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The Meaning of Exodus xx. 7.

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EXODUS 20⁷, or the Third Commandment, as it is commonly reckoned by Jews and Protestants, reads as follows : **לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־שֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוֹן כִּי לֹא יִנְקֶה יְהוָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר־יִשָּׂא אֹתוֹ : שְׁמוֹ לְשׁוֹן :** which translated verbally means, "Thou shalt not lift up the name of Yahweh, thy God, unto naught, for Yahweh will not count him innocent who lifts up his name unto naught." The commandment appears in an identical form in the Deuteronomic recension of the Decalogue in Deut. 5¹¹, but the combination "lift up the name unto naught" occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament. For the determination of the meaning of the passage, accordingly, we are thrown back upon a study of the three principal words, **נשא**, **שם**, and **שוֹן**.

There are no three words in the Hebrew language that have a greater variety of meanings. **נשא** denotes primarily 'lift up,' then 'carry,' and finally 'take away.' From each of these main meanings a host of secondary meanings are derived. **שם** denotes primarily 'name,' then 'person, presence, authority, character, reputation.' **שוֹן** denotes primarily 'emptiness, nothingness,' then 'sin, deceit,' and finally even 'idol.' By the combination of these meanings an immense number of interpretations can be put upon the passage ; and, as a matter of fact, the history of exegesis shows that nearly every possible theory has been tried at one time or another. The subject has called forth volumes of discussion, and is so exceedingly trite that I should not venture to present it if I did not have still another interpretation to add to the already long list. Before I present this, however, I wish to show the untenability of the more commonly received theories.

The word **נשא** is taken by the LXX in the sense of *λαμβάνω*, and the commandment is rendered, "Thou shalt not take, *i.e.* use, the name of the Lord thy God for naught." This is followed by Aquila, Origen, the Vulgate (*non assumes*), Luther, and all the English

versions. By Hengstenberg and Keil **נשא** is translated 'take away,' and the force of the commandment is supposed to be, "Thou shalt not pervert the name of Yahweh thy God unto an improper use."

By most modern commentators **נשא**, 'lift up,' is taken in the sense of 'utter' or 'speak' (so De Wette, Knobel, Dillmann, Wellhausen, Lange, Kautzsch, Holzinger, Baentsch). Attention is called to the idiom **נשא את הקול**, "lift up the voice," and to the formulæ "lift up a lament," "lift up a similitude," "lift up a prayer," and "lift up a song," which are supposed to indicate that **נשא** may have the meaning of 'speak' or 'utter.' Buhl in Gesenius's *Handwörterbuch* sums up this view by saying that *efferre* is used in the sense of *effari*, 'aussprechen.' Barth (*Etymologische Studien*, p. 63 f.) regards this meaning as so certain that he questions whether the verb in this sense has anything to do with **נשא**, 'lift up,' and proposes to connect it with the Ethiopic *'aušə'a*, which means 'speak, answer.'

It will be observed that all three of these interpretations come out to practically the same conclusion, namely, that **נשא** means 'utter.' 'To take' in the sense of 'to use' is unintelligible except of use in speech. 'Transfer' is also meaningless except in the sense of transfer in language; and the third interpretation assumes from the outset that speech is meant. It appears, accordingly, that there is general agreement that "lift up" means to utter.

In regard to the word **שם** there is also general agreement that it is used in none of its secondary significations, but means simply 'name'; so that the phrase "lift up the name" means "utter the name."

In regard to the meaning of **שוא** opinions differ widely. An early view is that the word retains its primitive sense of 'emptiness,' and that the prohibition is aimed against the use of the name of Yahweh in connection with trivial matters. The objection to this view is that nowhere in the Old Testament do we meet any trace of the idea that a familiar use of the name of God is improper. Old Testament history shows that the name Yahweh was used as freely by ancient Israel as the name Allah is used in the modern Orient.

A widely accepted modification of this theory is that the commandment is directed against profane swearing, or the use of the name of God in frivolous or unnecessary oaths. This view also is open to the objection of being foreign to the thought of the Old Testament. In the language of the Old Testament, "to swear by the name of a god," *i.e.* to use his name in asseverations, is equivalent to declaring one's self his worshipper. Far from prohibiting the use of the divine name in connection with the affairs of daily life, the law codes enjoin

the frequent use of the name of Yahweh as a means of indicating that one adheres to him. Thus in Deut. 6¹³ we read, "Thou shalt fear Yahweh, thy God ; and him shalt thou serve, and shalt swear by his name" ; similarly Deut. 10²⁰, "Thou shalt fear Yahweh thy God ; him shalt thou serve ; and to him shalt thou cleave, and by his name shalt thou swear." In like manner Jer. 12¹⁶ says, "And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name (saying), As Yahweh liveth ; even as they taught my people to swear by Baal ; then shall they be built up in the midst of my people." Old Testament history also shows that the name of Yahweh was used freely by ancient Israel. Accordingly, the common modern view that the Third Commandment is aimed against a careless use of the name of God must be regarded as untenable.

Others take שׁוֹאֵן in its secondary sense of 'sin,' and interpret the commandment as meaning that the name of God must not be used for any sinful purpose. Among recent commentators this view is represented by Holzinger and Baentsch. Against this view is the vagueness of the prohibition. The other commandments are concrete. They do not say, "Thou shalt avoid heathenism, Thou shalt not degrade the worship of Yahweh, Thou shalt set apart times for worship, Thou shalt reverence those in authority, Thou shalt be chaste" ; but "Thou shalt have no other god, Thou shalt make thee no graven image, Remember the Sabbath, Honor thy father and thy mother, Thou shalt not commit adultery." Such a generality as the precept "Thou shalt not use the name of Yahweh, thy God, for any sinful purpose," is wholly out of place in so specific a law as the Decalogue.

Many interpreters, ancient and modern, take שׁוֹאֵן in the specific sense of 'false' or 'lie,' and understand the commandment to mean, "Thou shalt not use the name of Yahweh, thy God, in attestation of any false statement." In favor of this view is the fact that this prohibition occurs elsewhere in the Pentateuchal legislation. In the Holiness Code (Lev. 19¹²) we read, "Thou shalt not swear by my name to a lie, lest thou profane the name of thy God." Lev. 5⁴⁻⁵ and 6¹⁻⁷ prescribe guilt offerings in the case of a man swearing carelessly or falsely. Against this interpretation, however, is the fact that it makes the third commandment practically identical with the eighth and the ninth. Swearing to a lie must be intended to defraud a neighbor, in which case it coincides with theft ; or it is intended to injure his good name, in which case it coincides with false witness. It is hardly likely that in so brief a code as the Decalogue a prohibi-

tion would be inserted that coincides so nearly with the scope of two other prohibitions. Moreover, if such a law had been inserted, it must logically have stood in the second table, along with theft and false witness, with which it is closely affiliated, rather than in its present position between the law in regard to idolatry and the law in regard to the Sabbath. Furthermore, if the author of this commandment meant to prohibit swearing to a lie by the name of Yahweh, why did he not use the specific word שָׁקֵר instead of the indefinite שׂוֹא? This word he uses in the ninth commandment, לֹא־תִעָנֶה, בְּרִעֲךָ עַד שָׁקֵר, "Thou shalt not answer a lying testimony against thy neighbor"; and there is no reason why he should not have used it in the third commandment, if he had meant to forbid false swearing.

Finally, the theory has been propounded that the word שׂוֹא refers to magic, divination, and other similar heathen practices; and that the scope of the third commandment is to prevent the use of the divine name for such purposes. This theory is defended at length by Dr. Coffin in Vol. XIX., p. 166 of this JOURNAL. Such a prohibition would be in place among the duties to God in the first table of the Decalogue, but it is very doubtful whether שׂוֹא, 'emptiness,' can have the specific sense of 'magic.' It is used in this sense nowhere else in the Old Testament, and there is not another law in the Pentateuch that prohibits the association of the name of Yahweh with magical rites. Ex. 22¹⁷ reads, "Thou shalt not suffer a sorceress to live." Deut. 18¹⁰⁻¹¹ reads, "There shall not be found with thee . . . one that useth divination, one that practiseth augury, or an enchanter, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a consulter with a familiar spirit, or a wizard, or a necromancer; for whosoever doeth these things is an abomination unto Yahweh." Lev. 19²⁶ reads, "Ye shall not use enchantments nor practise augury." Lev. 19³¹, "Turn not unto them that have familiar spirits, nor unto the wizards." (cf. Lev. 20⁶⁻²⁷). In all these passages magical practices are forbidden, as involving apostasy from Yahweh; but the possibility of the name of Yahweh being used in connection with them is not contemplated. It is very unlikely, therefore, that the scope of the third commandment is to prevent this sort of use of the divine name.

It appears, accordingly, that all the current interpretations of the third commandment labor under serious difficulties; and this rouses the suspicion that there is something wrong in the common assumption that נִשָּׂא אֶת שֵׁם means 'to use the name,' or 'to utter the name.'

This interpretation is based chiefly upon the analogy of the com-

mon expression **נשא את הקול** "to lift up the voice," which is supposed to be equivalent to "utter the voice." As a matter of fact, however, a study of the passages in which this expression occurs shows that it is never used in the simple sense of "utter the voice." There is not a passage in the Old Testament where we read "he lifted up his voice and spoke," or "he lifted up his voice and answered," as must have been the case if **נשא** had the meaning of 'utter.' The combination in which **נשא את הקול** is used are these: "He lifted up his voice and wept" (Gen. 26¹⁶ 29¹¹ Jud. 21² 1 Sam. 11⁴ 24¹⁶ 30⁴ 2 Sam. 3³² 13³³ Job 2¹²), "He lifted up his voice and cried" (Num. 14¹ Jud. 9⁷ Isa. 42²), "He lifted up his voice and shouted" (Isa. 24¹⁴), "He lifted up his voice and sang" (Isa. 42¹¹ 52⁸). These show that in the phrase **נשא את הקול** the verb retains its primitive meaning of 'lift up,' and that the expression denotes, not "to utter the voice," but "to raise the voice, to cry aloud." The phrase **נשא את הקול** is thus the precise equivalent of the phrase that alternates with it, **הרים את הקול**, that is, "elevate the voice." For "utter the voice," or "speak," the regular Hebrew idiom is **נתן את הקול** (Ps. 18¹⁴ 46⁷ Prov. 1²⁰ Jer. 2¹⁵, etc.).

The other phrases that are cited in proof that **נשא** can mean 'utter,' or 'speak' are equally inapposite. Not once do we meet the phrases "lift up a word," "lift up an answer," "lift up a saying," that must have occurred, if **נשא** had the meaning of 'utter,' or 'speak.' Instead of this the common formulæ are, "lift up a weeping" (Jer. 9⁹), "lift up a cry" (Jer. 7¹⁶ 11¹⁴), "lift up a lamentation" (Jer. 9¹⁸), "lift up a lament" (Jer. 7²⁰ Ezek. 19¹ 26¹⁷ 27^{2, 32} 28¹² 32² Amos 5¹), "lift up a prayer" (2 Ki. 19⁴ Isa. 37⁴ Jer. 7¹⁶ 11¹⁴), "lift up a psalm" (Ps. 81³), "lift up a **משל**, or similitude" (Num. 23^{7, 18} 24^{2, 3, 15, 20, 21, 23} Isa. 14⁴ Mic. 2⁴ Hab. 2⁶ Job 27¹ 29¹). These combinations show that **נשא** does not mean 'utter,' or 'speak,' but 'cry out, deliver in a loud and impressive manner.' In like manner **משא**, the derivative of **נשא**, is never used for 'utterance' or 'word,' as must have been the case if **נשא** meant 'speak,' but is limited to the exalted ecstatic utterances of the prophets. The only cases in the Old Testament in which it might be conjectured that **נשא** had the meaning of 'utter' are Ex. 23¹, "Thou shalt not lift up a false report," and Ps. 15³, "Who lifeth not up a reproach against his neighbor." In both cases, however, the context shows that the reference is not to uttering a false report or a reproach, but to receiving one. The translations of the Revised Version are accurate, "Thou shalt not take up a false report," and "Who taketh not

up a reproach." It may be concluded, therefore, that **נשא** never refers to simple speaking, but always to loud or emphatic utterance.

If this be true, **לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת שֵׁם יְהוָה** cannot mean, "Thou shalt not use, utter, speak, the name of Yahweh," but "Thou shalt not cry out the name of Yahweh." In this case "lift up the name of Yahweh" is the exact equivalent of "call upon the name of Yahweh," which is the common expression for 'worship' (cf. Gen. 4²⁶ 12⁸ 21³³ 26²⁵ 1 Ki. 18²⁴⁻²⁶ 2 Ki. 5¹¹ Isa. 12⁴ 41²⁵ 64⁶ Jer. 10²⁵ Joel 3⁵ Zeph. 3⁹ Zech. 13⁹ Ps. 79⁶ 99⁶ 105¹ 116^{4,13} Lam. 3⁵⁵ 1 Chr. 16^{8,10}). That this is the correct interpretation is shown by the fact that in the only passage where the expression **נשא שם** occurs (Ps. 16⁴) the reference is to worship. It is confirmed also by the fact that in every other case where the name of God is the object of human activity the reference is to worship. The phrases to "seek the name" (Ps. 83¹⁷), "wait on the name" (Ps. 52¹¹), "think on the name" (Mal. 3¹⁶), "know the name" (Isa. 52⁶ Jer. 48¹⁷ Ps. 9¹¹ 91¹⁴), "fear the name" (Deut. 28⁵⁸ Isa. 59¹⁹ Mal. 2⁵ 3²⁰ Ps. 61⁶ 86¹¹ 102¹⁶ Neh. 1¹¹), "love the name" (Isa. 56⁶ Ps. 5¹² 69³⁷ 119¹³²), "trust in the name" (Ps. 33²¹), "remember the name" (Ps. 20⁸ 119⁵⁵), all signify to be a worshipper of the god in question. As already noted, "call upon the name of Yahweh" is the common expression in the Old Testament for "worship Yahweh." Closely analogous is **הזכיר שם**, "to cause to remember the name," commonly translated in our version "make mention of the name." This is always used of invoking God in worship. Thus in Ex. 23¹³ we read, "In all things that I have said unto you take heed, and make no mention of the name of other gods" (cf. 20²³ 22¹⁹); Josh. 23⁷, "Neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow down yourselves unto them"; Isa. 26¹³, "O Yahweh, our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us, but by thee only will we make mention of thy name"; Amos 6¹⁰, "We may not make mention of the name of Yahweh." On the strength of the analogy of these passages we should probably follow the Peshitta in Ex. 20²⁴ in reading **תזכיר** instead of **אזכיר**, and translate, "An altar of earth shalt thou make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings and thy peace offerings, thy sheep and thine oxen: in every place where *thou* makest mention of my name I will come unto thee and bless thee" (so Merx, Bruston, Buhl, Holzinger). Other combinations, such as "praise the name" (1 Ki. 8^{33,35} Isa. 25¹ Ps. 44⁹ 54⁸ 69³¹ 74²¹ 99³ 106⁴⁷ 113^{1,3} 122⁴ 135¹ 138² 140¹⁴ 142⁸ 145² 148^{5,13} 149³ 2 Chr. 6^{21,26}, etc.), "sing praises

unto the name" (2 Sam. 22⁵⁰ Ps. 7¹⁸ 9³ 18⁵⁰ 61⁹ 66⁴ 68⁵ 92² 135³), "bless the name" (Ps. 72¹⁹ 96² 100⁴ 103¹ 113² 145^{1,21} Job 1²¹ Neh. 9⁵), "magnify the name" (2 Sam. 7²⁶), "glorify the name" (Isa. 24¹⁵ Ps. 86^{9,12}, cf. 115¹), "declare the name" (Ps. 22²³ 102²²), "sanctify the name" (Isa. 29²³), refer without exception to the worship of Yahweh. In this connection it is not without interest to note that the whole series of Deuteronomic phrases in which שׁוּם is used have a similar connotation. "To put his name there," or "to cause his name to dwell there" (Deut. 12^{5, 11, 21} 14^{23 sq.} 16^{2, 6, 11}, etc.), means "to establish his worship in that place." "To build a house unto the name of Yahweh" (2 Sam. 7¹³ 1 Ki. 3² 5^{17, 19}, etc.), means "to build a house for the worship of Yahweh."

In like manner all the phrases which speak of disregarding the name of Yahweh refer to remission of his worship. "To forget the name of Yahweh" (Jer. 23²⁷; cf. Hos. 2¹⁹ Ps. 44²¹) means to cease to be his worshipper "To cut off the names of the idols," or "to take them away out of the mouth" (Zech. 13² Hos. 2¹⁷) means to cause idol-worship to cease. "To profane the name of Yahweh" is to cease to be his worshipper or to disregard the precepts of his religion. His name is profaned by causing one's seed to pass through the fire to Molech (Lev. 18²⁴ 20³), by worshipping idols (Exek. 20³⁹), by making a bald spot on one's head, cutting the edges of one's beard, and making cuttings in one's flesh (Lev. 21⁶), by eating of sacrifices when one is ceremonially unclean (Lev. 22²), by not offering the proper sacrifices (Lev. 22³²), by the remission of worship during the exile (Ezek. 36²⁰⁻²³), also by false swearing (Lev. 19¹²), by a man and his father going in unto the same maid (Amos 2⁷), by enslaving again slaves that had been set free (Jer. 34¹⁶). According to Mal. 1^{6 sqq.} the priests "despise the name of Yahweh" when they offer blind, lame, and sick animals upon his altar.

In view of this uniform usage of the expression "name of Yahweh," I conclude that the only natural interpretation to put upon the words יְהוָה לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת שֵׁם יְהוָה is, "Thou shalt not invoke Yahweh, thy God, in worship."

What then is the meaning of שׁוּא? If "lift up the name of Yahweh" means "call upon him in worship," then שׁוּא must refer to the manner of worship. For the early Hebrews worship consisted primarily in sacrifice. To "call upon the name of Yahweh" meant to invoke him in connection with an offering. Thus, in Gen. 12⁸, "And Abram built an altar unto Yahweh, and called upon the name of Yahweh"; Gen. 26²⁵, "And Isaac built an altar there, and called upon

the name of Yahweh"; 1 Ki. 18^{23 sq.}, "Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on the wood, and put no fire under. And call ye on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of Yahweh"; Zeph. 3^{9 sq.}, "That they may all call upon the name of Yahweh. . . . From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia they shall bring my offering"; 1 Sam. 1³, "And this man went up out of his city from year to year to worship and to sacrifice unto Yahweh Sebaoth in Shiloh." In like manner, in Ex. 20²⁴, "to make mention of the name of Yahweh" is used in connection with the building of an altar of earth and the offering of burnt offerings and peace offerings; and in Ex. 23¹³, "to make no mention of the name of any other god" is equivalent to the law in 22²⁰, "He that sacrificeth to any god, save unto Yahweh only, shall be devoted to destruction." In the only other passage in the Old Testament outside of the third commandment where the expression "lift up the name" is used it is associated with sacrifice; Ps. 16⁴, "Their libations of blood I will not offer, and I will not lift up their names upon my lips."

We are justified, accordingly, in thinking that the word **לְשׂוּא**, "unto emptiness, unto naught," in the third commandment refers to the absence of an offering when the name of Yahweh is invoked; and that the commandment as a whole is to be translated, "Thou shalt not cry aloud the name of Yahweh thy God when thou hast brought no sacrifice."

The preposition **לְ** in this case denotes time, as in the idioms **לְעֵת** 'at the season,' **לְבֹקֶר** 'in the morning,' **לְעָרֵב** 'in the evening,' **לְיוֹם** 'in the day of,' **לְמָטָר** 'in time of rain.' **לְ** in **לְשׂוּא** commonly expresses *result*: thus in Jer. 2³⁰, "in vain, **לְשׂוּא**, have I smitten your children"; Jer. 4³⁰, "in vain shalt thou make thyself fair"; Jer. 6²⁹, "In vain do they go on refining"; Jer. 46¹¹, "In vain dost thou use many medicines"; Ps. 139²⁰, "Thine enemies lift themselves up in vain"; but it also expresses *direction* in Jer. 18¹⁵, "They have burned incense to naught, **לְשׂוּא**," and in Ps. 24⁴, "Who hath not lifted up his soul unto naught." **לְשׂוּא**, therefore, has no fixed meaning, so that there is no difficulty in assigning it a temporal signification in the passage under discussion. This is at least as easy as the current interpretation which makes it express *purpose*, for which no analogies can be found elsewhere in the Old Testament.

In justification of this exegesis of the third commandment the following considerations may be adduced: —

1. The analogy of all the other Hebrew codes demands that between the law against idolatry and the law concerning the Sabbath a law concerning sacrifice should stand. Thus the Book of the Covenant, according to E, begins (Ex. 20²³) with the words, "Ye shall not make other gods with me; gods of silver, or gods of gold ye shall not make unto you," and follows this with the commandment, "An altar of earth shalt thou make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings and thy peace offerings." J's Book of the Covenant also, in Ex. 34¹²⁻¹⁷, begins with prohibitions of polytheism and idolatry, and follows these with the commandment (34¹⁹), "All that openeth the womb is mine; and all thy cattle that is male, the firstlings of cattle and sheep." This is followed in its turn by the law of the Sabbath and of the other sacred seasons. In like manner the Deuteronomic legislation opens in chs. 5-11 with exhortations against polytheism and idolatry, follows in ch. 12 with regulations in regard to the place and the manner of sacrifice, and then gives the laws of the sacred seasons. The Holiness Code also, in Lev. 19⁴⁻⁸, reads, "Turn ye not unto false gods, nor make to yourselves molten gods: I am Yahweh your God. And when ye offer a sacrifice of peace offerings unto Yahweh, ye shall offer it so that ye may be accepted." It appears, accordingly, that a law concerning sacrifice is precisely what the analogy of the other Hebrew codes would lead us to expect at the point in the Decalogue where the third commandment stands.

2. A law requiring all worship to be accompanied with an offering is entirely in accord with the genius of the old Hebrew religion. In pre-Deuteronomic days every slaughter was at the same time a sacrifice, and it was customary to present the first fruits of every crop. Under these circumstances frequent presentation of offerings was necessary, and there was no difficulty in prescribing that every calling upon Yahweh should be accompanied with a sacrifice of some sort.

3. Provisions analogous to this are found in the earliest Hebrew codes. Ex. 34²⁰ reads, "None shall appear before me empty," which is the exact equivalent of "Thou shalt not cry out the name of Yahweh thy God when thou bringest naught," and which stands at the same point in the legislation between prohibitions of idolatry and prescriptions in regard to the sacred seasons. The larger Book of the Covenant repeats this law in Ex. 23¹⁵, and adds also the provision in 22²⁸, "Thou shalt not delay to offer of the abundance of thy fruits and of thy liquors."

4. Professor Peritz calls my attention to the fact that the exhortation which accompanies the law, "For Yahweh will not count him in-

nocent who lifts up his name unto naught," is more appropriate, if the law refers to remission of sacrifice, than if it refers to a blasphemous use of the divine name. In the latter case we should expect some severer threat.

I feel warranted, accordingly, in presenting this new interpretation of the third commandment as supported both by Hebrew linguistic usage and by the analogy of other Hebrew legislation. The important question of its bearing upon the age of the Decalogue, space will not permit me to discuss here.