrim-feast” might imply that the people would return. Hence Moses could be shading the truth in order to induce Pharaoh to let them go, with no intention of ever returning. But the fact that a religious feast and sacrifice did take place on the mountain substantiates that these elements were sincerely anticipated by the people.

⁶ Exodus 3:18; 5:3, 8, 17; 8:4[8], 21[25]; 10:25 (with *ōlā*, burnt offering).

⁷ Exodus 7:16, 26[8:1]; 8:16[20]; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7, 26; 12:31.

⁸ *ābad* is used in its broadest sense for any kind of work or service, for oneself or for another (Gen 3:23; Exod 5:18). Covenant duty is implied between kings and their vassals/subjects (Josh 9:11; 2 Sam 8:2, 6, 13; 10:19; 2 Kgs 18:7). In the context of service to God, the word refers to cultic acts such as maintaining the tabernacle (Num 3:7). It often stresses vassal allegiance signified through obedience to divine law and cultic duty (Deut 7:4; 8:10; 10:12; 12:30; Isa 19:21).

⁹ See F. C. Fensham, “Father and Son as Terminology for Treaty and Covenant,” *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright* (ed. H. Goedicke; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1971) 121–135.

¹⁰ This word has three major uses: (1) to denote bowing low or prostration in respect or submission (2 Sam 9:6; Gen 23:7; 33:3), (2) to physically prostrate oneself in worship and adoration (Ps 5:7; Lev 26:1), and (3) to perform an act of worship, such as sacrifice (Gen 22:5), eating a communal meal (Ps 22:28[29]) or uttering exaltation (99:5).

vides for worshiping YHWH who is present through covenant.¹¹ Covenant enactment and worship are inextricably linked in a single experience.

II. STRUCTURE OF EXOD 24:1–11¹²

Steven G. Vincent has observed two important structural devices in Exod 24:1–11 that highlight certain parts of the passage.¹³ Most important is the following chiasmic arrangement:

- A Moses and elders instructed to ascend and worship (vv. 1–2)
- B Words of the Lord / affirmation of the people (v. 3: “All the Lord has spoken we will do”)
- C Words written by Moses (v. 4a)
- D Sacrifices and blood ceremony (vv. 4b–6)
- C’ Words (book) read by Moses (v. 7a)
- B’ Words of the Lord / affirmation of the people (vv. 7b–8: “All the Lord has spoken we will do”)
- A’ Moses and elders ascend and worship (vv. 9–11)

This arrangement, which highlights the actual ratification ceremony (D), is reinforced by the pattern of subjects of the main verbs:

- v. 1 Moses (spoken to [object of verb put in emphatic position])
- v. 2 Moses (alone shall ascend)
- v. 3 Moses (came and recounted)
- v. 4 Moses (wrote words)
- v. 5 young men (offered sacrifices)
- v. 6 Moses (took blood)
- v. 7 Moses (took book)
- v. 8 Moses (took blood)
- v. 9 Moses (ascended *et al.*)
- vv. 10–11 “nobles” (beheld God, ate and drank; the consummation of sacrifice)

¹¹ J. I. Durham (*Exodus* [WBC; Waco: Word, 1987] 347) comments on the law announced to Moses at the end of Exodus 24: “Whatever this teaching may originally have been, the placement at the end of chap. 24 of what amounts to the Priestly prologue to the lengthy section on the media of worship in Yahweh’s Presence gives the impression that the revelation following the ceremony of Israel’s entry into covenant with Yahweh was a revelation guiding the first obligation of a people so committed, their worship of God who bound himself to them.”

¹² Childs writes: “Ch. 24 contains a whole series of compositional problems which have called forth a great divergence of opinion” (*Exodus* 499). Regarding Exod 24:1–11, a consensus of source critics would probably separate it into at least two sources (vv. 1–2/9–11 and vv. 3–8). E. W. Nicholson argues that 24:1b–2 was also not originally connected with vv. 9–11 (“The Interpretation of Exodus XXIV 9–11,” *VT* 24 [1974] 77–97). On the other hand G. C. Chirichigno cogently argues for literary unity throughout the Sinai pericope from Exodus 19 through 24 (“The Narrative Structure of Exod 19–24,” *Bib* 68 [1987] 457–479). It is outside the scope of this paper to address such issues. But the text exhibits a unity based upon the structure proposed in this section and so will be interpreted in its canonical form.

¹³ S. G. Vincent, “Exegesis of Exodus 24:1–11” (unpublished paper, 1984) 4–5. A similar chiasmic arrangement has been observed by Chirichigno (“Narrative” 464).

This literary structure emphasizes the ceremony at the base of the mountain and its consummation at the theophany on the mountain. The chiasmatic structure also highlights three themes of worship described in this passage: (1) the Lord's presence; (2) the word of the Lord; (3) ritual of sacrifice.

III. ANALYSIS OF EXOD 24:1-11

1. *Instructions for covenant ratification (24:1-2)*. Exodus 24:1 opens with an unusual word order (*wē³el-mōšeh ʿāmar ʿālēh*, "Now to Moses he said, 'Come up'"). The shift of the indirect object "Moses" to first position signals the beginning of a new section, a change in the immediate object of YHWH's instruction. Prior to Exod 24:1 YHWH addressed the law to the people through Moses. Now he gives new instructions for covenant ratification directed personally to Moses himself.¹⁴

The command to "come up" addresses three (groups of) individuals: Moses, the priestly family (Aaron, Nadab and Abihu) and the seventy elders. The last group are probably representative chieftains, perhaps the same group who were appointed to judicial functions in Num 11:16. The number seventy likely symbolized complete representation of the nation Israel.¹⁵

The point of YHWH's invitation was to invoke worship. What he intended as "worship" (designated *ʿabad* in Exod 3:12 and *hištaḥāwā* here) is described by the events that follow.¹⁶

The instruction that worship be "from afar" is clarified in v. 2.¹⁷ Moses, the priestly family and the elders were all to "come up," but not the people. Moses alone was to "draw near," but not the priestly family and the elders.¹⁸ Consequently three levels of nearness are pictured. The people re-

¹⁴ Childs, *Exodus* 504. Chirichigno calls this an instance of "resumptive repetition" where Exod 24:1 resumes and expands the narrative from 19:24 with its instructions about who should come up the mountain ("Narrative" 476).

¹⁵ This may be an allusion to the seventy individuals who went with Jacob to Egypt and from whom the entire nation sprang (Exod 1:5). Complete representation may also be signified by the Table of Nations (Genesis 10) where the number of tribes listed totals seventy. Vincent ("Exegesis" 6) suggests that seventy may be "a typical number to invite to a sacrificial feast in the ancient Near East, for we read in the Baal myth, after Baal prepares a banquet, 'He summons his brethren to his house, / His kindred within his palace: / Summons Asherah's seventy children' ('The Baal Myth,' Tablet 6, lines 45-47 in *ANET*, 134)." The idea would be that such a number indicates a "full house."

¹⁶ U. Cassuto (*A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983] 310) emphasizes the action of prostration here for *hištaḥāwā*. While this is one of the uses of the word (see n. 10 *supra*), nothing in the text suggests they actually assumed this posture. Therefore it is probably not the emphasis here. The events that follow suggest the broader denotation for the word.

¹⁷ Sarna (*Exodus* 151) offers a different view that does not rely on the following verses for explanation. Based upon ancient Near Eastern custom, the expression "from afar" can denote repeated prostration starting at a distance from the suzerain's presence (cf. Gen 33:3).

¹⁸ The LXX attempts to clarify the arrangement by translating *wēhištaḥāwāwitem* ("and you [2 pl.] shall worship [at a distance]") with the third person (*proskynēsousi*, "they shall worship [at a distance]") and translating the third singular *ʿimmō* ("with him") as third plural (*met' autōn*, "with them").

main at “the foot of the mountain,” where the ceremony takes place (v. 4). Moses and the others “come up” for the communal meal (vv. 9–11). Only Moses “draws near” (i.e. into the very cloud of God’s glory, vv. 12–18). The word *nāgaš* (“draw near”) here implies closeness for verbal and visual interaction (Gen 43:19; 45:4) or face-to-face negotiation (Num 32:16).

2. *Ratification of the covenant (24:3–8)*. Moses returns to the people with a report of YHWH’s words. The “words of the Lord” (*dibrê YHWH*) probably refer to the Decalogue (*haddēbārîm*, Exod 20:1; cf. also 34:1; Deut 10:4), and the “judgments” (*hammišpāṭîm*, Exod 21:1) include the instructions and case law given in Exod 20:22–23:33. These instructions defined the terms of the covenant relationship. The people respond with an oath of allegiance to YHWH, to accept the covenant as Moses has just described. Moses then records the covenant stipulations for use in the subsequent ratification ceremony.

In preparation for the ceremony, Moses “arose early” (indicating eagerness, cf. Zeph 3:7) and built an altar and erected twelve pillars. The altar upon which the sacrifice was burned represented YHWH.¹⁹ The twelve pillars possibly served a dual function. First, they probably represented the twelve tribes of Israel as the second party to the covenant, alongside the altar representing YHWH (cf. 1 Kgs 18:31). They may also have served as memorial stones to commemorate the occasion.²⁰ Moses then dispatched “young men” to assist in carrying out the actual work of sacrifice.²¹ Perhaps these men were the firstborn of all the tribes (Exod 13:2; Num 3:6–13), thus reinforcing the representation of the nation symbolized by the pillars.²²

The actual covenant ratification ceremony began with the sacrifice. The “whole burnt offerings” (*ʿōlōt*) were first.²³ The animal was slaughtered and placed upon the fire of the altar. This sacrifice made atonement (Lev 1:4)—that is, averted wrath by removal of sin—and so it established fellowship with God.²⁴ It also symbolized the total commitment of the worshiper to the service of God, and hence the entire animal was consumed on the altar as a

¹⁹ The burning of the animal symbolized the deity consuming it as a meal (Lev 3:11). Thus the Lord would be considered present at the table.

²⁰ Laban and Jacob set up such markers to commemorate their covenant (Gen 31:45). The frequent association of *maššēbā* (“pillar”) with idolatry prompted the LXX translator to substitute *lithos* (“stone”), but the word does not necessarily imply pagan worship rites (cf. Isa 19:19).

²¹ E. W. Nicholson suggests that *nēʿārîm* (“young men”) refers to a technical office of priests’ servants as in 1 Sam 2:13 (“The Covenant Ritual in Exodus XXIV 3–8,” VT 32 [1982] 81). Sarna (*Exodus* 151) points to the same cognate use in Ugaritic texts.

²² The genitive construct relationship between *naʿārê* and *bēnê yišrāʾēl* points to their representative function, parallel to the “seventy from the elders of Israel.”

²³ This presumes the order described in Leviticus 1–3 where the peace offering was placed on top of the whole burnt offering on the altar (Lev 3:5).

²⁴ Leviticus 1:4 states that the burnt offering is “received favorably” (*rāšā*) for the worshiper. Genesis 33:10 illustrates this use of *rāšā* in the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau. Leviticus 1:4 also states that the purpose of the offering is to make atonement (*lēkappēr*). The aversion of wrath is illustrated by the use of *kippēr* in Gen 32:20; Prov 16:14; 2 Sam 21:3. Leviticus 16 stresses that atonement involves the removal of sin through sacrifice.

symbol of acceptance. This appropriately expresses the allegiance vowed by the people in process of ratifying the covenant (v. 7).

Next came the "peace sacrifices" (*zēbāhîm šēlāmîm*), which expressed "well-being" (*šālôm*) between parties in the covenant. Absent from the Levitical discussion of this offering is any reference to atonement.²⁵ It served to express acknowledgment for answered prayer (Lev 7:12; Ps 107:19–22), to fulfill a vow (Lev 7:16; Ps 22:26[25]), or as a spontaneous expression of appreciation (Lev 7:16; Ps 54:8[6]). In other words, this sacrifice was in response to conditions of a good relationship, an expression of fellowship that already exists. This was graphically portrayed when the worshiper partook of the sacrifice in a communal meal together with YHWH whose portion was consumed on the altar (Lev 3:11; 7:15–18; Ps 22:27[26], 30[29]). Sacrifice with communal meal was the ultimate expression of covenant fellowship between worshiper and deity (Exod 34:15; Num 25:2). In summary, the burnt offerings established fellowship through atonement and signified total commitment by the worshiping nation; the peace offerings expressed celebration of covenant fellowship.

After the sacrifices were offered, the blood was used in a solemn ceremony of ratification. The three movements of this ritual are highlighted by the threefold repetition of the word *wayyiqqah* ("then [Moses] took"). First, half of the blood was dashed upon the altar (i.e. YHWH). The significance of tossing blood is not clear. E. W. Nicholson suggests that the "holiness" of blood is central to the ceremony. Since the holy blood contacted both the altar and the people, the nation is "thereby consecrated as Yahweh's holy people."²⁶ Others see the significance of the tossing of blood on both the altar and the people as symbolizing the coming together of the two parties in covenant.²⁷ Gordon Wenham advances this interpretation by noting a similarity between this rite and the ceremonies of priestly ordination (Lev 8:22–30) and of the "cleansing" of a healed person (14:10–32).²⁸ In both Exodus 24 and the Levitical rituals blood is applied to both the altar and to the worshiper, symbolizing renewed communion. Ronald Hendel adds that the splashing of blood serves a lasting communicative function. Blood remaining on the altar is a visible reminder of the performance of sacrifice and its corresponding blessing, which is the establishment of the covenant relationship.²⁹ Another possibility is that, since blood symbolizes life (Gen 9:4–5; Lev 17:11), spattered blood appropriately dramatizes the consequence of breaking covenant—that is, violent death.³⁰ There is no reason why the blood rite cannot signify a wide range of meanings.³¹

²⁵ The other sacrifice offerings have the explicit purpose of making atonement (Lev 1:4; 4:20; 5:6).

²⁶ Nicholson, "Covenant" 83.

²⁷ Cassuto, *Exodus* 312.

²⁸ G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 143, 209.

²⁹ R. S. Hendel, "Sacrifice as a Cultural System: The Ritual Symbolism of Exodus 24,3–8," *ZAW* 101 (1989) 387–388.

³⁰ This symbolism is behind the mutilation of the animal victim in covenant ceremony (Gen 15:10; cf. M. Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *JAOS* 90 [1970] 196–199).

³¹ Hendel, "Sacrifice" 388.

One-half of the blood was reserved in basins for sprinkling the people. But before sprinkling the people there needed to be a formal response of commitment to the covenant. Moses read the “Book of the Covenant,” which was likely the document he wrote containing the “words” and “judgments” mentioned in v. 4 (i.e. the terms of the covenant).³² In response, the people repeated their vow of allegiance given the day before (v. 3). Having committed themselves to the covenant, they were ready to seal that commitment by the blood rite.

The third movement of the blood ceremony involved Moses throwing the blood on the people. The significance is discussed above. At this point, however, Moses adds the words: “See here, the blood of the covenant that YHWH has made with you in accordance with all these words.” In this statement Moses summarizes the fact that the covenant relationship is mediated through sacrifice and is defined by the terms of the “Book” just read.

3. *Theophany and communal meal (24:9–11)*. In compliance with instructions recorded in vv. 1–2, Moses and the elders ascended the mountain for worship. Worship began with sacrifice at the foot of the mountain, but the consummation of worship awaited the events on the mountain where the significance of covenant ritual would be dramatically portrayed.

The statement “and they saw the God of Israel” is astounding.³³ Leaving aside for a moment the description of the theophany, the fact that God “did not stretch out his hand” is highly significant.³⁴ Previously YHWH commanded that anyone even touching the mountain would be put to death (Exod 19:12), and he had Moses warn the people “lest they break through to the Lord to gaze and many perish” (19:21). This surprise at the elders’ survival is underscored by the word order of the phrase *wē³el-³āšilē* (“but against the nobles”), which signals a contrast with the statement that they saw God. The covenant inaugurated a relationship between YHWH and the nation that was characterized by his very presence.

Although they saw God, the description in the text pertains only to what was under his feet. Apparently the theophany itself was beyond description, and even the footstool could only be described by comparison. Similarly, Isaiah could only describe the train of YHWH’s robe (i.e. what was at his feet; Isa 6:1). The first phrase likens his footstool to a sapphire pavement and the second to the brilliant purity of the sky. What associations would this description connote?³⁵ The similar description in Ezek 1:26 is helpful. Moses

³² The recent reappraisal by K. A. Kitchen of the question of covenant treaty forms in Exodus 20–23 and other OT passages strongly confirms the unity of law and treaty elements in the Mosaic covenant (“The Fall and Rise of Covenant, Law and Treaty,” *TynBul* 40 [1989] 118–135). Consequently the title “Book of the Covenant” appropriately describes the contents of Exod 20:1–23:33.

³³ So incredible was the statement to the LXX translators that they expanded v. 10 to read “[and they saw] the place where [the God of Israel] stood” (*ton topon hou heistēkei ekei*). Similarly v. 11 was changed to “and they appeared at the place of God” (*kai ōphthēsan en tō topō tou theou*), thereby escaping the even more graphic verb “they gazed” (*hāzā*). B. Jacob observes that *ēlōhē yiśrā³ēl* occurs only here in the Pentateuch, the implication being that “it is restrictive, as our verse did not wish to say *va-yir-u et y-h-v-h*” (*Exodus* [Hoboken: KTAV, 1992] 745).

³⁴ The phrase *šālah yādō* indicates a hostile action in Exod 3:20; 9:15.

³⁵ Helpful surveys are found in Nicholson, “Interpretation” 91–92; Durham, *Exodus* 344.

and the nobles were looking up through, as it were, the vaulted firmament of the blue sky. Seated above would have been the indescribable appearance of God.

Verse 11 repeats the amazing sight: "They gazed at God."³⁶ Yet their ascent up the mountain to worship involved more than enjoying God's presence. Their experience of communion was celebrated by consummation of the sacrifice of peace ("they ate and drank").³⁷ Table fellowship around the covenant meal climaxed their worship of God.³⁸ This is highlighted by the chiasmic parallelism between vv. 9–11 and vv. 1–2. In vv. 1–2 they are commanded to ascend for worship. Parallel to this command, they ascend and celebrate the covenant by eating in God's presence the peace offerings sacrificed at the foot of the mountain during covenant ratification.

4. *Worship in Exod 24:1–11.* Based on the promise given in Exod 3:12, YHWH calls Moses and representatives of the nation Israel to worship (24:1–2). The structure and exegesis of 24:1–11 emphasizes four elements in this worship. (1) Covenant inauguration summarizes the events of the whole pericope. This fulfills the implications of the word for worship in 3:12 (*‘abad*). (2) The chiasm hinges on the offering of sacrifice, which mediates the covenant and establishes fellowship. (3) God's word (and the people's commitment to it) defines the covenant relationship. (4) Communion in God's presence climaxes the experience. These elements might be summarized as follows: In Exodus 24 worship is response to the covenant relationship, which is characterized by God's presence, defined by his word and mediated through sacrifice.

"Response" is an appropriate word because worship came at the invitation of God. The choice of the term "response" is deliberately ambiguous to accommodate the full range of experiences on the part of the worshipers. Initially the theophany on Mount Sinai invoked only fearful trembling (Exod 20:18–21). The covenant ratification ceremony invoked solemn dedication. The communal meal on Sinai was likely characterized by joyful celebration.

The presence of YHWH stands out as the most distinguishing feature of the covenant relationship. Divine presence "characterizes" the covenant relationship in the sense that God's presence is the benefit of the covenant (with all that his presence means for the worshipers' protection and subsistence). It is the glorious presence of YHWH that invokes the response of his people.

³⁶ Alternative translations are possible. In view of the repetition in this passage and the meaning of *hāzā* in Isa 28:15, 18, D. Or offers the translation "they made a pact" ("And They Beheld God [Exod 24:11]," *Beth Mikra* 30 [1984/85] 257–258). R. Gelio argues that *hāzā* is a byform of *hādā* ("rejoice"; cf. Exod 18:12; Pss 63:3; 27:4; Job 8:17; "Osservazioni critiche su uno *hāzāh* 'gioire' usato per lo più in contesto liturgico [Is 28,15; Es 24,11; Sal 63,3; 27,4; Gb 8,17]," *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 100 [1986] 73–95).

³⁷ Nicholson's thesis is that this meal was rooted in a theophany tradition and not covenant ritual ("Interpretation" 77–97). But the literary structure of Exod 24:1–11 does not allow for detaching vv. 9–11 from the covenant ritual in vv. 3–8.

³⁸ Covenant-making celebrated through a communal meal is attested elsewhere in the OT (Gen 26:28–31; 31:44–54; 2 Sam 3:17–21; Exod 34:15). Joshua 9:6–15 associates cutting a covenant (*kārat bērit*), vassal service (*‘abad*), peace (*šālôm*), and eating and drinking a meal (implication of v. 14) in the same context.

God's word "defines" the covenant relationship and provides for communication in worship. God's word is the objective instruction about the nature of the covenant God, what benefits he bestows and what service he requires under covenant. So the word serves the communication of God's will to the people (for their "service," *ʿabad*) and for the people's response to him (all the attendant actions of *hištaḥăwâ*).

Sacrifice "mediates" the relationship between God and a sinful people. Sin alienates people from the presence of the holy God, and only through sacrifice can that relationship be restored.

IV. OT CORRELATION

1. *Exodus 24: back to Eden.* Exodus 24 concludes with Moses drawing near to YHWH to receive the stone tablets and instructions for the tabernacle. In preparation, Moses waits six days while the theophany storms upon the mountain. On the seventh day Moses is allowed to approach to receive the stone tablets containing the essential covenant stipulations. While not considered in the above exegesis of Exodus 24, this incident may be considered a continuation of "worship." First, it completes the instructions of vv. 1–2 where Moses is commanded to draw near. Second, it completes the covenant ceremony as YHWH creates the document symbolizing the covenant. Six days pass for creation of the document that symbolizes the creation of the covenant community.³⁹ The seventh day, the day of theocratic rest, is the day for communion between YHWH and Moses who draws near. Terence Fretheim contends that the redemption from Egypt (which climaxes at Sinai) is the continuation of God's creative activity recorded in Genesis 1. As Pharaoh sought to subvert the creation work of God among the Israelites (Exod 1:7; cf. Gen 1:28), so God's triumph over Pharaoh was a cosmic victory over Egypt, the embodiment of the forces of chaos threatening to undo God's creation (cf. Ezek 29:3–5; 32:2–8; Ps 87:4; Isa 30:7; Jer 46:7–8).⁴⁰ The connection between the cosmic mountain of God, temple worship, and creation is firmly established for ancient Near Eastern culture.⁴¹ The OT

³⁹ Hendel stresses the creation of the covenant community at Sinai based upon the cultural symbolism of the ritual in Exod 24:3–8 ("Sacrifice" 376–381). Diverse segmenting of a population, in this case separate tribes, is often transcended through unifying rituals at a religious shrine. Creation of social unity is especially true in a religious pilgrimage, of which the Sinai experience and ritual of 24:3–8 were the major part (cf. 5:1; 10:9).

⁴⁰ T. E. Fretheim, "The Reclamation of Creation: Redemption and Law in Exodus," *Int* 45 (1991) 357. R. Rendtorff extends the parallel between Genesis and Exodus further by showing that "in both cases, the first gift of God (creation/covenant) is endangered by human sin and threatened to be destroyed because of God's wrath. In both cases God changes his mind because of (the intervention of) one man (Noah/Moses)" ("Covenant' as a Structuring Concept in Genesis and Exodus," *JBL* 108 [1989] 393).

⁴¹ The literature is extensive. A representation might be found in O. Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World* (New York: Seabury, 1978) 113–120; H. Frankfort et al., *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1946) 50–61; R. J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (HSM 4; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1972); E. T. Mullen, Jr., *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literatures* (HSM 24; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1980) 128–168.

affirms the connection of these themes in Ezek 28:13–15. The “king of Tyre,” a worshipping cherub, is said to have been in “Eden, the garden of God” and on “the mountain of God” when he was created. Therefore the concurrence of these elements in the context of Exodus 24 is no surprise. Other elements of worship from Exodus 24 are reflected in the creation accounts as well. God’s presence and word are prominent themes from creation as he subdued and ordered chaos (hovering Spirit, Gen 1:2; “then God said,” 1:3). As a result of ordering chaos, Sabbath celebration (i.e. worship) is made possible (2:1–3).⁴²

If the divine side of creation sponsors worship, human responsibility in creation begins with worship. Humanity was created and caused to rest in the garden in order to subdue creation and bring life and order to it. As humanity serves YHWH, divine order over chaos is maintained. Fretheim notes that “the law is a means by which the divine ordering of chaos at the cosmic level is actualized in the social sphere, brought into closer conformity with the creation God intended. Thereby God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven, and the cosmic and social orders are harmoniously integrated.”⁴³ What must be recognized, however, is that Exodus 24 establishes the worshipping community as the context in which people respond to God’s word and the actualization of the divine order begins. In his discussion of the theology of Gen 1:1–2:3, Jon Levenson suggests that in worship the human task in creation is most exercised:

It is through the cult that we are enabled to cope with evil, for it is the cult that builds and maintains order, transforms chaos into creation, ennobles humanity, and realizes the kingship of the God who has ordained the cult and commanded that it be guarded and practiced. It is through obedience to the directives of the divine master that his good world comes into existence.⁴⁴

In Exodus 24, deity and humanity meet in communion on the cosmic mountain for a mutual act of worship and creation. The reward of this worship is theocratic rest and life in YHWH’s presence (Gen 3:8; cf. Exod 33:14: “My presence shall go with you; I will give you rest”). Perhaps the manner of worship experienced in Exodus 24 reflects a pattern inherent in the divine ordering of creation. It reveals the framework of God’s design for the ideal universe.

2. *Patriarchal worship.* The elements of worship found in Exod 24:1–11 are characteristic of patriarchal worship. There was a covenant relationship inaugurated through sacrifice and accompanied by theophany and a proclamation of God’s word in Genesis 15. Calling upon YHWH was united with sacrifice in response to theophany and covenant word in Gen 12:6–8.

⁴² The shared imagery between Eden in Genesis 2 and the tabernacle (which was patterned after what Moses saw at Sinai) has also been recognized (see G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* [WBC; Waco: Word, 1987] 61–62; “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden,” *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies. Division A. The Period of the Bible* [Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies] 19–25).

⁴³ Fretheim, “Reclamation” 362.

⁴⁴ J. D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988) 127.

Genesis 22 (the sacrifice of Isaac) offers an illustration of worship in which three elements are explicitly present (sacrifice, covenant, word of God). The fourth element, theophany, is implied in that “the angel of YHWH” speaks. This pattern is repeated in the life of Isaac (26:23–25) and Jacob (28:10–22; 35:1–15).

3. *Levitical worship.* The divine presence in the midst of Israel necessitated sacrifice. This is implied in the connection between the end of Exodus, where the glory fills the “tent of meeting” (Exod 40:34–35), and the opening verse of Leviticus where YHWH calls Moses to give him instruction regarding sacrifice.⁴⁵ Leviticus 9 records the occasion when the entire worship system commenced operation. The essence of the ceremony is summarized in Lev 9:22–24. All elements of Exod 24:1–11 are repeated: (1) YHWH appears to the people (the central benefit of the covenant), (2) the priests make sacrifice and peace offerings (a communal meal would follow that celebrates covenant fellowship), and (3) Aaron speaks a word of blessing to the people (implying benefits of the covenant, perhaps similar in content to the blessings defined in Lev 26:4–13). The Levitical sacrifices functioned to maintain and celebrate the covenant relationship, sanctifying the nation in service of the holy God in her midst.

4. *Prophetic hope for worship.* The prophets, as well as the book of Psalms, stressed that the sacrificial system meant nothing apart from the right attitude on the part of the worshiper (cf. the commitment required in Exod 24:7). Obedience was more important than sacrifice (Pss 40:6–8; 50; Isa 1:11–15; Amos 5:21–24; Mic 6:6–8; cf. 1 Sam 15:22–23). A disobedient heart rendered sacrifices useless (Mal 2:13–14). Humility and contrition were at the heart of sacrificial worship (Pss 32; 34:18; 51:16–17; Zeph 3:8–13). Yet sacrifice in itself was never degraded. In fact the future hope envisioned sacrifice as an integral part of celebrating YHWH’s presence in the kingdom. Isaiah’s apocalypse recalls the worship of Exod 24:9–11 (“For YHWH of Hosts will reign on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, and the glory will be in the presence of his elders,” Isa 24:23). Isaiah 25:6 continues this vision with a sacrificial feast on the mountain of God.⁴⁶ In a corresponding vision the prophet stressed the importance of God’s word and judgments to those who seek him on the eschatological mountain of God (2:2–4). Zechariah 8; 14:16–21 also anticipate universal worship on the mountain of God where there is sacrificial feasting and covenant blessing. Hence the prophets anticipate sacrificial worship in the kingdom in the presence of God himself, who dispenses his word and covenant blessing.

⁴⁵ The *waw*-consecutive of *wayyiqra*⁷ indicates narrative sequence between the canonical books as does the same construction in Num 1:1 and possibly Josh 1:1.

⁴⁶ Sacrifice is not explicitly mentioned but is implied in the coronation feast celebrating the commencement of YHWH’s reign. E. J. Young (*The Book of Isaiah* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969] 2.191) notes the custom of celebrating coronations with sacrificial worship (cf. 1 Sam 11:15; 2 Sam 3:20–21; 1 Kgs 1:9, 19, 25). Psalm 22:27[26]–30[29] associates the eschatological banquet with peace offerings.

V. NT CORRELATION

The theology of worship in Exodus 24 has relevance for the Church, particularly in view of the last Passover. Jesus' words "This is my blood of the covenant" (*Touto estin to haima mou tēs diathēkēs*, Mark 14:24) allude to the words of Moses in Exod 24:8: "Behold the blood of the covenant" (LXX: *Idou to haima tēs diathēkēs*). Hence, the inauguration of the covenant at Sinai served as a pattern for the inauguration of the new covenant recorded in the gospels and 1 Cor 11:25. Divine presence is indicated by the bread. Covenant and sacrifice are indicated by the cup. The importance of covenant inauguration through blood sacrifice, which Jesus signified by the elements of the Lord's table, is further connected with Exodus 24 in Heb 9:18–20. The writer of Hebrews integrates the entire cultic system, including tabernacle ritual and purification by the red heifer (Numbers 19), in terms of covenant inauguration by quoting from the blood ceremony of Exod 24:8. This covenant symbolism is recast in terms of Christ's work of inaugurating the new and better covenant.

The fact that Exodus 24 portends the eschatological banquet was mentioned in connection with Isa 24:23; 25:6–10. The Lord's table anticipates this banquet as well when the Lord will return to feast again with his people (Matt 26:29; Luke 22:28–30; 1 Cor 11:26). The portrayal of worship in the coming kingdom is described in Revelation 21, which might share images with Exodus 24. God's people will spend eternity with Christ worshipping on the holy mountain (Rev 21:3, 10), where twelve stones stand for the representatives of God's people (21:14) and pure gems pave the walkway for the sacrificial Lamb of God (21:21–22). This place of worship is the final "new creation" of which the creation of the covenant community on Mount Sinai was only a foreshadowing.

The connection between Exodus 24 and worship in the eschatological kingdom is further supported by allusions to the Sinai theophany in the accounts of the transfiguration. After the passing of six days the three disciples ascend the mountain and gaze upon the radiant glory of the unveiled Christ. Moses, the mediator of the first covenant, and Elijah, the forerunner of the eschatological kingdom, appear. Peter responds with the desire to observe the Feast of Booths, celebrating the arrival of the kingdom as the "second exodus." The cloud descends upon the mountain, and God issues the commandment to listen to the Son. In the context of Mark 9:7 the content of Jesus' instruction centered around the necessity of his sacrifice. The disciples would have understood the experience as the initiation of the new kingdom, patterned after the initiation of the kingdom in Exodus 24.

VI. CONCLUSION

Exodus 24 focuses for the worshipping community a number of central themes for worship: response to the covenant relationship, which is characterized by God's presence, defined by his word, and mediated through sacrifice. Contextually the worship of Exod 24:1–11 is linked with the crea-

tion of a new community after the pattern of creation of the cosmos (24:12–18). Furthermore the elements of worship outlined by the exegesis of 24:1–11 appear in several other important OT passages describing worship, including the patriarchal traditions, the Levitical order, and the prophetic hope for worship. Exodus 24 appears to highlight primary elements of worship normative for ancient Israel.

Exodus 24 served as the pattern for covenant inauguration when Jesus instituted the Lord's table. So the theology of Exodus 24 offers pertinent instruction for the worship of the Christian community. This is further reinforced by the relationship between the worship described in Exodus 24 and the eschatological portrayal of worship in the eternal kingdom. Perhaps it is too much to say that Exodus 24 is paradigmatic for worship. But the definition of worship that emerges from it can provide central categories for thinking about Christian worship in all ages that is in spirit and truth.