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Introduction

In most contexts deception is considered an immoral activity, and many view the Bible as supporting this conclusion. Passages such as the ninth command[1] of the Decalogue (Exod 20:16)[2] and the injunctions against false speech in the Book of the Covenant (Exod 23:1–8) are often said to prohibit all forms of lying and deception.[3] However, others read the same texts and conclude very differently. For example, Richard A. Freund writes: "a standard of absolute truthfulness does not seem to be a major issue in the Hebrew Bible."[4] Furthermore, in many biblical narratives, some acts of deception seem to be depicted positively. In Gen 38:13–18 Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and deceived Judah to get him to impregnate her. At the end of the episode Judah himself evaluated her actions positively: "She is more righteous than I" (Gen 38:26, NIV).[5] In Exod 1:19 the midwives lied to Pharaoh to cover up their disobedience to his death sentence against the Hebrew

1. Although a plausible case exists for the Lutheran/Roman Catholic enumeration of the Decalogue, by which the prohibition of false testimony is counted as the eighth command (see Block, "Reading the Decalogue Right to Left," 56–60), the scholarly discussion of lying and deception in the OT predominantly follows the Anglican/Reformed/Eastern Orthodox numbering. Therefore, for simplicity of communication, I will use this latter numbering and refer to Exod 20:16 and Deut 5:20 as the "ninth command."

2. All versification will follow the MT. Where the MT differs from English versions, I will provide the English versification in brackets.

3. E.g., John Murray writes, "The Bible throughout requires veracity; we may never lie," and then quotes Exod 20:16; 23:1, 6 as support (*Principles of Conduct*, 132). See also Wayne Grudem, "Why It is Never Right to Lie," 783–84. However, Grudem rightly distinguishes between lying and deception and only appeals to the ninth command concerning the former. See chapter 2 for a critique of these interpretations.

4. Freund, "Lying and Deception," 45. See also Shemesh, "Lies By Prophets," 84.

5. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

boys. The narrator seemingly affirms their actions by commenting, "So God was good to the midwives" (Exod 1:20), and, "He gave them families" (Exod 1:21). After hiding the Hebrew spies, Rahab lied to her own king concerning the spies' whereabouts (Josh 2:4–6) and was rewarded by being spared in the destruction of Jericho. Subsequently she was so thoroughly incorporated into Israel (Josh 6:25) that she became an ancestress of King David and Jesus (Matt 1:5). The writer of Hebrews even lists her among Israel's models of obedient faith (Heb 11:31). These positive depictions[6] show that the issue of deception is complex and requires close analysis of legal, prescriptive, and narrative texts.

However, this situation raises many other questions. How should readers view an act of deception in a biblical narrative, especially when it involves lying? What situational characteristics are present when deception is depicted positively? Do these positive depictions of deception in biblical narratives cohere with the Bible's ethical prescriptions concerning lying and honesty? These and similar questions have been explored in several monographs on deception in the Pentateuch[7] as well as in studies of deception in the OT broadly.[8] However, even though the books of 1 and 2 Samuel contain the highest density of narrative episodes involving deception in the OT,[9] no full-length examination of the motif of deception in this corpus exists. This study seeks to fill this gap.

6. Many who conclude that deception is always wrong have argued that even though these deceivers were rewarded or praised, it does not follow that the deceptions themselves were approved (see, e.g., Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 222–34, 271–74). Space prohibits a full analysis of such arguments concerning these particular narratives. It is sufficient to note that these narratives and many others *appear* to depict some deceptions positively, which should caution one against making sweeping statements before analyzing all the relevant data. The present work seeks to examine the deception episodes in the books of Samuel, many of which have not been adequately considered in the scholarly discussion.

7. Williams, *Deception in Genesis*; Nicholas, *Trickster Revisited*; Anderson, *Jacob and the Divine Trickster*.

8. Farmer, "Trickster Genre in the Old Testament"; Niditch, *Underdogs and Tricksters*; Prouser, "Phenomenology of the Lie."

9. Williams counts fifteen deception episodes in Genesis, which comprises fifty chapters (*Deception in Genesis*, 14–28). The present study counts twenty-eight deception episodes in the books of Samuel, which comprise fifty-five chapters. Thus while the deception-to-chapter ratio in Genesis is only 30 percent, in Samuel it is slightly over 50 percent.

Definition of Deception

Previous Definitions

Discussions of deception in biblical scholarship often lack a rigorous definition of the term. Many studies do not define the term at all,[10] which has led to subsequent methodological confusion.[11] Others have provided definitions, but in most cases they do not incorporate scholarly insight from philosophical studies on the phenomenology of deception, which results in imprecision.[12] For example, Gregory H. Harris writes, "Deception, at its core, is a lie in place of the truth."[13] This definition simply equates deception with lying, yet historically philosophers have distinguished between lying and deception; the former occurs when one communicates a falsehood and the latter occurs when one causes someone to believe a falsehood.[14] Although the goal of lying is to deceive and lying may result in deception, one may lie without deceiving (i.e., a lie may not be believed) and one may deceive without lying (i.e., through ambiguous language or physical motions rather than explicit communication). Thus deception is formally distinct from lying.

10. Hagan, "Deception as Motif," 301–26; Marcus, "David the Deceiver," 163–71; Roberts, "Does God Lie?" 211–20; Frontain, "The Trickster Tricked," 170–89; Bowen, "Role of Yhwh as Deceiver"; Chisholm, "Does God Deceive?" 11–28; Patterson, "Old Testament Use of an Archetype," 385–94; Esau, "Divine Deception in the Exodus Event?" 4–17.

11. For example, in postulating her reason for YHWH's alleged deception of Jeremiah in Jer 20:7–10 in promising protection but then not providing it, Bowen concludes that, among other potential possibilities, the "more likely possibility is that YHWH is *unable* to fulfill the promise" ("Role of Yhwh as Deceiver," 79, emphasis hers). However, a widely agreed upon characteristic of deception is *intentionality* on the part of the deceiver; an agent must intend to engender a false belief in another person to qualify as deceptive (see discussion below). Therefore, if the reason that YHWH failed to fulfill his promise of protection to Jeremiah was his *inability* to follow through, and thus not a lack of *intention* to follow through, we are not dealing with divine deception in this text but with divine *impotence*. If this were the case, as Bowen maintains, this passage would be misplaced in a study that seeks to understand the nature of divine deception.

12. As Vanhoozer wisely notes, "A biblical commentator would do well to consult the philosopher at this point in order to appreciate the fine conceptual distinctions between lying and deceiving" ("Ezekiel 14," 77).

13. Harris, "Does God Deceive?" 74.

14. See, e.g., Augustine, "Lying," 55–56; Mahon, "A Definition of Deceiving," 181; Carson, "Lying, Deception, and Related Concepts," 153–54.

In her study of lying and deception in biblical narrative, Ora Horn Prouser offers this definition:

> "Deception" entails communicating a message meant to mislead, making a receiver believe that which the deceiver does not. This can be done through gesture, disguise, actions, inaction or silence. Intention is a main ingredient of these definitions. False statements made by those who believe they are true are excluded.[15]

Prouser rightly emphasizes (1) that deception is necessarily *intentional* and (2) that it causes someone to believe something (in this case, "that which the deceiver does not [believe]"). However, according to this definition, a deception could theoretically result in the receiver believing something that is true. For example, if the soccer game begins at 4:00, but the deceiver (*x*) falsely believes the game begins at 3:00, and *x* tells the receiver (*y*) that the game begins at 4:00, intending to deceive *y* by making him believe something that *x* does not believe, and *y* shows up to the soccer game on time at 4:00, it cannot be said that *x* has deceived *y*. Certainly *x* has lied to *y*,[16] but he has not deceived him, since deception must involve *y* believing something false.[17]

In his study of deception in Genesis, Michael James Williams defines deception as follows:

> Deception takes place when an agent intentionally distorts, withholds, or otherwise manipulates information reaching some person(s) in order to stimulate in the person(s) a belief that the agent does not believe in order to serve the agent's purpose.[18]

Like Prouser's, Williams's definition could theoretically result in *y* adopting a true belief, since this definition only specifies that *x* does not hold the belief in question, not that the belief is actually false. Furthermore, this definition focuses only on the intention of *x* without specifying that *y* must actually adopt the false belief. However, if *x* does not succeed in causing *y* to believe something false, it cannot be said that a deception has occurred. As James Edwin Mahon notes, "deceiving necessarily has the result that another person either acquires a belief, or retains a belief, and that belief must be false."[19] For this reason, Mahon classifies deception as a perlocutionary

15. Prouser, "Phenomenology of the Lie," 1–2.

16. See, e.g., Fallis, "What is Lying?" 33; Mahon, "A Definition of Deceiving," 190.

17. Carson, "Lying, Deception, and Related Concepts," 154.

18. Williams, *Deception in Genesis*, 3. Williams's definition in a later article condenses this but does not change it in substance (see Williams, "Lies, Lies, I Tell You!" 11).

19. Mahon, "A Definition of Deceiving," 190.

act,[20] much like the acts of persuading or curing.[21] In addition to Williams's definition, neither the definitions of Yael Shemesh[22] nor John Anderson[23] include this aspect of deception.

Vanhoozer's Definition

Whereas critical elements in the phenomenology of deception are missing in each definition mentioned above, the definition proposed by Kevin Vanhoozer fully integrates the insights of the relevant philosophical discussion and provides the most succinct summary of the phenomenon. According to Vanhoozer, "*'x deceives y' means that x intentionally causes y to believe p, where p is false and x knows it to be so*."[24] Thus for an action to be deceptive, the deceiver must (1) *intend* to cause another person to believe something false, (2) *know* that the belief in question is false, and (3) *successfully cause* the other person to adopt this false belief. This definition will govern the following study and direct which episodes in the Samuel narratives are selected for analysis.[25] As noted above, this understanding of deception is distinct from lying. Following the format provided by Vanhoozer, I summarize lying as follows: *"x lies to y" means that x believes p to be false, but intentionally and explicitly communicates to y that p is true.*[26] Therefore, of the

20. Ibid. Here Mahon categorizes deception in terms of the third class of speech act theory, the "perlocutionary act," which J. L. Austin defines as "what we bring about or achieve by saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading" (*How to Do Things with Words*, 108). Later Austin notes that perlocutionary acts may achieve their response by "non-locutionary means," that is, non-verbally (ibid., 117–18). This is significant, since deception may be achieved by both verbal and non-verbal means.

21. Mahon, "Two Definitions of Lying," 211.

22. Shemesh's definition: "Deception . . . is the transmission of a message which the speaker believes to be false (even if it is actually—inadvertently—true), and moreover the speaker's intention is to mislead" ("Lies By Prophets," 82–83).

23. Anderson's definition, which he notes is streamlined from Williams's: "*Trickery* or *deception* . . . is what a trickster employs through any of various means of distorting, withholding, or manipulating information in order to serve or advance the trickster's own purposes and goals" (*Jacob and the Divine Trickster*, 46 [emphasis his]).

24. Vanhoozer, "Ezekiel 14," 77 (emphasis his).

25. This definition restricts the scope of this study to deceptions that actually occurred (i.e., the deceiver succeeded in causing the receiver to adopt the false belief). However, the ethical conclusions we draw from this study will logically apply to *attempted deceptions* as well (i.e., the deceiver failed to cause the receiver to adopt the false belief).

26. For a similar definition see Chisholm and Feehan, "The Intent to Deceive,"

three qualifications for deception summarized above, lying fulfills (1) but not necessarily (2) or (3). That is, like deception, lying must be *intentional*, but unlike the deceiver, the liar does not need to *know* but only *believe* that *p* is false (i.e., *p* may actually be true) and may or may not successfully cause *y* to believe *p*. Moreover, unlike deception, which can occur by ambiguous speech or physical actions that are neither true nor false, lying involves *explicit communication* of a falsehood, such as unequivocal speech or writing, or some other conventional means (e.g., nodding one's head to affirm or shaking one's head to deny).[27]

History of Research

Before investigating the motif of deception in the books of Samuel, it is necessary to survey views on the propriety of lying and deception, studies on deception in the OT generally, and the history of research of deception in Samuel specifically.

Views on the Propriety of Lying and Deception

In the history of thought, the discussion of the propriety of deception has usually revolved around the question of the legitimacy of lying. For many, such as Augustine and Immanuel Kant, it is never right to lie.[28] Others, such as Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther, distinguished between different types of lies and evaluated them accordingly. Aquinas recognized three types of lies: (1) the *mischievous lie*, whereby one intends to injure another, (2) the *jocose lie*, whereby one intends to entertain another, and (3) the *officious lie*, whereby one intends to help another.[29] According to Aquinas, all three are sinful, though the officious is better than the jocose, and the jocose

152. It is important to highlight here that, although deception is a perlocutionary act, philosophers of language are generally agreed that lying is not an illocutionary act. A lie falls under the illocutionary category of *assertion*, though in this case the speaker does not believe that the assertion is true. See the discussion of Meibauer, "Lying and Falsely Implicating," 81–85, 111–14.

27. Kant also acknowledged that lying could occur through "the use of conventional signs" (see Mahon, "The Truth About Kant on Lies," 203).

28. See Augustine, "Lying," 66–69; Augustine, "Against Lying," 129–30; Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 182–83.

29. Aquinas, "Of Lying," 89. Although Aquinas's language here concerns "lies," the intentions of both the mischievous and the officious are to deceive; thus his tripartite scheme is a helpful illustration for the present discussion.

better than the mischievous.[30] Luther also acknowledged this threefold division, but he argued that the officious lie should be told, the jocose lie may be told, and the mischievous lie neither should nor may be told.[31] Thus for Luther not all deception is wrong. This latter position coheres with the later articulation of Jeremy Bentham, who said,

> Falsehood, take it by itself, consider it as not being accompanied by any other material circumstances, nor therefore productive of any material effects, can never, upon the principle of utility, constitute any offense at all.[32]

Therefore for Bentham, neither lying nor deception is right or wrong in itself, but depends upon the end for which it is employed. This utilitarian view represents the opposite end of the spectrum from the deontological position of Augustine and Kant. From this brief survey it is clear that the history of thought evidences a continuum of views concerning the propriety of lying and deception.

Deception in the Old Testament

Similarly, the history of research on deception in the OT is varied both in its scope and conclusions. Some studies have focused on the so-called "trickster genre," comparing various biblical episodes with trickster stories from other cultures.[33] Others have focused on the thorny issue of divine deception in the OT and how to reconcile it with the traditional understanding of the trustworthy character of God.[34] However, the studies most relevant for our purposes are those that have attempted to extrapolate from the OT broad conclusions concerning the ethics of deception. Three works in particular are most germane to the discussion. First, Martin Klopfenstein's *Die Lüge nach dem Alten Testament* offers an extensive analysis of the primary vocabulary used to describe lying in the OT. Klopfenstein concludes that the OT never

30. Ibid., 90–91.

31. See Plass, *What Luther Says*, 2:870.

32. Bentham, *Morals and Legislation*, 223.

33. Farmer, "Trickster Genre in the Old Testament"; Niditch, *Underdogs and Tricksters*; Nicholas, *Trickster Revisited*.

34. Roberts, "Does God Lie?" Bowen, "Role of Yhwh as Deceiver"; Chisholm, "Does God Deceive?" Patterson, "Old Testament Use of an Archetype"; Harris, "Does God Deceive?" Esau, "Divine Deception in the Exodus Event?" Block, "What Has Delphi to do with Samaria?" Anderson, *Jacob and the Divine Trickster*; Vanhoozer, "Ezekiel 14."

prohibits lying outright,[35] but still argues that all lying is wrong because it supposedly destroys one's relationship with God and is inimical to society.[36] Although Klopfenstein's study does not focus on the issue of deception by means other than lying, for him, to deceive by lying is clearly wrong.

Second, Prouser's dissertation examines a variety of narratives in which biblical characters tell lies. After summarizing the relevant vocabulary, she analyzes what she deems clear and ambiguous lies, the special relationship between women and deception, and narratives depicting divine deceit. Concerning the acceptability of deception, she concludes: "Biblical society condoned lying and any form of deception that allows an underdog to accomplish a positive goal he or she would not have been able to achieve by direct means."[37] Basically, as long as one deceives upward along the power scale and not for negative purposes, deception is acceptable biblically. She also argues that "those who lie in negative circumstances are unsuccessful,"[38] that is, they fail to deceive. Prouser believes that this pattern even accounts for depictions of divine deception, claiming that because YHWH allegedly failed to deceive Ahab in 1 Kings 22, "God's use of stratagems when in a position of strength is narratologically condemned as a misuse of power."[39]

Third, in a comparative treatment of deception in Genesis, Williams catalogues and analyzes fifteen deception episodes, compares them to various deceptions elsewhere in the Bible (including some in Samuel), explores how later Jewish tradition viewed these deceptions in Genesis, and then examines parallels from both ancient Near Eastern literature and folklore material. Williams finds that the depiction of deception in Genesis is unique among the biblical materials, concluding, "In Genesis, deception is justified when it is used by one previously wronged against the one who has done the wrong in order to restore *shalom*."[40] However, outside of Genesis, a different set of criteria is operative. According to Williams, in the rest of the OT, positively evaluated deception is that which either "benefits a third (Israelite) party by removing a threat to that party's physical or spiritual well-being" or "directly safeguards the physical well-being of the Israelite perpetrator(s)."[41] He suggests that the difference between these criteria may

35. Klopfenstein, *Die Lüge*, 322.

36. Ibid., 353.

37. Prouser, "Phenomenology of the Lie," 181.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., 198. Shemesh similarly argues that lying and deception was acceptable as a tool of the weak against the strong ("Lies By Prophets," 84).

40. Williams, *Deception in Genesis*, 55.

41. Ibid., 74.

be attributed to the social identity evident in national Israel as a covenantal community, which did not yet obtain during the time of the patriarchs.[42] This representative survey sets the stage for a fresh analysis of deception in the books of Samuel.

Deception in the Books of Samuel

The motif of deception in the books of Samuel has been explored in only four articles. Harry Hagan focuses his study on deception in the Succession Narrative and detects eighteen instances in this section alone.[43] However, since he does not define deception, he includes episodes that are questionable in light of the philosophical distinctions of deception discussed above.[44] Although Hagan sees deception as a theme in its own right, he also argues that it functions within the larger theme of fidelity and infidelity, especially in the relationship between a king and his subjects.[45] He analyzes the deceptions in these chapters under five headings, identified according to the characters involved: (1) David, Uriah, and Nathan, (2) Amnon and Absalom, (3) Absalom's rebellion, (4) Sheba, Amasa, Joab, and the Woman of Abel, and (5) Adonijah and Solomon. Hagan concludes that in each case deception was committed either to obtain a woman or the kingdom, and counter-deception was committed to restore the order.[46]

In his study of deception in the life of David, David Marcus observes two major trends: (1) when David was young and on the rise, he succeeded both in his own attempts at deception and in his responses to attempts at deception against him, but after his rise to power and the Bathsheba

42. Ibid., 75.

43. Hagan, "Deception as Motif," 302.

44. E.g., Hagan includes 2 Sam 10:1–8, where Hanun *believed himself deceived* by David's sympathy delegation (ibid., 303). However, the text suggests that David's intention was not to deceive but to show loyalty (10:2), and since intentionality is a prerequisite for deception, this episode should not be considered. He also includes 2 Sam 20:14–22, where the woman of Abel Beth Maacah led the citizens in killing Sheba and hurling his head over the city wall to Joab (ibid., 318). However, while Sheba was certainly *betrayed* by the people of the city, the text does not suggest that he was caused to believe a falsehood. Hagan admits that deception proper did not occur here, but that "rebellion and betrayal are members of the family of deception" (ibid.). Nevertheless, a rigorous definition would eliminate this episode, since the phenomena depicted therein were not deceptive.

45. Hagan, "Deception as Motif," 303.

46. Ibid., 322.

affair his fortunes in this area changed;[47] (2) the various instances of deception exhibit a pattern of "measure for measure." That is, the one who deceived often later became the victim of deception.[48] However, since, like Hagan, Marcus does not define deception, he includes episodes that do not belong in this category.[49]

Raymond-Jean Frontain also finds evidence throughout the David narrative for the first trend identified by Marcus: early in his career David was the trickster figure who successfully deceived, but as he rose in political power, and especially after the Bathsheba affair, he tended to become the dupe of deception.[50] Frontain sees David's changing social power as the significant variable in the narrative's changing perspective on his deceptive actions; with time, his deception turned from trickery to treachery.[51]

Lastly, Joe Barnhart argues that the characters' use of deception in the books of Samuel suggests that the author has fabricated many of the events depicted.[52] Although he concludes that many accounts in the David narrative are fictional, his exegetical engagement with the text is superficial, lacking serious effort to determine the author's disposition in the depiction of

47. Marcus, "David the Deceiver," 164.

48. Ibid., 165. He gives the examples of (1) Saul deceiving David with Merab and Michal (1 Sam 18:17–23), and then Michal deceiving Saul with the idol (1 Sam 19:12–17); (2) Amnon deceiving David about Tamar (2 Sam 13:6–7), and then Absalom deceiving David about Amnon (2 Sam 13:26–28); (3) Absalom deceiving David about going to Hebron for a vow (2 Sam 15:7–9), and David deceiving Absalom through Hushai's counsel (2 Sam 15:31; 17:7–14).

49. For example, Marcus includes David's appointing of Amasa to command the army in place of Joab (2 Sam 19:13) as a deception against Joab (ibid., 165). However, while David may have appointed Amasa without Joab's knowledge, this does not mean that he caused Joab to believe a falsehood. Marcus also suggests that David deceived Joab by leading him to believe falsely that he would reconcile with Absalom after the encounter with the Tekoite woman in 2 Sam 14:2–21. According to Marcus, by later declaring that he would not see Absalom's face (v. 24), David misled Joab (ibid., 165). However, David had simply instructed Joab to "bring back the young man Absalom" (v. 21). To suggest that David deceived Joab, one would have to show that (1) David intended Joab to believe falsely he would have a face-to-face encounter, and (2) Joab understood David's command to imply such. Since the narrative is vague concerning such details, this situation is best left out of consideration.

50. Frontain, "The Trickster Tricked," 182.

51. Ibid., 181.

52. Barnhart, "Acknowledged Fabrications," 231–36.

the deceptions.[53] He concludes that lies and deception were accepted during military conflict as necessary resources.[54]

While these studies provide helpful insights into some aspects of these deception episodes, they are all brief and thus necessarily partial treatments of the phenomenon. What is needed is a comprehensive investigation of the motif of deception that extends across both 1 and 2 Samuel. To fulfill this need, the present study will seek to (1) operate consistently from a philosophically rigorous definition of deception, (2) analyze the narratological depictions of all the deception episodes, (3) determine any observable trends in these positively and negatively depicted deceptions, and (4) compare these data to the explicit statements made concerning lying and deception in the OT's prescriptive material.

Method

A Literary-Synchronic Approach

The method I will use in this study is what Moshe Garsiel calls a "literary-synchronic approach."[55] This approach is *literary* in the sense that the object of interpretation is *literature*—the biblical text itself—and not the putative historical realities behind the text. V. Philips Long has compared biblical narratives to artistic portraiture; just as the latter is visual representational art, the former is verbal representational art.[56] Just as a portrait artist has a physical subject whom she must represent through visual means, so the implied author[57] of a biblical narrative has a historical subject that he must

53. Many of his conclusions seem to be based on his own perception of the unlikelihood or inexplicability of an event, or his own explicit conjecture. He writes: "*I suspect* the redactors of Samuel and Kings viewed some of their own fabrications as elements of good storytelling" (ibid., 232). Concerning Samuel's prophetic knowledge: "*We cannot help wondering* how they [the authors/redactors] would gain access to the content of those putative revelations" (ibid., 233); "*We may conjecture* that threads of both fiction and fact have been woven into the Samuel-Saul-David-Solomon narrative" (ibid., 233). Concerning Dagon falling before the ark: "This of course *has the ring of pure fabrication* for embroidering the explanation" (ibid., 235 [all emphases are mine]).

54. Ibid., 233.

55. Garsiel, *First Book of Samuel*, 16.

56. Long, *Art of Biblical History*, 63–68.

57. In literary theory, the "implied author" is the version of the author implied in and projected by the text and is responsible for the work as a whole. The narrator is the direct means by which the implied author communicates to the reader. See Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, 71–76.

represent through verbal means. To accomplish this, both artist and author must make a variety of choices for how to depict their subject matter. The object of our study is this literary depiction in the biblical text. Therefore, by engaging in a close reading of the text and attending to its various shades of emphasis and reticence, we may glean great insight concerning the author's perspective on the events he depicts. This authorial perspective then provides the interpretive data from which we may draw theological conclusions. In addition, the approach taken here is *synchronic* as opposed to diachronic. Rather than focusing on the history of the text or any alleged sources behind the text, this analysis will examine the text as it stands in its final form. Although at certain points I will discuss textual variants or differences in the ancient versions where such items are especially relevant, the primary locus of study will be the Hebrew text as represented in *BHS*. This literary-synchronic approach to biblical narrative has blossomed over the last three decades and has been the subject of many fine theoretical treatments, most notably those of Robert Alter,[58] Adele Berlin,[59] Meir Sternberg,[60] Shimon Bar-Efrat,[61] and Jan Fokkelman.[62] The present study is greatly indebted to many interpretive insights found in these works.

In particular, this literary-synchronic approach pays special attention to narratological features such as plot, structure, characterization, point of view, repetition, allusion, narration time, narrated time,[63] direct and indirect discourse, and narration. Of special importance is the role of the so-called "omniscient narrator." As Sternberg writes, "Given the biblical narrator's access to privileged knowledge—the distant past, private scenes, the thoughts of the dramatis personae, from God down—he must speak from an omniscient position."[64] For this reason, the approach taken here views the narrator's (and God's) perspective on events within the narrative as supremely reliable, in contrast with the perspectives of the various characters, which may or may not be reliable.[65] Therefore, whenever a character's

58. Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*.

59. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*.

60. Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*.

61. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*.

62. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*.

63. Narration time is the amount of space the narrator devotes to depicting a particular event; narrated time is the amount of time elapsed within the narrative itself. See the discussion in Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 143–65.

64. Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 12. See also his later, extended discussion on pp. 84–99.

65. See also Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 54; Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 55–56.

perspective differs from a narratorial description, the latter will carry more weight. If the two perspectives are contradictory, that is a sign that the implied author is depicting the character as wrong. Ultimately, our goal is to evaluate the action and actors by reference to the narrator's omniscient and reliable perspective.[66]

A Biblical-Theological Approach

In addition to being literary-synchronic, this study will also use a biblical-theological approach. Recognizing that the phrase "biblical theology" has become uncertain and unwieldy in recent decades,[67] it still seems to be an appropriate label for the method taken here. What I mean by a "biblical-theological approach" is a method of inquiry that seeks "to survey and synthesize the results of both OT and NT studies."[68] Although the books of Samuel are my primary corpus of study, these books do not exist in a vacuum, but have been canonized along with the rest of the OT and NT. Therefore when other biblical passages address issues relevant to the exegetical discussion of a particular text, I will view these other passages as assets to the interpretive task and seek to incorporate them accordingly. Although our interpretation of a particular text must be exegetical, in a biblical-theological approach our interpretations must also comport with the larger witness of the whole of Scripture. The underlying presupposition behind this is that the Bible is a coherent whole, the parts of which are mutually illuminating.

The Structure of this Study

This study will proceed in three major parts. First, in chapter 2, I will examine all the explicit, ethical statements concerning deception in the OT. Whereas ethical evaluations in biblical narrative are usually implicit, many passages in the Torah, Wisdom literature, Psalms, and Prophets provide explicit commentary on deceptive activity. The analysis of this material will provide a theological grid with which to compare the narrative depictions of deception in the books of Samuel. Second, in chapters 3–6, I will examine the narrative episodes involving deception in the books of Samuel.

66. Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 155.

67. See Barr, *Concept of Biblical Theology*.

68. Scobie, *Ways of Our God*, 77. This brief summary obviously does not exhaust the meaning of "biblical theology" (nor does it for Scobie), but it does provide a succinct summary of this particular aspect of biblical theology that is most relevant at this point in our discussion. For a fuller discussion see ibid., 46–79.

After summarizing each biblical episode, the study of each will include two parts. The first part, "Establishing the Deception," will ensure that the phenomenon being examined is rightly classified according to the definition of deception provided above. This part will identify (1) the deceiver, (2) the receiver, (3) the false belief, and (4) the evidence that the receiver adopted the false belief. The second part, "Analyzing the Deception," will examine the characteristics of each deception by answering the following questions:

1. What tactic did the deceiver use?
2. What was the motive for the deception?
3. Are there any significant features that contribute to the narrative art of the episode (e.g., irony, a hint of the truth, allusions to other episodes, etc.)?
4. Did the deceiver(s) achieve the goal(s) for which they deceived?
5. Did the deceiver(s) experience any negative consequences for their deception?
6. What is the implied author's evaluation of the deception?

Regarding this last element, since the narrator never gives an explicit evaluation of these deceptions, we must rely on more subtle literary indicators to determine how the author is depicting each deception. The conclusions regarding evaluation are therefore more subjective than the other elements of the account.[69] Where I cannot determine the evaluation of a deception confidently, I will seek to show how the author is characterizing the deceiver. Third, in chapter 7, I will conclude by analyzing the findings of chapters 3–6, comparing those findings with the theology of deception developed in chapter 2, interacting with various scholarly views on deception in the Bible, and testing my conclusions against deception as presented elsewhere in the canon.

69. Williams makes a similar qualification in his study (*Deception in Genesis*, 14).