

# Exodus 20:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

## Analysis

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### **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

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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

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**Psalm 19:1** — Heavens declare God's glory

**Colossians 1:16** — All things created through Christ

## Study Questions

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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

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לֹא תַעֲשֵׂה כַּאֲשֶׁר תַּרְאֶה בְּרַעַב עִלָּם שְׁקָרָה:  
H3808 Thou shalt not bear H6030 against thy neighbour H7453 witness H5707 false H8267

## Additional Cross-References

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**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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