

## **A Lifetime Contract - Exodus 19:5-6**

**Introduction:** A few years ago, Alex Rodriguez signed the richest contract in baseball history. The contract was for an estimated \$250 million for 10 years. That's 25 million per year, about \$80,000 per game, and about \$125,000 per hit! Somebody figured out that he earns more in 3 games than the most Babe Ruth ever earned in one season.

For all of us, that kind of contract would essentially be a lifetime contract. We all could live comfortably for the rest of our lives with that kind of money, and have plenty left over.

Contracts are important documents. Pro athletes, school teachers, union workers, pilots, and a host of other professional workers work by contract. Business also knows the importance of contracts. They spell out conditions and terms of deals.

Technically, a contract is an agreement between two parties. It can be as simple as a handshake or as complicated as the thousands of pages, multiple clause trade agreements between two countries.

In Exodus 19-24, we find a contract made between God and Israel. The Bible refers to it as a Covenant. God had led Israel from out of Egypt to the base of Mt. Sinai, where He essentially made them an offer they could not refuse. Simply put, God said, *"If you will trust Me, serve Me, and live for Me, I will make you a great nation. I will provide for you, protect you, bless you, and give you something you cannot earn - eternal life."* If Israel accepted these terms, they would be bound to execute it, or else forfeit the covenant's promises.

However, this covenant God made with His people was far more than a simple agreement between equal parties. God intended for it to be a unique relationship between a holy God, and a sinful people. It was a special relationship between the One who has it all, and humanity who is depraved, destitute, and doomed without Him. It was and is a contract offered in love and grace. It was no small thing for Israel to consider, for it meant their existence, their eternity.

God took a great risk in making this offer to people He knew would be fickle, but He also wanted to take this opportunity to reveal to them who He really was and what He was about.

You see, the Israelites had a limited knowledge about God at this time. God's revelation of Himself was progressing, and by entering into this covenant relationship, that progressive revelation would be ramped up exponentially. The Israelites would learn that their God was vastly and uniquely different than any other god they had ever encountered or would ever encounter.

This covenant relationship God desired to make with Israel reveals some very important things about God which the Israelites needed to know. Today, we're going to look at this covenant, and discover something for ourselves about God. For I submit that there are many folks today who really don't know a lot about the God of Israel – the one we call our Father. Let's see what we can learn. First, we see from this lifetime covenant, that:

### **1. It Reveals God's Character (Ex. 19)**

Before anyone would enter into an agreement with another party, they would need to know certain things about their character. For example: Could they be trusted? What's their track record? Are there any questionable characteristics?

God knew that Israel would be somewhat confused or even skeptical about who He was. After all, these people had lived in Egypt for over 400 years where initially, they were treated very well, but over time, after other Pharaohs came to power; they had ended up as slaves. Over this time, they had been exposed to the pagan Egyptian culture and religion in which there were many gods. So, God wanted to remind Israel about what kind of God He was, so in this covenant relationship, He began to reveal to them more of His character. Specifically, the covenant revealed:

#### **A. God's Goodness and Kindness (19:4)**

Moses described God in terms of a mother eagle whose sole purpose was to protect, provide for, and nurture her young. He reminded them of the previous few months since they left Egypt - how God had heard their cries, came to their rescue, led them out of bondage, provided them with food and water, and helped them defeat their enemies. He told them that this was a result of God's goodness and kindness. This was the kind of God they were dealing with.

You know, there are times in life when we too need to be reminded of God's goodness and kindness. For example, in those times of crisis, when our world seems to be caving in around us, it can be a time of great worry and confusion. It's in the midst of those trying times of life when some people begin to cry out to God and shake their fists at Him in anger and say, "*Why are you doing this to me?*" as if God was mean and vicious. It's in those times when we can lose sight of the goodness and kindness of God because we're looking for someone to blame our troubles on.

But when those times come, if we'd just stop and look around us, we can see signs of God's goodness and kindness all around us. God is good to provide us with air to breathe and food to eat, and eyes to see and ears to hear. God is kind in that He wakes us up every morning and gives us another day.

Not only do we need to be reminded of God's goodness and kindness during the tough times, we also need to be reminded during those times when all is well. It is in those times when we can take His goodness and kindness for granted and forget to thank Him for it. So, don't ever forget that little prayer your mother taught you at mealtimes, "*God is great. God is good. Let us thank Him for our food. By His hand we all are fed. Give us Lord our daily bread. Amen!*"

But not only did God want the people to know of His goodness and kindness, but we are also reminded of:

#### **B. God's Holiness (19:9 & 16)**

God had announced on Mt. Sinai that He would appear to them in a thick cloud. He said that the mountain was to be sealed off from the people and that if any one touched the mountain, it would be fatal. Then He appeared amid the rumbling of thunder, the flashing of lightening, and the blast of trumpets. When the people

heard this, they knew that this was no ordinary god. This God was THE GOD. They would know that He was holy. They would know that He was powerful and mighty and uniquely different from any other god they had encountered.

God wanted them to know that this covenant was not an agreement between equals. He set the terms, conditions, and boundaries. The people could either accept Him as He is, or not. Take Him or leave Him, but know that leaving Him would be risky. Take Him as He is. He wasn't going to bargain with them.

We need to be reminded of God's holiness as well. Sometimes we can take God for granted to the point that we treat Him flippantly and disrespectfully. When we use His name in vain, we are scoffing at His holiness. When we go for days without praying or acknowledging His presence, we are brushing aside His holiness as if He were yesterday's news. When we put other things ahead of Him in our lives, we are disregarding His holiness. No wonder God has to show up every now and then in powerful ways. Sometimes that's the only way He can get our attention. Sometimes, that is the only way we will listen!

God's covenant with His people was offered in part to show us His goodness, His kindness, and His holiness. But another thing this Covenant relationship does:

## **2. It Stipulates God's Expectations (20; 20:22 - 23:33)**

Like with any contract, before you sign, you should read it. Many people have been surprised and angry to find out when it's too late what they've agreed to. We did that a few years ago when we leased a car. We thought we read and understood everything, but boy were we surprised? We really didn't expect all that we were faced with when we turned in that car.

But God wanted His people to know what to expect. He wanted them to know what they were getting into. In these verses, (20:1-17 - the Ten Commandments, and 20:22 - 23:33 - the Book of the Covenant) God stipulates His expectations, and says, "*Read them carefully before you decide.*"

Basically the Ten Commandments can be divided into two sections. The first four deal with our relationship with God, and the last six deal with our relationships between others. Let's look at them briefly and see what they mean. As for our relationship with God,

### **A. God Expects Total Allegiance Toward Him.**

In this covenant relationship:

God demands sole priority in our lives – He said you shall have "*no other gods*" except me in your life. (3)

God demands sovereignty – He said you shall have "*no graven images*" that you worship. (4a)

God demands sincerity – He said, "*Do not misuse the Lord's name.*" (7)

And God demands sanctity – He said to "*Keep the Sabbath day holy.*" It will be a day of rest and remembrance of Me. (8)

In our relationships with others, the last six commandments basically tell us that:

### **B. God Expects Us to Respect Each Other.**

These commandments will flow from having a right relationship with God.

They call for people to honor the home - God says for children to “*Honor your father and your mother.*”

(12)

They are a call to have a reverence for human life – God says, “*You shall not murder.*” (13)

They call for us to hold a high regard for marriage fidelity – God says, “*You shall not commit adultery.*”

(14)

They call for us to have respect for other’s possessions – God says, “*You shall not steal.*” (15)

They are a call for us to remember the integrity of our word – God says, “*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*” (16)

And they call for us to be free from envy and jealousy – God says, “*You shall not covet...*”(17)

The Book of the Covenant (20:20 - 23) expands on these relational demands. It deals with having a humanitarian spirit, seeking justice in human affairs, and how to prevent crime.

God wanted the people to know the high level of expectations He was calling them to - Total allegiance toward Him, and mutual respect and love toward others.

Finally, we see that this covenant between God and man:

### **3. It Ratifies a Relationship (24)**

When there is an agreement between two parties, there is usually some sort of formal “*signing*” or perhaps an informal demonstration of the agreement reached.

Chapter 24 describes the ratification of the covenant between God and Israel. God wanted there to be a celebration of this covenant – which was a relationship the people would have with Him always. This ratification ceremony reflects two unmistakable truths of the covenant. First, it gives:

#### **A. The Assurance of God’s Friendship (24:9-11)**

One of the unmistakable ancient signs of friendship was sharing a meal together. Often, agreements would be sealed this way. We do the same today. Friends and families often gather for a meal when there is a special occasion - marriage, graduation, birthdays, etc. Church families gather around the table to celebrate homecomings and certain special days. These fellowship meals not only demonstrate friendship, they also promote friendship. Many long lasting relationships started as a result of sharing meals and good times together.

God wanted to assure Israel of His friendship, and that He is eternally bound to them. He would not ever leave them or forsake them – even if they failed to live up to His expectations. So as these representatives of Israel’s leadership assembled on the Mountain, after Israel had agreed to God’s terms, they “*ate and drank*” (11) together to commemorate the occasion.

When we meet together for worship and fellowship, let it be a reminder of God’s assurance to us – that His love for us is not based on condition or stipulation. Let it remind us that His mercy and grace is free; that His

joy is unspeakable; that His peace goes beyond our own understanding; and that His forgiveness is always available. That is the commitment God makes to us, and it is ratified every time we come together for worship.

Another truth of God's covenant that was reflected in this ratification ceremony is:

### **B. The Irrevocable Promises of God (24:3-8)**

The record of the offerings on the altar and the blood in the basin and on the altar are highly symbolic acts of God's assurance that His part of the agreement was irrevocable. As long as God lived, He would fulfill His side of the covenant. And that is forever! It would not and could not be broken by Him.

Others may try to wiggle out of a contract, but God would not. Others might try to put in an escape clause, but God had no escape clause. Others would even blatantly break contracts, but God would never break His promises. You see, when God makes a covenant, it's written in blood. Literally, some 2,000 years later, it would be signed, sealed, and delivered by the blood of God's own Son, Jesus Christ. God remained true to His covenant, and the result is that anyone and everyone is invited to enter into the New Covenant with God through a relationship with Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

In this day of broken promises, shattered dreams, unfulfilled expectations, and easy divorces, it should be a refreshing comfort to know that God will never break His promise with us. His truth is relevant. His promises are irrevocable. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever because He is the alpha and the omega. He is the beginning and the end and everything in-between. You can count on God because He never changes.

**Conclusion:** Thousands of years ago, God offered a lifetime contract with the descendants of Abraham. He desired to enter into a covenant relationship with them that would ensure their eternity.

Today, that offer still stands for people everywhere. It's a free offer to experience God's love, God's forgiveness, and God's peace that passes all understanding. There's nothing to sign and there's nothing to pay. It's free for the taking, but in order for it to be yours, you must receive it. You can receive it today by accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. You receive it by trusting in what He did on the cross as payment for your sins. You receive it by confessing your sins and asking for God's forgiveness. And when you do, all of God's promises will be yours. All of God's riches will be yours for eternity. Those are some great benefits. What a sweet deal it is! It's worth a lot more than \$250 million. In fact, it's priceless and it will last a lifetime - even into eternity.