

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 294

Exodus 24, Part 1

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Episode Summary

Exodus 24 is the culmination of the Sinai scene that began in Exodus 19. The first eight verses detail the covenant ratification ceremony. Burnt offerings and, significantly, peace offerings of fellowship, are sacrificed by the Israelites to certify their relationship with Yahweh and role as a kingdom of priests in his service. The ceremony is unusual in comparison with other Israelite rituals because of the way the blood is handled, how it is applied to the people, and the role of the 12 pillars (standing stones) that were part of the ritual. This episode of the podcast (Part 1 of Exodus 24) discusses the covenant ceremony, its meaning, and its implications leading up to the communal meal with Yahweh (vv. 9-11) that will be the focus of Part 2.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 294: Exodus 4, Part 1. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike. How are you doing? Have you recovered from the conference yet?

MH: I have. It was a long but really enjoyable day. But I'm back in the routine now. The boring routine.

TS: Yeah. We appreciate everybody that came out. Everybody did wonderfully. All of the scholars... Everybody loved it and said it was better than they thought. So that was a nice compliment. A really quick story, Mike. John from Ohio told me a story about when you went up there to speak at one of their churches (probably last year or thereabouts). His son, Gideon, was 10 at the time. I wanted to give a shout-out to Gideon, because when John asked... Because both he and his son listen to the podcast. When he found out that you were going to be speaking at their church, he was like, "Hey, Dr. Heiser from the Naked Bible Podcast is going to be speaking. Do you want to go see him with me?" Gideon was like, "Is Trey going to be there?" And [laughs] his dad was like, "No, I don't think so." And he was like...

MH: [laughs] I think I know what's coming.

TS: "Meh." [laughter] So I want to give Gideon a shout-out there. Because I have at least one fan out there. So sorry, Mike. He didn't come see you because I wasn't there.

MH: I'm sure he was promptly disciplined. [laughter]

TS: That was funny. So that's just one of the many reasons it's nice to get together, because I heard lots of stories. Just a lot of the feedback from the show and everything you do and we do here. So it's nice to hear that, because it re-energizes me personally.

MH: Yeah. It's nice to see that people do listen. It means something to them. It means a lot to them, actually. Just over and over again, people expressing how much the content does mean. And you're right. It's a good shot in the arm. Not that we wander around looking for a shot in the arm, because we like doing this. But it still is a shot in the arm. It's a great motivation.

TS: Yeah, and also, Mike, switching gears here, it's a big week for you and me because we face off head-to-head in Fantasy Football.

MH: Yeah. The Pugs are in desperate need of a victory. It's my only losing team.

TS: As I am. We were literally 10 and 11 out of 12 teams. So...

MH: Yep.

TS: We really...

MH: It's bad.

TS: It is bad. We're only...

MH: I'm going to give Mori some extra treats this week. He likes whipped cream.

TS: Norman's not involved with the decisions at all? Norman's just left out?

MH: Maybe he should be involved. I don't know. [laughs]

TS: You might want to consider bringing him in, yeah.

MH: [laughs] Right. He'd probably get more points than some of my other position players have. [laughs] It's been bad.

TS: Alright, Mike. You know it was a nice break for the conference (although we didn't take much of a break from the podcast for the conference). But it seems like mentally we did, because it was a lot of work. But back into the grind here.

MH: Yep. Back in the regular mode.

TS: We're in the first part of Exodus 24.

MH: Yeah, today is Exodus 24:1-8. We're going to do Exodus 24 in two parts. There's a good bit to talk about here in both parts that... Some of it is going to be just dealing with what is sort of visible and then part of it is going to be dealing with some things that we may not associate with the text of Exodus 24, but that scholars do talk about, do associate. So Exodus 24, just generally, is obviously the culmination of the Sinai scene in Exodus that began back in chapter 19. We get the climax of that here. The events here are also the focal point of the initial demand to Pharaoh (remember that... remember Pharaoh way back when?) that Israel be released so that they could go into the wilderness to sacrifice to their God. That was way back in Exodus 5:3. Sarna comments on those bookends this way. He says:

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The stipulations of the covenant between God and Israel—the rules and principles that are hence-forth to govern Israelite society—have been promulgated [MH: have already been given]. The climactic scene in the historic covenant drama is about to be enacted. An elaborate rite of ratification takes place, after which Moses is called upon to ascend Mount Sinai in order to receive the tangible, permanent symbol of the covenant: the two stone tablets into which the Decalogue is incised.

Now the whole point is that when Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "Hey, God says, 'Let my son go that he can go out into the desert three days' journey and sacrifice to me,'" it wasn't just a random sort of thing. This is what he had in mind, because this is the only sacrificial ceremony (from that point on to this point) that we have. So this is a culmination. I'm going to read Exodus 24:1-8 and then we'll just jump in here. With that setting, here's what the text says:

Then he [MH: presumably God in the first verse] said to Moses, "Come up to the Lord [MH: a third person reference again], you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. ² Moses alone shall come near to the Lord, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him."

³ Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do." ⁴ And Moses wrote down all the words of

the Lord. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. 5 And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. 6 And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. 7 Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." 8 And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."

That's the first eight verses. That's what we'll focus on in this episode. And if you noticed in the first two verses, God invites Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel up, but they're not all at the same place.

² Moses alone shall come near to the LORD, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.

So we have, essentially, the Sinai area divided into gradations of access to Yahweh (something like zones) and that is going to be the setting that precedes the actual conversation Moses has with the people and then the ritual itself. Now "come up" is kind of interesting in and of itself, because way back in Exodus 20, we read (this is Exodus 20:21):

²¹ The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

So Moses was already up on the mountain. So we have to presume as readers that Moses had previously or already drawn near to God's location. There's a lot of coming and going here that we aren't specifically told about in the way that the material is written. So commentators have noted that we have to presume that Moses had descended at some point prior to Exodus 24. So some time between Exodus 20 and Exodus 24, Moses had come down and now he's summoned to go back up.

A couple of other cursory comments... Nadab and Abihu are two of Aaron's sons who were priests. They're the same two that are going to die later in Leviticus 10:1-3 for offering "strange fire." If you want to know my thoughts on that, go back to the Leviticus series and listen to the episode on Leviticus 10 for that. We have a reference to the seventy elders. Sarna notes that:

Seventy elders are mentioned again only in Numbers 11:16, 24–25 and Ezekiel 8:11. As in Exodus 1:5, the number seventy has symbolic force expressing totality, comprehensiveness. It represents the entire community of Israel.

It represents the people just generally. Now “worship from afar...” “You guys come up. Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar.” Now Sarna takes this as an idiom. He’s not the only scholar who does. I thought this was interesting enough to point out and make it part of the episode. He writes this about “worshiping from afar”:

Throughout the ancient Near East full-length prostration of the body was a conventional gesture expressing unconditional submission and homage to a superior authority.

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Let me just stop there. So the vision that we often have in our heads about worshiping from afar is... probably nothing. We probably don’t even think about it. But worship from afar is like, “Oh, what did they do? Did they set up a little altar at some distance from God and do stuff there? Did they have incense? What’s going on with the worshiping?” What Sarna is going to point out here is that no, the reference is that they’re going to bow. They’re going to prostrate themselves. They’re going to worship “at a distance.” He says:

The present instruction is to be understood as part of the formal ceremonial attending the ratification of the covenant [MH: so he thinks it’s part of the overall ceremony]; it was not simply an act of worshipful reverence... from afar. This phrase might be construed to mean that they are to keep their distance from the mountain summit. However, the figurative use of the idiom “to prostrate from afar” is found in letters to royalty from Ugarit in both the native language and in Akkadian, suggesting a recognized diplomatic courtesy on the part of a vassal, who makes repeated prostrations starting at a distance from the suzerain’s presence. Jacob’s performance in meeting Esau, as told in Genesis 33:3, illustrates this practice: “He himself went on ahead and bowed low to the ground seven times until he was near his brother.”

So it’s easy to read that instance with Jacob back in Genesis 33 and think that he got on his knees and he bowed seven times. But what Sarna is suggesting, based upon the parallels here found in the material from Ugarit, is that Jacob bowed once seven times getting progressively closer to Esau. The worship starts from afar and then gradually moves toward the individual. So Sarna is just wondering, “Hey, it seems like this could be what’s in view here, that you all start from afar prostrating yourselves, and then the area is sort of zoned off into these gradations of sacred space that some are allowed onto and others are not.” It just presents a different picture than what we might have in our heads. In verses 3-4, we read:

³ Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.” ⁴ And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel.

So Moses essentially tells everybody how God wants things to go, how he wants them to run. They agree. And Moses records what is to happen. Apparently, the point is that these stipulations and their actions were to become part of the description of the treaty with Yahweh (in other words, part of the ratification procedure) and Sarna had alluded to that earlier.

“Built an altar.” We saw recently the rules for building altars before there was the brazen altar. Exodus 20:24 said this:

²⁴ An altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you.

So it's interesting that Moses builds an altar at the foot of the mountain. That signifies where the Name is. Let me read Exodus 20:24 again.

²⁴ An altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you.

So it's a roundabout way of affirming the Name Theology idea again. He builds an altar at the foot of the mountain. The mountain is where God is. The mountain is also where the Name is. “The Name” is another way of referring to God. So that content should be familiar to those of you who listen regularly to the podcast. And of course, if you've read *Unseen Realm*, Name Theology is something that should be in the forefront of your mind.

The reference to the 12 pillars is interesting and I'm going to say something here and I'm going to return to this item toward the end of the episode. Because there's an interesting possible curveball that deals with the 12-pillars idea. But for now, the text is very clear that these 12 pillars that are erected (probably 12 standing stones, stones of some size that are erected in vertical formation) are “according to the 12 tribes of Israel.” They are not according to the 12 signs of the zodiac. So for those of you want to do internet theology, or run into internet theology, that is not what the text says. We have here very clearly, “according to the 12 tribes of Israel.” The pillars represent the people (the 12 tribes). So that

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likely needs to frame how we view the later sprinkling of blood “on the people” in verse 8.

Now if you think about it, it’s very easy to read this that the blood... People are gathered around there at the foot of the mountain. There’s a lot of people here. and Moses is holding a couple of basins of blood. It’s not 1,000 gallons and they don’t have a fire hose, where they’re going to sprinkle all the blood over everyone. They don’t have a helicopter or a crane or something where somehow he’s going to be able to throw the blood on every last Israelite that’s gathered at the foot of the mountain. It’s just absurd. So the assumption typically is that he’s out there flinging blood and it hits some people but 99% of the congregation doesn’t get wet, they don’t get any blood on them. What Sarna and others have suggested is that since these 12 standing stones (these 12 pillars) represent the people very obviously, because there’s one for each tribe, they say maybe what actually happened was that the blood was sprinkled on the pillars. You’d get all of them that way. And then by extension (emblematically) it would cover all of the people of Israel. They were *all* part of the covenant. They’re *all* responsible. An Israelite couldn’t say, “Well, I didn’t get wet. No blood got on me. So I’m not accountable.” No, that isn’t the point. It’s easy to see, if it was sprinkled actually on the pillars, and then so the phrase “on the people” really means “on the pillars” and everybody’s included. So it’s just kind of interesting. Sarna (to note what he says here) says:

It is likely that the dashing of the blood “on the people” described in verse 8 was effectuated by sprinkling it over the pillars. In Genesis 31:45–54 an upright pillar (*matsevah*) served as a mute witness to a treaty between Jacob and Laban. A large stone was similarly used to commemorate the covenant between God and Israel made at Shechem. The note in Joshua 24:27 is instructive: “See, this very stone shall be a witness against us, for it heard all the words that the Lord spoke to us.”

Well, obviously stones don’t have ears. So this idea is that the stone represents the individuals that *did* hear everything. It’s treated as though it were those persons. So if that’s the case, Sarna’s point is that the 12 pillars here, since it’s very clear that they do represent the 12 tribes of Israel, it’s quite possible (and Sarna thinks this is much more plausible, and indeed he thinks this *is* what happened) that the blood was actually sprinkled on the pillars—on the standing stones. So the 12 stones were, therefore, a memorial and a participant in the actual ceremony. Carpenter writes:

These pillars served as a silent testimony to the covenant and commitment of each tribe to Yahweh and Yahweh’s commitment to them.

So that's kind of an interesting side note that I think is pretty coherent, given the circumstances and given the symbolic meaning of these upright standing stones elsewhere in the Old Testament and in the ancient Near Eastern thinking.

So in verse 5, we have a reference to the sacrifices:

⁵ And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD.

So there are two types of offerings: burnt offerings and peace offerings. Sarna has an interesting note here. He writes:

The two types of sacrifice are the 'olah [MH: That's Hebrew for burnt offering] and the shelamim [MH: Hebrew for peace offerings]; the latter term, often rendered "peace offerings," is more accurately "an offering of well-being" or "a sacrifice of greeting." [MH: You could go back to the Leviticus series and you'll get some of that language there, too.] The first [MH: the burnt offering, the 'olah] was wholly consumed by fire upon the altar; the second [MH: the peace offering] was shared, certain parts being burnt and the rest consumed by the worshiper. The sacrifice of shelamim was a kind of shared sacred meal. See . v. 11.

That's going to become interesting in verse 11, which is Part 2 of our podcast episodes on Exodus 24. Because they do have a meal. There is some kind of a meal going on in the picture.

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Verses 6-8 (what is done with the blood) has drawn a lot of interest. So we have here Moses takes half the blood and puts it in basins. Half the blood he throws against the altar. So half of it is gone by the time you get to verse 7. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and he reads it in the hearing of the people. And then in verse 8,

⁸ And Moses took the blood [MH: the rest of it] and threw it on the people [MH: or most likely on the standing stones that represented the people] and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."

So the fact that the blood is divided up into basins and two different things are done with it has drawn some interest. There's a lot of scholarly debate on why this is so, because the ceremony is unusual. It's one of only three passages where blood is said to be applied to people in any sense (even if pillars are meant) and this division of the blood is also unusual. So I'm going to read a couple of opinions on this about what the meaning of the ceremony actually would have been. And the casting of the blood "on the people" and on the altar and all that stuff... why are they doing this? And what are the thoughts that

people (ancient readers) and the writer and the witnesses would have been thinking when they see this done? So Sarna chimes in this way:

The blood of the *ʿolah* and the *shelamim* was always collected and dashed against the sides of the altar [MH: in every other instance]. In the present ceremony Moses performs this standard ritual with only half of the blood; he stored the other half in basins for later sprinkling on the people (v. 8). The two parts were for the two parties to the covenant, God and Israel, respectively.

The significance of the sprinkling of the blood is never explained. However, the prevailing notion in Israel was that the blood, the vital bodily fluid, constituted the life-force. As such, like life itself, it belonged to God alone. For that reason, its consumption by humans is strictly forbidden [MH: we discussed this a lot in the series on Leviticus], and the blood of sacrifices is dashed on the altar. The use of blood in a covenant is found nowhere else in the Bible. The ordination of Aaron as High Priest, as related in Leviticus 8, involved daubing the blood of the sacrificial lamb of ordination on parts of his body and on the altar. It is likely that in both these ceremonies—covenant and ordination—the blood functions mysteriously to cement the bond between the involved parties. Through God’s sharing, as it were, of the vital fluid with Israel or with Aaron, the life of the recipient is thought to take on a new dimension and to be elevated to a higher level of intimate relationship with the Deity.

Now John Hilber, who was a speaker at our first Naked Bible Conference (and you’ve heard him also on podcast interviews at SBL) has an article called “The Theology of Worship in Exodus 24.” Let me share some of his thoughts about this. He writes:

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. 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). In both Exodus 24 and the Levitical rituals blood is applied to both the altar and to the worshiper, symbolizing renewed communion. Ronald Hendel [MH: Hilber’s just going through a bunch of different views here] 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. 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.

So we may not be really thinking these thoughts, but when they throw the blood on the altar like this, nobody says, “Okay, we’re done with that.” Or, “Time out.”

They don't get their squeegee. They don't get their little spray bottle of disinfectant and go up there and clean the thing off. No. It's a sacred, sanctified item that is not to be touched in any other way other than the way it's supposed to be used (if ever). So Hilber's thing is, "Look. In some cases, leaving the blood there might have been emblematic." It might have taught people. When are they going to see it? Well, they're going to see it when the elements are taken apart and packaged and carried and then re-assembled. They could catch a glimpse of maybe the blood on the altar or something like that. And you would be reminded that, "Hey, that blood's there because we had this covenant ceremony or because we need to be purged so that we can enter sacred space. Or in the covenant context, if the person who sees this is thinking of the covenant, it's like, "Whoa, if I violate the covenant, it's violent death."

So Hilber's just running us through the possibilities here. Now none of these have won the day. In fact, a more recent article by Amy Peeler is kind of interesting. It's called "Desiring God: The Blood of the Covenant in Exodus 24." This is a BBR (*Bulletin for Biblical Research*) article written in 2013. And she goes through the different views of this and doesn't really like any of them. She wants to make her own contribution, which I think is noteworthy. So in this article, she goes through a list of interpretations as to the ritual's significance and, therefore, the blood's significance. All the options have some kind of problem. So she theorizes that the answer may involve more than one option or what she's going to propose. So to summarize her article, she lists the main options as roughly (this is just my summary) as follows.

1. There are those who say the ritual is a cultic event that seals the covenant between God and the congregation. That much at least is kind of obvious in light of verses 3 and 7. The question is whether that's *all* that the ritual meant. So it means at least that much, because the text pretty much says that. But is that all that it means?
2. There are those who say, "Well, it was probably also a sanctifying or purifying act (that is, the blood purged the people). The manipulation (the handling) of the blood here bears some resemblance to Leviticus 8 and 9, which others have pointed out. The idea here in Exodus 24 would be that after the application of the blood, the people are purified. But the text never tells us from what or for what reason or why. There's no tabernacle yet. So there's no area of sacred space except for the mountain. And the people can't generally go to the mountain. God has already told them that. So what do they need to be purged from? That's a legit question that doesn't seem to get answered.
3. So the third category (and the Hilber quotation alluded to this) is that the blood signifies that the people's blood would so be shed if they were to break the covenant. So they're placed under obligation of the covenant and will reap the consequences if they don't keep it.

Now Peeler's pushback to that idea is that that makes it feel like the ritual of Exodus 24 places a blood curse on the altar, and she doesn't like that. It just kind of gives her an icky feeling. It just seems a little bit wrong-headed to her. It also has the problem that when the covenant *does* get violated shortly thereafter (with the golden calf incident), not everybody dies. Some suffer a plague but don't die. Others die. So it seems like, if this is what the ritual is about ("if you break the covenant, you're going to die"), not everybody who broke the covenant died shortly thereafter. So there's a disconnect there. That's a legitimate observation. Now what Peeler wants to contribute... I'm going to quote from her directly in this case. She writes on page 200 of her article:

Three times in Exodus, after meeting with God on the mountain (19:3; 20:21; 34:2) Moses passes on the words of the Lord to the people (19:7; 24:3; 34:32) as the specifications of the covenant (19:5; 24:7, 8; 34:27). The differences between the ceremonies themselves...

Now look at what they involve. They meet with God. Moses passes on the words of the Lord to the people. And then you get the specifics of the covenant.

The differences between the ceremonies themselves and also their effects show the blood ceremony alters the people's proximity to God, fear of God, and obedience to God.

In sum, the people initially, out of fear, obey so that God's presence remains distant and mediated to them by Moses. [MH: This is in the earlier episodes—not Exodus 24, but the instances she cites that happened earlier.] Then, the Israelites have no fear when some of the people experience God's glory as close and unmediated, and the rest, desiring this, act in disobedience to achieve it. Finally, the people overcome their fear and with stirred hearts obey to bring about the close but appropriately mediated divine presence in their midst...

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So she's saying, "Look. In the one instance, they want to stay away from God." And they specifically ask Moses (this is back at Exodus 20), "Hey, you do that God-thing. We don't want to be anywhere near that, because we're going to die." And then later in 34, after the people have seen some of the stuff happening on the mountain, they want some of that. So that's when you get the golden calf problem. And in between those two episodes ("keep God away" and "hey, let's build ourselves an idol and let's worship the Lord right here") you get Exodus 24. So what Peeler is arguing is:

What can account for these shifts?

"Keep God away." "Let's do that ourselves." And now Exodus 24—somewhere in the middle. What can account for the shifts? Well, the difference between the

three is the blood ceremony. She says:

The blood ceremony, the striking event that grabs the attention of readers for its profusion and singularity, accounts for the reactions of the people in each event.

Now I think her best point is something she says a little bit later. It doesn't rule out a covenant ratification meaning at all, because that's obvious. But it actually goes nicely with it. She writes this:

The accompanying peace offering involved the congregation more directly in the sacrificial worship. Once the animal was killed, the blood applied to the altar, and the fat burned in offering to God, the people were allowed to eat the meat of the sacrifice. The primary motivation of this offering was to rejoice. It signified the well-being that existed between God and his people, not that they communed together—no meat was offered to God—but that all the people rejoiced and celebrated before the Lord. Even here, the "blood rite is clearly the quintessential element in the well-being offering. It prepares for and makes possible the subsequent celebration in God's presence. In sum, in the sacrificial system, blood atoned both the place of offering and the people so that the gifts could be safely given to God and so that celebration could take place with him. By mentioning these specific offerings in Exod 24, the reader expects similar results.

So let me summarize that. Taking what Peeler says and some of these observations, the best guess as to the meaning of the blood scattering on the people (or the 12 pillars) is that (a) it sealed the covenant (that's the obvious part) and (b) prepared people for God's presence. It was part of (if you want to put it a little bit crudely)... It was kind of like table-setting. It's part of setting up the circumstances where they're going to have a meal with the Lord. Now the people on the mountain (in verses 9-11, which we'll do in Part 2) saw the God of Israel. They had a meal and they saw the God of Israel. They ate and drank and they saw God. Well, the peace offerings for the rest of the populace on the ground kind of accomplishes the same thing. Because part of the peace offerings were supposed to be eaten by the participants as a communal meal. This is what she's trying to argue. That makes good sense in the context of the people as a whole being a kingdom of priests, because the priests get blood applied to them. (Remember back in Leviticus?) And the people do here, either by proxy of the 12 pillars or something directly. They're a kingdom of priests, so it's not surprising there would be similarities between what happens to the priests when they're ordained and this scene. You also have this fellowship meal going on. The ceremony accomplishes all of these goals prior to the establishment of the priesthood later (Aaron's line, which is going to come later in the book of Exodus) or the creation of sacred space in the tabernacle. (That's also going to come later in the book of Exodus.) So she says this is kind of what's going on here. It has a dual purpose, or maybe even three purposes. And she kind of wants to get away from, "Oh, it was designed to scare people or freak them out when they saw the

blood.” “Oh, if we violate the covenant, that’s what’s going to happen to us!” It’s not necessarily purging for sacred space. It’s highlighting who they are: a kingdom of priests. “We draw near to God. We celebrate a meal with him.” That sort of thing. So I think what she says makes good sense there.

35:00

I have one more rabbit trail in the episode for today. We’re going to come back to the 12 pillars here. So we’ve been through the covenant ceremony. The big issue that people really want to talk about is, why is it the way that it is? Because it’s so different. We just covered that. So I want to go on one little rabbit trail here about the 12 pillars. Now this is something that would not immediately occur to not only the casual reader, but even a serious Bible student. Although I guess there’s a chance it might, if you were reading the New Testament in tandem with Exodus, and you hit the right spots at the same time. So the 12 pillars language was emblematic of Israel (the people of God). I want to read Galatians 2:9 here. This is Paul writing. And he says:

⁹ and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

This is really odd—this reference to Peter and James and John as pillars. There’s a really interesting article (it’s pretty technical, but he has some interesting stuff) by Roger Aus. I have referenced his name before on the podcast. Aus is an out-of-the-box thinker. I really like what he writes. So when I saw this article, “Three Pillars and Three Patriarchs: A Proposal,” in some German journal, I thought, “Okay, Aus always has something interesting to say.” And I was not disappointed. So I’m going to read you a few excerpts from this article, just to see what he’s angling for. What relationship might the language of Galatians 2 (Peter, James, and John—the three pillars) have to the 12 pillars of Exodus 24? So he opens his article this way. I’m just going to give you some scattershot here from Aus.

In his letter to the churches of Galatia, Paul provides us with some invaluable firsthand information concerning the early situation of the Jerusalem church, about which we unfortunately know precious little from other sources. Among other things, the apostle to the Gentiles relates in Galatians 2:9 that at a meeting in Jerusalem, James, Cephas, and John “reputed to be pillars” [MH: and then he quotes the Greek text] gave him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. The latter two were to go to the Gentiles. The pillars, on the other hand, were to missionize among the circumcised. The commentators speak only in general terms of this non-Pauline phrase [MH: he calls it non-Pauline because he’s going to tie it in with some early Second Temple rabbinic literature use of that term—so

it's not unique; Paul didn't invent it] reputed to be pillars nor are the two special studies of this expression entirely satisfying.

He cites them, basically saying, "Meh, I don't think they get it."

Rabbinic and intertestamental sources concerning the pillars of Israel, however, offer new insights into the self-understanding of the early Jerusalem church, including how it conceived its three leaders (James, Peter, and John). They also provide us with a better understanding of Paul's relationship to the Jerusalem church as expressed in his book, Galatians.

Now that just sort of sets the issue up. And Aus begins talking about the fact that in the New Testament, the apostles obviously are connected with the New Covenant community. Because there's a new covenant, and with a new Jerusalem. He talks a little bit about how the Church is conceived of as a new Israel and a new Jerusalem and different books of the New Testament. So this whole thing about new Jerusalem... if you think forward to the book of Revelation, this is the way the New Jerusalem gets talked about. The apostles are mentioned. The 12 tribes are mentioned. They're part of the building. People being part of the building. It's this metaphorical language. So he says:

In both of the latter [MH: these references to the New Jerusalem], the motif of pillars plays an important role. At the outset of his public ministry, Jesus chooses 12 disciples (a reconstituting of the 12 tribes of Israel) and at the last supper, he inaugurated a new covenant with the 12, indicating a new Israel. In the covenant ratification ceremony of Exodus 24, Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai erected 12 pillars, according to the 12 tribes. He then threw the blood of the covenant upon the people of Israel. Since in rabbinic sources the Messiah is often viewed as the final redeemer, the first being Moses, the connection between Moses' 12 pillars and the blood of the covenant and Jesus the Messiah and the 12 disciples and the blood of the new covenant is striking.

He goes on and he talks about Revelation 21:12—the gates of the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven in the eschatological age.

On those gates the names of the 12 tribes of the sons of Israel are inscribed. Revelation 5:14 states the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb were on the 12 foundations of the wall. Here the 12 disciples of Jesus support the new Israel, the Christian church. They function as its foundation, a term parallel to and at times interchangeable with pillars.

40:00

He cites some passages for that and also some rabbinic stuff. So you can see what he's already angling for. He's building a case with these connections. And I want to say two more things here. You can kind of see that there's a connection

here between the 12 and the pillars—the new Israel and the old Israel, all that sort of stuff. So he writes a little bit later:

I would suggest that the number three [MH: talking about why there are three pillars instead of 12—why does Paul single out Peter, James, and John?] in Galatians 2:9 is due to a deliberate selection by the Aramaic speaking Jerusalem church of three disciples or apostles as community leaders on the basis of the model of the three patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). Because those three (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) were thought of in rabbinic sources as the three pillars of Israel (indeed, of the entire world) to the rabbis. While the three fathers or patriarchs can also be called or described as fathers of the world, the princes of the world, the sureties or guarantees of Israel, God’s servants, God’s companions, God’s holy ones, God’s heavenly chariot.

Look at these terms. In rabbinic literature, the three patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob)... Together they collectively symbolize Israel as an entity. It’s only with the last one that you get the 12 tribes. But before that, they were The Entity. They were Israel. So they get referred to in rabbinic material as fathers of the world, princes of the world, guarantees of Israel, God’s servants, God’s companions, God’s holy ones, God’s heavenly chariot. In addition to those, they get called pillars. [laughs] And so Aus draws attention to this and he’s thinking, “Well, if there’s this analogy between the three patriarchs (he’s proposing this)...” Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Peter, James, and John. Well of course you might refer to them as three pillars. That’s the gist of what Aus is suggesting here. He’s an out-of-the-box kind of thinker. And he’s trying to come to grips with why we get this pillar language and also why we have three singled out. So just to wrap this up here, he says here:

The latter saying aids in understanding why James, Peter, and John were thought of as pillars by the earliest Jerusalem congregation [MH: which was Jewish]. As God wants to establish the world, the covenant community Israel, on the basis of the three patriarchs, so in the messianic period inaugurated by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, God was thought of by Jewish Christians as having established the world anew—the new covenant community, the Israel of God, to employ Paul’s phrase from Galatians 6:16, “the Israel of God.” God was re-establishing it on the basis of three new pillars (Peter, James, and John), hearkening back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by virtue of the language of pillars.

So I just thought that was really kind of interesting. I wanted to throw that into the episode because we hit that language here in the passage where it very evidently refers to the tribes. That’s what we have now. We don’t have the patriarchs anymore. Where we get the pillar language in Exodus 24, we have the 12 tribes. But just as the 12 tribes represent Israel (the collective people of God) when you get to Jacob’s time and afterward, before Jacob’s time it was Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob. So if Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would have been standing at the mountain, the reasoning would be that there would have been three pillars erected, not 12, to symbolize the covenant ratification, which of course... Basically he's saying, "In the Gospels you get this 12 imagery that connects the church with Israel. Here in Galatians 2:9 you get the three-pillar imagery that connects the church back to Israel." So I think that's some really good fodder for thought there. It seems to make sense. You get intertestamental context for it. You get some rabbinic context for it. It seems to make good sense of the language in Galatians 2:9.

So there you go. But next time on the podcast we will talk about the rest of the chapter, most specifically verses 9-11. That's kind of the guts there. But we'll traverse into some of the other material, as well, just a little bit. But next time (Part 2) we'll hit Exodus 24, the rest of the chapter, mostly 9-11.

TS: Sounds good, Mike. We'll be looking forward to that. And I just want to remind people, if you weren't able to catch our conference live, you can still watch it till January 12 (the end of the day). Go to NakedBibleConference.com. Click Livestream. You'll be able to watch the replay with that. With that, we look forward to Part 2 next week. We appreciate it. And I want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.

45:00