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GIDEON'S RESPONSE AND JOTHAM'S FABLE:  
TWO ANTI-MONARCHIAL TEXTS IN A  
PRO-MONARCHIAL BOOK?

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A Dissertation  
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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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by  
Daniel Scott Diffey  
December 2013

**APPROVAL SHEET**

GIDEON'S RESPONSE AND JOTHAM'S FABLE:  
TWO ANTI-MONARCHIAL TEXTS IN A  
PRO-MONARCHIAL BOOK?

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
BHS	<i>Biblia hebraica stuttgartensia</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur <i>ZAW</i>
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
EvQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
ExpTim	<i>Expository Times</i>
FOTL	The Forms of Old Testament Literature
GKC	Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A. E. Cowley
HALOT	W. Baumgartner et al., <i>Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>



<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	The International Critical Commentary
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal for Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
Joüon	P. A. Joüon, <i>Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i> , trans. and rev. by T. Muraoka
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
NAC	New American Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
<i>OTE</i>	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series

<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandanavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds.), <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>WW</i>	<i>Word and World</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

## PREFACE

While this dissertation bears my name, I need to thank many people for their help and encouragement along the way. First, I would like to thank Dr. Duane Garrett for challenging me and pushing me during the past several years. I have learned more from him than I can even begin to express. I would also like to thank the Old Testament professors at Southern Seminary. I have learned much from Dr. Betts, Dr. Fuller, Dr. Gentry, and Dr. Hamilton throughout both my M.Div. and Ph.D. studies. I am also thankful that Southern Seminary continually brought in amazing scholars such as Dr. Kenneth Mathews and Dr. Eugene Merrill. Taking classes from these men was a rare treat.

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One of the greatest blessings during much of the writing of this dissertation was the privilege of being a member and an elder at Third Avenue Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. I cannot say enough about my love for the people of Third Avenue. This church showed my family and me the amazing wonder of the bride of Christ. Because of Third Avenue Baptist Church, our home will always be Louisville.

Most of all I would like to thank my family. I could not have written this dissertation without the amazing support of my wife, Anne. She bore the pains of this dissertation in ways that I cannot imagine. I am also grateful for our children, who were

patient with me in this process as well. I am so thankful that the Lord has blessed me with a loving and supportive family.

Daniel S. Diffey

Louisville, Kentucky

December 2013

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

The ideology of monarchy in the book of Judges has been the focus of scholarly interest for the last several decades.<sup>1</sup> The trends in the interpretation of the Old Testament and of the book of Judges have shifted during that time. With the move from a diachronic approach to the text to a more synchronic viewpoint, the explanation of monarchial ideology both within the Old Testament in general and the book of Judges in particular has been strained and inconsistent.

The advocates for source criticism in the book of Judges posited a multiplicity of voices in the text, which included multiple voices on the book's understanding of

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<sup>1</sup>See Barnabas Lindars, "Gideon and Kingship," *JTS* 16 (1965): 315-36; Arthur Cundall, "Judges—An Apology for the Monarchy," *ExpTim* 81 (1970): 178-81; Martin Buber, *Kingship of God*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); Dale Ralph Davis, "A Proposed Life-Setting for the Book of Judges" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1978); William Dumbrell, "'In Those Days There was No King in Israel, Every Man Did What was Right in His Own Eyes': The Purpose of the Book of Judges Reconsidered," *JSOT* 25 (1983): 23-33; Phillip E. McMillion, "Judges 6-8 and the Study of Premonarchial Israel" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1984); Gerald Eddie Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*, SBL Dissertation Series 87 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986); David M. Howard, "The Case for Kingship in the Old Testament Narrative Books and the Psalms," *Trinity Journal* 9 (1988): 19-35; Lawson Grant Stone, "From Tribal Confederation to Monarchic State: The Editorial Perspective of the Book of Judges," (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1988); Marc Zvi Brettler, "The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics," *JBL* 108 (1989): 395-418; Uwe Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Studien zum Richterbuch* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990); Robert H. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 63 (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Marvin A. Sweeney, "Davidic Polemics in the Book of Judges," *VT* 47 (1997): 517-29; Philippe Guillaume, "An Anti-Judean Manifesto in Judges 1?" *BN* 95 (1998): 12-17; Dennis T. Olson, "Buber, Kingship, and the Book of Judges: A Study of Judges 6-9 and 17-21," in *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J. J. M. Roberts*, ed. Bernard Frank Batto and Kathryn Roberts (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 199-218; Serge Frolov, "Fire, Smoke, and Judah in Judges: A Response to Gregory Wong," *SJOT* 21 (2007): 127-38; Gregory T. K. Wong, "Is There a Direct Pro-Judah Polemic in Judges?" *SJOT* 19 (2005): 84-110; Isabelle de Castelbajac, "Le cycle de Gédéon ou la condamnation du refus de la royauté," *VT* 57 (2007): 145-61; Sara Locke, "'Reign Over Us! The Theme of Kingship in Judges 8-9'" (M.A. thesis, McMaster Divinity College, 2009); Marty Alan Michelson, *Reconciling Violence and Kingship: A Study of Judges and 1 Samuel* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011); George M. Schwab, *Right in Their Own Eyes: The Gospel According to Judges* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011).

monarchy. With the move to the synchronic study of the text credence has been given to the final form of the text. A difficulty, therefore, remains if the book is to be studied from a synchronic perspective, since the book of Judges contains material that is, according to many, both pro-monarchical and anti-monarchical in character.<sup>2</sup> Early studies could reconcile these phenomena by appealing to the source material, but a synchronic analysis has (or at least should have) worked more diligently to reconcile these texts. Synchronic approaches have largely viewed the book of Judges as pro-monarchical, but the majority has also emphatically proclaimed that the book contains two texts that are anti-monarchical: Gideon's response to the offer of kingship in 8:23 and Jotham's fable in 9:7-15.

Gordon McConville has posed the dilemma of distinguishing a coherent ideology of monarchy in the book of Judges:

The commonest answer to this question . . . is that the book serves the royal Davidic programme of king Josiah . . . . But is it possible to subordinate the voices of Judges to a single programme in this way? There are important factors that suggest otherwise . . . . Jotham's fable is by its nature elusive. Is the bramble-character of the king-figure inherent in the concept of kinship? Or is it a characteristic of Abimelech specifically, the tragedy consisting precisely in the refusal of the noble to bear the responsibility of office? . . . . Answers to these questions require careful readings of texts in context. Even the refrain, 'There was no king in Israel in those days; everyone did what was right in their own eyes' (chs 17-21) is somewhat opaque, not so obvious a plea for monarchical rule as is sometimes claimed. As Barry Webb has it, it is more of a drum-beat that signals what will be the next phase in the history of Israel with Yahweh, without evaluative commentary. If Judges as narrative is taken seriously, it is difficult to hear the refrain as an unambiguous call for monarchy above the background noise of the complications of Gideon and Abimelech.<sup>3</sup>

McConville's analysis of the difficulties probes the heart of the issue. Is there a single viewpoint of monarchy in the book? How can the book be pro-Davidic if it does not specifically allude to David? And his final point is the most apt when he writes, "If

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<sup>2</sup>The terms "pro-monarchical" and "anti-monarchical" will be used to denote the overall ideological viewpoint of kingship as an institution.

<sup>3</sup>J. G. McConville, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 126-27.

Judges as narrative is taken seriously, it is difficult to hear the refrain as an unambiguous call for monarchy above the background noise of the complications of Gideon and Abimelech.”<sup>4</sup> In writing this, McConville is pitting the “voices” of the book against each other.<sup>5</sup> He opts to leave the tension in the texts. McConville’s concerns are echoed by Kaminsky, who thinks that the biggest challenge to viewing Judges as a unified text is the presentation of the monarchy. With this in mind, he asks the question, “If the point of the book is to support the Davidic monarchy, then why . . . does the end of Judges 8 and all of Judges 9 contain material that openly mocks all human monarchic claims?”<sup>6</sup> Is there another option? Do the texts have to be viewed at odds with each other, or could there be a coherent view of monarchy espoused by the book as a whole?

### **Contribution**

Pro-monarchial treatments of the book of Judges have largely ignored Gideon’s response and Jotham’s fable. This omission can be seen most readily in the works of Marc Zvi Brettler and Robert O’Connell.

Brettler has several works on Judges<sup>7</sup> and one that is specifically oriented towards the understanding of monarchy within the book.<sup>8</sup> In all of these works, he barely even glosses Gideon’s response and Jotham’s fable. In his article, “The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics,” he advocates a strong pro-monarchial understanding of the book. In this article, however, his only interaction with these verses is the following quotation:

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 127.

<sup>5</sup>McConville’s conclusion is that all human rule is provisional (ibid.).

<sup>6</sup>Joel S. Kaminsky, “Reflections on Associative Word Links in Judges,” *JSOT* 36 (2012): 412-13.

<sup>7</sup>Marc Zvi Brettler, “Jud 1,1—2,10: From Appendix to Prologue,” *ZAW* 101 (1989): 433-35; idem, “Never the Twain Shall Meet? The Ehud Story as History and Literature,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 62 (1991): 77-86; idem, *The Book of Judges*, Old Testament Readings (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>8</sup>Marc Zvi Brettler, “The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics,” *JBL* 108 (1989): 395-418.

“The story of Gideon/Jurubbaal-Abimelech, which portrays judgeship as leading directly into kingship (8:22-23) and depicts judges as proto-kings, assures us that the issue of the legitimacy of specific types of kingship is very much within the purview of this author.”<sup>9</sup> In this twenty-four page treatment, focused on understanding the monarchy in Judges, he includes only one sentence about these two passages. Even more surprising is that his book-length treatment of Judges, which also advocates a pro-monarchial reading of the book, has only one reference to either of these passages. This reference does not even address the issue of monarchy, but instead references authorial style.<sup>10</sup> The difficulty of reconciling Brettler’s dealing with these texts becomes even more difficult when looking at his book *God is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor*.<sup>11</sup> In the preface to this work he briefly alludes to Gideon’s response and says that it was Gideon’s words that first propelled his study of God’s kingship because he “struggled to understand Gideon’s rather strange claim that divine kingship precludes human kingship.”<sup>12</sup> So Brettler seems to believe that Gideon’s response advocates a different monarchial ideology than the rest of the book of Judges.

Robert O’Connell gives the most thorough defense of a pro-monarchial ideology of the book of Judges that is currently available. In his work, which is over five hundred pages, he only discusses Judges 8:23 in a cursory manner. The same can be said of Jotham’s fable. He does not give any substantive discussion to resolving the apparent difference in monarchial outlook between these texts and the book as a whole. Regarding Gideon’s response, he does note that “the main concern of Gideon is that neither he nor

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 407.

<sup>10</sup>Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, 56.

<sup>11</sup>Marc Zvi Brettler, *God is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1989).

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 7.



his people should usurp YHWH's right to rule. The issue is not essentially one of the legitimacy of human or hereditary kingship."<sup>13</sup> Likewise he states that "the Jotham fable . . . shows that not kingship *per se* but the ill-motivated popular appointment of a king is the central concern . . . . [It] ridicules a people who do not know how to choose the right kind of king."<sup>14</sup>

These statements serve as the primary explanations of reconciling the monarchial outlook in Gideon's response and Jotham's fable with the monarchial view of the rest of the book. Neither of these explanations are given with detailed discussion or exegesis. This is common among pro-monarchial treatments of the book of Judges. A longer treatment of both Gideon's response and Jotham's fable is needed if the pro-monarchial position of the book is to be sustained.

Dale Ralph Davis makes an important point that if one views the book as pro-monarchial, then "one must nevertheless grapple with the apparently strong anti-monarchial argument of the Gideon-Abimelech passages. Any position advocating a totally pro-monarchial *Tendenz* for the book will have to justify itself before the bar of such data."<sup>15</sup> This study seeks to accomplish such a task by advocating a pro-monarchial position for the book while at the same time accounting for supposedly anti-monarchial texts in the Gideon and Abimelech narratives.

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<sup>13</sup>O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 164.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>15</sup>Dale Ralph Davis, "A Proposed Life-Setting for the Book of Judges," 18-19. Davis does deal with both of these texts. He advances the opinion that both can be viewed through the lens of a pro-Davidic sentiment.

## The Purpose of the Present Study

This dissertation is concerned with the theme of kingship found in Gideon's response and Jotham's fable. These texts will be viewed from a literary and theological perspective. This type of literary and theological study has been undertaken recently within the book of Judges by Massot<sup>16</sup> and Biddle<sup>17</sup> and has been a present in many of the synchronic studies of the book.<sup>18</sup> Wong describes the features of a literary study when he writes that whole book approaches tend to pay "careful attention to literary and rhetorical features such as narrative structure, recurring themes and motif, allusions, wordplays, points of view, plot, and characterization."<sup>19</sup>

This study argues specifically that neither Gideon's response nor Jotham's fable contradicts the ideology of monarchy, which is pro-monarchial in general and pro-Davidic in particular, found throughout the rest of the book. It will argue that neither of these texts should be interpreted as anti-monarchial, as the consensus suggests. It will demonstrate this argument by interpreting Gideon's response and Jotham's fable within the context of their respective narratives and within the context of the book as a whole. Particular attention will be paid to the history of interpretation, the life-setting of the book of Judges, and to literary features such as point of view, plot, and characterization.

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<sup>16</sup>Randal Mark Massot, "Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel: A Literary and Theological Analysis of the Gideon Narrative in Judges 6-8," (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1994).

<sup>17</sup>Mark E. Biddle, *Reading Judges: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2012).

<sup>18</sup>Some of these studies include the following: J. P. U. Lilley, "A Literary Appreciation of the Book of Judges," *TynBul* 18 (1967), 94-102; Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, "The Book of Judges," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, ed. Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), 141-62; D. W. Gooding, "The Composition of the Book of Judges," *Eretz Israel* 16 (1982), 70-79; Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist* (New York: Seabury, 1980); Alexander Globe, "The Literary Structure and Unity of the Song of Deborah," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93 (1974), 493-512; T. A. Boogaart, "Stone for Stone: Retribution in the Story of Abimelech and Shechem," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32 (1985), 45-56; Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1987); Amit, *The Book of Judges*; O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*; Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* (Sheffield, UK: Almond, 1988).

<sup>19</sup>Wong, *Compositional Strategy*, 22.

## Method

This study will view the book of Judges as a whole. This perspective will be attained through an exegetical, literary, and theological analysis of the text. Massot makes three important points about a study such as this. First, a literary approach is based on the final form of the text. He notes this by stating that within “synchronic and literary readings the object of study is always the *final form of the text*.”<sup>20</sup> Massot notes that this is the case because this is “the only text given to the reader.”<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that this present study does not assume a source critical development of the text, but the point of this study is the same as other literary studies in that it is concerned with the book as it is presented in the biblical text.<sup>22</sup>

Second, Massot points out that a literary reading has as its foundational methodological assumption “the *unity of the text* as a whole.”<sup>23</sup> In many whole-book treatments this concept of unity is discussed with the terminology of coherence. Within current synchronic treatments of the coherence of Judges is an important, though often unspoken, component. Unity is also discussed through an understanding of coherence. The term coherence has been widely used within synchronic treatments of the book of Judges. Greger Andersson writes, “Amit and O’Connell assume that the book of Judges is a coherent text and that the process of redaction or a compiler has given the book such consistency that we read it as ‘someone’s.’”<sup>24</sup> He similarly notes that “Webb and Klein

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<sup>20</sup>Massot, “Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel,” 2.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. Massot notes that “a final form approach does not deny the existence of a developmental history, rather, it *ignores* the existence of such a process” (ibid).

<sup>22</sup>On this Longman makes a good point: “The literary approach asks the question of the force of the whole. For this reason many evangelical scholars have seen the literary approach serving an apologetic function. If it can be shown that the Joseph narrative, the Flood narrative, the rise of the monarchy section (1 Sam. 8-12), and the book of Judges are all examples of literary wholes, then we apparently have little use for source criticism” (Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, vol. 3 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987], 60).

<sup>23</sup>Massot, “Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel,” 3.

<sup>24</sup>Greger Andersson, *The Book and Its Narratives: A Critical Examination of Some Synchronic Studies of the Book of Judges*, Örebro Studies in Literary History and Criticism 1 (Örebro, Sweden: Universitetsbiblioteket, 2001), 43.

state that the entire book is a coherent narrative and that the individual stories can be read as its episodes.”<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, most of synchronic treatments that Andersson mentions do not discuss the concept of coherence at any length. Amit never explicitly discusses the idea of coherence.<sup>26</sup> O’Connell mentions it in passing on six pages, but none of them really discuss or define what he means by the term.<sup>27</sup> Klein, similarly, only mentions coherence one time and not in any technical sense.<sup>28</sup> Webb, however, does speak of coherence with greater detail. Throughout his work he attempts to show the coherence of both the overall structure and the narrative texture. In doing this he pays particular attention to what he refers to as interlocking motifs that unify the text.<sup>29</sup> Marc Zvi Brettler discusses the issue of coherence particularly within the book of Judges.<sup>30</sup> While coherence has generally been used to refer to something that the reader accomplishes,<sup>31</sup> Brettler argues that the authors or editors of texts purposefully craft a narrative in a coherent fashion.<sup>32</sup> My assumption is that there are not multiple authors or editors at work within the book of Judges, but the purpose of this dissertation is not to prove that.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>26</sup>Amit, *The Book of Judges*.

<sup>27</sup>O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 50, 56, 69, 170, 198, 346.

<sup>28</sup>Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* (Sheffield, UK: Almond, 1988), 27.

<sup>29</sup>Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 177.

<sup>30</sup>Marc Zvi Brettler, “The Coherence of Ancient Texts,” in *Gazing on the Deep: Ancient Near Eastern and Other Studies in Honor of Tzvi Abusch*, ed. Jeffrey Stackert, Barbara Nevling Porter, and David P. Wright (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2010), 411-19. For two other works that discuss coherence in the book of Judges, see Mieke Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), and Cheryl Exum, “The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges,” *CBQ* 52 (1990): 410-30.

<sup>31</sup>Morton Ann Gernsbacher and T. Givón, “Introduction: Coherence as a Mental Entity,” in *Coherence in Spontaneous Text*, ed. M. A. Gernsbacher and T. Givón (Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 1995), vii.

<sup>32</sup>Brettler, “The Coherence of Ancient Texts,” 418.

<sup>33</sup>Longman notes that one of the pitfalls of a literary treatment is that it can eliminate the author. He writes that many approaches move “completely away from any concept of authorial intent and

Its purpose, rather, is to show a coherent message concerning kingship presented throughout the book of Judges.

Massot's third assertion is that the goal of a literary study is to understand the meaning of the text. Therefore, "a literary study has the dual task of describing the poetic or stylistic characteristics of a narrative text *and* determining how these features affect and contribute to its meaning."<sup>34</sup> Since the goal of the literary study is to understand the meaning of the text, and the text at hand contains a theological meaning, the goal of this study is to determine through literary analysis the ideological/theological understanding of monarchy within the book of Judges. By affirming that the Bible has "a message to convey," Longman demonstrates such an approach.<sup>35</sup> Some refer to such a view as ideological. In this vein Sternberg writes that the "Bible constitutes an ideological writing, anchored in a determinate world picture or value system and concerned to impress it on the audience."<sup>36</sup> Tushima concurs by noting that "biblical narrative is located at the conjunction of ideology (theology and ethics) and literary artistry (aesthetics). To understand adequately the ethical and theological message of the biblical narrative, therefore, attention must be paid to its aesthetic qualities as a narrative."<sup>37</sup> This study will prefer the terminology of ideology.

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determinant meaning of a text" (Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, 53). He also notes that the lack of focus on the author can be an advantage because the "literary approach focuses our attention more on the text than on the author during the act of interpretation" (ibid., 419).

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>36</sup>Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 36.

<sup>37</sup>Cephas T. A. Tushima, *The Fate of Saul's Progeny in the Reign of David* (Cambridge: James Clark & Co., 2011), 65.

While there are innumerable literary features that could be discussed, this study will primarily focus on three: point of view, plot, and characterization.<sup>38</sup> These will be surveyed briefly here.

### **Point of View**

Every narrative has a point of view. The basic definition assumed here is that the point of view within a narrative is “the position or perspective from which a story is told.”<sup>39</sup> There are many different aspects that are discussed concerning point of view within literary studies, but four are particularly important. First, there are different planes through which point of view is guided. Berlin points out four planes of point of view that are beneficial for biblical studies: phraseological, spatial/temporal,<sup>40</sup> psychological, and ideological.<sup>41</sup> The phraseological point of view deals with features that indicate whose point of view is being discussed.<sup>42</sup> The spatial and temporal point of view pertains to the “location in time and space of the narrator in relation to the narrative.”<sup>43</sup> The psychological point of view “refers to the viewpoint from which actions and behaviors are perceived or described.”<sup>44</sup> The final plane of point of view is the one that will be

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<sup>38</sup>For instance, Preminger and Greenstein note twenty-five features of literary criticism within the Hebrew Bible: character, conventions, dialogue, diction, humor, imagery, line, lyric, metaphor, meter, narrative, narrator, parallelism, personification, plot, poetry, prose and poetry, prosody, repetition, rhetoric, sound, stanza, style, themes and motifs, and wordplay. See Alex Preminger and Edward L. Greenstein, *The Hebrew Bible in Literary Criticism* (New York: Ungar, 1986), vii-viii.

<sup>39</sup>Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, Bible and Literature Series 9 (Sheffield, UK: Almond, 1983), 46.

<sup>40</sup>Often spatial and temporal planes are treated separately. See Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, 87-88.

<sup>41</sup>Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 55-56.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*

addressed most within this particular study. The ideological point of view pertains to the evaluation of the narrative by the narrator.

Second, point of view and narrator are closely related concepts. They are often discussed together within literary studies.<sup>45</sup> Longman, for example, notes that the narrator “is the one who mediates perspective on the characters and the events of the story. He guides readers in their interpretation of those characters and events and, through his manipulation of the point of view, draws readers into the story.”<sup>46</sup> Within literary studies it is the narrator who determines point of view. As Tushima notes, “the biblical narrator is an ideological persuader.”<sup>47</sup> The use of the term “narrator” here is not meant to undermine authorship.<sup>48</sup> This study will use the terminology of author and narrator synonymously when discussing the point of view of the narrative. The point of view, especially the ideological point of view, helps to provide narrative unity.

The third aspect of point of view that will be discussed here is that point of view within a narrative brings unity. Bar-Efrat notes several reasons why point of view is important. The first is that “the point of view is one of the factors according unity to a work of literature.”<sup>49</sup> It does this by bringing different characters and storylines into harmony within the narrative. This discussion of unity also relates back to the earlier discussion on coherence.

Fourth, it is important to know that the narrator’s point of view is written from an omniscient, but selective and often indirect, perspective. Alter summarizes well when

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<sup>45</sup>See Shimon Bar Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield, UK: Almond, 1989), 15; and Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 57-58.

<sup>46</sup>Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, 87.

<sup>47</sup>Tushima, *The Fate of Saul’s Progeny*, 89. Similarly, Berlin writes, “In the Bible the ideological viewpoint is that of the narrator. It is he, according to the conceptual framework, who evaluates” (Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 55-56).

<sup>48</sup>Contra David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, The Oxford Bible Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 52-53.

<sup>49</sup>Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 15.

he writes, “We are never in serious doubt that the biblical narrator knows all there is to know about the motives and feelings, the moral nature and spiritual condition of his characters, but . . . he is highly selective about sharing his omniscience with his readers.”<sup>50</sup> That is to say that within the plot “the relations between events are not made explicit.”<sup>51</sup> The narrator is often merely descriptive and expects the reader to piece together the information given instead of making explicit comment. So while the narrator is omniscient, he only supplies limited information.<sup>52</sup>

The narrator will often reveal his point of view without explicit statement or judgment. While the narrator is the one who shapes the ideological message, he generally does so through such things as plot and characterization. This, however, is not always the case. At times the narrator himself will interject an explanation or comment. These are particularly important. As Bar-Efrat notes, “Explanations of events are a powerful tool in the hand of the narrator, enabling clear and unequivocal messages to be conveyed to the readers.”<sup>53</sup> So while the narrator generally conveys a message that is more implicit, he will on occasion make explicit comments.

## **Plot**

The plot of a narrative provides both purpose and coherence. Leland Ryken defines plot as “a coherent sequence of interrelated events, with a beginning, middle, and end. It is, in other words, a *whole* or complete action.”<sup>54</sup> This definition is helpful for two reasons. First, it reinforces the whole-book perspective that is being advocated in this

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<sup>50</sup>Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981), 158.

<sup>51</sup>Tushima, *The Fate of Saul's Progeny*, 89.

<sup>52</sup>Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 93-94.

<sup>53</sup>Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 26.

<sup>54</sup>Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature . . . and Get More Out of It* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).



study. Second, it acknowledges that events are not random, but that they are interrelated and work together. These aspects are stressed in almost every definition of plot.<sup>55</sup>

While there are several important aspects of plot, two are of particular importance for the present study: conflict and resolution. One of the primary ways that the plot of a story can be traced is through the conflict within the narrative. So Longman notes that “as a general rule, plot is thrust forward by conflict.”<sup>56</sup> Not only is the plot driven along by the conflict within the story, but also the conflict sets the stage for the resolution. As Longman affirms, “the conflict generates interest in its resolution.”<sup>57</sup>

### **Characters**

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of characters within a narrative. It has often been noted that biblical characters are described in minimalistic terms. Alter sums up this position well:

Biblical narrative offers us, after all, nothing in the way of minute analysis of motive or detailed rendering of mental processes; whatever indications we may be vouchsafed of feeling, attitude, or intention are rather minimal; and we are given only the barest hints about the physical appearance, the tics and gestures, the dress and implements of the characters, the material milieu in which they enact their destinies.<sup>58</sup>

Berlin, however, warns about taking such a position too far: “the Bible contains characters that are neither flat, static, nor opaque.”<sup>59</sup> She then notes that, in general, the Bible contains three types of characters: full-fledged, types, and agents. Full-fledged characters correspond to what are normally called “round” characters. These characters

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<sup>55</sup>See Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 93; Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 101; Amit, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 46-47; and Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, 93.

<sup>56</sup>Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, 93.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 114.

<sup>59</sup>Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 23.

are complex and are shown from multiple perspectives. They are also generally well developed. Types, which correspond to what are often designated “flat” characters, are generally those who exhibit one trait or quality in excess. Agents are characters that move the storyline of the narrative along. They often go unnamed and will frequently not be described in any meaningful way.

Characters are developed through various means. Bar-Efrat notes that characters are shaped in either a direct or indirect manner. Some of the ways that the narrator directly shapes characters is through the description of the characters’ outside appearance or inner personality. The narrator indirectly shapes characters through speech, actions, and the roles of minor characters.<sup>60</sup> Speech and actions are of particular importance for this study. Alter notes the importance of speech and actions when he says that a “character is revealed primarily through speech, action, gesture, with all the ambiguities that entails; motive is frequently . . . left in a penumbra of doubt.”<sup>61</sup> Bar-Efrat expands upon this idea one step further by noting that “the views embodied in the narrative are expressed through the characters, and more specifically, through their speech and fate.”<sup>62</sup> The speech, actions, and fate of the characters are a particularly important point for the present study.<sup>63</sup>

### Outline

This study will use the exegetical-literary methodology discussed above in order to understand the ideology of kingship found within Judges 8-9. Before employing this methodology, however, a history of interpretation will be given. After the history of

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<sup>60</sup>Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 48-92.

<sup>61</sup>Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 158.

<sup>62</sup>Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 47.

<sup>63</sup>To refer to biblical personalities as characters is in no way an attempt to undermine the historicity of biblical personalities. Longman concurs: “To analyze David as a literary character in a text is not to deny that he was a historical king or that the events reported in the books of Samuel and Kings are accurate” (Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, 88).

interpretation a proposed life-setting will be advanced for the book.<sup>64</sup> This proposal will be followed by a discussion of the ideology of monarchy in the book of Judges. This section will be followed by discussions of both Gideon's response and Jotham's fable.

The second chapter provides a history of interpretation of the study of the book of Judges over of the past century. First, a short look at current trends within the study of the book of Judges is discussed. This observation reveals that a shift in interpretation has taken place from a synchronic, source-critical type of analysis, to a synchronic, whole-book perspective. This section is followed by a discussion of the study of monarchy within the book. This section demonstrates that a tension pertaining to the understanding of the monarchy within the book has developed with the shift in interpretive method from diachronic to synchronic. Under the diachronic method the book was viewed as having both pro-monarchial and anti-monarchial texts. The book has, therefore, been viewed as largely pro-monarchial, but this has come with some consequences. Those who view the book from a synchronic perspective have glossed over two important texts: Gideon's response in Judges 8:23 and Jotham's fable in 9:7-15. A history of interpretation of these texts, therefore, is given, especially as they relate to the monarchial perspective of the book as a whole.

The third chapter tentatively proposes a life-setting for the writing of the book. It will advance the position that the book was composed during the early parts of David's reign in Hebron when he only ruled over the South. This proposed setting makes sense of both the chronological indicators and the polemical message found within the book.

Chapter 4 discusses the ideological point of view of monarchy within the whole book of Judges. Some aspects of plot within the book will also be discussed. This

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<sup>64</sup>So, Robert Chisholm notes that part of an exegetical-literary study is fourfold. First, it should seek to understand the text in its historical, cultural, and literary context. Second, it should evaluate the literary qualities of the text, including things like plot, discourse structure, characterization, and point of view. Third, it should summarize the theme of the story. Fourth, it should consider the impact of the story on the implied reader. All of these will be done in this study. See Robert B. Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 184-85.

chapter argues that the three sections of the book--the prologue, the body, and the epilogue--all contain thematic coherence in the form of pro-monarchial sentiment. It will not discuss either Gideon's response or Jotham's fable because those passages will be addressed in detail in later chapters.

The fifth chapter focuses on the Gideon narrative within the overall narrative of Judges. It argue that the Gideon narrative is the central narrative of the book and that Gideon is a complex character. I show that there is a progression of the character of Gideon that is portrayed in both his speech and his actions. This progression serves as the context of Gideon's exchange with the men of Israel. I then examine the exchange between Gideon and men of Israel in 8:22-27, arguing that this dialogue is to be interpreted in light of the complexity of Gideon's character and in light of the pro-monarchial context of the book (as discussed in chapter 3). I note two things in particular: first, there is no clear condemnation of monarchy in Gideon's words and second, Gideon's actions in the surrounding context show that Gideon did accept the monarchy. In light of these two assertions, particularly the second, I attempt to understand Gideon's response to the men of Israel.

Chapter 6 begins the discussion of Jotham's fable. This chapter begins with a discussion of plot of the Abimelech narrative within the Gideon cycle. It also discusses the imagined scholarly consensus that has clouded the interpretation of this text as it relates to it monarchial ideology. It discusses, moreover, the widely perceived difficulties of this fable within the context of the Abimelech narrative. In addition, it also gives a discussion of the genre and purpose of fables, especially as they are used in the Old Testament. I then further discuss Jotham's fable within the context of both the genre and purpose of fables and in light of the pro-monarchial position of the book (as discussed in chapter 4). I conclude that Jotham does not make a statement about the ideology of monarchy. Rather, his speech is intended to condemn both Abimelech and those who appointed him king.

Chapter 7, the concluding chapter of this work, summarizes the arguments presented in this dissertation and briefly discusses the theological implications of the conclusions of this study.

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

#### **Introduction**

Before beginning the argument of the present study, it is necessary to summarize scholarship on the book of Judges in general and to look at the history of interpretation of both Gideon's response and Jotham's fable in particular. First, the trends within the study of the book of Judges will be discussed. This survey will reveal that a shift in interpretation has taken place from a diachronic, source-critical type of analysis, to a synchronic, whole-book perspective. After the discussion of trends within the study of the book in general, I will discuss the study of monarchy within the book. This discussion will show that a tension in the understanding of the monarchy within the book has developed with the shift in interpretive method from diachronic to synchronic. Under the diachronic method the book was viewed as having both pro-monarchial and anti-monarchial texts. Under the synchronic method the book has been viewed as largely pro-monarchial, but this shift has come with some consequences. Those who view the book from a synchronic perspective have glossed over two important texts: Gideon's response in Judges 8:23 and Jotham's fable in 9:7-15. A history of interpretation will therefore be given of these texts and how they have been understood, especially as they concern the monarchial perspective of the book of Judges. This historical survey will help to pave the way for the argument of this present study.

## Trends in the Study of Judges

For much of the last hundred years, scholars working within the book of Judges have been primarily concerned with determining the underlying sources within the book. Recent scholarship, however, is not as concerned with the sources per se, but rather the overall meaning of the book as it stands. This is not to say that the modern interpreters are not at all concerned with the source material of the book of Judges, but rather that the hypothetical source reconstructions have taken a back seat to the literary analysis of the text, which is considered to be a more sure endeavor. The focus has shifted from trying to understand the varying sources, and what they were individually trying to communicate, to determining what the final edition of the book communicates.

### Early Trends of Source Criticism

During the late nineteenth century and into the middle of the twentieth century the focus of the book of Judges in scholarship has been to divide out and ascertain the multiplicity of sources. This is a primary feature in most commentators within this period. A brief look at a handful of the more influential commentators of this period will suffice to show the general trend of Judges scholarship at that time. George Foot Moore distinguished seven distinct sources within the book.<sup>1</sup> Karl Budde, however, believed there to be at least nine distinguishable sources within the book, most of which came from the already “established” Pentateuchal sources.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, W. Nowack recognized eight different sources that were largely drawn from Pentateuchal criticism.<sup>3</sup> All of these

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<sup>1</sup>George Foot Moore, *Judges*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895), xv-xxxvii. Moore sees the following sources: J, E, E2, RJE, D, a post-Exilic author/editor, and a level of strata that represents the harmonization of the different “voices” found within the text. See also idem, *The Book of Judges: A New English Translation Printed in Colors Exhibiting the Composite Structure of the Book*, The Polychrome Bible (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1898).

<sup>2</sup>Karl Budde, *Richter*, Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1897), xxii-xxiii. Budde sees the following distinguishable sources: J, E, J2, E2, RJE, D1, D2, RP, and various insertions by a separate hand.

<sup>3</sup>W. Nowack, *Richter, Ruth u. Bücher Samuelis*, HandKommentar zum Alten Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1902), xxiv-xxviii. Nowack sees the following distinguishable sources: J, E, J2, E2, P, RJE, RD, and RP. Nowack charts the differences in the source material as

gave primacy to a deuteronomic redactor who has shaped the final work. C. F. Burney, while using the same sources as Moore, Nowack, and Budde, departed from their theory of a deuteronomic redactor, while maintaining the source critical method. He believed that the editor of Judges did not know Deuteronomy. He believed that the final editor was RE2.<sup>4</sup>

Otto Eissfeldt wrote the most comprehensive treatment of the sources of the book of Judges. Eissfeldt broke down the entire book into three major sources, dedicating fifty-seven pages to his analysis of the sources of Judges.<sup>5</sup> Though there is some variation in the sources that are distinguished by these scholars, and their versification does not always match the same source material, they are all primarily concerned with an analysis that recognizes different sources that have been patched together to make the final form of the book.<sup>6</sup>

### **Transition with the Deuteronomistic History**

The study of Judges shifted in 1943 with the publication of Martin Noth's *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*. Noth's work did not move the trend of study away from source-critical concerns, but shifted the focus by establishing a consensus of one deuteronomistic author (not just another redactor) in the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. This proposal caused a shift away from viewing Judges in light of Pentateuchal sources. With Noth's study Judges was analyzed in light of the deuteronomistic History, where he saw the Deuteronomist as shaping a complex history.

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observed by the major commentators of his time on the above mentioned pages.

<sup>4</sup>C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Rivington's, 1920), xli.

<sup>5</sup>Otto Eissfeldt, *Die Quellen des Richterbuches* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1925). His analysis of the sources appears as pages 1\*-57\* and comes at the end of his work.

<sup>6</sup>Several other important works are not mentioned that focused on the same issues as the aforementioned. Two of the more relevant are Harold M. Wiener, *The Composition of Judges II 11 to I Kings II 46* (Leipzig: Verlag der J.C. Hinrichs'schen Buchhandlung, 1929), and S. R. Driver, "The Origin and Structure of the Book of Judges," *JQR* 1 (1889): 258-70.



Noth's work paved the way for a dramatic shift in thinking about the "period of Judges,"<sup>7</sup> moving the emphasis from multiple fractured sources to one main authorial/editorial source. This is not to say that complex source-critical analysis on the book of Judges ceased completely,<sup>8</sup> but it became much less prevalent, and the book was now viewed from a deuteronomistic perspective.<sup>9</sup>

Though the general aspects of Noth's theory gained wide acceptance, there were several modifications of it,<sup>10</sup> some specific to the book of Judges. The two most prominent of these are the works of Richter<sup>11</sup> and Boling.<sup>12</sup> The understanding of a deuteronomistic Historian helped to pave the way for the next trend of scholarship.

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<sup>7</sup>This is Noth's language. He viewed the period of the Judges as being comprised of Judg 2:6-1 Samuel 12. For an explanation of this position, see Noth, *The deuteronomistic History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Max Niemeyer (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 69-86; Gregory T. K. Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges: An Inductive, Rhetorical Study*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1-10.

<sup>8</sup>The most substantive work after Noth that focused on discerning sources was Cuthbert Aikman Simpson, *Composition of the Book of Judges* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958). Simpson argued for two J sources (J1 and J2), E, a source he calls C, redactor RJE, three deuteronomic editors (Rd1, Rd2, and Rd3), and a final post-deuteronomic redaction (Rpd).

<sup>9</sup>The book of Judges has been notoriously difficult. For a discussion of possible theories on how Judges fits into the deuteronomistic history. Another recent proposal has been advanced by Michelson, who argues that the deuteronomistic history is ambivalent towards monarchy and that Girardian theory, through its understanding of mimetic rivalry, scapegoating, sanctioned violence, and sacral kingship, shows the origins and rationale of the rise of the Israelite monarchy in the book of Judges. See A. Graeme Auld, "What Makes Judges deuteronomistic?" in *Joshua Retold: Synoptic Perspectives* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 120-26 and Robert D. Miller, "Deuteronomistic Theology in the Book of Judges?" *OTE* 15 (2002): 411-16; Marty Alan Michelson, *Reconciling Kingship and Violence: A Study of Judges and 1 Samuel* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 1-5.

<sup>10</sup>For some examples, see Frank Moore Cross, "The Themes of the Book of Kings and the Structure of the deuteronomistic History," in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1973), 274-89; Richard Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the deuteronomistic History*, JSOTSup 18 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981); A. D. H. Mayes, *The Story of Israel Between Settlement and Exile: A Redactional Study of the deuteronomistic History* (London: SMC, 1983); Mark A. O'Brien, *The deuteronomistic History Hypothesis: A Reassessment* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989).

<sup>11</sup>Wolfgang Richter, *Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Richterbuch* (Bonn: Peter Hanstein Verlag GMBH, 1963).

<sup>12</sup>Robert Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975).

## The Rise and Dominance of Synchronic Approaches

With the rise of canonical and literary criticism, the trend in the study of the book of Judges moved from a focus on the diachronic to a synchronic approach to the book.<sup>13</sup> J. P. U. Lilley's article, "A Literary Appreciation of the Book of Judges,"<sup>14</sup> is considered by many to be a turning point. Lilley starts his article from an "assumption of 'authorship.'"<sup>15</sup> He goes on to discuss how the purpose of the book is bound up in authorship. He did not think that the issue of authorship ruled out the possibility of additions or later editing; instead, he preferred to examine the "maximum" rather than a "minimum." He preferred to focus on the certain final form of the text instead of a hypothetical reconstruction.

In the past few decades, the synchronic approach to the book has taken over. Gregory Wong discusses three types of synchronic studies within the book of Judges:<sup>16</sup> (1) short literary studies that argue that the current literary form of the book displays unity;<sup>17</sup> (2) in-depth explorations of particular narrative units that show unity of the parts in light of the whole;<sup>18</sup> and (3) larger whole-book treatments that involve literary analysis.<sup>19</sup> The study of Judges today is dominated by a synchronic outlook.

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<sup>13</sup>This is documented well in Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 35-37.

<sup>14</sup>J. P. U. Lilley, "A Literary Appreciation of the Book of Judges," *TynBul* 18 (1967): 94-102.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>16</sup>Gregory T. K. Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges: An Inductive, Rhetorical Study*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 111 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 10-16.

<sup>17</sup>Robert Alter, *Language as Theme in the Book of Judges* (Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati, 1988); Kenneth Gros Louis, "The Book of Judges," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, ed. Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974); D. W. Gooding, "The Composition of the Book of Judges," *Eretz Israel* 16 (1982): 70-79.

<sup>18</sup>Robert Alter, "Samson Without Folklore," in *Text and Texture: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore*, ed. Susan Niditch (Atlanta: The Society of Biblical Literature, 1990), 47-56; Yairah Amit, "The Story of Ehud (Judges 3:12-30): The Form and the Message," in *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum (Atlanta: The Society of Biblical Literature, 1989), 97-124.

<sup>19</sup>Yairah Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing*, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Leiden:

This does not, however, mean that everyone has viewed the book from a synchronic perspective. There have been a handful of recent detractors from the synchronic perspective.<sup>20</sup> Philippe Guillaume believes that the reason for these studies, including his own, is to strike a middle ground. He notes this point by writing that after “the excesses of diachronic exegesis, and after the healthy reaction of synchronic exegetes who study the text as it now stands, the author believes that it is now possible to steer a middle course.”<sup>21</sup> One of the critiques that has been leveled against synchronic studies of the book of Judges is that there is no general agreement among those who use the synchronic approach concerning the rhetoric of the book.<sup>22</sup> Synchronic treatments, however, have tended to agree on the view of rhetoric/ideology of the monarchy that is presented within the book of Judges.<sup>23</sup> The view of the monarchy has followed a similar interpretive path as the general trends within the book as a whole.

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Brill, 1999); Lilian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, JSOTSup 14 (Sheffield, UK: Almond, 1988); Robert H. O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading*, JSOTSup 46 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1987); Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges*.

<sup>20</sup>There has still been an interest in sources within the book of Judges. See Gregor Andersson, *The Book and Its Narratives: A Critical Examination of Some Synchronic Studies in the Book of Judges*, Örebro Studies in Literary History and Criticism 1 (Örebro, Sweden: Universitetsbiblioteket, 2001); Raymond Bayley, “Sources and Structures in the Book of Judges” (Ph.D. diss., University of Exeter, 1986); John Michael Engle, “The Redactional Development of the Book of Judges” (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 2002); P. Deryn Guest, “Can Judges without Sources? Challenging the Consensus,” *JSOT* 78 (1998): 43-61; Philippe Guillaume, *Waiting for Josiah: The Judges*, JSOTSup 385 (London: T&T Clark, 2004).

<sup>21</sup>Guillaume, *Waiting for Josiah*, 2.

<sup>22</sup>This is noted by Gregory T. K. Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges: An Inductive, Rhetorical Study*, Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum* 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2006). Wong writes that while the major synchronic studies “use basically the same synchronic, literary/rhetorical approach to uncover the rhetorical purpose of Judges, they have each arrived at a very different conclusion” (16).

<sup>23</sup>Interestingly, Wong, who criticizes the synchronic studies for coming to different conclusions, offers a different explanation on monarchy, which agrees with that of many synchronic approaches. This similarity will be explored more below.

## Trends in the Study of Monarchy in Judges

The ideology of monarchy in the book of Judges has long been debated. Many have considered the theology of the book to be centered on the idea of monarchy,<sup>24</sup> while others have seen the book as anti-monarchial.<sup>25</sup> Still, some have considered it as both pro- and anti-monarchial (multiple sources stitched together).<sup>26</sup> Some have gone even farther and claimed that it is inappropriate to speak of a single ideology of monarchy in the book of Judges.<sup>27</sup>

The study of the monarchy can be tracked mostly along the same lines as the trends in the book of Judges. Earlier studies in the book of Judges appealed to source criticism when discussing the issue of monarchy. The current scholarly trend of the study of kingship in the book of Judges has been caught between the past study of the deuteronomistic History and the present synchronic trend.

### Early Source Critical Views on Kingship in Judges

The early study of kingship was dominated by the view that there were differing sources with opposed ideologies stitched together. Wellhausen and others espoused this view about the books of Judges through Kings.<sup>28</sup> This view of differing sources is captured most clearly in the leading commentaries of the time, especially those

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<sup>24</sup>See Marc Zvi Brettler, "The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics," *JBL* 108 (1989): 395-418; Arthur Cundall, "Judges—An Apology for the Monarchy," *ExpTim* 81 (1970): 178-81; David M. Howard, "The Case for Kingship in the Old Testament Narrative Books and the Psalms," *Trinity Journal* 9 (1988), 19-35.

<sup>25</sup>Shemaryahu Talmon, "'In Those Days there was No מלך in Israel': Judges 18-21," in *King, Cult, and Calendar in Ancient Israel*, ed. Shemaryahu Talmon (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986), 39-52.

<sup>26</sup>Martin Buber, *Kingship of God*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 46-93.

<sup>27</sup>There has been one recent defense following none of the above positions by William Dumbrell, "'In Those days There was No King in Israel, Every Man Did What was Right in His Own Eyes': The Purpose of the Book of Judges Reconsidered," *JSOTSup* 25 (1983): 23-33.

<sup>28</sup>Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (New York: Meridian, 1957), 239-40.

of Moore and Burney. Moore, for instance, saw the anti-monarchial sources as originating from the E source and the pro-monarchial sources stemming from D.<sup>29</sup> Burney likewise sees differing sources as the explanation for the seemingly pro-monarchial and anti-monarchial tensions within Judges.<sup>30</sup> Other examples could be given from this time period, but they reflect this same basic approach to the text with minor differences found mainly in the identification of authorship for the respective sources. The presentation of a more unified deuteronomistic History changed the landscape of how texts with an ideology of monarchy were approached.

### **The Deuteronomistic History and Kingship in Judges**

The ideology of kingship was an important concern within Noth's understanding of the deuteronomistic history. The discussion of an ideological viewpoint of kingship was not focused on the book of Judges. Instead, certain passages in the books of Samuel and Kings were given prominence. This discussion, however, affected the understanding of kingship inherent within the book of Judges. Noth believed that kingship was viewed negatively within the deuteronomistic history. This was largely a comment on the ending of the book of Kings.<sup>31</sup> There were some, like von Rad, who disagreed with Noth's general conclusions concerning kingship.<sup>32</sup> Out of this tension other studies arose that advocated a double redaction of the deuteronomistic history that accounted for the differing ideologies (especially those concerning kingship).

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<sup>29</sup>Moore, *Judges*, 229.

<sup>30</sup>Burney, *Judges*, 235.

<sup>31</sup>Noth, *The deuteronomistic History*, 98.

<sup>32</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy*, Studies in Biblical Theology 9, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (London: SCM, 1953), 90-91; idem, *Old Testament Theology*, The Old Testament Library, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 1:343.

Frank Moore Cross made a significant contribution to this discussion. Cross advocated for two editions or a double redaction of the deuteronomistic history.<sup>33</sup> While Cross's study was focused on the book of Kings, the implication spanned the entirety of the deuteronomistic history. Cross argued that the first edition was composed during the time of Josiah and was pro-monarchial in support of his reforms. The second edition "retouched or overwrote the deuteronomistic work to bring it up to date in the Exile, to record the fall of Jerusalem, and to reshape the history, with a minimum of rewording, into a document relevant to exiles for whom the bright expectations of the Josianic era were hopelessly past."<sup>34</sup> This second edition then accounts for the more anti-monarchial texts.

### **Recent Studies on Judges and Monarchy**

Recent studies concerning the monarchy in the book of Judges have been marked by different characteristics. First, there are those who see an uneasy mixture of tension in the text between pro-monarchial texts and anti-monarchial texts. Another view is that the book of Judges is to be viewed as an apology for the monarchy. This is the majority view. There still remains minor dissent against this view.

**Pro-monarchial/anti-monarchial tension.** Some recent studies see a tension between texts concerning the monarchy in the book of Judges. The works of Martin Buber and Uwe Becker exemplify this approach.

Martin Buber's *The Kingship of God* is a seminal work on the monarchy in ancient Israel.<sup>35</sup> A large portion of his work is concerned with how the book of Judges

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<sup>33</sup>For a similar scheme within the deuteronomistic history, see Richard Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the deuteronomistic History*, JSOTSup 18 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1981) and Richard Nelson, "The Double Redaction of the deuteronomistic History: The Case is Still Compelling," *JSOT* 29 (2005): 319-37.

<sup>34</sup>Cross, "The Themes of the Book of Kings," 285.

<sup>35</sup>Martin Buber, *The Kingship of God*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., trans. Richard Scheimann (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 59.

perceives the concept of kingship. Buber spends significant time discussing Gideon's response, Jotham's fable, and the refrain at the end of the book that laments that there is no king in Israel. Buber views the book's refrain as it appears in the epilogue to be a pro-monarchical statement. He further proposes two books of Judges, which he redundantly refers to as the "book of Judges and book of Judges," in order to answer the apparent contradiction between Gideon's response, Jotham's fable, and the refrain in the epilogue. His explanation is that the epilogue of the book is pro-monarchical, but the body of the book, most notably the Gideon and Abimelech narratives, are written as an anti-monarchical political declaration.<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, Uwe Becker, in his work *Richterzeit und Königtum: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Studien zum Richterbuch*, tried to reconcile what he considered to be the two most important features of the book, its redaction and its view of kingship. Becker viewed the book as progressing in three redactional layers. The first two redactions of the book were anti-monarchical, but the third, which added chapter 1 and the epilogue, was decidedly pro-monarchical. Becker views both the Gideon narrative and the Jotham fable (as well as the whole of the Abimelech narrative and the body of the book of Judges) as an "unmistakable criticism of monarchy."<sup>37</sup> Most of Becker's work is spent discussing redactional concerns where he views both the pro-monarchical and anti-monarchical texts as foregone conclusions and offers little to no explanation or exegesis of individual passages. His way of dealing with the apparent contradiction is through source critical reconstructions.

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 77.

<sup>37</sup>Uwe Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Studien zum Richterbuch* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), 1, translation mine.

**The pro-monarchial majority.** The majority of recent interpreters have viewed the book from a more synchronic perspective. These studies have tended to view the book of Judges as an apology for the monarchy.

Arthur Cundall's article "Judges—An Apology for the Monarchy?" set the trend for much of the monarchial understanding of the book. This article suggested that the dating of the "first edition" of the book of Judges was in the early monarchial period (during the reign of David or Solomon).<sup>38</sup> Cundall thought that the pro-Davidic sentiment of the book proved the life-setting of the book to be in the early monarchial period. He argued that Judges was written to justify the monarchy by comparing it to the chaotic pre-monarchial period.<sup>39</sup>

According to Cundall's argument, the prologue of the book is pro-Davidic in two ways. First, the amount of space that is given to the tribe of Judah is disproportionately large, and Judah is portrayed in favorable terms. Second, as compared to the favorable portrayal of the tribe of Judah, the other tribes are portrayed as failures. Cundall further notes that the body of the book of Judges, which is comprised of the accounts of the Judges, is filled with unresolved problems. The problems are best explained by and fulfilled in the Davidic monarchy. He particularly notes the problem of leadership.<sup>40</sup> With this assertion, Cundall was stating that the Judges were morally corrupt, and Israel was lacking stable leadership. Such leadership was provided later by the Davidic monarchy.

The epilogue of the book shows the evil and anarchy of the period of the Judges and the lack of a strong centralized authority, especially through the refrain that there was no king. This is coupled with the repetitive mentions of Bethlehem, the city of David. Cundall concludes that all of these sections are written and preserved in such a

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<sup>38</sup>Cundall, "Judges—An Apology for the Monarchy?" 178.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 180.



way to promote the Davidic ideal.<sup>41</sup> So, for Cundall, everything in the book leads toward an understanding of the pro-monarchial, pro-Davidic ideal. Cundall was not the only one who viewed the book from a pro-monarchial perspective. His work influenced a slew of other works.

Several works followed the pattern of argument laid out by Cundall. First, there was Davis,<sup>42</sup> who took Cundall's argument and greatly expanded it. Davis's work serves as the first large scale synchronic reading of the book. His goal was to provide "a holistic approach" to the book.<sup>43</sup> Davis noted that his purpose was to build on the work of Cundall and offer not only an apology along the same lines as Cundall, but also to offer a specific life-setting for the composition of the book and give the motives for the selection of the material present in the book.<sup>44</sup> Several others follow both Cundall and Davis' pro-Judah line of reasoning.

E. Theodore Mullen argues that the pro-Judah slant of the book can be seen most clearly through the prologue. He cites as evidence the deliberate alteration of material that is also found in the book of Joshua. This alteration serves to glorify the tribe of Judah at the expense of the other tribes.<sup>45</sup> The works of Brettler, Sweeney, and

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 180-81.

<sup>42</sup>Dale Ralph Davis, "A Proposed Life-Setting for the Book of Judges" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1978).

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 19-23.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>45</sup>E. Theodore Mullen, "Judges 1:1-36: The deuteronomistic Reintroduction of the Book of Judges," *HTR* 77 (1984): 33-54. Several other treatments discuss the material shared between Judges 1 and the book of Joshua: M. Weinfeld, "Judges 1:1-2:5: The Conquest Under the Leadership of the House of Judah," in *Understanding Poets and Prophets: Essays in Honor of George Wishart Anderson*, ed. A. Graeme Auld, JSOTSup 152 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 388-400; A. G. Auld, "Judges 1 and History: A Reconsideration," *VT* 25 (1975): 261-85; K. Lawson Younger, Jr., "The Configuring of Judicial Preliminaries: Judges 1.1-2.5 and Its Dependence upon the Book of Joshua," *JSOT* 68 (1995): 75-92; K. Lawson Younger, Jr., "Judges 1 in Its Near Eastern Literary Context," in *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in its Ancient Near Eastern Context*, ed. A. R. Millard, James K. Hoffmeier, and David W. Baker (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 207-27; G. Ernest Wright, "The Literary and Historical Problem of Joshua 10 and Judges 1," *JNES* 5 (1946): 105-14; Serge Frolov, "Fire, Smoke, and Judah in Judges: A Response to Gregory Wong," *SJOT* 21 (2007): 127-38. Guillaume suggests the possibility of an anti-Judean polemic in Judges 1. See Phillipe Guillaume, "An Anti-Judean Manifesto

O’Connell advance this argument further and will be surveyed later. Despite these works, there are some who have challenged the growing consensus, namely, Susan Niditch.

**A recent non pro-monarchial approach.** There has been one recent discussion of monarchy in the book of Judges that has not viewed it from a pro-monarchial perspective. Susan Niditch offers one of the few treatments of monarchy within the book of Judges that questions the pro-monarchial majority opinion. Her reason for writing her article, “Judges, Kingship, and Political Ethics,” was to challenge the consensus pro-monarchial view of the book of Judges.<sup>46</sup> After surveying the works of Brettler,<sup>47</sup> Amit,<sup>48</sup> Sweeney,<sup>49</sup> Yee,<sup>50</sup> and Tribble,<sup>51</sup> Niditch argues that the book of Judges is ambivalent toward the monarchy. She advances this argument in three ways. First, she claims that the deuteronomistic History has a variety of different voices, which suggests ambivalence. Second, she does not believe that those who promote a pro-monarchial position have looked closely enough at the body of the book, which contains the tales of the Judges. Third, the tales of the judges are presented as epic tales of political creation, and the Judges are to be viewed as heroes.<sup>52</sup> In the conclusion of her study, Niditch believes that the view of monarchy in the book of Judges is complex and ambivalent.<sup>53</sup>

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in Judges 1?” *BN* 95 (1998): 12-17.

<sup>46</sup>Susan Niditch, “Judges, Kingship, and Political Ethics: A Challenge to the Conventional Wisdom,” in *Thus Says the Lord: Essays on the Former and Latter Prophets in Honor of Robert R. Wilson*, ed. Claudia V. Camp and Andrew Mein, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 502 (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 59.

<sup>47</sup>Brettler, “The Book of Judges.”

<sup>48</sup>Amit, *The Book of Judges*.

<sup>49</sup>Sweeney, “Davidic Polemics in the Book of Judges.”

<sup>50</sup>Gale Yee, “Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body,” in *Judges and Method*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 146-70

<sup>51</sup>Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

<sup>52</sup>Niditch, “Judges, Kingship and Political Ethics,” 61.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 70.

Despite this recent challenge, however, there has been a growing consensus that the book is to be viewed as being pro-monarchial. Those who view the book from a pro-monarchial perspective, however, have provided little or no interaction with Gideon's response and Jotham's fable.<sup>54</sup>

### **Gideon's Response and Jotham's Fable**

Both Gideon's response and Jotham's fable have been key passages in the discussion of the ideology of monarchy in the book of Judges. While the book has been largely viewed as pro-monarchial, these texts have posed the most challenge to that view. There are four major types of work that will be surveyed here where Gideon's response and Jotham's fable have been discussed from a monarchial perspective. First, many works discuss these passages within the larger context of the monarchy in Israel. The second category is those works that discuss these passages within the context of the book of Judges. These studies are largely monographs on the book of Judges that address both of these texts in some fashion. The third category is major commentators who have published on the entire book of Judges. Since these works have a different aim than the larger monographs, which address more specific subjects, it seems reasonable to discuss them in a different section. The fourth category is works that treat either Gideon's response or Jotham's fable independently of the surrounding context of the book. These works are largely comprised of journal articles or chapters in larger treatments of a genre. While it may seem odd to look at the type of work instead of the various positions held, this approach is followed because the various types of works have largely followed similar interpretive patterns when it comes to these two texts. It seems therefore, that the type of study that has been employed has influenced the findings. Each of these different types of works will be discussed below, and a discussion of the major views will be given later.

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<sup>54</sup>See the discussion in the first chapter on the statement of the problem.

## **Larger Overviews Concerned with Monarchy**

Several scholarly works concerned with the Israelite monarchy have contributed to the understanding of both Gideon's response and Jotham's fable. While each of these works is unique, they share some common characteristics.

**Martin Buber (1967).** Martin Buber's *Kingship of God* is one of the most frequently referenced sources in discussions of both Gideon's response and Jotham's fable.<sup>55</sup> Buber claims that both of these passages are clearly anti-monarchial. He believes that Gideon not only declined the offer of kingship, but that when declining it he was making a strong anti-monarchial statement.<sup>56</sup> Buber is very strong in his language and is the most referenced source in regard to the anti-monarchial view of these two texts. He argues that Gideon's response was not only intended "to withhold the rulership over this people . . . but from all people. His No, born out of the situation, is intended to count as an unconditional No for all times and historical conditions."<sup>57</sup> So Buber does not just view Gideon as turning down the offer of kingship but as saying that kingship is an illegitimate institution. Buber views Jotham's fable as working in concert with Gideon's response with language that is equally strong. Buber notes that Jotham's fable is "the strongest anti-monarchial poem of world literature."<sup>58</sup> As noted earlier, however, he does see an ideological tension within the book where the epilogue is to be viewed as pro-monarchial.

**J. Alberto Soggin (1967).** Soggin's treatment of the monarchy deals briefly with Gideon's response, but it does not touch on Jotham's fable.<sup>59</sup> The discussion of

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<sup>55</sup>Buber, *The Kingship of God*.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>59</sup>J. Alberto Soggin, *Das Königtum in Israel*, BZAW 104 (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1967).

Gideon's response comes near the beginning of his treatment, possibly because he sees this as one of the most important texts on the subject of monarchy within the Old Testament. When he first discusses Gideon's response, he notes that it is theologically motivated.<sup>60</sup> He later notes that Gideon's words contain the sentiment that theocratic rule cannot co-exist within a monarchical system.<sup>61</sup> According to Soggin, Gideon's response to the men was not just a rejection of their offer, but a rejection of the institution of kingship. In his evaluation of Gideon's response, Soggin does not offer an extended discussion, but appears to take this interpretation as self-explanatory.

**Tomoo Ishida (1977).** Ishida begins and ends his study on the Israelite monarchy with a discussion of Judges 8:22-23.<sup>62</sup> He follows this approach because he thinks that this text records the true understanding of monarchy in ancient Israel. He believes that this text "preserves the basic problem of the origin of Kingship in Israel."<sup>63</sup> For Ishida, Gideon's response is a, if not the, key text to understanding ancient Israel's outlook as anti-monarchical.<sup>64</sup>

Ishida believes that Gideon's response is secondary to the Gideon cycle and that it is uncertain as to whether he actually established a monarchy. Ishida does conclude, however that Gideon did bequeath ruling authority (of some sort) to his sons, which Abimelech usurped. Gideon's response in Judges 8:23 was actually written to distance Gideon from the actions of Abimelech.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Gideon's response was

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>62</sup>Tomoo Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel: A Study of the Formation and Development of Royal-Dynastic Ideology* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, (1977).

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>64</sup>While not a main feature of the present study, one of Ishida's primary concerns is to answer the question of whether there was a non-hereditary understanding or practice of kingship along the lines of Alt's proposal of a charismatic monarchy. His conclusion is that there was no such notion present.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 185.

based on theocratic principles and concerns. Ishida notes that “according to this view, a hereditary rulership, that is, a monarchy, would encroach upon the kingship of Yahweh over Israel.”<sup>66</sup> Ishida, therefore, believes that Gideon’s response is in line with theocratic principles and that the rule of Yahweh was never intended to co-exist with the rule of a human king.

Ishida does not spend as much time on Jotham’s fable as on Gideon’s response. As was noted above, he believes that Gideon’s response offers an apologetic for Gideon’s character against the later rule of his usurping son Abimelech. Ishida does not, however, believe that Jotham’s fable is intended to be anti-monarchial. Instead, the fable is intended to portray Abimelech negatively.<sup>67</sup> Ishida, therefore, believes that while at first glance the fable appears to be anti-monarchial, it only speaks to the historical situation of Abimelech and is used as a polemic against him. The true anti-monarchial statement is found in Gideon’s response.

**Frank Crüsemann (1978).** Frank Crüsemann wrote one of the most thorough treatments on the supposed anti-monarchial texts of the Old Testament.<sup>68</sup> In his work, he advanced the position that the anti-monarchial sentiment in Israel was much earlier (around the tenth century) than the previous consensus led by Wellhausen and Budde, who saw this sentiment as a later development in Israelite history.<sup>69</sup> Crüsemann believed that the anti-monarchial sentiment expressed in various texts was present from the time of the formation of the Israelite state under the monarchy. The first two anti-monarchial texts that he treats are Jotham’s fable and Gideon’s response.

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Frank Crüsemann, *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum: Die antiköniglichen Texte des Alten Testaments und der Kampf um den frühen israelitischen Staat* (Neukirchener: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978).

<sup>69</sup>Julius Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1963), 222-23; Karl Budde, *Die Bücher Richter und Samuel: Ihre Quellen und Ihr Aufbau* (Giessen: J. Ricker’sche Buchhandlung, 1890).

Crüsemann believed that Jotham's fable was used as a denouncement of the monarchy, and, in line with his thesis, that the fable was a very early composition, dating to the period of the judges.<sup>70</sup> Unlike some of the other studies surveyed in this section, Crüsemann gives a detailed discussion of both Jotham's fable and Gideon's response. Both of these texts, and the whole Gideon-Abimelech narrative, were redacted by an anti-monarchist. According to Crüsemann, Gideon was viewed as an ideal judge who rejected the monarchy. Gideon was then blessed with a long life. Abimelech, who took kingship by force, was viewed entirely negatively and died young at the hands of a woman.<sup>71</sup> In the end, Crüsemann believed that Gideon's response and Jotham's fable gave the "clearest and most basic rejection of kingship in the Old Testament."<sup>72</sup>

**Gerald Gerbrandt (1986).** Gerald Gerbrandt discusses both Gideon's response and Jotham's fable in his work, *Kingship according to the deuteronomistic History*.<sup>73</sup> When commenting on the history of interpretation of the Gideon passage, he notes that, "as a rule it has been assumed that 8:23 is a clear rejection of the offer of kingship."<sup>74</sup> Gerbrandt goes on to explain that it is not just that Gideon refused kingship, but that this text is a declaration against the institution of monarchy: "That Judg 8:22-23 reflects anti-kingship sentiments needs to be admitted . . . Gideon's answer assumes that Yahweh, and man as king cannot both rule at the same time."<sup>75</sup> Gideon's response is thus viewed as a theological declaration that Yahweh alone can be king and that within theocracy there is no room for a human king.

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<sup>70</sup>Crüsemann, *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum*, 20-42.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 42-54.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 42, translation mine.

<sup>73</sup>Gerald Eddie Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the deuteronomistic History*, SBLDS 87 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986).

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 126.

When discussing Jotham's fable, Gerbrandt believes that there was an original fable that Jotham used for his speech. The original fable was used as a denigration of kingship. He goes on to explain, however, that within its present context it does not express this same anti-monarchical sentiment.<sup>76</sup> When discussing the fable in its context Gerbrandt concludes that the fable is an indictment on the men of Shechem and Abimelech and not on the institution of monarchy.<sup>77</sup>

Since Gerbrandt's study is concerned with diagnosing the view of kingship within the whole of the deuteronomistic History, he only gives partial attention to the book of Judges. He does, however, view the book as containing multiple views of monarchy. He understands that the function of the refrain is "to demonstrate the dire straits into which Israel had fallen, and to show the need for a king to bring order into the situation of anarchy."<sup>78</sup> The Gideon and Abimelech narratives, therefore, differ in their perspective on monarchy with the epilogue of the book.

**Reinhard Müller (2004).** Müller's work is concerned with analyzing the development between human and divine kingship.<sup>79</sup> The first passages that he discusses are Jotham's fable and Gideon's response. He then discusses the framework of Judges 8-9 as a whole. In total, he spends more than one-hundred pages discussing these passages and their surrounding context. He starts with these texts because of their importance within the discussion of ideology of monarchy in ancient Israel.

In his work, Müller identifies specific layers of redaction in order to discern when anti-monarchical sentiment was present within ancient Israel. He concludes, contra Crüsemann, that anti-monarchical sentiment was not present until a later deuteronomistic

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 130-31.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 131.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 135.

<sup>79</sup>Reinhard Müller, *Königtum und Gottesherrschaft: Untersuchungen zur alttestamentlichen Monarchiekritik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).



strata. Müller believes that Jotham's fable is early in origin and that it is also not anti-monarchical. In fact, it is possible that it could be pro-monarchical and that it is favorable to higher forms of leadership.<sup>80</sup> While Müller does not consider Jotham's fable to be anti-monarchical, he does consider Gideon's response to be. He relates this position by saying that Gideon's response has a "radically anti-monarchical attitude."<sup>81</sup> Gideon's response, however, comes from a later redactor.

**J. G. McConville (2006).** J. G. McConville, in his political theology of the Old Testament, uses Judges 8:23 as a proof text that Yahweh alone is supreme king and judge.<sup>82</sup> McConville gives no exegetical support, nor does he discuss the text. He does say that he is not sure whether there can be only one discernible voice within the book. While he does use Gideon's response as a proof text, he notes the difficulty within the rest of the narrative, which seems to show Gideon becoming a king.<sup>83</sup> McConville then surveys the actions of Gideon's life that run contrary to his words. He does not try to reconcile Gideon's apparent refusal and subsequent actions; the reason for this omission may be that he does not see one organizing voice concerning leadership. He also appears to approach Jotham's fable with hesitation. He only mentions it in passing and gives the famous Buber quote about it being the clearest anti-monarchical statement in the ancient world. He does not seem to share Buber's view on this matter because he then quotes the refrain from the epilogue and says that it stands in contrast to what Buber has claimed.<sup>84</sup> For McConville there are several voices that do not need to be reconciled, but he does,

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 29.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>82</sup>J. G. McConville, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 100.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 129.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 125.

however, view the outlook of the book to be apprehensive toward the understanding of monarchy.<sup>85</sup>

**Robert Gnuse (2011).** Of all of the interpretations of this narrative, Gnuse has provided one of the most unusual.<sup>86</sup> He believes that the narrative of Judges 8-10 indicates that Gideon did become king.<sup>87</sup> He believes that comparing Gideon's life to the law of the king in Deuteronomy 17, however, serves as a condemnation of Gideon. Gnuse, therefore, views Gideon's words and actions as antithetical in nature. Gideon showed that he accepted the monarchy by his actions, but his words were unequivocally anti-monarchial. There is, however, more narrative complexity involved. The author of Judges "delighted in the superficial understanding of a quote by Gideon in Judg 8:23."<sup>88</sup> Thus by "glossing over the memory of Gideon's real rule, our present biblical text now seems to focus on Gideon's supposed rejection of kingship."<sup>89</sup> Gnuse's interpretation reflects the tension in Judges scholarship. He views the text as being composed of multiple traditions and sources, but he also attempts to understand the text as it stands. Gnuse believes that the Gideon narrative seeks to reflect both Gideon and the monarchy negatively. Gnuse's conclusion is that the author of the book of Judges wanted "to have it both ways" by condemning Gideon and condemning kingship.<sup>90</sup>

Gnuse's interpretation of Jotham's fable is more straightforward. He believes that Judges 9:8-15 not only targets Abimelech, but "the king-making process and kings in

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Robert Gnuse, *No Tolerance for Tyrants: The Biblical Assault on Kings and Kingship* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2011).

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 74.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

general.”<sup>91</sup> Gnuse believes that the meaning of the parable transcends the literary context and that it “can stand on its own with meaning apart from the narrative in which it is found.”<sup>92</sup> He notes that the various trees and plants view the institution of kingship as worthless and that only the pathetic bramble wants to be king. This detail may imply that only worthless people desire to be kings.<sup>93</sup> The Abimelech narrative, therefore, serves as the predominant anti-monarchial text in the book of Judges.

**Yair Lorberbaum (2011).** The purpose of Yair Lorberbaum’s work, *Disempowered King*, is to discuss the view of monarchy present in classical Jewish literature.<sup>94</sup> In doing so, Lorberbaum reflects on the ideology of kingship in the Old Testament and interacts with both Gideon’s response and Jotham’s fable.

Lorberbaum takes a similar position to that of Buber (see below) when considering the monarchy in the entirety of the book. He discusses the possibility of an anti-monarchial book within the larger framework of a pro-monarchial work,<sup>95</sup> but notes that the book is finally anti-monarchial.<sup>96</sup>

When discussing Gideon’s response, Lorberbaum says that the book teaches direct theocracy.<sup>97</sup> He expounds on this claim by stating that, “according to Gideon, a human king is the antithesis of the kingship of Heaven.”<sup>98</sup> With this claim Lorberbaum

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Yair Lorberbaum, *Disempowered King: Monarchy in Classical Jewish Literature*, The Kogod Library of Judaic Studies (London: Continuum, 2011).

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 2-3. He quotes and aligns his position with Buber’s perspective on the book.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 17.

neither considers the surrounding context of the narrative, nor does he try to frame it within the context of the entirety of the book.

Lorberbaum also views Jotham's fable as supporting a direct theocracy, but he does not comment on it in detail. He notes that "further expression of this principled reservation from the royal rule is found in the parable of Jotham."<sup>99</sup> His discussion of both of these texts is superficial and assumes from the outset a position where theocracy is in conflict with monarchy.

**Conclusion.** While each of these works is distinct and offers a different perspective on these two passages, there are two noticeable commonalities. First, for some of the larger overviews of monarchy, Gideon's response is given little attention and is presumed to be anti-monarchial. This is not a feature of the two larger volumes by Müller and Crüsemann, which are distinct from the other volumes surveyed here because they are primarily concerned with anti-monarchial texts. Second, these texts are addressed at the beginning of each of these works (except that of Soggin) because they are generally considered the primary texts on kingship within the Old Testament.

### **Monographs on the Book of Judges**

Besides the larger overviews concerning the monarchy, both Gideon's response and Jotham's fable are discussed in treatments that focus on or interact heavily with the book of Judges. While there are too many works that fit this description to survey here, this section will only look at those works that do interact with these texts in a meaningful way.

**Dale Ralph Davis (1978).** As was noted in the first chapter, Davis believes that interaction with both Gideon's response and Jotham's fable are crucial to an

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 2 n. 3.

understanding of the views of monarchy expressed in the book of Judges.<sup>100</sup> Davis believes that Gideon did refuse the monarchy, but that there is no anti-monarchical sentiment in his words. He notes that there are “no compelling reasons in the text itself which appear to require an anti-monarchical polemic.”<sup>101</sup> Davis points out that those who believe that Gideon’s response is anti-monarchical hold an unstated assumption. He does not hold, however, that this assumption is valid and that the anti-monarchical interpretation can only be supported implicitly. Instead of being anti-monarchical, Davis suggests that Gideon’s words are “more an assertion of ideal kingship than a categorical rejection of monarchy itself.”<sup>102</sup> Davis, however, does not believe that this ideal monarchy was exemplified by Gideon and his progeny, since Gideon declined the throne. Instead, the ideal kingship belongs to David, and the book of Judges was written in support of it.

Similarly, Davis does not hold that Jotham’s fable is anti-monarchical in its tone. He instead argues that those who view this text as anti-monarchical press the text toward that interpretation. He believes that the purpose of this text is not against kingship, but against Abimelech.<sup>103</sup> Davis goes on to argue that if one were to press the details of Jotham’s fable, it could just as easily be interpreted as pro-monarchical. He actually believes that there are reasons to prefer the pro-monarchical interpretation, namely, two in particular. First, the fable could be read as an indictment against the “trees” that declined the kingship. His reasoning is that when good candidates refuse the monarchy, only worthless candidates are left. Second, there is a thematic parallel between this fable and the preceding narrative.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>Dale Ralph Davis, “A Proposed Life Setting for the Book of Judges” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1978).

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 108.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 111-12.

Davis argues therefore that neither Gideon's response nor Jotham's fable contains anti-monarchial sentiment unless it is unduly pressed. He argues that the anti-monarchial polemic that some advance is an assumption and is not clear within either of these texts.

**Barry G. Webb (1987).** In the late eighties, Webb published one of the more influential synchronic treatments on the book of Judges.<sup>105</sup> In this work, Webb interacts briefly with both Gideon's response and Jotham's fable. He believes that these narratives feature kingship prominently, but that neither of them are about kingship. He also argues that neither of these texts is anti-monarchial.<sup>106</sup>

According to Webb, Gideon refused the monarchy, but he did not make a claim that kinship was incompatible with theocracy. Instead of making a theological claim about kingship, Gideon repudiated the people's thinking that it was he that delivered them. He was trying to draw attention away from himself and toward Yahweh. The problem, therefore, is not that kingship is incompatible with Yahwism, as others have claimed.<sup>107</sup>

While Webb views Gideon's response as not being anti-monarchial, he believes this is much more evident in the Abimelech narrative and Jotham's fable. Webb believes that Jotham does not call out Abimelech because he became king, nor are the Shechemites blamed for making him king. The crime is not monarchy; the crime is the unfaithfulness that the leaders of Shechem show to Gideon's house.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading*, JSOTSup 46 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1987).

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 160.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

**Randal Massot (1994).** In his dissertation on the Gideon narrative, Randal Massot addresses Gideon’s response.<sup>109</sup> He believes that Gideon declined the monarchy. He states, “Gideon’s humble decline of the offer, which includes an affirmation of the theocracy, is the theologically correct response.”<sup>110</sup> With this argument, Massot claims, as some others have, that Gideon rejects the monarchy with his response and that his response also indicates that any human institution of kinship is not compatible with theocracy. Massot, however, holds that the surrounding context contradicts Gideon’s words and that the “conclusion drawn from the evidence supports the notion that Gideon held an office similar to kingship.”<sup>111</sup> All of this data contributes to the complex character of Gideon, whom he describes as a man whose life is inconsistent with his calling.

**Robert O’Connell (1996).** Robert O’Connell claims that the rhetorical purpose of the book of Judges is the endorsement of a king from the tribe of Judah.<sup>112</sup> He argues that neither Gideon’s response nor Jotham’s fable is anti-monarchial. With Gideon’s response, the main concern is the popular appointment of a king.<sup>113</sup> When examining Jotham’s fable, he does note that it shows the results of choosing a bad king, but that this narrative is not anti-monarchial.<sup>114</sup> He sums up his position stating, “Like Gideon’s refusal of kingship, the Jotham fable—indeed, the whole Abimelech context—shows that not kingship *per se* but the ill-motivated popular appointment of a king is the

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<sup>109</sup>Randal Mark Massot, “Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel: A Literary and Theological Analysis of the Gideon Narrative in Judges 6-8” (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1994). While this work may have fit under the treatment of larger works, it does not interact with Jotham’s fable, and so it is addressed here.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 157.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>Robert H. O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 63 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 343.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 164.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid.

central concern.”<sup>115</sup> With this argument, O’Connell is one of the few to propose a harmony between these two “anti-monarchial” texts and the rest of the book. He does not, however, offer support to back up his claim, but considers his analysis a foregone conclusion.

**Yairah Amit (1999).** Yairah Amit attempts to show that the book of Judges, “as extant, is an integrated work, most of whose details are interrelated and complement one another, creating a significant structure.”<sup>116</sup> Amit ignores (though is sympathetic toward) diachronic reconstructions, especially those concerning Gideon’s response and Jotham’s fable.<sup>117</sup> She believes that Gideon’s response offers a new solution.<sup>118</sup> Gideon refuses the monarchy and thus shines a negative light on it. This is also true of Abimelech’s rule as well.<sup>119</sup>

Amit views Jotham’s fable, however, as “a thematic juncture connecting all of the units from 8:22 to 9:57.”<sup>120</sup> The concern of the parable is the deuteronomic ideal of God, as opposed to the people, appointing a king and serves as a negative comment on Abimelech, since he is not chosen by God. The literary features in the fable show “the unsuccessful attempt to set up a monarchy without divine approval.”<sup>121</sup> Amit does not consider Jotham’s fable to be anti-monarchial, but a literary tool that “turns the reader away from the refusal of Gideon.”<sup>122</sup> Amit understands these two narratives to be working in such a way as to promote a more “ambivalent attitude towards monarchy—

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

<sup>116</sup>Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 358.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 97.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 98.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid.



i.e., criticism of the monarchy combined with its presentation as a solution.”<sup>123</sup> According to Amit, the book’s view of monarchy is an editorial comment on how Israelite kings are similar to the bramble in Jotham’s fable. She also notes, however, that the author of Judges believes that monarchy is the solution to anarchy.<sup>124</sup> For Amit, there is a purposeful, editorial tension in regard to the book’s view of monarchy.

**Edgar Jans (2001).** Jans provides the most detailed literary-critical exegesis of Judges 9 currently in print.<sup>125</sup> Though he focuses most of his study on Judges 9, he does discuss Judg 8:23 briefly by noting that Gideon decidedly rejects the offer of kingship. Jans notes that “the choice of an earthly king is synonymous with the rejection of YHWH.”<sup>126</sup> When discussing Jotham’s fable, Jans similarly believes that it is anti-monarchical. When both Gideon’s response and Jotham’s fable are interpreted together, they show that kingship is opposed to the rule of Yahweh. These passages (including all of chapter 9) blame kingship for the fall of the Israel.<sup>127</sup>

**Wolfgang Bluedorn (2001).** Wolfgang Bluedorn offers a theological reading of the Gideon/Abimelech and advances that the two should be considered one narrative with one shared theological theme, “that YHWH is God, that the Canaanite gods are not gods and that human rulership without YHWH, together with idolatry, leads to mutual destruction.”<sup>128</sup> Within this framework Bluedorn believes that Gideon refused the

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<sup>123</sup>Ibid., 375.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid.

<sup>125</sup>Edgar Jans, *Abimelech und sein Königtum: Diachrone und Synchrone Untersuchungen zu Ri 9*, Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament 66 (St. Ottilien, Germany: Eos Verlag, 2001).

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., 384, translation mine.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 321-404.

<sup>128</sup>Wolfgang Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism: A Theological Reading of the Gideon-Abimelech Narrative*, JSOTSup 329 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 265.

leadership at first, but his actions, including his idolatry, show that he implicitly accepted it.

Gideon's actions then set up the Abimelech narrative and Jotham's fable, which is contained within that narrative.<sup>129</sup> Examining at the narrative in its context, Bluedorn argues that the text is not a comment on the nature or legitimacy of kingship, but that it is focused on the motive behind Abimelech's crowning. His conclusion then has consequences for his reading of both Gideon's response and Jotham's fable, where he notes that the narrative is not intended to be anti-monarchial.<sup>130</sup>

**Elie Assis (2005).** Elie Assis, in his work *Self-Interest or Communal Interest: An Ideology of Leadership in the Gideon, Abimelech and Jephthah Narratives (Judg 6-12)*, examines the ideology of leadership that is present in the Gideon-Jephthah narratives.<sup>131</sup> Assis is concerned with reconstructing the historical circumstances of the narratives as reflected in the "ideological, political and social context of the accounts."<sup>132</sup> He does so by viewing the narratives through the lens of the character's desire for either self-interest or communal interest. He views Gideon's response as a reflection of communal interest and argues that it is anti-monarchial. Gideon's response represents a "theocratic outlook that sets God at the centre of the people's existence. God, according to this outlook, is the king of Israel, and any human monarch conflicts with this outlook."<sup>133</sup> He considers Gideon's response as one of the "most impressive theological axioms of the Bible"<sup>134</sup> and writes that this text is the most anti-monarchial statement in

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<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 217.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., 218.

<sup>131</sup>Elie Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest: An Ideology of Leadership in the Gideon, Abimelech and Jephthah Narratives (Judg 6-12)*, Supplements of Vetus Testamentum 106 (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., 104.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., 121.

all of Scripture.<sup>135</sup> Gideon's response, therefore, serves as the most important point of contact for Israel's historic attitude towards kingship.

Somewhat surprisingly, however, Assis does not view the Jotham fable as anti-monarchical. He thinks that both Gideon and Jephthah are viewed as complex characters and that Abimelech is very one-dimensional. Therefore, Jotham's fable is not a statement on monarchical ideology, but a censure of Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem.<sup>136</sup>

Jotham's words do not contain an historical indictment against the institution of monarchy, but an indictment against Abimelech. Assis does not develop his argument in light of the book's view of monarchy, but he does briefly state that the whole of the book is concerned with addressing leadership problems.<sup>137</sup>

**Marty Michelson (2011).** In *Reconciling Violence and Kingship: A Study in Judges and 1 Samuel*, Marty Alan Michelson seeks to explain the relation of violence to the institution of kingship in Israel as it is presented in the books of Judges and 1 Samuel.<sup>138</sup> In doing so, Michelson interacts with both Gideon's response and Jotham's fable, saying that they are key texts to the origins of the Israelite monarchy. He believes that Gideon refuses the monarchy.<sup>139</sup> Michelson, however, does not identify this text as either anti-monarchical or pro-monarchical. Instead, he believes that this narrative sets up Abimelech's kingship.

Michelson moves on to examine Jotham's fable through the lens of mimetic rivalry and violence.<sup>140</sup> The fable seeks to critique Abimelech's kingship, not the

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<sup>135</sup>Ibid., 239.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., 153.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., 129.

<sup>138</sup>Marty Alan Michelson, *Reconciling Violence and Kingship: A Study of Judges and 1 Samuel* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., 43

<sup>140</sup>Michelson's thesis claims that these books contain sanctioned violence, which ultimately curbs other violence. He uses Girardian and literary theory within the context of the deuteronomistic

institution. With this view, he agrees with Lindars that kingship is presupposed in the fable, “and therefore the fable marks the ambivalence about what kind of kingship should emerge, not that kingship is itself bad.”<sup>141</sup> Within Michelson’s social-scientific paradigm, the office of kingship is assumed. The question is not whether the perspective of the book is either pro- or anti-monarchial, but what kind of monarchy would emerge.

**Gordon K. Oeste (2011).** While Gordon K. Oeste’s work is primarily concerned with the person of Abimelech and Judges 9, he interacts with the monarchial ideology discussed in both Gideon’s response and in Jotham’s fable.<sup>142</sup> Oeste notes that a quick reading of the text may produce an anti-monarchial reading, but a close inspection of the attitudes of these two chapters toward kingship show that Judges 8 displays an ambiguous stance, so that the “anti-monarchic link between the two chapters is not as clear as first supposed.”<sup>143</sup> The reason Oeste sees ambiguity toward kingship is because of the context of these passages and particularly the portrayal of Gideon.<sup>144</sup> The ambiguity of Judges 8 helps to set the stage for the kingship that will be found in the next chapter. According to Oeste’s argument, this ambiguity is played out in terms of legitimacy and illegitimacy.<sup>145</sup> These texts are not attempting to be anti-monarchial. Instead, they “provide a cumulative argument against the legitimacy of Abimelech’s

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history to explain this violence and posits that the violence stems from mimetic rivalry, which then turns into scapegoating. Scapegoating, as an institutionalized form, then leads to an understanding of sacral kingship. In the end, Michelson argues that the deuteronomistic history is ambivalent toward monarchy. See Michelson, *Reconciling Violence and Kingship*, 1-3.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>142</sup>Gordon K. Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule: Windows on Abimelech’s Rise and Demise in Judges 9*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 546 (London: T&T Clark, 2011).

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>144</sup>Oeste follows Block and identifies nine characteristics that he believes show Gideon to be portrayed as royal.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., 63-64.

kingship.”<sup>146</sup> So neither Gideon’s response nor Jotham’s fable is to be viewed as anti-monarchial.

**Conclusion.** While each monograph surveyed here is quite different in scope, there are a couple of patterns that emerge. First, Assis and Jans only saw Gideon’s response as anti-monarchial. There were some who saw it as ambiguous, and perhaps not helping the monarchy, but not that it was anti-monarchial. This interpretation is interesting, since the larger overviews concerning monarchy in ancient Israel viewed this passage as the most anti-monarchial text in the Old Testament. Second, only Jans viewed Jotham’s fable as anti-monarchial. While Oeste and Amit discussed how the monarchial position within the fable is ambiguous, almost all of the above thought that the fable was intended to denigrate Abimelech, not the institution of kingship. So treatments concerned with the monarchy overwhelmingly see these texts as anti-monarchial, whereas studies concerned with the book of Judges in general or the Gideon narrative in particular view these texts as needing to be interpreted within their context.

### **Commentaries on the Book of Judges**

Because of their format, usually a verse-by-verse or chapter-by-chapter overview of the entire book, commentaries have a distinct way of interacting with passages within a book. The approach differs from that of works like those surveyed in the above section. Those works address some topics and some passages within a book, but overlook others. Because of these differing approaches, it seems most appropriate to address commentaries separately.

Since the late 1800’s there have been numerous commentaries written on the book of Judges, too many to survey here. For this reason, a selection of the more influential commentaries will be examined.

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<sup>146</sup>Ibid., 138.

**George Foot Moore (1895).** George Foot Moore argues that Gideon's response is a clear rejection of the monarchy, and he uses source criticism to make sense of his words in light of the surrounding narrative.<sup>147</sup> He argues that the source material for 8:22-23 belongs to E.<sup>148</sup> Gideon's response is not just a rejection of the monarchy, but also a theological statement that the kingship of man is incompatible with the kingship of God. He writes, "the condemnation of the kingdom as a principle irreconcilable with the sovereignty of Yahweh, the divine king, appears to date from the last age of the kingdom of Israel, those terrible years of despotism, revolution and anarchy."<sup>149</sup>

Moore views Jotham's fable as derived from a different source than Gideon's response, but one that it is original to the situation. Jotham's fable, unlike Gideon's response, is not anti-monarchical because the concrete example of Abimelech was the intended target, nothing else.<sup>150</sup> For Moore, therefore, it is not just Gideon and his response that can be explained by source critical means, but Jotham's fable is placed in juxtaposition in its view of monarchy with Gideon's response.

**G. A. Cooke (1913).** G. A. Cooke argues that there are two possible interpretations of Gideon's response.<sup>151</sup> First, if one tries to reconcile the surrounding context of Gideon's actions with his words, Gideon rejects the title of king, but accepts the power associated with the office. The second, and as he notes the most popular interpretation of his time, is that Gideon espouses the view that monarchy is incompatible

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<sup>147</sup>George Foot Moore, *Judges*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895).

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., 229.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., 230.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., 245.

<sup>151</sup>G. A. Cooke, *The Book of Judges*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913).

with theocracy. If the second view is adopted, there must necessarily be an appeal to source criticism; this view reflects that of the later E document.<sup>152</sup>

Cooke does not speak of the monarchial ideology of Jotham's fable. Instead, he says that it serves as a contrast between Gideon, who at the very least refused the title of king, and Abimelech, who was an arrogant, unrespectable bramble.<sup>153</sup> For Cooke, therefore, one must appeal to source criticism for Gideon's response to be viewed as anti-monarchial, and since Jotham's fable appears to be reflecting on a certain instance, it is anti-Abimelech, not necessarily anti-monarchial.

**C. F. Burney (1920).** In his commentary on the book of Judges, C. F. Burney agrees with the sentiments of both Moore and Cooke that Gideon's response and view of theocracy belong to a later date and can be attributed to E.<sup>154</sup> This position states that "a human ruler is inconsistent with the true conception of the Theocracy."<sup>155</sup> Burney does not discuss Jotham's fable in terms of monarchial ideology. He believes that the purpose of the fable is to contrast Gideon with Abimelech.<sup>156</sup>

**C. J. Goslinga (1938).** C. J. Goslinga proposes a unique interpretation of Gideon's response.<sup>157</sup> He argues that Gideon unequivocally denied the monarchy because "he did not feel called to the office of king, and he could hardly regard a request that did not come from an official national assembly as divine appointment."<sup>158</sup> He does note,

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<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>154</sup>C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges with Introduction and Notes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Rivingtons, 1920), 235.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., 183.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid., 273

<sup>157</sup>C. J. Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, Bible Student's Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986). The date of 1938 is indicated above because that is the year that the Dutch edition of his commentary on Judges appeared.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., 349.

however, that even though Gideon declined the monarchial appointment, this action “does not mean that he rejected the very idea of a monarchy.”<sup>159</sup> With this argument, Goslinga is saying that monarchy is not necessarily in conflict with theocracy. He does, however, go on to say that “as long as the Israelites recognized the Lord’s rule, no human king would be necessary.”<sup>160</sup> So even though the monarchy may not conflict with theocracy, the human institution of kingship does not appear to be the ideal.

Goslinga has a very similar interpretation of Jotham’s fable. He believes that “Jotham’s fable was not condemning the kingly office itself but alluding to the dangers that accompany this office and make it an undesirable task.”<sup>161</sup> For Goslinga, neither of these texts is anti-monarchial, but neither of them views the monarchy as the ideal institution for Israelite society.

**Robert G. Boling (1975).** Robert Boling also advances the position that Gideon did not accept the position of king, saying that Gideon’s refusal of the throne was an affirmation of Yahweh’s kingship and reflected the strict orthodoxy of his day.<sup>162</sup> Boling notes that “the redactor allows Gideon to speak better than Gideon knows.”<sup>163</sup> This is in reference to Gideon’s actions and what would eventually come about during the reign of his son. Boling believes that this text was an insertion of an “exilic redactor who recognized a parallel to his own day.”<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>159</sup>Ibid.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid.

<sup>161</sup>Ibid., 350.

<sup>162</sup>Boling, *Judges*.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid., 160.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid., 161. Boling’s statements are quite difficult to reconcile. In one section he notes that the orthodoxy of Gideon’s day was a strict theocracy, but in the next section he says that this was a later addition that reflected the theological nuance of the exilic period.



While Boling may view Gideon's response as anti-monarchial, he does not think that Jotham's fable is directed at the monarchy. Instead, it is targeted against Abimelech and his associates.<sup>165</sup> So while Gideon's response is a theological declaration, Jotham's fable is simply a condemnation of Abimelech, not a condemnation of the institution of monarchy.

**J. Alberto Soggin (1981).** J. Alberto Soggin believes that Gideon rejected the offer of monarchy "for theological reasons" and that this text can be attributed to a relatively late source.<sup>166</sup> Soggin dismisses the view that Gideon politely accepted. Instead he favors Crüsemann's<sup>167</sup> theory that "these texts express the opposition of certain groups to the royal ideology centered on Jerusalem, especially the temple and the royal palace."<sup>168</sup> Soggin thus advances the view that Gideon's refusal is a theocratic statement that originates from a late date and that is opposed to the institution of the monarchy.

Soggin also believes that Jotham's fable is early in its composition and is anti-monarchial in its outlook. He posits that the fable is negative toward the monarchy in general and toward Abimelech in particular.<sup>169</sup> Soggin makes the point that, whereas the ancient Near East considers the institution of the monarchy a necessity, this fable views it as "fundamentally negative, and only desired by the wicked."<sup>170</sup> So even though Soggin believes that both Gideon's response and Jotham's fable come from fundamentally different time periods, both of them express an anti-monarchial point of view.

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<sup>165</sup>Ibid., 174.

<sup>166</sup>Soggin, *Judges*, 160. Soggin's discussion of these texts within his commentary is framed differently than his treatment on them in his work on the monarchy.

<sup>167</sup>Crüsemann, *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum*.

<sup>168</sup>Soggin, *Judges*, 160.

<sup>169</sup>Ibid., 174.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid., 176.

**Tammi J. Schneider (1999).** Tammi Schneider advances the opinion that Gideon “refused dynastic kingship [but] he was not opposed to receiving extra payment or the trappings of kingship.”<sup>171</sup> She also notes that this payment is equivalent to the tribute that would be due to a military leader and that the “narrator manifests his condemnation” of this act.<sup>172</sup> While Schneider does not discuss Gideon’s response in terms of monarchical ideology, she does believe that the root of Jotham’s fable is the issue of leadership.

Though Schneider believes that Jotham’s fable is largely about leadership, she does not think that the view of kingship espoused in the fable is clear. In her view, kingship had already been established when the book was redacted, but the “depiction is not favorable.”<sup>173</sup> She ends by noting that despite any ambiguity in the meaning of the fable, it is clear that the narrative “questions the legitimacy of Abimelech’s reign.”<sup>174</sup>

**Daniel I. Block (1999).** Daniel Block notes two parts to Gideon’s response: verbal and non-verbal.<sup>175</sup> The verbal response looks like a straightforward rejection of the monarchy, which Block notes is “theologically correct and appears to be perfectly noble.”<sup>176</sup> This interpretation, however, is overly simplistic and does not take into account the non-verbal actions of Gideon, both before and after the men of Israel request that he become king. One of the key difficulties that Block sees is that Gideon does not correct the men of Israel’s assumption that it was Gideon that delivered them, so “Instead of giving the credit for the victory to God, he merely alluded to a vague platitudinal ideal

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<sup>171</sup>Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1999), 127.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid., 139.

<sup>174</sup>Ibid., 143.

<sup>175</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*.

<sup>176</sup>Ibid., 298.

of divine rule over Israel.”<sup>177</sup> Ultimately, Block believes that Gideon’s response “simply seeks to formalize *de jure* what is already *de facto*.”<sup>178</sup>

Block alludes to Gideon’s words being theologically correct, insinuating that theocracy without monarchy is the correct model of Israelite government. Block, like some others, notes that “whereas in the ancient Near East kingship was viewed as positive, desirable, necessary, and coveted by all, Jotham perceives it as fundamentally negative.”<sup>179</sup> So, Block intimates that there is an anti-monarchial sentiment behind both Gideon’s response and Jotham’s fable.

**J. Clinton McCann (2002).** J. Clinton McCann resonates with the difficulties that many have had with this passage.<sup>180</sup> He believes that Gideon’s words are theologically correct, but that ultimately his actions speak louder than his words. McCann notes that Gideon says one thing, but ultimately does another. McCann does not speak of Gideon’s response in pro- or anti-monarchial terms, but he does speak more specifically about the ideology of kingship in Jotham’s fable.<sup>181</sup> He argues that the fable is more directed at Abimelech than it is at the institution of monarchy.<sup>182</sup> He is one of the only commentators to discuss this passage in light of the overall vantage point of monarchy present within the book of Judges. He even goes further than this, discussing it in light of a larger canonical theology when he writes, “the book of Judges is a setup for the Davidic monarchy; and the larger prophetic canon acknowledges a legitimate place for the

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<sup>177</sup>Ibid., 299.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid. Block believes that this interpretation is confirmed by all of the subsequent actions of Gideon.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid., 321.

<sup>180</sup>J. Clinton McCann, *Judges, Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

<sup>181</sup>Ibid., 69-70.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid., 72.

institution of monarchy.”<sup>183</sup> Ultimately, the sentiment found in Jotham’s fable is not anti-monarchical, but anti-Abimelech.

**K. Lawson Younger (2002).** In a similar fashion to some of the others surveyed, K. Lawson Younger argues that Gideon’s response reflects Yahwistic orthodoxy.<sup>184</sup> Gideon cannot rule because God is king over the people. Younger, however, also views this as too simplistic and notes that Gideon accepted the honor by fact of not correcting the people regarding the true source of their rescue. Interestingly, Younger omits any discussion of the concept of monarchy at all in his section on Jotham’s fable.

**Susan Niditch (2008).** As discussed above, Niditch believes that the book of Judges is ambivalent toward the institution of monarchy.<sup>185</sup> She discusses Gideon’s refusal and Jotham’s fable briefly in her article on kingship in the book of Judges by noting that Yahweh alone is to be regarded as king rather than a human ruler.<sup>186</sup> She elaborates on this argument in her commentary on Judges. Judges 8 contains important information on kingship. Unlike what some have claimed, she argues that Gideon is a great hero and that Gideon’s response to the men of Israel thus serves to lessen the supposed pro-monarchical stance of the epilogue of the book. She believes that this viewpoint is furthered within the Abimelech narrative, specifically through the anti-monarchical fable delivered by Jotham.<sup>187</sup> Niditch believes this because she believes that a parable is “often a vehicle to express a worldview.”<sup>188</sup> She believes that both of these

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<sup>183</sup>Ibid., 73.

<sup>184</sup>Younger, *Judges/Ruth*.

<sup>185</sup>Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008).

<sup>186</sup>Niditch, “Judges, Kingship, and Politics,” 64.

<sup>187</sup>Niditch, *Judges*, 103.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., 116.

narratives counterbalance the other voices that are present within the book to portray an ambivalent view of kingship.

**Trent Butler (2009).** Trent Butler notes what many others have already alluded to.<sup>189</sup> He too believes that Gideon’s response “represents orthodox Israelite theology . . . however, practice does not always follow theology.”<sup>190</sup> Butler believes that Gideon’s wording taken at face value represent true Israelite orthodoxy, but that his actions betray his words.

Butler also believes that Jotham’s fable was originally a Canaanite fable that portrayed the “folly of monarchy.”<sup>191</sup> In its representation of monarchy, Jotham’s fable does two things. First, it shows monarchy to be a necessary evil, insinuating that it can only work when two parties work in good faith. Second, it serves as a judgment against the coup and kingship of Jeroboam.<sup>192</sup> Within Butler’s thinking, then, both of these texts have at least some anti-monarchial sentiment.

**Mark Biddle (2012).** Mark Biddle, like others, notes that at face value Gideon appears to reject the offer of monarchy, but that Gideon’s actions and the ambiguity of his characterization bring this interpretation into question.<sup>193</sup> Gideon’s words follow the theological orthodoxy that is displayed in 1 Samuel 8, but his actions follow his tendency toward self-aggrandizement.<sup>194</sup> With this argument Biddle’s statements are somewhat difficult to interpret clearly. He believes that Gideon’s words reflect theological

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<sup>189</sup>Butler, *Judges*.

<sup>190</sup>Ibid., 221.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid., 239.

<sup>192</sup>Ibid., 242.

<sup>193</sup>Mark E. Biddle, *Judges: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys), 2012.

<sup>194</sup>Ibid, 98.

orthodoxy; however, he notes that the refrain that there was no king casts its shadow over the entire book and anticipates monarchy.<sup>195</sup> Biddle solves this tension by using a canonical approach that concludes that legitimacy of rule is not derived from an institution.

Abimelech then serves to demonstrate “the perils associated with an illegitimate claimant to royal power.”<sup>196</sup> Biddle believes that Abimelech is a usurper and not a legitimate king and that the entire narrative “raises questions as to its function as commentary on the institution of kingship.”<sup>197</sup> In the end, however, he does not believe that it is a critique of the monarchy, but “it may better be understood as an illustration of the faulty character of authority built on aggression and raw power, a theme that runs throughout the history of the Israelite, but not the Judean, monarchy.”<sup>198</sup> Jotham’s fable works within the Abimelech narrative to prove Abimelech’s illegitimacy. He notes that the point of Jotham’s fable is to show that Abimelech is a “makeshift prospect for the throne” and that those who made him king have no intention of granting him full allegiance and respect.<sup>199</sup> This is why Jotham focuses on whether their actions and request for Abimelech to be king are an act of good faith to Gideon’s household.

**Lawson G. Stone (2012).** Lawson G. Stone offers a unique interpretation of Gideon’s response. Stone believes that Gideon was not offered kingship because of the use of מִשָּׁל.<sup>200</sup> If kingship had been the intention of the request, then the men of Israel would have used מֶלֶךְ. Instead of kingship, Gideon and his family were offered the “senior

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<sup>195</sup>Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>196</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>197</sup>Ibid., 104.

<sup>198</sup>Ibid.

<sup>199</sup>Ibid. 106-07.

<sup>200</sup>Lawson G. Stone, *Judges*, in vol. 3 of *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2012).

rank as ‘chief’ over the region.”<sup>201</sup> He also opposes the interpretation of many who advance that Gideon’s statements are specifically anti-monarchial by noting that “the very logic that divine kinship excludes human kingship is absent from Judges.”<sup>202</sup> Stone does, however, see Gideon as refusing the role of senior chief. But since this was not an offer of kingship, and the repudiation of kingship is not found in Judges, he believes that Gideon’s response “repudiates any human institution of government.”<sup>203</sup> He continues by noting that Gideon believed that Israel did not need any human government, but that they could exist under the rule of Yahweh. He believes that this is what Gideon was trying to institute with the construction of the ephod after his refusal of leadership.<sup>204</sup> However, Stone believes that Gideon’s repudiation of human government was folly that led to the apostasy of the nation. He further argues that the narrator “criticized the premonarchic community structure and began making the case for polity characterized by regular patrimonial succession.”<sup>205</sup>

Gideon’s refusal leads into the Abimelech narrative, where Stone notes the complexity of leadership within the narrative by stating that it is more complex than pro- or anti-monarchial positions “can hope to capture.”<sup>206</sup> What Abimelech’s reign and Jotham’s fable illustrate is, “when legitimate human leadership abdicates, effectual divine leadership evaporates.”<sup>207</sup> Gideon’s response that human government is evil then led to the apostasy of Israel and a power vacuum that Abimelech filled with his illegitimate

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<sup>201</sup>Ibid., 299.

<sup>202</sup>Ibid., 301.

<sup>203</sup>Ibid.

<sup>204</sup>Ibid.

<sup>205</sup>Ibid., 302.

<sup>206</sup>Ibid., 321.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid., 322.

rule. Stone concludes that the “moral of the story is that when fit persons refuse to lead, unfit persons will seize power.”<sup>208</sup>

**Mark Boda (2012).** Mark Boda argues that Gideon refused the monarchy, but he does not believe that Gideon’s words are a rejection of monarchy as an institution.<sup>209</sup> Rather, Gideon’s response is a not a critique of human royal rule, but a critique of “human royal rule as envisioned by the Israelites in Judges 8.”<sup>210</sup> He believes this for two reasons. First, the people request that Gideon be king because of his military prowess. This request, however, usurps Yahweh’s military prerogative. The second reason lies in his interpretation of Jotham’s fable.

Boda believes that the point of Jotham’s fable “suggests that because more honorable individuals had refused the kingship, the nation was vulnerable to the royal rule of a dishonorable individual.”<sup>211</sup> The honorable individual who refused is Gideon, and the dishonorable individual is Abimelech. So Jotham’s fable serves as a rebuke of both individuals and focuses on the issue of legitimacy. In the end, what these narratives suggest “is that while kinship belongs to Yahweh alone, there may be room for an honorable royal figure.”<sup>212</sup> Neither of these texts is anti-monarchial in nature.

**Barry G. Webb (2012).** In the previous section, Webb’s monograph on the book of Judges was surveyed, but he has since published a lengthier commentary on the book that contains fresh analysis of both Gideon’s response and Jotham’s fable.<sup>213</sup> On

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<sup>208</sup>Ibid.

<sup>209</sup>Mark J. Boda, *Judges*, in vol. 2 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

<sup>210</sup>Ibid., 1079.

<sup>211</sup>Ibid.

<sup>212</sup>Ibid.

<sup>213</sup>Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).



Gideon's response, Webb draws attention to the motive behind the Israelites' request. He notes the use of the phrase "to save" within the narrative at this point and that the Israelites' request to Gideon is based on their belief that it is he, not Yahweh, who has saved them. Webb notes, however, that "Gideon recoils from the impiety of it and gives the theologically correct answer."<sup>214</sup> Webb does not, however, seem to mean that the theologically correct answer is that Yahwism is incompatible with monarchy, but that if "the rationale of the offer is that the one who saves is entitled to rule, that entitlement belongs to Yahweh, not to Gideon, and even less to his son and grandson."<sup>215</sup> So when Webb notes the theological accuracy of Gideon's response here, he does not mean what others do with this same language. As he noted in his monograph, "Gideon had to refuse, not because kingship is incompatible with Yahwism, but because Yahweh, not he, should have been given credit for the victory. The story as a whole is about the religious problem implicit in the offer, not with the institution of kingship as such."<sup>216</sup>

Webb discusses Jotham's fable in a similar manner, noting that it is not anti-monarchical. Webb believes that the majority position is that the fable in its original context arose within early Israelite society to show that kingship had no positive function. Webb, notes, however that even if this is the case, it does not mean that within its present context it still contains that same negative view of the institution of monarchy. Instead, he believes that it attacks the "foul play associated with Abimelech's rise to power."<sup>217</sup> So while Webb's position that neither of these texts is anti-monarchical has remained consistent, his commentary does bring out some other nuances within these texts that his monograph did not.

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<sup>214</sup>Ibid., 263.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid.

<sup>216</sup>Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading*, 160. Webb also notes, similar to Stone, that the ephod was a symbol of divine rule.

<sup>217</sup>Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 273 n. 142.

**Conclusion.** Two recurring themes emerge from commentators on these verses. The first is that a majority of them speak not only of Gideon refusing the monarchy, but they speak of his refusal as making a theological statement about the institution itself. According to this reasoning, Gideon's refusal states that a human king cannot exist within a theocracy. There are two ways that this interpretation is described. First, it is discussed as the orthodox understanding of monarchy. Second, it is discussed in terms of true Yahwism. Both of these positions infer that monarchy, per Gideon's refusal, is incompatible with true Israelite faith.

The second recurring theme found within these works is that Jotham's fable is overwhelmingly viewed as not anti-monarchial, but instead as anti-Abimelech. This was seen within the monographs as well, but there is one interesting observation to note about the commentaries. Most commentators seem to believe that they are cutting against the grain of scholarship by not considering this text anti-monarchial. Buber's famous quotation looms large within these volumes as the voice of this text. In reality, however, the majority is in fairly tight agreement about the interpretation of this text's monarchial position.

### **Individual Studies on Gideon's Response**

There have been a handful of works that have sought to interact only with, or at least primarily with, Gideon's response to the men of Israel. These works are unique in that they largely ignore the remainder of the book, including Jotham's fable. Instead, they focus primarily on the meaning of Gideon's response.

**G. Henton Davies (1963).** G. Henton Davies is one of the few scholars who does not view Gideon's response as an anti-monarchial statement.<sup>218</sup> Davies reacts against the diachronic reconstructions that either deny Gideon's kingship or deny

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<sup>218</sup>G. Henton Davies, "Judges VIII 22-23," *VT* 13 (1963): 151-57.

Gideon's response. In arguing his position, he puts forth four suggestions. First, Gideon's response is in fact his and not a later addition. Second, Gideon's response is actually an acceptance "couched in the form of a pious refusal with the motive of expressing piety and of gaining favour with his would-be subjects."<sup>219</sup> Third, Gideon's response reflects a desire for his kingship to be aligned and subservient to Yahweh's kingship; thus, "Yahweh's kingship does not preclude Gideon's kingship."<sup>220</sup> And fourth, Davies notes that this interpretation takes into account the royal features that are present in the rest of the narrative.

Davies develops his argument by examining the evidence of comparable stories as well as the evidence of the context, which includes both the narrative concerning Gideon and the narrative concerning Abimelech. The comparable stories are stories where one character uses humility to express his intention. He examines three such stories: Exodus 4:13; Genesis 13; and 2 Samuel 24. When discussing the context, he examines the royal features of the text, which include an apparent hereditary succession, a harem, and more.<sup>221</sup>

**Barnabas Lindars (1965).** Lindars discusses Gideon's response in his article entitled "Gideon and Kingship."<sup>222</sup> Lindars notes that Gideon's response in Judges 8:23 is key to understanding the importance of the origins of the Israelite monarchy. Lindars, however, disputes the historical reliability of the present form of the text. He concludes that the text consists of separate traditions, where Jerubbaal and Gideon are separate

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<sup>219</sup>Ibid., 154.

<sup>220</sup>Ibid.

<sup>221</sup>Davies also makes a quick comment on Jotham's fable, noting that "there is not one word against kingship as such in the parable, but the point of the parable is that it is the wrong person who holds the kingship. Jotham's parable and his subsequent flight are intended to reveal him as the third claimant to Gideon's office. Three possible claimants for office point strongly to the fact that there was an office to claim" (Davies, "Judges VIII 22-23," 156).

<sup>222</sup>Barnabas Lindars, "Gideon and Kingship," *JTS* 16 (1965): 315-26.

people whom the compiler edited together and that the offer of kingship belongs to Jerubbaal, not Gideon.<sup>223</sup> The separate traditions that Lindars speaks of are largely two traditions, though there is some other minor material as well, that tell the stories of two different characters, Gideon and Jerubbaal. He views the offer of the monarchy in 8:22 and the subsequent response as a religiously motivated refusal of the monarchy because the offer represents Canaanite ideals. He believes that the offer of kingship really “belongs to the local history of Jerubbaal.”<sup>224</sup>

Lindars views this text as containing the ideological views of the tribal confederacy during the time of the Philistine crisis. It therefore represents an anti-monarchical position that appeals to a source critical approach to smooth out the difficulties of the narrative.

**Samuel E. Lowenstamm (1980).** Samuel Lowenstamm’s discussion of Gideon’s answer to the men of Israel is a response to the article by Y. Dishon who argues that Gideon accepts the monarchy.<sup>225</sup> Lowenstamm makes four arguments indicating that Gideon could not have accepted the monarchy. First, Gideon is never explicitly called a king. Second, Judges 9:2 does not support a monarchical view, but an oligarchical view, which is a view that no scholar advances. Third, he does not think that a positive portrayal of Gideon means that he ascended to the throne. And fourth, the clear reading of Gideon’s response is a rejection of the monarchy. Gideon’s response then is an “anti-Monarchist theology in the period when conservative groups opposed a change in the

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<sup>223</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>224</sup>Ibid., 326.

<sup>225</sup>Samuel E. Lowenstamm, “The Lord Shall Rule Over You (Judges 8:23),” in *Alter Orient und Altes Testament: Comparative Studies in Biblical and Ancient Oriental Literatures*, ed. Samuel E. Lowenstamm (Neukirchener: Neukirchener Verlag, 1980), 440-42; Y. Dishon, “Gideon and the Beginning of the Monarchy,” *Tarbiz* 41 (1972): 255-68.

social structure.”<sup>226</sup> Lowenstamm thus believes that Gideon claimed that a request for a king is the rejection of God as king.

**Dennis Olson (2004).** Dennis Olson views Gideon’s response from within the context of the Gideon narrative and the entirety of the book.<sup>227</sup> He structures his argument in contrast to Buber’s view. When looking at the Gideon narrative, he notes that as the narrative moves from chapters 6-8 the reader becomes more suspicious of Gideon.<sup>228</sup> Olson views Gideon’s words in 8:23 very suspiciously. He does not think that the simple reading of Buber and others, who tend to view Gideon’s response apart from its context, is correct. Olson notes that “Buber and others fail to see that the narrator has placed Gideon’s claim . . . in a literary context that casts considerable doubt on the sincerity of the statement.”<sup>229</sup> Olson’s analysis takes into account the literary context.

Olson sees several points of complexity in the narrative, including the attributing of victory to Yahweh and to Gideon, Gideon’s description as the son of a king, his erection of an ephod and taking of tribute, as well as the naming of his son Abimelech. In light of this complexity, Olson does not believe that Gideon’s refusal can be “taken at face value as a straightforward antimonarchical statement spoken by an utterly reliable and pious Gideon.”<sup>230</sup> Olson views Gideon’s statement as a complex condemnation of Gideon, and thus there are two possible ways to interpret Gideon’s response. First, Gideon’s response may be a rejection of kingship, but the narrator is using Gideon’s rejection as a negative example of someone who abrogates responsibility.

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<sup>226</sup>Lowenstamm, “The Lord Shall Rule Over You,” 442. Lowenstamm believes that that Judg 8:23 represents the same royal ideology as 1 Sam 8, but Gideon’s response is more moderate.

<sup>227</sup>Dennis T. Olson, “Buber, Kingship, and the Book of Judges: A Study of Judges 6-9 and 17-21,” in *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J. J. M. Roberts*, ed. Bernard Frank Batto and Kathryn Roberts (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 199-218.

<sup>228</sup>*Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>229</sup>*Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>230</sup>*Ibid.*, 211.

Second, Gideon's words may simply be false humility or false piety, by which he claims all the power, but not the title. He views Gideon's response as integrally linked with the Abimelech as a criticism of both Abimelech and his father. In the end, Gideon's words are not anti-monarchical, but serve as part of the overall narrative in condemnation of the violence displayed by both Gideon and Abimelech.

**Katie Heffelfinger (2009).** Katie Heffelfinger proposes a different interpretive model for understanding Gideon's response to the men of Israel.<sup>231</sup> She is not solely concerned with Gideon's response, but one of the main questions that her essay attempts to answer is how to reconcile Gideon's response with the actions attributed to him in the narrative. What she proposes is the complex secondary chieftainship model as a way of understanding Judges 8:23 in light of the overall narrative.<sup>232</sup> This model advances the notion that the king sacralizes his rule and makes theocratic claims for both himself and his descendants. Therefore, Gideon, by stating, "I will not rule over you . . . Yahweh will rule over you," was aligning his rule with the rule of Yahweh. On Gideon's response Heffelfinger writes, "I suggest that the 'refusal' may be read as an acceptance speech in which Gideon claims the rulership for himself and his sons while identifying his rule with that of the deity."<sup>233</sup> Heffelfinger does not view this text as anti-monarchical.

**Conclusion.** Of the five studies identified here, four did not consider Gideon's response to be anti-monarchical. This observation is significant, since the majority of works thus far have considered his words some of the most anti-monarchical in the Bible. There was one other intriguing commonality between three of the studies. Three studies

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<sup>231</sup>Katie M. Heffelfinger, "'My Father is King': Chiefly Politics and the Rise and Fall of Abimelech," *JSOT* 33 (2009): 277-292.

<sup>232</sup>For a large scale discussion of the complex secondary chieftainship model, see Robert D. Miller, *Chieftains of the Highland Clans: A History of Israel in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Centuries B.C.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

<sup>233</sup>Heffelfinger, "My Father is King," 285

viewed Gideon's words (not actions) as signaling that he accepted the monarchial position. Davies and Heffelfinger believe that he did so in humility, while Olson believes that Gideon was duplicitous. It is clear from the results of these studies that a proper understanding of the characterization of Gideon is important for a correct understanding of his response in 8:23.

### **Individual Studies on Jotham's Fable**

In recent decades there have been several treatments of Jotham's fable. Many of these have addressed at least primarily or secondarily the monarchial ideology of the fable. These works will be discussed in this section, and the interaction will be primarily focused on the discussion of monarchy within these articles.<sup>234</sup>

**Eugene Maly (1960).** Eugene Maly's article "The Jotham Fable—Anti-Monarchial?" sets out to answer the question of whether this fable was intended to be anti-monarchial.<sup>235</sup> One of the primary questions that Maly asks is whether the fable is original to the occasion found in Judges. He does not believe that it was because of subtle differences found within the fable and the narrative account. For this reason, there are two possible levels of monarchial sentiment: the original use of the fable and the appropriation of this fable within the context of the Abimelech narrative. He argues that the original setting is not anti-monarchial, but that it is set "against those who refused, for insufficient reasons, the burden of leadership."<sup>236</sup> In its current context, likewise, Maly believes that "just as in the original fable there was no general condemnation of kingship

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<sup>234</sup>Consequently, there are some treatments that do not address the monarchy. Those that do not deal directly with the monarchy will not be surveyed in this section. See Graham S. Ogden, "Jotham's Fable: Its Structure and Function in Judges 9," *The Bible Translator* 46 (1995): 301-08; Sandra Scham, "The Days of the Judges: When Men and Women Were Animals and Trees Were Kings," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 97 (2002): 37-64; Silviu Tatu, "Jotham's Fable and the *Crux Interpretum* in Judges IX," *VT* 56 (2006): 105-24.

<sup>235</sup>Eugene Maly, "The Jotham Fable—Anti-Monarchial?" *CBQ* 22 (1960): 299-305.

<sup>236</sup>*Ibid.*, 303.

itself, so, too, in the biblical adaptation there can be found no criticism, on principle, of the rule of a king.”<sup>237</sup> Though Maly believes that this fable was in no way anti-monarchical, he does believe that the disastrous episode of Abimelech’s failed monarchy must have influenced people away from the monarchy.<sup>238</sup> In the end, however, this parable can “be seen as a prophetic condemnation of later individual kings.”<sup>239</sup>

**W. C. van Wyk (1973).** W. C. van Wyk is interested in understanding the Jotham Fable within its ancient Near Eastern context.<sup>240</sup> He argues that the correct form of the fable comes from two separate fables that were blended together to teach two lessons. First, there is “an undeniable anti-monarchical feeling . . . to the effect that there were more sensible and profitable things to do than being king. Kingship is being belittled and derogated.”<sup>241</sup> Second, any kingship like that of Abimelech’s is to be considered very dangerous, and the fable is used to discredit him. The final formation of this fable then lends itself to both a reflection against the monarchy and against Abimelech.

**Barnabas Lindars (1973).** Barnabas Lindars’s analysis is concerned with understanding how the work of the narrator, the original fable, and the monarchy are understood within the fable’s present context.<sup>242</sup> He posits that there is an original fable that has been appropriated and adapted within Judges 9 to serve a different purpose. The original fable was a condemnation of those who are able, but reject the position of

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<sup>237</sup>Ibid., 304.

<sup>238</sup>Ibid., 305.

<sup>239</sup>Ibid., 299.

<sup>240</sup>W. C. van Wyk, “The Fable of Jotham in Its Ancient Near Eastern Setting (Judg 9:8-15),” in *Studies in Wisdom Literature*, ed. W. C. van Wyk (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 1973).

<sup>241</sup>Ibid., 94.

<sup>242</sup>Barnabas Lindars, “Jotham’s Fable—A New Form-Critical Analysis,” *JTS* 24 (1973): 355-66.



monarchy. He notes that it serves as a condemnation of those who refuse the monarchy by writing that the original fable “would be addressed to the men who have refused kingship . . . prominent men who must be tactfully shown that they must take responsibility for the resulting anarchy.”<sup>243</sup> In its present form, the “institution of kinship is a presupposition of the fable . . . The fact that the fable tilts at a particularly unfortunate situation does not of itself constitute an objection to monarchy as such.”<sup>244</sup> He does not believe that there is any indication within the fable that it was wrong for the trees to seek out a king in either its original or final form.

**Jan de Waard (1989).** Jan de Waard is concerned primarily with trying to clear up some of the grammatical, syntactical, and structural concerns within Jotham’s fable in an attempt to understand the meaning and thus to be more faithful in translation.<sup>245</sup> He believes that grammatical considerations within the text make an anti-monarchical position untenable.<sup>246</sup>

De Waard argues that the structure of the final form of the text condemns those who refuse leadership. He believes that “it is clear that the triple *hechadalti* cannot be rendered in such a way that the discourse becomes radically anti-monarchical.”<sup>247</sup> Because of the grammar, syntax, and the structure of the fable, de Waard argues that this text cannot be interpreted from an anti-monarchical perspective.

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<sup>243</sup>Ibid., 366.

<sup>244</sup>Ibid., 365.

<sup>245</sup>Jan De Waard, “Jotham’s Fable: An Exercise in Clearing Away the Unclear,” in *Wissenschaft un Kirche: Festschrift für Eduard Lohse*, ed. Kurt Aland and Siegfried Meurer (Bielefeld: Luther-Verlag, 1989), 362-70.

<sup>246</sup>Ibid., 363-64.

<sup>247</sup>Ibid., 369.

**Isabelle de Castalbajac (2001).** As with many other studies, de Castalbajac is interested in understanding the redactional layers within the entirety of Judges 9.<sup>248</sup> Regarding Jotham's fable, she believes that there was an original fable that was not anti-monarchical, but that was a critique of the aristocracy. The fable was used within the book of Judges by a pro-Judean redactor. This redactor was concerned with portraying the Northern kingdom, and especially Jeroboam, negatively. This portrayal was accomplished in Judges 9 through the link with Schechem, which was the city that Jeroboam built (1 Kgs 12:25).<sup>249</sup>

**Karin Schöpflin (2004).** Karin Schöpflin's work is concerned with connecting the Abimelech narrative to both its immediate context and the other deliverer accounts within the book of Judges.<sup>250</sup> In making this connection, she believes that Jotham's fable is the latest addition to the chapter and that its contents reflect the period in which it was added. It serves as a criticism of the monarchy, especially in the North, and is in line with the feeling of monarchy in the deuteronomistic history. Schöpflin does not speak of the text in purely anti-monarchical terms, but instead argues that the text reflects a "negative connotation of kingship, especially in the Northern realm, and the idea of retribution for a king's crimes is characteristic of deuteronomistic authors."<sup>251</sup>

**Jeremy Schipper (2009).** Jeremy Schipper's work is somewhat distinct from the others surveyed thus far.<sup>252</sup> His work is concerned with understanding how parables

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<sup>248</sup>Isabelle de Castalbajac, "Historie de la Rédaction de Juges IX: Une Solution," *VT* 51 (2001): 166-85.

<sup>249</sup>*Ibid.*, 175-78.

<sup>250</sup>Karin Schöpflin, "Jotham's Speech and Fable as Prophetic Comment on Abimelech's Story: The Genesis of Judges 9," *SJOT* 18 (2004): 3-22.

<sup>251</sup>*Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>252</sup>Jeremy Schipper, *Parables and Conflict in the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

function within the Old Testament. He interacts at length with Jotham's parable. Schipper, like others, makes no distinction between parables and fables.<sup>253</sup> He does not believe that there is an intentional message concerning monarchy embedded in Jotham's fable.<sup>254</sup> He does not rule out the possibility that Jotham's fable does contribute to the ideology of monarchy presented in the remainder of the book, but he makes the point that this ideology is not available to either Jotham or his audience. Schipper does not speculate any further on how Jotham's fable interacts with the view of monarchy throughout the book.<sup>255</sup>

**Brian Irwin (2012).** Brian Irwin's article entitled, "Not Just Any King: Abimelech, the Northern Monarchy, and the Final Form of Judges," does not solely focus on Jotham's fable, but does use a fair amount of space discussing the monarchic understanding inherent in the fable.<sup>256</sup> He notes that the book exists to address the issue of leadership and that the character of Abimelech is unique, in that he is king and that he does not deliver Israel out of the hands of an enemy. Irwin believes that the intention of Jotham's fable "is the issue of legitimate versus illegitimate leadership."<sup>257</sup> In fact, the placement and shape of the Abimelech narrative, including Jotham's fable, serve not as a condemnation "of kingship per se but to how leaders are chosen."<sup>258</sup> In the end, Irwin believes that the actions of Abimelech are used to critique the early Northern monarchy. This critique is most clearly seen in Jotham's fable where legitimate leadership was

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<sup>253</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>254</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>255</sup>Ibid.

<sup>256</sup>Brian P. Irwin, "Not Just Any King: Abimelech, the Northern Monarchy, and the Final Form of Judges," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131 (2012): 443-54.

<sup>257</sup>Ibid., 446.

<sup>258</sup>Ibid., 448.

rejected for illegitimate leadership. Irwin believes that this situation intentionally parallels that of the early Northern monarchy.<sup>259</sup>

**David Janzen (2012).** Janzen's study is not primarily concerned with the understanding of the monarchy that is present in Jotham's fable, but he does discuss it.<sup>260</sup> Janzen's primary concern is to answer the interpretive difficulties that are universally acknowledged within the fable. Janzen believes that those difficulties can be answered by identifying Gideon and his house as the  $\tau\alpha\alpha$ , which is generally translated as "thornbush" or "bramble," instead of identifying it as Abimelech.<sup>261</sup> Janzen believes that the  $\tau\alpha\alpha$  is in fact "the right candidate" and that the phrase is not used in a pejorative fashion.<sup>262</sup> According to Janzen, the speech can be broken into two parts. The first part of the fable is "about choosing the right candidate," while the second part is moral lesson that concerns the sincerity of the offer.<sup>263</sup> The fable does not "imply anything negative about monarchy in general" and there is "nothing about the fable that necessarily suggests a critique on the office itself."<sup>264</sup>

**Conclusion.** While the discussion of monarchy within these studies is similar to others that have been surveyed, in that the majority does not view this text as anti-monarchical, there is one observation of particular interest. Almost all of these studies are

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<sup>259</sup>Irwin does make a brief comment about Gideon's response. He believes that it is quite odd that Abimelech is named "my father is king" when, as he believes, Gideon did not accept the position of king. He believes that his theory of the Abimelech narrative being used to promote an anti-Northern view of leadership can be used to explain the name. Irwin notes that "the name Abimelech may be the author's way of drawing attention to this figure as another in history's long line of usurpers and would-be rulers who resorted to manufactured claims of legitimacy" (Irwin, "Not Just Any King," 452).

<sup>260</sup>David Janzen, "Gideon's House as the  $\tau\alpha\alpha$ : A Proposal for Reading Jotham's Fable," *CBQ* 74 (2012): 465-75.

<sup>261</sup>*Ibid.*, 465.

<sup>262</sup>*Ibid.*, 471.

<sup>263</sup>*Ibid.*, 475.

<sup>264</sup>*Ibid.*, 471.

concerned with reconciling difficulties within the text, either with language or with correspondence between the elements in the fable and those in the narrative.

### Summary

As the contents of this chapter have shown, the general study of the book of Judges has moved from a diachronic source-critical point of view to a more synchronic type of reading. The study of monarchy within the book has followed a similar path, with the early studies appealing to differing sources. It moved from that to a study of kingship within the deuteronomistic History. The present synchronic perspective has led to a pro-monarchial consensus. This consensus, however, has failed to account for two passages, which have widely been viewed as anti-monarchial. If the book is to be seen as genuinely pro-monarchial, then these passages need to be addressed.

The history of interpretation of these passages reveals that the majority consensus of the book as pro-monarchial stands at odds with the majority consensus on the interpretation of these passages, especially Gideon's response. Within works that surveyed the institution of monarchy in ancient Israel, there was universal agreement that Gideon's response, and majority agreement that Jotham's fable, represent two of the strongest anti-monarchial texts in the Old Testament. The survey of monographs and commentaries produced similar results for Gideon's response, minus the work of Davis. The understanding of Jotham's fable within these studies, however, was that the issue of monarchy was either secondary or not present, but that the fable was meant as a condemnation of Abimelech.

From the standpoint of individual studies, there was an interesting turn of results. Half of the individual studies that focused on Gideon's response did not view Gideon's words as representing an anti-monarchial position. In fact, following the lead of Davies, Olson,<sup>265</sup> and Heffelfinger, scholars viewed Gideon as having accepted the

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<sup>265</sup>Olson's view is very nuanced.

position of king. The works dealing with Jotham's fable did not deviate from the norm that the fable is to be viewed as anti-Abimelech and that it does not clearly represent an anti-monarchical sentiment. Observing that the majority view of Jotham's fable is that it is not anti-monarchical, but anti-Abimelech is important because it seems that many scholars still think that the majority of scholars hold that Jotham's fable is strongly anti-monarchical, when this is not the case.

The dilemma between the majority interpretation of the book as pro-monarchical and the majority of interpreters of these passages, especially Gideon's response, needs to be addressed if one claims that there is a consistent monarchical ideology to be found in the book. This work argues that Gideon's response and Jotham's fable the book of Judges can be reconciled with the monarchical outlook of the book. The view of monarchy espoused in the book of Judges is broadly pro-monarchical and explicitly pro-Davidic. This dissertation defends this position by interpreting both Gideon's response and Jotham's fable within the context of the entirety of the book of Judges. It demonstrates that both Gideon's response and Jotham's fable, when interpreted within their immediate contexts and the context of the book, are not anti-monarchical. Instead, these passages are set in the middle of complex narratives and serve as condemnations of individuals, not of the institution of monarchy as a whole.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE LIFE-SETTING OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES

#### Introduction

There have been several proposed life-settings for the composition of the book of Judges. Robert O'Connell identifies nine possible settings for the writing of the book: (1) sometime during 1 Samuel 1-12 before Saul's monarchy fell into disfavor; (2) during the events described in 2 Samuel 1-4 when David reigned in Hebron (1011-1004 BC); (3) a time subsequent to David's rule over Israel from Jerusalem (post-1004 BC); (4) after the division of the monarchy when Jeroboam I set up alternate worship sites in Dan and Bethel (post-931 BC); (5) after Tiglath-pileser III's campaign in 734 BC; (6) after the fall of Samaria in 722 BC; (7) during the pre-exilic period subsequent to Josiah's reforms (a Deuteronomic redaction); (8) after the exile and deportation to Babylon in 587 BC; (9) during the post-exilic period of the 5<sup>th</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC (a later Deuteronomic redactor).<sup>1</sup> When advocating for a specific life-setting within the book of Judges, a few things must be considered. First, all explanatory and chronological references must be taken into account. Second, the situation proposed must defend a monarchial position in general and a pro-Judah stance in particular.<sup>2</sup> Third, the proposed setting must account for polemics against both the tribes of Benjamin and Ephraim. This chapter will first discuss the necessary components and then outline the most compelling life-settings for the writing of the book. It will argue that a composition during the time of David's reign

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<sup>1</sup>Robert O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 63 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 305-06.

<sup>2</sup>A defense for a pro-monarchial and pro-Judah purpose for the book is considered both later in this chapter and in chap. 4.

in Hebron best fits both the chronological notes and the ideological position presented within the book.

### **Explanatory and Chronological Notes**

The book of Judges contains several internal indicators that can be used to help date the time of composition of the book. Block breaks these down into two different categories: explanatory/parenthetical notes and chronological notes.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Explanatory Notes**

There are five explanatory or parenthetical notes within the book. Three of the five explanatory notes clarify the names of cities: 1:11 notes that Debir was formerly called Kiriath-sepher, 1:23 notes that Bethel was formerly called Luz, and 19:10 notes that the Canaanite name for Jerusalem was Jebus. The other two explanatory notes are found in 3:1-2 and 20:27-28. The passage found in 3:1-2 explains that there were other nations left in the land so that those in Israel who had not yet experienced war could experience it. Judges 20:27-28 notes that the Ark of the Covenant and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, were in Bethel in “those days.” While these texts by no means pinpoint a date for the composition of the book, the use of these notes by the author suggests the distance of the original audience from the events.

#### **Chronological Notes**

**The “to this day” passages.** Besides the five explanatory comments there are a series of chronological notes within the book. First, there are seven passages that use the phrase עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה (1:21; 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12; and 19:30):

1:21 And the Jebusites dwell with the sons of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

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<sup>3</sup>Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, NAC, vol. 6 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 64-67.



- 1:26 And he built a city and he called it Luz, which is its name to this day.
- 6:24 to this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.
- 10:4 and they had thirty cities which are called Havvoth Jair to this day, which are in the land of Gilead
- 15:19 Therefore the name of it was called En-hakkore. It is at Lehi to this day.
- 18:12 therefore the place is called Mahaneh-dan to this day, behold, it is west of Kiriath-jearim.
- 19:30 Such a thing has never been done or seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt to this day.

Similar to the explanatory notes, these chronological notes do not give much in the way of specific chronological data for the writing of the book. The most specific is 1:21, which says that the Jebusites dwell with the Benjamites in Jerusalem to this day. The most popular interpretation of this verse is espoused by Block, who writes that this text “apparently antedates David’s conquest of the Jebusites and his transformation of the settlement into a Judahite city.”<sup>4</sup> Three difficulties have been associated with this interpretation. First, a parallel text found in Joshua 15:63 says that the Jebusites dwelt with Judah in Jerusalem “to this day.” Second, the city may not have been called Jerusalem until David had captured it. Joshua 18:28 and Judges 19:10 indicate that the Canaanite name for the city was Jebus. Third, other texts within the book of Judges may indicate a later time of composition, especially 18:30, which will be discussed in more detail below.

Webb has recently argued that Joshua 15:63 and Judges 1:21 should be harmonized and considered as speaking to the same general time period. He does not believe that the Judges text needs to be viewed as prior to that of the Joshua text, thereby necessitating a very early composition of Judges. Instead, Webb notes, “If David did not expel the Jebusite inhabitants of Jerusalem, presumably he did not expel its Benjamite

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 65.

inhabitants either. Judges 1:21 may simply indicate that the continued association of Benjamites with Jebusites in Jerusalem was viewed as a scandal by the more zealous Judahites of a later time.”<sup>5</sup> It does seem clear from 2 Samuel 24:16 that at least some Jebusites remained in Jerusalem after David had captured the city. Webb goes on to note that both the Joshua and Judges texts seek to absolve Judah from Canaanite association.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Jeffrey Geoghegan believes that the continued use of the term “until this day” displays the interests of the Judean monarchy.<sup>7</sup>

Goslinga, however, advances the position for an early dating of this text based on the interpretation that the Benjamites never occupied the city with the Jebusites. The first half of 1:21 works in concert with the second half of the verse, indicating that the Benjamites did not drive out the Jebusites from Jerusalem, so the Jebusites dwelt with the Benjamites “to this day.” He believes that the phrase “with the Benjamites” only indicates that they were within Benjamite territory.<sup>8</sup> If the phrase was intended to indicate that the Benjamites dwelt within the city with the Jebusites, then it is only logical from Joshua 15:63 that Judahites lived there as well. This scenario seems like quite an odd arrangement, wherein the tribe of Judah captures the city (Judg 1:8), the Jebusites repopulate the city, the Benjamites then try to retake the city (Judg 1:21), but cannot, so all three live together within the city. Also, Judges 19:12 seems to indicate that the city is not under Israelite control, but under Jebusite control. This statement would seem odd if

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<sup>5</sup>Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 110-11 n. 65.

<sup>6</sup>Another solution has been offered by Barnabas Lindars, who does not believe that it refers to the actual time of writing, but refers to the period of the Judges. See Barnabas Lindars, *Judges 1-5: A New Translation and Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 48.

<sup>7</sup>See Jeffery C. Geoghegan, “‘Until This Day’ and the Preexilic Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History,” *JBL* 122 (2003): 202. For another viewpoint on this phrase, see Brevard S Childs, “A Study of the Formula ‘Until this Day,’” *JBL* 82 (1963): 279-92.

<sup>8</sup>C. J. Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, Bible Student’s Commentary, trans. Ray Totgam (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 217-18.

both Benjamin and Judah were inhabiting the city.<sup>9</sup> This line of reasoning is solid, and it seems that the writer is saying that Jerusalem is under the control of the Jebusites at the time of the writing of the book of Judges.

**The refrain.** Besides the seven “to this day” passages there is the refrain “In those days there was no king,” which is repeated four times (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; and 21:25). While this refrain is generally viewed primarily as an ideological statement (and it is viewed that way here), there is still a chronological element to it. Block notes this chronological element by stating that it is a “retrospective time notice, referring to a period prior to the monarchy.”<sup>10</sup> These verses appear to be written after the monarchy has already been established, and the writer is contrasting the time period of the Judges with his own. These verses, like the ones already discussed, do not give an exact time period, but it does seem unlikely that this refrain would have made sense in the later history of the Israelite monarchy.

A quick survey of the kings presented throughout the books of Kings reveals that the kings of both Israel and Judah did not follow Yahweh, but did what was evil or sinful in Yahweh’s eyes. This is said of every Northern king<sup>11</sup> (except Jehu<sup>12</sup> and Shallum)<sup>13</sup> and most of the Southern kings.<sup>14</sup> The four-fold repetition of the refrain,

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 218 n. 19.

<sup>10</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 65. Block views this statement as only representing a chronological time notice with no pro-monarchial significance.

<sup>11</sup>See 1 Kgs 14:9 (Jeroboam); 15:26 (Nadab); 15:34 (Baasha); 16:13 (Elah); 16:19 (Zimri); 16:25 (Omri); 16:60, 21:25 (Ahab); 22:52 (Ahaziah); 2 Kgs 3:2 (Jehoram); 13:2 (Jehoahaz); 13:11 (Jehoash); 14:24 (Jeroboam II); 15:9 (Zachariah); 15:18 (Menahem); 15:24 (Pekahiah); 15:28 (Pekah); and 17:2 (Hoshea).

<sup>12</sup>Second Kings 10:30-31 says that Jehu did some right in Yahweh’s eyes, but that he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam.

<sup>13</sup>Shallum is only discussed in 2 Kgs 15:13-16 and only reigned one month.

<sup>14</sup>See 1 Kgs 14:22 where it describes Judah doing evil. Also, 2 Chr 12:14 specifically says Rehoboam did evil; 1 Kgs 15:3 (Abijam); 2 Kgs 8:18 (Jehoram); 8:27 (Ahaziah); 16:2-3 (Ahaz); 21:2 (Manasseh); 21:20 (Amon); 23:32 (Jehoahaz); 23:37 (Jehoiakim); 24:9 (Jehoiachin); and 24:19 (Zedekiah). Of Judah’s kings only eight are said to do what is right. See 1 Kgs 15:11-14 (Asa); 1 Kgs 22:43

however, seems to affirm that the chaos and idolatry of the period of the judges will be solved by a strong centralized monarchy.<sup>15</sup> This statement would be a hard sell to an audience after a long history of idolatrous kings and would better fit the early monarchical period, possibly before idolatry became a problem under Solomon or Jeroboam. All of these texts taken together with the other explanatory and chronological notes work to bring some semblance to a possible time period in which this book could have been written. There is one final note of a chronological nature, as well as the ideological content, that needs to be considered.<sup>16</sup>

**Judges 18:30.** The last chronological note is found in Judges 18:30, which reads, “And the sons of Dan set up for themselves a carved image, and Jonathan the son of Gershom, son of Moses, and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the exile of the land.” A majority of scholars have interpreted this verse as a reference either to the exile of Dan under Tiglath-Pileser III (734 BC) or to the deportation of the Northern tribes in 722 BC.<sup>17</sup> Even Goslinga, who argues for a very

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(Jehoshaphat); 2 Kgs 12:2 (Joash); 14:3 (Amaziah); 15:3 (Uzziah); 15:34 (Jotham); 18:3 (Hezekiah); and 2 Kgs 22:2 (Josiah). First and 2 Kgs never specifically say that Athaliah’s actions as queen are evil, but the description of her in 2 Kgs 11 clearly portrays her in this manner.

<sup>15</sup>This claim is explored more in chap. 4. For a defense of this, see A. E. Cundall, “Judges—An Apology for the Monarchy?” *ExpTim* 81 (1970): 178; J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1981), 265; Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 458; Mark J. Boda, *Judges*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 1242; Philippe Guillaume, *Waiting for Josiah: The Judges*, JSOTSup 385 (New York: Continuum, 2004), 140-41; Webb, *Judges*, 426-27; O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 268-80.

<sup>16</sup>Brian Peterson argues that the reference in 1:29 to the Canaanites dwelling in Gezer also necessitates a dating of the book before Egypt captured the city and gave it to Solomon in 1 Kgs 9:16. This reference, however, does not seem to necessitate an early date syntactically since the simple past is used to describe the occupation of the city by the Canaanites; this statement could have been phrased this way even after the events of 1 Kgs 9:16. If the phrasing that the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer “to this day” had appeared, this would have indicated an earlier date of composition. As it stands, this statement could have occurred early or late. See Peterson, “A Priest Who Despised a King: David’s Propagandist and the Authorship of Judges Considered,” *BibSac*, forthcoming.

<sup>17</sup>See Barry G. Webb, *Judges*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 449; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 512-14; Yairah Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing*, Biblical Interpretation Series 38, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 310; George Foot Moore, *Judges*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1923), 400; Robert G. Boling, *Judges*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 266; and J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges*, OTL (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981), 276. Niditch, and a few

early dating of the book, believes the phrase “exile of the land” most naturally reflects the deportation under Tiglath-Pileser III, so he views this statement as a later editorial addition.<sup>18</sup> Despite the longstanding popularity of this view, there have been several dissenters.

Wong notes that the phrase “until the day of the exile of the land” has some difficulties. One difficulty is the unusual nature of the phrase גלות הארץ.<sup>19</sup> In fact, this phrase occurs nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. O’Connell also notes that while specific geographical locations such as Israel, Judah, Jerusalem, and Gilgal are said to be exiled, never is the generic term “land” said to be exiled without further specification.<sup>20</sup> He further notes that while in other contexts not using the terminology of exile, the term “the land” can serve as a metonymy for the inhabitants of the land, but that when this is done it is almost always sufficiently clear from the context.<sup>21</sup> That is not the case with Judges 18:30. This difficulty is usually not noted by those who view the phrase as referring to the Assyrian deportation. Amit and Soggin, for instance, do not feel the need to discuss this text.<sup>22</sup>

Two major arguments have been advanced in defense of understanding this phrase as referring to something other than the Assyrian exile of the Northern tribes. Both of these arguments have located the chronological reference of “until the day of the exile of the land” as referring to events in 1 Samuel, most notably somewhere from chapters 4-6. The first argument involves an emendation of the text from גלות הארץ to גלות הארון. This

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others view the reference to exile to that of Judah in 586, *Judges*, OTL (Louisville: WJK, 2008), 184-85.

<sup>18</sup>Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 473-74.

<sup>19</sup>Gregory Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges: An Inductive, Rhetorical Study*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 111 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 198.

<sup>20</sup>O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 481.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>See Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 317-18; Soggin, *Judges*, 277-78.

option has been proposed by Burney and, more recently, O’Connell.<sup>23</sup> While O’Connell notes that there is no textual evidence to support this emendation, he advances three arguments for it. First, he believes that there was an accidental scribal confusion between the letters ך and ך. He notes that “a copyist may simply have encountered a form of ך- that caused sufficient hesitation to allow historical-theological traditions to take over.”<sup>24</sup> Second, O’Connell advances that there are historical and rhetorical problems with viewing הארץ as the original. These problems are that the phrase “exile of the land” is not attested elsewhere in biblical Hebrew and the strangeness of leaving the term “the land” unidentified and unqualified, which is quite abnormal.<sup>25</sup> Third, O’Connell believes that there are significant rhetorical reasons to prefer הארון: (1) the mention of הארון in 18:30 (near a Mosaic genealogy) would parallel the mention of הארון in Judges 20:27-27; (2) הארון here in 18:30b could serve as the antithesis of הפסל in 18:30a; (3) there is a parallel between 18:30 and 18:31, which will be discussed in further detail below; and (4) the phrase הארון הגלות could have a connection with the description of the ark being taken away in 1 Samuel 4:21-22.<sup>26</sup>

A second argument given by those who advocate that the phrase “until the exile of the land” refers to the events of 1 Samuel 4 involves both exegetical and historical elements. The exegetical argument is based on two lines of reasoning. First, that there is a parallel between 18:30 and 18:31. Second, there are grammatical parallels between Judges 18:30 and other biblical texts concerning exile that describe the events of 1 Samuel 4. While O’Connell recommends the emendation, and uses these as subpoints

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<sup>23</sup>C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges with Introduction and Notes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Rivington’s, 1920), 415 and 435. Burney follows the discussion of Rabbi Kimchi, who lived in the twelfth century.

<sup>24</sup>O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 481.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 482.

to support his emendation, others have advanced these arguments without suggesting the hypothetical reconstruction of the text.

The first exegetical argument is that 18:30 and 18:31 are to be read as parallel and referring to the same time period. On this view, the time referent in verse 30, where the priests are serving in Dan “until the captivity of the land,” refers to the same period as the chronological referent in verse 31 that references a carved image being around “as long as the house of God was at Shiloh.” Keil advances this argument.<sup>27</sup> If these texts are to be taken as parallel, then the priests of Dan could only have ministered until the reign of Saul, since by the time of the events in 1 Samuel 21 the house of God had moved from Shiloh to Nob.<sup>28</sup>

The second exegetical argument notes that the events involving the Philistines in 1 Samuel 4 are described with exilic language. This happens within 1 Samuel 4 and Psalm 78. In 1 Samuel 4:21-22, the Philistine captivity of the Ark is described as גלה כבוד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל in a lament by Eli’s daughter in-law. Psalm 78:60-61 also describes how Yahweh forsook his dwelling in Shiloh and “gave his power to exile, his glory to the hand of the foe.” The parallels are clear with the mention of Shiloh, exile, and glory. The main difference is that the term for exile is from the root שָׁבַח instead of גָּלָה. Keil comments that this is how the godly in Israel viewed the events of 1 Samuel 4. He also goes on to note that the description of the Philistine subjugation of Israel given in 1 Samuel 19:23 may indicate that they “completely subjugated the Israelites, and treated them as their prisoners.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 2, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I & II Samuel* (Grand Rapids, 1976), 438-42. See also Philip Satterthwaite, “Narrative Artistry and the Composition of Judges 17-21” (Ph.D. diss., University of Manchester, 1989), 117, and Mark W. Bartusch, *Understanding Dan: An Exegetical Study of a Biblical City, Tribe, and Ancestor* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 200.

<sup>28</sup>Webb objects that these two events cannot simply be equated. See Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 449.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 441.

Along with the two exegetical arguments, those who advocate identifying the chronological note in Judges 18:30 with 1 Samuel 4 note that there are historical difficulties with associating the phrase “exile of the land” with the Assyrian exile. Keil notes that there are at least three historical arguments that undermine a belief that Jonathan’s descendants served as priests at a shrine with a carved image until the Assyrian or Babylonian exiles. First, it would be hard to imagine that David would have allowed this image worship when he had sought to restore lawful worship. It would also be hard to imagine that this could have gone on without his knowledge because he carried out wars in the North. Second, even if David would have ignored or allowed this image worship, it surely would not have been allowed by Solomon after the temple was built.<sup>30</sup> Third, the service of Jonathan’s sons as priests in Dan is irreconcilable with the fact that Jeroboam set up a golden calf in Dan and appointed non-Levitical priests to officiate at this shrine. It does not make sense that Jeroboam would establish a second worship of the same kind.<sup>31</sup>

### **Conclusions about the Explanatory and Chronological Notes**

Drawing a conclusion from the explanatory and chronological notes comes down to two things: an understanding of the more explicit chronological notes in 1:21 and 18:30 and an understanding of whether the other notes contain a general sense of close or distant chronological proximity to the events in the book.

Of all of the explanatory and chronological notes within Judges, 1:21 and 18:30 are the most explicit. At first glance these two texts seem to display different time periods of composition, with 1:21 being very early and 18:30 being much later. As the

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<sup>30</sup>Similarly, Peterson notes that this site “would have had to survive the judgeship of Samuel and the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon who were all cultic reformers to some degree (cf. 1 Sam 7:4; 1 Sam 28:3; 1 Kgs 5-7).” See Peterson, “The Priest Who Despised a King,” 4-5.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 440-41. Keil also notes that the expression גלות הארץ could refer to an unknown event in Israel’s history when Dan was conquered by the Syrians. Peterson also defends this position.



above survey has shown, there are arguments that have been made advocating a later date for 1:21 by those who see a later time of composition. Others who advocate an earlier date for the book note that 18:30 may refer to a much earlier time. After looking at these texts it does seem most probable that both 1:21 and 18:30 refer to a time early within the united monarchy. For 1:21, while there may have been some Jebusites living in or around Jerusalem (2 Sam 24:16), it seems unlikely that the blaming of Benjamin for the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem was written prior to David's occupation of the city. Goslinga's arguments are quite persuasive when he synthesizes Joshua 15:63, Judges 1:8 and 1:21. It seems that Judah took the city from the Jebusites, but then Benjamin lost it. It does not seem probable that Judah, Benjamin, and the Jebusites all dwelt within the city at the same time. Instead, it seems that 1:21 describes a Jebusite-ruled Jerusalem within the territory of Benjamin. This is the situation that seems to be implied in 19:12.<sup>32</sup>

Likewise, it seems probable that 18:30 could refer to an early date. While the phrase "exile of the land" does at first appear to be a reference to either the Assyrian or Babylonian exiles, neither of these options seems likely when the larger exegetical and historical circumstances are considered. While O'Connell's hypothetical reconstruction of the text seems unlikely, some parts of his argument that do carry some weight.<sup>33</sup> First, this is the only time that the phrase "exile of the land" occurs in the Hebrew Bible. Second, while it is by no means certain that 18:30 corresponds to the events in 1 Samuel 4, the use of the term "exile" to describe the taking of the Ark shows that there were events in Israel's history that were described in this way before the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Thus, the phrase may refer to the events of 1 Samuel 4 or other events that happened within the life of Israel that are not well-documented. Third, it seems possible, though not exegetically necessary, that 18:30 and 18:31 are parallel. If

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<sup>32</sup>Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 217-18.

<sup>33</sup>O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 481.

this is the case, then Jonathan's sons could only have presided in Dan as long as the house of God was at Shiloh, since Shiloh was destroyed around the beginning of the reign of Saul.<sup>34</sup> Fourth, and most convincing, it seems unlikely that David and Solomon would have allowed the worship described in 18:31 to continue. What seems even less likely, however, is that Jeroboam would have set up a second site within Dan, with non-Levitical priests, who were functioning in the same way. It seems that he would have just appropriated the already existing cultic site, but this does not happen (1 Kgs 12:25-33). It seems likely that Jonathan's sons had already stopped officiating in Dan by the time Jeroboam set up his alternate worship sites.

The second line of evidence that must be considered when drawing a conclusion on when these texts were written is the sense of the chronological proximity that these texts convey to the time of the events that they discuss. Block believes that 1:21 is an early text and that some of the other texts, especially the explanatory notes, suggest a time that is chronologically far from the events that they are describing.<sup>35</sup> O'Connell, however, believes that the chronological references give an internal sense of recency.<sup>36</sup> He first looks at the refrain that there is no king found in 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; and 21:25. O'Connell believes that these verses represent a recent past that is described in chaotic fashion and contrasted with a new monarchical order that is stable.<sup>37</sup> He then moves on to discuss how Judges 18:31 is silent about Jerusalem but appears to legitimate Shiloh as a worship center for Israelite life.<sup>38</sup> He then discusses 18:30, which has already

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<sup>34</sup>Willem VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), s.v. "Shiloh," by G. Gilmore. This also referred to in Ps 78:60 and Jer 7:12-15.

<sup>35</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 64.

<sup>36</sup>O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 307.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 331-33.

<sup>38</sup>O'Connell sees a comparison between 18:30 and 18:31 where in v. 31 the house of God in Shiloh is seen as legitimate and the sons of Jonathan with their image worship are illegitimate. His point is that if the author is comparing and contrasting legitimacy, then it is odd that Jerusalem is not what is used

been discussed. Lastly, he argues that the parenthetical note of 21:19, which states directions to Shiloh, seems to come between the time when Shiloh is destroyed (around 1050BC) and its reestablishment sometime later, which may be during the time of Solomon, since Ahijah is dwelling there in 1 Kings 11:29.<sup>39</sup>

It is also important to consider the “to this day” passages. Block notes that these verses only make sense in light of a pre-exilic leadership. This is especially true of 6:24, which speaks of an altar still standing in Ophrah.<sup>40</sup> While their works do not specify the dating of each text, Childs and Weinfeld date several of these texts to the earliest traditions. Childs writes that in the “early historical books [Joshua and Judges] the formula belongs to the earliest traditions of the book.”<sup>41</sup> Similarly, commenting on Judges 10:4, both Geoghegan and Weinfeld believe that this text belongs to a much older tradition than the Deuteronomistic History (Num 32:41, Deut 3:14).<sup>42</sup> These verses do seem to have an early date and would not contradict the early date seen thus far in the other texts.

In conclusion, the explanatory notes, the “until this day” passages, other chronological references such as 18:30, and the refrain at the end of the book all seem to make most sense in an early setting sometime within the early monarchial history of Israel, possibly before David had captured Jerusalem. While these texts are important to

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for comparison, thus it is likely that this text was composed before Jerusalem became the cultic center of Israelite life. See O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 333-34. For a similar view that sees v. 31 as legitimating the house of God at Shiloh, see K. Lawson Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 343.

<sup>39</sup>O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 337-38.

<sup>40</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 65. See also Geoghegan, “‘Until this Day,’” 226-27.

<sup>41</sup>Brevard S. Childs, “A Study of the Formula, ‘Until This Day,’” *JBL* 82 (1963): 292.

<sup>42</sup>Geoghegan, “‘Until This Day,’” 213; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, AB, vol. 5 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1991), 185.

the dating of the life-setting of the book, the ideological data within the book also needs to be taken into account. This data will be surveyed in detail below.

### **Ideological Considerations**

Beyond the various chronological indicators that are found throughout the book of Judges, there are also certain ideological indicators that can be used to help determine a possible time period for the composition of the book. While there are several things that could be discussed in this section, there seem to be three things that must be accounted for when discussing how the ideological content of the book supports a proposed life-setting. Butler believes that to understand the life-setting of the book the following must be understood. First, the book appeals to a pro-monarchical position. Second, the burden of leadership falls on the tribe of Judah. Third, beyond the pro-Judah slant there is a general anti-Northern polemic, which manifests itself particularly against the tribes of Benjamin and Ephraim.<sup>43</sup> These ideological considerations will be discussed briefly below. Some of them will be revisited in further detail in the next chapter.

#### **The Pro-Monarchical/Pro-Judah Material**

The book of Judges appears to have been written largely as an apology for the Judahite Monarchy.<sup>44</sup> Traces of both generic pro-monarchical sentiment and specific pro-Judah sentiment are present within the book.

**The pro-monarchical material.** The book of Judges supports a general pro-monarchical position. It does so in two primary ways: first, through the refrain that is repeated four times at the end of the book (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25); and second, through

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<sup>43</sup>Trent Butler, *Judges*, WBC, vol. 8 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), lxxii. These aspects of the ideological content are also accounted for by O'Connell and Davis. See O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 305-42 and Dale Ralph Davis, "A Proposed Life Setting for the Book of Judges" (Ph.D. diss. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1978), 28-47.

<sup>44</sup>See Peterson, "The Priest Who Despised a King," 1-5.

the presentation of the Judges within the main section of the book. Both of these show support for the monarchy by contrasting it with the chaotic pre-monarchial period.

The most clear pro-monarchial statement in the book is the refrain at the end that laments the lack of a king.<sup>45</sup> This refrain appears four times in slightly different forms:

Judges 17:6 In those days there was no king in Israel. Every man did what was right in his own eyes.

Judges 18:1 In those days there was no king in Israel.

Judges 19:1 And it happened in those days that there was no king in Israel . . .

Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel. Every man did what was right in his own eyes.

While the refrain appears in slightly different forms, the common thread is that presence or absence of the kingship is the major difference between the time of the writing of the book and the time of the judges. It appears to assume that with kingship people will no longer do what is right in their own eyes.

The cycle of deliverers within the book of Judges also contains pro-monarchial sentiment. This material is, however, much more indirect than the refrain. Cundall notes two different ways in which the body of the book highlights the problems inherent in the time of the judges that would be resolved under a strong monarchial system. First, the picture of Israel is of “a country that was sadly divided and vulnerable.”<sup>46</sup> There is no time in which all of Israel is united against a common enemy. In fact, a league of six tribes is the largest mentioned in the entire book (Judg 5:14-18). The picture provided is not only of a divided Israel, but the deliverer accounts also show that the peace that was

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<sup>45</sup>The vast majority of scholars view the refrain as pro-monarchial. A few have recently challenged this interpretation: W. J. Dumbrell, “‘In Those Days There Was No King in Israel; Every Man Did What Was Right in His Own Eyes.’ The Purpose of the Book of Judges Reconsidered,” *JSOT* 25 (1983), 22-33; Wong, *Compositional Strategy in the Book of Judges*, 191-224; and Susan Niditch, *Judges*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster, 2009), 181-82.

<sup>46</sup>Cundall, “Judges—An Apology for the Monarchy?” 179.

won by the various Judges was short-lived. The description of the land is that it is “wide open to an invader.”<sup>47</sup> Second, the judges themselves are depicted in a way that leaves much to be desired. This shows that leadership has become a “desperate problem.”<sup>48</sup>

Both the refrain and the cycle of deliverers imply the need for a stronger, more centralized government than the period of the judges provided. This is noted by Cundall, who writes, “It is obvious that he [the editor] regarded the evils noted in the earlier period as due to the absence of the strong, centralized authority of the monarchy.”<sup>49</sup> This argument could be used as an appeal for the tribes to unite under Davidic rule during the time of the civil war between the houses of David and Saul (2 Sam 3:1).

**The pro-Judah material.** Not only does the book appear to take a pro-monarchical stance, but the emphasis on leadership, as Butler notes, falls on Judah.<sup>50</sup> Several scholars have observed this emphasis on Judah.<sup>51</sup> Wong notes that pro-Judah material appears in two major ways within the book of Judges. First, it appears through explicit references to the tribe of Judah that portray Judah positively. Second, it can be seen implicitly through the polemic against other tribes, especially Benjamin and Ephraim.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 180.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid. See also O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 281-304.

<sup>50</sup>Butler, *Judges*, xxii.

<sup>51</sup>O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 59; Marvin A. Sweeney, “Davidic Polemics in the Book of Judges,” *VT* 47 (1997): 517-29; Serge Frolov, “Fire, Smoke, and Judah in Judges: A Response to Gregory Wong,” *SJOT* 21 (2007): 127-38; M. Weinfeld, “Judges 1.1-2:5: The Conquest Under the Leadership of the House of Judah,” in *Understanding Poets and Prophets: Essays in Honor of George Wishart Anderson*, ed. A. Graeme Auld, JSOTSup 152 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 388-400; E. Theodore Mullen, “Judges 1:1-36: The Deuteronomistic Reintroduction of the Book of Judges,” *Harvard Theological Review* 77 (1984): 33-54; A. G. Auld, “Judges 1 and History: A Reconsideration,” *VT* 25 (1975): 261-85; K. Lawson Younger, “The Configuring of Judicial Preliminaries: Judges 1:1-2:5 and Its Dependence Upon the Book of Joshua,” *JSOT* 68 (1995): 75-92.

<sup>52</sup>Gregory T. K. Wong, “Is there a Direct Pro-Judah Polemic in Judges?,” *SJOT* 19 (2005): 85.

The explicit references to Judah are largely found in Judges 1. These references are largely positive and indicate that Yahweh chose the tribe of Judah to lead the conquest (1:2) and that Yahweh was with them (1:19).<sup>53</sup> Besides the references to Judah in Judges 1 the first judge mentioned within the book is Othniel. Thus Judah seems to have a pride of place there as well. In both the first chapter and in the body of the book there is also a comparison between the tribe of Judah and the other tribes. This comparison is favorable to the tribe of Judah. Further discussion of each of these observations will be given in the next chapter, showing how these aspects display the monarchical ideology of the book. The significance of this pro-Judah ideology for the life-setting of the book is that it makes most sense in a time when there is a need to justify the Judean monarchy. This material would make good sense at the beginning of the Judean monarchy under the early reign of David. The two tribes that are contrasted most clearly with the tribe of Judah are Benjamin and Ephraim.

### **The Anti-Benjamite Polemic**

Several scholars believe that an anti-Benjamite polemic pervades that book and that the presentation of the tribe, as compared with the tribe of Judah, is the most important ideological consideration in the book. Discussions of this polemic are present in the works of Cundall,<sup>54</sup> Davis,<sup>55</sup> Amit,<sup>56</sup> O’Connell,<sup>57</sup> Brettler,<sup>58</sup> and Schwab.<sup>59</sup> The anti-Benjamite polemic is seen in all three sections of the book. Each of these will be briefly surveyed to determine if these can help to identify a life-setting for the book.

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<sup>53</sup>Gurewicz believes that these statements only make sense during the time of the Judean monarchy. See S.B. Gurewicz, “The Bearing of Judges i-ii 5 on the Authorship of the Book of Judges,” *Australian Biblical Review* 7 (1959): 38.

<sup>54</sup>Cundall, “Judges—An Apology for the Monarchy?” 178-81.

<sup>55</sup>Davis, “A Proposed Life Setting for the Book of Judges,” 34-36.

<sup>56</sup>Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 341-50.

<sup>57</sup>O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 320-22

The tribes of Judah and Benjamin are found alongside each other throughout the book, beginning with the introduction. In the first chapter Judah is portrayed as faithful in obtaining their allotment (Judg 1:1-20), while the other tribes fail to drive out the inhabitants of the land (Judg 1: 21-36). The first tribe to be mentioned in this failure is the tribe of Benjamin, and their failure is specifically contrasted with Judah's success. In 1:8 Judah drives out the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but in 1:21 Benjamin fails to drive out the Jebusites from Jerusalem.<sup>60</sup> These two tribes are discussed alongside each other both in the body of the book, with the presentation of Othniel and Ehud, and in the epilogue.

The next occasion is in the body of the text. The author presents the first two judges, Othniel from Judah and Ehud from Benjamin. It has been noted by some that Othniel's judgeship is paradigmatic or ideal.<sup>61</sup> In contrast, Ehud's characterization is somewhat odd. First, he is left-handed, but from the tribe whose name means "son of the right hand." Also, he is portrayed as both devious and as an assassin.<sup>62</sup> While this side-by-side presentation does serve to heighten the comparison between the tribes, the clearest anti-Benjamite polemic appears in the epilogue of the book.<sup>63</sup>

The most explicit anti-Benjamite polemic appears in the final chapters of the book. This polemic, however, is not just a generic anti-Benjamite polemic, but it is

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<sup>58</sup>Brettler, "The Book of Judges," 395-418.

<sup>59</sup>George M. Schwab, *Right in Their Own Eyes: The Gospel According to Judges*, The Gospel According to the Old Testament (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011), 22-24.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>61</sup>See Brettler, "The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics," 405; Yairah Amit, "The Book of Judges: Dating and Meaning," in *Homeland and Exile: Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honour of Bustanay Oded*, ed. Galil Gershon, Mark Geller, and Alan Millard (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 313-14; B. Oded, "Cushan-Rishathaim (Judges 3:8-11): An Implicit Polemic," in *Texts, Temples and Traditions—A Tribute to Menahem Haran*, ed. Michael V. Fox (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 89-94.

<sup>62</sup>See particularly O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 99-100. O'Connell also notes that there is no notice that Israel removed their idols under Ehud.

<sup>63</sup>Some also see a comparison between the portrayal of Saul and some of the Judges within the book. See Sam Dragga, "In the Shadow of the Judges: The Failure of Saul," *JSOT* 38 (1987): 39-46.



specifically targeted at the person of Saul. This polemic has been more thoroughly discussed in the works of Amit<sup>64</sup> and Brettler.<sup>65</sup> Amit notices four major connections between Judges 19-21 and Saul. First, there is the connection of several places, particularly Gibeah, Jabesh-Gilead, Ramah, and Mizpah.<sup>66</sup> Along with these connections Amit also notes that roughly 25 percent of the references to Benjamin as a tribe/tribal area are found in these three chapters.<sup>67</sup> The second connection between Saul and these chapters can be observed through the description of the Levite in Judges 19. Both the Levite and Saul had a pair of donkeys (Judg 19:3 and 1 Sam 9:3). There is also the presence of an old man from the hill country of Ephraim that is hospitable (Judg 19:6 and 1 Sam 9:22-26). Both the Levite and Saul had servants who gave them good advice (Judg 19:11 and 1 Sam 9:6-8). And both Saul and the Levite cut something into pieces to draw Israel to war. The Levite cut up his concubine (Judg 19:29), and Saul cut up oxen (1 Sam 11:7).<sup>68</sup> Third, both narratives contain motifs connected to war. Both Saul's army (1 Sam 11:7) and the army gathered against Gibeah (Judg 20:1) are described "as one man." There are also large troop numbers (Amit refers to them as exaggerated) that gathered. And the Ark is mentioned (Judg 20:27-28 and 1 Sam 14:18).<sup>69</sup> And fourth, there is a strong contrast between the exemplary hospitality of Bethlehem (to be associated with David) and the negatively depicted hospitality of Gibeah (to be associated with Saul).<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 341-50; Amit, "Literature in the Service of Politics: Studies in Judges 19-21," in *Politics and Theopolitics*, ed. H. G. Reventlow, JSOTSup 171 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 28-40.

<sup>65</sup>Brettler, "The Book of Judges," 408-15; Mar Zvi Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, Old Testament Readings (New York: Routledge, 2002), 88-89.

<sup>66</sup>Amit, "Literature in the Service of Politics," 31-33.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 35

Brettler rightly comments on this contrast by stating, “These multiple correspondences are too numerous to be coincidental.”<sup>71</sup> While not all of the correspondences alleged by Amit and Brettler are strong, there are some, especially Amit’s first and second points, which are quite striking.

As can be seen by the quick survey above, there does seem to be a polemic against the tribe of Benjamin that is present within each section of the book of Judges. A polemic against Benjamin would be most naturally situated within the early period of the monarchy and quite possibly during the time of the war between the house of Saul and the house of David referred to in 2 Samuel 3:1. Brettler, however, has argued that a later date for the book’s origin is compatible with a primary polemic against the tribe of Benjamin. He notes five reasons why this is so. First, Saul gained early and widespread popularity. This can be seen especially in statements like those found in 1 Sam 10:24 where Saul is said to be “unrivaled” and the people shout “long live the king.” Second, the long and difficult war between the houses of David and Saul showed that Saul still had a contingent of followers. Third, the genealogy of Saul is found preserved in 1 Chronicles 8:33-40, possibly because Saul was still seen as the rightful ruler. Fourth, within the genealogy one of Saul’s descendants is named Melek (1 Chr 8:35). Fifth, within the book of Esther the hero is a Benjamite descendant of Saul.<sup>72</sup> While Brettler’s points should be taken seriously, they do not negate the possibility of an early date, nor would a later date explain the need for a well-structured anti-Benjamite polemic (and particularly an anti-Saul polemic) like the time period portrayed in 2 Samuel 1-4.

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<sup>71</sup>Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, 89.

<sup>72</sup>Brettler, “The Book of Judges,” 413-15. Diana Edelman also discusses the likelihood of a Saulide-Davidic rivalry within later Israelite history. See Diana Edelman, “Did Saulide-Davidic Rivalry Resurface in Early Persian Yehud?” in *The Land That I will Show You: Essays on the History and Archaeology of the Ancient Near East in Honor of J. Maxwell Miller*, ed. J. Andrew Dearman and M. Patrick Graham (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 69-90.

One particular connection between the material in the book of Judges and the material found in the early chapters of 2 Samuel, and thereby David's early reign, is the instruction to Judah by Yahweh to "go up" against Benjamin.<sup>73</sup> This command appears in Judges 20:18, 23, and 28. The same language is used of David in 2 Samuel 2:1 with reference to the cities of Judah and in 2 Samuel 5:19 with reference to the Philistines. There is a further connection with early Davidic rule because in 2 Samuel 2:1, David is ultimately directed to Hebron, which can be connected to Judges 1:2 where Judah is told to "go up" and ultimately gains Hebron (Judg 1:12). Rake believes that Judges 1 and 2 Samuel 2 and 5 feature a correspondence between Judah's rise in Judges and David's rise in Samuel.<sup>74</sup>

### **The Anti-Ephraimite Polemic**

It has been widely argued that there is an anti-Ephraimite polemic within the book of Judges. The heart of this polemic is found in chapters 9 and 17-18 and usually associates the material in these chapters with a polemic that is specifically aimed against Jeroboam. This material is used to advocate a time of composition for the book after the divided monarchy or after the fall of Israel or Judah. Those who ascribe an earlier date generally downplay the significance of an anti-Ephraimite polemic or see it as a later development from the core material within the book. This section will therefore summarize the claims of those who believe that the Ephraimite material is key to understanding the dating or message of the book, identify the main components of the

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<sup>73</sup>Klaas Spronk, "From Joshua to Samuel: Some Remarks on the Origin of the Book of Judges," in *The Land of Israel in Bible, History, and Theology*, ed. Jacques van Ruiten and J. Cornelius de Vos (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 144.

<sup>74</sup>Mareike Rake, *Juda wird aufsteigen! Untersuchungen zum ersten Kapitel des Richterbuches*, BZAW 367 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 100.

anti-Ephraimite polemic, briefly survey the implications of these for the life setting of the book, and evaluate whether these could be viewed from within David's reign in Hebron.

According to some scholars, the anti-Ephraimite polemic serves as a, if not the, primary ideological factor in deciding the message or dating of the book of Judges. This is exemplified in the works of Butler and Sweeney, who both see the Ephraimite material as more important than other chronological or ideological material for determining the dating and meaning of the book.

For Butler, an understanding of what he refers to as "the Bethel issue" is crucial for dating the book. By this Butler is concerned with understanding the importance of the depiction of Bethel in 1:22; 4:5; 20:27-28; and 21:2-3.<sup>75</sup> In these texts God helps the tribes of Joseph to capture Bethel, Deborah judges near Bethel, and both the Ark of the Covenant and one of Aaron's grandsons, who serves as a priest, are in Bethel. But Bethel is also the place where Israel makes decisions to wage a civil war with the tribe of Benjamin. He gives nine possible understandings of this material and concludes that the most likely life setting of the composition of this material is the time period of the early divided monarchy.<sup>76</sup>

Similarly, Sweeney sees the polemic against Bethel and Ephraim as a pervasive polemic that "permeates the entire book."<sup>77</sup> Sweeney notes that the pattern of apostasy and deliverance found in Judges 2:11-23 reflects that found in 2 Kings 17. Similarly, the formula found within the narrative of each major judge, noting that the people of Israel did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh, matches the statements found throughout the books of Kings to describe the evil kings of Israel and Judah. While both of these observations are important in linking a largely anti-Ephraimite polemic to the

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<sup>75</sup>Though he does not mention them in this section, Bethel is also mentioned in 1:23; 20:18, 31; and 21:19.

<sup>76</sup>Butler, *Judges*, xxii-iv

<sup>77</sup>Sweeney, "Davidic Polemics in the Book of Judges," 528.

remainder of the Deuteronomistic History, Sweeney believes that “most importantly, Judges points to the role that Ephraim and Bethel play in the Canaanization of Israel.”<sup>78</sup> Sweeney outlines how Joshua the Ephraimite and the northern tribes were not able to drive out the Canaanites in Judges 1-2. This is contrasted with Judah, who was able to drive out the inhabitants of the land. Then, through the body of the narrative (which he identifies as Judges 3-21), Ephraim is considered the troublesome tribe. He notes that Ephraim and Bethel are the focal point for Israelite deterioration throughout the book:

Throughout the narrative the tribe of Ephraim and the sanctuary at Bethel are portrayed as culprits in the deterioration of Israel. Ephraim and Bethel are the source of tension and conflict among the tribes as Deborah is unable to unite the tribes against a common enemy, Abimelech plunges the country into civil war at Shechem in his quest for kingship, Ephraim threatens war against Gideon and carries out the threat against Jephthah when each judge chooses not to give the tribe a leading role in war, Ephraim/Bethel is the source of the idolatrous sanctuary at Dan, and Bethel is the site where the tribes choose to attack Benjamin.<sup>79</sup>

Those who view the book as originating from an earlier date either downplay the significance of the Ephraimite material or view the material as originating from a different time than the core of the book. Cundall,<sup>80</sup> O’Connell,<sup>81</sup> and Davis<sup>82</sup> represent the former approach. Boda represents the latter. He writes that the Ephraimite material “cannot be ignored and suggests to some that an original focus on the tension between the royal houses of Saul and David is now viewed through the vantage point of tension

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 527.

<sup>80</sup>Cundall, “Judges—An Apology for the Monarchy?”

<sup>81</sup>O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*.

<sup>82</sup>Davis, “A Proposed Life-Setting for the Book of Judges.”

between the royal houses of the north and south.”<sup>83</sup> The first question that needs to be answered is whether there appears to be a polemic against Ephraim within the book of Judges.

Cundall, O’Connell, and Davis downplay the significance of the Ephraimite material.<sup>84</sup> Cundall, who views the first edition of the book to have been written in the early monarchial period under either David or Solomon does not even address an anti-Ephraimite polemic; instead, he focuses solely upon the anti-Benjamite polemic.<sup>85</sup> O’Connell does not really discuss a polemic against Ephraim; instead, he also focuses on Benjamin and notes that the Ephraimite significance of the book comes in the form of work used to “elevate the status of Judah (i.e., the house of David) in the estimation of the Ephraimite league of tribes.”<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Davis sees the Ephraimite material as possibly constituting some sort of appeal to the north. Davis, however, sees neither an anti-Ephraimite polemic within the book nor Ephraim as a threat to David. On the latter he writes, “whether Ephraim posed any unique obstacle to David’s bid for northern allegiance is a moot point. The biblical record yields no clues on the matter.”<sup>87</sup> All of these studies that opt for an early dating of the setting of the book then undermine the general consensus of other studies that see the anti-Ephraimite polemic as a major emphasis within the work. The question that remains is that if an anti-Ephraimite polemic exists, then does it necessitate a later date?

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<sup>83</sup>Boda, *Judges*, 1049.

<sup>84</sup>Brettler also downplays the significance of an anti-Ephraimite polemic by favoring an anti-Benjamite polemic. Brettler, however, dates the composition of the book to a later period. See Brettler, “The Book of Judges,” 408.

<sup>85</sup>Even in his commentary it does not seem that he favors an anti-Ephraimite polemic within the book. See Arthur E. Cundall and Leon Morris, *Judges & Ruth*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1968), 25-28.

<sup>86</sup>O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 314.

<sup>87</sup>Davis, “A Proposed Life-Setting for the Book of Judges,” 43.

There does appear to be an anti-Ephraimite polemic within the book of Judges. The material presented by both Butler and Sweeney is convincing. What does this say about the dating of the life setting of the book? Both Butler and Sweeney believe that the Ephraimite material is key to a later dating of the book. Butler traces it as a polemic that was particularly pointed against Jeroboam that was written in order to glorify Judah.<sup>88</sup> Sweeney believes that the Ephraimite material places the composition of Judges within the larger Deuteronomistic framework.<sup>89</sup> These later dates, however, are not necessary. The elements that constitute the Ephraimite polemic deserve further attention.

Three elements within the Ephraimite polemic can be used to determine the life setting of the book: the treatment of Joshua in the introduction, the direct mentions of Ephraim throughout the book, and the presentation of the cities of Bethel, Shechem, and Shiloh. It will be argued that these three elements do not necessarily make the most sense within a later life setting for the composition of the book, but that they show an early tension between the tribes of Judah and Ephraim.

First, the book of Judges is concerned with leadership after Joshua and presents Joshua's campaigns as incomplete. Instead of understanding the book in light of Jeroboam and the divided monarchy, it is more natural to interpret the book in light of Ephraimite supremacy after the time of Joshua through the beginning of the monarchy. The first two chapters of Judges present Joshua's campaign as incomplete and unsuccessful. This is done in two primary ways. First, Judges 2:21 and 23 make it clear that Joshua's campaign was not complete. Both of these verses show that Joshua did not drive out the inhabitants of the land. Joshua's inability to drive out the inhabitants is portrayed in comprehensive way with verse 21 stating that Joshua left (עזב) the nations and verse 23 stating that it was Yahweh who did not give them "into the hand" of Joshua.

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<sup>88</sup>Butler, *Judges*, xxiv.

<sup>89</sup>Sweeney, "Davidic Polemics in the Book of Judges," 528.

This inability is even more striking compared with Judges 1:2, which states that Yahweh did give the land “into the hand” of Judah. Second, Joshua’s failure is shown through the retelling of Joshua’s death in 2:6-9. The original notice of Joshua’s death is found in Joshua 24:28-31. Both this text and Judges 2:6-9 share almost exact wording with little deviation.

Judges 2:6-9

Joshua 24:28-31

6 וישלח יהושע את־העם וילכו בני־  
ישראל איש לנחלתו לרשת את־הארץ

28 וישלח יהושע את־העם איש  
לנחלתו

7 ויעבדו העם את־יהוה כל ימי  
יהושע וכל ימי הזקנים אשר האריכו ימים  
אחרי יהושע אשר ראו את כל־מעשה יהוה  
הגדול אשר עשה לישראל

29 ויהי אחרי הדברים האלה  
וימת יהושע בן־נון עבד יהוה בן־מאה ועשר שנים

8 וימת יהושע בן־נון עבד יהוה בן־  
מאה ועשר שנים

30 ויקברו אתו בגבול נחלתו  
בתמנת־סרח אשר בהר־אפרים מצפון להר־  
געש

9 ויקברו אותו בגבול נחלתו בתמנת־  
חרס אפרים מצפון להר־געש

31 ויעבד ישראל את־יהוה ימי  
יהושע וכל ימי הזקנים אשר האריכו אחרי  
יהושע ואשר ידעו את כל־מעשה יהוה אשר  
עשה לישראל

As can be seen from these passages, besides the differing placement of the statement of the people serving Yahweh all the days of Joshua (Judg 2:7 and Josh 24:31), the only major difference is the addition of לנחלתו לרשת את־הארץ in Judges 2:6 to the statement about Joshua sending the people to their inheritance. Frolov argues that this addition to the Judges text signals that the book of Judges is showing that the tribal allotment was not under the control of Joshua before sending them back.<sup>90</sup> Compared to the text in Joshua 24:28, the notice from Judges 2:6 places the failure of removing the Canaanites upon Joshua the Ephraimite. Frolov believes that this repetition of Joshua’s death in Judges forms a temporal loop in the narrative that ultimately “makes it possible to explain Judah’s failure to dislodge the inhabitants of the plain (i 19) by Yhwh’s decision,

<sup>90</sup>Serge Frolov, “Joshua’s Double Demise (Josh. Xxiv 28-31; Judg. Ii 6-9): Making Sense of a Repetition,” *VT* 58 (2008): 320.



prompted by the northern tribes, to leave surviving Canaanites in place.”<sup>91</sup> Whether Frolov’s temporal loop is accurate is debatable, but it does appear that the failure to drive out the Canaanites is not placed on the tribe of Judah, but on the failure of the leadership of Joshua. This polemic does not focus on a later northern king, but on early Ephraimite leadership.

The second apparent element of an anti-Ephraimite polemic can be seen in some of the depictions of the tribe of Ephraim throughout the book of Judges. There are three main depictions of Ephraim within the book. The first is found in the introduction, and it describes Ephraim like the other tribes, saying, “Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites” (1:29). The second depiction of the tribe is found in the body. Both Judges 8:1-2 and 12:1-5 portray the tribe as petty and quarrelsome with the other tribes. In both of these texts the tribe is upset because they did not receive pride of place in battle. In both instances they threaten other tribes. In 8:1-2 Gideon is able to assuage their anger with flattery, but in 12:1-2 Jephthah chooses to go to war with them. The final depiction of the tribe is found in the epilogue, where Ephraim is associated with idolatry. The first example of such an association is the mention of Micah’s household and his idolatrous shrine. In Judges 17-18 the author notes four times that Micah’s house is located in “the hill country of Ephraim” (17:1, 8; 18:2, 13). The author is very intent on repeating this phrase when the repetition is not necessary. As a second example, the tribe is also depicted poorly through the association of the unnamed Levite in Judges 19. This Levite is said also to be from “the hill country of Ephraim.” This is repeated two times in the chapter (19:1, 18). It is also interesting to note that within three of these texts (17:8; 19:1; and 19:18) Bethlehem in Judah is mentioned, seemingly in contrast to the hill country of Ephraim. It should be noted that the portrayal of the tribe in these passages does not favor

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 322.

an early or late date for the setting of the book, but does help to contrast the tribe of Ephraim with the tribe of Judah.<sup>92</sup>

The final anti-Ephraimite polemic deals with the portrayal of the cities of Bethel, Shechem, and Shiloh. Those who argue for a later date of the book focus on the portrayal of Bethel, but this is not the only Ephraimite city that is portrayed negatively. The cities of Shechem and Shiloh are likewise portrayed in a negative fashion. The depiction of each of these cities will be discussed briefly along with a discussion of when a polemic against these cities would best fit within the history of Israel.

Bethel, as has already been noted within the survey of the works of Butler and Sweeney, is portrayed in a negative fashion. Bethel is mentioned eight times within the narrative of Judges (1:22, 23; 4:5; 20:18, 26, 31; 21:2, 19). As Sweeney has noted, the book of Judges presents the inhabitants of Bethel “as culprits in the deterioration of Israel.”<sup>93</sup> Besides these direct references, the city of Bochim mentioned in Judges 2:1-5 also seems to refer to Bethel. Burney was one of the first to advance the opinion that Bochim and Bethel are the same place. He argued that it is odd for a name to be given before the event that the name is related to, and he notes that the LXX mentions Bethel in connection with Bochim.<sup>94</sup> There is also the connection between the meaning of Bochim (weeping) and the identification of Bethel with the “oak of weeping” in Genesis 35:8,

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<sup>92</sup>Judges 5:14 includes a curious mention of Ephraim as having his root in Amalek in Deborah’s song. It is difficult to know how to interpret this verse in light of the depiction of Ephraim throughout the book. Block believes that this serves as a positive portrayal of the tribe in the estimation of Deborah, which he believes is at odds with the view of the narrator, who portrays the tribe negatively. See Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 232. What does seem clear from this text is that Ephraim is given the pride of place by being the first tribe mentioned. Guillaume, however, believes that if the MT is accepted (which he does not) then the association of Ephraim with Amalek would have a negative connotation. See Ph. Guillaume, “Deborah and the Seven Tribes,” *BN* 101 (2000): 18. For various interpretations of 5:14, see Butler, *Judges*, 146-47; Lindars, *Judges 1-5*, 252-53; and Andre Caquot, “Les tribus d’Israel dans le cantique de Débora,” *Semetica* 36 (1986): 57-58.

<sup>93</sup>Sweeney, “Davidic Polemics in the Book of Judges,” 527.

<sup>94</sup>Burney, *Judges*, 36-40.

which may also be alluded to in Judges 4:5.<sup>95</sup> Schneider elaborates on this further by connecting the weeping of Bochim with the weeping of the Israelites in Bethel in Judges 21:2. She notes that in Judges 2 “the people misbehaved, the deity reprimanded them, they recognized their faults, and sacrificed to the deity. At the end of the book the people erred in a much more drastic and destructive way, and yet did not understand why calamity struck despite their sacrifices and tears.”<sup>96</sup> The identification of Bochim with Bethel has been followed by most major commentators<sup>97</sup> and has been elaborated by Amit.<sup>98</sup> Amit believes that there are four signs that indicate that Bochim is to be associated with Bethel. First, and similar to Schneider, there is weeping in Bethel elsewhere in the book, especially 20:26 and 21:2-4.<sup>99</sup> Second, in 2:1-5 Gilgal is discussed with Bochim, and elsewhere in the Old Testament (Amos 4:4 and Hos 4:15), Gilgal and Bethel are discussed together.<sup>100</sup> Third, Bethel is a place of rebuke within the prophetic literature.<sup>101</sup> Fourth, the identification of Bochim and Bethel is present within the exegetical tradition, especially within the LXX.<sup>102</sup> Amit believes that these observations serve to provide a hidden polemic against Bethel that can be dated to the period before

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<sup>95</sup>See Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 112; Butler, *Judges*, 39. Butler also believes that “Bethel’s identification with Bethel goes back to Bethel’s patriarchal connections (Gen 12:8; 13:3; 28:19; 31:13; 35:1, 3, 6, 8, 15-16)” (idem.).

<sup>96</sup>Tammi Schneider, *Judges* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000), 27.

<sup>97</sup>So Lindars, *Judges 1-5*, 76-77; Webb, *Judges*, 132-33; Schneider, *Judges*, 27; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 111-12; and Butler, *Judges*, 39-40. Interestingly, George Foot Moore associates Bochim with Shiloh. See George Foot Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1923), 58.

<sup>98</sup>Yairah Amit, “Bochim, Bethel, and the Hidden Polemic (Judg 2, 1-5),” in *Studies in Historical Geography and Biblical Historiography: Presented to Zecharia Kallai*, ed. Gershon Galil and Moshe Weinfeld (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 121-31.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 129.

Josiah's reforms.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, Schneider believes that the Bethel polemic, and specifically the part of the polemic connected to Bochim, best fits in a time period after the division of the monarchy.<sup>104</sup> The setting of a polemic against Bethel would fit well in a time that postdates Jeroboam's idolatrous sanctioning of a cultic site there. This is not the only time period, however, that could make sense of a polemic against Bethel, but this is best seen in connection with the two other Ephraimite cities that are mentioned in the book of Judges, Shechem and, more notably, Shiloh.

A second Ephraimite city that is depicted negatively is the city of Shechem. There are twenty-seven references to Shechem in Judges, all but one of them occurring in Judges 8:31-9:57. Like the references to Bethel, it has been advanced by some that the references to Shechem are polemics against Jeroboam. Since Shechem appears to have been Jeroboam's first capital (1 Kgs 12:25), a polemic against this city could be targeted at him.<sup>105</sup> Irwin makes a connection between Abimelech and the early northern monarchy when assessing the Shechem material. He writes, "Abimelech, an *Ephraimite* from the family of Gideon rejects his family and establishes a *monarchy* in *Shechem* (Judg 9:6) . . . another *Ephraimite*, Jeroboam I, rejects the court of Solomon and establishes a *monarchy* with its capital in *Shechem* (1 Kgs 12:1, 20)."<sup>106</sup> Schneider<sup>107</sup> and Butler<sup>108</sup> also see a

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 130-31.

<sup>104</sup>Schneider, *Judges*, 27.

<sup>105</sup>G. Ernest Wright, *Shechem: The Biography of a Biblical City* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 22.

<sup>106</sup>Brian P. Irwin, "Not Just Any King: Abimelech, the Northern Monarchy, and the Final Form of Judges," *JBL* 131 (2012): 449. Irwin believes that that the northern polemic found in the Abimelech narrative fits well rhetorically before the fall of the northern kingdom, but that the final form of Judges took shape during the postexilic period in the community of Yehud. Similarly, Nadav Na'aman sees a polemic against Shechem, but believes that it originated in the final stages of the book's composition during the Persian period. See Nadav Na'aman, "A Hidden Anti-Samaritan Polemic in the Story of Abimelech and Shechem (Judges 9)," *BZ* 55 (2009): 20.

<sup>107</sup>Schneider, *Judges*, 136.

<sup>108</sup>Butler, *Judges*, 235.

polemic against Jeroboam in this chapter. Butler notes that this material “royally illustrates the danger and evil that come from kingship out of Shechem, kingship that is murderous and selfish and features false religious loyalties, kingship like that of Jeroboam I.”<sup>109</sup> While it must be admitted that this is a strong connection, and that a polemic against Jeroboam I would fit well within much of the ideological material in the book, there is another city from Ephraim that is portrayed negatively that is overlooked in the discussions of an anti-Ephraimite polemic.

Shiloh is mentioned in only four verses in the book (Judg 18:31; 21:12, 19, 21). In these passages it is compared to an idolatrous worship center and is the place where the annual festival to Yahweh is held where women are kidnapped to be the wives of the Benjamites. Neither description portrays the city of Shiloh positively. In fact, the portrayal of the city is possibly more negative than the portrayals of either Bethel or Shechem. This city, however, is not mentioned within works that discuss a general anti-Ephraimite polemic or a specific anti-Jeroboam polemic. This is probably because Shiloh did not hold an important position within Israelite life after it was destroyed around the beginning of Saul’s reign.<sup>110</sup> The city is mentioned in 1 Kings 14:2-4, where Jeroboam I asked his wife to go to Shiloh to speak with Ahijah the prophet. The city of Shiloh, however, did not have enough of a connection to Jeroboam I to support a polemic against him. So, if there is a polemic against Bethel and Shechem, which some have argued is the key to understanding the meaning and/or dating of the book, then there also appears to be a polemic against the city of Shiloh.

Both Bethel and Shechem were cities that associated with Jeroboam, and a polemic against these cities would fit well in a polemic that served to undermine his

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

<sup>110</sup>Gilmore, “Shiloh”; Ephraim Stern, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations of the Holy Land*, vol. 4 (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society & Carta, 1993), s.v. “Shiloh,” by Israel Finkelstein; and John D. Barry and Lazarus Wentz, eds., *Lexham Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Shiloh,” by Daniel Diffey, forthcoming.

reign. There are, however, a few other things that are important to note. First, if there is a polemic against these cities then there also appears to be a polemic against Shiloh. If that is the case, then the material would make most sense for a very early dating of the book when Shiloh held religious importance to Israel. There also seems to be a negative attitude toward Shiloh during the time of David and Solomon. This can be seen in Asaph's presentation of Shiloh in Psalm 78:60.<sup>111</sup> Second, it is important to note that while both Bethel and Shechem were important cities to Jeroboam I, these cities were also very important within early Ephraimite history under Joshua. The importance of Bethel can be seen by its repetitive mention as a familiar geographical landmark (Josh 7:2; 8:9, 12, 17; 12:9, 16; 16:1, 2; 18:13, 22). Shechem was identified as a city of refuge (Josh 21:21), and more importantly, Joshua brought together the people of Israel there, where they made a covenant with Yahweh (Josh 24:1, 25). Shechem is also where the bones of Joseph were buried (24:32). It is feasible to imagine that Shechem would have been a source of contention to Davidic rule. Similarly, Shiloh appears to have been the first capital city in Israel under Joshua. It is where the tent of meeting resided (Josh 18:1) and seemed to function as Joshua's capital, from which he both divided the land (Josh 19:51) and prepared to go to war (Josh 22:12).<sup>112</sup>

While some aspects of the Ephraimite polemic would fit well during or shortly after the reign of Jeroboam I, not all of them would make sense during this time period. If all of the material is considered, the polemic against Ephraim would also fit well within an earlier timeframe in Israel's history. It is clear from texts such as Judges 8:1-2 and 12:1-5 that Ephraim viewed itself as a leader among the tribes. This material is generic in

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<sup>111</sup>Asaph is most likely to be identified with the Asaph who led the temple singers who were installed by David. Both 1 Chr 16:5 and 2 Chr 5:12 associate Asaph with the ark in Jerusalem. See Tremper Longman, III and Peter Enns, eds. *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, & Writings* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), s.v. "Asaph and Sons of Korah," by D. G. Firth.

<sup>112</sup>It may also be worth noting that these three cities are mentioned together in Judg 21:19. The polemic against these cities seems even more pronounced when the cities associated with the tribe of Judah are considered, namely Bethlehem and Hebron.

nature, but would fit well within an early Israelite context. It would not be out of the question to say that the polemic against Ephraim would work well during a time when David was trying to consolidate the tribes.

### **The Life-Setting of Judges**

According to the internal data of the book of Judges the time period that best fits both the chronological data and the ideological material is an early date when Israel did not enjoy unity and there was an internal struggle between a loose confederation of tribes acting with relative independence from each other. These characteristics fit very well with the early reign of David, possibly while in Hebron during the time of civil war with the north, especially the house of Saul. The ideology of the book indicates a negative attitude toward the tribe of Benjamin, and this is not the tribe from which a king would be expected. As Peterson notes, “The political upheaval that the civil war would have engendered would have required some form of diplomatic appeal between the two sides; a reality alluded to in 2 Samuel 3:14-17. Judges thus became a propagandistic tractate promoting a unified nation under Davidic rule.”<sup>113</sup> This section will discuss the life-setting of 2 Samuel 1-4 and how this would serve as an ideal time period for the composition of the book of Judges.

### **An Appeal to the North**

Davis identifies five basic elements for establishing David’s reign in Hebron as the life-setting for the composition for the book of Judges. The five elements are all understood within the framework of an appeal to the north. These elements are the background of the appeal, the forms of the appeal, the need for the appeal, the motives of the appeal, and the success of the appeal.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>Peterson, “A Priest Who Despised a King,” 7.

<sup>114</sup>Davis, “A Proposed Life-Setting for the Book of Judges,” 28-47.

**The background of the appeal.** With the defeat of Saul, the Philistines were in complete control of the Jezreel valley and had effectively split the Israelite tribes. The desperation of the situation can be seen in 1 Samuel 31:7, where after the death of Saul the Israelites who were living in the valley abandoned their cities, and the Philistines occupied them. With the Israelites leaderless, a Davidic appeal to the north to consolidate the tribes in order to deal with the Philistine threat would make sense.<sup>115</sup>

**The forms of the appeal.** The presence of an appeal to the north within this setting is not hypothetical. David makes both direct and indirect appeals to the Israelites in the north. The direct appeal can be found in David's appeal to the men of Jabesh-Gilead in 2 Samuel 2:7. On this appeal Davis writes, "No one can doubt that 'Saul your lord is dead and the house of Judah had anointed *me* as king over them' (2:7) is a piece of unabashed Davidic propaganda—an open invitation."<sup>116</sup> Not only was there a direct appeal, but there appears to be different types of an indirect appeal. First, an indirect appeal can be seen in David's vengeance on the Amalekite who said that he had slain Saul (2 Sam 1:1-16). Second, and similarly, an indirect appeal can be seen in his taking vengeance on the men who killed Ishbaal, Rechab, and Baanah (2 Sam 4).<sup>117</sup> A third type of indirect appeal can be seen in David's lamentation over both Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:17-27) and his lamentation after Joab's murder (2 Sam 3:37).<sup>118</sup> A final form of the appeal is David's claim of the throne via marriage. In 2 Samuel 3:12-16 David demands that Michal, Saul's daughter be reunited with him.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 28-29. Though the book originated from the early divided monarchy, Butler sees the Philistine threat as one of the most important elements in the composition of the book. See Butler, *Judges*, lxxii.

<sup>116</sup>Davis, "A Proposed Life-Setting for the Book of Judges," 30.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>118</sup>For a contrasting view of David's treatment of those near and around Saul, see Cephas T. A. Tushima, *The Fate of Saul's Progeny in the Reign of David* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2011).

<sup>119</sup>Davis, "A Proposed Life-Setting for the Book of Judges," 33.



**The need for the appeal.** Davis notes that there are several reasons for the need for an appeal to the north. Most importantly, there may have been those from Benjamin or Ephraim who thought their tribes should be the ruling tribe. Similarly, there were surely those who did not believe that David's appeals were sincere (like Shemei in 2 Sam 16:5-8). Despite possible and actual objections by those of Benjamin and Ephraim, there could possibly have been a general anti-monarchical feeling among some, possibly those who were loyal to Samuel who expressed anti-monarchical feelings in 1 Samuel 8:6. There also may have been a need for an appeal because of David's connection with the Philistines. Surely there were still some who were weary of David's allegiance to Israel. All of these observations constitute small parts in the possible need for an appeal.<sup>120</sup>

**The motive of the appeal.** Davis notes the importance of David's appeal to the north being both religiously and politically motivated. Through the political aspect David could unite the tribes of Israel, and together they could dispossess the Philistines from their territory. 2 Samuel 3:18 indicates that the reason for the north eventually joining David was the belief that he could relieve them of the Philistines. The religious aspect of David's appeal was possibly to centralize worship.<sup>121</sup> This religious aspect is also picked up by O'Connell, who notes possible Davidic intent in centralizing worship. While this intent is not apparent in 2 Samuel 1-4, O'Connell notes both the actions of David in moving the Ark in 2 Samuel 6.<sup>122</sup>

**Success of the appeal.** The final aspect of David's appeal to the north is that this appeal was successful, as seen in 2 Samuel 5:3. Davis notes that the reason for David's success can be seen in Abner's argument, which consisted of popular appeal,

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<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 34-42.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 43-46.

<sup>122</sup>O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 314-15.

military necessity, and divine promise (2 Sam 3:17-18).<sup>123</sup> David became king over both Israel and Judah and later united the land both politically and religiously

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that a life-setting within the early Davidic monarchy would make the most sense for the composition of the book of Judges. This setting fits well with the explanatory and chronological notes within the book of Judges, which generally indicate an early date for the composition of the book. This setting also makes sense of the ideological material found within the book that idealizes the tribe of Judah over against other tribes, primarily Benjamin and Ephraim. The book of Judges would serve well as a justification for Davidic rule over the reluctant northern tribes.

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<sup>123</sup>Davis, "A Proposed Life-Setting of the Book of Judges," 46-48.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE IDEOLOGY OF MONARCHY IN JUDGES

The ideology of monarchy in the book of Judges has been a major topic of discussion over the past several decades. Some have considered the theology of the book to be centered on the idea of monarchy,<sup>1</sup> while others have seen the book as anti-monarchial.<sup>2</sup> Still some have considered it as both pro- and anti-monarchial (multiple sources stitched together).<sup>3</sup> Some have gone even further and claimed that it is inappropriate to speak of a single ideology of monarchy in the book of Judges.<sup>4</sup> This chapter examines the ideology of monarchy that is presented throughout the book of Judges without reference to Gideon's response or Jotham's fable, since these both are discussed in detail the following chapters. Detail is given to literary and theological analysis with a conclusion that the book of Judges presents a pro-Judah and pro-Davidic viewpoint and, therefore, that it is pro-monarchial. This chapter therefore argues that the entire book of Judges—from the prologue to the epilogue—is inundated with pro-Judah, pro-monarchial sentiment.

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<sup>1</sup>See Marc Zvi Brettler, "The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics," *JBL* 108 (1989): 395-418; Arthur Cundall, "Judges—An Apology for the Monarchy," *ExpTim* 81 (1970): 178-81; David M. Howard, "The Case for Kingship in the Old Testament Narrative Books and the Psalms," *Trinity Journal* 9 (1988): 19-35.

<sup>2</sup>Shemaryahu Talmon, "'In Those Days There Was No מלך in Israel': Judges 18-21," in *King, Cult, and Calendar in Ancient Israel*, 39-52 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986).

<sup>3</sup>Martin Buber, *Kingship of God*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 46-93.

<sup>4</sup>There has been one recent defense following none of the above positions by William Dumbrell, "'In Those Days There Was No King in Israel, Every Man Did What was Right in His Own Eyes.' The Purpose of the Book of Judges Reconsidered," *JSOT* 25 (1983): 23-33.

## The Prologue: 1:1-3:6

The prologue to the book of Judges emphasizes the tribe of Judah over against the other tribes of Israel.<sup>5</sup> Judah is seen as faithful, or at least more faithful, in their conquest of the land than are the other tribes. From the outset of the book of Judges there is a pro-Judah sentiment, for the prologue highlights the tribe of Judah in five major ways. First, Judah is given more space in the prologue than any other tribe. Second, Judah is seen as faithful in their allotment campaign, which is accentuated by the unfaithfulness of the other tribes. Third, Judah is the only tribe that is presented with a capable leader in the person of Caleb and then Othniel. Fourth, Judah seems to fulfill the role that was designated for Joshua in Numbers 27. Fifth, a comparison between the parallel passages found in Judges 1 and the book of Joshua show that the author of Judges intends to highlight Judah.

### Emphasis on Judah

The first way that Judah is highlighted is by the sheer amount of space that is allotted to the tribe. Brettler comments on the amount of space that the author allots to Judah when he writes the following about the prologue: “The major theme of this section is the supremacy of Judah. The text concentrates on Judah (in chapter 1, twenty of thirty-six verses concern Judah), and the narrative is shaped to glorify the tribe.”<sup>6</sup> As Brettler

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<sup>5</sup>Scholars are not in agreement as to where the introduction of the book ends. There are three main positions that are advocated: 1:1-2:5; 1:1-2:23; and 1:1-3:6. The advocate for 1:1-2:5 is J. A. Soggin, *Judges*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), vii. Those who advocate for 1:1-2:23 are Trent Buter, *Judges*, WBC, vol. 8 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), lxxxiv-lxxxv; Tammi Schneider, *Judges*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000), vii; and Susan Niditch, *Judges*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), v. The majority position is 1:1-3:6, and it is advocated by Barry G. Webb, *Judges*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), viii-ix; Daniel Block, *Judges, Ruth*, NAC, vol. 6 (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 75-76; Mark E. Biddle, *Reading Judges: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2012), vii-viii; Robert Boling, *Judges*, AB (Garden City, NY: 1975), viii-ix; Barnabus Lindars, *Judges 1-5* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), v; E. Theodore Mullen, “Judges 1:1-36: The Deuteronomistic Reintroduction of the Book of Judges,” *HTR* 77 (1984): 33-54; Mark J. Boda, *Judges*, in vol. 2 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev.ed., ed. Tremper Longman and David Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 1062. Marc Zvi Brettler sees the prologue to Judges originally being an appendix to Joshua. See Marc Z. Brettler, “Jud 1,1-2,10: From Appendix to Prologue,” *ZAW* 101 (1989): 433-35.

<sup>6</sup>Brettler, “The Book of Judges,” 402.

notes, more than half of the verses in chapter one are concerned in some way with the tribe of Judah. It is apparent that the author of the book desires the reader to have Judah at the forefront of his mind from the outset of the book. This emphasis towards the tribe of Judah is magnified by the death notice of Joshua in 1:1. It seems that the remainder of the chapter is asking, “If Joshua is dead, who will lead Israel?” This question appears to be answered with the comparison of Judah to the other tribes.

### **Faithfulness of Judah**

Not only is there an emphasis on Judah in regard to the amount of space that is given to the tribe, but also in the way in which the tribe is portrayed, especially in comparison to the other tribes. Judah is described as faithful in their allotment campaign. So in 1:2 the land is described as being delivered into Judah’s hand; in 1:4 Yahweh delivers the Canaanites and Perizzites into Judah’s hand; in 1:8-9 Judah captures Jerusalem and fights against the Canaanites in the lowland; in 1:17 Judah, with Simeon, smites the Canaanites and utterly destroys them; and in 1:19 Yahweh is with Judah and drives out the inhabitants of the hill country. When these statements are compared to the pronouncements made about the other tribes, it is clear that the author, at the very least, wishes to highlight the tribe of Judah over against these other tribes.

The prologue highlights the tribe of Judah over the other tribes. Every other tribe mentioned could not drive out the inhabitants of the land,<sup>7</sup> whereas Judah did drive

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<sup>7</sup>See 1:21, Benjamin did not drive out; 1:27, Manasseh did not drive out; 1:29, Ephraim did not drive out; 1:30, Zebulun did not drive out; 1:31 Asher did not drive out; and 1:34 where the Amorites force Dan into the hill country. This is a stark contrast. There is only one place where the “X did not drive out” formula is broken. Note then the language used for the tribe of Dan. Judah is said to drive out the inhabitants of the hill country in 1:19, whereas Dan is driven into the hill country. The Dan statement then provides a perfect contrast to conclude this section. Robert H. O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum* 63 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), notes that the “designation בית־יוסף (1:22a, 23a, 35b) serves as an inclusio to frame 1:22-36. Thus, the northern tribes are grouped together with ‘the house of Joseph,’ whose mention frames the tribes listed in 1:22-36” (60). O’Connell then notes that the house of Joseph is contrasted with the house of Judah and that Benjamin is left alone saying, “This leaves the intervening portrayal of Benjamin (1:21) conspicuously isolated from both tribal-entities—a phenomenon that rhetorically parallels Benjamin’s portrayal in Judges 19-21, where this tribe is isolated as the object of “all Israel’s” holy war” (60-61).

out the inhabitants. These negative statements against the other tribes serve to make the positive statements towards Judah more pronounced; Judah is the only tribe that is faithful. It is not only through these negative statements that Judah is compared to the other tribes.

A further comparison with Judah and another tribe is made implicitly through the similarity of accounts in 1:4-7, where Judah defeats Aboni-Bezek, and 1:22-26, where the house of Joseph encounters the unnamed man from Luz. Block notes that the style and content of these two anecdotes invite comparison on at least three levels. First, there is a difference in the status of the antagonist. Adoni-Bezek, whom Judah fought against, was an important figure with a title (Lord of Bezek), who ruled over many people. In contrast, the Luzite, in the narrative with the tribes of Joseph, was unnamed and a traitor to his people. Second, the actions of Judah and the tribes of Joseph are different. Judah's actions are that they find, fight, pursue, seize, mutilate, and deport Adoni-Bezek. The tribes of Joseph retreat, negotiate, and let the Luzite go free. Third, the fate of the antagonist differs. Adoni-Bezek loses his kingdom, his fingers and toes, and his life. The Luzite moves and builds another city.<sup>8</sup> Within the context of this first chapter this captures well the differences between Judah and the northern tribes. Judah is faithful in eliminating the Canaanites, whereas the tribes of Joseph are not. Block notes that while the Canaanite city is destroyed, the "spiritual Canaanite Luz is allowed to continue."<sup>9</sup>

The tribe of Judah is contrasted with these other tribes in at least two further ways. First, a more explicit comparison exists between Judah and Benjamin that is made by mentioning that, although Judah captured Jerusalem in 1:8, Benjamin could not keep the Jebusites out of the city (1:21).<sup>10</sup> Weinfeld notes that Judah is intentionally compared

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<sup>8</sup>This information is presented in a chart in Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 104.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>The city of Jerusalem will be mentioned again over against the city of Gibeah in the epilogue, drawing a further contrast between Judah and Benjamin.

to Benjamin; “It seems, furthermore, that the passage in Judges 1 has been written with the desire to glorify the tribe of Judah against a background of disgrace that the other tribes suffer, especially the tribe of Benjamin (the tribe of Saul), which did not succeed in driving out the foreign inhabitants of Jerusalem which was conquered for Benjamin by the Judahites.”<sup>11</sup> He also points out that there may be further comparison between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin in Judges 1:4-7, where Judah’s battles begin in Bezek, which is the first place where Saul would later fight. Here Weinfeld asserts that the “writer has used here a well-known geographical fact in order to advance his tendentious goal which is an attack on Benjamin and the praise of Judah.”<sup>12</sup> Both of these comparisons between Judah and Benjamin serve to glorify the tribe of Judah, and both use geographical locations to do so. The author of Judges makes a further geographical argument within the prologue that highlights the tribe of Judah at the expense of the other tribes.

Second, the tribe of Judah is elevated by comparison through the geographical movement of the presentation of the tribes in the prologue. The author uses a geographical pattern within the prologue. This pattern that is found in Judges 1 presents the tribes in a general south to north manner. According to Lawson Younger, this presentation of the tribes in the introduction serves at least two purposes. First, “Judges 1 uses its south → north geographic arrangement of the tribal episodes in order to foreshadow the geographic orientations of the Judges cycle in 3:7-16:31.”<sup>13</sup> This geographical arrangement thus sets up the movement of the plot within the book. Second, the geographical movement found in Judges 1 can be traced on both a literary and a

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<sup>11</sup>Moshe Weinfeld, “Judges 1.1-2.5: The Conquest under the Leadership of the House of Judah,” in *Understanding Poets and Prophets: Essays in Honor of George Wishart Anderson*, ed. A. Graeme Auld, JSOTSup 152 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1993), 389-90.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>13</sup>K. Lawson Younger, “The Configuring of Judicial Preliminaries: Judges 1:1-2:5 and Its Dependence on the Book of Joshua,” *JSOT* 68 (1995): 80.

moral plane. The literary plane is achieved by the use of expositional time, which in Judges 1 presents long periods of time in brief segments.<sup>14</sup> According to Lilian Klein, the use of expositional time in narratives in general, and Judges 1 in particular, is distinct from the time-norm found in the body of the work and serves to foretell the main action that will follow in the body of the work.<sup>15</sup> The moral plane illustrates a moral decline within the other Israelite tribes apart from the tribe of Judah. Younger believes that this moral decline is shown in two primary ways. First, it is shown through the use of the verb יָשַׁב.<sup>16</sup> Judah is not said to live (יָשַׁב) among the Canaanites, but the tribes of Benjamin, Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali are said to live with the Canaanites. Further, the Danites are said to go beyond living with the Canaanites; they are oppressed by them. Judah is thus distinct in not mixing with the Canaanites. The second way that the moral decline of the tribes can be seen is through a comparison between Judges 1 and the presentation of the tribal allotments in Joshua 13-19. Younger notes that the presentation of the tribal campaigns in Joshua 13-19 can be summarized as being initially successful in Judah, but concluding with the failure of Dan. He aptly notes that it “becomes evident that the narrator of Judges 1 has structured his account to emphasize this moral decline when it is compared to the narration of the tribal allotments in Joshua 13-19.”<sup>17</sup> The moral plane thus moves with the literary plane in order to contrast the tribe of Judah with the other tribes by presenting a gradual denigration of tribal morality along the south-to-north movement of the narrative. A comparison of the statements made about Judah and the statements made about the other tribes, however, is not all that can

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid. See also Mark E. Biddle, *Reading Judges: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2012), 21-24.

<sup>15</sup>Lilian Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, JSOTSup 68 (Sheffield, UK: Almond, 1988), 12, 213 n. 7. One such motif that Younger recognizes is the theme of women in the book with the introduction of Achsah. She can be contrasted with other women in the book, particularly Delilah. See K. Lawson Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 67-69.

<sup>16</sup>Younger, “The Configuring of Judicial Preliminaries,” 83.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.



be said about the pro-Judah ideology in the prologue. There is also the lack of leadership within the other tribes, whereas Judah has both Caleb and Othniel as able leaders.

### **Judah's Leadership through Caleb**

One of the main distinctives of the presentation of the tribe of Judah in Judges 1 is the presence of individuals from the tribe who are presented as capable leaders. No other tribe presented in this chapter singles out any individual. Frolov believes that “arguably the most important, and certainly most fundamental, aspect of Judah’s superiority highlighted by Judges 1:1-26 is the presence of a responsible and effective individual leader within its ranks.”<sup>18</sup> Four important aspects of the presentation of Caleb and Othniel can be seen here. First, from the presentation of the conquest in Judges 1, Caleb’s offering of his daughter as a reward for the captivity of Debir serves to continue the Judahite campaign in the south. Along with this, the differences between the description of Caleb in Judges 1:10-15, 20 and Joshua 15:13-19 serve to highlight the selflessness of Caleb. In the Joshua text, Caleb seems to attack Debir to expand his possessions, but within Judges he does not seem to have anything to gain from the capture of the city. Frolov notes that this passage presents Caleb as a selfless leader of Judah and parallels his selflessness to that of Judah leading all of Israel.<sup>19</sup> Second, the presence of the leadership of Caleb in Judah shows a “total lack of anything resembling it in the house of Joseph.”<sup>20</sup> Where Judah’s continued victory is the result of the actions of Caleb, the small victories that the house of Joseph experiences seem to be fortunate coincidences and not the result of strong leadership. Third, the presence of individual leaders from Judah moves the ultimate objective of this narrative from a general pro-Judah slant to a more specific pro-Davidic slant. This specifically pro-Davidic slant can

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<sup>18</sup>Serge Frolov, *Judges*, FOTL (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 48.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 48-49.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 49.

also be detected through the specific comparison with the tribe of Benjamin in 1:21, which “calls into question the claims of the Davidides’ rivals from the Benjamite dynasty of Saul.”<sup>21</sup> Fourth, there are subtle differences between Judges 1:12-15 and Joshua 15:16-19 that contain both monarchic and Davidic connotations. In the Joshua text Caleb gives his daughter watering holes identified as the upper and lower springs (גלת עליות and גלת תחתית). In Judges, however, the description with the use of singular adjectives (גלת עלית and גלת תחתית) can only be interpreted as toponyms. In the Judges text Caleb “unmistakingly transfers two villages into her [Achsah’s] possession—an act reminiscent of a royal grant.”<sup>22</sup> The presentation of Caleb as Judah’s leader is distinct within the narrative of Judges 1 and serves as a further contrast to the presentation of the other tribes and moves the general pro-Judah slant to a more specific pro-Davidic slant. While Frolov only draws attention to Caleb, it is noteworthy that there is another able leader who is identified from the tribe of Judah. This narrative also introduces Othniel, who will serve as Israel’s first, and arguably best, judge. The question of who will lead after the death of Joshua appears to be answered not only generally in the tribe of Judah, but more specifically with individuals who are capable of leadership within that tribe.

### **Judah as Successor to Joshua and Moses**

Pro-Judahite content can also be found in the election of Judah to go up into the land and lead the other tribes in battle. Numbers 27:15-23 outlines Joshua’s role as successor to Moses and his duty to go in and out before Israel, presumably in battle. Weinfeld notes that according to this tradition, “Joshua initiated the war of conquest at God’s command.”<sup>23</sup> This was to be accomplished through Eleazar the priest and his use

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Weinfeld, “Judges 1:1-2:5,” 388. Several commentators draw a connection to this passage, including Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 86; Webb, *Judges*, 64; Younger, *Judges*, 64; Schneider, *Judges*, 4; Boling,

to the Urim. But after Joshua was dead, who would lead the people in this manner? While Judges 1:1-2 is not clear what medium Israel used to inquire of Yahweh, the consensus is that the inquiry in Judges 1:1 is an oracular inquiry along the lines of Numbers 27:21.<sup>24</sup> With Joshua dead, Judah is presented as the leader of Israel and successor of Joshua just as Joshua was presented as the successor of Moses. Butler notes that after Joshua's death, "one would expect the answer to the question of who will lead Israel to be an individual. The narrator's unexpected answer names a tribe, not an individual."<sup>25</sup> As mentioned earlier, however, there are capable individual leaders within the tribe of Judges who are presented within this chapter. Judah is not just pictured as the successor to Joshua in this chapter. On two separate occasions within Judges 1 Moses is mentioned. These mentions of Moses "assert Judah's continuity with the founder of the Hebrew faith."<sup>26</sup> So Judah is presented as the successor to Joshua, and there is a narrative sense of Mosaic approval. While it is clear from this text that the tribe of Judah is called to lead, Judah's leadership can be seen even more clearly by comparing the conquest accounts concerning Judah in the prologue of Judges with their parallel texts in the book of Joshua. With these texts the author of Judges seems to be showing a theological desire to elevate Judah.

### **Judges 1 and the Book of Joshua**

Some of the texts within the prologue of the book of Judges that highlight the tribe of Judah the most are those that have correspondence with texts in the book of

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*Judges*, 53; and Soggin, *Judges*, 20.

<sup>24</sup>So Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 86; Younger, *Judges*, 64; Schneider, *Judges*, 4; Boling, *Judges*, 53; and Soggin, *Judges*, 20.

<sup>25</sup>Butler, *Judges*, 19.

<sup>26</sup>Lawson G. Stone, *Judges*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2012), 225.

Joshua. Some of the passages in Judges 1 have parallel texts in the book of Joshua, while others portray a continuation of the conquest that texts in Joshua present as incomplete. On the importance of these, Wong states that “the full rhetorical significance of certain episodes in the prologue and epilogue can simply not be grasped apart from an awareness of their dependence on the book of Joshua.”<sup>27</sup> Even a cursory reading of these parallel and complementary passages divulges different authorial intentions, or what Younger describes as a “re-presenting” of Joshua.<sup>28</sup> When compared, the presentation of the events in the book of Judges highlights the tribe of Judah. It does this through an understanding of the multi-stage model of the conquest, which sees Joshua’s campaigns as incomplete (Josh 23:4, 7, 12). As noted by Yairah Amit, “the chapter is presented as a complementary sequel.”<sup>29</sup> I explore three different connections between Judges 1 and the book of Joshua here: Judges 1:9 and Joshua 10:40; 12:8; Judges 1:10-15, 20 and Joshua 15:13-19; and Judges 1:21 and Joshua 15:63.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Gregory Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges: An Inductive, Rhetorical Study*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 111 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 47. The relationship between the dependence of Judg 1 and Joshua is debated, though most acknowledge at least some dependence on Joshua for some texts or the use of a common source. For further discussion of this, see Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges*, 47-74; Barnabas Lindars, *Judges 1-5: A New Translation and Commentary* (London: T&T Clark, 1995), 42-43; C. J. Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, Bible Student’s Commentary, trans. Ray Togtman (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 258-59; A. Graeme Auld, “Judges 1 and History: A Reconsideration,” *VT* 25 (1975): 277-78.

<sup>28</sup>Lawson K. Younger, “Judges 1 in its Near Eastern Literary Context,” in *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context*, ed. A. R. Millard, James K. Hoffmeier, and David W. Baker (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 207.

<sup>29</sup>Yairah Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing*, Biblical Interpretation, Series 38, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 143.

<sup>30</sup>There also appear to be other correspondences between the book of Joshua and Judg 1 that do not deal with Judah. These include Judg 1:27-28 and Josh 17:11-13; Judg 1:29 and Josh 16:10 as well as Judg 1:34 and Josh 19:47. These will not be dealt with here. Some also believe that Judg 1:4-7 corresponds to Josh 10:1-5 due to the similarity of the names Adoni-Bezek and Adoni-Zedek as well as the mention of Jerusalem. For this view see Weinfeld, “Judges 1.1-2.5,” 390-91; A. G. Auld, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 134-35; C. F. Burney, *Judges*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Rivingtons, 1920), 4-6. Similarly, Stone argues that Judg 1 intentionally evokes Josh 10 and the Adoni-Zedek story in order to highlight Judah. Stone believes that these are two different accounts, but the editor is intentionally prompting the reader to see Judah as victorious in a similar manner to the victory in Josh 10. See Lawson G. Stone, “From Tribal Confederation to Monarchic State: The Editorial Perspective of the Book of Judges” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1988), 214-16, 224-25. Stone’s proposal is intriguing because they do seem to be separate accounts of different people, but they do contain significant shared wording and themes.

Judges 1:9 presents Judah as fighting against the Canaanites who were living in the hill country, while Joshua 10:40 and 12:8 attribute this campaign to all of Israel under the leadership of Joshua. Here the book of Joshua attributes a campaign to Joshua or all of Israel. The book of Judges, however, attributes the success of that same campaign to the tribe of Judah. The Judges text not only diminishes Joshua's role, but it leaves Joshua out altogether.<sup>31</sup>

Another parallel is seen in Judges 1:10-15, 20 and Joshua 15:13-19.<sup>32</sup> In the Judges text Judah is given the credit for smiting three sons of Anak: Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi. In the Joshua text, however, Caleb is given the credit for driving these three out of the land.<sup>33</sup> The Judges text removes this narrative from the battle report context of the book of Joshua and introduces the reader to the first judge, Othniel, who will be revisited in Judges 3, which helps to present Othniel as the ideal judge within the body of the book.<sup>34</sup> Through all of this the author of the book of Judges is highlighting and emphasizing the tribe of Judah.<sup>35</sup>

Another parallel between the text of Judges 1 and the book of Joshua can be seen in the description of Jerusalem found in Judges 1:21 and Joshua 15:63. In the Joshua text the failure to capture Jerusalem fell upon the tribe of Judah, while in the book of

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<sup>31</sup>Brettler, "The Book of Judges," 400.

<sup>32</sup>Since Judg 1 seems to present these events as occurring after the death of Joshua, it is difficult to date them (Judg 1:1). For a discussion of this, see Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges*, 47-74; Stone, "From Tribal Confederation to Monarchic State," 196-214; and Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 258-59; Philippe Guillaume, *Waiting for Josiah: The Judges*, JSOTSup 385 (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 228-34. For further discussion on the literary and historical difficulties of Judg 1 and Joshua, see G. Ernest Wright, "The Literary and Historical problem of Joshua 10 and Judges 1," *JNES* 5 (1946): 105-14. For literary difficulties, see Eamonn O'Doherty, "The Literary problem of Judges 1,1-3,6," *CBQ* 18 (1956): 1-7.

<sup>33</sup>Brettler, "The Book of Judges," 399-401.

<sup>34</sup>Butler, *Judges*, 17. Butler also notes that this introduces the theme of the power and ability of women within the narrative of Judges through the presentation of Achsah.

<sup>35</sup>These accounts should be seen as complementary and not contradictory. A good parallel example of how these should be viewed is how the different Gospel writers view certain aspects of the life of Jesus, such as Gethsemane, from different perspectives.

Judges the blame for Jerusalem was placed squarely on the tribe of Benjamin. Judges 1:8 describes the capture of Jerusalem by Judah. Judges 1:21 begins the litany of failure by describing Benjamin's loss of a city that Judah had already captured.<sup>36</sup>

Amit notes that these parallels provide at least five insights: (1) Judah is the tribe that is chosen by God to fight against the Canaanites; (2) the conquests that are attributed to Joshua are seen as being accomplished by Judah; (3) Judah is to be seen as the cooperative tribe through its work with Simeon; (4) Benjamin is completely blamed for the loss of Jerusalem, and Judah is presented as blameless in this regard; (5) the one text that could be viewed as negative towards Judah (1:19) gives a justification for their non-action.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Stone aptly notes, "The text presents a successful, unified Judean campaign with a strong implicit nod in the direction of the Davidic tradition, in contrast to the failed efforts of Benjamin and the northern tribes."<sup>38</sup> The conclusion that can be drawn from the parallel and complementary passages is that "the tribe of Judah enjoys an extensive presentation and positive characterization in the exposition as compensation for its limited appearance throughout the book."<sup>39</sup> There is, however, one possible problem with this conclusion, and that is the portrayal of Judah in Judges 1:19.

### **The Presentation of Judah in Judges 1:19**

While Judges 1 does portray the tribe of Judah in a favorable light, verse 19 has been largely interpreted as a negative comment showing Judah's failure to possess the valley due to the Canaanites having iron chariots. Some have used this observation to advance the position that the prologue might not be as favorable to Judah as some have

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<sup>36</sup>Lindars notes that while Josh 15:63 puts Jerusalem within Judah's territory, Josh 18:16, 28 places Jerusalem within Benjamite territory. He goes on to note that the reader would first ascribe the responsibility of Jerusalem to Benjamin and that this is even more emphasized through the Ehud narrative, which makes no mention of Jerusalem. See Lindars, *Judges 1-5*, 47.

<sup>37</sup>Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 146-47. This will be discussed in further detail below.

<sup>38</sup>Stone, "From Tribal Confederation to Monarchic State," 214.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 147.

claimed.<sup>40</sup> Others, however, have said that this text just serves to present Judah in a realistic light, that the tribe is flawed, but faithful.<sup>41</sup> Still others say that this serves as a legitimate excuse to justify Judah's inability to take the valley.<sup>42</sup> Three difficulties arise, however, in interpreting this text. Each of these difficulties helps to maintain an overwhelmingly positive portrayal of Judah throughout Judges 1.

The first difficulty in the interpretation of Judges 1:19 is that Judges 1:19b seems to be at odds with both 1:18 and 1:19a. Three difficulties exist between these texts. First, verse 18 states that Judah captured the Philistine cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron, while verse 19b states that Judah was not able to take the valley. Scholars are quick to note the difficulty that these verses pose, since verse 18 seems to indicate that Judah had captured the cities in the valley, but then verse 19b indicates that they did not capture said valley.<sup>43</sup> Moore, for instance, believes that these verses are "completely contradictory."<sup>44</sup> Second, this difficulty is further complicated by the variant reading of verse 18 in the LXX, which indicates that Judah did not capture the Philistine cities, in contrast to the reading of the MT. Several scholars prefer the LXX reading at this point.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges*, 49; Niditch, *Judges*, 42; Webb, *Judges*, 108-09; and Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 99-100.

<sup>41</sup>O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 64; Butler, *Judges*, 26; and Boda, *Judges*, 1076.

<sup>42</sup>Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 147; Schneider, *Judges*, 19. This argument, however, is weak for at least two reasons. First, Joshua does not accept the excuse of iron chariots in Josh 17:18. Second, iron chariots were not a problem for Israel in Judg 4:12-16. See Jeffrey S. Stevenson, "Judah's Success and Failures in Holy War: An Exegesis of Judges 1:1-20," *Restoration Quarterly* 44 (2002): 50.

<sup>43</sup>Not all scholars see the valley referred to in Judg 1:19b as the coastal plain. This interpretation will be discussed in further detail below.

<sup>44</sup>Moore, *Judges*, 37. See also Cundall, *Judges*, 57. Goslinga attempts to maintain the MT reading of both vv. 18 and 19 and argues that they are not in conflict with each other. He believes that v. 18 refers to what is known of Judah's initial victories by the author from ancient documents while v. 19 shows the condition of the valley that existed throughout the time of the judges. See Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 253. This, however, seems difficult to maintain in light of the unbroken use of the *waw* consecutive throughout both these verses and the chapter.

<sup>45</sup>Gregory T. K. Wong, "Is There a Direct Pro-Judah Polemic in Judges," *SJOT* 20 (2005): 95-98; Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges*, 149; A. E. Cundall, "Judges—An Apology for the Monarchy?" *ExpTim* 81 (1970): 179 n. 3; Lindars, *Judges 1-5*, 42-44; Auld, "Judges 1 and History," 272-73. Boling notes that there is "no way of explaining this divergence [between the LXX and MT] except

Rake, however, concludes that the “deviations of the LXX are easily explained as a secondary adaptation, thus the MT is to be maintained as the original reading.”<sup>46</sup> Multiple arguments for maintaining the reading of the MT have been given: (1) the LXX seems to have understood verse 18 to contradict verse 19, which led to a “correction” of the text;<sup>47</sup> (2) the parallel between Judges 1:18 and Joshua 15:45-47 suggests the accuracy of the MT;<sup>48</sup> (3) the reading contradicts the pro-Judah sentiment found throughout the chapter;<sup>49</sup> (4) it is difficult to understand verse 19a, which states that Yahweh was with Judah, if it is sandwiched between two texts that show the failure of Judah. The third difficulty is that it is hard to reconcile verse 19a with 19b. The statement made in 19a that Yahweh is with Judah does not lead smoothly into a statement about Judah’s failure to capture the Philistine territory that had already been apportioned to them in Joshua 15:45-47. Webb points out that these two comments in juxtaposition with one another serve as a paradox “and we are left to wonder what, precisely, it signifies.”<sup>50</sup> Similar to this interpretation, Block has asked, “Why is Yahweh’s presence canceled by superior military technology?”<sup>51</sup> Butler engages in this same kind of questioning with, “Why was an

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to posit genuine traditions reflecting somewhat different concerns.” See Boling, *Judges*, 58.

<sup>46</sup>Mareike Rake, *Juda wird aufsteigen! Untersuchungen zum ersten Kapitel des Richterbuches*, BZAW 367 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 83, my translation. See also Weinfeld, “Judges 1:1-2:5,” 395; Uwe Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Studien zum Richterbuch*, BZAW 192 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), 44.

<sup>47</sup>Weinfeld, “Judges 1:1-2:5,” 395. Similarly, Frolov argues that this seems to be the attempt of the LXX, but that v. 19b should also retain the reading of the MT. This argument is solid and will be discussed in more detail below. See Frolov, *Judges*, 33-34.

<sup>48</sup>E. Theodore Mullen, “Judges 1:1-3:6: The Deuteronomistic Reintroduction of the Book of Judges,” *HTR* 77 (1984): 49; O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 445.

<sup>49</sup>O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 445. Both Wong and Frolov note the circularity of this argument. While this argument should not be used alone, it can fit within a larger argument in favor of the MT. See the discussion in Wong, “Is There a Direct Pro-Judah Polemic in Judges?,” 95-97; Serge Frolov, “Fire, Smoke, and Judah in Judges: A Response to Gregory Wong,” *SJOT* 21 (2007): 133.

<sup>50</sup>Webb, *Judges*, 109.

<sup>51</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 100



‘obedient’ Judah unable to carry out victory thoroughly if God was with the tribe?’<sup>52</sup> The answers to these questions turn into speculation, with some guessing that Judah must have done something wrong.<sup>53</sup> There seems to be, however, a better solution that understands verse 19b within the context of the chapter and in light of its grammatical construction.

The second difficulty in Judges 1:19 is that the grammatical construction *כי לא להוריש* is viewed as difficult in its present form within the MT, and many have suggested emendation. Of those favoring emendation, the majority believe that the verb *יכלו* to have been lost through haplography.<sup>54</sup> Others prefer to see a dittography of *ל* which would lead to a reading of *לא הוריש*, thus bringing this text in line with the list of other tribes who did not remove the inhabitants of the land (1:21, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33).<sup>55</sup> There is also the proposal of a defective spelling where *לא* should instead be read as *לאה*.<sup>56</sup> The text, however, is grammatically correct as it stands in the MT and is not in need of emendation. Many who suggest emendation even admit to this.<sup>57</sup> While the use of the infinitive with *לא* is rare in the Hebrew, it is not unprecedented (Amos 6:10; 1 Chr 5:1;

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<sup>52</sup>Butler, *Judges*, 26. See also Dennis Olson, *Judges*, The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 739.

<sup>53</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 100; Butler, *Judges*, 26. Similarly, Lindars oddly states that “the whole point of the verse is to explain Judah’s failure without casting doubt on Yahweh’s assistance” (Lindars, *Judges 1-5*, 45). A statement like this, however, makes little sense within the context of Judg 1 where Yahweh’s leadership of and presence with Judah has up to this point in the chapter been associated with victory.

<sup>54</sup>Lindars, *Judges 1-5*, 45; Boling, *Judges*, 58; Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 147; Webb, *Judges*, 108; Burney, *Judges*, 19; and Moore, *Judges*, 38. Boling also notes that the addition of *יכלו* would bring this verse in line with Josh 15:63 and 17:12. Burney believes that *יכלו* has been removed for theological reasons. This is countered by Guillaume who believes that “the Hebrew is probably carefully avoiding the conclusion that Judah did not take the plain because it *could* not do so!” (Guillaume, *Waiting for Josiah*, 231).

<sup>55</sup>Soggin, *Judges*, 23-24; Y. Kaufmann, *The Book of Judges—A Commentary* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1961), 83-84.

<sup>56</sup>Mitchell Dahood, “Scriptio Defectiva in Judges 1.19,” *Bib* 60 (1979): 570. Dahood’s suggestion at this point has not garnered acceptance.

<sup>57</sup>Moore, *Judges*, 38; Burney, *Judges*, 19; and Lindars, *Judges 1-5*, 45.

15:2). Driver explains that this construction in Judges 1:19 implies that the conditions for Judah’s capturing of the valley were altogether out of the question.<sup>58</sup> Frolov expands on this idea by noting that this text conveys the notion of prohibition and that a representative translation would be something like, “And YHWH was with Judah, and it dislodged (only) the highlanders, since the lowlanders are not to be dislodged.”<sup>59</sup> There are several who argue for retaining the original reading of the Hebrew text,<sup>60</sup> but this reading, for some reason, has not been given serious attention by many. The reading in the MT should be maintained for multiple reasons: (1) as noted above it makes grammatical sense; (2) the difference between לא הוריש (found in 1:21, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33 to describe the other tribes’ inability to remove the inhabitants) and לא להוריש serves as one further way of distinguishing Judah from the other tribes; (3) the reading of 1:19b as a prohibition is consistent with Judges 3:3, which says that the lords of the Philistines were left to test the Israelites;<sup>61</sup> (4) the reading of לא להוריש is to be preferred as the *lectio difficilior*;<sup>62</sup> and (5) there are two places where the author of Judges 1 removes יכלו from a text he has taken from Joshua (Judg 1:21 and Josh 15:63; Judg 1:27-28 and Josh 17:11-13), in which “he shows himself capable of altering the infinitive to produce a correct

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<sup>58</sup>S. R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew and Some Other Syntactical Questions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892), 202.

<sup>59</sup>Frolov, *Judges*, 48.

<sup>60</sup>Dominique Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle l’Ancient Testament*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 74; Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, Old Testament Readings (New York: Routledge, 2002), 100; Weinfeld, “Judges 1:1-2:5,” 396; Rake, *Juda wird aufsteigen! Untersuchungen zum ersten Kapitel des Richterbuches*, 84; Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum*, 44; Lawson Stone, *Judges*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2012), 217; idem, “From Tribal Confederation to Monarchic State,” 217-18; Georg Heinrich Ewald, *Syntax of the Hebrew Language of the Old Testament*, trans. James Kennedy (London: T&T Clark, 1891), 295; Frolov, “Fire, Smoke, and Judah in Judges,” 133; Frolov, *Judges*, 34, 48; Victor Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 102; C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 2, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I & II Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 257; Walter Groß, *Richter, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament* (Frieberg: Herder, 2009), 104. Gesenius also points to this in §114l, but he says that haplography is also a possibility.

<sup>61</sup>Frolov, *Judges*, 84. For further discussion of reconciling 1:19b with 3:3 if the theory of haplography is taken, see O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 445-46.

<sup>62</sup>Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle l’Ancient Testament*, 74; Frolov, *Judges*, 33.

finite form.” Thus it would seem odd that an incorrect form would occur here, since this is also a text that parallels Joshua (17:16-18).<sup>63</sup> There does not appear to be any substantial reason for deviating from the MT, which seems to align with the ideological underpinnings of the rest of the passage.

The third difficulty in interpreting Judges 1:19 is that the location of the valley (עמק) mentioned in 1:19b is somewhat difficult to identify. If the location of this valley is in Judah, then it can probably be identified as the coastal plain<sup>64</sup> or the Shephelah.<sup>65</sup> Several works make a link between this text and Joshua 17:16-18. In this text Joshua encourages the tribes of Joseph to prevail despite the iron chariots of the Canaanites.<sup>66</sup> Wong believes that this parallel is used to denigrate Judah and notes that “what this link seems to highlight is Judah’s failure to live up to its full potential.”<sup>67</sup> Wong’s interpretation assumes, however, both the reading in the LXX and the author of Judges using the text of Joshua to portray Judah in a negative fashion, something that has not been done up to this point.<sup>68</sup> Some believe that this connection to Joshua 17:16-18 instead serves to alleviate further any negative assessment of Judah. Both Hamilton and Stone believe that the parallel between these passages also means that these two texts refer to the same valley. Hamilton notes that if “Judg. 1:19b is alluding to Josh. 17:16-18 then it is simply saying that the Judahites failed to take an area that was far beyond their own borders, hardly a damning indictment.”<sup>69</sup> Similarly, Stone notes that “if the writer of

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<sup>63</sup>Stone, “From Tribal Confederation to Monarchic State,” 218.

<sup>64</sup>Moore, *Judges*, 37; Burney, *Judges*, 20; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 98-99; and Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 253.

<sup>65</sup>Keil, *Judges*, 257. Keil associates this with the valley described in v. 9.

<sup>66</sup>For a discussion on the iron chariots, see Robert Drews, “The ‘Chariots of Iron’ of Joshua and Judges,” *JOT* 45 (1989): 15-23.

<sup>67</sup>Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges*, 49.

<sup>68</sup>See the discussion above.

<sup>69</sup>Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books*, 102.

Judges 1 is alluding to Joshua 17, then the Judean failure is mitigated a second time by placing the locale of their failure far beyond their own borders.”<sup>70</sup> There does seem to be a parallel between Judges 1:19 and Joshua 17:16-18 and that parallel at least casts ambiguity on the location of the valley. It must be noted that this connection does not necessitate an understanding of the valley being the same valley referenced in Joshua 17, and the identification of the valley being in the north does not seem likely. The exact identification of the valley is not clear from the verse, but is likely the coastal plain from the context of verse 18.<sup>71</sup>

At first glance Judges 1:19 may seem to indicate a negative comment on Judah near the end of a long list of accomplishments. This interpretation, however, seems to be mistaken because it stands at odds with the surrounding context of verses 18 and 19a, it requires an emendation of the MT, and this verse’s connection to a similar text in Joshua 17 casts doubt on the actual location of the valley. Instead, the reading of the text as it stands indicates that it was not for Judah to take the valley. This interpretation makes sense of Judges 3:1-3, which states that the coastal plain was left by Yahweh to test Israel, if the valley referred to in 1:19 refers to the coastal plain. The understanding of verse 19b as a prohibition also makes sense if, as some have argued, the valley that is referred to in this verse is the one associated with the parallel text in Joshua 17, which is located in the north. All of these points show the difficulty of interpreting Judges 1:19 as a text that portrays Judah unfavorably. Instead, it appears that this verse falls in line with the ideological tenor of the remainder of the chapter, which highlights the faithfulness of the tribe of Judah.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Stone, “From Tribal Confederation to Monarchic State,” 217.

<sup>71</sup>Auld believes that the valley referred to is the coastal plain, but that the word עמק is used because of the connection with Josh 17. See Auld, *Judges 1-5*, 45.

<sup>72</sup>For another reason why this text should not be viewed as portraying Judah negatively, see Serge Frolov, “Joshua’s Double Demise (Josh. xxiv 28-31; Judg. ii 6-9): Making Sense of a Repetition,” *VT* 58 (2008): 322. Frolov argues that the failure to dislodge the Canaanites is blamed on the northern tribes through the use of a temporal loop within the narrative. By not dislodging the Canaanites the northerners force coexistence with these Canaanites upon Judah.

## The Cycle

In Judges 2:11-19 the cyclical pattern for the body of the book is introduced. In this cycle the key formulaic statements that comprise the narratives of the body are presented.<sup>73</sup> This section presents Israel's apostasy (2:11-13), Yahweh's anger and punishment of Israel (2:14-15), and Yahweh's deliverance of Israel through the raising of a judge (2:16-19).<sup>74</sup> From the presentation in this section there is an expectation that the cycle will be consistent throughout the book. But as Exum notes, "Although we are led to expect a consistent and regular pattern, what happens is that the framework itself breaks down . . . the political and moral instability depicted in Judges is reflected in the textual instability [of the cycle]. The framework deconstructs itself, so to speak, and the cycle of apostasy and deliverance becomes increasingly murky."<sup>75</sup> The repetition of formulaic statements breaks down within the narrative framework of the accounts of the Judges, thus giving the sense that the narrative breaks down.<sup>76</sup> The cycle as presented in the introduction also presents the hopelessness of the situation of the judges in vv. 18-19 where it reads, "Whenever Yahweh raised up judges for them, Yahweh was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge . . . But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods." As these verses show the leadership of the judges was not a lasting solution to the problem of Canaanization. Block notes this well when he writes that verse 19 "is crucial for interpreting the following narratives. Israel is depicted as increasingly Canaanized, spiraling downward into worse and worse apostasy."<sup>77</sup> Even

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<sup>73</sup>Frederick E. Greenspahn, "The Theology of the Framework of Judges," *VT* 36 (1986): 386-88.

<sup>74</sup>K. Lawson Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 87-91.

<sup>75</sup>Cheryl Exum, "The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 412.

<sup>76</sup>This will be addressed further in the discussion of Othniel below.

<sup>77</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 132.

before the main narrative begins, the outlook on the presentation of the period of the leadership of the judges is grim.

## **Conclusion**

The introduction to the book of Judges shows an emphasis on the tribe of Judah and presents Judah as faithful in driving out the Canaanites. The other tribes fail to do this, which leads to the Canaanization of Israel. The cycle, while it does not directly concern kingship, does show that the leadership of the judges fails to provide a lasting solution to lead the people towards faithfulness to Yahweh.

### **The Body: 3:7-16:31**

The prologue of the book is not the only section that contains a pro-Judah and pro-monarchial sentiment; the body does as well. It accomplishes this in two ways. First, the pro-Judah sentiment is revealed in the movement of the book from south to north, where the southern leader is pictured ideally and each subsequent leader is pictured as progressively more disappointing. Second, the body of Judges shows pro-monarchial sentiment through its representation of foreign kings. The representation of these foreign rulers serves as a foil to what a ruler should be like.

## **The Movement of the Book**

There is a growing consensus that the general movement of the body of the book of Judges can be seen in the movement of the location of the Judges starting in the south with Othniel, who was from the tribe of Judah, and ending in the north with Samson, who was from the tribe of Dan.<sup>78</sup> This proposal seems plausible even though

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<sup>78</sup>Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books*, 103-05; Younger, "The Configuring of Judicial Preliminaries," 80-83; Younger, "Judges 1 in Its Near Eastern Literary Context," 216-21; Abraham Malamat, "Charismatic Leadership in the Book of Judges," in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernst Wright*, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 154; Brettler, "The Book of Judges," 404-07; Butler, *Judges*, 50; Olson, "Buber, Kingship, and the Book of Judges," 204.

Samson's birthplace was in Zora, which was located in the original Danite allotment in the south, since the perspective of both the author and the reader would locate Dan in the far north.<sup>79</sup> This perspective is advanced by Brettler who says that while the Samson episode took place in the south, the original reader would have associated Samson with the tribe of Dan, who had long since traveled north. In fact, by the time of the writing of Judges the tribe of Dan would have already been located in the north for at least a few generations.<sup>80</sup> It is clear from the epilogue of Judges that Dan had moved from their original allotment quite early, and the author and even the earliest readers of the text would associate the tribe of Dan with their far northern settlement.

The movement of the body follows the same basic pattern of the movement from south to north found in Judges 1.<sup>81</sup> In the same way, the other tribes are set in juxtaposition with the tribe of Judah. This is coupled with the negative presentations of the judges from the other tribes.

The narrative flow of Judges does not seem to be solely confined to a geographical movement, but rather there also seems to be a progression in the sinfulness of the judges with each successive judge.<sup>82</sup> This would seem to be the implication of

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<sup>79</sup>Brettler, "The Book of Judges," 404; Malamat, "Charismatic Leadership in the Book of Judges," 154.

<sup>80</sup>This hypothesis would work with almost any dating of the book of Judges, even if one presupposes a rather early Davidic-Solomonic time frame.

<sup>81</sup>Younger, "The Configuring of Judicial Preliminaries," 80-83; Younger, "Judges 1 in Its Near Eastern Literary Context," 216-21.

<sup>82</sup>While the south-to-north movement does appear, the more important concern is the contrast between the tribe of Judah and the other tribes. So Brettler notes, "The geographical pattern noted by Malamat needs to be joined with observations concerning the behavior of the major judges as they move from south to north" (Brettler, "The Book of Judges," 405). See also O'Connell, who writes, "The deliverer accounts have been arranged within the book of Judges to advance the compiler/redactor's tribal-political concerns. Yet . . . one should be able to discern from each account what concerns the compiler/redactor was attempting to address by means of plot-structure and characterization" (O'Connell, *Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 80). See also Tanner, who writes, "Gideon receives attention as the focal point because he represents a significant shift in the 'quality' of the judges that served Israel" (Tanner, "The Gideon Narrative as the Focal Point of Judges," 152). See also Cheryl Exum, "The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 112. For a contrasting view on the minor judges, see Richard D. Nelson, "Ideology, Geography, and the List of Minor Judges," *JSOT* 31 (2007): 347-64. Nelson views the minor judges as anti-monarchical constructions. He writes, "the list of the so-called minor judges

Judges 2:19, which states that each generation became more corrupt than their fathers. This moral decline is exemplified by the portrayal of Othniel as an ideal judge, whereas the other judges within the body of the book are portrayed as anti-heroes.

The pattern of general moral and spiritual decline found within the book is noted by Tanner who writes, “Othniel was almost an idealized judge, and Samson was a debauched self-centered individual.”<sup>83</sup> The majority of interpreters refer to Othniel using descriptors such as ideal, hero, and exemplary.<sup>84</sup> Othniel is described as the paradigmatic judge in at least three ways.

First, the Othniel cycle is much more compact than that of the other major judges.<sup>85</sup> The brevity of Othniel’s cycle serves to concretize this judge already introduced in Judges 1.<sup>86</sup> The brevity of the narrative also portrays Othniel as bland.<sup>87</sup> Both the brevity and the blandness of Othniel are contrasted with the increasing length of the other judges’ narratives along with their sinful actions. Frolov notes that the rhetorical effect of presenting Othniel as bland “makes all the colorful details of the of the other cycles, including even the most admirable feats of the deliverers featured in them, look like wrinkles in the narrative, suggestive of difficulties, snags, and lack of effectiveness.”<sup>88</sup>

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is not based on any historical source or archival record, but originated as an anti-monarchic scribal construction composed in the territory of the Northern Kingdom . . . . It is modeled on the scribal conventions for summarizing royal succession that appear in the regnal formulas in the book of kings. It reveals an anti-monarchic ideology” (Nelson, “Ideology, Geography, and the List of Minor Judges,” 349). Contrast this view with that of Roger Ryan, who views the judges as positive, not negative deliverers. See Roger Ryan, *Judges, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix), 2007.

<sup>83</sup>Tanner, “Gideon as the Focal Point of the Judges,” 152.

<sup>84</sup>Schwab, *Right in Their Own Eyes*, 44-45; Frolov, *Judges*, 102-04; Butler, *Judges*, 17; Brettler, “The Book of Judges,” 405; Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 164-65; Stone, *Judges*, 234; Boling, *Judges*, 81; Schneider, *Judges*, 38; Biddle, *Reading Judges*, 42; and Olson, “Buber, Kingship, and the Book of Judges,” 204.

<sup>85</sup>See David M. Gunn, “Joshua and Judges,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1987), 112.

<sup>86</sup>Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 162.

<sup>87</sup>Frolov, *Judges*, 102-03.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 102. See also Gunn, “Joshua and Judges,” 113.



The brevity of Othniel's narrative helps to present him as an ideal deliverer. It cannot be coincidence that as in Judges 1, Othniel is from the tribe of Judah. While this is implicit within the narrative, it is too much to dismiss.

Second, Othniel is presented as an ideal judge through, as Amit puts it, "a reservoir of formulae."<sup>89</sup> While the Othniel cycle is short, it contains the largest number of formulaic statements in the entire book. Othniel's cycle uses more key phrases and formulaic statements than any other judge, which is all the more apparent due to the brevity of Othniel's account.<sup>90</sup> What these points of connection do is present the faithfulness of the deliverer from Judah who serves as the "evaluative profile by which to assess 3:12-16:31."<sup>91</sup>

Third, the antagonist in the Othniel cycle, Cushan-Rishathaim, serves as the prototypical enemy. First, Othniel is presented as defeating Cushan-Rishathaim single-handedly. While he certainly did not act alone in an absolute sense, all of the action in the narrative is presented in the third person singular, highlighting his actions: he went to war, Cushan-Rishathaim was delivered into his hand, and his hand prevailed.<sup>92</sup> Second, Othniel faces "an adversary that is far more formidable than those faced by the other judges."<sup>93</sup> This is shown primarily in his name, which can be translated as something along the lines of double evil,<sup>94</sup> double dastardliness,<sup>95</sup> or double wickedness.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 162.

<sup>90</sup>Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books*, 113-14; Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 163; and Stone, "From Tribal Confederation to Monarchic State," 265-66. Amit notes 15 recurring phrases where Stone notes 17.

<sup>91</sup>Stone, "From Tribal Confederacy to Monarchic State," 289.

<sup>92</sup>See Frolov, *Judges*, 103. Frolov believes that the use of the third singular here indicates that Gideon did not involve all of Israel, but possibly had his own private army.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>95</sup>Stone, "From Tribal Confederation to Monarchic State," 282.

<sup>96</sup>Brettler, "The Book of Judges," 408.

Othniel, the judge from Judah, is viewed by the author of Judges in a positive light, whereas each subsequent judge is progressively more sinful.<sup>97</sup> This cycle then culminates with Samson, who seems to be the most reprobate of all of the judges. So O’Connell writes, “As to Judges’ idealization of a type of leader distinct from that modeled by non-Judahite deliverers of Israel, it may be inferred that the portrayal of pre-monarchical leadership among the deliverer accounts in Judges serves as a foil to the ideal of kingship to which it is implicitly contrasted in Judges’ double dénouement (17:6a; 18:1a; 19:1a; 21:25a).”<sup>98</sup> With this O’Connell is stating that the non-Judahite deliverers are all foils of what true leadership should look like, which will come later, namely David. Brettler accentuates the claims of O’Connell by stating, “The author/editor has edited or written stories to indicate the superiority of Judah at the expense of the north.”<sup>99</sup> Thus it would seem plausible that this polemic against the north indicates that the idea of northern leadership is to be viewed as a failure when set against the backdrop of the Davidic monarchy.

### **Portrayal of Foreign Kings**

Beyond the narrative flow of the book and the clear presentation of the supremacy of the tribe of Judah, it also seems appropriate to make one further point concerning the body of the book of Judges and the idea of kingship. O’Connell notes, “As to Judges’ idealization of a model kingship distinct from that of foreigners, it may be averred that the deliverer accounts portray foreign kings in such a way as to make them objects of satire.”<sup>100</sup> The examples of this phenomenon are replete throughout the text of

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<sup>97</sup>Bustenai Oded argues specifically that the Othniel narrative is an implicit polemic against Saul. See “Chusan-Rishathaim: Judges 3:8-11: An Implicit Polemic,” in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran*, ed. Michael V. Fox (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 89-94, 410.

<sup>98</sup>O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 11. O’Connell goes on to note the following: “Indeed, most of the deliverer accounts, but especially the two stories of the double dénouement, show how the foibles of flawed tribal leaders could escalate to tribal or even national levels” (11).

<sup>99</sup>Brettler, “The Book of Judges, 408.

<sup>100</sup>O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 11.

Judges, being seen in the characters of Adoni-Bezek, Cushan-Rishathaim, Eglon, and the remainder of the foreign kings found in the book of Judges. These foreign kings are portrayed in a mocking fashion: Adoni-Bezek and the fate that he suffered similar to the seventy kings whose toes and thumbs he cut off, Chushan-Rishathaim and the meaning of his name, and Eglon with his unusual obesity and his glutton desire for a bribe. These kings represent pagan kingship at its worst. Thus, these kings serve as negative examples, much like the northern Israelite leaders in the book of Judges, that highlight what the true king should look like. O’Connell notes further that “the recontextualization of these stories into Judges’ dual framework heightens their ridicule of foreign kings by their contrast with the frames’ glorification of YHWH.”<sup>101</sup> Not only does it seem appropriate to contrast with the glorification of Yahweh, but also with the ideal kingship that seems to be supposed of the Judahite king, David, who was Yahweh’s anointed.

### **The Minor Judges**

Almost any literary understanding of the body of the book of Judges has struggled with how to account for the minor judges. This struggle is noted well by Brettler who writes, “I do not see how the minor judges fit in, and can only offer one of the standard biblical scholarship answers—it was traditional material than an editor included, or someone inserted it after the book already took shape—but these answers are not verifiable and are not really satisfactory.”<sup>102</sup> This short quotation is really the extent to which he treats the minor judges. While there is some difficulty in understanding how the minor judges fit within the overall structure of the body of the book there has been one suggestion that is promising. Olson, who advocates for a similar overall structure to the book of Judges that has been proposed here, believes that the minor judges show the

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup>Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, 114.

same moral and spiritual decline as the major judges.<sup>103</sup> He notes that the notices of the minor judges occur at three pivotal junctures within the narrative and that these “correspond to the three stages in the decline of the major judges.”<sup>104</sup> Shamgar is presented as successful and is presented with the early judges who are also presented as successful. Tola and Jair are presented after the transitional Gideon cycle. They are presented as rising up to deliver Israel, “but the narrator provides no indication that Jair accomplished anything for the well-being of Israel.”<sup>105</sup> Like Gideon and Abimelech both Tola and Jair seem to focus on themselves and their possessions. The third group of minor judges (Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon) occurs with the final judges Jephthah and Samson who are presented as failures. Likewise, the minor judges are not presented as either delivering Israel or really having any beneficial effect on the life of Israel. Their judgeships are also relatively short, which is similar to the short judgeships of the later major judges.<sup>106</sup>

The formula used to introduce the second and third sets of minor judges resembles the royal formula found in 1-2 Kings. This formula contains initial statements about their rule, the length of their reign, and a concluding notice about their death, burial, and successor.<sup>107</sup> Besides these Nelson notes a number of other royal features in the presentation of the later minor judges including the presentation of the numbers of

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<sup>103</sup>Dennis T. Olson, “Buber, Kingship, and the Book of Judges: A Study of Judges 6-9 and 17-21,” in *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J. J. M. Roberts*, ed. Bernard Frank Batto and Kathryn Roberts (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 206.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 207. Globe also sees a geographical movement with the minor judges along the same lines at the major judges, but this is somewhat tenuous. See Alexander Globe, “‘Enemies Round About’: Disintegrative Structure in the Book of Judges,” in *Mappings of the Biblical Terrain: The Bible as Text*, ed. V. L. Tollers and F. Kermodé (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1990), 242-43.

<sup>107</sup>Globe, “‘Enemies Round About,’” 236; Nelson, “Ideology, Geography, and the List of Minor Judges,” 354.

their children, the fact that they own donkeys, and their marriage alliances.<sup>108</sup> Nelson believes that the presentation of these minor judges provides for an implicit anti-monarchical ideology because he believes that “these six luminaries judged in direct succession, even though this is not explicitly stated, and that they judged the inclusive entity ‘Israel’, even though only local data is general for each. They judged Israel outside royal structures, built alliances based on kinship, and achieved a stable and orderly sequence of leadership without primogeniture or dynastic succession.”<sup>109</sup> Frolov agrees with Nelson concerning the monarchical presentation of these minor judges, but does not believe that they are used to promote an anti-monarchical agenda. Instead, Frolov states that these narratives show “that while politically stable central government is definitely a godsend, rotation of power between tribes (or charismatic individuals from different tribes) can ensure its continuity only for a limited time. What can do the trick is a royal dynasty, certainly the one that the deity has established forever—in other words the house of David (2 Sam 7:16).”<sup>110</sup> Nelson’s claim, however, seems quite forced in several areas; most clearly because it is not apparent that these judges lead in succession.<sup>111</sup> Both Nelson and Frolov view the minor judges positively, but believe that these judges portray different views towards the institution of monarchy. A more straight-forward reading of the narrative, however, seems to be to view these minor judges along the lines that Olson does, namely that as with the major judges, the minor judges progressively deteriorate morally and seem to have more care for their own self-interest than any communal interest.<sup>112</sup> This fact can be coupled with Frolov’s final observations that the remedy for

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<sup>108</sup>Nelson, “Ideology, Geography, and the List of Minor Judges,” 355-56.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 362-63.

<sup>110</sup>Frolov, *Judges*, 98.

<sup>111</sup>Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, 43 n. 63; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 338 n. 871.

<sup>112</sup>Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, 42, 236, 277.

the short tenures of these minor judges is a lasting royal dynasty that Yahweh has appointed.

### **The Epilogue: 17:1-21:25**

The conclusion of the book of Judges serves as the clearest indication of the pro-monarchial stance of the book as well as the clearest apology for the Davidic monarchy. While the introduction and the body are more implicit, the conclusion is explicit. This pro-monarchial stance is manifested in four ways. First, a king was anticipated as shown by the refrain that there was no king in the land. Second, a stinging polemic against Benjamin is given, which serves to diminish the legitimacy of the rule of Saul. Third, there is a portrayal of the tribe of Levi that anticipates a time and a leader who will bring a central place of worship. And fourth, there are multiple references to the city of Bethlehem, the city where David was born. It will also be important to look briefly at the only direct mention of Judah, which some have said portrays Judah negatively.

### **The Refrain: In Those Days . . .**

The anticipation of a king is most clearly seen in the book of Judges through the refrain that in those days there was no king in Israel (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; and 21:25). This refrain appears four times in the epilogue to the book of Judges, and it is phrased in two basic forms. All four of the refrains basically say “in those days there was no king.” Two of these refrains, however, make a further note beyond that of there not being a king by adding, “every man did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6 and 21:25). These refrains appear in the context of the epilogue, where the anarchy of the book of Judges is at its height, but they do not seem to be solely reflecting upon the contents of the epilogue; instead they seem to be reflecting on the content of the entirety of the book and serve as the interpretive key of the book that longs for the monarchy.<sup>113</sup> This can be

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<sup>113</sup>The majority view the refrain as being pro-monarchial. See Cundall, “Judges—An Apology for the Monarchy,” 180; Webb, *Judges*, 426; Gerald Eddie Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*, SBLDS 87 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986), 134-38; Olson, “Buber, Kingship, and the

readily seen by the link to the Samson narrative where Samson did what was right in his eyes (14:3). So Brettler notes, “The appendixes implicitly yearn for an era when there is kingship, when the people will do *hayyāšār*, ‘what is pleasing.’”<sup>114</sup> The refrain also insinuates that the content of the epilogue is not exceptional, but that it is normative.<sup>115</sup> While discussing the refrain as the interpretive framework not only for these episodes but for the book as a whole, Tribble writes, “The lack of a king is a license for anarchy and violence. So the editor uses the horrors he has just reported to promote a monarchy that would establish order and justice in Israel. Concluding not only this story but the entire book of Judges with an indictment, he prepares his readers to look favorably upon kingship.”<sup>116</sup> Not only does the refrain link the contents of the book to the epilogue, but it also reveals the narrator’s point of view. In writing the refrain, the narrator interjects his ideological point of view. Fokkelman observes the narrator’s point of view in the refrain by writing, “What is said here has no momentary aspect; it summarizes an entire era and thus betrays the narrator’s perspective. The second sentence is quasi-neutral, but there is little chance that the writer intends to use it in a neutral sense.”<sup>117</sup> This refrain therefore represents the narrator’s ideology. Thus, this climactic refrain longs for a stabilized time

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Book of Judges,” 212-13; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 169; Philip Satterthwaite, “‘No King in Israel’: Narrative Criticism and Judges 17-21,” *TynBul* 44 (1993): 75-88; Andrew D. H. Mayes, “Deuteronomistic Royal Ideology 17-21,” *Biblical Interpretation* 9 (2001): 255. Even those who view the book and the Deuteronomistic history as anti-monarchical note that the refrain is pro-monarchical. See Martin Noth, “The Background of Judges 17-18,” in *Israel’s Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Mulienburg*, ed. Bernard W. Anderson (New York: Harper, 1962), 80; Buber, *The Kingship of God*, trans. Richard Scheimann (New York: Harper), 77-78. For challenges to the pro-monarchical reading of the refrain, see W. J. Dumbrell, “‘In Those Days There Was No King in Israel; Every Man Did What was Right in His Own Eyes’: The Purpose of the Book of Judges Reconsidered,” *JSOT* 25 (1983): 22-33; Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges*, 191-224; S. Talmon, “‘In Those Days There Was No מלך in Israel’: Judges 18-21,” in *King, Cult, and Calendar in Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: The Magnes, 1986), 39-52.

<sup>114</sup>Brettler, “The Book of Judges, 409.

<sup>115</sup>Webb, *Judges*, 426-47.

<sup>116</sup>Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 84.

<sup>117</sup>J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Ineke Smit (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 69.

when everyone will not do what is right in his own eyes, but what is right in the eyes of the king, and when there will be a leader unlike the northern judges, a leader who will rule Israel legitimately and justly.

### **Polemic against Benjamin/Saul**

The epilogue further elaborates the anticipation of a Davidic king with a stinging polemic against the tribe of Benjamin.<sup>118</sup> This anti-Benjamite climax of the book continues the anti-Benjamite themes introduced in the prologue and leads well into the books of Samuel where Saul will be chosen as the first king, and a failure king at that. This anti-Benjamite polemic appears most strikingly in Judges 19, where a Levite and his concubine are approached in a similar fashion to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah by the men of the city of Gibeah, Saul's future capital. The contents of this episode will not be recounted here in their entirety, but only that which is directly applicable to the polemic. Before lodging in Gibeah, the Levite and his concubine pass by Jebus (Jerusalem) and decide not to lodge there because it was not an Israelite city at that time.<sup>119</sup> After passing by Jebus, which the author says is Jerusalem, they decide to stay the night in the future Saulide capital, Gibeah. These details are too coincidental to dismiss. The author is drawing a comparison between Bethlehem and Gibeah and by extension between David and Saul. On this contrast Amit notes that the "creation of this analogical pattern in the course of the exposition is intended to intimate that the groups of names of cities represent persons and juxtapose the one whose origin and capital are Gibeah with the one whose origin is Bethlehem and whose capital was Jerusalem."<sup>120</sup> It is

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<sup>118</sup>Yairah Amit, "Literature in the Service of Politics," 28-40. Amit considers the epilogue to be a hidden polemic.

<sup>119</sup>This harkens back to the prologue where Benjamin could not drive out the inhabitants of Jerusalem in 1:21.

<sup>120</sup>Amit, "Literature in the Service of Politics," 35. If Judges was written before David took Jerusalem this comparison would not fit. Avioz argues that the mention of Jerusalem does not serve as a justification of David necessarily, but as a justification of the city of Jerusalem itself. See Michael Avioz, "The Role and Significance of Jubus in Judges 19," *BZ* 57 (2007): 249-51. This argument is compelling and would serve as a Davidic justification for plans to move his capital to Jerusalem while he was in



not just the naming of Gibeah that is supposed to direct the reader's attention to Saul, but there are a number of other hidden<sup>121</sup> clues within the text that lead to Saul. Amit notes at least four further parallels between this narrative and Saul. First, the Levite had a pair of donkeys, whereas Saul was looking for his father's lost donkeys (19:3 and 1 Sam 9:3). Second, an old man from Ephraim hosted the Levite, whereas Saul was hosted by Samuel, an old man from Ephraim (19:6 and 1 Sam. 9:22-23). Third, both the Levite and Saul received help from their servants (19:12-14 and 1 Sam. 9:6-8).<sup>122</sup> And fourth, the Levite cut up his concubine and sent her corpse to the tribes to gather the people. Similarly, Saul cut up oxen to assemble the people (19:29 and 1 Sam. 11:7).<sup>123</sup> This polemic against Saul becomes even greater when considering the main purpose of Judges 19, which is to show that an Israelite city has turned into Sodom and Gomorrah. Israel has become so Canaanized that one of their own cities is described with an example in their history that serves as the epitome of paganism. Both the leadership of the judges and Saul, through the use of the polemic, fall under condemnation through the use of the parallel. The narrative is begging for a comparison between the wicked, chaotic time of the Judges and the first king of Israel, Saul. The narrative longs for the reign of the Davidic monarchy and relief from idolatry and Canaanization.<sup>124</sup>

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Hebron.

<sup>121</sup>The word "hidden" is used because Amit's category of hidden polemic seems to be appropriate. Amit writes that understanding this section as a hidden polemic "is preferable since as an indirect technique it avoids the danger inherent in polemic of arousing immediate opposition, while at the same time making a cumulative impression and shaping the reader's attitudes, producing a suitable setting for the story to come" (Amit, "Literature in the Service of Politics," 40).

<sup>122</sup>Both Frolov and Sweeney note that both the servant and donkeys serve no purpose in the unfolding of the narrative unless they are drawing a purposeful connection to Saul. See Frolov, *Judges*, 316; and Marvin A. Sweeney, *King Josiah of Judah: The Lost Messiah of Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 112.

<sup>123</sup>Amit, "Literature in the Service of Politics," 34.

<sup>124</sup>For a detailed parallel between this narrative and the Saul narrative and 1 Samuel, see Amit, "Literature in the Service of Politics," 33-35. Frolov and Orel also identify Saul's initial journey as matching that of the Levite. See Serge Frolov and Vladimir Orel, "A Nameless City," *JBQ* 23 (1995): 252-56.

## The Portrayal of Priests/Levites

The refrain that every man did what was right in his own eyes is seen vividly in the portrayal of the Levites and those who surround them. The Levites in the epilogue are portrayed in a very complex manner, but there are at least two particular ways in which the Levites are portrayed in the epilogue that promote a pro-monarchical viewpoint.

First, there appears to be a grammatical link between the refrain and Deuteronomy 12:8, which concerns the central sanctuary. Deuteronomy 12 describes what Israel's cultic life will look like after they have entered the land. They are to destroy all of the Canaanite worship sites (12:1-3) and to worship Yahweh at the place that he shall choose among the tribes (12:4-7). Deuteronomy 12:8 then draws a contrast between the way that the people are living in the wilderness and the way that they are to be living in the land. It makes this contrast by saying that they are not live the way that they do now, which is described as everyone doing "whatever is right in his own eyes" (אִישׁ כִּלְיָ (הַיִּשָּׂר בְּעֵינָיו). This phrase then has cultic significance, and it appears to take on this same significance in the longer version of the refrain in Judges 17:6 and 21:25, where there is an unmistakable grammatical parallel (אִישׁ הַיִּשָּׂר בְּעֵינָיו). This connection clearly denounces the cultic activity that took place in Judges 17-21 and treats it as illegitimate through the connection to Deuteronomy 12.<sup>125</sup> Mayes reflects on the use of Deuteronomy 12:8 in Judges 17:6 and 21:25 by noting that, "only with a monarchy can the cultic and moral problems posed by a lack of central sanctuary and centralized leadership be resolved. By implication the formula identifies the king as the one responsible for implementing the cultic and moral requirements of the deuteronomic law."<sup>126</sup> The use of the phrase "whatever is right in his own eyes" by the author of Judges inextricably links

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<sup>125</sup>O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 237-40.

<sup>126</sup>Andrew D. H. Mayes, "Deuteronomistic Royal Ideology in Judges 17-21," *Biblical Interpretation* 9 (2001): 255. Similarly, Frolov believes that "the narrator maintains that the establishment of shrines is, or at least should be, an exclusively royal prerogative" (Frolov, *Judges*, 158).

the lack of proper worship during the days of the judges to the lack of a king. It assumes that with the right king there will be right worship.

Second, the portrayal of the Levites within the epilogue serves to show the need for a stronger centralized authority. The Levites are viewed as sojourners in the land with no place to settle and are pictured as idolatrous and morally corrupt. In both of the narratives concerning Levites in the prologue they are spoken of as being sojourners (17:7, 9; 19:1). In the first narrative, a young Levite is said to be from Bethlehem, but the text says that he is sojourning there. He leaves Bethlehem to sojourn somewhere else, Ephraim. When the Levite leaves Bethlehem he does not appear to have a plan concerning where he will live, but just wanders north until he comes to a place to minister. After he ministers to a family in Ephraim he leaves again to serve the tribe of Dan as they move farther north. In the second narrative concerning Levites there is also sojourning taking place, where the Levite travels from Ephraim to Bethlehem and makes his way back to Ephraim. In both of these narratives the Levites are pictured as almost migratory and having no place to minister.

Not only are the Levites pictured as transitory figures, but also as immoral and idolatrous. In the first narrative where priests are mentioned a man seems to appoint his son, who appears to be outside of the tribe of Levi, as his priest (17:5). This priest is ministering with idols and household gods. It appears, though it is not completely clear from this narrative, that this is Micah's house. Micah later hires an unnamed Levite to act as his priest. This priest then ministers in this idolatrous house to a single family instead of the nation as a whole. The next narrative that mentions Levites concerns an unnamed Levite and his concubine. The relationship between the Levite and his concubine appears to be sordid. The Levite shows no compassion toward his concubine when the men of Gibeah show up at the door of the house in which they are staying. His emotions are not revealed as she is raped. Meanwhile, he apparently gets a good night's sleep and rises early in the morning. He sees her lying by the door of the house as he exits and coldly

tells her to get up. The character of this Levite appears even more contemptible in the ambiguity of the text concerning whether he killed his concubine by cutting her up or whether she was already dead by then. Either way, the fact that a Levite cuts up a woman in a sacrificial manner and sends her unclean remains throughout the tribes is frightening and disturbing. Interestingly, the Levites in both of these narratives are unnamed. By not naming either of these Levites the author of Judges seems to associate these particular Levites with the entire tribe of Levi. It is not only these two Levites who are corrupt, but the entire priestly tribe appears to have grave moral issues.

The evil days of the judges are accentuated by the sinfulness of the priests. What will it take to reform their ministry, and how can the people be right with God when the priests act this way?<sup>127</sup> As Davis notes, “The formula is a theological statement, for the king it refers to is a *particular kind* of king, a king who is a covenant instrument. That kind of king, so the argument goes, would have put a stop to such bastard worship.”<sup>128</sup> It is only under the monarchy that the temple is constructed and that the priests are no longer sojourners.

### **The Mention of Bethlehem**

The city of Bethlehem is mentioned seven times in the epilogue of Judges (17:7, 8, 9; 19:1, 2, 18 [2 times]). For such a small town to be mentioned seven times in the space of just a few chapters immediately draws attention not only to the town, but to what the town represents to the reader, which is the birthplace of David. The question that naturally arises is whether Bethlehem is supposed to be viewed negatively because it is found in arguably the most negative sections of the book or if it is to be viewed

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<sup>127</sup>Interestingly, in these evil days, Micah believes that his household will be blessed just by the fact that he has a priest (17:13).

<sup>128</sup>See Dale Ralph Davis, “Comic Literature—Tragic Theology: A Study of Judges 17-18,” *WTJ* 46 (1984): 158.

positively. A quick discussion of the mentions and portrayal of Bethlehem will be given below.

The first narrative involves a Levite who was from Bethlehem who was sojourning there. This Levite leaves Bethlehem to sojourn where he could find a place. After the Levite is offered a place to stay, he is satisfied to dwell in Ephraim. While in Ephraim the Levite serves the household of Micah as their priest. He ministers with household gods, idols, and an ephod. He later leaves Micah's household to be the priest of the tribe of Dan. Interestingly, though the priest is from Bethlehem he is spoken of as sojourning there, as if he were not really from there. Nothing is said of his time at Bethlehem, but what is clear is that when the Levite leaves Bethlehem to dwell in Ephraim he gets mixed up in idolatry. This episode may be making a contrast between Bethlehem and the north. This contrast may insinuate that when the Levite left Bethlehem to live in the north that he made a grave mistake.

The second narrative also involves a Levite. This Levite, who is from Ephraim, has a concubine who has gone to Bethlehem, her home city. The Levite then goes to Bethlehem to bring her back to Ephraim. After staying in Bethlehem for a few days, they leave to go back to Ephraim. On the way they encounter danger in Gibeah, and the concubine is killed. Once again, the characters seem to leave Bethlehem at their own peril. Though these interpretations are by no means clear, if correct, they may serve to glorify the birthplace of David over against the north. When these characters leave the birthplace of the king, they do so with grave consequences.<sup>129</sup>

### **Judah in 20:18**

The epilogue appears to be the most explicitly pro-monarchial section within the book of Judges, and through this, like the other sections of the book, appears to

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<sup>129</sup>For an article that briefly surveys these two Bethlehem episodes as well as the Bethlehem episode in Ruth, see Eugene Merrill, "The Book of Ruth: Narration and Shared Themes," *BSac* (1985): 130-41. Merrill sees these three episodes as forming a "Bethlehem Trilogy."

highlight both the tribe of Judah and more specifically David. Some have questioned this within the epilogue saying that the only appearance of Judah in the epilogue presents Judah in a negative light because they go to war against Benjamin. Wong believes that initial losses by the tribe of Judah show Yahweh's disapproval of the attacks.<sup>130</sup> A few difficulties with this interpretation can be seen, however. First, it is Yahweh in 20:18 who says that Judah should be the first ones to go up against Benjamin (using the same language as 1:2). Second, Yahweh commands two further attacks against Benjamin (20:23, 28). Third, Yahweh Himself defeats Benjamin (20:35). Frolov believes that the losses suffered by Judah at the hands of Benjamin actually work to exonerate Judah of the atrocities that happen later, since Judah was nearly annihilated in these attacks. The presentation of Judah in this account is not negative, but "Judges' sorry tale of Israel's descent into foreign worship and lawlessness is framed by Yhwh's explicit statements that Judah should spearhead the community's efforts against both foreign aggressors and domestic evildoers."<sup>131</sup> With this presentation Judah appears once again to be Yahweh's chosen tribe and the tribe that is willing to sacrifice for the sake of the nation, which was seen in both the prologue and in the presentation of Othniel.<sup>132</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The book of Judges is pro-Judah, with an implicit pro-Davidic leaning, and thus pro-monarchial. The author of the book of Judges shows this perspective in a variety of ways throughout his work. In the prologue he exalts the tribe of Judah over against the other tribes. He attributes faithfulness and victory to the tribe of Judah when the other tribes were unfaithful. The author also structures the body of the book in such a way that

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<sup>130</sup>Wong, "Is There a Direct Pro-Judah Polemic in Judges?" 104.

<sup>131</sup>Frolov, "Fire, Smoke, and Judah in Judges," 137.

<sup>132</sup>Robert Miller writes, "[I]t is clear that the author has God in control of the entire situation; note 20:23 and 35. It is God who leads the Israelites to their devastation in the first battles, and God who defeats Benjamin in the last" (Robert Miller, "Deuteronomistic Theology in the Book of Judges?" *OTE* 15 [2002]: 414).

exalts the judge of Judah, Othniel, while denigrating the judges after him as the story progresses geographically away from Judah. In the section dealing with the accounts of the judges the concept of an ideal king is magnified by the evil actions of both the northern judges and the foreign rulers. In the epilogue the author looks back at the days of the judges and laments that there was no king in the land to restrain the evil that the people committed against their covenant God. This king, however, would not be Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin, but rather David from the tribe of Judah. David, the Bethlehemite, would establish Jerusalem as his capital and would make plans for the temple, where the priests and Levites could minister to God's people in an appropriate fashion. The theology longs for a monarchy to be inaugurated where God's people could be ruled by God's king.

## CHAPTER 5

### GIDEON'S RESPONSE IN CONTEXT

#### **Introduction**

Many interpreters have viewed Gideon's response to the men of Israel in Judges 8:23 to be one of the clearest rejections of the institution of monarchy in the entire Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> If this is the case, then the thesis of this dissertation is severely flawed. The anti-monarchial interpretation of the passage, however, neither fits the context of the book nor the context of the Gideon cycle. This chapter first discusses the Gideon narrative in light of the book of Judges. Second, it explores the development of the plot and the characterization of Gideon within the Gideon cycle. And finally, it interprets Gideon's response within these contexts.

#### **The Gideon Cycle within Judges**

This section examines the literary context of the Gideon cycle within the book of Judges. The literary context, like the ideology of kingship found within the book, gives an interpretive framework from which to understand the dialogue between Gideon and the men of Israel. The Gideon narrative is presented as the central section of at least the body of the book of Judges, if not the book as a whole, and serves as a turning point for

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<sup>1</sup>See the history of interpretation of this passage in chap. 2. William Dumbrell considers this passage to demonstrate conclusively that the book of Judges is anti-monarchial. Dumbrell writes, "Given the continuity between the Book of Judges and 1 and 2 Samuel for which we have argued, is it likely that we have a positive appraisal of kingship in the concluding verse of Judges (21:25)? If so, we are faced with the problem that Judges 21:25 exhibits a different attitude to kingship than evinced by earlier sections of the Book of Judges, especially the Gideon narrative." He continues by stating, "If it endorses kingship with enthusiasm, then it contradicts the earlier accounts which damn the institution. Gideon (Judg. 8:23) is offered kingship after the Midianite defeat and dynastic kingship to boot! But with an affirmation that not he but Yahweh will reign over Israel, Gideon declines" (William Dumbrell, "In Those Days There Was No King in Israel; Every Man Did What Was Right in His Own Eyes." *The Purpose of the Book of Judges Reconsidered*, *JSOT* 25 [1983]: 27-28).



the characters of the judges themselves.<sup>2</sup> Within the apology for the monarchy, the Gideon narrative serves as the shifting point within the story. The judges after Othniel seem to digress gradually in their moral and spiritual qualities. This digression is coupled with a general northward movement as the narrative progresses, showing that the farther north, the more reprobate the judges become.<sup>3</sup> The gradual decline in the morality of the judges is shown in two ways. First, it is important to note that the judges before the Gideon narrative appear in generally shorter narratives with more formulaic statements. Starting with Gideon the narratives are generally longer and contain less formulaic statements about the judges. Second, the characterization of the judges before Gideon is more favorable, while the judges after Gideon are characterized negatively. The Gideon

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<sup>2</sup>See J. Cheryl Exum, "The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 412; Lilian Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, JSOTSup 68 (Sheffield: Almond, 1988), 50-51; K. Lawson Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 37-38. Some see the book as unfolding in a chiasmic structure as a whole where the Gideon narrative is located in the middle. So Tanner structures the book of Judges in the following way:

- A Introduction, Part I (1:1-2:5)
  - B Introduction, Part II (2:6-3:6)
    - C Othniel (3:7-11)
      - D Ehud (3:12-31)
        - E Deborah and Barak (4:1-5:31)
          - F Gideon (6:1-8:32)
            - E' Abimelech (8:33-10:5)
              - D' Jephthah (10:6-12:15)
                - C' Samson (13:1-16:31)
                  - B' Epilogue, Part I (17:1-18:31)
                    - A' Epilogue, Part II (19:1-21:25)

See J. Paul Tanner, "The Gideon Narrative as the Focal Point of Judges," *BSac* 149 (1992): 150. Similarly, see David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 110-11.

<sup>3</sup>Victor Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 103-05; K. Lawson Younger, "The Configuring of Judicial Preliminaries: Judges 1:1-2:5 and Its Dependence on the Book of Joshua," *JSOT* 68 (1995): 80-83; K. Lawson Younger, "Judges 1 in Its Near Eastern Literary Context," in *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context*, ed. A. R. Millard, James K. Hoffmeier, and David W. Baker (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 216-21; Abraham Malamat, "Charismatic Leadership in the Book of Judges," in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernst Wright*, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 154; Marc Zvi Brettler, "The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics," *JBL* 108 (1989): 404-07; Trent Butler, *Judges*, WBC, vol. 8 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 50; Dennis T. Olson, "Buber, Kingship, and the Book of Judges: A Study of Judges 6-9 and 17-21," in *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J. J. M. Roberts*, ed. Bernard Frank Batto and Kathryn Roberts (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 204; George M. Schwab, *Right in Their Own Eyes: The Gospel According to Judges* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011), 27.

cycle initiates a shift in both of these areas, and the shift can be seen in the character of Gideon himself. So Butler notes that Gideon himself displays the characteristics of both the judges who precede him and those who follow through the changing of his character throughout the narrative. Butler writes, “Gideon shows the best and worst of the leadership that brought final chaos. After him, one searches long and hard for things to praise in the lives of Abimelech, Jephthah, and especially Samson.”<sup>4</sup> This transition demonstrates that not only the placement of the Gideon narrative within the book, but also the characterization of Gideon himself show that the Gideon narrative is the turning point within the book of Judges.

There are six formulaic statements that are repeated within the cycles of judges: (1) Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh; (2) Yahweh delivered Israel into the hands of X; (3) Israel cried out to Yahweh; (4) Yahweh raised up a deliverer; (5) Yahweh gave X into the hands of the deliverer; (6) The land had rest X years.<sup>5</sup> All six of these formulaic statements are present in the Othniel and Ehud narratives. Formulas 1, 2, 3, and 6 are present in the Deborah/Barak narrative and in the Gideon narrative. Abimelech, who is not a judge, but a king, has none of the formulaic statements. Jephthah’s narrative only contains 1, 2, and 3, whereas Samson’s narrative only contains 1 and 2. The lack of these formulaic statements for the latter judges shows a breakdown in the cycle. There is a pattern of deterioration within the judges’ cycles that reaches a breaking point with the character of Gideon. No good judges appear after the Gideon cycle. Younger refers to the Gideon narrative as the “beginning of the Out-group of judges and notes that while the earlier judges (the In-group) showed minor flaws, the Out-group shows much greater

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<sup>4</sup>Butler, *Judges*, 192.

<sup>5</sup>These formulaic statements occur in slightly different forms. See the chart in Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, NAC, vol. 6 (Nashville: Broadman, 1999), 146-47. See also the discussion in David M. Gunn, “Joshua and Judges,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1987), 104-05.

weaknesses and more serious faults.”<sup>6</sup> Abimelech, Jephthah, and Samson are all seen in a very negative light. Each of them is a man who seems more concerned with self than with communal interests.<sup>7</sup> Abimelech and Jephthah seem to desire to rule or be head of their people, whereas Samson seems only concerned with self-abasing pleasures. This shift from communal interests to self-interests is found within the complexity of the Gideon story and is seen in the wavering, complex character of Gideon himself.

### **The Plot of the Gideon Narrative**

The literary divisions of the different episodes within the Gideon narrative are debated.<sup>8</sup> Frolov notes that despite the multiplicity of divisions of the text, there is general consensus in identifying divisions after 6:10 and 6:32.<sup>9</sup> The difficulty in assessing the various divisions of the Gideon narrative, however, is that “exegetes rarely take time to spell out the criteria use to structure the text under discussion, making it impossible to verify validity of these criteria and consistency of their application.”<sup>10</sup> Chisholm notes that there are multiple ways to detect the different divisions of the text into scenes and episodes including: (1) a change in setting; (2) the use of a formal transitional signal (particularly the use of וַיְהִי־אוּ or an offline disjunctive clause); (3) the use of *inclusio* to bracket a scene or episode.<sup>11</sup> These, along with other exegetical and literary clues, are used to distinguish the various episodes of the Gideon cycle.

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<sup>6</sup>Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, 38.

<sup>7</sup>Elie Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest: An Ideology of Leadership in the Gideon, Abimelek and Jephthah Narratives (Judg 6-12)*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 106 (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

<sup>8</sup>For a survey of the different divisions, see Serge Frolov, *Judges*, FOTL (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 168-69.

<sup>9</sup>Oddly, Frolov argues that the first episode of the story, after the introductory episode in 6:1-5, is 6:6-11. See Frolov, *Judges*, 156.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>11</sup>Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Interpreting the Historical Books: An Exegetical Handbook*, Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 46.

### **The Gideon Cycle: 6:1-9:57**

The parameters of the Gideon cycle appear to be Judges 6:1-9:57.<sup>12</sup> This material encompasses both the Gideon and the Abimelech narratives, which are joined together under one cycle. As Frolov notes, “Contentwise, the link between Gideon and Abimelech is as close as it can possibly be (note, in particular, that the narrator keeps the former in mind all the way to the very end of the latter’s story in 9:56-57).”<sup>13</sup> These two narratives, however, can also stand somewhat independently, but are closely linked together. Again Frolov writes, “the Midianite cycle proper and the Abimelech composition can be described as two largely self-sufficient but interlocked stories . . . In other words the first story gives birth to the second.”<sup>14</sup> The first part of this cycle focuses in on the character of Gideon.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Gideon Narrative: 6:1-8:32**

The episodes that concern the character of Gideon are found in Judges 6:1-8:32. The plot of the Gideon narrative unfolds in similar fashion to the other cycles in Judges, but with a couple of notable differences. First, the formulaic statements are expanded on or discussed in more detail. Second, the report of Gideon’s actions after the

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<sup>12</sup>While most see the Abimelech portion of the narrative as ending with 9:57, both Frolov and Chisholm see the narrative extending to 10:5. See Frolov, *Judges*, 156-68; Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books*, 46-50. While these narratives are linked through the mention of Abimelech in 10:1, neither Gideon nor Abimelech plays a narrative role.

<sup>13</sup>Frolov, *Judges*, 169.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>15</sup>I discuss the Abimelech narrative (Judg 8:33-9:57) in the next chapter.

defeat of the enemy is given in a more detailed fashion than that of the judges who preceded him. These will be discussed in more detail below.

**Introduction: 6:1-10.** The introduction of the Gideon narrative is presented in Judges 6:1-10. Gideon is not introduced in this episode, but the beginning elements of the cycle are present. The first verse of the episode contains two of the formulaic phrases, “The people of Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh” and “Yahweh gave them into the hand of Midian.” These formulaic phrases are followed by a description of the extent of the Midianite oppression of Israel. The temporal ויהי in verse 7 marks a division in the text, but verses 6 and 7 are linked through the repetition of the other formulaic statement that “Israel cried out” to Yahweh. Yahweh answers their cries by sending a prophet and a prophetic warning to remind them that he has power over the inhabitants of the land.<sup>16</sup>

Three aspects of this introduction set it apart from the narratives/cycles that have preceded it. First, the description of the enemy oppression is more comprehensive. Second, the judge is not introduced. Third, a prophet is raised up, before the judge, to rebuke Israel. The extended description found in these verses highlights two things: Israel’s present situation and Yahweh’s past salvific acts.<sup>17</sup> The raising of the prophet in 6:7-10 seems to indicate a low-point thus far in Judges. Tanner notes, “Though the familiar refrain ‘the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord’ is given in 6:1, the Gideon narrative is not simply one more cycle of apostasy on par with the previous ones. The nation’s apostasy had reached a lower point, and this is underscored by the additional fact that the Lord sent an unnamed prophet to rebuke them.”<sup>18</sup> This prophet not only signifies the low point, but also places an emphasis on Yahweh, which

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<sup>16</sup>See Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 254-55 on the similarities between the calling of the prophet here and the introduction of Deborah in 4:4.

<sup>17</sup>Randal Mark Massot, “Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel: A Literary and Theological Analysis of the Gideon Narrative in Judges 6-8” (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1994), 17.

<sup>18</sup>Tanner, “The Gideon Narrative as the Focal Point of Judges,” 153.

helps to “provide the interpretive key to the narrative by revealing at the outset that Yahweh is the source of Israel’s deliverance.”<sup>19</sup> The emphasis on Yahweh through his raising up of the prophet, instead of a judge, and the emphasis on Yahweh within the prophetic message start the introduction of the Gideon narrative off on a perilous note. Stone comments on how the call of the prophet impacts Gideon: “With Gideon, however, the outcry leads not to the rise of a savior, but to a prophetic rebuke, upon which the narrative of Gideon’s call follows directly. The call of Gideon thus stands under a question mark.”<sup>20</sup> The introduction found in these verses sets the stage for the call of Gideon in the next episode.<sup>21</sup>

**Episode 1: 6:11-24.** The first episode of the narrative proper is found in Judges 6:11-24. It serves to introduce Gideon formally, and it also serves as Gideon’s call narrative. This episode is bracketed by an *inclusio* with the mention of Ophrah and Joash the Abiezrite in both verse 11 and verse 24.<sup>22</sup> This episode is further broken down into two scenes. The first scene spans from verses 11-18 while the second begins with the offline clause in verse 19.<sup>23</sup> These scenes are tied together in several ways. First, both verse 11 and verse 19 begin with the same action with the use of the word בּוֹא. Second, they are linked with the use of רָאָה in verses 12 and 22. In the first use, Gideon does not

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<sup>19</sup>Massot, “Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel,” 17-18.

<sup>20</sup>Lawson G. Stone, *Judges*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2012), 201.

<sup>21</sup>For a discussion on the impact of 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> on the originality of vv. 7-10, see Massot, “Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel,” 25-26.

<sup>22</sup>Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books*, 47; Massot, “Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel,” 27-42; Elie Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 27-40; Phillip Eugene McMillion, “Judges 6-8 and the Study of Premonarchial Israel” (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1985), 35-36. Some see this episode extending to v. 32, including Tanner, “The Gideon Narrative as the Focal Point of Judges,” 151; Schneider, *Judges*, 103-09; Wolfgang Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism: A Theological reading of the Gideon-Abimelech Narrative*, JSOTSup 329 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield, 2001), 59-106.

<sup>23</sup>Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books*, 47.

“see” the identity of the Angel of Yahweh, but in verse 22 he does “see” that whom he was speaking to was the Angel of Yahweh. Third, there is a repetition of תהת האלה in both verses 11 and 19.<sup>24</sup>

There are several important features within this episode that move the plot along. First, the Angel of Yahweh appears to Gideon. Second, Gideon is introduced for the first time. Third, Gideon doubts the prophetic message of the introduction. This is the second time in the book of Judges that the Angel of Yahweh makes an appearance.<sup>25</sup> Both the narrative and the results of the Angel’s appearance are quite different. In 2:1-5 the Angel of Yahweh brings a message that is very similar to that of the prophet in the previous episode. The difference between the two narratives (2:1-5 and 6:11-24) is that in the previous appearance of the Angel of Yahweh the people were sorrowful and possibly repentant, whereas here the Angel’s confrontation of Gideon is only met with questions. There is no mention of Israel’s repentance. On this difference, Bluedorn writes, “[T]he record of Israel’s repentance is missing . . . . The omission may indicate Israel’s unwillingness to repent.”<sup>26</sup> This is all but confirmed by Gideon’s questioning of the Angel. Gideon’s question, “if Yahweh is with us then why is this happening to us?” betrays a lack of knowledge of the prophetic message that Israel had received just a few sentences earlier. As Assis points out, “Gideon’s words are the complete opposite of those of the prophet and they are another layer in presenting the religious problem existing in this account. The sharp contrast between the prophet’s words and those of Gideon shows the extent of Israel’s alienation from God.”<sup>27</sup> The religious problem is

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<sup>24</sup>For further connections, see James Paul Tanner, “Textual Patterning in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: A Case Study in Judges 6-8” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1990), 167-69.

<sup>25</sup>Deborah also mentions the Angel of Yahweh in her song in 5:23, but there was no appearance. The Angel will again appear at the beginning of the Samson narrative in Judg 13.

<sup>26</sup>Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 70.

<sup>27</sup>Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 32.

further illustrated by the subtle foreshadowing of Gideon's family idolatry through the description of the terebinth. There also appear to be cultic connotations within the narrative concerning Joash's terebinth. First, it is under a tree, which was a common Canaanite practice. Second, Gideon's description of the meal for the Angel (whom he still does not know to be the Angel of Yahweh) sounds more like an offering than a meal. In verse 18 he describes it as a מנחה, and in verse 19 it is described as a kid and unleavened bread. This description appears reminiscent of a Passover meal, which is ironic considering both the prophetic words and those of Gideon.<sup>28</sup> From this account and other aspects of the story, the reader begins to get a picture of Gideon as apparently associated with an idolatrous shrine (confirmed in the next episode), who is hiding from the Midianites in a winepress, who questions God, who seems to make excuses for why he cannot be chosen by God (v. 15), and who cannot recognize the Angel of Yahweh until the end of the narrative. The only glimmer of hope is that the Angel tells Gideon that Yahweh is with him, which appears to connect back to the formulaic statement in the cycle found in 2:18, where it said that "whenever Yahweh raised up a judge, Yahweh was with the Judge." From the first description of Gideon, however, it seems that Yahweh will have to do all of the saving himself.

**Episode 2: 6:25-32.** The second episode is connected through both a thematic and a temporal framework. This episode unfolds in two scenes, one during the night (vv. 25-27) and one during the day (vv. 28-32) and covers the span of a single day.<sup>29</sup> These two scenes are connected by both the setting and the content of the narrative, namely, Gideon's commission to destroy the altar of Baal. A connection exists between these scenes through the repetition of the words בעל, בתן, and מזבח, which appear in the verse

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<sup>28</sup>There is further irony in this narrative with Joash's name, which means "Yahweh will provide."

<sup>29</sup>Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books*, 48; Tanner, "Textual Patterning in Biblical Hebrew Narrative," 169.



that ends each scene.<sup>30</sup> There is also the repetition of the phrase אנשי העיר that occurs in the last verse of the first scene (v. 27) and the first verse of the second scene (v. 28).

At least four important aspects of this episode contribute to the plot. First, Yahweh's commissioning of Gideon to destroy the altar of Baal serves as a reminder of the prophetic message, and it serves to foreshadow the later apostasy that Gideon would bring about. In this narrative, Yahweh speaks directly to Gideon. This is not the first time that this has happened. In verse 23 Yahweh spoke directly to Gideon after the Angel of Yahweh had disappeared in verse 21. Gideon is the only judge to whom Yahweh speaks directly in the book.<sup>31</sup> Yahweh's speech here and in the next episode, however, makes his silence through the latter parts of the Gideon narrative all the more apparent. Through Yahweh's speech and the actions of Gideon, who is clearly the agent of Yahweh, Yahweh is portrayed as the main character of this narrative. This emphasis is made even more clear through the characterization of Gideon.<sup>32</sup>

Second, this narrative is important because it explains how Gideon received his other name, Jerubbaal. This aspect of the narrative has received significant attention and "has emerged as the pivotal text in the debate on the genesis of the Gideon narrative."<sup>33</sup> The features of this discussion are important and will be discussed later under the characterization of Gideon.<sup>34</sup> The use of the name Jerubbaal slowly gains prominence over the use of the name Gideon in the narrative. This trend is apparent in future episodes and is an important feature that the narrator uses in the characterization of Gideon.

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Yahweh speaks directly to all of Israel in 1:2; 2:20; 10:11; 20:18, 23, 28. Yahweh also speaks directly to Manoah in 13:13, 16, 18. Outside of the Gideon narrative, these are the only references to Yahweh speaking within the book of Judges.

<sup>32</sup>Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 97.

<sup>33</sup>Massot, "Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel," 45.

<sup>34</sup>See the sub-heading under characterization entitled "Gideon and Jerubbaal."

Third, this narrative is important in understanding the continually evolving character of Gideon. Both point of view and characterization are conveyed through direct speech. In this narrative Gideon is not only explicitly described as afraid, but he is also characterized this way implicitly by his lack of speech within this episode. When Yahweh directs him to tear down the altar, he is silent. Likewise, when the men of the city are looking for him, he does not say a single word. Narratively speaking, he hides behind his father, who does all of the talking for him. This depiction of Gideon as fearful continues into the next episode.

Fourth, the Israelites still show no repentance for their following after other gods. In fact, the men of the city are unashamed of doing so and even when their judge, Gideon, begins to rectify the idolatry, they seek his life instead of repenting. Despite the erection of an altar to Yahweh, the narrative never shows the Israelites worshipping Yahweh.

**Episode 3: 6:33-7:23.** Judges 6:33-7:23 serves as the longest episode within the Gideon narrative and is comprised of five scenes.<sup>35</sup> The episode is bracketed by the repetition of the mention of the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, and Naphtali in 6:35 and 7:23. The five scenes are marked by offline clauses and the use of temporal indicators and can be broken down as follows: 6:33-35; 6:36-40; 7:1-8; 7:9-14; and 7:15-23.<sup>36</sup>

This episode serves as the climax of the Gideon narrative and continues the plot and characterization of Gideon, but begins a transition in both of these areas. This transition is accomplished in a variety of ways. In the first scene both the elapsing of narrative time, where Gideon develops influence with the people, and the mention of the Spirit of Yahweh clothing Gideon are important. The statement of the Midianite threat is reestablished and escalated through the Midianites joining up with the Amalekites and the

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<sup>35</sup>Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books*, 48.

<sup>36</sup>See *ibid.*, 47-49, for a detailed discussion of the markers within the scenes.

people of the East. Gideon responds to this threat by calling out those closest to him. First, he calls his family clan, the Abiezrites, then his tribe, Manasseh, and finally the neighboring tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. In the previous episode the narrator spent considerable time introducing both the Midianite situation and the character of Gideon. Here the narrative time is elapsed. Both the formation of Midian's alliances and Gideon calling out the neighboring people would have taken considerable time, but they are discussed in a matter of a few short verses. This brevity gives the impression that Gideon gained influence with the other groups seemingly out of nowhere. To this point there has been little confidence as to how this could happen, but it is explained through the Spirit of Yahweh clothing Gideon.

While the Spirit of Yahweh coming upon a deliverer is common in the book of Judges, the phrase that is used here to describe the Spirit's presence with Gideon is. Judges 6:34 says that the Spirit of Yahweh clothed (לבש) Gideon. In the book of Judges the Spirit of Yahweh is made in reference to three other Judges. In Judges 3:10, the Spirit came upon (היה על) Othniel. Similarly, the Spirit came upon (היה על) Jephthah in 11:29. A different description is given in reference to Samson. The Spirit rushes upon (צלה על) Samson on three occasions (14:6, 19; 15:14).<sup>37</sup> There is also reference to the Spirit of Yahweh impelling (פעם) Manahem-Dan. The use of the language of the Spirit clothing Gideon is thus unique in the book of Judges and rare elsewhere. The only other time that רוח and לבש are used are in 1 Chronicles 12:19 (18) and 2 Chronicles 24:24.<sup>38</sup> The unusual employment of this phrase "implies that the spirit completely clothes and overwhelms Gideon."<sup>39</sup> It is only after this experience that Gideon is able to muster his clan, tribe, and the neighboring tribes.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>An ambiguous reference to Samson's spirit returning to him is also found in 15:19.

<sup>38</sup>See the detailed discussion in Massot, "Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel," 62-64.

<sup>39</sup>Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 111.

<sup>40</sup>Assis discusses the rallying of the troops as circular. He also believes that this serves as the

Another important narrative feature is that the direct speech in the narrative continues in a similar fashion from that of the previous episode, in which only Yahweh spoke. In this episode there is no dialogue between Gideon and God; each speaks while the other is silent. The first scene is comprised of reported action with no direct speech, but direct speech dominates the second and third scenes and is prominent in scenes four and five. In the second scene Gideon tests Yahweh by laying out the fleece and asking God to confirm that he is going to “save (יִשַׁע) Israel by my hand (יָדִי).” In this scene only Gideon speaks. The phrase “And Gideon said to God,” is repeated twice and is never answered with a reply from Yahweh. This fact gives the impression that though Yahweh performed the signs that Gideon requested, he disapproved of the request.<sup>41</sup> It appears to be confirmed further by Yahweh’s direct speech in the third scene. The third scene’s direct speech complements the speech of the second scene. While Gideon spoke in the second scene, God is the sole speaker in scene three. In this scene God diminishes the size of Gideon’s army through a series of tests. Yahweh tells Gideon in 7:2 that the reason for decreasing the troop size is because, “The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me saying, ‘My own hand (יָדִי) has saved (יִשַׁע) me.’” In scene two, Gideon is the sole speaker and asks for confirmation that the salvation of Israel will be accomplished through his hands. In scene three Yahweh is the sole speaker and diminishes Gideon’s troop size so that it will be clear that the Israelites did not save themselves by their own hand. Yahweh’s speech in scene three is a divine corrective to Gideon’s speech in scene two. It seems clear that Gideon is still unsure since he asks for a sign (twice) and he amasses a large army.

The characterization of Gideon continues in the same trajectory as the previous episode, but will take a drastic shift after this episode. Massot notes this change by

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confirmation of Gideon’s appointment because there has been a lack of a formal declaration. See Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 52-54.

<sup>41</sup>McMillion, “Judges 6-8 and the Study of Premonarchial Israel,” 213.

writing, “the development of the narrative’s plot insofar as they [vv. 9-4] bring to a conclusion the heretofore dominant sub-plot which centers on the conflict between Yahweh’s commission and Gideon’s fear.”<sup>42</sup> In the first scene, only the reported action with no direct speech is seen, so even after the Spirit clothes Gideon, there is no heroic account of him mustering the troops. As was noted above, the credit for the mustering of the troops should be given to the Spirit of Yahweh. Gideon also doubts God’s deliverance, which had already been confirmed in the previous episode (6:13). Not only does Gideon still question Yahweh’s deliverance like he did in 6:13 by testing God, he also shows signs of distrust in God by amassing a large army. In turn, Yahweh systematically decreases the size of this army so that he, not Gideon or the people, can take the credit for the victory. Other aspects of continuity with the characterization of Gideon are also shared with the previous episode. He is described as being afraid, and he operates under the cover of night. Klein notes that the Gideon narrative identifies the three night scenes (the tearing down of the altar, the testing of Yahweh with the fleece, and Gideon going into the Midianite camp) with doubt.<sup>43</sup> While this is true, the focus appears to be more on Gideon’s fear than on his doubt. The two are, however, linked. So Klein notes the following about Gideon’s characterization through his actions: “Lacking the courage of belief, Gideon initially and repeatedly acts in fear by night.”<sup>44</sup> While Gideon is implicitly depicted as being afraid through the fleece scene and the amassing of the army, he is explicitly said to be afraid in the fourth scene of this episode. In 7:9, Gideon is told by Yahweh to go down into the camp of the Midianites and defeat them, but in verses 10-11 Yahweh makes a provision for Gideon’s fear. Yahweh tells Gideon that if he is afraid he should go down into the camp with his servant and listen to what the

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<sup>42</sup>Massot, “Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel,” 84.

<sup>43</sup>Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, 58-59.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 59.

Midianites are saying. So Gideon confirms his fear and, by the cover of darkness, goes only to the outskirts of the camp with his servant and hears a dialogue between two Midianite soldiers. In this dialogue, one of the soldiers tells the other his dream, and the other interprets his dream as Gideon defeating them. Upon hearing the words of the Midianites, Gideon gains courage. This is somewhat ironic, since Gideon would not trust in the words of Yahweh, but did trust in the words of the enemy.<sup>45</sup> In the fifth scene, Gideon speaks to his troops for the first time in the narrative (up to this point there had only been reported action in this regard). This is highlighted all the more with Gideon encouraging his troops, saying, “Look at me and do likewise” in 7:19 and telling them to shout a battle cry of “For Yahweh and for Gideon!” Gideon, however, does not fully implement Yahweh’s instructions and only goes, once again, to the outskirts of the camp with his men. Bluedorn writes that “it rather seems that he is still fearful. It appears, therefore, that he lets YHWH fight the battle.”<sup>46</sup> After the divinely orchestrated victory where the Midianites routed themselves, Gideon’s character changes. From this point forward in the narrative Gideon will not be the same.

The nature of the battle shows that it was Yahweh who defeated the Midianites, and it marks the beginning of a transition where Yahweh’s presence within the narrative is decreased and Gideon’s presence is increased. The defeat of the Midianites was accomplished in the middle of the night through the blowing of horns, smashing of jars, and the holding of torches. Bluedorn notes that that the “troops appear somewhat lost in their chaos of activities.”<sup>47</sup> This truth is coupled with the description of them standing on the outskirts of the camp with the torches in their left hands and the

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<sup>45</sup>See Massot, “Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel,” 85. Massot notes that there are several points of irony within these scenes, and they ultimately show that while “Gideon is not ready to lead Israel into battle, he is no longer pictured as an heroic figure” (ibid.). While Massot asserts that Gideon is not pictured as heroic here, it would seem that Gideon has not been pictured as heroic at all up to this point.

<sup>46</sup>Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 140.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 141.

horns in their right hands (7:20).<sup>48</sup> Bluedorn aptly writes, “They are thus described as having both hands occupied, so that they are unable to pick up their swords to fight, let alone deliver Israel through their hands (cf. 6.36, 37; 7.2). Only YHWH is left with empty hands, therefore, only YHWH will be able to fight the battle and deliver Israel.”<sup>49</sup> The dialogue from scenes two and three of this episode finds culmination in Yahweh’s deliverance of the Israelites with his hands. The recognition of Yahweh’s exclusive role as deliverer was somewhat spoiled by the men’s shout of “A sword for Yahweh and for Gideon” in 7:20. It is clear that Yahweh is responsible for the victory not only for this reason, but also because he has been referred to as the deliverer, whereas Gideon has not been described in this way.<sup>50</sup> After this point within the narrative, Gideon’s character dominates and Yahweh completely vanishes. Amit notes this saying that at the beginning of Gideon’s narrative he “is depicted as fearful and is given signs by the intervening God; in the second, he is a charismatic leader whom the people beg to be their king . . . . The Gideon stories clearly illustrate how the image of the deity has a direct impact on the characterization of the human personae.”<sup>51</sup> Yahweh, who has been very active in this cycle through the appearance of the prophetic message, the presence of the Angel of Yahweh, the direct speech to Gideon, the clothing of Gideon with the Spirit, and the victory in battle, will not appear in another scene within the Gideon narrative. Gideon becomes the dominant personality.

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<sup>48</sup>Assis notes that there is no mention of the men being armed or equipping the men with weaponry. See Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 75.

<sup>49</sup>Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 141.

<sup>50</sup>See Boling, *Judges*, 170; Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 143.

<sup>51</sup>Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 87.

**Episode 4: 7:24-8:3.** This episode revolves around Gideon's interaction with the Ephraimites and can be broken into two scenes: 7:24-25 and 8:1-3.<sup>52</sup> The episode is introduced by an offline clause and the reference to Oreb and Zeeb. The episode is also held together with the general content about Ephraim who is mentioned in both 7:25 and 8:3.

This episode marks a change in both the plot flow and the characterization of Gideon. The transition appears immediately within this episode when compared to the previous episodes in the narrative. In 7:24, Gideon sent the messengers out to Ephraim with a clear message to fight against the Midianites. This action contrasts with the prior episode when in Judges 6:35 Gideon sent messengers, but did not send them to Ephraim. Instead he sent them to the smaller surrounding tribes. It also contrasts in that there is a specific message that Gideon communicates here in 7:24, whereas in 6:35 no specific message is mentioned. The tribe of Ephraim comes to fight and even kills Oreb and Zeeb, two of the Midianite princes; however, Ephraim is upset that they did not receive an invitation to the original battle.

A dialogue takes place in the second scene between Gideon and the Ephraimites that is important for the characterization of Gideon. The dialogue in this scene contrasts with two other incidents thus far in the Gideon narrative and reveals the sudden change in his character. It contrasts with Gideon's statement to the Angel in 6:15. In his conversation with the Angel, Gideon, out of either fear or humility, claimed to be a part of the weakest clan in Manasseh and the least of his father's house. As was mentioned above, the characterization both there and elsewhere throughout the narrative, favors a reading of Gideon as fearful. In 8:2-3 Gideon makes a similar type of statement by asking the Ephraimites twice who is he in comparison to them and by drawing an analogy between the gleaning of grapes in Ephraim and the harvest of his clan. It is also

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<sup>52</sup>Frolov views 7:24-25 and 8:1-3 as comprising two distinct episodes. See Frolov, *Judges*, 161.



contrasted with Gideon's lack of ability to speak when confronted by the men of his town who were seeking him in 6:28-32. When confronted by the men of the city, presumably a much smaller force than the men of Ephraim, he could not even speak for himself, but his father had to speak for him. In 8:2-3, however, he is instantly able to assuage the anger of the men like a master politician. Amit notes this drastic change in Gideon's character by writing, "In the second part of the cycle, Gideon's personality changes radically. Suddenly he is a charismatic leader who uses diplomatic tactics."<sup>53</sup> The dialogue between Gideon and the Ephraimites is important for understanding how Gideon treats fellow Israelites in the next episode, because it is clear that he has the power of persuasion.<sup>54</sup> It is also important for understanding Gideon's response in 8:23. As Biddle notes, Gideon's treatment of the Ephraimites demonstrates his "capacity for inspiring resistance to his leadership and contrasts with his subsequent dealings with his opponents."<sup>55</sup> Biddle is aptly stating that Gideon inspires those who are resistant to his leadership and wins them over using diplomatic means. Gideon does not act this way in his next encounter with fellow Israelites and may be using his rhetorical skills in his response to the men of Israel in 8:23.

**Episode 5: 8:4-21.** The fifth episode consists of four scenes that have a parallel or paneled structure.<sup>56</sup> The structure of this episode can be broken down into two

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<sup>53</sup>Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 86. Similarly, Derby believes that the tribe of Ephraim was appeased because they considered it a great compliment. Derby, however, believes that Gideon's words were actually an insult that ultimately evaded their question and put himself on par with the entire tribe of Ephraim. With the use of אִלֵּיךְ, Gideon turned the meaning of the saying around so what sounded like a compliment to the Ephraimites was actually an insult. See Josiah Derby, "Gideon and the Ephraimites," *JBQ* 30 (2002): 118-20.

<sup>54</sup>Exum uses similar language to Amit by stating that Gideon is a shrewd diplomat and notes that it foreshadows Jephthah's encounter in 12:1-7 that he would handle disastrously and lead to civil war. See Exum, "The Centre Cannot Hold," 418. For some of the unusual characteristics of this narrative, see Schneider, *Judges*, 118.

<sup>55</sup>Mark E. Biddle, *Reading Judges: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2012), 95.

<sup>56</sup>For a discussion of paneling, see Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books*, 50-52; Robert Chisholm, "The Chronology of the Book of Judges: A Linguistic Clue to Solving a Pesky Problem," *JETS*

panels, where scene one (vv. 4-9) and scene three are parallel (vv. 13-17) and where scene two (vv. 13-17) parallels scene four (vv. 18-21).<sup>57</sup> Or this structure could be represented as follows:<sup>58</sup>

Panel One: 8:4-12

Panel Two: 8:13-21

Gideon threatens Succoth/Penuel (vv. 4-9)

Gideon Punishes Succoth/Penuel (vv. 13-17)

Gideon captures kings (vv. 10-12)

Gideon executes kings (vv. 18-21)

This episode moves both the plot and the characterization of Gideon along by showing both the decline of the character of Gideon and the deterioration of Israelite unity. After the defeat of the enemy, thusfar in the book, it would be expected that there would be a notice that the land had rest. Instead of this formula, the Gideon narrative reveals strife between Gideon and the Ephraimites. Not only is this type of strife continued in the fifth episode, but Gideon also continues to pursue the enemy, which is a feature not present in the Othniel or Ehud cycles, and not as elaborated in the Deborah/Barak cycle.

In the first scene of this episode, Gideon and the soldiers whom he has pushed to exhaustion (8:4) meet the men of Succoth and Penuel while they are pursuing the Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna. While pursuing the Midianites Gideon comes to Succoth and asks for bread. The men of Succoth refuse Gideon because he has not yet completely defeated the kings.<sup>59</sup> Gideon's response to them is that when he comes back

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52 (2009): 247-55; Andrew Steinmann, "Literary Clues in Judges: A Response to Robert Chisholm," *JETS* 53 (2010): 365-73; Robert Chisholm, "In Defense of Paneling as a Clue to the Chronology of Judges: A Critique of Andrew Steinmann's Reply," *JETS* 53 (2010): 375-82.

<sup>57</sup>Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books*, 49.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>59</sup>Biddle notes that "the sociopolitical dynamics of these encounters are far from transparent to modern readers . . . . It is not clear in either case that those who refuse to grant the request have violated any social requirement, or even expectation, that would justify the reactions of the rebuffed" (Biddle, *Reading Judges*, 95). This view is in contrast to Malamat, who believes that Gideon must have had a treaty with the northern Transjordan tribes and that they were obligated to supply his army. See A. Malamat, "The Punishment of Succoth and Penuel by Gideon in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Treaties," in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume, Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East, Qumran, and*

from capturing the kings he will beat the men of Succoth with briars. Similarly, the next city that Gideon and his men enter, Penuel, also refuse him provisions. Gideon then threatens that when he returns to Penuel he will tear down their tower. This character is not Gideon the diplomat of the last episode or the Gideon who is too afraid to speak. Here Gideon takes on a completely new persona by threatening his fellow Israelites, which shows a further breakdown in tribal unity.<sup>60</sup> This new persona is further revealed in the irony of Gideon's words to the men of Penuel when he says, "When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower."<sup>61</sup> This statement is not the peace notice that is expected within the narrative. When Gideon has peace from the enemy he will turn on his Israelite brothers. The characterization of the men of Succoth is very similar to the early portrayal of Gideon when he needed a sign as confirmation. Biddle observes that while "he [Gideon] demanded evidence that God was with him, Gideon responds to the people from Succoth and Penuel, who desire evidence that he deserves their support . . . selfishly, peevishly, and viciously."<sup>62</sup> Klein aptly notes that when Gideon is interacting "with the powerful, like the Ephraimites, Gideon moderates; with the weak, he overreacts: the coward becomes the bully."<sup>63</sup> Klein goes on to point out further that Gideon's goals have become different from those of Yahweh by writing, "whereas Yahweh's [goal] is to save his people, Gideon's is to confirm his own power, himself."<sup>64</sup> Not only are the goals of Gideon and Yahweh different, but Yahweh is nowhere present in this scene or this episode. It appears that Gideon is now pursuing his own agenda.

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*Post-Biblical Judaism*, ed. Chaim Cohen, Avi Hurvitz, and Shalom M. Paul (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 69-71.

<sup>60</sup>The breakdown of tribal unity is a recurring theme that escalates in both the Jephthah narrative and the epilogue of the book. In both cases, large scale fighting breaks out between tribes.

<sup>61</sup>Note how the first half of this statement mirrors Jephthah's rash vow in 11:31.

<sup>62</sup>Biddle, *Reading Judges*, 95.

<sup>63</sup>Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, 61.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*

After Gideon captured the Midianite kings, he followed through with his promises. After interrogating a young boy from Succoth, Gideon procures the names of the officials of the city and beats them with briers, teaching them a lesson. His punishment of Penuel escalates in that he does not just break down the tower, but he also kills the men of the city. Klein notes the harshness of this action by stating, “In the destruction of these towns, Gideon observes the rules (Deut. 20.13) for waging holy war—putting ‘all the males to the sword’—but does so against his own people.”<sup>65</sup> This is even more odd when compared to the failure of the tribes to obey this rule within the prologue of the book, and it is odd in light of what Gideon says to Zebah and Zalmunna. Gideon vows in Judges 8:19 that if the Midianites had not killed his brothers he would have spared them. Gideon is willing to kill Israelites and let the enemy go. This panel gives “an account that only confirms Gideon’s egotism, petulance, and ruthlessness.”<sup>66</sup> This episode continues the downward spiral of Gideon’s character.

Besides his treatment of both his fellow Israelites and the Midianite kings, Gideon is characterized in a royal fashion. Four interesting things about the royal portrayal of Gideon in this episode can be seen. First, Gideon is acting like a tyrant through his treatment of the men of Succoth and Penuel. Second, Gideon’s brothers are described as being people who look like sons of a king (v. 18). Third, Gideon tells his oldest son to kill the kings. It appears that he is grooming him to take his place (v. 20). Fourth, Gideon takes the royal ornaments from the kings. This is an interesting portrayal considering the contents of the next episode. It appears that the characterization of Gideon in this episode foreshadows the offer of kingship that is to come.

**Episode 6: 8:22-27.** The sixth episode is marked by a change in subject and a change in dialogue where the men of Israel ask Gideon to be their ruler. The theme of this

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 62.

<sup>66</sup>Biddle, *Reading Judges*, 96.

episode also changes to the theme of kingship, which has been introduced through the royal features of the previous episode, but is made explicit here.<sup>67</sup> While this entire episode is contained within one scene, it can logically be divided into two parts. The first is the dialogue between Gideon and the men of Israel in verses 22-25, and the second is the result of the conversation found in verses 26-27.

After the defeat of the Midianites, the men of Israel ask Gideon to be their king and for his sons to succeed him. This request is not a surprise after the events of the previous episode. Massot notes that verses 18-21 laid the groundwork for the offer of kingship through “Gideon’s kingly appearance (v. 18), his physical prowess (כַּאִישׁ גְּבוּרָתוֹ), v. 21a), his slaying of the Midianite kings (v. 21b), and his seizure of the kings’ belongings (v. 21c).”<sup>68</sup> It could also be added that he seems to have been training his son to succeed him (v. 20), and his treatment of the men of Succoth and Penuel was beyond that of a judge. All of these factors move the plot forward to this point where the men of Israel request Gideon to rule. By doing this they may only be attempting to formalize the current state of affairs.

Ambiguity, however, is introduced in 8:23 when Gideon seemingly rejects the offer of kingship. When the men of Israel offer Gideon a dynastic rule in verse 22, he responds in verse 23 by saying, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you, Yahweh will rule over you.” With the presentation of Gideon thus far in the narrative, it would be a surprise to see him turn down the position, but when one considers the development of Gideon’s character through his speech, especially the political guile he showed in 8:3, his actions, and his request to the men just after this, he may well have accepted the position of king. Gideon’s possible acceptance of the offer to be king will be discussed in more detail below. What is clear is that this offer of kingship

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<sup>67</sup>Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books*, 49.

<sup>68</sup>Massot, “Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel,” 125.

provides the plot development necessary to understand the discussion of kingship with Abimelech in 9:2. Without this episode, Abimelech's ascendancy to the throne would not make narrative sense.<sup>69</sup>

After Gideon's supposed rejection of the offer of kingship, he makes a request of the men. He requests that they give him one of their earrings from the spoil of the battle in verse 24. Their response in verse 25 shows that they are more than willing to give Gideon a portion of the spoils. Their response is to say "[W]e will certainly give them" (נתנו נתנו). So the men of Israel spread a cloak and throw their spoil on it, the amount of which is 1,700 shekels of gold. The amount, along with the repetition of the mention of spoil that Gideon took from Zebah and Zalmunna, makes this collection resemble a royal treasury.<sup>70</sup>

From this gold, Gideon fashions an ephod<sup>71</sup> that he sets up as an idol in his hometown of Ophrah. According to verse 27, this ephod becomes a snare to Gideon's family, and all of Israel whores after it. Gideon is then the first, and only, judge to introduce the people into the idolatry so rampant throughout the book. Gideon's character comes full circle. The man who tore down the altar of Baal in his hometown now sets up an idolatrous image there. Klein aptly summarizes the reversal of Gideon's situation within the scope of Judges 6-8:

Gideon's last action ironically reconstructs the initial situation and counteracts his own deed (at Yahweh's command) to destroy the idolatrous Baal temple and the Asherah. This time his family cannot save him. In fact, the opposite occurs: Gideon's ephod of gold is an evil that traps Gideon and his family. And this allusion to Gideon's family as subject to the evil he has created prepares for the story of Gideon's son, Abimelech.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, 205; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 300.

<sup>71</sup>A precise understanding of exactly what this ephod consisted of is the topic of much scholarly conversation. For an overview and compelling answer, see Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, 205-10.

<sup>72</sup>Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, 63-64.

This is Gideon's last reported action before his death and certainly continues the downward regression of his character. It also leads into the introduction of his family, and especially his son, Abimelech, who is introduced in the conclusion of his narrative.

**Conclusion: 8:28-32.** The conclusion contains the expected formula of the land having rest. It also contains a concentric ending with Gideon returning to Ophrah and the repetition of both Joash and the Abiezrites from 6:11, which forms an *inclusio* between the beginning and ending of the Gideon narrative.<sup>73</sup>

This episode contains three features that are important for the plot development: it includes the formulaic statements that mark the end of a deliverer's narrative, it introduces the next major character, and it continues to portray royal features that were present from the previous two episodes. This episode includes the expected elements and formulaic statements associated with the closing of a deliverer. Three formulaic statements are made that correspond to other components of the book. First, there is a notice of the enemy being subdued in verse 28. This is similar to the notices in 3:30, 4:23, and 11:33. Second, the long-awaited notice of rest is given. The rest notice is given in all of the major judge cycles preceding Gideon (3:11; 3:30; 5:31), but will not be given again in the book. Third, in verse 32 Gideon is given a death notice. Similar notices are given of Othniel (3:11), Ehud (4:1), Tola (10:2), Jair (10:5), Jephthah (12:7), Ibzan (12:10), and Elon (12:12).

The conclusion of Gideon's narrative also introduces Abimelech, Gideon's son, who will be the next major character within the cycle. Abimelech is introduced in verses 30-31. Judges 8:30 introduces Gideon's seventy sons, and verse 31 specifically introduces Abimelech as the son of his concubine (פילגש) who was located in Shechem. This is interesting because verse 29 indicates that Gideon lived in Ophrah. While the

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<sup>73</sup>Amit notes that many biblical stories have concentric endings, noting that "in this type of ending the hero turns back to the place he came from" (Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 35).

characterization of Abimelech is not developed at all, this introduction is ominous. As Biddle notes that

the characterization of Abimelech in vv. 30-31 raises intriguing possibilities. While this material is as devoid of overt characterization of impulses, drives, and thoughts as any in the Hebrew Scriptures, the information that Abimelech was one of Gideon's seventy sons and that his mother was a concubine from Shechem may ominously portend things to come.<sup>74</sup>

As it turns out, Abimelech will inherit all of the worst traits of his father with none of the fear or timidity.

The conclusion also continues the royal features that are found in the previous two episodes. Two of these features are particularly noteworthy. First, Gideon has seventy sons, which would seem to indicate that he has a harem. The indication that he lived in Ophrah, but that he had a concubine from Shechem might also imply the presence of treaties that included the taking of wives and concubines.<sup>75</sup> Second, Gideon names his son Abimelech, which means "my father is king."<sup>76</sup> This name seems to indicate that regardless of whether Gideon accepted the office of king with his words, his actions show that he was king.

### **The Characterization of Gideon**

The above discussion of plot has brought out many of the major points of the characterization of Gideon, but a few important points still need to be made here. Massot notes that historically, characterization has only been discussed within the rubric of the plot; however, two major factors have contributed to a focus on characterization apart from plot. First, narratives are often centered on main characters. Second, a growing awareness within literary studies is present that recognizes that the unfolding of the story

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<sup>74</sup>Biddle, *Reading Judges*, 99.

<sup>75</sup>Alan Hauser, "Unity and Diversity in Early Israel Before Samuel," *JETS* 22 (1979): 299; Biddle, *Reading Judges*, 100.

<sup>76</sup>I treat this matter further under the discussion of Gideon's royal characteristics.



of a particular narrative “is an interaction between event (plot) *and* character, and that either may function as the dominant feature of the narrative.”<sup>77</sup> The intersection of plot and characterization is evident within the above discussion of the plot, where at times it is clear that the characters, and at times specifically their characterization, dominate the narrative.

Several aspects of Gideon’s character are discussed here. First, an important aspect of the narrative that is examined is the use of the two names for the main character of Judges 6-8: Gideon and Jerubbaal. After this examination, a literary discussion of Gideon’s character will be given. Kissling notes that characters are portrayed in three major ways: directly, indirectly, and through analogy.<sup>78</sup> Gideon is treated as a full-fledged character as well as one who is characterized in both a direct and indirect manner. Other scholarly discussions of Gideon’s characterization through analogy will be addressed, namely, how Gideon’s characterization shows several parallels with the character of Moses. All of these help the reader to understand the narrator’s view of Gideon as a character.

### **Gideon and Jerubbaal**

One of the most studied aspects of Judges 6-8 has been the names used for the deliverer in these chapters. This aspect of the Gideon narrative is also important for understanding his characterization. Within Judges 6-8 the name Gideon is used thirty-eight times.<sup>79</sup> Gideon was given a second name, Jerubbaal, in Judges 6:32. The name Jerubbaal is used thirteen times within Judges 6-9.<sup>80</sup> Jerubbaal is also mentioned in 1

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<sup>77</sup>Massot, “Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel,” 140.

<sup>78</sup>Paul J. Kissling, *Reliable Characters in the Primary History: Profiles of Moses, Joshua, Elijah and Elisha*, JSOTSup 224 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 18.

<sup>79</sup>6:11, 13, 19, 22 (2 times), 24, 27, 29, 32, 34, 36, 39; 7:1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25; 8:4, 7, 11, 13, 21, 22, 24, 27 (2 times), 28, 32, 33, 35.

<sup>80</sup>6:32; 7:1; 8:29, 35; 9:1, 2, 5 (2 times), 16, 19, 24, 28, 57.

Samuel 11:12.<sup>81</sup> Further difficulty can be found with the names, however, when 2 Samuel 11:21 says that Abimelech was the son of Jerubasheth.

Many scholars believe that the biblical data has harmonized two persons into one and that Gideon and Jerubbaal are to be viewed as different people. Not everyone has been convinced by modern critical theories concerning the two different judges. Various other views, therefore, have been postulated. Since an important part of the characterization of Gideon revolves around the use of these names, the scholarly opinions concerning them will be discussed here.

**Gideon and Jerubbaal as different people.** Several scholars have advanced the opinion that Gideon and Jerubbaal are two separate people. Roland de Vaux, for instance, believes that Gideon was the conqueror of the Midianites while Jerubbaal, as a distinct person from Gideon, was the father of Abimelech. He notes that they may have been confused as the same person either because they both may have been from Ophrah or because of vast differences between Gideon and Abimelech, namely, one rejecting monarchy while the other accepts it.<sup>82</sup> Martin Noth also believes these names represent different people and that the reason for the assimilation of the two characters was the redactional linking of the Abimelech narrative.<sup>83</sup> Barnabas Lindars expands on this theory by noting that these two different traditions have been fused and that the offer of kingship rightly belongs to Jerubbaal.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>The one NT reference, Hebrews 11:32, uses Gideon.

<sup>82</sup>Roland de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel: to the Period of the Judges* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971), 771-72, 800-01.

<sup>83</sup>Martin Noth, *The History of Israel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 152 n. 1. See also Herbert Haag, "Gideon—Jerubbaal—Abimelech," *ZAW* 79 (1967): 305-14.

<sup>84</sup>Barnabas Lindars, "Gideon and Kingship," *JTS* 16 (1965): 315.

**Gideon and Jerubbaal as the same person.** Some scholars agree with many of the above arguments, but they still consider Gideon and Jerubbaal to be the same person. So Robert Boling concedes that it may be possible that Gideon and Jerubbaal are different people, but he does not think that there is enough data to support this claim. Instead, Boling believes that there are two different traditions of the same person that have been joined together in Judges 6-9, each of them favoring one name over the other.<sup>85</sup>

J. A. Emerton, who wrote one of the longer treatments on this aspect of the Gideon narrative, does not gloss over the difficulties of the various names.<sup>86</sup> After a brief look at the use of multiple names in the Old Testament, Emerton discusses the difficulty of the aetiological narrative that ascribes the name Jerubbaal to Gideon and the difficulty of the meaning of his name. He discusses the history of the possible roots **ריב**,<sup>87</sup> **ירה**,<sup>88</sup> and **רבב**,<sup>89</sup> which others have ascribed to the name Jerubbaal. He believes that the etymology of the name as it is presented in the narrative is erroneous, but that this is often the case in Old Testament narrative. The narrative, however, highlights Baal as the subject and brings focus on the latter part of Gideon's new name, Jerubbaal. In conclusion, Emerton considers it "simplest" to favor a basic agreement with the biblical text that Gideon came to be known as Jerubbaal.

**The primacy of Jerubbaal.** Like Emerton and Boling, there are other scholars who believe that Gideon and Jerubbaal are to be viewed as the same person. They

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<sup>85</sup>Robert Boling, *Judges*, 128-37; Robert Boling, "Gideon," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 1014.

<sup>86</sup>J. A. Emerton, "Gideon and Jerubbaal," *JTS* 27 (1976): 289-312.

<sup>87</sup>C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Rivingtons, 1920), 201.

<sup>88</sup>Julius Wellhausen, *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis* (Göttingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1872), 31.

<sup>89</sup>W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), 112.

disagree, however, on which name should be given primacy. Soggin, for instance, believes that the name Gideon was the name that belonged to the aeteological narrative, but that it replaced the real name, Jerubbaal. He notes the difficulties of the possible roots for Jerubbaal and that the name Gideon fits better with the story.<sup>90</sup>

Similar to the comments of Soggin, Derby believes that Gideon is the name that explains the aeteological narrative. Like Emerton, Derby starts his study with a look at biblical names in general. In particular he looks at theophoric names, such as names that have an appellative of the divine name or Baal as part of the name. Derby, like Soggin, links the root of Gideon's name (גדל), which means to cut down, with the imagery found in Deuteronomy 7:5 and 2 Chronicles 3:4, both of which describe cutting down sacred pillars, the very thing that the aeteological narrative seeks to explain. After making this link, Derby discusses the difficulty of Jeru as the first part of Jerubbaal's name. According to Derby, if Jerubbaal was really the explanation of the aeteological narrative then the name would have been pronounced Yarivbaal. Jerubbaal, however, could have a large range of meanings, including "possession of," "foundation of," and "city of," but would not mean "contend." Derby offers a reason, however, as to why the name Jerubbaal was not used, even though he believes it to be his real name. He contends that the author of Judges was an "unswerving devotee of the God of Israel" who could not write a story where a primary hero had Baal in his name. The author, therefore, had a rhetorical function in the name that he used and switched the names as was necessary to paint the appropriate picture of the judge who was to be thought of as Gideon and not Jerubbaal.<sup>91</sup>

Block also advances the opinion that Gideon and Jerubbaal are the same person. According to Block, several reasons exist for why the characterization of Gideon

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<sup>90</sup>J. Alberto Soggin, *When the Judges Ruled* (New York: Association, 1965), 46.

<sup>91</sup>Josiah Derby, "Gideon or Jerubbaal," *JBQ* 31 (2003): 181-85.

can be viewed positively. The few positive statements about Gideon, however, are outweighed by his numerous negative traits. Within the context of the names for the judges, Block notes several points. First, he thinks that the reason for the name sounds downright false. Second, the name Jerubbaal interprets the name in the jussive, but nowhere else in the Old Testament does **רִיב** occur in the jussive. Third, the prepositions in the narrative are problematic, especially when the **כ** preposition is combined with Joash's response to the men. Fourth, the name Jerubbaal reveals Joash's Baalistic stance. All of this leads Block to conclude that the name Jerubbaal was Gideon's real name. Block concludes that the reference in 1 Samuel 12:11 reflects this fact and that 2 Samuel 11:21 changes his name by deliberate corruption because of the historian's horror at the meaning of the name Jerubbaal.<sup>92</sup>

**Gideon and Jerubbaal in the rhetoric of the passage.** Yet another position is held that tries to make sense of the two names that are given to Gideon. Both names, Gideon and Jerubbaal, were used within the narrative in a literary sense. This position does not seek to determine whether these names speak of the same person, but rather it tries to understand the narrative as it stands. It assumes that the biblical author/editor is seeking to prove a theological and literary point with the name that he chooses within the narrative.

Garsiel views the names in Judges 6-8 as being literarily significant. Garsiel believes that the names and the words around them are intentionally punned so as to draw attention to both the word and the name. He examines several names within Judges 6-8, including Gideon and Jerubbaal. Garsiel, like others, notes the possible roots of Gideon's name and the ironic connection that it has with the aetiological narrative. Furthermore, he notes that Gideon also "cuts down" the Midianites and that even though the root **גדע** does not appear in the narrative, it "arouses associations" that would be distinguished by

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<sup>92</sup>Daniel I. Block, "Will the Real Gideon Please Stand Up?" *JETS* 40 (1997): 360.

those familiar with Hebrew. For instance, the name Gideon is punned when he makes a sacrifice that sounds similar to his name in 6:19. Garsiel also notes that the name Jerubbaal has some linguistic similarity to other aspects of the Gideon narrative. First, the root רבב manifests itself in Jerubbaal's numerous children and the multiplication of gold from the Ishmaelites. There is also a connection with the root ריב when Jerubbaal contends with the Ephraimites.<sup>93</sup>

Bluedorn, while trying to understand the name Jerubbaal, also wrestles with possible Hebrew roots for the name. He surveys the possible roots ריב, ירב, ירה, רבב, and רבה. After surveying each root, Bluedorn advances the opinion that the name Jerubbaal comes from the root רבב, yet it paronomastically plays on the root ריב. Bluedorn believes that the name describes all of the greatness of that would have belonged to Baal, but intentionally mocks Baal through the use of the name in the context of the narrative. The play on ריב, is likewise used literarily to define the remainder of the Gideon narrative. The name Jerubbaal, therefore, “summarizes the theological motivation of the narrative,” where Yahweh is contending against Baal.<sup>94</sup>

A general feeling persists among scholars that trying to understand the redactional nature and/or origins of the names has caused the reader to miss their literary importance. So Schneider, when commenting on how the name Jerubbaal came to be, notes, “Most discussions of the text center around redactional problems without addressing the final form of the text, thereby missing the irony that Gideon did not really contend with Baal but his father did.”<sup>95</sup> Polzin elaborates on the use of two names for Gideon by noting that the “story means to emphasize through its hero's names a basic

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<sup>93</sup>Moshe Garsiel, “Homiletic Name-Derivations as a Literary Device in the Gideon Narrative: Judges VI-VIII,” *VT* 43 (1993): 302-17.

<sup>94</sup>Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 101-04.

<sup>95</sup>Schneider, *Judges*, 109.

tension concerning his loyalty towards Yahweh.”<sup>96</sup> It also appears that the increasing use of the name Jerubbaal as the narrative progresses is meant to reflect negatively on Gideon’s character by associating him with Baal, especially after he sets up the idolatrous ephod in the place where he had cut down the altar to Baal.

**Conclusion.** It is best to follow the biblical presentation of Gideon and Jerubbaal as the same person with the primacy of names being given to Gideon and the destruction of the altar of Baal and Gideon’s father’s speech to the men of the city serving as the aetiological narrative for the name Jerubbaal. The names, however, also appear to serve a rhetorical and literary purpose within the narrative since the name Gideon becomes less frequent as the narrative continues. The use of these names by the narrator serves as one of the ways the portrayal of Gideon is moved along within the narrative from a judge who is presented with some positives at first, but by the end of his judgeship he is portrayed almost completely negatively.

### **Gideon as Full-Fledged**

As mentioned in the first chapter, the Bible contains three types of characters: full-fledged, types, and agents.<sup>97</sup> Full-fledged characters correspond to what are normally called “round” characters. These characters are complex and are shown from multiple perspectives. They are also generally well-developed. Types, which correspond to what are often designated “flat” characters, are generally those who exhibit one trait or quality in excess. Agents are characters who move the storyline of the narrative along. They often go unnamed and are frequently not described in any meaningful way. Gideon can

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<sup>96</sup>Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History* (New York: Seabury, 1980), 169. Polzin goes on to note that “there are also periodic shifts in the name of the deity throughout the story, as throughout the whole book, and it is difficult to avoid the impression that this instability in naming of the deity has a compositional relationship with the twofold name Gideon/Jerubbaal” (169-70).

<sup>97</sup>See Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, Bible and Literature Series 9 (Sheffield, UK: Almond, 1983), 23.

clearly be identified as a full-fledged or round character. He is one of the most developed characters in the book of Judges.

As the prominent character of Judges 6-8, Gideon exhibits a range of qualities. Some of his qualities are favorable, and some are not flattering. Gideon is characterized in several positive ways throughout the narrative. He tears down the altar of Baal in his hometown (6:25-32). He is also clothed with the Spirit of Yahweh (6:33-35). In a tense situation, Gideon is able to temper the Ephraimites (8:1-3).<sup>98</sup> And, after Gideon's death, the land had rest for forty years (8:28), which signifies at least in part that his judgeship was successful.<sup>99</sup>

Several negative descriptions of Gideon throughout Judges 6-8, however, can be observed. Only a couple will be sampled here because many of these have already been discussed within the unfolding of the plot. Gideon doubts God throughout the narrative and continually tests him, including the fleece episode (6:36-40). While God does respond to the test he is silent within the scene, which insinuates divine disapproval. Gideon also deals harshly with his fellow Israelites (8:4-21). This is the first time within the book of Judges that the reader sees Israelites at odds. This foreshadows what is to come in the Abimelech narrative, the Jephthah narrative, and the civil war in the epilogue. And Gideon sets up a cult object that causes Israel to go into idolatry (8:27).<sup>100</sup> This is the first time within the book that a judge introduces apostasy in Israel. Up to this point apostasy came after the judge was dead. These mark just three of Gideon's negative traits. It is clear from the narrative that he is not portrayed in a flattering manner.

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<sup>98</sup>Looking at the book as a whole, Gideon's diplomacy with the Ephraimites is all the more important because this is something that Jephthah would not do, and it would result in a small scale civil war between tribes (12:1-7).

<sup>99</sup>For a full list of what some see as the positive accomplishments/portrayal of Gideon, see Block, "Will the Real Gideon Please Stand Up? Narrative Style and Intention in Judges 6-9," *JETS* 40 (1997): 356-57. Block lists 20 features of the narrative that some have argued portray Gideon in a favorable light. Many of these should be rejected, however, when viewed in light of the developing narrative of both the book and the Gideon cycle.

<sup>100</sup>For a list of negative qualities that Gideon shows, see Block, "Will the Real Gideon Please Stand Up?," 359-63.



The positive and negative traits associated with Gideon show that he is characterized in a very complex manner, which fits with his place within the book as the pivotal figure.<sup>101</sup> As Block notes, “Gideon’s position in the sequence [of judges] explains why the narrator paints his picture with both positive and negative strokes. As in Gideon’s own life, under his reign the tilt of Israel’s spiritual condition is obviously in the direction of paganism.”<sup>102</sup> His characterization as both positive and negative portrays the dynamics of both the judges who precede him and those who follow him. This dynamic accounts for the complexity of his characterization, and it also explains how Gideon moves from being portrayed as fearful in Judges 6-7 to being portrayed as tyrannical and idolatrous in Judges 8. Gideon’s character marks the transition and furthers the downward trend of the character of all of the judges who follow him.

### **The Direct and Indirect Characterization of Gideon**

The characterization of Gideon is shaped in both a direct and indirect manner. Some of the ways that the narrator directly shapes characters is through the description of the characters’ outside appearance or inner personality. The narrator indirectly shapes characters through speech, actions, and the roles of minor characters.<sup>103</sup> Speech and actions are of particular importance for understanding Gideon. Alter notes the importance of speech and actions when he says that a “character is revealed primarily through speech, action, gesture, with all the ambiguities that entails; motive is frequently . . . left in a penumbra of doubt.”<sup>104</sup> Bar-Efrat’s discussion of characterization complements

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<sup>101</sup>See the discussion above entitled “The Gideon Narrative within Judges” and the discussion of the plot of the book in chap. 4.

<sup>102</sup>Block, “Will the Real Gideon Please Stand Up?,” 365.

<sup>103</sup>Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield, UK: Almond, 1989), 15; and Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 48-92.

<sup>104</sup>Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981), 158.

Alter's assertion by noting that "the views embodied in the narrative are expressed through the characters, and more specifically, through their speech and fate."<sup>105</sup> The speech, actions, and fate of Gideon help to shed light on any ambiguity that may remain in his characterization.

**Direct.** As noted above, direct characterization can be seen in things such as physical description or personality. Direct characterization can come in the form of a narrator's comment on a character, but it does not need to be confined to this. It can also come through comments made by other characters or the character himself.<sup>106</sup> Massot notes that when characters other than the narrator give direct characterization, their characterization should be understood as a subjective interpretation, and it that it is the reader's responsibility "to evaluate the reliability of the speaker."<sup>107</sup> Judges 6-8 does not contain any explicit narrative comments, but there are a few comments about Gideon from other characters that need to be evaluated.

Three statements made by characters within Judges 6-8 deserve attention. The reader is introduced to Gideon when the Angel of Yahweh appeared to him in 6:12. At this introduction the Angel makes two statement concerning Gideon's character. He calls Gideon a "mighty warrior" (גבר החיל), and just a few verses later in verse 14 he tells Gideon to "Go in this strength (כח) of yours." With these two statements Gideon is described as a mighty warrior and as strong.<sup>108</sup> It is clear that the Angel of Yahweh is a credible speaker and that his words are to be trusted. The words of God or an agent of

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<sup>105</sup>Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 47.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 54, 64; Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 117; Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 34, 38; Meier Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 51.

<sup>107</sup>Massot, "Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel," 143. See also Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 54.

<sup>108</sup>Some think that the phrase גבר החיל, when used in this particular passage, refers to a man of wealth and is not necessarily a comment on his strength. See Exum, "The Centre Cannot Hold," 417.

God within a narrative are certainly as trustworthy as the words of the narrator. These descriptions appear to depict Gideon as strong and warrior-like, a man of physical prowess. But while the speaker is trustworthy, his words may read ironically, because in this narrative Gideon is hiding in a winepress (v. 11) and just after this he is described as being afraid (v. 27). Considering this irony, it may be that Gideon was a man characterized by physical prowess, but that his personality was timid. The third statement about Gideon from the speech of another character comes from the Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna.<sup>109</sup> In 8:18, Zebah and Zalmunna describe the men whom they have killed. They tell Gideon that these men were like him, and they describe them as those who resemble “a son of a king.”<sup>110</sup> They are therefore telling Gideon that he looks princely, or even kingly. The speakers, being kings themselves, would certainly know what princes/kings look like. In that respect they are trustworthy, but it should be noted that they were under duress, and so it is possible that they were trying to placate Gideon. But for the very reason that they feared for their lives, they may also have been telling the truth. This description also fits with plot build up to this point.

While there is little direct characterization found in Judges 6-8, it appears that Gideon was an affluent man who had at least some physical prowess. This narrative, like most biblical narrative, contains much more indirect characterization through such things as speech, action, and the fate of the character.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup>It is also possible to look at the dream of the Midianite soldier in 7:13, but in this passage he only refers to Gideon as “a cake of barley bread.” To discern whether any specific characterization was intended from this statement would be very difficult indeed.

<sup>110</sup>It may also be noteworthy that Zebah and Zalmunna rebuke Gideon when he tells his son to kill them. In v. 21, they make reference to a man’s strength (גבורה) with the apparent subject being Gideon. This too is difficult to interpret because they are rebuking him.

<sup>111</sup>Chisholm writes, “[N]arrators usually offer few, if any, direct evaluative comments of this type. They prefer simply to describe a character’s appearance and actions, leaving it to the reader to form an evaluation based on the overall presentation of the character throughout the story” (Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books*, 29).

**Indirect.** Besides direct characterization there is also indirect characterization. This is accomplished through several means within the narrative, three of which will be addressed here: speech, action, and fate. Massot notes how indirect characterization is implicit and that the interpretation of the reader plays a significant role.<sup>112</sup> Ryken outlines three things that the reader must do when trying to understand a character. First, the reader “must decide what a given detail in the story tells us about the character.”<sup>113</sup> Second, the reader “must be able to transform the particulars into an overall portrait of a person.”<sup>114</sup> Third, a reader must choose sides and determine “whether a character is good or bad, sympathetic or unsympathetic, in a given trait or action.”<sup>115</sup> Ryken’s suggestions are used to assess the characterization of Gideon through his speech, action, and fate.

One of the primary ways that the reader can understand a character is through his or her speech. This is particularly true at the beginning of a narrative. As Alter notes, “at the beginning of any new story, the point at which dialogue first emerges will be worthy of special attention, and in most instances, the initial words spoken by a personage will be revelatory, perhaps more in manner than in matter, constituting an important moment in the exposition of a character.”<sup>116</sup> The first time that Gideon speaks is no exception. When Gideon meets the Angel of Yahweh in Judges 6:13 and the Angel tells him that Yahweh is with him, Gideon replies by questioning Yahweh, doubting that he is with them, and asking for a sign.<sup>117</sup> Gideon questions Yahweh by saying, “if

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<sup>112</sup>Massot, “Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel,” 147.

<sup>113</sup>Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 75.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid. See also Massot, “Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel,” 147-48; Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 187. Both Massot and Sternberg offer further suggestions for what readers should do when involved in formulating opinions about characters.

<sup>116</sup>Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 74.

<sup>117</sup>Gideon wanted to know where the “wonderful deeds” of Yahweh were.

Yahweh is with us then why has this happened to us?” The answer to this had been given just a few verses earlier in 6:7-10 with a prophetic rebuke, which highlighted Israel’s unfaithfulness to Yahweh by following after other gods. By asking this question Gideon seems either to be unaware of the prophetic rebuke, or he does not realize the sinfulness of the idolatry that Israel is engaged in. The latter seems to be more likely, since there was an altar to Baal and an Asherah pole that his family sponsored. From his first words, he shows that he wanted a sign from Yahweh when he asked, “And where are all his wondrous deeds?” He follows up this question by directly asking for a sign in verse 17. This is a pattern that runs throughout the Gideon narrative. Gideon’s first dialogue is, therefore, very important in understanding his characterization.<sup>118</sup>

Gideon’s character is not just portrayed through his speech, but also through his lack of speech at certain points. This idea has been shown in the discussion above, but can be seen most clearly when Gideon’s father speaks for him during the first episode and when during Gideon’s silence when God removes members of his army. Gideon then remains silent up to the point of battle. It is not until Yahweh gives him encouragement to go down into the camp of the Midianites (7:9-11) and he hears them talking (7:13-14) that he is able to gain courage. Up to this point in the narrative Gideon had only spoken in 8 verses.<sup>119</sup> Comparatively, Yahweh spoke in 18 verses over this same amount of narrative space.<sup>120</sup> After this point, Gideon becomes the dominant speaker in the narrative and is given direct speech in 15 verses.<sup>121</sup> Yahweh has no speech from this point forward and is an absent character within the narrative after 7:23.<sup>122</sup> The importance is not just in

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<sup>118</sup>See also Massot, “Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel,” 151.

<sup>119</sup>6:13, 15, 17, 18, 22, 36, 37, 39.

<sup>120</sup>6:8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 20, 25, 26; 7:2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11.

<sup>121</sup>7:15, 17, 18, 24 (this verse could be debated because it is actually Gideon’s messengers speaking here, but they are giving his message); 8:2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 15, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24.

<sup>122</sup>L. Juliana M. Claassens, “The Character of God in Judges 6-8: The Gideon Narrative as Theological and Moral Resource,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 23 (2001): 51-71.

the quantity of Gideon's speech, but also in the content. Beginning with the battle of the Midianites, Gideon begins to draw attention to himself with his speech.

As the amount of Gideon's speech ramps up, it also changes tone. When he seeks to rally the troops during the Midianite battle he draws attention to himself by stating, "Look at me," and, "do as I do," in 7:17. He also instructs the men to yell, "For Yahweh and for Gideon," in their battle cry. This command also draws undue attention to himself, when it is clear that it is Yahweh who wins the battle. Gideon's speech in the remainder of the narrative follows this pattern.

Gideon's speech through much of Judges 8 is rather harsh, particularly the speech directed towards the men of Succoth and Penuel and the speech directed towards the Midianite kings. In these interactions, Gideon is unduly harsh, especially towards his fellow Israelites. While much of what has been summarized in regard to Gideon's speech is straightforward, there are three comments that Gideon makes throughout the narrative that may have significance, depending upon their interpretation.

On three occasions Gideon's speech, when isolated from the surrounding context, sounds very humble: (1) "O, Yahweh, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house" (6:15); (2) "What have I done in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? God had given the leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb, into your hands. And what was I able to do in comparison with you?" (8:2-3); (3) "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. Yahweh shall rule over you" (8:23). The difficulty, however, is that each of these passages does appear in a context. The first appears in an episode where Gideon is characterized by doubt and fear. The second appears to be political shrewdness instead of humility (if not insult), especially considering the events of the episode that follows this one with the treatment of Succoth

and Penuel.<sup>123</sup> The third is discussed in more detail below. As mentioned earlier, it is difficult to separate speech from action when considering characterization.

Actions are another important way in which characters are depicted within a narrative. A character's nature is revealed through his or her actions no less than through his or her speech. It is the actions of the characters that generally move the plot along.<sup>124</sup> A difficulty arises in interpreting the actions of a character, however. As Bar-Efrat notes, "The technique of building a character through deeds confronts the reader with a problem, however. For it is in the nature of this technique to refrain from revealing to us what are the internal motives which give rise to the actions and as in life, we have to build hypotheses about people's motives."<sup>125</sup> In a similar manner to understanding speech, it is necessary to interpret the actions of the characters.

A number of Gideon's actions reveal his character. The reader is first introduced to Gideon in 6:11, where he is beating out wheat in a wine press. Verses 3-4 detail Israel's perilous situation, especially how the Midianites and Amalekites devoured their crops. It is difficult to know whether this introduction to Gideon portrays him as resourceful<sup>126</sup> or cowardly.<sup>127</sup> Maybe the tension here is intentionally ambiguous. Within the context of the narrative, however, it does appear that Gideon is portrayed as fearful (6:24, 27) and generally unaware (6:23). So, at best, his initial actions seem ambiguous, but at least some very positive actions are attributed to him.

Gideon is described as obedient to Yahweh and on three occasions he worships. When Yahweh commands Gideon to break down the altar of Ball and cut down

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<sup>123</sup>Derby, "Gideon and the Ephraimites," 118-20.

<sup>124</sup>Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 77.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

<sup>126</sup>Webb, *Judges*, 228-29; Massot, "Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel," 151. Massot believes that Gideon is simply trying to hide the wheat from the Midianites and nothing else.

<sup>127</sup>Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, 173.

the Asherah pole Gideon “did as Yahweh had told him” (v. 27). Similarly, he sends messengers out to rally troops to battle the Midianites (v. 35). He also obeys Yahweh’s commands to reduce the size of his army (7:5, 8). Furthermore, on three occasions Gideon worships God. After his encounter with the Angel he builds an altar (6:24), and when he obeys Yahweh by destroying the altar of Baal and the Asherah pole, he builds another altar to Yahweh on which he offers sacrifices (6:27-28). And right before his battle with the Midianites, after hearing confirmation that he would have victory, the narrator explicitly says that Gideon worships (7:15). All of these portray Gideon in a somewhat positive light. They do not, however, occur in a vacuum. Each has a context. In the following cases Gideon was obedient, but he was also fearful and doubting. Before obeying Yahweh and cutting down the altar and Asherah pole, he takes ten men and performs the deed by night because he is afraid (6:27). He also sends messengers to rally troops to fight, but the narrative may indicate that it was not so much his ability, but the Spirit of Yahweh, that enabled him to do this (6:34). Similarly, both prior to and after his obedience in reducing his army he requires a sign that he will be victorious. This fact shows that even the positive actions of Gideon should be tempered with an understanding of doubt and fear.

After Gideon’s defeat of the Midianites, like his speech, Gideon’s actions are much different. There are two rather striking features about his actions in Judges 8. First, Gideon’s actions show self-interest at the expense of his fellow Israelites and his family. Second, his actions lead to idolatry. The obedient, worshipful, and timid Gideon of Judges 6-7 gives way to a much different character. Amit summarizes well:

Gideon is also characterized differently in the two blocs. In the first, the dominant feature is his fearfulness. He is afraid of the Midianites, and therefore beat out the wheat in the winepress (6:11); he is afraid of the people of his town, and therefore pulls down the altar of Baal and cuts down the Asherah beside it at night (6:27). Even the power gained from the Spirit of the Lord was limited to his mustering together the army, as immediately thereafter Gideon again appears as a frightened person in need of further signs . . . Gideon was afraid to go down to the Midianite camp by himself, and hence took with him his servant Purah (7:10-11). He needed numerous signs . . . . In the second bloc Gideon suddenly appears as a hero who



knows how to conduct his affairs independently; he acts without any need for signs or other forms of encouragement. His fearful son, Jether, is displayed as an antithesis to his own courage (8:20). Gideon's courage is even noted by the Midianite kings: "for as the man is, so is his courage" (8:21).<sup>128</sup>

Amit's discussion brings out many of the points made above and shows that Gideon's personality, as defined through his actions (and speech), has drastically changed. After the Midianite threat is vanquished, there is an expectation of the land having rest, but Gideon continues to pursue the enemy.<sup>129</sup> Two further points require elaboration. First, Gideon's fearfulness in Judges 6-7 dissipates and manifests itself in brutal actions toward his fellow Israelites. This dissipation of Gideon's fear can be seen with his actions toward Succoth and Penuel. Gideon beat the men of Succoth with thorns and briars to teach them a lesson (8:16). He went even further with the men of Penuel when he broke down their tower and killed the men of the city (8:17). Second, Gideon's worship of Yahweh seen in the first part of the narrative turns into idolatry in the second. After the Midianite victory there is no sense that Gideon seeks Yahweh, whether in regard to a sign/confirmation or worship until he erects an ephod that leads Israel into idolatry. The contrast between the Gideon of Judges 6 and the Gideon of Judges 8 is stark at this point. This contrast is revealed most clearly in Gideon's fate.

As Bar-Efrat suggests, one of the main ways to evaluate a person's character is through his or her fate. The last act credited to Gideon was setting up the ephod in his hometown of Ophrah that caused "all Israel" to whore after it (8:27). This ephod is also described as a snare to both Gideon and his family (8:27). This, however, is not the end of Gideon's story. While the land did have rest for forty years (8:28), Judges 8:33-35 shows that as soon as Gideon died the people of Israel "turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god . . . . And the people did not remember Yahweh . . .

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<sup>128</sup>Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 238.

<sup>129</sup>It is difficult to tell whether Gideon's continual pursuit of the Midianites is his own doing and constitutes a negative comment or whether Gideon is just being thorough. See Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1987), 146; Boling, *Judges*, 149; and Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 311.

and they did not show steadfast love to the family of Jerubbaal.” Gideon’s fate is seen in his idolatrous ending, the internal strife of his family, and the tyrannical kingship of his son Abimelech. Block summarizes Gideon’s fate well:

As in Gideon’s own life, under his reign the tilt of Israel’s spiritual condition is obviously in the direction of paganism . . . . And when he dies, the nation is no longer satisfied with playing the harlot with the Baals. Now they make Baal-Berith their god (8:33). The character of Abimelech’s reign, the account of which reads like a leaf out of the Canaanite political-science notebook (chap. 9), provides concrete testimony to the social implications of the Canaanization of Israelite society begun with Gideon.<sup>130</sup>

The legacy that Gideon leaves is not that of a conquering hero, but of the only judge who actually introduced idolatry into Israelite life. It appears that the particulars of Gideon’s narrative lead the reader to see Gideon as the transitional figure within the narrative of Judges. To say that Gideon’s story ends on a negative note would be a major understatement. While he may have some good and sympathetic traits at first, by the end of Judges 8, not to mention Judges 9, the reader is left seeing mostly the bad in Gideon and is unable to sympathize with him. More complexities in the characterization of Gideon, however, need to be addressed.

### **Gideon and Moses**

It has been widely recognized that Gideon has several points of contact with Moses, especially in their respective call narratives.<sup>131</sup> Massot notes that this connection “hold[s] out promise for the new judge.”<sup>132</sup> Wong argues that this connection to Moses was created intentionally and cannot simply be explained by the use of the same type-

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<sup>130</sup>Block, “Will the Real Gideon Please Stand Up?,” 365.

<sup>131</sup>Norman C. Habel, “The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives,” *ZAW* 77 (1965): 297-305; Gregory T. K. Wong, “Gideon: A New Moses?,” in *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld*, ed. Robert Rezetko, Timothy H. Lim, and W. Brian Aucker (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 529-45; Hava Shalom-Guy, “The Call Narratives of Gideon and Moses: Literary Convention or More?” *JHS* 11 (2011): 1-19; Larry D. Martens, “The Echoes of Moses in Judges: A Study of the Echo Narrative Technique in Exodus 3:1-15, Judges 6:11-21, and Judges 13:1-25” (M.Div. thesis, Providence Theological Seminary, 1995), 39-63.

<sup>132</sup>Massot, “Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel,” 150.

scene.<sup>133</sup> Wong notes seven points of connection between Gideon’s call and the call of Moses: (1) both call narratives are within the context of distress due to a foreign oppression (Exod 2:23; Judg 6:6); (2) both encounter the Angel of Yahweh (Exod 3:2; Judg 6:11-12); (3) both narratives switch between the Angel of Yahweh and Yahweh himself speaking (Exod 3:4a; Judg 6:14); (4) both protagonists are tending to the father or father-in-law’s business (Exod 3:1; Judg 6:11); (5) both “father” figures are linked to non-Yahwistic cults (Exod 3:1; Judg 6:25); (6) both commissioning scenes use the verbs הלך and שלח (Exod 3:10-11; Judg 6:15); (7) Yahweh promises his presence in the midst of the protagonist’s protest (Exod 3:12; Judg 6:16).<sup>134</sup> There are, however, connections beyond the call narrative that link Gideon and Moses. First, explicit references to the exodus account in Judges 6:8-9, 13 are made. Second, other parallels to Moses are present. Some of these parallels include the fearful responses of both Gideon and Moses at the presence of the Angel of Yahweh,<sup>135</sup> the mention of locusts,<sup>136</sup> the use of the names Jether/Jethro in their respective narratives,<sup>137</sup> and the fashioning of the idolatrous images out of זהב(ה) נזמי.<sup>138</sup> While some of the connections that have been made seem more coincidental, most of them appear to be intentional.<sup>139</sup> If the author of Judges is intentionally connecting Gideon with Moses, then this is certainly important for the

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<sup>133</sup>Wong, “Gideon,” 531. See also Shalom-Guy, “The Call Narratives of Gideon and Moses,” 14.

<sup>134</sup>Wong, “Gideon,” 531-35. Shalom-Guy notes the following connections: (1) confrontation between appointer and appointee; (2) personal address; (3) commission; (4) refusal; (5) reassurance; (6) signs; (7) unexpected revelation; (8) fearful encounter with the deity; (9) national distress; and (10) fire. See Shalom-Guy, “The Call Narratives of Gideon and Moses,” 15-16.

<sup>135</sup>Wong, “Gideon,” 535; Shalom-Guy, “The Call Narratives of Gideon and Moses,” 16.

<sup>136</sup>Wong, “Gideon,” 536.

<sup>137</sup>Klein, “*The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*,” 62.

<sup>138</sup>Wong, “Gideon,” 543.

<sup>139</sup>The purpose of this discussion is not to prove the priority of Moses’ call or the other aspects of the Exodus account that intersect this narrative. For arguments on these other aspects, see Wong, “Gideon,” 529-45, and Shalom-Guy, “The Call Narratives of Gideon and Moses,” 1-14.

characterization of Gideon. Moses is portrayed largely positively within the exodus traditions, but this study has argued that Gideon is to be pictured largely negatively. The question that needs to be asked is, what connections is the reader supposed to make between these two characters?

While Gideon appears to be intentionally characterized after Moses, there do seem to be some important differences. The author of Judges seems to be using irony in the comparison. Both Wong and Schneider note differences in Gideon and Moses' responses due to their situations. Wong and Schneider believe Moses' questions of the Angel can be seen as more appropriate, since Israel's salvation was still unfolding. This is heightened by the fact that Exodus 4:14 notes that Yahweh was angry with Moses. Gideon had more reason to trust Yahweh than Moses and his questions and may also be viewed negatively. Not only did he have the exodus tradition to draw from, but the prophet had just reminded Israel of it in 6:7-10. Therein lies the irony; Gideon and his generation had to be reminded about Yahweh's saving acts, and Gideon seemed to think that the exodus was such a distant event that Yahweh needed to prove himself again.<sup>140</sup> While there are connections between Gideon and Moses, right away there do seem to be some important differences. There is also irony in the portrayal of the Midianites in these narratives. They are on somewhat friendly terms (at least at times) with Moses (Exod 2:15-22; 3:1), but they are the oppressors in Judges.<sup>141</sup> Wong also believes that the use of the term locusts is used intentionally by the author of Judges when describing the Midianites in 6:3-5 and 7:12 to parallel them to the judgment on Egypt by the locusts in Exodus 10. These ironic parallels reinforce the "punishment from YHWH for the evil

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<sup>140</sup>Schneider, *Judges*, 105; Wong, "Gideon," 537.

<sup>141</sup>Schneider, *Judges*, 105; Wong, "Gideon," 538.

Israel did in his eyes.”<sup>142</sup> These uses of irony begin to show that the parallel that is being drawn between Gideon and Moses might be at Gideon’s expense.<sup>143</sup>

Gideon’s failure to live up to his call (or the stature of Moses) is confirmed most conclusively by the fashioning of the ephod from the *גזמי זהב*. There appears to be a clear parallel between Judges 8:26-28 and Exodus 32:1-6. As Wong mentions, “these are the only two cultic objects mentioned in Hebrew Scripture that are specifically said to be made from gold earrings.”<sup>144</sup> The difference between these two is obvious. Moses was not responsible for the idolatrous image in Exodus 32, and he also destroyed it and called the people to repentance. Gideon, on the other hand, was responsible for making all of Israel whore after it. Klein sums up the comparison between Moses and Gideon: “The repeated allusions to Moses in the Gideon narrative emphasize the discrepancies between a servant of Yahweh who remains humbly in contact with his god and a servant of humanity who becomes convinced of his own powers and ceases to hear the voice of Yahweh.”<sup>145</sup> By characterizing Gideon in light of Moses, Gideon is further shown to be a failure. In the end Gideon was “no new Moses.”<sup>146</sup>

### **Gideon As an Unreliable Character**

Biblical characters, like other literary characters, can be either reliable or unreliable.<sup>147</sup> This has caused Fokkelman to write that “characters are in principle just as

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<sup>142</sup>Wong, “Gideon,” 538.

<sup>143</sup>Contrast this presentation with W. Beyerlin, “Geschichte und heilsgeschichte Traditionsbildung im Alten Testament: Ein Beitrag zur Traditionsgeschichte von Richter vi-viii,” *VT* 13 (1963): 1-24. Beyerlin believes that Gideon is to be viewed as Moses’ successor. See *ibid.*, 9-10, 24.

<sup>144</sup>Wong, “Gideon,” 543.

<sup>145</sup>Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, 65.

<sup>146</sup>Wong, “Gideon,” 545. Wong actually says that Gideon should be viewed as an “old Aaron” due to his leading Israel into idolatry. *Ibid.*, 543-44.

<sup>147</sup>Unlike biblical characters the biblical narrators are always reliable. See Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 51. Contra Kissling, *Reliable Characters in the Primary History*, 23-26; David M. Gunn, “Reading Right: Reliable and Omniscient Narrator, Omniscient God, and Foolproof

ignorant and insecure, arrogant or sad, just as smart or vicious or ironical or excited as we are in our own lives.”<sup>148</sup> Biblical characters are portrayed in a realistic fashion and with this some biblical characters are reliable while others are unreliable. A character’s reliability is determined by a number of factors including the character’s speeches and actions and whether those conform to the narrator’s point of view.<sup>149</sup> According to the discussion of characterization of Gideon within Judges 6-8, it appears that Gideon is portrayed as an unreliable character. Never within the narrative does Gideon appear to act in a manner that is congruent with the narrator’s point of view. Similarly, Gideon’s speech does not conform to the narrator’s perspective. The reliability of a character’s speech is not only determined by their characterization, but things like whether the speech and actions are public or private play an important role. Gunn and Fewell note that when considering the reliability of a character’s speech that public and private speeches may differ in terms of their reliability.<sup>150</sup> In general, a public speech often makes the speaker look better than he really is.<sup>151</sup> A consideration of both the speech and actions of Gideon as well as the public nature of his speech has an important bearing on whether his words should be considered reliable in Judges 8:23.

## Conclusion

Gideon is a complex character presented in a full-fledged manner. He has some affinity with both the judges who precede him and those who follow him, making him the

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Composition in the Hebrew Bible,” in *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield*, ed. David J. A. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl, and Stanley E. Porter, JSOTSup 87 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1990), 56-57.

<sup>148</sup>J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Ineke Smit (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 68.

<sup>149</sup>Kissling, *Reliable Characters in the Primary History*, 20.

<sup>150</sup>David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, The Oxford Bible Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 69.

<sup>151</sup>See the examples in *ibid.*, 68-71.

ideal pivot point in the narrative of the book. In the end, however, his judgeship is remembered by the idolatry that he introduced into Israel. Biddle offers an apt summary assessment of Gideon's character: "As events unfold, the reticent, even fearful Gideon encountered at the beginning of the cycle devoted to him becomes increasingly self-centered, his primary concern becomes his own reputation, and his devotion to the unadulterated worship of YHWH gives way to a dangerous flirtation with idolatry."<sup>152</sup> Understanding the narrator's presentation of Gideon's character is crucial to interpreting Gideon's response in Judges 8:23.

### **Gideon's Response**

In Judges 8:23, Gideon responds to the request from the men of Israel that he accept a hereditary monarchy. His response is arguably one of the trickiest passages, not only in the Gideon narrative, but also in the book. Gideon's response seems straightforward: "No I will not rule over you." But the characterization of Gideon up to this point and the narrative content surrounding this event in particular make a straightforward reading somewhat odd. This section recaps the basic interpretations of Gideon's response and then examine both the request that Gideon become king (8:22) and Gideon's response (8:23) in more detail. After looking at these a detailed discussion of the royal characterization of Gideon is given.

### **Interpretations**

The various interpretations of Gideon's response can be broken down into two main groups. The first, and majority view, is that Gideon declined the monarchy. The second believes that Gideon accepted the monarchy. Within these two basic interpretations there are nuances, and each could be divided into sub-groups based on these nuances.

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<sup>152</sup>Biddle, *Reading Judges*, 100.

**Declined.** The vast majority of scholars believe that Gideon declined the offer to become king with what his response in 8:23.<sup>153</sup> It is important to understand, however, that a large number of scholars who believe that he rejected the monarchy with his verbal response also believe that in the end he accepted the monarchy with his actions or that his actions bring his response in 8:23 into question. This sentiment is captured well by Biddle who writes, “One could argue that the text effectively portrays a figure who effectively reigned as king, regardless of whether he bore the title.”<sup>154</sup> With this view, Gideon simply said one thing, but did the other. A very similar view says that Gideon’s refusal was merely a courtesy. Since he was already king, he politely declined the offer. Amit describes this by writing that some see Gideon’s refusal “as merely a refusal for the sake of appearances, a matter of ceremonial courtesy. Gideon was in fact acting like a king, as is evident from his next step . . . and from his lifestyle described in vv. 29-31.”<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup>George Foot Moore, *Judges*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895), 229-30; J. Alberto Soggin, *Das Königtum in Israel*, BZAW 104 (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1967), 17, 36-37; Tomoo Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel: A Study of the Formation and Development of Royal-Dynastic Ideology* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, (1977), 1, 185; Frank Crüsemann, *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum: Die antiköniglichen Texte des Alten Testaments und der Kampf um den frühen israelitischen Staat* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978), 20-42; Gerald Eddie Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*, SBLDS 87 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986), 124-26; Robert Gnuse, *No Tolerance for Tyrants: The Biblical Assault on Kings and Kingship* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2011), 74; Yair Lorberbaum, *Disempowered King: Monarchy in Classical Jewish Literature*, The Kogod Library of Judaic Studies (London: Continuum, 2011), 2-5; Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 160; Robert H. O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 63 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 143, 163-65; Edgar Jans, *Abimelech und sein Königtum: Diachrone und Synchronische Untersuchungen zu Ri 9*, Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament 66 (St. Ottilien, Germany: Eos Verlag, 2001), 384; Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 169; Elie Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest: An Ideology of Leadership in the Gideon, Abimelech and Jephthah Narratives (Judg 6-12)*, Supplements of Vetus Testamentum 106 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 121, 239; Marty Alan Michelson, *Reconciling Violence and Kingship: A Study of Judges and 1 Samuel* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 43; Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges*, 127; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 298-99; McCann, *Judges*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 2002), 69-70.

<sup>154</sup>Biddle, *Reading Judges*, 98. See also Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 299-305. On this subject, Gnuse writes, “The expression in which Gideon appeared to reject kingship became important for the overall story of the judges, yet at the same time Gideon was subtly condemned for acting as an unjust king by Deuteronomic standards” (Gnuse, *No Tolerance for Tyrants*, 74).

<sup>155</sup>Yairah Amit, *In Praise of Editing in the Hebrew Bible*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 39 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), 124. Amit believes that Gideon refused the position because of who asked him (the men of Israel) and because the kind of kingship that they wanted entailed military power. Instead, Amit’s interpretation is that Gideon is “portrayed as a wise and realistic leader who sees the true picture, and decides that one can live as a king without being called one” (123). The difficulty with this



The difference between these two views lies in the differing interpretations of the character of Gideon. In both interpretations he refuses the request, and in both he still reigns like a king. One believes that he does so despite his word and the other attaches nobler intentions to him.

Many who hold that Gideon declined the position say that he did so for theological reasons. So Gideon was not just declining the position offered to him, he was making a theological statement. This position is represented most fully by Buber:

In Gideon's refusal this is the remarkable thing, that it is not spoken for him and his descendants alone, but rather goes beyond all that is personal: not only is it intended to withhold the rulership over this people, whose representatives have just called upon him, for his own house, but from all people. His No, born out of the situation, is intended to count as an unconditional No for all times and historical conditions. For it leads on to an unconditioned Yes, that of a kingly proclamation *in aeternum*. 'I, Gideon, shall not rule over you, my son shall not rule over you'—in this is included: 'no man is to rule over you'; for there follows: 'JHWH, who is God himself, He it is who is to rule over you'. The saying dares to deal seriously with the rulership of God.<sup>156</sup>

The majority of those who believe that Gideon declined the position would hold a similar view to that espoused by Buber. Generally, their description of Gideon's refusal is viewed as a statement of Yahwistic orthodoxy. This orthodoxy claims that human kingship is incompatible with divine kingship.<sup>157</sup> It is those who have viewed Gideon's response as reflecting true Yahwistic orthodoxy who would say that Gideon's refusal is clearly one of the most anti-monarchical texts in the Old Testament.<sup>158</sup>

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interpretation is that nowhere in the Gideon narrative is Gideon ever characterized as wise or knowing. In fact, the opposite is the case. In the first episode, for instance, Gideon cannot even "see" the Angel of Yahweh for who he is.

<sup>156</sup>Buber, *Kingship of God*, 59.

<sup>157</sup>J. Alberto Soggin, *Das Königtum in Israel*, BZAW 104 (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1967), 36-37; Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties of Israel*, 1; Gerald Eddie Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*, SBLDS 87 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986), 124-26. On this position, Assis writes, "Gideon vehemently refuses, and instead of thinking of himself, he expresses in one short sentence one of the most impressive theological axioms of the Bible . . . Again Gideon nobly sets aside his own wishes, in order to take the correct and proper action for the good of the people and in God's eyes" (Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 121-22). The difficulty, however, is that Gideon's actions right after his response do not really work out for the good of the people.

<sup>158</sup>Almost every full-length treatment on the institution of monarchy in ancient Israel holds this position. See the discussion on this position in chap. 2.

Not all of those who interpret Gideon as declining the offer for kingship in Judges 8:23 see it as a theological statement that concerns the institution of monarchy.<sup>159</sup> Davis argues, “Indeed one can say that Gideon’s refusal (v. 23) is more an assertion of ideal kingship than a categorical rejection of monarchy itself.”<sup>160</sup> Those who hold to this position believe that the anti-monarchical interpretation of Gideon’s response assumes too much.

Some of those who have most ardently defended the position that Gideon’s response is a statement of true Yahwistic faith argue that Gideon is to be viewed as either an ideal judge or that he is to be viewed in a very positive manner.<sup>161</sup> Niditch summarizes this position by arguing, “that Gideon is portrayed as a great hero, and that minor ambivalences about the nature of the hero and major ambivalences about the best form of polity are typical of Judges and the tradition as a whole.”<sup>162</sup> For some, Gideon’s character is key to interpreting Gideon’s response as anti-monarchical. This interpretation of Gideon’s character, however, is severely flawed.

**Accepted.** While the majority of interpreters believe that Gideon declined the offer of the men of Israel to rule over them, there are a few who believe that Gideon’s verbal response should be viewed as an acceptance of the position. There have been three main arguments within this view.

First, Davies argues that Gideon’s response was a humble acceptance of the position of king. He describes Gideon’s responses as a “pious refusal with the motive of

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<sup>159</sup>Dale Ralph Davis, “A Proposed Life-Setting for the Book of Judges” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1978), 108-09; C. J. Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, trans. Ray Togtman (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 349; O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 164.

<sup>160</sup>Davis, “A Proposed Life-Setting for the Book of Judges,” 108.

<sup>161</sup>Crüsemann, *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum*, 42-54.

<sup>162</sup>Susan Niditch, *Judges*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster, 2008), 103.

expressing piety and of gaining favour with his would-be subjects.”<sup>163</sup> Furthermore, Davies notes that Gideon’s response conceals “a determination to exercise a personal and hereditary kingship within Yahweh’s kingship, and that, conversely, Yahweh’s kingship does not preclude Gideon’s kingship.”<sup>164</sup> Davies advances his argument by discussing similar Old Testament stories where there is pious negotiation/dialogue and by discussing the royal features present in the text, especially those within the Abimelech narrative.<sup>165</sup>

Second, Olson holds the position that Gideon may have been duplicitous.<sup>166</sup> Olson believes that Gideon is portrayed as the transitional figure among the judges and that his characterization is largely negative. Because of this, his words cannot be taken at face value. Instead, “they should be construed as in some way negative.”<sup>167</sup> He suggests that a possible interpretation of Gideon’s response is that there is a “false piety and humility behind which Gideon in fact claims the powers and benefits of a de facto kingship for himself, although he does not formally claim the royal title.”<sup>168</sup> Olson’s position is distinguished from Davies by their differing views of Gideon’s characterization. Olson does not believe that Gideon is capable of piety at the end of his narrative; therefore, any piety that he shows must be false.

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<sup>163</sup>Davies, “Judges VIII 22-23,” 154.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid., 154-57.

<sup>166</sup>Olson actually believes that there are two possible interpretations of Gideon’s response that are plausible, but that with either interpretation Gideon’s words cannot be taken at face value, and they should in some way be understood negatively. Only one of his possible interpretations will be surveyed here, since the other one does not fit within the stream of interpretation that Gideon accepted the monarchy. The other possible interpretation is that Gideon rejected kingship, but that his rejection represents the narrator’s point of view, which serves as a further condemnation of Gideon because he abrogates his responsibility. With this interpretation, Olson could actually be put in both camps of interpretation. See Olson, “*Buber, Kingship, and the Book of Judges*,” 212.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid.

<sup>168</sup>Ibid. This is very similar to Amit’s view, with the exception of the view of Gideon’s characterization.

Third, Heffelfinger proposes the complex secondary chieftainship model to understand Gideon's acceptance of the position offered to him. She notes that Gideon's response is not ambiguous, but rather straightforward. The surrounding context, however, causes confusion. She therefore seeks to understand Gideon's response within the complex secondary chieftainship model. In this model Gideon seeks to sacralize his claims while linking his leadership with theocratic rule. This means that through his response "Gideon claims the rulership for himself and his sons while identifying his rule with that of the deity."<sup>169</sup> She believes that this interpretation fills all of the logical gaps that are present within the Abimelech story.

**Conclusion.** As the above interpretations of Gideon's response show, it is necessary not only to look at Gideon's verbal response in 8:23, but also his actions and the narrator's characterization of him. To take just one of these into account does not deal honestly with the text. Gideon's words in 8:23 cannot be interpreted in isolation from the surrounding context. It will be beneficial, therefore, to look at both the request and Gideon's response in more detail.

### **The Request: 8:22**

After Gideon's victory over the kings of Midian, the men of Israel make the request that Gideon rule over them. But it is not only he whom they want to rule over them, but also his sons and the sons of his sons. Most commentators agree that this request goes beyond the mere governing that the judges of Israel took part in, and moves to the realm of a dynastic monarchical rule.<sup>170</sup> This type of rule was not unfamiliar to the Israelites of both the historical setting of the book and those to who were alive during the

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<sup>169</sup>Katie M. Heffelfinger, "'My Father is King': Chiefly Politics and the Rise and Fall of Abimelech," *JOT* 33 (2009): 286.

<sup>170</sup>Ellis Easterly, "A Case of Mistaken Identity: The Judges in Judges Don't Judge," *Bible Review* (1997): 41.

composition of the book of Judges. Those who had lived in the time of the judges had encountered such ruling authorities, such as Zebah and Zalmunna. An appropriate question to ask of the narrative then seems to be, why would the men of Israel ask Gideon to be their king? The answer to this question seems to lie in the progression of Gideon's character and the realization by the men of Israel that Gideon was already acting as if he were king. So, K. Lawson Younger writes, "Immediately after the slaughter of the last pair of kings, Gideon's countrymen offer him dynastic rule. It only stands to reason in their thinking that the slayer of kings has ipso facto achieved a kingly status."<sup>171</sup> The narrative then flows into this dialogue, which confirms what has already taken place: Gideon's rule. Three other important aspects of this verse need to be examined in greater detail.

First, who were the *איש ישראל* who made this request of Gideon? Amit notes that there have been two basic interpretations of this phrase. First is the view that the phrase "men of Israel" is an overstatement by the editor to imply all of the people of Israel. Second is the view that the phrase "men of Israel" was a formal way of describing an institution, namely an Israelite military force.<sup>172</sup> While having some reservations about the claims of this second view on the phrase "men of Israel," in general Amit believes that in 8:22 and some other texts where the phrase is present it indicates "a clear military significance."<sup>173</sup> From the direct context of the verse it is difficult to ascertain the exact identity or number of men who approached Gideon with this request. The passage preceding this request made clear that Gideon was with the three hundred men whom

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<sup>171</sup>Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, 203.

<sup>172</sup>Amit, *In Praise of Editing in the Hebrew Bible*, 126.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid., 128. Amit makes three comments about the phrase: (1) that a distinction needs to be made between the phrase in a clearly military context and a more general context; (2) that there is a nuance in meaning within the term that could indicate various tribal groups; and (3) the historical reliability of the biblical accounts does not affect the existence of this institution; the appearance of the term within these stories bears witness to the existence of such an institution. See *ibid.*, 127-28.

Yahweh had chosen to route the Midianites. At the very least, it would seem that the three hundred were in some part connected with this request, but it likely also includes some of the men from Ephraim whom Gideon had called earlier in the narrative (7:24). This becomes apparent when Gideon requests spoil from the men in verse 24. The designation of them as the “men of Israel,” however, insinuates that these men represented the feelings and desires of the nation, and so possibly includes the other tribes that were involved in the Midianite battles, and are thus to be viewed as representatives of all of the people of Israel and not just Gideon’s soldiers.<sup>174</sup>

A second important aspect of this verse is the use of the verb *משל* instead of the more common verb *מלך*. Block believes that the verb *משל* is used here because it represents an invalid offer of monarchy that goes against the monarchical stipulations of Deuteronomy 17.<sup>175</sup> Though Block’s final conclusion that this is an illegitimate offer appears to be correct, it is not because of the use of this verb, but rather because this offer goes against the Deuteronomic stipulations. The use of *משל*, however, neither drives nor necessitates this interpretation. It does not seem to be obvious why the men of Israel and the author of Judges chose to use this particular term, but two important things can be noted.<sup>176</sup> First, the use of the term *משל* in no way lessens the meaning of “to rule” or “to have dominion over.”<sup>177</sup> On this point, Gerbrandt notes that the “term ‘king’ (*מֶלֶךְ*) or the

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<sup>174</sup>Block notes, “[T]he people who come before the hero consisted minimally of the three hundred men who had accompanied Gideon in the pursuit of the Midianites (v. 4) and had witnessed his killing of Zebah and Zalmunna (v. 21) and maximally of the tribes who had been involved in the battles with the Midianites and their allies (Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, Naphtali, Ephraim)” (Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 296).

<sup>175</sup>Ibid, 297.

<sup>176</sup>Bluedorn also has an extended discussion of the use of *משל*. He believes that *מלך* “focuses on one person alone, who reigns, on the geographical region of the kingship, on the specific form of the leadership as one of the people’s overseer, or on all of these, rather than on one’s act of reigning” (Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 167). He distinguishes this from the use of *משל* by stating that this term “moves either the act of leading into the centre, whereby the person of the leader and the geographical extent of the leadership are regarded as less important, or the power that is exercised, whereby the leader and the office of leadership are less important than the effect of the leadership” (ibid.).

<sup>177</sup>Willem VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), s.v. “משל,” by Philip J. Nel.

related term ‘to rule’ (מלך) are not used in the passage but it is clear that the issue is one of kingship.”<sup>178</sup> Just because this term is used does not mean that monarchy was not in view here. And, second, the use of משל seems to be the dominating term in this passage. Here in this verse it is used with imperatival force, but it will be used three further times within Gideon’s response in the next verse.

Finally, it is strange that the offer for Gideon to rule is based on the men of Israel’s assumption that Gideon delivered them from the hand of Midian. This assumption by the men of Israel is much stranger because earlier in the narrative Yahweh limited the men to three hundred so that Israel would not think that they had delivered themselves from their enemies. The very thing that Yahweh had tried to prevent seems to have come to pass; they believe that one of their own countrymen, Gideon, has delivered them. On this point, Younger notes, “Throughout the Gideon account, it has been forcefully stated or implied that it is Yahweh who saves (yš’) Israel, not Gideon or the Israelites themselves (cf. 7:2, which explains the reason for the second troop reduction in these terms).”<sup>179</sup> It is also striking that in Gideon’s response he does not correct the men. I discuss this omission more below, but it should not be too surprising after seeing the escalating development of the character of Gideon and his gradual escalation toward a position of ruler.

### **The Response: 8:23**

Gideon’s response to the men of Israel is fairly straightforward. When asked if he would rule he responds by saying, לא־אֶמְשַׁל אֲנִי בְכֶם וְלֹא־יִמְשַׁל בְּנֵי בְכֶם יְהוָה יִמְשַׁל בְּכֶם. Three syntactical features of this verse deserve attention. First is the emphatic and contrastive use of the singular pronoun אֲנִי. The pronoun is added here to bring out antithetical contrast where one person is highlighted to the exclusion of the other. The

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<sup>178</sup>Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*, 123.

<sup>179</sup>Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, 204.

stress on Gideon through the use of the pronoun, who seemingly declines the offer of kingship, highlights Yahweh's rule.<sup>180</sup> Second, the triple usage of the term מִשַׁל parallels the triple request of the men in verse 22.<sup>181</sup> Third, in the latter part of the verse the subject precedes the verb, יהוה יִמְשַׁל בְּכֶם. This also places emphasis on Yahweh.<sup>182</sup> At face value, when this verse is viewed outside of its context, it appears that Gideon declines the offer. As Olson notes, however, "the narrator has placed Gideon's claim . . . in a literary context that casts considerable doubt on the sincerity of the statement."<sup>183</sup> The difficulty of Gideon's response is not in its syntax, but in the narrative context. This narrative context includes some things that Gideon does not address in his response as well as the royal features found throughout the narrative that must be considered. The development of Gideon's character, which has already been discussed in detail, needs to be taken into account.

### **Who is the Savior/Deliverer from the Midianites?**

The Gideon narrative up to this point has been clear that it is Yahweh who saves, but when the men of Israel requested Gideon to be king, it was because they thought that it was Gideon who saved them (v. 22). It is interesting that Gideon does not correct the men on this occasion. Younger offers an explanation for Gideon's silence by writing, "Though Gideon does not mention this, Yahweh is the One who has saved Israel, not him. Yet Gideon does not correct their mistake regarding who has saved them. By

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<sup>180</sup>Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, vol. 2, trans. and rev. T. Muraoka, *Subsidia Biblica* 14 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2000), §146a; Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 169.

<sup>181</sup>Some argue that the triple use of מִשַׁל is used to designate Gideon's staunch refusal of the offer of kingship. So, Block notes, "Choosing his words carefully and casting his answer as a solemn triple assertion, he categorically rejected the opportunity to be the founder of the first dynasty in Israel" (Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 298).

<sup>182</sup>T. Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985), 33; Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, §155nb.

<sup>183</sup>Olson, "Buber, Kingship, and the Book of Judges," 210.



allowing that statement to stand, he endorses it de facto.”<sup>184</sup> This is made even more apparent when one considers the conversation between the Angel of Yahweh and Gideon, in which Gideon says, “Oh, Lord, how shall I save Israel?” in 6:15. Here Gideon cannot imagine being able to save Israel. By 8:23, however, Gideon may not only see himself as the leader/ruler of his people, but also their savior and deliverer. If Gideon’s response is meant to be a correction of their understanding of God’s sole prerogative to rule or as an outright rejection of the position of kingship, then it is interesting that he does not correct them on their misunderstanding of who has saved them, a point which the narrative has made clear.

### **Theological Implications of Gideon’s Response**

In a recent work, Amit asks, “whether the narrative or character development [of Gideon] allows space for the refusal.”<sup>185</sup> A similar question will be asked here. Does the narrative and character development allow for Gideon to make a theological claim about the institution of the monarchy in his response to the men of Israel in 8:23?

For Gideon to make an anti-monarchial claim would go against his characterization. The characterization of Gideon that has been suggested is that early on in the narrative he was fearful, doubting, but obedient. Before the battle with Midian he sought Yahweh, though for signs and confirmation, and was obedient, though somewhat timidly. After the battle, Gideon is a changed man. He can now speak in situations that he could not previously, and it is “Gideon alone, not his soldiers and not Yhwh, who is pushing the action and calling the shots.”<sup>186</sup> By this point in the narrative the reader must

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<sup>184</sup>Ibid. Younger also notes, “It is particularly ironic that Gideon allows this to stand when even a Midianite soldier knew it was Yahweh who was delivering Midian, not Gideon’s hand” (Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, 204). This is a condemnation both on the soldiers who proposed this to Gideon and to Gideon himself.

<sup>185</sup>Amit, *In Praise of Editing in the Hebrew Bible*, 125.

<sup>186</sup>Olson, “Buber, Kingship, and the Book of Judges,” 209.

have serious reservations about any of the words that come out of Gideon's mouth or out of the actions that he takes.<sup>187</sup> And if Gideon's past were not enough, his setting up of the idolatrous image should put to rest any ambiguity about his character. All of the narrative clues that are used in the characterization of Gideon show that he is a thoroughly unreliable character.<sup>188</sup> His words and actions do not conform to those of the narrator throughout the narrative and it is difficult to believe that the narrator would decide to use him for this purpose right after the brutal episodes with Succoth and Peneul and right before he sends all of Israel into idolatry. This would not be an effective narrative technique to show that Gideon opposed the institution of monarchy.

If Gideon is making an anti-monarchial claim, which one would have to read into the text, then it could only serve to further denigrate his character. Because of the flawed characterization of Gideon throughout the narrative, if he is attempting to reject the entire institution of kingship, then this rejection ends up reflecting even more poorly upon Gideon's character since he takes on all the trappings of a king. Olson notes that if Gideon is rejecting the entire institution, then, "the rejection actually represents in the narrator's view an abrogation of responsibility and needed leadership in an unsettled time. By refusing kingship Gideon is contributing, along with his other actions, to the religious and social disintegration of his time."<sup>189</sup> While this interpretation seems unlikely, this scenario can really only contribute to the flawed characterization of Gideon. It would be a flashback to the scared Gideon hiding in the winepress or the fearful Gideon who needed his servant when going into the Midianite camp.

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<sup>187</sup>This is all the more the case if, as some have suggested, when Gideon sets up the ephod in Ophrah he is intending this to be how divine rule is practiced. For instance, Stone believes that "this ephod represented the alternative to human government since through it Yahweh could govern Israel by direct revelation" (Stone, *Judges*, 301). If Gideon thought that the proper means of Yahwistic rule could be obtained through setting up an idolatrous image, then anything he says about kingship or Yahwistic rule must be questioned.

<sup>188</sup>See the discussion above about the unreliability of Gideon's character.

<sup>189</sup>Olson, "Buber, Kingship, and the Book of Judges," 212.

Furthermore, if Gideon is saying that Yahweh alone should rule, it is quite odd that Yahweh, as a character, has been absent from the story since the Midianite battle in Judges 7, and he never actually rules in either the Gideon or Abimelech narratives. In fact, 8:34 says that the Israelites did not remember (זכר) Yahweh their God. So not only does God disappear as a character, but he is even forgotten by the people due to the idolatry that Gideon introduced into the nation. The only other time in Judges where there is a comparable saying is in 3:7 before Othniel judges. Here the people are said to have forgotten (שכח) Yahweh their God. Claassens notes God's absence by writing, "In contrast with the first movement, where God is very present and active, God is totally absent from the third movement [of the Gideon narrative]. It seems that god is expressing anger and disappointment at Gideon's response by withdrawing from the scene."<sup>190</sup> While God's emotional state is never revealed in this narrative, it is clear that he is no longer present after the battle with the Midianites. Within this absence Gideon's words seem all the more hollow. Gideon says that Yahweh should rule, but since the Midianite victory he has taken leadership into his own hands. If Gideon's words are to be taken at face value, then where is the rule of Yahweh?

### **Gideon's Royal Characteristics**

Instead of the narrative describing Yahweh's rule, there seems to be a thorough presentation of Gideon's royal characteristics. Throughout the narrative, Gideon is seen as going beyond the normal limits of leadership that a judge in the book of Judges would be bound to. Several aspects of the Gideon narrative portray him as more than a judge. Block identifies ten different ways that Judges 8:24-32 describes Gideon as kingly.<sup>191</sup> Similarly, Oeste echoes nine of these descriptions.<sup>192</sup> These will be surveyed below.

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<sup>190</sup>Claassens, "The Character of God in Judges 6-8," 67.

<sup>191</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 299-305.

<sup>192</sup>Gordon K. Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule: Windows on Abimelech's Rise and Demise in Judges 9*, JSOTSup 546 (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 59-63.

First, Gideon requested a portion of the spoil from the men after the battle. By doing this Gideon seems to demand a “symbolic gesture of submission.”<sup>193</sup> The amount of gold that Gideon took in was immense and could constitute a royal treasury. Oeste notes that the biblical record is rife with examples of both kings dedicating portions of their spoil to the temple and kings (2 Sam 8:13; 1 Chr 26:27) being entitled to a special portion of the spoil (Judg 5:30; 1 Sam 30:19-20; 2 Sam 12:30; 1 Chr 20:2).<sup>194</sup>

Second, Gideon took the Midianite kings’ symbols of royalty, including their pendants, purple robes, and the crescent amulets worn by their camels. By taking this portion of treasure for himself, he is not necessarily acting as a king, but the narrative does place special emphasis on this act by mentioning it in both 8:21 and again in 8:26. Oeste notes that “the transfer of these symbols of kingship to Gideon insinuates an attempt to take on a similar status among his own people.”<sup>195</sup> The double mention of Gideon’s procurement of these items appears to be something that the narrator wants the reader to notice.

Third, Gideon forms an ephod as a cultic object and places it in Ophrah, his hometown. By forming the ephod, Gideon appears to be acting as the patron of a cult, which is often associated with kingship.<sup>196</sup>

Fourth, through the use of the ephod as a cultic center of worship that attracted “all Israel,” Gideon may have established Ophrah as his capital. The linking of

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<sup>193</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 299.

<sup>194</sup>Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule*, 60. Oeste also notes that this is not restricted to kings (ibid.).

<sup>195</sup>Ibid., 62.

<sup>196</sup>Some source critical approaches think that royal clues in 8:22-28, especially those concerning Gideon’s erection of the ephod, show that there was an older narrative that described Gideon as being king and having a royal sanctuary. See a discussion of this view in G. Henton Davies, “Judges VIII 22-23,” *VT* 13 (1963): 152.

leadership, and kingship in particular, and priesthood are often seen together. David did this with Jerusalem and Jeroboam did this with Dan and Bethel.<sup>197</sup>

Fifth, the language used to describe the implications that the ephod had for Gideon and “his house” carries monarchial overtones. As Block notes, the term ביתו is ambiguous and does not necessarily carry any dynastic overtones, but within the context of this episode it may.<sup>198</sup> Jobling comments further on the gratuitous nature in which the Gideon narrative is concerned with not only Gideon, but his family, and the royal implications of this fact.<sup>199</sup>

Sixth, 8:29 says that Jerubbaal dwelt/sat (ישב) in his house, with the possible meaning that he ruled in his house. Oeste and Block note that this term could refer to Gideon sitting on a throne.<sup>200</sup> The multiple mentions of Gideon’s house within the narrative, especially in relation to him dwelling/sitting, is “more understandable if the narrative seeks to highlight Gideon as the founder of a dynasty whose actions influence later generations.”<sup>201</sup> So the use of this verb may be stated in a way to insinuate that Gideon ruled.

Seventh, the statement, “for he had many wives” and that he had 70 sons seems to insinuate that he had a harem. While harems are not restricted to monarchies,

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<sup>197</sup>Joshua also did this with Shiloh, showing that it is not exclusively a kingly activity.

<sup>198</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 301.

<sup>199</sup>David Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative II: Structural Analysis in the Hebrew Bible*, JSOTSup 39 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield, 1987), 69.

<sup>200</sup>Ibid., 300-01; Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule*, 61. Similarly, Assis believes that the use of ישב with the reference to “his house” cannot mean that he just went to his house or that he retired to a private life because Gideon continues to be a public figure. He writes, “The meaning of the word ישב is to enter into office, and the meaning of the passage therefore is that Gideon went and sat on his throne of leadership, and the passage seeks to intimate that this resembled a royal dynasty” (Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 112).

<sup>201</sup>Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule*, 62.

they are highly associated with them. Younger notes that to produce seventy sons, he would have required a harem of about 14 women.<sup>202</sup>

Eighth, verse 27 says Gideon had seventy sons. Oeste discusses the regal associations of the number seventy within a family. This can be seen in the seventy sons of the goddess Athirat at Ugarit and Ahab's seventy sons who were killed by Jehu (2 Kgs 10).<sup>203</sup> Furthermore, de Moor proposes that the number seventy within a family constitutes the archetypal family.<sup>204</sup>

Ninth, Gideon named his son Abimelech, which means "my father is king." While there is a possible range of meaning for the name Abimelech,<sup>205</sup> understanding it as referring to "my father [Gideon] is king" is the most natural reading. Jobling, who also sees a striking amount of proto-royal features in the text, argues, "the name Abimelech, whatever its technical meaning may be, surely invites in context, the literal understanding, 'My father is king'."<sup>206</sup> While the phrase "and he set his name" (וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת־שְׁמוֹ) is a rare construction,<sup>207</sup> the narrative does appear to indicate that it was Gideon who name his son Abimelech.<sup>208</sup> So Frolov writes that Abimelech's name "is chosen (as the

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<sup>202</sup>Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, 209.

<sup>203</sup>Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule*, 61.

<sup>204</sup>J. C. de Moor, "Seventy!" in "Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf": *Studien zum Alten Testament und zum Alten Orient. Festschrift für Oswald Loretz zur Vollendung seines 70. Lebensjahr mit Beiträgen von Freunden, Schülern und Kollgene*, ed. M. Dietrich and I. Kottsieper (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 1998), 199-200. See also F. C. Fensham, "The Numeral Seventy in the Old Testament and in the Family of Jerubbaal, Ahab, and Panammuwa and Athirat," *PEQ* 109 (1977): 113-15.

<sup>205</sup>Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 192.

<sup>206</sup>Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative II*, 69.

<sup>207</sup>The verb וַיִּשֶׂם occurs with the noun שֵׁם 18 times in the OT. Twelve of those occurrences refer to Yahweh placing his name: Deut 12:5, 21; 14:24; 1 Kgs 9:3; 11:36; 14:21; 2 Kgs 21:4, 7; 1 Chr 17:21; 2 Chr 6:20; 12:13; 33:7. There are 3 instances where the phrase is used when renaming someone: 2 Kgs 17:34; Dan 5:12; Neh 9:7. It is also mentioned in the Aaronic blessing in Num 6:27 and in a parable in 2 Sam 14:7. See Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 190.

<sup>208</sup>*Ibid.*, 189-91; Butler, *Judges*, 223; Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 268; Boda, *Judges*, 1166; Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, 210; Frolov, *Judges*, 177. While the construction may be somewhat rare it does not appear to have connection to Yahweh placing his name. Bluedorn notes that it does not seem to be

narrator finds it necessary to specify) by Gideon (8:31b).”<sup>209</sup> Naming is important for indicating the point of view of both the narrator and the characters.<sup>210</sup> So Gideon’s act of naming his son Abimelech may indicate his point of view, which would mean that Gideon viewed himself as a king. His naming is also narratively important, since of all of his siblings he is the only one whose naming is mentioned.<sup>211</sup>

Tenth, Gideon was buried in his family tomb, which may constitute a royal tomb. While family tombs were prevalent (in Judg 16:31, for example, Samson is buried in a family tomb), the distinction within this narrative is the repetition of the patronymic.<sup>212</sup>

While not all of these observations are conclusive, and many of them have no necessary connections to kingship in and of themselves, taken together it is difficult to underestimate the narrative clues that the author is leaving. If these were the only ones from the narrative, they would be enough to see Gideon as being portrayed or characterized in a royal fashion, but there are at least seven further royal elements within the Gideon cycle that help to characterize him in a kingly fashion.

First, the phrase “for Yahweh and for Gideon,” which Gideon told the men to shout in battle contains syntactic and semantic parallels with a royal dedicatory formula

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referencing a renaming either since “Abimelech is characterized with this name independently of any other name” (Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 191). Furthermore, the antecedent of the word he in v. 31 seems to be most plainly read as Gideon who was the only male referenced in the previous verse. Abramsky believes that the phrase “he set his name” is a formal act where “naming is designed for the aim of fulfillment of a specific thought regarding the person bearing the name” (quoted and translated from Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 113 n. 187). According to Abramsky the use of this phrase shows that Gideon planned for Abimelech to rule.

<sup>209</sup>Frolov, *Judges*, 177.

<sup>210</sup>Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 59-61.

<sup>211</sup>Schneider aptly notes, “The contempt or arrogance espoused by the name [Abimelech] is intended for the one who named the child” (Schneider, *Judges*, 130). Interestingly, however, Schneider does not think that the narrator clearly identifies who named him, but seems to say that it is likely Gideon.

<sup>212</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 304.

on two ANE inscriptions. On these inscriptions the saying “for <name of deity> and for <name of ruler>” constitutes a royal formula.<sup>213</sup>

Second, the Ephraimites brought the heads of princes Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon (7:25). For them to do this seems well outside the bounds of Gideon’s ruling as judge and seems to be the homage that one would pay to a king.

Third, Gideon treated the men of Succoth and Penuel harshly, as if he ruled over them (8:4-16). His treatment here also extended well beyond that of a judge.<sup>214</sup> It has been argued that his actions towards these two cities look a lot like stipulations found within a suzerain-vassal treaty.<sup>215</sup>

Fourth, when Gideon captured Zebah and Zalmunna, he asked them what kind of men they had killed. These men were Gideon’s brothers. Zebah and Zalmunna replied that the men were like Gideon, they had the appearance of sons of a king (8:18). By doing this they were explicitly equating Gideon with royalty.

Fifth, Gideon asked his son, who the narrative makes apparent is his firstborn, to kill Zebah and Zalmunna (8:20). By doing this Gideon may be grooming him as his successor.<sup>216</sup>

Sixth, Gideon is not given a concluding formula saying that he “judged” Israel. Instead, the text says that Midian was subdued, and that there was peace during Gideon’s

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<sup>213</sup>Philip C. Schmitz, “Deity and Royalty in Dedicatory Formulae: The Ekron Store-Jar Inscription Viewed in the Light of Judges 7:18, 20 and the Inscribed Gold Medallion from the Douïmès Necropolis at Carthage (*KAI* 73),” *Maarav* 15 (2008): 165-73. See also S. Gitin and M. Cogan, “A New Type of Dedicatory Inscription from Ekron,” *IEJ* 49 (1999): 193-202; C. R. Krahmalkov, “The Foundation of Carthage, 814 B.C.: The Douïmès Pendant Inscription,” *JSS* 26 (1981): 85-86.

<sup>214</sup>Contra Ryan, who writes that “[t]he inhabitants of Succoth and Penuel are not punished without cause . . . . He deals with Succoth and Penuel with the restraint of a noble and just visiting magistrate who responds to taunts, challenges and insults and acts with the nobility and presence of the mighty warrior he has become. He preserves his status and honor and punishes those who deserve punishment” (Ryan, *Judges*, 65).

<sup>215</sup>Malamat, “The Punishment of Succoth and Penuel,” 70-71; Frolov, *Judges*, 176.

<sup>216</sup>Hayyim Angel, “The Positive and Negative Traits of Gideon as Reflected in His sons Jotham and Abimlech,” *JBQ* 34 (2006): 162.



lifetime (8:28). While the book of Judges does at times leave off the notice of an individual judging, it seems particularly absent here in light of these other royal connections.

Seventh, Abimelech speaks to his mother's relatives and asks them whether it would be better for them to be ruled by one man or all of the sons of Gideon (9:2). The very fact that Abimelech asks this question assumes that the sons of Gideon are already ruling over them, thereby confirming that Gideon accepted the position of king.<sup>217</sup>

The royal characterization of Gideon is summarized well by Jobling, who writes, "it is striking how the Gideon-Abimelech material, recounting as it does the story of Israel's proto-monarchy, abounds with indicators, some direct, some more oblique, of the themes of heredity and monarchy."<sup>218</sup> While some of the characteristics concerning Gideon's royal description are more oblique, there are some that simply cannot be ignored. And taken together, both the direct and the oblique references are used to characterize Gideon in a kingly fashion. This is extremely important not only for understanding his character or characterization, but also for understanding his response to the men of Israel in 8:23. If Gideon is portrayed as a king, then he either accepted the offer verbally or rejected it, but kept all the trappings and privilege.

### **Gideon and Deuteronomy 17:14-20**

Gideon does appear to be kingly in some form or another. Whether by word and action or only by action, Gideon does appear to accept the position of king. Several royal characteristics were discussed above, but here it is important to trace out the implications of some of those characteristics. There were 17 royal features observed

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<sup>217</sup>Massot writes, "Clearly the single most influential factor in the determination of the answer to this question [of whether Gideon became king] is the assumption in 9.2 that Gideon's authority was to be inherited by his sons" (Massot, "Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel," 127). Contra Loewenstamm, "The Lord Shall Rule Over You," 440-42.

<sup>218</sup>Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative II*, 69.

concerning the character of Gideon within the Gideon cycle. Interestingly, 3 of those features are expressly forbidden in the law of the king found in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. Gideon is explicitly said to break two of the laws concerning the king. First, Deuteronomy 17:17 says that the king should not acquire many wives, but Judges 8:30 gives the explanatory note, “for he had many wives.” Second, according to Deuteronomy 17:17, the king is also not to acquire excessive gold. Gideon is seen doing this in Judges 8:25-27. Along with these observations, Olson points out one further connection when “Gideon crafts an ephod or idol to which ‘all Israel prostituted themselves’ (8:27). This, too, is a sign of a bad king, according to the law in Deut 17:20.”<sup>219</sup> The narrative, therefore, not only depicts Gideon with kingly language, but it also depicts him as a bad king.<sup>220</sup>

### **Two Likely Interpretations**

Several things need to be considered when interpreting Gideon’s response in 8:23: (1) the plain meaning of the words that Gideon spoke, which seems to be a clear rejection of the throne for himself and his descendants; (2) the interpreter needs to try and figure out whether Gideon’s words were intended to be an axiomatic and theological statement rejecting the institution of the monarchy; (3) the characterization of Gideon throughout the narrative needs to be accounted for; (4) the royal themes and the royal characteristics given to Gideon within the narrative need to be accounted for as well. Doing these things leads to the following conclusions.

First, Gideon’s character is portrayed in such a way that his words here or elsewhere cannot be taken at face value. So despite the straightforward reading of 8:23, Gideon’s characterization leads the reader to believe that his words may not be trustworthy. Interestingly, this principle is almost universally applied by scholars to

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<sup>219</sup>Olson, “Buber, Kingship, and the Book of Judges,” 210.

<sup>220</sup>Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative II*, 67.

Gideon’s confrontation with the men of Ephraim in 8:1-3. Taking these words at face value would imply that Gideon is being humble, but almost no one describes this encounter in such a way. Instead, there is near universal consensus that Gideon is at his diplomatic best here.<sup>221</sup> In other words, he is telling the men of Ephraim what they want to hear.<sup>222</sup> Even Assis who thinks that Gideon’s response in 8:23 is “one of the most impressive theological axioms in the Bible”<sup>223</sup> describes Gideon as dealing with the men of Ephraim “diplomatically.”<sup>224</sup> Also, in 8:1-3, Gideon emphasizes the tribe of Ephraim in his speech. As Bluedorn notes, “the emphatic בידכם emphasizes the Ephraimites’ role.”<sup>225</sup> He also contrasts his clan to that of Ephraim in 8:3 with the rhetorical question, “what have I done in comparison with you?” These are similar features to those found in 8:23. If there is near universal agreement that Gideon’s words to the men of Ephraim in 8:1-3 should be interpreted politically and diplomatically, then it seems logical that his words in 8:23 to the men of Israel could be interpreted diplomatically as well.

Second, too many narrative clues exist to dismiss Gideon’s royal portrayal within this narrative. It seems clear that, regardless of whether Gideon accepted the position of king or not with his words, in the end his actions show that at the very least he held a king-like status.

Third, Gideon’s character does not qualify him to make grandiose theological statements and for those to be taken as trustworthy. This is similar to Olson’s category

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<sup>221</sup>Several describe Gideon as being diplomatic in this text. Others refer to Gideon as political, which is nearly synonymous with being diplomatic in this context. See Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 89; Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, 196; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 285; Butler, *Judges*, 218; Boda, *Judges*, 1160; Schneider, *Judges*, 218.

<sup>222</sup>Some say that Gideon used flattery, while others say that he was speaking in such a way to abate their anger. See Biddle, *Reading Judges*, 94; Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 70; Boda, *Judges*, 1160; Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 151; Niditch, *Judges*, 104.

<sup>223</sup>Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 121.

<sup>224</sup>*Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>225</sup>Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 151.

that Gideon's words "should be construed as in some way negative."<sup>226</sup> So, if Gideon's words are meant as a theological statement on the institution of the monarchy, they are used by the narrator to condemn Gideon.<sup>227</sup>

Fourth, due to Gideon's characterization, it is difficult to accept that his words could be intended as humble or that he would be portrayed as heroic through them.

Within this interpretive framework, there are two plausible interpretations. First, Gideon rejected the title of king with his words, but then took the position of king (or a similar king-like position) with his actions. Here Gideon would simply say one thing, but then do another. It is important to note that he could have done this duplicitously as a way of garnering more power or by appearing more diplomatic, but it is difficult to take his words as either a theological axiom or as a sign of humility. Second, Gideon accepted the title of king with his words and his actions. His words are then to be understood as politically shrewd, like his conversation with the men of Ephraim in 8:1-3. By doing this he may, as Heffelfinger argues, be aligning his leadership with that of Yahweh's, or he might simply be telling the Israelites what he thinks they want to hear (once again, just like he did with the Ephraimites).<sup>228</sup> Neither of these interpretations have anti-monarchial insinuations in them.

### **A Possible Anti-Monarchial Objection**

The reading that has been proposed could spawn a possible anti-monarchial objection. Gideon is presented as an unreliable character and in a largely negative fashion, especially after the Midianite victory.<sup>229</sup> Gideon also appears to minimally have

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<sup>226</sup>Olson, "Buber, Kingship, and the Book of Judges," 212.

<sup>227</sup>Ibid.

<sup>228</sup>Heffelfinger, "'My Father is King,'" 286.

<sup>229</sup>This does not mean that Gideon never did anything worthy of praise or had good actions. This is not the case and as stated in his characterization part of the early portrayal of Gideon was favorable. The end of his career as judge, however, was the darkest this far in judges. Butler writes on this well by stating, "The Gideon material is thus structured around human weakness in leadership mysteriously

accepted the position of king through his actions, which has been noted by a majority of scholars. If these two things are true, then it could be possible to state that Gideon is then presented as a bad king for the purpose of showing the illegitimacy of the institution of the monarchy. There are a few important things that need to be said about this. First, this is a hypothetical objection that is not currently advanced within scholarship. Second, generally speaking those who think that Gideon's claim is an axiomatic theological statement believe that Gideon is portrayed overwhelmingly positive or that his words are a later insertion by an anti-monarchical source so his words would not have to match his character. Third, this interpretation would neglect the plot of the book, which is held to by a growing consensus of scholars. Within the plot of Judges Gideon appears as the transitional figure within the book of judges where the judges become increasingly immoral as the narrative progresses. These narratives do not appear to be shaped to show that the body of the book of Judges is anti-monarchical, but that the judges themselves become increasingly more corrupt, especially as they move away from Judah. The focus is not on any anti-monarchical sentiment, but on the failed leadership of the judges. Gideon is not presented as a failed king to show the illegitimacy of the institution of monarchy. He is presented as a judge who overstepped his authority and who showed the increasing immorality and ability of the judges within the framework of the book. The judges who follow Gideon illustrate this point even further. This possible interpretation would isolate the Gideon narrative from the plot structure of not only the body of the book, but also the prologue and epilogue, which anticipate kingship.

## **Conclusion**

Gideon's response to the men of Israel is in no way a clear anti-monarchical statement. Due to the characterization of Gideon throughout the narrative, if he were to make such a statement it would only serve to condemn himself. It also seems clear

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immersed in divine purpose" (Butler, *Judges*, 195).

through the immediate context within the Gideon narrative that, regardless of whether he accepted the position/title of king with his words, his actions show that he certainly lived a kingly lifestyle. Instead, his response could be interpreted in a similar fashion to his conversation with the men of Ephraim in 8:1-3 where he was politically shrewd and he persuaded the men of Ephraim to do what he wanted. In 8:23, he may have been politically shrewd and then requested enough spoil to constitute a royal treasury. In the end Gideon is largely portrayed as a failed leader and a bad king according to the Deuteronomic standard. The narrative seems to reveal the failures of Gideon's leadership and does not seem to have a theological axe to grind against the institution of monarchy.

### **Conclusion**

Gideon's, or at this point it is better to say Jerubbaal's, story shows the downward trend in the regression of the judges has worsened significantly since Othniel. The sinfulness of Israel has also reached a new low, with the judge himself leading the people into apostasy against Yahweh. By the end of the narrative, Yahweh has disappeared, and it is difficult to trust the judge. His words are suspect because he does the opposite of what he says, and his actions are even worse.

If one were to read only Judges 8:23 without considering the surrounding context of the passage, one might come to the conclusion, though it would have to be heavily implied, that this particular text or even the book of Judges is anti-monarchial. This conclusion, however, seems nearly impossible when one considers the development of the character of Gideon, whose actions show him as one who exercised authority well beyond that of a normal judge. Even if Gideon's words were meant as an attack on the institution of monarchy, although there is nothing contextually to suggest that they were, there is little to nothing from the characterization of Gideon that would lead the reader to accept his statement as authoritative. Gideon, moreover, never speaks for the narrator up to this point in the narrative, so why would the narrator choose to put his words into

Gideon's mouth after characterizing him in the way that he does? Instead, Gideon is presented as an unreliable character who does not appear to share the narrator's point of view. From the narrative context it appears that Gideon accepted the offer to be king, minimally with his actions and maximally with response as well, and he set up an ephod that caused Israel to go into idolatry yet again. Gideon's fate serves as one of many indicators within the book of Judges showing both the illegitimacy of non-Judean leadership and the lack of leadership offered through the judges. Even the man whom the men of Israel wanted to be king failed, and, in the end, Gideon did what was right in his own eyes.

## CHAPTER 6

### JOTHAM'S FABLE IN CONTEXT

#### **Introduction**

The Abimelech narrative serves as a sequel to the Gideon narrative and is part of the overall Gideon cycle within the book of Judges. One of the major components of the Abimelech narrative is Jotham's fable. This fable has been said by some to be the most anti-monarchial text in the entire ancient world.<sup>1</sup> To understand this fable properly, it is important to understand it within the context of the Abimelech narrative; therefore, a discussion of the plot of the narrative will be given. Oeste notes the importance of understanding the entirety of the narrative, especially in relationship to the theme of monarchy: "[T]here is more to this story than simple anti-monarchic polemic, and a narrative analysis can help us to see the particular points of emphasis in this story by carefully examining how the story is told and how it is structured."<sup>2</sup> It is also important to examine the characterization of Abimelech and his half-brother Jotham. After this examination, I offer a discussion of the genre and purpose of fables. A treatment of Jotham's fable proceeds from this discussion, which includes a discussion on the monarchial implications of the fable.

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Buber, *The Kingship of God*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., trans. Richard Scheimann (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 75.

<sup>2</sup>Gordon Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule: Windows on Abimelech's Rise and Demise in Judges 9*, JSOTSup 546 (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 55.



## The Plot of the Abimelech Narrative

The Gideon and Abimelech narratives are linked through their content. It is important to understand the connections between these narratives within the overall Gideon cycle in order to have a proper understanding of how Jotham's fable is to be interpreted.<sup>3</sup> By means of an examination of individual episodes and scenes, this section will survey how the Abimelech narrative fits within the Gideon cycle and the plot development throughout the narrative.

### The Abimelech Narrative and the Gideon Cycle

The Abimelech narrative serves as the sequel to the Gideon narrative that was examined in the last chapter.<sup>4</sup> As was noted in the last chapter, these two narratives can also stand somewhat independently, but they are closely linked together.<sup>5</sup> Numerous thematic connections between these two narratives are introduced within the Gideon narrative but find fulfillment in the Abimelech narrative.<sup>6</sup> Block notes seven different points of connection that demonstrate coherence between the two narratives: (1)

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<sup>3</sup>Contra Gnuse, who writes, "The parable can stand on its own with meaning apart from the narrative in which it is found. You do not need to know the references to the aspirations of Abimelech to be king and how he killed all his brothers and half-brothers, save Jotham, the one who crafted the fable. The critique of kingship is clear simply within the parable itself" (Robert Gnuse, *No Tolerance for Tyrants: The Biblical Assault on Kings and Kingship* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2011], 75).

<sup>4</sup>Robert Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 47-48; Elie Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest: An Ideology of Leadership in the Gideon, Abimelech, and Jephthah Narratives (Judg 6-12)*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 106 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 132. Butler prefers to refer to the Abimelech narrative as an appendix. See Trent Butler, *Judges*, WBC, vol. 8 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 195.

<sup>5</sup>As Frolov notes, "Contentwise, the link between Gideon and Abimelech is as close as it can possibly be (note, in particular, that the narrator keeps the former in mind all the way to the very end of the latter's story in 9:56-57)" (Serge Frolov, *Judges*, FOTL [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013], 169).

<sup>6</sup>Robert O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 63 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 139-46. O'Connell examines the thematic connections between the narratives and thinks that they should be the structural criteria for determining the rhetoric of the passage. So he writes, "A plot-structure analysis that treats thematic purpose as the main criterion for determining the rhetorical function of the complex of events demonstrates how integral is the Abimelech account to the resolution of themes in the Gideon account" (139 n. 177).

references to the good that Jerubbaal did for Israel; (2) the connection between Jerubbaal, his concubine, and Shechem; (3) References to El/Baal Berit-Berith; (4) the specific use of the name Jerubbaal when discussing Abimelech's father; (5) the mention of Jerubbaal's seventy sons; (6) references to Ophrah; (7) the role of blood vengeance in both narratives.<sup>7</sup> The Abimelech and Gideon narratives are intricately tied together through these similarities.

### **The Abimelech Narrative**

The Abimelech narrative is concerned primarily with the character of Abimelech. Within this narrative there is a large section of direct speech in the form of a fable and its application. This narrative is found in Judges 8:33-9:57 and is composed of an introduction, three episodes, and a theological conclusion. Each of the episodes, including the introduction and conclusion, focus on a negative portrayal of Abimelech.

**Introduction: 8:33-35.** Judges 8:33-35 introduces the Abimelech narrative.<sup>8</sup> It begins with the use of ויהי in verse 33.<sup>9</sup> This verse also connects with the previous narrative through the repeated mention of both Gideon's death (v. 32) and Israel whoring themselves (v. 27). Three things are mentioned within the introduction that foreshadow content in the body of the narrative. First, there is the mention of Baal-Berith in 8:33 and 9:4. Second, the motif of loyalty to the house of Jerubbaal is mentioned in 8:35 and repeated in 9:19.<sup>10</sup> Third, in 8:34, the people did not remember (זכר) Yahweh, which is

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<sup>7</sup>Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, NAC, vol. 6 (Nashville: Broadman, 1999), 308.

<sup>8</sup>Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books*, 47-48; Buber, *The Kingship of God*, 111; Robert Boling, *Judges*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 169; K. Lawson Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 218.

<sup>9</sup>Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books*, 50.

<sup>10</sup>Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule*, 56. Oeste points out various connections between 8:33-35 and the events of Judg 9, but does not believe that the actual Abimelech narrative begins until 9:1.

paralleled when Abimelech tells the people of Shechem to remember (זָכַר) him also in 9:2.

The introduction gives the background for Abimelech's rise to the position of king after Gideon's death. Prior to this, however, Gideon appears in the narrative for the last time. From here on Jerubbaal will be the name of choice used by the narrator.<sup>11</sup> The use of his "Baal" name contributes to the resulting legacy of the apostasy that he introduced, which has now caused all of Israel to play the whore, to no longer remember Yahweh, and to follow Baal-Berith.<sup>12</sup> Butler notes the poetic end of Gideon's tragic story: "Gideon's death returns Israel to Baal worship so that in the end Baal contends with Jerubbaal and wins the long-term victory."<sup>13</sup> Not only does this introductory section of the Abimelech narrative provide conclusion to Gideon's narrative, but as with any exposition, it provides the basic background material for the upcoming action.<sup>14</sup> The picture of Israel is the bleakest to this point in the book, and with the discussion of Israel's apostasy there is the renewed hope that Yahweh will raise up a deliverer as he has done in the previous cycles. So Klein writes that these verses "recapitulate the narrative paradigm . . . . The paradigm is familiar; surely another judge will follow. Having set up reader expectations, the narrative proceeds to shatter them completely by presenting the

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<sup>11</sup>Amit notes the importance of the name changes: "The large number of changes in names in this brief passage is not random. Its purpose is to stress the identity between Gideon and Jerubbaal, and indirectly the connection between him and Abimelech" (Yairah Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing*, Biblical Interpretation Series 38, trans. Jonathan Chipman [Leiden: Brill, 1999], 102).

<sup>12</sup>As Block notes, "Despite Gideon's establishment of the aberrant 'ephod' cult in his hometown, the final verses of the chapter seem to suggest that Gideon actually inhibited Israel's spiritual and moral declension" (Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 304-05).

<sup>13</sup>Butler, *Judges*, 223. Contra Niditch, who writes, "Gideon himself lives to a ripe old age and is buried in the ancestral tomb, a hero fully deserving of God's favor and blessed with the interment of a good man . . . . Judges 8:35 emphasizes the contrast between Gideon's good works and the people's lack of loyalty, setting the scene for the story of Abimelech" (Susan Niditch, *Judges*, OTL [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008], 106).

<sup>14</sup>Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 33.

story of an anti-judge, an anti-hero.”<sup>15</sup> With the mention of apostasy, the reader is reminded of the formulaic statement that has been present in the other cycles: “Israel did evil in the eyes of Yahweh.” As Klein notes, the narrator does set up the expectation that Yahweh will raise up another judge. But, since the author does not use the normative formulaic statement, a sense of tension exists. When the reader gets just a few verses into Judges 9 there is a realization that there will be no paradigmatic statements in this narrative and that the leader who will emerge is not raised up by Yahweh.

**Episode 1: 9:1-6.** There is wide-spread agreement that 9:1-6 constitutes its own episode.<sup>16</sup> This episode also begins the body of the narrative. The mention of Abimelech marks the beginning of the episode and the formal introduction of his character within this narrative, though he was mentioned in passing at the end of the Gideon narrative (8:31). The mentions of Abimelech and Shechem, as well as the use of the verb הלך, appear in verses 1 and 6. They form an *inclusio* for this episode.<sup>17</sup> In this episode, Abimelech seeks to rule over Shechem and is anointed king. There are a number of important literary features that both move the plot and introduce the characters.

One of the most obvious features of Abimelech’s introduction as a character is the lack of the formulaic statement that Yahweh raised up or sent a deliverer. Oeste recognizes this omission: “[N]one of these frame elements appears in Judg 9. This sets Judg 9 apart from the other deliverer narratives, preparing the audience to see Abimelech as an anti-model or foil.”<sup>18</sup> This makes the introduction to Abimelech’s character all the

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<sup>15</sup>Lilian Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, JSOTSup 68 (Sheffield, UK: Almond, 1988), 70.

<sup>16</sup>Wolfgang Bludorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism: A Theological Reading of the Gideon-Abimelech Narrative*, JSOTSup 329 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield, 2001), 204-10; Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule*, 70-79; Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 134-40.

<sup>17</sup>Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books*, 46.

<sup>18</sup>Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule*, 120. Similarly, Assis writes, “[T]he author wished to create the expectation that Abimelech would deliver Israel. The Abimelech account, however, is not a deliverance account” (Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 131).

more ominous. Immediately, the reader gets a sense of his character. Not only is he not sent by Yahweh, he seems to be sent by himself and concerned only with his own agenda.

The introduction left the reader asking the question of what kind of deliverer would appear. These verses quickly answer that question: Abimelech wants to be king. Some very important rhetorical content is used here to characterize Abimelech. First, when Abimelech goes to his mother's relatives and requests that they go to the lords of Shechem to request his kingship, he seems to allude to the offer to rule that was made to Gideon in 8:22-23. This allusion is recognizable through his use of the word מִשַׁל and his reference to the possibility of his brothers ruling over them (9:2). Abimelech uses these references as a means of both persuading the men of Shechem to fulfill his request and as a way of legitimizing himself in their eyes. As Bluedorn notes, "[Abimelech] legitimizes his own desire to rule as the logical consequence of the Israelites' proposal to Gideon and implies that he has the capacity to deliver them from external enemies."<sup>19</sup> Not only does Abimelech try to legitimize his rule by bringing up the offer that Gideon received in 8:22, but he also tries to legitimize his claim to rule by virtue of his connection and relationship to the Shechemites. In 9:2, Abimelech asks the leaders of Shechem if it is better for them to be ruled by all of Gideon's sons or just by him, and he reminds them that he is their bone and flesh. Abimelech then contrasts his relationship with the Shechemites to his relationship with his brothers. Bluedorn notes that Abimelech presents his half-brothers "as the sons of ירבעל, thus calling them the sons of the 'Baal-contender' and making them the enemies of the Baalists."<sup>20</sup> He draws a contrast with his half-brothers by saying that he is of the same bone and flesh as the lords of Shechem. This is, ironically, accepted by the lords of Shechem, who say in verse 3, "He [Abimelech] is our brother." Abimelech's tactics worked. Bluedorn notes the irony: "As their 'brother', however, Abimelech is about to kill his biological half-brothers, who represent Jerubbaal's line of descent, so

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<sup>19</sup>Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 204.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

that the brotherhood between Abimelech and the Shechemites is identified as a brotherhood of similar characters.”<sup>21</sup> A relationship forged under such treacherous circumstances is bound for failure.

While Abimelech seeks to legitimize his claim to rule, the narrator clearly shows his illegitimacy. This is done in at least four ways. First, while Abimelech appeals to the leaders of Shechem by saying that he is their bone and flesh, the narrator makes triple mention of Abimelech’s mother, thus showing the illegitimacy of his claim. No narrative imperative to mention his mother repeatedly is present. In 9:1, the first verse where he is introduced, she is mentioned two times, and there is a third mention of her in verse 3 right after Abimelech has appealed to them that he was their bone and flesh. It seems that these repeated references are used by the narrator to draw the reader back to 8:31, where she is referred to as a concubine (פִּילגֶשֶׁת). As such, Abimelech would not have been eligible for the throne in the same way that one of the sons of Gideon’s wives would have been; thus, his claim to rule is illegitimate. A second way that the narrator shows the illegitimacy of Abimelech’s claim is through the slaughtering of his brothers. Was there really a need to kill all of his brothers to secure the throne? This action might well insinuate that he was the last in line and that he therefore needed to eliminate all of the competition. The murdering of his brother also contributes negatively to his character for obvious reasons, but not only did he murder them, he did so by hiring worthless fellows using silver that he had received from the house of Baal-Berith (v. 4). A third way that the narrative questions Abimelech’s legitimacy is that he is the one who goes to his mother’s relatives so that they will then go to the lords of Shechem to discuss anointing him as king. In going to his mother’s relatives, Abimelech starts the discussion. This is vastly different than with Gideon, where the men of Israel approached him.<sup>22</sup> A final way

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 205-06.

<sup>22</sup>Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 134-35.

that the narrative throws suspicion on Abimelech's character and his legitimacy to rule is through his connections to Baalism. The lords of Shechem are literally referred to as the בעלי שכם, giving the sense that they are the Baalites of Shechem. This reference provides some important contrasts with the introduction to Gideon in the previous narrative, particularly the contexts in which the two are "called." Concerning this point, Bluedorn writes, "like Gideon, Abimelech is called within a Baalist context, but unlike Gideon, who is called out of a Baalist context to worship YHWH, Abimelech is called within a Baalist context to serve Baal and the Baalists."<sup>23</sup> The Baalism present in the episode is also strengthened by Abimelech receiving money from the temple of Baal to hire men to kill his brother (v. 4). Abimelech's installation as king also occurs at the "oak of the pillar" (v. 6), which could have connections to Baalism.<sup>24</sup> It is striking that at the beginning of the Abimelech narrative fidelity to Yahweh is not a concern for the central character. In the second episode, however, Jotham would call Abimelech, Shechem, and the nation back to covenant fidelity.

**Episode 2: 9:7-21.** The contents of the second episode are easily distinguished from the first and the third through the use of direct speech by Jotham. The boundaries of this episode are marked by a discussion of Jotham's movement, which forms an *inclusio* for the section. Similarly, in his speech Jotham references the בעלי שכם in both the beginning (v. 7b) and the end (v. 20). This fable is the focal point of the Abimelech narrative. This point is apparent from both its central location within the narrative and by the amount of space such a short period of time is given. Jotham's speech would have only taken a few minutes, but it is given fifteen verses. To put this length in perspective, his three-year reign is only given one verse (9:22).

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<sup>23</sup>Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 209.

<sup>24</sup>Block writes, "The installation ceremony is conducted by the 'Oak of the Pillar.' The nature and significance of this tree is unclear, but the association with the 'pillar,' a propped up stone representing Baal in Canaanite cult installations, suggests a sacred tree in the sanctuary area. The location heightens the religious significance of the event" (Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 312).

While there is a lot to say about the fable, only certain aspects of it are discussed here. A more detailed discussion will be given at the end of the chapter. Jotham's speech can be broken into two narrative units: verses 7b-15 and verses 16-20. Jotham was briefly introduced in 9:5 when he hid himself from Abimelech, but after Abimelech is anointed as king, he hears about it and goes to Mount Gerizim where he begins his extended discourse. The first part (vv. 7b-15) of the speech is a fable that is largely directed against Abimelech, but is also addressed to the leaders of Shechem (v. 7). In the fable the trees go out to anoint a king. In verses 7-13, the trees go to the olive tree, the fig tree, and the vine and request that they be king. Each of these rejects the offer with a question, where they ask something like, "Should I stop producing my good fruit to go and hold sway over the trees?" In verses 14-15, the trees go to the bramble, who seemingly accepts, but is concerned that the trees have been truthful (אמת) and threatens them that fire will go out and consume them if they have not been.

The second part (vv. 16-21) deals with application of the fable and is largely directed against Shechem.<sup>25</sup> The concern of the application is whether the Shechemites have acted faithfully (אמת) and blamelessly (תמים).<sup>26</sup> This is clearly the important point of the application, since it is repeated in both verse 16 and verse 19. For the purpose of plot and characterization, both the fable and the application of the fable are important.

Jotham's words continue the theme of Gideon's house, which has been a major concern of the narrative. Within this context Jotham's concern is that the Shechemite leaders have been faithful and blameless in their deeds toward Jerubbaal's house (vv. 16, 18, 19), which appears to tie back to the issue of legitimacy discussed in 9:1-6. The narrator also sees the remainder of the plot of the Abimelech narrative as being a

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<sup>25</sup>The tensions and difficulties that exist between the fable and the application will be discussed in greater detail below. Also, see Oestle, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule*, 139-41; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 316-17.

<sup>26</sup>Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 143.



fulfillment of Jotham's words. This is seen clearly in verses 56-57, where the actions of the plot are summed up as God "returning their evil" and bringing upon them "the curse of Jotham."

This narrative is also important for the characterization, not only of Jotham, who is viewed as speaking for God (v. 7),<sup>27</sup> but also of Abimelech and the Shechemites as well. On this point Oeste writes that "Abimelech's and the Shechemites' mute reactions characterize them as heedless and defiant, even when presented with the illegitimacy of their actions."<sup>28</sup> This is especially the case when Jotham refers to Abimelech as the son of a female servant (v. 18). This reference also connects back to the narrator's triple mention of Abimelech's mother and serves as further evidence of Abimelech's illegitimacy. At this point the narrator has defined the characters and the plot is set, but it is unclear whether God is really with Jotham's words because God has been absent from the narrative since the Midianite battle in Judges 7.

**Episode 3: 9:22-55.** The third episode starts in verse 22 and is comprised of two scenes. The first scene starts in verse 22, where the narrative shifts back to Abimelech, and the account ends at verse 41. The second scene goes from verse 42-55.<sup>29</sup> This episode begins with the temporal indicator that it is a new day and ends with the death of the main character, Abimelech. This episode also serves as God's response to Jotham's fable.

It appears from verse 22 that both Abimelech and the lords of Shechem remained unmoved by Jotham's speech. The narrator collapses time to indicate that Abimelech ruled over Israel three years, but this time period is only given one verse with no details or narrative comment on his reign. Zvi Adar aptly writes, "All that happened

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<sup>27</sup>Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule*, 145.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books*, 50.

during the three years of Abimelech's power and greatness are of no interest or importance; all that matters is the manner of his rise and the manner of his fall."<sup>30</sup>

Abimelech's reign, however, is obviously not the point of the narrative, since it is given so little narrative space. Instead, it appears that the demise of both Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem is the point of the narrative, as Block observes: "The striking feature is the extraordinary amount of space devoted to Abimelech's demise."<sup>31</sup>

One of the major ways that plots are developed is through conflict. Longman writes, "plot is thrust forward by conflict. The conflict generates interest in its resolution."<sup>32</sup> This is definitely the case in this episode. Three aspects of the conflict are especially important in this narrative. First, the conflict between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem is divinely orchestrated through the sending of an evil spirit (v. 22). Jotham had warned the leaders of Shechem to listen to him (v. 7) and had warned them of the consequences if they had not dealt truthfully (vv. 15, 16, 19). Jotham also made it clear that if they had not dealt in good faith, then the consequences would be that they would turn on each other (v. 20). This is exactly what happens within this episode. God accomplishes this outcome by sending an evil spirit (v. 22) between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem to deal treacherously with them. The sending of the evil spirit by God is an important rhetorical feature within the narrative. Not only does it confirm Jotham's words, but "it also brings Jotham's words in line with God's and the narrator's perspective."<sup>33</sup> This is the punishment for their not dealing truthfully with the house of Jerubbaal.

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<sup>30</sup>Zvi Adar, *The Biblical Narrative* (Jerusalem: Goldberg's, 1959), 13.

<sup>31</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 309.

<sup>32</sup>Tremper Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 93.

<sup>33</sup>Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule*, 145.

Second, the conflict is resolved through the fulfillment of Jotham's curse (9:56-57). The elements of that fulfillment can be seen in this episode. Abimelech finishes off the people of the city by destroying the leaders and the people of the tower of Shechem with fire. So Jotham's fable comes true: fire comes out of Abimelech and consumes them. The fulfillment of the second part of Jotham's fable happens in the latter part of this scene when Abimelech is fighting against Thebez and is once again trying to burn it with fire (v. 52), but his plans are thwarted when an unnamed woman throws a millstone on his head from the tower and crushes his skull. Instead of dying by the hands of a woman, he commands his armor-bearer to kill him. Ironically, both by its preservation here and elsewhere (2 Sam 11:18-21), exactly what Abimelech did not want to happen came to pass: he is remembered as being killed by a woman.<sup>34</sup> When the people saw that he was dead they departed to their homes. Thus, the second part of Jotham's fable is realized, and both Abimelech and the Shechemites have been repaid for the injustices that they committed against the sons of Jerubbaal.

Third, the conflict in this narrative shows the ruthlessness of the character of Abimelech. With each conflict he becomes seemingly more violent, even to the point that he kills women in the town (9:49-50). But there is some poetic justice to the description of Abimelech's demise. The man who killed his brothers on a stone (9:5) was himself killed with a millstone (9:53). Boogaart discusses this connection: "The correspondence between the two death scenes is unmistakable. The seventy sons of Jerubbaal, lying on a stone, were slain by Abimelech. Abimelech, lying on or near the bloody stone that had crushed his skull, was slain by his armor-bearer. His retribution has been exact indeed."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>On the use of this narrative by later biblical narratives, see Hava Shalom-Guy, "Three-Way Intertextuality: Some Reflections of Abimelech's Death at Thebez in Biblical Narrative," *JSOT* 34 (2010): 419-32.

<sup>35</sup>T. A. Boogaart, "Stone for Stone: Retribution in the Story of Abimelech and Shechem," *JSOT* 32 (1985): 51. For further discussion of this view, see J. Gerald Janzen, "A Certain Women in the Rhetoric of Judges 9," *JSOT* 38 (1987): 33-37.

These two events bracket the narrative life of Abimelech. He died in the same way that his tyranny was introduced.

**Conclusion: 9:56-57.** The final two verses of chapter 9 serve as the theological conclusion to the Abimelech story.<sup>36</sup> These verses are offset as an interruption by the narrator, who comments on the theological implications of the story. They make explicit what can be implicitly seen in the previous episode, the fulfillment of Jotham's fable and its application to the leaders of Shechem and Abimelech. The final summation from the narrator is, "God returned the evil of Abimelech, which he did to his father in killing his seventy brothers. And God returned all of the evil of the men of Shechem on their heads, and the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal was upon them." The importance of this explicit narrative comment cannot be overstated, especially for the purpose of this study.

The narrator's comment makes explicit that the concern of the narrative is not an anti-monarchial agenda. Instead, it appears to be divine retribution.<sup>37</sup> On this point Webb notes,

Divine retribution is a key issue from beginning to end, but nowhere is there any hint that Abimelech's crime was that he became a king. Nor is it suggested that the crime of the men of Shechem was that they chose to have a king. The crime is quite specifically the unfaithfulness shown to the house of Gideon by the rulers of Shechem, who conspired with Abimelech to kill his sons. That kingship is not the issue is clear from Jotham's words in 9:19-20.<sup>38</sup>

The final analysis of the narrative, which includes an explicit comment on Jotham's fable, is not primarily concerned with kingship, and there is nothing explicitly anti-monarchial in either the narrative or Jotham's fable.

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<sup>36</sup>Both Bluedorn and Assis refer to these verses as the theological conclusion. See Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 262, and Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 170-71.

<sup>37</sup>Roger Ryan, *Judges, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007), 66-76. Ryan argues here that retribution is the major theme of the Abimelech narrative.

<sup>38</sup>Barry Webb, *The Book of Judges*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 297.

## The Characterizations of Abimelech and Jotham

The discussion of plot here brought out some of the important aspects of characterization for both Abimelech and Jotham. A discussion of plot cannot be done without discussing characters and how they are portrayed. As Longman notes, “plot and character are closely related and may be separated only for purposes of analysis.”<sup>39</sup> In order to understand the purpose of these characters within the narrative, more analysis on their specific characterization needs to be given.<sup>40</sup> This analysis is important to the present study because it shows the overwhelming concern of the narrator is to paint Abimelech as a negative character.

### Abimelech

Abimelech is the main character of this narrative, and it is primarily through his character that the plot of Judges 9 moves along. While Abimelech does share some characteristics with his father, Jerubbaal, the presentation of his character is much different. While Gideon is presented as a full-fledged or round character, Abimelech is presented as a type or flat character. Gideon is also dynamic, whereas Abimelech is very static. From beginning to end, Abimelech is characterized negatively. Biddle notes the consistently negative portrayal of Abimelech by writing, “While the Gideon story portrays an arc in the character development of the protagonist from hesitance to egocentrism, the story of his son, Abimelech, paints a consistently negative picture. The son will exceed the father in vengeful lust for power.”<sup>41</sup> This negative portrayal is largely accomplished through direct characterization. Abimelech is given more direct

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<sup>39</sup>Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, 93.

<sup>40</sup>Heller believes that Abimelech is characterized by a very exacting retribution, which portrays him in a similar fashion to the foreign oppressors of Israel. See Roy L. Heller, “What is Abimelech Doing in Judges?,” in *Raising Up a Faithful Exegete: Essays in Honor of Richard D. Nelson*, ed. K. L. Noll and Brooks Schramm (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 225-35.

<sup>41</sup>Biddle, *Reading Judges: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2012), 101.

characterization than Gideon, which is all the more apparent considering how much less narrative space he has than Gideon. Both how he is directly and indirectly characterized will be discussed in more detail below. Judges 9 also provides two further means of characterization for Abimelech. Abimelech holds several characteristics in common with both his father and with Israel's other first king. The connections between Abimelech and these characters will also be explored.

**Abimelech as a type.** Abimelech is presented as a type, which is also referred to as a flat character. Berlin writes, "Flat characters, or types, are built around a single quality or trait."<sup>42</sup> The character trait that Abimelech is built around is clearly his own self-interest or egocentrism. Assis notes this well when discussing the characterization of Abimelech, especially as it relates to his leadership:

Abimelech's personality is one-dimensional. His desire for honour and power are extreme, whereas he shows no regard for national considerations or God's will. From this point of view, certainly, Abimelech is an anti-judge figure. He is shown as having a personality unworthy of the office. The account is not anti-monarchic, as many scholars purport. Rather it presents a model of an ego-centric leader, who is only concerned with his own good, and who is unworthy of leadership.<sup>43</sup>

Abimelech's character is one-dimensional, and the narrator, both through direct and indirect characterization, presents him in a very negative light from the start of the narrative to its conclusion.

**Direct characterization.** For the amount of narrative space that Abimelech is given, there is a lot of direct characterization that is included concerning his character. Abimelech is given direct characterization in two main ways: through direct comments from the narrator and through the direct speech of other characters.

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<sup>42</sup>Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield, UK: Almond, 1983), 23.

<sup>43</sup>Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 172.

Unlike elsewhere in the book, there are multiple explicit comments from the narrator concerning Abimelech. This is first seen in the description of Abimelech's mother. Abimelech's mother is first mentioned in 8:31, where she is referred to as Gideon's concubine (פילגש). Abimelech's relationship to her is reinforced through the narrator's triple mention of Abimelech's pedigree in the first three verses of Judges 9. As discussed above, this is one of the ways that the narrator reveals Abimelech's illegitimate claim to the throne.<sup>44</sup>

The narrator interjects with explicit comment on two occasions in Judges 9. Each time this happens the narrator includes negative comments about Abimelech. The first example appears in verses 22-24. In verse 24, the narrator describes Abimelech's actions toward his brothers using the words *הרג* and *המס*. The narrator's description of him at this point is that he is violent and a murderer. The other narrative interruption is the theological conclusion in 9:56-57. In verse 56, the narrator refers to Abimelech's actions as *רע* and once again uses the word *הרג* to describe his actions. While these could be discussed as actions, they are also explicit commentary by the narrator, who appears to be passing judgment on Abimelech with loaded words.

Abimelech is also characterized directly through Jotham's speech. He is referred to as a "son of a female servant," which once again reinforces his illegitimacy. Also, within the fable Jotham equates Abimelech with the bramble. There seems to be a clear digression in the worthiness of the plants within the fable, and the bramble is the lowest. Clearly, Jotham is using this to characterize Abimelech in a negative light.

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<sup>44</sup>Another direct narrative comment is found in v. 4, where Abimelech is said to hire worthless and reckless men, but this comment is not as clearly directed towards Abimelech as some of the others. The narrator says that he not only hired these men, but that they also followed him. This description insinuates that he keeps the company of these types of individuals. Unlike the other judges, who were able to rally the Israelites together, Abimelech has to pay off worthless individuals with money that was taken from a pagan site. So not only does Yahweh not bless Abimelech in leading the people, it is quite the opposite: Abimelech goes with the blessing of Baal.

Abimelech is not only spoken of poorly by Jotham, but his authority is also questioned by Gaal. Gaal questions Abimelech's authority to the leaders of Shechem in verse 28 by asking, "Who is Abimelech, and who are we of Shechem that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal . . . . [W]hy should we serve him?" This is the question that the narrative has been asking all along: why should anyone be serving Abimelech? Who is he? The narrator's answer is clear. He is the son of a concubine who keeps company with worthless fellows, and he is a murderous usurper with no legitimate claim to rule. For such a short narrative, Abimelech has a large amount of direct characterization. This characterization is decisively negative.

**Indirect characterization.** While there is enough direct characterization of Abimelech to provide a good understanding of his character, there is also some indirect characterization. This indirect characterization helps to bolster the impression of Abimelech that has already been discussed. As mentioned in the previous chapter, indirect characterization is typically achieved through the speech and actions of the character.

Abimelech only speaks directly in three verses. He first speaks in 9:1-2, telling his mother's relatives to convince the lords of Shechem that he should be king. He tells his mother's relatives to say, "Which is better for you, that all seventy of Jerubbaal's sons rule over you, or that one rules over you?" The reader is introduced to Abimelech through his attempt to make himself king. He appears to be concerned only with himself. Ironically, the end result is that the lords of Shechem would have been better with all seventy ruling over them. Abimelech speaks a second time when he commands his men to grab branches in 9:48 in order to burn the stronghold that held the lords of the tower of Shechem, as well as men and women in it. While this speech is not as significant as the other direct speech accorded to him, it is interesting that his words are also centered on himself. He tells his men to imitate him and do as he is doing. All eyes are apparently



focused on him. The final and most telling piece of Abimelech's direct speech is found in 9:54. Abimelech tells his young man, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest they say of me, 'A woman killed him.'" Commenting on this request, Block writes, "To the end Abimelech remained belligerent, defiant, arrogant."<sup>45</sup> Even when he is facing death his main concern is how he will be remembered.

Like Abimelech's direct speech, his actions also paint a horrifying picture of his character. Many of his actions have already been discussed in both the plot and the direct characterization. As was noted above, some of his actions are so heinous that there is even explicit narrative comment (9:22-24; 56-57). Abimelech's narrative contains multiple actions that clearly portray him negatively. The most notable is the murder of his brothers in 9:5. It is this act that spawns both Jotham's fable and the narrator's comments in verses 22-24, 56. The other actions that are attributed to him are all militaristic, the worst of which is the killing of the people of Shechem when they go out to tend to their fields (vv. 42-43). In these verses his soldiers kill farmers who were seemingly unaware that a military conflict was about to ensue. He eventually takes the entire city and then "sows it with salt" (v. 45). This account implies that Abimelech's vengeance is so deep that he will kill civilians and destroy the city, even for future generations. His actions appear to escalate here when he continues his vendetta by murdering over one-thousand men and women (v. 49). Abimelech's vengeance is not complete with Shechem, however, and he even goes to the nearby town of Thebez, which the narrative has not mentioned to this point. This movement is curious because it would seem that after Shechem was destroyed, Abimelech's bloodlust would be satisfied. Instead, he proceeds to murder more men and women (v. 51). It is in his attempt to do this that he is killed.

As discussed in the previous chapter, fate is an important aspect of characterization. As noted in the plot, the Abimelech narrative is largely concerned with

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<sup>45</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 333.

his demise. A disproportionate amount of space is concerned with this aspect of Abimelech's narrative. Abimelech's fate is heightened in the way that he dies. Two observations are of particular importance here. First, he is remembered in his death the exact way that he does not want to be remembered. He did not want to be remembered as one who died at the hands of a woman (v. 54), but this description of his death is what is preserved both in the book of Judges and lives on in infamy in 2 Samuel 11:21. That this account was preserved against his very wishes within the book of Judges is an indictment against his character. Second, Abimelech's death is meted out in a retributive way. The man who slew his brothers on a stone is killed with a millstone. While the stones are different, the correspondence between his death and the death of his brothers seems intentional. It insinuates that justice has been met and that retribution has been exacted.<sup>46</sup> The narrator thus brings about poetic justice in the portrayal of Abimelech's death.<sup>47</sup>

Both Abimelech's speech and his actions show that he is self-centered. He is more concerned about his own interests above those of his brothers. He proceeds to fight against Shechem and destroys the city in such a thorough manner that it will be gone for generations. He even extends his need for vengeance to neighboring towns, where his dying breath exhibits concern for how he will be remembered. All of these aspects of Abimelech's characterization work together to portray him as an egocentric character.

**Abimelech and Gideon.** Another important aspect of Abimelech's characterization is the connections between the events in his narrative and those of the Gideon narrative. First, there is the evil spirit in Judges 9:23 and the mention of the Spirit of Yahweh in the Gideon narrative.<sup>48</sup> This is the only mention of an evil spirit in the book

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<sup>46</sup>Boogart, "Stone for Stone," 51-52; Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule*, 159; Janzen, "A Certain Women in the Rhetoric of Judges 9," 33-37.

<sup>47</sup>Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule*, 159.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 145-46.

of Judges and certainly contrasts not only with the episode of Gideon being clothed by the Spirit (6:34), but also with the other judges. The Abimelech narrative is like no other narrative in the book of Judges. Abimelech is not raised up as a judge, he does not deliver Israel from any enemy, and instead of being used by the Spirit of Yahweh like some of the other judges, God actually works against him with an evil spirit. Second, Gideon's conflicts with Succoth and Penuel bear some similarities to Abimelech's treatment of the Shechemites. Gideon's defeat of the people of Penuel mentions both a tower and that Gideon killed (הרג) them (8:17). Abimelech's episode with the Shechemites also mentions a tower (9:46, 47, 52) and that Abimelech killed (הרג) the people (9:43, 45).<sup>49</sup> Abimelech's tyranny does appear to be escalated with the mention of women being involved in the death toll (9:49, 50). Third, Gideon's brothers are killed by the Midianite kings (8:18-19), while Abimelech kills his brothers (9:5). Fourth, when Gideon goes into the Midianite camp, he has his young man (נער) with him. Similarly, when Abimelech battles against Thebez, he has his young man (נער) with him (9:54).<sup>50</sup>

It appears that there is some uncanny resemblance between the narrative descriptions of the lives of Gideon and Abimelech. Abimelech has all of the negative qualities of Gideon, and that these are escalated in his character in order to present him in an entirely unsympathetic manner.

**Abimelech and Saul.** Several scholars see a connection between the characterizations of Abimelech and Saul.<sup>51</sup> While some see this connection as being

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<sup>49</sup>Hayyim Angel, "The Positive and Negative Traits of Gideon as Reflected in His Sons Jotham and Abimelech," *JBQ* 34 (2006): 160.

<sup>50</sup>Assis believes that Abimelech's acts are contrasted with Gideon's. While this is true to some degree, it appears that a better understanding would be that Abimelech has all of the negative characteristics of Gideon with none of the positives. Abimelech, then, helps to display the movement of the plot within the book of judges discussed in chap. 4. See Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 171.

<sup>51</sup>Mark J. Boda, *Judges*, in vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 1079; Moshe Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies, and Parallels* (Jerusalem: Revivim, 1990), 97-99; O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 291-93; Peterson, "A Priest Who

written from the perspective of book of Samuel,<sup>52</sup> most see it as originating from Judges.<sup>53</sup> There appear to be at least three fairly convincing connections between these two characters.<sup>54</sup> First, God sends an evil spirit to both Abimelech and Saul (Judg 9:23; 1 Sam 16:14). These are the only two mentions of an evil spirit being sent by God in the Old Testament. Second, Abimelech's murder of his seventy brothers (Judg 9:5), who were rivals to the throne, may parallel Saul's attempted murder of David (1 Sam 18:11), who was also a rival, as well as the murder of the priests of Nob (1 Sam 22:18), who helped David.<sup>55</sup> Third, there are similarities in their deaths, especially since both ask their

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Despised a King: David's Propagandist and the Authorship of Judges Considered," *BibSac*, forthcoming; Ken Stone, "The Un-Manning of Abimelech," in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 197-99; Gordon K. Oest, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule*, 171-72; Gregory T. K. Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 111 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 210-13; Schneider, *Judges*, 148. Interestingly, Dragga does not mention any connections between Abimelech and Saul even though he sees intentional connections between Saul and three other judges: Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson. See Samuel Dragga, "In the Shadow of the Judges: The Failure of Saul," *JSOT* 38 (1987): 39-46.

<sup>52</sup>Garsiel, *First Samuel*, 97-99; Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges*, 210. Wong favors the characterization of Saul after Abimelech, noting, "While it is never easy to determine the direction of dependence, from a rhetorical perspective, it seems more likely that the narrative about Saul is dependent on the one about Abimelech rather than vice versa. For by depicting Saul as a latter-day Abimelech, the author of Samuel would have immediately conveyed his negative evaluation of Saul" (Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges*, 210).

<sup>53</sup>Boda, *Judges*, 1079; O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 291-93; Schneider, *Judges*, 148; Stone, "The Un-Manning of Abimelech," 198-99; Peterson, "A Priest Who Despised a King," 14-15; These authors generally favor Abimelech being patterned after Saul as part of the anti-Benjamite polemic found in the book (see discussions in chapters 3 and 4). Peterson especially notes this point by positing the possibility of the authorship of Judges being attributed Abiathar, writing, "It is possible that Abiathar included Jotham's polemic against Abimelech in Judges 9 as a miniature autobiographical reflection on the senseless, murderous, acts that Saul propagated against his family . . . Judges 9 thus becomes a subtle plea from Abiathar to his audience to accept his message and embrace Yahweh's choice for king—David, not the usurper, Ishbosheth" (Stone, "The Un-Manning of Abimelech," 14-15). While Peterson's hypothesis appears to be overly specific, this story would fit well within the polemic against Benjamin. If the author was writing from David's court, then he would have known Samuel's activities either from personal experience, written sources, or oral tradition.

<sup>54</sup>O'Connell notes 8 possible connections, but 5 of them are very speculative. Another possible connection may be made between the stone that Abimelech slaughters his brothers on (Judg 9:5) and the stone that Saul slaughters the oxen and sheep on after defeating the Amalekites (1 Sam 14:33-34). Block does not draw any links between the characterizations of these two characters, but he does note that this may have been the same kind of stone. See O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 292; and Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 312.

<sup>55</sup>Boda writes that both Abimelech and Saul "seek to murder rivals" (Boda, *Judges*, 1079). Oest also notes that "[w]hile Abimelech's destruction is brutal in its thoroughness, 1 Sam 22 describes Saul's destruction of Nob in even greater detail . . . These parallels with Saul come in the context of an

armor-bearers to kill them (Judg 54; 1 Sam 31:4).<sup>56</sup> These connections serve to denigrate both Abimelech and Saul in connecting their characters and serve to further heighten the anti-Benjamite/anti-Saulide polemic which is displayed elsewhere in the book of Judges. This connection serves to show the illegitimacy of both Abimelech and Saul.<sup>57</sup>

**Conclusion.** Nothing in Abimelech's character is redeemable. He is consistently portrayed, through direct and indirect characterization, as a self-interested ruler who resorts to tyranny against his own family and people. Ryan, who sees the judges as heroes, even comments negatively on him, writing that Abimelech "is not a judge-deliverer but a ruthless opportunist who makes his poisonous contribution to the sum total of human misery when he acts like a tyrant."<sup>58</sup> Abimelech is portrayed as a flat character with no sympathetic value.

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overall narrative pattern of increasing violence against the king's own people" (Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule*, 116).

<sup>56</sup>Stone notes that while there are significant differences between these two narratives, there may be more overlap than many think. He writes, "[T]he frequent references to the Philistines as 'uncircumcised' in Judges and 1 Samuel arguably occur in the context of a representation of those Philistines as in some sense 'womanish.' Thus Saul, too, like Abimelech, is attempting to avoid being killed by an opponent who, from the Israelite point of view, rightly occupies a female or feminized role" (Stone, "The Un-Manning of Abimelech," 197). This is overly speculative, but the connection between Abimelech and Saul is still strong despite the differences.

<sup>57</sup>Brian Irwin believes that the connections between Abimelech and Saul are too speculative. He prefers to see a connection between the characterization of Abimelech and the northern kings in general. He notes six main connections: (1) both Abimelech and Jeroboam I are Ephraimites who established monarchies in Shechem (Judg 9:6; 1 Kgs 12:1); (2) both Abimelech and Jeroboam I hire אנשים ריקים (Judg 9:4; 2 Chr 13:7); (3) both Jotham and Abijah stand on top of a hill and shout to the people of the north (Judg 9:18; 2 Chr 13:4); (4) both Jotham and Abijah plead similar cases (Judg 9:16-20; 2 Chr 13:4-6); (5) Jotham's warning bears similarity to the history of northern kingship; (6) the mention of Thebez (תְּבֵז) in the Abimelech narrative may be a textual corruption for Tirzah (תְּרִזָּה), which is the location of the second northern capital (1 Kgs 14:12; 16:9-10, 18-19. See Brian Irwin, "Not Just Any King: Abimelech, the Northern Monarchy, and the Final Form of Judges," *JBL* 131 (2012): 443-54. Similarly, Butler writes, "The story of Abimelech thus royally illustrates the danger and evil that come from kingship out of Shechem, kingship that is murderous and selfish and features false religious loyalties, kingship like that of Jeroboam I" (Trent Butler, *Judges*, WBC, vol. 8 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009], 235).

<sup>58</sup>Ryan, *Judges*, 67.

## Jotham

Jotham is an agent who moves the plot of the narrative along. An agent is a character in a story who is not developed, but is subordinate to the plot.<sup>59</sup> They are also sometimes referred to as functionaries.<sup>60</sup> Very little development is seen in these characters because they are to be primarily thought of within the plot structure itself. The reader is told in passing that Jotham is Gideon's youngest son and that he hid himself from Abimelech (9:5). After Abimelech is anointed king, Jotham enters the scene, but he disappears as quickly as he entered. There is no resolution with his character, no development, and the narrator does not discuss his emotions. This is likely because these are not important to the narrative. Jotham is not the focal point of the narrative; his speech is. He is given very little direct or indirect characterization, but he does deliver the central dialogue within the plot structure of Judges 9.

Jotham's words appear to adopt the narrator's viewpoint. This is accomplished in three ways. First, in verse 8, Jotham appears to speak for God when he tells the leaders of Shechem to listen to him so that "God will listen to you." As Block notes, "The implication is that Jotham posed as a true spokesman for God."<sup>61</sup> Jotham is therefore to be viewed almost as a messenger or prophet of God. Second, the location and amount of space that Jotham's monologue occupies shows that it is central to the meaning of the chapter. Third, a shared language between Jotham's speech and the narrative is noticed. As Berlin notes, when the narrative shares verbal connections with the direct discourse, it

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<sup>59</sup>Block believes that Jotham is presented as a positive character. So he notes that Jotham "is presented as a positive character unlike his half-brother. In contrast to Abimelech, whose name reflects his ambition, Jotham's name is an expression of true Yahwistic faith" (Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 315). While Jotham is not presented negatively, he is not overtly presented in a positive fashion since there is little narrative discussion or description of his character.

<sup>60</sup>Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 25-27; Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 72.

<sup>61</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 316.

“may mean that the narrator is confirming the words of the character.”<sup>62</sup> The strongest connection here is the use of the word “fire.” In the parable, Jotham warns that fire from the bramble (Abimelech) will consume them (vv. 15, 20). Later in the narrative, Abimelech kills the people with fire (v. 49). This correspondence further confirms Jotham’s words and the linkage to the narrative. Fourth, the narrator immediately confirms his speech in verse 23 when God sends an evil spirit. More than this, however, is the theological conclusion in verses 56-57 that states that the narrative fulfills Jotham’s fable.

Jotham is the agent through which the viewpoint of the narrative is given. His function is to communicate information, not to dominate the narrative with his personality. Jotham’s words are the lens through which the remainder of the Abimelech narrative is viewed. This is extremely important because the opinion of Jotham in this fable is the opinion of God (v. 7) and of the narrator (vv. 56-57). So if Jotham’s fable is an attack on the monarchy, then the narrative would be taking an anti-monarchial stance.<sup>63</sup>

### **Jotham’s Fable**

For many interpreters, Jotham’s fable has presented a challenge to the monarchial perspective found elsewhere in the book. Before examining Jotham’s fable, however, it is necessary to note some of the interpretive difficulties surrounding it. First, it is important to understand fables in general. Second, the history of interpretation of this passage will be reviewed, especially as it pertains to a misunderstood consensus. Third,

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<sup>62</sup>Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 64. See also Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 66-67.

<sup>63</sup>Block writes, “Jotham’s speech giving his view on kingship is rendered all the more significant since he functions here as the *alter ego* of the narrator” (Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 320). Similarly, Webb writes, “Whatever Jotham’s motives may have been, it is clear that he has been adopted as the narrator’s own *alter ego*, the character in the story who gives voice to the narrator’s own interpretation of the situation” (Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 274).

an in-depth analysis of Jotham's fable will be given. A discussion of the monarchial implications of the fable in light of its overall purpose will follow.

### **Fables: Genre and Purpose**

Jotham's monologue in Judges 9:7-21 has been referred to using a variety of different terms. Schipper notes, "Although some label Jotham's story in verses 8-15 as a parable, allegory, or apologue, the majority of scholars prefer to see it as a fable, since it focuses on personified plants rather than humans."<sup>64</sup> In doing this, however, they often do not draw distinctions between these terms.<sup>65</sup> Some of these terms, however, can be used almost interchangeably. For instance, Block uses the terms "fable" and *apologia* interchangeably.<sup>66</sup> Schipper also discusses the use of the terms "fable" and "parable": "fables and parables do not describe two different types, or genres, of short stories. Rather, the term fable describes a certain type of narrative involving animals or plants (Gen 37:6-8; Judg 9:7-21) and at times their interactions with humans (2 Sam 12:1-4; Isa 5:1-7), whereas the term parable describes a function of any type of narrative, including fables."<sup>67</sup> The term "fable" will be used here with the understanding that fables are a subset of parables and serve the same basic function as other parables within the narratives in which they are contained. It is therefore important to define the term "fable" and to understand the function of a parable.

The term "fable" has been defined in many ways. Some have defined it very simply. For example, Anne Solomon writes, "[A] fable is a simple, yet unreal type of

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<sup>64</sup>Jeremy Schipper, *Parables and Conflict in the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 25.

<sup>65</sup>Schipper includes an in-depth discussion of the differences between parables and these other designations (Schipper, *Parables and Conflict in the Hebrew Bible*, 5-19).

<sup>66</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 316.

<sup>67</sup>Schipper, *Parables and Conflict in the Hebrew Bible*, 14.



story.”<sup>68</sup> While this is a helpful start, it is much too short to be of any benefit. Van Wyk provides more content to his definition by stating, “the fable is a form of didactic narrative in which plants or animals speak and behave as people do.”<sup>69</sup> This is a helpful distinction, but more needs to be said. A fable is a type of a parable that includes the use of personified plants or animals.<sup>70</sup> Since a fable is a type of a parable, it is important to understand the rhetorical functions/purposes of parables.

According to Schipper, parables have at least two main rhetorical functions within the Old Testament: (1) they intensify announcements of judgment instead of calling for a change of behavior or bringing about conflict resolution; (2) they are able to intensify announcements of judgment through the use of other genres that fit the speaker’s specific needs.<sup>71</sup> On the first rhetorical feature, Schipper writes, “parables in the Hebrew Bible help intensify their speakers’ point(s) by comparing the addressees’ present situation to a narrative involving some equally complex, although not exactly parallel, conflict.”<sup>72</sup> This feature is important because the focus of the parable is to address an immediate situation, and it is more a call to judgment than it is a plea for a change of actions. Understanding that a primary function of parables is to bring judgment helps to make sense of the unmoved Shechemites discussed within the plot.<sup>73</sup> On the

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<sup>68</sup>Anne M. Vater Solomon, “Fable,” in *Saga, Legend, Tale, Novella, Fable: Narrative Forms in Old Testament Literature*, ed. George W. Coats, JSOTSup 35 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1985), 115.

<sup>69</sup>W. C. van Wyk, “The Fable of Jotham in its Ancient Near Eastern Setting,” in *Studies in Wisdom Literature*, ed. W. C. van Wyk (Pretoria, South Africa: University of Pretoria, 1973), 92.

<sup>70</sup>Schipper, *Parables and Conflict in the Hebrew Bible*, 14.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>73</sup>Sternberg notes that the Shechemites remain unmoved, but that this response brings about the point and purpose of the parable. He writes, “Jotham does not in the least move the partisan Shechemites. But his failure is the narrator’s success, indeed the point and the making of the whole cycle. For it serves to articulate the theme under cover of indignant repetition, to dramatize the fitness of the parable . . . and to propel the action toward the enactment of its moral: the mutual destruction of the townsmen and the usurper” (Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 429).

second rhetorical function of fables, it will be shown that Jotham combines his fable with the genre of curse. Webb notes, “Jotham’s speech is more of a covenant lawsuit than a fable; the fable is just a means to an end.”<sup>74</sup> Seeing that Jotham is bringing a covenantal curse is the key to understanding the application of the fable in verses 16-20 and the remainder of the Abimelech narrative.<sup>75</sup>

## Two Interpretive Issues

Before discussing the history of interpretation of Jotham’s fable, it is necessary to discuss two interpretive issues. First, some scholars have misperceived the majority understanding of the interpretation of Jotham’s fable as it pertains to the issue of monarchy. Second, the majority of scholars have noted that there is not an exact correspondence between Jotham’s fable and the surrounding narrative. Both of these will be discussed before looking into history of interpretation in regard to the monarchical position of the fable.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 274. Webb notes that Jotham serves a parallel function to the prophet within the Gideon narrative (Judg 6:7-10). Lindars also notes this parallelism: “It is the aim of the narrator to provide a setting in which a curse is uttered against Abimelech and the men of Shechem. For this purpose he has used a fable” (Barnabas Lindars, “Jotham’s Fable—A New Form-Critical Analysis,” *JTS* 24 [1973]: 360).

<sup>75</sup>This combining of fable and curse genres fits well with Tatu’s observations: “What makes ANE fables original is the fact that the personified characters are contesting verbally one against the other” (Silviu Tatu, “Jotham’s Fable and the *Crux Interpretum* in Judges IX,” *VT* 56 [2006]: 109). See also van Wyk, who writes, “What distinguishes this early form of fable from the very short animal proverb on the one hand and the dispute on the other hand, are the occurrence of both conversation and narration” (van Wyk, “The Fable of Jotham in Its Ancient Near Eastern Setting,” 92).

<sup>76</sup>A possible third interpretive issue is whether or not fables by nature contain morals. There is much disagreement on whether fables in the Old Testament are intended to have universal morals. So Solomon writes, “the content of a fable must include some moral observation” (Solomon, “Fable,” 115). She goes on to write that within Jotham’s fable that “a certain morality is presupposed, and is indirectly reinforced or corrected through criticism” (ibid.). This can be compared with van Wyk’s statement: “Fables have the intent to teach. This intention to teach (not moralize) is the background of every fable” (van Wyk, “The Fable of Jotham in Its Ancient Near Eastern Setting,” 93). Similarly, von Rad notes that the fables do not pursue moral goals. This can be further contrasted with Williams, who notes that the genre of fable “began with the simple animal story having no moral purpose, but was intended solely for entertainment” (Ronald J. Williams, “The Fable in the Ancient Near East,” in *A Stubborn Faith*, ed. Edward C. Hobbs [Dallas: SMU Press, 1956], 5). Those who advocate the anti-monarchical interpretation of this particular fable seem to see the anti-monarchical claim as the moral of the story, but there appears to be much confusion over whether fables in the Old Testament contain morals necessarily as part of the form or function. See Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 43.

**Misperceived consensus.** One of the aspects of Jotham’s fable that has caused some misunderstanding within scholarship is that among several scholars there is a misperceived consensus. Several scholars note that the majority view of Jotham’s fable is that it is anti-monarchial in nature.<sup>77</sup> This claim, however, is incorrect. The majority of scholars actually view the parable as not being anti-monarchial at all.<sup>78</sup> Quite a few note that it could even possibly be interpreted from a pro-monarchial perspective. The misperception appears to be due largely to the influential work of Buber and his well-known quote that Jotham’s fable is “the strongest anti-monarchial poem of world literature.”<sup>79</sup> Even in scholarship that does not mention the majority position concerning the monarchial understanding, Buber’s quote tends to make its way into the discussion, seemingly representing the majority view. His influence looms over this fable even though the majority disagrees with his conclusions.

**The difficulties of the fable.** Most interpreters have observed that Jotham’s fable does not exactly correspond to the surrounding context.<sup>80</sup> This has caused several interpreters to question whether the fable had a prehistory outside of Jotham’s speech and either Jotham or the narrator adopted this fable for his purposes.<sup>81</sup> Four major areas of discontinuity between the fable and the surrounding narrative are generally discussed: (1)

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<sup>77</sup>Gerald Eddie Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*, SBLDS 87 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986), 129; Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 273 n. 142; Frank Crüsemann, *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum: Die antiköniglichen Texte des Alten Testaments und der Kampf um den frühen israelitischen Staat* (Neukirchener, Germany: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978), 19-20; Lawson G. Stone, *Judges*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2012), 322.

<sup>78</sup>See the discussion in chap. 2 and the discussion below.

<sup>79</sup>Martin Buber, *The Kingship of God*, 75.

<sup>80</sup>Uwe Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Studien zum Richterbuch*, BZAW 192 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), 190-93; Jan de Waard, “Jotham’s Fable: An Exercise in Clearing Away the Unclear,” in *Wissenschaft und Kirche: Festschrift für Eduard Lohse*, ed. Kurt Aland and Siegfried Meurer (Bielefeld: Luther-Verlag, 1989), 362-69; Schipper, *Parables and Conflict in the Hebrew Bible*, 27; Soggin, *Judges*, 173-79; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 316-17; Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy and the Right to Rule*, 139-41; Lindars, “Jotham’s Fable,” 355-66.

<sup>81</sup>Lindars, “Jotham’s Fable,” 355-66.

in the fable, the trees approach various other trees and offer kingship, but in the narrative Abimelech approaches his relatives and the lords of Shechem; (2) in the fable, there are three candidates who reject the offer of kingship, but in the narrative the discussion of kingship only occurs with Abimelech; (3) the fable is poetic, but the surrounding narrative is prose; (4) the narrative refers to Jotham's words as a curse (v. 57), but this is not explicit in the fable.<sup>82</sup> These difficulties, however, seem to stem from an over-reading of the text and a misunderstanding of the fable within its setting.<sup>83</sup> So Block rightly notes,

The points of disjunction are unmistakable. Nevertheless, to argue on these grounds that the fable has been artificially inserted in the narrative is to impose modern Western standards of literary consistency up an ancient historiographic treatise with a distinct theological and rhetorical agenda. When rhetoricians employ illustrative stories, they do not generally insist that every element of the story be consistent with every element of the rest of the speech. Admittedly, the fable could have been inserted into the account, but there is no reason a person as clever as Jotham could not have composed the speech for this particular occasion. For all its distinctive features, it suits the original rhetorical context and fits in perfectly with its present literary environment.<sup>84</sup>

Modern scholarship looks for a strict one-to-one correspondence between the fable and the surrounding narrative, but this is not what fables intend to do. Schipper notes that scholars' desire to see strict correspondence between a parable/fable and the surrounding context confuses a parable with an allegory.<sup>85</sup> There are, however, several points of connection between the fable and the context that appear to show that the fable rightly belongs in the context of Judges 9. Oestle notes four points of similarity between Jotham's fable and Judges 9:1-6: (1) both refer to the making of a king; (2) both assume some

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<sup>82</sup>Both Block and Soggin note further points of possible disjunction: the fable is overtly political, but the narrative is neutral; the fable critiques kingship in general, but the narrative only critiques Abimelech. While scholars note some of these points, they are not prominent in the discussion. The most prominent are the first and second noted above. See Soggin, *Judges*, 174-75; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 316-17.

<sup>83</sup>In an attempt to clear away some of the difficulties, Janzen proposes the Gideon's house is the  $\tau\alpha\alpha$  and that this is not a pejorative term. The problem is that this proposal assumes that there is supposed to be strict one-to-one correspondence between the parable, its application, and the surrounding narrative. This confuses a fable or a parable with an allegory. See David Janzen, "Gideon's House as the  $\tau\alpha\alpha$ : A Proposal for Reading Jotham's Fable," *CBQ* 74 (2012): 465-75.

<sup>84</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 317.

<sup>85</sup>Schipper, *Parables and Conflict in the Hebrew Bible*, 11.

benefit to sitting under the rule of a king;<sup>86</sup> (3) both situations present choices for whom the people may choose as kings; (4) both show the destructive potential of an unsuitable candidate.<sup>87</sup> The points of consistency have been overlooked by some who have sought a strict correspondence between the narrative and the fable. From an understanding of the genre of fables/parables, it seems difficult to accept that this fable existed outside of its present context. The importance of this point for an understanding of the monarchy is that generally, those who champion this text as anti-monarchical view the fable as a well-known anti-monarchical text that was appropriated by Jotham, to denounce not only Abimelech, but also the monarchy in general. Against this view, Moore writes,

While we concede the possibility, therefore, that the author has here drawn upon the stores of folk-wisdom, rather than his own invention, this supposition is by no means necessary; and it remains the simpler and more natural hypothesis that the fable is of the same conception with the rest of the speech. If this be the case, it is very doubtful whether we should see in the fable a judgment upon the kingdom as a form of government.<sup>88</sup>

The points of “inconsistency” between the fable and the narrative that have been noted by scholars appear to misunderstand both the structure and genre of the fable. This has led to various interpretations of the fable, which will be surveyed below.

### **History of Interpretation**

There have been three main interpretations of Jotham’s fable as it relates to the text’s view of monarchy. Some have viewed the text as anti-monarchical in nature. Others have argued that the fable is not inherently anti-monarchical, but it does reflect negatively on monarchy. Still others that have viewed the text as not being anti-monarchical at all. Instead, this group argues that Jotham’s fable is to be viewed as anti-Abimelech.

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<sup>86</sup>This assumption is false in 9:1-6 and in the fable because of the treachery of both Abimelech and the bramble.

<sup>87</sup>Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule*, 139-40.

<sup>88</sup>George Foote Moore, *Judges*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1923), 245.

**Anti-monarchial.** Some scholars believe that Jotham's fable is intended and intentionally crafted to be an anti-monarchial piece of literature.<sup>89</sup> As noted above, Buber has exerted a tremendous influence with this position. It is rare to read someone who discusses Jotham's fable without seeing Buber's quote suggesting that Jotham's fable is "the strongest anti-monarchial poem of world literature."<sup>90</sup> While this position has been the minority view, it has not been perceived this way by scholarship. Many of these scholars also note that this passage is not only attacking monarchy in general, but also Abimelech in particular. Van Wyk's statements serve as a good representation of this position when he writes that there are two lessons in the fable: "In the first place an undeniable anti-monarchial feeling . . . . And in the second place: Having a king like Abimelech is highly dangerous."<sup>91</sup> A feeling persists that while the fable was crafted, either by Jotham or by the narrator, it serves within its present context as not only a polemic against the institution of monarchy, but as an indictment of Abimelech as well.<sup>92</sup>

**Negative toward monarchy.** Some believe that Jotham's fable does not appear to be anti-monarchial, but that the fable and the Abimelech passage in general do

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<sup>89</sup>Buber, *The Kingdom of God*, 75; Crüsemann, *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum*, 42; van Wyk, "The Fable of Jotham in Its Ancient Near Eastern Setting," 94; Soggin, *Judges*, 174; Edgar Jans, *Abimelech und sein Königtum: Diachrone und Synchrone Untersuchungen zu Ri 9*, Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament 66 (St. Ottilien, Germany: EOS Verlag, 2001), 321-404; Susan Niditch, *Judges*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 114; Gnuse, *No Tolerance for Tyrants*, 75; Yair Lorberbaum, *Disempowered King: Monarchy in Classical Jewish Literature*, The Kogod Library of Judaic Studies 9 (London: Continuum, 2011), 2 n. 3.

<sup>90</sup>Martin Buber, *The Kingship of God*, 75.

<sup>91</sup>van Wyk, "The Fable of Jotham in Its Ancient Near Eastern Setting," 94.

<sup>92</sup>There are those, however, who do appear to view the fable outside of its context in Judg 9. Most notable is Buber, who only gives a few glancing references to Abimelech (Buber, *The Kingship of God*, 74-75). Similarly, Gnuse notes that Jotham's fable is "an abrasive critique of Abimelech's kingship," but that this text has its own meaning apart from the narrative (Gnuse, *No Tolerance for Tyrants*, 75). It is fairly easy to see that within the context of both of these writings, the authors are more concerned with seeing anti-monarchial sentiment than with examining the text within its context.

portray kingship negatively.<sup>93</sup> While slight interpretive variations are present within this group, Schneider's sentiments cover this position well:

At the root of the fable is the issue of leadership and it is not clear what the view of kingship is . . . . The paradigm of kingship as an implementation of rule that would be picked is a commentary on kingship, but whether Jotham used this paradigm because the sons of Gideon/Jerubbaal were practicing it, or because Abimelech was, is not clear. The depiction of kingship is not favorable.<sup>94</sup>

Schneider notes that there is not a clear anti-monarchical imperative within the text, but that the monarchy that is portrayed negatively. Others within this group speak of Jotham's fable and the Abimelech narrative as presenting the negative possibilities that exist within a monarchy. Amit writes, "the presentation of the negative aspects of Abimelech's rule seems intended to illuminate the negative aspects of monarchy."<sup>95</sup> Amit goes on to note, however, that "Jotham's parable brings out the problem of the absence of monarchy."<sup>96</sup> So according to Amit, the fable exposes the dangers of the monarchy, but it also shows the problem of the lack of need for "authoritative human leadership."<sup>97</sup> Those who advocate the negative understanding toward monarchy are clear that the text is not intended to be anti-monarchical, but it does expose the possible dangers of monarchy.

**Not anti-monarchical.** The majority of interpreters view Jotham's fable as not anti-monarchical.<sup>98</sup> While this designation may seem odd, it is the normative language

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<sup>93</sup>Schneider, *Judges*, 139; Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 99; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 321; Karin Schöpflin, "Jotham's Speech as Prophetic Comment on Abimelech's Story: The Genesis of Judges 9," *SJOT* 18 (2004): 21.

<sup>94</sup>Schneider, *Judges*, 139.

<sup>95</sup>Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 99.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup>Moore, *Judges*, 245; Lindars, "Jotham's Fable," 366; Boling, *Judges*, 174; Tomoo Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel*, BZAW 142 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), 185; Davis, "A Proposed Life-Setting for the Book of Judges," 111-12; Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*, 130-31; de Waard, "Jotham's Fable," 369; O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 164; Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 216-18; Isabella de Castelbajac, "Histoire de la Rédaction de Juges IX: Une Solution," *VT* 51 (2001): 169; McCann, *Judges*, 72; Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 153; Marty Alan Michelson, *Reconciling Violence and Kingship: A Study of Judges*

within the literature. This designation also seems to confirm further that many approach this text from a faulty understanding that the prevailing consensus is that Jotham's fable is anti-monarchial. Those who view the fable as not anti-monarchial in nature generally point to the prevailing context and the interpretation of the fable in 9:56-57. Gerbrandt's statements sums up the normative understanding of this position: "When Judges 9 is examined as a whole, it is quickly clear that within the chapter the Jotham fable is not used in order to attack the institution of kingship as such, but to indict Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem."<sup>99</sup> This position views Jotham's words within the context of Judges 9 as being anti-Abimelech and not anti-monarchial. In fact, many who hold to this position go even further, noting that the interpretive method employed by those who see the fable as anti-monarchial could just as easily, if not more easily, view the text as pro-monarchial.<sup>100</sup> Davis argues,

If someone were to insist that it is legitimate to press the details of the fable and thereby seek to uphold the anti-monarchial polemic, one could reply that by holding the same hermeneutical premise the fable can be viewed as a pro-monarchial argument. Thus when the olive, fig, and vine decline the kingship one is to understand this as an irresponsible act. Hence the fable goes on to show that the office invariably falls by default to some 'bramble' who will wreak havoc with them all.<sup>101</sup>

This position states that if the details of the fable are pressed, the text can be rightly interpreted in a number of ways that seem equally legitimate.<sup>102</sup> Most who note that the text could be interpreted as pro-monarchial, however, only do this to stress that the details

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*and 1 Samuel* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 58; Janzen, "Gideon's House as the  $\text{גִּדְעוֹן}$ ," 475.

<sup>99</sup>Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*, 131.

<sup>100</sup>Davis, "A Proposed Life-Setting for the Book of Judges," 111-12; Maly, "The Jotham Fable—Anti-Monarchial?" 303; Boda, *Judges*, 1079; Lindars, "Jotham's Fable," 366; de Waard, "Jotham's Fable," 368; Y. Kaufmann, *Sefer Shofetim* (Jerusalem: Kiriath Sefer, 1961), 201-02; Volkmar Fritz, "Abimelech und Sichem in JDC. IX," *VT* 32 (1982): 140; Boling, *Judges*, 174; Reinhard Müller, *Königtum und Gottesherrschaft: Untersuchungen zur alttestamentlichen Monarchiekritik* (Tübingen: Mohr Seibeck, 2004), 29. Both Maly and Kaufmann actually favor this as the intended interpretation of the fable.

<sup>101</sup>Davis, "A Proposed Life-Setting for the Book of Judges," 111.

<sup>102</sup>Kruschwitz notes that "a parable without context can mean anything—or nothing at all" (Jonathan A. Kruschwitz, "2 Samuel 12:1-15: How (Not) to Read a Parable," *RevExp* 109 [2012]: 255).



should not be pressed. The fable should then be interpreted within the context of Judges 9 without pressing the details of the fable too far.

**Conclusion.** Three main interpretations of Jotham's fable can in regard to its monarchical position can be seen and there is much to learn from each of them. First, it is very important to understand the fable within the context of the chapter. Second, it must be said that both the Abimelech narrative and Jotham's fable show the possible dangers of monarchical rule, as any text that presents a failed example of an institution would. This, however, does not mean that the text should necessarily be viewed as an anti-monarchical text. Third, if the details of the text are pressed, the fable could have a number of possible meanings. With these points in mind it seems best to interpret the fable in a way that accounts for both its context and the genre of fables, where the details of the fable are not intended to be pressed.

### **Jotham's Fable: 9:7-15**

While Jotham's fable does not technically begin until 9:8, it is difficult to talk about it apart from its introduction in verse 7. This verse introduces the location of Jotham's parable as well as the authority by which he speaks. After a discussion of verse 7, I discuss the fable proper. This discussion will reveal that the focus of the fable is not the institution of monarchy, but the verses that deal with the bramble and specifically verse 15. With the focus of the fable being on the curse presented in verse 15, it is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain that Jotham's fable is intended to be anti-monarchical.

**Introduction: 9:7.** The introduction of Jotham's fable is found in 9:7. The reader was briefly introduced to Jotham in verse 5, when he hid himself, avoiding the massacre that his half-brother Abimelech brought on all his brothers. His specific mention in verse 5 almost necessitated his reappearance in the later narrative. This

happens in verse 7, where Jotham reemerges to bring a curse (9:57) in the form of a fable against Abimelech and the Shechemites.<sup>103</sup>

When Jotham is told that Abimelech has been made king, he goes to Mt. Gerizim. The location of the mountain is surely important due to its use in Deuteronomy 27-28 for the covenant blessings (Deut 27:12). His appearance on Mt. Gerizim may seem odd because the narrative later says in 9:57 that his words were a curse (קללת). One might have expected him to go to Mt. Ebal where the covenant curses were echoed. The biblical text, however, put the Joseph tribes, which Jotham was a member, on Mt. Gerizim where the covenant blessings were given. Just as Jotham's ancestors had stood on Mt. Gerizim in Joshua 8:8, fulfilling the command Moses gave in Deuteronomy 11:29 and 27:12, so Jotham now stood on Gerizim, addressing Abimelech and the men of Shechem. So it may actually seem more natural that he would go to Mt. Gerizim due to its association with his tribe. This time Jotham was not there to deliver blessing, however, but a curse. As Bluedorn notes, "Jotham only applies the Deuteronomic curses (Deut 27:15-26) to Abimelech and the Shechemites."<sup>104</sup> With this location and the message of his speech, Jotham appears to be bringing a covenant lawsuit.<sup>105</sup>

Jotham prefaces his fable in verse 7 with a warning to the men of Shechem by telling them, "Listen to me . . . so that God will listen to you." This statement serves as a warning and indicates that Jotham's words are directed by God. It appears that Jotham is saying that they will receive a hearing from God if they will listen to him. The message of verses 16 and 19-20, however, seems to insinuate that the fate of the Shechemites is

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<sup>103</sup>Block notes that "the early reference to Jotham has created an expectation for a complication in the plot. We are not disappointed" (Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 315).

<sup>104</sup>Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 211. See also Biddle, *Reading Judges*, 105.

<sup>105</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 315; Webb, *Judges*, 274; Boling, *Judges*, 174.

sealed.<sup>106</sup> Within the parable Jotham never even gives the Shechemites an opportunity to respond.<sup>107</sup>

**Jotham's fable: 9:8-15.** The fable proper occurs in 9:8-15 and is composed in the three and four structure.<sup>108</sup> According to Amit the three and four structure “entails four events sharing a common denominator, the last of which entails a change of position; in other words, after three ineffective occurrences, there is an effective fourth.”<sup>109</sup> The fable unfolds in this structure with the first three trees refusing kingship, while the fourth accepts. The refusal by the first three draws particular attention to the fourth. The literary structure of the fable serves to alleviate some of the inconsistencies that have been seen between the fable and the narrative content. If the fable is told using this literary form then there would be no expectation that its contents would directly correspond to the surrounding narrative. Instead, the structure puts the focus on the fourth tree through the building up of the refusals of the other trees.

Within the fable the trees go out to anoint a king (מָלַךְ) to rule (מִלְךָ) over them (v. 8). They first ask the olive tree to reign over them (v. 9), and when he refuses they ask the fig tree (v. 10). When the fig tree refuses (v. 11), they ask the vine (v. 12). When the vine refuses (v. 13), they then ask the bramble (v. 14). Before getting to the bramble's response it is important to note the refusals by the other trees:

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<sup>106</sup>Jobling believes that each of the conditional statements in vv. 16, 19, and 20 represent a true possibility, but that there is irony present, and this leads him to believe that these conditional statements are “less a real outcome than a *reductio ad absurdum*” (Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative II*, 74). Similarly, Schipper notes that “Jotham does not intend his parable to prompt any change of behavior among his addressees, namely the lords of Shechem” (Schipper, *Parables and Conflict in the Hebrew Bible*, 23). On the irony of the passage, Webb notes that the “blessing, of course, is delivered with heavy irony; it has ceased to be a real alternative because the crime is irrevocable” (Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 274).

<sup>107</sup>Schipper, *Parables and Conflict in the Hebrew Bible*, 23.

<sup>108</sup>Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule*, 67; Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 109.

<sup>109</sup>Amit, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 62.

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| Tree  | Refusal  |
| Olive | Should I give up my oil by which gods and men honor me and go hold sway over the trees?  |
| Fig   | Should I give up my sweetness and my good fruit and go hold sway over the trees?         |
| Vine  | Should I give up my wine, which cheers the gods and men and go hold sway over the trees? |

Each of the trees refuses the position of king with a question. Within their questions are two repetitive features. First, each of the trees asks, “Should I give up?” (החזלתי) and then names its respective produce. Second, they each speak of holding sway (נוע) over the trees. With this response, each of them appears to be saying that its normative functions are more important than holding sway over the other trees. This is one of the main lines of argumentation for those who view this fable as anti-monarchial in nature. For example, Crüsemann writes, “Kingship is unproductive, it gives no fruit.”<sup>110</sup> Is this detail, however, to be pressed? As was noted earlier, if the details of this fable are pressed, it is just as easy to interpret these trees as abrogating their duty to lead.<sup>111</sup> Both of these positions seem to be placing too much emphasis on the details of the fable. It is important to remember that not every aspect of the fable is to be pressed. Similarly, some have argued that the phrase “to sway over the trees” is used in a pejorative manner that denigrates kingship. Davis combats this view: “[T]his imputes undue significance to the mere color of the fable, for this verb only describes what trees are prone to do (see Isa. 7:2).”<sup>112</sup> While it does appear that the olive tree, fig tree, and vine do not want to hold sway over the trees, there is no indication that the use of this phrase should be linked to their

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<sup>110</sup>Crüsemann, *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum*, 29, translation taken from Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*, 130.

<sup>111</sup>De Waard believes that this is the only possible understanding from the passage: “[T]he structural analysis is in favour of Maly’s thesis that the meaning of the original fable was not directed at kingship itself, but against those who refused, for insufficient reasons, the burden of leadership” (de Waard, “Jotham’s Fable,” 368).

<sup>112</sup>Davis, “A Proposed Life-Setting for the Book of Judges,” 111.

outright rejection of the monarchical system. As Lindars notes, “The sarcastic attitude of the fruit-trees is necessary to their function in the fable, but does not necessarily express the opinion of the composer of the fable.”<sup>113</sup> In fact, it is possible that these trees were involved in asking the bramble if he wanted to be king because verse 14 notes that “all the trees” requested that the bramble would be king. The use of “all” would seemingly imply that the trees that were already asked were there as well. If this is the case, then their objection would not be against the monarchy as an institution, since they were involved in asking for a king. Too much emphasis has been placed on these trees. The structure of the fable, however, focuses not on these three “trees,” but on the bramble in verses 14-15.

The structure of the fable moves toward the bramble, which first appears in verse 14. This verse is offset by the three and four structure, where an effective request is presented after three previous refusals. It is also distinguished from the remainder of the fable in two main ways. First, “all the trees” requested the bramble to be king. Up to this point in the fable, it was simply “the trees” who requested the other three trees to be king, with no sense that it was all of them.<sup>114</sup> Second, when compared with the previous requests by the trees, the request in verse 14 uses different wording.

Judges 9:10 ויאמרו העצים לתאנה לכי־את מלכי עלינו

Judges 9:12<sup>115</sup> ויאמרו העצים לגפן לכי־את מלכי עלינו

Judges 9:14 ויאמרו כל־העצים אל־האטד לך אתה מלך־עלינו

While verse 14 is saying basically the same thing as verses 10 and 12, the difference in wording from the previous request draws attention to verse 14. De Waard believes that

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<sup>113</sup>Lindars, “Jotham’s Fable,” 365.

<sup>114</sup>Bluedorn points out that the difference in wording here clues the reader to expect a different answer from the previous, since the introduction to this one differs from the previous three. See Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 213.

<sup>115</sup>For 9:12, the *qere* reads מלכי while the *kethiv* reads מלויכי.

the variation in the pattern signals “progression and intensification of the discourse.”<sup>116</sup> The progression leads to verse 14 and places the emphasis of the fable on the section of the fable dealing with the bramble.

An interesting aspect of this verse is the identification of the **אֲטֵר** with a certain kind of tree. It is generally accepted that the **אֲטֵר** is something akin to a bramble or a thornbush.<sup>117</sup> When compared with the olive tree, fig tree, and vine, it is clear that the narrator wants the reader to draw a comparison. One comparison is that the bramble yields no fruit. Oeste notes that the “differences between the first three offers and the fourth offer argues against the wisdom of choosing someone like the thorny tree to rule.”<sup>118</sup> The identification of the fourth tree as a bramble is intended pejoratively, and it is clear from the application in verses 16-20 that the bramble is to be identified with Abimelech.<sup>119</sup>

Verse 15 is key to understanding the fable, its application (9:16-20), and the remainder of the story. Here the bramble pronounces a curse that provides the structure for the application in verses 16-20. The bramble’s response shows concern that the other trees may not have acted in good faith (**אִמְתָּה**) and then gives an absurd response by stating that if they are acting in good faith they should seek refuge in the bramble’s shade. Younger speaks to the comedy of the bramble’s response: “This is a physical absurdity: How can trees get under the smidgen of shade supplied by a thornbush? And worse, to attempt to do so would only bring the pain of being pricked by its thorns.”<sup>120</sup> Not only is

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<sup>116</sup>De Waard, “Jotham’s Fable,” 365.

<sup>117</sup>Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), s.v. “אֲטֵר,” by K. Lawson Younger. Some spend significant space discussing the exact species of tree that the **אֲטֵר** is. For instance, see Silviu Tatu, “Jotham’s Fable and the *Crux Interpretum* in Judges IX,” 110-24.

<sup>118</sup>Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule*, 139.

<sup>119</sup>Contra Janzen, who believes that the use of **אֲטֵר** is not pejorative and that it represents Gideon and is a good candidate to be king. See Janzen, “Gideon’s House as the **אֲטֵר**,” 46-75.

<sup>120</sup>Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, 223.

the request of the bramble absurd, but the bramble threatens the other trees in the form of a curse by stating that if their offer was not made in good faith, then “let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon.” Noting the implication of this curse, Schipper writes,

Jotham creates his comparison out of the curse with which the bramble threatens the other trees. Through this comparison, he suggests that his addressees risk receiving a curse just as the trees in his story risk receiving a curse. In other words, the parable allows Jotham to intensify the curse. His parable allows him to introduce a curse into the story, and the rest of Judges 9 works out the fulfillment of this curse.<sup>121</sup>

It is this curse that Jotham focuses on in his application in verse 20. It is the focal point of the fable. It is what the fable is leading to and the main point for evoking the fable in the first place. Since the anti-monarchical interpretation is usually focused on the response of the other trees, the focus of the fable draws the reader away from making an anti-monarchical connection. Instead, it draws the reader to a negative impression of the bramble, which the application identifies as Abimelech. This negative presentation of the bramble fits well with the clearly negative characterization of Abimelech within the plot of Judges 9.

### **Jotham’s Application: 9:16-20**

While there is much that could be said about the application that Jotham makes of his fable in verses 16-20, there are two main things that will be discussed here. First, there are significant parallels between the last verse of the fable and the application. These parallels show that the focus of the fable is on the bramble, not on the other trees. Second, the conditional statements found in verses 16-20 are not used to present legitimate options, but are there to heighten the rhetoric of Jotham’s condemnation of both the Shechemites and Abimelech.

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<sup>121</sup>Schipper, *Parables and Conflict in the Hebrew Bible*, 20.

**Parallels between verse 15 and the application.** The use of עתה in verse 16 signals a change from the fable to its application. Bluedorn notes that the use of עתה “confirms the assumption that the motive rather than the crowning will be focused on now.”<sup>122</sup> The structure of verse 16-20 is patterned on of the final verse within the fable (v. 15).

- |             |    |   |
|-------------|----|---|
| Judges 9:15 | A  | If (אם) in good faith (באמת) you are anointing me king over you,  |
|             | B  | then take refuge in my shade;   |
|             | C  | but if not (ואם־אין)  |
|             | D  | let fire (שׂא) come out from the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon   |
| Judges 9:16 | A’ | If (אם) you have acted in good faith (באמת) and honor . . .   |
| Judges 9:19 | B’ | then rejoice in Abimelech and let him rejoice in you;   |
| Judges 9:20 | C’ | but if not (ואם־אין)  |
|             | D’ | let fire (שׂא) come out from Abimelech and devour the lords of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from Shechem, and from Beth-millo, and devour Abimelech <sup>123</sup> |

The parallels between verse 15 and the application are unmistakable, and they show that the focus of the fable is not on the details of the other trees and their refusal of the monarchy that was offered to them, but on the bramble and his threat. In fact, the other trees are not even mentioned in the application, and they have no place within the narrative that follows the application. The parallels between the end of the fable and the application clearly link the identity of the bramble with Abimelech. Coates notes that this comparison draws out the absurdity of the situation: “It is ridiculous to put Abimelech on the throne just as it would be ridiculous to crown the bramble in order to secure shade as

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<sup>122</sup>Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 222. For further discussion of how the use of עתה is the rhetorical turning point, see Ogden, “Jotham’s Fable,” 305; Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule*, 141.

<sup>123</sup>This is adapted from the structure given by Jobling. See Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative II*, 73. For similar structures, see Ogden, “Jotham’s Fable,” 305; Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 221.



refuge for the trees.”<sup>124</sup> The absurdity of this action is made all the more clear in Jotham’s accusation against the Shechemites.

**The accusation.** The application unfolds in a series of conditional statements. Three positive conditional statements are found in verses 16 and 19. If the lords of Shechem have acted in good faith in making Abimelech king and if they have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house (v. 19 repeats this and adds the phrase, “good faith”), then they can rejoice in each other. While these are clearly conditional, they are not stated to bring about change or repentance. In fact, between the positive conditional statements, Jotham makes a parenthetical comment that is an accusation of what they have already done.

Jotham levels a clear accusation against the Shechemites in verses 17-18. In this accusation Jotham makes the central issue of the fable and its application clear by rehearsing the sinful actions of Abimelech and the Shechemites in killing Jotham’s brothers. Webb notes, “Jotham makes it clear what the central issue is by piling up adverbs (*faithfully, blamelessly, rightly*), all of which have to do with the ethical status of what the rulers of Shechem have done. This issue is not kingship as such, but whether it was right for them to make this particular man king and, in so doing, to support and participate in the slaughter of Gideon’s seventy sons.”<sup>125</sup> In these verses he rehearses what Jerubbaal did for them and then how they acted toward the house of Jerubbaal by killing his sons and making Abimelech, who was the son of a concubine, king. So the result of the conditional statement that Abimelech and the Shechemites may enjoy each other is conditioned on whether they treated Jerubbaal’s house with good faith, but it is clear from the parenthetical comment in verses 17-18 that Jotham has already decided that they did not. On the conditionality of these verses, Schipper writes, “Although

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<sup>124</sup>George W. Coats, “Parable, Fable, and Anecdote: Storytelling in the Succession Narrative,” *Interpretation* 35 (1981): 374.

<sup>125</sup>Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 277.

Jotham sets up both verses 16 and 20 as conditional statements, he does not present the curse as a warning against acting in bad faith or as a motivation to do otherwise in the future. Clearly, he sees the damage as already done . . . . Their behavior would not qualify as acting in good faith.”<sup>126</sup> From this perspective it becomes clear that the only conditional statement that will be fulfilled is the one found in verse 20.

The application goes even further than just condemning the Shechemites and adds content that is not present in verse 15. If the Shechemites did not make Abimelech king in good faith and in an honorable way, then the two parties would mutually destroy each other. This mutual destruction becomes apparent in verse 20 where Jotham speaks of fire coming out of Abimelech and devouring the Shechemites and fire coming out of the Shechemites and destroying Abimelech. Since Jotham has presented verse 20 as the only legitimate conditional statement, the function of the fable and its application are not to warn or motivate, but to condemn. As Schipper writes, the fable “aims to condemn their previous actions. The conditional statements simply add rhetorical force to his negative judgment.”<sup>127</sup> The narrative that follows falls in line with this judgment. Fire comes out of Abimelech in verse 49 and destroys the Shechemites, and in verse 52 when he goes to destroy the tower in Thebez with fire, he is struck with a stone. The ways that the themes from the parable and its application play out within the larger context of the narrative are unmistakable. The repetition of these themes reveals much about the purpose of the fable from a literary standpoint. The focus here is not on the institution of kingship, but on the lack of good faith toward the house of Jerubbaal. This emphasis plays out as the retribution of Yahweh within the narrative. The purpose of the narrative is clear enough from this repetition, but it is made even more explicit through the direct narrative comment found in verses 56-57.

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<sup>126</sup>Schipper, *Parables and Conflict in the Hebrew Bible*, 29.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, 29-30.

**Purpose: 9:56-57**

The function of Jotham's fable and its application is to condemn Abimelech and the Shechemites. This is accomplished through the use of a curse, which is underscored by both the location of the announcement on Mt. Gerizim and the narrator's explicit comments in 9:56-57. The narrative itself does not refer to Jotham's speech as a fable, parable, or an apologue.<sup>128</sup> Instead, the narrator refers to Jotham's speech as a curse (v. 57b). So Schipper notes, "The narrator not only sets his speech in a geographic location associated with blessings and curses, it also explicitly identifies it as a curse."<sup>129</sup> Through the use of a curse the narrator places the focus not on kingship, but on the Abimelech and the Shechemites. It cannot be said from the context that he curses kingship. Instead, as the earlier discussion of the plot showed, the narrative that follows in verses 22-55 details the unfolding of this curse. The concern of the narrative is not kingship in general. The concern of the narrative is the treacherous actions of both Abimelech and the lords of Shechem that secured Abimelech his crown.

**The Monarchial Implications**

Within the context of Judges 9, Jotham's fable functions as a curse on both Abimelech and the Shechemites. It is not clear that the fable is anti-monarchial. The structure of the fable and its emphasis on verse 15 through that structure and through the application actually draw the reader away from specific issues involving the institution of monarchy. Instead, the focus is clearly on the actions of the Shechemites and Abimelech. So Schipper notes, "Jotham does not intend to present a clear message about the merits of monarchy or any other institution through his parable. It does not function as a lesson regarding the proper form of leadership for his addressees. Instead, it functions as a

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<sup>128</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid.

condemnation of the choices that his addressees have already made.”<sup>130</sup> To place the focus of the fable or the narrative on the issue of kingship would distract not only from the immediate narrative context in Judges 9, but also from the context of the entire Gideon cycle in Judges 6-9. Bluedorn notes that the implications of Jotham’s fable are not anti-monarchical when he writes, “if the fable is not used to condemn the institution of a monarchy, the whole Abimelech narrative, which is based on the application of the fable, is not a narrative to condemn kingship. This theme would be unfitting to the overall theme of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative anyway.”<sup>131</sup> Instead, the focus of the narrative is on verse 15, where Jotham levels a curse against Abimelech and the Shechemites. This focus can be seen through the three and four structure, the change in language that is used to introduce the bramble, the focus of the application in verses 16-20, the contents of the Abimelech narrative, and the direct statement in verse 57 that the focus of Jotham’s fable was a curse. This curse is not directed against the institution of monarchy. To discuss either Jotham’s fable or the Abimelech narrative as anti-monarchical brings a foreign element to bear on the text. None of the narrator’s veiled or explicit statements, of which there are a few in Judg 9, are aimed at the institution of monarchy. Instead, the focal point of the narrative is squarely on the evil actions of Abimelech and the Shechemites.

### **Conclusion**

All points of the narrative point toward a negative portrayal of Abimelech. This negative portrayal is seen in the unfolding of the plot, in the way that he is characterized, and is solidified in the fable, which was crafted as a rhetorical tool to heap judgment on him and the lords of Shechem. Unless the details of the fable are unduly

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<sup>130</sup>Schipper, *Parables and Conflict in the Hebrew Bible*, 26. This is also noted by Assis, who writes, “Jotham’s fable is not a pro or anti-monarchical declaration. It is a censure of Abimelech’s egocentric personality, his unsuitability for the office of king, and the egotistical motives of the citizens of Shechem in making him king” (Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 153).

<sup>131</sup>Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 218.

pressed, there is no clear anti-monarchial sentiment found within Jotham's fable or its application. In fact, if the details of the fable are pressed, it appears that one could just as easily interpret the fable in a pro-monarchial fashion. Neither of these interpretations, however, seems to fit the intention of the narrative. Instead, the fable, its application, and the explicit comments by the narrator in verses 22-25 and verses 56-57 are quite clear that both the fable and the surrounding narrative are crafted not as anti-monarchial, but as anti-Abimelech. This point has also been observed by the majority of interpreters. Olson aptly notes, "Jotham's 'fable,' as it is usually designated, is more clearly directed against Abimelech than it is against monarchy in general . . . . [T]he book of Judges is a setup for the Davidic monarchy . . . . From this perspective, the mistake of the people of Shechem is not so much that they made someone king, but rather that they 'made Abimelech king' (9:6)."<sup>132</sup> Jotham's fable does not contradict the pro-monarchial view found throughout the remainder of the book. The book continues to narrate Israel's continual spiral downward into sin, only this time it was not a foreign nation that plagued Israel, it was one of her own.<sup>133</sup> Instead of standing against the ideological tenor of the remainder of the book, the Abimelech narrative shows one further instance of failed northern leadership and the need for a king who will act in good faith.

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<sup>132</sup>McCann, *Judges*, 72-73.

<sup>133</sup>Heller, "What is Abimelech Doing in Judges?," 225-32.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

The book of Judges displays a clear concern for leadership with a focus on the institution of monarchy. This concern for the institution of monarchy can be seen throughout the book, but most notably in the refrain at the end of the book that laments the lack of a king in Israel (Judg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). The book has been largely viewed as pro-monarchical by scholars, but both Gideon's response and Jotham's fable have caused some scholars either to rethink the majority position or to posit differing sources. Both of these solutions, however, undermine the major trends within the study of the book.

Two growing trends have emerged regarding the interpretation of the book of Judges. First, there has been a shift from source-critical concerns to a more literary-synchronic approach to the text. Second, the book has been viewed as an apology for the Davidic monarchy. While a good number of studies have examined the book of Judges in a similar to this present study, no study has interpreted both Gideon's response and Jotham's fable as lacking any anti-monarchical purpose while at the same time fitting these narratives within the ideological flow of the overall narrative of the book of Judges.

#### **The Life-Setting of Judges**

The book of Judges does appear to have been written, at least in part, as an apology for the Davidic monarchy. This does not mean, however, that the book is to be read solely as a political treatise, but that it is concerned with Yahweh's choice for a king.<sup>1</sup> While it is always difficult to locate a book within its life-setting, significant

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<sup>1</sup>Brettler sees the book of Judges as primarily political: "Thus, when I claim that the work is

indicators within the book of Judges reveal the possibility of an early dating. This early dating could be placed within the time frame of David's reign in Hebron and used as an apologetic for his reign over all of Israel.<sup>2</sup> A dating to an early period is supported by the explanatory and chronological notes, especially 1:21. Strong evidence for this dating can be seen most readily in the anti-Saulide and anti-northern polemics found within the book, a perspective that intersects very closely with its monarchial ideology.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Monarchial Ideology of Judges**

The monarchial ideology of the book of Judges is developed in several ways. The prologue emphasizes the faithfulness of the tribe of Judah over against the unfaithfulness of the other tribes. The body of the book follows a general northward movement, with each successive judge becoming progressively sinful. Gideon's character falls in the middle of the plot structure of the book, where both he and his son Abimelech embody the continual degradation of Israelite leadership and morality. Gideon's character appears to be the focal point of the book and the turning point within the narrative where things move from bad to worse. The epilogue laments that there is no king and that each person is doing whatever he wants. Each section of the book of Judges is concerned with the ideology of leadership, and of kingship in particular. Both Gideon's response and

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predominantly political, I do not mean to downplay the theological aspect of Israelite politics; I do, however, mean to suggest that its primary purpose was not theological in some other sense that is divorced from the issue of: Whom did YHWH choose as the legitimate king?" (Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, Old Testament Readings [London: Routledge, 2002], 115).

<sup>2</sup>This position is also advanced by Dale Ralph Davis, "A Proposed Life-Setting for the Book of Judges" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1978); Robert H. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 63 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 305-42; Brian Peterson, "A Priest Who Despised a King: David's Propagandist and the Author of Judges Considered," *BibSac*, forthcoming.

<sup>3</sup>Several works view the ideological material as key to the dating of the book. So, Olson notes that the presentation of the judges "suggests a shaping of the book at some state that is ideologically tilted toward Southern Judah" (Dennis T. Olson, "Buber, Kingship, and the Book of Judges: A Study of Judges 6-9 and 17-21," in *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J. J. M. Roberts*, ed. Bernard Frank Batto and Kathryn Roberts [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004], 207).

Jotham's fable fall within this overall narrative framework and, instead of bringing tension to it, they help to support it.

### **Gideon's Response**

One of the greatest difficulties of Gideon's response to the men of Israel in Judges 8:23 is that it is often discussed and interpreted apart from its narrative context. When this mistake is made, Gideon's words are often seen as a theological statement that condemns the monarchy in favor of a theocratic form of government. For this view to be the case given the narrative context, however, one would expect Gideon to be the voice of the narrator and the voice of Yahweh, but this is not the case. While there is some positive characterization of Gideon early on in his calling as judge, it quickly fades so that by the end of his career he is viewed very negatively. To this point, it should be added that nowhere in the narrative does Gideon's speech appear to align with the point of view of the narrator. Instead, as Gideon's character transitions from a fearful son to an overbearing father, his speech shows that he is capable of skilled political rhetoric (8:1-3). Gideon is an unreliable character in that his words and actions do not align with those of the narrator.<sup>4</sup> This point has already been discussed in detail, but it can be seen most clearly in his idolatrous actions. Another important aspect of the characterization of Gideon is the large amount of material that presents him in a royal fashion. Several clues within the Gideon narrative indicate that Gideon's leadership went well beyond that of a normal judge.

When Gideon's response in 8:23 is interpreted in light of the flow of the plot and his characterization, then there seem to be two interpretive options: (1) Gideon refused to rule, but then kept all of the trappings of royalty; (2) Gideon was being shrewd

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<sup>4</sup>Paul Kissling writes that not all characters within a narrative portray the ideological point of view of the narrator. He writes, "The words which the narrator puts in the mouths of characters may or may not represent the point of view of the narrator. Further, a character's speech and/or actions may or may not have the narrator's approval" (Paul Kissling, *Reliable Characters in the Primary History: Profiles of Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha*, JSOTSup 224 [Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1996], 20).



and accepted the position of king through the use of politically shrewd language.<sup>5</sup> Either of these options is possible, but when one considers Gideon's royal characteristics, the development in his speech and actions throughout the narrative, and what already seems to be assumed in 9:2, Gideon might very well have accepted the position of king. Regardless of whether or not Gideon accepted the position of king, there does not seem to be any clear indicator that his statement should be taken as representing the theocratic ideal.

### **Jotham's Fable**

Jotham's fable is central to the Abimelech narrative, and several have viewed this text to be one of the most anti-monarchical, not only in the Old Testament, but also in the ancient world. The Abimelech narrative serves as the sequel to the Gideon narrative and portrays the cruel kingship of Gideon's son Abimelech. The Abimelech narrative continues the overall plot structure of the book by showing just how far Israel's leaders have fallen. Gideon introduced idolatry into Israel, and Abimelech acts more like a foreign oppressor than he does a king who is concerned with his fellow Israelites.<sup>6</sup> The entire narrative is concerned to demonstrate the illegitimacy of Abimelech's leadership and portrays him in a completely negative way. This concern with delegitimizing Abimelech intersects with the concern of the narrative, which is not the institution of monarchy, but the evil actions of Abimelech and the lords of Shechem.

That Abimelech's actions are the focus of the narrative can be seen by the structure of the fable, the focus of the application, the narrative content that follows Jotham's fable, and the narrator's comments in 9:24 and 9:56-57. One of the difficulties is that details of the fable have been unduly pressed. Within the genre of fable, however, the details are not meant to be pressed to the extreme. Along these lines, many have

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<sup>5</sup>Olson, "Buber, Kingship, and the Book of Judges," 210-11.

<sup>6</sup>Roy L. Heller, "What is Abimelech Doing in Judges?," in *Raising Up a Faithful Exegete: Essays in Honor of Richard D. Nelson*, ed. K. L. Noll and Brooks Schramm (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 225-35.

demonstrated that if the details are pressed, the fable could just as easily be viewed as pro-monarchial. The majority of scholars agree that there does not appear to be any anti-monarchial sentiment within the Abimelech narrative. Instead, the narrative condemns Abimelech, not the institution of monarchy.

### **Conclusion**

Neither Gideon's response nor Jotham's fable contradicts the ideology of monarchy found within the rest of the book. The presentation of these two leaders fits within the overall plot structure of the book that highlights the Davidic monarchy. To view Gideon's response in 8:23 as anti-monarchial, the reader would not only have to read such a perspective into the text, but Gideon would need to be presented as a character who speaks for the narrator. It is clear from his characterization that he does not do so. Similarly, Jotham's fable focuses on the dangerous rule of the bramble, who is clearly Abimelech. Neither of these texts seeks to demonstrate that the institution of monarchy in ancient Israel is incompatible with true Yahwistic faith. Instead, both narratives show the perils of leaders in Israel doing what is right in their own eyes.

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## ABSTRACT

### GIDEON'S RESPONSE AND JOTHAM'S FABLE: TWO ANTI-MONARCHIAL TEXTS IN A PRO-MONARCHIAL BOOK?

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This dissertation seeks to interpret Gideon's response in Judg 8:23 and Jotham's fable in Judg 9:7-15 within the context of the book of Judges. The book of Judges has recently been seen as an apology for the Davidic monarchy. Studies that have advocated this perspective have focused on the prologue (Judg 1:1-3:6) and epilogue (Judg 17-21) where there appears to be a focus on the tribe of Judah and an explicitly pro-monarchial refrain. These studies have largely neglected Gideon's response and Jotham's fable, which have been described by some scholars as two of the most anti-monarchial texts in the entire Old Testament. This dissertation analyzes both the book of Judges as a whole and these two texts in particular, with the aim of establishing the notion that the book of Judges contains a coherent message concerning monarchy from start to finish. Chapter 1 establishes the methodology used in the present study. The methodology employed is a literary-exegetical and theological analysis of the text from a synchronic perspective. Chapter 2 surveys the history of interpretation of the book of Judges with a focus on Gideon's response and Jotham's fable. Chapter 3 places the composition of the book within its life-setting arguing that the book was likely composed during David's early reign. Chapter 4 looks at the ideology of monarchy within the entirety of the book of Judges. Chapter 5 provides a detailed literary analysis of the plot of the Gideon narrative and the characterization of Gideon. This is done to establish the

Gideon is an unreliable character and that his response in 8:23 cannot be considered as a theological axiom that is to be trusted. Chapter 6 provides a detailed literary analysis of the plot of the Abimelech narrative along with a discussion of the characterization of both Jotham and Abimelech. This chapter argues that the purpose of Jotham's fable is to serve as a curse against Abimelech and the lords of Shechem and is not anti-monarchial in nature. Chapter 7 provides a summary of the contents of the dissertation with final reflecting thoughts.

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