

Homiletics Analysis: Exodus 24

Content & Intent

This Text — Content:

Exodus 24 narrates the formal ratification of the Sinai covenant between the LORD and Israel. The chapter opens with God's command for Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders to ascend the mountain — with Moses alone drawing near to the LORD (vv. 1–2). Moses descends, recites all the LORD's words and ordinances to the people, and receives their pledge of obedience: "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do" (v. 3). Moses then writes the words, builds an altar with twelve pillars, and arranges for burnt offerings and peace offerings. He takes half the blood, sprinkles it on the altar, reads the Book of the Covenant aloud, receives the people's second pledge of obedience, and sprinkles the remaining blood on the people — sealing the covenant: "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words" (vv. 4–8). The chapter then narrates the elders' ascent, where they see the God of Israel — pavement of sapphire beneath His feet, brilliant as the sky — and eat and drink in His presence without being destroyed (vv. 9–11). Finally, Moses alone ascends further at God's command to receive the tablets of stone. He leaves the elders in Aaron and Hur's care, enters the cloud of glory for forty days and forty nights (vv. 12–18).

This Text — Intent:

God is pressing on Israel — and on every reader — the utter seriousness and staggering grace of covenant relationship with Him. The structure of the chapter accomplishes two things simultaneously: it shows that covenant with a holy God is not casual, costless, or self-initiated (it requires mediation, blood, obedience pledged and sealed), and it shows that the same holy God actively draws His people near — the elders see God and *eat and drink* in His presence and are not consumed. The intent is to produce both reverent awe before the holiness of the covenant Lord and joyful confidence in the grace that makes nearness possible. God is not merely establishing legal terms — He is establishing a relationship, and He wants His people to know both what it cost and what it offers.

Subject Sentence: The Sinai covenant sealed in blood — Israel bound to God by sacrifice and pledge.

Primary Claim: God ratifies His covenant with Israel through blood, mediation, and law — sealing a relationship that is simultaneously holy beyond approach and gracious beyond

expectation, pointing forward to the one Mediator and the better blood that would make the covenant permanent.

Interpretive Evaluation

The nature of the covenant ratification and the role of blood (vv. 6–8): The blood-sprinkling ceremony is the interpretive center of the chapter, and its meaning is contested. A moralistic reading treats the blood primarily as a symbol of solemn commitment — “these people are serious.” A sacramental reading (Roman Catholic) sees the meal in verses 9–11 as a prototype of Eucharistic fellowship, with the blood and meal together establishing a participatory union. Both readings capture something real but miss the primary direction of the text. The Reformed reading insists that the blood functions as the covenant bond itself — not merely as symbol of human seriousness, but as the substance of divine ratification. The author of Hebrews makes this explicit in 9:18–21, citing this very passage to establish that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” The blood does not represent Israel’s commitment to God; it represents the covenant’s terms: life for life, blood for blood, death as the sanction for breach. Israel is brought near through sacrifice, not achievement. This reading accounts for why Moses sprinkles the blood *on the altar* (representing God) and *on the people* — the covenant bond runs in both directions, sealed by the same blood.

The vision of God in verses 9–11 and the question of divine visibility: “They saw the God of Israel” is a text that generates significant hermeneutical discussion. Lutherans and some evangelicals read this as a genuine theophanic vision — God making Himself visible in some form. Dispensationalists sometimes read it as a pre-incarnate Christophany (the Son appearing visibly). Some Reformed exegetes have been cautious here, emphasizing divine incomprehensibility and reading the vision as mediated and partial. The text itself navigates the tension: it says they *saw* God, but the description focuses on what was under His feet — the pavement of sapphire — not on God Himself. The Reformed reading acknowledges a genuine though partial and accommodated vision: the elders were granted a real encounter with the divine presence, bounded and mediated, sufficient to establish covenant intimacy without violating divine incomprehensibility. The Christophanic reading (John 1:18; John 6:46 — no one has seen the Father) has merit as a canonical qualifier: the one they saw was the pre-incarnate Son, the eternal Mediator, making access possible. This reading should be acknowledged and held provisionally — it coheres with the broader canonical witness without the text requiring it explicitly.

The meal in verse 11 — covenant fellowship or casual celebration? Some popular treatments of this passage sentimentalize the meal — “God invited His friends to dinner.” This domesticates what is happening. The meal is a *covenant meal*, a well-established ancient Near Eastern ratification practice in which covenanting parties eat together as the covenant is sealed, pledging mutual commitment. The meal signals that the relationship established is not merely legal but relational — these seventy-four representatives of Israel

are eating and drinking in the presence of the living God as a sign that the covenant bond holds, that they are not consumed, and that fellowship is now constituted. The Reformed reading affirms the relational warmth of this moment while insisting on its covenantal grammar — the meal is fellowship made possible by the blood that preceded it, not fellowship independent of it.

The two pledges of obedience (vv. 3 and 7) — Israel's sincerity or Israel's incapacity?

Some Arminian readings focus on Israel's pledge as a genuine act of will that establishes their covenant standing — the covenant is conditional and Israel's obedience is the operative factor. This reading overweights the pledges and underweights the blood. The Reformed reading notes that the pledges are real but fragile — Israel will break them within forty days (Exodus 32). The pledges are not the covenant's foundation; the blood is. The people's "we will do" is morally serious but covenantally insufficient — which is precisely why the blood, not the pledge, seals the covenant. This is what makes Hebrews' reading of this chapter so pointed: the better covenant (Hebrews 8–9) is not secured by better pledges but by better blood. The Arminian reading, applied homiletically, produces a sermon where Israel's (and our) sincerity is the load-bearing element — a misreading the text itself refuses.

Key Canonical Support

- **Hebrews 9:18–21** — The author of Hebrews explicitly cites Exodus 24 to establish the blood-ratification principle; the Sinai covenant's blood-sprinkling is the Old Covenant type for which Christ's blood is the antitype and fulfillment. The comparison is structural: same act, better blood, permanent covenant.
- **Hebrews 12:18–24** — The contrast between Mount Sinai (unapproachable, terrifying, bounded) and Mount Zion (the city of the living God, the blood of sprinkling that speaks a better word than Abel's) shows that what Exodus 24 established in type, the New Covenant has fulfilled in substance — with greater nearness, not lesser.
- **Matthew 26:27–28** — Jesus at the Last Supper speaks in explicit Exodus 24 language: "This is my blood of the covenant" (some manuscripts: "the new covenant"). He is invoking the blood-ratification ceremony of Sinai and announcing its fulfillment in His own blood. The Lord's Supper is the New Covenant meal corresponding to the covenant meal of Exodus 24:11.
- **Jeremiah 31:31–34** — The promise of the New Covenant anticipates the insufficiency of the Sinai covenant (not because the covenant was flawed but because Israel was): written on stone versus written on the heart. Exodus 24 is the ratification of the very covenant whose inadequacy Jeremiah announces and whose fulfillment comes in Christ.

- **Genesis 15:9–21** — The Abrahamic covenant ratification by blood (the divided animals, the smoking firepot passing through) establishes the covenantal grammar that Exodus 24 develops: covenant is sealed by blood, and the sovereign party takes the oath of self-imprecation. Exodus 24 is Sinai’s development of what Genesis 15 established.

Aim: To demonstrate that the Sinai covenant ratification in Exodus 24 is not merely a historical episode but a load-bearing canonical event that establishes the grammar of all covenant-making — blood, mediation, nearness — and that Christ is its fulfilment, so that hearers understand both the cost and the grace of their own standing before God.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1–2	God commands Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders to ascend; Moses alone is to come near	Graduated access: elders worship from a distance; Moses alone draws near — mediation established structurally
3	Moses descends; recites all the LORD’s words and ordinances to the people; the people pledge obedience: “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do”	First pledge of obedience; the people receive the word before the blood
4–6	Moses writes the words; rises early; builds an altar with twelve pillars; sends young men to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings; takes half the blood in basins	The altar represents the LORD; twelve pillars represent the twelve tribes; the division of the blood is deliberate and structurally significant
7	Moses reads the Book of the Covenant; the people pledge obedience a second time: “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient”	Second pledge; obedience pledged to the written word, not merely the spoken word
8	Moses sprinkles the	The central act of

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	remaining blood on the people: “Behold, the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words”	ratification; blood on the altar and on the people — covenant bond sealed; Hebrews 9:20 cites this verse directly
9–10	Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders ascend; they see the God of Israel; pavement of sapphire beneath His feet, like the very heaven for clearness	The vision is bounded — attention is directed to what is <i>under</i> His feet, not to God Himself; accommodated and partial theophany
11	God does not lay His hand on the chief men of Israel; they behold God and eat and drink	“He did not lay His hand” — destruction was possible and expected; the marvel is that they live; the meal is the covenant fellowship meal
12–13	The LORD summons Moses to ascend further to receive the tablets of stone; Moses arises with Joshua	Joshua’s presence anticipates future leadership; the tablets are the covenant’s written deposit
14	Moses instructs the elders to wait; Aaron and Hur are left in charge to adjudicate disputes	Administrative transition before Moses’ extended absence; anticipates what will go wrong in Exodus 32
15–17	Moses ascends; the cloud covers the mountain for six days; on the seventh day God calls from the cloud; the appearance of the glory is like devouring fire on the mountain to the eyes of Israel	The six-day wait echoes creation structure; seventh-day summons is structurally significant; the glory is terrifying from a distance even as Moses enters it
18	Moses enters the cloud and remains forty days and forty nights	Forty days: anticipates the wilderness wanderings in miniature; Moses as covenant mediator enters God’s presence on behalf of the people

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–2	The Structure of Access — Mediation Established
2	3–8	The Blood of the Covenant — Ratification by Sacrifice
3	9–11	The Covenant Meal — Nearness Without Destruction
4	12–18	The Mediator Ascends — The Covenant’s Living Centre

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The Sinai covenant sealed in blood — Israel bound to God by sacrifice and pledge.

Primary Claim: God ratifies His covenant with Israel through blood, mediation, and law — sealing a relationship that is simultaneously holy beyond approach and gracious beyond expectation, pointing forward to the one Mediator and the better blood that would make the covenant permanent.

Applications (Five)

1. [Mind/Belief] Your standing before God is covenantal, not contractual — and that means it rests on blood, not performance. Israel pledged obedience twice in this chapter and broke both pledges within six weeks. The covenant did not collapse because the covenant’s foundation was not the pledge — it was the blood. Every Christian who wakes up measuring their standing before God by yesterday’s spiritual performance has misread the grammar of their covenant. You are not in relationship with God because you kept your pledge last week. You are in relationship with God because a better blood was shed and a better Mediator entered a better holy place on your behalf (Hebrews 9:12). Reframe how you assess your standing: not “how am I doing?” but “what did He do?”

2. [Affections/Worship] Let the marvel of the covenant meal arrest you — you have been given what the seventy elders were given, and more. The text takes care to note what should have happened to the elders: God could have laid His hand on them and they would have been destroyed. They were creatures standing in the unveiled presence of the Creator. They were not consumed. They ate. They drank. They saw God and lived. This is not a neutral historical detail — it is an invitation to awe. If seventy elders eating in the presence of the LORD’s partial, bounded theophany at Sinai is a staggering act of grace, how much more the New Covenant meal where the covenant people eat and drink the body and blood of the Son, their Mediator, their covenant Head? Come to the Lord’s Table the way the elders should have come to that mountain — with the stunned gratitude of people who know they should have been consumed and were instead fed.

3. [Will/Behavior] Stop treating mediation as a formality and start treating it as your only ground of access. The graduated access structure of Exodus 24 is not incidental to the narrative — it is the theological skeleton. The people stay at the base. The elders ascend partway. Moses alone draws near. The entire structure exists to teach that there is no unmediated access to the holy God. This is not a statement about Israel's ritual law; it is a statement about human creatureliness and divine holiness. The New Testament does not abolish this structure — it fulfills it. Jesus is the one Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5). Pray accordingly. Come to God through Christ — not as a formula, but as the actual theological reality that your prayer is heard at all only because a Mediator stands between you and the consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). If your prayer life has become casual and God has become merely a resource to consult, return to the grammar of Exodus 24 and remember who it is you are addressing.

4. [Mind/Belief] The covenant meal of Exodus 24 reframes what you are doing every time you take the Lord's Supper. Jesus deliberately invoked Exodus 24 at the Last Supper: "This is my blood of the covenant." He was not inventing a new metaphor — He was announcing the fulfillment of an existing one. Every time the church gathers at the Lord's Table, it is reenacting the covenant meal of Exodus 24 — not in type but in antitype, not in shadow but in substance. The Lord's Supper is not a memorial service for a dead hero. It is a covenant meal — the covenant people eating in the presence of their living covenant Lord, sealed by His blood, assured of their standing, receiving nourishment for the journey. Understanding this changes not only how you receive the Supper but how seriously you take it, how you prepare for it, and what you expect it to do.

5. [Affections/Worship] Feel the weight of both "holy beyond approach" and "gracious beyond expectation" — and do not let go of either. The two movements of Exodus 24 hold in tension what we are constantly tempted to collapse. The first movement (vv. 1–8) insists: this God is holy, His covenant costs blood, access requires a mediator, and there is nothing casual about standing before Him. The second movement (vv. 9–11) insists: this God is gracious, He has drawn His people near, He has fed them in His presence, and He delights to do so. American evangelical Christianity tends to flatten this tension toward the second movement only — God is approachable, warm, safe, and costs nothing. The Sinai ratification refuses that flattening. The blood was real. The fire was real. The cloud was real. And the meal was real. Hold both. Worship a God who is genuinely holy and who has genuinely made you near at genuine cost — and let that double reality shape both the reverence and the joy with which you live before Him.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Exodus 24 establishes the covenantal grammar that governs all of redemptive history: relationship with God requires mediation, is sealed by blood, is constituted by the LORD's sovereign initiative, and issues in covenant nearness that could not otherwise exist. The chapter teaches that God is not merely a moral lawgiver but a

covenant-making Lord who binds Himself to His people through ratified agreement, with all the gravity and intimacy that implies. The vision in verses 9–11 reveals that the covenant God is not an abstraction — He has a form, a presence, a glory, and He invites the covenant people to eat and drink in that presence, alive and unashamed. The forty-day ascent of Moses establishes the mediatorial pattern that the entire sacrificial system will embody and that Christ will fulfill: the covenant stands because the Mediator stands before God on the people's behalf.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Exodus 24 is one of the canonical anchors for the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of grace — the principle that God's relationship with His people is established by divine initiative, maintained by divine faithfulness, and secured by atoning blood rather than human merit or sustained moral performance. The blood-sprinkling ceremony in verse 8 is not a footnote; it is the covenantal engine. It displays the Reformed insistence that forgiveness and nearness are not earned but given — given through substitution, through a death that stands between the holy God and the unholy people. The Mosaic covenant's mediation structure (Moses alone draws near; the people receive grace through a representative) points directly to the one Mediator of the New Covenant (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:6), in whom the Reformed understanding of Christ's active representation of His people finds its Old Testament grammar. The failure of Israel's pledges — implicit in the narrative, explicit in Exodus 32 — demonstrates the Reformed anthropological conviction that covenant faithfulness cannot originate in human resolve; it requires a Mediator who succeeds where the people fail.

Main Takeaway

You are not near to God because you pledged to be faithful — Israel pledged that twice and broke both pledges within six weeks. You are near to God because blood was shed, a Mediator entered the holy place on your behalf, and the covenant was sealed on terms you could never have generated yourself. This is what Exodus 24 insists upon: nearness to God is real, it is covenantal, and it cost everything. Stop measuring your standing by your recent performance. Start living in the covenant that blood bought you into — with the reverence of someone who knows what it cost and the joy of someone who knows it holds.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Moralizing Israel's pledges as the sermon's application target.** The two pledges of obedience (vv. 3, 7) are memorable and easily become the sermon's application hinge: "Like Israel, we need to commit ourselves to obedience." This inverts the text.

The pledges are not the covenant's foundation — they are the covenant's response, and their failure is the point the narrative will drive home in Exodus 32. Preaching the pledges as the application produces a works-righteousness sermon from a grace-driven text. The blood seals the covenant; the pledges respond to it. Keep that sequence.

- **Treating the theophanic vision (vv. 9–11) as the emotional payoff without its theological weight.** “Seventy-four people had lunch with God — and that’s what we get too!” This sentimentalizes a passage that is carefully, precisely structured around the fact that these people should have been consumed and were not. The theological weight is not the warmth of the meal; it is the marvel that they lived. If the preacher does not communicate why their survival was extraordinary, the application of covenant nearness will land as cheap rather than costly.
- **Skipping the blood ceremony to get to the meal.** Verses 6–8 are dense and liturgically foreign to contemporary hearers, and preachers are tempted to move quickly to the more accessible visionary meal of verses 9–11. But the meal is only intelligible in light of the blood. The grammar runs: blood first, nearness second. Reversing that order — or eliding the blood — produces exactly the kind of cost-free approach to God the text refuses. Spend time on the blood. It is where the text spends its weight.
- **Missing the canonical connection to the Lord’s Supper.** Exodus 24 is the Old Testament background Jesus explicitly invokes at the institution of the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:28; cf. Hebrews 9:18–21). A sermon on Exodus 24 that does not bring the hearer to the Lord’s Table has left the most important exegetical connection on the floor. This is not proof-texting — Jesus himself forged this connection. Follow his lead.
- **Flattening Moses’ mediatorial role to “good leadership.”** Moses’ graduated access — he alone draws near, he alone enters the cloud, he alone receives the tablets — is structurally and theologically load-bearing. Reducing it to a lesson about pastoral leadership or spiritual maturity (“Moses went further because he was more committed”) domesticates what is actually a pattern of substitutionary representation: Moses enters where the people cannot go, on the people’s behalf, to receive what the people need. Preach this typologically: Moses as the type of the one Mediator, not as the model of the spiritually serious individual.
- **Treating the forty days as biographical detail rather than covenantal structure.** Moses’ forty-day ascent is not a scheduling note — it is the covenantal frame for what follows in Exodus 25–31 (the tabernacle instructions) and what breaks down in Exodus 32 (the golden calf). The forty days establish Moses as covenant mediator in the holy place while the people wait below — and their impatience during those forty days is what produces the catastrophe of the golden calf. Don’t preach Exodus

24 as a self-contained unit without noting that the forty-day departure is the ticking clock that Exodus 32 will detonate.