



Lecture # 12 Part 1

The Ten Commandments, The Laws Governing Man's Duty To Others (Part 9):

Commandment Nine Concerns Man's Word and Character— Never Lie, Exodus 20:16

The Ninth Commandment Against False Testimony

“Lo taaneh vereakha ed shaker” (Exodus 20:16) “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.”

Exodus 20:16 (BHS)

¹⁶“לֹא-תִעַן בְּרֵעֶךָ עֵד שָׁקֵר: ס”

“Lo taaneh vereakha **ed shaker**”

Exodus 20:16 (KJV)

¹⁶“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.”

Exodus 20:16 (NASB)

¹⁶“You shall not bear **false witness** against your neighbor.”

This commandment differs from the earlier one concerning taking God's name in vain because it refers to witnesses in a legal proceeding, and witnesses did not testify under oath in ancient Israel. **Abравanel** suggested that this commandment follows as a corollary to the three preceding commandments, each of which deals with causing harm to another, through murder, adultery, or stealing his property.

This commandment deals with doing harm to another through speech, which by extension includes ridiculing another, malicious gossip, tale bearing, shaming another, and similar means of causing harm through vocal expression.⁴⁴⁷

It has been suggested by **Maimuni** that falsely testifying against a person may be considered worse than injuring him with a blow from a sword. A person can recover from a physical injury, but false testimony strikes its victim as a sharp arrow shot from an unknown source, has a lasting effect and can bring about one's premature demise.⁴⁴⁸

In explaining the implications of this commandment, a sage taught: “The Holy One, blessed be He, says: If you testified falsely against your fellow, I consider it as though you testified against Me that I did not create heaven and earth.”⁴⁴⁹

Numerous commentators have been troubled by the biblical reference to “**ed shaker**” or false witness instead of to “**edut shaker**”, meaning false testimony. **Meir Simha HaKohen** suggested that the specific reference in the text is to someone who is not an actual witness but who chooses to testify as one, even if the testimony is true.⁴⁵⁰



Lecture # 12 Part 1

Another interpretation offered by **Alshikh** suggests that the reference is to one who is a valid witness but tailors his testimony to favor a neighbor in fulfillment of the admonition to love one's neighbor as himself (**Leviticus 19:18**).

Leviticus 19:18 (NASB)

¹⁸“**You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.**”

The ninth commandment tells him that this is forbidden.⁴⁵¹ Others have sought to synthesize the various interpretations by pointing out that Judaic jurisprudence draws a distinction between false testimony and false witnessing, both of which are subsumed in the text under “**ed shaker**” “**false witness**”.

The former refers to a person who was actually present at the occurrence but gave false testimony regarding it, the latter to a person who was not actually present, and is therefore unqualified to testify as a witness in the first place, but nonetheless testifies to an event.

Because the translation given above, bear false witness, would seem to be focusing on a witness giving false testimony, **Hirsch** suggested that the Hebrew text might more accurately be translated as “**Thou shalt not testify as a false witness against thy neighbor**”, which would include both the categories of false testimony and false witnessing.⁴⁵²

Exodus 20:16 (BHS)

¹⁶“**לֹא-תִעַנֶּה בְּרֵעֶךָ עֵד שֶׁקֶר: ס**”

“**Lo taaneh vereakha **ed shaker****”

Exodus 20:16 (KJV)

¹⁶“**Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.**”

Exodus 20:16 (NASB)

¹⁶“**You shall not bear **false witness** against your neighbor.**”

(Exodus 20:16) Introduction— Commandments, The Ten— Lying: lying—bearing false testimony against people—is common to all of us. We have all lied.

Sometime in the past we have all.....

1. told a little white lie
2. twisted the truth
3. told a half-truth
4. gossiped, not really knowing the truth
5. discredited someone
6. slandered someone
7. sought to escape blame by skirting around the truth
8. tried to place blame elsewhere by failing to come forth with the truth
9. cast a suggestive hint or insinuated an untruth about someone
10. boasted or exaggerated the truth in order to boost ourselves



Lecture # 12 Part 1

11. raised an eyebrow, shrugged a shoulder, or made some motion to indicate something untrue or to keep from disclosing the truth

Scripture emphatically declares: “**All men are liars**” ([Psalm 116:11\(NASB\)](#)). Lying is so common that it is **condoned**, **accepted**, and **even expected** by many people. But lying is not ever justified. Silence sometimes is, but not lying, not answering dishonestly. Leaders, both business and political, can say or promise anything and people either accept or overlook their twisting of the truth. A person’s **character**, **his word** and **integrity**, seem to matter little. Making false claims and promises has become a way of life. There is a feeling that a person just cannot survive nor get ahead unless he twists the truth to boost himself. Telling the truth and being honest have fallen by the wayside.

Lying—bearing false witness—threatens the very foundation of society. Nothing can survive when it is filled with lies, not for long: not **families**, **friendships**, **businesses**, **clubs**, **schools**, **churches**, **communities**, **governments**. Any organization or group will collapse in the wake of mistrust and broken, severed relationships.

This is the great concern of the ninth commandment, the concern for truth, that we build our lives upon truth: build our families, friendships, businesses, clubs, schools, churches, communities, and governments upon truth. *Commandment Nine Concerns Man’s Word and Character: Never Lie*, [Exodus 20:16](#).