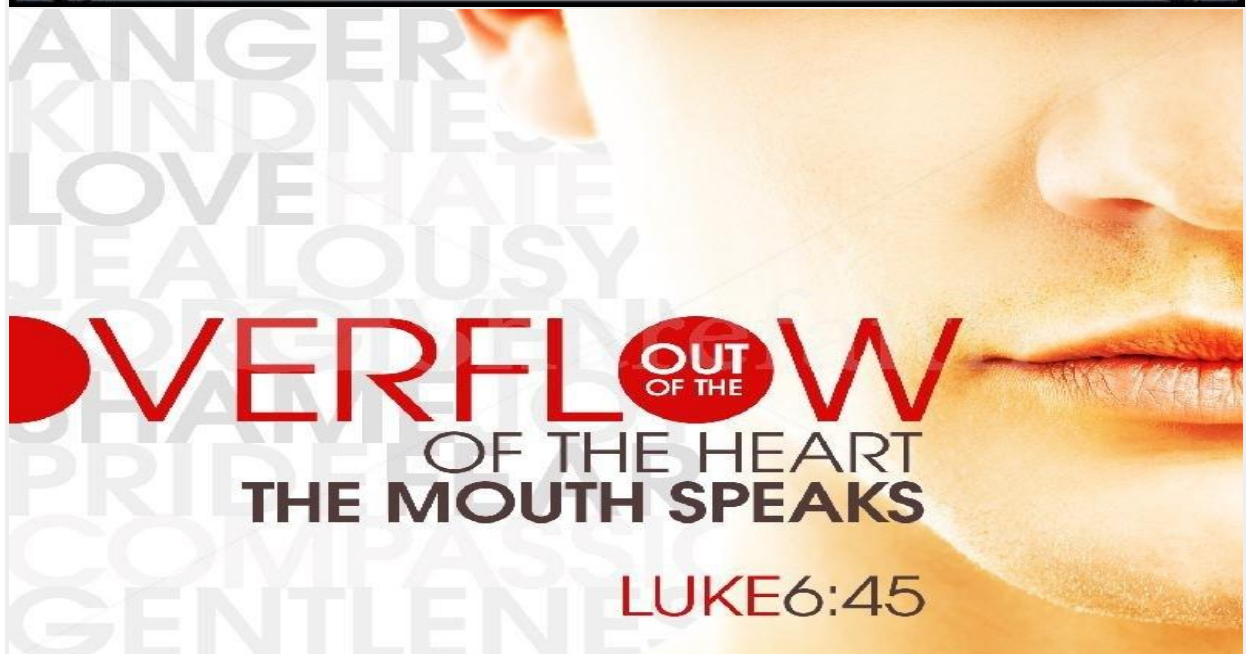


## PART 3. CORRUPT COMMUNICATION SERIES

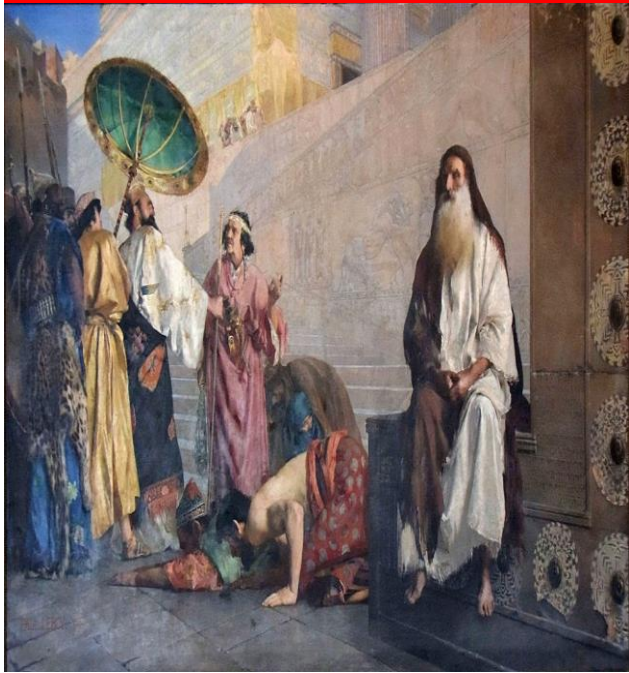
by David Lee Burris



### [Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers](#)

(45) **A good man out of the good treasure.**—See Note on [Matthew 12:35](#). There the words are spoken in immediate connection with the judgment which the Pharisees had passed on our Lord as casting out devils by Beelzebub, and follow on a reproduction of the similitude of the tree and its fruit. The sequence of thought in that passage helps us to trace a like sequence here. Out of the “good treasure of his heart” the good man would bring forth, not harsh or hasty judgment, but kindness, gentleness, compassion; out of the “evil treasure” the man who was evil, the hypocrite who judged others by himself, would bring forth bitterness, and harsh surmises, and uncharitable condemnation.

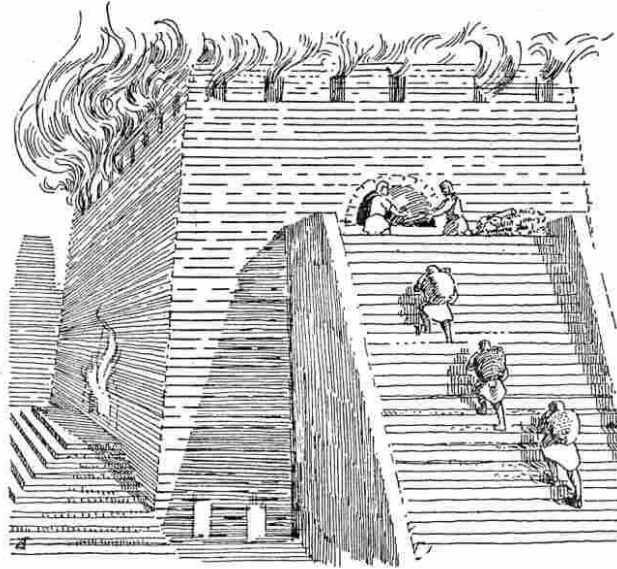
# LOYALTY PROCLAMATIONS



The music played- everybody bowed down- EXEPT Daniel's 3 friends, Shadrack, Meshach, and Abednego! They would not worship any other god than the TRUE GOD!

## THE FIERY FURNACE

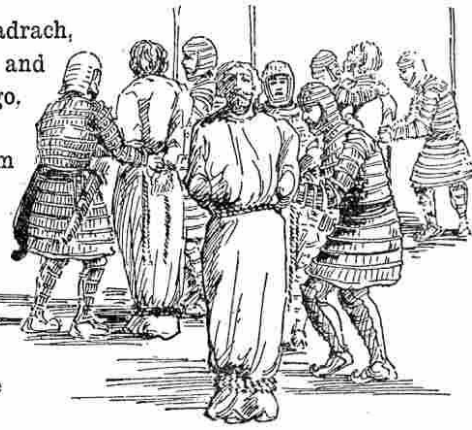
Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the



one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his



to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were



in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were



Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those



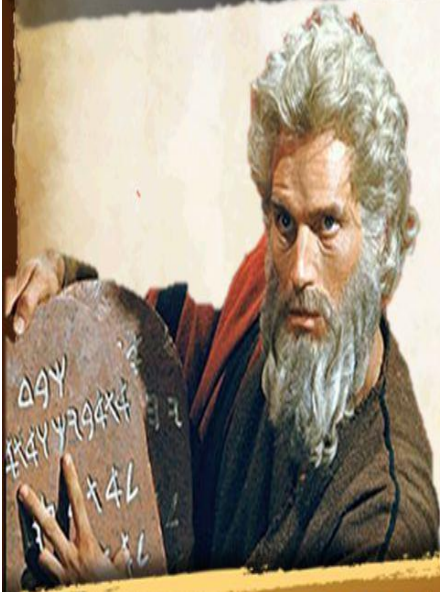
that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

# SERIOUS SPEECH & SWEARING

## The Sermon On The Mount

12

### Law of Moses Governing Vows & Honesty -



#### **Matthew 5:33 (NKJV)**

33 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.'

False swearing was condemned as an abuse of the name of God:

Ecclesiastes 5:1-5 (NKJV)

4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed-- 5 Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.




## SING PRAISES TO JEHOVAH'S NAME DAY AFTER DAY

How many of the vows that we have you made to God—one, two, or three? You surely realize that your vows should not be treated lightly. The failure to keep one's word to Jehovah & to pay a vow may have serious consequences. So let us happily 'sing praises to Jehovah's name forever as we pay our vows day after day.'

*It is a snare for a man to cry out rashly, "Holy!"  
And only later to give consideration to what he vowed.  
(Proverbs 20:25)*

*Do not allow your mouth to cause you to sin, and  
do not say before the angel that it was a mistake.  
Why make the true God indignant over what you  
say so that he has to destroy the work of your hands?  
(Ecclesiastes 5:6)*

*Then I will sing praises to your name forever  
As I pay my vows day after day.  
(Psalm 61:8)*




*Return to the Covenant*

**Deu 23:21** *When you make a vow to יהוה your Elohim, do not delay to pay it, for יהוה your Elohim is certainly requiring it of you, and it shall be sin in you.*

**Deu 23:22** *But when you abstain from vowing, it is not sin in you.*

**Deu 23:23** *That which has gone from your lips you shall guard and do, for you voluntarily vowed to יהוה your Elohim what you have promised with your mouth.*

A close-up photograph of a dragonfly with transparent wings and a yellow and black body, resting on a delicate spider web. The background is a dark, warm brown color.

It is a trap to dedicate something rashly and only later to consider one's vows.

**Proverbs 20:25**

## *Oath of Allegiance to the Roman Emperor and Family*

*"I swear by Zeus, Earth, Sun, all the gods [and] goddesses, and by Augustus himself, that I will be loyal to Caesar Augustus and his children and descendants for all the time of my [life], in word, deed and thought, considering as friends whomever they consider so, and reckoning as enemies whomsoever they themselves judge to be so; and that in their interests I shall spare neither body nor soul nor life nor children, but in every way for those things that pertain to them I shall endure every danger; and that if I see or hear anything hostile to them being either said or planned or carried out, this I will reveal and shall be the enemy of [the man] who is saying or planning or doing any of these things. And whomsoever they themselves may judge to be their enemies, these I will pursue and defend them against, by land and sea, by sword and steel.*

*But if I do anything contrary to this [oath] or do not conform to the letter with the oath I swore, I myself bring down on myself and my body, soul and life, and on my children and all my family and all that belongs to me utter and total destruction down to my every last connection [and] all my descendants."*

*(Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae 8781)*

# Oaths

Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time. Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:

‘But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne:

Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.

Neither shalt thou swear by the head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.’ (Matthew 5:33-37).

The problem of oaths is a perplexing one. It is a subject concerning which great extremes are both practiced and taught. All around us many of our friends, including, tragically, even little children, engage in the most frivolous and profane swearing imaginable. Opposite them are many, both of Christians and sectarians, who hold the position that it is wrong to utter an oath for any reason, even in a solemn legal or religious setting. What did Jesus teach concerning the use of oaths?



In order to comprehend the doctrine of the Master, we must understand the words he used. Three terms in Matt. 5:33-37 are of particular importance: “for swear,” “oaths,” and “swear.” To “for swear “oneself is “to swear falsely, to undo one’s swearing” (W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, II, 126). An “oath” is

An appeal to God in attestation of the truth of a statement or of the binding character of a promise . . . . Sometimes the appeal was to the sovereign or other sacred object (John D. Davis, *Davis Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 570).

To “swear” is to affirm, promise, threaten, with an oath . . . to call a person or thing as witness, to invoke (J.H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 444).

Thus, when some crude boor exclaims “By. . ., I’m going to bash your head in!”, he has sworn an oath, in this case a frivolous one; thus, he is guilty of profanity, having made the name of God common. If he fails to “bash” in the head of the object of his wrath, he has forsworn himself, having failed to consummate the threat he made under oath. However, when one solemnly swears under oath in a court of law to tell the truth, he is still swearing, although he would not be guilty of profanity. The fact that he might use the term “affirm” as a substitute for the word “swear” does not alter the fact that he has sworn, since he affirmed under oath. If one were to affirm:

For God is my witness . . . that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, he would have uttered a solemn, religious oath.

Furthermore, to understand the law of the Lord relative to oaths, one must be familiar with the Old Testament law concerning oaths and the Jewish tradition about swearing. This is because, although the statement Christ references in verse 33 is nowhere found in the Old Testament, is a fair summary of the law of Moses pertaining to oaths (cf. Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Deut. 23:21-23). Also, in verses 34-36, Jesus made reference to the Jewish tradition about swearing.

Moses demanded that, in swearing, people should use the name of God rather than those of idols (Deut. 6:13-15). In swearing, they should be truthful and perform what they had sworn to do (Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Deut. 23:21-23). This ordinance emphasized the importance of truthfulness and the fact that the Lord was the only true God.

Two Jewish traditions had grown up with the backing of tradition.

The first was what might be called frivolous swearing, taking an oath where no oath was necessary or proper. It had become far too common a custom to introduce a statement by saying, 'By thy life,' or, 'By my head,' or, 'May I never see the comfort of Israel if.'

The second Jewish custom was in some ways even worse than that; it might be called evasive swearing. The Jews divided oaths into two classes, those which were absolutely binding and those which were not.

Any oath which contained the name of God was absolutely binding; any oath which succeeded in evading the name of God was not held to be binding.

The result was that if a man swore by the name of God in any form, he would rigidly keep that oath; but if he swore by heaven, or by earth, or by Jerusalem, or by his head, he felt quite free to break that oath. The result was that evasion had been brought to a fine art (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1, 156-157). (cf. Matthew 23:16-17)

The reference of the Master in verse 33 indicates he dealt with the law of Moses itself and the abuse not specifically condemned by the law, i.e., frivolous swearing. The mention of kinds of swearing in verses 34-36 demonstrates Christ taught about evasive swearing. Thus, he dealt both with Moses' law and Jewish tradition.

Does the Lord, in this sweeping prohibition, condemn even the judicial oaths in a court of law and oaths taken under solemn religious situations? I don't believe so, and I believe the following considerations will substantiate this position. God himself has sworn by himself (Heb. 3:11, 18; 6:13; 7:21). It is our highest goal to be like God (2 Peter 1:4), for His character is moral perfection (Matt. 5:48). Also, Jesus Christ Himself, the very propounder of this law concerning oaths, took a solemn judicial oath when he testified before the Jewish council (Matthew 26:63-64; "Adjure" means "to demand testimony under oath" Thayer, p. 453).

Certainly, Christ is our example of conduct (1 Peter 2:21; Luke 6:40) as the revelation in His own person of the Father, so far as His character is concerned (John 14:7-11). The angel of God who appeared to John made a solemn religious oath (Rev. 10:5-6). The apostle Paul made several oaths of a serious, spiritual nature (Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 1:20; Phil. 1:8), and He is our example of conduct (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 2 Thess. 3:7, 9).

To understand the Lord's prohibition, we must realize its context. For example, in 2 Cor. 5:18 Paul declared, "All things are of God." Does this mean everything imaginable, including sin, emanates from God? No! The context is of the plan of human redemption, and the apostle was simply affirming that the entirety of that scheme of salvation originated with God.

Even so, "swear not at all" is limited by the context. Swearing is absolutely prohibited under the conditions described in the specific context. The Old Testament allowed frivolous swearing (verse 33), so long as God's name was used and the oaths was kept. Jewish tradition approved evasive swearing (verses 34-36), as long as the Lord's name was not employed. The Lord condemned frivolous oaths and evasive oaths, but he did not forbid solemn and truthful judicial oaths or religious oaths.

Two great principles stand behind the Master's doctrine here. The Christian must maintain a high and solemn regard for truth and never use any excuse to lie (Eph. 4:25). Furthermore, he must hold the name of God in the most profound reverence and never use it lightly, thus profaning that high and holy name (Heb. 12:28-29; Rev. 4:8, 11).

Each of these principles should be deeply rooted in the heart of every Christian and bear acceptable fruit in his life. In cultivating the beautiful fruit of honesty and reverence toward God in our speech, we eradicate the weeds of profanity (frivolous swearing), conversational oaths and lies.

Why did the Lord thus prohibit swearing? The Master gives two reasons. All oaths, ultimately, involve God and are, therefore, just as binding as one in which God's name is specifically mentioned (verses 34-36). The four categories Jesus mentioned encompass anything a Jew would call to witness. They include the spiritual, natural, national and personal spheres. An oath by heaven involved God because it is His throne (cf. Matthew 23:22). An oath by the earth involved the Father because it is His footstool (cf. Isa. 66:1). An oath by Jerusalem involved God, since it was in a special way His own city (cf. Psalm 48). Even an oath by one's own head involved God. To swear by one's own head is to swear by one's life. Our lives and even their conditions, including the aging process (black or white hair), is in God's hands. No matter by what one swears God is involved. To swear frivolously by anything is to profane God. To swear falsely by anything is to lie against God.

Another reason we should not so swear is that such swearing "cometh of evil" (verse 37; "is of the evil one" -American Standard Version; cf. James 5:12). Satan is the father of lies and liars (Gen. 3:1-4; John 8:44; Acts 5:3), and to swear falsely is to follow Satan. Furthermore, when the devil denied God's word and accused the Lord of bad motives (Gen. 3:4-5), he became the first to profane God. Thus, those who use profanity are following Satan.

What does profane and false swearing do for any one? It does not cause them to be any more believed. One who would violate the law of the Lord concerning oaths would also transgress his commands pertaining to lies. It does not cause a person to be any more highly thought of. Even people of the world generally agree that swearing is boorish and ill-mannered.

Profane and false swearing never helped any one, but only causes further trouble and disgust. It seems that, upon all the hooks with which Satan catches men to their destruction, he has placed a bait, except the hook of false profane swearing. Swearing is the empty hook with which Satan catches men. Only a fool is so caught!

The solution of this problem lies in the heart. Truth and reverence for God should be so firmly enthroned in the heart that they reign supreme in our daily conversations. One with such an attitude will be so truthful that people will accept his simple “yes” or “no” as better than a signed bond or a thousand oaths. Of him it will be said, “His word is his bond.” His proven character will be the strongest possible affirmation of the verity of his words.

Just speak the truth always and shun profane and false swearing. Anything other than this is of Satan.

Truth Magazine XXIII: 28, pp. 453-455

## 1.2. Oaths as Speech Acts

It is necessary before embarking on this study to review what an oath is. An oath may involve an assertion (whether an affirmation or a denial) concerning a state of affairs in the past or present. It may also involve a promise of something in the future. But an oath is more than a mere assertion or a mere promise. It also includes a statement of sincerity or earnestness: the person who swears the oath is committed to certain consequences or sanctions. At the very least, an oath (whether assertory or promissory) must satisfy the stakeholders that the person uttering the oath really means what she is asserting or promising.

We cannot proceed too much further on the subject of oaths without addressing the linguistic field of pragmatics and, specifically, speech act theory. This study of the way that language is used in communication is embodied in the title of one of the pioneering works in the field by J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. In a basic sense, any utterance that adheres to a grammar and has some meaning is a speech act. Austin used the term *locution* to refer to utterances on this level (Austin 1962: 94). In addition, every utterance contains within it some force or intention. Austin called this the *illocutionary* act within an utterance (1962: 99). With this, Austin guarded against the facile distinction that philosophers and linguists often made between *descriptive* and *constative* utterances, on the one hand, and *performative* utterances, on the other. Locutionary and illocutionary acts are only abstractions; “every genuine speech act is both” (1962: 147).

Nevertheless, Austin did not abandon the term *performative* but noted that some utterances are clearly more explicit or transparent than others in highlighting the illocutionary force contained within them (1962: 146, 150). The sentence “You are under arrest,” when spoken by an officer to a suspect, is more explicitly performative than the sentence “The suspect was arrested.”

In this study of Biblical Hebrew oaths, it may be necessary to invoke the term *performative* in a limited context for situations in which a speaker is actually represented in the text as uttering an oath. In BH, the performative is generally expressed with the suffix conjugation of the verb—the perfective (Waltke and O’Connor 1990, §30.5.1d). In my study below, I will indicate this use of the perfective by adding “hereby” to the translation.

However, I will endeavor to avoid the gratuitous use of the term *performative* by employing another distinction invoked by philosophers and linguists, the distinction between *use* and *mention*. The most common application of the use-mention distinction is in the employment of conventions such as quotation marks or italics to set apart selected words and phrases. In the previous paragraph, and in this sentence, I *mention* the phrase “You are under arrest.” I am treating the phrase as a thing, contrasting it to another phrase within quotation marks. However, when the phrase is uttered by an officer in an appropriate setting, the officer is *using* the phrase.

Another example of this distinction is in the following pair of sentences:

- (4) Michael was a brilliant scholar.  
“Michael” is a biblical name.

In the first sentence, the proper name is being *used* to refer to a person. In the second sentence, the name is being *mentioned* and referred to as an entity in itself.

We will employ the use-mention distinction in a slightly different way. I will distinguish between passages that *mention* an oath speech act, for example, “Moses swore an oath,” and passages in which a character *uses* an oath, for example, “I hereby swear that I did not do it.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Conklin, B. (2011). [Oath Formulas in Biblical Hebrew](#). (M. O’Connor & C. L. Miller, Eds.) (Vol. 5, pp. 2–3). Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.

## Swearing

The function of this authenticator is fairly straightforward and does not depend on the etymology of the verb *šb'* 'to swear', which is still a matter of uncertainty. The explicit use of a verb of swearing in the appropriate context puts the oath-taker in a legally binding state, subject to the penalties and sanctions for breaking an oath.

There are three categories here: the first involves linguistic mention, and the latter two involve linguistic use. The first category includes the mention of the verb *šb'* 'to swear' in the narrative context but not within the utterance of the oath itself (§2.3.1). The second category is the use of the verb *šb'* in the actual performance of an oath (§2.3.2). The third category is the use of *šb'* in spoken adjurations (§2.3.3), which differs from the second category only in that one party is imposing an oath on another rather than taking an oath him/herself.

### 2.3.1. Mention of the Verb *šb'* in the Narrative Context

In this section, we find examples of oaths introduced by the common verb for swearing in Hebrew. The verb is not part of the performance of the oath itself. In some cases (Gen 24 and Num 32), the oath that follows consists solely of the content of the oath. In the last example cited here (1 Sam 19), the quoted oath includes another authenticating element, the "life of X" formula. (see also Deut 1:34–35; Josh 14:9; 1 Sam 28:10; 2 Sam 3:35; 1 Kgs 1:13, 17, 29–30; 2:8, 23; Isa 14:24; Jer 4:2, 5:2, 12:16; Hos 4:15; Amos 8:14; Ps 132:2–4; Neh 13:25; Dan 12:7).

- (32) Gen 24:37–38  
**wayyašbi'enî** ... 'im-lo' 'el-bêṭ-ʿōḇî teleḵ wə'el-mišpaḥtî wəlōqəḥtə 'iššō<sup>h</sup> liḇnî.  
**My master made me swear:** "... if you do not go to the house of my father and to my clan and get a wife for my son, [may you be cursed]" (i.e., you must go).
- (33) Num 32:10–11  
**wayyihar-'ap yhw h bayyôm hahû' wayyiššōḇa'** le'mor 'im-yir'û hō'anošîm ... 'eṭ hō'āḏōmō<sup>h</sup>.  
**At that time, Yahweh became angry and swore:** "If (those) men see ... the land ..., [may I be cursed]" (i.e., [they] will not see the land).
- (34) 1 Sam 19:6  
**wayyiššōḇa' šō'ûl** ḥay-yhw 'im-yûmōṭ.  
**Saul swore:** "(By) the life of Yahweh, [I swear that,] if he is killed, [may I be cursed]" (i.e., he will not be killed).

### 2.3.2. Use of the Verb *šb'* within an Oath

In this section, all forms of the verb are in the Niphal stem. All but one are Perfect (Imperfect in Gen 21:24). They are all either in the first person, or God is referring to himself in the third person (God is the speaker in 13/15 of these texts). In all but two (Gen 21:24, 1 Sam 3:14) the person or thing by whom one swears is preceded by the preposition *bə*. It is generally accepted that swearing 'on' or 'by' X, when the preposition *bə* is attached to X, signifies that X is being put



at risk for the sake of affirming the veracity of the oath. In one text, a human speaker swears by Yahweh (2 Sam 19:8). Among the 12 texts in which God swears by something, in 4 he swears *bî* ‘by myself’. In others, he swears “by his right hand and his strong arm,” “by my great name,” “by his soul” (2×), “by his/my holy place” (2×), “by the Pride of Jacob,” and “by my anger”<sup>6</sup> (see also Gen 21:24; Isa 45:23; 62:8; Jer 44:26; 49:13; 51:14; Amos 4:2; 6:8; 8:7; Ps 95:11).

(35) Gen 22:16–17

**bî nišba tî nə’um-yhwh** kî ya’an ’ašer ’ošîṭo ’et-haddəḅor hazze<sup>h</sup> wəlo’ ḥośakto ’et-binəko ’et-yəḥîdeko kî ḅorek ’aḅorekəko wəharbo<sup>h</sup> ’arbe<sup>h</sup> ’et-zar’akko.

“**I hereby swear by myself,**” declares Yahweh, “that, because you have done this thing and have not spared your firstborn son, I will bless you and I will multiply your seed.”

(36) 1 Sam 3:14

**nišba tî ləḅēt elî** ’im-yiṭkapper ’awon bēt-elî.

**I hereby swear to the house of Eli** [that,] if the guilt of the house of Eli will ever be atoned for, [may I be cursed] (i.e., [it] will never be atoned for).

(37) 2 Sam 19:8

**bayhwh nišba tî kî-’ênəko yōše’** ’im-yolîn ’iš ’ittəko hallaylo<sup>h</sup>.

**I hereby swear by Yahweh that,** (if) you do not go out, (then) if anyone stays the night with you, [may I be cursed] (i.e., no one will stay the night if you do not go out).

(38) Jer 22:5

wə’im lo’ ṭišmə’û ’et-haddəḅorîm ḥo’ellə<sup>h</sup> **bî nišba tî nə’um-yhwh** kî-ləḅorbo<sup>h</sup> yihye<sup>h</sup> habbayiṭ hazze<sup>h</sup>.

“If they do not listen to these words, **I hereby swear by myself,**” declares Yahweh, “that this house will become a ruin.”

(39) Ps 89:36

’aḥat **nišba tî ḅəqəḏšî** ’im-ləḅwid ’akazzeḅ.

One thing **I hereby swear by my holiness [that],** if I lie to David, [may I be cursed] (i.e., I will not lie).

### 2.3.3. Use of the Verb *šb’* within an Adjuration

An adjuration is one party soliciting an oath from another party or placing another under oath. Seven of the texts above use the preposition *bə* to mark the person or thing by whom one swears, and only in two (Song 2:7 and 3:5), is it something other than a deity. It is also of interest to note that in none of these texts is the complementizer *ky* used; but another substantive marker is used in three texts, *šr*; and in two of the passages, another particle is used, *mh*, parallel with the conditional particle *’m*, which results in a negative oath.

The four examples where someone solicits an oath from another person employ volitive forms in the Niphal stem followed by *lî*, the preposition with the first-person pronominal suffix (see also 1 Sam 30:15; 1 Kgs 1:51).

- (40) Gen 21:23  
 wə'attə<sup>h</sup> **hiššəbə'ə<sup>h</sup> lî be'lohîm** hennə<sup>h</sup> 'im-tišqor lî ûlənî<sup>nî</sup> ûlənəkḏî.  
 So, **swear to me here by God** [that,] if you break treaty with me or with my descendents or with my progeny, [may you be cursed] (i.e., you will not break treaty).
- (41) 1 Sam 24:22  
**hiššəbə'ə<sup>h</sup> lî bayhwh** 'im-takrîṭ 'et-zar'î 'ah<sup>a</sup>rcəy wə'im-tašmîḏ 'et-šəmî mibbêt 'əbî.  
**Swear to me by Yahweh** [that,] if you cut off my descendants (lit.: my seed after me) or if you exterminate my name from the house of my father, [may you be cursed] (i.e., you will not cut off ... or exterminate).

The remaining seven adjurations involve one person placing another under oath. These are in the Hiphil stem, and they all take an object either as a suffix or using the definite direct-object marker 'et. (see also Gen 24:3–4; Song 3:5, 5:8, 8:4; 2 Chr 18:15).

- (42) 1 Kgs 22:16  
 'aḏ-kammə<sup>h</sup> pə'əmîm 'anî mašbî'əkə 'ašer lo'-təḏabber 'elay raq-'emət bəšem yhwh?  
**How many times (must) I adjure you that** you must tell me only the truth in the name of Yahweh?
- (43) Song 2:7  
**hišba tî 'etkem bənôt yərūšalayim bišəbə'ot 'ô bə'aylôt haššəde<sup>h</sup>** 'im-tə'îrû wə'im-tə'ôrərû 'et-hə'ah<sup>a</sup>ḏə<sup>h</sup> 'aḏ šetehpəṣ.  
**I hereby adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and the does of the field** [that,] if you arouse or if you awaken love until it is willing, [may you be cursed] (i.e., do not arouse or awaken love).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Conklin, B. (2011). [Oath Formulas in Biblical Hebrew](#). (M. O'Connor & C. L. Miller, Eds.) (Vol. 5, pp. 18–22). Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.

## Invocation of Witness(es)

The invocation of witnesses is fairly self-evident as a means of authenticating an oath and finds many parallels in the cognate literature, particularly in treaty curses. A third party will bear witness to the actions of the contracting parties, thus motivating them to keep their oath under pains of perjury.

The first three texts use the noun 'ed 'witness' in the predicate position. In the third (Jer 42:5), the noun is a complement to the imperfect jussive form of *hyh* 'to be'.

- (27) Gen 31:52  
'ed haggal hazze<sup>h</sup> wə'ed<sup>h</sup> hammaššeḇ<sup>h</sup> 'im-'ōnî (lo' )-'ε'εḇor 'ele<sup>h</sup>ḵo ... wə'im-'atto<sup>h</sup> (lo')-  
ta<sup>a</sup>ḇor'elay.  
**This pile is a witness, and the mašebah is a witness**, if I cross over to you, [may I be  
cursed] (i.e., I will not cross over) ... and if you cross over to me, [may you be cursed] (i.e.,  
you will not cross over).

The translation here has ignored the two negative particles, *lo'*, in the text, the presence of which make the meaning of the text incomprehensible and therefore are considered corruptions.

- (28) 1 Sam 12:5  
'ed yhw<sup>h</sup> bəḵem wə'ed məšihō hayyôm hazze<sup>h</sup> kî lo' məšō'tem bəyōdî mə'ûmō<sup>h</sup>.  
**Yahweh is a witness against you, and his anointed one is a witness** this day that you have  
not found anything in my hand.
- (29) Jer 42:5  
yāhî yhw<sup>h</sup> bōnū lə'ed 'εmεṭ wāne'εmōn 'im-lo' kəḵol-haddōḇor 'āšer yišlōḥ<sup>a</sup>ḵo yhw<sup>h</sup> 'εlohe<sup>h</sup>ḵo  
'elēnū ken na'<sup>a</sup>šē<sup>h</sup>.  
**May Yahweh be a true and faithful witness for us**, if we do not act in accordance with  
everything Yahweh your God sent you to (tell) us, [may we be cursed] (i.e., we will act).

The last two texts use verbs of perception, the subject of which are Yahweh, followed by the preposition *bên* 'between'. The first features the jussive form of the verb *šph* 'to observe', and the second uses a participle from *šm'* 'to hear' as a predicate complementing the main verb, the imperfect indicative form of *hyh*.

- (30) Gen 31:49–50  
yīšep yhw<sup>h</sup> bēnî ūḇēneḵo ... 'im-tə'anne<sup>h</sup> 'εt-bənoṭay wə'im-tiqqaḥ nōšim 'al-bənoṭay.  
**May Yahweh keep watch between me and you**, if you oppress my daughters and if you  
take wives in addition to my daughters, [may you be cursed] (i.e., you must not oppress  
[them] or take wives in addition to [them]).
- (31) Judg 11:10  
yhw<sup>h</sup> yihye<sup>h</sup> šome<sup>a</sup> bēnōtēnū 'im-lo' ḵiḡəḇorəḵo ken na'<sup>a</sup>šē<sup>h</sup>.  
**Yahweh will be a witness [lit.: one who hears] between us**, if we do not act in accordance  
with your proposal, [may we be cursed] (i.e., we will act).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Conklin, B. (2011). [Oath Formulas in Biblical Hebrew](#). (M. O'Connor & C. L. Miller, Eds.) (Vol. 5, pp. 17–18). Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.

## Oaths Marked with *ky*

Profane and vulgar swearing is often referred to as the use of “four-letter words.” In matters of real legal importance, words of even fewer letters can become the subject of dispute. Perhaps the most infamous recent example was a U.S. President’s attempt to answer a question about his actions, under oath, by stating, “It depends on what the meaning of the word *is* is.” The meaning of a large class of oaths in Biblical Hebrew hangs on the interpretation of another two-letter word.

We have seen that the majority of oaths in Biblical Hebrew are formulated as the protasis of a conditional sentence with an elided apodosis. The other means of marking oaths is through the use of the particle *ky*. In this chapter, I will begin by summarizing the secondary literature on the function of this particle as it occurs in all contexts in Hebrew—some 4,500 times in Biblical Hebrew alone. Then I will present the results of my own study of 1 Samuel, in which we find the particle *ky* about 250 times. Based on these semantic and morphosyntactic findings, I will attempt to place the function of this particle as it is used in oaths within the larger context of the particle.

### 4.1. Summary of *ky* Syntax from Secondary Literature

Clausal order gives us the first syntactical clue for the interpretation of the particle *ky*. In a relatively small percentage of cases, the *ky* clause precedes the main clause and marks a circumstantial clause with a conditional (“if”), temporal (“when”), or causal (“since”) nuance. In casuistic discourse, for example, in the legal material of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, *ky* may be used to mark a more general condition in a series, with subsequent specific cases beginning with *'m*. More often, however, we find the circumstantial *ky* clause introduced by one of the *waw*-consecutive conjugations of the verb *hyh*, a common circumstantial construction, followed by the main clause.

More commonly, the *ky* clause follows the clause to which it relates. If it follows a negative clause, the context may require the translation as adversative, ‘but, rather’. This usage is plausibly a subset of the causal function (below). If it follows a verb of speech, sense, or one of the various aspects of cognition (e.g., belief, regret, memory), the *ky* serves as a complementizer to this verb, for example: ‘he knew *that* ...’. The particle may also be used to mark the apodosis of a conditional or other compound clause. The large balance of *ky* clauses fits roughly into the category normally labeled *causal*. Claassen makes a good start at unraveling this broad category by showing the various types of causal relations that *ky* clauses can represent, including evidence, reason, and motivation.

Within this latter subcategory of motivation, he includes clauses that exemplify or provide parenthetical information about the preceding clause, and here he also treats the use of *ky* after questions—for example, in Ps 8:5, “What is man *that* you are mindful of him?” This use of the particle after questions is sometimes called *consecutive*.

There are 46 oaths that use the particle *ky*. Most of them do not readily fall into any of these categories. Schoors believes that a large number of *ky* clauses are *emphatic*, and under this banner he places oaths, along with *ky* marking apodoses of conditional sentences, and adversatives. Though these categories are clearly identifiable by the kind of clause that precedes the *ky* clause (an authenticating formula, a protasis, and a negative clause, respectively), the different meanings or functions of the *ky* in the subsequent clauses are not successfully elucidated by the single term *emphatic*. Aejmelaeus recognizes a much smaller number of emphatic uses of *ky*, and primary among them, in her opinion, are the oaths. Likewise, Follingstad cites the *ky* in oaths as the primary case in which the emphatic/asseverative function cannot be abandoned. Bandstra does not resort to the asseverative explanation, but his preference for seeing *ky* in oaths as either causal or adversative is not clearly or convincingly argued. Claassen would place the oaths within the “motivational” subset of the causal functions of *ky*, but he does not elaborate on how this would work. The only thing that is clear from this summary is that the use of *ky* in oaths is in need of a fresh look.

### 4.3. Oath Content Introduced by *ky*

There are 46 passages that mark oath content with *ky*. In all of these, the *ky* follows the authenticator, which is the clause to which it relates, and therefore, on the basis of clausal order alone, the circumstantial and conditional functions of *ky* are not likely, and indeed these functions do not make sense in any of the contexts. In only 8 of the texts does the function of the *ky* clearly fit into one of the functions outlined above. This function is the complementizer of the predicate (§4.3.1). In 7 texts, the predicate is the verb *šb* ‘to swear’, and in 1, the predicate is a nominal clause (1 Sam 12:5). However, in the majority of texts (38), the function of the particle is not readily apparent.

The consensus view is that the particle *ky* in Biblical Hebrew oaths is asseverative in function, ‘surely, indeed’. Even among the scholars who more recently have argued against the widespread attestation of this function of the particle (see §4.1 above), oaths remain the lone context in which this function is still deemed necessary. Were it not for oaths, there would be no reason to claim this function for the particle at all. Indeed, the asseverative function for a *k*-particle is not established with certainty in any Northwest Semitic language. The asseverative function is easy to propose because it works semantically. And it works semantically because the meaning ‘surely, indeed’ adds so little to the sentence. But in the absence of corroborating data for this function of the particle, we may be on better footing by looking at the well-established functions of the particle. Claassen has suggested that the function of *ky* in oaths may be found within the motivational function of the particle, a subset of the causal function. Claassen does not define the motivational function, but the relationship of the clause marked by *ky* to the preceding clause may be captured by translating the particle with the phrase “the motivation for the previous statement is....”

Claassen identifies three variations on this. The first is used with questions; a question is asked, followed by a clause marked by *ky*, meaning “the motivation for asking this question is...” Another kind of motivation he describes as “unfolding the particulars which exemplify it”; that is, the *ky* clause provides particular instances of a preceding general statement. The third nuance of motivation focuses on a particular word or phrase and “provides parenthetical information” about that word or phrase. It is clear that the *ky* clause does not logically provide a *motive* (much less a reason, explanation, or evidence) for the preceding clause. If anything, the preceding clause—the authenticating formula—provides a motivation for the *ky* clause. Motivation is the very essence of authentication. The logic of the situation renders the motivational function unlikely as well as the other causal subfunctions.

The final option that is before us is the function of the particle *ky* that occurs in 22% of *ky* clauses we surveyed in 1 Samuel (§4.2). It is the second most-common function behind the broad causal function and the only function of *ky* identified with certainty in any of the oaths in our corpus: *ky* as the complementizer of a predicate. We have 7 oaths that use the verb *šb* ‘to swear’ and 1 nominal clause where *ky* functions as a complementizer (§4.3.1). Given the elliptical nature of oaths, it is not a stretch to hypothesize that the verb ‘to swear’ is elided in the other 38 texts, leaving the complementizer *ky* to stand for it (§4.3.2). A phenomenon that seems to confirm this conclusion is that, when the verb *šb* is present, no other authenticating element is present (§4.3.1); but when the verb is elided, another authenticating formula is always present (§4.3.2). We might say that the swearing verb is not elided without the void’s being filled with another authenticator. The converse is also true: when the swearing verb is present, there is no other authenticator present.

#### 4.3.3.1. Resumptive *ky*

In 4 of the 8 texts with a resumptive *ky*, the oath itself consists of a full conditional sentence, and the second *ky* marks the apodosis of this condition (§4.3.3.1.1). The conditional sentence following the *ky* in oaths represents one of the more complicated syntactical scenarios in the entire oath corpus. We investigate this phenomenon below in §4.3.3.2. These 4 examples are included in that discussion as well. In the other 4 texts, the second *ky* marks the apodosis of a compound sentence (§4.3.3.1.2).

#### 4.3.3.2. Full or Partial Conditional Clause within *ky* Clause

Even in oaths with the content marked by the particle *ky*, the conditional sentence is not far from consideration. Twelve of these oaths, over 25%, use a full or partial conditional construction to express the content of the oath. Because of the relatively large number of these cases, and because it is easy to misunderstand the complicated syntax involved, it is important to understand this subclass of oaths. Furthermore, a grasp of the issues involved here will help us consider the mistaken identification of the compound particle *ky-’m* as an oath formula (§5.3 below). Table 5 summarizes the conditional elements in the *ky*-type oaths.

#### 4.3.3.2.4. Conditional Particle 'm in Protasis; Apodosis Is Elided

A conditional protasis with the apodosis elided is the classical construction of the conditional oaths as described in ch. 3. The only difference is that in the examples that follow, it is preceded by the complementizer *ky* (see also Num 14:21–23). The BHS editors note in 2 Sam 3:35 that the Syriac version reads *ly* ‘to me’ instead of *ky*. However, the Peshitta translator(s) consistently added this preposition + pronominal suffix element to the end of the “thus will God do” formula. Furthermore, the translation of *ky* is often omitted in the Peshitta when the particles *ky* and 'm are juxtaposed and function as independent particles (see §5.3 below). Thus the *ly* in Syriac has nothing to do with the Hebrew *ky* at all.

Our ability to identify unmarked protases and apodoses in this and the following sections is made much easier when these examples are analyzed in the framework of the oath structure that has been developed above. Because there are 9 oaths marked by *ky* that have a clearly marked protasis, the texts that are unmarked are possible to identify.

## Conclusion

The elusive function of the particle *ky* in oaths—in part because of its elusiveness—has come to bear the dubious burden of the so-called emphatic or asseverative function of the particle, meaning ‘surely’ or ‘indeed’. I have shown that there is no need to resort to this all-too-convenient explanation for *ky* in oaths. The function of *ky* as a complementizer is amply attested among these oaths: ‘I swear *that ...*’. It is reasonable to hypothesize that in other oaths where the function of *ky* is not so clear, the verb for swearing is elided and left implicit. The content of the oath in many of these oaths marked by *ky* exhibits complex syntax, including full or partial conditional clauses in which the apodoses are expressed in the form of a conditional protasis with an elided apodosis. I have provided an analysis of the complicated syntax of these difficult *ky* clauses.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Conklin, B. (2011). [Oath Formulas in Biblical Hebrew](#). (M. O’Connor & C. L. Miller, Eds.) (Vol. 5, pp. 46–59). Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.

## Mention of Hand-Raising as a Reference to Oath-Taking

The mention of hand-raising in these passages is often referring to a past event. In Deut 32, it is in the present. The expression can be seen as the equivalent of “I swear/swore.” Indeed, the phrases “I raise(d) my hand” and “I swear/swore” could be interchanged in these texts with no loss of meaning. The person(s) to or for whom the oath is uttered are usually indicated with the /-preposition, though in Deut 32 the preposition *’el* is employed. With the exception of Deut 32, in each of the texts in this section, the essential content of the oath is spelled out in an infinitival construct phrase, for example, “to give” in Exod 6:8 and “to bring them” in Ezek 20:6 (see also Num 14:30; Ezek 20:15, 23, 28, 42; 47:14; Neh 9:15):

- (21) Exod 6:8  
wəheḇe’*tî* ’eṭṭkem ’el-ho’*reṣ* ’ašer **nāśa’*tî* ’eṭ-yaḏî ləteṭ ’oṭṭh** lə’abrōḥōm ləyišḥoq  
ûləya’*aqob*.  
And I will bring you to the land **(concerning) which I raised my hand to give** to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- (22) Deut 32:40–41  
kî-’**éśśo’ ’el-šamayim yaḏî wə’omartî** ḥay ’onoḵî lə’olōm ’im-šannōtî  
bəraq ḥarbî wəto’*hez* bəmišpōṭ yaḏî ... ’ošîḇ ... ’ašallem....  
For **I raise my hand to heaven and say**, “(By) my life forever, [I swear that,] if I sharpen my sword and my hand seizes justice ..., (then) I will requite ... and repay....”
- (23) Ezek 20:5–6  
bəyôm bōḥō’*rî* ḥəyiśro’*el* wə’**éśśo’ yaḏî ləzera’ bêt ya’*aqob*** wə’iwwōḏa’ lōhem bə’*ereṣ*  
mišrōyim wə’**éśśo’ yaḏî lōhem le’*mor*’*nî* yhwḥ** ’*elohêkem* bayyôm hahû’ **nāśa’*tî* yaḏî**  
**lōhem ləhōšî’*om*** me’*ereṣ* mišrōyim.  
When I chose Israel, **I raised my hand to the seed of the house of Jacob** and was made known to them in Egypt; **I raised my hand to them, (saying,)** “**I am Yahweh your God.**” At that time, **I raised my hand to them to bring them** from Egypt.

### 2.1.2. Use of Hand-Raising within the Oath Itself

Most of the examples of this formula above and below employ the verb *nś’* ‘to raise’. In the examples below, the verb occurs in the perfect, as a performative. In Gen 14, another verb is used, the Hiphil perfect of *rwm* ‘to be high’. The prepositional phrase expressing ‘to, for, or against’ whom the hand is being raised is optional, occurring once with *’el* (Gen 14:22) and once with *’al* (Ezek 44:12).

- (24) Gen 14:22–23



**h<sup>a</sup>rîmoṭî yḡḡî 'el-yhwh** 'el 'elyôn qoneh šomayim wə'oreš 'immiḥûṭ wə'ad šərok-na'al wə'im-'eqqaḥ mikḡol-'ašer-ləḡ.

**I hereby raise my hand to Yahweh**, most high god, creator of heaven and earth, [and swear that,] if from thread to sandal thong, if I take anything of yours, [may I be cursed] (i.e., I will not take anything of yours, from thread to sandal thong).

(25) Ezek 36:7

'anî **našə'ṭî 'et-yḡḡî** 'im-lo' haggôyim 'ašer ləḡem missəḡîḡ hemmō<sup>h</sup> kəlimməṭəm yiššə'û.

**I hereby raise my hand** [and swear that,] if the nations around you do not bear their shame, [may I be cursed] (i.e., [they] will bear their shame).

(26) Ezek 44:12

'al-ken **našə'ṭî yḡḡî** 'alêhem nə'um 'adonay yhwh wənašə'û

“Therefore, **I hereby raise my hand against them**,” declares Lord Yahweh, “and [swear that] they will bear their guilt.”

Though it is not an immediate issue with this authenticator, I want to introduce a question now that will become more relevant with the “thus will X do to Y” authenticating element (§2.4). It is clear that the “raising of a hand” authenticator cannot be the apodosis to an oath the content of which is expressed in the form of a conditional protasis, as in Gen 14:22–23 and Ezek 36:7 above. This way of formulating oath content will be the subject of ch. 3. The obvious first point is that such an interpretation of the clauses makes no sense in this context. For example, Gen 14:22–23 would then mean, “If I take anything from you, (then) I raise my hand to heaven.” However, with an authenticator in which such a sentence could make sense, as in §2.4 below, additional points must be considered. The most important of these is the consideration of clause order. In Hebrew, conditional clauses are formed with the protasis preceding the apodosis (see further analysis of conditional clauses in ch. 3). However, the authenticating elements of oaths precede the content of the oaths that they accompany in 99% of cases (there are only 2 exceptions: 1 Sam 20:21 and Ruth 3:13; see §5.1.3.1 below).

More broadly, it is necessary to keep in mind that each of the authenticating elements functions to authenticate the truthfulness of the oath content that follows. Therefore, both conceptually and clausally, the authenticator precedes the utterance of the oath content. It puts the oath-taker into the state of being liable for the consequences of breaking an oath. The content of the oath, regardless of how it is formulated, is distinct from this authenticating element. We will return to this maxim when it becomes more relevant in §2.4, but keeping it in mind as we review each authenticating element will help diffuse any confusion as the syntactical logic becomes more complicated in §2.4 below.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Conklin, B. (2011). [Oath Formulas in Biblical Hebrew](#). (M. O'Connor & C. L. Miller, Eds.) (Vol. 5, pp. 15–17). Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.

# Taking the Lord's Name in Vain

by [Kyle Butt, M.Div.](#)



Any person who has earnestly read the Bible understands that God's Word has much to say about how we use our words. God condemns gossip (1<sup>st</sup> Tim. 5:12-13), lying (Ephesians 4:25), filthy talking (Ephesians 5:4), and a host of other detrimental uses of language. On the other hand, He commends building others up (Ephesians 4:29), telling the truth (Ephesians 4:25), preaching the Gospel (Matthew 28:18-20), and a

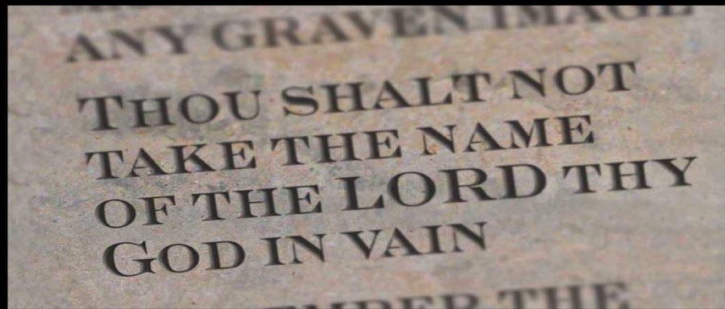
plethora of other constructive uses of our words. In truth, the power of death and life are in the tongue (Proverbs 18:21). It can be used to save, encourage, and build up, or it can be used to kill, destroy, and tear down.

One of the things that the Bible has consistently denounced is the taking of the Lord's name in vain. In fact, one of the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament states: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain" (Exodus 20:7). The word "vain" means "for no reason" or "useless." Thus, God was instructing the Israelites to avoid using His name in a useless, disrespectful way. Instead, the Israelites were supposed to revere the name of God and use it in a serious, considerate way. Many of the ancient Israelites were so respectful of the name of God that they would not even pronounce it or write it for fear of using it in vain. Those who did write it would often throw away the quill they had used, because they thought that any quill that had written God's name was holy and should not be used for regular words.

While it is true that the Ten Commandments in their original form are not binding on people today ([Lyons](#), 2001), it is also true that God continues to be serious about the vain use of His name. In Matthew 12:36-37, Jesus explained: "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned." While Jesus' warning against idle words is broader than just using the Lord's name in vain, it certainly would include that as well.

Unfortunately, many today no longer respect God's name. Not only does the skeptical community misuse and abuse God's name, many of those within Christendom have lost respect for His name as well. One of the most common abuses of God's name is the exclamation, "Oh my God." This phrase is used by millions of people every day who give no thought to God when they are using His name. They say these words in an idle, useless, vain way that shows contempt for God. Both the Old and New Testaments (Colossians 3:8) explain to us that God views this as a sin and will not hold him guiltless who uses His name in such a way. Another common way the Lord's name is abused is in statements of exclamation, such as "Good Lord," or "Lord, no," or "Lord, have mercy." Unfortunately, many who understand the fact that the phrase, "Oh my God" is using the Lord's name in vain, fail to see that saying "Good Lord," without thinking about the Lord, is equally wrong. Notice that Exodus 20:7 says not to take the name of "the Lord your God in vain." That verse includes both the terms "Lord" and "God."

Since the Bible explains that Satan is the "god of this world," it only makes sense that he would incorporate things into culture that are sinful and wrong. The cultural acceptance of the phrases "Oh my God," "Good Lord," "Lord have mercy," and a host of vain uses of the Lord God's name is exactly what we should expect from the world's sinful culture. We should remember, however that Christians are not to conform themselves to the sinful mold of this world (Romans 12:1-2). Instead, Christians are called to live a life of reverence to God and obedience to His Word. Let us all carefully consider what comes out of our mouths and determine that we will not use the Lord God's name in vain.



Exodus 20:7

## Misusing God's Name

GOD'S LAST NAME IS NOT

Exodus 20:7 **BECAUSE** you shall 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."

### ◀ Exodus 20:7 ▶

#### Exodus 20 Interlinear

3808 [e]	3588 [e]	7723 [e]	430 [e]	3068 [e]	8034 [e]	853 [e]	5375 [e]	3808 [e]
lo	ki	laš-šāw;	'ē lo-he-kā	Yah weh	šēm-	'et-	lāš-šā	lo
לֹא	כִּי	- לְשׂוּא	אֱלֹהֶיךָ	יְהוָה	שֵׁם	אֶת-	תִּשָּׂא	לֹא
not	for	in vain	your God	of the LORD	the name	-	take	not
Adv	Conj	Noun	Noun	Noun	Noun	Acc	Verb	Adv

	7723 [e]	8034 [e]	853 [e]	5375 [e]	834 [e]	853 [e]	3068 [e]	5352 [e]
ρ	laš-šāw.	šə-mōw	'et-	yiš-šā	'ā-Ser-	'et	Yah-weh,	ya-naq-qeh
פ	לְשׂוּא:	שְׁמוֹ	אֶת-	יִשָּׂא	אֲשֶׁר-	אֶת	יְהוָה	יַנְקֶה
-	in vain	his name	-	takes	that	-	the LORD	will hold him guiltless
	Noun	Noun	Acc	Verb	Prt	Acc	Noun	Verb

## Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary

20:3-11 The first four of the ten commandments, commonly called the FIRST table, tell our duty to God. It was fit that those should be put first, because man had a Maker to love, before he had a neighbor to love. It cannot be expected that he should be true to his brother, who is false to his God. The first commandment concerns the object of worship, JEHOVAH, and him only. The worship of creatures is here forbidden. Whatever comes short of perfect love, gratitude, reverence, or worship, breaks this commandment. Whatsoever ye do, do all the glory of God. The second commandment refers to the worship we are to render to the Lord our God. It is forbidden to make any image or picture of the Deity, in any form, or for any purpose; or to worship any creature, image, or picture. But the spiritual import of this command extends much further. All kinds of superstition are here forbidden, and the using of mere human inventions in the worship of God. The third commandment concerns the manner of worship, that it be with all possible reverence and seriousness. **All false oaths are forbidden.** All light appeals to God, **all profane cursing**, is a horrid breach of this command. It matters not whether the word of God, or sacred things, all such-like things break this commandment, and there is no profit, honor, or pleasure in them. The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. The form of the fourth commandment, Remember, shows that it was not now first given, but was known by the people before. One day in seven is to be kept holy. Six days are allotted to worldly business, but not so as to neglect the service of God, and the care of our souls. On those days we must do all our work, and leave none to be done on the sabbath day. Christ allowed works of necessity, charity, and piety; for the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath, Mark 2:27; but all works of luxury, vanity, or self-indulgence in any form, are forbidden. Trading, paying wages, settling accounts, writing letters of business, worldly studies, trifling visits, journeys, or light conversation, are not keeping this day holy to the Lord. Sloth and indolence may be a carnal, but not a holy rest. The sabbath of the Lord should be a day of rest from worldly labor, and a rest in the service of God. The advantages from the due keeping of this holy day, were it only to the health and happiness of mankind, with the time it affords for taking care of the soul, show the excellency of this commandment. The day is blessed; men are blessed by it, and in it. The blessing and direction to keep holy are not limited to the seventh day, but are spoken of the sabbath day.

## Matthew Poole's Commentary

Or, *not carry*, or *not take*, or lift up, to wit, in or into thy mouth, as the phrase is more fully expressed, [Job 4:2](#); [Psalm 16:4](#) 50:16. So men are said to *take up a proverb*, or a lamentation, [Isaiah 14:4](#) [Ezekiel 26:17](#). *The name of the Lord*; not only the proper name of the Lord, but any of his attributes, ordinances, and works, by which God hath made himself known. *In vain*; or *unto vanity*, or *vainly*. Either,

1. Falsely, or in a false oath; thou shalt not swear falsely by the name of the Lord, or not lift up the name of God into thy mouth in an oath to the confirmation of a lie. Or,

2. **In vain**, as we render it, and as the word *schave* is frequently used, as [Job 7:3](#) 15:31 [Psalm 60:11](#) 89:47 [Isaiah 1:13](#). You shall not use the name of God, either in oaths or in common discourse, lightly, rashly, irreverently, or unnecessarily, or without weighty or sufficient cause. Which being a duty enjoined not only in many places of sacred Scripture, but also in the apocryphal **APC Sir 23:15-17**, and even by heathen authors, as Plato in his Book of Laws, and it being evident by the light of nature to man's reason, it were strange if it were not here understood; especially considering that it is most reasonable to take these short laws in the most comprehensive sense, such as this, not the former, is; for the prohibition of using it vainly and rashly doth certainly include that of swearing by it falsely, but this latter doth not include the former. Besides, the former exposition restrains the words to swearing, whereas the words are more general, and speak of any taking God's name into their mouths, either by oaths or any other way. And it becomes not us to set limits to God's words where God hath set none. It is also here to be observed, as well as in the other commands, that when this sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded, to wit, to use the name of God, both in swearing and otherwise, holily, cautiously, and reverently.

**Guiltless**, or, *innocent*, i.e. free from guilt, and the punishment of it: the meaning is, the Lord will look upon him as a guilty person, and will severely punish him. And so this or the like phrase is used [1 Kings 2:9](#). And it is a common figure, called meiosis, where more is understood than is expressed, as [1 Samuel 12:21](#) [Psalm 25:3](#) [Proverbs 10:2](#). And this reason is here added, because sinners of this sort are usually held innocent by men, either because they cannot discover their fault when they forswear themselves, or because they take no care to punish the abusers of God's name by vain and customary oaths, curses, or blasphemies: q.d. Though men spare them, I will assuredly punish them.

"Let **no BAD TALK**  
**come out** of your  
**MOUTHS**  
but only what is *good*  
to **build** others  
and meet their **needs.**"

Ephesians 4:29



**Do not** let any  
**UNWHOLESOME TALK**  
come out of your

**MOUTHS**

but only what is *helpful*  
for building others up  
according to their *needs*  
that it may *benefit*  
those who *listen*

Priority  
Ministries

Ephesians 4:29 NIV

# Barnes' Notes on the Bible

Let no corrupt communication proceed - see the notes on [1 Corinthians 15:33](#). The word rendered "corrupt" (σαπρὸς sapos) means bad, decayed, rotten, and is applied to putrid vegetable or animal substances. Then it is applied to a tree that is of a useless character, that produces no good fruit; [Matthew 7:17](#). Then it is used in a moral sense, as our word "corrupt" is, to denote that which is depraved, evil, contaminating, and may denote here anything that is obscene, offensive, or that tends to corrupt others. The importance of this admonition will be appreciated when it is remembered:

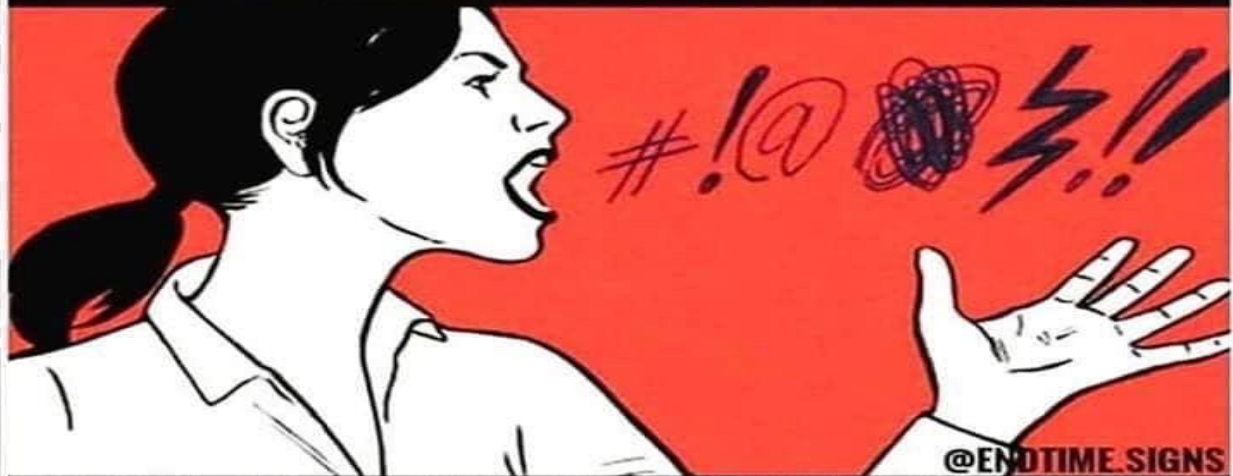
(1) that such obscene and filthy conversation prevailed everywhere, and does still among the pagan. So general is this, that at almost every missionary station it has been found that the common conversation is so corrupt and defiling that missionaries have felt it necessary to send their children home to be educated, in order to secure them from the contaminating influence of those around them.

(2) those who have had the misfortune to be familiar with the common conversation of the lower classes in any community, and especially with the conversation of young men, will see the importance of this admonition. Scarcely anything can be conceived more corrupt or corrupting, than that which often prevails among young men - and even young men in the academies and colleges of this land,

(3) its importance will be seen from the "influence" of such corrupt communications. "The passage of an impure thought through the mind leaves pollution behind it;" the expression of such a thought deepens the pollution on the soul, and corrupts others. It is like retaining an offensive carcass above ground, to pollute the air, and to diffuse pestilence and death, which should at once be buried out of sight. A Christian should be pure in his conversation. His Master was pure. His God is pure. The heaven to which he goes is pure. The religion which he professes is pure. Never should he indulge himself in an obscene allusion: never should he retell anecdotes of an obscene character, or smile when they are retailed by others. Never should he indulge in a jest having a double meaning; never should he listen to a song of this character. If those with whom he associates have not sufficient respect for themselves and him to abstain from such corrupt and corrupting allusions, he should at once leave them.

But that which is good to the use of edifying - Margin, to edify profitably." Greek, "to useful edification:" that is, adapted to instruct, counsel, and comfort others; to promote their intelligence and purity. Speech is an invaluable gift; a blessing of inestimable worth. We may so speak as "always" to do good to others. We may give them some information which they have not; impart some consolation which they need; elicit some truth by friendly discussion which we did not know before, or recall by friendly admonition those who are in danger of going astray. He who talks for the mere sake of talking will say many foolish things; he whose great aim in life is to benefit others, will not be likely to say that which he will have occasion to regret; compare [Matthew 12:36](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:2](#); [Proverbs 10:19](#); [James 1:19](#).

# THE BIBLE ON CUSSING



**EPHESIANS 4:29** - "LET NO CORRUPT COMMUNICATION PROCEED OUT OF YOUR MOUTH, BUT THAT WHICH IS GOOD TO THE USE OF EDIFYING, THAT IT MAY MINISTER GRACE UNTO THE HEARERS."  
**EPHESIANS 5:4** - "LET THERE BE NO FILTHINESS NOR FOOLISH TALK NOR CRUDE JOKING, WHICH ARE OUT PLACE, BUT INSTEAD LET THERE BE THANKSGIVING." SUPPORTING VERSES: PROV 4:24, JAMES 3:10, MATT 12:36, DEUT 5:11, 1 PETER 3:10.

words

words

words

There must be no **filthiness** and **silly talk**, or **coarse jesting**, which are not fitting, **but rather giving of thanks.**

[www.pfl.org](http://www.pfl.org)

~ Ephesians 5:4



# Barnes' Notes on the Bible

Neither filthiness - That is, obscene, or indecent conversation. Literally, that which is shameful, or deformed - αἰσχρότης aischrotēs. The word does not elsewhere occur in the New Testament.

Nor foolish talking - This word - μωρολογία mōrologia - does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament. It means that kind of talk which is insipid, senseless, stupid, foolish; which is not suited to instruct, edify, profit - the idle "chitchat" which is so common in the world. The meaning is, that Christians should aim to have their conversation sensible, serious, sincere - remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, "that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment;" [Matthew 12:36](#).

Nor jesting - εὐτραπελία eutrapelia. This word occurs also nowhere else in the New Testament. It properly means, that which is "well-turned" εὖ eu - well, and τρεπω trepō - to turn); and then that which is sportive, refined, courteous; and then "urbanity, humor, wit; and then jesting, levity" - which is evidently the meaning here. The apostle would not forbid courteousness, or refinement of manners (compare [1 Peter 3:8](#)), and the reference, therefore, must be to that which is light and trifling in conversation; to that which is known among us as jesting. It may be observed:

- (1) that "courteousness" is not forbidden in the Scriptures, but is positively required; [1 Peter 3:8](#).
- (2) "Cheerfulness" is not forbidden - for if anything can make cheerful, it is the hope of heaven.
- (3) "Pleasantry" cannot be forbidden. I mean that quiet and gentle humor that arises from good-nature, and that makes one good-natured in spite of himself.

Such are many of the poems of Cowper, and many of the essays of Addison in the "Spectator" - a benevolent humor which disposes us to smile, but not to be malignant; to be good-natured, but not to inspire levity. But levity and jesting, though often manifested by ministers and other Christians, are as inconsistent with true dignity as with the gospel. Where were they seen in the conversation of the Redeemer? Where in the writings of Paul?

Which are not convenient - That is, which are not fit or proper; which do not become the character of Christians; notes, [Romans 1:28](#). Christians should be grave and serious - though cheerful and pleasant. They should feel that they have great interests at stake, and that the world has too. They are redeemed - not to make sport; purchased with precious blood - for other purposes than to make people laugh. They are soon to be in heaven - and a man who has any impressive sense of that will habitually feel that he has much else to do than to make people laugh. The true course of life is midway between moroseness and levity; sourness and lightness; harshness and jesting. Be benevolent, kind, cheerful, bland, courteous, but serious. Be solemn, thoughtful, deeply impressed with the presence of God and with eternal things, but pleasant, affable, and benignant. Think not a smile sinful; but think not levity and jesting harmless.

But rather giving of thanks - Thanks to God, or praises are more becoming Christians than jesting. The idea here seems to be, that such employment would be far more appropriate to the character of Christians, than idle, trifling, and indelicate conversation. Instead, therefore, of meeting together for low wit and jesting; for singing songs, and for the common discourse which often attends such "gatherings" of friends, Paul would have them come together for the purpose of praising God, and engaging in his service. Human beings are social in their nature; and if they do not assemble for good purposes, they will for bad ones. It is much more appropriate to the character of Christians to come together to sing praises to God, than to sing songs; to pray than to jest; to converse of the things of redemption than to tell anecdotes, and to devote the time to a contemplation of the world to come, than to trifles and nonsense.

18 For when <sup>e</sup>they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that <sup>f</sup>were clean escaped from them who live in error.

19 While they promise them <sup>g</sup>liberty, they themselves are <sup>h</sup>the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

20 For <sup>i</sup>if after they <sup>j</sup>have escaped the pollutions of the world <sup>k</sup>through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.

21 For <sup>l</sup>it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

22 But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, <sup>m</sup>The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and

! Luke  
2:22  
m Pro

3:1  
n ch.  
3:2  
o Jud  
3:3  
p ch.  
3:4  
q Is.  
Jer.  
Ezel  
Mat  
Luk  
3:5  
r Ge  
Ps.  
Heb  
s Ps  
Col.  
3:6  
t Ge  
3:7  
u ve  
v Ma  
2 Ti

## Meyer's NT Commentary

### 2 Peter 2:18. Cf. Judges 1:16.

ὑπέρογκα γὰρ ματαιότητος φθεγγόμενοι] The γὰρ does not serve to explain the figurative words, [2 Peter 2:17](#) (as formerly in this commentary), for, as Hofmann justly says, “the description of their conduct contained in this verse goes far beyond those figurative statements as to their nature.” It must be referred either, with Wiesinger, to the judgment expressed in [2 Peter 2:17](#),

οἷς ... τετηρο. being included,—or, as is done by Hofmann, to the relative clause only; the former is probably the more correct view.[79]

**ΥΠΕΡΟΓΚΟΣ**, “swelling;” in the classics used also of style. **ΜΑΤΑΙΟΤΗΣ** gives the nature of the swelling, high-sounding speeches (“the proud words,” Luther); Luther aptly: “since there is nothing behind them.” The word **ΦΘΕΓΓΟΜΕΝΟΙ** (besides in [Acts 4:18](#), to be found only here and in [2 Peter 2:16](#)) is here the more appropriate that it is used chiefly of loud speaking.

**ΔΕΛΕΑΖΟΥΣΙΝ**] Cf. [2 Peter 2:14](#).

**ἘΝ Ἐπιθυμιαῖς σαρκὸς ἁσελγείαις**] **ἘΝ** is commonly taken as equivalent to **ΔΙΑ**, and **ἁσελγ.** as an apposition to **Ἐπιθ.**: “through the lusts of the flesh, through debauchery” (de Wette, Brückner, Wiesinger, probably Schott too); but thus there is a felt want of a **ΚΑΙ**, or of a second **ἘΝ**, and the **Ἐπιθυμιαῖς** of the seducers, too, are not to be considered as the means of allurements. Hofmann explains: “by means of fleshly lusts, which they awaken in them, through acts of wantonness, the enjoyment of which they hold out to them;” but here relations are introduced to which the text makes no allusion. It is therefore better to take **ἘΝ Ἐπιθυμιαῖς Σ.** as designating the condition of the seducers, and **ἁσελγείαις** as the dat. instrum.: “in the lusts of the flesh (*i.e.* taken in them, governed by them) they allure by voluptuousness those who,” etc.;

Steinfass correctly: “it is part of their ἐπιθ. σαρκ. that they seek to allure the members of the church;” he is wrong, however, when he explains the Ἀσελγείαις as that to which they allure them. Luther translates wrongly: “through lasciviousness to fleshly lust;” Ἐν ἐπιθυμίαις is not equal to εἰς ἐπιθυμίας.

ΤΟΥΣ ὀλίγως ἀποφεύγοντας] ὀλίγως, Ἄπ. λεγ., is hardly to be found elsewhere. It expresses both time and measure, and corresponds to the English: “*hardly, just*” (thus also Schott). Wiesinger and Hofmann understand it only of measure, equivalent to “little;” Hofmann understands it of space: “they are a little way escaped from those who walk in error.” The pres. of the verb shows that they are, as it were, still in the act of flight from their former condition, and are not yet firmly established in the new; cf. [2 Peter 2:14](#) : ψυχὰς ἀστηρίκτους.

τοὺς ἐν πλάνῃ ἀναστρεφόμενους] not an adjunct co-ordinate with what goes before; Luther: “and now walk in error;” but the accus. is dependent on ἀποφεύγοντας, and οἱ ἐν πλάνῃ ἀναστρεφόμενοι are those from whom the persons who are being seduced have separated themselves, those who are not Christians, especially the heathen, who lead a life ἐν πλάνῃ (Wiesinger, Schott, Brückner, Frommüller, Hofmann); Steinfass incorrectly understands by the expression the ψευδοδιδάσκαλοι.

[79] Bengel: Puteus et nubes aquam pollicentur; sic illi praegrandia jactant, quasi lumina ecclesiae; sed hi putei, hae nubes nil praebent; praegrandia illa sunt vanitatis.

## Barnes' Notes on the Bible

For when they speak great swelling words of vanity - When they make pretensions to wisdom and learning, or seem to attach great importance to what they say, and urge it in a pompous and positive manner. Truth is simple, and delights in simple statements. It expects to make its way by its own intrinsic force, and is willing to pass for what it is worth. Error is noisy and declamatory, and hopes to succeed by substituting sound for sense, and by such tones and arts as shall induce men to believe that what is said is true, when it is known by the speaker to be false. They allure through the lusts of the flesh - The same word is used here which in [2 Peter 2:14](#) is rendered "beguiling," and in [James 1:14](#) "enticed." It does not elsewhere occur in the New Testament. It means that they make use of deceitful arts to allure, ensnare, or beguile others. The "means" which it is here said they employed, were "the lusts of the flesh;" that is, they promised unlimited indulgence to the carnal appetites, or taught such doctrines that their followers would feel themselves free to give unrestrained liberty to such propensities. This has been quite a common method in the world, of inducing people to embrace false doctrines. Through much wantonness - See the notes at [2 Timothy 3:6](#). The meaning here is, that they made use of every variety of lascivious arts to beguile others under religious pretenses. This has been often done in the world; for religion has been abused to give seducers access to the confidence of the innocent, only that they might betray and ruin them. It is right that for all such the "mist of darkness should be reserved forever;" and if there were not a place of punishment prepared for such men, there would be defect in the moral administration of the universe. Those that were clean escaped from them who live in error - Margin, "for a little while." The difference between the margin and the text here arises from a difference of reading in the Greek. Most of the later editions of the Greek Testament coincide with the reading in the margin, (ὀλίγως oligōs,) meaning "little, but a little, scarcely." This accords better with the scope of the passage; and, according to this, it means that they had "almost escaped" from the snares and influences of those who live in error and sin. They had begun to think of their ways; they had broken off many of their evil habits; and there was hope that they would be entirely reformed, and would become decided Christians, but they were allured again to the sins in which they had so long indulged. This seems to me to accord with the design of the passage, and it certainly accords with what frequently occurs, that those who are addicted to habits of vice become apparently interested in religion, and abandon many of their evil practices, but are again allured by the seductive influences of sin, and relapse into their former habits. In the case referred to here it was by professedly religious teachers - and is this never done now? Are there none for example, who have been addicted to habits of intemperance, who had been almost reformed, but who are led back again by the influence of religious teachers? Not directly and openly, indeed, would they lead them into habits of intemperance. But, when their reformation is begun, its success and its completion depend on total abstinence from all that intoxicates. In this condition, nothing more is necessary to secure their entire reformation and safety than mere abstinence; and nothing more may be necessary to lead them into their former practices than the example of others who indulge in moderate drinking, or than the doctrine inculcated by a religious teacher that such moderate drinking is not contrary to the spirit of the Bible.

OUT OF THE SAME MOUTH:



# Blessing

AND

# Cursing

James 3:10

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Out of the same  
mouth come praise  
and cursing...



... this should not  
be. (James 3:10)

## **Barnes' Notes on the Bible**

**Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing - The meaning here may be, either that out of the mouth of man two such opposite things proceed, not referring to the same individual, but to different persons; or, out of the mouth of the same individual. Both of these are true; and both are equally incongruous and wrong. No organ should be devoted to uses so unlike, and the mouth should be employed in giving utterance only to that which is just, benevolent, and good. It is true, however, that the mouth is devoted to these opposite employments; and that while one part of the race employ it for purposes of praise, the other employ it in uttering maledictions. It is also true of many individuals that at one time they praise their Maker, and then, with the same organ, calumniate, and slander, and revile their fellow-men. After an act of solemn devotion in the house of God, the professed worshipper goes forth with the feelings of malice in his heart, and the language of slander, detraction, or even blasphemy on his lips.**

**My brethren, these things ought not so to be - They are as incongruous as it would be for the same fountain to send forth both salt water and fresh; or for the same tree to bear different kinds of fruit.**

# Profanity – A Biblical Assessment

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

A sincere Christian recently noted that the Bible in general, and the book of James in particular (cf. Jas. 3:1ff), warns about the improper use of the tongue. Yet he laments the fact that profanity and vulgarity are perhaps more widespread now than at any time in history – at least in America.

He wonders how it is that one identifies “profanity.” The Bible only warns against the evil use of language in a general way, but it doesn’t specify *which* words are to be avoided. Is it a cultural question?

This is an excellent item for study. It is true that this issue is not addressed in a solitary, compact biblical context. There are, though, helpful principles in Scripture that assist in clarifying this bewilderment. Think about these points for a moment.

1. The Bible could not possibly provide a list of “forbidden” words, since words come and go. Some words become obsolete, and fade from the human vocabulary with the passing of time. Too, new words are ever being born. A “word list” could never be totally relevant, even if it were possible to construct such. The biblical documents deal with different *abuses* of language, in a general way, but there is no catalog of prohibited words.
2. No mere assemblage of letters creates an intrinsically evil word. “God” and “dog” have the identical letters, yet the meanings attached to the respective arrangements are worlds apart. Words become “bad” by virtue of their connotation, motive, etc., and such circumstances can change from time-to-time, or from place-to-place.

Some years ago I was lecturing in Africa in an environment heavily influenced by the British culture. I referred to a certain military encounter as a “bloody battle.” Later, I was informed that the expression “bloody” – which to me was a perfectly legitimate descriptive – was “profane” to my English-oriented audience. The *cultural connotation* attached to the adjective made the difference.



3. Words convey ideas; they are vehicles of communication. It is, therefore, the *idea* associated with an expression that can create an evil word pattern. Here are passages that address the matter in principle.

The Scriptures speak of “filthy” talking (Eph. 5:4). According to Greek authorities (see Baur, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich, **Greek-English Lexicon**, Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000, p. 29), the term “filthy” (*aischrotes*) entails “behavior that flouts social and moral standards, shamefulness, obscenity” while “shameful speech” (*aischrologia* – Col. 3:8) denotes “speech of a kind that is generally considered in poor taste, obscene speech, dirty talk.”

“Lascivious” speech (cf. 2 Pet. 2:18) is that designed to conjure up illicit sexual images and ideas. “Corrupt” (morally unwholesome, harmful) communication (Ephesus 4:29) is likewise condemned. “Foolish (literally moronic) talking” is speech that reveals a stupid mind, while “jesting” suggests off-color humor (cf. Eph. 5:4).

What is rather disconcerting is the fact that some professed “Christians” vigorously defend the use of filthy language in books and movies under the guise of *artistic license*; they contend that opposition to such is “anti-intellectual” (Franky Schaeffer, **Sham Pearls for Real Swine**, Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1990, Chapter 9, “Freedom Versus Censorship”). Such rationalization carries no weight with the genuinely spiritual person.

4. Words become profane when sacred meanings are treated in a common and trivial fashion. One of the commands of the Decalog was: “You shall not take the name of Jehovah your God in vain” (Ex. 20:7). This probably refers to an appeal to the Lord’s name within the context of a false oath (cf. Lev. 19:12). To lie under oath (“so help you God”), or to whimsically accentuate your affirmations with a “by God” is, in principle, a form of profanity. Under the law of Moses, the “name” of God was not to be profaned (Lev. 18:21). The context has to do with the use of Jehovah’s name specific in the environment of pagan worship.

5. The principle involves taking the sacred name of the Lord and vulgarly transporting it into the domain of the secular. This concept finds a manifestation in various ways in America's crude modes of expression, such as, "O my God!" – as an ejaculation of surprise. "Lordy mercy!" "Jesus Christ!" and such are equally inappropriate.

The Greek word *bebeloo* is twice rendered "profane" in the New Testament (see Mt. 12:5; Acts 24:6). It is defined as "to cause something highly revered to become identified with the common, violate sanctity, desecrate, profane" (Danker, 173). Surely it is not difficult to conclude that this category of irreverence is perpetuated in many common expressions today. And it hardly minimizes the transgression to euphonize the use of sacred names by disguising the format – as in, "Good gosh!", "Golly!" and like. An unabridged dictionary will reveal the derivation of these terms to those who have sufficient interest in their vocabulary.

6. In biblical parlance, to "curse" (*katara*) is to utter a "malediction" or an imprecation upon someone. The term may be used legitimately of a pronouncement of divine judgment (cf. Gal. 3:10,13; Heb. 6:8), but when employed whimsically by humans, denotes a malevolent "curse" uttered against another as expression of personal wrath (cf. Jas. 3:10; 2 Pet. 2:14). It finds a modern vent in such phrases as, "You go to hell!" or "Damn you!"

It is important to note at this point that neither of these terms, "hell" or "damn," is inherently evil. There is a proper context in which they are permissible. Jesus spoke of that sort of person who is "a child of hell" (Mt. 23:15), and the Great Commission warns that those who believe not "shall be damned" (Mark 16:16, KJV). It is the *manner* in which such terms are employed, hatefully, vindictively, in a pejorative fashion, that makes the use of them wrong. See similarly the use of "fool" (Matthew 5:22), yet compare that with a legitimate employment of the word (Psa. 14:1; 1 Cor. 15:36; Gal. 3:1).

As a side note, we might mention that many misunderstand the meaning of the New Testament text that records that Peter “cursed and swore” in connection with his denial of Christ (Mk. 14:71). This does not mean that the apostle broke forth in vile, vulgar language, such as we commonly hear today. Rather, the meaning of the passage is this: In his fear, Peter denied the Lord, re-enforcing his denial with a calling down of “curses upon himself,” if his testimony were not true (Danker, 63).

What he did was terribly wrong – the panicky act of a terrified man. But his language was not the course, gutter-variety that one generally associates with the word “curse.”

The Christian must strive to keep his speech pure, such as facilitates edifying (Col. 4:6). One must try to refrain from the vulgar, the irreverent, and the reviling abuse of language that is unbecoming to the spiritual person.

The Bible does not lay down a prohibited vocabulary list, but it certainly contains guidelines that will assist the devout person in using speech that is well-pleasing to the Lord and to others.





Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it  
is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it  
is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem;  
for it is the city of the great King.

— Matthew 5:34-5

More verses at [jesus.texts.fr](http://jesus.texts.fr)

Jesus Christ said

“Do not swear at all: either by  
heaven for it is God's throne...”

Matthew 5:34

# Matthew 5:34 “Swear Not At All”

I trust you will read the whole article and follow the material till the end. Should you do this, it will be easy to understand the conclusion drawn. When I see the title of this article, “Swear not at all” I am reminded that the Bible teaches there were those who did swear.

## God Swore

“Since he could swear by none greater, he swore by himself” (Heb. 6:13). This had reference to a promise God made to Abraham. From this text we learn God did swear. Immediately, I’m confronted with the problem, did God do something he forbade his people to do? It would be as if he is saying, “You are not to swear; but, I am going to do it!”

## Jesus Swore

Jesus was told by the high priest, “I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou art the Christ, the Son of God” (Matt. 26:63). The definition of “adjure” is, “to cause to swear, to lay under the obligation of an oath,” but this word is “an intensive form” of the definition I have just given. The high priest called upon him, under the highest oath; called upon him to swear, “whether or not he is the Christ.” Under these circumstances, Jesus answered under oath. One is compelled to ask, “Did Jesus do what he told others not to do?”

## Angels Swore

“And the angel that I saw standing upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his right hand to heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever and ever” (Rev. 10:5-6). After observing that God swore, it is not strange to find an angel doing the same. Since the angels are lower than God, they can swear by someone greater; thus, he swore by “him that liveth for ever and ever.” He confirmed his word with an oath. This made it sure and steadfast, he could swear by none greater than “him that liveth for ever and ever.” Did the an-gel do what God forbade man to do?

## Paul Swore

“But I call God for a witness upon my soul, that to spare you I forbear to come unto Corinth” (2 Cor. 1:23). Here is an apostle, in the New Testament dispensation, engaging in an act to “call God for a witness upon my soul,” which is swearing. There is no question about what Paul did; but, did he sin? I think not, and hope to offer proof that neither he, the angel in Revelation 10 sinned, nor Christ sinned.

## Matthew 5:33-37

The first part of this text says, “Thou shalt not forswear thyself” (v. 33). This obviously appeals to Leviticus 9:12, Numbers 30:2 & Deuteronomy 23:21. A casual reading of these passages will show that one is not to perjure himself or, “foreswear,” or give a false testimony under oath. Of course, a false testimony is always wrong; you do not make a false thing true by swearing. The text of this passage states, “but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths.”

Matthew 5:33-37 is parallel with Matthew 23:16-22. In these two contexts there is dealt with the idea that oaths are only binding when there are certain things involved, and if those certain things are not involved,

then the oath is not binding. This was a religious way to lie! Jesus directly condemned it. “Woe unto you. ye blind guides, that say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple. It is nothing: but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple he is a debtor. Ye fools and blind: for which is greater, the gold, or the temple that hath sanctified the gold?” (Matt. 23:16-17). He also deals with swearing by the altar. Consider the same argument made by the “heaven,” “earth,” “Jerusalem,” or thy “head” in Matthew 5:34-36. In the middle of all of this he says, “Swear not at all.” You can understand what kind of swearing he is talking about “Foreswearing.”

## Truthful Speech

We are taught to “lie not one to another: seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings” (Col. 3:9). James teaches concerning the tongue, “Therewith bless we the Lord and Father: and therewith curse we men, who are made after the likeness of God: out of the same mouth cometh forth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be” (Jas. 3:9-10). How can one think of swearing for truth and error? Swear by one thing and you must do it, swear by other things and you do not have to keep your word! Amazing! My brethren “these things ought not so to be.” Even old Herod, as mean as he was, respected an oath when he made it (Mark 6:23: “And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom”).

The solution to this problem is, “Let your speech be, Yea. yea: Nay, nay: and whatsoever is more than this is of the evil one” (Matt. 5:37). Tell the truth! “And I say unto you. that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matt. 12:36-37). Tell the truth!

## James 5:12

“But above all things, my brethren. swear not, neither by the heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath: but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay: that ye fall not under judgment.” Note the idea of swearing by the heaven or earth; and, consider the information in Matthew 5:33-37; also, that found in Matthew 23:16-22, and immediately one is compelled to note that he is dealing with men who swear but do not perform unto the Lord their oaths. This same passage James 5:12 clearly states that our speech is to be yea, yea; and nay, nay. One has to consider James 5:12 in the light of what the Bible teaches in other places, the extended text, and in so doing we learn the truth. We are to “perform unto the Lord thine oaths” (Matt. 5:33).

## Swearing and Cursing

I have heard preachers, who would begin on the subject of “swearing” & end up talking about “cursing,” as if they were the same. A statement in Mark 14:71 is worthy of consideration: “But he began to curse, and to swear. I know not this man of whom ye speak.” In this text a distinction is to be made between “cursing” and “swearing.” Should you make the mistake of saying the two are equal, then you have God swearing, thus cursing; Christ swearing, thus cursing; an angel swearing, thus cursing; and Paul swearing, thus cursing. Did they sin? No, the terms are not equal. Notice that Peter was swearing to that which was a falsehood! “I know not this man!” (Mark 14:71). That, my friends, was a lie.



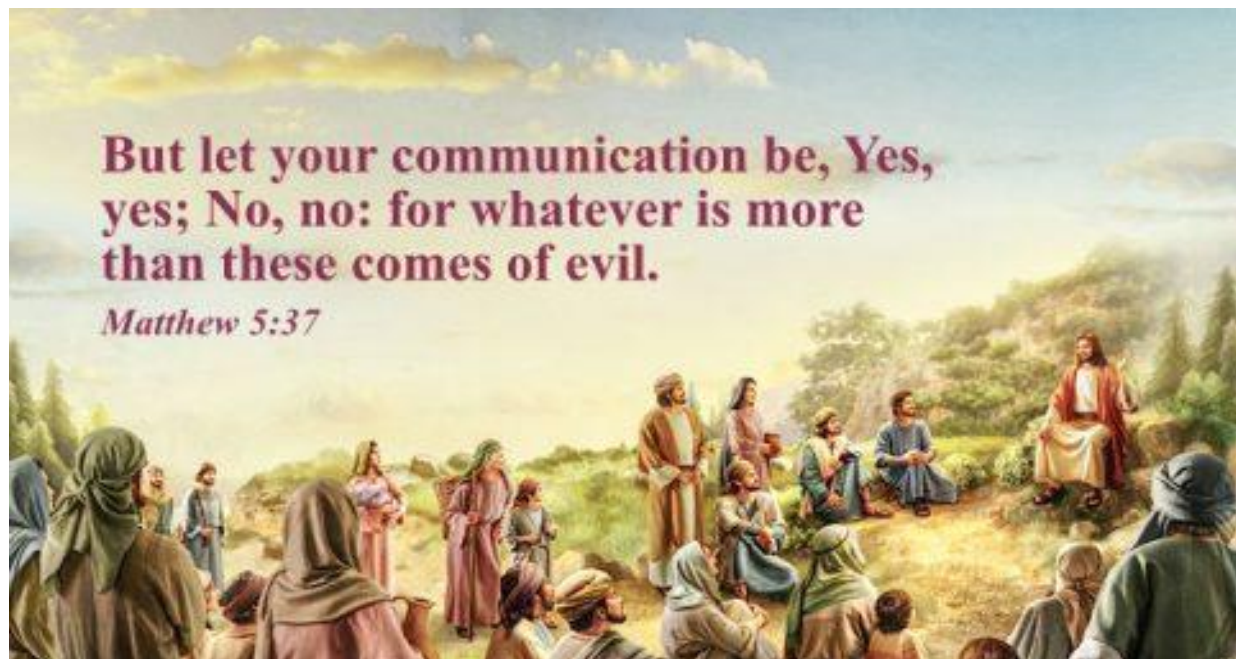
## Court of Law

The passages we have dealt with do not teach concerning this, Matthew 5, 23, James 5. All of these passages have to do with “performing unto the Lord thine oaths” (Matt. 5:33). The closest you would come to oaths in court is found in Matthew 26:63, when the Lord was before the high priest. In this passage he was under oath “I adjure thee.” Jesus did not forbid the practice: but rather, practiced it.

## Today

Don't try to find ways to get out of doing what you said you would do. I need to perform unto the Lord my word, and be faithful to him all the days of my life. My speech is to be “yea, yea; nay, nay, what is more than these is of the evil one.” If I am going to swear some-thing that I do not intend to keep, “Swear not at all.”

- Guardian of Truth XL: 3 p. 26-27



# Is Taking an Oath in Court or Reciting the Pledge of Allegiance Forbidden?

By **Wayne Jackson**

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**“In James 5:12, Christians are commanded not to swear any oath. Does this mean that we should not submit to practices such as swearing an oath of honesty in a court of law, or pledging allegiance to the American flag? Furthermore, is it also wrong to say ‘I promise’? I’ve never heard any Christian speaking against these things, but I want to make sure that I understand this matter correctly.”**

First, let me point out that the term “swear,” as employed in our modern society, has two distinct senses. It is used as an equivalent for “profanity,” which, of course, no Christian should ever use. Also, though, the term “swear” may refer to a “legal oath.”

The question above pertains to this latter usage. Is it proper, for example, in a court setting to answer in the affirmative when asked: “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you God?” The following facts may help us put the matter into focus:

## **Oaths are not evil**

An oath is not intrinsically evil. Jehovah bound himself under an oath to Abraham when he promised to bless the patriarch (cf. Heb. 6:13-14). With reference to the priesthood of Christ, God “hath sworn, . . . ‘You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek’” (Psa. 110:4).

Since the Lord is perfect, one must conclude that an oath *per se* is not sinful.

## **Jesus testified with an oath**

When Jesus was on trial, the high priest said:

“I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us whether you are the Christ, the son of God” (Mt. 26:63).

The word “adjure” translates the Greek *exorkizo*, which means “to extract an oath, to force an oath” (Thayer 1958, 224). Caiaphas put the Lord under oath, hoping that he would incriminate himself.

And Jesus honestly replied, “You have said” (*su eipas*), which, as language authorities note, “is a Greek affirmative reply” (Robertson 1930, 218). Mark’s parallel has it even plainer: “I am” (Mk. 14:62). This is the same expression used by Jesus when Judas asked the Lord, “Is it I?” (Mt. 26:25).

## **Paul made an oath**

The apostle, Paul, employed an oath when he wrote to the Corinthians:

“But I call God for a witness upon my soul, that to spare you I forbear to come unto Corinth” (2 Cor. 1:23; cf. Rom. 1:9).

And remember, he wrote these words by inspiration.

Observe the apostle’s strong statement in this passage:

“Now concerning the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not” (Gal. 1:20).

## **Warnings for a false oath**

The Scriptures warn against “false swearers” (1 Tim. 1:10), which would seem to be a needless specific if **all** swearing, of **any** sort, is prohibited.

## **What is the meaning of James’ prohibition from swearing an oath?**

What, then, is the meaning of James’ prohibition?

Since it is apparent that a respectful, sincere, legal oath is not condemned in the Scriptures, we must conclude that the prohibition of James 5:12 (cf. also Mt. 5:33-37) pertains to something else.

A **different kind** of swearing must be in view in these passages. What is it? Let me introduce the testimony of several respected scholars.

J. T. Mueller, a professor at Concordia Theological Seminary, describes sinful swearing as that which is “false, blasphemous and frivolous” as well as the assumption of oaths regarding “uncertain things” (Harrison 1999, 382).

Professor D. Edmond Hiebert says that the New Testament condemns the “indiscriminate, light, or evasive use of oaths” (Pfeiffer 1998, 1219).

Guy Woods noted that oaths that are condemned involve the “flippant, frivolous and profane” use of God’s name. Woods pointed out that the prohibitions of Matthew 5:33-37 and James 5:12 have no reference to sincere judicial oaths. His discussion of these matters is very thorough (1991, 288-294).

## **Jesus authorized oaths**

That all oaths of **every** kind were not forbidden is evident within the context of Jesus’ discussion of this theme in the sermon on the mount. In the context of condemning certain oaths, the Lord said, “but you shall perform **unto the Lord** your oaths” (Mt. 5:33).

## **What about the Pledge of Allegiance**

Finally, as to the Pledge of Allegiance, there is nothing in this historic pledge that is at variance with the principles of Christianity. It is simply an affirmation of devotion to the laws of the government under which we live. This is entirely consistent with the instruction of Romans 13:1ff (cf. 1 Pet. 2:13), which enjoins obedience and respect for the “powers that be.”

Of course, one’s allegiance to his nation is always subservient to his loyalty to God, and whenever the two come into conflict, obedience to the Lord takes precedence (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29).

**I STAND**

**FOR OUR  
NATIONAL ANTHEM**

**AND KNEEL FOR  
THE CROSS**

