

Exodus 20:16

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/exod/exod-20/exodus-2016/>

The 9th commandment is to protect a person from harm based on untrue accusations.

The ninth commandment specified that a person could not present untrue testimony against another person. It appears that this testimony was in a legal context.

This commandment is especially important in light of other legislation in the Mosaic Law. In [Deuteronomy 17:6](#) (see also [Deuteronomy 19:15](#)), a person can be convicted (and executed) on the testimony of two or three witnesses. But, if the witnesses “bear false witness,” the accused could be unjustly put to death. This would actually be breaking the commandment to not murder, which is to kill unjustly. Since this is already inferred, why was this commandment necessary?

It is likely necessary because this commandment establishes the means by which the Rule of Law under God will be adjudicated. The “executive branch” was delegated to the people, so too was the judicial branch, via testimony of multiple witnesses. There was a legal process whereby citizens would be tried and judged by fellow citizens. In tyrannies, the tyrant will always control the judicial process directly or indirectly. In God’s self-governing economy the citizens judge one another.

Justice is essential to enforce self-governance, and in order to have justice, the witnesses’ testimonies must be true. The three pillars of God’s self-governing society are:

1. Rule of Law.
 - a. The authority for the Rule of law is established by the first five commands. God, and only God has the authority to determine the supreme laws by which Israel will be governed.
2. Private Property.
 - a. The personal sovereignty of each person and family is established in the last five commands.
 - b. Each person is established as deserving to be treated with equal standing under the law.

3. Consent of the Governed

- a. The ninth commandment establishes a mutual responsibility each citizen bears to respect and honor all other citizens by telling the truth about their actions.
- b. Using the law as a means for personal gain is forbidden. The Law is to be a blessing to each person, and to the community.
- c. This ninth commandment makes it clear that each person's justice depends upon the goodwill and mutual consent of their neighbors.

The concept of multiple witnesses is seen in many places in the New Testament. Jesus used this principle when teaching how to confront an offending brother ([Matthew 18:15 – 16](#)). It was “false witnesses” who testified against Jesus to the priests, resulting in His crucifixion ([Matthew 26:59ff](#)). Paul employs this same principle of multiple witnesses when an elder is accused of something ([1 Timothy 5:19](#)).

Biblical Text:

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