

Exodus 24: The Covenant Ceremony

א. שמות כד:ג-ח

Moshe came, and he told all the words of the LORD, and the laws to the people. All the people responded in one voice and said, 'All the words the LORD spoke – we will do!'	וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה, וַיְסַפֵּר לָעָם אֶת כָּל־דִּבְרֵי יְיָ וְאֵת כָּל־הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים. וַיַּעַן כָּל־הָעָם קוֹל אֶחָד וַיֹּאמְרוּ, 'כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר יְיָ נַעֲשֶׂה.'
Moshe wrote all the words of the LORD. He rose in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars ² for the twelve tribes of Israel.	וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל־דִּבְרֵי יְיָ. וַיָּשָׁכֶם בַּבֹּקֶר, וַיִּבֶן מִזְבֵּחַ תַּחַת ¹ הָהָר וּשְׁתֵּים עָשָׂר מִצְבָּה ² לְשִׁנִּים עָשָׂר שְׁבִטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.
He sent the Israelite youths out and they raised up burnt-offerings ³ , and they slaughtered bulls as peace-offerings ⁴ to the LORD.	וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת־נְעָרֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַיַּעֲלוּ עֹלֹת. ³ וַיִּזְבְּחוּ זִבְחִים שְׁלָמִים ⁴ לַיְי פָּרִים.
Moshe took half the blood and put it in basins, and the other half the blood he threw on the altar.	וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה חֲצִי הַדָּם וַיִּשֶׂם בְּאֵגָנוֹת, וְחֲצִי הַדָּם זָרַק עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ.
He took the scroll ⁵ of the covenant and he read it to the people's ears. They said, 'All the LORD speaks, we will do and listen.'	וַיִּקַּח סֵפֶר ⁵ הַבְּרִית וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם. וַיֹּאמְרוּ, 'כָּל אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר יְיָ נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע.'
Moshe took the blood and threw it on ⁶ the people, and	וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַדָּם וַיִּזְרֹק עַל־הָעָם,

¹ The preposition תַּחַת here probably means "at the foot of" rather than the usual "under."

² The word מִצְבָּה from the *shoresh* נ.צ.ב (to stand erect) is a standing stone or monolith used for sacrifice/libations during the patriarchal period. Later prohibited in Deut. 16:22.

³ An עֹלָה is a "burnt-offering" which is fully consumed in the sacrificial fire on the altar and is not eaten. It usually symbolizes a feeling of gratitude and dedication to God. Most communal sacrifices are עֹלוֹת.

⁴ A זִבְח־שְׁלָמִים is a "peace-offering" of which some of the blood and fats are burned in the sacrificial fire on the altar and the remainder of the meat is shared among the priests and the owners. It usually symbolizes feelings of celebration and thanksgiving. Notably, the זִשׁ is usually offered by an individual and only once a year (on *Shavuot*!) is offered by the community.

⁵ Although often translated as "book," in the Late Bronze Age context of the Torah the word סֵפֶר probably refers specifically to a vellum scroll which was a relatively new technology at the time, as was the paleo-Canaanite/paleo-Hebrew alphabet.

⁶ As is debated below, it is a major question for us if the preposition עַל here is to be read as "on" or "on behalf of."

said, 'Behold! – This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has sealed with you concerning all these words.'	וַיֹּאמֶר, 'הִנֵּה דַם-הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת יְיָ עִמָּכֶם עַל כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה'.
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ב. ר' אברהם אבן עזרא כד:ה

In my opinion, there were 24 bulls because of the 12 pillars for the 12 tribes of Israel.	וכפי דעתי שהיו עשרים וארבעה פרים, מטעם: ושתים עשרה מצבה לשנים עשר שבטי ישראל (שמות כ"ד:ד'), בעבור שנים עשר.
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ג. רש"י כד:ז

Basins – two basins. One for half the blood of the burnt-offerings and one for half the blood of the peace-offerings to sprinkle them on the people.	באגנות - שתי אגנות: אחד לחצי דם עולה, אחד לחצי דם שלמים להזות אותם על העם.
From here our rabbis alluded: that our ancestors entered into the covenant of circumcision, immersion, and presentation ⁷ of blood; since there is no sprinkling without immersion.	מיכאן סמכו רבותינו: שנכנסו אבותינו לברית במילה וטבילה והרצאת ⁷ דמים, שאין הזאה בלא טבילה.

ד. תרגום אנקלוס כד:ח

Moshe took the blood and threw it on the altar to atone for the people, and he said this is the blood of the agreement that the LORD decreed with you concerning all these laws.	וַיִּסֹּב מֹשֶׁה יָת דָּמָא וַיִּזְרַק עַל מִדְּבַחָא לְכַפָּרָא עַל עַמָּא וַאֲמַר הָא דַם קִימָא דְגִזָּר יְיָ עִמָּכֶון עַל כָּל פְּתִיגְמִיָּא הָאֵלִין.
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ה. רש"י כד:ח (two textual variants)

Its translation: "And he threw it on the altar to atone for the nation."	ותרגומו: וזרק על מדבחה לכפרה על עמא.
Its translation: "And he threw it on the nation."	ותרגומו: וזרק על עמא.

⁷ The word הרצאה from the *shoresh* ר.צ.ה (to want or accept) means something like making the blood presentable or acceptable in the sacrificial scheme. As we will see in subsequent weeks, this is a word of central concern for our study.

ו. חזקוני (ר' חזקיהו בן מנח) שם

Behold! This is the blood of the covenant – Since it was divided in two halves in the manner of those who seal covenants, as the verse states, 'like the calf which they cut in two so as to pass between the halves' (Jer. 34:18)	הנה דם הברית - שנתחלק לשני חצאין שכן דרך כורתי ברית שנאמר העגל אשר כרתו לשנים ויעברו בין בתריו (ירמיהו לד:יח).
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ז. מכילתא דברים – מדרש תנאים פרכס כ"ג, עמ' 57

<p>'Moshe took the blood and threw it on the nation' – 'On the altar on behalf of the nation.' Do you mean to say 'On the altar on behalf of the nation' or 'on the nation' – literally? Learn to read the verse, 'A continual sacrifice for your future generations.' (Ex. 29:42) And it states, 'A continual sacrifice which was performed at Mt. Sinai.' (Num. 28:6) ... Rabbi Akiva said: There is an analogy from the sacrifice of Sinai to the sacrifice for future generations. Just like the continual sacrifice is performed [by sprinkling the blood] on the altar; so too, the sacrifice of Mt. Sinai was performed [by sprinkling the blood] on the altar. Abba Hanin said quoting Rabbi Eliezer: 'On the nation' – literally ...</p>	<p>ויקח משה את הדם ויזרוק על העם, על המזבח בשם העם. אתה אומר על המזבח בשם העם או על העם כמשמעו? ת"ל 'עלת תמיד לדרתיכם' (שמי' כט:מב) ונאמר 'עלת תמיד העשויה בהר סיני' (במי' כח:ו) ... ר' עקיבא אומר הקיש עולת סיני לעולת דורות מה עולת תמיד על גבי המזבח, אף עולת הר סיני על גבי המזבח. אבא חנין אומר משום ר' ליעזר על העם כמשמעו ...</p>
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