

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 210

God and Deception

April 7, 2018

Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)

Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)

Episode Summary

This episode of the podcast raises a straightforward question: Does God ever deceive anyone? While listeners might think the answer must be in the negative, that actually isn't the case. This episode considers several passages where God uses deception and suggests the same to biblical figures. We also consider related questions, such as: Is deception the same thing as lying? and, If God uses deception, how are we to think about that? Are there ramifications for personal ethics?

Transcript

TREY STRICKLIN: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 210: God and Deception. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. How you doing, sir?

MICHAEL HEISER: Pretty good, pretty good. I think we have an interesting topic for listeners today.

TS: Absolutely. Could you give us a little bit of a tease? (laughter)

MH: Are you angling there for some sort of, like, "I'd tell you, but I have to deceive you" kind of thing or do you want some misdirection here? (laughter)

TS: No, no, Mike. I just want the truth. Right? I just want the truth.

MH: (laughter) You want the truth.

TS: I can handle the truth.

MH: You can handle the truth?

TS: I can handle the truth.

MH: Well, it's not like our other episodes aren't interesting. That's not what I meant. So that... I guess that maybe that was a little bit of an accidental misdirection.

But this is a question I often would get asked, of course, in ethics class. I used to teach an ethics class in my green campus days. But I've also gotten it by email, too. So I thought hey, you know, why not? This is a good topic.

TS: Absolutely. I took Morals and Ethics in college in a philosophy class. To this date, Mike, it was one of the hardest classes I've ever taken. Because our professor, he would call on us. He would actually call on us. And if you didn't read the necessary literature at the moment, he would make you feel so small. I mean, it was awesome. It was scary and awesome at the same time. As a college student, it was the first time I'd ever experienced that. It was so hard, Mike, that I started sleeping with my book before a test. I literally... Everybody was laughing at me because I would go to bed and I would literally snuggle my Philosophy, Morals and Ethics book, with the hope that the knowledge would seep into my brain. And I did so well. I started making A's...

MH: That's how it works.

TS: Oh, I did so well that my roommate started sleeping with his books. True story.

MH: Okay, that's just... that's a little too much information there.
(laughter)

TS: It worked! But anyway...

MH: Nobody ever asked the professor, you know, "*Should* you be treating students this way?" Because the 'should' questions... those are the good ethics questions.

TS: So I'm hoping this will live up to my philosophy class, Mike. So you got a tall task ahead of you.

MH: Yeah, well, it sounds like it. I don't think you'll be, like, curling up with the transcript, but we'll do our best.

TS: With the MP3 player or something?

MH: Yeah. All right, well, let's just jump into it. So, you know, God and Deception.... It's pretty self-explanatory. What we're going to be talking about today is: does God ever use deception? You know, is it in the way he interacts with people or the way he might judge evil, so on and so forth. And people would hear that and go, "Well, duh, of course not. He's God

and he can't lie" and so on, and so forth. That kind of response presumes that deception and lying are the same thing. So that's sort of a subtext for the whole topic: is deception lying, or is there some difference there to discern? And I think your listeners can already tell that I believe that there *is* a difference there.

And then on from that, if God ever does use deception (and I'll tip my hand here—he does)... If God uses deception, how are we supposed to think about that? Are there ramifications for our own personal ethic? Do we just sort of get off imitating God in this respect? And what are the parameters... How do we think about this?

So as we jump into it, the sort of overarching question is pretty easy: God *does* use deception. For those who would doubt that, we're going to go through a series of passages where it's pretty transparently clear that God does use deception—that He withholds information or that he suggests to people that he's talking to... Like prophets, for instance, he suggests to them to withhold information—to do something deceptive.

5:00 So let's go. Let's go through some of these passages. I should add before we jump in that I'm excluding from this discussion instances where God rewards or overlooks human deception. Like the Egyptian midwives in Exodus 1, where the Hebrew women are having babies and then they make up some story about "Oh, those Hebrew women are just more lively than anybody else," as to why they're not having the babies killed. We're not talking about those instances. Like Rahab's lie—that isn't the issue. Obadiah (not the one that the book is named after, but there's a Biblical character Obadiah who hides the prophets from Jezebel—1 Kings 18)... Is that okay? Is that legitimate? Because he's deceiving the authorities. Well, it was okay with God. It was a good thing.

So, we're not really focused on those kinds of things. What we want to talk about this time is even more direct: where God himself actually does or says something deceptive and recommends such a course of action. So, as opposed to God kind of reacting, or in many of these instances I just named, *not* reacting negatively (sort of blessing it or overlooking it)... We're not looking at that. We're gonna try to fixate on instances where God himself does something that we could call "deception"—withholding information. Or he tells people to do so.

So, first passage here I want to look at is kind of a classic passage in this respect, and that's 1 Samuel 16, verses 1 through 5. I'm just going to read the passage. I'm using ESV again. It's only five verses here, but I think it'll become pretty apparent why we're starting off with this one. It's really clear. So in verse 1:

The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will

send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.”² And Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me.”

So Samuel's kind of freaked out. He's scared. And back in verse 2:

And the LORD said, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’³ And invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do. And you shall anoint for me him whom I declare to you.”⁴ Samuel did what the LORD commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling...

I love that verse! (laughing)

...and said, “Do you come peaceably?”⁵ And he said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice.” And he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

The story goes on, and they actually do have this event—this sacrifice—and then we get into the whole episode where Jesse's sons are there and Samuel says, "Oh, that one looks good. I'll bet he's going to be the king." And of course, he's not, and the one that's missing is David. Then David is brought, and David is anointed king by Samuel. And God says, "Man looks on the outward appearance, the Lord looks at the heart. This is the guy I want."

So they actually do the sacrifice. They have this meeting—this assembly. Again, we have every reason to say "Well, you know, good for you. Samuel, that wasn't a lie." And it wasn't. But the fact remains that that isn't the purpose. It's not the *real* purpose that Samuel went to Bethlehem. It's very transparently not the purpose. He's going to Bethlehem not to just have a sacrifice—not to meet Jesse and everybody else he's gonna meet. He is there to anoint someone as the new king. But he doesn't tell people that. And he doesn't tell people that because God suggests to him, "Well if anybody asks just say, hey, I've come to offer a sacrifice. Come on over. Come on over to the barbecue." He never reveals the actual reason why he's there, and this is God's idea to help Samuel not be afraid. Very clear. So, God himself suggests this strategy.

Let's go to another passage: Exodus 3. This one is perhaps not quite as obvious or maybe familiar to some people. Let's go to Exodus 3. And this is part of the

burning bush incident where God is telling Moses that, "Hey guess who I've decided is going to go to Egypt and demand that my people be let go by Pharaoh? That would be you, Moses."

So they're having this conversation and in verse 18 we read:

10:00

And they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.'

Now if we go back up to verse 8, this is the burning bush incident. Well, in verse 7 we'll start. Moses is afraid to look at God.

⁷ Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

So it's very clear why God is having the conversation with Moses and what God intends to do. But nevertheless, when he tells Moses about "Hey, when you show up and you talk to Pharaoh say to him (verse 18), 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us, and now please let us go a three day's journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.'" It's not, "Will you please let us go three days into the wilderness, and we're out of town. We're out of there." And it's not more direct: "God has sent us to you to demand that you let the people go, period." Now it's going to get to that point, but here in chapter 3 that is not the language we have. You could say, "Well, God's giving him a way to start the conversation. It's going to be kind of awkward. You go in there before Pharaoh, and Moses doesn't want to just lay it on him right away. So God gives him a nice icebreaker." Okay, God doesn't need to give icebreakers. (laughter) He's gonna give Moses signs so people will believe. And he's telling Moses, "I'm gonna be with you." Of course, we know Moses isn't the bravest soul here. He's going to beg off several times and God's gonna have to end up sending Aaron with him. But he actually tells them, "Look, when you go in front of Pharaoh, just say, 'Look. Look, dude. We just want to go out to the wilderness and sacrifice to our God. It's a three-day trip—you know, a three-hour tour.'" (That's what's going through my head now, about *Gilligan's Island* here.) He gives him this little thing to say so that doesn't sound to Pharaoh too extreme. He's not giving him the whole story. God's telling Moses to withhold some information.

Let's go to Joshua 8, another instance of this. And we're going to read a good portion of this—really through, I think, around 22 verses of this. But this is the fall of Ai, or as evangelicals like to say, "Ay-I." Okay, the fall of Ai. This is after the failure of Achan and, of course, also after the incident at Jericho. But here in chapter 8, we read this:

And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear and do not be dismayed. Take all the fighting men with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, and his people, his city, and his land. ² And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its livestock you shall take as plunder for yourselves. Lay an ambush against the city, behind it."

Okay. So let's just stop there for a moment. God tells Joshua to lay an ambush, which, of course, inherently requires deception.

³ So Joshua and all the fighting men arose to go up to Ai. And Joshua chose 30,000 mighty men of valor and sent them out by night. ⁴ And he commanded them, "Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind it. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you remain ready. ⁵ And I and all the people who are with me will approach the city. And when they come out against us just as before, we shall flee before them. ⁶ And they will come out after us, until we have drawn them away from the city. For they will say, 'They are fleeing from us, just as before.' So we will flee before them. ⁷ Then you shall rise up from the ambush and seize the city, for the LORD your God will give it into your hand. ⁸ And as soon as you have taken the city, you shall set the city on fire. You shall do according to the word of the LORD. See, I have commanded you."

15:00

So again, "according to the word of the Lord." This is God's plan.

⁹ So Joshua sent them out. And they went to the place of ambush and lay between Bethel and Ai, to the west of Ai, but Joshua spent that night among the people.

¹⁰ Joshua arose early in the morning and mustered the people and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. ¹¹ And all the fighting men who were with him went up and drew near before the city and encamped on the north side of Ai, with a ravine between them and Ai. ¹² He took about 5,000 men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the city. ¹³ So they stationed the forces, the main encampment that was north of

the city and its rear guard west of the city. But Joshua spent that night in the valley. ¹⁴ And as soon as the king of Ai saw this, he and all his people, the men of the city, hurried and went out early to the appointed place toward the Arabah to meet Israel in battle. But he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city. ¹⁵ And Joshua and all Israel pretended to be beaten before them and fled in the direction of the wilderness. ¹⁶ So all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them, and as they pursued Joshua they were drawn away from the city. ¹⁷ Not a man was left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. They left the city open and pursued Israel.

¹⁸ Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand." And Joshua stretched out the javelin that was in his hand toward the city. ¹⁹ And the men in the ambush rose quickly out of their place, and as soon as he had stretched out his hand, they ran and entered the city and captured it. And they hurried to set the city on fire.

So this is a signal. God tells Joshua how to signal—how to trigger the ambush.

²⁰ So when the men of Ai looked back, behold, the smoke of the city went up to heaven, and they had no power to flee this way or that, for the people who fled to the wilderness turned back against the pursuers. ²¹ And when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had captured the city, and that the smoke of the city went up, then they turned back and struck down the men of Ai. ²² And the others came out from the city against them, so they were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, and some on that side. And Israel struck them down, until there was left none that survived or escaped.

So these are the first 22 verses of Joshua 8. It's very clear that this is a plan, again, that God had suggested to Joshua. He gives him the signal once the ambush is in place: this is what you do, and so on and so forth. Ambushes are deceptive. Okay? If there was a moral problem, God would say, "Well I'm just gonna, like do something supernatural and dramatic. We don't want to use deception here, because that would be inconsistent with my character." That's not what happens here.

Let's go to 1 Kings 22. Again, this is a familiar passage because of the divine council stuff with the scene with Micaiah. Most of the people who are listening to this podcast are gonna be real familiar with this passage. This is about, "It's time

for Ahab to die, so how do we get that taken care of?" And in Micaiah's vision of God's throne room... We'll just go back up to verse 19:

¹⁹And Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; ²⁰and the LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said one thing, and another said another.

The spirit beings here are having a debate.

²¹Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, 'I will entice him.' ²²And the LORD said to him, 'By what means?' And he said, 'I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.' ²³Now therefore behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has declared disaster for you."

So in this instance, we have God using a planned deception—a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets (the prophets of Baal or whatever deity Ahab happens to be worshiping at that point, that day, whatever). A lying spirit comes up with the idea. God says, "Yep, that'll work, good idea." That's the way it happens. And God uses the deception that results from that to judge Ahab.

20:00

Let's go to the New Testament. We've got some inklings of this in the New Testament that are kind of interesting. In Matthew 16:20, this is an incident where Jesus... Let's just get the context here. This is Matthew 16. And this is part of the, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." When he gets done with that whole conversation (again, this audience is going to be real familiar with this), the narrator says... Matthew 16, verse 20 says:

²⁰Then he [Jesus] strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

They actually have a number of these in the Gospels, where Jesus tells his disciples or somebody else, "Now look, don't tell anyone that this happened. Don't tell anyone that I'm the Christ. Don't tell anyone X,Y, Z..." whatever the scene happens to be. And most of the time they just go off and blab and then it is what it is.

But, we have to ask ourselves: okay if the disciples go into Jerusalem (because that's where they're headed after the Matthew 16 incident, because we have the triumphal entry on the heels of this, roughly speaking, in a week)... And then after that, you know, we have the whole crucifixion. But they get to Jerusalem, and

surely they're going to have people ask them and wonder, "Hey, you know, you travel with Jesus. You've lived with him for three years (or whatever it is). You've spent a lot of time with this guy. Is he the Christ?" Their instruction was to either say no or say nothing. In other words, to not tell anybody that he was. Is that allowable?

Another instance is found in John 7:7-8. This is kind of an interesting passage. All these passages aren't quite the same as any of the other ones. But again, the whole point is that there's a deception factor, either quite transparently in there or kind of lurking as a subtext in the background. Here in John 7 we read this. Again, I guess I should go back and pick up some of the context here. We'll go to verse 1.

After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him. ² Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand. ³ So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. ⁴ For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." ⁵ For not even his brothers believed in him. ⁶ Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. ⁷ The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil. ⁸ You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come."

So he says, "Look, I'm not going up to this feast because my time has not yet fully come."

Then verse 9 says:

⁹ After saying this, he remained in Galilee.

We're good, right, but here's verse 10:

¹⁰ But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but in private.

So it looks like Jesus says, "Look you guys go that feast. I'm not going up there, my hour is not yet come." And then they leave and go up to the feast, and as soon as they're gone, he changes his mind. Or was this planned from the beginning? As soon as they're gone, he goes to the feast. He does the exact opposite of what he said he was going to do. And apparently, he doesn't want

them to know (or anybody else to know) that he's there, because, he doesn't do this publicly but in private.

Now if you keep reading the passage, Jesus does make it known that he's there later on. So commentators have had kind of an interesting discussion about this whole thing. I'm going to read you something that D. A. Carson says because it is... To be honest, it's a bit unclear whether this is a good example of divine deception or not. I'm not going to spend any more time on it other than to read the Carson quote and say a few words about it, but I wanted you to at least hear it and know that you have this episode in the gospel. So, Carson writes:

25:00

So let the brothers go to the Feast whenever they will. Their decision is without significance. But Jesus, whose itinerary is regulated by the Father, must at this point decline, because (he says) *for me the right time (kairos; cf. v. 6) has not yet come*. The early textual witnesses are divided between *I am not yet (oupō) going up to this Feast (NIV)*, and 'I am not (*ouk*) going up to the Feast'.

So the difference there... Some scribes inserted the word "yet" to take away the tension of Jesus saying, "I'm not going," and then he goes. So you actually have some manuscripts that insert the word "yet" (*oupō*) in there. Carson says:

The word *oupō* may have been an early scribal 'correction' to remove the obvious difficulty that arises in v. 10: Jesus does go up. But even if the reading *ouk* ('not') is correct, the difficulty is superficial because the context supplies a condition. Jesus' response to his brothers is not that he is planning to stay in Galilee forever, but that because his life is regulated by his heavenly Father's appointments he is *not* going to the Feast when they say he should.

This is how Carson takes it. So, he's basically saying, "Look what Jesus really meant here was just to telegraph the idea that 'I'm not going up here, because my life is regulated by the Father.' And then you know, he goes up later." I don't know if that's really valid or not. I mean, it could be. I'll give Carson and other commentators who look at it that way the benefit of that doubt. It may be. It's just that the way it's worded in John is you get... I get the distinct impression... Jesus does say, "My hour is not yet come," but he doesn't explain what that means. He doesn't add an addendum, saying "What I mean by that is: The things I do are regulated by the Father." He never says that. But again, maybe Jesus did mean that. But the impression you get when you read it is that as soon as they're gone, he goes. He just doesn't want them to know. And since I think there's a little bit of an ambiguity there, I'm not going to harp too much on that. But you should be aware of the passage.

Let's do one more: 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12. This is a bit more in-your-face here. This is Paul writing about the lawless one, which a lot of people would say is the Antichrist. So 2 Thessalonians, let's go back up to verse 8:

⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

Again, this sounds very similar to the slaying of the beast in Revelation. So that's a good bet that's what's going on here with the lawless one.

⁹ The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

Now, here's our two verses, verses 11 and 12:

¹¹ Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, ¹² in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

God deceives them. He sends them a strong delusion. It's from God. And the purpose is judgment on those who didn't believe but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Now, those are a number of passages from the Old and New Testament. So back to our question... We circle back here: God and deception. I think it's very clear. God does use deception. These passages (at least some of them) are... I don't think you could read them any other way—especially the last one there where God sends them a strong delusion. Well, they're going to be deceived. That's the whole point. So God does use deception. I think 1 Samuel is very clear, again, and these other instances.

So, what we have here, at the very least, is a withholding of information. All of these episodes have something to do with not completely telling whoever was in view (and it's a typically an unbeliever—someone who is hostile to God and hostile to God's people)... There's a withholding of information there that either God does or God recommends. There's a deception. Withholding of information is a reasonable definition for deception.

30:00 Now, we hear the word “deception” and we think of that term in a sinister way. I'm going to suggest in a few moments that maybe we need to rethink that. Can we really use a word like “sinister” when God decides to use deception to punish an evildoer? Because look, let's face it folks: God decides when a person's sin is going to be judged. That's God's job. That is his job description. It's not ours, but it's his. The righteous judge gets to decide when—not only when, but how—evil

is punished. And in some cases, deception plays a role. It's the arrow God pulls out of his quiver, so to speak, to do that.

I would suggest to you that that's different than lying. I would define lying as the utterance of a falsehood—something that is contrary to reality. That's a little bit different than withholding information. Because in theory, what comes out of your mouth is the truth. It's just not the whole truth when you withhold information. But this kind of creeps us out because we think of this only in sinister contexts. We think of this only in unjust contexts. Well, let me just run a few things by you. And here's the question I want floating around in your head for the episode here: Is the biblical command or idea of truth-telling... If you don't tell the whole truth, then you are withholding information, and that is deception. And again, we're ruling out the fact that someone can talk about something and not be omniscient and forget something. We get that. We're talking about the intentional withholding of information.

So is the biblical command or idea of truth-telling given by God in order to compel full, exhaustive information to questions like these: A little kid asks you, "Where do babies come from?" "Well, sit down. This is gonna take a while. I've gotta first explain all of the anatomical requirements and activities to produce children biologically, because I don't want to withhold any information because the Scripture tells us to tell the truth." Really? That's why the command's there—to force us to full, exhaustive information?

How about the doctor? The doctor has just been unable to save a child, either in an emergency room or some other situation—a car accident, or whatever. The parent—the grieving, suffering parent—comes up to the Christian doctor and says, "Did my child suffer before they died?" Well, I'm a Christian. So let me tell you exactly and exhaustively how acutely your child suffered. And I have to tell you it that way because I'm a Christian and we're supposed to tell the truth. So that means exhaustive information.

Really? For real? To be a little less heavy, how about questions like, "Did you like dinner tonight?" "Do I look fat in this dress?" Okay, every husband, I think, has gotten that one. "Well, you know, I'm a follower of Jesus Christ. So, let me just tell you exactly, in painful detail, how you look and how you'd look better" so that I would have to give you this exhaustive amount of information to describe what I really see when I look at you in this dress.

I mean, this is ridiculous. It's ridiculous to presume that truth-telling always requires exhaustive, full information. I mean, are the biblical commands given so that we can't be tactful? Is the truth-telling command given to prevent us from being kind? Is that their purpose? I don't think so at all. I don't think at all that that's the purpose.

35:00

How about if the pastor asks you, "What did you think of my sermon?" (laughs) Well, this is gonna be a real long conversation. Can't you be kind? "Are you planning a surprise party for me?" Well, yes, we are and this is how it's going to go, this is who's going to be there, you know, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah... In other words, "Oh, I wish you hadn't asked me that question because the truth-telling command prevents me from bringing you joy. Because we know you'll love this. But now that you popped the question, it's all ruined. By divine mandate."

How about this one: "Are you hiding any Jews here?" "Well, yes, in fact we are. Now what you do is, you go upstairs and you go down the hall. It's the second door on the left. And when you go in the room where the Jews are, you won't see any Jews right away, but you go in the closet and there's a trapdoor. There's this that, the other, and we've got like, four. So when you haul them out of there, make sure you get them all. Because we don't want you to be deceived that we only had three Jews instead of four."

Look, this is absurd to think this way. It's absurd to always think of the truth-telling command in a sinister, evil, wicked way. Of course, deception can be (and frequently is—like, every day) used to do evil. And yes, the command is designed to expose and—Lord willing—prevent evil. What I'm suggesting to you is that it is not given to forbid and prevent you from being kind or from being compassionate or from doing the right thing in other contexts, like, "Are you hiding Jews here?" You might think, "Well, I'm just gonna stand there and say nothing." Well, good. That's the answer, then. They've gotten the answer.

And you have contrary biblical examples, where not only do people withhold information and deflect people away—they use some point of deception... Not only is that true, but in some cases like we just read, God recommends it. Why? Because God wants to judge evil. And in some cases, the best way to judge evil is to preserve life. It's to save life.

The extreme examples might be easier to see. But, "did my child suffer when they died?" "Oh, yes, they did. I hope you're ready to hear exactly how much they suffered." Okay. Again, *that* kind of response is not only inappropriate, but I would almost be willing to call that kind of response evil. Because you know you are bringing pain. You know you are doing harm to someone. And to use the Bible as a legitimization to make people suffer in these kinds of contexts... That just isn't right. It's just not doing the right thing.

Again, we'll try to be a little lighter here. Some of these are going to be a lot funnier. But let's press this even further. We're Christians and the truth-telling commands... By the way, we pretend like these commands have no context. "Thou shalt not bear false witness." Have you ever thought about that command in light of the other stuff that the scripture teaches—the Torah teaches—about being a witness? This is legal language, folks. Not bearing a false witness was designed so that you would tell the truth in a judicial or trial setting. Because

sometimes there were some offenses where if you didn't tell the truth and then you found out to be lying, that was a death penalty offense, too. The whole system was designed... On the word of two or three witnesses, guilt or innocence is going to be established.

So this is the kind of setting that we have these commands in. They're not designed... God doesn't have in mind that moment when your wife asks you, "Do I look fat in this dress?" That is not what the command is for. The command has a context: to prevent evil—to prevent an innocent person from suffering and making sure that the guilty person who deserves to suffer—deserves that kind of outcome.... That they get what they deserve under the law. These commands have contexts.

But again, let's press it to some silly scenarios here. So we have the Christian quarterback who's been told to not bear false witness. Is the Christian quarterback allowed to look left and throw right? Is the no-look pass in basketball a sin? We've got a Christian basketball player out there, and he does the no-look pass. In other words, he deceives the person guarding him. Does he need to repent after the game—maybe after the moment—while he's running up to the other end of the court?

40:00

Can a Christian pitcher throw a change-up? Now, if you're not familiar with baseball, you may not understand that one. Can a Christian pitcher vary speeds? You do that (and the change-up is the classic example) to deceive the batter, so he can't time you. Is hide-and-seek a sinful, wicked game? Can you bluff in a card game, or is that a sin, too?

Again, these are silly examples, but the point is actually a meaningful one. Is the truth-telling command designed to cover these things? Are these things the point of the command? What I'm suggesting to you is no, they're not the point of the command. The command is to protect the innocent and to judge the guilty. That's why it's there. And if we look at the actual biblical examples, God does use deception to do both of those things. There's a consistent pattern, if you go through all of these things, where evil is judged and evildoers get what God said is coming to them. If they don't repent, "This is going to happen to you." And God decides when the time window for you to change course is over. That's God's job description. And God not only gets to choose when, but how evil is judged. This is the pattern: judging evil, protecting the innocent, trying to do what's right.

You could also throw into this the whole higher ethic thing. I am a believer that life is so sacred that it sort of trumps pretty much everything else. And I only take that position because of passages like Genesis 9:6 where it says, "*Whoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.*" Why? Because in the image (or as the image) of God, he created humankind. So to kill a person who had done nothing worthy of death (we have to add that because the Torah has death-penalty offenses)... So the issue is innocent life—a person who has done nothing

worthy of death in the eyes of God. To take that life is a moral evil because that person was created in, or as, the image of God. Taking that life is like killing God in effigy. And that seems to be the highest of God's interests—his laws—because of his personal attachment to humanity in that way. Again, we could go there, too. But without even throwing that sort of wild card into it, what I'm suggesting is that the truth-telling commands have a context and the pattern of the context is pretty clear: to judge evil and make sure that the innocent are not punished instead of the guilty.

So, I think there is a difference between truth-telling and withholding information in certain circumstances. I mean, we have these examples in Scripture. So that brings us around again to the to the question of: well, what do we do with that? How do we apply that?

I would say this: even though we have the truth-telling command and it has context and it's not... Withholding information is validated by what God does and what God recommends, in certain contexts. I think the other side of the question is equally as clear: that we owe the truth—the full truth—to God-given authority over us, unless they're going to use that information to compel us to sin. There we have the idea what we don't use the Bible to go and sin or to justify doing what's wrong. We owe the truth to God-given authority unless we're compelled to sin. And unless it requires us to harm people (like, "Do I look fat in this dress?")... So, it doesn't say... You can't justify scripturally that you're not obligated to tell the truth to God-given authority if it hurts you or if it makes you uncomfortable or if you'll suffer unjustly.

45:00

The point is, you don't cause the innocent to suffer or vice versa—allow the evildoer to get off the hook and not be judged for their evil. Obviously, you get into situations... Like I said before earlier, all these passages aren't quite the same. But there is an overarching pattern here about judging wickedness and making sure that people are not harmed by what we do.

Now, we're not omniscient. We're not omnipotent. We're not always in a situation where there is any clear choice. I understand all that. Life is hard. Ethics is hard. You get into these situations where who knows what the right thing to do is? I understand that. You know what? So does God. God knows... Profound thought for the day, for the episode: God knows that you're not omniscient. He knows that you may not be able to discern what the right thing to do is. He knows that; he gets it. He knows what he's dealing with. He understands that because he knows who you are and you are not him. You are lesser. God knows these things and he appreciates the internal struggle that you might go through. But you know, under the umbrella of Providence, God could very well have a reason (I would say he does) for putting you in that situation where you don't have a clear choice. He will teach you something from that. He will extract goodness and righteousness from it. He will do those things. But he doesn't expect you to be

what you cannot be, and that is omniscient in all these situations.

So I'll acknowledge that they're there. We all can think of instances like this, where how in the world would you know? The point of our discussion here is to get us to think about what to do with passages that validate God's own use of deception, or his recommendations in this way. You know, Samuel 16. God knows Samuel is afraid. He doesn't say, "Well, good grief, Samuel, you should be more godly. I thought I could use you today. I'll come back tomorrow. Think about it, you know, buck up." He doesn't do that. God knows Samuel is afraid and so God gives him an out. "Okay, if anybody comes up to you, just say I've come to offer sacrifice. Not 'go do that.' I'm not telling you to lie. But I am telling you to withhold information, and that will protect you. I am not here to see that you are harmed, Samuel. I am here, and you're going up to Bethlehem as part of my judgment on Saul, because Saul has forsaken me. It is time for Saul to be judged. That's going to happen over a long stretch of time, but here's where it starts. You're going to go and anoint David his successor, but I'm not going to compel you to tell that to everyone, and certainly not give all the details. You don't have to say that at all. Tell them this."

What we're trying to do in this episode is show that when we come across passages like this (and there are a good bit more than what we're talking about here), you'll find that God does do these things for specific reasons. And God as the lawgiver gets to decide how the laws are defined—in this case, the law of truth-telling. God gets to define that. And we can learn how God defines it by observing the context in which commands are given. They do have context. And we can also learn how God defines things by observing God's own behavior. What does God do? How does God live or act in a set of circumstances that are in relationship to the rules that he's given us? How does God do that? How does God behave? Let's look at God's own example.

And so I think for us we need to observe carefully God's own example and not extrapolate from it to legitimize, "Well, I'm going to not tell the truth here because boy, that'll hurt if I do. That's going to make me uncomfortable." We don't do these things out of self-preservation. In the biblical cases, God actually *did* tell people to do that. But we don't have the voice from heaven saying, "Well, say this and don't say that." We just have to go with making the best choice that we can.

We just had an episode recently about taking the two swords and all that stuff. We know from not only that episode, but dozens of scriptural passages, that we are supposed to be willing to endure personal suffering for the sake of the truth. For the sake of the gospel. For the sake of Jesus' reputation and God's own reputation. We don't use our comfort or our comfort zone as some sort of litmus test for truth-telling. We operate on an ethic—a Biblical ethic—by God's own example of trying to protect the innocent when we can. Sometimes we may not know how to do that at all and there may not be a way. But we try to do these

50:00

things. We try to be kind. We try to be loving. We try not to cause harm and pain that is undue. You say, "Well, what is undue?" It means something that is undeserved. In the scriptural examples, when God uses this, there are these occasions where God wants evil judged. We don't have that kind of discernment, necessarily, unless we absolutely know, or something like that. Again, we're not God. The whole point is that we don't use these examples or passages to make life easier for ourselves. That is not a biblical, godly ethic. When we do these things so that evil is punished and to protect a life that has done nothing deserving of death, well, that's different.

Those are different scenarios and we have biblical precedent for those. Chisholm has an article, and I think this might be available publicly. I'll have to check. If it is will put a link to it on the episode website. But Bob Chisholm, who teaches at Dallas Seminary (a friend of mine, an Old Testament professor), has an article entitled "Does God Deceive?" And he takes a similar tack. He writes this, and I think this is toward the end. It's either toward the beginning or the end. He writes:

God is truthful in that He keeps His unconditional promises to His people and fulfills His sovereign decrees and oaths. God's commitment to truthfulness, however, does not mean that He never uses deceit as a method of judgment on sinners. But He does so without compromising His truthful character and commitment to righteousness.

I agree completely with that. When God acts in these ways, he's not being inconsistent with his own character. He gets to judge evil and he gets to decide the time and the place and the means. And again, some of the time in scripture, God will use deception to do that. We do not put ourselves in the place of God. We can't intentionally try to model this as though we knew all of the things that God knows about a situation or a person or whatever. What we have to do to try to apply these things to ourselves is realize that we are not compelled to bring pain—to be unkind and unloving. And, when somebody's life is at stake, certainly, then we have some clarity. And we're not God. We're never going to be able to model this perfectly. But we can see it in scripture that God *does* have parameters and contexts for his interest in telling the truth.

And it's not about you being comfortable. You should be willing to suffer for his cause—the cause of the kingdom, the cause of Christ, so on and so forth. This is no justification for making your life easier and better. I think our hearts are deceitful, so that's where we would be prone to take this kind of thing. But we can try to use these things in the best way we can, being weak and lacking omniscience, to try to do what the Lord would do. Do what Jesus would do. However we can process them. That's the goal. We do have a precedent for these things. These things do have a context in scripture. And so we try, to the best of our ability, to act on God's behalf as he would and then use these things in some way for precedent. But not to serve ourselves. Not to serve ourselves,

and not to circumvent authority that God has put over us: government, our spouse, our family, church leadership. These are divinely-ordained positions of authority and accountability. You will never find a passage where God uses deception to deceive people in the right authority positions doing the right thing. (laughs) There's no excuse for that.

55:00

So again, I hope the topic was interesting. Again, I remember teaching an ethics class. You get to this day, and it always surprised me how these are these are Christian colleges with overwhelmingly Christian students, yet people had never thought about it. They had never even asked themselves if it's possible that "thou shalt not bear false witness" actually has a context—that there's actually something going on there. They just had not really thought about, "Well if we define truth-telling as exhaustive totality, we can't leave out any information. That would be withholding information. We're not allowed to do that." Well, all the scenarios that you could put yourself in, that just really bring people harm for no reason at all, other than your misguided interpretation of a biblical idea., A lot of Christians have never even thought about these passages. And so I thought this would be a good topic.

TS: All right, Mike, another great episode. Can you give us a little hint about our next week's topic—about Cain and the seed of the serpent?

MH: Oh, yeah. This is a question I get periodically about (how can I say this?) the deeply misguided notion that Cain was the spawn of Satan in the Garden of Eden. Out of that comes all sorts of really unfortunate and tragic racial theories about Jews and other people. So we want to get into that whole sort of misguided trajectory on Cain as an individual and the way Cain gets talked about in Scripture.

TS: Sounds good; I'll be looking forward to that. And again, if you haven't done so, get in on our Facebook group. Almost 2,000 people, Mike, having great discussions every day.

MH: Yup.

TS: We appreciate everybody that's in there. If you haven't done so, please go review and rate us on iTunes or wherever you consume our podcast. Help those other people discover and find us. That would be greatly appreciated. And we just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.