

**The Ten Commandments**  
**Lesson 7: Honoring God's Name**  
**Fully Valuing God for Who He Is**

Exodus 20:7 states, “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain” (NKJV). God’s name represents all that He is—His character and conduct, His power, His wisdom, and the honor and glory that belongs to Him. Who God is forms the foundation of the first three commandments. Exodus 20:1 says, “*I am the Lord your God...*”. That statement is the basis of all the commandments and relates especially to the first three (have no other gods before me, make no idols in place of Me, and do not take My name in vain). Obeying these three commands honors God for who He is (as God alone), for how He is (unlike any idol or image humans can conceive or produce), and for what He is (His name revealing His glory, power, honor, and majesty). God is holy, holy, holy, eternal love and perfect justice; wisdom beyond measure; and understanding infinite in depths. He shows wrath and vengeance with precise attention to detail yet abounds in grace and mercy to those who turns to Him and call Him Lord.

How are we to respond to the revelation of this wonderful Lord and Savior? How do we truly honor and revere His name? On the other hand, what does it mean to refrain from taking His name in vain? It certainly means more than simply not using foul language. It means honoring His name according to His true value. How are we to do that? What kinds of actions and words does God want from us? **Our words reveal what is in our hearts.** Honoring His name definitely includes speech—words of praise, thanksgiving, petition, and testimonies of honor to Him—but it does not stop with what we say. What else is involved in truly honoring His name?

In this lesson, we will explore the many ways God’s name can and should be honored. We will also look at ways in which we dishonor His name, the subtle actions and statements that devalue or distort Him in some way. We will discover how to better honor His name and what it means to truly regard Him as the Lord who is our God and Savior.

### 1. The Name of the Lord

When we think of a name, we often think of a simple label, something that officially identifies a person or family—Thomas, Linda, Mary, Bill, the Jones family, or the Andersons. Many people have the same names, so we add to a name as necessary to identify which Thomas or Linda we mean, such as Linda Jones, the redhead soprano with the beautiful voice” or “Thomas Green, that nice guy at the hardware store.” Often, we use nick names that more clearly identify certain persons. In the Scriptures, names are not mere labels but are descriptive of a person or place, referring sometimes to their origin and sometimes to a particular quality or to the hopes for that person’s life. *Adam* means “red earth” because the first man was taken from the ground. Adam named his wife *Eve*, which means “life or “living,” referring to her status as the mother of humanity.

In the Scriptures, the names used for the Lord often express some particular aspect of His character, His ways, or His will. Sometimes His name focuses on a unique attribute or action. The primary name *Yahweh* or *Jehovah* (Exodus 20:2—translated “LORD”) is related to the Hebrew phrase for “I AM,” which focuses on Him as the self-existent one, the “I am who I am” (Exodus 5:14). He is the Creator and Sustainer of everything; He is uncreated, existing as the Eternal One; He has always been and will

always be. His name expresses the reality of who He is. With these truths in mind, let's look at the third commandment.

- a. In Exodus 20:7 we see the third commandment. It tells us not to misuse the name of the Lord our God. The Hebrew word *shawu* or *shavu* translated "vain" in this verse means "evil," "empty," or "false." This term can refer to anything that does not live up to its reputation or disappoints the hopes resting on it, such as the empty and useless "vain idols" of Psalm 31:6.
- i. To take the Lord's name in vain, therefore, means to treat it in an empty, thoughtless manner, to consider Him and His name as nothing, to regard His name as of no value, or to use it in a lying way that expresses falsehood.
  - ii. To take His name in vain is not simply a matter of using His name in profanity or in jest or mockery. It is treating Him as nothing or as worthless, ignoring Him, or (worse) maligning (speaking about someone or thing in a spitefully critical manner) Him.
  - iii. For example, people treat Him in an empty way when they speak of "the Man Upstairs" or exclaim "Dear Lord" without really thinking of Him or truly seeking Him.
  - iv. The third commandment relates to the first two because taking God's name in vain is treating Him in an empty, hollow way rather than honoring Him as the only living Lord. Those who lift up His name in a meaningless way are like those who honor idols or those who try to add idolatry to their worship of God. All idols are powerless, fruitless, and useless, and the Lord's name should never be associated with them.
  - v. The Scripture says that God will not hold him guiltless that take His name in vain. This means that those that misuse His name, God will not ignore the offense. He deals with this sin against Him, taking personally any misuse of His name, and any maligning of His character. This includes not only open offenses such as mocking His name or telling lies about Him but also any failure to honor Him for who He is.

How do we treat the name of our Lord God in an honorable and holy manner, showing His true worth and the respect due Him? Remember, in Scripture a person's name is more than a label. It refers to all a person is, including his or her reputation and character. Even today, we talk about "a name you can trust," referring to the company that makes a product or offers a service worthy of purchase, or to an individual known to keep his or her word.

- b. In Exodus 33, Moses spoke with the Lord about His presence leading them to Canaan. He did not want to go without the Lord's presence. He also wanted to know Him more fully and so requested of God, "*Show me Thy glory!*" (33:18). God promised to make His **goodness** pass before Moses and to **proclaim His name** before Him.
- i. In 33:20, the Lord promised to reveal part of His glory but not His face, for no one could survive seeing His face in unlimited glory. The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with Moses. Moses called on the name of the Lord and "the Lord passed by," revealing only His back in blazing glory.
  - ii. **He proclaimed His name**, declaring and **revealing** Himself "*merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth*" (NKJV), which can also be translated "*slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness and truth*" (NASB).
  - iii. Statements such as "*merciful and gracious*" are more than labels; they describe **who the Lord is**. The name is more than the words *Lord or God or King*. It is the totality of who God is and what He does.
  - iv. Moses learned more about who God is and could, therefore, relate to Him with greater closeness and understanding. Knowing the Lord's name opens the door for growth in our

relationship with Him. When we understand that he is compassionate and gracious, we can come to Him with our weaknesses and failures, our sins and disobedience.

- c. Moses was zealous about honoring the name of the Lord. Deuteronomy 32 is called “The Song of Moses.” Summarizing verses 1-4, Moses called all creation to listen as he glorified God’s name. He spoke of the Lord as “the Rock”—dependable, the foundation for all of life. All that He does is perfect, without blemish or blame. There is no injustice in any of His ways or deeds. In everything He says or does, He is the “*God of faithfulness*” who is “*righteous and upright.*”
  - i. The more one knows the value and honor of the name of the Lord, the less likely one is to use that name in a meaningless way, to make light of it, or to fail to give it genuine honor.
- d. Several examples in Scripture show us how people glorified the name of the Lord.
  - i. One of the earliest Old Testament books written is the story of Job. He lived before the Ten Commandments were given, but he provides a wonderful example of honoring the name of the Lord. Look at Job 1:1-21, especially verse 21.
    - 1. With all he went through, he worshiped God, blessed His name, and didn’t accuse God foolishly.
- e. The psalms are filled with statements of praise and honor to the Lord.
  - i. Psalm 7:17: David said, “I will praise the Lord according to his righteousness: and will sing praise to the name of the Lord most high.”
  - ii. Psalm 113 is another hymn of praise to the Lord. Read verses 1-9, noting especially verses 1-3. The psalmist praises the name of the Lord by:
    - 1. Praising the name of the Lord.
    - 2. His servant should praise the name of the Lord. They should bless the name of the Lord forever more.
    - 3. From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the Lord’s name is to be praised.
  - iii. David says in Psalm 9:9-11 that, “The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in the times of trouble.” He also says that “...they that know thy name (the Lord’s) will put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.”
    - 1. Putting trust in Him includes seeking Him in prayer. That is part of what it means to honor His name.
    - 2. Knowing the Lord will live up to His name helps us honor and praise His name and avoid taking it in vain.

## 2. How Israel Dishonored the Name of the Lord

As we have seen, taking the name of the Lord in vain can refer to actions as well as words. We will see in the remainder of this lesson how the Israelites were guilty of both.

- a. Let’s look at the following verses in which the Lord gives specific instructions about how His people are to speak of Him.
  - i. Exodus 22:28: His name is not to be reviled or cursed. *Reviled* means to criticize in an abusive or angrily insulting manner.
  - ii. Leviticus 18:21: Don’t profane His name. *Profane* means to pollute, defile, or mix with impurities. To worship an idol polluted His people.
  - iii. Leviticus 19:12: Don’t swear by the Lord’s name. Don’t take an oath in His name and then lie.

- b. Did the Israelites obey God's commands? No. In Leviticus 24:10-23, we read about a young man born to an Egyptian father and an Israelite mother who got into a fight with an Israelite in which he "blasphemed the Name and cursed" the Lord.
- i. The Hebrew word *naqab*, which is translated as "blasphemed" here, means "to puncture" or "to hollow out." In other words, the young man spoke in such a way as to take the substance out of God's name, degrading, lessening, and hollowing out God's character and person.
  - ii. The Lord instructed Moses that all those who heard him curse were to lay hands on his head, and then all were to stone him to death. His sin merited death, because in blatantly breaking the third commandment, he broke the covenant with God and cut off himself from Israel and from life. At least in this instance, blaspheming the name of God carried the death penalty and sure judgment of the Lord.

Many Christians today are not passionate about honoring the name of the Lord. Often, we are not even upset by the shameful way that we hear others misusing His name. What about us? How is it in our lives? Do we honor the Lord? Are we guilty of taking the Lord's name in vain, of treating Him or His name in a flippant way?

- c. What more can we learn from the nation of Israel? About six hundred years later during the time of Elijah (860 BC) and the reign of King Ahab, Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, worshiped Baal and encouraged others to do the same. They even built a temple to Baal and gave provision for the prophets of Baal, thus, breaking the first and second commandments. They placed the name of Baal above that of God's name (taking the Lord's name in vain).
- i. You can read the background story in 1 Kings 18:1-20. But in verse 21, Elijah asked the people of Israel, "How long halt you between two opinions? If the Lord be God follow him: but if Baal, then follow him."
  - ii. They were dishonoring the name of the Lord by worshiping Baal. Any attempt to glorify God would automatically be polluted because of their ongoing worship of the false god Baal (You can read the rest of the story 1 Kings 18:22-40).
- d. Nearly three hundred years later in the days of Ezekiel (about 580 BC), the people of Judah and Israel continued to worship idols, and they committed atrocious sins in the eyes of the Lord. He punished them by allowing other nations to conquer them. Let's look at Ezekiel 36:17-32.
- i. The people profaned and smeared God's name. But God had pity on them for His name's sake.
  - ii. In verses 18, 25, and 31 we see that the people polluted the Lord's name with idol worship, they had filthiness from the idols, and they despised themselves because of their own iniquities and abominations.
  - iii. The Lord promised to wash the people and cleanse them. He would take out their stony hearts and give them hearts of flesh. And He promised to put His spirit in them.

Those promises, as well as similar promises found in Jeremiah 31:31-34, began to be fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection opened the door for men and women to experience spiritual regeneration (see also Hebrews 9:11-10:18) and to bring honor to His name.

**Homework:** Read Matthew 5:33-37, 6:7-9, 12:30-37, and 23:16-22.

**Lesson Topics:** The Name of the Lord in the New Testament, and Honoring the Name of Jesus