WHAT IS A LIE?

"If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it."
- Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Propaganda Minister

Lying generally involves saying something false to a person who is entitled to know the truth and doing so with the intent to deceive or to injure him or another person.

A lie need not always be verbal. It can also be expressed in action, that is, a person may be living a lie. The Hebrew verb that conveys the idea of speaking that which is untrue is **ka-zav**. (Pr 14:5) Another Hebrew verb **sha-qar** means false or act falsely, and the noun form is rendered lie; deception; falsehood. (Le 19:11; Ps 44:17; Le 19:12; Ps 33:17; Isa 57:4) The Hebrew verb **řšw** is at times rendered futility; falsehood, ġÉ it basically refers to something worthless, vain, valueless. (Ps 12:2; De 5:20; Ps 60:11; 89:47; Zec 10:2) The Hebrew verb **ka-čḥsh** (deceive) evidently has the basic meaning ṣprove disappointing. (Le 19:11; Ho 9:2) The Greek term **pseu’dos** and related words have to do with lying and falsehood.

The father, or originator, of lying is **Satan the Devil**. (Joh 8:44) His lie conveyed by means of a serpent to the first woman Eve ultimately brought death to her and to her husband Adam. (Ge 3:1-5, 16-19) That first lie was rooted in selfishness and wrong desire. It was designed to divert the love and obedience of the first human pair to the liar, who had presented himself as an angel of light, a benefactor. (Compare 2Co 11:14.) All other malicious lies uttered since that time have likewise been a reflection of selfishness and wrong desire. People have told lies to escape deserved punishment, to profit at the expense of others, and to gain or maintain certain advantages, material rewards, or the praise of men.

Especially serious have been the religious lies, as they have endangered the future life of persons deceived by them. Said Jesus Christ: Ἄγω to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you traverse sea and dry land to make one proselyte, and when he becomes one you make him a subject for Gehenna twice as much so as yourselves. (Mt 23:15) The exchange of God’s truth for the lie, ἠ the falsehood of idolatry, can cause a person to become a practitioner of what is degrading and vile. (Ro 1:24-32)
The case of the religious leaders of Judaism in the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry shows what can happen when one abandons the truth. They schemed to have Jesus put to death. Then, when he was resurrected, they bribed the soldiers who had guarded the tomb so they would conceal the truth and spread a lie about the disappearance of Jesus’ body.\(\text{Mt 12:14; 15; 27:1, 2, 62-65; 28:11-15; Mr 14:1; Lu 20:19.}\)

**Jehovah God cannot lie (Nu 23:19; Heb 6:13-18), and he hates “a false tongue.**\(\text{(Pr 6:16-19)}\) His law to the Israelites required compensation for injuries resulting from deception or malicious lying. \(\text{(Le 6:7; 19:11, 12)}\) And a person presenting false testimony was to receive the punishment that he desired to inflict upon another by means of his lies. \(\text{(De 19:15-21)}\) God’s view of malicious lying, as reflected in the Law, has not changed. Those desiring to gain his approval cannot engage in the practice of lying. \(\text{(Ps 5:6; Pr 20:19; Col 3:9, 10; 1Ti 3:11; Re 21:8, 27; 22:15)}\) They cannot be living a lie, claiming to love God while hating their brother. \(\text{(1Jo 4:20, 21)}\) For playing false to the holy spirit by lying, Ananias and his wife lost their lives.\(\text{Ac 5:1-11.}\)

Jehovah God allows ŵan operation of error to go to persons who prefer falsehood ŵhat they may get to believing the lie rather than the good news about Jesus Christ. \(\text{(2Th 2:9-12)}\) This principle is illustrated by what happened centuries earlier in the case of Israelite King Ahab. Lying prophets assured Ahab of success in war against Ramoth-gilead, while Jehovah’s prophet Micaiah foretold disaster. As revealed in vision to Micaiah, Jehovah allowed a spirit creature to become ŵ deceptive spirit in the mouth of Ahab’s prophets. That is to say, this spirit creature exercised his power upon them so that they spoke, not truth, but what they themselves wanted to say and what Ahab wanted to hear from them. Though forewarned, Ahab preferred to be fooled by their lies and paid for it with his life.\(\text{1Ki 22:1-38; 2Ch 18.}\)

However, persons who are momentarily overreached in telling a lie do not automatically become guilty of an unforgivable sin. The case of Peter, in denying Jesus three times, illustrates that if a person is truly repentant, God will forgive him.\(\text{Mt 26:69-75.}\)

While malicious lying is definitely condemned in the Bible, this does not mean that a person is under obligation to divulge truthful information to people who are not entitled to it. Jesus Christ counselled: ŵDo not give what is holy to dogs, neither throw your pearls before swine, that they may never trample them under their feet and turn around and rip you open.\(\text{(Mt 7:6)}\) That is why Jesus on certain occasions refrained from giving full information or direct answers to certain questions when doing so could have brought unnecessary harm. \(\text{(Mt 15:1-6; 21:23-27; Joh 7:3-10)}\) Evidently the course of Abraham, Isaac, Rahab, and Elisha in misdirecting or in withholding full facts from nonworshippers of Jehovah must be viewed in the same light.\(\text{Ge 12:10-19; chap 20; 26:1-10; Jos 2:1-6; Jas 2:25; 2Ki 6:11-23.}\)

\(\text{(see also: it 2 p244, wp 16 no.1 p 3,7,12, w13 3/1 p14, w13 11/1 p4,5,6, w11 4/15, p6 g 11/4 p10)}\)