

# Deuteronomy 19:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong;

## Analysis

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**If a false witness rise up** (כִּי־יָקֹוּם עַד־חָמָס, ki-yaqum ed-chamas)—the term ed chamas (עַד חָמָס) literally means "witness of violence/wrong," one who weaponizes testimony to harm the innocent. The verb qum (קֹוּם, "rise up") suggests aggressive initiative, not mere passive dishonesty. This addresses perjury with malicious intent.

To **testify against him that which is wrong** (לְעֹנֹת בּוֹ סָרָה, la'anot bo sarah) means to answer against him with deviation from truth. The word sarah (סָרָה) indicates turning aside, apostasy from truth. The ninth commandment (Exodus 20:16) prohibits false witness, but this passage prescribes the penalty. Proverbs repeatedly warns against false witnesses (6:19, 12:17, 19:5, 25:18), comparing them to deadly weapons. Jesus faced false witnesses at His trial (Matthew 26:59-60), as did Stephen (Acts 6:13).

## Historical Context

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Ancient judicial systems relied heavily on witness testimony, lacking modern forensic evidence, written contracts, or surveillance. A determined liar could destroy an innocent person through false accusation, especially in capital cases. The Torah required two or three witnesses for conviction (Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15), but this provided limited protection against conspiracy. False witness was thus among the most dangerous crimes, capable of perverting justice completely. Jezebel's false witnesses against Naboth (1 Kings 21:10-13) illustrate how this law

could be violated with devastating results. Moses's judicial reforms aimed to deter such corruption through severe penalties.

## Related Passages

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**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

**James 2:17** — Faith and works

## Study Questions

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1. How does the seriousness with which Scripture treats false witness inform Christian responsibility to speak truth, even when costly?
2. What parallels exist between ancient false witnesses and modern forms of character assassination or false accusation?

## Interlinear Text

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כִּי	יָקוּם	עֵד	חֹמֶס	בְּאִישׁ	לְעֵנֹת	וְ
H3588	rise up	witness	If a false	against any man	to testify	H0
	H6965	H5707	H2555	H376	H6030	

סְכָה:  
against him that which is wrong  
H5627

## Additional Cross-References

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**Psalms 27:12** (Resurrection): Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty.

**Psalms 35:11** (Resurrection): False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not.