

[Ten Commandments, Episode 6]

Jon: In the play *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare poses the question: What's in a name? Well, a lot, actually. A name is more than just a label or a sound people use to get your attention. A name represents your whole identity and reputation. It's the story of who you are.

Tim: Here's just an example of a proverb: A good name is more desirable than great wealth.

Jon: And when it comes to the God of the Bible, who is the source of all life and all that is good, his name is indisputably the greatest name. And yet in the story of the Bible, God chooses to share his name or attach his name to Israel. And what does that mean?

Tim: When God gives his name or attaches his name to others, it becomes a form of representation or a way that you encounter the God who is above and beyond.

Jon: In the 10 Commandments, God gives Israel 10 words that, if followed, will lead them to life and flourishing. Today, we'll discuss the third, which is all about how they will represent his name.

Tim: You will not carry the name of Yahweh your Elohim in vain.

Jon: You might be familiar with the translation, "Don't take the name of the Lord in vain," which makes you think of merely misusing God's name in your speech. But the Hebrew word here is "to carry the name."

Tim: It seems like carrying the name is bigger because it refers to your behavior. Stealing, deceiving, lying, swearing falsely in my name is a way to mistreat the name of God.

Jon: And you can carry Yahweh's name in vain?

Tim: In vain. It's the Hebrew word *shav'*. It can refer to something that doesn't fulfill its purpose. Why do the people of Yahweh exist as the people of Yahweh? Well, they were called to be an image and a representative of God to the nations and then to represent the nations before God.

Jon: Today, Tim Mackie and I discuss the third command about carrying the name of Yahweh. It's not a command about cursing. It's a command about representing God to the world. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

[Music break]

Jon: Hey, Tim.

Tim: Hello, Jon.

Jon: We are today going to discuss the third command or the word.

Tim: Third word of the 10 words, the third command of the 10 commands.

Jon: We're going slow through the 10 Commandments because this isn't simply just a list of things to check off. This is an invitation to a way of being in which you can truly find life.

Tim: Yeah. Yep. And these are words that God spoke to the community of ancient Israel, sitting at the foot of Mount Sinai. It's like the first words that God said to Israel, the foundation. And then Jesus boiled it all down yet again to "love God and love your neighbor." Mmm, which, recall, we found reflected in the overall shape of the 10. The first four are all related to God.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: And then the fifth is an interesting kind of hinge. And then six through 10 are all related to how you treat, really, people.

Jon: That's right.

Tim: Yes, so we're going to look at, now, the third word. That is the third commandment, which is super interesting. It's related to God, specifically the name of God. But you're already faced with challenges from even how you choose to put it into another language. Because—

Jon: How do you translate this?

Tim: Yeah. Translation and interpretation are bound up together. So how about we just read a few versions of it to see what people are after, and let's just take it from there.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Alright. Third command. So here's three popular English translations: the New International Version, the New Living Translation, and then maybe a lesser-known—but one that I'm really into these days—called the Lexham English Bible. And they read, “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God,” or the Lexham English Bible has “the name of Yahweh, your God.”

Jon: Hmm. Misuse the name.

Tim: Misuse the name. The English Standard Version and the King James are in partnership here: “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” To take in vain. The New Revised Standard Version: “You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God.”

Jon: So that's very similar to misuse, wrongful use.

Tim: Mhm. And just for a lesser-known English translation but just an interesting take on it, the Common English Bible, CEB: “Do not use the Lord your God's name as if it were of no significance.” The most literal translation would be as follows: “You will not carry the name of Yahweh your Elohim” ... I'm going to hang with the King James with “in vain,” if by “vain” we mean of vain purpose, of empty purpose.

Jon: Yeah, vanity means emptiness?

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah, purpose—

Jon: Is this where these other translations were getting the idea of useless?

Tim: Useless? Yeah. Or of no significance.

Jon: No significance.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: You shall not carry—and we'll talk about it in more depth—you will not carry the name of Yahweh your Elohim in vain, for Yahweh will not leave unpunished, or he will not declare innocent, the one who carries his name in vain. So actually, even this translation that's mine, I'm not very satisfied with. So maybe let's hold it up for revision as we have our discussion here, shall we?

Jon: Sure.

Tim: Okay. So first, let's think about the two main words here, which are "the name," clearly the name is important. This whole thing is about God's name.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: What is God's name? In the Hebrew Bible, God's name is spelled with four Hebrew letters, *yod*, *heh*, *vav*, *heh*, called the Tetragrammaton, which is a Greek way to refer to it. *Tetra*, four, means four; *gramma* means letters—the four letters. And the most ancient pronunciation that we're pretty sure we can recover of it would have been "Yahweh," which means "the one who is." He Is. Such a rad name. It's like the coolest name ever.

Jon: It's a good name.

Tim: The One Who Is.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So that's God's name. And so this prohibition is: Don't do something to the name, the One Who Is. What are you not supposed to do to the name? It's the verb *nasa'*, which means "to pick up and carry."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So that's one question. What does it mean to carry the name?

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So let's back up from that. Let's look at the word "name," the meaning of "name" in the Bible. Then let's look at this word "carry." Then we have to look at this word "in vain." Three short word studies, shall we?

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Okay.

[Music break]

Tim: So first of all, the Hebrew word for name is *shem*. *Shem*. And its first main meaning is “name.” The thing that humans—

Jon: A title.

Tim: Yeah. So sound waves that come out of a human’s mouth that humans have agreed together that these are the sounds that, when we say them, it refers to that person or thing.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: The name, Jon.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Your parents just decided, made a decision.

[Laughter]

Jon: Totally.

Tim: The human to be born, right?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: From your mother’s womb, that this would be, his name is Jon.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So it’s an actual name, but even in English, the word “name” has a wider resonance of meaning. Because I can—uhm, hmm—drag your name in the dirt.

Jon: Ah, yeah.

Tim: That’s an English turn of phrase.

Jon: Hmm. Yeah.

Tim: What are other name turns of phrase we have?

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: How about this one? To make a name for yourself.

Jon: Mmm. Yep.

Tim: She made a name for herself by doing X, Y, or Z. Mhm.

Jon: You can tarnish someone's name.

Tim: Oh, yeah, yeah, that's right. Yep. Mhm. Mmm. And if you want to reverse that, you can clear your name.

Jon: Ah, yeah, clear your name.

Tim: Clear your name of any guilt or something. Yeah.

Jon: Ah, yeah. That's a very common one.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. So both to tarnish your name, clear your name, and make a name for yourself.

Jon: Yeah, refers to your reputation.

Tim: Yeah. So not just the actual sound or word "your name," but when who you are is brought up in conversation, people have feelings. It brings up feelings, right? And associations, a story attached.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And that whole story—right?—can be referred to as your name.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So that's true in Hebrew, too. So here's just an example of a proverb: "A good name is more desirable than great wealth," says Proverbs 22:1. So for people, when they hear your name, to think good things, that is actually more valuable than accumulating lots of money.

Jon: Mmm. This is good ancient wisdom.

Tim: That's great ancient wisdom.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Totally. Because you can earn a bunch of money, but at some point, you'll use it up or run out.

Jon: Right.

Tim: But if people think well of you—

Jon: Then there's always opportunity to be productive again.

Tim: Yeah, there's always opportunity.

Jon: And then, what do you really want in life? A bunch of money, or—

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: —beautiful relationships?

Tim: Yeah. Yup. That's right. Yeah. So that's an example of a good name for people to think well of you. That is, your name refers to you, really. Which is why, in the Bible, for your name to fall into some bad reputation, for people to think badly of you or poorly of you in the future, that's like the ultimate disaster of a human life, is for your name to fall into disrepute.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. So, for example, to ... mmm, for your name to be used in curses, the way that people curse each other in the future. So in Isaiah 65, God's talking about people who have been opposed to God's purpose in Israel and who have actually begun to persecute and do violence towards God's, like, chosen prophets and representatives. God says, "Listen, you're not going to have a future. Your name will be left for a curse among my chosen ones."

Jon: Hmm. Yeesh.

Tim: But my servants will be called by another name.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So for people to say—mmm—"may you not become like so-and-so."

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That's leaving your name for a curse.

Jon: This is a way to ... especially someone you know really well, who you know who they can't stand or you know who they're afraid they're becoming like—

Tim: Ooh. Yes.

Jon: Is to then give them that name.

Tim: Yeah. You know who you're acting like?

Jon: You know who you're acting like right now?

Tim: You know who you sound like? Yeah.

Jon: That's fighting words.

Tim: Yeah, that's a quick way to ... yeah, because then somebody's like, "I'm not like so-and-so."

Jon: Yeah. That's using that person's name as a curse.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. That's right.

Jon: That's interesting.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. May you become like so-and-so, or you know who you're like right now.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Yeah. And then when God says, "My servants will be called by another name." So these are people whose name has been mistreated in reputation, but God will give them a new name. God will rename them, as it were, which means a new identity, a new reputation.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Mhm. This is why wiping out someone's name or blotting out the name—

Jon: Oh, yeah.

Tim: —is the ultimate tragedy. This idea that you have all these names written down, and if your name's written on, like a list, like a roster...

Jon: Then you're in.

Tim: You're on the list.

Jon: You matter.

Tim: Yeah! But to erase someone's name means that it's like they never were.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Sad. No one says their name anymore. Mhm. So when we're thinking about the name of the One Who Is, Yahweh's name, who's the author of all reality, Yahweh's name is like the greatest name. Because he's the creator of all things. So the idea of God's name being honored, God's name being great. There's a passage in Malachi, chapter 1, where God talks about "from the rising of the sun to its setting, my name will be great among the nations. Incense will be offered to my name. My name will be great." So to have a great name is to be honored. And if God's the most honorable being, because he's the source of all being in reality, then God is the greatest name.

Jon: Hmm. We're saying "name" means reputation.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. So then the biblical authors take another step. The name of Yahweh has something special to it. What is so interesting is that there's all kinds of examples in the Hebrew Bible where it's hard to tell apart the name of God from the very presence of God.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So when God says he's going to guide the Israelites through the wilderness into the land of the Canaanites to give them that land, as he promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God says, "I'm going to send a messenger to go with you, like a sign or a symbol of my divine presence with you." It gets translated "angel, my angel, my messenger." And then God says, "You know, you should be careful around that messenger. Don't rebel against him because he won't pardon your transgressions. My name is in him."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So how you treat him is how you treat me. And if you mistreat me as I'm protecting and guiding you to give you a gift, don't be surprised if you forfeit the gift.

Jon: Okay. Name becomes a way to describe the whole.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: God is in him.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: But instead of saying, "I am in him," he says, "My name is in him."

Tim: "My name is in him." Yeah.

Jon: So not only is it a way to refer to your reputation, it's a way to just, then, talk about your very essence.

Tim: Yes. Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: That's right. Yeah, which is why, in the book of Deuteronomy, when God talks about, "Hey, Israelites, when you get into the land, and you organize yourself in tribes and districts, and there's a central place where you all go to encounter me and bring your offerings to me, a central place of worship," God calls by—many times over, almost a couple dozen times in Deuteronomy—he calls it the place where his name will dwell. His name will take up residence in a place or a space or a building. And this phrase appears over and over. So people look at a building, and that's Yahweh's place. That's the place where his name lives.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yahweh can attach his name to things. And then how people relate to that thing is now how you relate to God. God's name is shareable.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So in other words, when God gives his name or attaches his name to others—to something—it becomes a form of representation or a way that you encounter the God who is above and beyond. But I can truly encounter something of that God in this angel or in this building.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: The point is this nuance—a metaphorical nuance—of part for whole, is, I actually think, important to this larger phrase "carry the name." So.

Jon: Right. Okay. I see where you're going.

Tim: Mhm. So maybe let's pause on "name." Let's go to the word "carry."

Jon: Yeah. Okay.

Tim: Shall we? Shift gears? Okay. From “name” to “carry.”

[Music break]

Tim: So to carry the name, it’s translated “to take the name.”

Jon: Yeah, or “use the name.”

Tim: Use the name. That’s the word “carry.” It’s the Hebrew verb *nasa’*. It’s one of the first verbs you learn. It’s used all over the Hebrew Bible, hundreds of times. If you’re familiar with the mid-20th century American space program called the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, I think that’s it.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: *Nasa’* means to lift up, they lift up rockets from the ground.

Jon: Someone, someone found a special little—

Tim: Yeah, this is a little Hebrew hack if you’re learning Hebrew and American.

Jon: Do you think, wait, do you think that’s on purpose, or do you think that was a happy coincidence?

Tim: It’s a—oh—it’s a happy coincidence.

Jon: Because those, the people who name these agencies, they get pretty creative.

Tim: Okay, well, who knows? I don’t know. You’d have to go ask the founders of NASA. I don’t know. But *nasa’*, how you transliterate the Hebrew word into English letters is how you spell the acronym NASA.

Jon: *Nasa’*.

Tim: *Nasa’*.

Jon: To carry.

Tim: *Nasa’*.

Jon: To lift up.

Tim: To pick up.

Jon: To pick up.

Tim: Lift up. And then also then once you pick it up, it's in your hands and you are carrying it.

Jon: What's great about this word, it's so concrete.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: It's, like, not abstract at all.

Tim: No. Yeah.

Jon: I could take something—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: —and I can, with my pure physical force, lift it off the ground and move it around. I can carry it.

Tim: Yeah. That's right. Yes. So you can pick up a box, you can pick up a child, you can carry a tree, carry a goat, carry a sheep. This is what the word means all throughout the Hebrew Bible.

Jon: Yeah. Maybe not like a real big goat. You might want to just—

Tim: That's right.

Jon: —let it walk.

Tim: Probably not an ox.

Jon: Not an ox.

Tim: So just like in English, in English, we carry things metaphorically. I'm carrying a really heavy burden today.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Can mean lots of things.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Like actually I have a heavy backpack on, or something terrible happened to a friend, and you're carrying that.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So to speak. So, similarly, you can metaphorically carry things in Hebrew.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And I guess what's very interesting, you can actually do a search on, well, what would it mean to carry the name? When you add this verb to the noun "name," how many times does that appear in the Hebrew Bible? It appears three times outside the 10 Commandments. Two occur just a few chapters after the 10 Commandments in something that God says to Moses on Mount Sinai. And it's a description of what Israel's priests are to do when they go in and out of the tabernacle, which is ... when the priests go in and out of the tabernacle, they're wearing a bunch of special clothes. And one of the special things that they wear is this chest plate with these gold settings in which are set 12 gemstones. And—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —on the gemstones are—

Jon: Quite the outfit.

Tim: —are etched. Totally. Super fancy outfit.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: On the gemstones are etched the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. And this is all symbolism bound up with the fact that this particular Israelite, the priest, is a representative.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Like, when the priest goes in with those names etched on the stones, it's as if all of the people of those tribes are walking into the tent.

Jon: He's going in on behalf of all the tribes. But actually, in a way to think about it is, all the tribes are going in with him.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Because he's carrying them in.

Tim: They are represented by him. They are in him, on him. They're on him in the form of those stones. So two times in Exodus chapter 28, that representative entering of all the tribes into the tent in the form of the priest entering in, that's called "Aaron carrying their name before Yahweh." "So you will set stones on the shoulder pieces as stones of remembering for the Israelites, and Aaron will carry the names—their names—before Yahweh."

Jon: Is that how it's usually translated?

Tim: Oh, okay, that's a great point. That's how I've translated these two. Aaron will carry the names of the Israelites.

Jon: But he will *nasa'*.

Tim: He will *nasa'* their name.

Jon: The *shem*. The *shem*.

Tim: *Nasa'* the *shem*. Yeah, that's right. That's Exodus 28:12 NIV: "Aaron is to bear the name."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: NAS: "Aaron will bear their names." Ah, the CSB. What is the CSB? Christian Standard Bible.

Jon: Christian Standard Bible.

Tim: I forgot that. Yep. "He will carry their names." There you go. "Carry." So "bear" or "carry."

Jon: When do you ever bear something?

Tim: Mmm. I don't. I don't ever say that. I say carry.

Jon: Well, we say that's a heavy burden to bear. So that's—

Tim: Bear or burden—maybe because of the alliteration.

Jon: Yeah, maybe the alliteration.

Tim: You have ring bearers.

Jon: Ring bearers.

Tim: In weddings.

Jon: It's just an old word, isn't it?

Tim: It's an old word for "carry."

Jon: Okay. It's an old word for "carry."

Tim: It sounds, like, ceremonial or fancy.

Jon: It does sound—that's why they chose it. Ceremonial. It's the fancy word.

Tim: Yeah. Yup. Okay, so what Aaron is doing with the names of Israel is carrying their name before Yahweh. Now let's think of all the ways that Aaron could mess up that process.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: What could go wrong? Now, he's carrying their name before Yahweh, and he's going to offer some gifts. He's going to offer sacrifices as a symbol of surrender, of honor. So let's say, ooh, let's say something that actually maybe does happen. Let's say they—Aaron's sons, the other priests—they get super drunk.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Like the morning of.

Jon: This is what happens to Aaron's sons right now.

Tim: Uh, perhaps.

Jon: Perhaps. Oh.

Tim: It's implied—

Jon: It's implied.

Tim: —in Leviticus.

Jon: The strange fire.

Tim: The strange fire.

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim: And then right after that, God says, “Hey, never—”

Jon: Drink on the job?

Tim: “Drink before you come into the tent.”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Just don’t do it. Bad idea. So let’s say he’s plastered drunk.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And he comes in all tipsy.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: With all the names of Israel on him.

Tim: Okay.

Tim: That would be bad news. He would be miscarrying the name.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: He’s a bad representative in that point.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So something like this seems to be part of what it means to carry the name of Yahweh. What Aaron is to do for Israel, Israel is supposed to do with Yahweh’s name, to carry the name. “Do not carry the name in vain” assumes that they do carry the name.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And carrying the name means to represent. Yep. Yeah.

Jon: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

Tim: So this kind of fundamental insight and the importance of it was brought to my attention by a Hebrew Bible scholar, Carmen Imes, who is also a friend. We went to college with her—

Jon: Yeah.

[Laughter]

Tim: —many years ago. In her book, *Bearing Yhwh's Name at Sinai*.

Jon: Oh, she used the “bear.”

Tim: She uses “bearing.” Yeah, that’s true. Yeah.

Jon: It’s fancy.

Tim: It sounds fancy.

Jon: It’s the fancy word.

Tim: It’s totally right. So she goes through the whole history of interpretation, because for most translations, remember all the way back to the beginning, say don’t misuse the name.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Don’t take it in vain.

Jon: Right.

Tim: Which is usually taken to mean—

Jon: Using it as a curse word.

Tim: —using it as a curse word.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. Or dishonoring it in our speech.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So that is different than this idea.

Jon: Sure. It’s much smaller.

Tim: Yeah, you might say misusing God’s name in your speech is one way—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —you could misrepresent God.

Jon: Right.

Tim: But it seems like carrying the name—and we'll look at what “in vain” means in just, in a few minutes—but it's bigger because it refers to your behavior. There is one other place the phrase “carry the name” is used, and it's in a psalm, from a poem from the book of Psalms. Psalm 16 verse 4: “Those who hurry after another god will increase their own sorrow. I will not pour out their drink offerings of blood.”

Jon: Who's the I?

Tim: That's the speaker of the poem. It's connected to David.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: “I will not pour out their drink offerings of blood, nor will I carry their names on my lips.”

Jon: What? Wow. Uh—

Tim: I know.

Jon: Drink offerings of blood?

Tim: Yeah. Oh, offer a sacrifice of the blood of an animal.

Jon: That's a drink offering?

Tim: Well, it's interesting. Well, usually drink offering is actual liquid, like wine or oil or something.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: But in this case, it's metaphorically referring to the blood of the animals, the drink offering.

Jon: Oh, okay, so he's saying they're pouring out drink offerings to other gods. I'm not going to do that.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. “People who hurry after another god increase their sorrow.” What do we mean, “to hurry after another god”? Well, you could offer a sacrifice to another god, or you could carry their name on your lips.

Jon: And so their name is the other god’s.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Ah.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah. So why would you call on another god? You want to get something done. You want to leverage the reputation of that god or the power of that god to do something.

Jon: Yeah. Okay.

Tim: So, “Oh, Baal, or oh, Marduk, save me, bring rain to my crops.” Or here’s another example. And look at—this is from Leviticus 19. And check out the context—it’s a group of commands given to Israel. Leviticus 19:11: “You will not steal.” You’re like, “Oh, that sounds like one of the 10 Commandments,” because it is. “You will not deceive. You will not lie to one another, and you will not swear an oath falsely in my name so that none of you profane”—or treat as common—“the name of your God. I am Yahweh.”

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So that’s interesting. Stealing, deceiving, lying, swearing falsely in my name is a way to mistreat the name of God. So why would you swear falsely in the name of Yahweh? And here, this is in the context of oaths.

Jon: How can I trust your word?

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. You’re manipulating other people into doing what you want, and you’re using God’s name as, like, leverage. So, “I swear to Yahweh, I will pay you back if you just loan me those hundred shekels.” And you know, in your mind, you don’t have a hundred shekels, and you don’t have a way to get them to pay them back. So you’re using Yahweh’s power and reputation as a way to manipulate someone, to get what you want. That seems to be an idea, that’s deceiving and lying.

Jon: That’s profaning the name.

Tim: Swearing falsely, and that profanes the name. So is it possible that carrying the name of God on your lips, is that what the third command refers to? So maybe the question is, "What does it mean to carry the name of the Lord your God in vain?"

Jon: Okay. So seems like I have two ideas of what it can mean now.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: One is, to carry the name means to speak the name.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And so to carry the name on the lips is just a way of saying, "I'm saying the name."

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: But then there's a deeper meaning, perhaps, which is that if a name is someone's reputation, to carry someone's name means to represent their reputation.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. Right.

Jon: And that's what the priest is doing for Israel with the stones, is Israel's identity and their story and who they are. I'm representing to Yahweh by carrying their names on me.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: So in the same way, we're asked to carry the name of Yahweh, his story, who he is, his character, all of that.

Tim: Yes. Yeah. So this links us—and again, thank you, Carmen Imes, for this fundamental insight—this goes back to the prologue to the 10 Commandments, the opening speech that introduces the whole covenant partnership between God and Israel. And what God said was: "Now Israel"—this is Exodus chapter 19, right before the 10 Commandments—"if you all will listen, listen to my voice and keep my covenant, then you will be to me a special possession among all the peoples." Like, you're my crew. You're my special humans among all the humans. All of the land belongs to me, but you all will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. So priests there is important, because then that sets up an analogy. What Aaron is to be for the people, all of the people are to be for Yahweh.

Jon: Hmm. Yeah. How are people going to encounter Yahweh? It's going to be by how you carry me.

Tim: How you carry the name.

Jon: How you carry the name.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: How you represent me.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So in that sense, Yahweh attaches his name to this angel. "My name is in him."

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: "How you treat him is how you treat me. But also, then, what he is to you is who I am to you." Yahweh attaches his name to a building, a temple. Then, here, Yahweh is attaching his name to, like, the Israelites.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So that, now, how people perceive you and think about you is how they will think about me. It's a risky move to attach your name to something.

Jon: Yeah, it's an intimate move.

Tim: It's an intimate move. Yeah.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Because, yeah, they become representatives of you. Yeah. So this is what God is doing when he enlists Israel as his covenant partners. He makes vulnerable his name among the nations.

Jon: Because the nations will know Yahweh by how they are going to act.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. And there's one particular prophet among Israel's prophets that really picked up on this theme and focused on it. It's the prophet Ezekiel. And in a really important pivot moment in the book of Ezekiel, he focuses in on God's name and the fate of God's name in the history of Israel. And he basically describes the whole history of Israel as defiling and dishonoring the name. That Israel brought dishonor on God's name among the nations. That's actually what he says. In Ezekiel chapter 36, he says Israelites were living on their land, but they defiled the land with their ways and their deeds. And he starts to name, like, idolatry. They sacrificed children to other gods. They neglected the poor, like ... bad scene. So "for all the blood they poured out on the land, I

poured out my anger on them.” And what does that mean? “I scattered them among the nations. I dispersed them in the countries according to their deeds. I judged them, and then they went into the nations and there they defiled my holy name.” How did they do that? Well, when the nations said about them, “Wait, these are the people of Yahweh? But they just went out from his land.” You can just kind of see the connection here.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Like—

Jon: You’re not representing me well.

Tim: Yeah. These are Yahweh’s people? So they don’t have a land anymore, and they were conquered by their enemies. Well, what kind of God is Yahweh, then? So then God’s response, then, in the next line, is, “And so I had deep concern for my holy name.” And then he goes on to talk about what he’s going to do to restore the holiness of his name.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So this is a good example of Israel miscarried the name. And that’s what Yahweh is asking them not to do.

Jon: And it wasn’t that they were—

Tim: Cussing.

Jon: Cussing. They were mistreating each other.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: They weren’t doing right by each other.

Tim: Right. Yeah. That’s right. Mistreating each other, mistreating their children, mistreating the poor. I mean, there’s the three big categories: idolatry, injustice, and child sacrifice are like the big list of three horrible things that Ezekiel’s really frustrated about—sad about—as he looks back over Israel’s history. But then what we also saw is this phrase, “carry the name in your mouth,” is also a way you can use this phrase to refer to faults or misuse of Yahweh’s reputation in your speech. And that actually is another way that this command gets interpreted and understood within the Torah itself. And Leviticus 19 is an interesting example of that. “Don’t steal, don’t deceive, don’t lie, don’t swear an oath falsely in my name.”

Jon: Mhm. Well, what's interesting is when you make an oath by the name of Yahweh, what you really are doing is your—

Tim: Yeah, you're borrowing credit from Yahweh's bank of reputation.

Jon: There it is.

Tim: Something like that.

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah. You're borrowing from Yahweh's reputation.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: So you are using his name, but for the purpose of calling up his reputation and saying, "Hey, you know Yahweh is faithful and good. And so, trust me, because I'm going to bring Yahweh's name into this"—meaning his reputation into this.

Tim: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's a good way to put it. Mhm.

Jon: And so the danger, if you're going to be deceitful by doing that, you are tarnishing or—

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: —abusing the name.

Tim: That's right. Yeah. And so, then, that brings us to the phrase "in vain."

[Music break]

Tim: So "in vain," it's the Hebrew word *shav'*, and it's very difficult to capture in English how this word works.

Jon: Oh, really?

Tim: Yeah, because when it's referring to words, words of *shav'*, what it often refers to is lying or deceitfulness.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So somebody can speak *shav'*, like Psalm 41, and—by which he means somebody who's trying to lie to me and take advantage of me, to speak *shav'*. But then it can refer to, mmm, something that doesn't fulfill its purpose.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So Psalm 108 verse 12: "Oh God, give us help against our enemies, because rescue that comes from humans, it's *shav'*." It's worthless.

Jon: Useless.

Tim: Useless. So if what I'm looking for—

Jon: Unreliable.

Tim: —is true rescue from my enemies, I can't depend on humans to do that. That will just ... that won't actually be true. Notice the word "true." It came to my mind.

Jon: Yeah. It seems like "deceptive" is a word that works for both. Like you can deceive with a lie, but then you can also be deceived by something's value.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: You can think, "Oh, this person is going to rescue me," but that was a deception because they can't.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. Ah, "unless Yahweh is building up a house, the people who build a house are building for *shav'*," for no purpose or for a wrong purpose, unfulfilled purpose. It won't actually succeed. It won't be what it's made to be.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So a house should endure so that it can protect you, right?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That's what a house is for. But if they build it in a shoddy, unreliable way, it can't actually be what it's made for. So don't carry the name of the Lord your God in *shav'*. God has attached his name to you for a purpose, to represent him. And if you become an unworthy representative, then you have become *shav'*.

Jon: That's interesting. So *shav'* is pointing to the purpose of something.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. Yes.

Jon: Is that right?

Tim: Yeah, and actually I think that's what "vain" means in its older English meaning.

Jon: Does it?

Tim: Yeah, with vain purpose.

Jon: Can you look it up? Can you look up the etymology real quick?

Tim: Of the English word "vain"?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. Ah, the word "vain" in English comes from the Latin word *vanus*, which means "empty, lacking content." The word was first recorded in Middle English in the late 1200s. Mhm.

Jon: Yeah, something being empty.

Tim: Lacking value or effect, or futile.

Jon: Value or effect. Yeah.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So Yahweh called Israel to represent him before the nations for a purpose. And if the effect that God was aiming for is rendered futile because of their moral corruption, their moral compromise, their idolatry, then they have carried the name for a futile purpose. It hasn't—you're not doing what you were purposed for.

Jon: Yeah, it's failed at actually doing the thing it was meant to do.

Tim: Yeah, failure to launch.

Jon: Yeah, if a cup is empty, it's maybe failed, I suppose.

Tim: Mmm, yeah, it's not fulfilling its purpose.

Jon: It's not fulfilling its purpose.

Tim: That's what it's made for.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yup.

Jon: But if a hole is empty, it has fulfilled its purpose.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: It's supposed to be a hole.

Tim: Yeah. So what does Israel exist for, really? The Hebrew Bible is trying to give an account for why this people came into existence and then endured and survived.

Jon: Yeah, what's the purpose? I think that that's what this word kind of makes you ask.

Tim: Yeah. What's the purpose?

Jon: What's the purpose? Is it fulfilling its purpose? If it's not, it's, what's the word? *Shav'*?

Tim: *Shav'*. Yeah, *shav'*.

Jon: Is that what ... it feels like that's what we're getting at. Does it fulfill its purpose?

Tim: That's right. Yeah. Why do the people of Yahweh exist as the people of Yahweh?

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Well, they were called to be an image and a representative of God to the nations and then to represent the nations before God. Kind of like Aaron, the priest, represents the tribes before God. And man, if they fail at being that by their behavior, they misrepresent God, then they certainly won't represent the people well before God. And it's ... they've ruined it.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Ruined the purpose.

Jon: So *shav'* is actually the negative. *Shav'* is the failure to fulfill the purpose.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. That's it.

Jon: There's got to be an English word for that.

Tim: Mmm.

Jon: Right?

Tim: Hmm. Hmm. If you fail to fulfill your purpose. “Futile” usually means of no purpose.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: I had a purpose, but it was futile, misspent. I worked all day thinking I could build X, Y, or Z. And then it crashed to the ground. My efforts were futile. I had to aim for a purpose. Didn’t succeed. Futile.

Jon: But it seems like if something’s futile, you’re saying it had no purpose.

Tim: Mmm. Mmm.

Jon: Right? That’s what you’re saying. Something’s futile—

Tim: Yeah, it ended up being purposeless.

Jon: —then you’re saying, it doesn’t actually have a purpose. But if you said something’s ineffective, then you’re saying it has a purpose. It just didn’t actually do the thing it was meant to do.

Tim: Yeah. Interesting. Yeah. Fruitless, pointless, useless, ineffective. Faulty.

Jon: Faulty.

Tim: Mmm. Failed, unproductive.

Jon: Yeah, failed.

Tim: Unprofitable. Mmm. Nugatory.

Jon: Nugatory?

[Laughter]

Jon: Where did you see that? Wow.

Tim: Nugatory.

Jon: I love that word. I’m so interested.

Tim: I don't know why it makes me laugh.

Jon: It's a funny word.

Tim: I'm either thinking of a noogie.

Jon: A noogie. That's why. That's why—a noogie.

Tim: Like grabbing someone by the head and rubbing it.

Jon: Yes. That's why it's funny.

Tim: They're ... like, top of their head with your knuckles.

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: I don't know why that makes me laugh.

Jon: Yeah, because noogies are funny. It's a funny word.

Tim: But I don't ... how's it related to nugatory?

Jon: What does that mean?

Tim: I don't even know what "nugatory" means. "Of no value or importance."

Jon: That seems more like futile.

Tim: Useless or futile.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: From the Latin *nugatorius*, which means "a trifle." Oh my goodness. Usage over time: Apparently, people in the 1800s were using the word "nugatory" a lot.

[Laughter]

Jon: Good for them.

Tim: Uh, 2024 is an all-time low for the use of the word "nugatory."

Jon: It's really trailing off.

Tim: Look at this usage chart. Look at all this Google has given to me.

Jon: Well, let's bring it back.

Tim: Nugatory.

Jon: Nugatory. I'm going to use it. Okay. This could be just getting way too into semantics.

Tim: This could be a nugatory part of this conversation.

Jon: Yes! Nailed it.

Tim: What is the—

Jon: *Shav'*.

Tim: —larger point that we're after?

Jon: Well, well ... hmm.

Tim: Don't carry the name of the Lord your God in *shav'*, for *shav'*.

Jon: *Shav'*. Yeah. I think all these words kind of help us get to the point. Don't do it in a futile way. Don't do it in a useless way. Don't do it in an ineffectual way.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: But all those are negative ways of saying, "Hey, do it in a way that fulfills its purpose."

Tim: Right. Yes. Okay, so let's flip it over.

Jon: Let's flip it over.

Tim: Yeah, like we've been doing.

Jon: This is what—yeah, this is how we end this—let's flip it over.

Tim: Basically. Because one way you could carry the name of the Lord your God in vain is with your speech to actually use the name of God as, like, religious leverage to manipulate someone else.

Jon: Mmm, for deceptive purposes.

Tim: But the actual phrase “carry the name” can refer to behavior and ... as well as speech.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So then, you flip it, and you say, well, what does it mean to carry the name of the Lord your God in truthfulness?

Jon: Hmm. With purpose.

Tim: With faithfulness.

Jon: With faithfulness to the purpose.

Tim: To faithfully carry the name.

Jon: Ahh.

Tim: Yes. Yes.

Jon: Yes.

Jon: And now ...

Tim: Wow.

Jon: Now you're into the kingdom of priests, category.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: You're in that arena, and you think of, what does it mean for Aaron to carry the name of Israel into the temple?

Tim: Mhm. Yeah, it means to come offering gifts and acts of surrender, which is a way of recognizing and thanking God for giving life and rain and abundance and fertility to his people. So gratefulness is a way of relating to God that is faithful.

Jon: Hmm. Yeah.

Tim: But here carrying the name also, then, before the nations.

Jon: Right.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And it seems like all the laws that we're going to read later, it's all about building a society in which people actually do right by each other, and they protect each other.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Yeah.

Jon: And especially those who really need protecting—the orphan and the widow—and that there isn't corruption and injustice. And so to carry the name means to, to love your neighbor.

Tim: Yeah. Mhm. Yeah. In a way, the third command is, "Don't screw it up."

[Laughter]

Jon: "Don't fail."

Tim: "Don't mess it up."

Jon: "Don't mess it up."

Tim: "You're my crew. I've attached my name to you. A lot of ways this could go right. There's a number of ways this could go wrong. Don't misrepresent me. I've commissioned you. Don't misrepresent me, which means do represent me faithfully."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Which is very open-ended, opens up to, well, what is the purpose of a human life?

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: And now we're almost back to how we ended the last two conversations, which is, like, love God, love your neighbor.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. Third command. So don't have any other *'elohim*. No other *'elohim* is your rescuer, liberator, or creator. You will dishonor God and dishonor yourself if you treat something else as God. Don't fabricate something and then treat it as if it is your source, and your liberation, and your creator. You'll dishonor God and yourself and probably mistreat yourself and others in the process. And let's say you find yourself

among the community that thinks that it's representing God to the world in some way. Don't mess it up.

[Laughter]

Tim: Do represent God faithfully.

Jon: Yeah, let's flip all three of those over. So, I am your life. So, find life in me.

Tim: Mmm. Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: You are my image.

Tim: Mmm. Yeah. Image me faithfully.

Jon: So, image me faithfully. And you have a purpose. Which is to be my representative here to others.

Tim: Represent me faithfully.

Jon: Represent me faithfully.

Tim: Yeah. All of a sudden, commands two and three come real close to each other.

Jon: They do.

Tim: Which they are literally close to each other. They're the second and third command. Yeah. It's a lot here, man. It's interesting. These first three that we've looked at are ways of thinking about the biggest concerns of human life.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And certainly the life of God's people.

Jon: Thank you for listening to BibleProject Podcast. Next week, we look at the fourth command: Remember the Sabbath.

Tim: Number four is the most culturally specific to the life and the liturgy and religious calendar of ancient Israel and then of later Judaism. So let's get ourselves into the heads of an ancient Israelite. What is the fourth command all about?

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