

Small Group Discussion Guide

Exodus 20:16

“Golden Apples”

Based on Sunday's
Sermon 4/19/2026

Background

To understand this commandment it helps to know more about the justice system in the ancient world. In those days people who were charged with a crime had little protection. They were not presumed innocent until proven guilty, but presumed guilty until proven innocent. There were few standards for the presentation of evidence, and sometimes the accused didn't even get the chance to mount a defense. Furthermore, most ancient courts were willing to convict someone on the strength of a single witness.¹

There is no reason to believe that this command is exclusively limited to the judicial realm. It is a law which lays down fundamental principles and, therefore, we would expect a wider application. It is likely that the statute generally protects a person's name and forbids harming one's neighbour through slander and unbridled defamation. Thus, we would argue that to speak falsely in order to deceive one's neighbour is prohibited by this commandment. The Hebrew word *shāqer* means 'to give an empty promise'. To promise, to give one's word, to covenant with one's neighbour—all come within the scope of this law. To speak falsely about one's neighbour, to the prejudice of his or her character and reputation, is also forbidden. Such things as gossip, slander and unwarranted flattery are to be shunned.²

Discussion Questions

Getting Started

1. Have each group member say one true statement about themselves, and one statement that is false. Then see if everyone can guess which one is true and which one is false.

Observation

2. Read Exodus 20:16. Often referenced as saying, “You shall not lie.” What does it literally say and is there any difference?
3. What other forms of false witness appear in the Bible?

¹ Philip Graham Ryken and R. Kent Hughes, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 654.

² John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus: Exodus 19–40*, vol. 2, EP Study Commentary (Darlington, England; Carlisle, PA: Evangelical Press, 2001), 49.

4. Discuss “false witness” further. What does this phrase mean exactly? Come up with an easy to remember definition.

Interpretation

5. How does this commandment relate to the other nine commandments?
6. How does Proverbs 25:11 help us understand the idea of “Golden Apples?”
7. Read Matthew 12:33-37. How does Jesus deepen the meaning of Exodus 20:16?
8. Read Ephesians 4:29-32. How does this passage help expand our understanding of Exodus 20:16?

Application

9. How does this commandment challenge the way we share information online?
10. How can we bear “true witness” instead of “false witness?”

Prayer List: