

Exodus 20:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

Analysis

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

'Lo ta'aneh' (לֹא תַּעֲנֵה) means 'do not answer/testify.' 'False witness' (עד שקר, ed shaquer) specifically addresses courtroom perjury, though applications extend to all lying. Truth-telling maintains justice—false testimony condemns the innocent and acquits the guilty. God values truth because He IS truth (John 14:6); lies come from Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44). Proverbs repeatedly condemns false witnesses (Proverbs 6:19, 12:17, 19:5). False witnesses crucified Christ (Matthew 26:59-61); false witness stones Stephen (Acts 6:13). The command protects reputation (ninth) as previous commands protect life (sixth), marriage (seventh), and property (eighth). Truth-telling builds community; lying destroys it.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern courts lacked forensic evidence; testimony was crucial. False witness could result in death sentences for the innocent. Deuteronomy 19:16-21 prescribes lex talionis for false witnesses—the penalty they sought to impose on another.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does false witness destroy justice and community trust?
2. In what ways do Christians bear false witness beyond courtroom perjury (gossip, slander, exaggeration)?

Interlinear Text

לֹא תַעֲשֵׂה כַּאֲשֶׁר תַּרְאֶה בְּרַעַב עַד שָׁׁלֵךְ
H3808 Thou shalt not bear H6030 against thy neighbour H7453 witness H5707 false H8267

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 19:5 (Witness): A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.

Matthew 19:18 (Witness): He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,

Psalms 15:3 (Parallel theme): He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.

Exodus 23:1 (Witness): Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness.

Proverbs 10:18 (Parallel theme): He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool.

Acts 6:13 (Witness): And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

Ephesians 4:31 (Parallel theme): Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

1 Timothy 1:10 (Parallel theme): For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine;

James 4:11 (Parallel theme): Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

Proverbs 11:13 (Parallel theme): A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.

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