RIGHTEOUS DECEIT: AN IMPLICIT DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

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ABSTRACT

The Bible explicitly prescribes deceit as being sinful, and yet there are a variety of descriptive accounts in which deceit seems to be presented implicitly in a positive and even commendable light. This presents the reader with an apparent conflict: If deceit is always sinful, how is it that some accounts portray it positively? This thesis demonstrates that deceit is indeed portrayed in a positive light under specific circumstances, and therefore at times can be called righteous. This thesis also demonstrates that the apparent conflict between the prescriptive and descriptive deceit accounts is resolvable using various ethical approaches, with varying levels of success. Graded Absolutism is shown to present the fewest theological difficulties, however difficulties remain. A blended approach will be endorsed. Finally, this thesis proposes the use of the label, "righteous deceit" to help teach and explain the often difficult "deceit" accounts in Scripture.

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INTRODUCTION

"This thesis is a lie."

That's a pretty hard statement to believe isn't it?[1]

Actually, that's not true, this thesis is not a lie. But that statement does illustrate how destructive a lie can be to successful communication. Although this thesis is not a lie, it is about lying. Lying and deceit. About lying and deceit and about questions that have been asked throughout history about God and about his Word. On that note, we begin.

They are questions that have been pondered throughout history: Is it ever permissible to lie? Are there ever any situations in which a lie is justified? Is it permissible to lie in order to save the life of another? Just as there are many different ways to ask the question, there are also many answers that have been given. Philosophers answer in various ways; Christians in others. There is by no means any consensus that exists on the issue, even among those who do believe in the Bible. A key consideration, which lies at the center of the issue is the topic of deceit in the Bible. How does the Bible deal with the issue of deceit?

The topic of deceit presents the reader with a difficult conundrum. It is clear that deceit is of the Devil, that it is sinful, and that it is hated and punished by God. Yet how does the reader reconcile this with accounts in which deceit is practiced by believers, commanded and rewarded by God, and even used by God himself? Although there are only a few accounts in which this occurs, they indicate that there is indeed a righteous use of deceit, and that it is practiced not only by believers but also by God.

This thesis will seek to answer two main questions: Part I: Does the Bible really contain examples of righteous deceit? And Part II: If it does contain examples of righteous deceit, how does that reconcile with the rest of Scripture?

If the answer to the first question in Part I is yes, then that will show that righteous deceit is implicitly taught in the Bible. However, in order to identify its presence, deceit itself must be defined. Having established a definition, a list of accounts in which righteous deceit is potentially present will first be analyzed to determine whether deceit itself is present. If present, then it will

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[1] The former statement is an example of what is known as the liar paradox. "This sentence is a lie" is a statement that both proves itself true and false at the same time. It originated as the Epimenides paradox: Epimenides, a Cretan, made the paradoxical statement: All Cretans are liars. It's a statement that cannot be understood logically because he is referring to himself. Wikipedia contributors, "Lie," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia,* https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Lie&oldid=705049562 (accessed November 11, 2015).

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be determined whether the deceit described is righteous or unrighteous, sinless or sinful. It will be shown that many of these accounts do indeed describe a "righteous deceit." It will then be shown that the "righteous deceit" accounts fit into the following categories: Deceit used in inconsequential social situations, deceit used in war, deceit used for safety, deceit used as a judgment/warning, deceit used in teaching/testing, and deceit used for privacy.

Part II will then attempt to address the difficulties that the implicit doctrine of righteous deceit causes to surface. The primary issues are as follows: How is the concept of righteous deceit reconciled with the explicitly negative prescriptive accounts of deceit that are also clearly present in the Bible? Does the Bible contradict itself? Although humans do not need to justify God and his Word, we are still left in a world in which we must live and react. So the question is brought up again, is it ever permissible to deceive?[2] And if so, when? In attempting to answer these questions, various approaches have been proposed throughout history. An analysis of these approaches will help resolve the apparent difficulties of the "righteous deceit" accounts. There are three ethical approaches to this question that can be defended biblically: Unqualified Absolutism, Conflicting Absolutism, and Graded Absolutism. Each view addresses the slightly narrower topic of lying, but can be applied to the broader topic of deceit.

Of these three approaches, I will aim to show that Graded Absolutism works best in true moral conflicts. However, it will also be noted that each approach has its strengths and weaknesses, both biblically and practically, and thus a blended approach will be endorsed. It will also be shown that no approach accounts for every biblical example of righteous deceit.

Having identified righteous deceit in the Bible as an implicit doctrine of Scripture and having explained how the concept can be reconciled in the context of Scripture, it will finally be shown that the label "righteous deceit" is a helpful term in creating meaningful conversation and instruction when teaching the accounts in which righteous deceit occurs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Deceit is a topic that has been written about throughout history. The amount of literature written on this topic is so large that to do a thorough review is beyond the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, the number of different fields in which the topic of deceit is covered is also vast.

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[2] The specific ethical question that most theologians and philosophers deal with in regards to this issue is, "Is it ever okay to lie?" As will be shown in the first section "Deceit Defined," due to its greater importance theologically, for the purpose of this thesis, I restate this question as "Is it ever okay to deceive?"

Dogmatics, Apologetics, Ethics, Philosophy, Exegesis History, Linguistics, Sociology and Psychology are but a few in which this topic is covered. With the sheer expansiveness and number of the potential resources that exist on deceit, I will review a few of the more recent resources that I found especially helpful in approaching this topic.[3]

ETHICS

Due to the lack of recent conservative Lutheran works on Christian Ethics, one must look elsewhere to the larger protestant community to find resources on this topic. *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* by Norman Geisler, is a Christian Ethics text that presented a Christ-centered approach to Ethics, along with a conservative approach to Scripture.

Norman Geisler's *Christian Ethics* begins by presenting an overview of the various definitions of Ethics that humans have proposed. He then presents a Christian approach to Ethics and stresses some important characteristics that it should have. Geisler proposes the following characteristics: "Christian Ethics is based on God's will," "Christian Ethics is absolute," "Christian Ethics is based on God's revelation," "Christian Ethics is prescriptive" and "Christian Ethics is deontological."[4] That it is based on God's will is self-explanatory for any Bible believing Christian. That it is absolute is based on the immutability of God. He does not change, therefore neither do the laws that God wants Christians to follow in their lives of sanctification. That it is based on God's revelation means that it is based on what God has revealed to the world through the Bible. This is against the alternative of using nature, God's creation, or any manmade source as a basis for Ethics. That it is prescriptive means that Christian Ethics indicate what humans should or ought to do rather than emphasizing what they are already doing. Finally, that it is deontological means that it is based on a Christian's duty, rather than being based on the result of an action, a teleological approach. This does not mean that a Christian is not concerned at all with the result of an action, but rather, that he is concerned with both the good of the action itself and the good of the result.[5] These characteristics are derived from Scripture and are helpful in determining the ethical views that are valid for Christians.

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[3] It may also be noted that due to the expansiveness of the topic and the purpose of this thesis, I limited my research predominantly to the fields of Ethics, History, and Exegesis.

[4] Norman Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 22-24.

[5] This point is emphasized by Professor Forrest Bivens on page 1 of his Christian Ethics Summer Quarter Notes, ST5090.2.

In the remainder of part 1 of the text, Geisler provides an analysis of the six major ethical views. They are antinomianism, generalism, situationism, unqualified absolutism, conflicting absolutism, and graded absolutism. Geisler shows how each of these ethical views would react to a situation in which a person has to decide between lying to save a life or telling the truth and risking the life of another. Geisler states that the first three views are not able to be supported biblically, whereas the final three are. An overview of the first three is provided in Appendix I. The three Christian views will be analyzed in their so-called sections of this thesis. Geisler states that he supports the Graded Absolutism approach.

In the second part of *Christian Ethics*, Geisler applies the Graded Absolutism approach to a variety of ethical issues that exist in the world. Geisler's work on ethics is a worthy introduction to the various ethical views that exist in the world.

HISTORY

Just by doing a quick search on Amazon.com, one can see that there are many books on the topic of lying and deceit from various perspectives. *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* by Sissela Bok, is one example that approaches lying philosophically. *The (Honest) Truth about Dishonesty*, by Dan Ariely approaches lying from a behavior economics perspective. *The Folly of Fools: The Logic of Deceit and Self-Deception in Human Life* by Robert Trivers, a *New York Times'* Notable Book of 2012, approaches lying from the field of psychology. Even *A Brief History of Lying* is a humorous take on the subject of the lie. However, *The Devil Wins: A History of Lying from the Garden of Eden to the Enlightenment* by Dallas G. Denery II, was the only true history I found on lying.

Denery's *History of Lying* was a fascinating read about how the interpretation of lying has developed throughout history. He begins in the garden of Eden and traces the lie's development from Augustine, through the Middle Ages, to the philosophers of the enlightenment, and finally to the modern era. He begins by approaching the lie in relation to Satan, continues with the lie in relation to God, and concludes Part 1 focusing on the lie in relation to humans.

In Part 2 of the text, Denery changes course, focusing instead on the secular history of lying. He examines the lies of the courtiers in the royal courts and how lying has related to women throughout history. These final two sections were less beneficial than part 1 for the

purposes of this thesis. It would also have been very interesting for Denery to have continued the interpretation of the lie all the way through modern theologians rather than ending with the Enlightenment.

This book was invaluable in helping trace the various approaches to the problem of deceit throughout history. This will be explained further in the section titled, Historical Approaches/Resolutions.

<p style="text-align:center">*EXEGESIS*</p>

Multitudes of papers, essays, and commentaries have been written about the exegesis and interpretation of what I am calling the "righteous deceit" accounts in the Bible. Of the many stances that people take, the paper, "Does God Deceive? the 'Deluding Influence' of Second Thessalonians 2:11" by Gregory Harris was most formative to the argument I am making in this thesis.

Harris approaches the topic of deceit in an attempt to understand the "deluding influence" of 2nd Thessalonians 2:11. He uses 1 Kings 22 and Ezekiel 14 as parallel examples of God's use of deceit to accomplish his will. Harris identifies a number of similarities between these accounts and relays them adeptly. More will be said of his arguments when these deceit accounts are specifically examined.

The topic of lying and deceit is one which has been and will continue to be thoroughly covered by the academic and religious communities. These are but a few of the many worthy and recommendable resources that are available today on the topic of deceit in general and as it relates to the Bible.[6]

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[6] The Bibliography of this thesis will also have additional resources if one is interested in further pursuing these subjects.

Does righteous deceit exist? Is it present in the Bible? Is it identifiable? These are the questions that Part I of this thesis will address. Before looking at the specific righteous deceit account, a number of preliminary thoughts will be made to help identify righteous deceit in various categories in the Bible.

PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS

Before venturing into the specific biblical accounts and passages about deceit, a few notes should be made about drawing conclusions from Scripture. Adolph Hoenecke says the following about drawing conclusions from Scripture:

> Whether in theology one can actually draw logical conclusions—The answer must be: In the full sense not; only in a very limited way, insofar as only analytical conclusions are permissible which in fact and truth only draw out of Scripture what God himself actually put into it and clearly testifies has been put into it.[7]

One should therefore only draw from Scripture what God himself put into it. How can this be determined? Hoenecke also states:

> But what is a legitimate conclusion? One
> 1) which does not violate the laws of logic;
> 2) which does not in the least contradict what Scripture says;
> 3) which takes its premises from Scripture itself;
> 4) which does not draw a conclusion which is not implicit in Scripture.[8]

Hoenecke's first three conditions for legitimate scriptural conclusions are self-explanatory, however a word on number four might be helpful. A legitimate conclusion must be at least implicit in Scripture. What does that mean? A distinction between implicit and explicit doctrine will suffice.

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[7] Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, vol III. trans. James Langebartels (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003), 71.

[8] Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, vol I. trans. James Langebartels and Heinrich Vogel (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003), 409.

IMPLICIT VS. EXPLICIT

An explicit doctrine of Scripture is one that is "fully revealed or expressed without vagueness, implication, or ambiguity**:** leaving no question as to meaning or intent."[9] It is literally stated in the text. For example, from John 3:16 the doctrine that *God loves the world* is stated explicitly. This is distinct from an implicit doctrine in Scripture. Implicit is "capable of being understood from something else though unexpressed**:** IMPLIED."[10] An implicit doctrine requires the use of logic and reason to deduce a conclusion drawn from the text. An implicit or implied truth from John 3:16 is that God loves me. The logical deduction begins with the premise, *God so loved the world* (Jn 3:16).[11] From this the logical inference, *I am part of the world*, is made. The conclusion that follows is, *therefore God loves me*.[12] As will be shown, righteous deceit is by no means an explicit doctrine of the Bible. The goal of this thesis is to determine whether it is an implicit or implied teaching of Scripture based on the evidence Scripture provides.

PRESCRIPTIVE VS. DESCRIPTIVE

Another important aspect to consider when determining application of biblical truths is the distinction between prescriptive and descriptive passages of the Bible. Prescriptive passages help indicate what should or ought to be done. In Matthew 28:19, when Jesus commands the disciples and therefore his church to "Go and make disciples of all nations," as part of the Great Commission. He is prescribing to the church what they should do, that is, "make disciples." However, a descriptive passage or account is different. It describes what is, rather than what ought to be done. The account of Paul and Silas baptizing the Jailer at Philippi and his family in Acts 16:33, is a description of Paul and Silas upholding the Great Commission. On its own nothing is prescribed by this account in terms of whether one should baptize others, rather it

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[9] Frederick C. Mish, "explicit," *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

[10] Frederick C. Mish, "implicit," *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

[11] *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Jn 3:16. Unless otherwise noted all further Bible passages will be from NIV 2011 and will be cited immediately after the verse. Any Hebrew provided will be from the BHS - *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: SESB Version.*, electronic ed. (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 2003) and any Greek will be from the UBS4 - Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition (with Morphology)* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993; 2006).

[12] Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, *WLS Dogmatics Notes.* http://www.wls.wels.net/resources/curricular-resources/. 25.

provides an example of one way to carry out the Great Commission as Jesus prescribed in Matthew 28.

Applying this to the concept of righteous deceit, even if righteous deceit were able to be identified from descriptive passages or accounts, one would still need to identify a prescriptive passage that shows the principle or command that is being upheld or carried out by those in the accounts, to show that it is something that Christians should follow. Yet deceit must first be identified as righteous in the first place. How is this done?

IDENTIFYING RIGHTEOUS DECEIT

In order to identify righteous deceit one must first identify whether deceit itself is present. To do this, deceit must either be labeled as such by the Bible, or the actions done must fall within the definition of deceit. A working definition is therefore needed. Once deceit has been identified as being present in an account, one must then determine whether it is indeed righteous. How is this determined? It depends on the context. There are two types of situations in which righteous deceit is possible.

The first is when it is done by man. Because man is sinful, and deceit is often described as being sinful, there must be something explicit to override the basic understanding. If the text remains neutral about a deceitful action, there is no evidence to say that it is righteous. Neutrality on an issue does not indicate approval. In cases such as this, the Bible remains silent. For deceit performed by a human to be labeled as righteous, there must be some explicit approval or condoning of the act in the context by God directly or through the inspired writer. This is also the case when deceit is practiced by believers. Because all people have a sinful nature, it is not enough to say that deceit is righteous for the sole reason that it is done by those who are considered righteous by God. There still must be some other indication in the text that helps determine its righteousness, a reference to it either in context or elsewhere in the Bible.

The second situation is when the deceit identified is from God. If God commands it, it is not sinful. God does not tempt anyone to sin, for "when tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone" (Jas 1:13). If God uses deceit, it also cannot be sinful. God is holy. Psalm 99 is an entire psalm about God's holiness. It repeats, "He is holy" in verses 3 and 5. It concludes with the verse, "Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the Lord our God is holy" (Ps 99:9). Isaiah 6 says,

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Is 6:3). In 1 Peter, Peter quotes multiple passages from Leviticus saying, "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy" (1 Pe 1:15,16). Because Jesus is also true God, this applies to him as well. Christ is described according to Isaiah's prophecy: "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth" (1 Pe 2:22).

Finally, if God condones, approves, or blesses an act, then it must also be righteous, because God hates sin. David also expresses this thought in Psalm 5: "For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness; with you, evil people are not welcome. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You hate all who do wrong" (Ps 5:4,5). God does not reward evil or unrighteousness, but rather he punishes it. Whether it is God the Father, the first person of the Trinity or God the Son the second person of the Trinity, all that God does is perfect. There is no fault or error that can be found in what God does. The question in these accounts is not whether the deceit is righteous or unrighteous, for it must be righteous if done by God, but rather, whether deceit is actually present and being used by God. Deceit cannot be sinful in a specific circumstance if God does it, condones it, or blesses it. In these cases, it would be considered righteous.

DECEIT DEFINED

When deceit is labeled as such in the text, in most cases it is portrayed negatively and as being sinful with a few important exceptions. However, most of the accounts in which deceit seems to be portrayed positively are descriptive accounts in which deceit is not explicitly labeled. A definition is therefore needed in these cases in order to determine whether deceit is actually present.

When theologians and ethicists approach this topic they often narrow the scope to lying specifically. After all, "deception at its core is lying in place of truth."[13] They ask if it is ever permissible to lie. To answer this, they needed a definition. Augustine defined a liar as he "who holds one opinion in his mind and who gives expression to another through words or any other

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[13] Gregory H. Harris, "Does God Deceive?: the 'Deluding Influence' of Second Thessalonians 2:11." *The Master's Seminary Journal* 16, no. 1 (2005): 73-93. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCO*host* (accessed September 2, 2015), 73.

outward manifestation."[14] He then qualifies this thought saying that "in reality, the fault of the person who tells a lie consists in his *desire to deceive* in expressing his thought."[15] This twofold definition of lying stuck. Lying became understood as not just the telling of untruth, but untruth coupled with intent to deceive. The intent to deceive became a necessary aspect of lying. This definition of lying has served as a standard throughout history. Even today, Merriam-Webster defines lying this way according to the first entry: "to make an untrue statement with intent to deceive." This is the narrow definition. However, the second entry shows that it can also mean, "to create a false or misleading impression."[16] This is the broad definition. When defining the lie, most use the narrow definition, as do Christian Ethicists, Copan and McQuilkin, who define lying as "a violation of the truth that includes a conscious intent to deceive."[17] The twofold narrow definition of lying is the standard.

The definition of deceit is somewhat broader, closer to the broader definition of lying. *Merriam-Webster* defines deceive as "ensnare," "to be false to," "to fail to fulfill," "to cheat," or "to cause to accept as true or valid what is false or invalid."[18] *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* defines deceit as "delusion or false dealing with another."[19] "To be false to" or "dealing falsely with someone" will serve well in helping to identify deceit moving forward.

It should be noted that these are simply working definitions, a place to start given the difficulties of the hermeneutical circle that accompanies language and interpretation.[20] In the Bible, lying and deceit are sometimes used synonymously.[21] However, lying is generally

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[14] Augustine. "On Lying," *St. Augustine Treatise on Various Subjects,* eds. Roy J. Deferrari. Translated by Mary Sarah Muldowney et al., vol. 16, The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation (New York: Father of The Church, Inc., 1952), 55.

[15] Augustine, "On Lying," 56. Emphasis mine.

[16] Frederick C. Mish, "lie," *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

[17] Paul Copan and Robertson McQuilkin, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics: Walking in the Way of Wisdom,* 3rd Edition. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 501.

[18] Frederick C. Mish, "deceive," *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

[19] Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 275.

[20] Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, Revised and Expanded Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 137.

[21] Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 941. The Hebrew word רְמִיָּה, meaning "deceit, treachery," is often paralleled with שֶׁקֶר. This often happens in the Psalms, showing how similar deceit and lying can be. In Psalms 120:2, the psalmist cries, "Save me, Lord, from lying (שֶׁקֶר) lips and from deceitful (רְמִיָּה) tongues. Lying lips and

considered a subset of deceit. Copan and McQuilkin note that when it comes to lying, "the basic sin is deception, not merely the deliberate verbal expression of falsehood."[22] Though it is at the heart of lying, it can also be at the heart of other actions. Other manifestations of deceit are possible. McQuilkin and Copan provide a comprehensive list of the various kinds of deceit, which can help one identify its presence in a biblical account: Lying with false words, lying without words, lying with true words, pretense and exaggeration, cultural lies, deceit motivated by self-interest, self-deception or hypocrisy, incomplete truth, deceit as a part of inconsequential social arrangements, deception in war, and deception in opposing criminals.[23] The number of different ways deceit can be manifested is also reflected by the terms that express deceit in the original languages. There is a "vast array of Hebrew and Greek terms [which] represent various shades of fraudulent behavior."[24] They all express the basic concept of dealing falsely with another. For the descriptive accounts, if any of the accounts have actions or situations that fit these examples, then it can be determined that deceit is present.

Before moving on to the various accounts, a few other preliminary points should be made about the working definition of deceit. The first is that it is a working definition for the English word "deceit." Although influenced by them, it is not necessarily the same as the definitions of the Hebrew or Greek words for deceit, which will be examined as they occur in the various accounts. This is important to clarify because in the examination of the biblical accounts I will be seeking to identify deceit according to the English word, which may (or may not) be broader than the words for deceit in Hebrew and Greek. The second point is that as much as possible, I am approaching these accounts with a clean slate in terms of the moral implications of deceit. Although the term deceit is still largely considered in a negative light in English, there are numerous examples of deceit, deception, and even self-deception that have come to be viewed positively.[25] Words are defined by use. Use and context will therefore dictate what the moral implications of deceit in and of itself are.

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deceitful tongues are something to be saved from Psalm 101:7 states, "No one who practices deceit (רְמִיָּה) will dwell in my house; no one who speaks falsely (שְׁקָרִים) will stand in my presence."

[22] Copan and McQuilkin, 508.

[23] Ibid., 503-511.

[24] Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, 275.

[25] Deception is a necessary requirement of placebo studies, self-deception is viewed as a way to improve one's view about oneself which in turn improves the way one performs, the list goes on.

UNRIGHTEOUS DECEIT

When deceit is referred to explicitly in the Bible, it is generally portrayed negatively. The Bible is very clear in its prohibition of deceit. The most known prohibition of deceit is the Eighth Commandment of the Decalogue. The Eighth Commandment says, "You shall not give false (שֶׁקֶר) testimony against your neighbor" (Ex 20:16). Although, in Deuteronomy, it has the same English translation: "You shall not give false (שָׁוְא) testimony against your neighbor" (Dt 5:20), there is a different Hebrew word for deceit. In Exodus, the Hebrew word שֶׁקֶר is used to describe the type of testimony that is forbidden, whereas in Deuteronomy, the Hebrew word is שָׁוְא is used. Both שֶׁקֶר and שָׁוְא refer to deceitful testimony. שֶׁקֶר can be "deception, disappointment, falsehood"[26] or a "breach of faith, lie."[27] שָׁוְא has the concept of "emptiness, vanity"[28] or "worthless."[29] Whereas the Exodus passage refers to a lying type of testimony, the Deuteronomy passage refers to an empty or worthless testimony. The only reason a testimony would be empty or worthless, is if it was somehow not truthful, which would be neither useful nor helpful. The terms are clearly synonymous. Deceitful testimony is thus forbidden. What all does deceitful testimony entail? Luther explains the extent and the heart of this commandment in his explanation to the commandment: "We are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light."[30] Thus, deceit in the form of a lie that is at the expense of another is forbidden by the Eighth Commandment.

The Old Testament contains many other explicit references to unrighteous deceit. In Leviticus, God explicitly commands the Israelites, "Do not steal. Do not lie (תְכַחֲשׁוּ). Do not deceive (תְשַׁקְּרוּ) one another" using verbal forms of the words כָּחַשׁ and שָׁקַר (Le 19:11). As identified before, שָׁקַר is most closely related to the English word "lie." כָּחַשׁ has the sense of "be disappointing, deceive, fail, grow lean."[31] Once again, lying and deceit are forbidden.

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[26] Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1648.

[27] Brown et al., *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1055.

[28] Ibid., 996.

[29] Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 1425.

[30] Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 353.

[31] Brown, et al., *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 471.

Unrighteous deceit also comes up repeatedly in Psalms and Proverbs as something that the Lord detests. The Psalmist says of the Lord, "you destroy those who tell lies (כָּזָב). The bloodthirsty and deceitful (וּמִרְמָה) you, Lord, detest" (Ps 5:6). Proverbs refers to a list of seven things that are detestable to the Lord: "There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him" (Pr 6:16). Deceit appears twice in the list as "a lying (שֶׁקֶר) tongue" (Pr 6:17) and "a false (כְּזָבִים) witness who pours out lies (שֶׁקֶר)" (Pr 6:19). God also blesses those who have no deceit according to Psalm 32: "Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit (רְמִיָּה)" (Ps 32:2). Deceit and lying are clearly and explicitly negative and considered sinful in the Old Testament.

The New Testament also explicitly prohibits deceit as sinful. In Mark, Jesus lists the evil thoughts that come out of a person's heart: "sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit (δόλος), lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly" (Mk 7:21,22). δόλος is most often translated as, "taking advantage through craft and underhanded methods, *deceit, cunning, treachery.*[32] In Ephesians, Paul highlights "deceitful (τῆς ἀπάτης) desires" as what "corrupted" their "old self" and what should be "put off" in favor of putting on the "new self." (Eph 4:22-24). ἀπάτη is most often translated directly as "*deception, deceitfulness*" or also possibly "*pleasure, pleasantness* that involves one in sin."[33] In Colossians, Paul states, "Do not lie (ψεύδεσθε) to each other" (Col 3:9). ψεύδεσθε from ψεύδομαι, means "to tell a falsehood, *lie.*"[34] In his first epistle, Peter tells the Christians in Asia Minor, "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit (δόλον), hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind" (1 Pe 2:1). Throughout the New Testament, deceit and lying according to their various Greek words are depicted as sinful and unrighteous.

Both testaments clearly identify deceit negatively throughout. There are also many descriptive passages describing specific individuals in the Bible including both Satan and his demons, and also various humans.

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[32] William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 256.
[33] Ibid., 99.
[34] Ibid., 1096–1097.

The Bible identifies Satan as the epitome of lying and deception. He "invented the lie, and it is an invention that defines and mars his very essence and existence."[35] In Genesis 3, he completes his deception of Eve in just two sentences. He begins with the doubting question, "Did God really say?" (Ge 3:1). He then lies blatantly, "You will not certainly die" (Ge 3:4) and then follows it up with a half-truth, deception-filled statement, "your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil?" (Ge 3:5). He posed it as if it were a good thing, implying something to be desired, which it was certainly not. As such, "the Devil's lie could be nothing except an intentional misinterpretation of God's command."[36] Although it was true that Adam and Eve became extremely well acquainted with evil when they ate of the tree, and in a sense their eyes were opened to that evil, they were certainly not like God, for God has no experiential knowledge of evil, and they certainly no longer knew or experienced what was good. According to our definition of deceit, Satan was certainly dealing falsely with Eve. In fact, "the Gospels made it clear that lying was, for all intents and purposes, the Devil's unique contribution to God's Creation."[37] Eve fell into sin because she accepted the false ideas that Satan was spouting. For this reason, Satan is described by Jesus when speaking to the Pharisees in John 8 as follows: "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies (τὸ ψεῦδος), he speaks his native language, for he is a liar (ψεύστης) and the father of lies" (Jn 8:44). Paul also explicitly labels Satan's temptation of Eve as deceit in 2 Corinthians 11, when he states, "But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived (ἐξηπάτησεν) by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Co 11:3). The verb ἐξαπατάω means, "to cause someone to accept false ideas about someth., *deceive, cheat.*"[38] Satan still does this at present in the world as he "masquerades (μετασχηματίζεται) as an angel of light" (2 Co 11:14). His goal is to get people to believe the lies he spouts. Just as the father of lies, whose native language is the lie, deceived Eve at the beginning of the world, he will be set free for a short time to continue his deceit before the end of

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[35] Dallas G. Denery II, *The Devil Wins: A History of Lying from the Garden of Eden to the Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 26.

[36] Ibid., 27.

[37] Ibid., 25.

[38] Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 345.

the world when he will be consumed by fire and tormented forever. John records it as follows in Revelation:

> When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive (πλανῆσαι) the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived (πλανῶν) them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever (Re 20:7-10).

Every time deceit is associated with Satan, it is clearly an unrighteous, negative and sinful deceit. It is what makes Satan who he is and what leads to his eternal destruction.

OF MAN

Unrighteous deceit is also often used as a characteristic of humans in the Bible. There are a number of clear examples in which humans actively deceive, but a few will suffice. Achan hides the fact that he took some of the plunder from Jericho (Jos 7), David covers up his adultery (2 Sa 11), and Ananias and Sapphira lie about how much they have given to the Lord (Ac 5).[39] These three accounts are just a few of the many cases of man's unrighteous deceit in the Bible.[40] Interestingly enough, in these cases in which man is deceitful, deceit is not the initial sin that is committed. Rather, deceit comes forth in the cover-up. Achan, Ananias, and Sapphira were covering up their greed. David was covering up his lust. Unrighteous deceit often accompanies trying to hide or get away with sin. In each account, deceit is clearly sinful and it is treated as such.

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[39] These three account are analyzed in greater detail in Appendix A.

[40] Other likely unrighteous deceit accounts of man include: Adam and Eve hide from God (Ge 3); Cain lies to God (Ge 4); Sarah lies about laughing (Ge 18); Lot's daughters get Lot drunk to sleep with him (Ge 19); Laban deceives Jacob (Ge 29); Rachel hides the gods she stole (Ge 31); Jacob's sons lie to the Shechemites (Ge 34); Jacob's sons lie to him about Joseph (Ge 37); Tamar deceives Judah (Ge 38); Potiphar's wife frames Joseph (Ge 39); the Gibeonite Deception (Jos 9); Amnon pretends to be ill to rape his sister (2 Sa 13); Absalom has Amnon killed at a feast (2 Sa 13); A woman pretends to mourn (2 Sa 14); Absolom's conspiracy (2 Sa 15); A prostitute switches out her dead baby (1 Ki 3); Jezebel has Naboth killed (1 Ki 21) Gehazi lies to acquire Naaman's gift (2 Ki 5); Herod lies to the Magi (Mt 2); The Samarian woman tries to conceal her sins (Jn 4); Herodias manipulates Herod into beheading John the Baptist (Mt 14; Mk 6); Judas steals money from the disciples (Jn 12,13); Judas agrees to betray Jesus (Lk 22; Mt 26; Mk 14); Peter lies about knowing Jesus (Lk 22; Mt 26; Mk 14; Jn 18). The Pharisees also use deceitful practices throughout the Gospels, repeatedly working secretly against Jesus to trap and discredit him. In addition to these accounts, some of the accounts in appendices potentially contain unrighteous deceit as well.

RIGHTEOUS DECEIT

Having examined the clearest cases of unrighteous deceit in the Bible, it is clear that deceit would not exist except because sin exists. However, is deceit inherently sinful? We will now turn our attention to the categories of righteous deceit that occur in the Bible to show that the answer is no. These categories are useful to help understand the nature of the deceit. It should also be noted that even though these are categories in which righteous deceit occurs, inclusion in the category does not automatically make it righteous. The moral implications of deceit need to be determined from the context. Rather, these are simply the categories of situations in which righteous deceit is found in the Bible. They are simply what has been observed. Each will briefly be examined and explained.

Noting that the Bible clearly condones the withholding of information, Christian Ethicists, Copan and Mcquilkin have proposed the following categories for justifiable deceit in the Bible: Inconsequential social arrangements, deception in war, and deception in opposing criminals.[41] This was the basis for the following categories. The first two have been retained, deceit used in *inconsequential social arrangements* and deception in *war*. The third has been slightly altered from deception in *opposing criminals* to deception used for *safety*. Three categories have also been added to include additional situations in which righteous deceit is found in Scripture: deceit used to protect *privacy*, deceit used in *teaching/testing*, and deceit used as a *judgment/warning*. Each category will be explained and references to specific righteous deceit accounts that fit the category will be given.[42] It should also be stated that not every account of righteous deceit fits perfectly into a single category. These accounts which span multiple categories of righteous deceit will also be analyzed. Finally, there are some overarching biblical themes and concepts that demonstrate righteous deceit, which will be discussed as well.

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[41] Copan and McQuilkin, 509-511.

[42] In the following categories, specific references and brief explanations will be made to the various righteous deceit accounts. For a more detailed look at each account see Appendices B-G for more possible cases of righteous deceit in Scripture.

Copan and Mcquilkin see a similarity between the Emmaus account (Lk 24:28-29) and the account in which Jesus gives advice regarding fasting (Mt 6:17-18).[43] They see both of these as Jesus submitting to the cultural and social arrangements of his society. Based on this, Mcquilkin and Copan, create this category of deceit used in inconsequential social situations. They expand what is permitted biblically under this category to additional "mutually agreed-on social arrangements" such as "humor, games, and casual social greetings."[44] Following the "rules" of manners and politeness would also fit naturally in this category.[45] The deception that occurs when an audience is drawn into a good unpredictable story might be added as well. These mutually agreed upon social situations vary based on culture and context. They include everyday accepted behavior and speech. From this, one might also add Jesus' sarcastic remark (Mk 7:9) to this category, if indeed an element of deceit is present.[46] The use of sarcasm could be considered a possibly deceitful, but common, understood, way of speaking. As such, it seems to fit this category of inconsequential social situations.

Are these accounts enough to justify the acquittal of so many common, every day, occurrences of deceit? Was Jesus submitting himself to the cultural norms despite the element of deceit contained in them? Copan and McQuilkin certainly thought that the two passages were clear enough to support the category, noting that a reason for a lack of biblical evidence may be "for the very reason that it is inconsequential."[47] Although there are numerous inconsequential social situations that technically fit a definition of deceit, there are no examples in the Bible in which deceit under these kinds of circumstances is condemned. Because Jesus does seem to

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[43] Copan and McQuilkin, 509. Jesus' Advice on Fasting fits better under Righteous Deceit for Privacy and will be examined in Appendix F. Because there are other possible uses of deceit in the Emmaus account, it will be examined in Appendix G – Righteous Deceit in Multiple Categories.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Customs, traditions, manners, politeness. These methods of communicating often work on two levels, just as sarcasm or irony does. Something is said or done that has a different, yet understood meaning, compared to the normal or customary meaning that would come from normal use. It is insider language. In the sense that those who are on the inside understand what is being communicated, these types of communication are not deceitful. However, in the sense that those on the outside do not understand what is being communicated, these are deceitful. Even more so when the insider language is used for the purpose of preventing those one the outside from understanding. In this way it is similar to Jesus' dual use of parables (see section on Parables).

[46] This will also be examined in Appendix G.

[47] Copan and McQuilkin, 510.

submit to the agreed-upon social norms, especially in the Emmaus account, it would seem to give this category of righteous deceit credence.

RIGHTEOUS DECEIT IN WAR

The next category of deceit identified by Copan and McQuilkin is deception used in war. They state that, "War by its very nature is waged with an array of available weapons, including psychology and deception."[48] There are at least four examples that fit this category in Scripture. Copan and McQuilkin include God's use of spies which God both condoned and even commanded before the Israelites were going to take over the Promised Land (Nu 13). They also include Rahab's defection from Jericho and subsequent lie (Jos 2), Joshua's ambush of Ai (Jos 8) and the fact that the LORD uses ambushes (2 Ch 20:22).[49] Other cases in which righteous deceit may possibly be present are, Ehud's assassination of Eglon (Judges 3), Jael's killing of Sisera (Judges 4), Spying on David's behalf (2 Samuel 15-17) and Elisha's half-truth to the Arameans (2 Kings 6).[50]

Copan and McQuilkin use these examples to justify the entire category of wartime deception, "If there can be just wars, as we have argued in chapter twenty-four ("War and Peace"), then ambushes, camouflage, spying, deceptive strategy and communicating in code, as integral parts of such wars are also legitimate."[51] This seems to be an appropriate conclusion given the amount of divinely commanded wars that occur throughout the Old Testament, and the likely deceitful strategies that occurred.

RIGHTEOUS DECEIT FOR SAFETY

The final category of righteous deceit identified by Copan and McQuilkin is deception in opposing criminals. It has been included here as deceit used for *safety* or *protection*. Copan and McQuilkin justify this category by explaining, "Deception is apparently one form of resistance that, like physical resistance, is ordinarily wrong, but not wrong in resisting a criminal or an

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[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] These accounts will be examined in Appendix B, except Rahab's Lie which will be examined in Appendix G.
[51] Copan and McQuilkin, 511.

enemy in war."[52] For them, this includes the deception of the Hebrew Midwives (Ex 1),[53] Samuel's Half-truth (1 Sa 16:1-5), and Obadiah's hiding a hundred prophets from Jezebel (1 Ki 18:1-15).[54] Additional accounts that fit this category are the Magi's avoidance of Herod (Lk 4:30), when Jesus attends the Feast of Tabernacles in secret (Jn 7:1-13), and when Jesus hides from a hostile crowd (Jn 8:59). There are a number of possible righteous deceit accounts that might fit into this category as well.[55] In each, deceit is used because of a perceived danger. Often, but not always, it is danger that is perceived to come from a criminal. However, the uniting aspect among this group of similar accounts is the desire to avoid the danger and find safety.

According to Copan and McQuilkin, some modern examples of deceit used in this way are as follows:

> If a homeowner, away on a trip, leaves a timer on her light system to deceive potential robbers into thinking that she is home, surely she does not sin. Deceptive police activity is a good thing when needed to apprehend a criminal—for example, sting operations to break up drug or prostitution rings.[56]

Geisler also uses the homeowner example as a justified kind of deceit, citing how people often use intentional deception to save their property, "Most people, for example, leave their lights on while away from home in order to deceive potential thieves."[57]

Although there are a number of situations in the Bible in which deceit is used to preserve one's safety, there also seems to be a limit to this category. As can be seen in some of the

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[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid. Copan and McQuilkin state, "How can it be said that their faith was good and their subversive activity bad? Or how can it be said that their disobedience was good and their deception bad? The Bible does not make such distinctions. It just says that god approved and rewarded."). I would argue that the Hebrew midwives' lie to the Egyptian official is not clearly a case of righteous deceit, as explained in Appendix B, the midwives' act of saving the newborns was separate from their lie to cover-up their true intentions. God did indeed bless them, but this could have been directly for the fact that they saved the infants. This argument may seem similar to the argument for Rahab's righteous deceit. The difference was that Rahab's lie was an integral part of her saving the spies, whereas the midwives' lie was not technically an integral part of saving the infants. Had they not lied, they would have been punished most likely, but the infants would have still been saved. As such the account of the Hebrew midwives is listed as a possible (and even probable) righteous deceit account rather than a certain righteous deceit account.

[54] Ibid. Although this account about Obadiah certainly fits this category, the Bible does not say conclusively that it is righteous.

[55] Abraham's Half-truth to Pharaoh (Ge 12), Abraham's Half-truth to Abimelech (Ge 20), Isaac's Half-truth to Abimelech (Ge 26:1-11), Jacob flees Laban (Ge 31), David escapes by window (1 Sa 19:11-24), David pretends to be insane (1 Sa 21:13), Ahab battles in disguise (1 Ki 22:30), Esther hides her ethnicity (Es 2), Jeremiah's lie (Jer 38:24-27), and Paul's secret escape (Ac 9:23-25). All the safety accounts will be examined in Appendix C.

[56] Copan and McQuilkin, 512.

[57] Geisler, 94.

possible deceit accounts regarding safety in Appendix C, it is not always applied correctly. According to Copan and Mcquilkin's category of deception in opposing criminals, one may perceive that a person is a criminal and deceive them even though they are not a criminal. In the same way, deceit used for safety has the same pitfall. One who perceives a situation as being dangerous and uses deceit as result, may still end up being at fault because the use of deceit was unwarranted. For example, both Abraham (Ge 12; Ge 20) and Isaac (Ge 26:1-11) read situations as being dangerous and told half-truths to maintain their safety, but were reprimanded because of it. This illustrates the former point about the identification of categories. They are merely being observed rather than prescribed. Although a situation may seem to fit an identified category of righteous deceit, it is not the case that the use of deceit in such a situation will necessarily be righteous. This shows that practically, it can be very difficult to know under what circumstances deceit is warranted. The use of caution is in order.

Nevertheless, deceit used for safety is clearly described in Scripture and is another example of righteous deceit.

RIGHTEOUS DECEIT AS JUDGMENT/WARNING

Although not identified as such by Copan and Mcquilkin, God clearly uses deceit as a form of both judgment and warning. There are four primary accounts that contain this form of deceit: The Lord sends a deceiving Spirit (1 Ki 22), the Lord entices false prophets (Eze 14), the Lord sends a spirit of dizziness (Is 19:13,14) and God sends a powerful delusion (2 Th 2:11-12).[58] Parables could possibly be included in this category, as well as God's defeat of Satan. Although there are a few other possible examples that fit this category, the primary examples given are clear and explicit. [59] God judges and warns using deceit.

This category of deceit may sound shocking. Whereas the other categories of deceit are either inconsequential or on someone's behalf (or defense) at least in part, this category of deceit may seem entirely offensive. Simply put, God uses deceit against his enemies, which has the

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[58] Although not technically given as a strict category of righteous deceit, Copan and McQuilkin include some of these accounts under the concept of *incomplete truth*. They do not get into the reason God withholds the truth, but merely state that he does. Furthermore, these acts are all done entirely by God, in fact, only God can do them. Because of this, in a sense, they are not as applicable to a work on ethics which is more focused on how humans interact with each other. This might explain the lack of explanation on the part of the ethicists.

[59] Other possible examples of deceit used as a judgment/warning include Jeremiah's outburst regarding the Lord's deception (Jer 4:10) and Satan being released to deceive (Re 20:7). All war accounts will be examined in more detail in Appendix D.

direct result of eternal judgment. In 1 Kings 22, Ahab consults false prophets who having been affected by a deceiving spirit sent from God. They tell him that he will succeed in battle. Micaiah then tells him the truth, that he will die. Ahab rejects the truth and chooses to believe the false prophets. The result, Ahab enters battle in disguise and is hit and killed by a random arrow. Is there any doubt of his eternal destination? Indeed, God punishes rebellion, rejection of the truth, to the point that he may even use deceit to bring about that punishment.

And yet, by comparing the Ahab account to the additional accounts of judgment, the other side to this category appears. In Ezekiel 14, God warns idolaters that he may entice prophets to prophecy to them according to their idolatry. Then, if the prophet is so enticed, he will destroy both the prophet and the idolater. God says this about himself. He is not retelling what has already happened, but telling what has the potential to happen if that situation occurs. In other words, it is a warning. He is laying out the fact that he may entice prophets to their own judgment. God explicitly says, "Then the people of Israel will no longer stray from me, nor will they defile themselves anymore with all their sins" (Eze 14:11). It is to deter the people from straying. Not only does God's judgment remove the idolaters and false prophets who would tempt the Israelites to stray, but the act of judgment would also serve as a warning that would remind them what happens to those who do reject the truth. 2 Thessalonians is similar as well. God sends a powerful delusion so that those who have rejected will believe the lie and be condemned. It is another message of judgment. Paul records this account not only to show that God uses deceit in judgment, but also to warn his audience about the dangers of rejecting the truth. He shows them what to be on guard against. Although it may seem that no one benefits when God uses deceit as judgment, indeed, it benefits those who are warned and curbed by the stark display of God's wrath. His hatred of rebellion and idolatry is ominous, as is the extent to which he goes to punish it.

This doctrine of divine deception is one of the strongest means of God's judgment. It is nearly as harsh as the law gets. Both Chisholm and Harris identify a similarity to another harsh preaching of the law, the hardening of the heart.[60] Chisholm's definition of how God hardens hearts illustrates the similarity:

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[60] Robert B Chisholm Jr., "Does God Deceive?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155, no. 617 (January 1998): 11-28. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCO*host* (accessed September 2, 2015), 12. See also Harris, 84.

Divine hardening, whether accomplished directly or indirectly, is an element of divine judgment whereby God exhibits His justice and sovereignty. The objects of such judgment are never morally righteous or neutral, but are rebels against God's authority. Divine hardening is never arbitrarily implemented, but comes in response to rejection of God's authoritative word or standards.[61]

Although it is doctrinally incorrect that a person can be described as "morally neutral," Chisholm has identified the manner in which God hardens. The *WLS Dogmatics Notes* describe it similarly:

Hardening is also a judgment of God inflicted on self-hardened sinners to prevent their salvation. This is more than God merely permitting the hardening but involves a judicial act that has the intended effect of hardening. In cutting off people's time of grace God is not arbitrary. He hardens those who first harden themselves.[62]

It would seem that one way in which God accomplishes this divine hardening is through the use of deception.

The comparison to the way God hardens hearts is also important in the way a Christian uses this teaching. Again, according to the *WLS Dogmatics Notes*, "The sin and judgment of obduracy is revealed not that we strive to determine if or to assume that any person living is under this judgment. Rather we are to watch and pray."[63] What is the purpose of acknowledging this category of deception? Is it not the same for Christians as the doctrine of hardening? "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Cor 10:12).

Yet the way in which God accomplishes this is also important to note. Harris has identified Romans 1:18-32 as a parallel account which echoes both God's use of deception and the way in which he hardens hearts:

As with the two previous OT accounts, those referred to in Romans 1 replace God's truth with something else, namely, "they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (1:25). Such action opens the way for additional sin which, unless repentance occurs, ultimately culminates in God's judgment (1:18; 2:2, 5). In keeping with the two previous accounts, God openly declares His pending judgment for such a course of action.[64]

Harris emphasizes that God is responding to the rebellion and rejection of the truth already committed by man. Furthermore, he states that God is not responsible for the sin committed, "As

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[61] Robert B Chisholm Jr., "Divine Hardening in the Old Testament." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153, no. 612 (October 1996): 410-434. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCO*host* (accessed September 2, 2015), 434.
[62] *WLS Dogmatics Notes*, 477.
[63] Ibid., 479.
[64] Harris, 84.

with 1 Kings 22 and Ezekiel 14, God does not lead people into sin but instead uses the determined course the unrighteous choose as a means of judgment against them."[65] The reason God is not responsible is because "before judgment He openly presented His truth to the people, even announcing beforehand what would transpire."[66] On every occasion of God's righteous deceit used in judgment recorded in Scripture, the truth was made available beforehand to those who would be subjected to deceit, but it was rejected by them. Harris sees the same concept in 2 Thessalonians, in which, "As with the OT accounts cited, people of the Tribulation stand forewarned of the deception before it occurs and will be held accountable before God for their own deception."[67] It seems that God deceives those who have deceived either themselves or others, rejecting the truth that God has given them.

Although the category of righteous deceit used as judgment and a warning by God may be shocking or even surprising, these accounts show that it is indeed present in Scripture. Luther describes this kind of work done by God as follows:

> God's "alien" works are these: to judge, to condemn, and to punish those who are impenitent and do not believe. God is compelled to resort to such "alien" works and to call them His own because of our pride. By manifesting these works He aims to humble us that we might regard Him as our Lord and obey His will.[68]

Indeed, according to Luther, God's shocking works of judgment, condemnation, and punishment are alien, but God's "'natural' work (is) life and righteousness."[69] Righteous deceit used as judgment could certainly be included among God's alien activities.

RIGHTEOUS DECEIT IN TEACHING/TESTING

There are a number of accounts and examples in the Bible in which God uses deceit in order to teach or test someone. The primary accounts in which deceit can be seen being used in teaching/testing is when God tests Abraham (Ge 22), when God tests Job (Job), and when Jesus

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid., 92.

[67] Ibid., 93.

[68] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 13: Selected Psalms II*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 13 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 135. The term "alien" work is from Isaiah, "The LORD will rise up as he did at Mount Perazim, he will rouse himself as in the Valley of Gibeon—to do his work, his strange work, and perform his task, his alien task. (Is 28:21).

[69] Ibid.

tests the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21-28).[70] Although they may also fit into the category of judgment, parables also fit this category well. The way Jesus gradually reveals himself to the disciples and to the world can also be included. There are also a few possible righteous deceit accounts that are clearly in the context of teaching and testing, however it is not always certain either that deceit is actually used or that the deceit used in them is actually righteous.[71]

The basic premise of this category lies in the way humans learn. Jesus understood that it not only takes time for humans to learn and understand new ideas, but that it also must be a gradual process because humans can only learn a little bit at a time. Often, the process requires a foundation first, followed by the building of layer upon layer of knowledge. Again, new concepts cannot always be taught or communicated entirely at one time, but rather gradually, layer by layer. This is especially the case when what is being taught is very different or even contrary to what one already knows and experiences.

There are a number of passages that illustrate this idea. Mark records, "With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand" (Mk 4:33). A similar thing is recorded by John when Jesus says, "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear." (Jn 16:12). Paul refers to this same concept in terms of matters of milk and meat. He says, "I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready" (1 Co 3:2). At this point, it should be noted that these were not merely matters of head knowledge but of heart knowledge, matters of faith. Paul speaks of having maturity in the faith, yet the same concept of gradual growth applies. By performing miracles and teaching, Jesus gradually and repeatedly revealed himself and his mission to the disciples, building upon and strengthening the foundation he had lain. Each teaching gave the disciples enough to wrestle with by itself. He allowed them to wrestle with the truths of God one by one, little by little, so that they would have a solid foundation upon which he would build. In summary, yes, Jesus did not tell the entire revelation of God to the disciples all at once, holding certain truths back at times. But by doing so, and by repeatedly building upon what he had revealed, Jesus gave the Holy Spirit plenty of opportunity to work on, build, and strengthen the faith of the disciples.

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[70] These Teaching/Testing accounts will be examined in greater detail in Appendix E. However, the account of Job will be examined in Appendix G, as it possibly fits multiple categories of righteous deceit.

[71] Possible righteous deceit accounts used for teaching/testing include Nathan's Rebuke of David (2 Sa 12), and Solomon's deceitful verdict (1 Ki 3:16-28) which will be examined in Appendix G. Also included are: Joseph tests his brothers (Ge 42-45), and the boy, Jesus, in the temple (Lk 2). These will be examined in Appendix E.

Any teacher who teaches a subject that builds upon itself will easily understand this concept. For example, in elementary physics, students are taught equations that work only under ideal circumstances. This is done to isolate the concept being taught, making it easier for the students to learn the basics. Yet once they advance to higher levels of physics, students quickly realize that none of the equations they spent so much time learning in elementary physics actually work in the real world, because there are no ideal circumstances. Even so, what the student learned at the beginning was critical for learning to occur at the advanced level. Indeed, truth is often withheld from a beginning student, at least in part, so that he is able to learn and process as much as he is able, while having no prior knowledge of a given subject. This equips the student to advance to higher levels of learning in which more of the truth is revealed.

Maybe an even better example is the way parents teach their children about the world. Children by the age of three have learned to be inquisitive and to repeatedly fire the "why?" question at their parents without relenting. But due to the process of brain development, there are certain explanations about the world that children cannot understand at an early age. When the three-year-old asks, "Why is the sky blue?" The wise parent does not answer:

> A clear cloudless day-time sky is blue because molecules in the air scatter blue light from the sun more than they scatter red light. When we look towards the sun at sunset, we see red and orange colours because the blue light has been scattered out and away from the line of sight.[72]

They understand the technical answer is too advanced for their three-year-old. Rather, parents tirelessly answer the "why" questions in ways they think that the child can understand. Eventually, they result to the stock answers of "because" or "that's the way God made it." Although they hold back the full truth of the answer the children are seeking (assuming the parents even know the answer), they give their child what they are able to understand at that point in their life and development. Is not what Jesus does with the disciples similar? They start as babies spiritually, so he feeds them milk, until the point at which they are ready for meat.

What's more, Jesus also understood that using a variety of teaching methods can result in deeper understanding, internalizing, and taking the truth to heart. He understood that learning and understanding can be done on three different levels, cognitive, emotive, and volitive. He understood that each level of learning is touched by different methods. The different teaching

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[72] http://math.ucr.edu/home/baez/physics/General/BlueSky/blue_sky.html (accessed, February 4, 2016).

methods that Jesus used demonstrate these ideas well. Jesus would often teach by example. Not only would he demonstrate his care for the sick and those in need, but he would also demonstrate the power he had as true God using miracles. Other times, he let the disciples struggle with a concept before explaining it, teaching them in a more inductive way. The way Jesus used parables is an example of this. Other times he would use the element of surprise or the unexpected to teach the disciples. This seems to have occurred in the way Jesus interacted with the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21-28). Though he initially made it seem like he was not going to help her, he then praises her faith and heals her daughter. In doing so, he allows the disciples to believe one thing, and then turns their presumed knowledge on its head.

Finally, what Jesus used to teach others, he sometimes used as a test as well. The disciples certainly learned from the way Jesus interacted with the Canaanite woman. But the woman also learned as well. Jesus seems to have been testing her, making it seem as though he would not help her. She persists and passes the test, thus demonstrating her great faith. It was a lesson that was certainly memorable for both her and the disciples who witnessed it.

In this category, one can see how Jesus sometimes holds back truth for a time, a kind of deceit, until the disciples are ready for it. Thus he uses deceit to teach truths in memorable ways and to test his followers. In each case, although the entire truth is not present at first, eventually it is revealed.

RIGHTEOUS DECEIT AND PRIVACY

There are two accounts in which Jesus specifically condones deceit used to protect privacy. They are when Jesus tells the disciples to keep their prayers and offerings secret (Mt 6:3-6) and when he tells them to fast in secret (Mt 6:16-18). Additionally, a possible example that might fit this category is when Jesus hides from the crowd (Jn 12:36).[73]

The idea behind the concept of privacy is that it is at times permissible to withhold, or keep hidden, information about oneself. Privacy assumes that there is information about oneself that no one else has the right to know. First, one must determine if this concept is biblical. Are their certain kinds of information that should be hidden from others? Or, must one always be completely transparent with those around them?

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[73] All of these privacy accounts will also be examined in Appendix F.

The Bible speaks surprisingly little on this topic directly, yet as far as what it does say, it does seem to support the concept. The best examples of privacy involve things that should remain between man and God. This includes offering and prayers (Mt 6:3-6), and fasting (Mt 6:16-18).[74] Other than these two verses, which are guarding against hypocrisy, not much else is said. However, there are a few verses in Proverbs which consider the concept. Proverbs 11:13 connects keeping a secret with being trustworthy: "Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy (נֶאֱמַן) in spirit keeps a thing covered" (Pr 11:13 ESV). נֶאֱמַן is from the Hebrew verb, אמן, which is where the English "Amen" comes from. In the Niphal form, it means "to prove to be firm, reliable, faithful" and clearly has a positive connotation.[75] It is a good thing to be trustworthy and therefore it is a good thing to keep maintain another's secret. It acknowledges that in reality some things are best kept covered or as secrets. Similarly, Proverbs 20:19 implies that there are some things that one may want to keep a secret, "Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babbler" (Pr 20:19 ESV). If one desires to maintain a secret, they should not tell the secret to a babbler who might tell a slanderer who could use it against them. In both verses, slanderer, the negative party in these proverbs, is associated with revealing someone else's secret. From these proverbs, which are by no means absolute statements that apply for every situation, one can see that keeping another's secret is a positive thing and betraying another's secret is a negative thing. Although they do not explicitly condone keeping secrets, by implication the point is made. According to the clearest accounts in Matthew, in spiritual matters between man and God, one is thus allowed to have privacy and therefore hide the truth.

Aside from privacy in spiritual matters, can one also be private in other matters? The seventh commandment, "You shall not steal," assumes that property exists and thus that it is something that should be protected (Ex 20:15). Does this also imply that because it belongs to an individual, the individual is allowed to do whatever he wants with it including preventing others from knowing about it, hiding it or keeping it private? Possibly, but not necessarily. There is a limit on ownership in that one must certainly practice good stewardship with all that one owns. The eighth commandment, which protects one's reputation, assumes that one's reputation should

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[74] Jesus illustrates the concept of private prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane when he prays in private (Mt 26; Lk 22; Mk 14).

[75] Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 63.

be protected. Does this imply that one can protect one's reputation by keeping things hidden and calling it privacy? Also possible, but not necessarily. Rather, the Bible much more often speaks about how sin should be revealed (Eph 5:11-12) and how nothing can be hidden from God (Lk 8:17; Lk 12:2-3; He 4:13). In non-spiritual and non-sinful matters, the Bible remains largely silent about what can or should appropriately be kept private.

The Bible does teach that marriage is a relationship that has certain aspects which are to be kept solely between the husband and the wife. They are to be entirely faithful to each other (He 13:4). That the relationship between a man and woman parallels the relationship between Christ and the church makes sense as these are the only relationships that are granted some level of privacy. Between the two of them is transparency, but that same level of transparency need not be conveyed to the world. To what extent this can be applied to other relationships, thus granting privacy in other matters, one cannot say specifically from the text.

In both of the examples given, between God and man, and between husband and wife, privacy is given to protect something. Either one's spiritual worship life, or one's purity in marriage. It is not privacy for privacy's sake. Furthermore, from the examples of deceit used in war and for safety, it also seems that it is not the right of an enemy or an adversary to know information about their victim. Yet once again the reason for the withholding of information is for safety, or to win a victory, not solely for privacy's sake. It may be that the issue of privacy between men about non-sinful matters, is a matter of adiaphora. That being said, in the United States, the government certainly allows and sometimes requires privacy and one should follow the rules of the government where they do not conflict with God's law.

Finally, based on the account of Job and a number of other Bible verses, there does seem to be a level of privacy that God has for himself. God has not revealed everything to man: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law" (Dt 29:29). Jesus did not reveal to man when the end will come, saying to them, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority" (Ac 1:7). Jesus also revealed that only the Father knew when the end would come, "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mt 24:36). Finally, the account of Job illustrates this as well. Job did not know why he had been subjected to such suffering and in the end it was

never revealed to him.[76] Job's interaction with God may be along the same lines as the reason Isaiah proclaims, "Truly you are a God who has been hiding himself, the God and Savior of Israel" (Is 45:15). Might this be because he knows that humans, his creation, are incapable of grasping an all-encompassing revelation of God, their Creator? Quite possibly. Whatever the reason, it is true that God only reveals what he wants to reveal about himself to his creation.

Privacy is the final category of righteous deceit identified in the Bible. It is deceitful insofar as information is withheld about the truth and knowledge is kept secret. Although there are not specific example of privacy for the sake of privacy between humans, there are examples of privacy that should be maintained between men and God for the sake of avoiding hypocrisy, and between husband and wife for the sake of faithfulness in a marriage. It also seems that God hides simply because he has decided that it is the best thing to do, and just like Job, we have no grounds to question our Creator.

RIGHTEOUS DECEIT IN MULTIPLE CATEGORIES

The following are a number of examples of righteous deceit which do not fit neatly into one category.[77]

Parables (Teaching/Judgment)

One of the most forgotten aspects of parables is that they have a dual purpose. Jesus told parables to illustrate a point about spiritual matters. He used them to teach. However, Jesus' audience, in addition to his disciples, was often confused by the parables that Jesus told. His disciples often inquired of Jesus as to what a parable meant. When Jesus first started using parables, they did not understand why, so in Matthew 13, after Jesus told the parable of the sower, they asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" (Mt 13:10). Jesus' answer reveals the dual purpose of his parables. He said:

> "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's

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[76] Because it includes multiple categories of righteous deceit, the account of Job will be examined in greater detail in Appendix G.

[77] Other righteous deceit accounts that may be in multiple categories will be examined in Appendix G.

heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'" (Mt 13:11-15)

Jesus spoke to the people in parables because they were the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. He spoke to them so that they would not understand even though they were hearing what he was saying. The parallel passages in Mark 4 and Luke 8, illustrates this even more clearly. When the disciples asked him about the parables, Jesus replied, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables *so that* (ἵνα), "'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!'" (Mk 4:11,12; emphasis mine) and also, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, *so that* (ἵνα), "'though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand'" (Lk 8:10; emphasis mine). Though many have tried to emphasize that ἵνα emphasizes the result of the parables in these verses, as is reflected by the NIV's translation, Voelz disagrees, "All attempts to evade the purposive force of the ἵνα respect neither the most natural sense of the Greek nor the fundamental ambiguity of the picture of Jesus presented by Mark's Gospel."[78] In agreement, Just adds the following about the Luke passage, "This introduces either a purpose clause or one of result. Since God achieves his purposes, there is little difference here. It suggests that God works in a veiled way through Jesus, and this "veil" (cf. 2 Cor 3:14–16) keeps people from understanding "the mysteries of the kingdom," unless they receive Jesus in faith."[79] Edwards explains, "The sense of 4:11–12 is that Jesus' parables confirm the states of people's hearts: insiders who are with Jesus will be given the understanding of the mystery, and outsiders who are not with Jesus will be confirmed in their disbelief."[80] Jesus' parables thus have a dual purpose, as Macarthur explains:

> So it's quite true that the parables *do* help illustrate and explain truth to simple people who listen with faithful hearts. But they also conceal truth from unwilling and unbelieving auditors—by neatly wrapping the mysteries of Christ's kingdom in familiar symbols and simple stories. This is not an incidental point. By His own testimony, the

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[78] James W. Voelz, *Concordia Commentary: Mark 1:1–8:26*, ed. Dean O. Wenthe (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 284.
[79] Arthur A. Just Jr., *Luke 1:1–9:50*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 1996), 338.
[80] James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 134.

main reason Jesus suddenly adopted the parabolic style had more to do with hiding the truth from hard-hearted unbelievers than explaining the truth to simple-minded disciples. It was Jesus' own declared purpose thus to "utter things kept secret"—and His parables still serve that same dual purpose today.[81]

Parables, therefore, have two purposes. The first is to reveal a spiritual truth. The second, however, is to conceal the spiritual truth. Parables can only be understood by faith. Intentionally speaking in a way that will hide the truth from someone is certainly an example of deceit, and therefore righteous deceit when from Jesus. Yet from whom is the truth being concealed? Morris notes that "the Isa 6:9–10 quotation occurs six times in the NT, always in contexts of unbelief and hardness of heart."[82] Parables were a way to withhold the truth from those who had already rejected the truth. The concept of withholding the truth from those who have already rejected it has already been explored further in the above section about righteous deceit used in judgment.

Indeed, the context of the disciples' question emphasizes Jesus' use of parables for judgment as well. In Matthew 12, the Pharisees accuse the disciples of breaking the Sabbath. Jesus then rebukes them and has the gall to declare, "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Mt 12:8) and proceeds to heal on the Sabbath (Mt 12:13). From this point on the "Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus (Mt 12:14). Jesus withdrew because of the danger (Mt 12:15) and then heals a demon-possessed man (Mt 12:22). In response, "All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" (Mt 12:23). The Pharisees then heard this and responded, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons" (Mt 12:24). Jesus takes their murderous plots and accusations as the final straw. They have made their rejection of him clear. They have shown where they stand. They are against him. In response, Jesus rebukes them strongly. He says "whoever is not with me is against me" (Mt 12:31), he references the "blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven" (Mt 12:31), and he calls them a "brood of vipers," who are "evil" and can say nothing "good" (Mt 12:34). It was on that very day (Mt 13:1), that Jesus started speaking in parables, prompting the disciples' question in the first place. Up to that point Jesus taught clearly and used miracles to teach, after that point, he began using parables. Jesus thus used began using parables in order to conceal the truth from those who had rejected him.

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[81] John F. MacArthur, *Parables: The Mysteries of God's Kingdom Revealed through the Stories Jesus Told.* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2015), xxiii.
[82] Edwards, 134.

Many commentators have emphasized this dual purpose of parables. Indeed, Franzman states:

> Jesus' parables serve to conceal as well as reveal (…) They conceal the *secrets of the kingdom* (…) from those who have rejected the Kingdom as revealed in the words and works of Jesus the Servant, from those who do not hold and treasure (…) what God has given them already in the OT, in John the Baptist, in Jesus' plain words and eloquent acts. The parables are unintelligible to them because they have thrown away the key to them, Jesus. Because they refuse to see in Jesus the coming of the Kingdom ([Mt] 12:28), they cannot (and by God's judgment on their unbelief shall not) see that He is sowing the Word of the Kingdom.[83]

Franzman specifically connects their confusion with their rejection of Jesus, who is "the key" to the parables. Stoeckhardt reflects similarly:

> The parables of the Lord had one effect on the simple and another on the perverted. Before the eyes of the simple the parables pictured the invisible, heavenly things in a way that for them was both within reach and attractive. They were thereby attracted and tenderly invited to search for the real sense hidden under the picture, and what they thus learned, attached itself to their heart and memory (…) But for the disobedient and unbelieving the mysteries of the kingdom of God were then and are still veiled and hidden by parables, that they do not see and do not understand them.[84]

Parables were a unique tool that allowed Jesus to reveal the truth to those who sought him, yet at the same time, to conceal the truth from those who rejected him.

Not only was the spiritual truth hidden from those who rejected Jesus, it was also sometimes hidden from the disciples. Although the purpose of the parable was to reveal a spiritual truth to the listener, it was not always accomplished immediately by the parable alone. In the example before, Jesus' disciples came to him asking why he used parables at all. Another question they often asked after Jesus told them a parable was if he could explain it to them. This occurs after the parable of the Weeds Among the Wheat, when "His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field" (Mt 13:36) and again after the parable about That Which Defiles, when Peter says, "Explain the parable to us" (Mt 15:15). In Mark, we have an additional insight about how Jesus used parables to teach his disciples, "He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything" (Mk 4:34). It is clear from these passages that even for those who would

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[83] Walter H. Roehrs and Martin H. Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study Comentary*, electronic ed., vol. 2 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1998), 29. Emphasis theirs.
[84] George Stoeckhardt, "An Analysis of the Gospel Read on the Sunday Called Sexagesima [Luke 8:4-15]," *Quartalschrift* 51 (July 1954): 192.

eventually understand the meaning of Jesus' parables, on certain occasions the truth was initially hidden from them. Might this be another example of a use of righteous deceit? Parables hid the truth while they allowed the listeners to wrestle with the real meaning and truth of the parable. How many parables did the disciples misunderstand before Jesus finally explained the meaning to them? The Bible does not give us the answer. What can be said though, is that Jesus understood how humans learn. He understood that his message was contrary to the way the sinful world normally works, contrary to experience, and contrary to reason. He understood the process and the time it would take for the disciples to understand the truths about the kingdom of God. The previous verse illustrates this as well when it says that "With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand" (Mk 4:33). Learning is a process that takes time. Jesus used the hidden aspect of parables to gradually reveal spiritual truths so that the disciples would be better able to understand. The deceptive holding-back-the-full-truth aspect of parables in reality actually helps the learner process the truth being taught.

The dual purpose of Jesus' use of parables seems to fit the use of righteous deceit both in judgment and in teaching.

Jesus Hides Who He Is (Teaching/Safety)

Miracles were used by Jesus to reveal his identity throughout his ministry. Jesus explained about miracles, "But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father" (Jn 10:38). He is both true man and true God. He is the Savior of the world, the promised Messiah. Yet occasionally, after Jesus did a miracle that revealed him as true God, he would tell those who witnessed the miracle not to tell others.

Mark emphasizes this line of thought the most in his Gospel, yet the parallel accounts also reflect it. In the first chapter of Mark, Jesus commands the demons who had witnessed his miracles to be silent. He drives out many demons, but "would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was" (Mk 1:34). Later in Mark, Jesus "gave [impure spirits] strict orders not to tell others about him" (Mk 3:12). It is easily understood why Jesus would do this, as even the truth from a demon cannot be trusted. It would not help others hear about Jesus from a demon and might even make them question if Jesus was on the demon's side. Furthermore, it showed his power over the demons given that they remained silent when he commanded them to do so.

Yet what about when Jesus tells people to be silent about his power as he does to the leper whom he had just healed? He commanded the healed leper, "See that you don't tell this to anyone" (Mk 1:44).[85] Jesus makes similar statements after miracles several times.[86] The reason that Jesus commanded the leper to be silent about the miracle is made clear in the next verse: "Instead [the healed leper] went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places" (Mk 1:45). Mark again illustrates Jesus' desire to keep his presence a secret, noting how difficult it was, "He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret." (Mk 7:24b). The faster the news about Jesus spread, the harder it was for him to move openly and stay in town. Also, the larger the crowds became, the more the government and the religious leaders would notice and get involved, the more dangerous it would become for Jesus. Finally, Jesus did not want to be seen solely as a miracle worker or healer. Limiting how quickly news spread about him would keep this view from spreading. On the one hand, Jesus was maintaining secrecy for the practical benefits of safety and ease of travel, on the other hand it may have been to keep rumors and thus misperceptions about him at bay.

Although he had valid reasons, when he asked and told people to maintain his secrecy, what was he asking them to do? For the leper, people would certainly want to know how he was healed. As the text indicates, the leper told them, disobeying Jesus' command. But what should he have done? The answer is that he should have done exactly as Jesus said, "say nothing to no one." With this command, Jesus was opening the man up to a potentially ethically difficult situation. If someone asked the leper how he was healed, it would be difficult to know how to respond. Should he tell the truth and disobey Jesus? Or should he deceive the questioner and obey Jesus' command. Though this is not necessarily how it happened, one could at least conceive of a situation like this in which he would have had to decide between telling the truth or disobeying Jesus' direct command. Even silence can sometimes betray the truth. In this case it seems that the man sinned by disobeying Jesus' command and telling the truth to those around him. Had the man done the opposite and thus concealed the truth, it would have been a case of righteous deceit.

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[85] See also Luke 5:14,15 and Matthew 8:4.

[86] After Jesus heals the daughter of Jairus, Mark 5:43 says, "He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this." After healing the deaf and mute man, Mark 7:36 says, "Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it" (also in Matthew 9:30).

Jesus not only told those he healed not to say anything, but in at least one case, he commanded the same thing of his disciples. In Mark 8, Jesus and his disciples have the following exchange:

> On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah." Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. (Mk 8:27-30)[87]

Once again, Jesus tells his disciples to conceal the truth. Why does he do this? Possibly this concealment was for his own safety and ease of travel. It is also possible that this is connected to the process by which Jesus gradually revealed himself to the people. Timing was involved and it was not yet time. It was a process. Yet it cannot be denied that Jesus concealed his identity and told the disciples to conceal his identity as well.

As before with those who had been healed, it may have put the disciples in a conflicting situation. What should they do if someone asked about Jesus? Would it be permissible to conceal the truth and say nothing? Would it be permissible to allow those inquiring to remain in their false thinking, whatever it may be, about Jesus? The answer once again is clear. Obey Jesus. He told them to be silent and that is what they should do, even if it meant that others were left in a state of not knowing the truth because it was hidden from them. If that were to have happened, due to the fact that it was commanded by Jesus, this would have been another example of righteous deceit.

Finally, just as Jesus had the disciples conceal information about him, he also made it clear that it would all be revealed in time, "There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs" (Lk 12:2,3). Though he concealed things for a time, it was not permanent. The call of Christians through the Great Commission, is to reveal what has been revealed to them through the Holy Spirit, to others.

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[87] See parallel accounts Mt 16:13-16 and Lk 9:18-21.

God Withholds Knowledge (Privacy/Teaching/Testing)

Proverbs says, "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter" (Pr 25:2-3). From the first account of man in the Bible, this principle shows itself to be true. God withholds knowledge and information from humans. The very name of the tree from which God forbid Adam to eat reflects this concept. It was called, "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (הַדַּעַת טֹוב וָרָע)" (Ge 2:17). The knowledge of good and evil, as Lawrenz and Jeske describe, referred to the "experiential knowledge of good" they would have if they kept God's command, in contrast to the experiential knowledge of evil they would have if they did not keep God's command.[88] God created Adam and Eve to be perfect which meant they had no experiential knowledge of evil. Satan lies to them saying that this experiential knowledge of evil is something that God has and they will be like him if they disobey his command. The knowledge that God withheld from Adam and Eve in the beginning, was according to his good and gracious will, and according to his holy nature. It was a blessing that this was withheld and yet Adam and Eve still fell into sin because of Satan's temptation. Thus it can be seen that God withheld an experiential knowledge that would have been (and eventually was) disastrous for his creation.

God also withholds knowledge and information about himself. This can be seen from various passages such as when Moses declared, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law" (Dt 29:29). God compares his creation of man, to a potter and potsherds, "Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker, to him who is but a potsherd among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making?' Does your work say, 'He has no hands'?" (Is 45:9). There is a distinction between God and the crown of his creation, man. Man is in no position to question God, nor does he have the right. But why does God withhold information about himself? Why does God hide as Isaiah proclaims just a few verses later (Is 45:15)?

Although an acceptable answer may simply be, "because he is God," Luther wrestled with this very question and came to some interesting and insightful conclusions. Paulsen summarizes Luther's thoughts on this subject by saying, "It is not so much that God cannot be seen that concerns Luther, but that God actually and actively hides. God hides in order not to be

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[88] Carl J. Lawrenz and John C. Jeske, *A Commentary on Genesis 1-11,* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), 134.

found where humans want to find God. But God also hides in order to be found where God wills to be found."[89] Paulson describes it in the terms of a game of hide-and-seek:

> One hides initially, of course, so as not to be found. Yet, even in the game of hide-and-seek a child initially hides so as not to be found in one place, only later to reveal herself in the safe goal, with a cry, "Here I am!" The game would have no point if remaining forever unfound were its goal. God's game of hide-and-seek is not far different, though the "game" is a matter of life and death.[90]

The problem began in the garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve sinned, "That is, they sought God not where God wanted to be found, where his word promised his blessing, but where God's word of promise was not. They sought God outside his words."[91] As a result God hides behind his creation, so that one cannot find God there. One looks solely at creation and one cannot find who God truly is, because all they see is the result of sin. By extension, God hides behind human speculation: "In short, God hides in the world behind the question, "Why?" Why did God allow this to happen? At such moments a person cannot distinguish neatly, as a theologian might like, between God and the devil. God actually hides himself *in* our speculation."[92] Once again the reason God does this is "in order not to be found outside the preached word who is Jesus Christ incarnate."[93] For this same reason, God hides behind the incarnation of Christ, so that he is found not in the physical aspects of who Christ is, but because "God wants to be found in the words of promise in Christ that give new life."[94] Finally, God hides behind the means of grace, the sacraments and proclamation of the gospel, through which the Holy Spirit works, because "The Holy Spirit is the person in whom God comes finally and completely so as to accomplish the goal of all the hiding, to bring you to faith in Christ in a world reconciled to God."[95] This is evidenced by Jesus' and especially Paul's repeated use of the word *mystery* in the Bible to describe "the unmanifested or private counsel of God," which had to be revealed to be known.[96] Thus the whole point of God's hiding is so that he can be revealed through faith worked by the

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[89] Steven D. Paulson, "Luther on the Hidden God" *Word & World,* Vol. XIX no. 4 (Fall 1999 Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN), 363.

[90] Ibid., 364.

[91] Ibid., 366.

[92] Ibid., 367.

[93] Ibid., 368.

[94] Ibid., 369.

[95] Ibid., 370.

[96] Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 662.

Holy Spirit. Another way of saying it, if God did not hide, one would not need faith to know God, but then, one would be able to find him on his own.

God thus keeps information from his creation, who have no right to question it, but he also has a purpose for his hiding, so that the creation can come to know its Creator through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Person of Christ (Teaching/Testing/Judgment/War)

There is however a larger and bigger-picture type of hiddenness that has been advocated by some regarding deceit and the person of Christ. As a result of the incarnation, Jesus was both true man and true God. Although he was both true God and true man for the entirety of his life beginning at his conception and will be so through all eternity, throughout his life, he did not always appear as such. The outside observer looked at Jesus and he did not recognize God. He saw a human. An infant. A little baby. A toddler. A young man in the temple. A rabbi. A teacher. A prophet. A miracle-worker. Yet Jesus was true God and true man. According to appearances, many people only saw a man. This is because his true nature had to be revealed. This is what Jesus public ministry was all about. Revealing to the world that he was true God, and that as true God, the Son of God, his death would be the only possible sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world. Without the revelation of the prophets, of his teaching, and of his miracles, according to their senses, people did not detect Jesus' divine nature, that is, his supernatural nature. In the area of Dogmatics called Christology, this is a result of the concept called the *Genus Maiestaticum*. This refers to the fact that in the person of Christ, his divine nature communicates its attributes to his human nature. However, during his time on earth, Christ did not make full use, at all times, of his divine attributes which had been communicated to his human nature.[97] In other words, he did not at all times reveal his divine power, his divine knowledge, etc. which would have revealed who he was. When people saw glimpses of his divine attributes, they were amazed and sometimes confused. Yet when he did not make use of his divine attributes, his human nature concealed his divine nature. Might this also be a possible example of righteous deceit?

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[97] These definitions are from personal notes taken in Dr. John Brenner's Dogmatics I class at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, during the 2013-2014 school year.

Some, such as Augustine, took this a step further and said that this was an intentional ploy to deceive the Devil. Denery states, "Augustine had done much to popularize the idea, mentioning it in any number of works, in any number of contexts."[98] He explains, "According to Augustine, the story of Christ's incarnation, life, and crucifixion is that of an extended ruse, a well-thought-out plot to trick the Devil into abusing his power and dominion over mankind."[99]

Gregory of Nyssa also connected the incarnation to a grand deception, using the metaphor of a fish and fishhook, "'The divine nature,' Gregory writes, 'was concealed under the veil of our human nature so that, as with a greedy fish, the hook of divinity might be swallowed along with the bait of flesh.'"[100] Denery describes how Gregory thought the plan worked:

> Christ's incarnation, his wondrous birth, and his miraculous life are all aspects of an extended charade to convince the Devil that the value of a sinless Christ exceeds that of all other sinful men combined. Christ's excellent life is the bait, while Christ's divinity, the hook, is hidden within the bait of his human flesh. (…) This was, Gregory assures his readers, the only way the Devil would have handed over mankind. Had Christ appeared in his divinity, had he not hid himself behind a veil of flesh, the Devil would have been too fearful to make the exchange.[101]

Other Church Fathers who thought along these lines include Cyril, the Patriarch of Alexandria, and Ambrose, who both saw deception even in the way Jesus, while hungry and thirsty, allowed himself to be tempted by Satan in the desert.[102] Others, such as Thomas Aquinas, saw deceit in the fact that Mary married Joseph and that he served as Jesus' stepfather.[103] All who recognized deceit in Jesus' incarnation and life agreed that "Christ's actions are prudent, justified, and sinless because they perfectly counter the Devil's actions: deception counters deception, fraud counters fraud and, for all that, prudence counters cunning."[104] Denery notes how this belief was held by many throughout early Christianity, saying, "from the earliest Christian centuries until at

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[98] Denery, 67-68.
[99] Ibid., 68.
[100] Denery, 68. Quotation from Gregory of Nyssa, in *The Later Christian Fathers: A Selection from the Writings of the Fathers from St. Cyril of Jerusalem to St. Leo the Great*, ed. And trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 142. According to the editors of Luther's Words, this patristic metaphor of the 'fishhook' has its roots in Job 41:1 "Can you pull in Leviathan with a fishhook or tie down its tongue with a rope?" Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 26 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 267.
[101] Denery, 69.
[102] Ibid., 70.
[103] Ibid., 72.
[104] Ibid., 75.

least the fifteenth century a great many people believed God could deceive, could commit fraud, perhaps could lie."[105] That Jesus deceived Satan was certainly no uncommon belief through most of history since the time of Christ.

However, as evidenced by Satan's interactions with Jesus, when Satan tempted Jesus (Lk 4; Mt 4; Jn 6), when cast-out demons proclaimed who Jesus was (Mk 1:34; Mk 3:12), when Satan entered Judas (Lk 22:3; Jn 13:27), or when Jesus revealed that Satan asked for Peter (Lk 22:31), it seems evidently clear that Satan knew exactly who Jesus was, that he was the Son of God. Yet more can be said on the subject regarding deceit and what Satan's goal was in relation to the Son of God.

Satan's Defeat by Jesus on the Cross (War/Judgment)

This final example of righteous deceit regards deceit on the largest scale possible in the Bible. It regards the culminating event of God's entire plan of salvation, Jesus' crucifixion, death, and resurrection three days later. To be blunt, the question is, was it deceitful? How could the most loving act of God be considered deceitful? More specifically how could it be deceitful, and to whom? The concept is based on an assumption about what Satan knew about Jesus' death. In truth, it cannot be said definitively exactly what Satan knew, but both sides have been argued. On the one hand Satan is extremely knowledgeable, much more than humans, though not omniscient, making him extremely dangerous to humans. On the other hand, he is pure evil, speaking lies and deceit as his native language. It is the kind of evil that can blind itself. The question is, what did Satan expect from the cross? What did Satan think Jesus' death meant?

The arguments proceed as follows. On the one hand, there are those who acknowledge the vastness of Satan's knowledge. They point to the clear prophecies that had been spoken against Satan concerning his defeat, beginning right after the fall in the garden of Eden. Prophecies such as, "he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Ge 3:15). These prophecies that indicate who Jesus would be and what he would do, continued throughout the Old Testament, and were even pronounced by Jesus during his ministry.[106] Because of this, some say that Satan knew that he was going to be defeated. In fact, he probably even knew that the cross would be his ultimate defeat. His goal was therefore to either prevent Jesus from going, or

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[105] Ibid., 77.
[106] See Is 53; Mk 8:31-33; 9:30-32; Mt 16:21-28, 17:22,23; Lk 9:22-27.

if not, then to at least inflict as much pain and sorrow on Jesus as well as the rest of the world in the process. This argument certainly has some truth to it. However, not everyone agrees.

On the other hand, there are those who say that though Satan has a supernatural level of knowledge about God and the workings of the world, he became so blinded that he actually thought that he could defeat God and his plan of salvation. One way Satan thought he could achieve this was by getting Jesus to sin. Yet, according to his knowledge about God, shouldn't he have known that this was impossible? He tried anyway. He gave it his best shot by tempting Jesus three times in the desert, but Jesus defeated his temptations perfectly every time.[107] Why did Satan try even though he should have known that it was impossible? Possibly because he figured it was his best shot, or possibly because he became so blinded and deceived by his own evil, that he thought he could actually succeed in tempting the Son of God. The other way Satan apparently thought he could defeat God and ruin the plan of salvation, was by killing God's Son. He therefore made every effort to kill Jesus throughout his life. Was Satan behind Herod's execution of all the boys two and under in Bethlehem? Possibly. What about when Jesus escaped death-by-mob, by disappearing into the crowd intent on killing him? Also possible. Those who see it this way look to Jesus' death on the cross as the moment when Satan thought he had defeated God, yet in reality had at that very moment been defeated by God. The question is, how did Satan view the cross? What did he anticipate would happen at the cross? Would it be his terrible victory or his most pronounced defeat?

The fact that Satan went into Judas, which resulted in Jesus' betrayal and eventual execution, seems to indicate that Satan wanted Jesus dead.[108] To what extent did Satan realize that the cross meant his ultimate demise? The Bible does not say. Was Satan thus deceived by Jesus' crucifixion and death? Though the Bible does not say explicitly, many have thought so.

Augustine was a big proponent of this concept. Denery describes the deception proposed by Augustine as the "mousetrap" of the cross:

> Christ's spotless and holy life, his divinity hidden beneath an all too human exterior, was the bait that lured the devil to his own self-destruction. 'The Devil exulted when Christ died,' Augustine adds, 'and by that very death of Christ the Devil was overcome: he took food, as it were, from a trap. He gloated over the death as if he were appointed a deputy

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[107] See Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12,13; Lk 4:1-13.
[108] See Jn 13:27 & Lk 22:3.

of death; that in which he rejoiced became a prison for him. The cross of the Lord became a trap for the Devil; the death of the Lord was the food by which he was ensnared.'"[109]

Again quoting Augustine, Denery says, "Augustine put it even more succinctly in another sermon when he stated, "The Lord's cross was the devil's mousetrap: the bait which caught him was the death of the Lord Christ."[110]

Luther also supported this idea, agreeing with the church fathers and continuing the 'fishhook' metaphor used by Gregory Nyssa:

> Thus a fisherman deceives a fish by enticing it with bait, and it was not unreasonable on the part of the fathers to apply this to Christ. For He came into the world clothed in flesh and was cast into the water like a hook. After biting Him, the devil was suddenly pulled back out of the water by God, thrown on dry land, and crushed. This means that Christ presented to the devil His weak humanity, which covered that eternal and unconquerable majesty. Then the devil struck at the hook of His divinity, and by it all his power as well as the power of death and hell was overcome, as is stated in Col. 2:15: "He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in Him." But Satan could rightly have complained that he had been shamefully deluded and deceived, since he had thought that he would kill a man and was himself being killed after being decoyed by Him into a trick. But by God's wonderful counsel the same thing happened to him that is commonly said: "That cunning might deceive cunning."[111]

Luther thus clearly advocated the idea that God deceived Satan at the cross, using his humanity as a sort of decoy or bait. Like Luther, this idea was openly accepted by many theologians before and during the time of the Reformation. Also like Luther, theologians would state their belief strongly, but then qualify it by immediately including statements similar to Luther when he said, "For the fact that God cannot lie is sure and dependable."[112] It seems they distinguished between lying and deceit. God cannot lie, but God can and does use deceit.

The idea that God could have deceived Satan is especially fitting considering the way in which Satan first brought sin into the world. He deceived Eve. She took the bait of the fruit. Was Satan thus deceived into taking the bait of the cross which led to his ultimate defeat and

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[109] Augustine, "Sermon 263," in *The Fathers of the Church: Saint Augustine*, Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons, trans. Mary Sarah Muldowney (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Univeristy of America Press, 1959), 392. Quoted in Denery, 68.

[110] Augustine, "Sermon 261," *The Later Christian Fathers: A Selection from the Writings of the Fathers from St. Cyril of Jerusalem to St. Leo the Great*, ed. and trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 222. Quoted in Denery, 68.

[111] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 5: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 5 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 150–151.

[112] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 4: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 4 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 97.

punishment? And if so, when did he find out? This idea might even indicate the reason for Jesus' subsequent descent into hell (1 Pt 3:18-20). It would not be too much of a stretch to think that when Jesus descended into hell, he declared his triumphant victory over those who thought they had won, over those who had thought that Jesus was dead and defeated.

Although Scripture does not say so explicitly, it certainly would have been a fitting and appropriate way to defeat Satan. If true, then it can be said that at the cross, God deceived Satan. It is an ominous act of judgment, the ultimate form of God's righteous and holy justice, a powerful example of God's righteous deceit. Either way, what is important is that Satan was defeated. Jesus was the Savior he said he was. He accomplished exactly what he said he would and the resurrection proved it.

AN IMPLICIT DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

Based on the categories in which it is identified and the accounts that describe it, righteous deceit is implicitly present in Scripture. Again, although it is not explicitly identified anywhere, it is implied. According to the definition of deceit, deceit is clearly present in many accounts in the Bible. In many of these cases, the context clearly indicates that the deceit which is present in them must be righteous because it is either condoned or approved by God, or used by God himself.

PART II

Having identified the presence of righteous deceit in various biblical accounts, the more important theological question arises: How can the concept of righteous deceit as identified in these specific accounts be reconciled with the rest of Scripture?

This question can be approached on two levels. The first is in relation to God. How can a God who is holy and just use deceit? And how can a God who uses deceit be trusted? The second is in relation to man. If righteous deceit exists, how is it reconciled with the clearly negative prescriptive accounts of deceit in the Bible? In other words, is it ever permissible for man to deceive? After these questions are answered, the term "righteous deceit" will be defended and applied.

HOW CAN A JUST GOD USE DECEIT?

In response to this question, one might ask, is it even necessary to answer? Lutherans understand that there are times when Scripture teaches two doctrines that must be held in tension and not resolved logically. This is the case when the Bible teaches both that God is the reason some are saved and also that man is the reason he is condemned. The two teachings must be held in tension. Any attempt to resolve the two statements logically results in false doctrine. Could the same thing be said of the descriptive accounts about God, that he is truth and does not lie, when compared to the descriptions of God using deceit?

As has been shown, many of the Church Fathers had no problem holding these two ideas in tension. Augustine spoke of the divine deceit of Satan while maintaining that God is holy. Theologians from Augustine to Luther reflected this idea. Luther spoke about God's wisdom in using "cunning (that) might deceive cunning," but then acknowledged that God does not lie.[113] The theologians who speak this way have identified both teachings in the Bible. Because God's Word is perfect, both teachings are true, regardless of how contradictory they may seem to human logic. Hoenecke describes what should be done with biblical teachings such as this that do not necessarily fit perfectly into the framework of the rest of Scripture:

> But we cannot call dogmatics a system in this sense that all doctrines, as they are set up *a posteriori*, that is, according to their divine revelation in Scripture, must according to dialectical necessity regarding their connection with and their relationship to the central idea of dogmatics, sound just so. Rather, we take all the doctrines as God has given them

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[113] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 5: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30*, 150–151.

in Scripture and arrange them as they are given and after careful analysis in our doctrinal structure in such a manner as we have learned to know them in their relationship to the central idea of justification and salvation through faith in Christ (Jn 20:31), which is given in Scripture. But if a doctrine presented in Scripture cannot be brought into such relationship with this central idea, it is nevertheless not to be rejected as not belonging in dogmatics but is to be integrated elsewhere; for Scripture and not some systematic structure decides what belongs in dogmatics.[114]

Because it is present in God's Word, it is true. It does not have to fit into a perfect logical framework. It may very well be the case that one simply has to accept that a God who is just can use deceit. God fashioned the rules and does not violate them. This is part of what God reveals about himself. So the answer to the question, "How can a just God use deceit?" may simply be "I don't know." Or even more simply, "because the Bible tells me so." God is immutable and unchangeable. If God says he is just, and the Bible shows God using deceit, by definition, this cannot contradict who God is. Although it may not always seem like it according to human logic, God's use of deceit is just.

Distinguishing between the Law and the Gospel can also assist in how one understands the situation. Viewing God through the lens of the Law will present a very different view of God than when he is viewed through the lens of Gospel. Yet they are both true depictions of God. Christians and even Lutherans who are rightfully gospel-focused might be uncomfortable when looking at God through the harsh lens of the Law. According to the law, God hates sinners, God punishes sinners, God hardens sinners, and according to this thesis God deceives sinners. According to the Gospel, God loves sinners, God forgives sinners, God saves sinners, all because of Jesus. The seeming contradiction is thus resolved by viewing God's righteous use of deceit through the lens of the Law rather than through the lens of the Gospel.

Finally, this thesis is another answer to the question. Although the Bible often labels deceit as sinful, it is not inherently so, because the Bible also describes situations in which deceit is used righteously. It is perhaps not that different from the term righteous anger. Anger is often labeled as being sinful and discouraged, but God also exhibits anger against sin and evil. In such cases, God's use of anger is righteous. A just God can therefore use deceit, because deceit is not universally unjust.

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[114] Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics* Vol IV, trans. Joel Fredrich, Paul Prange and Bill Tackmier (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1999), 294.

CAN A GOD WHO USES DECEIT BE TRUSTED?

Although one might acknowledge that deceit is not inherently unjust, deceit is still deceit. It still is a use of what is false. This then leads to the question of whether a God who uses deceit can be trusted. To answer this question one must look at the specific reasons and details regarding the way in which God uses deceit. In none of the cases in which God uses deceit is deceit used exclusively, the truth is always involved. God only uses it for the benefit of those who love him and against those who have rejected him. It is thus both a source of comfort and of fear depending upon one's standing before God.

In many of the categories of righteous deceit, there exists a progression from truth to deceit. Deceit used in inconsequential situations is always done with the underlying social agreement that such practices are acceptable in society. A similar thing can be said of deceit used in wars. There in an underlying understanding that deceitful strategies etc. are fair game or at least understood as possible strategies that can be used by an enemy. Furthermore, when God uses deceitful war strategies, it is often in response to initial deceitful strategies used on the part of the enemy. In response to deceit, deceit may be a valid option. Deceit used for protection or safety is similar. If one is intending to harm another, the rules about who has the right to whose information are abandoned. One intending to harm another has, "*forfeited the right* to full or even partial disclosure" of the truth.[115] Furthermore, this seeming contingent use of deceit can also be seen in the way God uses deceit for judgments and warnings. Those who have rejected the truth risk having the truth withdrawn from them by God and a lie put in its place so that they are hardened in their unbelief. One who is not willing to uphold the truth does not have the right to the truth. It is not God's fault if one has the truth, but rejects and abandons it, nor is it untrustworthy on the part of God. God judges them according to their rejection.

When God uses deception in teaching and testing, the progression from truth to deceit does not occur. Rather it goes in the opposite direction, from deceit to truth. The truth may initially be withheld from someone so that he or she may better learn the truth of the lesson. Truth may also be withheld so that one may be tested in the first place. In both of these cases God ends with the truth. The recipient involved is only better off for it.

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[115] Copan and McQuilkin, 512.

Finally, the use of deceit for privacy, is a use that God gives to us for our benefit. He allows deceit to hide things that belong solely between us and him, such as prayer or fasting. But God also hides himself. He only allows us to know what we need to know about him, which is also for our benefit. He hides so that by faith, believing without seeing, man might come to know him. He hides so that confidence, trust, and certainty in God's promises can be created in man by the Holy Spirit. He hides to show us that we are his through faith, entirely because of what he has done for us. We could not have found what was hidden on our own. He hides to show us that he is loving and merciful. It is how God saw fit to work. The more one understands who God is, what he did, and how he works, the closer one is brought to him.

Ultimately it is not for humans, God's creation, the sculptor's clay pots, to judge the sculptor, the Creator. There is no need to justify God's actions, or to get him off the hook according to human reason, logic, or even, ethics. God is God. He does not need our defense. And yet, in his use of righteous deceit, one can see God's power and justice, and even his love. This is demonstrated by God's ultimate act of victory. If it is true that Satan did not realize what was coming, that he was indeed fooled by the cross, thinking that he had won the victory, then righteous deceit is present at the very center of Christianity. The ultimate act of victory was accomplished under the appearance of defeat. God deceived the deceiver to win the victory over Sin, Death, and the Devil. How fitting that would that have been! If indeed it was a victory under the appearance of the ultimate defeat, then how sweet a victory it was! A victory that also happens to be the greatest act of love for mankind, Jesus' sacrifice for the sins of the world. Thank God for that victory!

Can a God who uses deceit be trusted? The answer is indeed yes, God is trustworthy. His promises are true. Just as Abraham trusted God's promise of countless descendants through his son, Isaac, when he went to sacrifice his son, so also we trust the clear promises God has given us. We look to what he did for us two thousand years ago on the cross, we look to the way he brought us to, and strengthened our faith through, Baptism, and we look to his promise to preserve us in the faith until we are with him in heaven. God's work of judgment, punishment and even deceit may be his alien work, but they are far outshined by his natural works of love, reconciliation, and salvation.

IS IT EVER PERMISSIBLE FOR MAN TO DECEIVE?

In responding to this ethical question, Copan and Mcquilkin have answered in the affirmative using the examples in Scripture to justify entire categories of righteous deceit. Because examples of righteous deceit are present in the Bible under certain circumstances, Copan and Mcquilkin affirm that when used in similar circumstances today, deceit is permitted and is therefore righteous: "Our contention is that the Bible *does* justify deception in three categories (…) If these exceptions are valid biblically, then to deceive in these circumstances in any way, including verbally, is no evil to be confessed, but legitimate moral behavior."[116]

Geisler arrives at the same conclusion, though he attempts to answer the deeper question, why? Why is deceit righteous in certain circumstances and unrighteous in other circumstances? Especially when considering the many explicit passages against deceit. It seems as though there is an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, deceit is forbidden and on the other hand it is condoned. Why is this the case? How does a Christian resolve the seeming contradiction? In answering these questions, Geisler categorizes and analyzes the various approaches used throughout history to reconcile cases where God's commands seem to be in conflict. He arrives with certainty at his endorsement of Graded Absolutism.

However, the answer may not be so certain. Each approach has its legitimate strengths and weaknesses. For this reason, a blended approach is recommended. The blended view acknowledges the strengths of each approach, while also acknowledging that the Bible does speak in different and sometimes seemingly conflicting ways about the way one should approach ethics. One must hold these concepts in tension, and trust in God and his Word.

HISTORICAL APPROACHES/RESOLUTIONS

There are six ethical systems and thus six ways to approach the question of man using deceit. They are Antinomianism, Situationism, Generalism, Unqualified Absolutism, Conflicting Absolutism, and Graded Absolutism.[117] Of these ethical approaches only three can be defended biblically as potentially valid solutions to the apparent contradiction: Unqualified Absolutism, Conflicting Absolutism, and Graded Absolutism. These categories were coined by Norman Geisler as the only possible biblical approaches to ethics. The first three he rejects as valid

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[116] Ibid., 509.
[117] Geisler, 25.

Christian ethical approaches because they do not fit the requirements he sees for an ethical system derived from Scripture. What are his requirements?

> Christian Ethics Is Based on God's Will
> Christian Ethics Is Absolute
> Christian Ethics Is Based on God's Revelation
> Christian Ethics Is Prescriptive
> Christian Ethics Is Deontological[118]

Although he does not state that Christian ethics is teleological, he does state, "Christian ethics does not neglect results," and, "Indeed, results of actions are important in Christian Ethics."[119] He then explains his distinction, "In Christian ethics these results are all calculated within rules or norms. That is, no anticipated result as such can be used as a justification for breaking any God-given moral law."[120] In other words, the end cannot justify sinful means. Antinomianism, Situationism, and Generalism are all ethical approaches that violate Scripture's requirements for an ethical system.[121] They are examples of "ethical relativism" and thus do not meet the requirement that Christian Ethics is absolute.[122] According to Geisler, the remaining three, Unqualified Absolutism, Conflicting Absolutism, and Graded Absolutism all meet the requirements of Scripture for an ethical system because they are all forms of "ethical absolutism."[123]

> Copan and Mcquilkin agree without labeling their position as such. They state:
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> We must think holistically about moral acts. Not only can acts themselves be right or wrong (e.g., the act of rape or baby torture is always wrong); motives can render an act good or evil. For example, two acts can be identical, but the motives may differ. Furthermore, the character of a person is the fountain from which virtuous (or vicious) actions flow.[124]

"Acts themselves (being) right or wrong" would be an example of a deontological based ethics. "Motives (rendering) an act right or wrong" would be more of an example of a goal-based or teleological ethics. Copan and Mcquilkin consider both aspects to be important. A Lutheran

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[118] Ibid., 22-24.
[119] Ibid., 25.
[120] Ibid., 25.
[121] Brief descriptions of these non-biblical ethical systems can be found in Appendix C.
[122] Geisler, 79.
[123] Ibid., 79.
[124] Copan and McQuilkin, 511.

approach to ethics is similar. It is both *deontological*, duty-based, and *teleological*, goal- or results-based.[125] Lutherans recognize that one must look at both the action, motivation, and goal of an action when determining what is right in a given situation, however they also recognize the difficulty of doing so.

Unqualified Absolutism, Conflicting Absolutism, and Graded Absolutism, meet all of the requirements and have been held by various Christians throughout history. However, in regards to the way they approach the issue of lying and deceit, they all differ. They each have a different approach to situations in which two of God's commands seem to conflict. These differences will be identified and explained through the ethical dilemma of lying to save a life. In addition to summarizing the approach, some of the adherents of each ethical system will also be identified along with the way they approach the issue of deceit. This will help identify why deceit, though explicitly prohibited in Scripture, is used on occasion in a righteous way.

UNQUALIFIED ABSOLUTISM

Unqualified Absolutism, the first biblical approach to ethics listed by Geisler, was held by Augustine as well as many theologians after him. In response to the ethical conflict about whether it is permissible to lie to save a life, Geisler summarizes this approach as follows:

> *Lying is always wrong: There are many nonconflicting laws.* Unqualified absolutism believes that there are many absolute moral laws, and none of them should ever be broken. Truth is such a law. Therefore, one must always tell the truth, even if someone dies as a result of it. Truth is absolute, and absolutes cannot be broken. Therefore, there are no exceptions to telling the truth. Results are never used as a rationale to break rules, even if the results are desirable.[126]

Geisler also notes, "The basic premise of unqualified absolutism is that all moral conflicts are only apparent; they are not real. Sin is always avoidable."[127] One does not have to lie to save a life, because such a situation does not exist. It is a false dilemma. There is really no conflict. One should therefore tell the truth. Lying to save a life is a false dilemma because, either one can tell the truth and leave it in God's hands to intervene, or one can be silent and thus avoid both lying and putting another's life at risk. In this way, regardless of the situation, one always has the option to avoid sin. There is always necessarily a third option.

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[125] From WLS Summer Quarter Ethics Class Notes – ST5090.2, 1.
[126] Geisler, 27.
[127] Ibid., 79.

In regards to the apparent righteous deceit accounts, two strategies are used. When deceit is being used by God, this view redefines deceit such that it is not what is actually occurring. When deceit is being condoned by God, this view attempts to show that it is not the deceit in and of itself that is being condoned, but rather some other aspect of what was done. Those who lied could and should have found another option that would have been righteous. Furthermore, it does not matter if the one who lies is believer or not, all people are sinners. Often, a combination of these arguments is used.

Augustine

Augustine gave Unqualified Absolutism its "classic presentation" in his view on lying.[128] Augustine defined a lie as having two parts, falsification and the intention to deceive.[129] With this as his definition, Augustine established his firm stance against lying, which Denery summarizes as follows:

> Every lie is a sin, the great bishop had argued, and every sin must be avoided. No hoped-for benefit, no amount of good to be achieved or evil to be prevented, can justify our lies. Augustine was adamant about this and believed the Bible itself supported his confidence.[130]

The basis for Augustine's extreme stance on lying was his high view of the truth. For him, telling the truth was an absolute that could not be broken.[131] To maintain the truth was not merely a command of God, but it reflected who God was. God is truth. Jesus is the Word made flesh. It was this that served as the foundation for Augustine, "The real basis for his prohibition against lies had little to (do) with outcomes and everything to do with our relationship to God, to the Word, and to the Word made flesh in the incarnation of Christ."[132] Lying was therefore more than just breaking a command, it was denying the essence of God. God is truth. Augustine thus saw every sin as being a lie, because sin is nothing but rejecting the truth that is given in God's Word.[133] Lying was not just another sin, it was the essence of sin. Furthermore, although it was not the primary reason for his prohibition against lying, Augustine also recognized other negative

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[128] Ibid., 79.
[129] Ibid., 80.
[130] Denery, 106.
[131] Geisler, 80
[132] Denery, 110.
[133] Ibid., 112,

aspects of lying, for example, that it destroys all certainty within communication.[134] With these underlying beliefs, Augustine's strong, extreme, unqualified absolutist approach to lying was established.

Augustine established three categories of lies, the malicious, the neutral, and the beneficial or officious. [135] He thus acknowledged that lies could help other people, but in line with this extreme position, Augustine did not see beneficial lies as a kind of lying that could be justified. He saw any attempt at lying for good as an attempt to put oneself in the place of God, determining what is good and what is evil.[136] Even in situations in which one might lie to communicate the truth, or use deceit without the intention of deceiving, Augustine concluded "that it is safest to always speak the truth."[137]

This position guided the way he viewed the righteous deceit accounts in the Bible. Denery describes the struggle that Augustine faced when trying to reconcile the accounts in which deceit is condoned and even praised, while refusing to lower his standards:

> Augustine worries repeatedly over the possible consequences of lowering his absolute standard and admitting the acceptability of certain sorts of lies. "He who says that there are some just lies," Augustine writes in *Against Lies*, "must be regarded as saying nothing else than that there are some just sins and, consequently, that some things which are unjust are just."[138]

As a result, he did everything he could to explain that lying and deceit were neither present nor condoned in the apparent deceit accounts:

> Faced with these challenges, Augustine deploys his prohibition against lying as the basis for something like a nascent literary theory and hermeneutic for the Bible, Since God cannot lie and every lie is a sin, there can be no justifiable lies in the Bible. In all these cases of apparent biblical deception, Augustine will therefore find it necessary to argue

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[134] Geisler, 80.

[135] Denery, 115. Augustine subdivided these three categories into eight subtypes. Denery summarizes them as follows: "There are, Augustine explains, three types of malicious lies, that is three types of lies that are told to cause harm: there are lies spoken when teaching others about the faith (…), lies that harm someone and help no one, and lies that harm someone while helping someone else. The middle or neutral category of lies consists of two types, lies told simply for the love of lying (…) and lies told to please others. Rounding out the list are three types of beneficial lies, which help others while causing no harm. There are lies that protect a person's temporal goods from unjust seizure, lies told to save the lives of the innocent (…) and, finally, those lies we tell to save someone 'from physical defilement.'"

[136] Denery, 113.

[137] Ibid., 114.

[138] Augustine, "Against Lying," *Treatises on Various Subjects,* ed. Roy J. Deferrari, trans. Harold B. Jaffee (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1952), 164. Quoted in Denery,117.

that either the alleged lie is no lie at all or that, if it clearly is a lie, the lie itself is not approved, not held up as a model of virtuous behavior.[139]

Augustine thus strongly forbade any form of lying. When lying and deceit were used in the Bible, he found ways to explain them according to his beliefs.[140] Again, this was all done based on the premise that lying struck at the very essence of God. It is no surprise that he went to such extreme lengths to defend his beliefs about lying, because in doing so, he was defending God.

Finally, it should be noted that Augustine did think it was permissible to withhold information, a kind of deceit, though not strictly a lie, "It is not, however, the same thing to hide the truth as it is to utter a lie. For although every one [sic] who lies wishes to hide what is true, yet not every one [sic] who wishes to hide what is true, tells a lie."[141] Furthermore, he did not address certain uses of deceit that did not fit his two-fold definition of lying. For example, he did not address the deceitful aspect of jokes saying, "whether it be meet to be used by perfect minds, is another question which we have not at this time taken in hand to clear.[142]

From Augustine to Luther

Augustine had a vast influence on theologians after him. His flat out prohibition of lying was advocated by many. His twofold definition of the lie became the standard. Even his three categories of lies, which he subdivided into eight types, "just like his prohibition, would become canonical."[143]

Thomas Aquinas is but one example of someone who upheld Augustine's prohibition. Denery writes about Aquinas, "Writing in the 1260s, the Dominican theologian Thomas Aquinas

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[139] Denery, 117.

[140] Geisler, 81-82. Geisler provides summaries of Augustine's explanations about some of the deceit accounts. He cites Augustine's stance that God blessed the mercy of the Hebrew midwives and Rahab, but not their lie, that Jacob's lie to Esau was a "mystery" and that Jesus' acting as if he were going further to the Emmaus disciples was merely instruction rather than deception. Geisler also includes other examples of moral conflicts on which Augustine comments in this section. Augustine's own commentary on these passages can be found in his "Against Lying."

[141] Augustine of Hippo, "To Consentius: Against Lying," in *St. Augustin: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. H. Browne, vol. 3, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 491.

[142] Augustine of Hippo, "On Lying," in *St. Augustin: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. H. Browne, vol. 3, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 458.

[143] Denery, 115.

has no doubt that every lie is a sin."[144] However, the basis for his view was different. Rather than seeing the basis for the lie's prohibition in Christ, he sees a lie as both a misuse of language, and an attack of the virtue of truth.[145] Lying became more about dishonesty rather than an attack on God:

> He [Aquinas] locates the essence of the lie, not in the intention to deceive, but in the intention to say or to show what is false, to embody dishonesty. The desire to deceive, he explains, directs this initial inequality toward others, when we assert or show what is false in order to deceive someone.[146]

Although he ends up with the same result as Augustine, there is a subtle difference in how he arrived at that result, "Thomas, in good Augustinian fashion, condemns all lies, even the most seemingly beneficial, as offenses against truth and justice, arguing that good cannot come from evil and virtue cannot come from vice.[147] However, the more time passed, the further away from Augustine's view theologians drifted. The idea, "Why we lie matters," became popular even though it was still said, "we must never lie."[148] The subtle change that occurred from Augustine to Thomas Aquinas represents a shift that had been happening. Although theologians still prohibited all lies, "the drift from Augustine's Christological rejection of lies cannot be denied."[149] Following this subtle development, Luther would present a distinct change, breaking from the Unqualified Absolutist approach to ethics.

Strengths of Unqualified Absolutism

There are a number of strengths to the approach of Unqualified Absolutism when dealing with apparent conflicts.[150] The first is that it places a high value on God and his Word.[151] God's commands are serious and should not be taken in a relativistic way. Just as God does not change, neither does the moral law. This is also the case for the other two approaches and so will be stated only here. Another strength is that it is applicable in most situations. It is true that most

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[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid., 121.
[148] Ibid., 126
[149] Ibid., 127.
[150] Geisler also has a strengths and weaknesses section in his text. Some of these will be similar and will be noted, but some will be different from what he has proposed.
[151] Geisler, 87. Geisler identifies this as that it is deontological and based on God's unchanging nature.

situations one faces do not involve two commands of God which are in direct conflict with each other. When one might think there are no other options, often in reality there are other options. He simply has not identified them, or is not willing to consider them. Another strength of this approach is that it emphasizes trust in God.[152] When following God's laws seems like it might cause a bad result, one simply trusts that God is in control and knows what he is doing. A final strength is that it assumes that there is always a sinless way out of a situation.[153]

<p align="center">Weaknesses of Unqualified Absolutism</p>

There are however a number of weaknesses to Unqualified Absolutism as well. One weakness is that it denies the possibility of moral conflicts, rejecting the idea that "third alternatives are not always available."[154] However, in the Bible and in life it seems they are possible and do happen. The next weakness flows from the first. Because third options are always available according to this approach, it must be explained why the "third option" is not taken by those in the apparent righteous deceit accounts. One way this is achieved is by redefining terms and reinterpreting the situation figuratively:

> In other words, the presence of an apparent false statement or deceptive act in the Bible, one that is neither condemned nor shown not to be a lie at all (as in Abraham's case), provides something like the justification, even the need, to engage in a figurative reinterpretation of the act that will render it truthful.[155]

Another weakness of this view is the contradiction that sometimes arises between its prohibition of deceit and its acceptance of God's deceit:

> Theologians who in some places loudly proclaim that God's perfection makes it impossible for him to be a deceiver, in other places praise God's deceptions. Theologians who claim God merely allows or permits evil actions to occur, who argue that God never directly deceives, invoke gripping and memorable metaphors in honor of Christ's duping the Devil.[156]

If deceit is by definition wrong, then God cannot and does not deceive. If God deceives, then it cannot be inherently wrong, for God is perfect. Those who advocate this view try to have it both

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[152] Ibid. Geisler identifies this as "It shows trust in God's providence."
[153] Ibid., 88. Geisler identifies this as "There is always a way to avoid sinning."
[154] Ibid., 94.
[155] Denery, 118
[156] Ibid., 77.

ways. Another weakness of this view is that it places too much emphasis on sins of commission and not enough emphasis on sins of omission.[157] One might say that is always wrong to lie even if it might save a life. However, is it not also wrong, to fail to do what one can in order to help his neighbor? As Geisler explains, "So, in failing to show mercy to the innocent by withholding truth from the guilty, the unqualified absolutist falls into a sin of omission while attempting to avoid a sin of commission."[158] Finally, this view also tends to be legalistic, advocating the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law.[159]

<center>CONFLICTING ABSOLUTISM</center>

Conflicting Absolutism, the next biblical approach to ethics listed by Geisler, was purported to have been held by Lutherans and Luther himself. In response to the ethical conflict about whether it is permissible to lie to save a life, Geisler summarizes this approach as follows:

> *Lying is forgivable: There are many conflicting laws.* Conflicting absolutism recognizes that we live in an evil world where absolute moral laws sometimes run into inevitable conflict. In such cases it is our moral duty to do the lesser evil. We must break the lesser law and plead mercy. For instance, we should lie to save the life and then ask for forgiveness for breaking god's absolute moral law. Our moral dilemmas are sometimes unavoidable, but we are culpable anyway. God cannot change his absolute moral prescriptions because of our moral predicaments.[160]

Geisler also notes, "The central assumption of the ethical position of conflicting absolutism is that we live in a fallen world, and in such a world real moral conflicts do occur. The accompanying premise, however, is that when two duties conflict, man is morally responsible to both duties."[161] One must lie to save a life, because it is the lesser of two evils, though it is still sinful. Because it is sinful, one must then repent and trust in God's forgiveness.

In explaining the apparent righteous deceit accounts in the Bible, this view explains or redefines the situation when deceit is being used by God, to show that deceit is not what is actually occurring. When it seems that deceit is being condoned by God, this view attempts to show that it is not the deceit in and of itself that is being condoned, but rather some other aspect of what was done. However, when humans use deceit, they may have done so simply because

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[157] Geisler, 95. Geisler calls this weakness, "Falling into sins of omission."
[158] Ibid, 95.
[159] Ibid. Geisler identifies this as "The tendency to Legalism."
[160] Ibid., 27.
[161] Ibid., 97.

they had no other righteous option. They were faced with two evils and chose the lesser of the two sins. Having sinned, they had to repent of their actions and rely on God's forgiveness. This is the same answer that is given to ethical dilemmas faced in life. Conflicting Absolutists acknowledge that one may indeed face true dilemmas in which there is no sinless course of action. In the example between telling the truth and saving a life, both options involve breaking a command of God. On the one hand one is a sin of commission, lying, on the other is a sin of omission, failing to help one's neighbor.

Thielicke

The association of Conflicting Absolutism with Lutherans is in part due to the German theologian Helmut Thielicke. Thielicke was a twentieth century Lutheran theologian who not only advocated the Conflicting Absolutist view, but also associated it with Martin Luther.

Thielicke calls the true moral conflict, the "borderline situation."[162] He avoids advocating a situational approach in which it is "up to us to decide for ourselves by our own contingent resolve which of the conflicting commands we regard as binding."[163] He also recognizes the difficulty of choosing the lesser evil in the borderline situation:

> If we wish to maintain the concept of the borderline situation (as we obviously do), and to take it for granted that in such a situation there is no direct way of escape, and if we are to insist upon recognizing the existence of some de facto "crooked" element in every proposed solution, then can we at the same time really have this unequivocal assurance that we ourselves stand in the front line of the embattled kingdom of God? To put it another way, do we not encumber the kingdom itself, and the leading of the Spirit, with this de facto "crooked" element? Have we not said ourselves that we can undergo and endure the borderline situation and its inescapable conflicts only under forgiveness? But if we have to claim forgiveness for our actions, then we are confessing with all possible clarity that this action is itself in conflict with the will of God, and that consequently it is wrong and not in good order. But if it is wrong, then we surely cannot chalk up our questionable solutions and evasion to God's account as if they were his doing. After all, Yes cannot be No, or No, Yes! We are thus plunged into the innermost core of the theological difficulties posed by the ambivalence of the borderline situation. As a result, we have no recourse here but to stop and think through these difficulties.[164]

He notes the difficulties not only in choosing between two evils, but also in the logic of this approach, yet he still emphasizes that a decision must be made and that one must rely on God's

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[162] Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, ed. William H. Lazareth, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1966) 609.
[163] Ibid., 610.
[164] Ibid., 654.

forgiveness in making that decision, saying, "No matter how we proceed, however, or fail to proceed, there can be no doubt that here decisions do have to be made, that the situation is in the true sense problematical, that it is not unambiguous, and that it consequently involves real distress of conscience."[165] Thus according to Thielicke, borderline situations exist, and even though there may be no sinless way to proceed, one still has to make a choice and rely on God's forgiveness for that sin.

Luther

Geisler associates Martin Luther with Conflicting Absolutism saying, "The concept of lesser evils was given a new dimension with the Reformation doctrine of depravity, particularly as that was developed by Martin Luther."[166] Luther certainly saw the potential for moral conflicts to arise in a fallen world as "He believed that Christians live simultaneously in two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. Since they are opposed and since Christians have responsibility in both, it is inevitable that there will be conflicts."[167] In addition to his belief that moral conflicts actually occur, the other reason Luther is often associated with the conflicting absolutist view is that in a letter to Melanchthon, Luther tells him to "sin boldly."

Of Luther's "sin boldy" quote, Geisler says that it is "amenable to a lesser-evil interpretation."[168] Thielicke comments about the same statement from Luther:

> The essential point here is that the sin committed in compromise is *not* described as the law of this world, a law of tragic character, and so justified. It is rather that this sin takes place in the awareness that Christ is victor over this very sin, and over the world whose structure wrings it out of me, as it were.[169]

According to Thielicke, Luther is advocating the concept that the circumstances of a situation can create a conflict in which there is no sinless path to take. Again he comments, "It is not I who justify the compromise; it is Christ who makes it right."[170] One thus relies on Christ's victory over sin and his forgiveness to make the sin right. However, it seems that they have both taken this quote out of context and misinterpreted what Luther was communicating to Melanchthon.

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[165] Ibid., 610.
[166] Geisler, 98.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Thielicke, 504.
[170] Ibid.

Written on August 1, 1521, the topics of Luther's letter are clerical vows and communion in both kinds. He explains that it is not wrong for monks to marry and that the Bible does not explicitly say that communion in one kind is sinful. His "sin boldly" quote comes at the end of the letter as a sort of prologue. He writes to Melanchthon:

> If you are a preacher of grace, then preach a true and not a fictitious grace; if grace is true, you must bear a true and not a fictitious sin. God does not save people who are only fictitious sinners. *Be a sinner and sin boldly*, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly, for he is victorious over sin, death, and the world. As long as we are here [in this world] we have to sin. This life is not the dwelling place of righteousness, but, as Peter says, we look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. It is enough that by the riches of God's glory we have come to know the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world. No sin will separate us from the Lamb, even though we commit fornication and murder a thousand times a day. Do you think that the purchase price that was paid for the redemption of our sins by so great a Lamb is too small? Pray boldly—you too are a mighty sinner.[171]

Given the context of the letter, that Luther advocates monks to break their vows of celibacy, one might think to import this into Luther's final quote. However, this is wrong on two accounts. First, in the context of the letter, Luther does not say that monks will sin if they break their vows. Rather he says the opposite, that if monks break their vows, they will not be sinning. Second, in the final statement, Luther is not advocating sin at all when he says, "sin boldly." The immediate context shows that Luther is drawing a comparison between "fictitious sin" and sinning "boldly." A fictitious sinner is one who does not think he sins. Instead of being a fictitious sinner, one should acknowledge that in life, this side of heaven, one will always be a sinner and thus they should view themselves accurately. In other words, Luther is saying "don't pretend that you aren't a sinner, because then you don't need grace. Rather, recognize that your sin is real, take ownership of it, sin boldly, but believe even more boldly in Christ and his forgiveness of that sin." To take Luther's "sin boldly" statement as being representative of a Conflicting Absolutist view, is a misunderstanding of what Luther was communicating in his letter to Melanchthon. It is true that Luther recognized that moral conflicts do indeed occur in this world in the life of a Christian, but his approach to ethics is better represented by the Graded Absolutist approach and will be evaluated in that section.

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[171] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 48: Letters I*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 48 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 281–282. Emphasis mine.

Strengths of Conflicting Absolutism

Although Luther did not hold this view, the Conflicting Absolutist view does have some strengths. The first is that unlike Unqualified Absolutism, it asserts that true moral conflicts are not only possible, but sometimes are unavoidable.[172] This reflects the number of accounts in Scripture in which someone faces a moral dilemma and regardless of the choice he makes, he is forced to break a command of God. Furthermore, it appreciates that sin results in morally complicated situations. Without sin there would be no moral conflicts.[173] It also recognizes the difficulty of making a decision in a moral dilemma.[174] In addition, it appropriately emphasizes that when one makes a sinful decision, he turns to God for forgiveness.[175]

A final strength of this view is that it reflects the idea that fallen man, and even the believer, will always be sinful in this life. This may be another reason for its association with Lutherans. However, this emphasis also reflects a weakness of the Conflicting Absolutist view. Indeed, Lutherans believe that man can never be free from sin and that every decision he makes will be affected by sin. However, this is because every human has an Old Adam, a sinful nature, who is always a part of him, affecting everything he says and does, tainting every decision, every act, such that "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Is 64:6). Thus the sin is not a result of the external situation as the Conflicting Absolutist view implies, but rather the result of the internal, spiritual, situation of being at the same time sinner and saint. Luther expresses it as follows:

> Luther: A Christian is righteous and a sinner at the same time (*simul justus et peccator*) (*LW* 26, p 232). A righteous man sins in all his good works (*LW* 32, p 83). Our condition in the kingdom of Christ is half sin and half holiness. What there is in us that belongs to faith and to Christ is completely pure and perfect, since it is not our own but Christ's, who is ours through faith and who lives and works in us. But what is still our own is completely sinful. Yet under Christ and in him it is concealed and blotted out through the forgiveness of sins (*LW* 21, p 205).[176]

In a moral conflict, it can be said that no matter what choice one makes, it is sinful in that the sinful nature is constantly present and battling the new man. But it is not because the moral conflict has only presented sinful options. Furthermore, one may find oneself in a situation in

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[172] Geisler, 101. Geisler identifies this strength as "Moral Conflicts Are Unavoidable"
[173] Ibid., 103. "It sees moral conflicts as rooted in man's fallenness."
[174] Geisler, 102. Geisler identifies this as "It has moral realism."
[175] Ibid.
[176] *WLS Dogmatics Notes*, 424.

which there is no sinless option because his conscience is speaking against every path he has. In this case, no matter which option he chooses, he will be sinning against his conscience. In these ways, the same conclusion is reached, that a decision made in a moral conflict will be sinful. This is true in that every act is affected by one's sinful nature. It is also true if the act is condemned by one's conscience. However, the Conflicting Absolutist arrives at the same conclusion by different means, assigning the sinfulness to the sinful options from which one has to choose.

<div align="center">*Weaknesses of Conflicting Absolutism*</div>

There are other significant weaknesses of this view. The first is that if a believer finds himself in a moral dilemma, it forces him to consciously plan to sin.[177] In identifying and choosing the lesser evil option of two decisions, one identifies and chooses a sinful course of action. Logically then, if one found himself in the same situation again, he would again be forced to consciously sin whether he decided to choose differently or not. Yet, the believer's goal must never be to sin. One must never plan or intend to sin. Paul completely rejects this idea saying, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (Ro 6:1,2). A Christian must never plan or intend on sinning regardless of what situation he finds himself in. Another significant weakness of this view is in relation to Christ being the complete substitute in every way for mankind.[178] The author to the Hebrews writes, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin" (He 4:15). Jesus was tempted in every way, but did not sin. On the one hand according to the Conflicting Absolutist view, Jesus must have never faced a true moral conflict, because he did not sin, and thus he was not tempted in every way. On the other hand, according to the Conflicting Absolutist view, if Jesus was tempted in every way and thus did face true moral conflicts, then he must have sinned, because a true moral conflict can only be resolved by choosing the lesser evil, a sinful choice. Neither option allows Hebrews 4:15 to

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[177] Geisler,

[178] Geisler, 106-110. This is a combination of two of Geisler's points, "Jesus Must Have Sinned" and "Christ Must Have Faced Moral Conflicts."

stand. This demonstrates the major weakness of this view. Finally, on logical grounds, it does not make sense that one could have a moral duty to do what is immoral.[179] It would be, according to Geisler, "a morally absurd claim."[180]

GRADED ABSOLUTISM

Graded Absolutism, the final biblical approach to ethics listed by Geisler, not only aligns with Luther, but is also the least problematic approach to the problem of deceit. In response to the ethical conflict about whether it is permissible to lie to save a life, Geisler summarizes this approach as follows:

> *Lying is sometime right: There are higher laws.* Graded absolutism holds that there are many moral absolutes and they sometimes conflict. However, some laws are higher than others, so when there is an unavoidable conflict, it is our duty to follow the higher moral law. God does not blame us for what we could not avoid. Thus he exempts us from responsibility to follow the lower law in view of the overriding obligation to obey the higher law. Many graded absolutists believe that mercy to the innocent is a greater moral duty than telling truth to the guilty. Hence, they are convinced that it is right in such cases to lie in order to save a life.[181]

Geisler describes the three essential elements of Graded Absolutism saying that "There are Higher and Lower Moral Laws," "There are Unavoidable Moral Conflicts" and "No Guilt is Imputed for the Unavoidable."[182] As an extension of this final point, one does not sin if he follows the higher law in a moral conflict, but he is guilty of sinning if he follows the lower law of the moral conflict, instead of the higher law. In forming a basis for the hierarchy of God's laws according to Scripture, Geisler identifies the following emphases, "Love for God over Love for Man," "Obey God over Government" and "Mercy over Veracity."[183] The law of love as Jesus summarized in the synoptic gospels is central to this approach.[184] One must therefore lie to save a life, because it is following the higher of God's laws as he has established in Scripture. This exempts one from having to follow the lower law of telling the truth and therefore the action is not sinful.

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[179] Geisler, 103. Geisler identifies this as "A moral duty to sin is Morally Absurd."
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid., 27.
[182] Ibid., 116-119.
[183] Ibid., 121.
[184] See Mt 22:34-40; Mk 12:28-34; Lk 10:25-28.

In regards to the apparent righteous deceit accounts in the Bible, this view asserts that God may use deceit according to his will and purpose. Furthermore, when God condones or even blesses someone for using deceit, it is evidence that the person faced a true moral conflict, acted according to the higher law and thus it is an example of righteous deceit. Finally, when humans lie and deceive in Scripture, and the text is otherwise silent on the moral correctness of the act, if they followed a higher law of God, they did not sin, however, if they did not follow a higher law of God, then they did sin and are guilty of that sin.

It is also important to note that all Graded Absolutists do not necessarily resolve the issue of deceit in the same way. This is due to the fact that they do not all grade the absolutes of Scripture similarly.

Geisler

As the originator of the title Graded Absolutism, Geisler advocates this approach to ethics as the only approach that is true and biblical. He writes, "in real, unavoidable moral conflicts, God does not hold a person guilty for not keeping a lower moral law so long as he keeps the higher. God exempts one from his duty to keep the lower law since he could not keep it without breaking a higher law."[185] That one law exempts another law preserves the absolute nature of God's laws, while still providing a sinless path to proceed in a moral conflict. Geisler calls the exemption an ethical "right of way" law, summarizing it using the following comparison:

> In many states the law declares that when two cars simultaneously reach an intersection without signals or signs, the car on the right has the right of way Common sense dictates that they both cannot go through the intersection at the same time; one car must yield. Similarly, when a person enters an ethical intersection where two laws come into unavoidable conflict, it is evident that one law must yield to the other.[186]

Geisler thus would allow someone to deceive another if it were done according to a higher law, such as lying to preserve a life.

Copan & Mcquilkin

Copan and Mcquilkin also advocate a Graded Absolutist approach to ethics. They clearly indicate that one should choose the higher law when faced with a true moral conflict:

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[185] Geisler, 120.
[186] Ibid.

That is, our duties should be understood in terms of a hierarchy or an ordering of obligations. If two come into conflict—say, our duty to love God and our duty to love family—we must choose the higher. Likewise, as we note below, when we must choose between saving life and telling the truth, we save a life.[187]

They also indicate that when one chooses the higher law in a true moral conflict, they have not sinned, but have done right. They explain their view according to the following example:

> When a robber demands entrance to a home, or access to possessions or people within, and he can be deflected by deception (with true words or false words), *the deceiver has not chosen the lesser of two evils, but has done right*. Note that we are not justifying these deceptions on the grounds of situationism (that acts are right or wrong based solely on the situation), deciding for ourselves which course of action is the more loving for the most people. Nor are we saying that both courses of action are sinful and that one must sometimes make a tragic moral choice and choosing to lie over letting another be murdered, for example). *No, we are saying that deception is sinful, except those situations in which Scripture itself permits or advocates deception*—and which are also very much in keeping with reason: inconsequential social arrangements, war and criminal resistance. In the instances cited God himself either took the deceptive action, commanded it, or is said to have approved of those who did.[188]

Not only is Graded Absolutism endorsed by modern ethicists, it also has been supported by various figures throughout history. Although one might not expect it, Augustine, had some Graded Absolutist beliefs in addition to his Unqualified Absolutist approach to lying.

Augustine

Although Geisler credited Augustine as having given Unqualified Absolutism its classic presentation according to his approach on lying, he also sees elements of Graded Absolutism elsewhere in his theology. Augustine believed there was a "hierarchy of sins" and a "pyramid of value."[189] Love was central to his ethical approach, he saw true moral conflicts in regards to other sins, such as killing, and he also emphasizes a greater good approach in them.[190] Thus, Geisler calls Augustine, "a precursor to the graded absolutist."[191]

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[187] Copan and McQuilkin, 509.
[188] Copan and McQuilkin, 512. Emphasis mine.
[189] Geisler, 114.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid.

Luther is associated with Conflicting Absolutism for various reasons as noted above, however, he also has many similarities with the Graded Absolutist approach. First, Luther shows that he does not necessarily agree with the way the church fathers have defined a lie, "Strictly defined, it is a lie when our neighbor is deceived by us to his ruin and our own advantage. Out of respect for the fathers I am keeping this distinction, even though it is not precise enough."[192] His dissatisfaction with the traditional definition reveals itself in the way he approaches other moral issues. Later he says, "Actually, however, there is only one kind of lie, namely, that which harms one's neighbor in his soul, as the lie of Satan, in his body, or in his possessions and reputation."[193] He then says that other kinds of lies are not really lies because they are not sinful, "For the jocular lie—when we fabricate something—serves to instruct the youth, as when short fables are told to them and when they are frightened by fictitious characters, as on the stage. Similarly, the so-called obliging lie is also invented for the advantage of one's neighbor."[194] Again he makes his stance clear that the obliging lie is not sinful, "This is keeping the commandments of God, not transgressing them. Someone will object: "But the truth should not be concealed." My answer is that in such instances it should not be told unless you are driven to do so."[195] This shows that he acknowledges deceitful actions are not always sinful, such as a lie, even though he wants to avoid calling it a lie because he sees the lie as being sinful. This nuanced approach shows that he has more similarities with Graded Absolutism than the traditional approaches.

Luther's sermon on Matthew 22:34-46 from the 18th Sunday after Trinity directly highlights these similarities. In the text, an expert in the law asks Jesus, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" (Mt 22:36). Responding to the question, Jesus says, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All

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[192] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 2: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6-14*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 2 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 292.
[193] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 3: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 15-20*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 3 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 326–327.
[194] Ibid., 327.
[195] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 5: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30*, 41.

the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Mt 22:37-40). Luther first

explains that Jesus is "Telling them what the sum of the whole law is."[196] Luther then points out

Christ's emphasis, that the law "must be kept with the heart."[197] He then summarizes the purpose

of the law, "To this I answer, these commandments were given to the end that we might become

conscious whether we really love God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our

strength, and in addition our neighbor as ourselves."[198] Thus the purpose is not so that man can

do it, but so that he sees an accurate reflection of where he stands before God. Luther then

emphasizes the central and necessary aspect of love which all God's commands reflect:

> We are also to notice here that all the works of the law are not commanded merely for the purpose that we simply just perform them; no, no; for if God had given even more commandments, *he would not want us to keep them to the injury and destruction of love.* Yea, if these commandments oppose the love of our neighbor, *he wants us to renounce and annul them.*[199]

Luther thus warns against a legalistic view of God in which he establishes laws for the sole

purpose of them being performed. The purpose of following God's laws is as Christ summarized,

love. Again, Luther makes his view clear that a law must be driven by love, and if is not it should

be removed:

> Therefore, when the law impels one against love, *it ceases and should no longer be a law*; but where no obstacle is in the way, the keeping of the law is a proof of love, which lies hidden in the heart. Therefore ye have need of the law, that love may be manifested; but if it cannot be kept without injury to our neighbor, *God wants us to suspend and ignore the law.*[200]

Thus Luther advocates an approach similar to Graded Absolutism. He emphasizes that on behalf

of love, the summary of the law, one has a valid reason to break a law. Yet only if the law

conflicts with the purpose of love. He also emphasizes that if one does this, he is not sinning.

Luther cites a few examples to illustrate and prove the concept. He cites how the Israelites

following a "higher commandment" as they journeyed through the wilderness "which God

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[196] Martin Luther, *The Sermons of Martin Luther*, Vol IV, ed. John Nicholas Lenker, trans. John Nicholas Lenker and others (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 170.
[197] Ibid., 171.
[198] Ibid., 171-172.
[199] Ibid., 172-173. Emphasis mine.
[200] Ibid., 175. Emphasis mine.

accepted (…) as obedience."[201] He also references Jesus' permission for the disciples to gather food and eat on the Sabbath, saying that they were "excused" and "doing no wrong."[202] Finally, he gives the hypothetical example of a priest having to decide between doing his assigned duties and helping someone in need.[203] These examples emphasize Luther's view as love being the summary and heart of the law, which he summarizes by saying, "Do you want to do something pleasing to God, then do it out of genuine love."[204]

Another similarity of Luther's approach with Graded Absolutism comes during what many consider to be a black eye on Luther's life and work. In dealing with Philip of Hesse's bigamy, Luther advocated a lie saying, "What is it, if for the good and sake of the Christian Church, one should tell a good, strong lie?"[205] Again in another statement referencing the same situation, Luther said:

> What harm would it do, if a man told a good strong lie for the sake of the good and for the Christian church […] a lie out of necessity, a useful lie, a helpful lie, such lies would not be against God he would accept them.

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[201] Ibid., 174. Emphasis mine. "Take the example of this, I recently gave you: Moses brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, leading them for forty years through the wilderness, and not one of them was circumcised, although it was commanded them. Where was their obedience to the commandment? Was God not angry with them because they did not obey his commandment? No, there was a *higher commandment* in force at that time, namely, that they were to obey God who commanded them to come out of Egypt in haste to the promised land. By their marching they daily obeyed God, and *God accepted it as obedience*; otherwise he would have been angry in that they did not keep his commandments."

[202] Ibid., 174-175. "In like manner *Christ excused his disciples*, as is recorded in Matthew 12, 3-4, when the Jews accused them of transgressing the law, of doing on the Sabbath that which was not lawful to do on the Sabbath day, when they plucked the ears of corn and ate them. Then the Lord gave them to understand that *they were doing no wrong*, as if to say: Here is no Sabbath; for the body needs food, necessity demands it; we must eat, even though it be on the Sabbath. Therefore the Lord cited the example of David, which he laid before the Jews, and said, "Have ye not read what David did; he and 'they that were with him, when he was an hungered, how he went into the house of God and ate the shew bread which was not lawful to eat, nor for those that were with him, excepting for the priests?" 1 Samuel 21, 3f. Then David ate the bread, though he was not a priest, because hunger pressed him to do it. Neither did Ahimelech the priest violate the law in giving the bread to David, for love was present and urged him to give it. Thus even the whole law would have had to serve David in his need."

[203] Ibid., 176. "I will give you an example we recently heard. Here is a priest or monk, who is to read his prayers or the rules of his order, or to hold mass, or say penance. At this moment there comes a poor man or woman to him who has need of his help and counsel. What shall this priest or monk do? Shall he perform his service, or shall he assist the poor man? He should therefore act prudently and think: True, I am required to read my prayers, hold mass, or say penance; but now on the other hand, a poor man is here; he needs my help and I should come to his rescue. God commanded me to do this; but the others man devised and instituted. I will let the mandates of men go, and will serve my neighbor according to God's commandment."

[204] Ibid., 176.

[205] Preserved Smith, *The Life and Letters of Martin Luther*, (Boston: The Riverside Press Cambridge, 1914), 381.

– Martin Luther cited by his secretary, in a letter in Max Lenz, ed., *Briefwechsel Landgraf Phillips des Grossmuthigen von Hessen mit Bucer*, vol. I.[206]

Although it can be debated as to whether Luther was deserving of the criticism and the harm to his reputation that these statements resulted in, it does seem to reveal another example in which Luther was practicing (whether rightly or wrongly) what he believed, that under certain circumstance in which there is a true ethical conflict, guided by love, one may use a righteous lie. Again, whether Luther's application of this principle was correct can be debated, yet that he advocated the principle is clear.

Luther is often associated with Conflicting Absolutism for his "sin boldly" statement, his acknowledgement of moral conflicts and probably his emphasis on the depravity of man. However, his language and his approach to ethics implies his belief that one may break a law when it conflicts with love and that if one does, it is not sinful. For these reasons, it seems Luther was more of a modified Graded Absolutist than the Conflicting Absolutist he was reputed to be. Even so, he does not necessarily line up with every tenant of Graded Absolutism.

Strengths of Graded Absolutism

There are a several of strengths to the Graded Absolutist approach to ethics. The first is its emphasis that one should deal with moral conflicts according to which is the most loving for God and for one's neighbor.[207] Another strength is its recognition that Jesus did not enforce the letter of the law and at times both did and allowed things according to the spirit of the law.[208] It also recognizes the potential for conflicting situations to occur and reflects the way the Bible treats those situations. For example, the apostles say, "We must obey God rather than human beings!" when being told by the government to stop preaching the gospel (Ac 5:29). Most importantly however, it asserts that there is always a sinless way to proceed in moral conflicts without denying that they conflict. In a way, by providing a sinless path to take, Graded Absolutism shows that in reality the moral conflict was not real. It acknowledges the difficult situation that exists when faced with two conflicting commands of God, but by resolving the situation according to the hierarchy of them in Scripture, it eliminates the problem it was trying

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[206] Sissela Bok, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*, (Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., New York, NY: 1999), 47.
[207] See Mt 22:34-40.
[208] See Mt 12:1-11; Lk 6:1-11; Mk 2:23-3:6. See also Jn 5:10.

to solve. In other words, are there true conflicts? On the surface, yes, in reality, no. These emphases are what gives Graded Absolutism its merit. However, there are weaknesses to this approach as well.

Weaknesses of Graded Absolutism

There are a number of weaknesses that exist with Geisler's Graded Absolutism. Two of them come from what Geisler labels the essential elements of Graded Absolutism.

The first is Geisler's statement "No guilt is imputed for the unavoidable."[209] Although this statement can be appreciated both in relation to situations in which one might encounter, and also according to logic, this statement is simply not scriptural. It goes against the doctrine of original sin. Although it was true in the Garden of Eden that Adam and Eve could have avoided sinning, everyone born from then on has been born sinful, and can do nothing to avoid it. The result of that first sin is original sin, which is "the inherited and inborn disposition according to which man is void of original righteousness and filled with evil concupiscence."[210] Thus everyone is born guilty according to the original sin which has been imputed to them, for "Original sin makes us guilty before God. Inherited sin is imputed to us and we are held responsible for it."[211]

The second weakness lies in the essential element that Geisler describes as "There are Higher and Lower Moral Laws."[212] The Bible does at times speak in a way that might give evidence to a hierarchy of commands. For example, Jesus refers to the "first" and "greatest" commandment and the "second" (Mt 22:37-40). He also refers to the "least" of the commands (Mt 5:19). These ranking terms also are applied to virtues. Paul says of faith, hope, and love that the "greatest of these is love" (1 Cor 13:13). Jesus speaks of a "greater" kind of love (Jn 15:13). This is also the case with sins. Different sins have different degrees of punishment. Thus sins are sometimes spoken in terms of degrees or rankings as well. Based on these terms, Geisler says that "not all moral laws are of equal weight."[213] He also says it is a "common myth that all sins are equal."[214] He bases his assertion primarily on Jesus' summation of the law in Matthew 22.

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[209] Geisler, 119.
[210] *WLS Dogmatics Notes*, 442.
[211] Ibid., 454.
[212] Geisler, 124.
[213] Ibid., 116.
[214] Ibid.

However, it is clear in the passage, that Jesus' emphasis is more on summarizing the two tables of the law rather than ranking them. Geisler sees a hierarchy in all of these verses where it is not necessarily present. That being said, there is some truth in what he is saying. Sins are different in their effects and consequences, though not in terms of the guilt they incur before God. Also, one must not love his neighbor above God or else he creates an idol out of his neighbor, so there is somewhat of a hierarchy there. Again, one must "obey God rather than human beings" (Ac 5:9). That is, when someone in authority commands something against God's Word such as to not spread the gospel, one is not bound by the fourth commandment to obey those who are in authority. Rather, when one is told to act against God's Word by one in authority, he is actually bound to break that human command. Thus he obeys God rather than human beings.

Although the hierarchy that Geisler identifies, loving God over man, obeying God over the government, and mercy over veracity, is supported by the Bible, he overstates some of his evidence, misinterprets some of the passages, and arrives with certainty on conclusions that could easily be misunderstood as advocating what is not biblical.

A final weakness of the Graded Absolutist approach is that it is somewhat difficult to apply to daily situations. It is not as simple to identify and apply the appropriate principles to a given situation as Geisler makes it out to be. The Bible is not as black and white on these topics as Geisler wants and takes it to be. Furthermore, life is often ambiguous. Situations in life are not black and white and can often be viewed from varying perspectives. Thus, in a moral conflict, one may very well have to choose a path despite not being certain of what the correct path will be.

DO MORAL CONFLICTS EXIST?

Up to this point, it has been assumed that true moral conflicts exist. In addressing apparent moral conflicts, one question that might be asked is, do they actually exist? If one looks at all of the literal commands of God, one will see that there are commands that have the potential to be in conflict, at least externally. However, when one understands the law as Jesus summarized in Matthew 22, many of the conflicts of the law disappear. Although two commands of God may seem to conflict externally, they do not conflict internally according to the heart or spirit of the law because they are rooted in the same thing, that is, love. Thus, according to the

fact that all of God's commands are rooted in love, they do not conflict, and as such there are no moral conflicts, at least internally at their root.

This is why Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, who were accusing him and his disciples of breaking the Sabbath, "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent" (Mt 12:7). The spirit of the law is more important than the strict obedience to the letter of the law. Thus, one's motivation is important. Jesus emphasizes this repeatedly during the Sermon on the Mount. Speaking of murder Jesus says, "But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment" (Mt 5:22). Of adultery he says, "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:28). The Pharisees misunderstood what the law was and how to apply it. They thought they could achieve worthiness before God by it. As a result, they had a caricature of the law, viewing it as a set of unconnected, external rules. They did not realize that the essence of every command of God is love. That is why Jesus emphasized the spirit of the law to them. It showed them how impossible it is to keep the law on one's own. But the Christian who knows the forgiveness he has in Jesus Christ, his Savior, is able to do what the law commands. He is able to have genuine love, the heart and summation of the law, because genuine love is what flows from faith. It is what a Christian naturally does according to his new man. The law is not the problem; sinful man is the problem. Internally according to its spirit there is no conflict in the God's laws, because at the root of every command of God is love.

That being said, practically speaking, as a result of sin, there are external conflicts in the law that may occur. When faced with such a situation, one still must decide how to proceed. In these instances, a blended approach works best.

A BLENDED APPROACH TO ETHICS

Given the strengths and weaknesses of each approach to ethics, a blended approach is preferred even though it does not necessarily fit into a neat system. At its heart, when conflicts truly occur, a slightly modified version of Graded Absolutism works best.

In this approach, most often, one can approach a situation as an Unqualified Absolutist. This is because most issues are not true moral conflicts. Most often there are third options in a given situation. One must simply identify and acknowledge them.

If, however, one is presented with a true moral conflict, one can take a modified Graded Absolutist approach and acknowledge that at times there is both a sinful path and a sinless path to take. The best path should be identified according to Scripture. The law of love as Jesus summarized to the expert in the law, can be helpful in deciding the correct path (Mt. 22:34-40). One should view it both as a summary of God's law and as the greatest of God's laws. However, because the Bible does not speak directly to each situation, and because it is not always simple to apply the principles established in Scripture to a complicated life, one can also look to the examples of conflicting situations in Scripture to help determine how to proceed.

Even so, one may not always be able to identify the correct path according to Scripture. He may think he knows the correct path, but be uncertain. He may doubt a path. He may even render the correct path as sinful if it against his conscience. If this is the case, as it often may be, then one must approach the situation as a Conflicting Absolutist. He must choose as best as he can, recognizing that there is a possibility that he chooses the wrong path. Furthermore, he also recognizes that according to his sinful nature, even the correct choice is sinful. Because of this, as a Christian always does, he relies on Christ's forgiveness that he won on the cross. Indeed, there are many sins that a Christian commits, which he is either entirely unaware of or that he does not intend to commit. A Christian repents of his unconscious and unintended sins, because even for these sins, Christ died.

A blended approach allows one to take the best of the systems and use them as they apply. However, at its core, the blended approach draws the most from Graded Absolutism because it is the only approach which assumes that there is a sinless option between the two conflicts.

Strengths of the Blended Approach

This approach takes and uses what is best and biblical about each approach to ethics. It preserves moral absolutes and conflicts, while still providing a sinless path to follow. It recognizes that in reality, moral conflicts are not that common and that there are normally third options available. It also focuses on love to navigate through difficult situations. However, it focuses on love as the summary of the law more so than as a strict hierarchy. It acknowledges that this does make it more difficult to identify the correct path, however it does not force a Christian to decide between two wrong paths and thus it does not force someone into intentional

sin. Rather, with the increased potential to sin unintentionally or unknowingly, it emphasizes a Christian's constant reliance on Christ's forgiveness. It recognizes how critical forgiveness is for man not only for unintentional or unconscious sins, but also because of the fact that in this life man's sinful nature is always present and fighting and tainting everything he does, only to be cut out permanently through death or at the final judgment. Yet, it also recognizes that Christ cleanses a believer's good works, removing from them the tarnish of sin, so that they are pleasing to God.

Finally, it has a wholative view of the morality of actions. It acknowledges that motivation, the act itself, as well as the results of an action, all play a role in whether an act is right or wrong. However, it does not use strict black and white distinctions to do so. It recognizes that everything one does is either righteous and pleasing to God, or it is sinful. It recognizes that only a Christian can do what is pleasing to God because good works flow from faith. Finally, it recognizes that everything a Christian does that flows from faith is motivated by love and done to the glory of God.

Weaknesses of the Blended Approach

The biggest weakness of this approach is that it is messy. It cannot explain or account for every category of righteous deceit. Nor does not fit into a clean cut manmade system of ethics. Perhaps this is a flaw, but perhaps it is a strength. This reflects the messiness of life and in a sense the messiness of the Bible. Situations that one may encounter in life are not always black and white. Given that sin and man is present throughout the Bible, it is no surprise that the Bible also does not speak in black and white terms either. This is not to say that the Bible is in any way imperfect, but rather, that it does not fit perfectly into a manmade system. For that matter, neither does God. God has revealed what he has revealed in a way that was best for us, regardless of whether it can fit into a manmade system. A blended approach to Christian ethics, though messy, thus mirrors itself after the Bible, staying true to the revealed Word of God.

A BLENDED APPROACH APPLIED TO DECEIT

In applying this approach to actual issues of deceit, it gets even more difficult. One cannot in a way that is both consistent and logically satisfactory, answer the question that was set out to be answered, why? Why is deceit on the one hand forbidden for man and on the other

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condoned when used by man? According to the modified Graded Absolutism, the part of the blended approach use in each true conflict, one must be motivated by love.

For some examples of man's use of righteous deceit, this applies well. Rahab was certainly in a moral conflict. Her lie was justified in that she was faced with two conflicting commands of God. She made her choice motivated by love for God, which led her to side with God's people, and love for the spies, which led her to keep them safe. She did not sin by telling a lie to the officials. For those who use deceit for protection or safety this also works well. They are faced with danger, a potential moral conflict, and they deceive in order to protect themselves and those around them. Love could certainly be the motivating factor. This also applies for protecting another's privacy. Love for Jesus and his commands would have exempted Jesus' disciples from telling the truth when Jesus potentially put them in a moral conflict by telling them to remain silent about what they had seen.

However, righteous deceit is also used by man in inconsequential situations, in war, and possibly for teaching and testing.[215] These situations are not filled with moral conflicts. The use of deceit in language or according to cultural norms is certainly not forced on someone. The use of deceitful strategies in war is not absolutely necessary to win. Also, one can teach (though possibly not test) without using deceit. Even for a situation of testing, such as when Joseph tested his brothers, he did not necessarily have to test them. It was not a situation of two conflicting laws in which he chose the most loving option. He opted in rather than being forced in. Based on these situations it seems that there does not have to be a moral conflict for deceit to be permissible.

There does not seem to be a uniting factor in the remaining accounts. Even the motivation of love is not necessarily at the heart of what is being done. A blended approach based on Graded Absolutism thus does not fully satisfy the question of deceit, "Why?" Although it applied to the situations which had a true moral conflict, in those which did not, it does not apply at all.

The fact is that the answer to the question of deceit may not fully fit into a manmade system of ethics regarding a blend of absolutes, conflicts, or grades. One can appreciate what each ethical approach brings to the table to help address the question of deceit. However, one also might have to simply appreciate the tension that exists in the Bible on this topic. Perhaps the

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[215] It seems only God uses deceit as a judgment or warning.

best way to proceed is in a way similar to Copan and Mcquilkin who looked to the examples of righteous deceit in Scripture and said, "If these exceptions are valid biblically, then to deceive in these circumstances in any way, including verbally, is no evil to be confessed, but legitimate moral behavior."[216] Given that there are also negative examples in Scripture in some of the categories identified in this thesis, it cannot be stated as strongly as they state it. The mere identification of categories of deceit is not enough to justify every possible modern occurrence of deceit within a biblical category. That would be too rigid, creating black and white distinctions where the Bible does not. Rather, one should find where it is condoned in Scripture and accept that deceit is sometimes permitted in such a situation. Any further conclusion would be drawing more from Scripture than it actually says. Thus deceit in inconsequential social situations, in war, for safety, for judgement or warning, for teaching or testing, and for privacy, and as a solution to conflicting situations may possibly be righteous.

Finally, it was said that for the use of righteous deceit to be prescribed as a possible option for man, there must be some passage that prescribes its use. As has been shown, there are many descriptions of righteous deceit in the Bible. There are even examples in which God commands it in a specific place at a specific time, however there are no examples that explicitly prescribe righteous deceit in general. Here Graded Absolutism assists as well. It emphasizes love as what is at the heart of other commands of God. On the night before Jesus was crucified he said to his disciples and thus the church, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (Jn 13:34). From this verse, therefore, when righteous deceit is a demonstration of love for another, it is thus prescribed implicitly in the Bible according to Jesus' command. Other commands of Jesus would have a similar effect. In the great commission, Jesus commands all believers, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20). Here is the ultimate way to show love to one's neighbor. Bringing them the good news about Christ. Might deceit be used in a righteous way to give one an opportunity to spread the gospel? Rahab told a lie to save physical lives. How much more important are the spiritual lives of those who do not know Jesus?

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[216] Copan and McQuilkin, 509.

TEACHING "RIGHTEOUS DECEIT"

Having identified righteous deceit in the Bible and having explained the extent to which it can be reconciled in the context of Scripture, it can be concluded that the concept of righteous deceit is an implicit doctrine of Scripture. Yet this is a difficult and potentially confusing doctrine to teach. It is difficult not only in that the concepts themselves are sometimes theologically heavy for the mature Christian, but it is also difficult because the Bible does not provide specific terms to speak about the concept. The underlying concepts described by the term righteous deceit are not new and have been taught in various ways throughout history.

As an example, Augustine taught that all lies were wrong, yet condoned the deceit used in hiding.[217] He might have called this a 'righteous hiding of the truth.' Luther expanded the kinds of deceit he saw in the Bible, from Augustine's narrower view. Using Augustine's terminology about the lie, the "harmful lie," the "obliging lie" and the "the playful lie," Luther taught that only the harmful lie is what is being forbidden in the Eighth Commandment.[218] The "obliging lie" is "not properly called a lie" and rather is a "respectable and pious lie and should rather be called a service of love."[219] The "playful lie" is not sinful, but rather is "nothing but laughter or fun" and is a "useful lie."[220] Luther's "obliging lie" and "playful lie" are thus both examples of the words he used to describe the concept of righteous deceit in its various forms. He also used "pious lie" to describe the "obliging lie," although he never seemed satisfied by these terms.

One of the reasons that he may have not been satisfied by the terms is the confusion and ambiguity they brought with them. It was not clear whether the actions and concepts described by these labels were right or wrong. Augustine used the same terms to describe actions that were sinful. Luther used the first term to describe the actions that were sinful and the second two terms to describe what sinless actions and to distinguish from the first. Is an "obliging lie" or a "playful lie" right or wrong? It would constantly be confusing.

For this reason, the term "righteous deceit" is a better label for the overarching concept that would include the 'righteous hiding of the truth' of Augustine, the "obliging" and "playful" sinless lies of Luther, as well as the other examples of righteous deception used in the Bible, as

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[217] Augustine of Hippo, "To Consentius: Against Lying," 491.
[218] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 5: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30*, 40-41.
[219] Ibid. 40.
[220] Ibid. 41.

previously identified. Even though one might come in thinking deceit is inherently wrong, using a term such as "righteous deceit" leaves no doubt that what the speaker is referring to is right, righteous, and sinless. In this way, it avoids the confusion and ambiguity of other terms and directly confronts the difficulty that exists in the doctrine itself. It directly confronts and affirms that something, which is so spoken against in Scripture, can at times and under certain circumstances, be righteous. It is similar to the label, righteous anger. The Bible emphasizes that anger is wrong and should be avoided, but there are times when a correct use of anger, or righteous anger, is appropriate. So it is with righteous deceit. The doctrine described by righteous deceit is difficult enough. A label such as this thus allows one to immediately address the heart of the issue, to state the truth, and then to explain it using the examples provided in Scripture.

CONCLUSION

The point of this paper, is to show that there are indeed two kinds of deceit present in the Bible, the most common unrighteous deceit, and the much rarer righteous deceit. The concept of righteous deceit is a striking if not offensive concept to those who have become so familiar with the unrighteous deceit to which is referred throughout the Bible. Yet this foreign, almost alien, righteous deceit is indeed present, and is thus an implicit doctrine of Scripture.

One might wonder, "Why in the world would he take on such a potentially controversial topic like righteous deceit?" In fact, I was asked this many times throughout the research and writing of this thesis. To answer that question, I refer back to an experience that I had during my Vicar year over summer quarter in the South. I attended an ethics course in which one of the assignments was to analyze and present the ethical implications of a number of ethically ambiguous accounts in Scripture, many of which involved deceit. As I watched and listened to the presentations, what I noticed was that one after another we were all trying to justify God's behavior and the behavior of our forefathers in the faith. We were trying to explain why God would act in such away and also why believers would act in such away. We were trying to explain why actions that seemed deceitful were in fact not deceitful, and how God could commend and bless faith despite its connection to what seemed sinful. We were trying to explain how saints, considered righteous by him, who live by faith, could make such ethically questionable decisions. The answer of course was because of sin, but how could God then commend it or bless it? The truth is, these accounts are ethically difficult. It was a struggle trying

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to explain them. But it seemed that we were approaching the accounts with a black-and-white concept of deceit, that it is always wrong and speaking the truth is always right. It seemed to me that we were siding with Augustine who implies that in reality there are no ethically ambiguous decisions regarding deceit and that one should simply tell the truth in every situation, no matter what. In our efforts to show that deceit was neither occurring, condoned nor blessed, it seemed to me that we were bending over backwards to try and explain away what was going on, massaging the definitions of words or making distinctions where there sometimes were none regarding what was and was not deceitful. As I said, the accounts are difficult. At the end I left intrigued but not convinced on the issue. I was left wondering if there was another approach to the issue. On the one hand, I acknowledge that, "I don't know" is an acceptable answer and is sometimes the only answer with which Scripture leaves us. On the other hand, I decided to explore the topic further. I decided to follow the hypothesis, that deceit is not inherently unrighteous, to see if it was sustainable according to Scripture. The goal of my thesis, then, was to simply show that there is another biblically viable explanation to the deceit accounts. Furthermore, it is to show that the topic of deceit is not always black-and-white, that Christians encounter situations that are not always black-and-white, and that life in a sinful world is more complicated than simply saying, "lying is always wrong" or "we must tell the entire truth in every situation." I also acknowledge that there are opposing views. With that in mind, my hope and goal is to simply start a conversation so that we might consider what God is revealing to us about himself in the Bible and that we may come to a more accurate understanding of who our God is. I come to the conclusion that righteous deceit is implicitly taught in Scripture, that God can and does use righteous deceit, as do believers as a fruit of faith, that this should not make us question our faith or our view of God, and that by labeling it is as such, it will actually help us grasp this difficult doctrine portrayed in the Bible, as well as understand these difficult accounts.

I should restate that this is merely one attempt at following through the hypothesis that deceit can indeed be righteous. I recognize that this topic and issue has existed throughout history and that many credible, biblical, and far more intelligent theologians have landed on both sides of the issue and so once again I would like to state that the goal of this thesis is simply to start a conversation about the topic.

Following the conclusion of this paper there are a number of appendices which dig into the actual scriptural accounts in which, in my opinion, I have identified righteous deceit. I consider the appendices as the most important part of this thesis and I encourage you to read through them and look into the accounts, so that you can wrestle with them yourself. My attempt at this has resulted in this thesis, but I know there is far more to learn from them. Now you have the chance to return to God's Word and wrestle with what God is teaching to us. Return to the text, read it, meditate on it, consider the points of this paper, discuss it, read the texts again, so that it may sharpen and enhance your view of what our God of grace and truth has revealed to us about himself in these accounts. If that can be accomplished, and even if that is the only thing that is accomplished by this thesis, then I will consider this thesis a success. To our triune God of truth, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be all the glory. Amen.

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APPENDIX A – UNRIGHTEOUS DECEIT ACCOUNTS

Joshua 7 – Achan's Deception (Greed Cover-up)

In Joshua 6, Joshua and the Israelites were preparing to conquer the city of Jericho. However, before they stormed the city, the Israelites were told to keep away from the devoted things and that "all the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury" (Jos 6:19). After they conquered and destroyed the city, the text reveals that Achan had taken some of the devoted things and hid them (Jos 7:1). The Lord's anger burned against the Israelites because of this. When it was revealed to the Israelites that Achan's theft was the cause for the Lord's anger, he confessed that he not only took them, but that he hid them in the ground inside his tent. As a result, the Israelites took him out and executed him by stoning. Although Achan's initial problem was disobeying a direct command of the Lord, he also tried to hide what he had done and kept it secret until the deception was revealed. He was lying without words. In his cover up, Achan dealt falsely with all of the Israelites.

Achan was selfishly motivated. He had sinned. He did not want his sin to be discovered, so he attempted to deceive those around him by hiding the items and remaining silent. Yet, the Lord did not allow him to succeed and thus revealed him to Joshua. The Lord's anger was the result of both Achan's deception and his disobedience against the Lord's command. There is nothing in the text that would lead one to assume otherwise. Achan was simply punished for his sin, part of which was his deceitful cover-up. Achan's cover-up is therefore an example of unrighteous deceit.

2 Samuel 11 - David and Bathsheba (Lust Cover-up)

David's sin with Bathsheba, and the subsequent sins that David committed as a part of his cover-up, were fraught with deceit. After committing adultery with Bathsheba which resulted in her pregnancy, David tried to cover it up by having Uriah return from battle to be with his wife. David lied in his reason for wanting Uriah to return home. When this did not work, he had Uriah killed in battle, risking the lives of other soldiers in the process. He then took Bathsheba as his wife. David's cover-up was an attempt to uphold his reputation in his kingdom, by hiding his sin.

As the king, no one could hold him accountable. The result was that he deceived the entire nation until Nathan confronts him about his sin.

The account concludes with the statement, "But the thing David had done displeased the LORD" (2 Sa 11:27). There is no indication that "the thing David had done" refers to any specific aspect of David's sinful actions. Because of this it can be inferred that it refers to the entire adultery and cover-up. The entire act was unrighteous. As part of the entire act, the deceit employed by David was also unrighteous, because it "displeased the LORD."

Acts 5 – Ananias and Sapphira (Greed Cover-up)

The cover-up of Ananias and Sapphira is similar to Achan's cover-up; however, this account includes explicit lying. Ananias and Sapphira sold a plot of land and acted as though they gave their full profit to the church. However, they held some back for themselves. According to Acts 5, Peter confronts Ananias and says the following:

> Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied (ψεύσασθαί) to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied (ἐψεύσω) just to human beings but to God. (Ac 5:3,4)

Both Ananias and Sapphira immediately died after their sin was exposed.

Peter's rebuke of Ananias and Sapphira clearly indicates the sinfulness of the lie that they had told. They misrepresented themselves not just to the church, but to God himself. For this reason, their lives were taken from them. As shocking as these events are to the modern reader, they were also shocking to the rest of the Christians at that time as it is said that "great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events" (Ac 5:11). God is serious about the truth. This is a clear case of unrighteous deceit. Ananias and Sapphira each explicitly lied to cover up their greed, and faced the consequences for their actions.

In Appendices B through I the most certain righteous deceit accounts will be examined and analyzed. Each category of righteous deceit is divided into those accounts which are most certain and those which are less certain according to the text. In the most certain accounts, deceit is either specifically rewarded by God, it is commanded by God, or it is used by God himself.[221] In the possible righteous deceit accounts, deceit is most often present, but it is not always clearly identified as being righteous.

Numbers 13 – The Twelves Spies (Deuteronomy 1:22-24) (Joshua 2) (War)

In Numbers, after the Israelites finished wandering through the desert, they were on the edge of the Promised Land. God tells Moses to send some spies to explore the land, saying, "Send some men to explore (וְיָתֻרוּ) the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders" (Nu 13:2). The word וְיָתֻרוּ comes from the verb תּוּר which is translated as, "seek out, spy out, explore."[222] Furthermore, "Of the twenty-three occurrences of *tûr* in the OT, more than half are found in Num 13f. in the sense of "spying out, reconnoitering" the land of Canaan preparatory to conquering it."[223] It does not inherently implicate deceitful exploring, however the context clearly indicates this type of spying. Before heading out, Moses described to them what type of information he was looking for, saying:

> "Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwalled or fortified? How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees in it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land. (Nu 13:17-20)

They were to scout out the land with the thought that they were about to conquer and occupy it. Moses refers to this same incident in Deuteronomy 1, saying, "Then all of you came to me and said, "Let us send men ahead to spy out (וְיַחְפְּרוּ) the land for us and bring back a report about the

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[221] One thing to note about the "righteous deceit" account sections. They will include the use of commentaries insofar as the issue of deceit is present in them. However, this author found that with many of the accounts, commentators did not specifically address the presence or ethical implications of deceit at all, which is the reason not every section has specific references to commentaries. That being said, the author certainly did not do an exhaustive search of every commentary to see if the issue of deceit was covered.

[222] Brown et al., *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1064.

[223] Ronald F. Youngblood, "2500 תּוּר," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 967.

route we are to take and the towns we will come to" (Dt 1:22). Here again, the root of חָפַר, וַיַּחְפְּרוּ, is translated to "dig, [or] search for."[224] The twelve spies were to search for the information Moses indicated. Was this something to be done in secret? Or were the men free to recount their mission to the inhabitants of the land? In the next two verses Moses continues to recount the story of the spies. He says, "The idea seemed good to me; so I selected twelve of you, one man from each tribe. They left and went up into the hill country, and came to the Valley of Eshkol and explored (וַיְרַגְּלוּ) it" (Dt 1:23,24). The gloss of וַיְרַגְּלוּ from רָגַל is "*slander*" or "*go about as explorer, spy*."[225] "Some etymological connection between the meaning to slander (…) and to spy out must exist (…) but it cannot be determined with certainty; suggestions include: (…) to walk around as a slanderer (…), a spy, a scout."[226] It implies a spy who is exploring a land telling fancy stories as to who he is. וַיְרַגְּלוּ also has the same root as מְרַגְּלִים which is what Joseph falsely accuses his brothers of doing when they came to Egypt for food during a famine. He said, "You are spies (מְרַגְּלִים)! You have come to see where our land is unprotected" (Ge 42:9). What were his brothers accused of doing? Telling a false story while seeking to find vulnerabilities among the Egyptians. Furthermore, Joseph's brothers contrast מְרַגְּלִים with someone honest saying, "Your servants are honest men (כֵּנִים), not spies (מְרַגְּלִים)" (Ge 42:10,11). כֵּנִים means "right, veritable, honest."[227] This same contrast is made multiple times throughout the account about Joseph and his brothers.[228] Secrecy and deception are clearly indicated by this word in the context of Joseph and his brothers. Secrecy and deceit is therefore a possible understanding of the word "spies." More importantly, the context of sending spies to scout out a land prior to an assumed take over certainly implies secrecy and deceit.

The same word, מְרַגְּלִים, is also is used in another account of spies from Joshua 2. After forty years of wandering in the desert, the Israelites under Joshua's lead were now in the process of conquering the Promised Land. Verse 1 states, "Then Joshua son of Nun secretly (חֶרֶשׁ) sent two spies (מְרַגְּלִים) from Shittim" (Jos 2:1). Their mission was nearly compromised by the fact that they were found out. The king of Jericho found out they were there and tried to track them down and find them. Without Rahab's help they would have been caught. Once again, this

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[224] Brown et al., *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 343.
[225] *Ibid.*, 920. Emphasis theirs.
[226] Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 1184.
[227] Brown et al., *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 467.
[228] See Genesis 42:31,34.

context shows that the very nature of a spy is deceit. There must be some level of secrecy for a spy to be able to explore the land without being caught or compromising his mission. A spy is "a person employed by a government or other organization to collect and report secret information on an enemy or competitor," or "a person who observes others secretly."[229]

Though in the Numbers 13 passage, secrecy is not explicitly present, it is explicitly indicated by Moses' in Deuteronomy when he recounts the same events. In Numbers 13, therefore, God explicitly commands Moses to send out spies, whose very task is inherently filled with secrecy and deceit.

That God commanded Moses to send out spies to explore the land of Canaan makes this a clear case of righteous deceit. God does not command someone to sin. Therefore, this command to be a spy in the land could not have been an unrighteous task.

Joshua 8 – The Ambush of Ai (War)

Just a few chapters after Rahab's righteous lie, we again see an example of righteous deceit, this time on the battlefield. After conquering Jericho, the Lord commanded Joshua to take the army and attack the city of Ai. He concludes by telling them how, that they should "set an ambush (אֹרֵב) behind the city" (Jos 8:2). אֹרֵב a participle from אָרַב means "lie in wait"[230] when used in the context of battle, "ambush as a method of warfare is described."[231] The ambushes in the Bible follow the following deceitful pattern:

(1) the positioning of an ambush behind the city;
(2) the deceptive flight by the assault force to draw the defenders out of the city and after them in pursuit;
(3) the storming of the city by the ambush party;
(4) the "fleeing" assault force turns now to counterattack.[232]

This is exactly how Joshua proceeds. He sets an ambush behind Ai, he attacks the city from the other side, and draws Ai's army out of the city. The plan worked perfectly such that "Not a man remained in Ai or Bethel who did not go after Israel" (Jos 8:17). The Lord then tells Joshua,

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[229] Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[230] Brown et al., *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 70.

[231] Victor P. Hamilton, "156 רַב," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 68.

[232] Hamilton, "156 רַב," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 68. See Jos 8 and Jdg 20 for other ambush accounts.

"Hold out toward Ai the javelin that is in your hand, for into your hand I will deliver the city" (Jos 8:18). He does this, and the men in the ambush rose and took the city successfully. The army was then defeated. The ambush that was commanded, both before and during the battle, is inherently deceitful. The army presents itself as if it is going to attack, then flees to lure the defenses away from the city. The king of Ai and his army were clearly deceived. Had they known the truth, that the rest of the army was hidden on the other side of the city, they would have certainly not left the city undefended.

As this was commanded by God, both before and again during the battle, it must be righteous. God in fact used the ambush as the way in which he kept the promise he made when he said, "into your hand I will deliver the city" (Jos 8:18). God used the deceitful ambush to keep his promise to Joshua to deliver the city into his hands.

2 Chronicles 20:22 – The Lord Sets Ambushes (War)

In 2 Chronicles 20, God is the origin and enactor of ambushes. The passage reads, "As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes (מְאָרְבִים) against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated" (2 Ch 20:22). The result of the ambush was that the armies all defeated each other, so that the men of Judah were able to take all of the plunder. Given that it is the same word translated as ambush as in Joshua 8, the deceitful aspect has already been covered in the commentary on that section.

The Lord is clearly the one who originated and set the ambush, although he used the various enemies to carry it out against each other. The deceitful ambush is from God and therefore must be considered righteous.

POSSIBLE RIGHTEOUS DECEIT ACCOUNTS IN WAR

Judges 3:12-30 – Ehud Kills Eglon (Possible War)

There are at least four other possible righteous deceit accounts used in a wartime setting. In Judges 3:12-30, Ehud assassinates King Eglon by hiding a sword under his clothing and bringing a tribute to him in order to gain access to the king. He then tells a lie, that he has a "secret message" for the king in order to gain a private audience with him (3:19). Ehud then kills him and he escapes. Though Ehud's ploy was clearly deceitful, the Bible is silent on whether it

was a righteous or unrighteous way of killing Ehud, although it was done on behalf of God's people.

<p style="text-align:center">Judges 4 – Jael Kills Sisera (Possible War)</p>

In the next chapter, Judges 4, another deceitful ploy is used effectively by Jael. In this account, Sisera, the commander of the Canaanite army had been oppressing the Israelites for twenty years and had been able to renew his oppression with the death of Ehud. Using Barak and Deborah, the "Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera (…) fled on foot" (Jdg 4:15). Sisera flees to Jael's tent, where she welcomes him saying, "Come, my lord, come right in. Don't be afraid" (Jdg 4:18). He then goes to sleep and while he was sleeping, Jael, "picked up a tent peg and a hammer" and "drove the peg through his temple into the ground," thus killing him (Jdg 4:21). In this way, she killed the man who had been oppressing the Israelites.

In this account, deceit is clearly used to achieve the goal of the deceiver. It is similar to the previous account of Ehud in that both Ehud and Jael killed the one they were intending to and used deceit to pull it off. However, unlike Ehud, there are other passages in the Bible which actually praise Jael's actions. In the following chapter, Judges 5, Deborah praises Jael highly in her song. She says:

> Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, most blessed of tent-dwelling women. He asked for water, and she gave him milk; in a bowl fit for nobles she brought him curdled milk. Her hand reached for the tent peg, her right hand for the workman's hammer. She struck Sisera, she crushed his head, she shattered and pierced his temple. At her feet he sank, he fell; there he lay. At her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell—dead. (Jdg 5:24-27)

She calls Jael "blessed of women" and praises her defeat of Sisera. At the end of the song, Deborah, still speaking about Sisera's death, proclaims, "So (כֵּן) may all your enemies perish, Lord! But may all who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength" (Jdg 5:31). The Hebrew word, כֵּן, is an adverb that means "so, thus."[233] Deborah is declaring that all of God's enemies should perish in the same way that Sisera perished. This shows that, at least according to Deborah, it is perfectly acceptable and even praiseworthy to use deceit to defeat the Lord's

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[233] Brown et al., *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 485.

enemies. Though, what she says is not explicitly from God, it certainly gives credence to the righteous use of deceit in war, especially when it is used against enemies of God.

2 Samuel 15-17 – Hushai's Spying; Jonathan and Ahimaaz Hide; the Woman of the House Lies (Possible War)

There are at least three deceitful actions that happen in these few chapters and will thus be analyzed together. The context of these accounts is that David has fled Jerusalem because his son Absalom has staged a conspiracy to become king. David thus seeks to keep tabs on Absalom by assigning those he trusts to various spots in Jerusalem. David sends Zadok and his son Ahimaaz and Abiathar and his son Jonathon back to Jerusalem to serve as informants (2 Sa 15:27-29). David then sends Hushai to serve as a spy for David, "by frustrating Ahithophel's advice" and passing on information to the other informants, who could then relay it to David (2 Sa 15:34-36). When Hushai reaches Absalom, he lies in order to gain his trust, saying, "Just as I served your father, so I will serve you" (2 Sa 16:19). He then proceeds to frustrate Ahithophel's advice. After Absalom chooses Hushai's advice, the writer then says something interesting, "For the LORD had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom" (2 Sa 17:14b). It would seem this is another case in which God uses spying. However, this time it is in more of a civil war and is used to accomplish the judgment of Absalom.

In order to inform David, Jonathon and Ahimaaz leave, but are seen by someone who tells Absalom, who then sends some men after them. They hide in a well to conceal their location, and the woman who hid them tells a lie when she is asked, "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?" (2 Sa 17:20). She lies, saying, "They crossed over the brook." As a result, the men were unable to find Ahimaaz and Jonathan.

Thus in this section, there is spying, hiding, and lies used to get David information. Luther calls both Hushai's lie that allowed him to spy and the woman's lie obliging lies, "Such is the lie of Hushai the Archite (…) and that of the woman at the well" [234] As shown previously, this meant that Luther did not believe it was a lie, but rather that these were acts of "virtue and outstanding prudence."[235] However, once again, the Bible simply describes the events of the

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[234] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 2: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6-14*, 292.
[235] Ibid.

situation without passing judgment. Thus, it can only be said that these are possible examples of righteous deceit.

2 Kings 6 – Elisha's Half-truth (Possible War)

The final possible occurrence of righteous deceit used in war comes from 2 Kings 6. In the account, Elisha uses a half-truth to lead a blinded army sent to arrest him to Samaria into the hands of the king of Israel. Seeing the army coming to arrest him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, "Strike this army with blindness" and the Lord complied (2 Ki 6:18). When they arrived, Elisha, said to them, "This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for" (2 Ki 6:19). He then leads them to Samaria where though they could easily have been killed or captured by the army there, Elisha allows them to be fed and released. The statement Elisha made to them was in a sense half true because he was the man for whom they were looking. However, he clearly deceived them making them think they were in the wrong place and had found the wrong man. Once again, Elisha clearly used deceit, but it is neither condoned nor condemned by the text.

APPENDIX C – RIGHTEOUS DECEIT FOR SAFETY

1 Samuel 16:1-5 – Samuel's Half-truth (Safety)

Fast forward to King Saul's reign over the Israelites, and there is another occurrence of righteous deceit in the form of a half-truth instructed by God. The Lord tells Samuel to go to Jesse and anoint one of his sons to be king. Samuel is worried that if Saul finds out about Samuel's objective that he will be killed. The Lord then tells Samuel, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate" (1 Sa 16:2,3). Samuel's primary goal is to anoint the future king. God instructs him to use the sacrifice as a front for achieving his goal without putting his life at stake. Samuel then goes to Bethlehem and when confronted by the elders of the town, he says, "I have come to sacrifice to the LORD" (1 Sa 16:5). He does not reveal his primary intention. The plan works. No suspicion is raised, Saul does not hear about it, and Samuel is able to anoint David without incident.

Samuel's half-truth was intended to conceal his real purpose for being in Bethlehem. It was deceptive for two reasons. It resulted in the elders not knowing Samuel's true reason for being there and it prevented Saul from knowing the truth that Samuel was in the process of anointing his successor as king.

Due to the fact that Samuel was instructed by God to use the half-truth in this way, this is also a case of righteous deceit.

Matthew 2 – The Magi Deceive Herod (Safety)

Another righteous deceit account occurs in the New Testament when the Magi come to worship Jesus and leave by a different route. Also connected to this account is when Mary, Joseph and Jesus deceive Herod by subsequently fleeing to Egypt.

The Magi had been following the star which had led them as far as Jerusalem. Without further guidance, they went to King Herod to find the specific location of Jesus. Herod, of course, saw Jesus as a threat to his reign, so he sent the Magi to search for him and said, "As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him" (Mt 2:8). At this point as far as the Magi knew, Herod was being truthful. However, after finding Jesus, they were "warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, [so] they returned to their country by another route"

(Mt 2:12). After they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph telling him to escape immediately to Egypt, to which Joseph complied. The angel had also revealed Herod's true motives, saying that, "Herod is going to search for the child to kill him" (Mt 2:13). Herod's reaction to the situation is then recounted by the writer: "When Herod realized that he had been outwitted (ἐνεπαίχθη) by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi" (Mt 2:16). ἐνεπαίχθη is the passive from the word ἐμπαίζω. Although in every other case that this word appears in the New Testament it has the idea of "to subject to derision, *ridicule, make fun of, mock,*" BDAG suggests based on context other ancient works the sense of "to trick someone so as to make a fool of the person, *deceive, trick*" in this case.[236] According to the biblical use of this word it could easily be translated as "make a mockery of." Yet even with a translation such as this, the sense of deceit is still there. Herod was made a fool of, because he was fooled by a combination of God and the Magi. He thought he was going the Magi were going to return to lead him to Jesus, but he was deceived by the Magi.

Just as it is explicitly said that an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, it can be assumed according to that context, though it does not specifically say, that an angel also was who appeared to the Magi in a dream and warned them to not return to Herod. If this is the case, then ultimately it was God who warned the Magi to leave via another route. Just as it was ultimately God who warned Joseph in a dream to flee to Egypt. By these two events, Herod was thus deceived. Their escape, being directed by God, therefore was not sinful and was righteous, because according to the will of God. It also is interesting to note that Herod had already attempted to deceive the Magi into giving him Jesus' location so that he might have Jesus killed, rather than worship him. This could be an example in which God uses righteous deceit in response to sinful deceit.

In all of these accounts where humans are the agent of deception, God either explicitly directs one to deceive another or it is explicitly stated as an act of faith.

John 7:1-13 – Jesus Attends the Feast of Tabernacles in Secret (Safety)

Jesus' secret journey and attendance at the Feast of Tabernacles is an interesting text especially when considering the various aspects of deceit which are involved. The first verse of

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[236] Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 323.

the account notes that, "He [Jesus] did not want to go about in Judea because the Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill him" (Jn 7:1). Thus the Jesus' safety is a consideration. However, his brothers, who "did not believe in him" (Jn 7:5), encouraged him to go publicly, against his desires, saying, "Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world" (Jn 7:3,4). Some have accused Jesus' next statement of being a lie when he tells his brothers, "You go to the festival. I am not going up to this festival, because my time has not yet fully come" (Jn 7:8). However, given the context that Jesus did not want to go publicly, as it seems would have been the case if he went with his brothers, and given that Jesus actually does go to the festival in secret, it would seem that Jesus is indicating that he is not going to go up to the festival in the manner his brothers want him to. The next verse seems to confirm this, "However, after his brothers had left for the festival, he went also, not publicly, but in secret (ἐν κρυπτῷ)" (Jn 7:10). The dative κρυπτῷ, from κρυπτός means "pert[aining] to being unknown because of being kept secret, *hidden, secret*."[237] As he had done before, Jesus kept his presence at the festival a secret, and thus is another example of righteous deceit used for safety.

The next few verses are quite interesting in that it reveals the how divided the people were about Jesus. Although the Jewish leaders were looking for him at the festival, "Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people." But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the leaders" (Jn 7:12,13). Indeed, those who did not believe in Jesus thought that his teaching was false and that he was a deceiver. Oh how wrong they were. Jesus' message was true, but they rejected it in favor of believing the lies.

John 8:59 – Jesus Hides from the Hostile Crowd (Safety)

There are a number of accounts in Scripture in which Jesus is in a dangerous situation and somehow gets away. This happens in Luke, when Jesus walks through the crowd that is trying to throw him off a cliff (Lk 4:30), and again in John, when Jesus escapes the grasp of the crowd (Jn 10:36). These accounts do not specifically say how Jesus escaped. The simply say that

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[237] Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 570. Emphasis theirs.

he did. However, there is at least one occasion in which Jesus actively hid himself from a crowd that was trying to kill him. This happened first when Jesus was speaking to Jews at the temple. Jesus proclaimed himself to be God saying, "Before Abraham was born, I am" (Jn 8:57). Upon hearing Jesus' claim to be God, the Jews "picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid (ἐκρύβη) himself, slipping away from the temple grounds" (Jn 8:59). ἐκρύβη is the aorist passive form of κρύπτω, which means "to keep from being seen, *hide.*"[238] Jesus thus hid in order to maintain his safety. The crowd was prevented from knowing where he was and was thus deceived. Jesus therefore used righteous deceit to maintain his safety and escape from the crowd.

POSSIBLE RIGHTEOUS DECEIT FOR SAFETY

Genesis 12:10-20 – Abram's Half-truth to Pharaoh (Possible Safety)

After Abram had been called by God to leave his father's house and go where the Lord has told him, a famine drives him and Sarai to Egypt. As they are about to enter Egypt, he says this to his wife, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you" (Ge 12:11-13). The text then assumes that Sarai followed Abram's wishes because upon entering Egypt her beauty was noticed and she was brought into Pharaoh's house. This initially led to goodwill from Pharaoh to Abram until "the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai" (Ge 12:17). Pharaoh then becomes angry and clearly indicates that he was deceived by what he says in his rebuke of Abram, "What have you done to me?" he said. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!" (Ge 12:18,19). In this situation, Abram used a half or incomplete truth to deceive the Pharaoh. Later in Genesis 20, Abraham, who had been given a new name, explains, "Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife" (Ge 20:12). Sarai is Abram's half-sister. He not only hid the fact that they were married in order to protect his own life, but he also intentionally told a half-truth. As a result, Pharoah was deceived and serious

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[238] Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 571. Emphasis theirs.

diseases were inflicted on him by God because of it. Abram was clearly deceitful in his interaction with Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

Was Abram's motivation of saving his own life a warranted justification for telling a half-truth to Pharaoh? Some have said no. For example, Keil and Delitzsch say, "But his precaution did not spring from faith."[239] Franzmann says, "Yes, Abram had sinned."[240] Others, like Luther, say yes, it was justified. In fact, Luther says some very interesting things regarding Abram's half-truth. He first admits that the half-truth may possibly be excused, though clearly admits that Abram was in the wrong:

> This passage greatly offends the fathers and all the theologians because Abraham himself not only lies, but he urges his wife to lie too. Perhaps the lie can be excused; but this cannot be excused, that willingly and knowingly he exposes his wife to the danger of adultery and by this lie invites the Egyptians to adultery, even though they might have spared a married woman. Now that they hear that she is unmarried, they think they can possess her without sinning.[241]

Again Luther says about the lie, "So far as Abraham's action is concerned, let us maintain that he did not lie; or at least let us say that it was an obliging lie and praiseworthy foresight."[242] Again, he states that the plan was not sinful, "At all events, there was no sin involved in his plan; and so far as he was able, he controlled his misfortune with prudence."[243] But then Luther starts to think about it from different perspectives and he comes to different conclusions. On the one hand he says, "Therefore we can declare that amid so many dangers Abraham's faith gave way to some extent and that although this is a sin, it was nevertheless a sin of weakness."[244] But then on the other hand he reasons, "But another thought comes to me, a thought that induces me not only to maintain that Abraham did not sin and that his faith did not waver but to believe that this very plan came from a very strong faith and from the Holy Spirit."[245] He explains that it could also be that Abraham, "nevertheless feels that God must not be put to the test. Therefore he looks for

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[239] Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 126.

[240] Werner Herman Franzmann, *Bible History Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Milwaukee, WI: Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1980), 103.

[241] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 2: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6-14*, 291.

[242] Ibid., 292.

[243] Ibid.

[244] Ibid., 293.

[245] Ibid.

every means of safety or self-defense."[246] Thus Luther had many thoughts about this account as to what extent Abram did or did not sin by telling a half-truth to Pharaoh.

However, one cannot deny that it did result in an increase of possessions and wealth for Abram. He "acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels" (Ge 12:16) on account of his wife and he was allowed to leave Egypt with "everything he had" (Ge 12:20).

However, except for Pharaoh's rebuke of Abram, there is no other indication from the immediate context that this was either sinful or righteous. Comparing this to some of Abram's actions later in his life, such as being willing to sacrifice his only son Isaac, it seems like he does not trust God as he does later. Instead, he relies on his own solutions. Thus whether or not this account is an example of righteous deceit remains as the Bible leaves it, undecided.

Genesis 20:1-18 – Abraham's Half-truth to Abimelech (Possible Safety)

A similar account happened to Abraham and his wife Sarah later in their lives in their dealings with Abimelek, the king of Gerar. In Genesis 20:2, Abraham and Sarah stayed in Gerar, "and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelek king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her" (Ge 20:2). God then came to Abimelek in a dream and revealed the truth to him, that Sarah was Abraham's wife. He then confronts Abraham saying, "What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should never be done." And Abimelek asked Abraham, "What was your reason for doing this?" (Ge 20:9,10). Abraham then reveals that he acted in order to avoid putting his own life at risk. This reveals that it was Abraham's standard practice, and that he considered it a valid option under certain circumstances. When God led him away from his father's household, he told Sarah, "This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, 'He is my brother'" (Ge 20:13). Once again, Abimelek was clearly deceived by Abraham and Sarah's half-truth. He considered this deception something that "should never be done" (Ge 20:9).

Although this was clearly condemned by Abimelek, there is no explicit reference to this event by God. It is neither condoned nor blessed. Once again, some defend Abraham's half-truth.

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[246] Ibid., 294.

Luther explains Abraham's motivation, "Since Abraham has no definite word from heaven that his wife will be protected, he does what reason suggests and hopes that by such a lie he and his wife can be protected."[247] As he does elsewhere, Luther explains that the "obliging lie is not sinful and that in regards to Abraham, "This is the kind of lie we are now discussing."[248] Luther thus excuses it.

This account also reveals that it was something that Abraham did at least twice. If it was a sin, then it was a repeated sin, seemingly, of weakness, as he was trying to protect his own life. His use of the half-truth was also passed on and repeated by Abraham's son Isaac.

Genesis 26:1-11 Isaac's Half-truth to Abimelech (Possible Safety)

A similar situation occurred with Isaac and Abimelech. When a famine came to the land, the Lord directed Isaac to stay in the land rather than go to Egypt. Isaac stayed in Gerar instead. For the same reason as his father, he told the people that his wife, Rebekah, was his sister. He thought, "The men of this place might kill me on account of Rebekah, because she is beautiful" (Ge 26:7). At best, this was a half-truth. Isaac and Rebekah were first cousins.[249] אָחוֹת, the word Isaac used to describe her, can mean "blood relation" but the intent to deceive was still there.[250] Isaac did not want Abimelek to know that Rebekah was his wife. Yet once again, Abimelek found out and rebuked Isaac:

> So Abimelek summoned Isaac and said, "She is really your wife! Why did you say, 'She is my sister'?" Isaac answered him, "Because I thought I might lose my life on account of her." Then Abimelek said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the men might well have slept with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." (Ge 26:9,10)

Abimelek clearly does not condone this deceptive use of a half-truth nor the possible consequences to which it might lead.

The same question can be asked as to whether it was permissible for Isaac to lie in a case where he was fearing for his life. In this case, Luther see it negatively, "But I do not praise these failings and weaknesses as good deeds or virtues."[251] However, he later says:

> Accordingly, one asks whether what Isaac does is a sin. I answer that it is not a sin. No, it is an obliging lie by which he guarded against being killed by those among whom he was

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[247] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 3: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 15-20*, 320.
[248] Ibid., 327.
[249] See Ge 24:15.
[250] Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 31.
[251] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 5: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30*, 25.

staying if he said that Rebecca was his wife. Yet it is a weakness of faith, because he did not make an open and firm confession and did not despise death. For that would have been a splendid and truly heroic virtue and firmness. But God wanted him to be weak, in order that there might be an example which teaches the church that God is not offended, whether you confess firmly, which is heroic, or are weak; for He overlooks this and leaves it unnoticed. And from this we see that we have a gracious God who can forgive and wink at our weaknesses and forgive our sins, provided that we do not lie harmfully.[252]

Although initially it may seem like Luther is contradicting himself here, the issue is resolved by identifying the way he is using the word sin. It seems he uses the word sin to describe conscious sins, whereas he is uses the word weakness to describe sins of weakness.

Once again, aside from Abimelek's rebuke, there is no other blessing or condemnation of the act.

Genesis 31 – Jacob Flees Laban in Secret (Possible Safety)

The context of this account between Jacob and Laban is that Jacob had been working for Laban for many years when God came to him in a dream and told him to "leave this land at once and go back to your native land" (Ge 31:13). Jacob and his family left the land without telling Laban. The text makes it clear that Jacob deceived Laban in doing this, saying, "Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban (וַיִּגְנֹב אֶת־לֵב לָבָן) the Aramean by not telling him he was running away. So he fled with all he had, crossed the Euphrates River, and headed for the hill country of Gilead" (Ge 31:20,21). וַיִּגְנֹב אֶת־לֵב לָבָן literally means 'he stole the heart of Laban.' This construction is an idiom meaning "*deceive.*"[253]

What was the result of Jacob's deception? Laban finds out that they had left without telling him and is hurt. He catches up to them and says to Jacob, "You didn't even let me kiss my grandchildren and my daughters goodbye. You have done a foolish thing. I have the power to harm you; but last night the God of your father said to me, 'Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad'" (Ge 31:28,29). Jacob and Laban end up making a covenant between them and Laban returns home.

The text clearly indicates that Jacob deceived Laban by leaving secretly. However, was it righteous? Jacob's motivation is shown when he said, "I was afraid, because I thought you would take your daughters away from me by force" (Ge 31:31). Jacob thus deceived Laban because he

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[252] Ibid., 41.

[253] Brown et al., *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 170.

perceived Laban to be a threat to his family and thought that he might try to forcefully break them apart. However, Laban did not agree nor approve of Jacob's actions. He clearly thought it was unacceptable, describing what Jacob did as a "foolish thing" (Ge 31:28). Furthermore, he felt that he had "the power to harm [Jacob]" (Ge 31:29). God on the other hand remained neutral on the situation merely stating that Laban should not "say anything to Jacob, good or bad" (Ge 31:29).

Luther, however, explicitly calls it a crime, "This is another crime and a far more serious theft than Rachel's, for Jacob did not steal Laban's idols or his goods but his heart."[254] Nevertheless, although deceit is clearly used for safety, there is not enough evidence in the text to determine that it is another example of righteous deceit. Did Laban deserve to know that Jacob had left? Was the information private? The answers are not given and thus the moral implications of this situation cannot be decided conclusively.

Exodus 1 – The Hebrew Midwives (Safety)

The account of the Hebrew midwives perhaps presents one of the strongest examples of righteous deceit as characterized by humans, though it still cannot be said absolutely.

Nearly four hundred years after Joseph died and the Israelites were still in Egypt, they became so numerous that the Egyptians made them slaves. Even then they continued to multiply and spread. The king therefore hatched a plan to kill all the newborn sons of the Israelites. The account continues as follows:

> The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, "When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?" The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive." So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own. (Ex 1:15-21)

Not only did the midwives disobey the order of the king because they feared the Lord, but they also deceived him about the reason it was happening. The midwives' answer to the king seems to

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[254] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 6: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 31-37*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 6 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 35.

be a lie. It is possible that it was more of a half-truth, that it was indeed true that they did not get there in time. Either way, it is deceptive in that they were hiding the truth, which was that they had no intention of following the king's command. What was their motivation to deceive? The text does not say explicitly. However, it can be inferred that if they had told the king the truth, they would have been punished if not put to death. It is therefore likely that they did not want the king to know the truth so that they could continue in their roles and not face the punishment.

Without question the midwives were righteous in their disobedience of the king's command. Acts 5:29 articulates the principle they were upholding. In it, the apostles were told to stop preaching and said, "We must obey God rather than human beings!" (Ac 5:29). They were correctly upholding the value of human life over obedience to the government. The real question to be explored is whether they were also righteous in lying to cover up their disobedience of an unjust command. As a result of their actions, the text says, "so God was kind to the midwives" (Ex 1:20) and "because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own" (Ex 1:21).

It is at least possible that God is rewarding their disobedience to the king, but not their lie. This is Augustine's position. He says in reference to God's reward, "this was not because they lied, but because they were merciful to God's people. That therefore which was rewarded in them was, not their deceit, but their benevolence; benignity of mind, not iniquity of lying."[255] Keil and Delitzsch agree citing Augustine's explanation.[256] However, this seems unlikely. Copan and McQuilkin agree in this assessment stating, "How can it be said that their faith was good and their subversive activity bad? Or how can it be said that their obedience was good and their deception bad? The Bible does not make such distinctions. It just says that God approved and rewarded."[257] This account can be considered a case of righteous deceit. Nevertheless, because it is not explicitly stated that the lie was just, which was technically a separate act from when they saved the Israelite infants, it does remain somewhat uncertain.

1 Samuel 19:11-24 – David escapes by window; Michal lies (Possible Safety)

There are a number of deceptions that occur in this account. An evil spirit from the Lord came upon Saul making him attempt to kill David with his spear while he was playing the harp. David escapes and flees from Saul. Saul then sends some soldiers to watch David's house, where

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[255] Augustine of Hippo, "To Consentius: Against Lying," 495.
[256] Keil and Delitzsch, 275.
[257] Copan and McQuilkin, 511.

David had fled to, with the intention of killing him in the morning. David then secretly escapes through a window, thus deceiving the men who still thought that he was in his house. Michal, David's wife, creates a decoy from an idol and goat's hair to look like David, sick in bed. When the men question Michal, she lies saying, "He is ill" (1 Sa 19:14). When they discover the decoy instead of David, Saul explicitly indicates that he was deceived when he asks Michal, "Why did you deceive (רִמִּיתִנִי) me like this and send my enemy away so that he escaped?" (1 Sa 19:17). She answers with another explicit lie saying, "He said to me, 'Let me get away. Why should I kill you?'" (1 Sa 19:17). In reality, the text had already revealed that Michal had insisted that David leave (1 Sa 19:11). David had not threatened her. It seems she lied so that Saul would not realize that she helped David and turn his anger toward her. In all of these cases it is clear that the intent was to deceive Saul and his men so that David could escape with his life. Michal also lies so that Saul would not be suspicious of her. Both lie to maintain their safety.

Were David's and Michal's actions righteous and justified, or were they sinful? Once again, the text does not indicate anything explicitly. Luther equates this lie with Augustine's obliging lie, yet different from Augustine, he maintains that it is not sinful, "The second kind of lie is the obliging one, when we lie for the sake of someone's good, as Michal lies when she says (1 Sam. 19:17) that David had threatened her with death."[258] He then says of this kind of lie:

> This lie is called "obliging" because it not only serves the advantage of someone else, who would otherwise suffer harm or violence, but also prevents a sin. Therefore it is not proper to call it a lie; for it is rather a virtue and outstanding prudence, by which both the fury of Satan is hindered and the honor, life, and advantages of others are served.[259]

Although Luther sees this act as being sinless, because the text does not explicitly speak to the justness of Michal's and David's actions, this remains a possible account of righteous deceit.

1 Samuel 21:13 – David Pretends To Be Insane (Possible Safety)

In this account, when David is on the run from Saul, he flees into enemy Philistine territory. The attempts to hide out in Gath, which was a surprising place for David to go in enemy territory, because "It was the birthplace of their hero Goliath, the one David had slain!"[260] Unfortunately for David, he was recognized. Thinking quickly on his feet, "He pretended to be

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[258] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 2: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6-14*, 291–292.
[259] Ibid., 292.
[260] John R. Mittelstaedt, *1, 2 Samuel*, 2nd ed., The People's Bible (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 2002), 121.

insane in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard" (1 Sa 21:13). David's ruse worked and Achish sent him away.

This is another example of deceit in which David is able to quickly think on his feet. He certainly deceived Achish, maintained his safety, and kept his identity a secret. However, the Bible is silent on whether the deceit in and of itself was good or bad.

1 Kings 18:1-15 – Obadiah Hides a Hundred Prophets (Possible Safety)

In short account, Obadiah hides prophets from the wicked queen, Jezebel. The text describes the situation as follows, "While Jezebel was killing off the LORD's prophets, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves, fifty in each, and had supplied them with food and water" (1 Ki 18:4). It would be very difficult to view this as an unrighteous act, even though it involves the deceitful aspect of hiding, because Obadiah saved the lives of one hundred prophets through his actions. However, the Bible merely refers to it as the context of Obadiah's situation, neither condoning nor condemning it explicitly. However, given the presence of the categories of righteous deceit, this is certainly a possible and even probable example of righteous deceit used to maintain the safety of others.

1 Kings 22:30 – Ahab Enters Battle Disguised (Possible Safety)

The context of this account is that Ahab has consulted false prophets regarding his success in an upcoming battle. Because of a lying spirit sent by God, they tell him he will win and he believes their lying prophecy.[261] Ahab thus disguises himself before he enters the battle (1 Ki 22:30). Exactly as the true prophecy had predicted, Ahab does indeed die in battle after he is hit at random with an arrow (1 Ki 22:34). In that this was done by the wicked king Ahab, it was certainly unrighteous. However, it does bring up the question as to whether it is ethical to disguise oneself in such a way in battle. Although this account does not prove it, based on the category of deceit used for safety, in theory, it could be an example of using deceit in a righteous way.

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[261] An analysis of the lying spirit sent by God can be found in Appendix D.

Esther 2 – Esther Conceals Her Background (possible Safety)

The story of Esther is very dynamic. It involves a Jewish girl winning the graces of the Persian king and using her position to save the entire Jewish people in the land. However, there is one deceitful aspect to the story. Esther hides her ethnicity from the king. In chapter 2, it is recorded that "Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so" (Est 2:10). After Esther had been made queen, again the text reveals that "Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do." The text does not say why Mordecai had forbidden her to reveal her identity. It is certainly possible that it was for her own protection and safety. However, it is clear that she did hide her identity and that it served her well when she finally did reveal it to foil Haman's plot (Est 7:4). As with many of these accounts, the Bible merely recounts the story not judging it one way or another. That being said, many of God's people were certainly saved as a result of what Esther did, a part of which her concealment was an important aspect.

Jeremiah 38:24-27 – Jeremiah's Lie (Possible Safety)

In this somewhat strange account, Jeremiah lies on behalf of Zedekiah, who thinks he is in need of protection from the nobles. Zedekiah tells Jeremiah:

> "Do not let anyone know about this conversation, or you may die. If the officials hear that I talked with you, and they come to you and say, 'Tell us what you said to the king and what the king said to you; do not hide it from us or we will kill you,' then tell them, 'I was pleading with the king not to send me back to Jonathan's house to die there'" (Jer 38:24-26).

Zedekiah asks Jeremiah to lie on his behalf, and he complies, "All the officials did come to Jeremiah and question him, and he told them everything the king had ordered him to say. So they said no more to him, for no one had heard his conversation with the king" (Jer 38:27).

This was clearly deceit, but for what purpose? Gosdeck indicates that it was to help protect the king, for "The king, fearing for his own life, knew that the powerful nobles would question the prophet. If they had the slightest inkling that the king was thinking of surrender, they might well kill him for the good of the city."[262] Jeremiah certainly showed mercy on the king by complying, however was his lie to the officials a case of righteous deceit? Perhaps.

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[262] David M. Gosdeck, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, The People's Bible (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 1994), 252.

However, it is not indicated explicitly one way or another. Even so it would seem that the purpose was for safety.

Acts 9:23-25 – Paul's Secret Escape (2ⁿᵈ Corinthians 11:33) (possible Safety)

Here is another short account of a secret escape that saved someone's life. The account about Paul is as follows:

> After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall (Ac 9:23-25).

Although this account is not directly discussed positively or negatively it certainly mirrors the accounts when Jesus hid himself from the crowd or when David fled through his window to preserve his safety.. As such it is certainly a possible example of righteous deceit used for safety.

APPENDIX D – RIGHTEOUS DECEIT IN JUDGMENT/WARNING

1 Kings 22 (2 Chronicles 18) – The Lord Sends a Deceiving Spirit (Judgment/Warning)

To understand the context of this account, one must briefly consider the immediately preceding account of Naboth's Vineyard in 1 Kings 21. In summary, Ahab wants Naboth's vineyard who has been forbidden by the Lord to give it away. Even after Ahab offers him a better vineyard or its monetary equivalent, Naboth rejects the offer. As a result, Jezebel schemes to have Naboth stoned to death. After she accomplishes this successfully, Ahab takes possession of the vineyard (1 Ki 21). As a result, the Lord instructs Elijah: "Say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?' Then say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: In the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood—yes, yours!'" (1 Ki 21:19).

This account about Ahab, the king of Israel, Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, and Micaiah, the prophet, is somewhat complex. Jehoshaphat went to see Ahab so that they might join forces in battle to retake Ramoth Gilead from the king of Aram. Before agreeing, Jehoshaphat advised Ahab to seek God's counsel. Ahab therefore brought together four hundred prophets and asked them whether he should wage war against Ramoth Gilead. The prophets conclusively answered in the affirmative, that the Lord would give Ramoth Gilead into the king's hand. However, Jehoshaphat, a believer who "did what was right in the eyes of the LORD," (1 Ki 22:43) must have known that they were not prophets of the Lord because he replied, "Is there no longer a prophet of the LORD here whom we can inquire of?" (1 Ki 22:7). Ahab acknowledged that Micaiah was the one prophet left "through whom we [could] inquire of the LORD" (1 Ki 22:8). But he also expressed his hatred for him saying, "he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad" (1 Ki 22:8). Nevertheless, Micaiah was summoned. He initially told king Ahab that he would succeed in battle, yet, because this was either out of character for Micaiah, or possibly because he spoke using an untruthful tone, Ahab doubted that what he said was true and replied, "How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?" (1 Ki 22:16). Micaiah then recounted the vision that he saw:

> I saw the LORD sitting on his throne with all the multitudes of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left. And the LORD said, 'Who will entice (יְפַתֶּה) Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?' "One suggested this, and another that.

Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the Lord and said, 'I will entice (אֲפַתֶּנּוּ) him.' "'By what means?' the Lord asked. "'I will go out and be a deceiving (שֶׁקֶר) spirit in the mouths of all his prophets,' he said. "'You will succeed in enticing (תְּפַתֶּה) him,' said the Lord. 'Go and do it.' (1 Ki 22:19-22)

Micaiah then concluded by saying to Ahab, "So now the Lord has put a deceiving (שֶׁקֶר) spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The Lord has decreed disaster for you" (1 Ki 22:23). What happens in the end? Ahab ignores Micaiah's warning, proceeds to attack Ramoth Gilead, and is killed in battle, exactly according to Micaiah's prophecy.

Furthermore, Ahab's death was also exactly as Elijah had predicted following the account of Naboth's vineyard. The author of 1 Kings described it accordingly: "So the king died and was brought to Samaria, and they buried him there. They washed the chariot at a pool in Samaria (where the prostitutes bathed), and the dogs licked up his blood, as the word of the Lord had declared" (1 Ki 22:37,38).

Micaiah's vision deserves more comment. According to the vision, the four hundred prophets were being influenced by a "deceiving" or "lying" spirit. This spirit was requested by the LORD to "entice" Ahab. The word for "entice," which is used multiple times in this account not only by the deceiving spirit but also by God himself, is the Piel form of פָּתָה.[263] Whereas the Qal form expresses the idea of "to be calm, persuade," the Piel form has more of a deceitful shade: "to persuade, entice."[264] The connection between the forms of the verb can be explained as follows, "The basic verb idea is "be open, spacious, wide," and might relate to the immature or simple one who is open to all kinds of enticement, not having developed a discriminating judgment as to what is right or wrong."[265] There is close relationship between this type of enticement and deception, in fact, "To deceive carries almost the same idea as to entice."[266]

The Lord wanted Ahab to be enticed or persuaded to act a certain way that would result in his own death. It was certainly not what Ahab wanted. Had Jehoshaphat not realized that the prophets were false, and had Ahab not believed Micaiah's initial false prophecy, the truth of the situation might never have been revealed by Micaiah. Yet it was. At that point Ahab had two

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[263] Chisholm, "Does God Deceive?" 14. Chisholm has a detailed analysis of this verb and concludes, "the nuance 'to entice' or 'to deceive' fits best."

[264] Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 984.

[265] R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 742.

[266] Ibid., 742.

options: to believe the false prophets, or to believe the prophet of God. He chose the former. Despite the clear warning, he chose to attack Ramoth Gilead where he met his demise. The question is, was he deceived? Did Micaiah's revelation of the truth mean that Ahab was not actually deceived because he rejected the truth in full awareness? Not necessarily. Chisholm argues that Micaiah's revelation actually strengthens the argument that the deception worked, saying that it actually "shows how effective the divine deception had been."[267] The deception worked despite the truth being revealed as such. One way or another, the result was that Ahab perished. He ended up siding with the four hundred false prophets. The truth had been revealed, but he rejected it. He chose to ignore the truth and believe the lie that had been presented to him.

Although it might be argued as to what extent Ahab was deceived, it cannot be denied that deceit was used. Nor can it be denied that the LORD asked and even commanded a spirit to entice Ahab into his own defeat. Harris confirms the deceit, saying, "In this episode God commissioned the spirit, either holy or evil, to deceive, something not normally associated with the God who cannot lie (Heb 6:18)."[268] The LORD asked and commanded a spirit to deceive Ahab so that he would receive his due punishment. From this it can be said that God used deceit in judgment against Ahab. Furthermore, the spirit itself which God selected to entice Ahab is twice called a "deceiving" or "lying" שֶׁקֶר spirit. It has already been shown how this word describes concepts of deceit. That God literally commands the lying spirit to "go and do it (צֵא וַעֲשֵׂה־כֵן)," that is, to go and cause the prophets to tell a lie, once again shows God's use of deceit.

In terms of what this indicates about God, questions certainly arise. Chisholm says that in these events it is "apparent that the Lord was the ultimate source of false prophecy. He instigated and authored the ruse."[269] God as the source of false prophecy? Is that even possible from the God of truth? Harris points out the importance of the specific details of the events:

> First, it is difficult to call God a liar or deceiver when He announced *before* Ahab went to battle that a deceiving spirit had been placed in the mouths of all his prophets and that certain defeat awaited Ahab. Second, God sent a spirit to counsel Ahab to take the wrong course of action Ahab had already decided to take. God did not lure Ahab into sin, nor did God entice him to change his intentions. Simply put, God did not lead Ahab into sin. Ahab had already determined what he intended do; he was simply looking for religious

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[267] Chisholm, "Does God Deceive?" 16.
[268] Harris, 79.
[269] Chisholm, "Does God Deceive?" 14.

permission to pursue his own course of action, and even that permission came only because of the request of Jehoshaphat. Nothing—including God's specific revelation whereby He had proclaimed disaster against Ahab (22:23, 28)— would deter him.[270]

Yet, he does note, "Ironically, God then used 'other truth' Ahab had chosen as a means of judgment against him."[271] How fitting is it that God used the false prophets of whom Ahab inquired, to deliver a false prophecy that would lead to Ahab's own judgment? Harris' statement acknowledges the reason God sent a deceiving spirit to entice the prophets, it was a means of judgment against Ahab.

Furthermore, is it surprising that God worked in this way against Ahab? The Bible describes Ahab repeatedly in extremely negative ways. The author of 1 Kings says of him:

> Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him. He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him (1 Ki 16:30-33).

Again he says of Ahab, "(There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the LORD drove out before Israel.)" (1 Ki 25-26). The depth of Ahab's rebellion and rejection of the truth resulted in the measures of deception used by God to withhold the truth from him.

In the account, the fact that a lying spirit was sent by God shows that it is another example of righteous deceit. It can be seen clearly that God used deceit to accomplish his will, in this case, the judgment of Ahab. Given that this account has also been recorded in the Bible, it also serves as a hard warning of the extent to which God goes to punish sin and rebellion. It is a warning to lead us to repentance. Thus it serves the dual purpose of judgment and warning.

Isaiah 19:13-14 – A Spirit of Dizziness (Judgment/Warning)

Isaiah's prophecy against Egypt is another example of righteous deceit used as a judgment/warning. In the prophecy, Isaiah declares all of the harsh things that will happen to Egypt. He speaks against their idols, that they will be stirred up against each other, and he says

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[270] Harris, 81.
[271] Ibid.

that their officials are fools. He then declares again, "The officials of Zoan have become fools, the leaders of Memphis are deceived (נִשְּׁאוּ); the cornerstones of her peoples have led Egypt astray. The Lord has poured into them a spirit of dizziness (עִוְעִים); they make Egypt stagger in all that she does, as a drunkard staggers around in his vomit" (Isa 19:13,14). נִשְּׁאוּ from the verb נָשָׁא means "beguile, deceive."[272] עִוְעִים meaning, "distorting, warping," is the only occurrence of this noun in the Bible, but comes from the verb עָוָה meaning "bend, twist."[273] There is however no direct indication in this verse as to who is deceiving them or if they are deceiving themselves. They are simply deceived. Verse 11 however, refers to the "senseless advice" of the "wise counselors of Pharaoh" (Is 19:11) indicating that the leaders are deceived by the senseless advice given.

The question then is, what is this "spirit of dizziness?" that results in this senseless advice. Keil and Delitzsch call it a "spirit of giddiness" and a "giddiness of intoxication" that is poured out on them for the purpose of judgment, also calling it a "a spirit of judgment."[274] Luther also speaks of the same thing, calling it a *"spirit of confusion."*[275] He says, "He [the Lord] has poured it in. This is the course of their deception by the Lord, namely, it has been done."[276] Luther thus attributes the deception in the previous verse to God. Chisholm does the same saying, "Then verse 14 connects this deception to the Lord, who had 'poured into them a spirit of dizziness.'"[277] Like Keil and Delitzsch, Chisholm identifies this as the Lord's judgment, "As in most if not all the instances of divine deception already discussed, God's deceiving work is an aspect of His judgment on a sinful object of His displeasure."[278] By connecting the Lord's pouring out a spirit of judgment in verse 14 to the deception referred to verse 13, it shows that the deception of the Egyptians to a certain extent is indeed coming from God. Because the Lord is clearly the source of the "spirit of dizziness" which caused the deception in the previous verse, this is another example of God using righteous deceit in judgment.

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[272] Brown et al., *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 674.
[273] Ibid., 730.
[274] Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 235.
[275] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 16: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 16 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 162. Emphasis theirs.
[276] Ibid.
[277] Chisholm, "Does God Deceive?" 25.
[278] Ibid.

Ezekiel 14:1-11 – "I, the LORD, Have Enticed that Prophet" (Judgment/Warning)

This account from Ezekiel is somewhat similar to the Ahab account from 1 Kings 22 in that it also "associates God with deception as a means of judgment."[279] In the account, elders have come to Ezekiel to inquire of the LORD, but they had set up idols in their hearts. The LORD says to Ezekiel to tell the idolaters the following: "When any of the Israelites set up idols in their hearts and put a wicked stumbling block before their faces and then go to a prophet, I the LORD will answer them myself in keeping with their great idolatry" (Eze 14:4). This is an important point in regards to how God judges. He will answer them "in keeping with their great idolatry." It seems to indicate that the method of God's judgment may differ according to the sin. God then says that he will do this in order that they might turn away from the idols and turn to him. God explains that in this situation, he will answer them himself:

> When any of the Israelites or any foreigner residing in Israel separate themselves from me and set up idols in their hearts and put a wicked stumbling block before their faces and then go to a prophet to inquire of me, I the LORD will answer them myself. I will set my face against them and make them an example and a byword. I will remove them from my people. Then you will know that I am the LORD. (Eze 14:7,8)

What God says to Ezekiel next is most applicable to the topic of deceit. He says, "'And if the prophet is enticed (יְפֻתֶּה) to utter a prophecy, I the LORD have enticed (פִּתֵּיתִי) that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and destroy him from among my people Israel. They will bear their guilt—the prophet will be as guilty as the one who consults him" (Eze 14:9,10). The LORD concludes by saying that then the people will no longer stray from him and he will be their God.

There are multiple parties in this account that make it somewhat complex. First there are the idolaters who are inquiring of a prophet. God says he will answer them in keeping with their idolatry. One of the possibilities is that his answer to them will be in the form of a false prophecy. This happens when "the prophet is enticed to utter a prophecy." Then there is the prophet himself, who may be enticed by the Lord to utter a prophecy and will be destroyed by the Lord as a result. It seems that there is deception against both the inquiring idolaters, as well as the prophet who is enticed.

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[279] Ibid.

In terms of the Lord enticing the prophet, the same root word as in the previous 1 Kings 22 passage is also used here in Ezekiel פָּתָה. It once again is in the Piel form. As before, it contains an aspect of deceit or beguiling. The Lexham Theological Wordbook agrees, stating that "In the Piel stem, however, it can mean to persuade someone by enticing or deceiving them."[280] Deception is clearly present, but is it righteous?

As in 1 Kings, this is a clear example of God using deceit. Harris sees many similarities in this and the 1 Kings account, "While particular circumstances differ in this account, the overall framework is virtually identical to that of 1 Kings 22, as are many of the same questions."[281] Cooper also sees this connection, "This verse clearly states that the deception of these false prophets was allowed by and even encouraged by God as a part of the judgment process. A similar judgment was mentioned, for example (1 Kgs 22:23), against the false prophets who misinformed Ahab."[282] Keil and Delitzsch also agree, and do so with such certainty that they correct early church fathers and theologians:

> The Fathers and earlier Lutheran theologians are wrong in their interpretation of פִּתֵּיתִי, which they understand in a permissive sense, meaning simply that God allowed it, and did not prevent their being seduced. Still more wrong are Storr and Schmieder, the former of whom regards it as simply declaratory, "I will declare him to have gone astray from the worship of Jehovah;" the latter, "I will show him to be a fool, by punishing him for his disobedience." The words are rather to be understood in accordance with 1 Kings 22:20ff., where the persuading (*pittâh*) is done by a lying spirit, which inspires the prophets of Ahab to predict success to the king, in order that he may fall. As Jehovah sent the spirit in that case, and put it into the mouth of the prophets, so is the persuasion in this instance also effected by God: not merely divine permission, but divine ordination and arrangement; though this does not destroy human freedom, but, like all "persuading," presupposes the possibility of not allowing himself to be persuaded.[283]

God is explicitly the subject of the enticement in this passage. This passage also expands the way God uses deceit:

> Such a pronouncement against both inquirer and false prophet merely expands the pronouncement of God previously made in singling out Ahab for destruction; the core

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[280] Francesco Bianchi, "Deception," ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

[281] Harris, 81.

[282] Lamar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel*, vol. 17, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 160–161.

[283] Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 9 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 104–105.

issues are identical. When a false prophet is enticed into compromising with idolaters, the LORD will deceive him as a means of judgment. Instead of light, those who aligned themselves with evil would receive darkness; instead of life they would choose death.[284]

It is clear that God uses deceit for judgment. Yet there is also another reason besides judgment for the enticing that is also explained in the account. God also uses it as a warning. The next verse says, "Then (לְמַעַן) the people of Israel will no longer stray from me, nor will they defile themselves anymore with all their sins. They will be my people, and I will be their God, declares the Sovereign LORD'" (Eze 14:11). According to Note 1 in BDB's entry, "לְמַעַן is always *in order that*, never merely *so that.*"[285] לְמַעַן therefore gives the purpose for the act of judgment. It is so that Israel will no longer stray. Not only are the false prophets and idolaters no longer able to tempt the rest of the people, but it also warns them against what can happen to them if they do turn to idolatry. Chisholm indicates there is another possibility as well in addition to deceit's use as a judgment or warning. He indicates that it could also be an example of "divine testing."[286] It could be that "God tested the prophet to see if the prophet would remain true to his calling."[287] Regardless of the use, God is still clearly the one speaking as the subject of the 1st person verb פִּתֵּיתִי.

God's use of deceit once again must be righteous because It is used to judge the prophet and the idolater who consults him, but it is also used as a warning to turn the people back to him.

2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 – God sends a Powerful Delusion (Judgment/Warning)

The topic of this much weightier account from 2 Thessalonians is the Antichrist. Paul has communicated to the Thessalonians that they should not be deceived by false prophecies from anyone "asserting that the day of the Lord has already come" (2 Th 2:2). He knows that this is the case because the "day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed" (2 Th 2:3). Paul then goes on to describe different aspects about the man of lawlessness, that he will rise up, but be overthrown on the last day, and that he will work as Satan works. Paul then says, "He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie (ψεύδους), and all the ways that wickedness deceives [lit. and in every deception (ἀπάτη) of unrighteousness to] those who are perishing" (2 Th 2:9,10). Notice that the

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[284] Harris, 83.
[285] Brown et al., *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 775.
[286] Chisholm, "Does God Deceive?" 24.
[287] Ibid.

man of lawlessness is characterized by lying and deceit. His power and signs serve the lie and deceit against those who are perishing. Of course, this is how the Antichrist works against God and against the truth, but the next verse is even more striking.

Paul says in verses 11 and 12, "For this reason God sends (πέμπει) them a powerful delusion (ἐνέργειαν πλάνης) so that they will believe the lie (τῷ ψεύδει) and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness" (2 Th 2:11,12). Harris notes, "A striking aspect is the linking of the same word used elsewhere for satanic deception (*planao*) with a work of God. In fact, with the exception of 2 Thess 2:11, every other Scripture predicting tribulational deception attributes the deception to Satan and his agents."[288] This is therefore possibly the clearest case in which God uses righteous deceit as a judgment. Yet Harris also notes, "To associate God with any form of deception is unusual; one should approach this verse cautiously."[289] Caution noted. The verb πέμπει from πέμπω is active and means "to dispatch someone, whether human or transcendent being, usually for purposes of communication, *send.*"[290] God is clearly the subject of the sending, and is therefore sending an ἐνέργειαν πλάνης. This is literally a "working of deceit." ἐνέργειαν is from the noun ἐνέργεια meaning, "the state or quality of being active, *working, operation, action.*"[291] πλάνης is from πλάνη, one of the more common words for deceit in the New Testament, meaning, "wandering fr. the path of truth, *error, delusion, deceit, deception.*"[292]

What is this working of deception? Martin describes the two options as follows:

> This "powerful delusion" may be understood in two ways. It is most commonly taken as a new element in the passage, a revelation that God, in the last days, will actively confuse the reasoning of the lost and guarantee their condemnation. Thus the delusion sent by God represents some sort of mental and spiritual confusion that prevents the lost from recognizing the truth as truth, changing their minds, and being saved as a result. It is also possible, however, to see the "powerful delusion" as a reference to the coming of the lawless one. In Paul's sentence it is not "delusion" *(planēs)* but *energian* (translated "work" in v. 9 but used in v. 11 as an adjective, "powerful") that is the object of the verb

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[288] Harris, 75.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 794. Emphasis theirs.
[291] Ibid., 335.
[292] Ibid., 822.

"sends." *Planēs* ("of error") is a genitive modifying "work." Thus the phrase *(energeian planēs)* indicates that God sends to those who have rejected the truth a "work of error."[293]

Harris argues against the second option:

> So while *energeia* may be a component of Antichrist's deceptive works, it is not synonymous with him. Finally, that *energeian planēs* cannot refer to a person is evident when Paul describes the man of lawlessness in 2 Thess 2:9 as coming "in accord with the activity of Satan" (*energeian tou Satana*). Paul employed the same word to describe what God sends in 2:11. A person is not in view in 2:9; no hermeneutical grounds give reason to switch to a person two verses later.[294]

He then sides with the first option:

> In light of those considerations, the *energeian planēs* sent by God appears to be God's creating the environment by which evil can manifest itself to its fullest capacity, allowing satanic power and works of such magnitude as not previously permitted by God. The *energeian planēs* may be similar to God expanding Satan's realm of operation under Job, but with an intensified form beyond this because of factors related to the word *energeia* and the impossibility of survival unless God limits its duration (Matt 24:21-22).[295]

Green sides with the first option, answering that it is a "confusion," which prevents them from distinguishing the truth and the lie.[296] Gordon Fee shows his agreement as well in his explanation of the verses:

> That is, what they receive from God is a delusion of such power that they will believe in what is utterly false. And this is not about just any falsehood, but *the* lie, the ultimate falsehood generated by the Evil One, that has caused them to reject the one and only God, who has been revealed in his Son, the savior of the world.[297]

In either case it is clear, God is the subject of the sending in this verse. He works in an active way.

The purpose of this sending is also clear, "so that (εἰς) they will believe the lie" (2 Th 2:11). In this case, εἰς may denote the result or purpose of an action, but given the next phrase it seems to denote purpose. The sending is therefore for the purpose of them believing the lie. Again it says "so that (ἵνα) all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have

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[293] D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 33, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 248–249.

[294] Harris, 90.

[295] Ibid., 92.

[296] Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos, 2002), 323.

[297] Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 295.

delighted in wickedness" (2 Th 2:12). ἵνα plus the subjunctive is a "marker to denote purpose, aim, or goal, *in order that, that,* final sense".[298] God's active role in the condemnation of those who have rejected the truth cannot be denied. It is a striking statement of God's judgment. Fee notes the difficulty that some have had with this passage and then explains it accordingly:

> Some have had theological difficulty with this clause—that God should be involved in what is otherwise evil. But this is an expression of divine judgment on those who have refused God's mercy. That the judgment in this case is temporal is simply incidental to the present point.[299]

Harris agrees as well, "Not only will God not hinder or limit his [the man of lawlessness] earthly realm of operation, but He will also 'energize' the deception so as to extend it beyond any human explanation and cause the entire world to marvel."[300] The point is clear, those who reject the truth risk having the truth taken away from them and a delusion sent in its place, causing them to believe the lie.

Although the majority of the references to the Antichrist in Scripture emphasizes Satan's and fallen man's role, in these verses it is clear that God has a role as well. God sends a working of deceit that results in those who have rejected, to believe the lie. God is the sender which makes it apparent that this is another righteous use of deceit. Why does he use deceit? Harris emphasizes that it is for judgment, "The *energeian planes* will confer judgment on those who do not believe the truth, but take pleasure in wickedness, and the wickedness in which they will take pleasure will ultimately become an avenue of their judgment."[301] Yet Harris also notes that God's judgment will be upon those who have been exposed to the gospel, "The recipients of the *energeian planes* will know at least the content of the Gospel."[302] In other words, just as indicated in 1 Kings 22 and Ezekiel 14, righteous deceit is used in judgment upon those who have rebelled by rejecting the truth and embracing what is false.

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[298] Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 475.
[299] Fee, 295.
[300] Harris, 92.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid.

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Jeremiah 4:10 – Jeremiah Accuses God of Deceit (Possible Judgment/Warning)

Jeremiah had a ministry of judgment, often against his own people. Jeremiah's exclamation comes in a section where the entire focus is "on the disaster that is coming upon the rebellious people."[303] In the verses immediately preceding, he has been told to prophecy against Judah that the Lord is "bringing disaster from the north, even terrible destruction" (Jer 4:6). He goes on to describe the ruin and destruction that will come upon them. In response, Jeremiah exclaims, "Alas, Sovereign LORD! How completely you have deceived (הַשֵּׁא הִשֵּׁאתָ) this people and Jerusalem by saying, 'You will have peace,' when the sword is at our throats!" (Jer 4:10). הַשֵּׁא הִשֵּׁאתָ are different forms of the same verb, נָשָׁא, which means, "beguile, deceive."[304] The construction of an infinitive absolute followed by a verb heightens the extent of the verb. In this case the translators of the NIV determined that it most likely means a complete kind of deceiving. Jeremiah is certainly accusing God of deceit. The question is, was that accusation warranted? Did God deceive in this case?

Chisholm states that although God clearly deceives in other accounts, in this account he is not:

> Based on 1 Kings 22, it would not be correct to say to Jeremiah, "You should not accuse God of deception, because He would never do such a thing." Rather, a theologically perceptive response would be, "Jeremiah, it is true that God sometimes deceives prophets, but He is not doing that in your case. You stood in the heavenly assembly and were commissioned to preach your message. Your message is consistent with the covenant principle that sin will be punished. Judah is sinful and God's punishment is coming."[305]

Keil and Delitzsch reflect this idea, also connecting it to the 1 Kings account:

> The deception of the people by such discourse from the false prophets is referred back to God: "Lord, Thou hast deceived," inasmuch as God not only permits these lying spirits to appear and work, but has ordained them and brought them forth for the hardening of the people's heart; as He once caused the spirit of prophecy to inspire as a lying spirit the

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[303] F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, vol. 16, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 80.

[304] Brown et al., *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 674.

[305] Chisholm, "Does God Deceive?" 17-18.

prophets of Ahab, so that by promises of victory they prevailed upon him to march to that war in which, as a punishment for his godlessness, he was to perish; 1 King 22:20–23.[306]

They see God's righteous deceit being used to harden the hearts of the rebellious according to God's judgment. Gosdeck emphasizes that the judgment which was coming on the people was a result of the fact that they ignored the many warnings that had been given to them:

> Because the nation chose to ignore all the warnings it had received, the Lord's judgment would catch the whole nation by surprise. Many prophets, Jeremiah chief among them, had predicted the coming judgment. Despite the warnings, the leaders and people of Judah had chosen to believe the wispy peace the false prophets had promised. This too was part of the Lord's judgment; he let his stubborn people believe the lie.[307]

They chose the false prophets over the truth. In this way, they deceived themselves, which God rewarded by deceiving them further sealing them in judgment.

Although there are clear instances in which God uses righteous deceit for judgment, which thus serves as a warning to others, because it is an accusation in this case, it is not completely certain that this is a case of righteous deceit. However, as noted by the commentators, it certainly fits the category of righteous deceit in judgment as established by other more certain examples.

Revelation 20 – Satan Released to Deceive (Possible Judgment)

These verses about the end of the world have another possible use of righteous deceit used for judgment. John record the vision he sees:

> And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time (Rev 20:1-3).

The thousand years represents the current New Testament era. Jesus defeated the Devil at the cross and bound him, to keep him from deceiving the nations, doing that which is according to his nature. Then, in reference to the short time that he must be set free, "Satan will be released (λυθήσεται) from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them for battle (Rev 20:7,8). This will happen at the end

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[306] Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 8 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 69.
[307] Gosdeck, 32.

of the thousand years, but before the Devil and his army of followers are defeated one final time as John says, "But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever." In this account Satan is clearly the deceiver. However, Satan does not escape, he is clearly released. As Jesus is the one who bound him, Jesus is the one who releases him. Satan thus does what he always does, goes out "to deceive the nations" and to "gather them for battle." Is God the one doing the deceiving? No, it is clearly Satan. But it was certainly allowed by God and it is clearly used as a means to judge the unbelievers. This account is perhaps not so different from other cases in which God uses deceit. Deceit is used according to God's alien work of judgment, pronounced on those who have rejected him and believed the lie. This account also serves as a strong warning about what will happen at the end of the world.

APPENDIX E – RIGHTEOUS DECEIT IN TEACHING/TESTING

Genesis 22 – God Tests Abraham; Abraham Conceals his Plan (Teaching/Testing)

God's test of Abraham is perhaps the most well-known test in the Bible. The context needed for this account is the promise God made to Abraham about Isaac. God said to Abraham, "your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him" (Ge 17:19). God clearly indicates that the covenant would be established with Isaac and Isaac's descendants.

Years later, after Isaac had reached boyhood, God tested Abraham saying, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you" (Ge 22:2). Abraham did what the Lord had commanded. He took Isaac to the mountain and when they were near, "He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you" (Ge 22:5). When the two proceeded alone, Isaac asked his father, "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" (Ge 22:7). Abraham then answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son" (Ge 22:8). After they arrived, the account continues:

> Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." (Ge 22:9-12).

Thus God prevented Abraham from sacrificing his son. He then provided a ram to sacrifice as a burnt offering instead of his son.

First, one can analyze God's test itself. God told Abraham to do what seemed to be contrary to his promise. He told him to sacrifice his son, but God also had told him that the covenant would be established for Isaac and Isaac's descendants. Indeed, these two words from God do seem to conflict. Luther writes,

> Here God is clearly contradicting Himself; for how do these statements agree: "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named" (Gen. 21:12) and "Take your son, and sacrifice him"? He does not say that some bandit would come and secretly carry off his son; for in that case Abraham could have continued to have hope concerning the life and return of

his son. But he himself is commanded to do the slaying, evidently in order that he may have no doubt that Isaac has actually been killed.[308]

Abraham certainly may have been confused as to why God would command something that seemed contrary to one of his promises. Luther then speaks of Abraham's faith:

> I have stated what Abraham's trial was, namely, the contradiction of the promise. Therefore his faith shines forth with special clarity in this passage, inasmuch as he obeys God with such a ready heart when He gives him the command. And although Isaac has to be sacrificed, he nevertheless has no doubt whatever that the promise will be fulfilled, even if he does not know the manner of its fulfillment. Yet he is also alarmed and terrified. For what else could the father do? Nevertheless, he clings to the promise that at some time Isaac will have descendants.[309]

Although, Abraham may not have understood how God would keep his promise, he still trusted that God would keep his promise.

As far as whether this is an example of the righteous use of deceit, the most that could be said is that Abraham did not necessarily know that he was being tested. He did not know that God would prevent him from sacrificing his son, otherwise it would not have been a real test. However, Abraham was certainly not deceived into thinking that his son would not survive. Abraham trusted that God would somehow keep his promise that he had made about Isaac.

Abraham's statements to his servants and to his son should also be examined. He told his servants both he and Isaac would return even though he was planning to sacrifice his son. Again, he told his son that the Lord would provide a lamb even though he was planning on sacrificing Isaac. These cannot really be called lies because they were proved to be true. In fact, it seems that they reflect Abraham's trust that God would somehow keep his promise about Isaac so that they would somehow return. However, in a sense, Abraham did conceal his intention to sacrifice his son Isaac through these statements, even though he also believed that they would return. By using such statements, Abraham hid his intention of following God's command. Thus these statements in a sense deceived the servants and even Isaac in that they were kept from knowing Abraham's plan. Had they known, it can certainly be conceived that they might have tried to prevent Abraham's action. Luther agrees in regards to the servants:

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[308] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 4: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, 92.
[309] Ibid., 95.

> If the slaves had been present, they would not have allowed the father to do what he intended; or they would have suspected that he was out of his mind. But if they had been unable to prevent him, they would nevertheless have shouted aloud, and by closing their eyes they would have avoided seeing so great a crime.[310]

Also regarding Abraham's statement to Isaac, Luther says, "Abraham does not want to torment his son with a long torture and trial. Therefore he does not yet disclose that Isaac himself must die."[311] Thus, Luther indicates that Abraham is concealing the truth for Isaac's sake. In both cases, it seems that Abraham was doing what he thought he had to do to follow God's command. However, in this case, the text does not say specifically whether these specific deceitful aspects of Abraham's act were righteous in and of themselves, nor does it indicate that the deceitful acts were necessarily an inherent part of Abraham's obedience to the Lord's command.

Matthew 15:21-28 – Jesus Tests the Canaanite Woman (Teaching/Testing)

The next account from Matthew 15 is lighter in tone, but has a similar emphasis. When Jesus withdrew to Tyre and Sidon, a Canaanite woman came to him and begged him to heal her daughter. When this happened, "Jesus did not answer a word" (Mt 15:23). He not only did not respond to her verbally, but it seems as though he completely ignored her based on the disciples' response. The text reads, "So his disciples came to him and urged him, 'Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us'" (Mt 15:23). He does not answer her until she comes right up to him and begs for his help. Jesus' behavior seems rather strange. The context indicates that Jesus is clearly aware of her, yet he acts as if he is not.

Because Jesus is the subject of the potential deceit in this account, one only has to identify whether Jesus is acting deceitful to identify this as being righteous deceit. In short, the answer is yes, it does seem to be deceitful. Jesus acts as if he does not hear her, even though it seems very evident that he does. This is also shown by what he says to the woman when she again asks for help. He responds, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs," making it seem as though he will not help her based on who she is, a Canaanite woman (Mt 15:26). The woman then boldly replies, "'Yes it is, Lord,' (…) 'Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table'" (Mt 15:27). Jesus then changes his tone toward her when he replies, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted" (Mt 15:28).

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[310] Ibid., 110.
[311] Ibid., 112.

What is Jesus doing in this account? Why does it seem like he was putting on an act? A possible answer is that it is combination of testing and teaching. By acting as though he did not hear her, he put an obstacle in the woman's way to test if she truly believed what she was saying. If she truly believed that Jesus could heal her daughter, then she would certainly persist. When she reaches Jesus and confronts him again, his reply once again tests her faith.[312] Is what Jesus offers something that is only for a certain, specific people, the Jews, the children of Israel? Or is it for all people? Once again she shows her faith in her answer, "Yes it is, Lord." Her faith had been tested and approved. Jesus' response, "You have great faith," confirms it.

Not only was the woman tested, but might this also have been done in front of everyone present, especially the disciples, for a reason? Might it have been a lesson for them as well? Jesus may have been playing into some of the preconceived notions they had about Canaanites or even women in general. Maybe Jesus did not have time for her. Maybe she should be ignored. Is it possible that these were thoughts lurking in the minds of the disciples? The surprising and impactful way that Jesus eventually showed the truth to the woman, as well as the disciples, drove the lesson he was teaching, deep into their hearts and minds. If it is indeed true that Jesus withheld his true intentions for a time, a form of deceit, it seems that he did so only to test the woman and to teach a striking and memorable lesson to those who were present. This account therefore demonstrates the use of righteous deceit in situations of testing and teaching. Once again, it is important to note that in the end, Jesus does reveal the truth.

POSSIBLE RIGHTEOUS DECEIT IN TEACHING/TESTING

Genesis 42-45 – Joseph Tests his Brothers (Possible Testing/Teaching)

The account between Joseph and his brothers has a number of deceitful actions. Joseph's brothers, who had sold Joseph into slavery years before, were driven to Egypt to find food. When they arrived, Joseph, the one in charge of all of Egypt, second to only Pharaoh, recognized them immediately. However, Joseph's brothers did not recognize him. In Genesis 42, it says, "he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them" (Ge 42:7). He then accuses them of being

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[312] Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 11:2–20:34*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 787. On this point Gibbs agrees expressing about Jesus, "Now Jesus wants to know this: does the Canaanite woman *really* know who he is, or are the things that have come out of her mouth ("have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David") just words and no more?"

spies, even though he knows they are not, and throws them into prison. Joseph listens in on their conversation without them knowing and then has Simeon bound, so that he would remain in Egypt while they return to their father. He then returns their money to their sacks and allows them to leave, making it appear to them as though they had stolen the grain. Later, when they returned for more food a second time, Joseph once again keeps his identity a secret. He fills up their sacks with food, and again returns the money to them without their knowledge. This time, however, he also puts a royal cup in Benjamin's sack to make it appear as though he had stolen it.

Joseph lied without words multiple times throughout his interaction with his brothers. He allowed them to have a false understanding of who he was. He intentionally kept his true identity a secret and twice deceived them by hiding the truth from them about the money he had returned to them. In the end however, Joseph did reveal himself to his brothers and they were relieved. He forgave them and was able to provide for his entire family for the remainder of the famine.

Joseph was seeking to identify if his brothers had changed from the time when they had sold him into slavery. He used deceit to identify that indeed their attitudes had changed. This account between Joseph and his brothers brings up the question about whether it is ever permissible to deceive someone in the short term while planning to reveal the truth to them in the long run, and whether it is permissible to deceive someone in order to find out the truth of a matter for oneself.

As with many of these descriptive accounts, Joseph's deceitful actions are neither explicitly condoned nor forbidden.

Luke 2:41-51 – The Boy, Jesus, at the Temple (Possible Teaching/Testing)

In this account, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph go to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. Jesus was only twelve years old at the time. After the festival, his parents left without him, not realizing he was not with their group. After they realized Jesus was not with them, they returned to Jerusalem and searched for him until they found him in the temple after three days. Mary asked Jesus "Why have you treated us like this?" (Lk 2:48). Jesus responds, "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Lk 2:49) Luke then records Jesus' parent's confusion, "But they did not understand what he was saying to them" (Lk 2:50).

Although it is true that Mary and Joseph did not know the truth as to where Jesus was, there is simply not enough information given by Luke to know what exactly went on to cause Mary and Joseph to leave Jesus behind. It seems as though it was simply a misconception or miscommunication. They thought he was with them, even though, according to Jesus, they should have known that he was in the temple. Without any more information given, it cannot be said that any deceit was used, much less righteous deceit.

However, one might wonder if it is possible for Jesus, who is true God, to have had some form of miscommunication. Given that he is perfect, however it happened, deceitful or not, it would not have been unrighteous. To what extent Jesus may have been using his divine omniscience in this account also muddies the waters. What may have been happening, was that Jesus was using this moment as a teachable moment. He was reminding his parents who his true Father was and what was the extent of his true mission on earth. It was truly a memorable and impactful lesson, as Mary "treasured all these things in her heart" (Lk 2:51).

Although there is not enough information to identify this as a righteous deceit account, it would fit the category of righteous deceit used for teaching.

Matthew 6:1-6 – Keep Prayers and Offerings Secret (Privacy)

As part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns against doing good works in front of others. He says, "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Mt 6:1). If one does good works seeking the fame or good reputation that it might bring from witnesses, the pure selfless motivation that God desires in a good work is taken away. Thus whatever is done is no longer a good work. Jesus then elaborates with two specific examples.

The first is example that Jesus gives is concerning offerings. He emphasizes that they should be given in secret:

> So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret (τῷ κρυπτῷ). Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret (τῷ κρυπτῷ), will reward you. (Mt 6:2-4).

The dative κρυπτῷ, from the adjective, κρυπτός, means "pert[aining] to being unknown because of being kept secret, *hidden, secret.*"[313] Here Jesus clearly advocates that one should hide their offerings. If one were to give offerings publicly rather than privately, the temptation to give for selfish reasons would increase. If one were to fall into that temptation, he would be guilty of hypocrisy, acting as if he is giving money selflessly to God, but in reality giving money selfishly to reap the praise of others. This would be a use of righteous deceit that fits very well under the category of privacy. It protects one's pure and selfless motivation for giving.

The second example Jesus gives is similar. He says using the same word for secret:

> And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen (τῷ κρυπτῷ). Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret (τῷ κρυπτῷ), will reward you (Mt 6:5,6).

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[313] Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 570. Emphasis theirs.

Again, Jesus is guarding against hypocrisy by advocating prayer in secret. Due to the fact that Jesus is advocating that one should conceal what he is doing in order to protect his worship life, between him and God, this is another example of righteous deceit used for privacy.

Matthew 6:16-18 – Keep Fasting a Secret (Privacy)

Later in Matthew 6, Jesus' words provide another example of righteous deceit in the New Testament. Jesus, in the process of giving the Sermon on the Mount, says a few words about fasting:

> When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Mt 6:16-18)

Jesus tells those who fast to hide the fact that they are fasting from the world, to make it appear as though they are not fasting. How should they accomplish this? By applying oil and washing their faces.

Some have explained that Jesus is telling those who fast to basically apply "makeup" in order to prevent others from knowing.[314] This is probably not the case. What is more likely is that, according to Gibbs, "Jesus' direction to "anoint your head and wash your face" should be understood to refer to normal grooming practices."[315] Gibbs continues by explaining that "His whole point is that no one should be able to tell that anything different is happening."[316] Either way, however, the result is the same. Jesus condones acting in such a way as to hide the truth about one's fasting, a clear form of deceit.

Because Jesus is the one telling those who fast to hide the truth about their fasting, this must be another case of righteous deceit. Jesus is indicating that there are certain things that are better kept private than to be displayed completely to the public. Whether or not one is fasting is not information that has to be conveyed explicitly and transparently. In fact, because it can affect one's own motivation for fasting, Jesus says that it is even better to actively keep it a secret, so that only God knows. From this account, it is demonstrated that certain kinds of information

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[314] Copan and McQuilkin, 509.
[315] Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1,* Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2006) 349.
[316] Ibid., 349.

about oneself is better kept private than made public for all to see, especially when it can affect oneself spiritually.

Jesus' warning against hypocritical behavior adds an interesting slant to the situation. A hypocrite is one who outwardly acts one way while inwardly thinks another. On the one hand, what Jesus is telling the disciples to do could be seen as hypocrisy, to act as if one is not fasting while one is actually fasting. In this case, how one's appearance aligns with reality is inconsistent. Yet this is the opposite of Jesus' point. The real hypocrisy came from those who were acting outwardly in a way that was consistent with the fact that they were fasting. The problem was that fasting was something that should be between them and God, rather than a way to create pious reputations for themselves. This account illustrates that what is considered true about a situation is not always easy to pin down.

POSSIBLE RIGHTEOUS DECEIT FOR PRIVACY

John 12:36 – Jesus Hides from the Crowd (Possible Privacy)

Later in John, after Jesus predicts his own death, he hides, "When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid (ἐκρύβη) himself from them" (Jn 12:36). ἐκρύβη is the aorist passive form of κρύπτω, which means "to keep from being seen, *hide*."[317] In this account there is nothing in the text that says Jesus was in danger. Rather the reason he hid may have been more to avoid the crowd so that he might rest and recover. Although it cannot be stated with certainty why Jesus hid, it seems likely that Jesus hid for the sake of privacy, due to the fact that nothing else is indicated. In any case, the crowd was prevented from knowing where he was and was thus deceived. This is thus another possible example in which Jesus used righteous deceit to maintain his privacy.

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[317] Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 571. Emphasis theirs.

APPENDIX G – RIGHTEOUS DECEIT IN MULTIPLE CATEGORIES

Joshua 2,6 – Rahab's Lie (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25) (War/Safety)

      Joshua chapter 2 also records another case of righteous deceit. The two spies that had been secretly sent into Jericho were somehow discovered by the king to be at Rahab, the prostitute's, house. Rahab had hidden them under stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof. When Rahab was told to bring out the men because they were spies, she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, they left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them" (Jos 2:4,5). She explicitly lied to those in pursuit of the spies, sending them away while the spies were hidden on her roof, and it worked. Those pursuing the spies left. She then speaks to the spies and tells them how she had heard about the Israelites' previous victories and proclaims that "the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below" (Jos 2:11). It is also made clear that she spared the lives of the spies when they agree to keep her safe saying, "Our lives for your lives!" (Jos 2:14). The spies return safely to the Israelites and when they proceed to conquer Jericho, the lives of Rahab and her family are spared.

      Rahab told a lie with false words. She deceived the king and the messengers by sending them in another direction. In doing so, the spies acknowledged that she saved their lives and spared her and her families' lives in return. She clearly uses deceit to accomplish this.

      Rahab's clear use of deceit is also clearly righteous. According to Joshua 6, Joshua says to spare her life "because (כִּי) she hid (הֶחְבָּאתָה) the spies we sent" (Josh 6:17). Again in chapter 6, it is said that she was spared "because (כִּי) she hid (הֶחְבִּיאָה) the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho" (Jos 6:25). Both הֶחְבָּאתָה and הֶחְבִּיאָה are Hifil feminine forms of the verb חָבָא meaning "withdraw, hide."[318] The use of this verb in the Hifil form is transitive.[319] Rahab actively hid the spies. Furthermore, the Hifil form can also have the sense of "to keep hidden."[320] This verb "in twenty-five of its thirty occurrences, refers to people hiding in fear of death."[321] Rahab's life was spared because she hid and even kept the spies hidden. She achieved this by lying. Had she not

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[318] Brown et al., *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 285.
[319] Carl Philip Weber, "588 חָבָא," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 257.
[320] Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 284.
[321] Weber, "588 חָבָא," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 257.

lied but instead had told the truth, she would not have kept the spies hidden, the very reason her life was spared. The lie is an integral aspect of the hiding of the spies. Even without the lie, she was still using deceit. She hid the spies in the roof so that others would not know the truth, that the spies were at her house. She dealt falsely not only by lying, but also by hiding the spies in the first place, effectively telling a lie without words.

The New Testament confirms this explicitly. In the "by faith" section of Hebrews, it says that "By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed (δεξαμένη) the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient" (Heb 11:31). According to this verse, Rahab's *not being killed because she welcomed the spies* was done by faith. δεξαμένη from δέχομαι means "to be receptive of someone, receive, welcome." It emphasizes "hospitality," to "welcome someone into one's house" or to "receive as a guest."[322] She welcomed them and treated them as guests by faith. Lying and sending the messengers away in the other direction was a critical aspect of her welcoming. Had she told the truth and the spies were caught, it could not be said that she welcomed the spies and treated them as one would treat a guest. This verse thus describes her act as an act of faith. She acted not based on what she saw, but based on the certainty of a future promise. Furthermore, the same verse separates her from those who were "disobedient," who were killed. She was not part of the disobedient, therefore she was part of the obedient.

Then, in James 2:25, James gives perhaps the most convincing proof of Rahab's righteous lie. In a section emphasizing how faith is demonstrated in action, James writes, "In the same way (ὁμοίως), was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous (ἐδικαιώθη) for what she did when she gave lodging (ὑποδεξαμένη) to the spies (τοὺς ἀγγέλους) and sent (ἐκβαλοῦσα) them off in a different direction?" (Jas 2:25). When James says, "in the same way" in verse 25, he is referring to Abraham's demonstration of faith in offering his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God according to God's command. His act of doing what the Lord commanded showed his faith and trust in the Lord. This is an apt comparison. James says ὁμοίως, "in the same way" Rahab's ὑποδεξαμένη "welcoming" and ἐκβαλοῦσα "sending away" τοὺς ἀγγέλους "the messengers" off in a different direction was a demonstration of her faith that showed her to be righteous. The *sending away in a different direction* is important. This includes her lie to the king's messengers. She sent them one way, she sent the spies the other way.

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[322] Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 221.

The comparison between Abraham's act of faith and Rahab's act of faith is also fitting, due to the nature of what they were asked to do. Abraham was told to sacrifice his son, to kill his son on an altar. This would have assaulted his natural knowledge of the law that puts a high value on life which would also be articulated in the Fifth Commandment. It would also have seemed contrary to God's promise to bless the world through Isaac's line. Yet Abraham had faith and trust in God and would have gone through with the sacrifice had God not stopped him because he had proved faithful. If God had not stopped Abraham, his sacrifice would have been righteous. Is it not similar with Rahab? She was faced with a situation in which she would have been torn. Her recognition of the value of truth would have been under assault by her situation, yet she knew that it was right to protect the spies. She thus lied to the king's messengers and saved the lives of the spies in faith, trusting in the Lord.

Mcquilkin and Copan agree with this analysis stating:

> Some have argued that Rahab was commended for her *faith*, not for her deceptive activity. Apart from the fact that all three of the relevant passages say explicitly that it was *because* of what she did that she was commended (Jas 2:25), how is it possible so to divorce faith and works? A dangerous theological notion with unending potential for mischief is introduced if one may deliberately do a sinful act for a good cause and be rewarded for her faith. If a person *sins*, should she not be *reprimanded* rather than *rewarded*—especially when the act is designed to save her own skin? No, Rahab acted in the faith that the God who was with Israel was mightier than the gods of Jericho, and she did the right thing—she sided with God's people and deceived through actions and words in what may properly be called an act of war. Others have argued that the hiding of the spies was acceptable but that she sinned when she spoke untrue words. But this is an inadmissible definition of the sin of deception and opens the door to all kinds of theological vagaries in which words are sacrosanct but actions are not.[323]

Luther agrees as well, though he calls Rahab's act an obliging lie, which he really does not believe is a lie at all:

> "Rahab's lie in Joshua 2:5 is similar. Accordingly, it is an obliging lie by which one has regard for the welfare and the good name of the body or the soul. On the other hand, a harmful lie attacks all these, just as an obliging lie defends them and is not properly called a lie (…) Therefore it is a respectable and pious lie and should rather be called a service of love.[324]

This author agrees with Luther's conclusion. Rahab's lie is thus an example of righteous deceit used in a time of war and to keep the spies safe. It was an act of faith.

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[323] Copan and McQuilkin, 510.
[324] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 5: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30*, 40.

The book of Job is a striking and fascinating account in which the reader is given a behind the scenes view of events that to Job are simply inexplicable. Beginning with a narrative, Job is described as being "blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1). After giving a description which characterizes Job as a righteous man, the scene shifts to a divine counsel scene in which Satan comes before the Lord. The Lord asks Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil" (Job 1:8). Satan then replies to God:

> "Does Job fear God for nothing?" (…) "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." (Job 1:10,11)

He insinuates that Job loves God only because of all the blessings he has received from God. God replies "Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger" (Job 1:12). Satan proceeds to destroy Job's life. His cattle were stolen, his sheep and servants were burned up and killed, and his children were found dead. After he heard all that had happened, Job "got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised" (Job 1:20,21). The next verse records, "In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing" (Job 1:22). Satan had been shown to be wrong, but he did not give up. He returns to the Lord and says, "'Skin for skin!' (…) 'A man will give all he has for his own life. But now stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face'" (Job 2:4,5). God thus allows Satan to afflict Job physically saying, "Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life" (Job 2:6). Satan proceeded to afflict him with sores on his entire body (Job 2:7). How did Job respond? When his wife told him to "'Curse God and die!' He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" (Job 2:9,10). Again the Bible records, "In all this, Job did not sin in what he said" (Job 2:10).

This is when the book of Job gets especially interesting. Job has multiple dialogues with three friends who try and comfort him unsuccessfully. They each try to blame Job as if there was some specific secret sin that he had committed to deserve all of his suffering. He justly maintains

that he has done nothing of the sort to deserve it. However, in these dialogues, as Job laments his situation, he accuses and questions God. He does this in two different ways. In summary, "God is cruel. God is unjust."[325] Job sees no justice or reason behind what has happened to him and so he accuses God in this way. After the three friends all fail to comfort Job and are rejected by him, another a younger man, Elihu, speaks up. Rather than accusing Job of secret sins, he rebukes Job for these very accusing and questioning God in this way, saying Job has no right to do so. In an answer to Job's accusations, Elihu's speech can be summed up as:

> 1st *God is good*, even when he sends great afflictions to the God-fearing. (…) 2nd *God is just*, because he is the almighty Creator and lord of all things, and in his government of the world, he has always overthrown the ungodly and heard the cries of the miserable. 3rd *God certainly does not exercise justice in accordance with our thinking*. That does not mean, however, that we who are nothing have any right to censure him who is exalted above every created thing. We have the sole duty to turn to his grace with our humble requests. 4th *In afflicting the God-fearing, he has only good in mind*. The Lord's intention is to humble them and to lead them to even greater happiness. Even in the revelation of his majesty, which seems terrible to us, his benedictory goodness is concealed. Therefore all his creatures should worship him.[326]

As Elihu is speaking, a storm cloud develops. Elihu's speech is then cut off by the voice of God, who speaks "to Job out of the storm" (Job 38:1). God's only direct response to Job's accusations comes in the form of questions. He says, "Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me." (Job 38:2,3). God then questions Job asking things such as, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it?" (Job 38:4,5). In summary, "who, Job, are you to question me?" Pieper explains the effect of God's argument:

> God does not enter in upon a demonstration of proofs - - that would be beneath him - - but he puts Job in his place by stressing his majesty, power and wisdom. God does not reveal to him why or to what purpose he deals with Job in this manner. Rather without offering an answer to his complaints and questions, he simply demands of Job recognition of his right to treat him like this.[327]

All Job wanted to know was the answer to his question, "Why?" He wanted to see the reason for what had happened. Yet God did not provide an explanation to Job and instead rebuked him for

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[325] August Pieper, "The Book of Job in Its Significance for Preaching and the Care of Souls," ed. Tom Jeske, trans. James Fricke and Armin Schuetze (2013), 22.

[326] Ibid.

[327] Ibid., 25.

his accusations. Job's response? "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know," and also, "Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:3,6). The book then returns to a narrative and the reader is told how Job was blessed even greater than he had been before.

Here again we see God withholding information. All Job wanted to know was why. But God did not give him the answer. In this way, he keeps Job from knowing the truth. There is no doubt about it. However, the greater question is, why does God do this? It seems that there are at least four possible reasons. First, God is allowing Job to be tested. For a test such as this to be truly legitimate, the one being tested must not know he is being tested. Thus it is a use of deceit in testing. Second, it is also used to teach Job. It is almost ironic. God withholds information from Job to teach Job that God withholds information. Job learns about God that there are things man has no right to know or question God about. Rather, man is to trust in God. Third, what happened to Job was because of Satan's accusation against God. Everything that happened to Job was a way for God to prove Satan wrong. As such, it is sort of an experiment to answer whether there is any substance to Satan's accusation. Yet for the experiment to yield true results, it had to be a blind test. Had Job been aware of the conversation between Satan and God, the results would have been biased. Satan could have called foul. God thus kept the conversation between him and Satan as a secret from Job, so that Satan's accusation might be fully disproved. Finally, this may also possibly be an example of God withholding information simply because it is not something that Job had the right to know. It is clear that God withholds information about himself from man, because that is what he does, essentially to maintain a kind of godly privacy. God reveals to man what he needs to know, but he does not reveal everything about himself. In this way it is at least possible that the account of Job demonstrates God's use of privacy. In summary, God thus used righteous deceit in his interaction with Job for the sake of testing, teaching, disproving Satan and possibly even for privacy.

Luke 24:28-29 - On the Road to Emmaus (Inconsequential Social Situation/possible Testing)

In what was one of Jesus' first appearances to any of the disciples after he rose from the dead, Jesus appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. While they were walking along the road, he joins them, though not recognized, and explains to them "what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Lk 24:27). As they were approaching their destination there is a

small but interesting note that, "Jesus continued on as if he were going farther (προσεποιήσατο πορρώτερον πορεύεσθαι). But they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them" (Lk 24:28,29). He then breaks bread with them. They realize that he is Jesus, risen and alive. He disappears and the disciples run back excitedly to Jerusalem.

Once again, because Jesus is the subject of the action, it must only be determined whether what Jesus did is an example of deceit for it to be labeled as righteous deceit. The key lies in the definition of προσεποιήσατο. It is from the verb προσποιέω, which means "to engage in an action or gesture that gives the appearance of conveying specific intent, *make/act as though, pretend.*"[328] It therefore can be said that Jesus "pretended to travel further." He acted as if he was going to travel further. The word προσποιέω then assumes that had they not invited Jesus in, he would not have travelled further. Or at least it was not his intention to travel further. What was his intention? The passage does not say explicitly. However, Just states that "the Emmaus narrative suggests that Jesus, who had approached the disciples and initiated the conversation, planned all along to join them in a meal in order to complete his revelation to them."[329] This is exactly what happened, which means there is no way to know what Jesus would have done had he not been invited in. The point remains, Jesus' acted as if his intention was to continue walking, whereas his real intention was to eat with them. The result was that the disciples, because they were so engaged and amazed by what Jesus was telling them, convinced him to stay, rather than travel further according to what they thought he was going to do. Were they deceived by Jesus' acting as if he were going to travel further? It seems so. Luther agrees as well, when says, "Thus in Luke (24:28) Christ pretended that He would go farther," calling it a sinless "obliging lie."[330] Jesus thus pretended. This, therefore, is another example of righteous deceit.

What was Jesus doing by acting in such a way? It cannot be said definitively. One option, Jesus could have been testing the disciples' faith, to see if they were so taken and convinced about what he was saying that they had to hear more. Luther seems to advocate this point when he references it in conjunction with God's testing of Abraham:

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[328] Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 884. Emphasis theirs.

[329] Arthur A. Just Jr., *Luke 9:51–24:53*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 1008–1009.

[330] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 3: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 15-20*, 327.

For although it can happen—as with those who were on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:28)—that He pretends to want to go farther and seems to be dealing with us as though He had forgotten His promises, faith in the Word must nevertheless be retained, and the promise must be stressed—namely, that it is true and dependable—even if the manner, time, occasion, place, and other particulars are unknown. For the fact that God cannot lie is sure and dependable.[331]

Another option, according to Stein, is that it was a test of hospitality, "Jesus gave the two disciples the opportunity to practice hospitality to "a herald" of the gospel message. Luke may have intended for this to serve as a model of such hospitality."[332]A final possible option is that Jesus, according to the rules of manners, was simply being polite. Marshall agrees stating, "The stranger made as if to proceed further; προσποιέομαι can mean 'to pretend', but this is too strong here, since, although on one level of understanding he intends to stay with them, he is merely giving them the opportunity to invite him in, and will not force his presence on them."[333] Jesus did not want to impose himself on them and so acted as if he were going further, so that they would not feel pressured or compelled to invite him in. With little additional information given in the account it would seem that Jesus may have been doing any (or even all) of the three options. Yet the point is, that although the reason for it may be unclear, Jesus did pretend, which is clearly another example of righteous deceit.

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[331] Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 4: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, 96–97.

[332] Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 612.

[333] I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 897.

2 Samuel 12:1-14 – Nathan Rebukes David (Possible Teaching/Testing/Judgment/Warning)

David had committed many sins in the process of committing adultery with Bathsheba and covering it up. God clearly did not approve, as the text indicates, "But the thing David had done displeased the LORD" (2 Sa 11:27). In response to David's adultery and deception, "The LORD sent Nathan to David" (2 Sa 12:1). In order to rebuke David and show him the error of his ways, Nathan tells him a story that David believes to be true about a rich man who robs a poor man of his only ewe lamb. David believes Nathan to be speaking literally. He is outraged by the rich man in the story, "David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity" (2 Sa 12:5,6). Nathan responds, "You are the man!" thus revealing that he was not speaking literally about an actual event that happened to another person, but rather metaphorically about David himself. David was clearly deceived. Nathan did it in order to show him his sin. Nathan needed David to think of the situation not only as a real situation, but also as a situation not referring to himself. It allowed David to look at the acts he committed in an objective light without his own bias. It worked well. David realized his sin, was convicted by it, and repented. In summary, Nathan used a hypothetical story that David thought was real to call him to repentance.

In so far as Nathan was sent by the Lord and used deception to convict someone of a sin that involved much deception, this seems to be a case of righteous deceit. However, it is not explicitly labeled as such in the text.

1 Kings 3:16-28 – Solomon's Deceitful Verdict (Possible Teaching/Testing/Judgment)

In this account, one sees Solomon's practical wisdom getting results. Two prostitutes both had babies within three days of each other. One of the babies died because the mother accidentally smothered it in her sleep. She then secretly traded her baby out with the other woman's newborn. Of course, the real mother recognized that it was not her baby, but the deceiving woman denied it. An argument certainly ensued, so they came to Solomon to render a verdict. In response, Solomon said, "Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other" (1 Ki 3:25). Upon hearing this, the real mother said, "Please, my lord, give her the

living baby! Don't kill him!" whereas the other woman said "Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!" (1 Ki 3:26). Their reactions revealed who the true mother was and Solomon gave the baby to its true mother.

Solomon clearly used deceit in order to render a verdict. He tested the women to see who was the true mother. Although it cannot be known what would have happened if the women reacted differently, one would think that he would not have put the baby to death one way or another. He made it seem as though he was going to put the baby to death even though that was not his intention. Thus he acted as if he was going to have the baby put to death in order to carry out justice. The test worked, the true mother was revealed, and justice was carried out. Furthermore, if the woman who did not receive the baby felt duped by the situation, she brought it on herself because of her crime, which was deceitful in the first place.

Was this a righteous use of deceit? The people certainly thought so, "When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice" (1 Ki 3:28). Only because this is merely the people's reaction, which can be flawed, is this not with all certainty a case of righteous deceit. Indeed, it also fits both the categories of testing and judgment very well.

Mark 7:9 – Jesus' Sarcastic Remark (Possible Inconsequential Social Situation/Warning/Teaching)

In this account, Jesus speaks against the Pharisees, calling them "hypocrites," applying Isaiah 29:13 to them, and stating that they are holding onto "human traditions" instead of the "commands of God" (Mark 7:6-8). He then says, "You have a fine way (Καλῶς) of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!" (Mark 7:9). Καλῶς, an adverb from the Greek καλός, can be translated in a variety of ways. It pertains to what is done "well, beautifully (…) fitly, appropriately, in the right way, splendidly (…) commendably (…) acceptable (…) rightly, correctly."[334] It never has a negative meaning. Yet setting aside God's commands in favor of one's own traditions is certainly negative, and not something that is "good, well, or beautiful." The solution to this issue seems to be that Jesus uses Καλῶς ironically or sarcastically in this account. Jesus uses words in a way that communicate the opposite of what the words usually communicate. The context indicates this as well.

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[334] Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 505.

Although it can be argued whether Jesus' use of sarcasm is or is not deceptive, it certainly had the potential to be. Although the Pharisees probably heard Jesus' rebuke loud and clear, what about the uninformed onlooker? The use of ironic or sarcastic language is insider language that can easily be misunderstood by those who do not have inside knowledge of the context or culture. Yet, communication is more than just words. Tone and body language can often communicate far more than the words themselves. Because the tone in this situation can only be assumed, it is not possible to identify this as being deceitful. Most likely the Pharisees received Jesus' rebuke exactly as it was intended.

Genesis 27 – Jacob Takes Esau's Blessing

Isaac desired to give his oldest son, Esau, his blessing before he died. He had Esau go out, hunt some wild game, and prepare a meal for him. Rebekah overheard their conversation and wanted Jacob to receive the blessing. They prepared a similar meal and disguised Jacob in Esau's clothes and furs so that Isaac would think he was his son, Esau. When asked who he was by his father, Jacob then lies explicitly. He says, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing" (Ge 27:19). Apparently suspicious, Isaac has him come closer so that he could touch him to see if he was really Esau. Jacob complies and Isaac is fooled by the furs. When asked explicitly again, "Are you really my son Esau?" Isaac asked. Jacob once again lies, "I am" (Ge 27:24). He then received his father's blessing. Jacob lied in the traditional sense twice, and he lied without words once, all with the clear intention of deceiving his father.

Although this has largely been interpreted as being an example of a clear, sinful lie, done at the expense of another for one's own personal gain, some have argued otherwise. Luther says that what Jacob did was not a sin:

> People also debate about the guile, whether the saintly fathers acted with guile and whether they sinned by acting with guile. For we have often heard that they lied inordinately, not only obligingly but also actually. But in this deed there is no sin. Although in the fact and in the sight of men there is fraud and deceit—for Jacob deluded his father with his hairy hands and by covering his neck with skins—yet before God it is not a fraud, because the primogeniture and the blessing which he had bought from his brother and previously already had by divine authority was owed to him, since it was destined for him in accordance with the prophecy, which declared (Gen. 25:23): "The older shall serve the younger." Consequently, to contrive a plot and to take away from another by deceit what God has given to you is not a sin.[335]

Luther concluded that to deceive in order to get what is rightfully yours is not a sin, and thus Jacob was not guilty.

> This is how one should also regard this fraud on the part of Jacob; for when the saints perpetrate a fraud and have a command of God in regard to it, then, although it is a fraud in the sight of men, yet it is a saintly, legitimate, and pious fraud. Therefore there is no need to ask and debate in what way and whether Jacob sinned, but one must consider that what he took away from his brother by fraud had previously been granted to him by

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[335] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 5: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30*, 149–150.

divine authority. Thus in their wars the saints frequently deceived their enemies, but those are lies one is permitted to use in the service of God against the devil and the enemies of God.[336]

Although Luther's reasoning is sound, the text is simply silent on whether Jacob was guilty or not for taking Esau's blessing by deceit.[337] Thus whether this is a case of righteous deceit is not certain.

2 Kings 8:7-15 – Elisha Advocates a Lie?

This account has been placed in the section of other notable accounts simply because it does not seem to fit any other category. It is possibly explained by an error in transmission of the text. Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram, became ill and sent Hazael to ask Elisha, "Will I recover from this illness?" (2 Ki 8:9). Elisha respond either, "Go and say to him, 'You will certainly recover.' Nevertheless, the LORD has revealed to me that he will in fact die" (2 Ki 8:10), or "Go and say, 'You will certainly not recover,' for the LORD has revealed to me that he will in fact die" (2 Ki 8:10 alternate reading from the footnote). Regardless of which reading is correct, the result is that Hazael returned to the king and told him that he would recover. Then the next day Hazael suffocated him and succeeded him as king. (2 Ki 8:15).

The differences in the reading come from a Qere/Ketiv in the Masoretic text. The Ketiv written in the text is לֹא, which means "no," and thus reads "say, 'you will not live.'" However, most likely according to oral tradition, the Masoretes prefer the Qere. The Qere, לוֹ, means "to him," and reads "say to him, 'you will live.'" Thus either Elisha tells Hazael to lie, or at least is cryptic in his answer, or Hazael lies of his own accord to the king before he kills him. Old Greek has αὐτῷ which reads, "to him."[338] Keil and Delitzsch say that לֹא, sometimes stands for לוֹ, "Most of the commentators follow the ancient versions, and the Masoretes, who reckon our לֹא among the fifteen passages of the O.T. in which it stands for the pronoun לוֹ (…) and some of the codices, and decide in favour of the *Keri*.[339] However they state, "We therefore prefer the reading in the text, since it is not in harmony with the character of the prophets to utter an

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[336] Ibid., 150.

[337] If Luther is correct that it is permissible to deceive in order to get what is rightfully yours, other accounts might be included under this category, i.e. Tamar deceives Judah (Ge 38).

[338] *Septuaginta: With Morphology*, electronic ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979), 4 Kgdms 8:10.

[339] Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 237.

untruth; and the explanation, 'thou wilt not die of thine illness, but come to a violent death,' puts into the words a meaning which they do not possess. For even if Benhadad did not die of his illness, he did not recover from it."[340] Thus is an exegetical question. Although it is less supported by the textual evidence, it is easier to understand that Elisha is the one who tells the truth and Hazel lies. However, is it possible that Elisha had reason to tell Hazael to lie to the king, or that he was being somewhat cryptic in his response to Hazael? Indeed, it is possible as well, especially given the greater textual evidence. As is often the case, nowhere in the text does it say that what Elisha did was right or wrong, it merely records the events.

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[340] Ibid.

APPENDIX I – NONBIBLICAL ETHICAL APPROACHES

ANTINOMIANISM

Lying is neither right nor wrong: There are no laws. Antinomianism asserts that lying to save lives is neither right nor wrong. It affirms that there are no objective moral principles by which the issue can be judged right or wrong. The issue must be decided on subjective, personal, or pragmatic grounds, but not on any objective moral grounds. We are literally without a moral law to decide the issue.[341]

GENERALISM

Lying is generally wrong: There are no universal laws. Generalism claims that lying is generally wrong. As a rule, lying is wrong, but in specific cases this general rule can be broken. Since there are no universal moral laws, whether a given lie is right will depend on the results. If the results are good, then the lie is right. Most generalists believe that lying to save a life is right because in this case the end justifies the means necessary to attain it. However, lying in general is wrong.[342]

SITUATIONISM

Lying is sometimes right: There is only one universal law. Situationism claims that there is only one absolute moral law, and telling the truth is not it. Love is the only absolute, and lying may be the loving thing to do. In fact, lying to save a life is the loving thing to do. Hence, lying is sometimes right. Indeed, any moral rule except love can and should be broken for love's sake. Everything else is relative; only one thing is absolute. Thus the situationist believes lying to save lives is morally justified.[343]

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[341] Geisler, 26.
[342] Ibid.
[343] Ibid., 26-27.