

Robert Vannoy, Exodus to Exile, Lecture 7A

Joshua 1-5, Jordan Crossing, Gilgal Circumcision, Rahab lying

Review

III. The Book of Joshua

A. Introductory Remarks

4. Contemporary Approaches to the Establishment of Israel in Canaan

Last week, we ended with Roman numeral III, “The Book of Joshua”; Section A. “Introductory remarks”; and we looked at the handout for A-4, “Contemporary approaches to the establishment of Israel and Canaan.” We went through that handout rather quickly. We surveyed the traditional conquest model, and then what’s often called the modified conquest model, where just three cities were actually destroyed rather than a host of cities. We discussed the more contemporary viewpoints of mainstream biblical studies, “the migration” model and “the peasant rebellion” model. So that’s where we stopped last week.

B. The Entry into Canaan: Joshua 1:1-5:12

1. Joshua’s Commission – Joshua 1:1-9

That brings us to III. B. of the book, and that’s where we will begin tonight, in the book of Joshua itself. “The entry into Canaan: Joshua 1:1-5:12”—you will notice there are five sub-points under the B.—I want to make just a couple of very brief comments on one and two, and then spend more time on three. One under B. is “Joshua’s commission; Joshua 1:1-9.” You remember the book of Deuteronomy, the covenant renewal in the plains of Moab. One of the prominent features of that was the transition of leadership from Moses to Joshua. At the end of Deuteronomy 34, Moses died and now the successor becomes the leader, and that successor to Moses is Joshua. You read in verse 2, “Moses my servant is dead. Now you [Joshua], and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan into the land that I will give to them—to the Israelites.” You’ll notice in that commission (which runs down through verse 9), in verse 7, he says to Joshua, “Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from

it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.” That’s the Deuteronomic theology: if you are obedient, you will be blessed and you will be successful. If you are disobedient, then the covenant curse and judgment will follow. Verse 8: “Do not let the book of the law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.” So that’s the challenge to Joshua as he gives leadership to the people as they undertake the crossing of the Jordan, the entrance into the land of Canaan, and eventually the conquest of that land.

2. The People Are Mobilized under Joshua 1:10-18

Number 2. under B. is “The people are mobilized under chapter 1:10-18.” You’ll notice there, in verse 11, Joshua gives instructions. He orders the officers, “Go through the camp and tell the people, ‘Get your supplies ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan to go in and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving to you.’” So the people were mobilized to cross the Jordan, but before actually doing that, you have the next chapter.

3. Joshua 2 Tells of Sending the Spies across the River

Chapter 2 tells of the sending of spies across the river in advance of Israel’s crossing the river, to see what the situation was there. That involves the story of Rahab the harlot, who gave refuge to those spies and then protected them when the king of Jericho sent his people to try to capture them. The story of Rahab in chapter 2 is one that has attracted a great deal of interest, and from a standpoint of ethics, it has attracted a great deal of discussion as to how to evaluate the conduct of Rahab. Did she do something commendable in misleading the agents of the king of Jericho, so that they were *not* able to capture those spies? Is that commendable or is that something for which she should be criticized or condemned? Didn’t she lie?

a. Rahab's Faith

We're going to come back to that in a few minutes, but I think however you read Joshua chapter 2, you should read it in light of two New Testament passages. One is Hebrews 11:31 and the other is James 2:25. Hebrews 11 is that chapter which recounts a long list of the heroes of faith of the Old Testament period. You read in verse 31, "By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient." James 2:25 gives a little more detail about Rahab, after talking about Abraham's faith. It reads, "In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered *righteous* for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?" You'll notice that both the Hebrews text and Joshua 2 speak of Rahab's faith. I think Rahab's faith is the key to the explanation of what she did. If you go back to Joshua 2:3, you read that "The king of Jericho sent a message to Rahab: 'Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land.' But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, 'Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them.'"

But then verse 6 parenthetically tells us what the reality of the situation was: "But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof." But then you read down in verse 8, and you can see something of Rahab's faith: "Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, 'I know that Yahweh has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how Yahweh dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you. [Why?] For Yahweh your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.'" There's Rahab's faith. She believed that Yahweh was God in heaven and on earth. Her action in giving protection to those spies was an

action that was born of that faith.

b. Ethics of Rahab

Now, if you get back to the question of the means she used to protect them, it's certainly a legitimate topic for discussion. It's been often discussed, as I mentioned. Some find fault with the way in which she protected them. For myself I would prefer to reserve judgment on her action. The Bible makes no criticism or no condemnation of her, and the statements that *are* in the Bible—particularly those New Testament texts—are fairly commendatory, particularly of her faith. But the question arises: what was Rahab's obligation when the king of Jericho sent his people to capture those spies? What was her obligation toward the king of Jericho, as well as toward the spies that she was protecting? Did she have an obligation to betray the Hebrew spies to the king of Jericho when asked about their whereabouts? I would say James 2:25 sounds quite positive. James 2:25 says, "Was not Rahab considered *righteous* for what she did when she gave lodging for the spies and sent them off a different way?"

c. Comments on Rahab

I want to come back to this and spend some time on it just as an illustration of an ethical issue, because I think it's something worth reflecting on. But before doing that, let me make just a couple more comments about Rahab. She's the only woman in the Old Testament who has the name "Rahab." The first chapter of Matthew contains a genealogy of Jesus, and in verse 5 of Matthew 1 you read, "Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, the father of King David." So there is a Rahab in Matthew 1, and most think it is this Rahab, who is in the line of descent of Christ himself. There's a Jewish tradition that she, subsequent to the conquest, became a prophetess and eventually married Joshua, and that eight prophets including Jeremiah were among her descendants. There's little evidence for any of that, and certainly no biblical evidence, but her name is included in

the genealogy of Christ.

d. Rahab's Courage

Jericho was a city-state with its own king. If you look at Joshua 12, you have a list of the kings and the cities that Joshua and the Israelites conquered in the process of taking the land of Canaan. In verse 9 you read, "The king of Jericho, one; the king of Ai, one; the king of Jerusalem, one; the king of Hebron, one." So you have a territory made up of city-states, each with their own king. This fits well with what we know from the Amarna letters from that time, where there were city-states with their own rulers that corresponded with the Pharaoh in Egypt. But what Rahab did in that kind of a social context was a very dangerous thing. In Hammurabi's Code, Law 109, death is the penalty for not reporting "outlaws." So there's certain obligations on citizens of that time to report outlaws. Certainly what she did could have put her own life in jeopardy had she been caught protecting those spies. So she did a courageous thing, and her action clearly was born of her faith. She believed that Yahweh was the God of heaven and earth, and she wanted to be identified with that God and with his people, rather than with the king of Jericho.

e. Rahab's Ethics – Lying

The ethics of her actions is a whole other subject, and I want to spend some time talking about that. I think the question which the story of Rahab raises in a broader sense is this: are there any conceivable circumstances in which it is permissible to deceive another person? Now, I might rephrase that and insert another element into that question: are there any conceivable circumstances in which it is permissible, or perhaps even obligatory for someone to deceive another person? That heightens the stakes. Are there situations where it's your *obligation* to do something similar to what Rahab did?

Now it seems to me that when you come to that kind of a question, the place to start is to put it in the context of the requirements of the ninth commandment. The foundational law of the Ten Commandments provides the framework, the objective

framework, for ethics. The ninth commandment is “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” What are the implications of the ninth commandment? I’d like to look at that in what it requires and what it forbids, and do that first of all with respect to what I would call the specific intent of the ninth commandment, before looking at its broader intent.

1. Rahab and the 9th Commandment

So what is the specific intent of the ninth commandment, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor”? The language of that prohibition, and particularly the phrase “bearing false witness,” brings us into the sphere of judicial procedure or jurisprudence. I think you’ll find in the second table of the law—that is, commandments 5-9—that they speak about horizontal relationship. The first four speak about your relationship with God. Then, beginning with the fifth, you have “Honor your father and mother”; six, “You shall not murder”; seven, “Adultery is forbidden,” and eight, “Theft is forbidden.” These regulate relationships between people. In the fifth commandment, God protects authority in relationships: “Honor your father and your mother.” In the sixth where murder is forbidden, he protects life. In the seventh, where adultery is forbidden, he protects marriage. In the eighth he protects possessions. Those are very basic things in the structure of any social organization. In the ninth commandment, he provides for the enforcement of the other commandments by means of judicial procedure: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” So God secures or provides a basis for order and justice in society, not just by giving laws, but also by making provisions for the enforcement of those laws by judicial procedure. In other words, there’s to be a court of justice, and there are to be officials who provide for the maintenance and restoration of justice in the social order. In doing that, one of the important features of the procedure is to call for witnesses in order to substantiate charges that might be brought against someone for having broken one of those other commandments.

I think all of that judicial procedure is bound up in the wording of the ninth commandment, “You shall not bear false witness.” As far as its specific intent, “Bearing

false witness” is speaking to this issue of judicial apparatus, where you’d have a judge, or someone who was making the charge. The judge would call witnesses to establish if the complaint is valid, an oath would be taken, a decision would be made, and a sentence would be rendered.

2. Judicial System in Israel

As far as the legal background for this, you read in Deuteronomy 16:18 that judges and officials were to be appointed “for each of your tribes in every town the Lord your God has given you, and they shall judge the people fairly. Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you.” That was to be done when Israel comes into Canaan. There were to be judges in each town. Now look at 2 Chronicles 19:5. You read there of Jehoshaphat, “He appointed judges in the land, in each of the fortified cities of Judah. He told them, ‘Consider carefully what you do, because you are not judging for man but for the LORD, who is with you whenever you give a verdict. Now let the fear of the LORD be upon you. Judge carefully, for with the LORD our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery.’”

Now, as I’ve mentioned, there was to be a judicial procedure. That procedure rested on witnesses to establish the facts. Go back to Deuteronomy; in Deuteronomy 19:15 and following, you read: “One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” So there’s a procedure there to make certain that a mistake isn’t made. You need two or three witnesses to establish someone’s guilt. But notice where it goes from here, and this brings us back into the wording of the ninth commandment: “If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse a man of a crime, the two men involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the LORD before the priests and the judges who are in office at the time. The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony...” (“False

testimony” is the same Hebrew wording as the wording in the ninth commandment, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”) “...If the witness proves a liar, giving false witness against his brother, then do to him as he intended to do to his brother. You must purge the evil from among you. The rest of the people will hear and be afraid.” So, you see, bearing false witness was an extremely serious business, because bearing false witness could cause injustice, and God is concerned with justice. It’s interesting that the provision here is that if somebody was found out to be a false witness—whatever he had accused that other person of, whatever the crime might have been—he himself would bear the penalty for that crime.

I remember reading of a case some years ago: somewhere in the Midwest, a woman had accused a man of molesting or raping her. The man was convicted, was put in jail, and served 10 or 15 years. Later, as it turned out, evidence came up—I don’t know if it was DNA—but he was proven innocent of it. Well, he had given 10 years of his life on the basis of a false witness. Now, as far as I know, the woman who charged him with this never really had to suffer anything. She didn’t have to serve his sentence. Our judicial system works that way, but that’s not the way it worked here in Deuteronomy. Bearing false witness was a serious business. I think generally what you find in human history is that God has made the provision “Don’t bear false witness” in this context of judicial procedure, but fallen human beings often turn the system on its head and attempt to use the judicial system in opposition to its foundational purpose. God gives the procedure to assure every person of justice and protection, and often people attempt to use the procedure to cause injustice. That’s why there is this command: “Do not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

3. Another Example: Naboth’s Vineyard (1 Kings 21)

Let me give you another Old Testament example. 1 Kings 21 describes Ahab’s seizing of Naboth’s vineyard, and it’s an interesting story. As you remember, Ahab was married to Jezebel, who was from Phoenicia, a worshipper of Baal and Ashtoreth. Verse 4 of 1 Kings 21 says that when Naboth refused to sell his vineyard to Ahab, “Ahab went

home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, ‘I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.’ He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat. His wife Jezebel came in and asked him, ‘Why are you so sullen? Why won’t you eat?’ He answered her, ‘Because I said to Naboth the Jezreelite, “Sell me your vineyard; or if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard in its place.” But he said, “I will not give you my vineyard.”’ Jezebel said, ‘Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I’ll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.’ So she wrote letters in Ahab’s name, placed his seal on them, and sent them to the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth’s city with him. In those letters she wrote: ‘Proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people. But [notice!] seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them testify that he has cursed both God and the king.’” In other words, have them bear false witness. ““Then take him out and stone him to death.’ So the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city did as Jezebel directed in the letters she had written to them. They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth in a prominent place among the people. Then two scoundrels came and sat opposite him and brought charges against Naboth before the people, saying, ‘Naboth has cursed both God and the king.’” That’s bearing false witness in a judicial procedure, and injustice was the result. Naboth was taken out and put to death.

4. Another Example: Jesus (Matt. 26:59)

Look at Matt 26:59. This is when Jesus is before the Sanhedrin. You read there, “The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for *false evidence* against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many *false witnesses* came forward.” This is an attempt to subvert judicial procedures so that injustice rather than justice prevails. So I think that if we go back to where we started, and place Rahab’s actions in the context of the provisions of the ninth commandment, we see that the commandment is speaking specifically about judicial procedure and the way in which a person’s words should cause justice rather than injustice to prevail, with respect to their neighbor. As far as the broader intent of the ninth commandment, I think

it certainly has broader implications and goes beyond the limits of the letter and its function in its judicial setting. I think the spirit or broader sense of the commandment is that it requires us to serve our neighbor with our witness, or words, so that our words will not cause injustice to come upon our neighbor. In other words, the just due of our neighbor should be secured and protected by our words, not only before a court of law but also in everyday life. It is very easy to slander someone, to circulate rumors about someone that injures them and their reputation. It's even possible to speak the "truth" about someone out of season. In other words, perhaps you might spread some information that may be true about someone's past; the information is no longer relevant, but it damages the person's reputation. I think that's a violation of this commandment.

5. Is it Ever Permissible to lie?

a. 4 Positions

But there are cases in which application of the ninth commandment becomes difficult, and I think that's where we come to the kind of situation that Rahab was in. We then come to the question: Is it ever permissible to deceive another person in order to avoid injustice being brought on their neighbor? Now, having said that, often that question will be formulated in a more blunt or direct way: Is it ever permissible to lie? Isn't that what Rahab did, if you go back to Joshua chapter 2? The agents from the king come in, and she says, "Yes, they were here, but they left; I don't know which way they went"; but she'd put them up on the roof and hidden them. So if you formulate the question "Is it ever permissible to lie?", and then look at the way that has been answered, I think there are basically four responses that I've come across. Let me go through them quickly, and then we'll discuss them a bit.

Is it ever permissible to lie? Some would say, "No; without exception, it is never permissible." That response would say that Rahab acted wrongly in what she did because she lied. That's one end of the spectrum. The other end of the spectrum would answer "yes" to the question "Is it ever permissible to lie?" But they would answer "yes" in the

context of what is normally called a situation ethic, which argues that there is no objective standard of morality. You must determine right or wrong in any given situation by application of the law of love. A man named Joseph Fletcher many years ago wrote a book called *Situation Ethics* and that was the basic position he argued for: there is no objective standard; you just apply the law of love in whatever situation, and wherever that leads you, that is the answer. I think that position is in conflict with biblical norms, because certainly the Ten Commandments are an objective standard; there *is* an objective standard, but that's the other end of the spectrum.

A third position would respond “yes” to the question “Is it ever permissible to lie?”; but that answer comes with the following qualification: it is permissible *only* under extreme circumstances in which there is a clash of obligations. The advocates of this view would say there are certain extreme circumstances in which there is a clash of obligations, and in such situations the spirit of the ninth commandment takes priority over some formal statement corresponding to reality—in other words, a formal statement of “truth.” In the clash of obligations, the spirit of the ninth commandment takes priority over some kind of formal statement of full truth. I'll come back to that and we'll discuss it more later.

A fourth response to the question “Is it ever permissible to lie?” gives the answer “no,” but then proceeds to redefine “lie” in order to allow for situations in which speaking or intimating what is not true is not a lie, at least not by definition. Now you can say, “That's just semantics.” Well, maybe. We'll come back to that one and look at it too.

Those, I think, are the four positions. Is it ever permissible to lie? No, never. Or then go to situation ethics where there is no standard of morality; but that clashes with the word of God. Third, you have a clash of circumstances or clash of obligations in certain extreme circumstances where the spirit of the ninth commandment takes priority over the letter of the law. For the fourth one, the answer to “Is it ever permissible to lie?” is “no,” but then “lie” is redefined to allow for situations where not speaking the truth is not considered a lie, at least not by definition.

b. Discussion of the 4 Positions

I want to go to view 3 first. Is it ever permissible to lie? Yes, but only where there's this clash of obligations and the spirit of the ninth commandment has priority over the formal statement of truth. Now, it's interesting if we put this in the context of the ninth commandment. The ninth commandment is worded differently than "You shall not lie." That's not what it says. The ninth commandment says, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." I think we need to notice that this is not an abstract kind of commandment "you shall not lie." It's a formulation in which the neighbor is involved. "You may not bring injury to your neighbor by your speaking." I think *that* wording puts a different slant on the commandment than a simple impersonal prohibition against lying. It's not that. It's a prohibition in which there is another person involved. Its essence is, "You may not damage your neighbor with your words." I think that we can say there are three elements involved: you, your neighbor, and the situation. All three of those are under God. Certain situations involve you and your neighbor. We call this situation reality. So you have those three elements: you, your neighbor, and reality all before the face of God. What God generally asks us is when we speak to keep both the reality as well as the neighbor in view. You can't deny the reality for the sake of your neighbor, but you can't deny your neighbor for the sake of reality. There's where you get the conflict of obligation. Sometimes you find situations in which you get a conflict between the obligation to the neighbor and the obligation to speak about what the reality is. Then the question is, are there situations in which we must consider our obligation to our neighbor as a higher obligation than our witness to reality?

The advocates of the third position would say that the person who says that in every situation we are bound to some formal statement corresponding to reality, has really separated the letter of the law (that is, the ninth commandment) from its spirit or its intent. In this way they may actually violate the command by holding to it in this rigidly formal way. In other words, holding to the letter of the law actually violates the spirit or the intent of the law. We should certainly keep in mind that the spirit of the law certainly cannot be separated from the letter, but the reverse is also true: the letter should not be

separated from the spirit. What you have here is speaking truth in relationship because there's another person involved, rather than truth in the abstract.

So advocates of that third position would say, "Yes, it is permissible to lie—but only in the extreme set of circumstances in which there's this clash of obligations in which our words should guarantee that justice come to our neighbor rather than injustice." Thus someone like Rahab was completely justified in obeying the spirit or the intent of the ninth commandment by doing what she did.

c. Charles Hodge's Discussion

Now, in response to the fourth view, advocates would answer "No" to the question "Is it ever permissible to lie?", but then redefine what is meant by the term "lie." Look at your citations on page 46. This is taken from Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology* and his discussion of the Ten Commandments, and here specifically his discussion of the ninth commandment. I might say his discussion of the Ten Commandments is very useful; it's rather lengthy and detailed, but volume three of his *Systematic Theology* is very helpful regarding the exposition of the obligations and duties of the Ten Commandments. Notice what he says: "The intention to deceive is an element in the idea of falsehood, but even this is not always culpable. When Pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives to slay the male children of their countrywomen, they disobeyed him, and when called to account for their disobedience they said 'The Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women, for they are livelier and deliver ere the midwives come in unto them. Therefore God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty.' In first Samuel 16:1-2 [which is quite interesting—we'll come back to this a little while], we read that God said to Samuel: 'I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons.' And Samuel said, 'How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me.' [Remember, Saul had been rejected as king in chapter 15, and now God is sending Samuel to anoint Saul's replacement. God says "Go there and do that," but Samuel objects: "If Saul hears it he'll kill me."] And the LORD

said, 'Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD.' Here, it is said, is the case of an intentional deception actually commanded. Saul was to be deceived as to the object of Samuel's journey to Bethlehem.

Still more marked is the conduct of Elisha recorded in 2 Kings 6:14-20. The king of Syria sent soldiers to seize the prophet at Dothan, and when they came down to him Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, 'Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness.' And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. And Elisha said unto them, 'This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek.' But he led them to Samaria. And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, 'LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see.' And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria [that is, in the hands of their enemy]. The prophet, however, would not allow them to be injured, but commanded that they should be fed and sent back to their master. Examples of this kind of deception are numerous in the Old Testament. Some of them are simply recorded records without anything to indicate how they were regarded in the sight of God, but others as in the cases cited above received either direct or by importation divine sanction."

Now Hodge comments generally on these kinds of situations: "It is the general sentiment among moralists that stratagems in war are allowable. That it is lawful not only to conceal intended movements from an enemy, but also to mislead them as to your intention. A great part of the skill of a military commander is in detecting the intentions of his adversary while considering his own response. That's a pretty common procedure in military strategies." Of course, in the Iraq war, they had all these Marines off shore in ships; it looked like they were going to invade from a certain direction, but then they came around from the other side, which is a common thing. "Few men would be so scrupulous [this is going further], as to refuse to keep a light in a room when robbery was anticipated, with the purpose of producing the impression that the members of the household were on the alert."

Here Hodge uses another interesting illustration. We live in a time when you can

set these timers, so if you're going away for a week, your lights come on every night when it gets dark and go off at 10 or 11 o'clock. I don't know if you do that; we've occasionally done it. What's the purpose? I think it's what he says here: you want to deceive people into thinking you're home. Is there something ethically or morally wrong with doing that?

“On these grounds it's generally admitted that in a criminal falsehood there must not only be an enunciation and signification of what is false and an intention to deceive, but also a violation of some obligation. If there may be any complication of circumstances under which a man is not bound to speak the truth, those to whom the declaration and signification is made have no right to expect him to do so. A general is under no obligation to reveal his intended movements to his adversaries, and his adversary has no right to suppose his apparent intention is his real purpose! Elisha was under no obligation to aid the Syrians in securing his person and taking his life. They had no right to assume he would thus assist them, and therefore he did no wrong in misleading them. It is often said the rule above stated applies that when a robber commands your purse. It is said to be right to deny that you have anything of value in it. You are not bound to aid him in committing a crime; he has no right to assume that you will facilitate the accomplishment of his object.”

Now that's an interesting case. Notice Hodge's comment—this is not so clear: “The obligation to speak the truth is very solemn, and when the choices left to a man are to tell a lie or lose his money, he better let his money go. On the other hand” [and here you see you get into a different context], “if a mother sees a murderer in pursuit of her child, she has a perfect right to mislead him by any means in her power, because the general obligation to speak the truth is merged or lost for the time being in light of the higher obligation.” In other words, if the life of your child is at stake, you have no obligation to help the person who wants to take that life. You have every obligation to do whatever you can to protect that child.

Hodge says, “This principle is not invalidated by its possible or actual abuse; it can easily be abused.” [You see, that's where you have to weigh and be careful how you

draw these lines.] “It has been greatly abused. The Jesuits thought that the obligation to promote the good of church absorbed or superseded every other obligation; and therefore in their system, not only falsehood with no reservation, but also perjury, robbery, and even assassination became lawful if committed with the design of promoting the interest of the church. Notwithstanding this liability to abuse, the principle that a higher obligation absolves a lower stands firm.” Now at that point, you’re back into answer number three: higher obligation, and clash of obligation. There are gradations of obligations.

But notice where he goes further, and this is what distinguishes Hodge’s position from number three. “The question now under consideration is not whether it is ever right to do wrong, which is a solecism, nor is the question ‘Is it ever right to lie?’ but rather, ‘What constitutes a lie?’ It’s not simply an *enunciatio falsium*, a false statement, but there must be intent to deceive when we are expected and bound to speak the truth. That is, there are circumstances in which a man is not bound to speak the truth, and therefore there are cases in which speaking or intimating what is not true is not a lie.” That’s the essence of Hodge’s position. “It is far better that a man should die or permit a murder to be committed than that he should sin against God. Nothing could tempt the Christian martyrs to save their own lives or the lives of their brethren by denying Christ, or by professing to believe in false gods. In these cases the obligation to speak the truth was in full force. But in the case of a commanding general in a time of war, the obligation does not exist to intimate his true intentions to the adversary. Intentional deception in his case is not moral falsehood.” So, is it ever permissible to tell a lie? If you put it that way, Hodge would say, “No it isn’t,” but then you redefine what a lie is to allow for situations in which intimating something that is not true or speaking something that is not true is not by definition considered a lie.

d. Walter Kaiser: Always Wrong to Lie, Rahab was at Fault

I want to go back to the first answer. Is it ever permissible to lie?—No, without exception. I’d say probably the strongest current advocate of that first viewpoint is Walter

Kaiser. That's his response in his volume *Toward Old Testament Ethics*. In his discussion of this question, Kaiser finds fault with Rahab as well as with the Hebrew midwives in their response to the Pharaoh. He rests much of his argument on the distinction he makes, following the definition of another man whom we will see in our citation in a minute. But he makes a distinction between what he terms concealing and lying; in other words, he would argue that it's permissible in certain situations to conceal something from another person, but it's never permissible to lie to another person. As far as Rahab and those New Testament texts are concerned, he says that Rahab is commended for her faith, not for her lying.

Look at page 49 of your citations. In the middle paragraph Kaiser says, "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 and fulfilling the purpose of his will. Can strong faith coexist and be actuated by the infirmities of unbelief? It is true that Hebrews 11:31 includes Rahab as a woman of faith: 'By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.' Likewise James 2:25: 'Was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?' [But, here's his comment:] The areas of Rahab's faith must be strictly observed. It was not her lying that won her divine recognition; rather, it was her faith. She believed in the Lord God of the Hebrews and God's action in Israel's Exodus more than she was frightened by the king of Jericho. The evidence of her faith was seen in the works of receiving the spies and sending them out another way. Thus she was well within the proprieties of biblical ethics, such as revering the holiness and character of God, when she hid the spies and took the legitimate precaution sending them out another way. But her lying [at least in Kaiser's opinion] was an unnecessary accoutrement to both of the above approved responses."

Well, that's about all she could say if she was going to tell the truth. Then you get into the question, "Is that not tempting God?" Hold that question for a minute; we're going to come back to that. There are other examples. Corrie ten Boom would not lie.

She would expect God to intervene. Brother Andrew, in smuggling Bibles, would not lie, and he would expect God to intervene. So hold that question for a moment.

The last comment on page 49, about the Hebrew midwives, you notice what Kaiser says: “While we agree that Pharaoh has given up the right to know all the facts, and while this could be a legitimate case—a case of legitimate concealment of things, just as in the case of Saul and Samuel, we cannot agree that the midwives had any right to lie. Pharaoh does not deserve to know all the truth, but the midwives owe it to God to speak only the truth. If they truly had not made even one Hebrew male delivery during the months of Pharaoh’s new program, then their response was laudable and justified according to Old Testament ethics. However, if they were partially true and partially telling a lie, they were just as blame-worthy as Rahab, Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob when they lied”—there’s the Abraham point, in Kaiser’s opinion.

Now we’ve read those paragraphs from Kaiser, and what I mentioned earlier was his view is really based on this distinction he makes between lying and concealment. Go back to page 48. He says Asa Mahan commented on this definition in the following manner, and he’s quoting from Mahan too: he says, “The deception must be intentional as guilt is not attached to the agent, for the crime falls under some other denomination than lying. The person or persons deceived must have the claim to know the truth, if anything’s communicated, or else no obligations are violated in the act of deception.” And the next several sentences: “Lying should be carefully distinguished from concealing. It is proper to conceal facts from an individual whom we have no right to deceive. Concealment is a sin when and only when an obligation exists to reveal the fact which is concealed.” So that’s the distinction he makes.

He continues, “The importance of this definition can be seen in those instances where concealment was present without it being a moral evil. Thus Mahan teaches that concealment is proper or even a duty when it does not violate the moral obligation. Several instances will illustrate what types of situations these are. Concealment is demanded when the person from whom the truth is withheld has forfeited his or her right, or has no legitimate claim to that truth. [And here’s how he understands 1 Samuel 16.]

That was Saul's position in 1 Samuel 16:1-3. God instructed Samuel, 'Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.' But Samuel said, 'How can I go? Saul will hear about it and kill me.' The LORD said, 'Take a heifer with you and say, "I have come to sacrifice to the LORD."' Now notice the comment in that next paragraph: "Without question from John Murray here is divine authorization for concealment by means of a statement other than that which would have disclosed the main purpose of Samuel's visit to Jesse. But it is just as important to note that Samuel had no special prerogative to speak a falsehood, either. The only point that may legitimately be made is that concealment in some situations is not lying. Only what was true was presented to Saul. As for Saul's ultimate intentions, nothing is affirmed nor denied and nothing incited Saul's mind to probe concerning what may have been Samuel's ultimate motives for going to Bethlehem at this time. And such questions have raised an altogether different problem when he confronted Samuel he would have to avoid affirming or denying what those purposes were or face the wrath of Saul's disclosure."

Now, you see, I think Kaiser's making here a distinction without a difference. Yes, Samuel did sacrifice when he went there, but the Lord instructs him, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.'" What's the purpose of that? Of course, this is all in a certain sense hypothetical because Saul didn't ask him; but had he asked, and Samuel had responded "I am going to Bethlehem all for a sacrifice," isn't that deception? Isn't the purpose to deceive? You might say that technically he was speaking the truth because he did sacrifice, yet at the same time he deceived! Or he would have deceived had he been asked and that was his response. The Lord instructed him, I would say, not just to conceal but to deceive!

So you can ask that question about 1 Samuel 16: Is God's command to Samuel just intended to conceal, or also to deceive? It seems to me, had the question been asked, and had Samuel done what the Lord instructed him to do, the result would be intentional deception! Saul would think he was going there to offer a sacrifice and not to anoint a new king. So I'm not sure that distinction is as helpful as Kaiser suggests that it is.

e. Corrie ten Boom Protecting Jews in WWII

Now the question was asked about what Rahab should have said. I mentioned that Corrie ten Boom hid many refugees. This is from an article that's in your bibliography, "Was Rahab's Lie a Sin?" by Peter Barnes. He says that Corrie ten Boom saved many refugees, notably Jews escaping from Nazi tyranny. Corrie ten Boom committed herself to not lie, even to save those who were hiding from the Gestapo. She maintains that God honors truth-telling with perfect protection. She advocated telling the Gestapo the truth, no matter how many Jewish lives were thereby in danger. On this view, Rahab should have told the truth and trusted that God would protect the two Israelite spies by some means of his own. Now I think that if you were going to argue for always telling the truth without exception, you would have to say Rahab should have said "They're up on the roof" and then expect that God would protect them by some means of his own. In what I think is a better approach, J. I. Packer said, "Rahab might not have broken the ninth commandment, as she is not bearing false witness against her neighbor, but in his favor!" In other words, her words were to bring justice to her neighbor rather than injustice. Rushdoony says that "had Rahab told the truth, as Corrie ten Boom did, she would have become guilty of the sin of testing God." He sees a parallel to the devil's temptation of Christ, urging him to leap off the pinnacle of the temple because God had promised his angels would protect his people. To leap from the top of the temple would have been to demand an unsolicited useless miracle from God! So, it gets complex. There are a lot of ramifications to this.

f. Brother Andrew and Bible Smuggling

I mentioned Brother Andrew with his Bible smuggling, and in a review of his book called *The Ethics of Smuggling*, a review by Greg Brahnson, he says, "One of the weaknesses of the book is the attempt to maintain that his activity of smuggling is not a deviation from truth-telling. Andrew apparently feels compelled to argue he does not lie when he smuggles in Bibles. There are two things which must be said here. First, Andrew should feel no compulsion to defend himself against the observation that he is not telling

the truth as Scripture ordinarily requires; nor should he feel that he must draw back from overtly lying to border guards. In Andrew's discussion of this, he gets back into this distinction between concealing and lying. He says, "You must be careful to guard the distinction between concealment and lying. As far as my own ministry is concerned, I will never tell a lie. I pray mighty hard that I don't have to tell the truth either." In his last chapter he explains that he always tells the truth, but sometimes conceals a relevant part of it. Sometimes he says things for which guards will have a different interpretation. In other words, he deceives them. Now I think such behavior could be morally justified if we were permitted to deviate from telling the truth under special circumstances, but it is facetious to argue that it is consistent with such behavior as telling the truth. If Andrew intends to deceive his hearer, he has not told the truth in the way Scripture ordinarily requires. By willingly misleading his hearer through his tactics, he has as much as lied.

So, it's an interesting ethical question, and complex. I spent this time on it simply because I think it's something you ought to think about and try to sort through. I'd add this caution: almost all these examples are in the context of abusive totalitarian kinds of governments or conditions of war. Living in this country, I don't think most of us bump up against these kinds of issues very often. If you were living under totalitarian oppressive governments, particularly as a Christian, you would probably live with these kinds of ethical dilemmas pretty constantly, and you'd have to think about it, and go through them.

I might say my wife was reared in Holland as a child, during the German occupation of the Netherlands. She remembers well the German soldiers marching through Amsterdam and randomly shooting people. Her parents harbored some Jewish people in their house during that time. Her parents are not living anymore, but I think I know them well enough to say if one of those German soldiers knocked on their front door, like the Rahab situation, and asked if they had a person hiding in the house, they would not have opened the door and said "Yeah, they're hiding there in the closet" and expected God to intervene. They wouldn't have done that! I'm certain they would have felt that their responsibility was to protect that person with their words, even if that meant

misleading or deceiving those German soldiers. So there's a higher obligation. The obligation falls into that category.

B. Sending of the Spies to Jericho

4. Crossing the Jordan – Joshua 3:1-5:1

a. The River Crossing

That was all under B. 3., “Sending of the spies to Jericho.” 4. is “Crossing the Jordan: Joshua 3:1-5:1.” Israel was faced with a very dangerous thing: they had to cross a river in order to enter the land of Canaan. Crossing a river in a military sort of situation puts someone at great disadvantage. You notice in verse 2 of chapter 3 that they were encamped by the Jordan for three days. If you go down further in chapter 3 verse 15 you read, “The Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest”—this was the time of Passover. So here they are, encamped by the Jordan, looking at this barrier to their entrance into the land of Canaan, and the river was in flood stage. I don't know how many of you have seen the Jordan; I was there many years ago and it wasn't at flood stage, it was in the dry season. You know you hear the song about “the mighty Jordan rolling”—it didn't look like the mighty Jordan, it looked like a small creek. But at flood stage I'm sure it looks quite different, because during the rainy season there, the water just pours off that kind of soil and floods. So Israel had to cross the Jordan, and it was a difficult thing to do.

But the Lord gives a sign. Notice verse 9: “Joshua said to the Israelites, ‘Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you.’” Verse 13: “As soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap.”

So the Lord tells Joshua (and tells the people through Joshua), that that's what will happen, and in verse 15b you read, “Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream

stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan.” Now, Zarethan’s about 20 miles north of where Israel is crossing the Jordan. Israel is crossing the Jordan opposite Jericho, and about 20 miles north the flow of the river was blocked. So the water ceased flowing down where the Israelites were, but that was timed precisely when the priests picked up the ark and started moving toward the Jordan River. So that it was completely cut off, and the people crossed over opposite Jericho.

If you have the NIV study Bible there’s a note there on verse 13 where it says, “the waters flowing downstream will be cut off in a heap.” The note says: “Hebrew for ‘heap’ is found here in verse 16 also; it is possible that God used a physical means such as a landslide to dam up the Jordan at the place called Adam near the entrance of Jabbok. As recently as 1927, a blockage of the waters in this area was recorded that lasted over 20 hours, but still the miraculous element is not diminished.” In that area the Jordan runs through a narrow canyon with walls on either side, and there has been more than one example where landslides or earthquakes have blocked the Jordan River. It may well have been an incident of that sort that occurred, but as this note says, “The miraculous element is not diminished.” The Lord used that, and timed it precisely in order to fulfill what he had said, and they were able to cross.

b. Setting up the Stones: Cairn

So that is chapter 3. In chapter 4, Joshua is instructed to get twelve stones, one for each tribe, and to make a monument to this deliverance of the Lord for the Israelites as they were able to cross the Jordan River. You read in 4:4, “So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, and said to them, ‘Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask, “What do these stones mean?” tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.

These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.” So here’s a visual reminder of what the Lord had done. When you go down to verse 21 in chapter 4 when those twelve stones are actually set up, Joshua says, “In the future when your descendants ask their fathers, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’ For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan just what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we crossed over.” And then notice verse 24: “He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of Yahweh is powerful and so that you might always fear Yahweh your God.” You’re back into the same sort of theme you had with the plagues of Exodus: “that the Egyptians might know that I am Yahweh; that Israel might know that I am Yahweh.” Here is another instance of a similar story. So God is again demonstrating his existence and his power.

c. Parallel with Red Sea Crossing

The other thing that kind of parallels the time of the crossing of the Red Sea is that just as Moses’ leadership was authenticated at the time of the Exodus, so Joshua’s leadership is authenticated here in a similar way. You notice in 3:7, the Lord said to Joshua, ““Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses.”” Then look over in Joshua 4:14 “That day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, and they revered him all the days of his life, just as they had revered Moses.” That’s very similar to Exodus 14:31, where after the deliverance through the Red Sea, you read: “When the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.” Now, just as that happened with Moses, here it happens with Joshua.

5. Circumcision and the Encampment at Gilgal – Joshua 5:2-12

Let’s go on to 5. and then we’ll take a break. 5. is “Circumcision and the encampment at Gilgal: Joshua 5:2-12.” I’d say that 5:1 tells us how it is that,

immediately upon entering the land, Israel could circumcise the males who had not been circumcised during the wilderness period, as well as observe the Passover without being attacked by the Canaanites. The first verse says, “When all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings along the coast heard how the LORD had dried up the Jordan before the Israelites until we had crossed over, their hearts melted; they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites.” So, the will of the Canaanites to resist was removed by fear, and it seems to me that God caused that to be so in order that Israel’s initial days in the Promised Land could be spent in worship and covenant renewal, rather than in war. War would come, but there were some more important things that needed to be done before Israel engaged in battle. The first thing was that all of the males who had not been circumcised during the thirty-eight years in the wilderness were now to be circumcised.

It seems clear that circumcision had not been practiced during the wilderness period. You read in verse 2, “The LORD said to Joshua, ‘Make flint knives; circumcise the Israelites again.’ So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth. Now this is why he did so: All those who came out of Egypt—all the men of military age—died in the desert on the way after leaving Egypt. All the people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the desert during the journey from Egypt had not.” So for forty years you have a generation that had not been circumcised. Now Joshua was commanded to do it.

Now the question arises, why weren’t all of those males circumcised according to the regulations of the Mosaic Law during the wilderness period? There’s no direct explanation of that. Look at Numbers 14:34—there’s a reference there and in Psalm 95 as well—after the spies went out to Kadesh Barnea and said, “We can’t conquer the land,” the Lord condemned them to the thirty-eight years in the wilderness, and it says “for forty years—one year for each of the forty days you explored the land—you will suffer for your sins,” and then notice the next phrase: “and know what it is like to have me against you.” So, for that thirty-eight year period, Israel was under the Lord’s judgment.

Look at Psalm 95:9, reflecting back on this. It speaks of Meribah and Massah

“where your fathers tested and tried me,” but then look at verse 10: “For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, ‘They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.’ So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’” It seems that Israel was under God’s judgment for that thirty-eight year period, and perhaps for that reason, although there’s no explicit statement of this, applying the sign of the covenant of circumcision was not appropriate and was not done. But the Lord is explicit here: now it is to be done, and so the new generation is circumcised in Joshua 5.

Passover at Gilgal

Then the Passover is observed. 5:10 says, “On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover.” Apparently the Passover had not been observed either, since the second year of the wilderness wandering. In Numbers 9 (remember we talked about that), there was an observance of the Passover and there were some who were ritually unclean who couldn’t observe then, but provision was made so they could participate at a later period of time. But, apart from that Numbers 9 reference to observance of the Passover, the second year after the Exodus while Israel was still at Sinai, there’s no further reference to observance of the Passover.

Of course, the Passover could not be observed by those who were uncircumcised, because being uncircumcised would make them ritually unclean. Look at Exodus 12:43 in part: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘These are the regulations for the Passover: No foreigner is to eat of it. Any slave you have bought may eat of it after you have circumcised him.’” Go down to the end of verse 48: “No uncircumcised male may eat of it. The same law applies to the native-born and to the alien living among you.” If you’re uncircumcised, you may not partake of the Passover. So there was a generation that hadn’t been circumcised, and that same generation hadn’t observed the Passover either.

Here God provides for a renewal of covenant fellowship with his people immediately upon entrance into the Promised Land. He wants to assure them that he is

their covenant God. He wants to encourage them as they face the coming battles that very shortly they will be engaged in.

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