Title: ĠEM YHWH and its being taken in vain in Exodus 20:7

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Abstract:

This dissertation has attempted to provide the meaning and implications of the third commandment which reads, “You will never take the name of YHWH your God in vain; for YHWH will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain” (Exod 20:7). An analysis of the major interpretations reveals that (1) most scholars base their arguments on lexical meanings of the words present in the text; (2) investigation of the phrases and clauses, particularly the expression “the name of YHWH” which is crucial to the commandment’s understanding is not available to date; and (3) the commandment has not been studied in its immediate and larger contexts. This work has attempted such a study through the historical-grammatical method of exegesis.

According to an examination of ANE and biblical backgrounds, YHWH’s name represents YHWH Himself, His power, authority, presence, character, reputation, revelation; in short, everything He is and everything He says and does. Misuse of any of these may represent taking YHWH’s name in vain. Further, YHWH’s covenant people who are called by His name may take His name in vain when they either deliberately disobey Him (behavior) or silently reject His gracious provisions (attitude).

Moreover, though the commandment is given as a negative prohibition, as a positive implication it calls for an active engagement in “acceptable taking of YHWH’s name,” that is,
“calling upon His name” in the similitude of the patriarchs. This may involve (1) gratefulness to YHWH’s provisions, (2) constant communion with Him, (3) obedience to the Ten Commandments, and (4) active involvement in the proclamation of His name, that is, revelation of YHWH. All these elements in acceptable worship may be the result of remembering, that is, paying attention to all that is represented by YHWH’s name—Himself and His characteristics.