



**Clanking Chains: Impact of 5th Commandment on Client Nations; Meaning of “Covenant”;  
Signing On to the Contract, Ex 24:3-4, 7; The “Shema,” Deut 6:1-4-7**

**V. The Critical Impact of the Fifth Commandment on a Client Nation:**

**A. The Meaning of “Covenant”:**

1. The Ten Commandments are part of the Sinai Covenant or the Mosaic Law. The word “covenant” is the Hebrew noun:

בְּרִית *berith* - “covenant”

**Botterwick, G. Johannes and Helmer Ringgren (eds.). *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Rev. ed. Translated by John T. Willis. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 2:255:**

The original meaning of the Hebrew *berith* is not “agreement or settlement between two parties.” *Berith* implies first and foremost the notion of “imposition,” “liability,” or “obligation.” *Berith* is commanded which certainly cannot be said about a mutual agreement. *Berith* is synonymous with law and commandment and the covenant at Sinai in Exodus 24 is in its essence an imposition of laws and obligations upon the people (vv. 3-8).

2. In the ancient world both individuals and nations entered into contracts that placed obligations on one party in exchange for protection, provision, and blessing on the part of the other party.
3. Such contracts are called “suzerain-vassal” or “master-servant” treaties:

**Tenney, Merrill C. (ed.). *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 1:1002-3:**

**Suzerainty covenants.** When the parties concerned are not equal, the *berith* may become a disposition, imposed or guaranteed by the superior party. Negative critics of Scripture have been slow to recognize this frequent lack of “two-sidedness”; but it lies in the very Old Testament terminology: on the one hand, “to establish” or “to command” a given *berith* and, on the other hand, “to obey” or “to transgress” it. The initiator thus normally makes a *berith* “to” or “for” the recipient, rather than “with” him. Scripture often employs *berith* in this sense to describe the legal relationships that exist between God the Lord and man the servant. God therefore has chosen the word *berith* as the most available term for a legally binding instrument, to describe what is His sovereign pleasure.

4. Suzerain is a French term that referred originally to a feudal lord to whom fealty was due. Fealty is the obligation and loyalty owed by a vassal to his feudal lord. The Latin word for “fealty” is *fidelis*. Therefore, the divine covenant is fulfilled when the Israelites develop the mental attitude of *semper fi*: always faithful.
5. Therefore, the Mosaic Law, beginning with the Ten Commandments is a *berith*—a covenant—between God as sovereign and Israel as His vassal state.
6. In the parlance of our current study it is permissible to use the word “contract” to define these arrangements between God and the Israelites:

**Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “contract”:**

A mutual agreement between two or more parties that something shall be done or forborne by one or both; a compact; a covenant. An agreement enforceable by law.



7. The Mosaic Law was a contract issued by God on Mount Sinai and agreed to by the entire adult population of Israel:

**Exodus 24:3** - Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do!”

**v. 4** - And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel.

**Exodus 24:7** - 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. The Israelites have signed off on the contract. The key word is one very familiar to you but which in this context has a different translation:

שָׁמַע *shama* - “to hear, to listen, to obey”

9. *Shama* is the first word in Deuteronomy 6:4 which begins the famous Hebrew liturgy called the *Shama*. The Jewish practice is to entitle certain prayers or significant passages of Scripture by the first word in the passage. Thus, **Deuteronomy 6:4** begins with the phrase:

שָׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד *Shama Yisrael, YHWH Elohanu, YHWH Echath*: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is the unique One.”

10. Out of respect for the Third Commandment, the Jews developed a system which they conceived would avoid any possibility of using the Lord’s name in vain: don’t ever say it. When encountering the Word *YHWH* in Scripture they would substitute a word assigned to earthly fathers or respected leaders: אֲתוֹנַי *Athonay*. Eventually, the copyists who wrote the Masoretic Text continued to use the four original consonants but added the vowel points of *Athonay*. When the word *YHWH* was encountered, the vowel points for *Athonay* were there to remind the reader to pronounce it rather than the tetragrammaton. Over time a combination of the two emerged in other languages as *Yehowah*. The German transliteration *Jehovah* was carried over into the English.

Thus when reading Scripture, *Elohim* refers to God. It can indicate according to context any member of the Trinity. *YHWH* is best translated “Lord” and is commonly printed in English translations by small capital letters, e.g., LORD, and can refer to any of the three members of the Trinity.

When both *YHWH* and *Elohim* occur in the same context then more than one member of the Trinity can be involved. Such is not the case for Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear O Israel! Jesus Christ is our God. Jesus Christ is the unique One.”

11. The importance of this statement in Deuteronomy 6:4 is indicated by the first word: *Shama*. It is in an imperative mood which commands the Israelites to listen, concentrate, and obey the following message. Take a look at what that message is:

**Deuteronomy 6:5** - “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.



v. 6 - "And these words which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart;

v. 7 - and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up."

12. The *Shama* liturgy was considered by the Israelites to be their confession of faith and was recited twice daily. Today it includes Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21; and Numbers 15:37-41. The central theme behind the *Shema* is obedience to its mandates.
13. The basic meaning of the word is "to hear" but is extended in various ways, generally involving an effective hearing or listening: (1) "listen to," or "pay attention," (2) "obey" when used with such words as "commandment," (3) "Hear," (4) "understand." The use in Deuteronomy 6:4 stresses the obligation to "obey."
14. In this very same context the word *Shama* has just been used in Moses' review of the Ten Commandments:

**Deuteronomy 5:1** - Then Moses summoned all Israel, and said to them, "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully."

15. *Shama* is a mandate for the Israelites to pay attention so that they might learn. The word for "learn" is the Qal stem of:  
**לָמַד lamath** - Has the idea of training as well as educating.
16. Greek uses two different words for training: "to learn" is **μανθάνω, manthanō** and "to teach is **διδάσκω, didaskō**. Hebrew uses the same root for both words because all leaning and teaching is ultimately to be found in the fear of the Lord. To learn is to come to terms with the will and law of God.
17. Once the will of God is learned then it is the obligation of the believer to make his decisions based on this knowledge and then to execute the thing commanded. The verb "observe" is the Qal infinitive of:  
**עָשָׂה asah** - "to do," "to accomplish"
18. *Asah* is often used with the sense of ethical obligation as noted in:

**Harris, R. Laird (ed.). *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:701:**

The Israelites were frequently commanded to "do" all that God had commanded. These contexts attest to the importance of an ethical response to God which goes beyond mere mental abstraction and which is translatable into obedience which is evidenced in demonstrable act.

19. The obedience concept is consistently evident in passages that have to do with the Mosaic contract and the obligation of the Israelites to do these things which they willingly agreed to do.
20. To obey the word of God indicates loyalty to the thinking of God which has been stored in the stream of consciousness. Loyalty to that thought under pressure is right motivation. To obey is right decision making which produces right action. This honors God!



21. The Israelites' pledge to obey is therefore directly related to their profession of faith as indicated by our passage:

**Exodus 24:7** - 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 [עָשָׂה *asah* ], and we will be obedient [שָׁמַע *shama* ]."

22. This is a verbal commitment to inculcate and execute the contract with the understanding that noncompliance will result in discipline.