THE OLD TESTAMENT USE OF AN ARCHETYPE: THE TRICKSTER

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Trickery appears to be a common trait of human culture. For not only does it form an important part of several human activities such as battle and sports strategies as well as humor and entertainment, but wherever the traveler goes he must be acutely aware of trickery. It is small wonder, then, that the antics of the trickster are given literary expression in many parts of the world. Indeed, one may say that the trickster forms an important archetype common to the writings of numerous cultures.¹

I. TRICKERY IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

The trickster archetype is particularly prominent in primitive cultures. Thus in the folklore of the Central African Republic one encounters the tales of Tere. Of divine descent, Tere is the implementor of all that contributes to mankind's wellbeing. He is also a trickster. In one tale Tere succeeds in escaping a crocodile by convincing it that if he lets him go, Tere will make the crocodile as beautiful as the bird that happens to be flying overhead. Freed from the crocodile's grasp, Tere proceeds to paint one of the crocodile eggs and convinces him that the hatched reptiles from all the eggs will be as beautiful as this one. Tere assures the crocodile and his family that he will also make them beautiful. All the crocodile gets for his trouble, however, is the loss of all of the crocodile community's eggs and being duped into transporting Tere across the river where he had first captured him.

In yet another tale Tere's quest for a wife is rebuffed by the girl's parents who promise him their daughter on the condition that he bring a leopard's whiskers to them. Resourceful to the end, Tere persuades a leopard that he can make him beautiful if the leopard submits to a beauty treatment that involves being enclosed in a basket. When the basket is tightly woven around the leopard, Tere presents him to his beloved's parents, animal and whiskers alike. So it is that he obtains his wife.

Both tales are also aetiological, the former explaining why crocodiles have a hatred for men and the latter how the leopard got his spots from the

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¹ For preliminary discussion of archetypes, see L. Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1984) 187–193; *Words of Delight* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 25–29, 48–51. For the trickster and trickery, see "Deception," "Trickster," in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (eds. L. Ryken et al.; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998) 200, 894–895.

sun shining through the holes in the basket. In addition to this, the latter tale closes with a moral: "If you put your heart on being beautiful for your own gain, you too may become captured." ²

Trickery is also known in the ancient literature of the Mediterranean world. Particularly impressive are the cunning and trickery of Odysseus in the ten-year struggle that he and his men endure as they attempt to reach home after the Trojan War. In personal communication Michael Travers points out one instance:

When caught in Cyclops' cave, he has his men cling to the belly wool of the rams as they leave the cave in the morning. When Cyclops (blinded by Odysseus) runs his hands along the rams' backs on their way out, he finds no men. Odysseus himself regards this as a particularly poignant incident of trickery when he taunts Cyclops after his men are free.

Again, when he has arrived back at Ithaca and finds his wife beset by importunate suitors, Odysseus uses trickery to win the day. He disguises himself as a low class man and does not tell Penelope his identity. He mingles among the suitors, wins a contest of strength, and defeats the suitors *en masse*. The neat twist of irony in this disguise is that his wife is not sure whether to believe him to be her long-lost husband and, until he can identify a characteristic of their bedroom, does not accept him as Odysseus.³

Also to be noted is Virgil's updating of Homer's Iliad. In book II of the Aeneid he tells of the fall of Troy by the trickery of the famous Trojan Horse. Feigning the lifting of the siege, the Greeks leave behind a gigantic wooden horse as a thank offering to Athena. They retreat to their ships and pull away from the shore. Although the Trojans at first suspect Greek trickery and mistreat the horse, they are deceived by the lies of a certain Greek named Sinon who had allowed himself to be captured. Adding to their confusion is the coming of two huge sea serpents who kill the Trojan priest of Neptune. Now convinced by Sinon's words and afraid of having committed a trespass against a sacred offering, they bring the horse through the walls of the city. A night of celebration follows. As the weary Trojans sleep, Sinon lets out the Greeks hidden in the horse's hollow belly. They slay the sentries and the returning Greeks take the city.

Trickery is also reported in the Sultantepe Tablets in the tale of the Poor Man of Nippur. Cheated out of his goat, his last possession, by an unscrupulous mayor who accuses him of attempting a bribe, Gimil-Ninurta is driven out of the mayor's house. "Gimil-Ninurta, on passing out of the gate, addresses the porter and tells him to inform the mayor that he will take three-fold vengeance for the insult."

Having obtained the rental of a royal chariot from the king, the poor man returns as a feigned representative of the crown. He is now ready to take his vengeance and does so by managing to beat the mayor three times. A. Leo Oppenheim summarizes the poor man's dramatic actions: "The three

² P. Strong, African Tales (Mogadore, Ohio: Telcraft, 1992) 33.

³ For details, see especially books 10 and 21–23 of the Odyssey. Dr. Travers is Professor of English at Mississippi College.

⁴ O. Gurney, "The Sultantepe Tablets (continued)," Anatolian Studies 6 (1956): 145–164.

beatings are cleverly connected: first, the rogue, appearing in state in the borrowed royal chariot and acting as if he were a person of importance, pretends that gold he was carrying was stolen in the mayor's house and uses this pretense to beat the mayor; next, as a physician, he comes to treat the mayor's wounds, which allows him to inflict additional pain; lastly, he uses a lie to lure the mayor from his house and beat him outside the city wall."⁵

II. TRICKERY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT WORLD

1. As battle strategy. One of the richest sources of trickery is the OT (plus the apocrypha). It often takes the form of a ruse de guerre. Thus Ai is taken by tricking the men of the city into thinking that Joshua's troops are retreating. When the forces of Ai pursue the fleeing Hebrews, other Hebrew troops come out from ambush, take and burn the city, and join Joshua in a pincer movement that wipes out the trapped forces of Ai (Josh 8:1–29).

The story of Gideon's brave band of 300 reaches its climax with the men strategically placed in three groups, all equipped with horns and clay pots. At a given signal they blow their horns and break their pots. Then, holding blazing torches in their left hands and horns in their right, they shout, "A sword for the Lord and Gideon" (Judg 7:20, NLT). Set into panic by the clamor all around them, the Midianites attack one another. Those that survive flee only to find themselves chased by Israelites from several tribes. Other examples of trickery as a *ruse de guerre* can be seen in Elisha's leading the blinded Aramaean troops to be entrapped in Samaria (2 Kgs 6:15–20), the Lord's subsequent tricking of other invading Aramaeans into thinking that they heard the din of hostile forces surrounding their camp (2 Kgs 7:6–7), and the intertestamental story of Judith.

In this latter case the commander of the invading Assyrian hosts, inflamed with passion, loses his head over the lovely Judith. Judith has tricked him into thinking that she had deserted her Jewish people and that the two of them would spend a romantic evening together in Holofernes's tent. Rather, as he lies stretched out on his bed overcome with wine, she cuts off his head with his own sword. Because she and her maid had established the practice of going to the edge of camp to pray at night, the guards pay no attention to them. Thus they are able to make their way back to their town with Holofernes's head. There she explains to the people what had happened: "As the Lord lives, who has protected me in the way I went, it was my face that tricked him to his destruction" (Jdt 13:16). When the Assyrians discover the headless body of their slain leader and realize that Judith has tricked them, they are greatly afraid and scatter (15:2).

⁵ A. L. Oppenheim, Ancient Mesopotamia (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964) 274. With regard to another Mesopotamian story, some have suggested that the water serpent's stealing of Gilgamesh's newly acquired plant which restores a man's youth was a trick of the gods to demonstrate that immortality was not the lot of mere mortals. This is by no means certain, however, for the episode is presented in a straightforward telling without any hint of divine trickery. For translation and discussion, see N. K. Sanders, The Epic of Gilgamesh (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964). For the ramifications of the Gilgamesh epic for OT studies, see A. Heidel, The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

In this vein as well is the account of Jael's tricking of Sisera, commander of the defeated Canaanite forces at the Battle of Ta'anach (Judg 4–5). Fleeing for his life, he was making his way toward Hazor and safety when a certain Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite, urged him to turn aside to her tent to rest and hide (Judg 4:17–18). Overcome with fatigue and warmed by a drink that Jael has supplied, Sisera falls fast asleep. He dies of a piercing headache. For Jael fastens his head to the ground with a tent peg driven through his temple (Judg 4:19–21; 5:24–27). ⁶

Ehud's assassination of Eglon (Judg 3:15–25) may also be cited. Concealing his dagger under the garment on his right side, the left-handed Ehud utilizes ancient protocol to his own advantage so as to get close to the overweight king. Having done so, he plunges the weapon so far into the king's belly that it could not be seen. With the grisly deed accomplished, he closes the door to the king's chamber and makes good his escape.

An instance of group deception may be seen when the citizens of Gibeon trick Joshua into thinking they have come from a far country. Therefore, rather than exterminating them as people of the land of conquest, Joshua and the Israelites are tricked into making a pact of peace with them (Joshua 9).

Perhaps also to be considered here is Rahab who tricks the men that the king has sent to apprehend the Hebrew spies by saying that the spies had left and intimating that they were probably heading back to their own camp (Josh 2:1–7). Of course this deception was also designed to gain her own safety when the Hebrew armies would take the city.⁷

2. For personal safety or welfare. Rahab's trickery of the spies' pursuers introduces another category of trickery where the deception is designed to insure a person's safety or welfare. Here could be mentioned Abram's passing off of Sarai as his sister on two occasions (Gen 12:10–13; 20:1–18) and Isaac's similar deception when famine forced him and Rebekah to seek refuge among the Philistines (Gen 26:7). David later sought asylum among the Philistines. On one occasion, in order to save his life he tricked the king and his servants into thinking he was insane (1 Sam 21:10–15).⁸ A case of trickery for personal welfare or gain may be seen in Tamar's tricking of Judah into believing that she is a prostitute in order to gain that which was rightfully hers (Gen 38:13–30; cf. Jub. 41:23–26).

In personal communication Harvey Hartman of Liberty University suggests yet another possible OT occurrence of trickery: the Lord's decree to make the advice of Ahithophel distasteful to Absalom so as to allow David time to regroup his forces after his son's rebellion had driven him out of Jerusalem (2 Sam 17:14). See further the discussion under *Concluding Considerations*.

⁶ See R. D. Patterson, "The Song of Deborah," in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg* (eds. John S. and Paul D. Feinberg; Chicago: Moody, 1981) 123–160.

⁷ Possibly also to be included is the Lord's miraculous supplying of water to the combined forces of Israel, Judah and Edom which the Moabites mistook for blood. Thinking that the three allies had come to a falling out that led to their mutual slaughter, they rushed to claim the spoils from their camp. They were sadly mistaken, however, and soundly defeated (2 Kgs 3:20–25). For details, see R. D. Patterson and H. J. Austel, "1, 2, Kings," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (eds. F. E. Gaebelein et al.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988) 4:180–181.

⁸ Here may also be included Jeremiah's following Zedekiah's order to tell less than the truth to the royal officials in order to preserve his life (Jer 38:24–27).

- 3. For noble ends. Another group of texts demonstrates that trickery sometimes was employed in order to gain a noble result. For example, Joseph tricks his brothers into bringing Benjamin (and eventually Jacob and the family) to Egypt by having his silver cup hidden in one of his brothers' sacks. When Joseph's attendants overtake the brothers, they accuse them of thievery (Gen 44:1–13). Samuel tricks the citizens of Bethlehem into thinking that he has come there only to offer sacrifice to the Lord, while actually his main purpose is to find the Lord's designated successor for Saul (1 Sam 16:1–3). Esther tricks the king and Haman into twice coming to a private banquet she prepares for them. For they do not know that she has a hidden agenda of denouncing wicked Haman and delivering her people from his clutches (Esth 5:1–8; 6:14–9:17). To be mentioned also are the intertestamental stories of Daniel, such as Daniel's trapping of the priests of Bel by scattering ashes on the floor of the temple of Bel so as to expose their voluminous appetites (Bel 1:1–22).
- 4. For selfish or ignoble ends. Trickery was also used for less than noble purposes. Thus Jehu assembles the priests of Baal. Feigning his allegiance to this Canaanite storm god, he destroys them all (2 Kgs 10:18–31). Yet, although he does help to exterminate Baal worship in the land, his actions were "soon seen to be political and selfish rather than born of any deep concern for God." 10

Delilah tricks Samson into revealing the secret of his strength in order to betray him and gain monetary reward for herself (Judg 16:4–21). Samson later avenges himself on the Philistines, who want to make sport of him, by tricking an attendant into thinking that he merely wishes to steady himself against the supporting pillars of the outer court of the Dagon temple complex. When the Lord in pure grace answers his request for one more show of strength, he brings the edifice crashing down upon himself and his tormentors (Judg 16:23–30). In this God has graciously answered his prayer for vindication and simultaneously seen to the destruction of a pagan temple and those who are mocking him and his disgraced servant. ¹¹

III. THE JACOB STORY AND ITS RECEPTION

The biblical story of trickery par excellence is that of Jacob. Interestingly, one denominative verb (${}^c\bar{a}qab$) associated with his name ($ya{}^c\bar{a}q\bar{o}b$) stresses the element of trickery while retaining its nominal origin associated with the heel of the foot. Indeed, "The supplanting of Jacob becomes synonymous with the deception of Jacob." Further, two of the nominal derivatives from the denominative verb carry some reflection of the thought of deception or trickery:

⁹ Probably to be included here is Michal's providing a household idol with goat's hair and placing it in David's bed so as to cover David's escape from Saul (1 Sam 19:11–17).

¹⁰ R. D. Patterson and H. J. Austel, "1, 2 Kings" 4:212.

¹¹ A case of group trickery/deception may be seen in Dinah's brothers' avenging of their sister's rape by convincing the men of Shechem to be circumcised so that Dinah might be given to the perpetrator as wife. Their compliance led to their being slaughtered while they were recovering from the operation (Genesis 38).

 $(\bar{c}aq\bar{o}b,$ "deceitful"; $\bar{c}oqb\hat{a}$, "trickery"). ¹³ Jacob is quickly portrayed as a trickster, first tricking his brother out of his birthright in exchange for a bowl of stew (Gen 25:27–34) and then tricking his father out of Esau's rightful blessing (Gen 27:1–40). In all of these early dealings "Jacob shows himself resourceful, crafty, dishonest, greedy—exactly what we have come to expect of this trickster." ¹⁴

Jacob's trickery became legendary. Accordingly, it served as a ready symbol for the prophets to seize upon in condemning the grasping, greedy ways of contemporary society. Thus Jeremiah describes the Judahites of his day in terms of Jacob's deception of his brother: "Do not trust your brothers. For every brother is a deceiver" (Heb. $\bar{c}aq\hat{o}b\ ya^cq\bar{o}b$, Jer 9:4[3]). The mention of brothers and the choice of the verbal form $ya^cq\bar{o}b$ make the allusion to the patriarch Jacob $(ya^c\bar{a}q\bar{o}b)$ unmistakable.

The use of Jacob's trickery to denounce Israel's treacherous ways becomes crucial to the understanding of two of Hosea's prophetic oracles. Hosea 12:2–6[3–7] records the prophet's observations on God's condemnation of Israel's deceitful political policies (11:12–12:1[12:1–2]). He points out that his people have a history of deceit stretching back to their forefather Jacob.

- 2 The LORD has a charge to bring against Judah; he will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds.
- 3 In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God.
- 4 He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor.
 He found him at Bethel
 and talked with him there—
- 5 the LORD God Almighty, the LORD is his name of renown!
- 6 But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always (NIV).

Trickster Jacob $(ya^c\bar{a}q\bar{o}b)$ came into life (v. 3[4]) grasping $(\bar{a}qab)$ his brother's heel (cf. Gen 25:26). The Hebrew clause could also be understood as "in the womb he deceived his brother" (i.e. he was a deceiver from birth, showing his eventual future acts by holding his brother's heel). The following phrase is usually understood as "in his manhood" (NRSV). It is significant, however, that the three Hebrew letters $(\bar{a}wen)$ of the word "manhood" form a play on a noun for deception or iniquity $(\bar{a}wen)$. The latter is a word that Hosea has used as a "byword for the shrine at Bethel, Beth Aven. The implied accusation is: Jacob as a man struggled with God near Bethel; the nation has

 $^{^{12}}$ E. Carpenter and M. Grisanti, "cqb I," in New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (eds. W. A. VanGemeren et al.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) 3:504–506. 13 See KBL-3 825–827.

¹⁴ Ryken, Words 79. Jacob found a capable sparring partner in his father-in-law Laban. Tricked out of spending his wedding night with his intended wife Rachel, for whom he would therefore have to work another seven years, Jacob complained to Laban: "It was for Rachel I worked. Why have you played this trick on me?" (Gen 29:25, REB).

rebelled against God at Beth Aven."¹⁵ In a later encounter there (Gen 35:9–15), Jacob talked with God. Israel, however, has failed to do so (Hos 12:5[6]).

It should be pointed out in passing that a second homographic root 'āqab' is also known in Northwest Semitic which carries the meanings "watch/protect." For example, it is attested in names dating to the patriarchal era at Tell Mari (e.g. ya-ah-qu-ub-el, "may God protect") so that Kitchen can say, "Parallels for Jacob are particularly well-known in the early to mid-second millennium." If the patriarchal narratives are to be taken as historical as well as literary, this root would form a more logical basis for Isaac's naming of his son.

Likewise, the name Israel is attested as a component of names from the second millennium BC at Ugarit and has often been suggested as being found in the Eblaite texts at Tell Mardikh. Although the original significance of the name is much debated, the most likely meaning for the verbal root is "rule." Whether the verb itself is $\delta \bar{a} rar$ ("rule") or $\delta \bar{a} r\hat{a}$ acting as a byform of $\delta \bar{a} rar$ is uncertain. In either case both would be denominatives from δar ("prince/ruler"). This could be important for understanding Hosea's use of the Genesis passage.

Certainly it is the more traditional meanings of the Hebrew verbs $\bar{a}qab$ and $s\bar{a}r\hat{a}$ ("struggle") that the patriarchal writer employs. Esau exclaims, "Isn't he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing!" (Gen 27:36). And the man (= angel; cf. Hos 12:4[5]) with whom Jacob wrestles at Peniel explains, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome" (Gen 32:28[29]).

The understanding of Hosea, however, is less certain. In 12:3[4] he uses $\delta \bar{a} r \hat{a}$ in standard fashion to indicate that Jacob struggled with God when he became a man (lit. in his virility/strength; "in the strength of his manhood"). ¹⁹ The meaning of the verb in the next verse, however, is not as clear. For the verbal form $(w \bar{a} y y \bar{a} \delta \bar{o} r)$ is unique. The most common interpretation is that here too $\delta \bar{a} r \hat{a}$ is utilized in the traditional sense: "and he struggled/wrestled with/against the angel." The problem is that the expected verbal form should be $wayyi \delta e r$. Nevertheless, most expositors decide for Hosea's strict drawing upon the vocabulary of the Genesis account, concluding either that Jacob's struggles with God (Hos 12:3[4]) were capped by his striving with the angel (v. 4[5]) or that v. 4[5] explains (waw explicative), the struggle with God of the previous verse. That is, by struggling with God, Hosea means God's angel.

Hamilton, however, proposes that the verbal form is more closely related to $\delta \bar{a} r a r$ ("rule"). If he is correct, the result is a clever paronomasia not only

¹⁵ D. Garrett, "Hosea, Joel," in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997) 237.

 $^{^{16}}$ See KBL-3 825.

¹⁷ K. Kitchen, The Bible in Its World (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1977) 68. See also H. B. Huffmon, Amorite Personal Names in the Mari Texts (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1965) 203–204.

 $^{^{18}}$ See M. Noth, Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der gemeinsemitischen Namengebung (Hildesheim: Olms, 1966) 207–208.

¹⁹ T. McComiskey, "Hosea," in *The Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) 1:199, 201–202.

in verbal meanings but graphically: "Thus the two parts of the two verses read: 'he strove with God' (12:4b[Eng. 3b]); 'he lorded it over the angel'" (12:5a[Eng. 4a]). ²⁰ The problem here is that if the verb is $\delta \bar{a} rar$, one would expect to find either $wavy\bar{a}\delta\bar{o}r$ or $wavyi\delta\delta or$.

In any case, particularly interesting is the passage's vivid paronomasia: the Jacob $(ya^c\check{a}q\bar{o}b)$ of v. 2[3] and the 'aqab and $s\bar{a}r\hat{a}$ of v. 3[4] are followed by the $w\bar{a}yy\bar{a}s\bar{o}r$ 'el mal' $\bar{a}k$ in v. 4[5]. Hosea has juxtaposed the letters of the verbal form $wayy\bar{a}s\bar{o}r$ with the preposition 'el so as to form the consonants of the name Israel: ysr'l. Thus in one context he has cleverly brought together both Jacob's original name and his new one.

Regardless of the precise understanding of the relationship between vv. 3 and 4[4 and 5], in drawing upon the Jacob story Hosea has selected several prominent events in Jacob's life: the birth narrative (Gen 25:24–26), perhaps (?) Jacob's general struggles when he became a man that led to his flight and his first meeting with God at Bethel (Gen 28:10–22), the wrestling match with God's angel at Peniel (Gen 32:22–30), and God's second appearance to Jacob at Bethel (Gen 35:9–14). Hosea thereby brings together several incidents from Jacob's life so as to bring them to bear on the conditions of the Israel of his day. At the very place where Jacob the trickster finally came to the end of himself, the people of the Northern Kingdom deceive themselves by feigning allegiance to God in their syncretistic worship (a charge Hosea frequently brings against Israel), while being at heart devotees of Baal.

The worship of Baal, who is no god at all, especially at Bethel, is therefore foolish. For Bethel is the traditional site where the Lord God Almighty twice revealed himself to their forefather. Like Jacob of old they must meet and submit to God, and reflect his standards in their lives (v. 6[7]). Not to do so is to follow the old Jacob, the trickster. Indeed, in following their own ways they only deceive themselves and are tricked by their own deceptive practices (cf. Prov 28:10; 1 Cor 3:19).

Hosea's point in chapter twelve sheds light on an earlier oracle which contains a veiled allusion to Jacob the trickster. Having faulted his people as unfaithful covenant breakers (Hos 6:7), the Lord condemns the Gileadites as purveyors of wickedness (${}^{2}awen$) whose heels (${}^{c}aqubb\hat{a}$) are stained with blood (6:8). Here the heel is a synecdoche for the foot. That is, they have left bloody footprints. The juxtaposing of the noun for wickedness and a noun from the root underlying Jacob's name, both of which occur in Hosea 12:2–6[3–7], suggests that this context likewise alludes to the story of Jacob. That which is explicit in that latter passage is hinted at here: the self-deceived Israelites "have taken on the worst characteristics of Jacob—selfishness and cunning without having his redeeming experiences." Here as in Hosea 12:2–6[3–7] and Jeremiah 9:4[3] familiarity with the archetype of the trickster provides a distinctive flavor to prophetic allusions to the patriarch Jacob.

²⁰ V. P. Hamilton, "The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50," in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 334.

²¹ The most likely assumption is that by noting the name Israel in the clause, one is to understand the verbal component in the name as "rule," whether the verb is $\hat{sa}rar$ or $\hat{sa}r\hat{a}$ as its byform. ²² Garrett, "Hosea, Joel" 163.

IV. CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS

It is evident that the archetype of the trickster was known in the biblical and extra-biblical literature of the Near Eastern and classical worlds as well as in the traditions of the Central African Republic. Trickery has been shown to be a vital part of battle strategy. Trickery was also used sometimes not only to gain one's own goals, whether for personal safety or noble purposes, but at other times for less than noble intentions. Knowledge of this archetype can be helpful, even in some places crucial, to the full exegesis of a given context (e.g. Hosea's use of the Jacob story).

The ethical and theological implications of trickery have not been the focus of this paper. Yet obviously such matters naturally attend the archetype of the trickster and the art of trickery. Particularly troublesome are those passages where God himself is said to be involved in the situation. Most instances fit the category of *ruse de guerre*. Thus God caused the Aramaean soldiers to hear what seemed to them the clamor of a great host coming upon them and fled in panic (2 Kgs 7:6–7). At the Lord's direction Absalom and his advisors were deceived into following advice that would ultimately lead to their defeat (2 Sam 17:14) and Ahab is deceived into following the counsel of his false prophets to his own destruction (1 Kgs 22:19–23). To be noted also is the Lord's blinding of the Aramaean troops so that they are eventually entrapped in Samaria (2 Kgs 6:15–20).

Although God is not said to be involved directly, Rahab's lie may also be explained on similar grounds. The New Testament Scriptures commend her both for her faith in Israel's God and her act of hiding Israel's spies (Heb 11:31), while helping them to escape via a route other than that of their pursuers (James 2:25–26; cf. Josh 2:4–7, 15–16). In that regard R. McQuilkin remarks, "Rahab acted in the faith that the God who was with Israel was mightier than the gods of Jericho, and she did the right thing—she sided with God's people and deceived through actions and words in what may properly be called an act of war."²³

Two other instances demand our attention. (1) The Lord tells Samuel to conceal the real reason he is going to Bethlehem by manufacturing an act of diversion to allay any fear or suspicion that the king might have (1 Sam 16:1–3). (2) Although God had not commanded the Hebrew midwives to lie to Pharaoh when they deceived him with regard to why they did not kill the Hebrew boy babies at birth, he did reward them (Exod 1:15–21).

Both cases stand in apparent contradiction to the scriptural condemnation of lying (e.g. Lev 19:11; Ps 34:13[14]; Prov 12:22; Col 3:9; 1 Pet 2:21–22; Rev 21:8; cf. Heb 6:18). God's instruction to Samuel can be vindicated by deeming it as a case of telling the truth but concealing information that Saul is not entitled to know. ²⁴ Yet while withholding full details may be proper in some

²³ Robertson McQuilkin, An Introduction to Biblical Ethics (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1989; repr. 1995) 441. A different approach is taken by W. Kaiser, Jr. who contends that the Scriptures commend her faith but not her lying (Toward Old Testament Ethics [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983] 271–273).

²⁴ Kaiser, Ethics 225-226.

situations, so facile an explanation may not fit here. It does not set aside the fact that were Saul to be told such a half-truth, he would assume that it was the whole truth.

Indeed, unless there are extenuating circumstances (such as where the recipient does not need to know all the details or is incapable of understanding the full ramifications of the information), truth must include the impression that words are intended to convey in the other person's mind. As Erickson points out, "God has appealed to his people to be honest in all situations. They are to be truthful both in what they formally assert and in what they imply." The lie of the midwives, of course, is far different. They simply did not tell the truth at all, yet were commended and rewarded by God. 26

Nevertheless, neither Samuel's intention to deceive nor that of the midwives warrants resorting to the philosophy of situational ethics. Both cases involved men and regimes disapproved by God. These apparent exceptions to the scriptural standards of truthfulness are instances in which God's people were under the control of men and institutions that were opposed to them and, above all, to God and his revealed standards. So then trickery in the form of deliberate deception, whether in word or deed, appears to be justified under the normal circumstances of wartime activities. The same would apply where a quasi-wartime situation exists involving clear opposition to God and his people by a godless regime or individual.

These exceptional cases do not invalidate the normal course of human activity, however. Truly, deception, especially by believers, can never be justified for purely selfish or especially evil reasons. In that regard believers should be reminded that the trickster with wicked designs has been operative since earliest times (Gen 3:1–7) and is still prowling about today (1 Pet 5:8). Believers should also be warned against false teachers who like Elymas are "full of all kinds of deceit and trickery" (Acts 13:10; cf. 2 Cor 11:3; Col 2:8).

Even more subtly, it is all too easy to be tricked by one's own self. The psalmist declares that the mind and heart of man are cunning (Ps 64:6[7]), and Jeremiah (17:9) reminds us that the heart is deceitful ($\bar{a}q\bar{o}b$). Isaiah (5:21) denounces "those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight."

Rather, we do well to remind ourselves that although the Jewish authorities sought by trickery (*God's Word*: "Some underhanded way") to place Jesus under arrest (Mark 14:2), Paul declares that his labors in the gospel are from neither impure motives nor trickery (1 Thess 2:3). So it is as well that I trust that in all I have said I shall not have to remark as Paul sarcastically did of his detractors, "Yet crafty fellow that I am, I caught you by trickery!" (2 Cor 12:16, NIV).

²⁵ M. Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 290.

²⁶ G. L. Archer takes a less than satisfactory approach to explaining the midwives' lie: "When faced with the choice between penetrating [sic] systematic infanticide against their own people and misleading the king by a half-truth in order to avert this calamity, they rightly chose the lesser ill in order to avoid the greater" (*Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982] 109).