

# What is Blasphemy?

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Are you confused about blasphemy? Many Christians are, though some do not realize it. The reason for the confusion is that the word has come to mean something today that the original Greek word *blasphemia* did not mean. Also, blasphemy is often confused with another problem. The idea of “taking the name of the Lord in vain” is an Old Testament concept that is often thought to be blasphemy. As we shall see, ***it is not***.

What then, is blasphemy? Thayer defines it as “slander, detraction, speech injurious to another’s good name...” As with most words, blasphemy took upon itself various nuances, but this is the basis for all of them. To blaspheme is to make a false accusation, to slander a person by saying something that hurts his reputation.

However, the word also has a positive connotation in Scripture. It is possible to make an accurate blasphemy, though there is no direct instance of it happening in the New Testament. The closest case is found in Jude 9, where Michael refrained from making a “judgment of blasphemy” against Satan in their dispute over the body of Moses, though it would have been accurate to do so.

Another related use of the word blasphemy means to take God’s nature and prerogatives upon one’s self. By so doing, a person is claiming something that belongs to God alone. It was of this that Jesus was accused in John 10:33, “The Jews answered Him, saying, For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.”

Some think that blasphemy is equal to “taking the name of the Lord in vain.” Exodus 20:7 expresses the original prohibition, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.” Part of the problem is the unfortunate translation. This quote is from the NKJV, and it follows closely the original KJV. But a more accurate translation is, “You shall not take the name Yahweh your God in vain, for Yahweh will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.”

The proper name of God is expressed in the four letters of the Hebrew word that is normally translated “the LORD.” But the word does not mean LORD or anything close to it. Many scholars today believe the word is derived from the Hebrew verb “to be” and expresses God’s self-existence as a proper name. God is saying literally, do not misuse the name Yahweh.

Now, the Israelites went too far. They ceased to use the word at all, thinking that if they did not use it they couldn’t misuse it. This is the process of the legalistic mind-set. The result of this practice was that the pronunciation of the word was lost, because in Hebrew the vowels are not written, and are only understood by constant verbal repetition. The problem became so bad when Israelites ceased to speak Hebrew because of the dispersion, that a system of vowels was added, but not until many years after the correct pronunciation of God’s proper name was lost.

As a consequence, the scholars who developed the vowel system assigned the vowels from another word to the four letters of the name of God. Unfortunately, they picked vowels from a word that meant “lord.” The resulting confusion, proceeding

through Latin, into the romance languages, and finally into English, resulted in the word Jehovah.

Today we still do not know the correct pronunciation of God's name, but it is thought that Yahweh is a fairly close approximation.

So, if a person were to misuse the name of God, Yahweh, he could be taking the Lord's name in vain. But today, a person usually just uses the word God, not His proper name, in inappropriate language.

Such expressions as "god damn" when used as an unthinking curse are not actually taking the name of the Lord in vain. They are, in fact, acts of blasphemy, because the word "damn" is a perfectly good English word that means *to judge*. So a person who claims that God is damning something when He is not is making a false statement about God performing an act of judgment when He is not, and *is committing a blasphemy*. The use of the words God and Jesus as curses today are blasphemies, and should never be used by the spiritual believer, for they are, in a real sense, slandering persons of the Godhead.