



# 9th Commandment: Do Not Bear False Witness

## Video Transcript

### Chapter 1: Bearing Witness

0:00-0:52

**Tim:** Command number nine of the 10.

**Jon:** “You will not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

**Tim:** The way we normally summarize the meaning of the 9th Commandment is we flatten it out.

**Jon:** “Don’t tell lies.”

**Tim:** Yeah, “don’t lie.” But instead, it’s “bearing false witness.” So first of all, “bearing witness.” Here in the command, it’s *ta’aneh*. It’s from the Hebrew verb *’anah*, which is a fixed little phrase used to refer specifically to, like, legally or publicly making a declaration. It’s like, put your hand on the Bible.

**Jon:** Yeah. Courtroom setting. But ancient Israel didn’t have courtrooms like we have courtrooms, right?

**Tim:** Yes. They had city gates where the elders of a town come together.

**Jon:** Okay. This was the public forum where you would have people come and say, “Okay, what’s your side of the story? What’s your side of the story?”

**Tim:** That’s it. You’re being called upon to represent your version of what you saw or witnessed or experienced.

## Chapter 2: False Witness

0:52-1:47

**Tim:** And then the kind of witness that you are bearing—“false” is how it gets translated—is the Hebrew word *sheqer*.

**Jon:** *Sheqer*.

**Tim:** *Sheqer*. A *sheqer* presents itself as one thing, but in reality, it’s not that thing.

**Jon:** Hmm. It’s like an illusion?

**Tim:** It’s an illusion. Something that betrays. It’s masquerading. You put forward, “I’m a truth-teller. I’m trustworthy. I’m one thing.” But in reality, it’s another. So you can just have words of *sheqer*, or you can do *sheqer*.

**Jon:** Because the move could have been, “Don’t lie.” But there’s something about the way that this command is written to say, “Actually, I just really want you to focus on the communal aspect.”

**Tim:** Yeah. This is about presenting something false publicly. So these are the types of lies that affect a whole community. And that is so important, it gets its own spot in the 10 Commandments.

**Jon:** Yeah. Why is it so important?

**Tim:** Yeah. It’s a great question.

## Chapter 3: False Witness Leading to Violence

1:47-4:11

**Tim:** So after the 10 commands, later in Exodus chapters 21-23, there’s many more commands that fill out the values at work in the 10. And in them, this idea of bearing false witness is connected to violence.

**Jon:** What does that look like?

**Tim:** Yeah. Okay, here’s an example from Exodus 23, verses 1 and 2. “Don’t spread a false report. Don’t join your hand with a wicked man to become a witness of violence.”

**Jon:** Become a witness of violence. What does that mean?

**Tim:** Yeah. So it’s describing speaking falsely about someone in public so that they get accused and punished, maybe even killed, which is what Exodus 23 goes on to say. “Stay away from a false charge so that you don’t bring death to an innocent or an honest person.”

**Jon:** Ah, I see. So then you can join hands with others to be a witness of violence.

**Tim:** Yeah. So one person's false testimony can inspire a whole group to team up around a story about somebody that's not true.

**Jon:** Yeah.

**Tim:** Don't go along with the majority when it leads to evil, and don't give testimony in a dispute that goes along with the majority in distorting justice.

**Jon:** Yeah. Yeah, that's unfair, and it could totally devastate people.

**Tim:** Yeah. Especially when it's people who are socially vulnerable. "Don't let justice be distorted against a needy person in their dispute."

**Jon:** Yeah. If someone doesn't have money or connections, they can easily be taken advantage of.

**Tim:** Exactly. And so this is why, at the end of this little paragraph in Exodus 23, it names a group of people who are really vulnerable to false accusations. "Do not oppress an immigrant, because you know what it means to be an immigrant, because you all were immigrants in the land of Egypt."

**Jon:** Huh. Yeah, and this ties all of this back to Israel's story.

**Tim:** Yeah. They were a vulnerable group of enslaved immigrants in Egypt. And God is warning Israel so that they don't end up doing to others what Egypt did to them, because that's what inevitably happens when we bear false witness about other people in public.

**Jon:** Yeah. There's a high value for being a person of truth and protecting those in vulnerable situations.

## **Chapter 4: Reinforce the Value of Truth**

**4:11-4:45**

**Jon:** So flip it over, and how would we frame it?

**Tim:** Yeah. Hold up and celebrate and reinforce the value of truth-telling in our public setting.

**Jon:** To the benefit of everyone.

**Tim:** Yeah.

**Jon:** Especially the vulnerable.

**Tim:** Yes, that's right. If Israel is meant to be the light shining in the darkness in the city on the hill, God really wants to have even their communal justice systems stand apart from the typical types of corruption and distortion that they're liable to. That is what's at stake in the ninth command.