

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

EXODUS 20:1-7

At this point, the people are gathered around the base of Mt. Sinai while Moses and Aaron are somewhere up the side of the mountain between the people and the presence of Yahweh on the summit. The Ten Commandments were spoken by God in the hearing of all the people and not just in the hearing of Moses and Aaron. Cassuto refers to this as “the climax of the entire Book [of Exodus], the central and most exalted theme, all that came before being, as it were, a preparation for it, and all that follows, a result of, and supplement to, it.”¹ That may be overstating the case just a bit, but nevertheless, this was a very significant moment in the history of the formation of the nation and the subsequent influence of Judaism and Judeo-Christian thought on western civilization and throughout the world. The sculpture on the Supreme Court building is evidence of the influence this event had on the history of the world.

Moses later confirmed the fact God spoke to all the people and not just to him and his brother.

Deuteronomy 4:10–13 ¹⁰“Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, ‘Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.’ ¹¹“You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud and thick gloom. ¹²“Then the LORD spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form—only a voice. ¹³“So He declared to you His covenant which He com-

¹ U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1997), 235.

manded you to perform, *that is*, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.

The words “Ten Commandments” appear in the Old Testament only three times (Ex. 34:28; Dt. 4:13, 10:4). The Hebrew reads, עֲשֶׂר דְּבָרִים, which actually means the ten words and that is how theologians, including the Jewish rabbis, refer to it. The Septuagint translates this as δέχα λόγος in Exodus 34:28 and Deuteronomy 10:4 and δέχα ῥῆμα in Deuteronomy 4:13.

The declarations of the Decalogue are more than merely a set of dos and don'ts. It acts a national charter of sorts from which all the other laws flow that regulate the moral, civil, and religious life of Israel from this time forward—until the Messiah comes. God has formed the Israelites into a nation and now He needs to transform them into the nation He wants them to be. That process began in Egypt as He revealed Himself there and it continued here at Mt. Sinai with His commands for living life as God's people as they relate to Him and to others. The Ten Commandments do not contain any specific regulations for worshipping God; those will come later.

Before getting into the specifics of the Ten Commandments, we know that nine of the ten are reiterated under the Law of Christ. This illustrates the fact that from dispensation to dispensation, under different law economies, some commandments or elements of the old system continue into the new system unchanged, some are modified and continued, and some are done away. That does not mean the old law system is preserved; it simply means the new law sys-

tem has some common elements with the old system that has passed away and is no longer in effect. It is still a new system of law.

The first three commandments pertain to the Israelites' relationship with Yahweh. He is going to reveal to them that He is not just another god; He is THE God and He is the only God they are to acknowledge and worship.

Exodus 20:1–3 ¹Then God spoke all these words, saying, ²“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³“You shall have no other [אֱלֹהִים] gods before [פְּנֵה עַל] Me.

God audibly spoke to the people and by means of speaking to them He revealed Himself to be a personal God who interacts with His people and who reveals Himself to them. False gods do not speak.

Habakkuk 2:18 ¹⁸“What profit is the idol when its maker has carved it, Or an image, a teacher of falsehood? For *its* maker trusts in his own handiwork When he fashions speechless idols.

Even more importantly than what is said here is the identity of the one speaking it; the Speaker is revealing Himself in a very powerful way to the Israelites. Yahweh identified Himself to the people as “your God” who had just rescued them from slavery in Egypt revealing Himself to be their Redeemer and the God who actively works on their behalf and who performs signs, wonders, and miracles in their presence and for their good. These are truths that should have been forever stamped into the Israelite's permanent memory banks. In a way, they have been remembered, but really not in the way they should have been. The history of the Israelites is one of rebellion and unbelief and that characterizes the majority of them to this day. They remember these things in a formulaic, ritualistic way,

but they don't remember them in a personal, believing way which is the way they were intended to be remembered.

This format serves as the historical prologue to the Mosaic Covenant. I noted last week that some people think God modeled this covenant after the pagan covenant format, but I think God had the pagans use a format that He wanted to use with the Israelites later in history. The other possible factor in using this covenant format was its familiarity; the people were already exposed to this type of covenant and had no trouble acknowledging it as a valid covenant format.

The word other, אֲחֵר, means other, another, different and it pertains to one of the same kind of class or object but distinct within that class. In the pantheon of gods, real or imagined, God is telling them He is the only real God and the only God they are to acknowledge and worship. This word also means additional, more, or extra which refers to a quantity of a collection or mass. This definition also pertains to the revelation disclosed here because people were used to a collection or plurality of gods, but Yahweh is revealing the factual truth of monotheism here. He is the only God they are to worship; none of the other false gods are to be acknowledged and worshiped by them. The gods of the pagans do not even exist as real gods except as they represent the god of the world at this time, Satan, but that doesn't stop people from worshiping these non-existent gods as though they are real. Worshiping these non-existent gods can, in fact, invite real demonic manifestations into one's life; therefore, in addition to re-

maining spiritually dead, people who worship false gods can invite real temporal physical and spiritual danger into their lives by means of demonic influences. Wherever paganism is thoroughly ingrained into a society, demonic manifestations abound.

According to Cassuto,² “other gods” eventually became a term referring to the Gentile gods whom the Israelites knew to be no gods at all. That’s true, every god apart from Yahweh is another god and not to be worshiped. The word “other” also evolved to mean something strange or bizarre referring to something that was not what it should have been. That is true as well. Languages evolve and when these two changes in meaning came about is not clear because they certainly didn’t behave as though they believed this before the Babylonian captivity. After that period of exile, they did refrain from idolatry; therefore, either this evolving understanding of the word “other” must not have come along until after the Babylonian captivity, or, prior to that time, they simply paid lip service to this evolution of the meaning and ignored it.

Before me, פְּנֵי עַל, is interesting because it literally means before the face. פְּנֵי means at, near, over, against or close by; it refers to a spatial position in very close and to be in initial proximity to another object. פָּנֵה means face, the front part of the head including the main organs for perception (eyes) and speech (mouth). This word is primarily used in a figurative or idiomatic sense as it is here.

² U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1997), 241.

Theologians argue about just what this means. Some suggest it means over against Yahweh or in opposition to Him. Others believe it means in addition to Yahweh. I see no reason why it can't mean both. The words can encompass both interpretations and both are valid in terms of the revelation God was conveying to the Israelites; therefore, the nuances of both meanings may apply. They were to have only one God, Yahweh, and they were not to set any other gods in opposition to Him which would be the case if they worshiped any other god. By definition, worshiping any god other than Yahweh is to put that god in opposition to the Creator God of the universe. The TANAKH suggests this meaning by translating it, "You shall have no other gods besides Me," that is, no other god or gods in addition to Me and no other god or gods "in my face" or in front of Me.

They couldn't sneak off somewhere and worship another god because God was already wherever they went. That was a problem in the Temple immediately before the Babylonian destruction. Anyone who thinks they can sneak off and worship other gods is fooling themselves because God knows. It is noteworthy—and astonishing—these elders who were supposed to be the servants of the one true God as they led and shepherded His people were secluded in a dark room housed in the Temple, the house of God, worshiping carved images! That is no less an abomination today no matter where it takes place.

Ezekiel 8:12 ¹²Then He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his

carved images? For they say, 'The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land.'

The second commandment directly relates to this situation. It prohibits the making of an idol or an image in order to worship it. The command does not prohibit paintings, sculptures, stained glass, or other artwork, but it does prohibit worshiping those things as though they are deity having the power to do anything in and of themselves or as though they cause God to do something for the people worshiping them. People use them as charms or amulets both of which are pagan concepts. Idols and images have no power to protect anyone from evil or from harm and they have no power to bring good into a person's life, but that doesn't stop people from believing they actually do those things.

Exodus 20:4–6 4“**פָּסֵל** You shall not make for yourself an idol [פָּסֵל], or any likeness [תְּמוּנָה] of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5“**קִנְיָא** You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous [קִנְיָא] God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate [שִׂנְאָה] Me, 6**רַחֲמֵי** but showing lovingkindness [רַחֲמֵי] to thousands, to those who love [אֶהְבֵּב] Me and keep My commandments.

Idols are the product of human engineering; they have to be made by human hands because they are not real gods. God's command is idols are not to be made much less worshiped. Idol, פָּסֵל, means an idol or image as a shaped or fashioned worship icon itself being a god or a representation of a god. It refers to a carved image. It is from the root פָּסַל meaning to hew or to cut which refers to whatever the material used to make the idol must first be rough cut. Like-

ness, תְּמוּנָה, refers to a form or an image representing an appearance as a visual form.

Man has an unlimited capacity to make an idol out of anything that has already been created by God. Whether it is celestial objects or birds in the sky, or land animals or objects, or water creatures, man can imagine it to either be a god or a representative of a god. This is very dangerous because every idol has a demonic manifestation related to it and both Moses and Paul made that perfectly clear.

Deuteronomy 32:17 ¹⁷“They [the Israelites] sacrificed to demons who were not God, To gods whom they have not known, New gods who came lately, Whom your fathers did not dread.

1 Corinthians 10:19–20 ¹⁹What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons.

Idolatry involves man worshiping the creation instead of the Creator. It is forcing God into a humanistic box because the creator of the idol is imagining he can force the Creator of the universe to be part of His creation which is how the idolater wants Him to be. The reality is God is transcendent and is totally apart from His creation. He is intimately involved in it, but He isn't part of it. Bringing Him down into His creation elevates the creation to a place of superiority over the Creator, and brings God down to the level of mere man. Ultimately, this results in man making himself out to be his own god because he is usurping the authority of the true Creator God in order to create his own god. That makes man, at

least in his own mind, the sovereign because he is deciding who and what god it is that he should worship. No matter the idol, however, all roads apart from Yahweh lead to Satan. Lest we think we are somehow superior to those idolaters who have come before us, it's not just ancient or third-world man who worships idols. "Christian" America and Western civilization has a plethora of idols today: sports and sports stars, actors, golf, hunting, fishing, careers, politicians, money, children, or anything else with which man can replace God becomes an idol. Anything man's wicked heart can imagine that has been made by God can be made into an idol and worshiped and used replace the Creator God in his life.

The prohibition on the making of an idol seems to have two purposes. God is spirit and as the Creator He is transcendent over His creation and not a part of it; therefore, no man knows what He looks like and to make an image of Him is to bring Him down to our level. In Deuteronomy 4:12, 15, one reason presented for prohibiting the creation of an image of Yahweh Himself was the fact the Israelites heard God speaking but they saw no physical form of Him. Any attempt to physically represent the spiritual God has to distort His identity because no human being knows Him well enough, or has even seen Him, in order to accurately portray Him; therefore, to attempt to portray Him is to change Him into what we think He should be. Even if someone could know what He looks like, we would still know so little about Him that accurately portraying Him in all His glory and magnificence would be impossible and we would diminish Him anyway. This was the problem with the golden calf at Mt. Sinai we will study later. They

weren't trying to worship the bull god of Egypt; they were trying to say the bull they made was Yahweh.

Deuteronomy 4:12, 15 ¹²"Then the LORD spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form—only a voice.... ¹⁵"So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire,

Secondly, they are not to make an image of any created thing and worship it in place of Yahweh. The grammar here is plural and the command is not to make images of any created things in order to worship them and serve them. God has already revealed He is one in essence so the prohibition must refer to more than simply trying to make an image of Yahweh as some, in fact many, theologians suggest. This Scripture is suggesting that worshiping anything in any form other than God is forbidden. Further, trying to make an image of Yahweh Himself is also forbidden. When we do try to make an image of God, we must, due to our limited knowledge and experience of the spiritual world, fashion Him into something we already know which is some aspect of the creation.

One fact that seems to be lost in all the discussion about images is the fact that we have seen the image of God in Christ Jesus, or at least those who saw Him during His First Advent have seen the image of God made visible.

Colossians 1:15 ¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

The other thing to know, and it is pretty silly, is all the people who think they see the face of Jesus in a tortilla or in a vegetable or on a wall or wherever, are actually seeing something that looks like the paintings Medieval artists painted depicting Christ. The truth is we have no idea what He looked like.

The concept of icons has a long history in Churchianity. The Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches have many icons they revere. I maintain they worship them, but they deny that and say they only venerate them. I say that is an issue of semantics and the practice is far different than the official position of their denominations. The problem is two-fold. One, in English the definitions of venerate and worship come very close to being synonyms. Venerate means to regard with great respect; to revere. There is no word in the Bible translated "venerate." Worship means the feeling or expression of reverence and adoration for a deity and/or adoration or devotion comparable to religious homage shown toward a person or principle. In Hebrew, worship, *פָּשַׁע*, means to fall prostrate; to take a bowing stance as a position of submission to a human superior. In Greek, *προσκυνέω*, means to bow as an action of allegiance or regard; to prostrate oneself before or kneel down as an act of reverence. In terms of icons and the way Roman Catholics and Orthodox worshipers relate to them, there seems to be no practical difference between venerate and worship. This appears to me, as an outsider to those religions, to be the very type of practices the second commandment was meant to prohibit. People do bow down to icons and relics in their churches and in their shrines that house some of these things.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has four paragraphs under the heading "Holy Images." "The sacred image, the liturgical icon, principally represents *Christ*" [par. 1159]. "Christian iconography expresses in images the same

Gospel message that Scripture communicates by words. Image and word illuminate each other” [par. 1160]. “All the signs in the liturgical celebrations are related to Christ: as are sacred images of the holy Mother of God and of the saints as well. They truly signify Christ who is glorified in them.... Through their icons, it is man ‘in the image of God,’ finally transfigured ‘into his likeness’ ... we rightly define with full certainty and correctness that, like the figure of the precious and life-giving cross, venerable and holy images of our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ, our inviolate Lady, the holy Mother of God, and the venerated angels, all the saints and the just, whether painted or made of mosaic or another suitable material, are to be exhibited in the holy churches of God, on sacred vessels and vestments, walls and panels, in houses and on streets” [par. 1161].

In an article written by a member of the Orthodox branch of Churchianity, he wrote, “Everything in Orthodoxy, including its traditional forms of artistic expression, [icons] is inherently connected to the Orthodox understanding of man’s salvation: deification (*theosis* in Greek).”³ The Roman Catholic quotes above hint at the same thing. That’s astounding; apparently, according to these religions, man is deified when he comes to faith.

Of course, as mentioned, Catholics claim they do not worship icons but rather venerate them. “The Christian veneration of images is not contrary to the first commandment which proscribes idols. Indeed, ‘the honor rendered to an image passes to its prototype,’ and ‘whoever venerates an image venerates

³ <https://adoremus.org/2001/09/15/Are-Icons-Catholic/>, accessed 20 Oct. 2017.

the person portrayed in it.' The honor paid to sacred images is a 'respectful veneration,' not the adoration due to God alone: Religious worship is not directed to images in themselves, considered as mere things, but under their distinctive aspect as images leading us on to God incarnate. The movement toward the image does not terminate in it as image, but tends toward that whose image it is" [par. 2132]. The Roman Catholic official position is the incarnation of Christ "introduced a new 'economy' of images" [par. 2131] rendering them acceptable. In essence, the Roman Catholic position tries to claim Christ's incarnation supersedes the commandment and images are now acceptable. They wouldn't put it that way, but that is what it seems to be saying. They can say they only venerate them and do not worship them all they want, but the practical result is they do worship these images. Praying to images, kissing images, bowing before images (which is the definition of worship in Hebrew and Greek), and so on are all indications of worship.

There is also a problem with Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox people worshiping relics. A relic is either the physical remains or personal effects of a saint or holy person kept for the purpose of veneration. In Jerusalem, in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, there is a marble slab upon which people are told the Lord's body was placed after His death. People touch it, kiss it, cry over it, and rub various articles on it to take home as some sort of charm. That's worship and it is disingenuous on the part of their religious leaders to claim these icons and relics are not worshiped in violation of the second commandment.

Another factor that plays into the concept of prohibiting images which I think also includes icons and relics is the fact they are a hallmark of pagan religion. Pagans have to have them; their gods are not living gods; they represent spiritually dead, but physically living demonic beings, but they are not themselves alive. As noted above, people can't resist worshiping these things when they have them even when they know such worship is forbidden.

God is a jealous God who loves His people and He will tolerate no competition from false gods for their allegiance nor will He tolerate any rebellion from them. Yahweh alone is worthy of glory and honor. Jealous, *qayal*, means to be jealous pertaining to having a feeling of ill will ranging even to anger based on a perceived advantage or a desire for exclusivity in a relationship. This word describes God's attitude towards the worship of false gods by the Israelites with the result of experiencing His anger and judgment for the transgression. It is such a characteristic of His in this regard that He later identified Himself as the Jealous God and He referred to Himself as a jealous God a number of times in Scripture.

Exodus 34:14 ¹⁴—for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God—

The concept of the jealousy God has for Israel is related to the fact that He considered Israel to be His wife and He was jealous to keep her from other pagan, idolatrous suitors. The book of Hosea highlights the marriage relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Nothing would provoke His anger more than the Israelites consorting with pagan deities.

Deuteronomy 32:16 ¹⁶“They made Him jealous with strange gods; With abominations they provoked Him to anger.

The concept of visiting the iniquity of the fathers to the children has caused no amount of suffering and guilt among Christians because they think they have done something to curse their children, or the children think their parents cursed them for some sort of sin. This is not true; we know that each person is judged for his own sin problem and children are not judged for the sin of their parents.

Deuteronomy 24:16 ¹⁶“Fathers shall not be put to death for *their* sons, nor shall sons be put to death for *their* fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.

That does not mean parents that you are off the hook. You have the responsibility, first of all, to introduce them to their Savior, and then to train your children to walk in the manner in which they should walk. You have a responsibility to model sanctification for your children so they can see what living life is according to what a sanctified Christian life should look like. That's no guarantee they will ultimately walk a sanctified life, but your job is to train them up in that way and if they depart from it, they will be held accountable for their own sin. You will be held accountable for whether or not you did that, but if you did, your children will bear the responsibility for their own rebellion. Conversely, if you train them up to live a life of sin and rebellion against God, you will be held accountable for how you raised your children and they will be held accountable for the sin they refuse to turn from.

What then does this Scripture actually mean? It means that absent succeeding generations being taught the right way, they will inevitably commit the sin of their fathers and, in turn, reap the judgment due them for their own sin. The context here involves worshiping idols and therefore hating God. In the Exodus context, those Israelites who worship idols and false gods will be teaching their children to worship idols and false gods thereby inviting God's wrath and judgment into their own lives. If each generation follows the preceding generation into idolatry, each generation will suffer the judgment due idolaters, i.e., those who hate God. Each person, by means of hearing divine revelation delivered through the prophets, if followed by belief and obedience to the Law, can turn from their parent's idolatrous ways and therefore be spared suffering the curses of God and instead enjoy the blessings of God. When the idolatry problem consumes the whole nation across generations, the nation is going to suffer the consequences of God's judgment and we know that is exactly what happened later in their history.

Conversely, God desired to show His lovingkindness to those who honored Him by loving Him and keeping His commandments. It is not God's desire to exercise His wrath and judgment on anyone; it is His desire that people honor Him by means of faithful lives lived well according to His Word.

Hate, **אָוֶז**, is a strong word meaning to hate, to be hateful, or to be unwilling. It refers to a feeling of open hostility and intense dislike. The word may also mean unloved, not chosen, and abandoned or rejected. Both of these nuances

in meaning come into play in this verse. Those who turn to idolatry are expressing hostility towards God and rejecting Him. They are abandoning the God who created them and brought them out of bondage in order to choose to worship idols in His place. Lovingkindness, **רַחֲמֵי**, means kindness, lovingkindness, mercy, goodness, faithfulness, and love. Love, **אֶהֱבֶה**, means to love, to have an affection based on a close relationship. The dichotomy being expressed here could not be stronger. People can hate God by going their own way, choosing to worship false gods whatever they may be, and suffer the consequences, or they can love God and be faithful and enjoy God's lovingkindness in return. That was true then and that is still true today. And by the way, God's lovingkindness is not a factor in terms of life's circumstances. We enjoy the benefits of His lovingkindness in good times and in bad times and in good circumstances and in bad circumstances. Too many people want to evaluate God's love for them based on their experiential circumstances.

The idea that God's love will extend to thousands if they love Him and keep His commandments is, I think, a Kingdom prophecy. It has an endless, forever, eternal nuance to it that can only apply to a time when the Israelites will be faithful to Him, and that won't happen until they are living under the auspices of the New Covenant in the Kingdom. Thousands refers to generations (cf. Dt. 7:9) and Israel hasn't been around for thousands of generations and they haven't been in a loving relationship with God on a permanent basis which is what this Scripture calls for. This refers to the time of restoration according to the

Land Covenant (Dt. 30:10) and the New Covenant when the law will be written on their hearts, they will obey the law. they will be God's people and He will be their God, and they will all know Him (Jer. 30:33-34). There will be no more idolatry, but that hasn't happened yet. Once it does, God's love for the Israelites will extend forever and that is the basic meaning being expressed and that's why I think referring to a thousand generations is a Kingdom prophecy.

Most people assume idolatry was no longer a problem for Israel once they returned from the Babylonian captivity and that's true in that they rejected the known false religious systems they had embraced before 586 BC. However, they gradually embraced secular humanism, which is also idolatry and which is fully manifested in Jewish life today. In other words, they still practice idolatry, but it is the idolatry of worshiping self and rationalism rather than Baal and Tammuz and other pagan deities.

Some theologians want to restrict the meaning of the blessing and cursing for idolatry to refer to only Israel as a nation, but that doesn't fit with the overall context of the Decalogue which does deal with national Israel, but it also deals with the Israelites as individuals. The nation will be judged for its national sin of idolatry, but individuals will be blessed or cursed according to their own behavior as well.

Exodus 20:7 ⁷"You shall not take the name [אֱלֹהִים] of the LORD your God in vain [בְּטוֹעַ], for the LORD will not leave him unpunished [יִקְרָא] who takes His name in vain [בְּטוֹעַ].

This commandment probably has two facets. One facet relates to using the Lord's name in an irreverent manner. Generally, we think of this facet when we use the Lord's name as a curse word. It is my personal opinion that those who say, "God told me ..." are using the Lord's name in vain because God didn't tell them anything. God has spoken and we have His Word. To refer to audibly hearing from God in this age is to receive new revelation and the canon of Scripture is closed; therefore, to say God has been speaking to you is to make light of the way He is working in this dispensation. It is an abuse of His name to claim He is doing something He clearly is not doing. Flippantly using God's name or mocking His name would fall under this category. Any time we invoke the name of God in some way that is dishonest, misleading, blasphemous, or something similar, we have taken His name in vain.

The second facet of this commandment involves false swearing using God's name and some theologians restrict the meaning of this command to this facet. I assume that was the basis behind swearing in witnesses during a courtroom trial with their hand on a Bible and swearing to tell the truth "so help me God" in order to discourage perjury. Conversely, this swearing in is a call to honesty and integrity. Taking an oath in the Lord's name is a promise that the covenant or other agreement entered into will be honestly adhered to. This facet may also include prohibiting a declaration using God's name to obligate Him to some sort of action based on what we do or do not do. For example, "May God strike me dead if I fail to ..." God is not going to be the Guarantor for anything

we say we are going to do because we are inherently fallible, emotionally and mentally undependable, sinful, and frequently dependent on our environment or outside influences concerning whether we can or we cannot do something. It is not our place to obligate God to anything. When we do that, we are placing Him in a position subordinate to us and that is not permissible.

It is interesting to note the punishment for violating this command is not specified although punishment is promised. Presumably, God will evaluate the seriousness of the offense and impose a proportional punishment. Unpunished, *נִקָּה*, means to go unpunished or to be pardoned. It means to not receive a just punishment implying pardon or innocence. In this verse, the word is negated meaning punishment will be imposed. It is clear God does not want His holy name abused, misused, or profaned.

Another factor in this commandment, is the fact that at least some biblical names in Old Testament times meant something; they described the character of a person. God's name is a revelation of God's character and nature; therefore, to abuse His name is to abuse Him as a Person. His name demands respect. "... [T]he name of the LORD, is understandably the predominant force in the OT. The name of the Lord is Yahweh, in all that fullness of divine power, holiness, wrath, and grace that he revealed as his nature. The name of the LORD

does what the Lord does ... [T]he name of the Lord stands for God's essential nature revealed to people as an active force in their lives."⁴

The word vain, [אִשָּׁר], means vanity, futility, worthlessness; it refers to that which has no result or use and is therefore worthless. God's name represents God; therefore, to take His name in vain is to make the claim His name is worthless.

Unsurprisingly, the Roman Catholic Church adds to this commandment which is, of course, expressly forbidden. They have to add to it in order to justify their theology of Mary and the saints. "The second commandment *forbids the abuse of God's name*, i.e., every improper use of the names of God, Jesus Christ, but also of the Virgin Mary and all the saints" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 2146).

⁴ Willem A. VanGemeren, gen. ed., s.v. "אִשָּׁר," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 4:150.