

Swearing Oaths

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Introduction

In the Bible, the swearing of an oath was a solemn and sacred act, wherein one affirmed his veracity, often by calling upon the God of heaven. Let us, therefore, consider those Greek words that communicate the concept of swearing oaths. The Greek verb *omnuō* means “to swear” or “take an oath.” The noun *horkos* signifies “an oath.” The related noun *horkōmosia* refers to “the process of taking an oath.” It is noteworthy that the concept of an oath is akin to a fence or enclosure. Though a man of integrity swears to his own hurt, yet, he changes not (Ps. 15:1-5). Consider also the sacred nature of the marriage vows (Gen. 2:18-24; Mal. 2:13-16; Matt. 19:3-9).

Sinful Oaths

The New Testament warns against making false, foolish, or frivolous oaths. King Herod foolishly swore to give the daughter of Herodias whatever she might ask, up to half of his kingdom (Matt. 14:6-10; Mark 6:21-28). The Jewish leaders employed a complicated, corrupt system of deceptive oaths (Matt. 23:16-22). Simon Peter denied the Christ, attempting to hide his discipleship by cursing and swearing (Matt. 26:71-74; Mark 14:69-71). Avoiding unnecessary oaths, the disciple’s word should be counted as binding and obligatory (Matt. 5:33-37; James 5:12).

Sacred Oaths

Holy Scripture makes reference to various divine oaths. If the word of the Lord is authoritative and trustworthy (Prov. 30:5-6; Ps. 18:30), how much more so His promises and oaths (Heb. 6:13-20)? God swore to Abraham that He would fulfill His promises (Luke 1:67-75; Heb. 6:13-18; cf. Gen. 22:15-18). God swore to David to seat one of His descendants on His throne (Acts 2:29-31; cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 89:3-4, 35-37; 132:11-12). The Father swore to the Son, saying “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 7:20-22, 28; cf. Ps. 110:4). God swore to wayward Israel that they would not enter into His rest (Heb. 3:7-11, 17-19; 4:3; cf. Num. 14:20-35; Deut. 1:34-40; Ps. 95:8-11). Finally, the angel of the Lord swore there would be no further delay in judgment upon the corrupt culture of Rome (Rev. 10:5-7).

Conclusion

While warning against sinful oaths, the Bible also records various sacred and solemn vows. Let us be wise enough to mark the difference. There may be special circumstances, wherein we call God as our witness (Rom. 1:9-10; Phil. 1:8), and even make solemn vows in the presence of witnesses, as in a wedding ceremony or court of law (Acts 18:18; 21:23-24); nevertheless, our basic communications must needs be simple: Let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No” be “No” (2 Cor. 1:17-20; James 5:12).