

## Study 0051

### Scripture Text: Exodus 19:1—24:11

Thus far, we have seen that the Old Covenant Era worship was an elaborate one which included **a sanctuary**, where God dwelt among His people, and where sacrifices were offered to Him, and where the priests ministered before God; **a priesthood**, specially chosen by God along with their clothing which was significant of the beauty and honour due God; **sacrifices**, which were intended to make God's people able to approach God, as well as use the sacrificial animal as a substitute for the sinner (the intended worshipper), such that the sinner was able to express his devotion and desire for a closer relationship with God through this innocent animal now made to take the place of the sinner; the **regular feasts**, by which God wanted the people to constantly meditate on His faithfulness and benevolence to His people in the remote and immediate past; and, **the Law**, which brought all these other aspects of worship together through sets of rules, regulations, and ordinances on how to relate with God and His creation, as well as the worship of God. This whole system of Old Covenant worship was conceived through a covenant which God initiated and entered into with the children of Israel in the wilderness, after He had brought them out of Egypt with a strong and outstretched hand.

### The Old Covenant Era: The Covenant

A covenant is not just an agreement between two Parties, like one drawn up by a lawyer or a group of lawyers. That is, it is not an agreement that can be breached and then defended by lawyers. Neither is it a gentleman's agreement between two honest and perfect gentlemen. That is, it requires more than simple honesty; it requires commitment on the part of the Parties concerned. A covenant is a bringing together of two Parties into an inseparable union or unbreakable relationship, for their mutual benefit. It is a binding arrangement which sees either Party benefitting from one another. That is, it is an arrangement whereby what one Party lacks; the other Party is able to supply; and vice versa. In order to enter into a covenant with another Party, the Parties concerned must desire to be in a covenant relationship, and must be in agreement with the terms of the covenant. Most covenants are attended by all the Parties concerned, and are usually perpetuated by generations that were yet unborn at the time the covenant was entered into. Breaching a covenant is a very serious offence, and the consequence for breaching such a covenant is usually stated *ab initio*. Covenants are put in place through a ceremony which involves cutting animals in two, laying them on the ground, and the chiefs of the Parties concerned walking in-between the pieces, after which meals were shared by all members of the Parties to the covenant (**Genesis 15:9-10, 17; 31:44-55**). Thus, in ancient times, a covenant was said to be 'cut' between two Parties, because of the cutting of the animals and the walking in-between the pieces which would usually have the blood of the animal all over the place. Usually, covenants can be entered into between two individuals (**1 Samuel 18:1, 3-4**), two communities (**Joshua 9:1-27**), or even between an individual and a community (**Genesis 26:26-31**).

A more common occurrence of covenants in the bible is that between God and man (**Genesis 9:8-17; 15:1-21; Numbers 25:1-13; 2 Samuel 7:1ff**). Every covenant which God enters into with man is initiated by God Himself. In entering into a covenant with man, God gives a promise or promises to protect and provide for the man concerned, as well as His descendants. God also would make the terms of the covenant very clear to the man concerned, which would principally involve the man's faithfulness in keeping the provisions of the covenant. For His part, God always keeps His promises, and gives a sign for the covenant (**Genesis 9:12-13; 17:11**). Most times, even though God enters into a covenant

with a man, and expects His descendants to continue with it, He nonetheless seeks to enter into the same covenant with such descendants as He makes them aware that they are living under such a covenant (**Genesis 26:2-5; 28:10-15**). Indeed, it was God's earlier promise in His covenants with the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), which led to the deliverance of the children of Israel out of Egypt into the Promised Land. Having brought them out of Egypt, God now desired to enter into a covenant with them. This was basically God entering into a personal relationship with the descendants of the Patriarchs, and so He initiated a fresh covenant with them. But before getting into the covenant process, He had shown proof of His power, His ability, and His faithfulness to His covenant with the Patriarchs (**Exodus 19:3-6**). With that in place, God then met with all the children of Israel (**Exodus 19:9-25**) who were now to be in a personal relationship with Him, individually, and collectively. He asked that they be sanctified through washing, cleansing, and abstinence from sexual intercourse with their spouses. And when God came to meet with the children of Israel, His holiness and awesomeness was apparent (**Exodus 19:16; 20:18-21**). He also told them about the terms of the covenant, in what we now know as the Ten Commandments, as well as, other ordinances (**Exodus 20:1—23:33**). The people agreed to obey the word of God (**Exodus 19:7-8; 24:3-4**), and Moses ratified the covenant with the people by offering to God, a burnt offering (a mark of total dedication or devotion to God) and a peace offering (a mark of fellowship or partnership with God), and sprinkling the blood of the animals on the people, thus sealing the covenant (**Exodus 24:5-8**). Finally, a representative of the people, met with God, where they shared a meal with Him (**Exodus 24:1, 9-11**).

At the time God cut the covenant with the children of Israel, He spoke to the whole assembly at Mount Sinai, where He gave them the Ten Commandment. God also bound Himself to take care of (provide for and protect) His people on His part; while for their part, they were to worship Him and no other god besides, as well as keep His commandments. By this covenant, as long as they remained faithful to the provisions of the covenant, God was going to do everything He had promised He would do for them. And even though there were over 400 ordinances, commandments, and precepts for the children of Israel to follow, God simplified it for them by telling them that all they needed to do was; *“Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.”* (**Deuteronomy 6:5**).

We conclude this study by noting from the foregoing that under Old Covenant Era worship, it was impossible to truly worship God unless one was in a personal relationship or covenant with God. Indeed, it was in a covenant initiated by God that people under the Old Covenant Era could truly worship God. In **John 4:22**, the Lord Jesus' statement to the Samaritan woman suggests that true worship of the One True God must be preceded by the knowledge of God (**2 Kings 17:26-34**). Paul the Apostle, on Mars Hill, talked about this same matter of ignorance of Who is being worshipped, when He told his audience about the engraving they had made *“To the Unknown God”* (**Acts 17:22-31**). Therefore, we can conclude that under the Old Covenant Era worship, a worshipper had to be in a covenant relationship with God, before He could even be allowed to offer any sacrifice.

## **EXERCISE**

Please state true or false to the statements below:

1. The very foundation of true worship in the Old Covenant Era was a personal relationship with God.
2. A covenant can be an agreement between two men, or two communities.
3. A covenant is a binding arrangement which can only be broken by any Party at the pain of suffering the consequence of the breach of the covenant.
4. God's covenant is one initiated by God Himself.
5. God did not want bland worship, so He entered into a covenant relationship with Israel in the wilderness to enable a rich relational worship.
6. Without being in a covenant relationship with God, a man could not even offer a sacrifice to God.
7. A covenant can be binding on every generation of a person with whom God has had a covenant, even if they have not had a personal one with God.
8. A covenant can be said to be a set of promises made by the Parties involved and which is binding on them throughout their generations.
9. Christian marriage is, in reality, a covenant between a man and his wife, with God as the Supervisor.
10. Old Covenant Era worship required that the worshipper knew Who was being worshipped.