

# Deuteronomy 5:11

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-5/deuteronomy-511/>

*God warned Israel against misusing His name because He will punish anyone who dishonors Him.*

## The Third Commandment

The nations surrounding Israel used to take oaths for serious affairs such as contracts and treaties in order to demonstrate their intention to keep the obligations. This oath taking involved calling on the name of a god to attest to the oath transactions. Since the ancient people thought the god would punish those who violate the agreement, they were forced to tell the truth. That is why, instead of being punished by a god for not abiding by the agreement stipulations, some would refrain from taking oaths even when they had to pay a fine. Amid this ancient Near Eastern belief and practice, the true God issued the warning to His people not to misuse His name. He stated, “*You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.*”

The verb “to take” here basically means “to lift up,” or “to carry.” It is often used in the expression “raise the hand.” It was a common practice in ancient times to lift the hand up when taking an oath, as in [Deuteronomy 32:40](#). Since the act of taking oath was a serious affair, God told His people not to take it lightly if they took an oath in His name.

When God told His people not to swear falsely by His name, He is literally saying, “Do not lift up the name of the LORD your God in vain.” The Hebrew word for “name” also means “fame,” “character,” or “reputation.” Thus, the name of God is more than the mere pronunciation of His title of address. God’s name also pertains to His nature, being, and fame ([Psalms 8:1](#); [Psalms 20:1](#); [Psalms 103:1](#); [Jeremiah 32:20](#); [Isaiah 42:8](#)). Moreover, the Hebrew word translated “LORD” is the personal name of God (YWHW or Yahweh), the name He gave to Moses in [Exodus 3:14](#) as “I AM.” This name means that God is eternal, self-existent, faithful to His covenant, and compassionate ([Exodus 6:2-8](#); [Exodus 34:5-7](#)). Thus, using God’s personal name in a frivolous or fraudulent way would bring dishonor and shame to Him. Therefore, the Israelites were to refrain from doing such an evil act.

The Suzerain God warned His vassals (Israel) against misusing His name, saying that He *will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.*

Swearing falsely will usually bring about negative consequences on its own right. But the one who takes God's name in vain brings dishonor to the LORD. This carries its own risk because God will surely inflict punishment on the one who does such a wicked action.

The New Testament expands this principle, and encourages truthfulness at all time. It encourages us to be so truthful that oaths are not necessary. In the sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his disciples to "make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black" ([Matthew 5:34-36](#)). The disciples were commanded to simply be honest so that other people can see their integrity. Jesus said, "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil" ([Matthew 5:37](#)). Believers are thus exhorted to avoid making a distinction between speaking under oath and speaking in everyday communication. Each should be done in complete integrity, brandishing the sword of truth in all we say.

#### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>11</sup> You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.**