

Exodus 24:1-18 (1984 NIV)
Come Up to the LORD

Introduction

How do people normally respond to an invitation that seems too good to be true?

One afternoon, a wealthy man was riding in the back of his limousine when he saw two pathetic-looking men by the side of the road, eating grass. He ordered his driver to stop and got out to investigate. He asked the men, "Why are you eating grass?"

"We don't have money for food," the first man replied.

"Then you must come with me to my house," insisted the wealthy man.

"But sir, I got a wife and three kids here," said the first man.

"Bring them along!" replied the wealthy man.

The second man exclaimed, "I got a wife and six kids!"

"Bring them as well!" the wealthy man proclaimed as he headed back to his limo.

They all climbed into the car, and once underway, one of the men said, "Sir, you are so kind. Thank you for taking all of us with you."

The wealthy man replied, "I'm most happy to do it. You'll love my place. The grass is almost two feet tall!"

It is story like this that makes us very wary of accepting some invitation that seems too good to be true. What's the catch? What's the ulterior motive?

The text we are about to study is one of the most fascinating passages in the Old Testament. It is about God who invited Moses and some of Israel's leaders to come up and meet Him on the mountain. In fact, Moses received the call to come up to the Lord not once, but two times in vv. 1 & 12. Moses was invited to meet up with God, the Creator of all heavens and earth!

How would you respond if you have heard such a call from the Almighty God to come and meet up with Him? How did Moses respond to such an invitation from God that seemed too good to be true?

I. A Response of Commitment to Faithfulness (vv. 1-8)

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1 Then he said to Moses, "Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance,

2 but Moses alone is to approach the Lord; the others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him."

3 When Moses went and told the people all the Lord 's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the Lord has said we will do."

4 Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

5 Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord .

6 Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar.

7 Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey."

8 Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."

Before Moses and the elders went up the mountain to the Lord, they observed a ratification of covenant (a binding treaty) with Him. Some ancient covenants were made between equals, such as those between Isaac & Abimelech (Gen 26) and between Jacob & Laban (Gen 31). Others were not between equals. The Mosaic Covenant is of this latter kind.

God initiated the covenant. He brought Israel out of Egypt, and He declared the covenant, and He invited Moses and the elders to come up to worship Him (v. 1). Worship is not practiced among equals. The inferior always worships the superior being.

The response to this divine invitation is recorded in verses 3-8, where we see Moses taking the initiative to make preparations for the worship of God on the mountain. It also seems apparent that the 74 leaders (Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the 70 elders) were representatives who acted on behalf of the entire nation. By the way, Nadab and Abihu were sons of Aaron (Num 3:2).

Twice in vv. 3 and 7 the Israelites had verbally committed themselves to keep the covenant. Moses knew that you can't trust people to remember what they heard and much less what they said. So, he wrote these things down and initiated ritually the ratification of the covenant.

Moses offered burnt and fellowship offerings after making an altar and setting up twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. The blood of the sacrifices was sprinkled upon the altar and upon the people, thus linking the people with the

covenant sacrifices. The sprinkling of the blood set the people apart to worship God as well as ratified the covenant.

Afterwards, he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. Again, they all responded to obey everything that the Lord had said (v. 7).

In summary, Moses' first and immediate response to God's invitation to come up to Him was a response of commitment to faithfulness as he prepared the people to set themselves apart as God's people. In that covenant ratification, God committed Himself to be their God, and they committed themselves to be His people; God committed Himself to be faithful to His promises to His people, and they committed themselves to be faithful to their obedience to Him.

Moses built an altar of worship to God. We need to do the same. Many people tend to ignore the invitation because they are too busy with a lot of things—work, hobbies, self, etc.

God invites us to come to Him without delay, not only on Sunday but also each day of the week. Let's learn from Moses—come to God without delay each and every day of the week, and not only when Sunday comes along.

Today, we come to worship God as His people. And each time of worship is not just a time for us to find peace in God because we have had a rough and tough week. More importantly, it is a time to dedicate ourselves afresh to obey God. In this sense, each time we come to God in worship is a response to commit ourselves afresh to faithfully obey Him.

Charles Spurgeon was considered the “Prince of Preachers” in the 1800s when he preached as pastor to thousands in London at the Metropolitan Tabernacle every Sunday for almost 40 years. Yet he started his ministry by passing out tracts and teaching a Sunday School class as a teenager. He was eventually invited to obscure places in the country side to preach before the Lord honoured His commitment to faithfulness, making him one of the greatest preachers in England.

Spurgeon said: “I am perfectly sure, that if I had not been willing to preach to those small gatherings of people in obscure country places, I should never have had the privilege of preaching to thousands of men and women in large buildings all over the land.”

(<https://www.ministry127.com/resources/illustration/he-started-small>)

Today as we come to worship God, He is also inviting us to come and commit afresh our faithfulness to obey Him. It may be just a small step; a small thing, like how He had called and started with Charles Spurgeon. But as we obey,

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He can open up a great field of opportunities for us to be greatly used by Him. Would you commit to take that small step and do that small thing for God today?

The 2nd response of Moses to God's invitation to come was ...

II. A Response of Fellowship in God's Presence (vv. 9-11)

9 Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up
10 and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself.
11 But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.

Twice in vv. 10-11, we are told that Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the 70 elders saw the God of Israel. Not only that, these 74 men ate and drank in His presence (v. 11).

This can be puzzling, especially because we know that several scriptures seem to contradict this verse. In Ex 33:20, when Moses asked to see God's face, the Lord responded: "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!"

So do we have a contradiction? No. There is one important thing to note here.

These 74 men were far enough down the mountain to just be able to make out that God was there. They actually saw a pavement of sapphire that was clear as the sky; they did not see the Person of God, but the "feet" of God as He sat on His heavenly throne (v. 10). In other words, what they actually saw was a vision of God in heaven.

Many visions of God in heaven are recorded by the prophets. You can read of them in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation.

In both Ezekiel (1:22, 25-26) and Revelation (4:6) there is a crystal-like floor on which the throne of God stands, very much like the crystal-clear sapphire pavement of Exodus 24:10. In both Ezekiel (1:26) and Revelation (5:1) as well as in Exodus (24:10), the One who is enthroned appears with human characteristics.

The elders of Israel (Exodus 24) saw God enthroned high above them from under the crystal floor. Since the floor was crystal clear, they could see God above them through the floor, with the throne sitting on the floor, and God on the throne.

So, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the 70 elders of Israel went up and saw a vision of God on His heavenly throne. During that time of fellowship, they were also privileged to eat and drink in His presence.

Today, the Lord is also calling each of us to fellowship with Him. Every day you awake, God wants to spend time in fellowship with you.

We need this reminder every now and then because the idea of how we fellowship with God can so easily become masked over by either purely externals (what I do), or the purely subjective experience (what I feel). The truest test of fellowship with God is laid down in 1 John 1:7 - "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."

But how do I know if I am walking in the light? What does a life that is in fellowship with the Lord look like? John makes it very clear:

- First, a life of fellowship with God is very conscious of indwelling sin and confesses it constantly. You see, the nearer we are to God the more aware we are of our sin and the more grieved we are and want to be rid of it. We glorify God when we confess and forsake sin because it shows we hate what He hates and keeps us clinging to His Son in faith and love.
- Second, a life of fellowship with God is lived in submission to His commands. In other words, obedience is an essential mark of fellowship with Him. Jesus said to His disciples in John 14:15: "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Notice that love comes before obedience, and obedience is the outflow of love.
- Third, a life of fellowship with God loves Him much more than the things of this world. 1 John 2:15 reads: "Do not love the world, nor the things of the world. If anyone loves the world the love of the Father is not in him."

A third and final response of Moses to the invitation of God to come to Him was ...

III. A Response of Deep Connectedness with God (vv. 12-18)

12 The Lord said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction."

13 Then Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and Moses went up on the mountain of God.

14 He said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them."

15 When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it,

16 and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud.

17 To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain.

18 Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

Sometime later, the Lord said to Moses a 2nd time, “Come up to me on the mountain and stay here. I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction.”

Then Moses set out with Joshua, his aide, and they went up on the mountain of God. He said to the elders, “Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them.”

The second “upward call” given in v. 12 is calling Moses to go alone to the top of Mt. Sinai. This is for the purpose of giving him the commandments personally written on stone by God (24:12). It is also for the purpose of revealing to Moses the “heavenly pattern” and the blueprints for the tabernacle and its furnishings (Ex 25:9).

Times of deep connectedness with God are times when He speaks and reveals to us deep things that He wants us to know and do.

Moses made the necessary preparations for his trek up the mountain, which indicated that he might have planned to be gone for some time. In particular, Moses appointed Aaron and Hur to judge any disputes which might arise in his absence.

It may appear that Israel is encamped at the foot of Mt. Sinai, the elders somewhere part way up the mountain, and Moses alone goes to the top. But I believe this 2nd call to Moses to go up the mountain took place sometime later, i.e. after he and the other elders had returned to be with the people after the 1st call in v. 1.

Upon hearing this 2nd call in v. 12, Moses told the elders to “wait here” (v. 14). But the “here” refers to the base camp of the Israelites. Aaron and Hur would stay back at base camp to judge the people; they did not ascend the mountain with Moses this time.

It is important to note that after a grand time of fellowship with the Lord and others in vv. 9-11, Aaron was the one who led in the making of the golden calf in Ex 32. So, we are reminded that those great times of fellowship on the mountain are not meant to sustain us as we return to live in the valley of everyday life. We need to constantly keep in fellowship with God each day.

So, everyone except Moses was back in base camp when he went up the mountain the 2nd time. And Moses took along Joshua who ascended at least part way with him (v. 13).

For six days Moses waited and on the seventh day, God called Moses to Himself in the cloud, and he was up there alone in the cloud with the Lord for forty days (vv. 16, 18).

So, the last response of Moses to God's invitation to come up was to spend extended time with God—a time of deeper connectedness with God as He had intended to show him deeper things—He was about to give Moses the tablets of stone upon these He would write down His law and commands for the people (v. 12).

Today, God is also calling us to deep connectedness with Him for He has deep things to speak to us. How then do we cultivate deep connectedness with the Lord?

- First, trust in the Lord's control. When Moses reached the mountain top it was covered by a cloud. Moses remained in the cloud for forty days. Moses couldn't see. He was living temporarily in a fog. In other words, he had to trust that God would eventually remove the cloud so that he could find his way back down.

There are simply some things that are beyond our capability to control. God is in control of the bigger picture and God wants us to trust Him in all circumstances. Like Moses, when God calls us, we may be living in a cloud and not able to see all things too clearly. This is often a call to trust and obey by faith and not by sight.

- Second, be patient with God's timing. When Moses arrived at the mountain top he had to wait six days before God spoke to him. Moses had no choice except to be patient. The impatience of the Israelites caused them to turn away from God and focus on idols. They built the golden calf.

Patience is something we often lack. When we lose patience we are vulnerable. Like the Israelites we can easily be misled and follow someone or something that moves us further from God. By being patient we are putting our trust in God and living in faith. Consequently we are prepared for deeper connectedness with God.

- Third, be completely focused on God's presence. Since Moses was up there alone, there were no other distractions. He had no schedule, nor could he perform any daily tasks. He was unable to see anything in the cloud, but could only focus on God.

Spending unhurried time with God in His presence is never meant to be spiritual wastage. God often has deep things to teach us in these unhurried moments.

The F-11 Tiger is a supersonic, carrier-based US Navy fighter aircraft in operation during the 1950s and 1960s.

On 21 Sep 1956, the manufacturer was testing a version of the F-11 Tiger off the coast of New York state. The pilot fired a long burst of rounds from its guns into the ocean. He then dived his plane into a steep and super fast descent (remember, it's a supersonic jet). A minute later, the plane's windshield suddenly caved in and the engine started making funny noises, eventually conked out. The pilot had to crash land his plane. Though he survived, he sustained quite serious injury.

Investigation revealed that after the pilot had made his super fast dive, his plane accelerated while the rounds he fired had decelerated because of air drag. So, his plane came in front of the rounds he fired at some point in his dive, resulting in the windshield and engine of the plane being hit by the rounds.

The F-11 Tiger is now out of service. But it is now well known as the plane that shot itself.

(<https://www.popularmechanics.com/military/aviation/a27967/the-fighter-plane-that-shot-itself-down>)

When we are busy with many things, the tendency is to try and go faster than the speed of sound. When God calls us to come up to Him, He often calls us to take a slow trek up the mountain where the fog is, and spend unhurried time with Him. But when we are caught up with getting busier and faster, we fail to come up to God. Instead, we shoot ourselves down because we tend to live in the speed of the flesh and not in the power of the Lord; in the superficiality of our human understanding and not in the deep wisdom of the Lord.

God called Moses to come up to Him a 2nd time when he was supposedly busy with many other things. But He was willing to put these aside, go up the mountain, and spend 40 days of unhurried time with the Lord.

Today, God is calling you and me to come up to Him. Are we willing to put aside unhurried time and be more deeply connected with Him so that we know Him more deeply, hear Him more clearly, and obey Him more faithfully?

Conclusion

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The Mosaic Covenant clearly defined Israel's relationship with God, and what was expected of each Israelite. But you may ask: "As Christians, we are now living under the New Covenant mediated through Jesus Christ. This New Covenant is about God's grace, but the Old Covenant is about God's Law. We are now living under grace and not under Law. So, what is the relevance of this Old Covenant mediated through Moses for us today?"

Let me stress that it is a mistake to think that only the Old Covenant contains God's laws or commands, but not the New Covenant.

- E.g. in John 14:15, the Lord Jesus said to His people: "If you love me, keep my commands." The Lord's people are exhorted to keep His commands.
- Also in 1 John 3:15 we are cautioned that "anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him." The New Covenant law against murder goes beyond the physical act of killing to include the mental act of hating. So, the New Covenant does not nullify the law in the Old Covenant, but actually "intensifies" it.

All these are just to stress that both the Old and New Covenants entail obedience to the Lord's commands. Under the Old Covenant, the Lord's people struggle to obey out of fear of Him and in their own strength. Under the New Covenant, the Lord's people seek to obey out of love of Him and in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

And in both the Old and New Covenants, the Lord would call people to come and build up a relationship with Him—a relationship of commitment to faithfulness, of fellowship in His presence, and of deep connectedness with Him. To build up such a relationship with God, we need a mindset change.

My beloved aunt was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer at the age of 78. She eventually was delivered from the disease when the Lord took her home after 10 months. I think she would have at least two things to complain about if she had not known the Lord.

First, she had always been disciplined in terms of her diet and exercise. One time she said to me: "I have always been very careful about taking care of my health. So, I don't really understand why this has happened to me. But I don't complain to Jesus; only to ask Him help me live each day in His peace and not in my pain."

Second, my aunt had always been a fast-moving and driven person, even in her retirement years. She would start her day by shooting off like a bullet. Imagine how frustrated she was when cancer had weakened her to almost a standstill in her daily life.

I remember calling her one morning but no one answered the phone. I called again later and she picked up the phone.

I asked, “I tried to call you earlier but you were not in. Where did you go?”

She answered, “I felt quite OK this morning. So, I went down to the nearby park to do some exercise.”

I protested, “You should not be pushing yourself like that. You need to keep still and rest more, especially a day after your chemo session.”

She replied, “Don’t worry. I do this exercise as my way of thanking Jesus for making me strong today. It is light and slow, and it makes me feel that Jesus is with me in all that I am going through.”

I believe that by the Lord’s enabling, my late aunt had a mindset change in her faith relationship with the Lord in her last days on earth.

The Lord is still calling His people to come and build up a relationship with Him—a relationship of commitment to faithfulness, of fellowship in His presence, and of deep connectedness with Him.

To build up such a relationship with God, we need a mindset change—i.e. to intentionally choose to sense the Lord’s presence in all that we are going through or doing in life everyday.

This is our starting point every day on our journey to grow as a person and people of Christ.

Just as He had called Moses to come up to Him, the Lord is calling you today and everyday to come to Him. Will you hear His call and come to Him today and everyday in loving obedience to Him?