

Day Nine

Psalm 145; Job 42:7-17; Exodus 20:16

Bearing false witness against another person is a serious problem which is addressed in the Ten Commandments. In God's infinite wisdom, He understood how the power of false words could destroy a person, by defaming one with lies and malignant innuendoes. For a people who were just struggling to gain an identity, as it departed Egypt and sojourned toward the Promised Land, the prohibition against falsely accusing or defaming someone was imperative in order to insure survival. If the Ancient Israelites were allowed to let their tongues wag about anything which their hardened hearts desired, then lack of cohesiveness—required to solidify the nation—would possibly erupt. This was such a problem that centuries later, as the Jewish Sages developed the annual Torah cycle, the two Torah readings of *Tazria* (Leviticus 12:1-13:59) and *Metzora* (Leviticus 14:1-15:33) typically gave Torah teachers the opportunity to address the issue of bearing false witness or *lashon ha'ra*, "the evil tongue," at least twice a year.

Before discussing the lethal nature of bearing false witness, perhaps another reading of Psalm 145 will draw you closer to the Holy One, and open you to Him ministering directly to your repentant heart and spiritual needs.

The Ninth Commandment

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor"

(Exodus 20:16).

Before exploring some of the problems associated with bearing false witness against someone, please read the following quotes from the Book of Proverbs. These should give you a sense of what our

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Heavenly Father thinks about those who are considered false witnesses:

“There are six things which the LORD hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness *who* utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers” (Proverbs 6:16-19, NASU).

“He who speaks truth tells what is right, but a false witness, deceit. There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only for a moment. Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but counselors of peace have joy. No harm befalls the righteous, but the wicked are filled with trouble. Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal faithfully are His delight” (Proverbs 12:17-22, NASU).

“A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will not escape” (Proverbs 19:5, NASU).

“A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will perish” (Proverbs 19:9, NASU).

As you can read, the Almighty hates those who speak with a lying tongue, and considers those who speak falsely to be an abomination. In very precise terms, He has declared that false witnesses will not go unpunished. They will not only not escape, but ultimately they will perish. In very precise language, the Lord has stated His disdain for this base human activity.

If you have ever been the victim of a false witness or malicious gossip, you can probably understand why God has such abhorrence for the practice. On some levels, character assassination and outright lies about someone, are in essence murdering a person without firing any physical bullets. Whereas the person who is physically murdered simply has to die once, the person who is being attacked by a false accusation or an outright lie can be murdered over and over again until the lie dissipates. In some cases, the lie may never be removed from the person who has been slandered—because once it has been released into the airwaves, it cannot be retracted! Even if lies or falsehoods are

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later proven to be false, the murdering of a person via a false report may still continue. (And sadly, many people who hear such reports, often do not try to confirm whether or not what they hear is verifiable, consulting other witnesses.)

When it comes to a court of law where a degree of reliable truth is required in order to execute proper judgment, the Torah's instruction is precise. Multiple witnesses are required to testify:

"You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. You shall not follow the masses in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert *justice*; nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute" (Exodus 23:1-3, NASU).

"Now if a person sins after he hears a public adjuration *to testify* when he is a witness, whether he has seen or *otherwise* known, if he does not tell *it*, then he will bear his guilt" (Leviticus 5:1, NASU).

In order to convict someone of murder, the Torah requires two or more eyewitnesses to the crime to give testimony. In a dramatic way, the Torah instructs that such two witnesses must be the first to personally execute the criminal:

"On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness. The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst" (Deuteronomy 17:6-7, NASU).

On the other hand, if a false witness was discovered to be lying, then the punishment which the false witness wanted the accused to suffer, would instead be placed upon him:

"A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed. If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be *in office* in those

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days. The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness *and* he has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you. Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Deuteronomy 19:15-21, NASU).

As you can read, the Scriptures deal extensively with the issue of bearing false witness. Just consider the “art of politics” which we absorb today, and the huge media industries in pulp and celluloid which are funded in large part because of the human propensity to relish gossip, slander, and libelous statements. *This should not surprise us.* If you think back to the very Garden of Eden, you might recall that the serpent himself used a false witness to convince Adam and Eve to taste of the forbidden fruit: “Hath God not said?” (Genesis 3:1).

If the prevalence of bearing false witness is among us, then inevitably we will be subject to some lies—especially if we are seeking to walk in the righteousness of God. Yeshua declared that His followers would be persecuted for righteousness’ sake, and that they would face abuse for it:

“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:10-12, NASU).

We should understand that we *will* be and should *expect* to be persecuted—at least verbally—for our walk of faithfulness with the Lord. Yeshua taught that this would be a blessing and that His followers should rejoice and be exceedingly glad. How do you handle situations when you have been falsely accused? Most people do not jump up and down for joy. But one who endured a substantial amount of malicious gossip from his adversaries, for his walk with the Holy One, was King David. Perhaps you can better relate to how David responded to these circumstances when they came:

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“Teach me Your way, O LORD, and lead me in a level path because of my foes. Do not deliver me over to the desire of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and such as breathe out violence. *I would have despaired* unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the LORD” (Psalm 27:11-14, NASU).

Some of us might want to salve our wounds from the wicked lies of others, by repeating the schoolyard rhyme: “Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” In reality, though, using this as a comeback for name-calling or slander is not very helpful. Instead, the words of a false witness can do significant damage to a person’s reputation and to one’s soul, that the individual might have a tendency to harbor unforgiveness toward the one who originally uttered the false accusations (cf. Matthew 6:14-15; Mark 11:25-26).

This is why the advice of David is to be trusted. Have faith that God in His time will take care of a situation where you have been slandered, and that eventually the false witness will be dealt with. What the victim is to do is to be strong and courageous and wait upon the Lord! While waiting, perhaps some prayer for the false witness would be in order. After all, words can kill—but prayers can bring healing to the soul and move hearts toward our King. The faithfulness of a Believer, who has been persecuted, *includes* a deep concern for unrepentant sinners.