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ABSTRACT

GOD AND INTEGRITY: A CASE STUDY OF WALTER C. KAISER JR.
AND NORMAN L. GEISLER

by

Augustin Tchamba

Adviser: Miroslav M. Kiš

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: GOD AND INTEGRITY: A CASE STUDY OF WALTER C. KAISER JR. AND
NORMAN L. GEISLER

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Date completed: April 2012

The God of the Bible is sometimes portrayed as using and condoning deceit to achieve His purpose, especially when human life is at stake. Two evangelical scholars, Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Norman L. Geisler, with a shared theological heritage, differ in their interpretation of Exod 1:15-21 and Josh 2:1-7 that addresses the ethical issue of lying to save life.

This dissertation not only refutes the claim that God uses and condones the use of deceit to achieve His purpose, but also clarifies biblical argument for His integrity. The study provides answers to a number of questions. First, what causes divergent interpretations in the work of Kaiser and Geisler? Second, is it ever right to lie in order to save life? Third, does the God of the Bible who claims not to lie use or condone lies in

any form? A biblical, theological, and philosophical inquiry is conducted in order to establish the biblical teachings on God's character.

In the first chapter, a historical survey displays the intensity of two opposing views and shows how scholars have pondered the moral issue of lying in general and lying to save life in particular.

In order to explain the underlying reasons for these two divergent views on the issue of lying as implied in Exod 1:15-21 and Josh 2:1-7, the second chapter determines the meaning of the word *integrity* in the Bible. After an overview of terms in both Testaments, the Hebrew word תָּמִים and the Greek word τέλειος, as related to God, His actions and/or attributes, are analyzed contextually, exegetically, and semantically. This chapter establishes that the word תָּמִים means "without blemish or spotless" when it is applied to sacrificial animals, and means "whole, sound, healthful, flawless" when applied to God. The chapter thus concludes that God's integrity is flawless.

The third chapter extends the analytical scope of the word תָּמִים to certain attributes of God. A systematic analysis of the attributes of truthfulness, trustworthiness, holiness, and mercy are done both biblically and theologically. The analysis of these attributes together with the exegetical study of the word תָּמִים confirms that the God of the Bible is a being of integrity.

The fourth chapter makes available the reasons for both scholars' divergent interpretations by providing a report of their presuppositions, hermeneutical principles, and interpretations of the two texts under consideration. This report identifies the different presuppositions and hermeneutical principles at the genesis of their understanding of the texts.

The first part of chapter five presents an exegetical study of Exod 15-22 and Josh 2:1-7 and the second part critically analyzes both Kaiser's and Geisler's presuppositions and hermeneutical principles. The assessment focuses on internal consistency and consistency with the biblical material. As their divergent views became more and more apparent and evident, this study concludes and posits that God is the being of integrity in whom there is no lie. He, consequently, does not use deceit to achieve His purpose. Accordingly, any attempt to use dishonesty or deceit to achieve one's purpose is biblically unwarranted. Kaiser's and Geisler's different interpretations of Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7 provide just another example of how hermeneutical principles that are alien to Scripture may project a different view of God and morality.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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KAISER JR. AND NORMAN L. GEISLER

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
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Doctor of Philosophy

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>b.</i>	<i>Babylonian Talmud</i>
<i>BDB</i>	Brown, E., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford, 1907
<i>CPNIVC</i>	<i>College Press NIV Commentary</i>
<i>HALOT</i>	<i>A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
<i>IVPNTC</i>	<i>IVP New Testament Commentary</i>
<i>JATS</i>	<i>Journal of the Adventist Theological Society</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>LBBC</i>	<i>Layman's Bible Book Commentary</i>
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
<i>SDABC</i>	<i>Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary</i>
<i>WBC</i>	<i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Does God lie? If He does, can He still be trusted? The answers to these questions unfold one's view of His nature and integrity, and ultimately influence an individual's perspective of who He is.

In the introduction of his dissertation titled "The Phenomenology of the Lie in Biblical Narrative," Horn Prouser overtly states that God Himself perpetrates blatant acts of lying and deception and even instructs people to engage deliberately in deceptive behavior.¹ Coincidentally, Gregory H. Harris, by referring to 1 Kgs 22:22; Ezek 14:9; and Rom 1:18-32, concurs with Prouser when he argues that God uses deception as a means of judgment against those who reject His truth. Additionally, Harris's reference to 1 Sam 19:9-17 seems to suggest that deceit receives divine approval when it is necessary to preserve life or the integrity of life.²

Numerous biblical and theological evidences, as noted throughout this study, have been employed to challenge the claim that God uses deceit and encourages people to do so. The claim that God uses deceptive behavior versus the claim of His truthfulness and

¹Ora Horn Prouser, "The Phenomenology of the Lie in Biblical Narrative" (Ph.D. diss., Theological Seminary of America, 1991), 12.

²Gregory H. Harris, "Does God Deceive? The Deluding Influence of Second Thessalonians 2:11," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 16, no. 1 (2005): 73-93. According to Rodney L. Bassett, a scriptural approach to lying suggests that, although generally unacceptable, lying may be justified in the specific case of lying to gain understanding and, under certain limiting conditions, deception may be an acceptable methodology for Christian researchers. See more of his arguments in Rodney L. Bassett, "Lying in the Laboratory: Deception in Human Research from Psychological, Philosophical, and Theological Perspectives," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 34 (December 1992): 201-12.

integrity beg for a thorough biblical, theological, and philosophical inquiry in order to establish the biblical teachings on God's character. Contra Prouser and Harris, John Murray argues, "He [*Satan*] accuses God of deliberate falsehood and deception, *that* God has perpetrated a lie. . . . The Tempter openly assails the integrity and veracity of God, in a word it is the truthfulness of God that is impugned."³

Because the view of the integrity of God is being challenged, it behooves us to determine at this preliminary stage the meaning of the word "integrity."

Working Definition of the Word "Integrity"

Webster defines integrity as a steadfast adherence to a strict moral standard or possession of moral virtues such as incorruptibility, soundness, and completeness.⁴ It is a quality of being that is entire or complete, with sound moral principles of uprightness, honesty, and sincerity. The etymology of the word relates it to the Latin adjective *integer*, which means whole or complete. It further suggests the idea of being unimpaired, unadulterated, in a genuine state, or in an entire correspondence with an original condition of purity.⁵ Integrity is also expressed in doing what one says he/she will do; in other words, integrity includes keeping one's promises. R. C. Roberts concurs with Webster's etymology and adds that a person is said to have integrity if he or she is a complete and

³John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 126.

⁴Philip Babcock Gove, ed., *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1993), s.v. "Integrity"; William Allan Neilson, Thomas A. Knott, and Paul W. Carhart, eds., *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged*, 2nd ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam, 1959), s.v. "Integrity."

⁵Gove, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, s.v. "Integer."

definite self and has powers to resist disintegration in the face of temptation, suffering, peer pressure, and other adverse moral influences.⁶

As noted above, the argument that God condones lying and uses deception as a means to an end can not be dismissed out of hand. The apostle Peter warns against taking the understanding of scriptural text for granted when he states that in the Bible there “are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.”⁷ The writings of a number of authors who hold that God lies reveal a paucity of contextual, exegetical, and semantic analysis.⁸ I wonder to what extent the genesis of their understanding, presuppositions, and/or hermeneutical principles contributed to their misinterpretation. Some of the difficult biblical texts quoted to suggest God’s apparent use of deceit are considered below.

Difficult Passages in Scripture

The assumption that God uses deceit, or lets those who lie get away with it, is based on, but not limited to, Gen 4:9 (Cain lied to God when asked of his brother’s whereabouts); Gen 12 and 20 (Abraham lied that Sarah was his sister); Gen 26:7 (Isaac lied that Rebekah was his sister); Exod 1:15-22 (the midwives lied to Pharaoh about not killing the Hebrew babies); Josh 2:1-7 (Rahab lied to the king in order to protect the spies sent to Jericho); Judg 3:19-20 (Ehud lied to Eglon the king of Moab, saying that he had a message from God); and 1 Sam 16:1-3 (God told Samuel to say that he had come to offer sacrifice when this was not his primary reason for coming).

⁶R. C. Roberts, "Character," *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, ed. David John Atkinson et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 65. For a discussion of the word “integrity,” see also Cora Diamond, "Integrity," *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. Lawrence C. Becker and Charlotte B. Becker (New York: Routledge, 2001), 863-866.

⁷See 2 Pet 3:16.

⁸The next chapter provides an in-depth study of the contextual, exegetical, and semantic analysis of some of those difficult biblical texts as related to God, His actions, and/or attributes.

Inasmuch as the above texts report the human sinful tendency to lie, prevaricate, and deceive, a literal reading yields several motives for untruthfulness such as the fear for one's life (Gen 4, 9, and 12) and the desire to safeguard one's fame recorded (Judg 3:19-20). The most serious of these motives is the impulse to save life at the price of a lie as recorded in Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7.

In his comments on Exod 1 and 1 Sam 16, Prouser confirms the argument that God uses deceit and recommends others to do so. He states that in biblical narrative, lying was not considered an absolute moral issue; in fact, deception was rather considered an acceptable and generally praiseworthy means for the weaker party to succeed against a stronger power.⁹

This dissertation focuses on two narratives found in Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7, not only because they address the issue of lying to save life, but also because of God's apparent endorsement of their lies. Some have made this assumption due to the lack of direct condemnation of their lies. These two episodes figure prominently in discussions of the biblical teachings on honesty and integrity.

The divergent understanding or interpretation of Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7 is not something peculiar to contemporary readers. The interpretation of these two passages over the centuries still has a great impact on one's view of the integrity of God. These differing interpretations leading to divergent views of God's integrity are examined in turn.

Historical Survey of the Interpretation of Exodus 1:15-22 and Joshua 2:1-7

A survey of literature reveals that two different views emerge from the historical development of the interpretation of Exod 1:15-21 and Josh 2:1-7. One view holds that

⁹Prouser, "Phenomenology," ii.

God's integrity is flexible enough to condone dishonesty under some circumstances; the other position maintains that God does not lie and that under no circumstance does He condone lying. I begin this analysis with the former.

While on the one hand the Talmud and the Midrash Rabbah refer to the preceding texts without commenting on the moral issue of lying to save or protect life, Shmuel Himelstein contends that any act of lying, even a less serious form such as bearing false witness or committing perjury, is considered a violation of both a prohibition—"not to lie to one another" (Lev 19:11)—and a positive precept (Exod 23:7)—"Keep far from false charge."¹⁰ However, Himelstein further adds that, in order to preserve family harmony, lying may be permitted.¹¹ Himelstein's remarks fit the characteristics of the God who does not lie but is flexible enough to condone lies.

In like manner, although Tertullian does not address the case of Rahab or the Hebrew midwives, he nevertheless contends that even though God is faultless, He sometimes condones evil acts.¹² Tertullian's comments present an ambivalent picture of God.

Similarly, in his moral treatise, *On Lying*, Augustine follows the same pattern. He

¹⁰Shmuel Himelstein, "Lying," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, ed. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 428.

¹¹Ibid., 429. He notes the following nine types of lies quoted in Rabbi Yonah ben Abraham: untruths spoken in the course of business dealing; lying without intending or causing harm; lying with an eye to some future benefit; deliberate falsification of facts heard; a promise made with the intention of not keeping it; a promise made and left unfulfilled; causing another to assume that one has done him a favor; priding oneself on qualities one does not possess; and the undeliberate falsehoods of children. See further discussions in Nathan Ausubel, "Jewish Concept of Truth," *The Book of Jewish Knowledge*, ed. Nathan Ausubel (New York: Crown, 1964), 484-485.

¹²Tertullian, "Ad Martyras," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 3:693.

rejects lying in all its forms; he adds that by lying eternal life is lost.¹³ In his comments on both Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7, he further contends that God blessed the Hebrew midwives and Rahab the harlot, not because they lied, but rather because they were merciful to God's people. That which was rewarded, he adds, was not their deceit, but rather their benevolence, benignity of mind, and not the iniquity of their lying.¹⁴ Moreover, in his comment on the Psalms, Augustine argues, there is no "substance or nature opposed to truth. . . . To speak of what is, is to speak the truth; to speak of what is not, is to tell a lie." He further states that it was not the actions of the Hebrew midwives, who told a lie of kindness in order to save the male children from death, that was praiseworthy, but rather their motives.¹⁵

Surprisingly, despite his rejection of all lies, Augustine envisions flexibility on lying by contending, "There resulteth then from all these this sentence, that a lie which doth not violate the doctrine of piety, nor piety itself, nor innocence, nor benevolence, may on behalf of pudicity of body be admitted."¹⁶ It is this dualistic perception of God who both condemns and condones lies that this dissertation seeks to clarify.

Thomas Aquinas, one of the most prolific theologians of the medieval period, follows more or less the Tertullian/Augustinian path. First, he suggests that the midwives were rewarded, not for their lie, but for their fear of God, and for their goodwill, which led

¹³Augustine, "On Lying," *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. H. Browne (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 3:462-463.

¹⁴Augustine, "To Consentius: Against Lying," *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 3:495-496.

¹⁵Augustine, "Discourse on Psalm 5," *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, Ancient Christian Writers 29, ed. Johannes Quasten, trans. Scholastica Hebing and Felicitas Corrigan (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1960), 1:53-54.

¹⁶Augustine, "On Lying," 475.

them to tell a lie. Hence, it is expressly stated: “And because the midwives feared God, He built them houses.”¹⁷ Therefore, the subsequent lie was not meritorious.¹⁸ Second, referring to Augustine’s eight divisions of the lie,¹⁹ Aquinas also envisions a flexibility on lying by suggesting three possible bases for lying as noted in his three divisions of lies: the *humorous lie*, in which the fault is lightened when the purpose is good; the *useful lie*, intended for another’s advantage or protection; and the *pernicious lie*, in which the malice of the lie is worsened when anyone intends by it to injure another.²⁰

While Tertullian, Augustine, and Aquinas present the ambivalent picture of God who is both truthful and deceitful, Martin Luther emphasizes the flexible God who condones lies. He calls Rahab’s lie an *obliging lie*, a lie told to protect and defend those whom they are seeking or are asking about. He contends that God overlooks this kind of lie and lets them go unnoticed.²¹ Martin Luther was reported to have 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.”²²

¹⁷Exod 2:21.

¹⁸Thomas Aquinas, “Lying,” *Virtues of Justice in the Human Community* (2a2ae. 101-122), *Summa Theologiae*, ed. and trans. Thomas C. O’Brien (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), 41:151-155.

¹⁹Ibid., 153, 155. Augustine’s eight types of lies are as follows: lies in religious teaching; lies serving no one but harming someone; lies working to someone’s advantage by hurting another; lies told for sheer pleasure of lying and deceiving; lies told with a desire to amuse; lies going against no one, but saving someone’s money; lies hurting nobody, but saving somebody’s life; lies harming no one, but saving someone’s purity. See also Augustine, “On Lying,” 475.

²⁰Aquinas, “Lying,” 155.

²¹Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 1958), 5:40-41.

²²Martin Luther as quoted by his secretary in a letter cited by Philipp I and Martin Bucer, *Briefwechsel Landgraf Philipp’s des Grossmüthigen von Hessen mit Bucer*, ed. Max Lenz (1880, Osnabrück: Zeller, 1965), vol. 1, quoted in Uri Gneezy, “Deception: The Role of Consequences,” *American Economic Review* 95, no. 1 (2005): 384.

John W. Haley in his analysis of Exod 1:15-21 concluded that the Hebrew midwives did tell a lie to avoid the murdering of innocent babies. Of the two evils, he adds, they chose the lesser. In Rahab's case, he argues that she could not have been expected to understand the wrong of falsehood because she was raised in the darkness of heathenism.²³

Helmut Thielicke, while addressing lying in general, goes further by claiming that we live in an evil world where absolute moral laws sometimes run into inevitable conflict, which he calls the "collision of duties," and therefore it is our moral duty to do the lesser evil, thus breaking the lesser law, and then to plead for mercy. In this regard, we should lie to save life and then ask for forgiveness for breaking God's absolute moral law.²⁴ Sissela Bok, although she does not refer to Rahab's case, contends that "lying requires a reason while truth telling does not"; consequently, she concludes that there are some circumstances which warrant a lie, particularly situations where innocent lives are at stake and where only a lie can deflect a danger.²⁵ To contend that only a lie could deflect a danger would mean that morality is not absolute but casuistic. J. I. Packer, in his book *The Ten Commandments*, sides with Helmut Thielicke by arguing that an outright lie, like that of Rahab, may actually be the best way, the least evil, and the truest expression of love to all parties involved.²⁶ We now turn to the opposing view.

²³John Wesley Haley, *An Examination of the Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Goodpasture, 1951), 290-291.

²⁴Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, ed. William Henry Lazareth (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 1:520-545.

²⁵Sissela Bok, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 49-54.

²⁶James I. Packer, *The Ten Commandments* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1982), 66.

Contrary to the reference that lying may sometimes be condoned,²⁷ both the Talmud²⁸ and the Midrash Rabbah²⁹ attribute the blessings of both the midwives and Rahab to the fear of God. While no comment is made concerning the moral issue of lying, the tractate *Sanhedrin* vehemently rejects lying. The following illustrates the argument against lying in any form:

Raba said: I used to think that at first that there is no truth in the world. Whereupon one of the Rabbis, by name of R. Tabuth—others say, by name of R. Tabyomi—who even if he were given all the treasure of the world would not lie, told me that he once came to a place called Kushta, in which no one ever told lies, and where no man ever died before his time. Now, he married one of their women, by whom he had two sons. One day his wife was sitting and washing her hairs, when a neighbour came and knocked at the door. Thinking to himself that it not be etiquette [to tell her that his wife was washing herself], he called out, ‘She is not here.’ [As a punishment for this] his two sons died. Then the people of that town came to him and questioned him. ‘What is the cause of this?’ So he related to them what happened. ‘We pray thee,’ they answered, ‘quit this town, and do not incite Death against us.’³⁰

Clement of Rome, in one of his letters to the Corinthians, argues that Rahab was saved not for her lie but rather for her faith and hospitality.³¹ John Calvin takes a similar route by admitting, “As to the falsehood, we must admit that though it was done for a good purpose, it was not free from fault. For those who hold what is called a dutiful lie to be altogether excusable, do not sufficiently consider how precious truth is in the sight of God. It can never be lawful to lie, because that cannot be right which is contrary to the

²⁷See Bok, *Lying*, 49-54.

²⁸b. Isidore Epstein, “Zebahim,” 5:575.

²⁹Harry Freedman, “Shemoth,” *Midrash Rabbah Exodus*, ed. Harry Freedman and Maurice Simon (New York: Soncino, 1983), 18-21. It is stated that the midwives feared God and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them.

³⁰b. Harry Freedman, “Sanhedrin,” 655-656. Admittedly, Shmuel Himelstein remarks on the Talmud’s condemnation of lying: “Liars cannot behold the glory of God” (*Sotah* 42a); “Lying is the equivalent [in severity] of idolatry” (*Sanhedrin* 92a); “God hates the man who speaks one thing with his mouth and another with his heart” (*Pesahim* 113b); “The punishment of liars is that they are not believed when they speak the truth” (*Sanhedrin* 89b). See Himelstein, “Lying,” 428-429.

³¹Cyril Charles Richardson, ed. and trans., *Early Christian Fathers*, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 1:49.

nature of God. On the whole it was the will of God that the spies should be delivered, but he did not approve of saving their life by falsehood.”³²

John Wesley acknowledged that Rahab’s acts were unquestionably sinful, although in his judgment Rahab thought that an officious lie might not be unlawful.³³ In his commentary on the book of Joshua, C. F. Keil remarks that Rahab’s lie is not to be justified as a lie of necessity told for a good purpose. Therefore, her falsehood remains a sinful expedient by which she protected herself and her family.³⁴

In like manner, George W. DeHoff comments that the Bible does not say Rahab was justified by lying but rather by receiving the messengers and sending them out another way. She was justified for what she did and not for what she said. Similarly, concerning Exod 1:15-22, DeHoff notes that God dealt well with the midwives for saving the children and not for what they told the king.³⁵

George Bush notes that Rahab lived in the midst of a people who were corrupt, abandoned to sin, and profligate to the highest degree. She had probably never been taught the evil of lying. But this, he suggests, does not excuse her iniquitous conduct.³⁶ Gleason L. Archer points out that God did not bless these brave women because they withheld part of the truth, but rather he blessed them for their willingness to incur personal danger in

³²See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 1:411-412.

³³John Wesley, *Wesley's Notes on the Bible*, ed. G. Roger Schoenhals (Grand Rapids, MI: Asbury Press, 1987), 153.

³⁴Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), 6:34-35.

³⁵George Washington DeHoff, *Alleged Bible Contradictions Explained* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1951), 157.

³⁶George Bush, *Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Joshua: Designed as a General Help to Biblical Reading and Instruction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Phinney, 1862), 33-35.

order to save the lives of the innocent babies. Her lie thus meant for her a step of faith.³⁷ Accordingly, David M. Howard remarks that the Bible nowhere condones the lies of the Hebrew midwives or the deception of Rahab the harlot. Rahab's sin, he adds, was not only a lie but also a lack of trust in a God of whom she had just acknowledged as all-powerful. God judged her by her faith and not by the lie she told.³⁸

Clement of Rome, John Calvin, John Wesley, C. F. Keil, George W. DeHoff, George Bush, Gleason L. Archer, and David M. Howard represent those who argue that it is morally wrong to lie in order to save life. Conversely, Tertullian, Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John W. Haley, Helmut Thielicke, Sissela Bok, and J. I. Packer represent the opposite view.

Although the preceding list is not exhaustive, one observes that two contemporary, prominent, evangelical scholars, Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Norman L. Geisler, belong to opposing views of this issue. Kaiser represents the latter position, and Geisler the former. Regardless of which view to which one subscribes, these divergent interpretations entail implications affecting the view of the integrity of God as evidenced in subsequent chapters. For example, if one subscribes to the view that God approves of lying or shows some forms of flexibility regarding lying, it would appear that God is inconsistent with what Scripture teaches about Him.³⁹ On the other hand, if one believes that God rejects lying in any form, it would not only paint a consistent image of the biblical God, but also,

³⁷Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 109, 155.

³⁸David M. Howard, *Joshua*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 5:104-112.

³⁹"It is impossible for God to lie" (Heb 6:18); "Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb 13:8); "In God there is no change" (Ps 55:19); "There is no variation" (Jas 1:17).

God would certainly not be, as Lloyd P. Dunaway puts it, “responsible for the presence of evil.”⁴⁰

The historical survey above reflects the two divergent schools of interpretation. This, as Aiken argues, shows that the interpretation and understanding of the biblical texts are subject to variations based on the underlying assumptions of the interpreter.⁴¹

Problem

Two evangelical scholars,⁴² Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Norman L. Geisler, differ in their interpretation of Exod 1:15-21 and Josh 2:1-7. This raises a first question: Why do two scholars with a shared theological heritage arrive at such divergent positions when considering the same biblical passages related to the moral issue of lying to save life?

More important, there seems to be even a more serious conflict. Some interpretations not only create ethical implications with regard to the view of the integrity

⁴⁰Lloyd Philip Dunaway, “Evil as God’s Own Problem: A Study of the Theodicies of Karl Barth and E. S. Brightman” (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1979). He concludes his study by making God responsible for the presence of evil.

⁴¹Aiken, along with most existentialists, argues that no existential situation can compel one’s loyalty unless for whatever reason or for no reason at all one chooses to be bound by it. He further argues that the continual possibility or indifference thus renders the authority of moral rules constantly dependent upon what an agent elects to be or to do. See Henry David Aiken, *Reason and Conduct: New Bearings in Moral Philosophy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1978), 86-87. Similarly, Hans-Georg Gadamer submits that only the subject matter is the determiner of meaning. Furthermore, a text would mean whatever it said to the mind of the reader, not necessarily what its author meant; for each subsequent audience could read its own situation into a text, therefore, a text transcends its original circumstances. See Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, reprint ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1989), quoted in Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 192-193.

⁴²Both scholars are listed in the *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* as evangelicals. Balmer describes Geisler’s theology as conservative and dispensational. See Randall Herbert Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), s.v. “evangelical.” Kaiser identifies himself as evangelical as he invites non-evangelicals and teachers of religion to renew the dialogue with evangelical literature. Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1972), 7. Hitchen confirms core evangelical essentials that reflect both scholars’ shared theological heritage. John M. Hitchen, “What It Means to Be an Evangelical Today—an Antipodean Perspective,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2004): 100.

of God Himself, but also a tension within the character of this God who both rejects and condones lies.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine four things: First, what causes divergent interpretations in the work of Geisler and Kaiser? Second, it is ever right to lie in order to save life. Third, does the God of the Bible who claims not to lie condone lies in any form? Fourth, is God a being of integrity?

Justification of the Study

As John MacArthur has observed, contemporary society is gradually turning away from biblical moral standards in favor of expediency or pragmatism.⁴³ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., reflects this shift when he argues that “most ethicists are moving away from a deontological and teleological type of moral theory in favor of responsibility and response type.”⁴⁴ It is also clear, he adds, that “Scripture is not viewed as supplying the content (whether propositional or conceptual) for ethical character or decision making. More popularly it is viewed as presenting a set of witnesses (either to the mighty acts of God in history or to the person of Christ Himself) or a set of images.”⁴⁵

It seems that the underlying philosophy of new theories of morality is driven by the premise of accomplishing goals by whatever means necessary. Postmodern ideology⁴⁶

⁴³John MacArthur, *The Power of Integrity: Building a Life without Compromise* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), vii. Moreover, M. E. Alsford and S. E. Alsford suggest that pragmatism represents a rejection of rational idealism where truth is seen as eternal and one. M. E. Alsford and S. E. Alsford, “Pragmatism,” *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral Theology*, ed. David John Atkinson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 682-683.

⁴⁴Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 56.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Walter Kaiser Jr. calls this prevailing thought the new principle of postmodernism: “I can do whatever I wish to do as long as I judge that it doesn’t hurt anyone else.” Kaiser, *Guide*, 175.

demonstrates indifference to any objective morality by claiming, “My values are my own, and my experiences are my own.” Because of this indifference, relativism has almost become a way of life.⁴⁷ Furthermore, if tolerance is a fundamental principle of the postmodern society,⁴⁸ different interpretations of scriptural texts in such a context, particularly those dealing with moral issues, are equally accepted because of the concept of the plurality of truths.⁴⁹ Since relativism and tolerance are key elements in postmodern society, Kaiser’s and Geisler’s divergent understandings and/or interpretations of Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7 are not considered as mutually exclusive, although they generate implications that inform one’s view of the integrity of God. God is thus perceived as either a “laissez faire/flexible” God or as a trustworthy God who does not allow cases or situations to determine the course of action. Ultimately, God cannot be both at the same time. Consequently, any serious scholarly attempt to respond to these exegetical, textual, ethical hermeneutical, and/or moral issues, which affect the view of the integrity of God, is of significant value.

Postmodernism seems to assume that we can be our own authorities and our own judges for everything, including faith and morals. See *ibid.*, 175.

⁴⁷Denis McCallum, *The Death of the Truth* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1996), 16-44. In an attempt to explain the challenges of postmodernism, this author notes that one of its identifying marks is that “reality is in the mind of the beholder.” He further notes that, in postmodernism, one should never criticize someone’s culture or question an individual’s moral decisions because all views deserve equal respect. Similarly, Christopher J. H. Wright notes that in an age of moral relativism dominated by popular culture ‘if it feels OK and nobody gets hurt, who can say it’s wrong?’ to the more sophisticated forms of subjectivism, existentialism, situationism and utilitarian consequentialism, the common dogma is that there is no transcendent authority by which absolute right or wrong, good and evil, can be determined *a priori*. Consequently, morality is relative. Against this climate of moral relativism he argues, Christians affirm the authority of Scripture. See Christopher J. H. Wright, *Walking in the Ways of the Lord: The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 48.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 1-14.

⁴⁹As Walter Kaiser points out, the present flirtation with pluralism stresses the legitimacy of every one being right at the same time, while holding contradictory conclusions on the same subjects. Kaiser, *Guide*, 177.

Theologians and ethicists have certainly addressed questions having to do with difficult texts of the Bible; however, as far as can be ascertained, no one has undertaken a systematic study of those texts used by Kaiser and Geisler, which are related to the moral issues of lying in order to save life.

Scope and Delimitations

This dissertation seeks to determine whether God, whose integrity is challenged by different conclusions on the interpretation of Exod 1:15-21 and Josh 2:1-7 concerning the morality of lying to save life, is a being of integrity. Consequently, three delimitations are necessary:

1. This research focuses only on two passages of Scripture for at least two reasons: the first reason is that they have received very ample attention from scholars, and secondly because they both relate to saving life by lying.

2. The use of presuppositions and hermeneutical principles that are alien to Scripture challenged the view of the integrity of God. In this regard, since one of the main thrusts of this research is to determine whether God is a being of integrity, contextual, exegetical, and semantic analysis of the root תָּמַם in the Old Testament, its derivatives, and translated forms in the LXX and the New Testament, will be done exclusively on passages where it relates to God, His actions, and/or attributes.⁵⁰

3. It is beyond the scope of this research to provide a critical assessment of all hermeneutical principles of both Kaiser and Geisler. Consequently, only those

⁵⁰The root word תָּמַם, its derivatives, and translated forms in the LXX and New Testament as related to God, His actions, and/or attributes include the following: (1) תָּמַם in the Old Testament does apply to God, His actions, and/or attributes. Therefore, in Deut 32:4 His work is תָּמַם; in 2 Sam 22:31 and Ps 18:30 His way is תָּמַם; in Job 37:16 God is תָּמַם in knowledge; in Ps 19:8 the law of the Lord is תָּמַם; in Ps 18:31 His way is תָּמַם. (2) Among the translated forms of תָּמַם in the LXX only three are related to God, His actions, and/or attributes: namely τελειότητι (Deut32:4), ἄμωμος (2 Sam 22:31; Pss 18:30; 19:7), ἀληθείας (Job 36:4). (3) In the New Testament the adjective τέλειος, the translated form of תָּמַם (Deut 18:13), occurs in three texts (Matt 5:48, Rom 12:2, and 1 Cor 13:10) as applying to God, His actions, and/or attributes.

hermeneutical principles deemed to have influenced their interpretation of the two texts under consideration are considered.

Methodology

This dissertation explores the biblical material, Kaiser's and Geisler's resources, and secondary literature. It reports, analyzes, and critically assesses their presuppositions and hermeneutical principles at the genesis of their interpretation of the two periscopes under consideration. In order to determine the reasons for their opposing views, I ask the following questions:

1. Why do two scholars with a similar theological heritage come to such different conclusions while addressing the same texts relating to moral issues?
2. What are their theological and/or philosophical presuppositions?
3. What are their textual and hermeneutical principles?
4. How do their theological and/or philosophical presuppositions and their textual and ethical hermeneutical principles influence their understanding and therefore their conclusions?
5. Which interpretation appears to be more consistent with the character of God as revealed in the whole of Scripture?
6. Do concepts such as "a justified lie" and "doing evil for the sake of good" find support in Scripture?

After the introduction, which outlines the problem, purpose, and justification for this study, chapter 2 determines and establishes the meaning of the word *integrity*. While the first section of this chapter deals with the general concept of integrity in Scripture, the second deals with the meaning of the word integrity as it relates to God's actions and/or attributes. To this effect, the section presents a contextual, exegetical consideration, and semantic analysis of תְּמִיּוּם "integrity" in the Old Testament (Pentateuch, Prophets and Writings) and its translated forms in the LXX and in the New Testament.

This endeavor further leads to a systematic study of certain aspects of the attributes of God in chapter 3. This chapter examines certain divine, moral, and relational attributes of God. Attributes such as trustworthiness, holiness, truthfulness, and mercy and justice are theologically examined.

As chapters 2 and 3 articulate the biblical concept of the integrity of God, chapter 4 provides a report of Kaiser's and Geisler's presuppositions, hermeneutical principles, and interpretation of Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7. It further outlines their divergent views, thus setting the stage for finding the possible causes of their different interpretations. After such a report, chapter 5 proposes a brief exegetical study of the two texts to ensure an accurate evaluation of their conclusion on the same texts. The chapter further discusses the probable causes of their difference by identifying and analyzing specific principles at the genesis of their interpretation and deemed to have influenced their conclusions.

Finally, chapter 6 summarizes the findings and indicates why Kaiser and Geisler diverge in their conclusions even though they share the same theological heritage.

I begin this quest for the integrity of God by establishing a general meaning of the concept of integrity in Scripture and explore how such a concept specifically relates to God, His actions, and/or attributes.

CHAPTER II

MEANING OF THE WORD *INTEGRITY* IN THE BIBLE

Overview of Terms

Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the concept of integrity is conveyed by the terms תָּם, תָּמִים, תְּמִימָה,¹ and תְּמִימִים. These Hebrew words, derived from the root תָּמַם, appear 137 times in the Old Testament.² Its occurrence in various forms and functions conveys the meaning of that which is complete, blameless, just, honest, perfect, peaceful, etc.; hence, an attribute or an attitude that reflects genuineness and reliability.³

The noun תָּם⁴ expresses the idea of “completeness, fullness, simplicity or integrity.” The adjective תָּמִים⁵ depicts “perfection in beauty, wholesomeness, someone morally innocent, having integrity,” or complete, sound, orderly, normal; thus peaceful,

¹Such as in Exod 26:24.

²George V. Wigram, *The New Englishman's Hebrew Concordance: Coded to Strong's Concordance Numbering System* (1997), s.v. “תָּם,” “תָּמִים,” “תְּמִימָה,” “תְּמִימִים,” “תָּמִים,” “תְּמִימִים.” See also Francis Brown, with S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (BDB) (2003), s.v. “תָּם.” See also Payne J. Barton, “תָּמִים,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 973-974. Koch gives detailed statistics of the occurrences of the root תָּמַם and its derivatives. K. Koch, “תָּמַם,” *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 3:1424-1428.

³J. P. J. Olivier, “תָּמַם,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 4:306.

⁴Such as in Lev 25:29; Num 14:33; Deut 2:14; Gen 20:5, 6.

⁵Such as in Josh 4:11; Job 1:1; Ps 37:37; Exod 26:24.

quiet (Gen25:27), pure, blameless (Job 8:20).⁶ It is used seven times in the book of Job and four times in other books (Gen 25:27; Prov 29:10; Pss 37:7; 64:4). It designates a discernible group of people who adhere to the ethos of moral values clearly distinguishing the God-fearing from the wicked. This group of people is called the peaceful in Gen 25:27, the blameless in Job 1:8; 2:3; 9:21, the man of integrity in Job 8:20, the guiltless in Job 9:20, 22; Pss 37:37; 64:4; and Prov 29:10, and the upright in Job 1:1.⁷

The adjective תָּמִים often indicates that someone or something is intact, perfect, whole, unobjectionable, free of blemish, blameless.⁸ When used as a neuter adjective, it conveys the idea of what is complete, entirely in accord with truth and fact.⁹ The feminine noun תְּמִימָה is found only in the book of Job except for the occurrence in Prov 11:3; it describes the character and quality of a life that is guided by the fear of the Lord and by the ethical principles of uprightness, honesty, and integrity.¹⁰

In the Old Testament the word תָּמִים as related to God, His actions, and/or attributes occurs five times (Deut 32:4; 2 Sam 22: 31; Job 37:16, Ps 18:30; and Ps 19:7).

⁶William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), s.v. “תָּמִים.” See also F. Brown, *BDB*, s.v. “תָּמִים.”

⁷*Ibid.*, s.v. “תָּמִים,” “תָּמִים.” See also F. Brown, *BDB*, s.v. “תָּמִים,” “תָּמִים.”

⁸An example of this usage is found in connection with the burnt offerings of the sacrificial system in the book of Leviticus. Leviticus 22:21 states that every offering must be without תָּמִים to be acceptable to the Lord, meaning “without spot or blemish.” See also Holladay, *HALOT*, s.v. “תָּמִים”

⁹Holladay, *HALOT*, s.v. “תָּמִים.”

¹⁰Olivier, “תָּמִים,” 4:308.

Septuagint

In the Septuagint, אֱמִתּוּת is rendered as τελειότητα,¹¹ ἀληθινά,¹² ἄμωμος,¹³ and ἀληθείας¹⁴ in those passages related to God, His actions, and/or attributes. While the first two and the fourth Greek words do not appear in the New Testament in those forms, the third one does appear once.¹⁵ The masculine noun אֱמִתּוּת and the feminine noun אֱמִתּוּת are translated in the LXX as ἐξανηλώθη¹⁶ and ἐξαναλώσαι,¹⁷ meaning “use up or to exhaust.” Neither of the preceding Greek words appears in the New Testament.¹⁸ Αληθινός, which means “conform to facts, genuine,” is the LXX translation of the adjective אֱמִתּוּת; it appears also in both Old and New Testaments.¹⁹

¹¹Lancelot Brenton, *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament with an English Translation and with Various Readings and Critical Notes* (London: Bagster, 1884). Τελειότητα appears only twice (Judg 9:16, 19) and does not appear in the New Testament in this form.

¹²See Deut 32:4.

¹³See 2 Sam 22:31, Pss 18:30; 19:7.

¹⁴See Job 36:4.

¹⁵See Eph 5:27.

¹⁶Other words translating אֱמִתּוּת include but are not limited to πληρωθή (Lev 25:29) and ἀναλώθη (Num 14:33).

¹⁷Other words include ἀπώλεια (Prov 11:13) and ἀκακίαν (Job 31:6) meaning guilelessness.

¹⁸For a complete list of such occurrences, see George Morrish, *A Concordance of the Septuagint: Giving Various Readings from Codices Vaticanus, Alexandrinus, Sinaiticus, and Ephraemi, with an Appendix of Words from Origin's Hexapla, etc., Not Found in the Above Manuscripts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), s.v. “ἐξανάλισκω,” “ἐξανηλώθῃ,” or “ἐξαναλώσαι.” See Exod 32:12, 33:3, 5; Lev 26:22, 33, 44; Num 14:35; 16:21, 45; 17:12; 25:11; 32:13; Deut 2:15; 5:25; 7:22; 9:4; 28:21, 42; Josh 24:20; Jer 9:16; 10:25; Lam 13:65; Ezek 20:13.

¹⁹Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, eds., *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), s.v. “αληθινός.”

New Testament

In the New Testament τέλειος²⁰ appears nineteen times in ten different forms.²¹ Its meaning suggests the idea of “totality,” of someone or something having reached its end, of completeness or perfection. This, according to Delling, justifies the rendering of the corresponding Hebrew term תָּמִים. Thus τέλειος in Matt 5:48 means that the disciples of Jesus should be “total, complete, undivided,”²² sound, with the stress lying on being whole, perfect, or intact.²³

After this brief general overview of terms, this research narrows to the use of תָּמִים as related to God, His actions, and/or attributes.

Terms for Integrity as Related to God, His Actions, and/or Attributes

The main thrust of this section is to determine the meaning of the word “integrity” in the Pentateuch, prophets and writings, wisdom literature, Septuagint, and New Testament. Primacy is given to those instances where it relates to God, His actions, and/or attributes. Contextual, exegetical, and semantic analysis of the word תָּמִים in the Old Testament and its Greek translation in the Septuagint and New Testament will suffice to establish the meaning of integrity as it relates to God in Scripture.

²⁰The LXX rendering of תָּמִים in Deut 18: 13 is τέλειος.

²¹See Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 8:49-87.

²²Gerhard Delling Halle, “Teleios,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 1164.

²³Verlyn D. Verbrugge, ed., *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), s.v. “τέλειος.”

Old Testament

Pentateuch: Deuteronomy 32:4

Throughout the Pentateuch the word תָּמִים is used forty-nine times.²⁴ Of these, it occurs only once in reference to God, His actions, and/or attributes: Deut 32:4.

Contextual analysis

Hebrew Text: תָּמִים פְּעָלוֹ כִּי כָל־דַּרְכָּיו מִשְׁפָּט אֵל אֱמוּנָה וְאֵין עוֹל צְדִיק וְיֹשֵׁר הוּא הַצּוֹר

Translation: “The rock, His work is without fault or blemish, for all his ways are judgment; a steadfast God with no injustice; righteous and straight is He.”²⁵

Internal evidences²⁶ and Jewish tradition ascribe the authorship of the book of Deuteronomy to Moses. The summation of the Torah completes the Pentateuch, the foundation of the Hebrew Bible.²⁷ Although the verdict of liberal scholarship concerning the authorship of the Pentateuch has been against Mosaic authorship, Gleason L. Archer exposes the fallacies and weaknesses of the Wellhausian theory which promoted the documentary hypothesis and assumed multiple authors of the Pentateuch.²⁸ The Mosaic

²⁴See Gen 6:9; 17:1; Exod 12:5; 26:24; 29:1; 36:29; Lev 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6, 9; 4:3, 23, 28, 32; 5:15, 18, 25; 9:2, 3; 14:10; 22:19, 21; 23:12, 15, 18; 25:30 Num 6:14; 19:2; 28:3, 9, 11, 19, 31; 29:2, 8, 13, 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, 32, 36; Deut 18:13; 32:4.

²⁵This is my translation of Deut 32:4 and thereafter every other translation of the Hebrew and Greek texts will be mine as well.

²⁶Deut 32:24: “And it came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete.” See also Josh 1:7, 8: “Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.”

²⁷Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary 4 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 273.

²⁸Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of the Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 96-7. See also Peter C. Craigie, “The Book of Deuteronomy,” *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 24-29.

authorship functioned theologically within the community to establish the continuity of faith of successive generations once delivered to Moses at Sinai.²⁹ Mark E. Biddle remarks that Jesus' quotation of the *shema* shows its importance as part of the canon.³⁰

Some commentators suggest that the Greek name of the book as well as the Hebrew based on Deut 17:18 and Josh 8:32 means "repeated law" or "second law."³¹ Conversely, this notion of Deuteronomy as merely a copy or restatement of Exodus has led to a failure in many circles to appreciate the singular uniqueness and importance of the book. Instead, Deuteronomy is an amplification and advancement of the covenant text first articulated to Moses and Israel at Sinai nearly forty years earlier.³²

What is most important, Deuteronomy is a book of reformation, calling Israel to hear again the word of God and to make a new commitment to Him.³³ Eugene H. Merrill adds that the book reiterates the covenant in a greatly expanded form and in terms appropriate to a new generation, one that would soon enter a new life experience and engage in a new realm of responsibility.³⁴ The book is thus an explanation, a reminder, and a sustained exhortation.³⁵

²⁹Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979), 134-135. See also "The First Book of Moses Called Genesis," *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1978), 1:201.

³⁰Mark E. Biddle, *Deuteronomy*, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary 4 (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2003), 9-10.

³¹Moshe Weinfeld, "Deuteronomy, Book Of," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:168. See also Gary Harlan Hall, *Deuteronomy*, College Press NIV Commentary (CPNIVC) (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2000), 14; Andrew D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, Century Bible, new ed. (London: Oliphants, 1979), 27; Stephen K. Sherwood, *Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2002), 199.

³²Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 22.

³³Roy Lee Honeycutt Jr., *Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, Layman's Bible Book Commentary 3 (LBBC) (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1979), 107.

³⁴Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 26.

³⁵David F. Payne, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 4.

The Hebrew version of the Old Testament and most commentators agree that Deut 32:4 belongs to the pericope extending from vv. 1-6. Similarly, David F. Payne argues that the concern of Deut 32:1-6 is about God's exordium, a form of summons, where He calls heaven and earth to witness as He states His case against Israel. Hence, the meaning of the adjective תְּמִיִם in relation to God becomes vital due to its relatedness with the nature of God. Deuteronomy 32:1-6 belongs to a larger section known as the song of Moses, extending from vv. 1 to 52.³⁶ The song functions as a part of the witness to the renewal of the covenant. When sung by the Israelites, they would bear witness to their understanding and agreement to the full terms and implications of the covenant.

It could be argued that Deut 32:1-6, which includes the word תְּמִיִם under consideration, fits the general purpose of the book, namely, the reiteration of the covenant in an expanded form. Therefore, God's call of heaven and earth as witness against Israel may be seen as resulting from the overall purpose of the book. The first verse opens the song by calling upon the heavens and the earth to hear the words that are to be spoken; the poetic form is that of synonymous parallelism, but the point of reference for this verse is the earlier mention of heaven and earth as the silent witnesses to the renewal of the covenant.³⁷ "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants."³⁸

תְּמִיִם in Deut 32:4 could thus be understood within the context of a covenant relationship between Yahweh and His people. Walter Brueggemann reinforces this idea

³⁶Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC) 6B (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 792-796; Samuel R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951), 348-349; Hall, *Deuteronomy*, 467-469; Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 407-411; Sherwood, *Deuteronomy*, 279.

³⁷Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 409-410.

³⁸See Deut 30:19; see also Deut 31:28.

when he suggests that Deut 32:4-6 is a preliminary statement as though to tell the jury at the opening litigation what will be demonstrated for the court during the trial.³⁹ Since the themes of judgment/compassion flow through Deut 32, then Yahweh as the key defining player ought to be תָּמִים.⁴⁰

Exegetical considerations

Deuteronomy 32:4 belongs to a larger section extending from vv. 1 to 52 and known among Bible commentators as the song of Moses. According to Daniel Isaac Block, Deut 32 is a national anthem to keep alive the memory of Yahweh's grace. In addition, it is an exordium, a call to acknowledge the perfection of Yahweh.⁴¹ Richard Clifford is of the opinion that this verse⁴² constitutes the climax of a six-verse poem in the form of a menorah pattern (which is simply a chiasmic structure). Christensen summarizes the pattern as follows:

- A Give ear, O heavens, And let the earth hear the words of my mouth (32:1)
- B May my teaching drop as the rain (32:2)
- C The Name of Yahweh I proclaim, I ascribe greatness to our God (32:3)
- D The Rock—perfect is his work, his ways are just (32:4)
- C' Has Yahweh dealt corruptly with his people? (32:5)
- B' No, his children are a crooked and perverse generation (32:6)
- A' Is this how you repay the father who created and established you?⁴³ (32:7)

³⁹Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 278.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 284.

⁴¹Daniel Isaac Block, *How I Love Your Torah: Studies in the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 162-188.

⁴²Richard J. Clifford, *Deuteronomy: With an Excursus on Covenant and Law* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1982), 168. He compares this poem with Ps 78. Mark E. Biddle also argues that Deut 32 parallels Ps 78. See Biddle, *Deuteronomy*, 471. See also Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 73-150*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003).

⁴³Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 793.

Clifford further suggests that the purpose of Deut 32, which constitutes the song of Moses, is to convince Israel that the punishment it has undergone for its infidelity is not the end of the covenant, but that God's offer of life still holds.⁴⁴

Gerhard von Rad points out Yahweh's perfect ways as opposed to Israel's denial of God.⁴⁵ Walter Bruggemann remarks that the song establishes the generosity and reliability of Yahweh and functions as a great theodicy concerning the history of Israel.⁴⁶ The principle of analogy and/or intertextuality, which demands that the word in other contexts be examined, is very significant in the exegetical process. Thus, תָּמִים as used elsewhere becomes necessary in ascertaining its meaning.

The adjective תָּמִים in Deut 32:4, a masculine singular absolute, describes the way of Yahweh as perfect. Its position in the Hebrew text פָּעֲלֹי תָּמִים, shows its predicate use. Although occasionally used for God's insight, as is presently the case, the term is nevertheless a relational concept elsewhere in the Pentateuch.⁴⁷ The word צֹרֶר literally means place of security; it thus figuratively refers to God as a support and defense of His people.⁴⁸ In Deut 32:4-9, the sharp contrast is drawn between the perfection of God in v. 4 and the imperfection of His people in v. 5. The Lord is described as the צֹרֶר. The word is placed at the beginning of the verse for emphasis and is followed by a series of lines in the poetic parallelism which systematically elaborates the attributes of God as the rock of Israel.⁴⁹ In Ps 95:1, the clause יִשְׁעֵנוּ: לְצֹרֶר refers to God as the "rock of our salvation." In

⁴⁴Clifford, *Excursus*, 168.

⁴⁵Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library, trans. Dorothea Barton (London: SCM Press, 1966), 196.

⁴⁶Bruggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 277.

⁴⁷For example in Exod 12:5; Num 28:19, 31; and 29:8, 13. Gen 6:9; 17:1; Deut 18:13 also refer to an untroubled human relationship with God. K. Koch, *Theological Lexicon*, s.v. "תָּמִים."

⁴⁸Holladay, *HALOT*, s.v. "צֹרֶר."

⁴⁹Ibid.

Isa 44:8, the word צור is employed to contrast the permanence of God with the impermanence of false deities. The word may indicate also the personal aspect of devotion to the Lord, whose very permanence makes Him the source of absolute truth. This is expressed in Ps 19:14: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.”

Semantic analysis

In order to provide a basic biblical meaning of the word תָּמִים our quest should extend to other sections of the Old Testament in general and the Pentateuch in particular. In this regard, the forty-nine occurrences are examined in turn.⁵⁰

According to Biddle, תָּמִים does not connote the platonic notion of abstract perfection, but the idea of completion, time, wholeness, soundness, innocence, or having integrity. Nearly every time it is used in the Pentateuch, תָּמִים occurs as a modifier in reference to cultic offerings that are acceptable, such as in Exod 12:5. When used to characterize people, it expresses reliable, proper, healthy relationships such as in Gen 6:9 where Moses, in the account of the flood, reveals that Noah was a righteous and blameless man, תָּמִים among the people of his time, one who walked with God. Furthermore, the term is primarily relational as Yahweh acts with integrity.⁵¹ Biddle further adds that the words in v. 4 are expegetical because they further exposit the relational idea that Yahweh is the Rock who acts with blameless integrity.⁵² The Jewish Publication Society captures this idea in its translation of Deut 32:4 which reads, “The

⁵⁰See Gen 6:9; 17:1; Exod 12:5; 26:24; 29:1; 36:29; Lev 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6, 9; 4:3, 23, 28, 32; 5:15, 18, 25; 9:2, 3; 14:10; 22:19, 21; 23:12, 15, 18; 25:30 Num 6:14; 19:2; 28:3, 9, 11, 19, 31; 29:2, 8, 13, 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, 32, 36; Deut 18:13; 32:4.

⁵¹Biddle, *Deuteronomy*, 473-474.

⁵²Ibid., 473.

Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice; a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is He.”

Of the forty-nine references to תָּמִים in the Pentateuch, it occurs twice in Genesis, four times in Exodus, twenty-two times in Leviticus, nineteen times in Numbers, and twice in Deuteronomy.

In the two references in Genesis תָּמִים is rendered as sound, innocent, wholesome, unimpaired, and having integrity.⁵³ It is further used to indicate the serenity of the unclouded relationship between God and the righteous.⁵⁴ In a minority of instances the adjective תָּמִים characterized people, as in Gen 17:1 where it refers to an untroubled human relationship with God.

The masculine adjective תָּמִים occurs four times in the book of Exodus. Both Exod 12:5 and Exod 29:1 refer to the physical condition of the animal to be offered as a sacrifice. The animal was to be healthy and without defect or blemish. The other two occurrences in Exod 26:24 and 36:29 reveal that the frames of the two corners and the sides of the tabernacles were to be תָּמִים, therefore, well-fitted or without fault.⁵⁵ Regardless of whether תָּמִים applied to animals, persons, or abstract things, the quality of the being or thing being modified by the adjective was to be without blemish or fault.

In Leviticus, all but two of the twenty-two occurrences of תָּמִים describe the quality of Israel’s sacrifices, which were to be without blemish, perfect in that respect, so as to be accepted as a type of Christ, the spotless lamb of God.⁵⁶ In like manner, the presentation of an animal that is not תָּמִים makes the sacrificial acts invalid, even

⁵³See Holladay, *HALOT*, s.v. “תָּמִים.”

⁵⁴Olivier, “תָּמִים,” 4:307.

⁵⁵See Exod 26:23-26; 36:28-29.

⁵⁶P. J. Barton, “תָּמִים,” 973. In Lev 23:15 and 25:30 are two exceptions in which תָּמִים means full or complete.

harmful.⁵⁷ Accordingly, Koch suggests that תָּמִים thus means a verifiable, unobjectionable physical quality in contrast to a maimed or sick animal.⁵⁸ Since the criteria were not those of neutral agriculture, it was strictly related to the cult in the vast majority of instances.⁵⁹ While on the one hand the feminine plural form of תָּמִים occurs in Lev 3:9 to suggest, according to Ludwig Koehler, that the complete fatty tail was to be unscathed or intact, the feminine singular form on the other hand occurring in Lev 25:30 conveys the idea of entirety in the expression of time.⁶⁰

Just as in Leviticus, the nineteen occurrences of תָּמִים in Num 6:14 are also related to the physical quality of animal sacrifice. The animal was to be without fault or free of blemish to be fully accepted as a sacrifice pleasing to God.⁶¹

In the book of Deuteronomy תָּמִים occurs twice (Deut 8:13 and Deut 32:4) in the masculine singular form explaining its connectedness to the antecedent. תָּמִים in Deut 32:4 is the only one in the Pentateuch directly referring to the character and work of God, whereas in Deut 18:13 God requires Israel to be תָּמִים or perfect.⁶² This requirement to be תָּמִים before Him was in compliance to shun away from child sacrifice, divination, and magic. Of the thirty-nine references to perfect sacrifices that use תָּמִים in Exodus and Leviticus, all of these, in shadow form, point to the perfect spotless character of the Son of God.

⁵⁷See Lev 22:19-21.

⁵⁸Koch, "תָּמִים," 3:1426.

⁵⁹Ibid., 1426.

⁶⁰Ludwig Köhler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Brill, 1994), s.v. "תָּמִים."

⁶¹See P. J. Barton, "תָּמִים," 974; Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English*, ed. Baruch Sarel (New York: Macmillan, 1987), s.v. "תָּמִים."

⁶²P. J. Barton, "תָּמִים," 974. See also Holladay, *HALOT*, s.v. "תָּמִים."

Accordingly, it is important to note that the leading concept associated to תָּמִים is not the one who perseveres in one's work and completes it; rather it involves a process that has already been accomplished in the thing or the person concerned and, through imminent necessity, will produce either a good or a bad result.⁶³ This concept is evident when death or punishment is involved. For example, God predicts that the Israelites' "sons shall be shepherds for forty years in the wilderness, and they will suffer for your unfaithfulness, until your corpses lie in the wilderness,"⁶⁴ in others words, until your corpses come to an end or decay.

In general תָּמִים in the Pentateuch means without blemish, without spot or decay. We continue with its meaning in the prophetic literature.

Prophets: תָּמִים in 2 Samuel 22:31

In the prophetic books, תָּמִים occurs once as related to God, His actions, and/or attributes: 2 Sam 22:31.

Contextual analysis

Hebrew Text: הָאֵל תָּמִים בְּרָצוֹן אִמְרַת יְהוָה צְרוּפָה מִן הוּא לְכֹל הַחַסִּים בּוֹ:

Translation: For God, His way is blameless, the word of the Lord is tested, He is a shield to all who seek refuge in Him.

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel as known in the Protestant and more recent Jewish traditions have carried three other titles.⁶⁵ However, the books originally were one book; the division into two derives from the Greek and Latin traditions of the text and not

⁶³Koch, "תָּמִים," 3:1425.

⁶⁴See Num 14:33.

⁶⁵In the LXX and Greek Orthodox traditions these books were known as 1 and 2 Kingdoms; in the Vulgate and Catholic traditions, they were known as 1 and 2 Kings; and then prior to the Bomberg edition in 1516 it was simply called Samuel. See Robert D. Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel*, The New American Commentary 7 (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 17.

necessarily the Hebrew.⁶⁶ Bill T. Arnold thinks that the authors of Samuel are anonymous because many hands were involved in the writing, compiling, arranging, and editing processes.⁶⁷ However, two arguments explain the naming of the book after Samuel; first, Samuel anointed Saul and David and thus inaugurated the kingdom of Israel, and second, his prophetic activity exerted an influence on the spirit of Saul's government as well as David's in a continuation and completion of the reformation of the Israelite theocracy that he began in obedience to God's command.⁶⁸

While the content of the books of Samuel reflects the historical development of Israel's theocracy from the end of the period of the judges to near the end of the government of King David,⁶⁹ Robert D. Bergen argues for a multifaceted function and purpose of the books. Consequently, the function is understood to be a historical work, a literary art, an apologetic literature, a theological treatise, and Holy Scripture used in the Jewish and Christian faith.⁷⁰ Although many purposes may have helped shape the books, one overriding purpose dominates the whole: to demonstrate the right of the Davidic

⁶⁶P. Kyle McCarter, *1 Samuel: A New Translation*, Anchor Bible 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 3.

⁶⁷Bill T. Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text to Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 25. He further contends that the Talmud preserves the rabbinic tradition that these books were written by the prophet who lived contemporaneously with the events described. Therefore, Samuel wrote 1 Sam 1-24, and the rest was written by Nathan and Gad according to 1 Chr 29:29. See *ibid.*, 25. Lewis also refers to 1 Chr 29:29 to suggest that Samuel, Nathan, and Gad may well have left accounts which were ultimately used in putting the whole books together. See Joe O. Lewis, *1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Chronicles*, LBBC 5 (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1980), 11.

⁶⁸Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *The Books of Samuel*, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), 9:2-6.

⁶⁹Johann Peter Lange, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homilectical, with Special Reference to Ministers and Students*, ed. and trans. by Philip Schaff (New York: Scribner, 1908-1915), 52.

⁷⁰Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 27.

kings to rule Judah and Israel, a right anchored in the will of God and established by His work.⁷¹

תְּמִים in 2 Sam 22:31 belongs to a larger pericope, extending from 2 Sam 22:1-51. Commentators in general think that 2 Sam 22:31 is David's psalm of thanksgiving.⁷² That the hymn was indeed composed by David is confirmed by Ps 18 where the poem with some variation also appears. Both 2 Sam 22 and Ps 18 begin with the clause "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer." They are both approximately equal in length. In both, David recounts in broad outline the story of the marvelous deliverances and victories that God had given him. This commemorative song of triumph is heart history, the story of a human heart ever devoted to God and sincere in its integrity in the things of God.⁷³

While the section from vv. 29-31 denotes an expression of confidence,⁷⁴ vv. 31-33 appear to make up a single semantic unit.⁷⁵ Because the right of the Davidic kingship to rule Israel and Judah was anchored in the will of God, this psalm of thanksgiving confirms the greatness of God who receives praise and honor. David's claim that the way of God is תְּמִים contributes to the general purpose of the song, whose main thrust was to praise God for His goodness and greatness.

⁷¹Lewis, *Samuel*, 12.

⁷²A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 11 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 257. Eric C. Rust refers to 2 Sam 22:1-51 as almost identical to Ps 18. See Eric Charles Rust, *The Book of Judges, the Book of Ruth, the First and Second Books of Samuel*, Layman's Bible Commentary 6 (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1961), 149.

⁷³"Ps 18, Introduction," *SDABC*, 3:671.

⁷⁴Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 262. See also Lewis, *Samuel*, 120.

⁷⁵Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 459.

Exegetical considerations

Second Samuel 22:31 and 33 begin with the same word **הָאֱלֹהִים** “the God” and contain the predicate use of **תְּמִים** as expressed in **הַרְבּוּ תְּמִים הַרְבּוּ** “sound/perfect is His way.” Bergen contends that 2 Sam 22:31-33 was constructed chiasmically, magnifying the Lord, whose way, word, and protection are **תְּמִים**.⁷⁶ The diagram below illustrates his thought:

- A His way is blameless; (31)
- B For who is God, besides the Lord? And who is a rock, (32)
- A’ Blameless in His way (33)

God had provided a pathway for life for David. The king had walked in the way of God and found it to be **תְּמִים**. The word of God, both as it was written in the law and spoken through the prophets, had invariably guided David to safety and success. God was David’s only source of divine help because there was no other God beside the Lord. David notes that the one true God was a “mountain stronghold,” He is the one whose way is **תְּמִים**.⁷⁷ These verses tell us not only that God’s way is blameless, but that freedom is found for all those found blameless in Christ and His way.

The predicate use of **תְּמִים** in 2 Sam 22:31 explains the use of the verb “to be” in this non-verbal clause so as to show equality between the noun and the adjective. It appears that both words agree in gender and number (masculine, singular). The suffix in the third-person masculine singular construct points to the closest antecedent, which is God. Thus, **הַרְבּוּ תְּמִים הַרְבּוּ** literally means “perfect is the way of Him.” The closest antecedent in the clause is God; therefore, the way of God is **תְּמִים**.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid.

Semantic analysis

In the portion of the Hebrew Scripture known as the prophets, the word תָּמִים occurs twenty-three times,⁷⁸ with the greatest concentration appearing in the book of Ezekiel (thirteen times). A comprehensive meaning of the word necessitates a brief survey of all twenty-three occurrences.

The predicate use of תָּמִים in Josh 10:13 not only justifies the use of the verb “to be” in the English translation, but also shows how it modifies the noun preceding it. Thus, כָּיּוֹם תָּמִים describes a day’s journey; the sun stood still for an entire or complete day.⁷⁹ In firm reliance upon the promise of God Joshua offered a prayer to the Lord during the battle, that he would not let the sun go down till Israel had taken vengeance upon their foes.⁸⁰ Therefore, the context suggests that the sun and the moon stood still for a complete day. J. Harris comments that the Lord’s control over the moon and sun gave the people an extended day that would allow them enough time to complete their victory.⁸¹ Thus the idea is that the victory was תָּמִים completed on that day. Joshua 24:14 tells us that we are to serve Yahweh in תָּמִים and in truth. We are to be like Him. In Judg 9:16 and 19, Jotham makes two strong statements: “If you have dealt in truth and תָּמִים, then rejoice in Abimelech and let him also rejoice in you.”

In 1 Sam 14:41, the word תָּמִים is used in a legal context to determine the guilty party. For that matter, Saul’s appeal to God for a perfect lot also presupposes the existence of a false one. Following Saul’s prayer for divine guidance, the process of

⁷⁸See Josh 10:13; 24:14; Judg 9:16, 19; 1 Sam 14:41; 2 Sam 22:24, 26, 31, 33; Ezek 15:5; 28:15; 43:22, 23(2), 25; 45:18, 23; 46:4(2), 6(2), 13; Amos 5:10.

⁷⁹John Joseph Owens, *Analytical Key to the Old Testament* 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989), 955. John argues that this expression means “about a whole day.”

⁸⁰Keil and Delitzsch, *Joshua*, 6:106.

⁸¹J. Gordon Harris, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 5:65.

determining guilt was carried out in two stages. Initially a trial by lot was conducted to see if the sin lay with the royal family or the army of Israel. Then a selection was made between the king and his son Jonathan using the same method.⁸² It could thus be inferred that תָּמִים in this context means “true method in finding the guilty as opposed to the false one.” James E. Smith is of the same opinion when he says that Saul prayed to God for the right answer.⁸³

תָּמִים in 2 Sam 22:24 is used attributively to describe David’s relationship with King Saul. His claim that he was תָּמִים before the Lord does not in any case suggest that he was without sin or guilt. According to the biblical context, Saul is persecuting David, although he has done nothing deserving of such vicious treatment by Saul.⁸⁴

Second Samuel 21-29 explains the reasons for David’s deliverance. So David’s injunction תָּמִים תִּתְקַמֵּם עִם-גִּבּוֹר תָּמִים “with the strong perfect man, you show yourself perfect” further shows that David is not claiming a sinless status. He voices not only his innocence vis-à-vis Saul’s persecution but also his faithfulness in following the perfect way of the Lord.

There are thirteen occurrences of תָּמִים in the book of Ezekiel. Accordingly, commenting on Ezek 15:5, Daniel Isaac Block contends that if the wood of the grapevine has no practical value as raw material in its natural form, how much less its value after it is burned.⁸⁵ In other words, the context suggests a change in form of a raw material from its תָּמִים state to its disintegrated state—just as the prophet wrote, “Our righteous deeds

⁸²Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 160.

⁸³Ibid., 193.

⁸⁴James E. Smith, *1 & 2 Samuel*, CPNIVC, Old Testament (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2000), 513.

⁸⁵See Daniel Isaac Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 1:457.

are filthy rags” (Isa 64:6). If what the best of committed followers of God could offer is tainted with sin and therefore filthy rags, how much less worthy are the deeds of those who willfully rebel against God?

This idea of a change of state is carried on in Ezek 28:15. Here the king of Tyre refers to Satan, and the circumstance of his original fall is recounted. The judgmental overtone of Ezek 28:15 contrasts the king of Tyre’s original תָּמִים (blamelessness) with his subsequent corruption. The use of תָּמִים immediately after הִתְהַלֵּכְתָּ “walk,” in v. 14, invites comparison with Noah, who was תָּמִים (blameless) and walked with God (Gen 6:9), and Abraham who was charged by God to הִתְהַלֵּךְ (walk) before Him and be תָּמִים (Gen 17:1).⁸⁶

תָּמִים in Ezek 43:22, 23, 25; 45:18, 23; 46:4, 6, 13 refers to the cultic procedures, dedication, and cleansing of the sanctuary; it denotes the quality of the sacrificial animals which were to be תָּמִים (without blemish or unimpaired).

Of all the twenty-three occurrences in the prophetic literature, five involve human relationships. In Amos 5:10, תָּמִים expresses a reliable and complete discourse between persons, whereas in Ezek 28:15 the prophet describes the king of Tyre’s תָּמִים state with its corrupt state on the day iniquity was found in him.⁸⁷

In the light of the preceding and irrespective of the context, תָּמִים always means that someone or something has kept its original state; or that he/it has not experienced corruption, disintegration, or any change in nature and form, especially when used attributively or predicatively. Thus, the relationship could be תָּמִים and the animal sacrifices were to be תָּמִים in order to be pleasing and acceptable to God.

⁸⁶Ibid., 2: 116.

⁸⁷Koch, “תָּמִים,” 3:1426-1427.

Writings

There are three occurrences of תְּמִים in wisdom literature as related to God, His actions, and/or attributes (Job 37:16; Pss 18:30; 19:7). Inasmuch as 2 Sam 22 and Ps 18 are nearly the same, this section will consider only Job 37:16 and Ps 19:8. We will begin with Job 37:16.

Contextual analysis of Job 37:16

Hebrew Text: הַחֲדַע עַל־מַפְלְשֵׁי־עָב מַפְלְאוֹת תְּמִים דְּעִים:

Translation: Do you know the height of the thick clouds, the wondrous work of Him who is perfect in knowledge?

The book of Job belongs to a group of writings known as wisdom literature. The concept of wisdom expressed in it involves a distinctive outlook on life and a particular way of thinking. The book bears the name of the key figure Job and consists of several sections: the account of his trial and numerous speeches that treat the issue of suffering.⁸⁸ The canonicity of the book has never been seriously questioned, though its location in the various canons has fluctuated.⁸⁹

According to Balmer H. Kelly, the identity of the author of the book of Job remains unknown for there are no clues, he adds, in the book to suggest its author.⁹⁰

Similarly, Robert L. Alden seems to concur with Balmer by pointing out that the events

⁸⁸John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 3.

⁸⁹See *ibid.*, 3. In most English Bibles, Job heads what are called the poetical books (Job to Songs of Songs). This follows the Greek Codex Vaticanus which put Job after the historical books. A variety of arrangements can be found: with Job after Deuteronomy (the Syriac Peshitta and Codex Sinaiticus), before Proverbs (Baba Bathra 14 b, MT), or after Proverbs (NJPS). See Robert L. Alden, *Job*, New American Commentary 11 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 31.

⁹⁰Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 54.

in Job's life that form the background of the book are areas of vigorous speculation. This explains Alden's argument that the author of Job declined to reveal his identity.⁹¹

However, internal evidences seem to suggest that Moses is the author of the book.⁹² The Babylonian Talmud claims, "Moses wrote his own book and the portion of Balaam and Job."⁹³ Moses spent forty years in Midian, which would give him ample background for the strong Arabic flavor that is evident throughout the book. His Egyptian background also explains the allusion to Egyptian life and practice that occur in the book.⁹⁴ The picture of God as creator and sustainer fits well with the creation narrative preserved in another book written by Moses. There are no exodus allusions, but the destruction of the guilty by the flood (Job 22:15) and possibly that of Sodom and Gomorrah (Job 18:15) are referenced, but no later facts.

Two purposes of the book overlap each other: one corrective and instructive, the other therapeutic. The former explains that there are exceptions to the principle of "just reward," the idea that punishment or blessing always comes as a result of one's sin or obedience. The latter gives comfort to believers of all ages who find themselves in Job's situation of suffering.⁹⁵

The reader of Job 37:16 is captivated by Elihu's exaltation of the goodness and power of God (Job 36:1-37:17). This exaltation not only explains the fallacy of the

⁹¹Alden, *Job*, 28. Although the author is unknown, the importance lies in the fact that the book was written under divine inspiration; therefore, there is no reason to doubt its historicity or to be uncertain about its meaning. See Gleason Leonard Archer, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., and Ronald F. Youngblood, eds., *A Tribute to Gleason Archer* (Chicago: Moody Press 1986), 31.

⁹²See Exod 17:14; 24:4; 34:27; Lev 1:1; 6:8; Deut 31:9; 24-26.

⁹³"Baba Bathra," 14a-15b, in *The Babylonian Talmud*, ed. Isidore Epstein (London: Soncino, 1935), 71.

⁹⁴"The Book of Job," *SDABC*, 3:493.

⁹⁵Alden, *Job*, 40-41.

doctrine of just reward propagated by Job’s friends, but also reveals the untarnished or unblemished character of God as portrayed in Job 37:16. From the perspective of Job’s friends, God alone could provide a solution to the problem of suffering. Hence, an appeal to the one who is תָּמִים in knowledge. For those innocent sufferers in every age, only the God תָּמִים in knowledge could bring perfect comfort.

Exegetical considerations

While the framework of the book of Job—introduction and conclusion—is prose, its core is poetry. It is therefore important to consider the words or expressions closely tied with תָּמִים. The book as a whole is a combination of both a narrative and an argument—perhaps an argument set within the context of a narrative. David A. Clines suggests the following such structure.⁹⁶

1:1-2:13 Framework prose	narrative
3:1-42:6 Core poetry	argument
42:7-17 Framework prose	narrative.

Elihu’s exaltation of the goodness and power of God contributes to the meaning of תָּמִים in Job 37:16. Job 37:14-18 forms a unit whose content projects Elihu’s rationale of God’s justice to punish the wicked based on such texts as Gen 6:17; Exod 9:18; and Deut 28:15, 16. However, upon careful examination of the last section of the book (Job 42:7-17), one observes that God declares Job’s innocence by restoring all he had lost. This once more proves the fallacy of the doctrine of just reward advocated by Job’s friends.

Because of the predicate use of תָּמִים in Job 37:16, the nominal or non-verbal clause מִפְּלֹאֵת תָּמִים הָעֵיִם shows that the verb “to be” is supplied in the translation.

⁹⁶David J. A. Clines, *Job 1-20*, Word Biblical Commentary 17 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1989), 35.

Therefore, the preceding nominal clause could be translated “the wondrous works of the one who is perfect in knowledge.” The use of **בְּשׁוֹמְ-אֵלֹהִים** “in place God” in Job 37:15 suggests that God is the antecedent of the nominal clause in Job 37:16. The one who is **תְּמִים** in Job 37:16 is God.

Semantic analysis

תְּמִים is used three times in the book of Job. The first occurrence in Job 12:4 describes the noun **צַדִּיק** by standing in apposition to it. They both agree in gender, number, and definiteness. The context of Job 12:4 suggests that the one who is righteous and **תְּמִים** is laughed to scorn. Norman C. Habel renders **תְּמִים** as innocent. He notes that although Job has become a laughingstock, he justly objects to this treatment and pursues his claim of innocence before God.⁹⁷ The use of the verb **קָרַא**, which is a qal participle masculine singular absolute, describes Job’s former close relationship with God. Job’s allegation of innocence is seen in the use of the phrase **תָּם-אֲנִי** “I am a person of integrity” in Job 9:20 when he argues that he is guiltless; the verse reads, “Though I am righteous, my mouth will condemn me; though I am guiltless, He will declare me guilty.”

Elsewhere in Job 1:8 and 2:3, his friends thought of him as a laughingstock or object of derision **שִׂחָק**, because he remained faithful to God and maintained his integrity. Thus, the context of Job 12:4 suggests that **תְּמִים** conveys the idea of innocence because his friends attempted to convict him of sin.

In Job 36:4, Elihu’s presumption reached an apex when he claimed freedom from falsehood and “perfect knowledge,” a phrase he applied to God in Job 37:16.⁹⁸ Elihu boasted that his arguments are free from **שִׁקָּר** “deception” or “falsehood.” In his opinion his reasoning skills are **תְּמִים**. According to Norman C. Habel, the parallelism of Job 36:4

⁹⁷Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1985), 218.

⁹⁸Alden, *Job*, 348.

suggests that תְּמִיּוֹם implies complete mastery of the argumentation in the case Elihu is presenting. In spite of Elihu’s claim to be perfect in the legal process of the judgment, this perfection is later attributed to God in Job 37:16. Elihu has fallen into the trap of taking the place of God, and his pompous claim to argue his case as one perfect in reasoning is shown to be false.⁹⁹ Conversely, God is the omniscient One whose knowledge is absolute as to its depth as well as its circumference.¹⁰⁰ The noun דְּעֵימָם in Job 37:16 is a common masculine plural absolute whose antecedent is found in the previous verse. Thus, it refers to God Himself; the common masculine form אֱלֹהֵי is used, but this is used interchangeably in the Scripture with the plural form אֱלֹהִים as found in Gen 1:1.

Contextual analysis of Psalms 19:8

Hebrew Text: תּוֹרַת יְהוָה תְּמִימָה מְשִׁיבַת נַפְשׁ עֲדוּת יְהוָה נֶאֱמָנָה מִחִפְיִמְחַפְתָּי:

Translation: The law of God is perfect, restoring the person; the testimony of the Lord is trusty, making the wise simple.

The Hebrew Scriptures note that David wrote many of the psalms, but some had another author. A variety of names have been applied to the book, each of which reflects a distinct way of viewing the collection over the ages.¹⁰¹ The 150 Psalms have been divided into five books, probably on the analogy of the Torah, with each book closing with a liturgical doxology.¹⁰²

⁹⁹Habel, *The Book of Job*, 506, 514.

¹⁰⁰Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Job* (1949; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), 2:301.

¹⁰¹Gerald Henry Wilson, *Psalms: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 21. Peter C. Craigie believes psalms covers the time before the monarchy to the period after the exile. Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*. WBC, edited by David Allan Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts, 19 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 28-30.

¹⁰²Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library, trans. Herbert Hartwell (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1962), 21.

תָּמִים is found in Pss 18:30 and 19:7 and belongs to the first division of the Psalms.¹⁰³ Psalm 18:1-51 falls within the category of a royal psalm of thanksgiving sung on the day of deliverance. That song of thanksgiving commemorated David’s deliverance from great peril and victory over his enemies. Weiser is of the opinion that David composed this song after God delivered him from the hand of King Saul. The similarity with 2 Sam 22 also points in that direction.¹⁰⁴ The context of Ps 18 in compliance with the biblical record explains the reason why the way of God is תָּמִים. Because of what God has done for the king—deliverance—the certainty of the way of God as תָּמִים explains why the king praised God’s way as he will praise His law elsewhere as תָּמִים.

Psalm 19 is an awe-filled description of the cosmic self-revelation of God through His creative act and His gracious instruction in the Torah.¹⁰⁵ The pericope in vv. 7-11 describes God’s revelation through the Torah. Psalm 19 provides an example of the righteous person who follows the pattern laid out in Ps 1:1, “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.” It also offers a public hymn, which expresses a joyous appreciation of the statutes, ordinances, and instruction of Yahweh, all of which set Israel apart from the other nations.¹⁰⁶ In the first section of Ps 19, the heavens begin the chorus of praise, and day and night point back to the first day of creation. Then the glory of the sun, created on

¹⁰³FFor a detailed structure of the book of Psalms, see Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 28-30. Using the Hebrew numbering of the verses, he further suggests the following structure of Ps 18: title (v. 1); introductory praise (vv. 2-4); the psalmist’s plea and the theophany (vv. 5-20); the goodness of God (vv. 21-31); the incomparable God and His servant (vv. 32-46); concluding praise to the living Lord (vv. 47-51); *ibid.*, 172.

¹⁰⁴Weiser, *The Psalms*, 185-186; Wilson, *Before Philosophy*, 335. See also C. J. A. Vos, *Theopoetry of the Psalms* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 94.

¹⁰⁵Wilson, *Before Philosophy*, 360. See also Nancy L. DeClaissé-Walford, *Introduction to the Psalms: A Song from Ancient Israel* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2004), 60.

¹⁰⁶Jamie A. Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy’s Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 94.

the fourth day of that first week, adds his praises as the Torah teaches.¹⁰⁷ Accordingly, the anointed ones of Ps 20:6b-7, whose prayer will be heard, are also the devout servants of Yahweh in Ps 19.¹⁰⁸

In Marc Girard's opinion, the recurrence of תְּמִים in Ps 19:7 suggests that there are no other sources of perfection for man than the perfect law of God; Redemption is also key in this chapter as seen in v. 15, which suggests that redeeming a life means also its restoration when it is threatened.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, the king's expression of praise, thanksgiving, and his delight in the way and law of God explains the recurrence of תְּמִים in chaps. 18 and 19 of the book of Psalms.

Exegetical considerations of תְּמִים in Psalms 18:30

The adjective תְּמִים in Ps 18:30 is a masculine singular absolute which agrees in gender and number with הָאֱלֹהִים, a common noun masculine singular absolute. Thus, the clause הָאֱלֹהִים תְּמִים shows that the adjective modifies the noun. The presence of the definite article in הָאֱלֹהִים reveals the specificity of the noun it modifies; in this case, it points to the specific God who rescued David from the hand of Saul. The suffix in the third-person masculine singular in הַדֶּרֶךְ shows that the דֶּרֶךְ (way/road) refers to the way of the Lord. Therefore, His way is תְּמִים. In Robert C. Hill's understanding, it is the judgments of the Lord that are right.¹¹⁰ This predicate use of the adjective in a non-verbal clause further shows that תְּמִים and the way of "the" God can be used interchangeably. Psalm 19:7a presents another non-verbal predicate clause; thus, both תוֹרַת and תְּמִים agree in gender

¹⁰⁷Vos, *Theopoetry of the Psalms*, 94.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 95.

¹⁰⁹Marc Girard, *Les Psaumes: Analyse Structurelle et Interprétation* (Montréal: Bellarmin, 1984), 172.

¹¹⁰Robert C. Hill, *Theodore of Mopsuestia Commentary on Psalms 1-81*, Writings from the Greco-Roman World (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 337.

and number (feminine, singular). Therefore, the clause תּוֹרַת יְהוָה תְּמִימָה suggests that the Torah of Yahweh is complete for it lacks nothing in itself. Psalm 19 has four movements, differentiated from each other by their changing theme: namely, space and time (vv. 1-4a); the sun (vv. 4b-6); the law (vv. 7-10); an examination of the conscience and the final request (vv. 11-14).

The first two portions of Ps 19 honor the creator. In the third, the psalmist meditates on God's moral order (vv. 7-10). In the last section, he examines his own conscience. The natural and ethical sections are linked by the fact that the sun provides light to the natural world even as the Torah enlightens the rational being.¹¹¹ The characteristic particularities attributed to the Law are true also of the God who is behind the law and from whose authority the law derives its value. Thus in praising the law, the psalm praises the God who is revealed in that law. This is yet another evidence that God is תְּמִימָה as well as His law.

Semantic analysis

תְּמִימָה in Ps 15:2 describes the quality of the one "who may dwell in the holy hill" of the Lord as referred to in the previous verse. To walk תְּמִימָה (blamelessly) is to maintain one's integrity as a child of God. Thus, to do right is to conform one's life to moral and ethical standards which are above reproach and to shun every corrupt practice. To speak truth is to be free from any deceit or falsehood.¹¹² James Luther Mays adds that to walk with תְּמִימָה means living with integrity.¹¹³ He further argues that תְּמִימָה marks the character

¹¹¹Konrad Schaefer, *Psalm*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry, ed. David W. Cotter, Jerome T. Walsh, and Chris Franke (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2001), 45.

¹¹²S. Edward Tesh and Walter D. Zorn, *Psalms*, The College Press NIV Commentary: Old Testament (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1999), 164.

¹¹³James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 84.

of the one whose conduct is coherent, consistent, and reliable. What God says is proven by what He does; He is the shield for those who take refuge in Him, who hold to Him and His ways.¹¹⁴

In Ps 18:23 and 25, תָּמִים describes not only the psalmist's character, but also his commitment to the precepts of God. The psalmist was “upright” (KJV), or “blameless” (NAS) before God. Whereas Ps 18:30 depicts the way of the Lord as תָּמִים v. 32 depicts how the Lord makes David's way תָּמִים. Jamie A. Grant argues for a close ideological association between Ps 19 and Deut 4. Accordingly, the Sinai covenant and its teaching were the wisdom by which Israel was to live and find life. He further states that the whole approach of Ps 19 towards the Torah of Yahweh resonates strongly with Moses' exhortation to the people prior to the conquest of the Promised Land. Therefore, the torah of Yahweh is תָּמִימָה—self-sufficient, addressing every area of life and practices, setting God's people apart from all others.¹¹⁵

תָּמִים in Ps 101:2, 6 describes the quality of the one who dwells with the Lord. Leslie C. Allen argues that this section of Ps 101:2-6 coincides with the wisdom theme, which moves from positive to negative statements. Thus, the king bears before God a responsibility for his compatriots. Accordingly, he has ensured that the members of his administration are men committed to Yahweh, loyal men whose trustworthiness is grounded in their faith. Thus, the faithful one, who walks in a תָּמִים way, pleads not sinless perfection but a conscientious attitude towards royal duties.¹¹⁶ תָּמִים in this context is understood as a commitment to the way of the Lord. James Luther Mays contends that תָּמִים in Ps 101:2, 6 refers to what is whole, complete, finished, in reference to conduct. In

¹¹⁴Ibid., 93.

¹¹⁵Grant, *The King as Exemplar*, 96.

¹¹⁶Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 11-12.

this regard, הָם and תְּמִיִּם describe acts that are coherent and consistent in relation to some foundational value. In this context it would be the loyalty and justice of the Lord; the way of the תְּמִיִּם (blameless) is the characteristic conduct of those whose motives, and choices, and acts are consistent with their dependence on the Lord.¹¹⁷

In Ps 119:80, תְּמִיִּם describes the integrity of the human heart vis-à-vis the moral law of God. In Anderson's understanding, a man whose heart is תְּמִיִּם (blameless) in God's statutes is one who reflects in his actions something of the very life of God, and who does the will of God.¹¹⁸ תְּמִיִּם in this context seems to suggest a complete commitment to the will of the Lord.

A thematic contrast exists between the wise and righteous person and the wicked fool in the eleventh chapter of Proverbs. Those who are righteous and wise practice virtues that lead to well-being for themselves and their social order. These virtues include an accurate weight as Yahweh's delight; wisdom emerging from humility; integrity (תְּמִיִּם) guiding the upright; life resulting from steadfast righteousness; blameless ways that are the delight of Yahweh.¹¹⁹ Consequently, תְּמִיִּם in Prov 11:5 (צִדְקַת תְּמִיִּם), as William McKane explains, means the righteousness of the upright men guarantees them unfailing guidance on the way of life, whereas wicked men will fall because of their wickedness.

¹¹⁷Mays, *Psalms*, 321.

¹¹⁸A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 830. Kenneth T. Aitken calls this the theme of two ways as seen in the sayings of the righteous and the wicked. The theme is primarily a teaching aid which helped the teacher to sum up the thrust of his lesson so that his pupils would have no difficulty understanding, highlighting the contrast between two different lifestyles and the two subsequent destinations of travelers walking through life. See Kenneth T. Aitken, *Proverbs* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1986), 141.

¹¹⁹Leo G. Perdue, *Proverbs*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2000), 166.

Similarly, the subject in Prov 11:3 deals with a particular aspect of the righteous-wicked antithesis and puts תְּמִיּוֹם (integrity) in contrast with סִלְף (perversion, crookedness or crooked dealing).¹²⁰ Therefore, vv. 5 and 6 in Prov 11 pair with each other, connecting thematically, syntactically, and semantically. Both verses contrast the fates of the righteous and wicked.¹²¹ Roland E. Murphy suggests that each word in v. 5a is a key term in virtuous conduct: “justice,” “integrity,” “straight,” and “way.” The implication points to journeying along God’s path without stumbling or falling.¹²²

Proverbs 28:18 addresses the same dichotomy; the one whose way of life is תְּמִיּוֹם will be safe, while the one with a crooked way will fall into a pit. Duane A. Garrett submits that vv. 17 and 18 of Prov 28 could be read in a theological or social sense. Theologically, the murderer is oppressed by a guilty conscience, and no one should seek to lessen that guilt or punishment (v. 17). On the other hand, someone with a clear conscience is free of such torments (v. 18a). Socially, the courts should punish murderers to the utmost (v. 17), but the innocent have no fear of such retribution (v. 18a). Whether by the hand of God or of men, the wicked will fall (v. 18b).¹²³ Murphy thus concludes that the one who walks תְּמִיּוֹם (blamelessly) will be safe from the evil results that can be expected to come upon the wicked.¹²⁴

¹²⁰William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1970), 435.

¹²¹Milton P. Horne, *Proverbs-Ecclesiastes*, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2003), 12:154.

¹²²Edmund Roland Murphy, *Proverbs*, Word Bible Commentary 22 (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1998), 81.

¹²³Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, New American Commentary 14 (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1993), 225-226.

¹²⁴Murphy, *Proverbs*, 216.

Summary

Of the ninety-three occurrences of the word **קִדְמוֹת** in the Old Testament, only five of these relate to God, His actions, or attributes.¹²⁵ These five occurrences address four essential aspects of God's attributes: (1) His work (Deut 32:4); (2) His way (2 Sam 22:31, Ps 18:30); (3) His law (Ps 19:7); and (4) His knowledge (Job 37:16). All four of these aspects of God's **קִדְמוֹת** reveal that His work, way, law, and knowledge are perfect, undefiled, and flawless. Consequently, in the Old Testament **קִדְמוֹת** applies to things, animals, humans, and God Himself. In each of these cases, it means that something or someone is undefiled, flawless, or unadulterated. My analysis continues in the Septuagint.

Septuagint

Ἀληθινα and *ἄμωμος* are the Greek translation of the Hebrew word **קִדְמוֹת** as they relate to God, His actions, and/or attributes.

Ἀληθινα means “real, genuine, true, dependable.” In Deut 32:4 it is a nominative neuter plural, which agrees in case, gender, and number with *τὰ ἔργα*, meaning “work, deed, action,” a nominative neuter plural noun. Although the former is an adjective and the latter is a noun, the case, gender, and number agreement show how the adjective modifies the noun. It means therefore that the *τὰ ἔργα* is *ἀληθινα*. The personal pronoun, genitive masculine singular, *αὐτοῦ* “self, of oneself,” could only refer to *θεός*, the closest and immediate antecedent. Consequently, it suggests that the works of God are true, real, or dependable.

ἄμωμος “faultless, without blemish” in 2 Sam 22:31 is a nominative feminine singular which agrees in case, gender, and number with *ὁδός* “way” certainly showing

¹²⁵Once in the Pentateuch (Deut 32:4); once in the prophetic literature (2 Sam 22:21); and three times in wisdom literature (Pss 18:30; 19:7; Job 37:16).

that ἡ ὁδὸς is ἄμωμος. In this regard, ἄμωμος ἡ ὁδὸς αὐτοῦ, also found in Ps 18:30, states that God’s way of life or conduct is faultless or without blemish.

In Ps 19:7,¹²⁶ the predicate use of the adjective ἄμωμος explains why the verb has been added in the translation of this nominal clause. Hence, in the clause ὁ νόμος τοῦ κυρίου ἄμωμος “the law of God is flawless,” one observes that νόμος, which agrees in case, gender, and number with ἄμωμος, is not only the main subject in the sentence but is also being modified by the adjective ἄμωμος. It therefore suggests that the νόμος of the Lord is faultless or without blemish. The word תְּמִיךְ in Job 37:16 does not have the corresponding equivalent in the Septuagint. Therefore, Job 37:16, ἐπίσταται δὲ διάκρισιν νεφῶν ἐξάισια δὲ πτώματα πονηρῶν, does not offer the Hebrew equivalent of תְּמִיךְ.¹²⁷

Semantic analysis of ἀληθινά (Deuteronomy 32:4) and ἄμωμος (2 Samuel 22:31; Psalms 19:7)

The name “God” is not mentioned in the Hebrew version of Deut 32:4, but rather הַצֵּוֹר, which means “rock or cliff.” In the Septuagint, הַצֵּוֹר in Deut 32:4 is translated as θεός (God). Its usage in the nominative case suggests that it plays a subjective role in the sentence. Therefore, the clause θεός ἀληθινὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ, “true are the works of God,” suggests that the works of God are true, real, and genuine.

In Ps 19:9, both the noun κρίματα and the adjective ἀληθινά agree in case, gender, and number. Thus, the judgments of the Lord are real and genuine for God has the power and authority to judge.¹²⁸

¹²⁶Ps 18:8 in the LXX; 19:7 in the English Bible; 19:8 in the Hebrew.

¹²⁷The Septuagint translates Job 37:16 as follows, “And he knows the divisions of the clouds, and the signal overthrows of the ungodly.” See Brenton, *Septuagint*, 693. The Masoretic Text of Job 37:16 reads, הֲתָדַע עַל-מַסְלְשֵׁי-עָב מַסְלֵאוֹת הַתְּמִיךְ הָעִיִּים: “Do you know about the layers of the thick clouds, the wondrous work of one perfect in knowledge?”

¹²⁸Ps 18:10 in the LXX; 19:9 in the English Bible; and 19:10 in the Hebrew. See Rev 20:4.

ἄμωμος occurs eleven times in the Septuagint, three of which apply to God, His actions, and/or attributes.¹²⁹ In 2 Sam 22:31, ὁ ἰσχυρός ἄμωμος ἢ ὁδὸς αὐτοῦ states that the “way of the powerful one is faultless or without blemish.” The predicate use of the adjective ἄμωμος in Ps 18:30¹³⁰ makes God the subject of that clause. David, in his royal expression of thanksgiving for victory, claims that the way of “his” God is ἄμωμος (faultless or without blemish). Similarly, in Ps 19:7,¹³¹ the law of the Lord is ἄμωμος. Interestingly, in Ps 19:13 David is ἄμωμος only if God will φείσῃ “spare” him from sinning.¹³² In other words, God would protect David and keep him ἄμωμος . The use of φείσῃ in the imperative aorist middle suggests that David’s claim of ἄμωμος is contingent upon the power and authority of God. Thus David’s claim of ἄμωμος is a witness to his level of commitment and God’s infinite power.

The use of ἔσομαι, a future middle indicative verb, suggests that David’s claim of ἄμωμος is conditional. In like manner, Ps 119:80 portrays the same conditionality for the concept of ἄμωμος.¹³³ In order for David not to be ashamed, he needs a heart that is ἄμωμος; this ἄμωμος heart that he desires is contingent upon his commitment to God. Only God alone gives such a heart; thus, this God Himself must be ἄμωμος.

In Prov 20:7, ὃς ἀναστρέφεται ἄμωμος ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ seems to suggest that the one who continues to walk (ἄμωμος) blamelessly has the kind of righteousness that God requires. The verb ἐγενήθη in Ezek 28:15, aorist passive indicative, suggests that at one point in the past the king of Tyre was ἄμωμος until iniquity was found in him. Thus,

¹²⁹See 2 Sam 22:31; Pss 18:31; 1:8.

¹³⁰Ps 17:31 in the LXX; 18:30 in the English Bible; 18:31 in the Hebrew.

¹³¹Ps 18:8 in the LXX; 19:7 in the English Bible; 19:8 in the Hebrew.

¹³²Ps 18:14 in the LXX; 19:13 in the English Bible; 19:14 in the Hebrew.

¹³³Ps 118:80 in the LXX; 119:80 in the English Bible and in Hebrew.

ἄμωμος indicates that the king of Tyre underwent a disintegration in his moral being. He was ἄμωμος, but now he is no more, because ἀδικήματα “sins, crimes” have been found in him.

Finally, Ezek 46:6 explains the nature of offerings acceptable to God; the young calf was to be ἄμωμος, without spot or blemish.

Summary

In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew תָּמִים reveals that only four of the five occurrences of the word have a Greek equivalent. In Deut 32:4, תָּמִים corresponds to ἀληθινὰ and is translated as “real, true or dependable.” This suggests that the work of God is true or dependable. In 2 Sam 22:31, Pss 18:31, and 19:8 the Greek equivalent of תָּמִים is ἄμωμος. In the first two passages, God’s way is flawless; His law is perfect in the third.

The Septuagint gives no indication that God is deceitful or uses deceptive methods to achieve His ends as Prouser¹³⁴ claims. However, the query continues in the New Testament with τέλειος, the Greek equivalent of תָּמִים.

New Testament

In the New Testament, the stem τέλος and its declined forms occur 101 times; of these, τέλειος, the Greek translation of the Hebrew תָּמִים, occurs three times as related to God, His actions, and/or attributes: Matt 5:48, 1 Cor 13:10, and Rom 12:2. In order to ascertain the meaning of τέλειος as related to God in the New Testament, a contextual, exegetical, and semantic analysis becomes necessary as well.

¹³⁴Prouser, "Phenomenology," ii.

Τέλειος in Matthew 5:48

Contextual analysis

Greek text: Ἔσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλειοι ὡς ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τέλειός ἐστιν.

Translation: Therefore, you shall be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Scholars argue that the Gospel of Matthew, as well as the other three canonical Gospels, is anonymous.¹³⁵ Although later in the second century (circa A.D. 180), Irenaeus reports that Matthew wrote “a gospel . . . for the Hebrews in their own language,” John Nolland argues that Matthew’s authorship of part of the canon is unlikely.¹³⁶

George R. Knight notes at least three purposes of the Gospel of Matthew. The first and major purpose was to set forth Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. The second was to present the significant events in the life of Jesus from His birth to His death and resurrection. The third was to provide a teaching manual for the Christian community.¹³⁷ Dockery adds that the Gospel of Matthew seeks to encourage the church in the midst of persecution from hostile authorities in both Jewish and Roman

¹³⁵Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992), 22:43. Donald Senior also claims that Matthew did not compose this Gospel, but depended on an earlier source such as Mark. See Donald Senior, *Matthew*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 25.

¹³⁶John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 3. Dockery adds that the titles of the Gospel were not added until the second century when the early church tradition unanimously ascribed it to Matthew. David Dockery, *Holman Concise Bible Commentary, Simple, Straightforward Commentary on Every Book of the Bible*, Holman Reference (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 402. On the other hand, McKnight holds the position that Matthew wrote the first Gospel. This traditional understanding that Matthew authored the first Gospel has some inherent problems: (1) the problem of dating, and (2) the argument that the Gospel of Mark was written first. See Scot McKnight, “Matthew, Gospel Of,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 526-541.

¹³⁷George R. Knight, *Matthew: The Gospel of the Kingdom*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1994), 19.

circles. Moreover, it deepened Christian faith by supplying more details about Jesus' words and works.¹³⁸

In an annotated structure of the Gospel of Matthew, Nolland suggests that Matt 5:21-48 is a set of six antitheses: on murder (21-26); on adultery (27-30); on divorce (31-32); on oaths (33-37); on 'an eye for an eye' (38-42); and on love (43-48).¹³⁹ From these antitheses flows one of the purposes of the book: to provide a manual for the Christian community. Given these premises, Matt 5:48 is well understood within that context. Hence the requirement to be τέλειος in love as expressed in Matt 5:48. Because the theme of love was addressed in the latter part of Matt 5, Nolland contends that Matt 5:48 completes both the final antithesis and the whole set of antitheses by its call to be perfect in love and uncompromised.¹⁴⁰

Exegetical considerations

There are two occurrences of τέλειος in Matt 5:48: the adjective τέλειοι, the first usage in the verse, is a nominative masculine plural with a predicate function in the clause. Τέλειοι agrees in case and number with the pronoun ὑμεῖς, which suggests that to be τέλειοι is God's command for you (ὑμεῖς). Accordingly, Randolph Yeager contends that τέλειοι means complete, perfected, lacking nothing, fully developed, that idealistic state of Christian development toward which all Christians should strive.¹⁴¹ In the second occurrence, the adjective τέλειος has a predicate usage as well; "your Father in heaven," ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος is τέλειος. Εσσεθε is a future middle deponent indicative verb; it

¹³⁸Dockery, *Holman Concise Bible Commentary*, 404.

¹³⁹Nolland, *Matthew*, 46.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 270.

¹⁴¹Randolph O. Yeager, *The Renaissance New Testament* (Bowling Green, KY: Renaissance, 1976) 1:444.

is substantially equivalent to an imperative, a mood of command. This was the climax of love, the sixth antithesis which began in Matt 5:43, commanding us to love. The plural rather than the singular indicates that Jesus calls for all to live out these high ideals which are addressed to a plural “you.”¹⁴²

John A. Broadus contends that the emphatic ὑμεῖς means that the disciples of Christ as contrasted to the publicans were to be τέλειος.¹⁴³ Jesus illustrated in Matt 5:21-48 some of the ways a Christian’s righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees. In George Knight’s understanding, Matt 5:48 should be linked to v. 20 which calls for greater righteousness than that of the scribes and Pharisees. Thus, “being perfect likewise as the Father” is equated with keeping the spirit of the law, as opposed to its legalistic letter. The final command in v. 48 belongs to the paragraph beginning in v. 43 and its initial command to love. This is demonstrated by a comparison of v. 45 with v. 43. Both call for Christians to be like their Father in heaven. Being like the Father means loving one’s enemies, just as God loves His enemies.¹⁴⁴ This is the true test of love.

Semantic analysis

The word τέλειος occurs two times in the Gospel of Matthew and one time in the epistle of James. Matthew 5:48 epitomizes all of Jesus’ teaching. It presents a final maxim, summing up the doctrine underlying not only the sixth antithesis but the entire set of antitheses (Matt 5:21-48).¹⁴⁵ Consequently, by loving one’s enemy (Matt 5:44), the

¹⁴²See Matt 5:43 where ἀγαπήσεις is a future with imperative force (you shall love).

¹⁴³John A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, ed. Alvah Hovey, An American Commentary on the New Testament (Valley Forge: Judson, 1958), 1:123.

¹⁴⁴Knight, *Matthew*, 94-95.

¹⁴⁵Hans Dieter Betz and Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 320.

disciples become τέλειος. The Greek term for “perfect,” as Donald Senior argues, is from the root τέλος which means “goal.”

The connotation in Matt 5:48 is that of “completion” rather than a static sense that the English term “perfect” can imply.¹⁴⁶ The term τέλειος occurs twice with two different meanings: in v. 48a as an attribute of human beings, and in 48b as an attribute of God.

The relationship between the two attributes is parallel to that between God and the sons of God. The basic meaning, therefore, is “having attained the end,” or “purpose,” “complete,” “perfect.”¹⁴⁷

A close parallel to τέλειος in Matt 5:48 is Matt 19:21 where the rich young ruler is invited to sell his possessions and follow Jesus if he wishes to be τέλειος (reach the goal). In Mark’s version of the rich young ruler, the clause “in one thing you fall short” is Matthew’s version “if you desire to be perfect.” This then suggests that τέλειος in this context means “completion,” or “lacking nothing necessary to completeness.” The text by Jesus does say he falls short.

In Jas 3:2, the phrase “if anyone does not stumble in words or speech,” the same is qualified to be τέλειος. We note that the word τέλειος and its cognates occur at several pinnacles in the New Testament, such as in Jas 1:4 where it stands at the climax of the process of growth and is best translated as “mature,” or having reached completion and lacking nothing. In Jas 1:25, it describes the quality of the law of God as τέλειος; the perfect law that gives freedom.

¹⁴⁶Senior, *Matthew*, 81.

¹⁴⁷Betz and Collins, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 322.

Τέλειος in Romans 12:2 and 1 Corinthians 13:10

Contextual analysis of τέλειος in Romans 12:2

Greek Text: καὶ μὴ συσχηματίζεσθε τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ, ἀλλὰ μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοῦς εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρεστον καὶ τέλειον.

Translation: And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may demonstrate what is the will of God, good, pleasing, and perfect.

Pauline authorship of Romans is rarely debated. Universal acceptance of Pauline authorship has been one of the assured results of modern scholarship.¹⁴⁸ The book of Romans shows an exception from his other letters. Usually Paul writes to a church that he knows well, often one that he has personally founded, in order to address specific problems that have arisen in the church. But according to Rom 1:13, the apostle is not the founder of this church and he has never been to Rome. However, he was eager to visit Rome on his way to Spain (Rom 1:11-13; 15:23).

As Hendriksen points out, there is considerable difference of opinion as to the purpose of the letter to the Romans.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, James D. Dunn notes there is a long and unending debate arising from two features in the letter: (1) the different reasons for writing the letter in 1:8-15 and 15:14-33, and (2) the problem of how to relate these reasons to the body of the letter (1:16-15:13). Consequently, the rationale for providing

¹⁴⁸Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*, IVP New Testament Commentary (IVPNTC) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 6:13. William Hendriksen gives evidence of Pauline authorship in reverse chronological order. See William Hendriksen, ed., *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 4-26. See also Erwin R. Gane, *Jesus Only: Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Roseville, CA: Amazing Facts, 2004), 9-21; Mark Reasoner, *Romans in Full Circle: A History of Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), xx.

¹⁴⁹Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistles to the Romans*, 33. Karl Donfried devoted two sections of his edited book in which fifteen scholars argue on the different purposes of the book of Romans. See Karl P. Donfried, *The Romans Debate*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 3-231.

such a lengthy and involved discussion to a largely unknown congregation is not immediately obvious.¹⁵⁰ He further argues that most of the different views on the purpose of the book are a matter of different emphases among these several reasons. Therefore, the book had a missionary, an apologetic, and a pastoral purpose. Consequently, all three of the main emphases and purposes hang together and indeed reinforce each other when taken as a whole.¹⁵¹

Romans 12:1-13:14 is the apostle's exhortation to live the Christian life. Leander E. Keck echoed the same sentiment when he says that Rom 12:1 to 12:14 calls attention to important features that should characterize the community's ethos.¹⁵² Thus, Rom 12:1-2, whose theme is worship and transformation, serves as an introductory paragraph to the call to live a Christian life. The call "not to be conformed to this world" is an antithesis to the "will of God" which is τέλειος. The exhortation to be τέλειος (perfect), as used in Rom 12:2, fits well the general pastoral purposes of the book. Commenting on Rom 12:1-2, Osborne submits that the transition from the meaning of the gospel to its implication for Christian conduct is certainly one of the most beautiful and powerful portions of Scripture.¹⁵³ Consequently, Rom 12:1-2, an exhortation for transformation of character, shows our high calling to give proof in our own lives of the perfect will of God, "τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ ... καὶ τέλειον."

¹⁵⁰James D. G. Dunn, *Romans*, WBC 38 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), iv.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, viii.

¹⁵²Leander E. Keck, *Romans*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 289.

¹⁵³Osborne, *Romans*, 318.

Contextual analysis of τέλειος in 1 Corinthians 13:10

Greek Text: ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ τὸ τέλειον, τὸ ἐκ μέρους καταργηθήσεται.

Translation: But when complete perfection comes, that which is unfinished shall be destroyed.

There is no challenge to the apostle Paul's authorship of the Corinthian letter.¹⁵⁴ The apostle continued his close relationship with the Corinthian assembly through periodic correspondence and visits by delegated leaders. He thus wrote this letter about two years after he left Corinth for Ephesus.¹⁵⁵ David E. Garland remarks that the apostle kept this long-distance relationship with the Corinthian church without the benefit of the modern communication technology. Consequently, the letter serves as his substitute presence.¹⁵⁶ Two developments in particular seem to have prompted Paul to write this epistle. First, he had received a report from "Chloe's people" about the rise of at least four factions, grouping themselves around the names of Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and Christ (1 Cor 1:10-12). Second, the apostle needed to respond to several questions put to him in a letter from the Corinthians (1 Cor 7:1).¹⁵⁷ He was deeply concerned for the church's well-being. Therefore, he wrote in order to correct the non-Christian behavior that had manifested itself in the life of the community since he left approximately two years earlier.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians*, ed. Grant Osborne, IVPNTC 7 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 18.

¹⁵⁵Richard A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 33. See also Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 31-2.

¹⁵⁶David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 7:30.

¹⁵⁷Gregory J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 2000), 18-19.

¹⁵⁸Wayne G. Johnson, *Morality: Does "God" Make a Difference?* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005) 22.

In general, 1 Cor 12:1 to 14:40 addresses “the misunderstanding of spiritual gifts.” While love is the subject in 1 Cor 12:31b to 13:13, this section argues that gifts without love are pointless. Furthermore, 1 Cor 13:4-7 describes the virtues of love, whereas 1 Cor 13:8-13 refers to the permanence of love.¹⁵⁹ “When the permanent comes, the partial will be done away” (1 Cor 13: 10). The key to understanding this verse lies in the preceding verse. “For we know in part and we prophesy in part” (1 Cor 13: 9). Consequently, love was needed to settle the disputes that prompted the apostle’s letter to the Corinthians. In addition, the meaning of τέλειον in 1 Cor 13:10 is not only in harmony with the general purpose of the book but also helps settle issues among the Corinthians. Thus, God requires us to be τέλειος in love.

In contrast, the Corinthians thought that their knowledge was full (1 Cor 6:12; 8:1, 4; 10:1-4) and not partial; furthermore, they thought that they were τέλειος “mature” or “perfect,” as opposed to being mere children.¹⁶⁰

Exegetical consideration of τέλειος in Romans 12:2
and 1 Corinthians 13:10

Romans 12:2. The adjective τέλειον in Rom 12:2 is a nominative neuter singular which agrees in case, gender, and number with τὸ θέλημα. It seems to suggest that, in this case, the adjective τέλειον is something with which the will of God is identified, as shown in its predicate use. Thus, the clause τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρεστον καὶ τέλειον indicates what God wants His children to think and act: to be and to do what in His sight is good, well-pleasing, and perfect.¹⁶¹ The will of God means “the good” or what is morally right; it is defined as that which is acceptable or pleasing. It is also identified

¹⁵⁹W. Larry Richards, *1 Corinthians: The Essentials and Nonessentials of Christian Living*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1997), 29.

¹⁶⁰Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 178.

¹⁶¹Hendriksen, *Exposition to Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, 406.

with the τέλειον, “the perfect,” which is ethically adequate and complete.¹⁶² All that are good, acceptable, and perfect are needed in order to live a holy and fulfilled life.

The apostle was conscious of the widespread use of this category in Greek thought, and of the equivalent concept in the Old Testament. Τέλειος has thus the force of “having attained the end purpose, complete, perfect” will of God.

1 Corinthians 13:10. The adjective τὸ τέλειον is nominative neuter singular; its only occurrence in the nominative case in 1 Cor 13:10 suggests that τὸ τέλειον acts as subject in the verse. The apostle thus explains in 13:10 that when τὸ τέλειον (the perfect) comes, what is partial will come to an end. Robert L. Thomas contends that τὸ τέλειον draws upon the idea of “reaching the end” and sometimes means “complete” or “mature.” Moreover, a choice between these three meanings depends on the subject discussed. Thus, when various possibilities are weighed in v. 10, the great likelihood is that Paul’s meaning of τὸ τέλειον is “mature.”¹⁶³ Raymond F. Collins argues that τὸ τέλειον provides a sharp contrast with τὸ ἐκ μέρους “the partial.” He thus suggests that τὸ τέλειον in English can either be rendered as “the end” or “the perfect.” Given the eschatological thrust of the pericope, it seems useful to render the Greek with the word “end.”¹⁶⁴ Dominating the comparison between love and the Corinthians’ spiritual gifts is the contrast between the present and the eschatological future. The apostle’s previous teaching about “the present form of this world” that “is passing away” (1 Cor 7:31) and “the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:10) that will finally be realized at the coming of Christ will have been sufficiently familiar to the Corinthians that the apostle can simply allude

¹⁶²Jack Cottrell, *Romans*, CPNIVC (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996), 317-318.

¹⁶³Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: The Christian's Special Gifts in the Light of I Corinthians 12-14* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 106-107.

¹⁶⁴Raymond F. Collins and Daniel J. Harrington, *First Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina 7 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1999), 486.

to it in 1 Cor 13:10. Thus, τὸ τέλειον certainly refers to the “perfect” Christ coming at the end of ages.¹⁶⁵

Τέλειον, understood from this backdrop, whether as mature or perfect, suggests a contrasting meaning, such as mature as opposed to immature or perfect as opposed to imperfect. The meaning, therefore, is derived within the context of a word meaning its opposite.

Semantic analysis of τέλειος in Romans 12:2
and 1 Corinthians 13:10

Romans 12:2. In Rom 12:2, when the apostle Paul talks about the τέλειος the focus is on what is true in God’s sight. The apostle perhaps seeks to remind the believers that the transformation wrought in them by the renewal of the mind is pleasing to God. When the mind is renewed and the whole life changed, then the will of God is perfectly fulfilled for this is its grand design in reference to every human being. In his comments on Rom 12. Barnes argues that the word “conformed” properly means to put on the form, fashion, or appearance of another. It may refer to anything pertaining to the habit, manner, dress, or style of living of others.¹⁶⁶ Thus, the word means free from defect, stain, or injury and that which has all its parts complete or which is not disproportionate. The apostle warns the disciples of Christ against reviving usages that He has abolished. The world that now is—the present state of things—is as much opposed to the spirit of genuine Christianity as the world that existed in Paul’s day, filled with pride, luxury,

¹⁶⁵See Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 178.

¹⁶⁶Albert Barnes, *Romans*, rev. ed., Notes on the New Testament: Explanatory and Practical 13, ed. Robert Frew (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1950), 271.

vanity, extravagance in dress, and riotous living. These worldly habits are unworthy to a Christian's pursuit and are hateful in the sight of God.¹⁶⁷

1 Corinthians 13:10. Commentators have several interpretations for *το τέλειον* in 1 Cor 13:10.¹⁶⁸ Some believe Paul meant Christian maturity, while others think he was thinking of the Christian canon of Scripture, which when completed would do away with the partial form of charismatic revelation.¹⁶⁹ According to Gregory J. Lockwood, the context of 1 Cor 13:10 indicates that the apostle is speaking about perfection in the “eschaton.” Therefore, the expression “that which is complete” is eschatological and needs to be seen in the light of the apostle's usage of its cognate, *τέλος*, “the end” in 1 Cor 1:8 and 1 Cor 15:24.¹⁷⁰

As previously noted, those who believe Paul referred to Christian maturity in 1 Cor 13:10 also point to Eph 4:13.¹⁷¹ Walter L. Liefeld is of the opinion that *τέλειον* in Eph 4:13 means maturity, which, he argues, is defined as the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.¹⁷² According to Gordon Fee, “even though Paul says ‘we know in part,’ the emphasis is not on the immaturity of the Corinthians, but on the relative nature

¹⁶⁷Adam Clarke, *New Testament of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: The Text in the Authorized Translation: With a Commentary and Critical Notes, the Epistles, and Revelation* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1883), 2:75. See his comments on Rom 12:2.

¹⁶⁸Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 644-645.

¹⁶⁹This view was articulated by B. B. Warfield and has been adopted by contemporary reformed scholars. See Fee, *Corinthians*, 644-645.

¹⁷⁰Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 468-469.

¹⁷¹Yeager talks of spiritual maturity; see Yeager, *The Renaissance New Testament*, 14:286.

¹⁷²Walter L. Liefeld, *Ephesians*, IVPNTC 10 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 107-108. Lincoln argues that *τέλειος* in 1 Cor 13:10 has the nuance of mature rather than perfect because the use of the word *ἄνδρα* from *ἀνήρ* (man), instead of *ἄνθρωπον*. He further states that *ἀνήρ* in this context denotes an adult male, a full-grown man. Therefore, the emphasis is thus in the mature adulthood of this person in contrast to the children to be mentioned in v. 14. See Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1990), 255-259.

of the gifts. This is demonstrated (1) by the [gar] that ties it to v. 8, where it is said of these gifts that they will pass away, not that the Corinthians need to grow up, and (2) by the clause ‘we prophesy in part,’ which makes sense only as having to do with the prophecies, not with the prophets.¹⁷³ In Greek usage τέλειος in Col 1:28 could denote the quality of sacrificial victims, entire and without blemish, and is so used of the passover lamb in Exod 12:5. Consequently, by natural implication and by appealing to the principle of the analogy of Scripture, τέλειος could denote as well the equivalent quality of moral character, of which blameless Noah was a classic example.¹⁷⁴

Summary

Of the 101 occurrences of the stem τέλος and its derivatives in the New Testament, the adjective τέλειος occurs once in the nominative form in Matt 5:48, and twice in the neuter form in Rom 12:2 and 1 Cor 13:10 as related to God, His actions, and attributes. Matthew 5:48 reveals the completeness of a loving God who commands and enables His followers to have an undivided commitment to love those who do not love them in return. In Rom 12:2, God warns His followers to shun the corruptions of this world, which are antithetical to His perfect will. Finally, 1 Cor 13:10 clearly shows the contrast between sinfulness and sinlessness; the sinner and the sinless; the imperfect and the perfect.

Having provided a contextual, exegetical, and semantic analysis of the word “integrity” as related to God, His actions, and/or attributes in the Old Testament, Septuagint, and New Testament, what biblical and theological meaning could be assigned to the word “integrity”?

¹⁷³Fee, *Corinthians*, 645.

¹⁷⁴See, for example, Gen 6:9. See also Dunn, *Romans*, 125.

**Biblical and Theological Meaning of the Words תמי (OT),
ἄμωμος (LXX), and τέλειος (NT) in the Bible**

The contextual, exegetical, and semantic analysis of the words תמי, ἄμωμος, and τέλειος as related to God, His actions, and/or attributes yielded an enlightened background for ascertaining their meaning.

The five predicates' usages of תמי as related to God in the Old Testament describe the nouns preceding them. Deuteronomy 32:4 introduces God as the “rock” whose work is תמי. Other phrases of this verse explain this assertion; all His ways are just, God is a faithful God who does no wrong, He is upright and just. God’s perfection is an attribute of who He is as a person and it involves ethical qualities like justice and uprightness rather than properties that would indulge selfish human desire and pleasure. As David A. Hubbard points out, perfection in the Old Testament is maintaining right relationship to God, the standard and judge of perfection, whose ways are perfect (Deut 32:4; Ps 18:30).¹⁷⁵ Second Samuel 22:31 acknowledges the way of God as תמי; Job 37:16 reminds us that the works of God are תמי. In Ps 18:30, His way is תמי; and finally in Ps 19:7, the law of the Lord is תמי.

In the LXX ἄμωμος found in 2 Sam 22:31 and Ps 18:30 suggests that God’s way of life or conduct is flawless and without blemish. The three occurrences of ἄμωμος as related to God in the Septuagint make Him the subject of the clause; God therefore is ἄμωμος.

In the New Testament, the three occurrences of τέλειος as related to God reveal that His admonition in Matt 5:44 to love one’s enemy empowers us ultimately to obey His commands to be τέλειος as He is τέλειος (v. 48). In 1 Cor 13:10, the apostle Paul explains that when the τέλειος comes, that which is μέρους (in part) will come to an end.

¹⁷⁵David A. Hubbard, “Perfect,” *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Everett Falconer Harrison, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1960), 401-402.

This points out that what is present is only a part of the whole that is yet to come. In Rom 12:2, the apostle admonished believers not to conform to this world, but rather to have a renewed mind, which is the τέλειος will of God.

A survey of the usages of these words in the OT, LXX, and NT has shown that besides those related to God there are other references that apply to people, things, or ideas. Therefore, in the Old Testament, the word תְּמִיִם applies to animals, human beings, and objects or abstract things. In Exod 12:5, תְּמִיִם refers to the physical condition of the sacrificial animal which was to be healthy and without blemish. Furthermore, it applied to abstract things as in Exod 26:24; the frames of the two corners and the sides of the tabernacles were to be תְּמִיִם or well-fitted and without fault.

In Ezek 28:15, the contrast is shown between the king of Tyre's original תְּמִיִם and his subsequent corruption. Psalm 119:80 addresses the integrity of the human heart; thus, the clause יְהִי לִבִּי תְּמִיִם could be translated as "let my inner man or heart become sound or complete."

In the LXX, ἄμωμος and its related forms are used in relation to the quality of the animals to be sacrificed. Thus, in Lev 1:3, the burnt-offering sacrifice was to be without spot. In Prov 11:5, the clause δικαιοσύνη ἄμώμους, "the righteousness of the blameless," suggests that the blameless choose to reflect the righteousness of God. Therefore, this kind of righteousness is without flaw. In Ezek 46:6, the young bullock required for sacrifice was to be ἄμωμος or "without blemish."

In the New Testament, τέλειος is used in Matt 19:21 in Jesus' admonition to the rich young ruler. He was to sell all his belongings to the benefit of the poor if he wished to be τέλειος or perfect. The young man believed he had kept the commandments since childhood, but when he was put to the test, he failed to prove that he was τέλειος or complete as he claimed. In Eph 5:27, the apostle reflects on the state of the church at the *parousia*, a church that is ἄμωμος (without blemish). The context of Jas 3:2 shows that the issue is not sinless perfection, but commitment. He is a τέλειος man, not because he is

sinless, but because he is able to keep his body in check. What is then the meaning of תָּמִים (OT), ἄμωμος (LXX), and τέλειος (NT)?

In the light of the preceding contextual, exegetical, and semantic analyses of תָּמִים, ἄμωμος, and τέλειος as related to God, His actions, and/or attributes and to human beings, animals, and abstract things, one can safely conclude that each of these contexts does not in any way suggest sinless perfection. The apostle Paul denies that he is perfect (τέλειος). It is clear that he is not complete as he tries to measure up with Christ, who alone is perfect or complete. Thus, it is safe to conclude with Ernest Klein that the adjective תָּמִים means whole, sound, healthful (when applied to people), and without blemish (when applied to sacrificial animals). When the adjective used is neuter, it means what is complete or true. When the adjective used is a noun, it means a man of integrity.¹⁷⁶ Ἀμωμος and/or τέλειος in the Bible mean complete, whole, having integrity, unblemished, without spot, and/or unadulterated.

Since these adjectives apply to God, His actions, and/or attributes, it suffices to conclude without hesitation that He is a being of integrity. The historical survey on the issue of lying to save life referred to in the previous chapter has shown divergent views on the issue. Some hold that God condones lying to save life; on the other hand, there are those who hold that He does not. The divergence of opinions resulting from unbiblical assumptions challenges the view of the integrity of God.

It appears that Geisler's and Kaiser's conclusions on the interpretation of Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7 represent the two divergent views mentioned above. The arguments that sometimes a lie could be justified and that God on some occasions condones a lie definitely challenge the view of His integrity. Although some scholars have argued that God used deceptive and dubious methods to achieve His purposes; this

¹⁷⁶Klein, *Etymological Dictionary*, s.v. “תָּמִים.”

study in its contextual, exegetical, and semantic analysis of תָּמִים, ἄμωμος, and τέλειος as related to God, His actions, and attributes in the Bible has so far yielded no biblical ground for such a claim. Consequently, with the biblical meaning of the word integrity as related to God well established, the view of His blameless and perfect integrity has been brought to light in the preceding analysis. Therefore, the Bible apparently shows no evidence that God is faulty in His dealings with human beings, at least as far as the meaning of the word תָּמִים as related to Him is concerned.

In order to take my claim that God does not use deceit to achieve His purpose one step farther, it seems imperative to expand this investigation beyond the meaning of the word תָּמִים in the Bible to other biblical attributes of God. Analysis of such attributes as truthfulness, holiness, trustworthiness, and mercy/justice would provide the platform to examine the character of God and confirm that He is a being of integrity. Consequently, this analysis presents conclusive evidences that God does not use deceit to achieve His purposes.

CHAPTER III

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF CERTAIN ATTRIBUTES OF GOD: MORAL AND RELATIONAL

As established in the previous chapter, the word תָּמִים means whole, sound, healthful, and flawless as it relates to God, His actions, and/or attributes. The same meaning is applied to humans empowered by God. The term means without blemish or spotless when applied to sacrificial animals. One of the main thrusts of this study concerns clarifications of the integrity of God resulting from the following accusation: (1) condoning lies in certain circumstances¹ and (2) using deceit to achieve His purpose.²

Since a review of the previous chapters has established that God is a being of integrity, the current chapter moves one step further by examining certain attributes of God that will provide additional evidence in dismissing the charge that God uses deceit to achieve His purpose or is flexible when He condones lies on certain occasions.

The argument that God is a being of integrity would require that additional attributes directly connected to Him as a being of integrity be examined. Far from being exhaustive, the biblical and theological analysis of such attributes as truthfulness, trustworthiness, holiness, and mercifulness will show that the God of the Bible does not use deceit to achieve His purpose (contra Prouser). The charge of deception as part of God's worldview would contradict the biblical understanding of these attributes of God.

¹See Norman L. Geisler, *Ethics: Alternatives and Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 115.

²See Prouser, "Phenomenology," 12.

These moral and relational attributes are analyzed below in turn in the subsequent sections.

Moral Attributes

Truthfulness

A number of biblical texts, such as Num 23:19, 1 Sam 15:29, Ps 92:15, and Mal 3:6, portray God as the only being who is incapable of lying. On the other hand, verses like 1 Kgs 22:20-23, Jer 20:7, Ezek 14:9, and 2 Thess 2:11-12 seem (according to critics) to undermine the truthfulness of God. However, an examination of these verses in context from Old and New Testament reveals the portrait of a truthful God.

Biblical Basis

Old Testament

Scripture in general is an expression of God's truth and law. In the Old Testament it frequently condemns lying and labels it as hateful to God. For example, Leviticus warns against stealing, dealing falsely, or lying to one another.³ A lying tongue is among the seven things that are an abomination to God.⁴ Proverbs 30:5 states: "Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him." This means the word of God is as pure as He is Himself. Consequently, to be a shield calls for truthfulness and trustworthiness.

One of the passages that seem discordant with other biblical passages that deal with God's truthfulness is 1 Kgs 22:22-23, "And the Lord said to him, How? And he said, 'I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then He said, 'You are to entice him and also prevail. Go and do so.' Now therefore, behold, the

³See Lev 19:11.

⁴See Prov 6:16-19.

Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; and the Lord has proclaimed disaster against you.”

As king of Israel, Ahab intended to wage war against the Arameans and asked Jehoshaphat to join him. However, Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, insisted they first seek counsel from the Lord. Consequently, King Ahab gathered four hundred men around him to endorse his action in the conflict and to predict the success he wanted to hear. He was not interested in the message of truth, but finally admitted, “There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. He is Micaiah son of Imlah.” Ahab’s reaction shows that he had preconceived ideas; he was not interested in the truth. He despised Micaiah, the true prophet of God, and chose to surround himself with four hundred lying prophets who pleased him (1 Kgs 22:8).

By this act, he rejected the truth while taking pleasure in lies. Through the prophet Elijah, the Lord had already pronounced judgment upon Ahab for the death of Naboth: “Have you murdered, and also taken possession? And you shall speak to him, saying, Thus says the Lord, In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth the dogs shall lick up your blood, even yours” (1 Kgs 21:19). Like Elijah, Micaiah truthfully foretells Ahab’s death and the defeat of Israel, but Ahab despises the truth: “Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?” (1 Kgs 22:18). God disclosed the truth to Ahab. He was given many opportunities to repent, but he chose what was pleasing to him. Ahab had every possible occasion to reject the lying spirits and accept the true message from God, but he did not.

In 1 Sam 22:15, Micaiah bids the king of Israel to go to war and be successful. Was the prophet lying at first by espousing a view similar to that of the four hundred

false prophets? Some commentators suggest that Micaiah spoke ironically.⁵ Daniel I. Block calls for another look at the oracle against the backdrop of both the Old Testament and extra-biblical oracular prophecy.⁶ After comparing Judg 18:5-6 and 1 Kgs 22:5-6, Block makes three arguments to convey the ambiguity of the oracle. First, “from the outset it is not clear that Yahweh is the deity involved. Second, the prophets do not specify whom the deity will deliver, and it is not clear whom the Lord will deliver into the king’s hands. Third, the prophets do not identify the king into whose hands whatever/whoever the Lord will deliver.”⁷

However, a closer look at 1 Kgs 22:15a—“When he [Micaiah] came to the king, the king said to him,”—shows that the city and the king referred to in v. 15b could only be Ramoth-Gilead and King Ahab respectively.

I cannot agree more with Matthew Henry; this is sarcasm. Micaiah knew that the king hated him (1 Kgs 22:8). The prophet simply uttered what the king wanted to hear, yet something in the prophet’s demeanor must have reflected his sarcasm. Harris argues that Ahab readily recognized Micaiah’s insincerity and gave him a second crucial injunction that dramatically changed the course of the conversation.⁸ Block also observes something striking in the narrative when he queries, “Was there something in their tone or demeanour that betrayed insincerity?”⁹ He further notes, “Whether it was sarcasm in his voice or a non-verbal declaration, something about Micaiah’s utterance

⁵Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (New York: Revell, n.d.), 2:702.

⁶Daniel Isaac Block, “What Has Delphi to Do With Samaria? Ambiguity and Delusion in Israelite Prophecy,” in *Writing and Ancient Near Eastern Society: Papers in Honour of Alan R. Millard*, ed. Piotr Bienkowski, Christopher Mee, and Elizabeth Slater (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 191.

⁷Ibid.

⁸G. H. Harris, “Deceive?” 80.

⁹Block, “What Has Delphi,” 199.

communicated an insecurity that not even his strong affirmation had convinced him.”¹⁰ This certainly explains why in v. 16 the king adjured the prophet to tell the truth. The king’s injunction presupposes that he knew that Micaiah’s statement was not true; it was a message of deception similar to what the four hundred prophets prophesied. The king’s response in v. 16 suggests that at some level in his consciousness, Ahab was aware that what the four hundred prophets told him was not true.¹¹

Concerning the lying spirits, Matthew Henry further contends that there are malicious and lying spirits which go about continually seeking to deceive and destroy. These spirits put lies into the mouths of prophets to entice many to their destruction. It is not without divine permission that the devil deceives people, and even thereby God serves His own purpose as judgment falls on those who hate His strength.¹² The argument is that Satan does the deception, and God allows His created beings freedom of choice.

Bible versions translate differently the Hebrew word יִפְתֶּה in 1 Kgs 22:20 as “entice” (NIV, NAU, NAS, JPS, NRSV), “persuade” (KJV, NKJV, DRB), and “deceive” (LXE). יִפְתֶּה in 1 Kgs 22:20 is best translated as “persuade”,¹³ since the use of the piel suggests that someone besides the questioner does the deceiving. Then, God’s question, “Who will persuade Ahab to go up?” makes sense in the overall context. In 1 Kgs 22:23, the Lord put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of these prophets. The word used for “deceiving” is שָׁקַר instead of יִפְתֶּה. The action verb “to put” in v. 23 suggests that the deceiving spirit was not of the Lord. The verb נָתַן implies that God gave them up to their

¹⁰Ibid., 209.

¹¹P. J. Williams, “Lying Spirit Sent by God: The Case of Micaiah’s Prophecy,” in *The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture*, ed. Paul Helm and Carl R. Trueman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 63.

¹²Henry, *Commentary*, 2:703.

¹³Holladay, *HALOT*, s.v. “יִפְתֶּה.”

own desires. Inasmuch as Ahab refused to obey God's instructions, he readily embraced deception for which God was not necessarily responsible. A similar reasoning could be said of the betrayal of Jesus. The psalmist predicted the betrayal in these terms: "Even my close friend, in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me" (Ps 41:9). Judas by his own choice fulfilled the prophecy; he chose not to accept God's truth which was so clearly demonstrated in the life of Christ.

Two passages of Scripture, referring to the numbering of the children of Israel from Dan to Beersheba, outline the earlier argument that Satan does the deception. On the one hand, 2 Sam 24:1-2 states, "Now again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and it incited David against them to say, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.' And the king said to Joab the commander of the army who was with him, Go about now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and register the people, that I may know the number of the people." On the other hand, 1 Chr 21:1-2 states, "Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel. So David said to Joab and to the princes of the people, Go, number Israel from Beersheba even to Dan, and bring me *word* that I may know their number." It is evident from these two passages that Satan and not God does the deception. A related incident in Job 1 reveals that when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan also came among them (Job 1:6). Then God's statement to Satan, "Behold, all that he [Job] has is in your [Satan] power, only do not put forth your [Satan's] hand on him [Job]" (Job 1:12), shows that Satan and not God is responsible for his demise.¹⁴

The narrative of 1 Kgs 22 suggests that God was not in any way engaged in deceitful behavior. The judgment was already pronounced on Ahab when he murdered

¹⁴A reading of Job 1:13-21 further shows that Satan bears the responsibility of Job's loss of his family and wealth.

Naboth to own his vineyard (1 Kgs 21:19).¹⁵ Ahab is deluded into thinking that with Yahweh's help he will regain Ramoth-Gilead.¹⁶ Consequently, when the prophet Micaiah appeared to him, Ahab had yet another opportunity to reject the deceiving spirits. Inasmuch as he did not accept the truth conveyed through the prophet Micaiah, it follows that by rejecting the truth he was accepting the deceiving spirit. While this does not make God responsible for the deceiving spirit, God gave him freedom of choice to listen to lies or listen to truth through the prophet. Micaiah's response to Ahab in 1 Kgs 22:28, "If you indeed return safely the Lord has not spoken by me," shows evidently that he was a true prophet sent from God. Thus, a God in whom there is no lie (1 Sam 15:29) only utters a sure word to His prophet (1 Kgs 22:19-23). God did not lead Ahab into sin; Ahab had already determined what he intended to do. Ahab wanted religious permission to pursue his own course of action. He rejected God's truth and ultimately became responsible for the deaths of the majority of God's people (1 Kgs 19:14, 10). Block thus concludes that the delusion is not the result of divine lie, but the effect of the work of Yahweh on his ear and his mind so that when he hears his prophets pronounce an ambiguous oracle (from Yahweh) he puts his confidence in a mistaken interpretation. In the end, his interpretation proves to be not merely irrelevant but wrong. Tragically, for Ahab, the course of events was determined not by the recipient of the oracle but by the one who inspired it.¹⁷

Jeremiah 4:10; 20:7; and Ezek 14:9 record other cases of God's so-called association with deception. "Then I said, Ah, Lord God! Surely Thou hast utterly

¹⁵In the broader literary context, this decision represents the implementation of the threat that Elijah had announced to Ahab in 1 Kgs 21:21-24 in the wake of his confiscation of Naboth's field and the murder of the man. See Block, "What Has Delphi," 205.

¹⁶Block, "What Has Delphi," 208. According to Block, Ahab interpreted the addition "and succeed" as reinforcement of the promise that his effort to reclaim Ramoth-Gilead would be successful. Ibid., 209.

¹⁷Block, "What Has Delphi," 211.

deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, You will have peace; whereas a sword touches the throat” (Jer 4:10). “O Lord, Thou hast deceived me and I was deceived; Thou hast overcome me and prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me” (Jer 20:7). Do Jer 4:10 and Jer 20:7 affirm that God deceives people? Or could these be the prophet’s complaints to God in moments of deep despair? A reading of Exod 5:22 and Job 11:11 seems to point in that direction, as in these passages the Israelites attribute their misfortune to God, even though He is not responsible for it.

Concerning the complaints of Jeremiah in Jer 4:10 and 20:7, Jack R. Lundbom argues that Jer 1:6-7 is a recollection of Jeremiah’s call, his demur, and Yahweh’s dismissive response.¹⁸ With the fall of Samaria, the impending doom of the southern kingdom was “at our gullet” (Jer 4:10). Accordingly, J. A. Thompson thinks that Jeremiah had a deep conviction that God was sovereign and would work out His purposes. Therefore, “rather we must see in such an utterance, not so much a considered judgment, but the spontaneous reaction of a man who felt deeply about the tragedies of life, whether his own or those of others. The same tendency recurs in Jeremiah’s later outpourings of soul before God.”¹⁹

In Jer 20:7 Jeremiah gives voice to his perplexity using the approach of a psalm of complaint, with an introductory address to God which describes the trouble in which the prophet finds himself.²⁰ The Hebrew verb פָּתַח occurs in Exod 22:16 (Judg 16: 5) in a law

¹⁸Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 21A (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 855.

¹⁹J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 222.

²⁰John L. Mackay, *Jeremiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Mentor Commentary (Fearn Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2004), 1:565.

regarding sexual seduction.²¹ This verb does not, however, refer to “deceit,” for Yahweh did nothing deceptive in calling the young Jeremiah into divine service.²² In Jer 20:7, the verb פָּתַח is repeated twice in different conjugations, the first as piel and the second as niph'al. Francis Brown suspects that the root originally conveyed the idea of “to be spacious” or “wide,” and then “to be open-minded” or naïve; thus it came to indicate “to be deceived.”²³ John Mackay argues that it is unlikely that “deceive” is the correct interpretation in the verse because the Lord had never withheld from the prophet the sort of reception he would encounter (cf. Jer 1:6, 17-18). Therefore, “persuade” seems to translate the idea best. Jeremiah expressed strong reservations about his suitability and capacity (Jer 1:6), but the Lord persuaded him; in other words, he overcame his initial reluctance.²⁴ Therefore, the language of persuasion rather than deception seems to be the case in Jer 20:7.

Ezekiel 14:9 reads: “But if the prophet is prevailed upon to speak a word, it is I, the Lord, who have prevailed upon that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from among My people Israel.” This provides a clearer picture of the meaning of the Hebrew word פָּתַח. Several Bible versions translate the word פָּתַח differently; as a result, the word פָּתַח in Ezek 14:9 is rendered as “enticed” (JPS, NIV), “deceived” (KJV), “caused to err” (LXX), “prevailed” (NAU, NAS), “seduced” (DRB, LSG). While Ezek 14:5 suggests that the Israelites have turned away from God, v. 8 reveals that they will be cut off from among God’s people. In rejecting God, the Israelites

²¹The word also occurs in Judg 14:15 and 16:5. Some commentators such as Bright contend that Jeremiah has likened himself to a woman who has been assaulted and raped, but this is reading far too much into the text. See John Bright, *Jeremiah*, trans. John Bright, Anchor Bible 21 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 132.

²²Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 855.

²³Holladay, *HALOT*, s.v. “פָּתַח.”

²⁴Mackay, *Jeremiah*, 1:566.

similarly chose false prophets to feed their souls. The promises of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience in Deut 28 become a reality in this passage. Consequently, W. H. Brownlee contends that in Ezek 14:9, God punished the apostate nation by granting them false prophets who led them to their doom.²⁵

While some still perceive God as a deceiver²⁶ who punishes sin with sin,²⁷ others argue that the real possibility of obedience was open to the prophet since there was a clear word of Yahweh forbidding idolatry, such as in Deut 13:1-5, and this should have warned him against any communication with idolaters.²⁸ However, the Old Testament frame of mind makes God responsible for everything, either good or bad. An example of such is Isa 45:7: “The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these.”

Ezekiel 13:2 provides the background for a better understanding of the meaning of the word “entice” in Ezek 14:9. The Lord tells Ezekiel to prophesy against the prophets of Israel. They prophesy through illusions, and not visions. What they say does not come true, and they claim that what they say comes from God when it does not. They deceive the people who look to them for guidance. When the people are deceived, they cast the blame on God. The Lord condemns these prophets and will remove them from among His people. God not only set forth His truth of impending judgment, He also

²⁵William Hugh Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19* (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), 28:203-204.

²⁶John William Wevers, *Ezekiel*, The New Century Bible Commentary (1969; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 90. An even more challenging interpretation asserts that God Himself “leads unbelievers into error.” See Paul Ellingworth and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians* (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1975), 17:178. A suggested translation of 2 Thess 2:11 is “God causes them to act very wrongly”; quoted in G. H. Harris, “Deceive?” 77.

²⁷Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, trans. Cosslett Quin, The Old Testament Library (1970; repr., London: SCM Press, 1986), 183.

²⁸Gottfried Quell, *Wahre und falsche propheten; Versuch einer interpretation*, Beiträge zur Förderung Christlicher Theologie (Gutersloh: Bertelsmann, 1952), 46:99-102.

identified and denounced the false prophets of Israel whom the people foolishly respected and revered. God revealed that such false prophets prophesied from their own inspiration, even though they presented their message as originating from Him (Ezek 13:2).

When Ezek 14:9 is put into its proper context, one observes that God deceives no one, but rather punishes those who deceive others or who allow themselves to be deceived. He allows deception to take place when people choose to turn away from Him or when people voluntarily or involuntarily reject Him. As in 1 Kgs 22, God openly presented His truth as well as exposed the source of falsehood. Anyone who then chose to ignore God's instructions, replacing them with the teachings of the false prophets, stood in active opposition to God and would receive the just consequences of rebellious actions. God exposes all lies and liars by His truth.²⁹

In a pattern analogous to 1 Kgs 22, God addressed those who would yet choose to rebel against Him and seek the word of false prophets. As with the prophetic announcement of Ahab's doom, God proclaimed beforehand what would result. God did not deceive by hiding the truth, neither could it be argued that God led anyone to sin. As was true for Ahab, those of Ezekiel's day who refused God's warning and chose instead to consort with false prophets continued in the established inclination of their sinful hearts. Such individuals would seek the false prophets even though specifically forewarned by God not to do so. What they use to replace God's truth will eventually become the instrument of judgment God will use against them.³⁰ Another text that deserves our attention is 2 Thess 2:11-12.

²⁹G. H. Harris, "Deceive?" 82.

³⁰Ibid., 83.

New Testament

The God of the New Testament is also known to us as the God of truth. As John puts it, “I am the way, and the truth” (John 14:6) and “This is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God” (John 17:3). Revelation 15:3 echoes the same thought: “Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations.” Therefore, to despise the truth is to despise God whose very being and nature are truth.³¹ The word of God is as pure as He is Himself. A reading of Rom 3:4; Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18; and Jas 1:17-18 shows that God alone is incapable of lying.

In the New Testament, 2 Thess 2:11-12 is another passage that seemingly portrays God as a deceiver. The apostle Paul states, “And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.” The issue of deception is more or less similar to the verses in 1 Kgs 22:20, Jer 4:10; 20:7 and Ezek 14:9.

Second Thessalonians 2:8, 9 provides the contextual background for understanding vv. 11 and 12. Accordingly, in 2 Thess 2:8 the lawless one will be revealed and destroyed by the splendor of the coming of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of the dragon, the old Serpent, Satan (v. 9). Accordingly, God may use Satan as part of His judgment on rebellion.³² God uses people’s rebellion as a judgment against them. By their own free

³¹Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 95.

³²“Behold, I am going to send and get Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant” (Jer 43:10).

will they chose to rebel.³³ Thus, 2 Thessalonians depicts the man of lawlessness as coming in one accord with the activity of Satan (2 Thess 2:9), as well as all deception of wickedness (2:10). One would expect a continuation of Satan's role in empowering such a person. Instead, the Apostle Paul switches to God as the sender of the ἐνέργειαν πλάνης.³⁴ The finite and transitive verb πέμπει underscores the fact that the deluding influence is, in fact, sent; it will not merely result from an outworking of related events.³⁵ Harris thus concludes that for God to send some element of deception is not exactly equivalent to active deception by God. He sends someone or something which deceives. He Himself is not named as the deceiver.³⁶ In both Testaments, there is no indication that God is a deceiver or uses deceit to achieve His purpose.

Theological Understanding

Given the cultural climate in today's society, we experience the widespread rejection of absolute truth and especially biblical truth. If biblical truth is undermined, it logically follows that the truthfulness of God would be undermined as well. But evidence

³³Bruce B. Barton, Linda Chaffee Taylor, and David Veerman, *1 & 2 Thessalonians: Life Application Commentary*, ed. James C. Galvin and Ronald A. Beers, Life Application Bible Commentary, ed. Grant R. Osborne (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1999), 133.

³⁴G. H. Harris, "Deceive?" 75.

³⁵In reference to 2 Thess 2:11, Aus argues, "God is the subject, he does the deluding although it is based on the individual's rejection of the gospel. The theocentric significance of this summary statement should not be overlooked because of the more interesting details of the whole paragraph, 2:1-13." Roger D. Aus, "God's Plan and God's Power: Isaiah 66 and the Restraining Factors of 2 Thessalonians 2: 6-7," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977): 500.

³⁶G. H. Harris, "Deceive?" 78. The uniqueness of the future period must be emphasized. The tribulation will be an unprecedented period of God's judgment on earth with many unique events. For example, two important elements among several will be the removal of the restrainer (2 Thess 2:6-7) and the presence of the beast who will exercise the full extent of Satan's power for three and a half prophetic years (Rev 13: 1-5). It might seem that God uses tools of deception, but one should note that deception occurs when God's admonitions are forsaken. As argued earlier, God ratifies one's decision to accept or reject His admonition without necessarily being involved in the process or outcome of these decisions.

from both Old and New Testaments has refuted that argument. There is no biblical ground for God's untruthfulness.

Truthfulness as an attribute of God is well established in both Old and New Testaments. God is truthful because in Him, Scripture says, there is no lie. The Apostle Paul reiterates: "Let God be found true, though every man be found a liar" (Rom 3:4). Robert L. Reymond remarks that God's truth is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.³⁷ The God of the Bible is the one living and true God. To talk about the true certainly implies the false that Scriptures appropriately describe by the word "lies."³⁸ Consequently, truth and lies are depicted in their final, metaphysical, and theological senses. The biblical God is the true God; by contrast, all the gods of this world are "lies" or false gods conjured up by godless or immoral persons of darkened understanding who reject the true God's revelation of Himself in nature.³⁹ Accordingly, as Job 37:19 states, "God is perfect in knowledge" and as such, as Wayne Grudem argues, God's truthfulness thus means that He is the true God, and that all His knowledge and words are true and the final standard of truth.⁴⁰ God reveals what He is by what He does. His righteousness is known to us because he rules the world in righteousness and justice. Whatever God does, is by definition, righteous.⁴¹

Because we are finite beings, we must not say that a being must conform to our idea of what God should be like in order to be the true God, for we are mere creatures; we

³⁷Robert L. Reymond, *What Is God?* (Fearn, Ross-Shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2007), 265.

³⁸See such passages as Pss 96:5; 97:7; 115:4-8; Isa 44:9-10, 20; Jer 10:2-16; Amos 2:4.

³⁹Reymond, *What?* 269.

⁴⁰Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 195.

⁴¹Christopher J. H. Wright, *Living as the People of God: The Relevance of Old Testament Ethics* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 136.

cannot define what the true God must be like. It must be God Himself who has the perfect idea of what the true God should be like. He has revealed it repeatedly in Scripture, as Jer 10:10 states, “But the Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King.” To say that God knows all things and that His knowledge is perfect (Job 37:16) is to say that He is never mistaken in His perception and understanding of the world. All that He knows and thinks is true; God alone has the correct understanding of reality. Thus for finite creatures to think or speak truthfully, they must reflect the character of God because He is truth and the standard for truth, which is revealed in Scripture.

God’s truth is firmly grounded in His immutable nature; it is not a construction of humans, nor is it variable or relative, or dependent on social or cultural conditions. Thus, what God knows and tells us in His word is perfect and absolute truth.⁴²

Some theologians contend that God’s and man’s knowledge of truth is such that man’s knowledge of truth will never be more than an analogy of God’s knowledge of truth. The argument is that man will never unequivocally know anything as God knows. I must disagree with Calvin who contends that God speaks sparingly of His essence. Calvin mistakenly thinks that God’s form of speaking does not so much express clearly what He is as accommodate the knowledge of Him to our slight capacity so that we may understand it.⁴³ Because of the weakness of humanity, Calvin believes “the description of him [God] that is given to us must be accommodated to our capacity so that we may understand it. Now the mode of accommodation is for Him to represent Himself to us not as He is in Himself, but as He seems to us.”⁴⁴ Accordingly, for Robert Reymond, Calvin is erroneously expressing God’s impassibility. Calvin maintains that God could not

⁴²Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:109.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid., 1:195.

provide us a univocal verbal depiction of Himself as He is in Himself because of our finitude. Thus we possess at best only a finite representation of God; we understand Him only as He seems to us and not as He is in Himself.⁴⁵ Contrary to Calvin, we can know on the basis of God's verbal self-revelation many things about Him in the same sense that He knows them. The biblical claim that God is immutable (Heb 13:8) in no way suggests that God is impassible. Throughout Scripture, God is vehemently involved in the lives of His creatures.

One such theologian who agrees with Calvin is Cornelius Van Til who argues that all human predication is analogical re-interpretation of God's pre-interpretation. Thus, the incomprehensibility of God must be taught with respect to any revelational proposition.⁴⁶ He further states, "When the Christian restates the content of Scriptural revelation in the form of a system, such system is based upon and therefore analogous to the existential system that God Himself possesses. Being based upon God's revelation it is, on the one hand, fully true and, on the other, at no point identical with the content of the divine mind."⁴⁷ In John 12:49 Jesus Himself rejects both Calvin's and Van Til's argument that we can only know God as He seems to us rather than as He really is in Himself: "For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandments, what to say, and what to speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me." He who proclaimed Himself as the truth revealed to us that God is truth.

⁴⁵Reymond, *What?* 271.

⁴⁶Cornelius Van Til, "In Defense of Faith," in *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, ed. Cornelius Van Til (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978), 171.

⁴⁷Cornelius Van Til, "Introduction," in *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Benjamin B. Warfield (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 33.

Theologians who hold Calvin's view promote the idea that truth cannot be attained or known. To suggest that truth is relative or cannot be known is to defeat the purpose for the coming of the Son of God. "For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (John 18:37).

Conclusion

In the Bible, there are records of human lies, depravities, and unfaithfulness as well as stories of faithfulness and truthfulness. Often human depravities have been emphasized by men at the expense of the positive attributes of truthfulness so cherished in Scripture. A contextual reading of 1 Kgs 22:20-23, Jer 20:7, Ezek 14:9, and 2 Thess 2:11-12 suggests that God indeed does not lie, neither does He recommend deception or lies. There is no biblical evidence that God uses or recommends deceit.

I have established so far, through biblical evidence, that God is truthful. The next attribute under consideration is holiness. The God of integrity who is truthful and trustworthy must be holy as well.

Holiness⁴⁸

Is the God of the Bible holy or does He have moral purity? No other word in Scripture is more distinctly divine in its origin and meaning than the word holy. Holiness is a conception of God that is often difficult to define. In the words of John Morley it is "the deepest of all the words that defy definition."⁴⁹ The word holy is the most intimately divine word in the Bible; it is that in God which marks Him off as God. To say that He is holy is to say that He is God. Thus in Scripture, holiness is one of the fundamental

⁴⁸I am indebted to Allan Coppedge for his treatment of the holiness of God in his book *Portraits of God: A Biblical Theology of Holiness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

⁴⁹John Morley, *Voltaire* (London: Macmillan, 1923), 175.

attributes of God that conditions and qualifies all other attributes.⁵⁰ The Bible presents several images of the holiness of God. It abounds in ascription to the holiness of God in contrast to the sinful deities of paganism and the foul gods of the false religions of the day. The God of the Bible, as shown below, is consistently represented as holy.

The problem with defining the word holy is made more difficult because in the Bible the word holy is used in more than one way. First, it is associated with the idea of purity or absence from stain, perfect, and immaculate in every detail. Second, it is connected with the idea of being separate. The ancient root word for holy means “to cut” or “to separate.”⁵¹ My analysis of this attribute in both Testaments further dispels the charge that He uses deceit to achieve His purpose.

Biblical Basis

Old Testament

The Old Testament word for holy is קָדוֹשׁ and for holiness קְדוּשָׁה. The verb קָדַשׁ is derived from a Semitic root meaning to cut off or to separate. It signifies that which is marked off, separated, withdrawn from ordinary use.⁵² The foundational significance of holiness is underscored in the biblical passages where God’s presence is revealed. For example, in Moses’ first encounter with God, He revealed His holiness. “Then He said, Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Exod 3:5). The use of the word holy in the Old Testament appears to confirm its relationship to separation. It points to the infinite distance that separates Him from every creature. He is exalted infinitely above everything else. Thus,

⁵⁰Thomas L. Trevethan, *The Beauty of God’s Holiness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 13.

⁵¹R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1985), 54.

⁵²Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 6th ed., trans. J. A. Baker (London: SCM Press, 1961), 1:270.

when the Bible calls God holy, it means that God is transcendentally separate; He is the holy “other.”⁵³

The Hebrew root קדש occurs 842 times in the Old Testament with significant concentration found in the books of Leviticus (152), Ezekiel (105), and Exodus (102).⁵⁴ This explains the high emphasis on the holiness of God in the narrative sections of these books. Things that are holy are set apart, separated from the rest. Nothing is holy in itself; only the holy God who is holy in Himself can consecrate or sanctify something or someone. In the niphal, God is the only subject; He shows Himself to be holy by manifesting His unchangeable divine holiness before Israel (Exod 29:43) and the nations (Ezek 20:41; 28:22, 25; 36:23; 38:16; 39:27).⁵⁵ Thus, when the holy God touches something, it changes from common to uncommon, to something special, different, and apart from the other. It is God who transfers things into the category of holy. All holy things in the Scripture have only derived holiness. This derived holiness arises out of a right relationship to God, the holy One. Thus, certain places are described in Scripture as holy, such as Jerusalem (Isa 52:1), Zion (Isa 27:13), the camp of Israel (Deut 23:14), and heaven (Isa 57:15). In addition, certain things are described as holy like the tabernacle, which houses both the Holy place and the Holy of Holies (Exod 26:33). Certain times and seasons are also designated as holy, for instance, the Sabbath (Gen 2:3; Exod 20:8) and the annual festivals (Lev 23).

This kind of holiness has nothing to do with moral and spiritual purity. It refers to the fact that they are consecrated or set apart. The narrative of God’s revelation to Moses

⁵³Sproul, *Holiness*, 55.

⁵⁴Vienna Kornfeld, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. Johannes G. Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), s.v. “קדש.”

⁵⁵Kornfeld, *TDOT*, s.v. “קדש.”

and Israel reaches its climax by an awesome restatement of the same truth. The flame of holiness that burned in the bush becomes an awesome mountain of fire blazing up into heaven, another revelation of His holiness (Exod 19).⁵⁶ The picture of God in Genesis certainly makes the case for that transcendent God creator of the world, but the Bible unfolds even more of His character as God begins to reveal His holiness in the context of Exodus Sinai's events. This holiness encompasses His sovereignty, His immanence, and His moral character. On Mount Sinai, God told Israel His high ideal for them as His holy people. Exodus 19:6 states, "You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel." They were to be holy as He is holy (Lev 11:44). The New Testament also expresses the holiness of God.

New Testament

The New Testament time builds on the holiness of God already established in the Old Testament. Everett F. Harrison remarks, "The lesser emphasis in the New Testament is readily accounted for on the assumption that the massive presentation under the Old Testament is accepted as underlying presupposition."⁵⁷ Although in the New Testament the idea of the holiness of God as a divine attribute is emphasized somewhat less than in the Old Testament, yet it is everywhere presupposed. God's holiness appears at decisive points in the New Testament as the revealing and saving work of Christ unfolds in a new and living way the name and character of God.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Trevethan, *The Beauty of God's Holiness*, 14. Moses was personally confronted by the holiness of God in the incident with the burning bush (Exod 3:1-5). As he learned the name of God and received the promise of God for Israel, he anticipated the experience of Israel in the Exodus and at Mount Sinai (Exod 19). See David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 151.

⁵⁷Everett F. Harrison, "Holiness," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 2:725.

⁵⁸Emil Brunner, *Christian Doctrine of God*, Lutterworth Library, trans. Olive Wyon (London: Lutterworth, 1949), 35:157.

As seen in the Old Testament, holiness is the basis for all other attributes of God; this accounts for the New Testament emphasis on the Son of God. Filled with praise to God because of her miraculous pregnancy, Mary acknowledges the holiness of His name:⁵⁹ “For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name” (Luke 1:49). Jesus instructs His disciples to say “Hallowed be thy name” as they pray to the Father in heaven (Matt 6:9). In His conversation with Philip, Jesus plainly asserts: “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:7).

All these examples show that the New Testament writers understood the connection between the holiness of God and the character revealed in His Son Jesus Christ and clearly expressed this to all. Jesus calls His Father “Holy Father” (John 17:11). The apostle Peter echoes Exodus in his call for Christians to be holy in their conduct: “Like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet 1:15, 16). The child to be born is called holy, the Son of God (Luke 1:35). Jesus is thus recognized at the outset of His ministry as the “Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24). The disciples also acknowledged Him as the “Holy One of God” (John 6:66).

Commenting on holiness in the New Testament, Otto Procksch holds that it is thought of as His essential attribute in which the Christian must share and for which the heavenly Father prepares him by His instruction. Therefore, the nature of Christianity is thus centrally determined by the concept of the holy.⁶⁰

Within the context of adversity God draws us to grow in holiness. Hebrews 12:10 states, “He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness.” God’s holiness

⁵⁹Walther Eichrodt argues, “Of all the qualities attributed to the divine nature there is one which in virtue both of the frequency and the emphasis with which it is used, occupies a position of unique importance—namely, that of holiness.” Eichrodt, *Theology*, 270.

⁶⁰Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, s.v. “Holy.”

as manifested in His law forbids sin in all of its modifications: “So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Rom 7:12). The holiness of God is highlighted in the book of Revelation as John echoes the vision of the prophet Isaiah. Day and night, the living creatures never cease saying: “Holy, holy, holy, *is* the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come” (Rev 4:8).⁶¹

Theological Understanding

In the light of the biblical data, it is not surprising that holiness is the most central concept for understanding the nature and being of God. As noted earlier, holiness is identified with God’s separateness from the creation and His elevation above it. Holiness is, as Kaiser puts it, a transcendental attribute of God.⁶² It is the essential character of God as transcendently ‘other’ and separate. This absoluteness and perfection pervades all the qualities and acts of God.⁶³ It is that which gives God His transcendence, for He alone is holy. Both transcendence and immanence are expressed in this attribute of holiness.⁶⁴ Therefore, when we talk about the transcendence of God, we are talking about that sense in which God is above and beyond us. The word is used to describe God’s relationship to the world, to show that He is higher than the world. It describes God in His majesty, His exalted loftiness.

Just as R. C. Sproul contends that holiness is associated with both the idea of purity and separation, Kaiser remarks that God’s holiness had two distinct sides. While one stresses His otherness, His so-called numinous character, as referred to in the ceremonial and ritual laws of Israel, the other side expresses His righteousness and

⁶¹See Isa 6:4.

⁶²Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 148.

⁶³Wright, *Living as the People of God*, 134.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 140.

goodness, which became the basis for the morality and ethics taught in the Old Testament.⁶⁵

The first aspect, commonly called otherness or incomparable glory, is exclusive to God. This is, doubtlessly, a common Old Testament use of the term. Yahweh as the Holy One stands out in contrast to all false gods: “Who is like Thee among the gods, O Lord? Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?” (Exod 15:11). Throughout Scripture, the holy represents the opposite of the common or the profane. This aspect is seen in the Lord’s complaint to Ezekiel: “Her priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the profane, and they have not taught the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they hide their eyes from My sabbaths, and I am profaned among them” (Ezek 22:26). God’s people were to be more than common: “Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine” (Lev 20:26). God stands in contrast to His creation: “‘To whom then will you liken me that I should be his equal?’ says the Holy One” (Isa 40:25). As referred to above, Kaiser’s and Sproul’s emphasis on the two aspects of the holiness of God explains why the holiness of God is connected to His transcendence over all creation. Initially what was set apart for God’s service in the Old Testament was regarded as holy, and that fact in itself presupposed the holiness of God.

Beside the transcendental aspect of the holiness of God, holiness is also perceived as a moral attribute of God; it is that attribute of which God makes Himself the absolute standard. Holiness is therefore God’s self-affirmation. The self-existing I AM is thus equated with holiness. Holiness is the comprehensive expression of all the divine perfection. This explains why holiness is attributed to each person of the Godhead as the

⁶⁵Ibid., 143.

highest expression of divinity and excellence of divine nature. Erickson concurs with Kaiser⁶⁶ for at least the two basic aspects of God's holiness: His uniqueness and His righteousness.⁶⁷ God is unique and very separate from all of creation: "Who is like Thee among the gods, O Lord? Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?" (Exod 15:11). He is presented in the Old Testament as ethically unique. He acts with holy justice when His people rebel against Him, yet His love will not allow Him to wipe them out.⁶⁸

The uniqueness of God had always been there, sustaining His creation, making promises to the patriarchs, and fulfilling His plans as portrayed through Pharaoh's defeat and the passage through the Red Sea. According to Peterson, Israel witnessed two sides of the holiness of God in the Exodus and subsequently. He brought judgment upon those who flouted His purposes and salvation to those who trusted in Him. At times the revelation of His holiness seemed threatening even to His people.⁶⁹ God is also unique because holiness in Him is inherent, while in the Christian it is acquired. In God, holiness is infinite and unchangeable; it admits of no increase or diminution as it is an immutable attribute of the divine nature. Holiness in Christians is conditional and may be lost. In God, it is integral and substantive and can no more be lost than God can cease to be.⁷⁰

God's holiness, being absolute and total, is proclaimed, yet He calls everyone in each generation to reflect His holiness: "For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate

⁶⁶Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 143.

⁶⁷Millard J. Erickson, *God the Father Almighty: A Contemporary Exploration of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 99.

⁶⁸Peterson, *Possessed*, 17.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁰Asbury Lowrey, *Possibilities of Grace* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1884), 277-278.

yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth” (Lev 11:44).

The second aspect of the holiness of God besides His uniqueness or otherness lies in His moral purity. The Bible in its entirety from Genesis to Revelation is the revelation of a holy God. Righteousness is one of the significant aspects of the moral purity of God. God’s holiness is manifested in His work: “The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and kind in all His deeds” (Ps 145:12). Nothing but that which is excellent can proceed from Him; holiness is the rule of all His actions. In the beginning, He pronounced all He made “very good” (Gen 1:31). He could not have done this had there been anything imperfect or unholy in His creation. A holy God is righteous, and in His role as judge, He sets a standard for righteous conduct. A people who are to be holy must conform to this standard of righteousness in their behavior and personal relationships. If they are to be holy as He is holy, they will have to be righteous as He is righteous.⁷¹ The righteousness of God means that His law, being a true expression of His nature, is as perfect as He is. Psalm 19:7 puts it this way: “The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.”

The righteousness of God means that His actions are in accord with the law revealed in Scripture, which He Himself has established. Ezra 9:15 states, “O Lord God of Israel, Thou art righteous, for we have been left an escaped remnant, as it is this day; behold, we are before Thee in our guilt, for no one can stand before Thee because of this.” While Ezra declares the righteousness of God, Moses also along with several others points to His compassion, mercy, and the fairness of His judgment.⁷² Accordingly, the right is not something arbitrary; cruelty and murder would not have been good if God had

⁷¹Coppedge, *Portraits of God*, 362.

⁷²See Deut 16:18; 32:4; Pss 7:11; 116:5; Isa 45:21; Ezek 18:9; 2 Tim 1:5; Heb 11:4.

so declared. In making decisions, God exemplifies an objective standard of right and wrong, a standard which is part of the very structure of His nature. However, that standard to which God adheres is not something external to God; it is inherent to His own nature. He decides in accordance with reality, and that reality is Himself.⁷³

Additional elements of the holiness of God are expressed in His name and His place of abode. Psalm 99:3 says, “Let them praise Thy great and awesome name; holy is He.” The name of God is holy as it expresses His nature and character. Psalm 111:9 puts it this way: “He has sent redemption to His people; He has ordained His covenant forever; holy and awesome is His name.”

As the name of God expresses His holiness, so it is with His residence. The prophet Isaiah well portrays God’s abode: “For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite” (Isa 57:15). Similarly, the prophet Joel quotes Him, “Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, dwelling in Zion my holy mountain. So Jerusalem will be holy, and strangers will pass through it no more” (Joel 3:17).

The God who lives in that holy mountain is acknowledged as holy. The prophet Isaiah describes a vision of the holiness of God and encapsulates much of what had been revealed before. The Lord appeared to him in the temple as the King of the universe, enthroned in a heavenly palace (Isa 6:1-4), with His supernatural attendants proclaiming, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.”⁷⁴ Although the holiness of God cannot be adequately conveyed in vision or word, angelic beings

⁷³Erickson, *Father Almighty*, 100.

⁷⁴The concept of holiness is central to the whole theology in Isaiah. His holiness denotes His innermost and secret essence. The fearfulness of the holy God is inimitably expressed in the holy awe of the prophet Isaiah. See Isa 6.

declared that this holiness is revealed in our universe, which is like a temple dedicated to His use and the display of His glory.⁷⁵

When the word holy is applied to God, it does not refer to one single attribute. On the contrary, when God is called holy, it is used synonymously with His deity. The word holy calls attention to all that God is; it reminds us that His love is holy love, His justice is holy justice, His mercy is holy mercy, His Spirit is the Holy Spirit.⁷⁶ Thus, the holiness of God stands at the very heart of His nature; this explains the prophet's designation "the Holy One of Israel" (2 Kgs 19:22). Rudolph Kittel asserts that the idea of holiness is not just one side of God's essential being, but rather it is the comprehensive designation for the total content of the divine being in His relationship to the external world.⁷⁷

The holiness of God is so identified with the very nature of His divinity that, as Smith points out, when God swears by Himself, He swears by His own nature, that is, by His holiness (Ps 89:35).⁷⁸ Holiness is the foundation on which the whole conception of God rests; all other characteristics need to be qualified by His holiness. Gustaf Aulen rightly contends that holiness gives specific tone to each of the various elements in the idea of God and makes them part of a fuller conception of God. Every statement about God, whether in reference to His love, power, or righteousness, ceases to be an affirmation about God unless it is projected against the background of His holiness.⁷⁹

⁷⁵Peterson, *Possessed*, 18.

⁷⁶Sproul, *Holiness*, 57.

⁷⁷Rudolph Kittel, "The Holiness of God," *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge: Embracing Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology and Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Biography from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, ed. Johann J. Herzog, Philip Schaff, Albert Hauck, Samuel Macauley Jackson, Charles Colebrook Sherman, and George William Gilmore et al. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908), 5:316-317.

⁷⁸William Smith, *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Artford, CT: Scranton, 1918), s.v. "Holiness."

⁷⁹Gustaf Aulen, *The Faith of the Christian Church*, trans. Eric H. Wahlstrom (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg, 1960), 103.

Conclusion

In the light of the preceding analysis, there is no question that God is holy. This holiness is reflected in both His uniqueness and His righteousness. The righteousness of God entails the sacredness of His name as well as His place of abode, which is referred to as the Holy of Holies, both in the heavenly and earthly sanctuaries. Consequently, the holiness of God ties together all the other attributes of God. It allows for a proper understanding of other major categories that describe God's nature, such as His trustworthiness and His mercy. In addition, His wrath is an expression of His holiness as well.⁸⁰

The term holy calls attention to both His transcendence and moral purity. God can reach down and consecrate special things to make them holy. His touch makes the common become holy. Thus, nothing in this world is holy in itself. Only God can make something holy. This means that the holiness of all other things becomes a secondary holiness, not a primary one. While God is holy always and forever, persons and things may lose their holiness. This explains why Jerusalem was no longer holy when the glory of God departed from it (Ezek 10:11). There is no doubt; God is indeed holy. Thus far God, as a being of integrity, is truthful and holy. All these attributes dismiss the charge that He uses deception as a means to an end. I continue with the relational attribute of trustworthiness.

Relational Attributes

Trustworthiness

Is God trustworthy? Does He keep His promise to His people, "You shall be my people and I shall be your God"? One would expect a truthful God to be trustworthy.

⁸⁰Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 260.

Arthur W. Pink contends that unfaithfulness is one of the most outstanding sins of our modern days, with marital infidelity in the social world as well as unfaithfulness to covenants made with Christ.⁸¹ The relationship between God and mankind is expressed primarily in terms of loyalty to the covenant relationship, the constitutive factor in Israel's existence as a nation and the focus of their identity as a people. In this section, we examine the scriptural basis of God's trustworthiness in both Testaments followed by a brief theological reflection.

Biblical Basis

Old Testament

The trustworthiness of God has to do with whether or not He keeps His promises. Scripture abounds in illustrations of God's faithfulness, with such examples as Gen 9:9, "Now behold, I myself do establish my covenant with you, and with your descendants after you." The unconditional and universal nature of the covenant shows that God did not prove unfaithful inasmuch as the continuance of the covenant was dependent upon divine faithfulness alone. To use anthropomorphic terms, it was upon divine remembrance alone that the covenant was carried out: "When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth" (Gen 9:16).

Unlike the unfaithfulness of His creatures, Scripture states that faithfulness is a quality in His being: "Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His loving-kindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments" (Deut 7:9). The trustworthiness of God is inextricably linked to the trustworthiness of what He said, first at Horeb, and then

⁸¹Arthur Walkington Pink, *The Attributes of God: A Solemn and Blessed Contemplation of Some of the Wondrous and Lovely Perfections of the Divine Character*, 5th ed. (Swengel, PA: Reiner, 1964), 47.

in Moab. Moses' address then flows smoothly through the long exhortation that eventually introduces the collection of laws in Deut 12-26. Throughout chaps. 6-11, the emphasis is on the connection between God's words, actions, and character. Nowhere is the connection to be seen more clearly than in the *Shema* of Deut 6.⁸² God's trustworthiness ultimately finds its fullest expression in the greatest demonstration of grace yet seen. His reliability stretches even to solving the one problem that the Israelites could not solve themselves: the problem of their sinful nature.⁸³ God therefore means what He says.

Deuteronomy 32:4—"A faithful God who does no wrong"—shows that the God who speaks is the God who acts. Therefore, God can be trusted. God never fails, never forgets, never falters, and never forfeits His word: "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Num 23:19).

The words of Ps 89:34, "My covenant I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of my lips," further support the faithfulness of God. God keeps His promises. This passage in Psalms and many others show the determinateness and the immutability of the divine promise. The trustworthiness of God is also established when He disciplines His people. God is still faithful in what He withholds no less than in what He gives. The Chronicler relates a vivid example of God's faithful discipline as contrasted with the faithlessness of His people:

For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done evil in the sight of the Lord our God, and have forsaken Him and turned their faces away from the dwelling place of the Lord, and have turned their backs.

They have also shut the doors of the porch and put out the lamps, and have not

⁸²J. G. Millar, "A Faithful God Who Does No Wrong," in *The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture*, ed. Paul Helm and Carl R. Trueman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 9.

⁸³Ibid., 9.

burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel. Therefore the wrath of the Lord was against Judah and Jerusalem, and He has made them an object of terror, of horror, and of hissing, as you see with your own eyes. For behold, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this.⁸⁴

To acknowledge God's discipline means that we humble ourselves before Him, own that we fully deserve His correction, and thank Him for it. The words of the prophet Daniel echo this line of reasoning, "Righteousness belongs to thee, O Lord, but to us open shame, as it is this day to the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are nearby and those who are far away in all the countries to which thou hast driven them, because of their unfaithful deeds which they have committed against you (Dan 9:7). Throughout the Old Testament, cases of unfaithfulness have always been attributed to human beings who did not keep their part of the covenant, unlike God who was and is always faithful and trustworthy. I continue my analysis in the New Testament.

New Testament

From the Old Testament perspective, faithfulness is frequently attributed to God.⁸⁵ In response to His steadfast love, His people are dutifully compelled to respond to His ideal love through their faithfulness to His covenant. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul epitomizes the deep love of God in Rom 8:38-39: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." In this passage the apostle expresses faithfulness to the grandeur of God's love toward us.

⁸⁴2 Chr 29:6-9. Similarly, the Psalmist says, "Then I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. But I will not break off My loving-kindness from him, nor deal falsely in My faithfulness" (Ps 89:32, 33).

⁸⁵See Pss 33:4; 100:5; 119:80.

On this firm assurance the apostle writes, “For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day” (2 Tim 1:12). Scripture repeatedly states that God is faithful in the glorification of His people; He wants to preserve them “blameless” for the day of His coming (1 Thess 5:24). Throughout the New Testament, one of the strongholds of the trustworthiness of God is encapsulated in the words of the apostle to the Hebrews, “He Himself has said, I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.” This assertion is certain because the promise is uttered by a God “who cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). God is trustworthy not only because He promises “never to leave us nor forsake us,” but also because He cares for all His creatures. The apostle Peter tells you to cast “all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you” (1 Pet 5:7).

Another evidence of God’s trustworthiness in the New Testament is the fact that He is our sustainer. Hebrews 1:3 states, “He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.” The apostle echoed in Col 1:17, “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” God can be trusted, for without Him there would be no life on earth. Acts 17:28 clearly says that “in Him we live and move and exist.” God provides for all our physical needs: “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness” (2 Cor 9:10). In both Testaments, God’s promises never fail.

In both Old and New Testaments God’s trustworthiness is based on who He is and what He has done for His creatures. This understanding is the foundation for correct theology.

Theological Understanding

When God's truthfulness is considered in relation to the Psalms, it emphasizes the faithfulness of God. The close connection between God's truth and His faithfulness is seen in the Septuagint's translation for the Hebrew word אֱמֶת "truth" by the Greek word ἀλήθεια which means faithfulness.⁸⁶ If both God and His word are true, then they become the final standard of truth. This means that God is reliable and faithful in His word. With respect to His promises, God always does what He says He will do, and we can depend on Him to never be unfaithful to His promises. Thus, He is a God of faithfulness who does no wrong (Deut 32:4). Furthermore, the poet desires to praise the greatness of Yahweh and calls Him אֱלֹהֵי אֱמֶת, the God who is faithful, and thus in whom there is no fault. In passages in the book of Psalms, אֱמֶת has been chosen with great care. Psalm 33:4 says that all God's work is done in אֱמֶת, which means in constant faithfulness.⁸⁷

The niph'al of the root אֱמֶת in its participle and perfect use such as in Deut 28:59 is used in connection with things and therefore means "lasting, continual, firm." It speaks of afflictions and sickness, which do not cease. When the word is used in connection with people such as in Prov 25:13; 1 Sam 8:2; Jer 42:5; and Neh 13:13, it means men who are reliable.⁸⁸

The Hebrew word אֱמֶת translated as truth is used in the Old Testament to describe God and the character of His acts. It means that God is not arbitrary or capricious but can be trusted. The word connotes that which is firm, reliable, or trustworthy. Thus, God is

⁸⁶For example, Pss 36:5 (LXX 35:6); 40:10 (LXX 39:11); 89:11 (LXX 87:12); 89:1, 2, 5, 8, 14, 24, 33, 48 (LXX 88: 2, 3, 6, 9, 25, 34, 50). See Drake Williams, "Let God Be Proved True: Paul's View of Scripture and the Faithfulness of God," in *The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture*, ed. Paul Helm and Carl R. Trueman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 102.

⁸⁷Alfred Jepsen, *TDOT*, s.v. "אֱמֶת."

⁸⁸*Ibid.*

absolutely true and worthy of confidence. He is faithful to His promises. George E. Ladd remarks that the God of אֱמֶת is not simply the guardian of some abstract entity called “truth” but one who belongs to the realm of eternal truth as over against the realm of eternal appearance (2 Chr 15:3). He is the God who can be trusted, who is able to act, and whose care for His people is sure.⁸⁹ When the word אֱמֶת is used of people and things in the Old Testament, it designates their trustworthiness and reliability. One who acts with אֱמֶת is the one whose conduct can be trusted because he or she recognizes the tie of family or friendship and acts loyally.⁹⁰ A truthful witness is one whose word can be trusted because it corresponds to the facts (Prov 14:25).⁹¹

While אֱמֶת describes the character of a person on whose words and deed one can rely, it denotes the conduct of a person corresponding to his own inner being. אֱמֶת is used of God’s word and deeds on which man can rely; אֱמוּנָה is used of God’s conduct, which corresponds to the nature of His deity. Thus, it is God’s stability, which is a true reflection of His deity that is the motivation for calling on Him in time of distress and for praising Him.⁹²

Adrio Konig understands God’s faithfulness to mean that He achieves His purposes and does not abandon them on account of our unfaithfulness. Even in the face of Israel’s unfaithfulness, He achieved what He had in mind. God therefore keeps His promises. We can thus go into the future with confident expectation, knowing that He will give us the new heaven and the new earth.⁹³ In his comment on Genesis, Calvin

⁸⁹George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 301.

⁹⁰See Gen 24:49; 42:16; 47:29; Josh 2:14.

⁹¹Ladd, *New Testament*, 300.

⁹²Alfred Jepsen, *TDOT*, s.v. “אֱמֶת.”

⁹³Adrio Konig, *Here Am I: A Christian Reflection on God*, trans. from Afrikaans (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 90.

notes that God reminds Abraham of His earlier deliverance and His redemptive fidelity in the past to show that He is indeed trustworthy. Calvin elaborates on the God who keeps His promises:

Since it greatly concerns us to have God as the guide of our whole life, in order that we may know that we have not rashly entered on some doubtful way, therefore the Lord confirms Abram in the course of his vocation, and recalls to his memory the original benefit of his deliverance; as if he had said, 'I, after I have stretched out my hand to thee, to lead thee forth from the labyrinth of death, have carried my favour towards thee thus far. Thou, therefore, respond to me in turn, by constantly advancing; and maintain steadfastly thy faith, from the beginning even to the end.' This indeed is said, not with respect to Abram alone, in order that he, gathering together the promises of God, made to him from the very commencement of his life of faith, should form them into one whole; but that all the pious may learn to regard the beginning of their vocation as flowing perpetually from Abram, their common father; and may thus securely boast with Paul, that they know in whom they have believed, (2 Tim 1:12) and that God, who in the person of Abram, had separated a church unto himself, would be a faithful keeper of the salvation deposited with Him. For this very end, the Lord declares himself to have been the deliverer of Abram appears hence, because he connects the promise which he is now about to give with the prior redemption; as if he were saying, 'I do not now first begin to promise thee this land. For it was on this account that I brought thee out of thy own country, to constitute thee the Lord and heir of this land. Now therefore I covenant with thee in the same form; lest thou shouldst deem thyself to have been deceived, or fed with empty words; and I command thee to be mindful of the first covenant, that the new promise, which after many years, I now repeat, may be more firmly supported.'⁹⁴

There is an unbreakable connection in the doctrine of God: the words of God as presented in the biblical text relate to the actions of God of which the text bears witness. In a similar way, the Horeb theophany makes concrete the link between God's words and actions. God does not only act on behalf of His people; He has become the God who speaks to His people. In His words, He expresses His character just as surely as when He acts.⁹⁵ The nexus of speech and action establishes the trustworthiness of God in Israel's

⁹⁴John Calvin, *Genesis*, The Geneva Series of Commentaries, ed. and trans. John King (1847; repr., Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1965), 410-411.

⁹⁵Millar, "Faithful God," 11.

eyes. God is faithful, and now Israel's role is to respond obediently to His ongoing requirements in the light of what she has seen and heard.⁹⁶

Conclusion

God's actions toward His people correspond with the words He speaks to them. This is a recurring theme that begins in the Pentateuch, runs through the wisdom literature and the prophets, and carries on through the New Testament, including the teaching of Christ Himself, and the letters of Paul.⁹⁷ God is a God of promise, and the crucial element in believing a promise is believing that the promiser can and will deliver on the promise made.

In final analysis, one observes that God is both real and truthful. Consequently, His faithfulness means that He proves true, and that He keeps His promises. He never has to revise His word or renege on a promise. His faithfulness is demonstrated throughout Scripture. He proved Himself a God who always fulfills what He says He will do. His promise to Abraham of a son came in his old age when Isaac, the promised son, was born. The God behind the Scripture is as trustworthy as the words He inspired and His actions recorded therein. I join in the conclusion of John Calvin:

Now, therefore, we hold faith to be knowledge of God's will towards us, perceived from his word. But the foundation of this is a preconceived conviction of God's truth. As for certainty, as long as your mind is at war with itself, the Word will be of doubtful and weak authority, or rather of none. And it is not even enough to believe that God is trustworthy who can neither deceive nor lie unless you hold that whatever proceeds from Him is sacred and inviolable truth.⁹⁸

God as a being of integrity is immutable, truthful, trustworthy, and holy. The next section argues that God, the promise keeper, is also merciful.

⁹⁶Ibid., 13.

⁹⁷Paul Helm and Carl R. Trueman, "Introduction," in *The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture*, ed. Paul Helm and Carl R. Trueman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), x.

⁹⁸Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.6.

Mercy and Justice

Mercy is a term used to describe the leniency or compassion as shown by one person to another, or a request from one person to another to be shown such leniency or compassion. Mercy entails that the innocent party bear the brunt of sin, in the execution of what is just or right. Justice is thus defined as conformity to moral rightness in action or attitude. It is conformity to truth, fact, or sound reason. What was just and right was executed upon Christ: therein lies the foundation of God's mercy. He bears our sin and blame in Himself.

Mercy is a quality intrinsic to the nature of God. It is best expressed when one deserves one thing but gets another. John 3:16 illustrates this point; "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Depending on the context in which it is used, the term mercy in the Bible is often expressed as tenderheartedness, loving compassion for His people, His tenderness of heart toward the needy. The Bible is replete with God's concern for man's total being as expressed in both Testaments.

Biblical Basis

Old Testament

The first expression of God's mercy toward humankind is expressed in Gen 3:2: "The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them." Mercy was shown in God's provision for the unfaithful couple; the Hebrew word כַּפֵּרָה means the propitiatory, the golden cover of the ark. The piel conjugation means to "cover up," "forgive," "reconcile," or "atone for offenses." The atonement was for the breach of the covenant. Appropriately, therefore the mercy-seat covered the covenant which was written on the two tables of stone inside the ark. God, thus reconciled through the blood sprinkled on the mercy-seat, could speak to His people "from off the mercy-seat that was

upon the ark of the testimony” (Num 7:89; Ps. 80:1).⁹⁹ Thus mercy was founded upon the promise of the death of Christ.

In the Old Testament, justice is manifested in His retribution to all people and nations according to their just deserts. Those who felt unjustly treated by others in social, economic, and political relationships summoned God to judge them, that is, to do them justice by saving them from their enemies or oppressors (Ps 7:6-11).¹⁰⁰

The adjective רַחֻם is linked with הַנּוֹן and is often part of a long liturgical formula that spells out the divine attribute such as: the compassionate (רַחֻם) and gracious (הַנּוֹן) God, slow to anger, abounding in love and (וְאַמֻּנָה) faithfulness (Ps 86:15). Furthermore, Deut 4:30-31 envisages repentance in exile and concludes, “You will return to the Lord your God and obey Him. For the Lord your God is a merciful (רַחֻם) God.”¹⁰¹

A lack of mercy is more natural to the human condition (Prov 5:9; Isa 47:6; Jer 6:23). In the relationship between God and His creatures, mercy derives from the quality in God that directs Him to forge a relationship with His people who absolutely do not deserve to be in a relationship with Him. Mercy is manifested in God’s activity on behalf of His people to free them from slavery. The Psalmist said, “Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him (Ps 103:13). God is praised for His mercy: “O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His loving-kindness is everlasting” (1 Chr 16:34).

Justice was central among the Israelites because they were very much concerned with social relationships among themselves as people covenanted to God and also among the nation surrounding them. Thus God would administer justice by punishing those

⁹⁹Holladay, *HALOT*, s.v. "בַּפְּתָח."

¹⁰⁰Temba L. J. Mafico, *ABD*, s.v. “Just, Justice.”

¹⁰¹Mike Butterworth, *NIDOTTE*, s.v. “רחם.”

whose conduct made the lives of others very difficult in the world (Ps 94:2-4).¹⁰² Men were appointed to sing of His mercy: 1 Chr 16:41: “And with them were Heman and Jeduthun, and the rest who were chosen, who were designated by name, to give thanks to the Lord, because His loving-kindness is everlasting.” Since mercy presupposes sin, it denotes the ready inclination of God to relieve the misery of His fallen creatures. God Himself announces His mercy as “showing loving-kindness to thousands, to those who love me and keep my commandments” (Deut 5:10). The message of hope given by the prophet is that the compassionate God cannot leave His people in a state of alienation. For example, the prophet Jeremiah proclaimed, “Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a delightful child? Indeed, as often as I have spoken against him, I certainly *still* remember him; therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy (רַחֵם) on him, declares the Lord” (Jer 31:20). Zechariah encourages the postexilic community to keep their hope fixed on Yahweh. He writes, “And I shall strengthen the house of Judah, And I shall save the house of Joseph, And I shall bring them back, because I have had compassion (רַחֵם) on them; and they will be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the Lord their God, and I will answer them” (Zech 10:6).

Scriptural evidence reveals that God’s salvific activity toward the outcast, the oppressed, the afflicted, the poor, and the fatherless is derived from His mercy. All of His creation is utterly dependent upon Him, “His tender mercies are over all His works” (Ps 145:9). When we contemplate the characteristics of this Divine Excellency, we cannot do otherwise than bless God for it. His loving-kindness is “great” (1 Kgs 3:6) and “abundant” (Ps 86:5 and 1 Pet 1:3); it is “from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him” (Ps 103:17). We may therefore exclaim with the Psalmist, “Yes, I shall joyfully sing of Thy loving-kindness in the morning” (Ps 59:16). It is difficult to envision

¹⁰²Mafico, *ABD*, s.v. “Just, Justice.”

a God who ceases to be merciful, for being merciful is a quality of the divine essence. Psalm 136:1 says, “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His loving-kindness is everlasting.”

The other side of God’s mercy is revealed in the punishment of the wicked even as His mercy toward us was shown in the awful justice of the cross. Mercy and justice are not mutually exclusive, but two sides of the same coin. He is the God of justice as well as the God of mercy. He is the one “who keeps loving-kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generation” (Exod 34:7). The absolute justice of God is particularly important for Job. He bases his judgment against his friends on the belief that God cannot pervert justice (Job 8:3; 9:19).¹⁰³ God’s universal judgeship was based on the fact that it was He who created the world and established equity and justice (Ps 99:1-4). He was regarded as the source and guardian of justice because justice and righteousness are His very nature and attributes (Ps 97:2).¹⁰⁴

His mercy is eternal and unchanging, but He does not clear the guilty who refuse His mercy. God’s mercy is according to Ps 103:17, “from everlasting to everlasting” just as God Himself is from everlasting to everlasting. His mercies know no end; they are new every morning (Lam 3:22, 23), constantly fresh, perfect, and never fading with age. His mercy indeed endures forever. The pattern of God’s dealing with His people in the Old Testament has at its core the attribute of mercy and justice. This provides the foundation for understanding His dealings in the New Testament.

¹⁰³Peter Enns, *NIDOTTE*, s.v. “מִשְׁפָּט.”

¹⁰⁴Mafico, *ABD*, s.v. “Just, Justice.”

New Testament

Justice is one of the major themes in the New Testament. In many instances, the New Testament substitutes “justice” for “righteousness.” Matthew 6:33 provides a good example. Seek first the kingdom of God and His δικαιοσύνη. Conversely, the characteristic of God’s mercy is often emphasized when people are in distress or misery. Two blind men wished to see Jesus and cried out for healing: “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” (Matt 9:27). As Paul speaks of the source of comfort in affliction, he calls God “the Father of mercies and God of all comfort” (2 Cor 1:3). This shows that mercy belongs to God. In Matt 5:6, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for δικαιοσύνη, for they shall be satisfied. While God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, He is “full of compassion and is merciful” (Jas 5:11). The resources of His mercy are inexhaustible (Eph 2:4); for this reason, people can confidently cry out to Him for mercy in time of need.¹⁰⁵ The Apostle Paul reminds us of the divine commitment of mercy given to undeserving Israel in the Old Testament and links this to His mercy through Christ in the New Testament era and His extension of mercy to the Gentiles (Rom 9:15-16; 11:31-32).¹⁰⁶

In time of need, we are to draw near to God’s throne so that we might receive both mercy and grace: “Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16). According to the Gospel of Matthew, we are to imitate God’s mercy in our conduct toward others: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (Matt 5:7). The attribute of mercy is vividly expressed in the compassion which Jesus felt when people suffering from physical ailments came to Him (Mark 1:41). In Matt 15:21-28, there are

¹⁰⁵See Luke 18:13; 2 Tim 1:16, 18; Matt 15:22; 17:15, just to name a few.

¹⁰⁶W. Smith, *Dictionary*, s.v. “Mercy.”

those like the Canaanite woman, who often do not receive justice because they are so easily overlooked. Thus, she expresses her need in images of hunger, challenging Jesus to grant her mercy in spite of the fact that she stands at the margins of society.

God's mercy to the Gentiles is revealed in 1 Pet 2:10: "For you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." The apostle Peter suggests that the flood was delayed in order to provide opportunity of salvation to those who ultimately were destroyed. And God calls His people to be merciful like Him, "not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing" (2 Pet 3:9).

Theological Understanding

The great act of mercy that God showed to the Israelites found intimate expression in the ministry of Christ. The pattern set forth was not a new one but an echo of the Old Testament. The attribute of mercy is often mentioned with grace, especially in the Old Testament. When God declared His name to Moses, He proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth" (Exod 34:6).

God is often seen as withholding judgment and continuing to offer salvation and grace over a long period of time. Longsuffering usually appears as an outflow of His faithfulness. This was demonstrated when the people of Israel rebelled against God. Desiring to return to Egypt, they rejected Moses' leadership and set up idols for worship, yet the Lord did not cut them off. His patience was not limited to His dealings with Israel as a nation.¹⁰⁷ God's mercy was also manifested when He did not cast out individuals who had sinned and failed Him, such as Moses, David, Solomon, and Manasseh.

¹⁰⁷Erickson, *Father Almighty*, 104.

The ascription to God of such anthropomorphic qualities as jealousy, vengefulness, and wrath, presupposes also a God who cares deeply for His people.¹⁰⁸ Pink made three¹⁰⁹ distinctions of the mercy of God in Scripture. First, the general mercy of God is extended not only to all men, believers and unbelievers alike, but also to the entire creation. Psalm 145:9 illustrates this point: “The Lord is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works.”¹¹⁰ Second, a special mercy is exercised towards God’s children, helping and succoring them, notwithstanding their sins. To them He also supplies all the necessities of life. Matthew 5:45 illustrates this point: “He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” Third, God’s sovereign mercy is reserved for the heirs of salvation who express their faith in the only Son of God, the Mediator between God and man. While it is true that God’s mercy endures forever, yet we must consider carefully all those cases when His mercy is shown. Even casting of the reprobates into the lake of fire is both an act of mercy and justice. As Ps 85:10 states, “Lovingkindness and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”

Consequently, the punishment of the wicked could be seen from three¹¹¹ standpoints: from God’s viewpoint, it is an act of justice, vindicating His honor; from the point of view of the reprobates, it is an act of equity when they suffer the due reward of their iniquities; from the eyes of the redeemed, the punishment of the wicked is a sign of their relief and rescue.

¹⁰⁸Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 74.

¹⁰⁹Pink, *Attributes*, 64.

¹¹⁰See also Acts 17:25, “neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things.”

¹¹¹Pink, *Attributes*, 67.

Conclusion

In His dealings with human beings, God is merciful as evidenced in both Testaments. The attribute of mercy is the foundation of salvation. We can certainly conclude with Towner that salvation rests on God's mercy executed in and through the Christ event.¹¹² Having received salvation through the mercies of God, true Christian faith must produce genuine compassion and fruit in the form of acts of mercy toward those in need.

This characteristic of mercy caused Christ to mingle with sinners and people of all classes in order to help them. Believers are to respond to the mercy shown to them by seeking to help others as Christ did. The absence of mercy is a sign of unbelief and a rejection of God. God is truly merciful and His mercy endures forever.

Summary and Conclusion

A review of chapter 2 of this study reveals that the word $\square\text{מִיְרָא}$ as related to God, His actions, and/or attributes means whole, sound, and healthful when it applies to persons, and without blemish when said of sacrificial animals. The current chapter has also revealed that God is truthful, holy, trustworthy, and merciful.

In light of the preceding assertions, Prouser's allegations that God uses deceit to achieve His purpose are biblically unwarranted. Consequently, this would mean that God's integrity is not impugned, and therefore He is and will always be a being of integrity. As the Bible reveals, He is faithful, trustworthy, and truthful. While the Bible portrays such a view of God, the unbiblical view of either scholar that led to their disagreement over the understanding of Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7, both addressing the

¹¹²Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 139, 779-780. See also Philip H. Towner, "Mercy," *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 521.

issue of lying to save life, projects a different picture of God than the biblical claim that He is a being of integrity.

My research has confirmed and established that the God of the Bible is a being of integrity. The goal of this research will not be met unless the reasons of both Kaiser's and Geisler's divergent interpretation on the same texts of Scripture are given. To achieve this goal, the next chapter reports the presuppositions and hermeneutical principles at the genesis of their divergent conclusions.

CHAPTER IV

REPORT OF KAISER'S AND GEISLER'S PRESUPPOSITIONS, HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES, AND INTERPRETATION OF EXODUS 1:15-22 AND JOSHUA 2:1-7

This chapter has three sections. First, it reports in turn Kaiser's and Geisler's presuppositions; second, their hermeneutical principles, and third, their interpretation of Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7. A comprehensive overview of their extensive writings provides an accurate report of their presuppositions and hermeneutical principles that certainly guided them not only at arriving at the meaning they assigned to the text but also at arriving at such a divergent conclusion on the same texts of Scripture. What are the different meanings they assigned to the texts? We begin with their presuppositions.

Kaiser's and Geisler's Presuppositions

To presuppose means to take something for granted as true or factual, or to imply that something is true knowledge. Peter Adam posits that it is an "implicit or explicit assumption made in the act of viewing something or in the process of inference; it is that which must be assumed to arrive at a desired conclusion."¹ For Simon Blackburn, it is a proposition whose truth is necessary for either the truth or the falsity of another statement.² It is that which must antecedently be assumed if a desired result is to be

¹Peter Adam Angeles, *Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1981), s.v. "presuppose."

²Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), s.v. "presupposition."

derived. Thus, it is a postulate.³ Rod Bertolet sums it up when he argues that presuppositions are what a speaker takes to be understood in making an assertion. These are beliefs that the speaker takes for granted.⁴ In this regard, we ask: What did Kaiser and Geisler take for granted to arrive at the assigned meaning given to the texts?

I have selected two areas of interest, namely, the nature of God and the authority of Scripture. The rationale of this selection is that one's view on both of these areas could affect not only their understanding of God but also the meaning they assign to the texts. The views of Kaiser and Geisler on both of these areas not only broaden the ground of inquiry as to the reasons of their divergent conclusions but also contribute in confirming the view of the integrity of God established in the previous chapter. Could their views or understanding of the nature of God and the authority of Scripture have affected their interpretation and ultimately their conclusions on Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7? Their divergent views as to whether God condones lying on some occasions challenge the view of the integrity of God already established. Consequently, the quest for the reasons for their divergent interpretation warrants an inquiry of their understanding of the nature of God and authority of Scripture. We begin with Kaiser's understanding of the nature of God.

³Charles A. Baylis, "Presupposition," *Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (Savage, MD: Littlefield, 1983), 265.

⁴Rod Bertolet, "Presupposition," *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 735.

Presuppositions

Kaiser's view on the nature of God

What is Kaiser's concept of the nature of God? What is God like for him? According to Kaiser, God is one,⁵ pure, and perfect.⁶ He is transcendent, unchangeable,⁷ and eternal.⁸ However, he concurs with Abraham Joshua Heschel who submits that God can and does change His judgments.⁹ Furthermore, in these cases, Kaiser argues, "God must be changeable,¹⁰ for if he did not relent in these instances, it could dramatically signal that he had a reversal in his own nature, character, and being."¹¹ Thus, "God's repentance does not prove him fickle, mutable, and variable in His nature or purpose."¹² He responds to changes in others. Consequently, it is not that God's nature or character

⁵Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 144.

⁶Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Christian and the Old Testament* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1998), 107.

⁷Kaiser refers to Ps 110:4; Jer 4:28; 20:16; Ezek 24:14; Zech 8:14; and Mal 3:6 to argue for the unchangeableness of God. See Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 250. He further states that God would not change one iota from His present nature or method of working. What He cannot and will not change is the consistency of His own person as the basis on which these decisions are made. See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Malachi: God's Unchanging Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 76-77.

⁸Kaiser, *Christian*, 221.

⁹This change in God, Kaiser argues, occurs when there has been a clear change for the worse in the moral and ethical integrity of people with whom He is in covenant, in response to the intercessory prayer of His appointed prophet, or when people renounce their evil ways and deeds and turn back to Him. He adds, no word from God is final. Judgment, far from being absolute, is conditional. A change in man's conduct brings about a change in God's judgment. See Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 194.

¹⁰Kaiser refers to anthropomorphism as a valuable tool in communicating to us the emotions and feelings of God. Thus, God does not change in His essence or nature, a point that Kaiser acknowledged earlier. Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 251.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Thus God's repentance is a form of anthropomorphism that dares to picture the God-man relationship in terms of our everyday lives. Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 250.

changes, but as a living person under covenant He can and does change His judgments when people change, either accepting or rejecting what he has set forth as the norm of righteousness.¹³ The next chapter assesses Kaiser's argument that God does change His judgments.

For Kaiser, "God is altogether different from us sinful humanity,"¹⁴ and in like manner incomparably great in His person. The immensity of all planets and of the universe itself is just like the span of a man's hand from his thumb to his little finger. That is simply what the entire universe is in comparison to God.¹⁵

God is the creator of all as He created out of nothing. He is also the God of providence, the guide of all history, the revealer of all truth. He sustains, maintains, and upholds the universe.¹⁶ "In His being, He is ontologically and morally different from sinful human beings."¹⁷ "The Old Testament celebrates God for His personality, His infinite feelings of compassion, His graciousness, His presence, and His acts of wisdom and power."¹⁸ Involved in His name¹⁹ are: (1) His nature, being, and very person; (2) His teaching and doctrines; and (3) His ethical directions and morals.²⁰ God's name is His

¹³Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Back Toward the Future: Hints for Interpreting Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989), 61-62.

¹⁴Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Old Testament in Contemporary Preaching*, Ontario Bible College: The Elmore Harris (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), 43.

¹⁵Kaiser, *Christian*, 186.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 222.

¹⁷Kaiser, *Contemporary Preaching*, 43.

¹⁸Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 6.

¹⁹At times the name of God is used to indicate the whole system of divine truth and doctrine revealed in Scripture. For various uses of the name of God, see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Name," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill Chapin Tenney (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 360-366.

²⁰Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 88.

character and His doctrine. Therefore, to use God's name is to speak of all that God is, and all that He stands for.²¹ Related to God's name is His holiness. As Kaiser notes, "it is His holiness that is most decisive for Old Testament Ethics."²²

Holiness expresses the otherness of God and His moral character. Yaweh's moral nature summed up in his holiness determines the character of His ethical demands.²³ What He requires of us springs out of His nature. "An ontological and moral gap exists between God and humanity."²⁴ Consequently, "God is creator and humankind is creatures; therefore, this gap in being will remain forever."²⁵ Before and after the fall, "humanity is morally distinct from God;²⁶ as God is pure, righteous, and just.²⁷ It is therefore not surprising that God calls His creatures back to holiness even as He is holy. The ontological and moral gap is reflected in Kaiser's argument that God is both "transcendent and immanent."²⁸ Accordingly, the tent of meeting, he argues, "stresses God's transcendence while the Ark of the Covenant stresses His immanence."²⁹ Kaiser further notes that "Lev 11:44 boldly grounds Old Testament ethics in the normativeness of Yaweh's moral nature, character, and commands, which express His 'wholeness.'"³⁰

²¹Kaiser, *Contemporary Preaching*, 64.

²²Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 6.

²³*Ibid.*, 21.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 6.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸Kaiser, *Contemporary Preaching*, 43.

²⁹Kaiser, *Christian*, 94-95, 101-03. He further argues that there are four other forms of the divine presence: (1) the "Face" appearance or presence of the Lord; (2) the angel of the Lord; (3) the glory of the Lord; and (4) the name of God. The name of God safeguards the unity of God, because the name and the person are identical. To see the presence of God is to see the character of God. *Ibid.*

³⁰Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 140.

More than any other attribute, holiness is the one quality in God's character that describes the essential nature of God in His fullness.³¹ From a basic principle, Kaiser argues that the basis for determining which aspect of the law is temporary and which one is permanent lies in its reflecting the very nature of God.³² The laws based on the character and nature of God, which Kaiser calls the moral law, are permanently set in the law by the immutability or unchangeableness of His character.³³ The permanence of the law reflects the very nature of God. "His nature is constant, not only for this age but for all ages to come."³⁴ He is from "eternity to eternity. He will never change; therefore, those things which are based on His nature, such as His holiness, for example, will always stay the same."³⁵ His standards of righteousness and holiness will not be altered. They will be reflected permanently in the moral law.³⁶ He further adds that "God proved Himself to be gracious, abundant in mercy and goodness, longsuffering, and full of loving kindness and truth."³⁷

"There is absolute loyalty in Scripture to the principles founded on the nature of God."³⁸ Kaiser concludes that God, as the God of holiness, is the model for Old Testament men and women. He is incomparably pure and spotless beyond all human calculation: the

³¹Ibid.

³²Kaiser, *Contemporary Preaching*, 60.

³³Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 30.

³⁴Kaiser, *Contemporary Preaching*, 60.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., 61.

³⁸Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moses Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 188.

standard for all individuals, races, and nations.³⁹ God is the only Lord of history; there is no one like Him in the entire universe.⁴⁰

In view of the preceding statements, Kaiser concludes that the character of God remains the norm for all decisions of right or wrong. Admittedly, that norm determines what is true, what is false, what is right, what is wrong, what is just, what is unjust, what is good, and what is evil. That norm is nothing less than the nature and the character of God.⁴¹ For Kaiser, God is immutable, eternal, and the standard of right and wrong. We proceed with his view on the authority of Scripture.

Kaiser's view on the authority of Scripture

Despite uncertainties in evangelical circles concerning the problem of authority,⁴² Kaiser believes that the Bible is the word of God.⁴³ He views the Bible not only as a book about morality and ethics,⁴⁴ but also as a divine book.⁴⁵ He concurs with John Albert Bengel's idea that "Scripture is the foundation of the church: the church is the guardian of Scripture. When the church is in strong health, the light of Scripture shines bright; when the church is sick, Scripture is corroded by neglect."⁴⁶ He further contends, "The Bible in its entirety is a story of the continuing work of the same God who gives His love and gift

³⁹Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 7.

⁴⁰Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Revive Us Again: Biblical Insights for Encouraging Spiritual Renewal* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 87.

⁴¹Kaiser, *Christian*, 76.

⁴²Kaiser, *Contemporary Preaching*, 32.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁴Kaiser, *Essays*, 207.

⁴⁵Kaiser, *Future*, 129.

⁴⁶Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), 7.

when man has nothing to give back except a response of acceptance.”⁴⁷ The Bible is filled with the revelation of God.⁴⁸ In its doctrinal use, it is that which gives substance and form to the whole Christian faith.⁴⁹ Doctrine is possible only because God has spoken in Scripture. How then are we to value or read Scripture? According to Kaiser, one needs to read the texts of Scripture from God’s point of view and accept God’s authority, instead of reading in one’s own personal ideas.⁵⁰ His emphasis on scriptural authority is seen in his argument that “Christian ethics will continue to be possible only where ethics and the Bible go together.” For, he argues, “setting one against the other could lead to disastrous consequences; especially in those Christian communities that confess sola scriptura.”⁵¹ Therefore, to reject the Scriptures or the sense in which they were intended is ultimately to reject Him as Lord of His church.⁵²

As argued earlier, the Bible purports not only to be a word from God,⁵³ but is indeed the word of God.⁵⁴ Inasmuch as the mind governing Scripture is one, is it not appropriate and fair for God the Holy Spirit to gather His thoughts on a particular subject, much as we might do with the writings of a human author?⁵⁵ In other words, Scripture is

⁴⁷Kaiser, *Contemporary Preaching*, 23.

⁴⁸Ibid., 28. Kaiser refers to 1 Cor 1:17-2:5 as one of the more definitive statements on the fact that the word of God is both the wisdom and power of God if we will but use it. Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 242.

⁴⁹Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moses Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 202.

⁵⁰Kaiser, *Contemporary Preaching*, 28.

⁵¹Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 57.

⁵²Ibid. Kaiser refers to John 5:39; 10:35; and Matt 5:18 to establish his view of the authority of Scripture. Ibid.

⁵³Kaiser and Silva, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (1994), 34.

⁵⁴Kaiser, *Contemporary Preaching*, 58.

⁵⁵Kaiser and Silva, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (1994), 196-197.

as authoritative as the Lord Jesus Himself.⁵⁶ The idea that the Bible is an open and honest book showing wisdom in and for itself is not something that belongs to a select and privileged group of people, but comes from the living God Himself.⁵⁷

The close connection between ethics and theology is similar to the connection between theory and practice. For this reason, the Bible should play a major role in preaching. Kaiser advocates that a call for preaching that is totally biblical is guided by God's word in its origins, production, and proclamation.⁵⁸ He further contends that one has to let the Scriptures have the major, if not the only, role in determining the shape, logic, and development of evangelical message.⁵⁹

The Bible must not only be understood historically, culturally, grammatically, syntactically, and critically; it must also be appreciated for its vertical axis and its horizontal orientation.⁶⁰ According to Kaiser, the unity of the Bible can be argued from at least three points of view: coherence, organic nature, and canonical nature.⁶¹ Furthermore, the concept of unity in Scripture is prominent because it is based on four pillars: (1)

⁵⁶Kaiser, *Contemporary Preaching*, 58.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 118.

⁵⁸Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 19. The Bible is coherent; for one biblical writer affects another directly and indirectly. This refers to those portions of the biblical text that have preceded him. There is an organic nature to revelation. Many a times, the earlier forms contain the seminal or germ forms of the ideas that are to come to full expression later on in the progress of revelation. The very idea of a canon implies a standard or authoritative measuring device by which a collection of books is recognized as norms for the community.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 160.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 244-245.

⁶¹Kaiser and Silva, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (1994), 197-198. The argument for coherence can be found, in part, in the way that one biblical writer after another directly and indirectly refers to those portions of the biblical texts that have preceded him. Then there is an organic nature to revelation in that often the earlier forms contain the seminal or germ forms of the idea that are to come to full expression later on in the progress of revelation. Another argument for the unity of the Bible involves the canonical closure. The very idea of the canon implies a standard or authoritative measuring device by which a collection of books is recognized as norms for the community. See *ibid.*

Scripture has one single, divine author; (2) Christ is present in the Old Testament, not only virtually or implicitly, but directly, since the prophets speak of him; (3) Christ is the center of Scripture; and (4) the doctrines within the Scriptures are linked together throughout the text and tend to build upon one another.⁶²

In order to reject the threat that the unity of Scripture has received in recent years, Kaiser recommends a revival of three main principles: perspicuity of Scripture, Scripture interprets Scripture, and the “chair” passage of Scripture.⁶³ The Bible is not just a book that is about people in the past, or even a book that is written to us; it is a book in which we must become identified in a very personal way with all its stories, commands, and promises.⁶⁴ All authorities emanate from God and He is the source of all authority.⁶⁵ Therefore, God is the ultimate and divine author of an authoritative and inerrant Scripture.⁶⁶ We continue with Geisler’s presuppositions: his view of the nature of God and the authority of Scripture.

Geisler

Presuppositions

What one takes for granted impacts not only what one says or thinks, but also informs one’s worldview.

⁶²Ibid., 198.

⁶³First, Kaiser explains that the message of the Bible is clear enough that even the most unlearned person can understand the basic message of salvation that the Bible presents. Second, Scripture interprets Scripture means that what is obscure in one part of the Bible is made clear in another part. Third, similar themes, passages, and doctrines can serve as a test for the general sense of the rightness of the interpretation proposed. See *ibid.*

⁶⁴Ibid., 281-282.

⁶⁵Kaiser, *Guide*, 175.

⁶⁶Ibid., 194-195. See also Walter C. Kaiser, *Rediscovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 11-35.

Geisler's view on the nature of God

One of the strongholds of Geisler's apologetics is his belief in the existence of a personal and a moral God which, according to him, is fundamental to all Christian believers. This belief in a personal God is further strengthened with his use of a series of basic arguments to prove the existence of God.⁶⁷ Accordingly, he argues that God is "of infinite value; He is not only the basis of all good but He is the essence of good itself."⁶⁸ Geisler identifies the God of the Bible as the one true God, possessing certain metaphysical attributes that make Him readily identifiable. Such metaphysical attributes include, but are not limited to, "unity, infinity, eternality, immutability, indivisibility, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, transcendence, and personality."⁶⁹

For Geisler, "God is absolutely perfect, having perfect love, holiness, truthfulness, and justice."⁷⁰ From these attributes, Geisler states that God is a pure, independent, and necessary existence who alone gives existence to everything that exists. As such, His own nonexistence is impossible. Accordingly, He has no possibility not to exist. His pure actuality is derived from the fact that He is an uncaused being; He is an uncaused cause for all that exists.⁷¹ Therefore, in Geisler's opinion, "God's infinity can be inferred theologically from several other attributes. Thus, conclusively, infinity follows from pure actuality; and because pure actuality has no potentiality, it follows that potentiality is what

⁶⁷These arguments are cosmological, teleological, axiological, and ontological. For more detail and insights see Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1990), 15-33. He further explains that the God of the Bible is the true God in that He is powerful, intelligent, moral, unique, and is Lord over creation. See also Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 375.

⁶⁸See more detail on divine attributes in Geisler, *Ethics*, 116.

⁶⁹Norman L. Geisler and Paul K. Hoffman, *Why I Am a Christian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 82.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid., 83.

limits actuality. In this regard, everything He could be, He is and always was and will always be.”⁷²

Geisler explains that the limitlessness of God is based on the biblical claim that “the heavens, even the highest cannot contain Him.”⁷³ Hence, the fact that pure actuality has no limits suggests that God is the first uncaused cause because infinity also flows from His uncausality.⁷⁴ Similarly, infinity flows from both His omnipotence and omniscience; and as a result, what is omnipotent is also infinite in power. The power of God is identical to His being since His knowledge and His being are absolutely one. Therefore, “His nature is the source of all love and it is reflected in the people that He has made in His image.”⁷⁵ The God who is the first uncaused cause, who has no potentiality, must be both infinite and immutable.

The immutability of God, according to Geisler, has biblical roots.⁷⁶ It appears that God’s changelessness also flows from His infinity for an infinite being has no parts, since whatever has parts cannot add up to an infinity.⁷⁷ For him, the Bible establishes the eternity of God in that He was before time and created time. Therefore, He cannot be part of time although He can relate to time as its creator in the way a cause relates to its

⁷²Ibid., 84-89.

⁷³As seen in 1 Kgs 8:27; Ps 147:5.

⁷⁴Geisler and Hoffman, *Why*, 83. Geisler adds that everything caused is limited, and everything uncaused is unlimited. Since God is uncaused, therefore, He must be unlimited (infinite). Ibid., 83.

⁷⁵Geisler and Brooks, *Skeptics*, 278.

⁷⁶Geisler refers to the following Bible texts to show the biblical roots of the immutability of God: “God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change His mind” (Num 23:19); “He who is the glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind” (1 Sam 15:29); “they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. . . . But you remain the same, and your years will never end” (Ps 102:26-27, Heb 1:10-12); “I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed” (Mal 3:6). Geisler and Hoffman, *Why*, 84. See also Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989), 17.

⁷⁷Geisler and Hoffman, *Why*, 84.

effect.⁷⁸ Furthermore, God is not a temporal being because whatever is temporal has potentiality. Hence, God is not temporal but eternal.⁷⁹ Then Geisler addresses both the oneness and the personhood of God.

First, Geisler also argues for God's oneness on biblical grounds.⁸⁰ This unity of God,⁸¹ in his opinion, can be argued from other attributes as well; therefore, such attributes as infinity imply that there is one God. In order to have two or more such beings, there would have to be some potentiality or limiting factor by which they differed. Geisler continues his argument on the oneness of God by suggesting that the nature of the cosmos implies one God. It follows that the cosmos is a "uni-verse," not a "multi-verse." Geisler refers to the anthropic principle, which affirms that from its very inception the entire cosmos was fine-tuned and tweaked so as to make the origin of human life possible. This points to a oneness of the universe from the very beginning.⁸² Consequently, oneness of the universe from its very inception implies one creator.⁸³

Second, Geisler defines the personhood of God as generally understood to include three essential characteristics: intellect, feeling, and will. He claims that the God of

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Geisler builds his case for the oneness of God on the following texts: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut 6:4); "you shall have no other gods before me" (Exod 20:3); "I am the Lord, and there is no other" (Isa 45:18); "for there is one God and mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5). In answering the question of how there can be three persons in one God, Geisler asserts that the oneness of God is manifested eternally and simultaneously in three distinct persons. God is like a triangle, he says; it has three corners and yet it is only one triangle. He is like one to the third power ($1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$). Geisler and Hoffman, *Why*, 85. See Ravi K. Zacharias and Norman L. Geisler, *Who Made God? And Answers to over 100 Other Tough Questions of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 29.

⁸¹Geisler explains the trinity as three persons in one nature and Jesus as one person in two natures. See Geisler's illustrative chart in Geisler and Turek, *Atheist*, 351.

⁸²John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), chapter 8.

⁸³Geisler and Hoffman, *Why*, 86. According to Geisler, God's absolute oneness means that He cannot be divided. What cannot be divided is indivisible; hence, God is a simple (indivisible) being.

Scripture has a mind; He is all-knowing with an infinite understanding.⁸⁴ Thus, He can feel and these feelings, according to Geisler, are unchanging.⁸⁵ God also has a will and consequently has free choice.⁸⁶ This unchangeableness according to Geisler does not mean that God is impassible.

In final analysis, Geisler argues that the God of Scripture is evidently transcendent,⁸⁷ has moral perfection,⁸⁸ and is truth in a perfect way by self-identity.⁸⁹ Although Geisler suggests that God created all things including evil,⁹⁰ he maintains that there is one personal, infinite, eternal, self-existent, immutable, and morally perfect God who is the first uncaused cause of everything else that exists.⁹¹ Conclusively, Geisler thinks that God is “an omnibenevolent, and an all-good God who has a good purpose for everything He does or permits.”⁹² We continue with Geisler’s view on the authority of Scripture.

⁸⁴Geisler refers to Ps 147:5—“Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit”—to show that God thinks. Other texts include: Job 36:4; 37:16; Pss 147:4; 139:2-4, 17-18; Isa 46:10; Matt 6:8; 10:29-30; Rom 11:33; Eph 1:11; Heb 4:13.

⁸⁵Geisler and Hoffman, *Why*, 87.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 87-88. Geisler refers to several Bible texts to show that God has free choice: “then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom 12:2); “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines [wills]” (1 Cor 12:11; Eph 1:5; Heb 10:7; Rev 4:11). See Geisler and Turek, *Atheist*, 375.

⁸⁷Geisler affirms that the God of Scripture is transcendent over all His creatures. He refers to Gen 1:1; 1 Kgs 8:27; Job 11:7-8; Pss 8:1; 57:5; 97:9; Isa 6:1; 40:12; 55:8-9; 57:15; 66:1-2; and Col 1:17 to support his argument.

⁸⁸Geisler’s claim that God is perfect in His nature is rooted in Scripture. Thus, he refers to the following texts: Deut 32:4; 2 Sam 22:31; Job 36:4; 37:16; Pss 19:7; 18:30; 138:8; Ezek 16:13-14; Matt 5:48; Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 13:10; Phil 3:12-14; Heb 9:11; Jas 1:17; 1 John 4:18.

⁸⁹Geisler and Hoffman, *Why*, 35.

⁹⁰Norman L. Geisler, *If God, Why Evil?* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2011), 18.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 89.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 49.

Geisler's view on the authority of Scripture

In the opening chapter of his book *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues*, Geisler overtly states that the Bible will be cited as authority for every conclusion drawn.⁹³ According to him, the Christian Scriptures are yet another basis for hierarchical ethics.⁹⁴ He further suggests that the basis of human ethical responsibility is divine revelation, inasmuch as Christians do not find their ethical duties in the standard of Christians but in the standard for Christians—the Bible.⁹⁵ This, despite Geisler's contention that the Bible has an hierarchical arrangement of norms.⁹⁶

According to Geisler, the source of ethical responsibility is divine revelation. Accordingly, the propositional revelation of God in Scripture is one of the great revelations that stands at the center of historic Christianity. Moreover, the evidence that the Bible is the written word of God is anchored in the authority of Jesus Christ.⁹⁷ Jesus thus confirms the authority of both Old and New Testaments and also confirms his teachings as authoritative.⁹⁸ Geisler rejects all apocryphal books and accepts the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament as authentic from the apostolic period. He believes that sixty-six books provide the “all truth” Jesus promised.

⁹³Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 17.

⁹⁴Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 127. See also Geisler, *Ethics*, 127.

⁹⁵Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 23. Geisler has no doubt that the Bible is the word of God, telling a rebellious world how it can return to Him. See Geisler's discussion on the Bible's divine source and authorship in Geisler and Brooks, *Skeptics*, 141-161.

⁹⁶Geisler, *Alternatives and Issues*, 127.

⁹⁷Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 353. Geisler adds in support of this claim the following arguments: (1) the New Testament documents are historically reliable; (2) these documents accurately present Christ as claiming to be God incarnate; (3) whatever Christ teaches is true; (4) Christ taught that the Old Testament is the written word of God and promised that His disciples would write the New Testament; (5) it is true on the confirmed divine authority of Jesus Christ that the Bible is the written word of God. *Ibid.*, 351.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 360-361.

For Geisler, then, the canon of Scripture is completed with the addition of the apostolic writings.⁹⁹ In Geisler's opinion, the Old and the New Testaments confirm in two steps the authoritative nature of the Bible.¹⁰⁰

Evidently, according to Geisler, Jesus' teaching that the Jewish Scripture was the inspired word of God confirms its divine authority. As a result, Geisler concludes that the Old Testament is the written revelation of God¹⁰¹ and in like manner establishes its own authority.¹⁰² Admittedly, the New Testament confirms the authority of the Old Testament.¹⁰³

Geisler affirms the authority of the Bible but warns against the belief that everything contained in the Bible was taught in the Bible.¹⁰⁴ Jesus taught that the Jewish Old Testament is the inspired and written revelation of God; His teaching was with all authority in heaven and on earth.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹Ibid., 371.

¹⁰⁰See Geisler and Turek, *Atheist*, 356-370. Geisler wonders how the Bible's contents could be believed unless it is assumed that biblical books have divine authority and credibility, and have been transmitted with integrity, and therefore automatically have genuineness. See also Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 344-346.

¹⁰¹Geisler expands on seven points to argue that the Old Testament is the word of God: divinely authoritative, imperishable, infallible, inerrant, historically reliable, scientifically accurate, and of ultimate supremacy. See details in Geisler and Turek, *Atheist*, 356-359.

¹⁰²Geisler refers to Deut 6:2; 10:2; Josh 24:26; 1 Sam 10:25. Moses claimed that his writings were from God (cf. Exod 20:1; Lev 1:1; Num 1:1; and Deut 1:3). Ibid.

¹⁰³On this, Geisler remarks that Jesus and the New Testament writers indicated their belief that the Old Testament was the word of God. Examples of this are John 10:35 where Jesus says, "The Scriptures cannot be broken," and "you are wrong, because you know neither the Scripture or the power of God" (Matt 22:29). See Geisler, *Apologetics*, 354-355.

¹⁰⁴Geisler refers to Gen 3:4 as an example of the Bible's record of Satan's many lies. Although it is recorded, he admonishes, the Bible is not thereby teaching that these lies are true. See *ibid.*, 362.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 367.

Geisler’s own arguments led him to the conclusion that “the written word is the authority of God for settling all disputes of doctrine or practice.”¹⁰⁶ Admittedly, he holds that “whatever Jesus, the incarnate God, teaches is true.”¹⁰⁷ Moreover, “the Bible and the Bible alone contains all doctrinal and ethical truth God has revealed to humankind.”¹⁰⁸ The Bible, “all sixty-six books, has been confirmed by God through Christ to be the infallible word.”¹⁰⁹ Conclusively, the Bible uses many other words or phrases to describe itself in ways that validate its divine authority.¹¹⁰ We now proceed with Kaiser’s and Geisler’s hermeneutical principles.

Kaiser’s and Geisler’s Hermeneutical Principles

While hermeneutics is the study of the supposition and practice of interpretation, biblical hermeneutics involves the interpretation of Scriptures. Its activity, Kaiser argues, “can either impoverish or enrich our Bible knowledge.”¹¹¹ In order to “interpret, Kaiser

¹⁰⁶Geisler and Turek, *Atheist*, 370.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Ibid. See also Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), for additional resources on the inerrancy of Scripture.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 376-377. Geisler concludes that because God cannot err and the Bible is the word of God, therefore, the Bible cannot err. See Geisler and Turek, *Atheist*, 370. He further contends that the roots of biblical errancy are embedded in the philosophies of Bacon, Hobbes, and Spinoza. Hence, the rise of an errant view of Scripture did not result from a discovery of factual evidence that made belief in an inerrant Scripture untenable; rather, it resulted from the unnecessary acceptance of philosophical premises that undermined the historic belief in an infallible and inerrant Bible. See Norman L. Geisler, *Biblical Errancy: An Analysis of Its Philosophical Roots* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 10-22. See also Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 306-354.

¹¹⁰According to Geisler, Jesus claims that the Bible is indestructible (Matt 5:18), infallible, completely reliable and authoritative, unbreakable (John 10:35), decisively authoritative (Matt 4:4, 7, 10), and sufficient for faith and practice (Luke 16:31). See Zacharias and Geisler, *Who?* 114.

¹¹¹Kaiser, *Contemporary Preaching*, 14.

warns, we must, in every case, reproduce the scene the scriptural writer intended for his own word.”¹¹²

In the sections that follow below, two sets of hermeneutical principles are considered; namely, textual and ethical hermeneutical principles. A review of Kaiser’s and Geisler’s material reveals the hermeneutical principles that guided them in the interpretive process to arrive at the conclusion concerning the interpretation of Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7. I begin with Kaiser.

Kaiser

Hermeneutical Principles

Textual hermeneutical principles

In Kaiser’s opinion, the current crisis regarding the doctrine of Scripture is directly linked to poor procedures and methods of handling the Scriptures.¹¹³ He asserts, “Any successful exegete must face the question of intentionality.”¹¹⁴ Furthermore, Kaiser claims, “The meaning of any given word (in its text and context) is discretely contained in a single intention of the author.”¹¹⁵ Kaiser’s exegesis to discover the author’s intended

¹¹²Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “Legitimate Hermeneutics,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 119.

¹¹³Kaiser, “Legitimate Hermeneutics,” 147.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹¹⁵Kaiser rejects the idea that every word in Scripture has several levels of meaning which the author was unaware were there. Proponents of such theories include: Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), vi; and Catholic theologians such as Raymond E. Brown, “The Sensus Plenior in the Last Ten Years,” *Catholic Quarterly* 25 (1963): 268-269; Norbert Lohfink, *The Christian Meaning of the Old Testament*, trans. R. A. Wilson (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce, 1968), 32-49. Those who advocate the single authorial meaning of the biblical text include but are not limited to, Joseph Coppens, “Levels of Meaning in the Bible,” in *How Does the Christian Confront the Old Testament? Concilium Theology in the Age of Renewal: Scripture*, 30, ed. Pierre Benoit, Roland Edmund Murphy, and Bastiaan Martinus Franciscus van Iersel (New York: Paulist Press, 1968), 135-138; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “Meanings from God’s Message: Matters for Interpretation,” *Christianity Today*, October 5, 1979, 30-33; Bruce Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration*, Theological Resources (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1972), 115.

meaning certainly prompted him to develop his own method which is known as the syntactical-theological method of exegesis.¹¹⁶ As such, a method generally requires guiding principles to serve in the interpretive process.

Kaiser thus recommends that the following three rules and principles of general hermeneutics be considered as presuppositions in the interpretive task:

1. “The Bible is to be interpreted with the same rules as applying to other books.”¹¹⁷ Although the Bible deals with supernatural things, the point remains that God has deliberately decided to accommodate humankind by disclosing Himself in our language and according to the mode to which we are accustomed in other literary productions.¹¹⁸ “While it is a fact that a unique revelation containing supernatural things that no human may aspire to know on his own, yet the above conclusion, often drawn from this agreed-on-fact, is not necessary. After all it is *revelation* to us that God deliberately designed to communicate to human beings what they themselves could not or would not know unless they receive it from Him.”¹¹⁹

2. The principles of interpretation are as native and universal to humanity as is speech itself. In other words, Kaiser’s argument is that “man’s ability to interpret is not derived from science, technical skill, or exotic course open only to the more gifted intellects of a society.”¹²⁰ They are part of the nature of man as a being made in the image of God. Given the gift of communication and speech itself, human beings already practice the principles of hermeneutics. However, it would be wrong to argue that everyone is

¹¹⁶Kaiser, *OT Theology*, 18-19.

¹¹⁷Kaiser, “Legitimate Hermeneutics,” 119.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 119-120.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 120.

automatically and totally successful in the practice of hermeneutical art just because it is an integral part of the gift of communication.¹²¹

3. My personal reception and application of an author's words is a distinct and secondary act from the need first to understand his words. Therefore, one should not confuse meaning and significance. God spoke in human, rather than heavenly language; He spoke through the vocabularies, idioms, circumstances, and personalities of each of the chosen writers.¹²² Although these presuppositional principles are an integral part of our normal conversation, that does not exclude the need for hermeneutical principles of interpretation. Various interpreters of Scripture take exceptions to these three basic hermeneutical presuppositions.¹²³

Besides these general hermeneutical principles, Kaiser provides additional guidelines for special hermeneutics. The primary areas of tension that have been generated concerning historical particularities of the text include: (1) "the divine commands that are directed to special persons or isolated situations,"¹²⁴ (2) "practices and customs that may

¹²¹Ibid., 120-122.

¹²²Ibid., 122.

¹²³These are what Kaiser calls "the five principal by-passes used as an escape to the key distinction between meaning and significance." Those scholars who equate significance to meaning usually do so for the following reasons: (1) use of allegorical interpretation, (2) over-dependence on the principle of the "perspicuity of Scripture," (3) improper use of the principle of "progressive revelation," (4) unfair appropriation of the alleged freedom with which the New Testament writers cite the Old Testament, and (5) appeal to the implied presence of a dual sense of the messianic predictions of the Old Testament. For detailed treatment of these principles see *ibid.*, 125-138. See also Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Eschatological Hermeneutics of 'Evangelicalism': Promise Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 13, no. 2 (1970): 91-99; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Single Intent of Scripture," in *Evangelical Roots: A Tribute to Wilbur Smith*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1978), 125-126. In the revised edition of his *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, Kaiser recommends four foundational principles that may help in our search for the meaning of the text: (1) importance and centrality of the text of Scripture under investigation; (2) the intertextuality in which both authors and texts influence each other, both directly and indirectly, as later writers read or remembered the works of their predecessors, the Bible that existed up to their day; (3) in every interpretation one should refer to the person and character of God; (4) the Bible is not a potpourri of disconnected readings, canonical or otherwise, but rather does exhibit strong connections and connectors with all of its parts. See more in Kaiser and Silva, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (2007), 74.

¹²⁴There are specific commands such as "take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exod 3:5); and "untie the donkey and bring them to me" (Matt 21:2-3) that were directed to

merely reflect the cultural norm of the day but that nevertheless cause consternation for subsequent readers who are puzzled over the problem of whether these descriptions are really prescriptions and are still normative,¹²⁵ and (3) “use of language”¹²⁶ dealing with “factual matters outside the spiritual and moral realms, such as allusions to biology, geography, and cosmology.”¹²⁷ After referring to the current crisis in hermeneutics, Kaiser observes that this crisis in hermeneutics is neither an issue unique to the biblical interpreter nor unrelated to the root crisis in exegetical theology.¹²⁸ He further notes, “At the heart of the debate is the problem of how the interpreter can relate ‘what the text meant in its historical context’ to ‘what that same text means to me.’”¹²⁹

In order to help the interpreter to move from exegesis to preaching, Kaiser suggests a set of principles to serve as guidelines in this endeavor.¹³⁰ He opts for the syntactical-theological method as a viable method for understanding the biblical text¹³¹ in

no one other than those to whom they were originally given. Therefore, the principle that past particularity is no obstruction to present significance finds its fulfillment here. See Kaiser, “Legitimate Hermeneutics,” 139-140.

¹²⁵For options for handling cultural items in Scripture, see *ibid.*, 141-144. See also next section (ethical hermeneutical principles).

¹²⁶Kaiser suggests a set of guidelines for interpreting scriptural language that points to facts outside the spiritual realm: (1) determine the literary form to which the section under examination belongs (for example, what textual clues does the writer offer that will aid us in deciding to which literary genre his statement belongs); (2) examine individual words and phrases to see if they have Near Eastern or classical backgrounds and then determine the type of similarity and the use of them made in Scripture; (3) note all figures of speech and determine the part they play in the total statement of the author; (4) whenever Scripture touches on factual matters, note the way the author uses the data. See *ibid.*, 145-47. For tropes, parallel passages, and figurative terms, see Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 121-125.

¹²⁷Kaiser, “Legitimate Hermeneutics,” 139.

¹²⁸Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 23.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*

¹³⁰Kaiser, “Legitimate Hermeneutics,” 139.

¹³¹Kaiser and Silva, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (2007), 34. See also Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 69-148.

which he emphasizes the context, syntax, and theological meaning.¹³² In order to uncover the meaning of any biblical text, paragraph, section, or book, Kaiser recommends the following four major steps: contextual analysis, syntactical analysis, verbal analysis, and theological analysis. Kaiser expounds upon his syntactical theological method in order to help the interpreter discover the meaning of the text as intended by its author.

1. Kaiser's first step is the contention that a good exegetical procedure dictates that the details be viewed in the light of the total context.¹³³ Therefore, it is important to carefully consider the sectional context, book context, canonical context, and immediate context.¹³⁴

2. In the second step, the syntactical analysis stresses two key parts of the exegetical process. First, the emphasis is placed on the syntax; this is one of the most important avenues for the interpreter to use in reconstructing the thread of the author's meaning. In Kaiser's judgment, the way in which words are put together so as to form phrases, clauses, and sentences will aid in discovering the author's pattern of meaning.¹³⁵ He further adds that syntactical analysis systematically operates from three building-blocks, namely, concept, proposition, and paragraph. It is therefore through these that the exegete receives the data needed to get the meaning of the text from the organization of these building-blocks.¹³⁶ The second key part focuses on theological analysis, a neglected feature in exegetical literature. Kaiser notes, "Doctrine and theological truth are imported from all over Scripture without concern as to whether the process is legitimate or not."¹³⁷

¹³²For more details, see Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 69-148.

¹³³Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 69.

¹³⁴See detailed step-by-step discussions and guidelines of these four levels in *ibid.*, 71-86.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, 89.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*

¹³⁷*Ibid.*

In order to provide a solution to this crisis in hermeneutics, Kaiser contends that “the analogy of the antecedent of scripture will be a chief contributor to the theological analysis of any passage at hand.”¹³⁸

3. In the interpretation process, a word may appear in one sentence as a noun and in another as a verb; thus the meaning of that word is indicated by the grammatical construction in which it occurs.¹³⁹

Kaiser lays out some general principles for the exegete to serve as guidelines in the search for the meaning as intended by the original author.

- a. The meaning of words is determined by customs and general usage current in the times when the author wrote them. Kaiser admonishes: “No intelligent writer deliberately departs from the current usage that is prevalent in a particular age without having a good reason for doing so and without furnishing some explicit textual clue indicating that he has done so.”¹⁴⁰
- b. “In assigning a meaning to a word, the exegete is on the most solid basis when the author himself has defined the term he uses.”¹⁴¹
- c. “A word may be explained by the immediate attachment of an appositional phrase, or some other defining expression.”¹⁴²

¹³⁸In another work Kaiser argues that the principle of the perspicuity of Scripture means that the Bible is sufficiently clear in and of itself for believers to understand it. See Kaiser, “Legitimate Hermeneutics,” 128.

¹³⁹Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 105.

¹⁴⁰Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 106.

¹⁴¹An example of this principle is seen in Heb 5:14 where the writer defines “perfect” as those “who by practice have their senses trained in the discrimination of good and evil.” Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 106-107.

¹⁴²One such example is Eph 2:1 where the apostle declares that “you are dead” and adds the explanation “in trespasses and sins.” See also John 2:19: “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” *Ibid.*, 107.

d. The grammatical construction of a word may be another clue to its meaning.¹⁴³

e. The meaning of some words may be determined by contextual antitheses and contrasts.¹⁴⁴

f. In Old Testament poetry, one of the best ways to determine the meaning of a word is by means of Hebrew parallelism.¹⁴⁵

g. A careful comparison of parallel passages may help an exegete.¹⁴⁶

Kaiser warns against two extremes often found in the discussion of customs, cultures, and biblical norms. While one tends to level out all features in the Bible, including its cultural institutions and terms, the other tends to jump at any suspected culturally conditioned description in the Bible as an excuse for reducing the teaching connected with that text to a mere report of a now defunct situation.

4. The fourth and final step in the search for meaning in any biblical text, as Kaiser suggests, is the theological analysis. This is the missing ingredient in most sermon preparation. The first step toward theological analysis is to identify the core of the text and the assemblage of the books which were available in the canon at the time of the writing of that text. To this end, the interpreter may determine God's normative word.

¹⁴³An example of this principle is seen in the use of the word "shepherd" which may be used as either noun or verb. At other times the subject or predicate will serve to limit and define a word which may have different meanings in different contexts. *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁴⁴In Rom 8:5-8 Paul contrasts those who live "according to the flesh" with those who live "according to the Spirit." *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁴⁵Kaiser notes that Hebrew poetry often uses either a synonymous or antithetic parallelism. In the former, a thought in line A is repeated in line B in a slightly different way. In the latter, an opposite or contrasting thought is presented in the line that completes the poetic couplet. *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁴⁶These principles are discussed in more detail with biblical examples in Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 108-114.

Kaiser thus concurs with John Bright that a correct theological analysis depends upon applying the principle of the antecedent of Scripture.¹⁴⁷ Kaiser's appeal is that theological analysis must become an integral part of exegesis, organized along diachronic lines so as to make a contribution to the discipline of exegesis.¹⁴⁸ Theological analysis, he further argues, bridges the gap from grammar, syntax, and literary structure to the endeavor to discover the meaning for a contemporary audience. In no case should a later doctrine be used as an exegetical tool to unlock an earlier passage.¹⁴⁹ That, he adds, would be an extremely serious methodological mistake because all revelation would then be leveled out.¹⁵⁰

In applying the principle of the antecedent of Scripture, Kaiser's contention is that "theology must be objectively derived from the text and not be subjectively imposed on the text by the interpreter."¹⁵¹ Another way to unpack the theological meaning of a text is to use a theological wordbook that seeks to define the leading theological concepts of the Bible by tracing (1) the meaning that these words have in the various contexts where they receive major development, and (2) the history of these same words throughout biblical

¹⁴⁷John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament*, Lectures on the James A. Gray Fund of the Divinity School of Duke University, Durham (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1967), 143, 170. See also Kaiser, *OT Theology*, 14-19.

¹⁴⁸Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 137-38.

¹⁴⁹Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 161.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁵¹Kaiser suggests the following clues to the antecedent theology within a text as follows: (1) The use of certain terms which have already acquired a special meaning in the history of salvation and have begun to take on a technical status (examples: "seed," "servant," "rest," "inheritance"). (2) A direct reference or an indirect allusion to a previous event in the progress of revelation with a view of making a related theological statement. (3) Direct or indirect citation of quotations so as to appropriate them for a similar theological point in the new situation (examples: "be fruitful and multiply. . ."; "I AM the God of your fathers"). (4) Reference to the covenant, its contents of accumulating promises, or its formulae (example: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt"; "I will be your God; you shall be my people, and I will dwell in the midst of you"). Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 134-37.

literature.¹⁵² Thus, this endeavor will help the exegete to check the work that has already been done in biblical theology, including conclusions, which have been drawn about the terms in the passage under consideration.¹⁵³

Kaiser warns that wordbooks cannot be substitutes for the exegete's own work with the immediate context. He suggests the following procedure for personal word study before any attempt to consult any theological wordbooks:

1. The word to be studied is to play a key role in the passage being exegeted.
2. Define the word selected in terms of its function in the immediate context and consider how that word is used elsewhere within the same book. There might be progression of nuances of meaning within one book.
3. Examine the usage of this word by other authors who wrote during the same period of time.
4. It is helpful to study the root from which the word came.
5. Consult an exhaustive concordance for the following information:
 - a. the total number of times the word appears in the Bible
 - b. the period in which there is the highest concentration of usage
 - c. any limited context that exhibits an extraordinary number of uses, and
 - d. those contexts that illustrate its usage prior to the selected text being exegeted.
6. Consult the various cognate languages to find additional usage, especially for those words which occur infrequently in the Bible or only once (*hapax legomena*).¹⁵⁴

¹⁵²Gerhard Friedrich, "Prehistory of the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 10:613-661; James P. Martin, "Theological Wordbooks: Tools for the Preacher," *Interpretation* 18 (1964): 304-328.

¹⁵³Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 140-141.

¹⁵⁴See detailed procedures for doing a personal word study in *ibid.*, 143-146.

By providing these sets of textual hermeneutical principles, Kaiser seeks to help the exegete discover the meaning of the text as intended by the original author and its significance for us in the present time. Besides Kaiser's textual hermeneutical principles, he also suggests ethical hermeneutical principles.

Ethical hermeneutical principles

Before these ethical hermeneutical principles could be applied to the biblical text, Kaiser advises that three assumptions be considered when dealing with ethical issues: The first assumption is that the particular commands of the Old Testament can be universalized because its moral statements were meant to be applied to a universal class of peoples, tribes, and conditions. The second is that the commands of the Old Testament exhibit consistency because a biblical writer has, elsewhere in his writings, already given a pattern of thought that shows us what universal understanding lies behind a particular injunction. The third assumption is that the commands of the Old Testament are prescriptive and make demands and claims upon their readers because all mortals are made in the same image of God.¹⁵⁵

In addition to the above guidelines for the interpretation of Old Testament passages containing moral instructions, Kaiser provides additional aid to approach the popular cushioned precepts in accordance with the true intentions of the authors. He argues:

1. Universal moral statements are frequently found in Scripture; however, the expressions by which they are conveyed must often be understood with certain

¹⁵⁵See Kaiser, *Christian*, 81-84.

limitations found in the nature of things or various other circumstances.¹⁵⁶

2. Universal moral truth often must be understood comparatively, even though not cast in that form.¹⁵⁷

3. Negative moral principles include affirmatives, and affirmatives include negatives, so that when any sin is forbidden, the opposite duty is urged upon us and when any duty is encouraged, its opposite sin is forbidden.¹⁵⁸

4. Negatives are binding at all times and we must never do anything forbidden even though good may ultimately come from it.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶Kaiser suggests some of the limitations and their examples as follows: (1) “Some universal or indefinite moral prescriptions often stress only the tendency of a thing to produce a certain effect even though that effect may not always necessarily take place; thus in Prov 15:1 ‘Solomon observes that a gentle answer turns away wrath’ even though in an obstinate and wicked man it may actually at times produce the opposite result.” (2) “Other universal or indefinite moral prescriptions intend only to tell what generally or often takes place without implying that there are no exceptions to the rules. Proverbs 22:16 urges to ‘train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.’ This is indeed the frequent consequence of wise parental education. But the text does not mean to hold that there are no exceptions to this rule or that there are no other instructive factors that could frustrate the good training laid down.” (3) “Other universal prescriptions state what *ought* to be done, not what actually takes place always. Accordingly, Mal 2:7 says ‘the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge’ and Prov 16:10 affirms, ‘the lips of a king speak as an oracle.’” (4) “Often moral precepts are set forth generally and absolutely when they are to be taken with certain limitations. For example, the statement ‘Do not swear not at all’ (Matt 5:34 or Lev 19:12), does not forbid us from taking any legitimate oaths in court or the like. For Moses urged in another text, ‘take your oaths by his name’ (Deut 6:13).” See Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 64-65.

¹⁵⁷For example, God “desired mercy, not sacrifice” (Hos 6:6; Matt 9:13, 12:7), yet the sacrificial system was part of his revelation as well. This then must be understood in terms of priorities, “this first and then that” (cf. 1 Sam 15:22). Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 64-65.

¹⁵⁸For example, Deut 6:13 commands us to serve God, thus we are thereby forbidden to serve any other god without the text explicitly forbidding it.

¹⁵⁹As it is stated, for example, in Rom 3:8.

5. Some moral precepts in Scripture will allow for exceptions in some situations on account of other duties or moral precepts that ought to predominate according to biblical instruction.¹⁶⁰

6. Changes in circumstances change moral things; therefore, contrary actions may be taken in the moral realm on account of differences of circumstances.¹⁶¹

7. It is important to distinguish between what is being described and what is being prescribed in the character, actions, and judgment of people, nations, and events in the Old Testament.¹⁶²

Kaiser further adds: “The silence of Scripture must not be counted as acquiescence.”¹⁶³ Responding to the charges against the character of Old Testament men and women, he notes, “God's approbation of an individual must be strictly limited to certain textually specified characteristics.” To put it in another way: “Divine approval of an individual in one aspect or area of his life does not entail and must not be extended to mean that there is a divine approval of that individual in all aspects of his character or

¹⁶⁰Frequently Solomon laid down rules for putting up security for others (Prov 6:1-2; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16); while he does not condemn the practice, which love, justice, and prudence might demand in some cases, he does urge us to avoid doing so rashly and without considering the person and his or her ability to pay off the debt. Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 66.

¹⁶¹In Prov 26:4-5, we meet two such approaches to morality: “Do not answer the fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself” and “Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.” These are not two inconsistent or even contradictory rules, but two distinct rules of conduct that will be severely observed, depending on which set of circumstances noted in the text are operable at the time. In one case we are advised to pay fools back in their own coins, with the aim of showing them their own foolishness. However, in other instances the best policy will be to avoid answering altogether and avoid playing the fool ourselves. Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 66.

¹⁶²Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 64-67. Kaiser further elaborates on the seventh principle by adding that it is important to separate out those precepts or items that are merely circumstantial and temporary from what is abiding, essential, and therefore obligatory and permanent for all ages. *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, 184.

conduct.”¹⁶⁴ Therefore, we must make a distinction between what the Bible approves and what it reports.¹⁶⁵ Admittedly, Kaiser remarks that reporting or narrating an event in Scripture is not to be equated with approving, recommending, or making that action or characteristic normative for emulation by all subsequent readers. In addition, we must constantly distinguish, on the basis of explicit statements and the immediate and larger contexts, between what the Bible teaches and what it merely, but sadly, must report in order to describe how far the people of God departed from the standard of the holiness of His person and the encouragement of His law.¹⁶⁶ Still another principle states that meaning or truth is not to be limited by the erroneous conceptions or temporary blindness of others, but is to be dictated by all the facts and the verbal referents that are known by the one making the statement.¹⁶⁷ In other words, Kaiser asserts that speakers should not act outside of a full consideration of all relevant facts and data known, just as no one is held accountable or charged with falsehood if in an athletic contest or on a battlefield some cried “deception” because they failed in their responsibility to discover the real purpose of actions involved.¹⁶⁸

While laying his ethical hermeneutical groundwork, Kaiser did not overlook the cultural realm; he thus lays out some principles for approaching cultural terms in the text:

¹⁶⁴Ibid., 270-271. To illustrate this principle, Kaiser points to the biblical story of Abraham. He notes that while Abraham mightily trusted God in leaving Ur (Gen 12:1), in looking up at the stars and receiving the promise about a line of descendants as numerous as the heavenly bodies (Gen 15:5-6), and in being willing to offer Isaac his son (Gen 22), he certainly was not to be commended in his anxiety over his wife and the ruse he devised to protect her. The tragedy is that Abraham taught his son the same sin, which Isaac then used in Gen 26:6-11. Again, I repeat with Greene that commendation of a character need not imply commendation of every element of the character. William Brenton Greene Jr., “The Ethics of the OT,” *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, ed. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1972), 213.

¹⁶⁵Kaiser and Silva, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (1994), 280.

¹⁶⁶Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 283.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., 274.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., 274.

First, “those items which reflect the specific times, culture, and temporal forms in which the message was given should be identified. The author and his context must be the final authority as to how each one of these items is to be handled.”¹⁶⁹ Second, where a distinction between the cultural form and its content is to be made, Kaiser suggests the following guidelines that could be used to distinguish timeless truth from that which is temporary and contingent.¹⁷⁰ In this regard, Kaiser recommends that the exegete (a) must determine when the writer is merely describing something and setting the background for his abiding principle, and when he is prescribing something for his time and afterwards;¹⁷¹ (b) must determine whether the passage is inculcating a theological principle by means of a handy illustration from the culture of that day (in this case the principle remains regardless of whether or not the illustration continues);¹⁷² (c) should ask himself/herself whether the same theological principle may not be recognized just as fully today through an equivalent but not culturally identical medium;¹⁷³ (d) should note that there is something to be learned whenever Scripture itself, in a later historical situation, applies a different form or sanction to the same content.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 116.

¹⁷⁰See Robert C. Sproul, “Controversy at Culture Gap,” *Eternity* 27 (May 1976): 13-15, 40.

¹⁷¹For example, the exegete must assess whether the early church government is to be followed to the letter or whether there are hints that some or all of their notices are merely descriptive. See Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 117.

¹⁷²Kaiser refers to Jas 2:1-7 to suggest that the principle of humility remains though the requirement that rich parishioners be seated on the floors of our churches so that the poor might be seated on the pews does not. See *ibid.*, 117.

¹⁷³An example of this is seen in a form of greeting such as shaking hands in occidental cultures just as a holy kiss functions in oriental cultures (1 Cor 16:20). See also John 13:12-16 where a servant-like attitude may be equivalent to the custom of foot washing. See *ibid.*, 117.

¹⁷⁴For example, the teaching on incest continues into the New Testament, yet without the form of the sanction provided for in the Old Testament, namely death. Instead, the New Testament recommends excommunication from the church until there is public repentance. See *ibid.*, 117.

Third, “if a reason for a practice or for what might appear to be a culturally-conditioned command is given and the reason is located in God's unchanging nature, then the command or practice is of permanent relevance for all believers in all ages.”¹⁷⁵

Fourth, at times the principle of “other things being equal” may be attached to some of these commands. While those commands based on God’s nature will allow no exception, often there are times when circumstances will alter the application of those laws which rest only on the word of God addressed to a particular time or situation.¹⁷⁶

Fifth, special emphasis must be placed on the context every time the exegete meets what is suspected of being a strictly cultural item.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵According to Kaiser, Gen 9:6 requires that the state use capital punishment against all who commit first-degree murder “because God made man in His own image,” and as long as men and women continue to be made in the image of God, this sanction is to be used—not as compensation for the victim's grieving family. See *ibid.*, 117.

¹⁷⁶An example is the command that no one was to eat “the bread of presence” except the priest according to Lev 24:5-9. But this command was set aside in favor of David's famished men (1 Sam 21:1-6). See more detail in *ibid.*, 118.

¹⁷⁷Examples are found in those New Testament passages dealing with the sphere of authority assigned to women. The following illustrates Kaiser's argument: The use of explicit doctrinal and theological statements interspersed throughout the passage which treats some local problem indicates that serious teaching is involved even if the form of the custom is not always to be retained. For example, 1 Cor 11:3 announces that “the head of every man is Christ, the head of every woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.” If the context rejects a practice or custom mentioned in the text being examined, we may be sure the practice or custom was never normative for believers. For example, in 1 Cor 6:12 and 10:23 the apostle Paul says “all things are lawful,” but he quickly refutes that position by adding “but not all things build up.” A more difficult decision is to be made when the immediate passage is not qualified by anything except an explanatory clause or sentence that follows it. An example of this is 1 Tim 2:8-15 apparently not allowing women to teach. The exegete must diligently work to determine what the reasons were, for on their proper identification will hinge whether the injunctions given in the text are to be regarded as permanent or provisional. Finally, strict attention must be paid to the Bible's own definition of its terms as found in the context. Too often there is an easy substitution of contemporary values for these terms. An example is the use of the term *φυσικῆν* in Rom 1:26-27 to mean sexual relations which are “natural” for an individual given his biological makeup, earlier experience, and orientation to life. See more detail in *ibid.*, 120. For additional discussions on arriving at the single meaning of the author in those places he includes cultural-historical elements; see Kaiser, “Legitimate Hermeneutics,” 142-144. But Kaiser argues that the apostle is using “natural” in corporate and moral terms; he is not thinking of distinctive individual nature. The source of such readjustments to the text is the behavioral sciences and modern ideologies, not the text itself. A fine critique of this error could found in Charles H. Kraft, “Toward a Christian Ethnotheology,” in *God, Man and Church Growth*, ed. A. R. Tippett (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 357-367; Charles H. Kraft, “Interpreting in Cultural Context,” *Journal for the Study of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21, no. 4 December (1978): 357-367.

Kaiser provides guiding principles for the interpretation of the moral law of God such as the “Ten Commandments.” First, he notes that the prologue of the Ten Commandments has the environment of grace;¹⁷⁸ second, all moral law is double-sided, meaning that it can be expressed either positively or negatively.¹⁷⁹ Third, omitting or refraining from doing a forbidden act is not a moral response. Fourth, the opposite good of a forbidden evil must be practiced if we are to be obedient.¹⁸⁰ He then concludes that the Ten Commandments are thus expressions of the character of God in which these textual/ethical hermeneutical principles take root.¹⁸¹

Without being exhaustive, I have reported above Kaiser’s ethical hermeneutical principles of which some directly influenced his interpretation of the two texts under consideration. Before assessing some of the hermeneutical principles deemed to have affected his understanding of the texts, it is imperative to provide a similar report for Geiler’s textual and ethical hermeneutical principles.

Geisler

Hermeneutical Principles

Textual hermeneutical principles

The interpretive task requires hermeneutical principles to guide in the quest for meaning. Although Scripture reveals that there are difficult texts which are hard to

¹⁷⁸For example, Kaiser's argument in regard to Exod 20:2—“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery”—is that it was because of the grace of God, for no one deserved it. Kaiser, *Christian*, 89.

¹⁷⁹When we say what we can't do, we imply all that part that we must do. See *ibid.*, 90.

¹⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 89-90. One must actively seek to protect the life and to encourage the life of others if one is carrying out the “thou shall not kill” command. See *ibid.*, 90.

¹⁸¹*Ibid.*, 77.

understand,¹⁸² Geisler nevertheless contends that there are also real answers to those difficulties. In order to answer questions concerning Bible difficulties,¹⁸³ Geisler provides six guidelines for handling difficult passages:

1. Be sure you know what the text says as an often-misquoted verse may mislead someone.¹⁸⁴
2. Be sure you know what the text means as the Bible uses figurative or symbolic language to express some words and phrases.¹⁸⁵
3. Don't confuse error with imprecision.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸²See, for example, 2 Pet 3:16: “as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.”

¹⁸³Geisler refers to several mistakes resulting from “the misinterpretation of man”: assuming that the unexplained is not explainable; presuming the Bible guilty until proven innocent; confusing our fallible interpretation with God’s infallible revelation; failing to understand the context of the passage; neglecting to interpret difficult passages in the light of clear ones; basing a teaching on an obscure passage; forgetting that the Bible is a human book with human characteristics; assuming that a partial report is a false report; demanding that New Testament citations of the Old Testament always be exact quotations; assuming that divergent accounts are false ones; presuming that the Bible approves of all it records; forgetting that the Bible uses non-technical, everyday language; assuming that round numbers are false; neglecting to note that the Bible uses different literary devices; forgetting that only the original text, not every copy of Scripture, is without error. See details of these in Norman L. Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 15-24.

¹⁸⁴Geisler refers to the often misquoted “money is the root of all evil” in 1 Tim 6:10 to reinforce the importance of applying the textual principles. The text says that “the love of money,” and not money itself, is decried as the root of all evil. Geisler and Brooks, *Skeptics*, 164.

¹⁸⁵Geisler uses this principle to explain what the “seed” in Matt 13:31 and Mark 4:31 means. He concludes that a closer examination of what Jesus said reveals that the word He used for “seed” means garden seeds that yield a crop. Geisler also notes that some words change meaning in different contexts. Accordingly, a “trunk” might belong to an elephant, a car, a salesperson, or a tree; thus its meaning depends on the context in which it is used. Finally, Geisler suggests that the Bible is its best interpreter and he finds no substitute for comparing Scripture with Scripture. See *ibid.*, 165.

¹⁸⁶On this principle Geisler is of the opinion that as long as it can be shown that the biblical author’s citation is faithful to the meaning of the text quoted, imprecision can be tolerated. He appeals to the same principle as used in today’s media.

4. Don't confuse falsity with perspective.¹⁸⁷
5. Language about the world is everyday language.
6. Remember that the Bible *often* records things of which it does not approve.¹⁸⁸

For Geisler, Christ is both the key to Bible interpretation and the theme of the entire Bible. The Bible must be therefore interpreted Christocentrically.¹⁸⁹ Besides providing textual principles for the interpretation of the biblical text,¹⁹⁰ Geisler also suggests some ethical guiding principles for dealing with texts which involve moral issues.

Ethical hermeneutical principles

Geisler's system of ethics—hierarchicalism or graded absolutism—is a system in which one is not guilty for doing the greater good but is praised for doing his or her best.¹⁹¹ It maintains that whenever norms conflict, one is morally right in breaking the lower norm in order to keep the higher one.¹⁹² Since one is not guilty for breaking a lower

¹⁸⁷The argument is that when a biblical writer records a part of an event which he saw and fails to mention some other part someone else saw, his record is still true. Just because a witness sees only part of the accident or sees it only from one angle doesn't mean that his or her testimony is false. See Geisler and Brooks, *Skeptics*, 166.

¹⁸⁸Geisler rightly observes that the Bible records things it does not approve. For example, David's sin (2 Sam 11) and Solomon's polygamy (1 Kgs 11:1-8) are recorded without any sermons condemning them. Similarly, it also records Satan's lie without approving it (Gen 3:4-5). For detailed examples of how Geisler used those principles to resolve some Bible difficulties, see Geisler and Brooks, *Skeptics*, 166-178.

¹⁸⁹Norman L. Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977), 19.

¹⁹⁰Geisler applies these guidelines to resolve difficulties such as genealogical problems, ethical problems, historical problems, quotation problems, and scientific problems. See details in Geisler and Brooks, *Skeptics*, 166-178.

¹⁹¹Geisler argues that in graded absolutism the person is only obligated to obey the higher command. See *ibid.*, 286-87. It maintains a hierarchical arrangement or ordering of ethical norms based on the relative scale of values they represent. It implies a pyramid of normative values which in and of themselves are objectively binding on human beings. In addition, one is not guilty for breaking a lower norm but has an exemption from it in view of the overriding duty to the higher norm. See Geisler, *Ethics*, 114-115.

¹⁹²Geisler, *Ethics*, 114. He further explains that when conflict arises, one is only obligated to obey the higher command. His duty is to follow the higher command given by God, which is the greatest good. See Geisler and Brooks, *Skeptics*, 286.

norm but has exemption from it in view of the overriding duty to the higher norm, Geisler offers the following seven ethical hermeneutical principles for decision-making in view of a possible conflict of values.

1. “Persons are more valuable than things; therefore, people are to be loved and things are to be used.”¹⁹³ Geisler offers three arguments to further explain this first principle. The first argument holds that persons are intrinsically valued higher than things because subjects are more valuable than mere objects. The second states that a personal subject is intrinsically higher than an object as manifested by the subject’s ability of self-determination. The third argument advocates that persons are intrinsically valued higher more than things because persons can relate personally to others while things cannot.¹⁹⁴

2. An infinite person is more valuable than finite persons are. Because God is of infinite value and the essence of good itself, Geisler explains that whenever there is a conflict between the value of finite persons and the infinitely personal being, one must choose in favor of the latter over the former. Geisler refers to Acts 5:29 to argue that whenever there is conflict between whether to obey God or man, “we must obey God rather than man.”¹⁹⁵

3. A complete person is more valuable than an incomplete person. In Geisler’s own words, “the complete is of more value than the incomplete,” thus, suggesting “a whole person is of more value than a partial person.” For Geisler, the incompleteness of a person is determined by his mental state. He argues that a mentally ill man is lessened by his incapacitation because he cannot bear nor engage in the full responsibility of personhood. Another explanation is that a handicapped or a blind person is of less value because of

¹⁹³Geisler, *Ethics*, 114.

¹⁹⁴See *ibid.*, 115-116.

¹⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 116.

their physical limitations on their personal activities. A person who is physically complete has a better manifestation of humanity than one who is not.¹⁹⁶

4. An actual person is of more value than the potential person. Thus, it follows that a mother is more intrinsically valuable as a person than the fertilized ovum within the womb because the mother is an actual person, whereas the embryo is only a potential person.¹⁹⁷

5. Potential persons are more valuable than actual things. Geisler gives two reasons for preferring potential persons to mere things: the first one is that the most sophisticated computer and the most educated animal cannot enter into relationship; the second is that the embryo may potentially become a person whereas a stone which has no potentiality to become a person cannot become a person.¹⁹⁸

6. Many persons are more valuable than few persons are. The contention here is that if one were faced with the decision of saving five lives or two lives, one should save the most lives possible because, according to Geisler, many persons have more value than one person does. However, he warns against assuming that the greater value is based on the mere quantity of persons but rather on the potential for interpersonal relationships and

¹⁹⁶Although Geisler claims not to imply that the mentally retarded or physically handicapped are not equally human with those who are not, he nevertheless submits that their personhood would be more valuable if it were complete. See *ibid.*, 117. See also Geisler, *Options and Issues*, 120-132.

¹⁹⁷Although Geisler is not explicit on what it means to be fully human, he maintains that being fully human is better than the mere possibility of becoming human. See Geisler, *Ethics*, 118.

¹⁹⁸Geisler sums it up when he says that the potential for the greater good of personhood is to be preferred to the actuality of the lesser good or mere "thinghood." He adds that a potential person is worth risking anything one can, provided that it does not involve the sacrifice of other persons. Thus, one should not use up the resources needed to preserve actual persons in attempting to save a potential person. See *ibid.*, 118-119.

the enhancing of the personhood of all the persons involved. Geisler sees overcrowded cities and the threat of overpopulation as exceptions to this principle.¹⁹⁹

7. Personal acts, which promote personhood, are better than those which do not. Geisler's argument is that the many acts performed by persons with respect to others are not all of equal value. Therefore, because some acts promote hatred while others enhance inter-personal relations, acts which promote interpersonal relationships should have precedence over those which do not. In the case of a moral dilemma in which one must choose between an equal number of persons living while the others die, the decision should be based on which person will probably promote the best truly interpersonal relationships if he or she lives. For example, a general might be saved and a soldier sacrificed or a minister kept alive while a murderer dies.²⁰⁰

I have provided above both Kaiser's and Geisler's presuppositions and hermeneutical principles. These presuppositions and hermeneutical principles guided them in the meanings they assigned to the two texts of Scripture under consideration. The following section presents a report of their interpretation and conclusion on the texts. I begin with Kaiser.

¹⁹⁹Geisler warns against drawing the conclusion that this principle always applies. He foresees some possible limitations: for example, if a family, nation, or even a race reaches the point where it stretches to exceed its own possibilities, then the suggested ways of leveling off the population are starvation, plagues, and war. In addition, there could be too many people for each individual to develop fully his personhood. Thus, the principle that many persons are better than few extends only as far as the word "person" permits. See *ibid.*, 119-120.

²⁰⁰But how do we know that by sparing the lives of those individuals, the interpersonal relationships of these will be enhanced? See *ibid.*, 114-121.

Kaiser's Interpretation of Exodus 1:15-22 and Joshua 2:1-7

Exodus 1:15-22

As an Old Testament theologian, one would expect Kaiser to exegete the preceding texts following all the steps outlined in his book *Toward an Exegetical Theology*.²⁰¹ Nowhere in his writings has he provided a guided systematic exegesis of those texts under consideration. However, for reasons he has not provided, Kaiser simply states his understanding of texts. Consequently, the lack of a systematic exegetical treatment of the texts does not seem to constitute a handicap as to the meaning he gives to the text.

In his book entitled *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, Kaiser makes reference to Exod 1:15-22 and observes, "The issue at stake in the case of the midwives and Rahab is whether God recognizes and approves of otherwise dubious methods that are alien to the integrity of His character in fulfilling the purpose of His will."²⁰² It seems evident from the start that for Kaiser, the midwives ought not to have lied. He queries, "Can a strong faith coexist and be actuated by the infirmities of unbelief?"²⁰³ Since for Kaiser "the standard for truth is first of all God himself,"²⁰⁴ the midwives' lie would thus be incompatible with the "God in whom there is no lie."²⁰⁵

Explaining his reasoning, Kaiser states, "When a government (or ruler) orders its subjects to do something that violates the direct commands of God, such as murdering children (Exod 1:16-17) . . . then the government and its ruler must be disobeyed. Obedience to God takes precedence over all other edicts."²⁰⁶ After referring to the case of

²⁰¹See Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 69-148.

²⁰²Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 271.

²⁰³Ibid.

²⁰⁴Ibid., 223.

²⁰⁵See Heb 6:18.

²⁰⁶Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 163.

Rahab, Kaiser notes, “The case is not different with the midwives in Exodus 1:17-22. They too ‘feared God and not the king of Egypt’. They are praised for outright refusal to snuff out male infant lives. Their reverence for life reflected their reverence for God and so he built them into ‘houses’ (בָּתֵּי), permanent families in Israel. All of this is good and well.”²⁰⁷ Kaiser asks, “But does the text give us warrant to speak untruth under proper conditions?”²⁰⁸ Kaiser explains his rejection of lies: “The juxtaposition of the account of their lie to Pharaoh in Exodus 1:19 with the statement that God dealt well with them in verse 20 might appear to imply an endorsement of their lie. But this suspicion cannot be sustained in the text, for twice it attributes the reason for God’s blessing them to the fact that they fear (believed) God (vv. 17 and 21).”²⁰⁹ In another work, Kaiser explains that it was their fear of God.²¹⁰ He asks, “Can the endorsement of that one area of their life mean endorsement of all areas?”²¹¹

In Kaiser's opinion, Pharaoh had given up his right to know all the facts²¹² although Kaiser claims the unlikeliness of the midwives’ right to lie. Inasmuch as Pharaoh did not deserve to know all the truth, Kaiser maintains that the midwives owed it to God to

²⁰⁷Ibid., 273.

²⁰⁸Ibid.

²⁰⁹Ibid.

²¹⁰Ibid., 273. “God built the midwives into houses.” This means, “God gave them families and perpetuated their families in Israel because they feared God more than they feared the king of Egypt, the Pharaoh. But that was not an endorsement of everything they did.” See Kaiser, *Christian*, 60.

²¹¹Kaiser, *Christian*, 60.

²¹²Kaiser thinks that this is similar to the case of Saul and Samuel in 1 Sam 16:1-3, and could be considered as a case of legitimate concealment of facts. See Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 273. In 1 Sam 16 God has rejected Saul as king, and the prophet Samuel was to anoint David in his stead. Since Samuel was afraid for his life, God instructed him to take a heifer to offer a sacrifice. In v. 3 God told Samuel to invite Jesse to the ceremony. Since he did offer a sacrifice, a case of lying or deceit cannot be claimed. When one argues for a case of voluntary concealment, it is in the light of v. 5 where the elders inquired about the purpose of Samuel’s visit. Since the elders failed to ask whether there was anything else beside the sacrifice, it could be argued that Samuel was in no way compelled to disclose the purpose of his visit. Therefore, we can safely conclude that neither God nor Samuel was engaged in any kind of deceptive behavior.

speak only the truth.²¹³ Admittedly, if the midwives truly had not made even one Hebrew male delivery during the month of the Pharaoh's new program, how then could their response be laudable and justified by Old Testament ethics? Consequently, if they were only telling partial truths, they were just as blameworthy as Rahab, Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob had been when they lied.²¹⁴ Kaiser talks about Pharaoh forfeiting his right to know the facts, then he discusses legitimate concealment, and concludes that the midwives ought to tell the truth.

However, this overview has raised the moral question of how someone could lose their right to know all the facts. How does this harmonize with the moral obligation to tell the truth? Does it make sense that the midwives are obligated to be honest while Pharaoh loses his right to know the truth? Kaiser provides additional explanations.²¹⁵ Despite his rejection of lying in Exod 1:15-22, he foresees a third alternative. Kaiser suggests that honest options are available when he refers to 1 Cor 10:13, which states that “God is faithful and will provide with the temptation a way to escape.”²¹⁶ These statements from Kaiser and more are analyzed below in the critical assessment section in the next chapter.

So far, it seems from the preceedings, according to Kaiser, that the midwives owed it to God to tell the truth to the Pharaoh when asked about the fate of the newborn babies. Consequently, for him the Bible does not warrant their lying to the king. The next section covers Kaiser's understanding of Josh 2:1-7.

²¹³Ibid., 273.

²¹⁴Ibid.

²¹⁵Were the midwives right to lie? Kaiser thinks that the midwives had no more right to lie than we have to lie, even when there seemed to be such conflicting absolutes as telling the truth and protecting life. Instead, they were obligated both to sustain and save life and to honor the truth. See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Peter H. Davids, F. F. Bruce, and Manfred T. Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 137. See also Geisler, *Ethics*, 79.

²¹⁶Kaiser, *Christian*, 60.

Joshua 2:1-7

Akin to the case of the midwives who lied to Pharaoh to protect innocent babies in Exod 1:15-22 is the case of Rahab, who also lied to the king of Jericho when she was asked for the spies' whereabouts. As with the midwives, Kaiser opines, the commendation of Rahab in Heb 11 is not as a result of her lie to the king of Jericho, but rather, for her faith in the God of Israel. The Bible, he says, "is unhesitating in its praise of Rahab, as Heb 11:31 commands her faith in God."²¹⁷ He further states, "The Old Testament does approve of one main quality of her life—her faith. This faith is seen in the fact that she feared the God of Israel more than she feared her own king of Jericho."²¹⁸

It is thus evident, according to Kaiser, that "it was not her lying that won her the divine recognition, but rather her faith. The evidence of her faith was seen in the works of receiving the spies and sending them out another way."²¹⁹ Accordingly, Kaiser believes Rahab was mirroring the character and goodness of God when she hid the spies and took the legitimate precaution of sending them out another way. Therefore, her lying was an unnecessary accouterment to both of the approved responses. Kaiser even makes his case stronger by referring to John Murray, who writes of Rahab this way:

It is strange theology to insist that approval of her faith and works in receiving the spies and helping them to escape must embrace the approval of all actions associated with her praiseworthy conduct. Moreover, if it were objected that the preservation of the spies and the sequel of sending them out another way could not be accomplished apart from the untruth uttered and that the untruth is integral to the successful outcome of her action, there are three things to be borne in mind.

(1) We are presuming too much in reference to the providence of God when we say that the untruth was indispensable to the successful outcome of her believing action.

(2) Granting that in *de facto* providence of God, the untruth was one of the means through which the spies escape, it does not follow that Rahab was morally

²¹⁷Ibid.

²¹⁸Kaiser, *Contemporary Preaching*, 19. James 2:25 echoed similar praises for lodging and sending the spies in a different direction from those seeking them.

²¹⁹Kaiser et al., *Hard Sayings*, 181.

justified in using this method. God can fulfill His holy, decretive will through our unholy acts.

(3) To justify the untruth because it is so closely bound up with the total result is poor theology and worse theodicy.²²⁰

Although the Bible does not comment on Rahab's lie, this lack of negative comment “does not grant her the right to lie.”²²¹ Consequently, Rahab could have said, “You think there are spies here? Come in and search for yourself.”²²² To support his arguments, Kaiser refers to Rom 3:8 to warn against doing evil that good may come.²²³ Furthermore, he writes, “Even if Rahab's untruth allowed the two spies to escape harm, this does not therefore justify such a method. God is not reduced to unholy acts to fulfill His will. Untruth cannot be vindicated simply because it is closely tied to the total result.”²²⁴

Kaiser objects to the idea that “protecting innocent lives is a greater good than the demand to always tell the truth.”²²⁵ To advocate such a hierarchy is, he says, “an artificial and subjective construct.”²²⁶ “To do so would pit part of God’s nature against other parts.”²²⁷ As in the case of the midwives, Kaiser advocates a third providential alternative

²²⁰Murray, *Conduct*, 138-139.

²²¹Ibid.

²²²Kaiser, *Christian*, 61. According to Kaiser, Corrie Ten Boom and her sister faced an identical situation in Holland during World War II. Corrie, by telling the truth, did the right thing. She hid the Jews well from the Nazi soldiers, and she answered the soldiers without giving a yes or no answer. He adds that there comes a point where some forfeit their right to know all the facts. Even in those situations, we still do not have the right to lie. Evidently, for Kaiser, a lie cannot be justified. The Old Testament does not condone lying. Kaiser, *Contemporary Preaching*, 19.

²²³“And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say), ‘Let us do evil that good may come’? Their condemnation is just.”

²²⁴Kaiser et al., *Hard Sayings*, 182.

²²⁵Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 97.

²²⁶Ibid.

²²⁷Ibid.

by suggesting that it is “possible to maintain a position of non-conflicting absolutes.”²²⁸ Referring to 1 Cor 10:13, he suggests that “God will provide the way to avoid conflicts.”²²⁹ Kaiser’s understanding of Josh 2:1-7 seems similar to Exod 1:15-22 as he maintains in each case the rejection of lying to save life.

In light of the previous depiction of Kaiser’s understanding of Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7 one observes that, for Kaiser, lying in order to save life as implied in both texts above appears wrong, unbiblical, and unwarranted. In both cases, Kaiser maintains that it was their faith that warranted the blessings and not the lies told. I continue with Geisler.

Geisler’s Interpretation of Exodus 1:15-22 and Joshua 2:1-7

Exodus 1:15-22

Geisler follows a thomistic approach in his interpretation, an approach that consists of raising questions and then providing answers to his own questions.²³⁰ He raises the question as to “how two midwives could take care of so many Hebrew women.”²³¹ First, Geisler acknowledges what Scripture says about the two midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, who were summoned by Pharaoh to kill the Hebrew babies. Second, according to Geisler, the Pharaoh spoke to Shiphrah and Puah because they were the leaders of the Hebrew midwives. This, he argues, was in keeping with the structure of Egyptian society in which individuals were chosen to function as overseers in almost every profession and craft. The

²²⁸Ibid.

²²⁹Kaiser, *Hard Sayings*, 97.

²³⁰See Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, trans. Daniel J. Sullivan (Chicago, IL: Britannica, 1952); Thomas Aquinas, *Holy Teaching: Introducing the Summa Theologica of St Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005).

²³¹Norman L. Geisler and Thomas A. Howe, *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992), 63.

Israelites had chosen two individuals to function as superintendents of a large group of Hebrew midwives.²³²

Geisler raises another question, “How could God bless the Hebrew midwives for disobeying governmental authority, even though they lied?”²³³ Before providing the solution to the problem raised, Geisler appeals to the authority of Scripture. He writes, “The Bible declares that the authorities that exist are appointed by God (Rom 13:1). The Scripture also says ‘lying lips are abomination to the Lord’ (Prov 12:22).”²³⁴ Upon Pharaoh’s request to murder the newborn boys, the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but “saved the male children alive.”²³⁵ When questioned about their actions, Geisler acknowledges that they lied but argues in the light of Exod 1:20 that God “dealt well with them.”²³⁶

After this series of questions, he then provides solutions to the questions raised, in three arguments. First, Geisler contends, “there is moral justification for what the Hebrew midwives did.”²³⁷ In his opinion, “the moral dilemma in which the Hebrew midwives found themselves was unavoidable.”²³⁸ They could obey “either God's higher law or the lesser obligation of submitting to the Pharaoh.”²³⁹ The midwives chose to disobey Pharaoh's orders rather “than commit deliberate infanticide against the children of their

²³²Geisler and Howe, *When Critics Ask*, 63.

²³³*Ibid.*, 64.

²³⁴Geisler and Howe, *Big Book*, 63.

²³⁵*Ibid.*, 64.

²³⁶*Ibid.*

²³⁷*Ibid.*

²³⁸*Ibid.*

²³⁹*Ibid.*

own people.”²⁴⁰ Geisler thinks that saving innocent lives is a higher obligation than obedience to the government. He states that when the government commands us to murder innocent victims, we should not obey. Just as God did not hold the midwives responsible, neither does God hold us responsible for not following the commands of men in order to obey the higher law.²⁴¹

Second, Geisler submits that it was “the midwives’ fear of God that led them to do what was necessary to save innocent lives.”²⁴² Thus, “their false statement to Pharaoh was an essential part of their effort to save lives.”²⁴³

Third, Geisler thinks that their “lying is comparable to their having disobeyed Pharaoh in order to save the lives of the innocent newborns.”²⁴⁴ In his opinion, this is where the midwives had to choose between lying and being compelled to murder innocent babies. Here again, according to Geisler, the midwives chose to obey the higher moral law.²⁴⁵

Geisler advocates obedience to parents as part of the moral law.²⁴⁶ However, “if a parent commands his or her child to kill a neighbor or worship an idol, the child is to refuse because of Jesus’ emphasis on the need to follow the higher moral law.”²⁴⁷

Accordingly, Geisler submits that “one is not guilty for doing the greater good or breaking

²⁴⁰Ibid.

²⁴¹Geisler refers to Acts 4 and Rev 13 to support his argument.

²⁴²Geisler and Howe, *Big Book*, 64.

²⁴³Geisler and Howe, *When Critics Ask*, 64.

²⁴⁴Ibid.

²⁴⁵Ibid.

²⁴⁶Geisler refers to Eph 6:1.

²⁴⁷Geisler refers to Matt 10:37 to support his argument.

the lower norm in order to keep the higher one.”²⁴⁸ For Geisler, “God does not blame us for what we could not avoid, thus he exempts us from the responsibility, and hence in such cases it is right to lie in order to save life.”²⁴⁹ We proceed with the review of Geisler’s interpretation of Josh 2:1-7.

Joshua 2:1-7

Geisler’s interpretation of Josh 2:1-7 follows the same pattern as with Exod 1:15-22. Geisler proceeds in two steps: first, he formulates the problem by raising a question to which he will later provide an answer. He raises the question as to “how God could bless Rahab for lying?”²⁵⁰ Once again, Geisler appeals to the authority of Scripture; he notes, “There is no question that the Bible commands Christians to ‘not give false testimony’ (Exod 20:16). We are also told to ‘put off falsehood and speak truthfully with his neighbor’ (Eph 4:25). Indeed, deception and lying are repeatedly condemned in Scripture (Prov 12:22; 19:5). On the other hand, the Bible indicates that there are occasions when intentionally falsifying (lying) is justifiable.”²⁵¹ In his opinion, God saved Rahab and blessed her for protecting the spies and assisting in the overthrow of Jericho.²⁵² While Geisler remarks, “Nowhere does the Bible explicitly say that God blessed Rahab for lying,”²⁵³ he maintains, “God could have blessed her in spite of her lie and not because of it.”²⁵⁴ Since “Rahab’s act of protecting the spies was a demonstration of the great faith

²⁴⁸Geisler and Howe, *Big Book*, 64.

²⁴⁹Geisler, *Options and Issues*, 26.

²⁵⁰Geisler and Howe, *Big Book*, 135.

²⁵¹Geisler, *Options and Issues*, 122.

²⁵²Geisler and Howe, *When Critics Ask*, 135.

²⁵³Geisler and Howe, *Big Book*, 135.

²⁵⁴*Ibid.*

in the God of Israel . . . it may have been impossible for her to both save the spies and tell the truth to the soldiers of the king. If so God would not hold Rahab responsible for this unavoidable moral conflict.”²⁵⁵

Though the Bible commands obedience to the government,²⁵⁶ Geisler thinks that there are many examples of justified civil disobedience to the government when it compels unrighteousness.²⁵⁷

I have just stated above Kaiser’s and Geisler’s presuppositions, hermeneutical principles, and interpretations of Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7. While both scholars affirm the authoritative nature of Scripture, their divergent hermeneutical principles at the genesis of their interpretation have been clearly outlined.

A review of their interpretation of the two passages of Scripture dealing with the ethical issue of lying in order to save life reveals that, for Geisler, lying in those circumstances when human life is at stake is morally justified, while for Kaiser it is not.

In order to conclude this study and state the reasons for their divergence of opinion and understanding of the two texts under consideration, the next chapter provides a brief exegetical study of the texts and a critical assessment of the presuppositions and hermeneutical principles stated above.

²⁵⁵Ibid.

²⁵⁶Geisler refers to Rom 13:1.

²⁵⁷Geisler refers to Exod 5, Dan 3:6, and Rev 13.

CHAPTER V

EXEGETICAL STUDY OF EXODUS 1:15-22 AND JOSHUA 2:1-7 AND CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE PRESUPPOSITIONS AND HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES OF KAISER AND GEISLER

This chapter presents a brief exegetical analysis of Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7. Additionally, it critically assesses Kaiser's and Geisler's presuppositions, hermeneutical principles, and interpretation of these texts. While some argue that God blessed the midwives for their deceit in protecting the male children against the king of Egypt's order to kill them, others argue that this was not the case.¹ Since both Kaiser and Geisler endorse the authoritative nature of Scripture and have derived their interpretations of the texts from it, it is imperative that we consider an exegetical study of the texts in order to present an accurate assessment of their understanding of the texts. The critical purpose of this exegetical study is to consider the textual evidence within both the midwives' and Rahab's statements and thus respond to the question: Does God use deceit to achieve His purposes?

The divergent interpretations resulting from different presuppositions claiming to derive from these texts in the books of Exodus and Joshua warrant a careful investigation of the evidence provided in the two pericopes under consideration. Three different steps help us discover the purpose of both the midwives' and Rahab's blessings. First, a contextual analysis provides the historical background, setting, and literary structure: What event or events led up to the texts under consideration? Second, the exegetical

¹As noted in the historical survey in the introduction of this study, pp. 6-13.

analysis provides a grammatical study and syntax of important key words and clauses.

Third, the semantic analysis provides the intertextual and theological meanings.

Exegesis of Exodus 1:15-22

Contextual Analysis

Hebrew Text:

- 15 וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לְמִדְוָת הָעִבְרִית אֲשֶׁר שֵׁם הָאֶחָת שִׁפְרָה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית פּוּעָה:
- 16 וַיֹּאמֶר בְּיָלְדְכֶן אֶת־הָעִבְרִיּוֹת וּרְאִיתֶן עַל־הָאֲבָנִים אִם־בֵּן הוּא וְהַמֶּתֶן אֹתוֹ וְאִם־בַּת הִיא וְחִיָּה:
- 17 וְתִירָאן הַמִּדְוֹת אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וְלֹא עָשׂוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵיהֶן מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וַתַּחֲנוּן אֶת־הַיְלָדִים:
- 18 וַיִּקְרָא מֶלֶךְ־מִצְרַיִם לְמִדְוֹת נְיֹאמֶר לָהֶן מִדְּעַ עֲשִׂיתֶן הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וַתַּחֲנוּן אֶת־הַיְלָדִים:
- אֶל־פְּרֹעֹה כִּי לֹא כֹנָשִׁים הַמִּצְרַיִת הָעִבְרִית כִּי־חַיּוֹת הִנֵּה בְטָרָם תָּבוֹא אֲלֵהֶן הַמִּדְוֹת וְיָלְדוּ:
- 19 וַתֹּאמְרֵן הַמִּדְוֹת
- 20 וַיִּשָּׁב אֱלֹהִים לְמִדְוֹת וַיִּרְבַּ הָעָם וַיַּעֲצֻמוּ מֵאֵד:
- 21 וַיְהִי כִּי־רָאוּ הַמִּדְוֹת אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בָּתִּים:
- 22 וַיִּצַן פְּרֹעֹה לְכָל־עַמּוֹ לֵאמֹר כָּל־תִּבֶן הַיְלֹד הַיֵּאֱרָה תִשְׁלִיכֶהוּ וְכָל־בַּת תַּחֲיוּן: ס

Translation of Exodus 1:15-22:

15. The king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives of whom one was named Shiphrah and the other Puah.
16. And he said to Shiphrah and Puah, “When you help the Hebrew give birth upon the birth stool; if a son, you shall put to death, but if a daughter, she shall live.”
17. The midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded, but caused the boys to live.
18. The king of Egypt called the midwives and said, “why have you done this thing and caused the boys to live?”
19. The midwives said to Pharaoh; “because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptians; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives come to them.”

20. God was good to the midwives and the people became exceedingly mighty.

21. Because the midwives feared God, He made them households.

22. Pharaoh gave charge to all people saying: every male child born, you shall throw in the Nile but every daughter shall cause to live.

While some scholars² contest Moses' authorship of the book of Exodus, others consider him as its author.³ Specific parts of the book are assigned to him, as, for example, he was to record the battle against the Amalekites in a book (chap. 17:14). Exodus 17:14 together with Num 33:2 points to the fact that Moses kept a diary in which he wrote the ordinances contained in Exod 20:21-23:33, and the book of the covenant in Exod 24:7.⁴

After the death of Joseph and his brothers, "the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them" (Exod 1:7). Then, in those days, a new pharaoh emerged who did not know Joseph. שְׂמֵיחַ, the title of the book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible, is the English word "names"; this term indicates a literary connection between Genesis and Exodus. It shows that the Israelites living in bondage had retained a knowledge of their ancestry, and with it, a knowledge of God's promise. As such, the Scriptures report, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom

²Donald W. Wicke, "The Literary Structure of Exodus 1:2-2:10," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (JSOT) 7, no. 24 (1982): 99-107, has suggested that several redactors put the book together; John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC 3 (1987), 10, has suggested that Elohists authored some sections of Exodus. See J. P. Hyatt, *Commentary on Exodus*, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1971), 56; Noth has posited that vv. 15-22 are a fragment of the Elohists. M. Noth, *Exodus*, The Old Testament Library, trans. J. S. Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 23.

³Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 2:28. See also Ronald E. Clements, *Exodus*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary: New English Bible 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 2.

⁴"The Second Book of Moses Called Exodus," *SDABC*, 1:491.

they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions” (Gen 15:13-14).

In an attempt to thwart this prophecy, Exod 1:1-11 describes the first stage of the Israelites’ oppression. The first attempt to disrupt Israel’s growth was the appointment of “taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor” (Exod 1:11). There seems to have been some concern as to the rapid growth of the Israelites. “But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel.”⁵ Verses 15-22 explain their prosperity as divine favor in spite of Pharaoh’s attempts at controlling the population.⁶

There is a parallel structure between Exod 1:1-14 and 2:1-10, the relationship between them from general to specific. While the first section (Exod 1:1-14) describes the sons of Israel and particularly the sons of Jacob, the second section (Exod 2:1-10) narrows down to one family within the house of Levi and further narrows down to one man—Moses. The pericope under consideration represents a plot that bridges these two sections.⁷ Exodus 1:15-22 is written in a chiasmic pattern whose main theme is Pharaoh’s attempted genocide.

- A1 Pharaoh’s directive to the midwives (vv. 15-16)
- B1 the midwives’ fear of God—civil disobedience (v. 17)
- C the king’s charge against the midwives and their response (vv. 18-19, 20)
- B2 the midwives’ fear of God—reward (v. 21)
- A2 Pharaoh’s command to all his people (v. 22)⁸

As the Israelites became more numerous, they presented a possible military threat to Egypt as well. Hence, in the pericope under consideration, in order to hinder the birth

⁵Exod 1:12.

⁶See Wicke, “Exodus 1:2–2:10,” 99-107.

⁷Ibid., 101.

⁸Ibid.

rate, the king turned to the Hebrew midwives, giving them specific instructions to kill the males born of the Hebrews.⁹

Exegetical Considerations

Pharaoh gives directives to the midwives (vv. 15-16). The word for “midwife” is simply the feminine piel participle of the verb יָלַד, “to give birth.” Moses used the term “Hebrew” instead of the “Israelites” to refer to the midwives. This is consistent with the general pattern in the Old Testament when the Israelites are dealing with non-Israelites. People of other cultures tended to lump the Israelites together with other related ethnic groups and to refer to them by the more broadly generic term, “Hebrew.”¹⁰ The clause (Hebrew midwives) may also be rendered “midwives of the Hebrews,” meaning the midwives who attended to the Hebrew women.¹¹ The use of the verb וַיֹּאמֶר in v. 15 connotes a command. The narrative opens with irony as two midwives outwit the king of all Egypt. The Egyptian community is parallel to two Hebrew midwives; once this irony is perceived, speculation as to how two midwives could service the entire Israelite community is beside the point.

Another irony is that the king of Egypt stooped down to converse with two lowly Hebrew women in order to move his intention forward. Shiphrah and Puah highlight the

⁹This escape explains the meaning of the word “exodus,” which means, “exit or going out.” See Kenneth A. Kitchen, “Exodus, The,” *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 700.

¹⁰J. Lewy, “Origin and Signification of the Biblical Term ‘Hebrew’,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 28 (1957): 1-13; J. Bottero, *Le probleme des Habiru a la 4e rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, Cahiers de la societe Asiatique 12 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1954), quoted in Stuart, *Exodus*, 78.

¹¹“Exodus 1:15,” *SDABC*, 1:498; see also John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus* (Auburn, MA: Evangelical Press, 2000), 1:51.

fact that Pharaoh is unnamed while the two midwives are named.¹² The king, therefore, summoned the midwives to execute his orders. He expected obedience from them. The same verb אָמַר “speak, say” is also used at the beginning of v. 17, thus, perhaps to avoid redundancy (v. 16 uses ‘said’ instead of ‘spoke’). The verb אָמַר used to describe the king’s communication to the two midwives can mean “speak to” but also can mean “communicate to” or “give instruction for.” It could thus be argued that in v. 16, the king passed instruction through the officials and later summoned them directly in v. 18.¹³ The use of לְמַנְלֶרֶת, “cause to bring forth”) in v. 15 in the piel suggests that it was expected of the midwives to cause or help to bring forth babies. Similarly, בְּיִלְדָן, “cause to bring forth” in v. 16, the piel infinitive construct serves as an adverbial clause of time. This clause lays the foundation for the next verb, the Qal perfect with a vav consecutive, which literally means, “When you assist . . . then you will observe.” The latter carries an instructional nuance (the imperfect of instruction), “you are to observe.”¹⁴

Upon hearing Pharaoh’s instructions or directives, the midwives, rather, chose to disregard Pharaoh’s request. Another irony is that Pharaoh can get the Egyptian community to bend to his will but fails to get two midwives to respond to his command.¹⁵

The use of וַיִּירָאוּ in v. 17 in the qal means “to fear, to be afraid, to stand in awe of, to be awed, to fear, to reverence, to honour, to respect.” וַיִּירָאוּ as qal literally means “they feared.” Thus, the ‘they’ translated in the verb referred to the midwives. The midwives

¹²Shiphrah means in Hebrew “beauty” or “fair one.” The name has been preserved in a list of Egyptian slaves of the eighteenth century B.C. Puah has no obvious etymology, but it is usually taken to mean “splendour” or “splendid one.” See more in W. F. Albright, “Northwest-Semitic Names in a List of Egyptian Slaves from the Eighteenth Century B.C.,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 74, no. 4 (1954): 229.

¹³Stuart, *Exodus*, 78.

¹⁴Holladay, *HALOT*, s.v. “אָמַר,” “לְמַנְלֶרֶת,” “בְּיִלְדָן.”

¹⁵Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus: Interpretation*, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991), 31.

feared God and did not carry out Pharaoh's command. Upon the king's request they (the midwives) let the boys live.

For Douglas K. Stuart, the clause, "Fear God," does not necessarily imply that they "believe in the true God of Israel." In the Pentateuch, "fear God" tends to mean "to be honest, faithful, trustworthy, upright, and, above all religious." It does not mean being afraid of Him in general but being afraid of the consequences of disobeying Him.¹⁶

Contra Douglas, the *SDA Bible Commentary* argues that the midwives were Hebrews and consequently they knew that God had forbidden murder though they might not have been acquainted with the words of the sixth commandment of the Decalogue.¹⁷ This pericope climaxes with the king's charge against the midwives for non-compliance. The Hebrew verb **וַיַּחְיֶינָהוּ**, piel vav consecutive imperfect third-person feminine plural, often indicates a factitive nuance with stative verbs, showing the cause of the action. Here it means, "Let live; cause to live." The verb is the exact opposite of Pharaoh's command for them to kill the boys as we see in the clause **הוּא וַיְהַמְתֵּן** in v. 16 where the verb **וַיְהַמְתֵּן** in the Hiphil means "to kill, put to death or to bring to a premature death."¹⁸

Several years may have elapsed between the king's decree to the midwives in v. 16 and his angry summoning of the disobedient midwives as described in v. 18. In v. 18, the king summons the midwives to ask why the executive order was not carried out. The second verb in Pharaoh's speech is a preterite with a vav consecutive. It may indicate a simple sequence: "Why have you done . . . and (so that you) let live?" as introduced by the adverb **מִדְּמָה**, "why?" which reinforces Pharaoh's astonishment. Why have you caused

¹⁶Stuart, *Exodus*, 79.

¹⁷"The Book of Exodus," *SDABC*, 1:499.

¹⁸Holladay, *HALOT*, "וַיַּחְיֶינָהוּ."

the boys to live? On what account have you done so?¹⁹ The context of this pericope suggests that Pharaoh's command envisioned a secretive killing of infants done by the midwives at birth.

The midwives' response in v. 19 that Hebrew women are vigorous is noteworthy. Were the midwives telling the truth or were they disregarding the king's command? According to Gesenius, וַיִּלְדוּ, "and bring forth" in v. 19 is a perfect with vav consecutive which serves as the apodosis to the preceding temporal clause; it has the frequentative nuance.²⁰ Gesenius's argument renders trustworthy the midwives' statement that the Hebrew women gave birth prior to their arrival.²¹ To some extent, the answer hinges on the meaning of the hapax legomenon קָיָה translated as "vigorous" (NAS), "lively" (KJV, JPS, NKJV). It is perhaps best translated as "more active" or "more involved." The midwives' response that "they . . . give birth before the midwives arrive" could be perfectly true inasmuch as they were being subject to hard labor, as opposed to Egyptian women who were not as active and therefore had more challenges in their delivery.²²

The point of this brief section is that the midwives respected God above the king. They simply followed a higher authority that prohibited killing. Fearing God is a basic part of the true faith that leads to an obedient course of action and is not terrified by worldly threats. There probably was enough truth in what they were saying to be believable, but they clearly had no intention of honoring the king by participating in murder, and they saw no reason to give him a straightforward answer. God honored their

¹⁹Ibid., 396, 551. See also N. Lemche, "'Hebrew' as a National Name for Israel," *Studia Theologica* 33 (1979): 1-23.

²⁰Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd ed., ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 337-338.

²¹Ibid.

²²Stuart, *Exodus*, 82.

actions. In v. 20 the verb **וַיַּטֵּב** is the Hiphil preterite of **יָטַב**. In this stem the word means “to do good to,” “treat well,” “treat kindly, graciously.” The vav consecutive shows that the expression of God’s grace was a result of their fearing and obeying him. It means “do good to,” “to make things go well for.”²³ The temporal indicator **וַיְהִי** in v. 21 focuses attention on the causal clause and lays the foundation for the main clause, namely, “God made households for them.” This is the second time the text affirms the reason for their defiance, their fear of God.

In v. 21 because the midwives feared God He made them households or families. The force of the Hebrew word **בְּתֵיבִים**, “house” suggests that God established their families; He made them fruitful. The king expresses his disappointment by involving all Egyptians in the genocide. Exodus 1:22 forms a fitting climax to the pericope under consideration, in which the king continually seeks to annihilate the Israelite strength. At last, with this decree, he disregards any potential complication and orders the open massacre of Hebrew males. In v. 22, all Egyptians were expected to join in the killing of all Israelite newborn boys. The throwing of babies into the Nile River was probably due to the fact that the pantheistic Egyptians viewed the Nile River as a god.²⁴

A closer look at the literary structure²⁵ suggested above indicates that while A1 and A2 point to Pharaoh’s directives to both the midwives and his officials, B1 and B2 center on the midwives’ motives for letting the boys live—fear of God.

²³Holladay, *HALOT*, “יָטַב.”

²⁴On the Egyptian pantheistic religion that made the Nile as a god, see the excellent description by Henri Frankfort in *Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Interpretation* (1948; repr., New York: Harper and Row, 1961); Henri Frankfort, Henriette A. Groenewegen-Frankfort, John Albert Wilson, and Thorkild Jacobsen, *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1967) originally was published with the title, *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1946). See also W. LaSor, “Nile,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed., ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 3:536-537.

²⁵See p. 161-162 above.

Semantic considerations

Pharaoh's attempted genocide is best understood theologically as the midwives' challenge to him as recorded in two separate statements (vv. 17, 21). "For their fear of God, these midwives were rewarded in that not only were they fruitful themselves, God also gave them families of their own."²⁶ Hyatt argues that one possible reason why child-bearing may have been a special blessing to these midwives was the probability that barren women were regularly used as midwives. If so, he continues, their reward was that they became fertile and had families of their own. The blessing of bearing children was not denied to the Hebrew women and neither was it denied to the Hebrew midwives.²⁷

An implicit moral imperative to "fear God" is suggested in these verses, especially in light of the use of the Hebrew expression "fear God" in v. 17. Moses used this expression six times²⁸ in the Pentateuch. On each occasion, the fear of God helped provide the ground for the bestowed blessings. In Gen 22:12, Abraham feared God by not withholding his only son and, as a result, God provided a substitute lamb in his son's stead. Further, in 42:18, because of Joseph's fear of God, he did not do harm to his brother and he became a source of blessings for all his brothers. Of the three occurrences in Exodus, two are from the pericope under consideration. In Exod 1:17 and 21, the midwives' fear of God provided a channel for the blessings upon their families; God made them fruitful as a result. In Exod 18:21, upon Jethro's admonition, Moses was to select leaders of the people from among those who feared God. In Deut 25:18-19, Amalek's remembrance was to be blotted out because he did not fear God.

²⁶Hyatt, *Exodus*, 61.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸See Gen 22:12; 42:18; Exod 1:17, 21; 18:21; Deut 25:18. Especially helpful is Gen 20:11 where Abraham is afraid to be in Gerar because "there is no fear of God in the place," that is, the place is lawless, immoral, and unrighteous. See Stuart, *Exodus*, 83.

Outside the Pentateuch, the expression “fear God” occurs seven times in wisdom literature and seven times in the New Testament. In Job 1:1, Job was a man who was $\square\text{ָ}$ “complete” and who feared God. In Ps 55:19, it is stated that God shall afflict those who do not fear Him, while in Ps 66:16, the Psalmist invites those who fear God to hear his personal testimony. Ecclesiastes 5:7 admonishes the fear of God amidst the vanities. In Eccl 8:12, 13, happiness is promised those who fear God, while unhappiness is promised to those who do not fear Him. Solomon, traditionally seen as the author, concludes Ecclesiastes by recommending the fear of God and the keeping of the commandments.

In the New Testament, Luke 18:2-5 tells the story of the judge who neither fears God nor man but who nevertheless acknowledged that those who fear God shall receive justice. In 23:40 one of the thieves on the cross feared God. The apostle Paul, in Acts 13:16 and 26, addressed those who fear God as having salvation belonging to them. First Peter 2:17 points to the characteristics of the chosen people as those who fear God. Revelation 14:7 points to the judgment as coming upon those who do not fear God.

All these “fear God” passages are connected by the reverence, faith, and trust in His ability to guide, protect, and save.

Conclusions

A review of the story in Exod 1:15-22 showed that Pharaoh’s attempted genocide did not prevail. From the one family who went down to Egypt came a mighty nation, a people belonging to God. When Pharaoh’s first attempt to decrease the Israelites’ population through hard labor did not yield the expected result, he proceeded with the second option that consisted of murdering the newborn baby boys through the midwives of Egypt. When that too did not succeed, Pharaoh resorted to the third alternative, which consisted of throwing all newborn baby boys in the Nile River.

Of interest here is Pharaoh’s second alternative, the midwives’ open challenge at the peril of their lives of Pharaoh’s order to murder the male newborn babies. Thus, it is

evident in light of this brief exegetical study that the reason for the midwives' blessings was not their lie but possibly their fear of God. They feared God more than they feared their own king. As a result, God prospered them and blessed their families. The blessings bestowed upon them were, therefore, not because of their mischief, but solely because of their fear of God.

Another passage of Scripture warranting a careful analysis is the case of Rahab, a prostitute who purposely misled the king's officials, sending them in a different direction. We ask, "For what purpose was Rahab blessed?"

Exegesis of Joshua 2:1-7

Rahab was well known to New Testament writers as a woman of exemplary faith (Heb 11:31) whose help to the spies is recorded in Scripture (Jas 2:25). The Gospel of Matthew also referred to her in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:5). Jewish tradition also held Rahab in high esteem.

The puzzling question then is, "Why does Scripture have such a high esteem of her faith when she purposely misled the king's officials by hiding the spies and pretending that she did not know their whereabouts?" For John Hamlin, Rahab became a part of Israel because of her bold act of befriending the spies.²⁹ Contextual, exegetical, and semantic analyses provide additional insights.

Contextual Analysis

Hebrew Text:

בֶּן־נֹון מִן־הַשְּׂטִים שְׁנַיִם־אָנָשִׁים מִהַגְּלִים חָרַשׁ לֵאמֹר לְכוּ רְאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת־יְרִיחוֹ וְגִלְכוּ וְגִבְאוּ
1 וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוֹשֻׁעַ

בֵּית־אִשָּׁה זֹנָה וְשִׁמָּה רָחַב וַיִּשְׁכְּבוּ־שָׁמָּה:

²⁹John E. Hamlin, *Joshua: Inheriting the Land* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 16.

2 וַיֹּאמֶר לְמַלְךְ יִרְיָחוֹ לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה אַנְשִׁים בָּאוּ הֵנָּה הַלַּיְלָה מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לַחְפֹּר אֶת־הָאָרֶץ:

אֶל־רַחַב לֵאמֹר הֲוֹצִיָאִי הָאֲנָשִׁים הַבָּאִים אֵלֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר־בָּאוּ לְבִיתְךָ כִּי לַחְפֹּר אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ בָּאוּ:
3 וַיִּשְׁלַח מַלְךְ יִרְיָחוֹ

4 וַתִּקַּח הָאִשָּׁה אֶת־שְׁנֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים וַתַּצְפֵּנּוּ וַתֹּאמֶר | כֵּן בָּאוּ אֵלַי הָאֲנָשִׁים וְלֹא יָדַעְתִּי מֵאֵין הִמָּּה:

הַשָּׁעַר לִסְגֹּר בַּחֹשֶׁךְ וְהָאֲנָשִׁים יָצְאוּ לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אָנֹכִי הִלְכוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים רִדְפוּ מִהֵרָ אַחֲרֵיהֶם כִּי תִשְׁגֹּמוּ:
5 וַיְהִי

6 וְהִיא הִעֲלֵתָם הַגֶּנֶה וַתַּטְמִנֵם בְּפִשְׁתֵי הָעֵץ הָעֵרְכוֹת לָהּ עַל־הַגֶּנֶה:

רִדְפוּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם הַרְדָּ הַיְרֵחוֹן עַל הַמַּעְבְּרוֹת וְהַשָּׁעַר סָגְרוּ אַחֲרָיו פֶּאֶשֶׁר יָצְאוּ הַרְדָּפִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם:
7 וְהָאֲנָשִׁים

Translation of Joshua 2:1-7:

1. Joshua the son of Nun sent men secretly from Shittim saying “go view the land of Jericho.” They went and came to the house of a prostitute named Rahab and lodged there.

2. And it was told the king of Jericho saying; behold men from the sons of Israel came here by night to search the land.

3. And the king of Jericho sent to Rahab saying “bring out the men who came to you and entered your house; who came to search the land.

4. The woman took the two men and hid them and said; they came to me but I do not know where they come from.

5. And it came to pass, the gate was shut at dark, the men went out, I do not know where they went; pursue them quickly, for you shall overtake them.

6. But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid on the roof.

7. So the men pursued the spies on the road that lead to the fords of Jordan. As soon as they had gone out, the gate was shut.

As a book of boundaries, the book of Joshua opens with an announcement signaling the end of an era (the death of Moses), a description of the borders that define

the Promised Land, and a command to cross a geographical boundary (the Jordan) into a new land, and thus a fulfilling life with God.³⁰ There is a divergence of opinions regarding the authorship of the book of Joshua. The book does not specify who the author was, nor is the author named anywhere else in the Old Testament. The book gives a few clues as to the identity of its author. Although tradition holds that the book was composed by Joshua himself, a notion supported in a limited way by Josh 8:32 and 24:26,³¹ for David Howard Jr., the author is anonymous. The Talmud and some rabbis (Rashi, David Kimchi) attributed it to Joshua,³² but saw part of the book as written by later hands (e.g., the account of Joshua's death or other fragments). Avranel attributed it to Samuel, due to the phrase "to this day" (4:9; 5:9; 7:26; etc.).³³ B. S. Childs concurs with Avranel when he notes that the use of the formula "to this day" in Josh 15:63 and 16:10 points to a period not later than the tenth century B.C.E.³⁴ One may raise reservations for both proponents of documentary hypothesis and the views that authorship of the book is not assigned to Joshua due to the unified theological outlook that runs through the books of

³⁰Daniel L. Hawk, *Joshua*, Berith Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry, ed. David W. Cotter (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), xi.

³¹Jerome F. D. Creach, *Joshua*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), 9-10.

³²See also Archer, *Survey*, 270.

³³See Howard, *Joshua*, 29. See also Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 5.

³⁴Brevard S. Childs, "A Study of the Formula, 'Until This Day,'" *Journal of the Biblical Literature* 82 (1963): 279-292. This is suggested because Josh 15:63 mentions people from the tribe of Judah living in Jerusalem alongside the Jebusites, whom they could not drive out. Since David captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites ca. 1003 B.C. (2 Sam 5:6-10), presumably the Jebusites did not live there in any significant numbers much later than that time. Furthermore, 16:10 mentions Canaanite inhabitants of Gezer among the Ephraimites. Since an Egyptian pharaoh—probably Siamun (ca. 978-959 B.C. E.) see Kenneth A. Kitchen, *The Bible in Its World: The Bible and Archaeology Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 100-101, 105-106—destroyed the Canaanites at Gezer and gave the town to Solomon as a dowry (1 Kgs 3:1; 9:16), the references to Canaanites in Gezer would have come from a period prior to that. Other references to "until this day" would seem to make more sense if a relatively long period had elapsed between the events and the time of writing. See Howard, *Joshua*, 30.

Deuteronomy through Kings. Ancient traditions have always made a sharp distinction between the Torah—the first five books—and the rest of the Old Testament. While the book of Joshua emphasizes the close relationship between the persons and work of Moses and Joshua, it makes clear that Joshua was not another Moses. The book of Joshua has always been separate from the rest of the Pentateuch. The similarities in theology and language may indicate no more than that the authors of the historical books were very thoroughly versed in the style and theology of Deuteronomy.³⁵ The author of Joshua drew from various sources. According to Donald H. Madvig, some of these traditions may admittedly have been etiologies; he argues that this does not deny their historical credibilities, nor does it repudiate the possibility that the author had some more important reason for including them.³⁶

After forty years of wilderness wandering and after the children of Israel mourned the death of Moses for thirty days in the desert of Moab (Deut 34:8), then “Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him” (Deut 34:9). The book of Joshua begins as though it were a continuation of something written previously, which of course, it is. A translation of the first portion of the verse would read “and it happened, after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, that the Lord said to Joshua . . .” The phrase the “death of Moses” ties this material in with an earlier event. The vav consecutive in וַיְהִי clearly presupposes preceding material, even though in this case, that which precedes comes from a different book and author.³⁷ Internal biblical evidences seem to attribute the authorship of the book of Joshua to Joshua, the son of Nun (Josh 1:1) The opening verse of the book emphasizes two leaders—Moses and

³⁵Donald H. Madvig, “Joshua,” *Deuteronomy-2 Samuel*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gabelein et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 3:241-242.

³⁶Madvig, “Joshua,” 3:242.

³⁷Howard, *Joshua*, 71.

Joshua. Like Moses earlier, Joshua certainly supplied the accounts of his communion with God (Josh 1:1; 3:7; 4:2; 5:2, 9, 13; 6:2; 7:10; 8:1). He was also in the best position to describe these events as recorded in the book, just as Moses did earlier.

The author had two purposes in writing. The first was to show that God had been faithful in fulfilling His promise to Abraham to give the land of Canaan to him and his descendants. Then the second purpose was to demonstrate that the covenant-keeping God is also righteous.³⁸

In the opening chapters of the book of Joshua, God commands Joshua to arise with the people and to cross the Jordan to the Promise Land. Then Joshua sends the spies to Jericho and, during their excursion, they stopped at the house of a prostitute, Rahab. While the spies were in the land, the king of Jericho summoned Rahab to report the strangers within her house.

The literary form of the book of Joshua is a series of narratives (descriptions of tribal boundaries, and lists of towns), joined together by means of transitional paragraphs and summary statements that give unity and continuity to the whole.³⁹ Although there is no chiasm in this pericope, Hawk on the one hand argues that Josh 2:1-7 contains three basic subplots: (1) the concealment where Rahab secretly hid the spies who entered Jericho, (2) the interrogation where the king's men interrogate Rahab concerning the spies (2:2-3), and (3) the diversion where Rahab sends the king's officials into the hills after the spies (2:4b-5, 7).⁴⁰ On the other hand, Wagner posits for the etiological character of the narrative; he included the story among his spy narratives whose form he described as having six elements: (1) selection or naming of the spies; (2) dispatching of the spies

³⁸Madvig, "Joshua," 3:244.

³⁹Ibid., 3:242.

⁴⁰Hawk, *Joshua*, 25.

with specific instructions; (3) report of the execution of the mission, along with confirmation through an oracle or reference to the context of salvation history; (4) notice of return and results; (5) a perfect-tense formula confirming the gift of the land by Yahweh; and (6) conclusions derived from 1-5, namely, action of entering or conquering the land.⁴¹ Davidson remarks on a similar pattern when he argues that the account of Joshua 2 contains many allusions to the narrative of the twelve spies in Num 13. He notes five parallels to the story:

1. The spies are commissioned (Num 13:1-20); Joshua commissions and sends the spies (Josh 2:1).

2. The spies enter the land (Num 13:21, 22); the spies enter the land selected for reconnaissance (Josh 2:1).

3. The spies return to the people (Num 13:25); the spies return to the people (Josh 2:23, 24).

4. The spies report on their findings (Num 13: 27-29); they report on their findings (Josh 2: 23-24).

5. Someone makes a decision to act on the basis of the report (Num 13:30-33); leadership makes a decision to act on the basis of the report (Josh 3-6).⁴²

However, a closer look at Josh 2:1-7 shows that this narrative revolves around five main characters: Joshua, the spies from Israel, the king of Jericho, the spies from Jericho, and Rahab the prostitute. Of the five characters, only two are named (Joshua and Rahab) while the three others remain anonymous. Rahab is the main character

⁴¹S. Wagner, "Die Kundsschatergeschichten im Alten Testament," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 76 (1964): 261-262, quoted in Trent C. Butler, *Joshua*, WBC 7 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 28.

⁴²Richard M. Davidson, *In the Footsteps of Joshua* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1995), 48.

dominating the plot. She plays a key role in the success of the mission. In light of the role Rahab plays in the story, this pericope can be structured as follows:

- A Joshua sends the spies to Jericho (v. 1)
- B The king of Jericho is informed of their presence in Rahab's house (v. 2)
- C The king of Jericho summons Rahab (v. 3)
- D Rahab receives and hides the spies (vv. 4, 6)
- E Rahab denies knowledge of the spies' whereabouts (vv. 5, 7)

The narrative reveals that Rahab misled the king's officials by hiding the spies from Jericho in the stalks of flax she had spread out. Beyond this pericope, the rest of the narrative suggests that Rahab's life and her household were spared. She lied as much in what she did as in what she said. Since the Bible never condemns Rahab but admires her faith,⁴³ one wonders whether there are any textual evidences of divine approval of her lies?

Exegetical Considerations

Although Joshua had received a promise from the Lord of his almighty help in the conquest of Canaan, he still thought it necessary to do what was requisite on his part to secure the success of the work committed to him, as the help of God does not preclude human action, but rather presupposes it.⁴⁴ Joshua sends two spies secretly to Jericho. The verb *וַיִּשְׁלַח*, "send human subject" is used two times in this pericope, in v. 1 and in v. 3. Just as Joshua sends the spies to Jericho, so did the king of Jericho send the state's officials to Rahab. Both *לֵךְ* and *רֵא* are imperative verbs that literally mean "go, see/look." The spies readily obeyed the command, thus enhancing the status of Joshua as a leader. The sending of spies was not an act of unbelief. The promise of divine aid never rules out human responsibility. Throughout the book of Joshua, we find an interweaving

⁴³Heb 11:31.

⁴⁴Keil and Delitzsch, *Joshua*, 6:33.

of human action and divine intervention.⁴⁵ Joshua instructed them to find out all about the land of Jericho.

They stopped at the house of a prostitute named Rahab and spent the night there. The typical term for cult prostitute is not used here הַקְדֵּשׁוֹת, “temple prostitute,” as in Hos 4:14. Instead the word זֹנֶה, used in v. 1, is a more general term that refers to the one who comits fornication (Judg 19:2).⁴⁶ Rahab is called a *zonah*, a harlot, not πανδοχεῖ, “an innkeeper,” as in Luke 10:35. Hawk reports that commentators throughout the ages have sought to deny the plain sense of the text. They do so, he argues, by following the lead of the Jewish historian Josephus who claims that Rahab was an innkeeper and that the spies went to her for an evening meal after surveying the city’s defences.⁴⁷ Does both וַיָּבֹאוּ, “come in” and וַיִּשְׁכְּבוּ-שָׁמָּה, “lie down” give a sexual overtone? The spies went in and literally lay down there. Hawk contends that both expressions are used elsewhere for sexual activities.⁴⁸ However, there is no evidence in the text that the term is used in a sexual sense. There is a common expression for going into buildings of all sorts. For example, “Abimeleck went to his father’s house at Ophrah” (Judg 9:5); “Elkanah and his wife went to their own home” (1 Sam 2:20); “And when King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and entered the house of the Lord” (2 Kgs 19:1). Consequently, the spies’ entrance into Rahab’s house is common in the Old

⁴⁵Madvig, “Joshua,” 3:259.

⁴⁶Although the term is paired with the word for sacred prostitute in Hos 4:14 and Gen 38:21-22, 24, it appears alone in Josh 2:1, and there is no indication that her activity has religious overtones. See Creach, *Joshua*, 33.

⁴⁷Daniel L. Hawk, *Joshua in 3-D: A Commentary on Biblical Conquest and Manifest Destiny* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010), 25-26. For a full discussion and comments on the word, see Richard S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. Donald J. Wisemann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 83-84; Donald Wisemann, “Rahab of Jericho,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 14 (1964): 8-11.

⁴⁸“Come to,” e.g., Gen 6:4; 16:2; 38:8-9; 1 Sam 12:24; 16:21; Ezek 23:44; Prov 6:29; and “lie with,” e.g., Gen 34:7; Exod 22:16; Num 5:13; Deut 22:23; 2 Sam 12:11. See Hawk, *Joshua in 3-D*, 26.

Testament and, therefore, does not imply sexual relations with a prostitute. If the intention was to imply sexual relations, there would be no intermediate term, such as the *house of*, used when Samson visited a prostitute and ‘went in to spend the night with her’ (Judg 16:1).⁴⁹ The word שָׁכַב can mean “lie down to sleep” or “lie down for sexual intercourse.” The text gives little help for clarifying this ambiguity. In view of the spies’ precarious circumstances, it seems highly unlikely that they engaged Rahab’s professional services.⁵⁰

Keil argues that their entering of the house of such a person would not excite so much suspicion.⁵¹ The two spies are unnamed, handpicked, while the prostitute has a name, Rahab. The author thus highlights the identity of the זֹנֶה, “prostitute” to underscore the key role she plays in the success of the mission.

As suggested above, the second section of this pericope shows that upon their arrival at the prostitute’s house, a report was given to the king of Jericho. Who gave this report to the king of Jericho? The king certainly had his own spies who scrutinized all who entered the land. The spies from Israel did not enter the city unnoticed. The king was given specific information of their whereabouts and the purpose of their mission. The verb לְחַפֵּר qal infinitive construct literally means “to dig,” “to search,” “to search out or explore.” The spies from the sons of Israel came to Jericho to search and explore the land and so did the king’s officials.

The unnamed king of Jericho, upon reception of the report, sent for Rahab and summoned her to הוֹצִיֵאֵי הַיָּמִי the men who came to her. הוֹצִיֵאֵי in the hiphil imperative suggests that the king’s request was a command or an order that could not be challenged.

⁴⁹Hess, *Joshua*, 83.

⁵⁰Madvig, “Joshua,” 3:260.

⁵¹Keil and Delitzsch, *Joshua*, 6:34.

The force of the hiphil is that Rahab was the agent to deliver the spies; to literally “bring forth” (JPS), “bring out” (NAS). She was to turn them over to the authorities. הוֹצִיאִי comes from the root ⁹צִא which means “to come or to go out.” The spies will not bring themselves out or turn themselves in. Hence, the significance of the hiphil usage in this verse. They have come to לְחַפֵּר, “search” the land. In other words, they have come with a hostile purpose to explore the land. Hence, we have the king’s command to turn them over. The king expected Rahab to do her patriotic duty and turn the spies in. The ancient law code of Hammurapi contains the following provision: “If felons are banded together in an ale-wife’s [prostitute’s or innkeeper’s] house and she has not haled [them] to the palace, that ale-wife shall be put to death.”⁵²

The narrative takes a new twist with Rahab at the center; she becomes the subject while the spies are the object. There is an abrupt change in the flow of the story. The narrator informs the reader in v. 4a that Rahab has hidden the spies. The four remaining verses of the pericope under consideration focus on Rahab’s hiding the spies and misleading the king’s officials seeking after them. Rahab overtly ignored or defied the king’s order. She וַתִּקַּח, “take by hand” the men and hid them. וַתִּקַּח is a qal vav consecutive imperfect third-person feminine singular. It literally means “to take by the hand”; in the LXX λαβοῦσα, an aorist active participle nominative feminine singular, means “to receive.” Thus, Rahab received the spies and hid or concealed them against the king’s command to turn them over. Then Rahab replied to the king that she did not know where the men went. The verb יָדַעְתִּי, “know” is used twice in this pericope in vv. 4 and 5 respectively. While the first usage denies the spies’ origin, the second denies their

⁵²William W. Hallo, ed., *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 2, *Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 16. See also Godfrey R. Driver and J. C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws, Ancient Codes and Laws of the Near East* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952-1956), 2:45, quoted in Donald H. Madvig, “Joshua,” *Deuteronomy-2 Samuel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain et al., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: With the New International Version of the Holy Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 3:260.

whereabouts. Consequently, she intentionally misled them by contending that the king's officials still had time to catch them. The implications of her statement are that she did not concern herself with their business in the city, only with their business with her. All the while, the reader is aware that Rahab has hidden the men and that her report of the men leaving is a lie (v. 5a).⁵³

Furthermore, her suggestion to “pursue them quickly, for you can overtake them,” is disingenuous (v. 5b). She responds to the king's men with quick-thinking cleverness. She immediately confirms the men's assertion that the spies have come to her house, a tactic meant to allay suspicions that she might be collaborating with the spies.⁵⁴ Having disarmed the king's officials that she was on their side, she then feigns ignorance by claiming that she did not know who they were or where they have gone. She uses her role as prostitute to cover the fact that she is harboring the spies. The Hebrew verb תַּשִּׁיגוּם from נָשַׁג in the hiphil imperfect literally means “to overtake.” Rahab misled the king's officials, giving them the impression that they could still overtake the spies. However, v. 6 discloses Rahab's mischievous activity; she had hidden the spies from Israel in the stalks of flax. After the king's officials went after the spies (who were in Rahab's rooftop), the city gate was shut as soon as they had gone through. Rahab told the king's officials, “go after them quickly.” She did not want to take a chance on having her house searched, because she knew that anyone suspected of collaboration with the spies would be put to death.

⁵³Creach, *Joshua*, 33.

⁵⁴Hawk, *Joshua in 3-D*, 27.

Semantic Analysis

Rahab's story finds parallel in the Gibeonites. For example, the concealment in v. 4 finds a parallel where the Gibeonites disguise themselves by hiding their identity in order to find favor in Joshua's sight (9:3-6). The king's officials interrogate Rahab (2:2-3); the Israelites' leaders interrogate the Gibeonites (9:7-8). Rahab purposely misled the king's officials (2:4b-5, 7); the Gibeonites purposely misled the leaders of Israel with a sample of their dry provisions (9:12-13).⁵⁵

Rahab corresponds to Joshua as the faithful one of her people who is chosen to lead them to salvation, or at least to offer it to those who are interested. In the broader context of the Pentateuch, there are obvious ties with Num 13:2 and Deut 1:22. In Num 13:2, God told Moses to send spies—one from each tribe—to survey “the land which the Lord swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to them and their descendants after them.” לְחַפֵּר is normally used to describe the digging of the wells. Its one occurrence with the sense of spying is in Deut 1:22, which relates the earlier sending of scouts to search the land of Canaan. Repetition of this text indicates the key points of the narrative.⁵⁶ Joshua 2 justifies the character of Joshua as a leader concerned for his people, for he gathers intelligence before leading them into hostile territories. It also describes how Joshua gives Rahab and her family an opportunity to deliver themselves from the coming destruction.⁵⁷

It would seem that deception is an important strategy in warfare. Espionage would be impossible without it. When Rahab hid the spies, she sided with Israel against her own people. It was an act of treason. Rahab's assertion of her ignorance of the spies'

⁵⁵Hawk, *Joshua in 3 D*, 25.

⁵⁶Hess, *Joshua*, 84-85; Deut 1:8.

⁵⁷Hess, *Joshua*, 80.

whereabouts reinforced her commitment to Israel and its agent, a commitment for which she risked her own life by attempting to deceive the representatives of the king of Jericho.

The inhabitants of Jericho stood under God's judgment. Furthermore, the Bible never condemns Rahab but admires her faith. Nor does the Bible excuse lies because the person lied to is morally reprehensible. In light of this exegetical study, it cannot be said that the narrator condones the actions of Rahab. This is contra Prouser, who argues that deception is considered an acceptable and generally praiseworthy means for a weaker party to succeed against a stronger power.⁵⁸ Some may argue that Rahab, a Canaanite and a prostitute, would not be expected to have higher standards than she displays here, but there is no indication of this view in the text.⁵⁹ For example, the *SDA Bible Commentary* notes, "To a Christian a lie can never be justified . . . but to a person like Rahab light comes gradually. . . . God accepts us where we are, but we must 'grow in grace.'"⁶⁰

Conclusions

A review of the story in Josh 2:1-7 shows that the king of Jericho's attempt to thwart God's plan for His people did not prevail. One Bible character is at the forefront with the success of the mission resting on her attitude to the spies from Israel. The ethical issue of lying is not the concern of the narrative. It stresses the deception, not in order to condemn Rahab, but to magnify her personal risk in hiding the spies. The book of Hebrews confirms, "By faith Rahab, the harlot, did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace."⁶¹ Without endorsing Rahab's lie, Davidson notes seven important lessons from this narrative: (1) God wants to save and

⁵⁸Ora Horn Prouser, "The Truth about Women and Lying," *JSOT* 61 (1994): 15-28.

⁵⁹Hess, *Joshua*, 86.

⁶⁰*SDABC*, 2:183.

⁶¹Heb 11:31.

use mightily even the apparently least-promising individuals; (2) Rahab's experience shows that all have opportunity to learn the truth about Yaweh and give a brilliant testimony of his character; (3) Rahab is valued for her courage to stand against her own people and follow the God of Israel; (4) Rahab is valued for her faith and is one of the pivotal examples of righteousness by faith; (5) Rahab is valued as an agent of salvation; (6) Rahab is valued as an integral part of Israel's community; and (6) Rahab is valued as an ancestor of Christ.⁶²

The brief exegetical study above yielded no textual evidences that either the midwives or Rahab were blessed for the lies they told. The midwives were blessed for their faith in the God of Israel and so was Rahab. I proceed below with a critical assessment of Kaiser's and Geisler's presuppositions, hermeneutical principles, and interpretation of the texts under consideration.

The presuppositions, hermeneutical principles, and conclusions of both scholars as reported in the previous chapter have exposed their strengths and vulnerabilities. On the one hand, a reading of Kaiser's material reveals that as an Old Testament theologian, his interest covers areas such as Old and New Testament exegesis, hermeneutics, homiletics, ethics, and theology. On the other hand, Geisler, a systematic theologian, has interests that include epistemology, philosophy, logic, humanism, evolution, atheism, cults, civil disobedience, theodicy, hermeneutics, New Age movement, innerancy, and the ethical theory. Even though the above list is not exhaustive, both scholars have used their respective and divergent principles effectively to generate the different conclusions stated above in the previous chapter.

While Geisler develops his thoughts and hermeneutical principles in his own ethical system known as graded absolutism, Kaiser does not identify with an ethical

⁶²Davidson, *Footsteps*, 49-53.

system. However, he shows preference for non-conflicting absolutism as a way of resolving moral dilemmas.⁶³

Both Kaiser's and Geisler's presuppositions, hermeneutical principles, together with their respective interpretations of Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7 that address the moral issue of lying to save life are critically appraised in the sections below. It is beyond the scope of this research to provide a critical assessment for all presuppositions and hermeneutical principles for both of these scholars. However, their hermeneutical principles that have influenced their interpretation of the texts and are significant to the purpose of this research are considered. I have identified six such principles for each scholar. The principles assessed are labeled as arguments 1 through 6. The argument is stated first, then the critical assessment follows.

The first four chapters of this research confirmed the integrity of God both biblically and theologically. The arguments that the midwives and Rahab were blessed for their lies could not be substantiated. Consequently, to propose the reasons why Kaiser and Geisler, two evangelical scholars with a shared theological heritage, would arrive at a divergent conclusion on the same texts of Scripture requires an evaluation of their presuppositions and hermeneutical principles, employing the two main variables used in this assessment:

1. Internal consistencies within their own respective system of thought and with their peers in the field
2. Consistencies with the biblical material.

In light of these variables, several questions are of interest: When both Kaiser and Geisler apply their presuppositions and hermeneutical principles to Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7, are their conclusions on these texts warranted? What are the opinions of their

⁶³Kaiser, *Hard Sayings*, 97.

peers in the field concerning their understanding of the texts and the conclusions they used? Are their presuppositions and/or hermeneutical principles and understanding of the texts consistent with the biblical materials? We begin with Kaiser.

Critical Assessment of Kaiser's and Geisler's Hermeneutical Principles

Kaiser

As argued earlier, the presuppositions and/or hermeneutical principles assessed below influenced Kaiser's understanding of the texts.

Argument 1

God can and does change His judgments.⁶⁴ God can and does change His actions and emotions towards men so as not to change in His basic character.⁶⁵

Critique 1

In order to clarify the notion that the judgments of God could change, Kaiser argues that the change occurs when there has been a clear change for the worse in the moral and ethical integrity of people with whom He is in covenant, such as in response to the intercessory prayer of His appointed prophet, or when people renounce their evil ways and deeds and turn back to Him. He adds that no word from God is final. Judgment, far from being absolute, is conditional. A change in man's conduct brings about a change in God's judgment.⁶⁶ Kaiser is certainly correct in his argument that a change in man's attitude withholds God's judgment. This notion seems to be the argument in Deut 28 that conveys blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience.

⁶⁴Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 251.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid.

For Kaiser, the description of God using human feelings translates to God's change of emotions or actions. Admittedly, God's change of emotions does not translate a change in His character, since Scripture points to His revealed character as unchanging (Mal 3:6). Canale is of the same opinion when he claims that the immutability of the biblical God does not exclude His ability to change His decision to destroy Nineveh (Jonah 3:4) because on account of the Ninevites' positive response to Jonah's preaching. He adds that God's change of mind does not involve a change in His divine purpose for human beings, but rather an adjustment to the change of man's mind and purpose.⁶⁷

Thus, Kaiser's notion that God can and does change His actions and emotions towards men so as not to change in His basic character finds explanation in the biblical doctrine of God. In this doctrine, movement and change in the divine life such as in the incarnation show that God has the capability not only of relating and of living with the limits of created time but also of personally experiencing new, real historical events.⁶⁸ Hence, this experience needs not be perceived as a change in His essence.

In addition to the arguments stated above, God's change of mind does not translate a change in His character or nature.⁶⁹ For example, in Exod 3:14, God reveals Himself to Moses as the "I AM," "the one who always is." The "I AM" is the self-existent, independent, and unchangeable God. "I AM" God is not the God who was anything, in the sense that He changes. Whatever He was, He continues to be, and He will always be. The God who is exists not only really and independently, but also unchangeably. Therefore, whatever God has started to do He will bring to completion, because there are no unforeseen changes which necessitate any alterations in His original

⁶⁷L. Fernando Canale, "The Doctrine of God," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 110.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid.

plans and purposes. Even if His immediate goal appears unfulfilled, His ultimate goal will come to pass. Since God is both eternal and unchanging, then nothing which He has purposed to do can ever fail.

Kaiser's statements as argued above seem to concur with the biblical claim in Mal 3:6 where God affirms, "I the Lord do not change."⁷⁰ Numbers 23:19 points out, "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"

The notion that God's actions and emotions change without changing His basic character must be understood not only contextually,⁷¹ but also with the background of the great controversy between good and evil that calls for God's presence in the midst of His people. In Exod 25:8, God says, "And let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them." Consequently, the biblical understanding of God's eternity allows for an undergirding compatibility between God's perfection and a conception of His life that includes dynamic changes such as real newness, emotions, and relations.⁷² With this understanding, the notion that God changes His actions and emotions so as not to change in His basic character would be consistent with both the biblical material and the next principle.

Argument 2

"The lack of condemnation of the midwives and Rahab for their acts of lying to their respective kings does not mean that acceptance of one area of someone's life means

⁷⁰Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *More Hard Sayings of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 39-41.

⁷¹A change in man's attitude brings about a change in God's action without changing His actions. This is the case in Jonah 3:4.

⁷²See Isa 43:19; Jer 31:31; Rev 21:5; Exod 34:14; Num 11:33; Deut 4:24; Lev 26:12; Zech 13:9; Rev 21:3.

acceptance of all of it.” “Untruth cannot be vindicated simply because it is closely tied to the end result.”⁷³

Critique 2

A review of Kaiser’s conclusion on Exod 1:15-21 and Josh 2:1-7 reveals that when the current argument under appraisal is applied to the two texts under consideration, his conclusions are similar to the biblical understanding of the same texts. Commenting on the dilemma Rahab faced, Kaiser contends that she should have hidden the spies well and then refused to answer any question concerning their location. For example, she could, he argues, have volunteered, “Come in and have a look around,” while simultaneously praying that God would make the searchers especially obtuse.⁷⁴

On this same incident, Roy Adams disagrees with Kaiser when he states, “Potential consequences of any action must be carefully considered, and rigorously avoided if life-threatening.”⁷⁵ For Adams, human life is considered most important, and it needs to be protected even at the cost of truth.⁷⁶ Furthermore, the tacit condemnation of this great woman is unwarranted since the Bible did not condemn her.⁷⁷

In reference to Roy Adams’s argument concerning the lack of the Bible’s condemnation, Kaiser notes that the lack of condemnation of the midwives and Rahab for their acts of lying to their respective kings does not mean that “acceptance of one area of someone’s life means acceptance of all of it.”⁷⁸ Therefore, according to Kaiser, Rahab

⁷³Kaiser et al., *Hard Sayings*, 137, 182.

⁷⁴Kaiser, *Hard Sayings*, 97.

⁷⁵Roy Adams, “In Defense of Rahab,” *Adventist Review* 174 (December 4, 1997): 24.

⁷⁶Adams, “Defense,” 188.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Kaiser et al., *Hard Sayings*, 137. Kaiser adds that God declared David to be a man after his own heart but there was also the matter of Uriah and Bathsheba; Solomon was called Jedidiah, meaning, “loved

was blessed because of her faith and not because of her lie. Similarly, Kaiser notes the wording of Exod 1:21 which specifically says that Shiphrah and Puah were blessed of the Lord because “they feared God” and not because they lied.⁷⁹

There is no textual evidence that either the midwives or Rahab was blessed because of the lies they told. It shows that they trusted the God of Israel more than they trusted their own respective king. Consequently, they were rewarded because of their faith in God.

Kaiser continues his argument by contending that even if Rahab’s untruth allowed the two spies to escape unharmed, this does not therefore justify her deceitfulness. God is not reduced to unholy acts to fulfill His will. With the lack of condemnation of their act of lying, it does not follow that the Bible endorses their act of lies. To do so would be akin to situation ethics where the morality of an act is determined by the projected consequences. As Kaiser points out, “Untruth cannot be vindicated simply because it is closely tied to the end result.”⁸⁰

Conjectural interpretation appears as one of the more perilous approaches employed in the retelling of the Bible stories, especially of brief narratives that seem to omit some details. Terrance J. Keegan notes that in all narratives, “there are the gaps, the things left unsaid,” for “one never receives a step by step, sequential presentation of everything.”⁸¹ Keegan’s remarks and Kaiser’s current arguments are similar in principle as they both convey the idea of the argument of silence. I concur with Kaiser that the lack

of the Lord.” Ibid., 137. See also Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *What Does the Lord Require? A Guide for Preaching and Teaching Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 175. “We are to distinguish between what the Bible reports and what the Bible teaches.” Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰ Kaiser et al., *Hard Sayings*, 182.

⁸¹Terrence J. Keegan, *Interpreting the Bible: A Popular Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 102-103.

of the Bible's condemnation of both the midwives' and Rahab's acts of lies need not imply that their actions were commanded, especially as it reports things it does not approve of. The Gospel of John endorses the idea of the argument of silence. The apostle John writes, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written."⁸² Consequently, both Kaiser's and Keegan's arguments are congruent with the biblical material.

Besides the midwives and Rahab, another biblical story that lacks divine condemnation is the story of Tamar in Gen 38. Tamar was widowed as a result of her wicked husband's death, abused by her second spouse, and duped by Judah, her father-in-law. Taking the matter into her own hands, she dressed like a prostitute to lure her father-in-law into sex. Upon conception, she gave birth to Perez, one of the twins who came out of that incestuous relationship. As recorded by the Gospel writer (Matt 1:21), Perez is the direct ancestor of Jesus Christ, the Savior of humanity. Since there is no direct condemnation of Tamar throughout the entire Bible, should we conclude that incestuous sex with one's father-in-law is morally permissible? Alternatively, do we conclude that prostitution is allowable at times? Kaiser is correct in his argument that "reporting or narrating an event in scripture is not to be equated with approving, recommending, or making that action or characteristic normative for emulation by all subsequent readers."⁸³ To argue in this manner, Kaiser continues, would not only be poor exegesis and theology, but the worst theodicy. Any other conclusion would eventually validate David's adultery because the next heir in the messianic line, Solomon, resulted from David's union with Bathsheba.⁸⁴

⁸²John 21:25.

⁸³Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 283.

⁸⁴Kaiser, *Hard Sayings*, 96.

By enforcing his principle that the lack of condemnation need not mean approval, Kaiser not only dispels the argument that untruth could be told to achieve a good end, but also concurs with the apostle who warns “against doing evil that good may come.”⁸⁵ As I argued earlier, the current principle on the lack of condemnation is one of “the key principles” at work in Kaiser’s understanding or interpretation of Exod 1:15-21 and Josh 2:4-6 in addressing the moral issue of lying to save life. A faithful application of this hermeneutical principle to the texts above would yield the same conclusions as Kaiser suggests. Consequently, with this understanding, God is perceived as the God of truth, the God who does not lie. J. J. M. Roberts summarizes the biblical data which declare the impossibility of God to lie:

The Old Testament characterizes Yahweh as a God of truth (Ps 31:6) or faithfulness (Deut 32:4), who is just and right (Deut 32:4; Ps 92:16; 119: 137; 145:17), and without iniquity (Deut 32:4; Ps 92:16). His word and judgments are straight (Ps 33:4) and true (Ps 19:10). He does not lie, because He is not a man that He should lie or change His mind (Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29); what He says He will do, and what He promises He will bring to pass (Num 23:19). The New Testament also characterizes God’s word as truth (John 17:17), denies that there is any unrighteousness in Him (Rom 9:14), and speaks of him as *ho apseudeis Theos*. ‘God does not’ or ‘cannot lie’ (Titus 1:2). Finally, the author of the Hebrews claims that when the divine promise is confirmed by the divine oath, these two things make it impossible for God to prove false (Heb 6:18).⁸⁶

Thus, the application of Kaiser’s principle to the text under consideration portrays the God of the Bible as J. J. M. Roberts described above where the lack of scriptural condemnation of certain narratives need not suggest its commendation. The next principle reinforces this point.

⁸⁵Rom 3:8.

⁸⁶J. J. M. Roberts, “Does God Lie? Divine Deceit as a Theological Problem in Israelite Literature,” in *Congress Volume: Jerusalem, 1986*, Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 211. Note: In this quotation, the punctuation has been modified for clarity and consistency with the rest of this article.

Argument 3

Scripture expects “us to evaluate what is going against the message of Scripture.”⁸⁷

Critique 3

Kaiser accepts a high view of Scripture. He perceives the moral law as revealed and as the recognized standard of holiness that remained authoritative for Christ, the apostles, and the early church. Therefore, the moral law continues to function as one of Scripture’s formal teachers on what is right or wrong in conduct.⁸⁸ For Kaiser, Scripture alone is the authoritative word of God and the yardstick by which all that is said and done is measured and evaluated. By acknowledging the authoritative nature of Scripture, he advises us to evaluate what is going against the message of Scripture. With this principle, Kaiser validates his stand against lying as implied in Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7.

In a church marked by an “incipient Marcionism in ethics,”⁸⁹ Kaiser makes an energetic plea for the normative nature of Old Testament ethics. He finds the ethics of the Old Testament to be consistent and unified, governing both outward acts and “the intention of the heart.”⁹⁰ His contention that the Old Testament is a unified system shows that no biblical meaning could be derived from one single text. A biblical scholar with a strong exegetical background, he could have provided an exegetical study of the texts under consideration using the set of guidelines as outlined in his book *Toward an Exegetical Theology* to arrive at his position against lying. However, he simply gives to

⁸⁷Kaiser et al., *Hard Sayings*, 137. See particularly his comments on Exod 1:15-21.

⁸⁸Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 312.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 32.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 7.

the readers his understanding of these texts from Scripture. As one author puts it, “For more detailed exegesis you will have to look elsewhere.”⁹¹

Since Scripture does expect “us to evaluate what is going in against the message of Scripture,”⁹² one can understand why Kaiser, through his diachronic approach, could reject the midwives’ and Rahab’s lies. Such argument is consistent with the biblical material. Elsewhere, such as in Prov 12:22, lying is condemned. Kaiser notes that teachers of the Scripture exegete individual passages, and preachers, for the most part, limit themselves to small slices of Scripture. Scholars also focus on smaller texts and build toward an overarching umbrella-like theology. However, this exegetical process is also the reverse; it is a grasp of the larger framework of theology that not infrequently gives clues to interpretation of smaller units, especially the difficult passages.⁹³ Thus, in keeping with his diachronic approach and his own counsel, Kaiser’s understanding of the texts under consideration (addressing the issue of lying) seems to parallel other texts of Scripture that highlight the issue of lying. By way of example, Kaiser’s comments on Jer 4:10 and 20:7 seem to present God as a deceiver. He argues that the prophet Jeremiah’s injunctions are similar to complaints of other prophets who mistakenly viewed the promise of God as an assurance that no evil or derision would come on him or his ministry. These verses, he adds, cannot be cited as the basis for giving any credence to the charge that God is deceptive.⁹⁴ Kaiser’s principle is compatible with his argument for the unity of Scripture conveyed by his use of the diachronic approach.

⁹¹Paul L. Schrieber, review of *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament*, by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Concordia Journal* 21, no. 4 (October 1995): 447.

⁹²Kaiser et al., *Hard Sayings*, 137.

⁹³Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 17-19.

⁹⁴Kaiser, *Hard Sayings*, 121.

The issue of lying implied in Exodus and Joshua is not unique. The book of Proverbs warns, “There are six things which the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness *who* utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers.”⁹⁵ In addition, liars will be destroyed in the lake that burn with the fire and brimstone.⁹⁶ As Frank Hasel has noted, only on the basis of its unity can Scripture function as its own interpreter. Only then is it possible to cover up with a harmony in doctrine and teaching.⁹⁷

I must contend with Kaiser that what is going in against the message of Scripture must be evaluated. His understanding of the unity of Scripture certainly led him to conclude in light of his principle that lying to save life implied in the two texts under consideration is incompatible with the biblical material. The next argument adds an exception to this principle that presents an apparent conflict.

Argument 4

Occasionally the right to know all the truth may be forfeited in cases where their evil actions have forfeited their right.⁹⁸

Critique 4

Kaiser maintains his view that condoning lies in any form is biblically unwarranted. However, he argues that the right to know all the truth may occasionally be

⁹⁵Prov 6:16-19.

⁹⁶Rev 21:8.

⁹⁷Frank M. Hasel, “Presuppositions in the Interpretation of Scripture,” in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed. George W. Reid (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2006), 37.

⁹⁸Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 95.

forfeited. Even in those situations, Kaiser points out, we still do not have the right to speak an untruth. Lying is always wrong, be it the midwives' lie or anyone else's lie. Scripture, he adds, repeatedly warns against all falsehoods and commends truth-telling,⁹⁹ since God, His truth, and His law are one.¹⁰⁰ For Kaiser, truth-telling is not only a covenantal responsibility, it is a universal responsibility for all times, all peoples, in all places.

On the one hand, Kaiser admonishes truth-telling and rejects lying in any form. On the other hand, he states that no one has the right to lie; but then, neither does every one have the right to know all the facts in a case; especially where their evil actions have forfeited that right.¹⁰¹ These two statements may seem mutually exclusive; especially where an open lie is not accepted as such because of the context in which it is told. However, a close examination shows that this is not the case. The notion that one has lost the right to know the facts seems to find similar parallel in Scripture, especially in cases of voluntary withholding of truth.¹⁰²

He further states, "It is not a lie to intentionally deceive a person by withholding information from him, information that is inferred by the question and essential to the answer."¹⁰³ Kaiser's statement partly concurs with George Bush who argues, "This assertion of the midwives was doubtless true in itself, although not the whole truth. . . . It

⁹⁹Ibid. See also Prov 6:19; 14:15; Pss 27:12; 35:11.

¹⁰⁰ Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 144.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 227.

¹⁰²There are numerous examples of withholding the truth in Scripture. In Mark 14:61; 15:5; Luke 23:9, Jesus refrained from answering the High Priest. Ecclesiastes 3:7 advises "there is a time to keep silent and a time to speak." John 16:12 states, "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear it now." See Miroslav M. Kiš, "Was God Telling Samuel to Lie?" in *Interpreting Scripture Bible Questions and Answers*, ed. Gerhard Pfandl (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), 194.

¹⁰³Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 273-274.

was withholding a part of the truth from those who take advantage of the whole to injure or destroy the innocent. . . . [It] is not only lawful but laudable.”¹⁰⁴ In Tremper Longman’s opinion, Bush’s argument “smacks of artificiality and subjectivity.”¹⁰⁵ In answer to Kaiser’s handling of the issue of lying, he adds, “The brothers did not lie to Jacob about the death of Joseph. All they do is hand him the bloodied robe and say, ‘We found this.’ Examine it to see whether it is your son’s robe (Gen 37:32). Perhaps this could even be ‘justified’ by saying that Jacob lost his right to hear the full truth by his partial attitude toward Joseph.”¹⁰⁶ Longman’s assessment of both Bush and Kaiser does not square with the biblical notion of voluntary concealment of truth. To ignore the mandate of Scripture, where one is not obligated to answer every question asked, could lead to subjective opinion. Kaiser warns that theology must be objectively derived from the text and not subjectively imposed on the text by the interpreter.¹⁰⁷

Reference to Mark 14:61; 15:5 where Jesus refrained from answering questions seems to suggest that someone could lose his or her right to know the truth because of prior evil actions. For example, Jesus was not deceptive in either speech or silence.¹⁰⁸ Adam Clarke is of the same opinion when he argues, “no man in any circumstance, should ever tell a lie, yet, in all circumstance he is not obligated to tell the whole truth.”¹⁰⁹ It is evident from Clarke’s observation that willingly withdrawing information is not sinful. After Jesus cleansed the leper, he bid him to “see that you tell no one; but go

¹⁰⁴George Bush, *Notes on Exodus* (1852; repr., Minneapolis, MN: James and Klock, 1976), 20.

¹⁰⁵Tremper Longman, review of *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, by Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27, no. 4 (1984): 503-504.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 137.

¹⁰⁸See 1 Pet 2:22.

¹⁰⁹Adam Clarke, *A Commentary and Critical Notes* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1938), 257-258.

show yourself to the priest.”¹¹⁰ It could be argued that Jesus’ act of mercy shows that the leper’s would-be hearers did not deserve to know all the facts about the case.

The principles given at the beginning of my interpretation are essential to the hermeneutical task. One may arrive at the wrong conclusion if the hermeneutical principles at the outset are inaccurate and incompatible with biblical material, as Kaiser reminds us: “It would be wrong to argue that everyone is automatically and totally successful in the practice of hermeneutical art just because it is an integral part of the gift of communication.”¹¹¹

Kaiser’s admonition “to intentionally deceive a person by withholding information from him”¹¹² seems compatible with the biblical notion of voluntary concealment of truth from those who have no right to know the facts. Inasmuch as Pharaoh was king, it was immoral to murder innocent children. Evidently, Pharaoh did not deserve to know the facts, although the midwives owed it to God to be truthful.

He rightly concludes, “While we agree that Pharaoh has given up his right to know all the facts, this could be a case of legitimate concealment of facts, just as in the case of Saul and Samuel (1Sam 16:1-3), we cannot agree that the midwives had any right to lie. Although Pharaoh does not deserve to know all the truth, the midwives owe it to God to speak the truth.”¹¹³ For Kaiser, both the midwives and Rahab were blessed not because of their lies to their respective kings but because of their faith. The next argument further establishes the “raison d’être” of the current one.

¹¹⁰See Matt 8:4.

¹¹¹Kaiser, “Legitimate Hermeneutics,” 119-120.

¹¹²Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 227.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 273.

Argument 5

The principle of the “antecedent of Scripture” demands that reference be made of similar issues at hand under investigation elsewhere in Scripture.¹¹⁴ “The particular commands of the Old Testament can be universalized because its moral statements were meant to be applied to a universal class of peoples, tribes, and conditions.”¹¹⁵

Critique 5

Kaiser’s understanding and application of the principle of “the antecedent of Scripture”¹¹⁶ seems compatible with his assumption that “the particular commands of the Old Testament can be universalized because the Old Testament moral statements were meant for a universal class of peoples, tribes, and conditions.” Along with promoting the unity of Scripture, he also promotes its analogy. Therefore, the prescriptive narrative must be universalized.

“These particular commands of the Old Testament were prescriptive since they made demands and claims upon their readers inasmuch as all mortals are made in the image of God.”¹¹⁷ The principle of the antecedent of Scripture demands that reference be made of similar issues under investigation elsewhere in Scripture. Since for Kaiser moral statements are rooted in the character of God and were meant to be universalized, one may conclusively concur with Kaiser’s understanding of the moral issue of lying to save life as implied in Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7 as compatible with the biblical material. He further adds, “If a reason for a practice or for what might appear to be a culturally-conditioned command is given and the reason is located in God’s unchanging nature, then

¹¹⁴Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 137.

¹¹⁵Kaiser, *Christian*, 81-84.

¹¹⁶Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 137.

¹¹⁷Kaiser, *Christian*, 81-84.

the command or practice is of permanent relevance for all believers in all ages.”¹¹⁸ Since the command against lying is rooted in the character and nature of God, it follows that lying to save life is biblically unwarranted. The prophet Isaiah tells us that a good interpretation would include “line on line, line on line, a little here, a little there.”¹¹⁹ Isaiah’s understanding as to what a good interpretation entails is akin to Kaiser’s argument that the “Bible is not a potpourri of disconnected readings, canonical or otherwise, but rather does exhibit strong connections and connectors with all of its parts.”¹²⁰ His principles of antecedent Scriptures applied to the texts under consideration certainly contributed to his current conclusion against lying in general and lying to save life in particular. The next argument strengthens this conclusion.

Argument 6

Negative moral principles include affirmatives and affirmatives include negatives.¹²¹ The principle of *ceteris paribus* (“other things being equal”) may be attached to some of these commands.¹²²

Critique 6

The current argument added to the previous ones reinforces Kaiser’s position against lying implied in the two texts under consideration. When one applies his opinion that “negative moral principles include affirmatives and affirmatives include negatives, so that when any sin is forbidden, the opposite duty is urged upon us and when any duty

¹¹⁸Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 117.

¹¹⁹Isa 28:13.

¹²⁰Kaiser and Silva, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (2007), 74.

¹²¹Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 65.

¹²²Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 118.

is encouraged its opposite sin is forbidden,”¹²³ to the moral issue of lying to save life in Exod 1:15-21 and Josh 2:4-6, one would arrive at the same conclusion as with Kaiser that lying to save life is biblically unwarranted. Thus, Kaiser understands that the command against lying must also entail telling the truth at all times. Consequently, the midwives’ or Rahab’s lies are incompatible with the biblical teaching on lying and the character of God.

Although the first part of the current argument concurs with the biblical material, the second on the treatment of exceptions raises some inconsistencies with the biblical material. He argues that, at times, the principle of *ceteris paribus* (“other things being equal”) may be attached to some of these commands.¹²⁴ Furthermore, while those commands based on God’s nature will allow no exception, often there are times when circumstances will alter the application of those laws which rest only on the word of God addressed to a particular time or situation.¹²⁵ By way of explanation, he refers to 1 Sam 21:1-6 where David ate the bread meant for the priests. When a command rooted in the character of God is set aside for another one, this is similar to the “greater good ethics” where the higher command takes over the lower command. Referring to David’s story, Kaiser writes, “David was given the showbread even though the Old Testament law said, ‘Don’t eat the showbread,’ there was an exception that proved the rule.”¹²⁶ Kaiser did not provide additional explanation as to when and how to use it. Scripture nowhere indicates that the one moral command was set aside to give way to another moral command. The Bible simply reports that David asked for bread but the priest did not have ordinary

¹²³Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 65.

¹²⁴Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 118.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*

¹²⁶Kaiser, *Contemporary Preaching*, 100.

bread. The priest's response, "There is some consecrated bread here—provided the men have kept themselves from women," shows that there was a provision in the law which allowed the use of consecrated bread if those receiving it had no prior contact with women.

According to Henry Preserved Smith, "This does not originally mean that only the priest could eat it; like a sacrifice, it could probably be eaten by worshippers when it was duly prepared liturgically. As a safeguard, such persons usually partook of the consecrated food within or near the sanctuary . . . but there seems to be no reason in the nature of the things why it should not be taken away, if only proper care was exercised, if only the young men have kept themselves from women. They ought to eat, is the natural conclusion of the sentence."¹²⁷ As was required at the *giving of the law* (Exod 19:15), and was abundantly clear from the Pentateuchal legislation as well as from Arabic usage, the sexual act in the Hebrew cultus rendered one unfit for any sacred ceremony until proper purification had been carried out.¹²⁸ It is thus evident that consecrated things were not forbidden to those who were holy according to the law. Thus, Kaiser's assertion that one moral command with its roots in the character of God was put aside for another one seems to have no biblical evidence.

While this might seem to be the case with exceptions in general, one cannot argue that whenever an exception occurs, one command is put aside for another command rooted in the character of God. In biblical exceptions, however, one command is not put aside for another, as one is still held accountable for both commands. Exceptions, by their very nature, are not predictable and are never to replace other moral rules.¹²⁹ Therefore,

¹²⁷Henry Preserved Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel*, The International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner, 1902), 198.

¹²⁸Ibid.

¹²⁹For a detailed relationship between moral rules and exceptions, see Miroslav M. Kiš, "Moral Rules and Exceptions," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 30 (Spring 1992): 15-33.

David and his associates had not anticipated eating consecrated bread when they left king Saul's palace. Otherwise, if one holds solely that a certain moral command could be put aside for another command, then some may argue that the command to tell the truth could be laid aside for the command to save life, just as in the greater-good ethics where no one is held accountable for breaking the lower command in order to obey the greater. As one commentator puts it, "There was nothing in the Mosaic regulation forbidding the eating of the bread by those who were ceremonially clean."¹³⁰

With Kaiser's admiration for non-conflicting absolutism as a viable option for resolving moral dilemmas, he posits that the midwives or Rahab should not have lied in order to protect the spies who came to Jericho to survey the land or the babies being born. This view holds that God has given us absolute norms that cannot be altered. Any apparent conflict is due to a lack of knowledge rather than a real conflict in the commands. For a non-conflicting absolutist, the conflict is only apparent; to advocate a conflict of moral absolutes is akin to advocating a conflict in the moral nature of God.

Geisler provides an extensive treatment of non-conflicting absolutism. He notes that non-conflicting absolutism is "perhaps the most influential and widely-held view among Christians."¹³¹ By claiming that both the midwives and Rahab were obligated to tell the truth and save life, Kaiser holds a belief similar to Rakestraw, a non-conflicting absolutist, who maintains that absolute norms never really conflict and thus admit no exceptions.¹³² Therefore, absolute moral laws should be kept at all times, regardless of

¹³⁰"From Women," *SDABC*, 2:557.

¹³¹See Norman L. Geisler, *Options in Contemporary Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), 43. Geisler also labeled it as "unqualified absolutism" in his *Options and Issues*, 79.

¹³²Robert V. Rakestraw, "Ethical Choices: A Case for Non-Conflicting Absolutism," *Criswell Theological Review* 2, no. 2 (1988): 244-245.

the circumstances;¹³³ since God will always provide a way out.¹³⁴ Thus when close attention is paid to the moral absolute, “there will never be a situation in which obedience to one absolute will entail disobedience to or the setting-aside of another absolute.”¹³⁵ Kaiser concurs with Rakestraw when he argues, “Negatives are binding at all times and we must never do anything forbidden even though good may ultimately come from it.”¹³⁶

Commenting on Rahab’s case, John Murray is of the same opinion as Kaiser; he notes that neither Scripture itself nor the theological inferences derived from Scripture provide us with any warrant for the vindication of Rahab’s untruth and there is no evidence that under certain circumstances we may justifiably utter an untruth.¹³⁷ Similarly, John Calvin states, “For those who hold what is called a dutiful lie to be altogether excusable, do not sufficiently consider how precious truth is in the sight of God. It can never be lawful to lie, because that cannot be right which is contrary to the nature of God. On the whole it was the will of God that the spies should be delivered, but he did not approve of saving their life by falsehood.”¹³⁸ From Kaiser’s overall arguments, we note that lying to save life is biblically unwarranted. We proceed with Geisler.

¹³³Erwin W. Lutzer and Mark M. Hanna, *The Necessity of Ethical Absolutes*, Christian Free University Curriculum (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 74.

¹³⁴Gordon Kainer, *Faith, Hope and Clarity: A Look at Situation Ethics and Biblical Ethics* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1977), 126. See also Rakestraw, “Absolutism,” 239-267.

¹³⁵Rakestraw, “Absolutism,” 248. See also J. Robertson McQuilkin, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1989), 13. McQuilkin argues that universal biblical moral norms, when properly understood, cannot and will not conflict under any circumstances.

¹³⁶See Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 64-65, where he also refers to Rom 3:8 to make his case against lying in any form.

¹³⁷Murray, *Conduct*, 139.

¹³⁸See Calvin, *Institutes*, 411-412.

Geisler

Geisler is emphatic that his ethical system known as hierarchicalism¹³⁹ is the best and only adequate ethical view to hold. In his response to Olson's critique of hierarchicalism, Geisler states, "I am more firmly convinced of the basic principles of 'graded absolutism' than when I proposed it 15 years ago."¹⁴⁰ He maintains that this method of resolving moral conflict is comprehensive, consistent, and biblical—the only true ethical approach for Christians. In order to illustrate this, he formulates a strategy for resolving the moral conflicts he perceives in "the real world"¹⁴¹ and in the Bible.¹⁴² Below is an assessment of some of his arguments.

Argument 1

God is not temporal but eternal. He cannot be part of time although He can relate to time as its Creator in the way a cause relates to its effect.¹⁴³

¹³⁹Geisler also used a variety of terms to refer to his ethical system. For example, he calls it "hierarchical ethics." See for example Norman L. Geisler, "In Defense of Hierarchical Ethics," *Trinity Journal* 4 (September 1975): 82-87. He also uses the name "hierarchical ethics," as for example in Norman L. Geisler, "The Origins and Implications of the Greater-Good Ethics," Cassette (Lynchburg VA: Quest Production, 1989); see also Geisler, *Ethics Alternatives*, 193. Geisler calls his ethical system "the greater-good view," "the greater-good ethic," "the greatest-good view." See for example Norman L. Geisler, "Biblical Absolutes and Moral Conflicts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131 (July-September 1974): 226-228; Norman L. Geisler, *The Christian Ethic of Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973), 74-75; Norman L. Geisler, review of *The Morality Gap*, by Erwin W. Lutzer, *JETS* 16 (Spring 1973): 97-101. Geisler also used the term "graded absolutism" to refer to "hierarchicalism" as we see in Geisler, *Contemporary Options*, 81-114; Norman L. Geisler, "A Response to Olson's Critique of Ethical Hierarchicalism," *Evangelical Journal* 4 (Fall 1986): 82-86.

¹⁴⁰Geisler, "Response," 86.

¹⁴¹What does Geisler call the real world? Does he mean that those who disagree with his system are not in the real world?

¹⁴²Geisler, *Ethics Alternatives*, 114-136.

¹⁴³Geisler and Hoffman, *Why*, 84.

Critique 1

Geisler refers to several Bible quotations including the following to show the eternity of God: “I am who I am” (Exod 3:14); “Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Isa 57:15); “No, we speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that had been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began” (1 Cor 2:7); “This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time” (2 Tim 1:9); “God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time” (Titus 1:2); “To the only God our savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen” (Jude 25).¹⁴⁴

Although Geisler refers to these preceding biblical supporting arguments confirming the eternity of God, one must be aware that for Geisler, the God referred to is the timeless God who has no interaction with His creatures in space and time. Hence, his argument is that God is not temporal, but eternal. This notion is contra Exod 25:8 where God dwells in the midst of His people. Geisler’s contention promotes the timeless understanding of God advocated by Greek philosophy. As Frederik Sontag rightly observed, “The most crucial route by which philosophy shapes theology is via the doctrine of God.”¹⁴⁵ According to Norman R. Gulley, the view that God is timeless does not come from Scripture, but originates from such philosophers as Parmenides.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵Frederik Sontag, *How Philosophy Shapes Theology: Problems in the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 128.

¹⁴⁶Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 4-12. For additional reading on the timeless view of God, see John E. Callahan, *Four Views of Time in Ancient Philosophy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1968), 188-193; Plato, *Plato and Parmenides: Parmenides’ Way of Truth and Plato’s Parmenides*, 6th ed., ed. and trans. Francis Macdonald Cornford (1939; repr., London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), 185; L. Fernando Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993).

It is not clear as to whether this notion of the atemporal God influenced his understanding of the texts under consideration. What is clear, however, is that for Geisler, the midwives' and Rahab's lies were commendable. Geisler's conclusion is incompatible with the biblical material. When Geisler suggests that God is not temporal but eternal, is he suggesting that the character or nature of God would not be affected if He condones lying as implied in the two texts under consideration? In the next argument he emphasizes human independence.

Argument 2

“Human beings know what is right and wrong by their own natural intuitions.”¹⁴⁷
“A hierarchy of values is known intuitively.”¹⁴⁸ “Rational and moral creatures know intuitively that love is to be preferred to hate and that some forms of love are higher than other forms.”¹⁴⁹

Critique 2

The current argument highlights Geisler's contention of human autonomy and his intuitive knowledge of a hierarchy of value. Geisler's emphasis on human autonomy denotes his own subjective attempt to resolve moral conflict. On a number of occasions, he emphasizes intuition as a tool for the knowledge of right and wrong. He states that human beings know what is right and wrong by their “own natural intuitions.”¹⁵⁰ He further notes, “A hierarchy of values is known intuitively.”¹⁵¹ Furthermore, he states,

¹⁴⁷James Porter Moreland and Norman L. Geisler, *The Life and Death Debate: Moral Issues of Our Time* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 148.

¹⁴⁸Geisler, *Ethics Alternatives*, 125.

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

¹⁵⁰Moreland and Geisler, *Debate*, 148.

¹⁵¹Geisler, *Ethics Alternatives*, 125.

“Rational and moral creatures know intuitively that love is to be preferred to hate and that some forms of love are higher than other forms.”¹⁵² On another occasion, he asserts that human beings “know intuitively that it is better to love God than man and better to save many lives than one.”¹⁵³ By emphasizing human autonomy through intuition, Geisler promotes an independent human being who has the power or faculty of attaining to direct knowledge of God.

After claiming human autonomy, Geisler challenges his own argument concerning human independence. First, he argues, “The natural law is written in every one’s heart”¹⁵⁴ because God knew that not all men would have access to the truth of Scripture at all times. As Geisler puts it, He inscribed a law upon their hearts.¹⁵⁵ For this reason, Christians are not to decide for themselves what the ethical priorities are. Rather “it is God who establishes the pyramid of values in accordance with his own nature.”¹⁵⁶ Thus, Geisler explains, “The ethics of hierarchy is objective and determined by God and is, therefore, biblical.”¹⁵⁷ Geisler’s conflicting argument is evident and confusing. It shows that Geisler depends upon human autonomy versus human dependence upon God for the knowledge of right and wrong. He queries, “When asked why we believe some things are right and others are wrong, we have our one answer: because God said so.”¹⁵⁸ It is no longer “human know intuitively” as he argued earlier. Rather the source of

¹⁵²Ibid.

¹⁵³Ibid., 126.

¹⁵⁴Norman L. Geisler, “Natural Law and Business Ethics,” in *Biblical Principles and Business: The Foundations*, ed. Richard C. Chewning (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1989), 157.

¹⁵⁵Geisler and Feinberg, *Christian Perspective*, 362.

¹⁵⁶See Geisler, *Contemporary Ethics*, 94; Geisler, *Options and Issues*, 124; Geisler, “Hierarchical Ethics,” 83.

¹⁵⁷Geisler, *Contemporary Ethics*, 94.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 25.

morality is “anchored ultimately and firmly in the unchanging nature of a God of perfect love and justice.”¹⁵⁹ If Geisler believes that the source of morality is anchored in the character of God, then why does he not apply the same argument when the midwives and Rahab told lies to save lives?

On the one hand, Geisler’s notion that one’s knowledge of right and wrong is known intuitively yields his suggested conclusion when applied to the texts under consideration. On the other hand, his other argument that God determines what is right or wrong yields a different conclusion when applied to the texts. Given the biblical claim that one’s “statement be, ‘yes, yes’ or ‘no, no’; and anything beyond these is of evil,” Geisler’s argument that the midwives’ and Rahab’s lies could be justified are biblically incorrect.

In light of the preceding, Geisler’s current arguments are inconsistent with his own system and, consequently, incompatible with the biblical material. Surprisingly, his next argument appeals on the authoritative nature of the Bible on moral issues.

Argument 3

The Bible will be cited as the authority for every conclusion drawn.¹⁶⁰ He further contends that the Bible is the established standard for truth; thus, anything that contradicts the Bible is false.¹⁶¹ Accordingly, he believes “biblical commands do not admit exceptions.”¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 25-26.

¹⁶⁰Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 17.

¹⁶¹See Geisler and Turek, *Atheist*, 375.

¹⁶²Geisler, *Love*, 75. See also Geisler and Brooks, *Skeptics*, 286-287.

Critique 3

For Geisler, “the Scripture’s prohibitions against adultery, lying, murder are binding on all men at all times and all places.”¹⁶³ In the previous argument, Geisler claimed human independence in knowing moral matters but in the current one, he appeals to biblical authority. It is thus evident that human independence in moral matters versus biblical authority creates an irreconcilable conflict. His appeal to the Bible as authority for every conclusion drawn led him to conclude that lying is binding on all men at all times and places. Consequently, one wonders why Geisler could not consider lying implied in the two texts under consideration as binding at all times and places? Are those lies of a different nature? Geisler’s opinion that the Bible is the established standard for truth supports the biblical claim that lying is among the things that God hates.¹⁶⁴ If the source of morality is rooted in the unchanging nature of God as Geisler argues, then the midwives must be wrong for lying and not be exempted for the wrong they did.

It is thus surprising as Geisler himself warns about the dangers of interpreting the Bible based on personal experience. He rightly observes, “Reevaluation of the Bible based on our experience often ends in reinterpreting the Bible based on our experience, rather than interpreting our experience by the Bible. The Bible is our final authority, not our experience.”¹⁶⁵

While Geisler is correct that the command against lying is binding on all men, he is incorrect to suggest that the biblical command admits no exception. He argues, “If there is an exception, the law is not absolute and hence does not reflect the nature of God.”¹⁶⁶ While the notion of absolutes cannot be ignored, one must note that the Bible is

¹⁶³Geisler, *Contemporary Ethics*, 25-26.

¹⁶⁴Prov 12:22.

¹⁶⁵Norman L. Geisler, *Signs and Wonders* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), 110.

¹⁶⁶Geisler, *Options and Issues*, 127.

replete with exceptions. By way of example, the biblical story of King David and his associates who ate of the bread meant for the priest is an illustration of a biblical exception. Since David and his associates did not set out that morning hoping to eat the bread meant for the priest, it could be argued that their actions were classified as an exception. Inasmuch as exceptions are not substitutes for the rule and are not predictable, David's story fits these characteristics.¹⁶⁷ Another example is Jesus' injunction on divorce. The clause, "Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way,"¹⁶⁸ shows that this example fits the characteristic of biblical exceptions.

Josef Fuchs cautions, "The critical thinker must constantly be on guard against the naïve acceptance of a multitude of norms for which there is provided no adequate justification."¹⁶⁹ Then he adds, "Especially should one be defensive about absolutes which conflict with each other."¹⁷⁰ Unfortunately, Geisler has neither heeded his own counsel nor those of his peers on these matters, since ethical hierarchicalism is based partly on his assumed absolutes that conflict with the "facts" of human experience. It is, therefore, an unacceptable method of moral reasoning. This is internally inconsistent with Geisler's thought since he personally warns, "For a Christian, all of life must be interpreted by the final authority of the Bible."¹⁷¹ The next argument expresses Geisler's assumed principles.

¹⁶⁷For an indepth study on exceptions, see Kiš, "Exceptions," 15-33.

¹⁶⁸See Matt 19:8.

¹⁶⁹Josef Fuchs, *Natural Law: A Theological Investigation*, trans. Helmut Rechter and John A. Dowling (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 131. See also William, *Grace Theological Journal*, 28.

¹⁷⁰Fuchs, *Natural Law*, 131.

¹⁷¹Geisler, *Signs and Wonders*, 110.

Argument 4

One is not guilty for doing the greater good, but rather is praised for doing his or her best; one is not guilty for breaking a lower norm, but rather has exemption from it in view of the overriding duty to the higher norm.¹⁷² Remember that the Bible *often* records things of which it does not approve.¹⁷³

Critique 4

Geisler maintains, “When conflict occurs, the greater duty is to fulfil the higher law.”¹⁷⁴ What happens to his statement that biblical commands admit no exceptions? Geisler himself seems to acknowledge the contradiction, and tries to provide additional explanations. First, he queries, “In what sense is this view absolute when it allows that one is not obligated to follow some lower ethical law when they are in conflict with higher ones?”¹⁷⁵ Geisler explains, “There are three ways in which Graded Absolutism is an Absolutism.”¹⁷⁶ It is, first of all, absolute in its source, since it holds that all norms are based on the absoluteness of God in whose nature moral principles are based. Second, each particular command is absolute and should be obeyed absolutely,¹⁷⁷ unless there is a conflict between these absolutes, at which point the hierarchy is used to determine which is the higher relationship that takes precedence.¹⁷⁸ And third, “the very hierarchy of

¹⁷²Geisler, *Ethics Alternatives*, 115.

¹⁷³Geisler rightly observes that the Bible records things it does not approve. For example, David’s sin (2 Sam 11) and Solomon’s polygamy (1 Kgs 11:1-8) are recorded without any sermons condemning them. Similarly, it also records Satan’s lie without approving it (Gen 3:4-5). For detailed examples of how Geisler used those principles to resolve some Bible difficulties, see Geisler and Brooks, *Skeptics*, 166-178.

¹⁷⁴Geisler, *Love*, 74.

¹⁷⁵Geisler, “Biblical Absolutes,” 227.

¹⁷⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷Geisler and Brooks, *Skeptics*, 288.

¹⁷⁸Geisler, *Options and Issues*, 124.

values by which the conflicts are resolved is absolute.”¹⁷⁹ If the very hierarchy of values by which the conflicts are resolved is called “absolute,” as Geisler claims, why are they called “absolute”? For example, Geisler notes, “It is absolutely established in accordance with the nature of God that in an avoidable conflict between God and parent one must put God first.”¹⁸⁰

How could we have hierarchy with absolutes? According to Geisler, God provides the hierarchy of values. In his understanding, this hierarchical absolute is contextual. He then concludes that hierarchical ethics hold that moral laws are absolute in their source, absolute in their sphere, and absolute in their sequence of priority.¹⁸¹ For Geisler, all the norms that flow from God’s character are thus considered absolute in a given context.¹⁸² If, according to Geisler, absolutes are contextual, then hierarchical ethics are closer to Joseph Fletcher’s *Situation Ethics*, which not only contest or deny the validity of absolutes, but also promote that the morality of an act depends on its context.

In William Luck’s judgment, by not denying the plurality of commandments, Geisler offers a way to act in conflict so as not to be guilty of breaking a commandment. In short, Geisler seems to accept both of Fletcher’s premises (multiple commandments and conflicts) and yet deny his conclusion (normative incoherence).¹⁸³ Geisler further asks, “How can anyone resolve an irresolvable conflict of laws (one requiring what another one prohibits)?”¹⁸⁴ Then, “a moral conflict that can be resolved is not really a

¹⁷⁹Ibid.

¹⁸⁰Geisler, *Contemporary Ethics*, 94. See also Geisler, *Options and Issues*, 124.

¹⁸¹Geisler, “Greater-Good.”

¹⁸²Geisler, *Ethics Alternatives*, 132.

¹⁸³William F. Luck, “Moral Conflicts and Evangelical Ethics: A Second Look at the Salvaging Operations,” *Grace Theological Journal* 8 (August 1, 1987): 19-34.

¹⁸⁴Ibid.

moral conflict in the first place”¹⁸⁵ for “if there is a way to resolve the moral conflict on the normative level, then the conflict is only apparent.”¹⁸⁶ Thus, the inconsistency within the hierarchical system cannot be overlooked. If it alters the obligation, it resolves the apparently irresolvable conflict by denying the conflict. If it does not alter the obligation, it retains normative incoherence. Geisler’s system is indeed caught between the two ends. The system has to move one way or the other. Either it has to deny the reality of moral conflict or it has to accept the charge of being an incoherent system insofar as the theory pretends normatively to resolve¹⁸⁷ the irresolvable.¹⁸⁸ William Luck thinks that this is analytically absurd.¹⁸⁹ Geisler attempts to answer this criticism by explaining what he meant by “irresolvable.”¹⁹⁰ However, as Luck points out, “this clarification is a study in shifting linguistic sand.”¹⁹¹ Geisler insists on the “normative” as he himself points out,¹⁹² “We say that the conflict was ‘irresolvable’ only in the sense that there was no ‘give’ in the force of the commands. Neither law ‘backed down’; both continued to demand with the same absoluteness that is theirs by virtue of their grounding in God.”¹⁹³

Then Geisler contends, “God intervenes in love and exempts a man from the demands of the command which cannot be kept without breaking a higher command.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁵Ibid.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., 22.

¹⁸⁷Geisler, *Ethics Alternatives*, 72, 134.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., 118.

¹⁸⁹Luck, “Moral Conflicts,” 19-34.

¹⁹⁰See Geisler, *Ethics Alternatives*, 118.

¹⁹¹Luck, “Moral Conflicts,” 19-34.

¹⁹²Geisler, *Contemporary Ethics*, 99.

¹⁹³Ibid.

¹⁹⁴Ibid.

In other words, God removes the demand so that it does not have the same absoluteness that it had by virtue of its grounding in His nature. However, if God intervenes in love and exempts man from the demands of the command, as Geisler claims, then as William Luck argues,

without irresolvable conflict there is no need to devise a methodology to handle conflict. On the other hand, if it is irresolvable then no method can be devised that will resolve the normative incoherence. Since Geisler's resolution involves the exempting of obligation, it is a normative resolution and therefore reveals that the supposed conflict of norms cannot have been irresolvable in the first place. And since resolvable conflicts are only *prima facie* conflicts, Geisler cannot really be serious about being a conflict theorist. He must be a crypto-non-conflicting absolutist.¹⁹⁵

Nowhere does the internally divergent or conflicting character of Geisler's system become more obvious than in his debate of the difference between exceptions and exemptions.¹⁹⁶ Geisler came up with the definition that "an exception means that lying as such is sometimes right under certain circumstances."¹⁹⁷ Then he continues, "Not so with exemption. Lying as such is always wrong; it is only the life saving activity of which the falsehood may be a necessary concomitant that is good."¹⁹⁸ Grenz recognizes that Geisler is playing a semantic game in which universals are not universally applicable and absolutes are relative.¹⁹⁹ Geisler seeks to differentiate between an exception to a norm (which is always disallowed) and an exemption from a lower norm (which is granted each time a higher norm is obeyed at the cost of a lower one).²⁰⁰ Moreover, non-compliance with the lower norm for the sake of the higher one does not constitute a

¹⁹⁵Luck, "Moral Conflicts," 23-24.

¹⁹⁶Geisler, *Options and Issues*, 127.

¹⁹⁷Ibid.

¹⁹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹⁹Stanley J. Grenz, "The Flight from God: Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling and Universal Ethical Systems," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 14 (Summer 1987): 157-158.

²⁰⁰Ibid. See also Geisler, *Ethics Alternatives*, 130.

transgression, but rather a transcending of the lower norm.²⁰¹ John Tape points out that this attempt at distinguishing between exceptions and exemptions does not solve the problem concerning the absolute nature of moral law,²⁰² for “whether one allows a moral law to be suspended by an exception or an exemption, it is still suspended and such allowance is contradictory to the absolute nature of God’s laws.”²⁰³ As Luck expresses it: “Exemption and exception are two sides of the same coin.”²⁰⁴

Despite Geisler’s explanation of the difference between exception and exemption, the reader is still left with conflicting, unresolved statements. For example, Geisler himself shows us the impossibility of accepting Fletcher’s premises and rejecting his conclusions. He asserts, “Lying as such is always wrong.”²⁰⁵ Then, he claims, “Lying is sometimes right: There are higher laws.”²⁰⁶ These kinds of internal conflicts dispel his claim that Graded Absolutism is internally consistent and revealed by God. Commenting on Geisler’s assertion, William Luck adds, “All of this means that Geisler’s crucial distinction between exemptions and exceptions is utterly opaque. He has not theoretically vindicated any clear distinction between the two things. The fact is that Geisler is here writhing on the horns of the dilemma he has created for himself. He must have real moral conflict, and he must, with his system, resolve real moral conflict. All his squirming simply impales him further on the horns of his dilemma.”²⁰⁷ Consequently, Geisler’s

²⁰¹Geisler, *Ethics Alternatives*, 130.

²⁰²John Tape, “A Case for Conflicting Absolutism” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, New Orleans, LA, 1990), quoted in Ronald A. G. du Preez, “A Critical Study of Norman L. Geisler’s Ethical Hierarchicalism” (Th.D. diss., University of South Africa, 1997), 296.

²⁰³Ibid.

²⁰⁴Luck, “Moral Conflicts,” 25.

²⁰⁵Ibid., 19-34.

²⁰⁶Ibid.

²⁰⁷Ibid.

assertion that morality is rooted in the unchanging nature of God is irreconcilable with his statements that “one is exempted from the unavoidable.”²⁰⁸ Therefore, based on Geisler’s internal inconsistency, the God of truth in whom there is no lie (Heb 6:18) could be viewed as both accommodating and rejecting lies.

In order to prove that “unavoidable moral conflicts exist,”²⁰⁹ Geisler refers to several Bible stories. He argues, “The Abraham and Isaac story in Gen 22 contains a real moral conflict. ‘Thou shall not kill’ is a divine moral command, and yet God commanded Abraham to kill his son, Isaac.”²¹⁰ Then Geisler refers to the stories of Rahab’s lie to save life,²¹¹ Samson’s “divinely approved suicide,”²¹² and the Hebrew midwives’ “divinely approved lying”²¹³ to the king in order to save the male babies.²¹⁴ Geisler refers to Rom 15:4 to argue that “since all things in the Old Testament are ‘for us’ and happened ‘for our example’ (1 Cor 10:11), it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that these were God-approved examples of how He wants us to behave in similar moral conflicts.”²¹⁵ For Geisler, the Bible is replete with persons who were praised by God for following their highest duty in situations of conflict.²¹⁶ He then concludes, “In each case, there was no divine condemnation for the moral law they did not keep but there was rather, evident

²⁰⁸Geisler, *Ethics Alternatives*, 120.

²⁰⁹Geisler, *Contemporary Ethics*, 84.

²¹⁰Ibid.

²¹¹Geisler, *Options and Issues*, 118.

²¹²Geisler, *Contemporary Ethics*, 85.

²¹³Ibid., 91.

²¹⁴Ibid.

²¹⁵Geisler and Feinberg, *Christian Perspective*, 417.

²¹⁶Geisler, *Options and Issues*, 120.

divine approval.”²¹⁷ While Geisler argues that God is the God of truth in whom there is no lie, he also affirms that on some occasions, God approves of lying. By also affirming that the moral law is rooted in the character of the unchanging nature of God, one wonders how lying could be rooted in the character of God. The Bible nowhere affirms that there was divine approval in any of these cases of lying to protect human lives.

Since Geisler acknowledges that the Bible often records things it does not approve, why could he not apply this principle to the two narratives under consideration. It seems evident that Geisler is selective in what he applies to the texts to arrive at his desired conclusion. The next argument elaborates this concept.

Argument 5

Geisler holds that there are many “moral absolutes that often conflict.”²¹⁸ Consequently, lying is sometimes ethically right.

Critique 5

Geisler’s current argument posits for conflicting moral absolutes. Unlike absolutism which maintains that there is only one absolute, Geisler holds that there are many “moral absolutes.”²¹⁹ As a result, lying is sometimes ethically right. However, he rarely explains what he means by the term “moral conflicts,” based on the numerous examples he cites as well as on the few explanations he gives. In Geisler’s understanding, a moral conflict can be defined as an occasion when one is faced with two moral obligations, only one of which it is possible to perform.²²⁰

²¹⁷Ibid.

²¹⁸Geisler, *Options and Issues*, 123.

²¹⁹Ibid.

²²⁰Norman L. Geisler, “Morality: The New and the True,” *Pastor’s Quarterly* 2 (Spring 1969), quoted in Ron A. G. du Preez, *Grappling with the Greater Good* (Berrien Springs, MI: Lithotech, 2005), 125.

For Geisler, the facts or experiences of life provide the evidence that absolute norms conflict. Yet, even though it is clear that the one who believes in the existence of conflicting moral norms can only do so based on an understanding as to what these moral absolutes actually are, nowhere in his work does Geisler take the time to exegetically establish or systematically outline the fundamental moral absolutes that are required for all Christians. Based on his personal interpretation as to what these absolutes are, Geisler concludes that these obligations conflict in the real world and in the Bible.²²¹ On this type of phenomenological approach to ethics, Helmut Thielicke says, “Many theological ethicists allow the development of their work to be controlled, not by the theological inquiry, but by the law of that phenomenology of life.”²²² Thielicke continues, “Even what appears to be the most objective and natural human understanding of that which is observed is not really without its prior assumptions.”²²³ Thielicke’s astute analysis of the phenomenological approach to ethics exposes a fateful flaw of Geisler’s method. Despite Geisler’s repeated declarations that the experiences or “facts” of life prove that moral absolutes conflict, it is clear that these conflicts are due to his own interpretations of the so-called “facts,”²²⁴ which are based on subjective assumptions.

Consequently, Geisler considers the problem of lying to save life to be the conflict of moral absolutes in order to prevent innocent life from being taken. Gordon Olson, in his biblical critique of ethical hierarchicalism, ironically states, “It is an absolute not to commit murder; but it is not an absolute to save a life.”²²⁵ In other words, as David Gill

²²¹See Geisler, “Morality,” 126.

²²²Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, 1:461.

²²³Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, 1:462.

²²⁴Geisler, “Morality,” 126.

²²⁵Gordon Olson, “Norman Geisler’s Hierarchical Ethics Revisited,” *Evangelical Journal* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 12.

has remarked, “Geisler’s dilemmas are often false dilemmas arising from his impositions of worldly definitions of truth on the Bible.”²²⁶

Geisler also assumes that the command to obey civil rulers is unqualified. Again, this assumption ignores basic principles of biblical hermeneutics. Moreover, it may be maintained that the authors of Scripture always assumed that we must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29) whenever obedience to human authority is required. Again and again, Geisler assumes far-fetched and legalistic interpretations of biblical commands in order to give his premise of moral conflict the color of probability. To the discerning eye he only succeeds in raising serious questions about his understanding of Scripture. When he insists that the Scriptures approved of Jephthah’s sacrifice of his daughter in fulfillment of his vow, he goes so far in this direction that he even raises questions about his own hierarchicalism. In endeavoring to show a conflict between the duty to keep one’s oaths and the duty not to kill, he asserts, “The Scripture appears to approve of Jephthah’s keeping the oath to kill.”²²⁷ The implications of this are alarming. If the Scriptures do approve of Jephthah's keeping his oath to kill his daughter, then this contradicts Geisler's own hierarchicalism. This is so because I assume that Geisler does not approve of Jephthah’s keeping his oath. If the Scriptures only appear to approve of his keeping the oath, but do not really approve of it, then of what relevance is this instance to Geisler’s case?²²⁸

In promoting hierarchy of command, he contends that lying is sometimes ethically right.²²⁹ However, he states that lying to save life cannot be based on God as true, but can

²²⁶David W. Gill, review of *Options in Contemporary Christian Ethics*, by Norman L. Geisler, *Transformation* 1 (October /December 1984): 28.

²²⁷Geisler, *Ethics Alternatives*, 118.

²²⁸Luck, “Moral Conflicts,” 19-34.

²²⁹Geisler, *Ethics Alternatives*, 121-122.

be based on God as merciful.²³⁰ With this kind of reasoning, one wonders if there is a tension or conflict within the nature or character of God.

Elsewhere, Geisler states, “When truth and mercy conflict as in a life or death emergency, lying finds its basis in God’s nature as merciful.”²³¹ If they are both rooted in the character of God, then why do they conflict? Because, according to Geisler, there is a hierarchy of moral commands within the nature of God. Thus for Geisler, “justifiable lies are not based in God’s truthfulness but in His mercy.”²³² Are truth and mercy mutually exclusive? When such an assertion is contrasted with Geisler’s previous statement that all ethical commands are in harmony with God’s unchangeable moral character,²³³ it becomes even more obvious that Geisler is engaged in self-contradiction by promoting an illegitimate disjunction between God’s attributes of mercy and truth. For example, he contends that the usefulness of lies does not make them truthful.²³⁴ Then Geisler shifts by arguing that lies are morally justifiable and God does not hold accountable those who could not do otherwise. Geisler suggests that it was impossible to save the spies and tell the truth. However, he further argues that truth is found in correspondence; it is telling it the way things really are.²³⁵ This change reveals Geisler’s contradicting thoughts. Furthermore, his use of Prov 12:22 to suggest that God does not condone lying lips further exposes that contradiction. In addition, he refers to Rom 13:1 to argue that God appoints the existing authorities.

²³⁰Ibid., 129.

²³¹Ibid., 130.

²³²Ibid.

²³³ See Geisler, *Contemporary Ethics*, 9.

²³⁴Geisler and Hoffman, *Why*, 31.

²³⁵Ibid.

These internal inconsistencies within Geisler's own system could lead only to the suggested conclusion on the issue of lying implied in the texts under consideration. Consequently, he also acknowledges that the midwives both lied and disobeyed the Pharaoh, which is against the mandate of Scripture. It becomes more and more convincing that Geisler's conflicting thought leaves his audience baffled: How can one cope with the idea of a flexible God who, at the same time, condones and condemns lying? Could Geisler have it both ways? In his treatment of Josh 2:1-7, Geisler remarks that the Bible nowhere explicitly states that God blessed Rahab for her lying. In fact, God could have blessed her in spite of her lie and not because of it. Since Geisler observes that lying is against the mandate of Scripture, and since he believes that Scripture is the authoritative word of God, then why not sanction it as wrong and biblically unwarranted?

Geisler explains: "Since God's moral character does not change (Mal 3:6; Jas 1:17), it follows that moral obligations flowing from His nature are absolute. That is, they are always binding everywhere on every one." With this background in mind, one understands better why Geisler's contention—that both Rahab's lie to the king of Jericho and the midwives' lie to the king of Egypt are morally justifiable—is also inconsistent with his own principles. How could a moral law incompatible with the character of God revealed in Scripture be morally justifiable? For Geisler, "lying to save life is really an act of mercy, and mercy is an attribute of God."²³⁶ Therefore, according to Geisler, God could not hold them accountable for the unavoidable. While this might seem acceptable within Geisler's ethical system and frame of mind, it would be inconsistent with the character of God portrayed in Scripture.

How could God's moral absolutes be in conflict? Robert V. Rakestraw contends that the character of God is consistent within His own moral nature and it would be

²³⁶Geisler, *Options and Issues*, 129.

jeopardized by any view that places God's absolutes in conflict with each other.²³⁷

Attempting to answer the question as to how lying could flow from the nature of God's truthful nature, Geisler asserts that "lying as such" does not flow from the nature of God, adding that a lie can never be justified by an appeal to Him who is truth.²³⁸ While he thinks and believes that God is truth, yet he still contends that while "lying as such is never justified, lying to save life is."²³⁹ Geisler seems to have a different definition for the word lie,²⁴⁰ and the next argument seems to reveal this.

Argument 6

For Geisler, deception is sometimes necessary to accomplish a good result. Consequently, lying is both "always wrong" and "right when human life is at stake." In addition, one is not held accountable for the unavoidable.²⁴¹

²³⁷Rakestraw, "Absolutism," 255.

²³⁸Geisler, *Options and Issues*, 129.

²³⁹Luck, "Moral Conflicts," 19-34.

²⁴⁰Adams, "Defense," 24. Roy Adams defines a lie as a false statement with wicked or malicious intent to deceive or mislead. This definition raises some significant questions: Is he suggesting that if the intention were not to deceive, it would not be considered a lie? So, in a doctoral dissertation Ora Horn Prouser concurs with Roy Adams's definition of the word "lie." He defines a lie as "an intentionally deceptive message in the form of a statement." Prouser, "Phenomenology," 1-2. According to Prouser, deception entails communicating a message meant to mislead. Is Prouser suggesting that unintentional deceptions are not lies? Is a lie subjective? Or is a lie independent of the one who tells it? Similarly, Sissela Bok defines lies as "any intentionally deceptive message in the form of a statement." Bok, *Lying*, xvii. On the other hand, Ron Du Preez, who carefully investigated three major English dictionaries covering the last century from 1897 through 1997, notes an amazing unanimity regarding the essence of words which address the issue of misleading someone. Whether it is "deceit," "deceive," "falsehood," "lie," or "prevaricate," the same basic idea emerges. It is a deliberate distortion of the truth by word or deed with the objective of misleading, Du Preez, "Holocaust," 206. Conclusively, a lie is a lie regardless of the intention of the one who tells it. Since both Kaiser and Geisler independently refer to Prov 12:22, which rejects lying as distasteful to God, it is beyond the scope of this study to revisit its biblical root since it is not an issue with either scholar.

²⁴¹Geisler, *Ethics Alternatives*, 120.

Critique 6

The current argument applied to the two narratives under consideration reveals why Geisler would conclude that the midwives and Rahab were morally justified for their acts of lying to their respective governmental authorities. His double assertions that “lying is always wrong” and “lying is right when human life is at stake” provide evidence for one of the strongest arguments confirming his internal inconsistencies. Similarly, this double assertion plays a pivotal role in his interpretation of the texts under consideration. With this type of hermeneutical conflict, it is logical that Geisler would argue that neither the midwives nor Rahab were guilty of lying to protect innocent life. However, nowhere does Scripture provide such a principle. It is not clear how Geisler concluded that “one is not held accountable for the unavoidable.”²⁴²

However, the Bible vehemently speaks against “doing evil that good may come” (Rom 3:8). Yet Geisler writes, “Remember that the Bible records things it does not approve of.”²⁴³ Certainly the midwives’ and Rahab’s stories are among the stories which the Bible records while not approving of the immoral acts therein. Geisler also argues, “Misinterpretations consist of ‘failing to understand the context of the passage,’ such as ‘basing a teaching on an obscure passage,’ and ‘neglecting to interpret difficult passages in the light of the clear ones.’”²⁴⁴ If Geisler had applied this principle on the two texts under consideration, he would have interpreted the difficult ones in the light of clear ones. Since lying is forbidden elsewhere in Scripture, his case for lying when human life is at stake would have been biblically unwarranted upon application of the principle.

²⁴²Ibid.

²⁴³Geisler and Brooks, *Skeptics*, 166.

²⁴⁴Geisler and Howe, *When Critics Ask*, 15-17.

To uphold his point of view that lying may be right when human life is at stake, Geisler argues that “there are higher and lower moral laws.”²⁴⁵ He refers to Matt 23:23 and 5:19 where Jesus spoke about the weightier matters of the law and Matt 22:36 where He talked about “the greatest Commandment,” as supporting arguments for his “hierarchy of values.” With this hierarchical principle, Geisler would be correct that the midwives and Rahab were not guilty of lying and were morally justified. Any exegete applying the principle that “there are higher and lower moral laws” and that “one is not guilty for lying in order to protect innocent life”²⁴⁶ would arrive at the same conclusion with Geisler on the issue of lying. However, for Geisler to arrive at such a conclusion would mean that some of his own principles must be discarded. For example, he states that misinterpretations consist in “failing to understand the context of the passage” based on “a teaching on an obscure passage” and “neglecting to interpret difficult passages in the light of the clear ones.”²⁴⁷ This is a situation where I think Geisler has overlooked that Matt 23:23 could be explained in the light of clearer references. The brief exegetical study of Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7 yielded no textual evidence that God approved of the midwives or Rahab’s lie to save the lives of the spies.

A look at the context of Matt 23:23 seems to indicate that Jesus did not advocate higher and lower moral laws. Nolland points out, “Whichever it is, Matthew at the end wants it to be quite clear that a prophet-like focus on issues of justice and mercy is not to be thought of as antithetical to even the minutiae of cultic practice: ‘and not abandoned by [*sic*] the others.’”²⁴⁸ Similarly, “Jesus does not tell the Pharisees and teachers of the

²⁴⁵Geisler, *Options and Issues*, 116.

²⁴⁶Geisler, *Ethics Alternatives*, 122.

²⁴⁷Geisler and Howe, *When Critics Ask*, 15-17.

²⁴⁸Nolland, *Matthew*, 938.

law to neglect the tithes, but their scrupulous attention to ceremonial details consumes so much of their time and attention that they have no time to plan how they will daily exercise the more important matters, such as bringing justice to those who are wronged, mercy to those who do wrong, and faithfulness to those who have departed from the faith.”²⁴⁹ As Geisler remarks, “There is no substitute with comparing Scripture with Scripture.”²⁵⁰ He also argues earlier that one should not neglect “to interpret difficult passages in the light of the clear ones.”²⁵¹ When Geisler states that “no guilt is imputed to the unavoidable,”²⁵² providing they keep the higher moral law, and that a “just God will not hold a person responsible for doing what is ethically impossible,”²⁵³ it becomes evident that Geisler’s understanding is that “in the Old Testament the Hebrew midwives both disobeyed the king and lied to save innocent lives and God blessed them for it.”²⁵⁴ He adds, “There was not only no divine condemnation for the moral law they did not keep, there was rather evident divine approval.”²⁵⁵ If Geisler holds the principle that there was divine approval for their action, then he is consistent with some of his own principles in saying that the midwives and Rahab were right for what they did.

However, once again it is evident that Geisler contradicts himself when he warns, “The Bible records Satan’s lie without approving it (Gen 3:4-5). The sermons are not

²⁴⁹W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 2:295.

²⁵⁰Geisler and Brooks, *Skeptics*, 165.

²⁵¹Norman L. Geisler and Ron Rhodes, *When Cultists Ask: A Popular Handbook on Cultic Misinterpretations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), 15-17.

²⁵²Geisler, *Options and Issues*, 119.

²⁵³*Ibid.*, 120.

²⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 123.

²⁵⁵*Ibid.*

necessary because the condemnation is elsewhere.”²⁵⁶ In other words the Bible records things of which it does not approve. This begs the question as to what the difference is between Satan’s lie and the midwives’ or Rahab’s lie? Why would Geisler decide to acknowledge Satan’s lie as unbiblical and Rahab’s or the midwives’ as biblically justified? Geisler’s explanation is that “it was done to save life.” Perhaps it could be argued that, in Geisler’s system, Satan’s lie could have been recognized and justified had it been to save life.

The preceding arguments and critique have pointed out several inconsistencies within Geisler’s ethical system. His conflicting principles have led him to the conclusion that the midwives’ and Rahab’s lie were morally justified. It is therefore evident that anyone applying some of his principles could arrive at the same conclusion as Geisler. It was also clear that nowhere in Scripture do we have evidence of some of the principles he used to arrive at his desired conclusion of the two texts of Scripture.

Before I conclude this chapter and propose the reasons for Kaiser’s and Geisler’s divergent views on the interpretation of the same texts related to moral issues, it is important to provide a summary assessment of Kaiser and Geisler.

Summary

From close examination of both Kaiser’s and Geisler’s books and materials, it seems that they have not engaged themselves in thorough exegetical analysis and word studies of the two passages of Scripture under consideration as the exegetical process would normally require. After reading their interpretation of the texts under consideration, the readers who were looking for a detailed exegesis of the two passages under investigation would have been disappointed. Thus, a brief exegetical study of

²⁵⁶Geisler and Brooks, *Skeptics*, 166.

Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7 has been provided above. As such, no textual evidences support the view that lying to save life is biblically warranted.

Although they both differ in background—Kaiser, a biblical theologian, and Geisler, a systematic theologian—they have both outlined their interpretation with clarity so that the reader cannot miss their divergent views on the issue of lying to save life. They both have a keen interest in the subject of lying as they both answer questions related to Bible difficulties.²⁵⁷ However, it seems that they both employed their ethical and textual hermeneutical principles to arrive at their conclusions. It is interesting to note that despite their differences, they both share evangelical roots.

Neither Geisler nor Kaiser contends that God is a liar. They both agree that the God of the Bible is the God of truth. Both scholars refer to the unchanging nature of the character of God. For Geisler, God condones lying when the human life is at stake since one is not accountable for the unavoidable; but for Kaiser, we cannot say that protecting innocent life is a greater good than the demand to tell the truth always. Scripture nowhere advocates or allows for such a hierarchy.

On the one hand, Geisler thinks that God could condone lying and yet not be a liar. On the other hand, Kaiser, as if responding to Geisler, argues that this cannot be the case. To do so, he argues, would pit part of God's nature against other parts of His nature. To say that lying is a lesser evil than involuntary implication in murder is again an artificial and subjective construct. We must not form our own subjective hierarchies or personal priorities in assigning what we believe are the greater good or lesser evil.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷See Kaiser, *Hard Sayings*; Kaiser, *More Hard Sayings*; Kaiser et al., *Hard Sayings*; Geisler and Howe, *Big Book*; Geisler and Howe, *When Critics Ask*; Geisler and Brooks, *Skeptics*; Geisler and Rhodes, *When Cultists Ask*.

²⁵⁸Kaiser, *Hard Sayings*, 97.

In connection with Rahab's lie, Geisler says: "It seems that God blessed her because of it, not in spite of it."²⁵⁹ This statement is controverted by Geisler himself, where he recognizes the biblical truth that "God sometimes blesses us in spite of ourselves and he is able to bring good out of evil (Gen 50:20; Rom 8:28)."²⁶⁰

Regarding Rahab's actions, Kaiser notes that "Romans 3:8 warns us not to say, 'let us do evil that good may result.' Neither should we argue, especially from a descriptive or a narrative passage, that a text validates deceit under certain conditions."²⁶¹ For Kaiser, to argue in favor of deception in this manner would be "poor exegesis and theology."²⁶² Kaiser notes,

We cannot say that protecting innocent lives is a greater good than the demands always to tell the truth. Scripture nowhere advocates or allows for such hierarchy. To do so would pit part of God's nature against other parts of his nature. To say that lying is a lesser evil than being involuntarily implicated in murder is again an artificial and subjective construct. We need to follow all of God's word and that word involves respect for both life and truth.²⁶³

Furthermore, Kaiser warns, "We must not form our own subjective hierarchies or personal priorities in assigning what we believe is the greater good or lesser evil."²⁶⁴ Rather, it must be recognized that, according to the written word of God, truth-telling "is a universal responsibility for all times, all peoples, in all places."²⁶⁵

Concerning the story of the midwives, Geisler declares, "We have an even clearer case of divinely approved lying to save life."²⁶⁶ He reasons that since "the text explicitly

²⁵⁹Geisler, *Options and Issues*, 122.

²⁶⁰Geisler and Feinberg, *Christian Perspective*, 397.

²⁶¹Kaiser, *Hard Sayings*, 96.

²⁶²Ibid.

²⁶³Ibid., 97.

²⁶⁴Ibid.

²⁶⁵Ibid.

²⁶⁶Geisler, *Options and Issues*, 122.

says following their deception that ‘because the midwives feared God, God established households for them’²⁶⁷ and since all things in the Old Testament happened as examples for us, “it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that these were God-approved examples of how he wants us to behave in similar moral conflicts.”²⁶⁸ Acknowledging that these women lied to the king, Kaiser queries, “Does the text gives us warrant to speak an untruth under the proper conditions?”²⁶⁹ Kaiser explains that “this suspicion cannot be sustained in the text.”²⁷⁰ Pack rightly attests that “nowhere in the text is their conversation with Pharoah endorsed.”²⁷¹ Thus, contrary to Geisler’s assertion, there is no evidence of divine approbation for using deception in this pericope.²⁷²

On the issue of moral absolutes, Kaiser disagrees with Geisler on this point. According to Kaiser, Rahab or the midwives owed it to God to tell the truth and save life. For Geisler, the laws of creation are not inviolable, especially when something is done for the good of humanity, but for Kaiser, such a hierarchy is a subjective construct.²⁷³

From the arguments, critiques, and summary assessment of both Kaiser and Geisler, their divergent views are obvious and evident. The assessment of their hermeneutical principles further exposed their divergent opinions on the issue of lying. Both scholars agreed that the Bible reports things it does not approve of. Admittedly, Henry Wirker notes that “descriptive passages relate what was said or what happened at a

²⁶⁷Geisler, “Response,” 85.

²⁶⁸Geisler and Feinberg, *Christian Perspective*, 427.

²⁶⁹Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 273.

²⁷⁰Ibid.

²⁷¹Rolland W. Pack, “An Examination of Norman Geisler L. Geisler’s Ethics of Hierarchy” (Master’s thesis, Harding College, 1979), 122.

²⁷²I am indebted to Du Preez for his “Critical Study,” 244-247.

²⁷³Kaiser, *Hard Sayings*, 95-97.

particular time without necessarily commenting on the veracity of the statement or the appropriateness of the action. . . . When Scripture describes human actions without comments, it should not necessarily be assumed that those actions are approved by God.”²⁷⁴

The divergence of opinion implied in the two passages of Scripture under consideration has been examined throughout this study. I am now in a position to suggest the reasons as to why two scholars with a shared theological heritage would have arrived at different interpretations of the same texts of Scripture.

²⁷⁴Henry A. Virkler and Karelynn Gerber Ayayo, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 88.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Findings

This study was concerned with whether God was a being of integrity, a concern resulting from Kaiser's and Geisler's divergent conclusions on their understanding of Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7 that address the issue of lying to save life. The outcome of this conflict of interpretation would either pose a threat or vindicate the view of the integrity of God as revealed in Scripture. The issue was the morality of lying to save life as implied in the two texts of Scripture mentioned above.

Two conflicting interpretations resulted from the understanding of the two texts under consideration. While Kaiser contended that God cannot lie nor condones lying in any circumstance, Geisler affirms that, occasionally, God may condone lying when human life is at stake. Consequently, one is left to wonder whether God was a liar because one scholar portrayed Him as condoning lies without being a liar while the other would portray Him as not condoning lies in any form. Before I propose the causes of their divergent interpretations, it is important to present a brief synopsis of this research.

The first chapter reemphasized the prevalence of difficult texts in the Bible. As a result, this led some to believe that God condones lying on some occasions, especially when a human life is at stake (Geisler), while others maintain that God does not condone lying in any form (Kaiser). The historical survey has shown the intensity of these two opposing views and how scholars have pondered the moral issue of lying in general and lying to save life in particular for centuries. Therefore, the opposing views referred to

earlier explain the divergent views on the issue of lying to save life. Hence, Kaiser and Geisler's conflicting views on the issue were not surprising. As a result, regardless of which view one subscribed to, the issue of the integrity of God has been challenged. How could God both condemn and condone lying?

In order to explain the underlying reasons for these two divergent views on the issue of lying as implied in Exod 1:15-21 and Josh 4:1 -7, the second chapter determined the meaning of the word integrity in the Bible. After an overview of terms in both Testaments, the Hebrew word **תָּמִים** as related to God, His actions, and/or attributes was analyzed contextually, exegetically, and semantically. This chapter established that the word **תָּמִים** meant "without blemish or spotless" when it applied to sacrificial animals and meant "whole, sound, healthful, flawless" when applied to God. The chapter thus established that God's integrity was flawless; therefore, the accusation that He uses deceit to achieve His purpose was biblically unwarranted.

In order to give more substance to the claim that God is a being of integrity, the third chapter extended the analytical scope of the word **תָּמִים** to certain attributes of God. A systematic analysis of the attributes of truthfulness, trustworthiness, holiness, and mercy was done both biblically and theologically. The analysis of these attributes together with the exegetical study of the word **תָּמִים** confirmed that the God of the Bible is a being of integrity.

In order to make available the reasons for both scholars' divergent interpretations, the fourth chapter provided a report of their presuppositions, hermeneutical principles, and interpretations of the two texts under consideration. This report provided the different presuppositions and hermeneutical principles at the genesis of their understanding of the texts.

The fifth chapter proposed a brief exegetical study of Exod 15-22 and Josh 2:1-7 and critically analyzed the presuppositions and hermeneutical principles that were at the genesis of their interpretation of the texts. The assessment focused on internal

consistency and consistency with the biblical material. Their divergent views were more and more apparent and evident. While for Geisler, a lie would be morally justifiable when human life is at stake, for Kaiser this was not the case. Naturally, this led to the question of why two scholars with a shared theological heritage would arrive at different conclusions while considering the same biblical texts.

In light of the preceding synopsis, the following remarks provide the conclusion and summary of this research.

1. Scriptures confirm that God is a being of integrity and, admittedly, he is immutable, truthful, trustworthy, holy, and merciful. The Bible portrays Him as the God of truth in whom there is no lie.

2. Both Kaiser and Geisler agree that the Bible is the authoritative word of God and is the standard by which all are evaluated. God is the author of an inerrant Scripture. The nature of God, the authority of Scripture, and, by implication, the authority of God would be questioned if someone accused Him of using deceit or dubious actions to accomplish His will. For Kaiser as well as Geisler, the God of the Bible is pure, holy, perfect, and unchangeable.

3. For both scholars, God is not a liar. They both acknowledge that Scripture rejects lying in all forms. As I have suggested in my critical analysis, their differences in thought and conflicting hermeneutical principles provide the genesis of their divergent conclusions. Kaiser believes that lying to save life is morally wrong, while Geisler contends that deceptions are morally justifiable, especially when human life is at stake. Although not exhaustive, below are briefly outlined some of the major principles deemed to have led both scholars to their respective conclusions.

4. Although these principles were already stated above, it is important to note that their application of these principles to the two texts certainly contributed to the divergent conclusions of Geisler and Kaiser. I begin with Kaiser.

- a. “The lack of direct condemnation of the midwives and Rahab does not mean commendation.”¹
- b. “The Bible is to be interpreted with the same rules as applying to other books.”²
- c. “Negative moral principles include affirmatives and affirmatives include negatives, so that when any sin is forbidden, the opposite duty is urged upon us and when any duty is encouraged, its opposite sin is forbidden.”³
- d. “The Old Testament moral statements were meant to be applied to a universal class of peoples, tribes, and conditions.”⁴
- e. “The commands of the Old Testament are prescriptive and make demands and claims upon their readers because all mortals are made in the same image of God.”⁵
- f. “The Bible is not a potpourri of disconnected reading . . . but rather does exhibit strong connections and connectors with all of his parts.”⁶
- g. “The Ten Commandments are the expression of the character of God from which hermeneutical principles take root.”⁷

¹Kaiser, *Christian*, 61.

²Kaiser, “Legitimate Hermeneutics,” 119.

³Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 65.

⁴Kaiser, *Christian*, 81-84.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Kaiser and Silva, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (2007), 74.

⁷Kaiser, *Christian*, 77.

h. “Reporting or narrating an event in Scripture is not to be equated with approving, recommending, or making that action or characteristic normative for emulation by all subsequent readers.”⁸

For Geisler, several principles account for his understanding and conclusions when applied to the texts under consideration.

a. “One is not guilty for breaking a lower norm, but has exemption from it in view of the overriding duty to the higher norm.”⁹

b. “No guilt is imputed to us for the unavoidable; for God does not hold the individual responsible for personally unavoidable moral conflicts, providing they keep the higher law.”¹⁰

c. “Lying to save life is morally justifiable when human life is at stake.”¹¹

d. Lack of condemnation means commendation.¹²

e. “One is not obligated or held accountable for breaking the lower command when human life is at stake.”¹³

⁸Kaiser, *OT Ethics*, 283.

⁹Geisler, *Ethics Alternatives*, 115. In applying this principle Geisler concludes that “God would not hold Rahab responsible for this unavoidable moral conflict. A person cannot be held responsible for not keeping a lesser law in order to keep a higher obligation.” See Norman L. Geisler and Thomas Howe, *Making Sense of Bible Difficulties: Clear and Concise Answers From Genesis to Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 61-62.

¹⁰Geisler, *Contemporary Ethics*, 87. He notes elsewhere, “Lying is always wrong except when it conflict with saving a life.” See Norman L. Geisler and Randy Douglass, *Integrity at Work: Finding Your Ethical Compass in a Post-Enron World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 46.

¹¹Geisler, *Ethics Alternatives*, 131.

¹²This statement is akin to Geisler’s assertion that “no guilt is imputed for the unavoidable.” Geisler, *Contemporary Ethics*, 87.

¹³Geisler, *Options and Issues*, 119,

5. Therefore, the evidence of this research shows clearly that Kaiser’s understanding of Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7—at least in its conclusions that both the midwives and Rahab were not blessed because of their lies—seems compatible with the biblical understanding of the same texts—as evidenced in the brief exegetical analysis provided earlier in chapter 5 of this dissertation. The Bible is replete with biblical texts that reject lying as hateful to God as evidenced throughout this study. The Bible claims that God does not lie,¹⁴ nor approve of lying.¹⁵ Accordingly, Exod 1:15-22, Josh 2:1-7, Heb 11, and Jas 2:25 do not claim that Rahab or the midwives were commended for their lies, but rather for their faith.¹⁶ Walter Kaiser’s rejection of lying is further expressed as he queries, “Does God approve of dubious actions to accomplish his will in certain perilous situations? Can strong faith go hand in hand with the employment of methods which are alien to the integrity of God’s character and word?”¹⁷ Contra Geisler, he further states, “We cannot say that protecting innocent lives is a greater good than the demand always to tell the truth. . . . To do so would pit part of God’s nature against other parts of his nature.”¹⁸

¹⁴As noted earlier, “The Old Testament characterizes Yahweh as a God of truth (Ps 31:6) or faithfulness (Deut 32:4), who is just and right (Deut 32:4; Pss 92:16; 119: 137; 145:17), and without iniquity (Deut 32:4; Ps 92:16). His word and judgments are straight (Ps 33:4) and true (Ps 19:10). He does not lie, because He is not a man that He should lie or change His mind (Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29); what He says He will do, and what He promises He will bring to pass (Num 23:19). The New Testament also characterizes God’s word as truth (John 17:17), denies that there is any unrighteousness in Him (Rom 9:14), and speaks of him as *ho apseudeis Theos*. “God does not” and “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). Finally, the author of Hebrews claims that when the divine promise is confirmed by the divine oath, these two things make it impossible for God to prove false (Heb 6:18).”

¹⁵Among the things God hates is “lying lips.” See Prov 12:22.

¹⁶Jas 2:25 states Rahab was justified not because she lied but because “she received the messengers and sent them out by another way.”

¹⁷Kaiser, *Hard Sayings*, 95.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 97.

In light of the previous observations, we can safely conclude that the overall biblical principle to reject lying in any form is akin to Kaiser's understanding and treatment of the issue of lying in order to save life implied in the two texts. Kaiser's principle may apply here as well. Agreeing with Kaiser's understanding of Exod 1:15-21 and Josh 2:1-7 need not imply that we endorse all of his hermeneutical principles. In the assessment section, some of his conflicting hermeneutical principles have been noted.

6. Unlike Kaiser, it has also become evident that Geisler's understanding of Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7 addressing the ethical issue of lying to save life is quite incompatible with the biblical understanding or treatment of the issue of lying in general and to save life in particular. Geisler's argument that "lying may be morally justifiable" is based partly on his ethical principles mentioned above as guidelines for decision-making. However, he rejects the view that such a lie can never be justified by an appeal to God who is truth. Such justification of a lie, he argues, is an act of mercy. While this seems consistent with Geisler's graded absolutism, it is, however, inconsistent with the biblical prohibition against lying in any form. God is both merciful and truthful. Consequently, Geisler's submission that lying to save life is akin to being merciful is biblically unwarranted; for both mercy and truth are rooted in the character of God and are not mutually exclusive. Among those who do not share Geisler's opinion that lying to save life is biblically unwarranted are Roland W. Pack and William F. Luck.

For Roland W. Pack, Geisler's ethical system has been evaluated and considered as an unacceptable method for ethics because it is individualistic, naturalistic, humanistic, situational, relativistic, utilitarian, and antinomian.¹⁹ Accordingly, William Luck concluded that Geisler's ethical system is incoherent, inconsistent, self-contradictory, and

¹⁹Pack says that it entails a contextual or situational approach to ethics. See Pack, "Examination," v.

unscriptural.²⁰ Furthermore, he argues that “Geisler’s method shows a failure to avoid situationism.”²¹ Hierarchicalism is a confused conglomeration of several different methodologies, all pulling against each other but held together by the misuse of terms.²² This assessment is not alien to Geisler’s own beliefs as he states, “An act changes its moral value from evil to good when used for a good purpose.”²³ Although lying is morally justifiable within Geisler’s system, it is incompatible with the biblical teaching on lying.

7. If according to Geisler lying in order to save life is morally justifiable, it would be akin to the situation ethics advocated by Joseph Fletcher promoting “the ethics of love” in which “the end always justifies the means.”²⁴ As Geisler acknowledges, “Real moral conflicts exist and as a result, higher laws must take precedence over lower ones.” Therefore, according to Geisler, “one can guiltlessly ignore lower law.” By so doing, Geisler creates a dichotomy in the law of God and by extension creates a disjunction with God Himself as he rightly points out, “Either a person accepts the authority of Scripture or he must impugn the integrity of the Son of God.”²⁵ Geisler’s understanding of the morality of lying to save life does indeed “impugn” the character of God and His integrity.

²⁰Luck, “Moral Conflicts,” 26. This conclusion conflicts with Geisler’s ambitions for his ethical method: “My hope is that Evangelicals will increasingly see the value of Graded Absolutism. It is not only consistent with biblical Christianity, but also provides a viable answer to many problems in both Scripture and society.” Geisler, *Contemporary Ethics*, 114. See also McQuilkin, *Introduction*, 162. McQuilkin argues that it has some similarities to situationism in method and outcome.

²¹Luck, “Moral Conflicts,” 19.

²²Ibid., 32. He suggests the different systems that Geisler could hold if he were to restate his method, eliminating contradicting elements and clarifying key terms.

²³Geisler, *Contemporary Ethics*, 113.

²⁴Fletcher claims that situation ethics aims at a contextual appropriateness—not the good or the right but the fitting. See Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1966), 27-28.

²⁵Geisler, *Apologetics*, 368.

The following statements reveal the causes of Kaiser's and Geisler's divergent interpretations of Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7. As these scholars address the moral issue of lying to save life, their differing hermeneutical principles lead them to dissimilar conclusions. It is therefore evident that their divergent set of hermeneutical principles could only yield divergent interpretations. Despite the few conflicting ones mentioned above, Kaiser's hermeneutical principles would tend to promote the biblical view of the integrity of God and the Scriptural teaching on lying. On the contrary, Geisler's hermeneutical principles undermine the morality of the Bible and God Himself. Although Geisler claims to uphold the authority of Scripture, his view that God condones lying when human life is at stake is clearly inconsistent with the biblical teaching on lying and creates a disjunction within the nature of God.

Finally, this study posits that God is a being of integrity in whom there is no lie. He, consequently, does not use deceit to achieve His purpose. Accordingly, any attempt to use dishonesty or deceit to achieve one's purpose is biblically unwarranted. Kaiser's and Geisler's different interpretations of Exod 1:15-22 and Josh 2:1-7 provide just another example of how hermeneutical principles that are alien to Scripture could project a different view of God and morality.

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