

Deuteronomy 5:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

Analysis

The third commandment prohibits taking God's name 'in vain' (Hebrew 'la-shav'—emptiness, worthlessness, falsehood). This encompasses far more than crude profanity—it prohibits flippant, careless, or false invocation of God's name in oaths, worship, or daily speech. God's name represents His character, reputation, and covenant presence. Misusing His name dishonors Him and profanes holy things. The severe warning 'the LORD will not hold him guiltless' indicates certain judgment. This commandment demands reverence in all God-talk, prayer, worship, and oath-taking. Only those who fear God guard His name carefully.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern cultures invoked deity names in oaths, curses, and business transactions. Israel was commanded to swear truthfully by Yahweh's name (Deuteronomy 6:13, 10:20), not falsely or by pagan gods. Violations included: false prophets claiming 'thus says the LORD' (Jeremiah 14:14), priests profaning God's name (Malachi 1:6), and people swearing falsely (Leviticus 19:12, Zechariah 5:4). Jesus extends this command, prohibiting oath-swearing altogether (Matthew 5:33-37), demanding simple truthfulness.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does taking God's name 'in vain' extend beyond profanity to include careless, flippant, or hypocritical God-talk?
2. In what ways might Christians violate this command through casual God-language, thoughtless prayers, or living inconsistently with our profession?

Interlinear Text

ל	א	ישׁ	א	את	שׁמ	ו	יהוה	אלה	יך	לשׁוא:
H3808				H853						
			Thou shalt not take		his name		for the LORD	thy God		in vain
			H5375		H8034		H3068	H430		H7723

ל	א	כִּי	י	יבקה	יהוה	ה	א	ת	אשר
H3588									
				will not hold him guiltless	for the LORD				
				H5352	H3068				

ישׁ	א	את	שׁמ	ו	לשׁוא:
Thou shalt not take			his name		in vain
H5375			H8034		H7723

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 20:7 (References God): Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

Deuteronomy 6:13 (References God): Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.

Leviticus 19:12 (References God): And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.

James 5:12 (Parallel theme): But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

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