

### The Third Commandment

“Thou shall not take the name of thy Lord God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name is vain” (Exodus 20:7, Deuteronomy 5:11). Taking the Lord’s name in vain, do we really know what that means? Of course, who doesn’t? It simply means cursing or swearing and using His name Jesus and His title Christ as part of a vocabulary of profanities, whether it is disparagingly or in anger, hate, frustration, despair or just casual or habitual vulgarness. Surely such utterances are sinful as are all things contrary to God’s will. But is that what God had in mind when He carved that commandment on the stone tablets He gave to Moses? I think not, at least not the principal meaning.

The ancient Hebrews took this commandment most seriously, so much so that they would not even speak His name under any circumstances, both out of great reverence and out of fear that somehow God would interpret it as having been spoken in vain. It has been said that in some of their writings, they would even leave a blank space instead of writing His name. Or as was more common, they substituted a tetragrammaton in the text instead of His name. Thus, by never speaking His name, its pronunciation was lost. All that is left are these four letter equivalents of His name, in Hebrew transliterated as JHVH, IHVH, JHWH, and YHVH & YHWH. Adding vowels to these, they became pronounceable and became equivalent names such as Elohim, Yahweh, and Jehovah etc. But we now know Him by His new name Jesus Christ, which is quite pronounceable, yet no less sacred.

In order to get a better understanding of what our Lord meant by the commandment, let us examine the Hebrew meaning of a couple of key words, “take and vain”. The word “take” appears 587 times spelled out in the King James Version of the Old Testament of which there are 35 different Hebrew words that have been so translated. The applicable one here in Exodus 20:7 is “nasa.” It has a variety of related meanings with the first listed being “accept,” with “take” being effectively the last meaning, just before “wear” and “yield” which obviously do not fit the context of the message. The word “nasa” can also mean, advance, arise, suffer to, extol, etc. Only one other of the 35 words for take

includes the word “accept.” That is the Hebrew word “lagach,” which is identified as having a very wide application, such as, “bring, buy, carry away, seize etc.” All of the other 35 Hebrew words translated as “take” have meanings such as “seize, gather, join, fetch, plunder, catch, consume, pluck, pull off, capture, chase, rob etc.” From this analysis and for reasons developed herein after, it seems reasonable to conclude that this particular word “nasa” is used because of its first and prime meaning “accept” in the sense of taking. I believe this most closely relates to what our Lord intended, “Thou shalt not *accept* the name of thy Lord God in vain.” At this point, this subtlety may seem like nit picking, but read on, it may not be.

The word ‘vain’ appears 86 times in the King James Version of the Old Testament, and there are 15 different Hebrew words that have been so translated. The applicable one here is “shav.” According to Strong’s concordance, it means, “desolating, evil, ruin, guile, and idolatry, as false, deceptive, lying.” The other words translated as vain have meanings such as, “come to naught, lead astray, employer, devoid of cost, reason or advantage, deceive, hallow, wind empty, untrue, worthless etc.”

As we can see, the Holy Spirit chose appropriately which of the many related words He would use in composing this commandment so that it could be understood as was intended. It is the unfortunate choice of the translations along with the limiting capacity of the English language to convey the nuances, the subtle distinctions of certain words, which cause many of the difficulties associated with really understanding God’s Word. Knowing that this would happen, our Lord took good care to carefully preserve, with great accuracy, the originally inspired writings of the Scripture in the original Hebrew and Greek language.