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Mapping Gideon:  
An Exploration of Judges 6-8

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An Exploration of Judges 6-8

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An abstract of  
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the  
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University  
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## Abstract

### Mapping Gideon: An Exploration of Judges 6-8 By Kelly J. Murphy

This study examines the Gideon narrative from Judges 6-8 through textual criticism, redaction criticism, and literary criticism. In view of the fact that there is already a wide-range of literary studies on the book of Judges and the Gideon narrative, this dissertation primarily addresses diachronic issues, mapping out a hypothetical compositional history of the Gideon narrative and focusing on the text's meaning in its different redactional phases. Chapter 1 and 2 set the stage by briefly surveying the history of interpretation of the Gideon narrative from both the diachronic and synchronic perspectives and presenting an initial synchronic reading of Judges 6-8. Chapter 3 then turns to 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>, a fragment of the book of Judges discovered at Qumran, exploring the fragment's possible relevance for an understanding of the compositional growth of the Gideon narrative. Chapters 4-8 offer a compositional analysis of Judges 6-8, identifying six possible strata of material in the Gideon narrative. These six strata comprise material through which various authors transformed an earlier, largely profane tale about a "mighty warrior" (*gibbôr hayil*) and his local exploits into a hesitant farmer dependent on divine assurance for action. As a result, the final form of the narrative contains multiple views on issues of orthopraxy, warfare, monarchy, and even the character of Gideon himself. Chapter 9 then returns to a synchronic analysis of Judges 6-8 and explores the way the text works as a literary unit, with a special focus on the literary trope of ambiguity. The final chapter presents conclusions about the Gideon narrative, as well as on the place and purpose of the Gideon narrative within the book of Judges.

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**Chapter 1**  
**Mapping Gideon:**  
**An Exploration of Judges 6-8**

*To ask for a map is to say, 'Tell me a story.'*<sup>1</sup>

### **1.1 Introduction**

Judges 6-8 tells the story of Gideon, a hero/deliverer from the tribe of Manasseh, his divine appointment to save the Israelites from the encroaching Midianite threat, and his subsequent and successful military exploits on both sides of the Jordan River. The narrative begins in Ophrah of the Abiezerites, where Gideon is introduced as a “mighty warrior” by a divine messenger as he beats out wheat in a winepress in order to hide from the enemy (6:12). Gideon responds by saying, “But sir, how can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family” (6:15).<sup>2</sup> Following a series of divine signs, Gideon acquiesces to the deity’s command and leads an army of Israelite troops to defeat the Midianite horde. Surprised by the nighttime attack, the enemy army flees toward the Jordan River, while Gideon summons the Ephraimites to pursue them. The Ephraimites pursue, capture, and execute Oreb and Zeeb, two Midianite captains. The narrative continues as Gideon and his men cross the river into the Transjordan and fight the enemy army a second time, with Gideon himself killing the two Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna. With this second and final defeat of the enemy, the Israelites offer Gideon dynastic rule, “Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian” (8:22). Gideon responds, “I will not rule over

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer* (San Antonio, Texas: Trinity University Press, 2004), 11.

<sup>2</sup> All translations are my own.

you, and my son will not rule over you. Yahweh will rule over you” (8:23). The narrative then concludes with Gideon once again in Ophrah, where he constructs an ambiguous ephod in his hometown, after which “all Israel prostituted themselves to it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family.” The final verses of the narrative report the ensuing apostasy of the Israelites following Gideon’s death: “And the Israelites did not remember Yahweh their God, who had rescued them from the hand of all their enemies on every side and they did not exhibit loyalty to the house of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in return for all the good that he had done to Israel” (8:34-35). The text is ambiguous: Gideon is both a mighty warrior and the least in his family; he both led Israel astray and did good for Israel.

For a relatively minor character in the greater corpus of the Hebrew Bible, Gideon makes a surprising number of appearances outside of the biblical text, beginning in antiquity and continuing to the present, stretching from Pseudo-Philo to Paddy Chayefsky’s Broadway play *Gideon*, and makes an appearance in Alfred Lord Tennyson’s poem “Napoleon,” which compares the English victory over Napoleon at Trafalgar to Gideon’s chastisement of the people of Penuel (“Late he learned humility/Perforce, like those whom Gideon school’d with briars”).<sup>3</sup> Gideon also shows up in a fragment of the book of Judges from the caves at Qumran and in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*.

A cross section of how later readers and writers interpret the MT of Judges 6-8 clearly reflects the ambiguity with which the final form of the biblical text portrays Gideon. For example, the authors of the New Testament book of Hebrews place Gideon

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<sup>3</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, *The Early Poems of Alfred Lord Tennyson* (ed. John Churton Collins; London: Methuen & Co., 1900), 300.

amid not only other hero/deliverer characters from the book of Judges—Barak, Samson, and Jephthah—but also alongside such figures as David, Samuel, and the prophets.

According to Heb 11:32-34, these men “through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, (and) put foreign armies to flight.” Early Rabbinic interpretation likewise portrays Gideon positively; for example, *Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah* equates Gideon’s judgeship in God’s eyes with that of Moses.<sup>4</sup> Finally, in a more recent example, the *NIV Adventure Bible* published by Zonderkidz includes several insets in the pages devoted to the Gideon narrative, including one that describes Gideon as “a mighty warrior who trusted and obeyed God, even though he was often afraid.”<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, for every positive evaluation of Gideon, there is an equally negative one.<sup>6</sup> John Calvin’s conclusion about Gideon (and Samson and Jephthah) was that “Thus in all the saints, something reprehensible is ever to be found.”<sup>7</sup> Later, the American preacher Alexander White claimed, “Gideon left Israel under the heel of her oppressor’s; or if not that just yet, then fast and sure on the way to that. Gideon’s great sin, and Satan’s great triumph over Gideon all arose out of this, that all through his magnificent

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<sup>4</sup> Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1:4.

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence O. Richard, “People in Bible Times: Gideon,” in *NIV Adventure Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderkidz, 2009), 273.

<sup>6</sup> It is for these latter reasons, as Daniel L. Smith-Christopher notes, that though the writers of children’s Bibles only very rarely leave out the story of Gideon, they never seem tell his entire story. For a helpful purview of such readings, see Daniel L. Smith-Christopher’s “Gideon at Thermopylae? On the Militarization of Miracle in Biblical Narrative and ‘Battle Maps,’” in *Writing and Reading War: Rhetoric, Gender, and Ethics in Biblical and Modern Contexts* (eds. Brad E. Kelle and Frank Ritchel Ames; SBLSymS 42; Boston: Brill, 2008), 197-212.

<sup>7</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews* (trans. John Owen; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 303.

life of service, in Paul's words, the law of Moses, the law of God, had never entered Gideon's heart."<sup>8</sup> Wolfgang Bluedorn, in his monograph *Yahweh versus Baalism*, argues that 6:1-8:28 focuses on "the demonstration of YHWH's power and Gideon's selfish continuation of the battle against the Midianites to get credited (*sic*) himself."<sup>9</sup> The contrast is striking: "Gideon's selfish continuation of the battle against the Midianites" is a far remove from the description of Gideon as a "mighty warrior who trusted and obeyed God." Perhaps most telling, however, is that the entire depiction of Gideon—from hesitant, anxious farmer in the Cisjordan to vengeful leader in the Transjordan—is rarely cited or used. Judges 8, the final chapter of the Gideon pericope in which the majority of negative material about the hero is contained and in which there is a serious decline in the role played by the deity in the narrative, is often conspicuously absent. For instance, the *NIV Adventure Bible* lists Gideon as one of the "Famous People of The Bible" in its first pages, but references Judges 6-7.<sup>10</sup> Judges 8 is noticeably omitted.

The way in which interpreters present Gideon, stretching from the rabbinic commentators to the writers of contemporary children's works like the *NIV Adventure Bible*, varies considerably. The complex history of interpretation undoubtedly stems from the ambiguity present in the biblical narrative: Gideon is both "mighty warrior" and "least in [his] family," both a man who leads Israel astray and one who does "good" for Israel. However, the text is decidedly unambiguous on one point: the Gideon of the Cisjordan is dramatically different from his Transjordan doppelganger. In the Cisjordan,

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<sup>8</sup> Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters* (London: Oliphants Ltd., 1958), 186.

<sup>9</sup> Wolfgang Bluedorn, *Yahweh versus Baalism: A Theological Reading of the Gideon-Abimelech Narrative* (JSOT 329; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 55.

<sup>10</sup> *NIV Adventure Bible*, "Famous People of the Bible" chart located in the front matter of the book (Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderkidz, 2009).

Gideon is repeatedly portrayed as afraid, acts in constant contact with the deity, and once convinced to act does so with the willing aid of other local Israelite tribes. In the Transjordan, Gideon is never hesitant or fearful, never communicates with the deity, and acts only with a small band of 300 warriors. Accordingly, geography plays a fundamental role in the Gideon narrative.

## **1.2 Mapping Gideon**

The import of geography in the Gideon account—and, indeed, how the setting of the narrative coincides with the way that its protagonist is depicted—provides a glimpse into the means by which maps and mapping intersect in a text like Judges 6-8, as well as a way to think about approaching the text. To begin, scholars and interpreters frequently illustrate portions of Judges 6-8 in map form (like many other so-called historical narratives in the biblical material [e.g., the story of Jericho from the book of Joshua]), charting Gideon's route through pre-monarchic Israel, and identifying the putative locations of various key cities in the story. Second, the narrative itself forms a kind of verbal map, in which geography is of fundamental importance: Judges 6-8 tells a story that begins and ends in a place called Ophrah and whose two major scenes occur on opposite sides of the Jordan River. Finally, an exploration of the interpretative history and textual, redactional, and literary features of the Gideon landscape is in itself an act that creates yet another map—a sort of roadmap to guide readers through the biblical text. The ensuing exploration will introduce the Gideon narrative, mapping out its textual history, its compositional strata, and charting the literary features of the final form of the narrative.



In the first connection between maps and the Gideon narrative, as with other so-called historical narratives—especially those historical narratives that depict battles—scholars and interpreters frequently represent the Gideon material in a map form. The desire to depict the Gideon narrative graphically reflects a fascination with the military strategies and tactics employed therein, as well as the desire to pinpoint the numerous locales described in the text. As one example, portions of the Gideon narrative frequently appear in children’s books about the Bible. In the children’s book *Bible War and Weapons*, there is an illustrated map outlining the “troop movement” of Gideon’s army, which also identifies both the “Land of Amalekites” and the “Land of Midian.”<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the map in *Bible War and Weapons* identifies the “Battle Zone,” the location where Gideon and his men defeat the enemy army in a surprise nocturnal attack (cf. 7:16-22). The “Battle Zone” is surrounded by marks identifying the “Gideon and Israelite Camp,” the “Midianite Camp,” and the “Amalekite Camp.” In the bottom left hand corner of the scene, a man (Gideon?) holds a broken jug with a flame burning inside of it. In this way, interpreters translate the geography and battle depicted in the narrative in Judges 7 into physical reality: the story of Gideon is a story that happened. As a story that happened, it can be illustrated and mapped into the world its readers and interpreters know. However, there is one noticeable absence in the map found in *Bible War and Weapons*: the deity.

Further examples of the interest in depicting the Gideon narrative in map form

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<sup>11</sup> Rick Osbourne, Marnie Wooding, and Ed Strauss, *Bible War and Weapons* (Grand Rapids: Zonderkidz, 2002). I initially discovered *Bible War and Weapons*—and was inspired to investigate the intersection between the Gideon narrative, maps, and geography—while reading Daniel L. Smith-Christopher’s article “Gideon at Thermopylae? On the Militarization of Miracle in Biblical Narrative and “Battle Maps,” cited in n. 5 above.

occur in genres ranging from biblical atlases to scholarly articles. For instance, the biblical atlas *The Sacred Bridge* provides two maps in the section devoted to Gideon: the first entitled “The war of Gideon, 12<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, BCE,” and the second labeled, “The pursuit of the Midianites, 12<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.”<sup>12</sup> Both of these maps provide graphic illustrations of the biblical narrative, complete with arrows depicting troop movement. The first map provides color-coded arrows in the key detailing the direction in which the Israelite force moved (dark green), the gathering of the Israelite warriors (light green), and the flight of the Midianites (red), along with the location of the Midianite camp (marked by a small yellow tent). The second map includes three text boxes: the first states “Ephraimites seize fords of the Jordan,” the second “Become dung for the ground (Psalms 83:10),” and the third “Gideon punishes Succoth and Penuel.” In the instance of the second text box, a line from a psalm that refers to the Gideon narrative (“become dung for the ground”) is lifted from the Psalter and applied to the map of the Gideon narrative—a graphic representation based otherwise only on details from Judges 6-8. The narrative encapsulated in 7:16-22 (and the poetic material from Ps 83) thus becomes the basis for tactical and illustrative map-making. Strikingly absent, as in *Bible War and Weapons*, is any mention of the significant role played by the deity (cf. 7:22).

Similarly, *The Rand McNally Bible Atlas* describes the geographical details included in the Gideon narrative, puzzling over the exact location of Ophrah (the contemporary *Tell el Fār ‘ah?* Alternatively, *eṭ Ṭaiyibeh?*) and noting that the “Midianite invasion of Gideon’s day represented a seasonal northward movement of camel-breeding

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<sup>12</sup> Anson F. Rainey, ed., *The Sacred Bridge: Carta’s Atlas of the Biblical World* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006), 139.

Arabian Bedouin, driven father west than usual by drought prevailing in those years.”<sup>13</sup> For *The Rand McNally Bible Atlas*, not only are the locations mentioned in Judges 6-8 identifiable with contemporary places, but the movement of enemy troops is credited to a mundane cause, in this case “drought prevailing in those years.” This explanation is at a far remove from the explanation presented in the book of Judges, where the deity delivers the Israelites into the hands of their enemy as a punishment for an unspecified evil (6:1). Both *The Sacred Bridge* and *The Rand McNally Bible Atlas* maps make the Gideon narrative concrete, translating the world described in Judges 6-8 into one that readers can identify, see, and explore.

The fascination with things geographical in the Gideon narrative also appears outside the genre of biblical atlas. Abraham Malamat’s article “The War of Gideon and Midian: A Military Approach” provides one example. Malamat writes:

The Israelite army was arrayed, it seems, on one of the hill-tops at the north-eastern tip of the Gilboa range, near the Well of Harod, the present day Ain-Jalud. The enemy’s camp lay below the Hill of Moreh in the northern extension of the Vale of Jazreel (in the so-called Chesulloth Valley) (VI, 33; VII, I). Gideon surprised them from the Hill: “And the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley . . . . the LORD said unto him: Arise get thee down unto the host” (VII, 8-9). Whoever stands at the top of the steep northernmost summit of the Hill of Moreh, looking down at a camp on the plain below, imagines that he sees it under his very feet, and will appreciate the significance of the above quotation.<sup>14</sup>

For Malamat, as he analyzes the military techniques and the strategic factors described in the passage in Judges 7, the Israelites’ knowledge of the territory and their familiarity with the terrain gave them a “distinct advantage.”<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the geographical details in

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<sup>13</sup> Emil G. Kraeling, *Rand McNally Bible Atlas* (Rand McNally & Company: New York, 1956), 154.

<sup>14</sup> Abraham Malamat, “The War of Gideon and Midian: A Military Approach,” *PEQ* 85 (1953): 65.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

the Gideon account—as a story that really happened—can be culled for information about current geography and provide a way in which contemporary readers can themselves enter the world created by the biblical narrative—by standing on the hilltop of Ain-Jalud and imagining the scene described in 7:8-9. As in the aforementioned maps, the geographical data contained in the Gideon narrative translates into real-life geography, providing a way for readers to enter the world described therein.

In another example, Jeremy Hutton uses the geographical information in 8:9-14, in which Gideon travels on a “caravan route” in his pursuit of the Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna, to draw connections between the Gideon account and Gen 32-33. Additionally, Hutton uses the geographical data in the stories to “postulate with a high degree of likelihood the identification of Penuel with T. aḍ Ḍahab aš-Šarqīya and of Mahanaim with T.aḍ Ḍahab al-Garbīya.”<sup>16</sup> According to Hutton, the combination of archaeological data and biblical narratives “provides us with a means to gain a deeper understanding of the geographical situation with which the Israelites were familiar during the time of the narratives’ composition.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, the Gideon narrative supplies contemporary readers with information that allows them to comprehend precisely what ancient Israelites knew. Not only is the Gideon narrative a story that actually took place, translatable to contemporary geography, but it also provides a way to enter the world of ancient Israel, to know what the ancient Israelites themselves knew.

All of these examples illustrate the importance of geography and maps for readers

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<sup>16</sup> Jeremy Hutton, “Mahanaim, Penuel, and Transhumance Routes: Observations on Genesis 32-33 and Judges 8,” *JNES* 65 (2006): 178; Hutton briefly explores the Gideon narrative and its relationship to things geographical in *The Transjordanian Palimpsest* (BZAW396; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), cf. 27-29; 315.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

and interpreters of the Gideon narrative. Mapping Gideon becomes a way to enter the world of the judges as described in the Gideon narrative—to make real the story for its later audience and to allow them a way to access the world of ancient Israel. It may simply be the case that detailed accounts of wars in the biblical texts lead to such map-making by later readers and interpreters. However, the maps of the Gideon account seem to do much more. They largely ignore the role played by the deity in the narrative, instead focusing on how the events in Judges 6-8 took place in geographical locations knowable to the contemporary reader. In this way, map-making of the Gideon narrative emphasizes the belief that the events described therein actually took place, and are reflected in contemporary geography.

In addition to the graphic representation of Judges 6-8, the narrative found therein forms a kind of verbal map, charting in words Gideon's reputed adventures through ancient Israel in the pre-monarchic period. That is to say, the biblical text is itself a map, inasmuch as "[a] story or a novel is a kind of map because, like a map, it is not a world, but it evokes one (or, at least, one for each reader)."<sup>18</sup> The story of Gideon evokes the world created by the book of Judges, a world in which geography plays a significant role. The list of places included in the text is exceedingly long, beginning by identifying the enemy—including Midian and the "land of the Amorites." The text then mentions Egypt briefly, alluding to the story of the exodus from Egypt (and setting the stage for the importance of the figure of Moses in the Gideon account). Yet this story happened not in Egypt but in Ophrah of the Abiezerites, where an altar stands "to this day"—for whoever wrote 6:24, Ophrah and its altar still existed. The list of toponyms mentioned in the

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<sup>18</sup> Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination*, 166.

narrative grows following Ophrah, including the Jordan, the Valley of Jezreel, the spring of Harod, the hill of Moreh, Beth-shittah, Zererah, Abel-meholah, Tabbath, the hill country of Ephraim, Beth-barah, the rock of Oreb, the wine press of Zeeb, Succoth, Penuel, Karkor, the caravan route east of Nobah and Jogbehah, the ascent of Heres, Tabor, and Shechem. Geographically, the narrative ends where it began, in Ophrah of the Abiezerites.

Second, while Ophrah creates a geographical inclusio in the narrative, the landscape created by Judges 6-8 is also divisible geographically by the Jordan River, which plays a crucial role both in the Gideon narrative and in the larger book of Judges. Mentioned in 6:33; 7:24; 7:25; and 8:4, the Jordan runs from Mt. Hermon in the north down to the Dead Sea, and thereby separates the western part of ancient Palestine (Cisjordan) from the eastern part (Transjordan). Additionally, both the Gideon narrative and the book of Judges continually depict the people in the Transjordan negatively.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, as both Webb and Amit notes, in the Gideon account the protagonist's characterization changes depending on his location in reference to the river: when in the Cisjordan, Gideon operates only at the behest of Yahweh with no hint of a personal agenda, while when in the Transjordan Gideon pursues his own revenge-oriented plan and never once interacts with the deity.<sup>20</sup> In short, geography plays a fundamental role in

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<sup>19</sup> The strategic value of the Jordan plays an important role in the Ehud and Jephthah stories as well (cf. 3:28 and 12:5), underscoring the importance of the river in the larger literary horizon of the book.

<sup>20</sup> The Jordan plays such an important role in Judges 6-8 that Webb (rightly) divides the narrative into two movements (6:11-8:3 and 8:4-35): the second movement begins at 8:4, when Gideon and his men cross the Jordan River into the Transjordan (Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 146-147). Amit also notes the importance that geography plays in the Gideon narrative, outlining how her bloc of signs stories occur in the Western Jordan, while the Eastern Jordan stories she sees as primarily concerned with questions of Gideon's leadership (*The Book of Judges*, 243; for her larger discussion of geography in the Gideon narrative cf. pp.241-244). Her insights are helpful, although I think that Gideon as a "good" leader is also explored in the stories in the Cisjordan.

the narrative, with the Jordan River separating “good” Israelites (i.e., those in the Cisjordan) from “bad” Israelites (i.e., those in the Transjordan), and “good” Gideon (i.e., Gideon in the Cisjordan) from “bad” Gideon (i.e., Gideon in the Transjordan). Geography and place in Judges 6-8 function so that the audience—both ancient and contemporary—when listening to or reading the Gideon narrative enters the textual landscape that the authors of the narrative created. The geographical descriptions create a reality for the audience: if a reader knows where they are in the geographical landscape of the world of Judges, then the reader is simultaneously oriented to the Israelite’s relationship to their deity and the state of intertribal relations.

Attending to the textual map created by the Gideon narrative also means recognizing what other maps and worlds the account invokes; in other words, it means entering a world of intertextuality, in which the places mentioned bring to mind other biblical stories that occur in the same locales and other biblical characters associated with those places. Similarly, the language used in the Gideon narrative connects the story with other places and figures from the larger biblical texts. There is significant evidence of both inter- and intra-textual work present in these chapters. A. Graeme Auld’s expresses his genuine insight into the Gideon narrative with the following

Why are there so many links with other biblical traditions: with the call of Moses (and some of the prophets), and the god who names himself *'hyh* (Exod. iii); with Jacob, who is also associated with Peniel (Gen. xxxii 22-32) and Succoth (xxxiii 17), and who shares the problem of seeing the face of God; with the *ml'k yhwh* who also deals with Samson’s parents (Judg. xiii); with the making of an ephod by the disreputable Micah (Judg. xvii-xviii); with the commands to destroy illicit cultic items in Deut. vii 5 and xii 3; with Elijah, and divine fire consuming a proper offering (1 Kgs xviii); with the renaming of *y'qb* to *y'sr-'l*, a name in several ways similar to *yrb-b'l* (Gen. xxxii 27-9); with the similarly named *yrb-*

*m*, who did building work at Peniel (1 Kgs vii 25); with the offering of jewelry to make a Golden Calf (Exod. xxxii 2-4)?<sup>21</sup>

The number of apparent allusions and similarities between the Gideon narrative and other biblical traditions is overwhelming, making the list of other stories and characters invoked by the Gideon map is lengthy. From outside the book of Judges, the Gideon narrative reminds readers of the worlds of Jacob, Moses, Aaron, David, Elijah, and Jeroboam, while from within the book the Gideon narrative demonstrates clear connections with the stories of Deborah, Jephthah, Samson, and Micah.

Finally, the following exploration of the Gideon narrative will itself create yet another kind of map, a map detailing the set of conclusions of the ensuing investigation. This map will guide readers through the textual variations, the different levels of the literary strata, and the final landscape produced by the canonical form of the chapters. The methodological approach to the text will largely be diachronic, although first an initial synchronic tour of the text will address the issue of structure and introduce readers to the narrative. Next, issues of textual criticism and redaction criticism will be explored, creating a guide with which readers may navigate the textual and compositional growth of the text, allowing readers to inhabit the imaginations of the ancient author(s) in order to explore how the language, motifs, and themes they utilized shaped the territory the consecutive layers of the Gideon narrative creates. Finally, a thorough exploration of the text in its final form from a synchronic perspective will occur, recognizing the role it plays as a distinct literary unit, and will chart a way in which readers can understand the Gideon narrative as it now stands.

In sum, the Gideon narrative is very much a story linked to geography and to

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<sup>21</sup> Auld, "Gideon: Hacking at the Heart of the Old Testament," *VT* 39 (1989): 256.



maps geographical, textual, historical, and literary. The words and images of the Gideon narrative generate a veritable map in the readers' minds, guiding the reader through the terrain that Gideon himself travels and explores, functioning both to locate the reader within the biblical world of ancient Israel and to invoke other narratives and stories from both the book of Judges and the larger biblical text. Moreover, geography and place in Judges 6-8 functions so that the audience—both ancient and contemporary—when listening to or reading the Gideon narrative enters the textual landscape that the authors of the narrative created. The geographical descriptions create a reality for the audience: if a reader knows where they are in the geographical landscape of the world of Judges, then the reader is simultaneously oriented to the larger thematic and moral issues of the text.

### 1.3 A Roadmap for Reading and Exploring the Gideon Narrative

To begin an exploration of the Gideon narrative, it is helpful to know its history in all its guises; in other words, “When a long and arduous journey across a tricky terrain is planned, maps and notes left by previous travelers might come in handy.”<sup>22</sup> The maps and notes left by the preceding travelers of the Gideon territory not only illustrate how others have navigated their way through the narrative, but also inform a reader of the contemporary place that Judges 6-8 occupies on the larger map of current biblical studies.<sup>23</sup>

Contemporary studies of the Gideon narrative straddle the significant split

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<sup>22</sup> Serge Frolov, *The Turn of the Cycle: 1 Samuel 1-8 in Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives* (BZAW 342; New York: de Gruyter, 2004), 6.

<sup>23</sup> For other examples of the history of interpretation of Gideon and the book of Judges, see David M. Gunn, *Judges* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 93-120; Bluedorn, *Yahweh versus Baalism*, 18-55; Eliyahu Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest: An Ideology of Leadership in the Gideon, Abimelech, and Jephthah Narratives (Judg. 6-12)* (VTSup 106; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1-13.

between diachronic and synchronic studies of the book of Judges (and biblical studies in general). Broadly speaking, the divide is between “historical criticism” and “literary criticism.” Of course, to use the terms diachronic and synchronic is to invoke a much broader discussion with origins in linguistic theory; derived from the Greek, diachronic means “through/across time,” while synchronic means “simultaneous in time.” Ferdinand de Saussure first used the terms as they relate to the field of linguistics in his work *Cours de linguistique générale*, later published in English as *Course in General Linguistics*.<sup>24</sup> In linguistics, the field thus divides into two main branches, one diachronic, and the other synchronic:

A diachronic approach to the study of language (or languages) involves an examination of its origins, development, history and change. In contrast, the synchronic approach entails the study of a linguistic system in a particular state, without reference to time.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, to describe the terms with an analogy, studying the history of a language is comparable to a game of chess: “to study it synchronically is to describe the pieces on the board at any moment between moves. To study it diachronically is to say how they have reached these positions.”<sup>26</sup> For Saussure, the methodological priority goes to synchronic studies: it is necessary to adopt the user’s point of view in order to understand language as a coherently organized structure.

However, Saussure, as the father of modern linguistics, was not discussing the

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<sup>24</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris, 1916). English Trans. *Course in General Linguistics* (eds. C. Bally & A. Sechehaye, London: McGraw Hill, 1983).

<sup>25</sup> J.A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 217.

<sup>26</sup> P.H. Matthews, *Linguistics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 85.

exegesis of biblical texts when he coined the terms, and the distinction between the two terms made by Saussure at the beginning of the twentieth century is different from their current usage in biblical studies.<sup>27</sup> For biblical exegesis, diachronic analyses attempt to trace the development of a biblical text over time, while synchronic analyses treat the biblical texts as coherent, self-contained literary units. As Barr notes of the current state of methodological affairs in biblical studies, “Diachronic interests have come to be down-valued, and these tendencies have come to be associated with a more general anti-historical trend in modern culture—something that may have been quite absent from Saussure’s own intention. Exegesis, it is now widely felt, should treat the text synchronically and largely leave aside historical matters.”<sup>28</sup>

The need to understand the terms stems from the problem identified above; namely, the problem of the widening gulf between synchronic and diachronic approaches to the Gideon narrative (and biblical texts more broadly). Most recent studies of the Gideon narrative (and the larger book of Judges) are now often approached from a purely synchronic perspective, examining the material as a coherent, self-contained unit. Yet locating the Gideon narrative on the greater map of biblical studies shows that it is part of a larger conversation inherently diachronic in nature; namely, the discussion around the composition of the Deuteronomistic History (DH).

Moreover, as Barr notes, the divide in biblical studies between diachronic and synchronic approaches is problematic from a Saussurean perspective. After all, “synchrony in the Saussurean sense, if one thinks about it, must support a historical

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<sup>27</sup> Barr, “The Synchronic, Diachronic, and the Historical,” 1-9; Clines, “Beyond Synchronic/Diachronic” in *Synchronic or Diachronic?*, 60-62.

<sup>28</sup> Barr, “The Synchronic, Diachronic, and the Historical,” 2.

approach, indeed must be a historical approach rather than an anti-historical one”—in other words, to understand a text historically means to understand what it meant synchronically in the relevant biblical time (and vice-versa).<sup>29</sup> The text of the MT does not provide readers with “direct and precise access to only one synchronic state of ancient Hebrew,” but rather to material that is layered, with each layer being the result of a different synchronic moment.<sup>30</sup> In order to understand more fully a biblical narrative, to work responsibly with the text, it is necessary to approach it both diachronically and synchronically. To do this, it is helpful to examine the work of previous travelers who have already covered this terrain.

### **1.3.1 A Change in Terrain: Martin Noth’s Deuteronomistic History**

For the most part, studies of Judges 6-8 have paralleled the major trends of the study of the Hebrew Bible writ large.<sup>31</sup> With the advent of critical studies of the biblical text, scholars initially searched the book of Judges for the various sources regularly identified in the first five books of the Bible: J, E, P, and D.<sup>32</sup> A regularly noted example is George Moore’s early commentary on the book of Judges, in which Moore finds evidence of the traditional “J” and “E” sources consistently within Judges 6-8.<sup>33</sup> Although Robert Boling’s more recent commentaries continues to employ some of this language, the identification of the Pentateuchal sources within Judges 6-8 (and the

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>31</sup> McMillion, “Judges 6-8: A Study of Premonarchic Israel,” 1-2.

<sup>32</sup> G.F. Moore, *Judges* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895), xx, xxiv.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 173-237.

historical narratives more broadly) was abandoned with the work of Martin Noth.<sup>34</sup> It is now a commonplace to observe that Noth's postulation of a "Deuteronomistic History" (DH) marked a significant turning point in scholarship on the book of Judges.

Noth's *The Deuteronomistic History* radically changed the terrain when it came to the study of the book of Judges.<sup>35</sup> In that work, Noth postulated that a single exilic author/redactor ordered and shaped older sources at his disposal, in addition to inserting his own comments (particularly in speeches by major characters), and thereby produced a historical sketch of ancient Israel that explains the fall of Judah. According to Noth, these biblical texts—stretching from the books of Deuteronomy to Kings—demonstrate a certain unity in both linguistic detail and content (especially speeches and theological interpretation).<sup>36</sup> The resulting product was an uninterrupted history of Israel that begins with Moses in the wilderness and stretches to the fall of Jerusalem and the ensuing Babylonian exile: the so-called "Deuteronomistic History" (DH). For Noth, this "deuteronomistic" author/redactor (Dtr) was a historian, who used older sources at his disposal while also integrating them into his work according to his uniform purpose and design. Noth believed that the "Dtr did the largest amount of original work on the period between the occupation and the beginning of the monarchy—here he created the idea of a specific period of 'judges.'"<sup>37</sup> He postulated that the Dtr molded traditional materials, including a series of stories about various tribal heroes and a list of "judges," into the

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<sup>34</sup> Robert G. Boling, *Judges: An Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (AB 6A; Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1975).

<sup>35</sup> Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup15; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-21

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

composition of what is now the book of Judges. For Noth, the original work composed by the Dtr extended from Judg 2:6-1 Sam 12 (minus Judg 1:1-2:5 and Judg 13-21, which were post-Dtr additions). The Dtr also composed the introduction in 2:6-16, 18-19 and framed the traditional materials he used with a pattern of belief-apostasy-crying out-repentance-delivery. Additionally, the Dtr added brief summaries in 6:7-10 and 10:6-16 to underscore Israel's repeated misconduct. Finally, Noth located the Dtr's characteristic "end of era" reflection for Judges in 1 Samuel 12, with Samuel being the last of the judges who delivers Israel from foreign oppression.

Noth's reflections on the Gideon narrative indicate that it largely conforms to his broader thesis: the Dtr composed the Gideon narrative from older traditions and framed it with the pattern of belief-apostasy-crying out-repentance-delivery. Of Judges 6-8, Noth wrote:

The long Gideon story (Judg 6.1-8.32) had already been compiled in the old tradition out of various different elements; to it Dtr. provides a relatively detailed introduction. He merely follows his usual practice by prefixing to the old account of the Midianite oppression (6.2-6a) a statement that the apostasy brought about this external affliction (6.1); but he also introduces an unnamed prophet who says that the incongruity between God's saving activities and the people's disobedience has grown greater and greater (6.6b-10). The prophet provides a reflection upon the situation such as D. on occasion likes to put into his characters' mouths. That in this situation God is nevertheless ready to help is implied in the old Gideon story which follows immediately. Dtr.'s epilogue to the Gideon story goes well beyond the framework of the usual short formulaic conclusion because it has, at the same time, to serve as an introduction to the Abimelech story (Judg 9.1-57). We cannot doubt that this passage, too, derives from Dtr.<sup>38</sup>

In short, Noth argued that the Gideon narrative was part of the original work of the Dtr, as was 6:7-10 and the material that connects Gideon to the following Abimelech

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 74.

narrative. Unique to the Gideon narrative is the “relatively detailed introduction” and the additional elements of the epilogue that connect Gideon to Abimelech.

Noth’s hypothesis changed the way that biblical scholarship approached the books of Deuteronomy-Kings, and has largely defined scholarly discourse on the book of Judges since. Consequently, to explore the Gideon narrative is to enter a world defined by Noth’s construct, and the scholarly modifications, amendments, and challenges to it.

### **1.3.2 Modifications and Amendments to Noth’s DH**

While Noth’s theory about the books of Deuteronomy-Kings was largely accepted, it was not long after the publication of *The Deuteronomistic History* that scholars began to propose extensive modifications and amendments to it. For the most part, the initial responses did not challenge the idea that the books of Deuteronomy-Kings comprised a distinct unit, but rather addressed the issue of the purpose of the DH and the number of redactors responsible for the books.

For Noth, the purpose of the DH was to explain the fall of Israel and Judah.

According to *The Deuteronomistic History*, the Dtr:

did not write his history to provide entertainment in hours of leisure or to satisfy a curiosity about national history, but intended it to teach the true meaning of the history of Israel from the occupation to the destruction of the old order. The meaning which he discovered was that God was recognizably at work in this history, continuously meeting and accelerating moral decline with warnings and punishments, and, finally, when these proved fruitless, with total annihilation.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 89.

Subsequent works raised anew the question of the purpose of the Dtr, especially questioning Noth's fundamentally negative view of the intended purpose of the DH.<sup>40</sup> In contrast to Noth, Gerhard von Rad identified a theme of grace running throughout the DH, which he argued Noth ignored by solely emphasizing the theme of final judgment. In particular, von Rad focused on 2 Samuel 7, Yahweh's promise to David that is repeated throughout the DH (1 Kgs 8:20, 25; 9:5; 11:5, 13, 32, 36; 15:4; 2 Kgs 2:4; 8:19; 19:34; 20:6). These statements, argued von Rad, offer a basis for hope for the restoration of the Davidic monarchy and culminate in Jehoiachin's release from prison while in exile (2 Kgs 25:27-30). According to von Rad, the inclusion of this narrative offers a subtle indication that the Davidic line continues—an indication that the DH was not as dismal as Noth proposed. Like von Rad, H.W. Wolff argues that the DH contains a more intricate purpose than Noth's original theory recognized. For Wolff, the purpose is apparent in the repeated cycle of apostasy, punishment, repentance, and deliverance (especially as found in Judges). Wolff argues that the DH intends to illustrate to the exiled peoples that they were in the second stage of the cycle—punishment—and that by crying out to Yahweh in repentance they might hope for deliverance (as evidenced by the cyclical nature of the DH). In short, the amendments of both von Rad and Wolff identify additional elements that signify the complexity of the material—a complexity not fully realized by Noth's original hypothesis. Additionally, scholars posed significant amendments to Noth's idea of a single, exilic editor as responsible for shaping the history. Wolfgang Richter was one of the first to amend Noth's theory as it relates to the book of Judges, arguing

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<sup>40</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 154-66 and H. W. Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Deuteronomistic Historical Work," *ZAW* 73 (1961): 171-86.



that before the stories in the book underwent redaction by Noth's Dtr, they already formed a unified collection with an overall interpretive framework.<sup>41</sup> Richter bases this hypothesis on the fact that what he considers "typical" Deuteronomistic language, especially the Hebrew word for "judge (שפוט)," occurs neither in the so-called framework material surrounding the various deliverer stories nor in the (generally assumed as paradigmatic) Othniel story in 3:7-11. For these reasons, Richter argues that neither the framework material nor the Othniel pericope came from a Dtr redactor, but rather from the previously existing source from which the Dtr drew.<sup>42</sup> This existing source Richter calls *Retterbuch*; namely, a collection of stories with an interpretive framework that existed prior to editing by any so-called Dtr redactor. The Gideon narrative belongs, according to Richter, to this original *Retterbuch*. Rather than postulating one single Dtr redaction, Richter suggests that there were three pre-Dtr redactions of the book. According to Richter's hypothesis, a northern redactor first compiled the *Retterbuch* from diverse traditions. A later redactor added framing material around the stories of Ehud, Deborah/Barak, and Gideon, while a third redactor added the Othniel story as an introduction to the larger *Retterbuch*. After these three pre-Dtr redactions, Richter postulates the existence of a DtrG (similar to Noth's Dtr) who then reworked the already thrice-redacted collection of stories. Finally, the DtrG combined the deliverer stories with the accounts of the minor judges, added the Jephthah and Samson narratives, and composed the introduction in Judg 2:6-11, 14-16, and 18-19.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Wolfgang Richter, *Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Richterbuch* (BBB 18; Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1963), 61-62.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 25, 61.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Richter, *Traditionsgeschichtliche*, 115-118, 127-131.

Revisions to Noth's theory of the Dtr continued. While Richter focuses on the pre-Dtr redactions of the material found in the book of Judges, others argue that multiple redactors revised an original Dtr history; in other words, the focus moved from pre-Dtr revisions to additional post-Dtr revisions. In the first of these, Frank Moore Cross identifies two layers of redaction in the material that Noth attributes solely to a single creative writer/redactor.<sup>44</sup> Rather than postulating one exilic redaction, Cross argues for two redactions based on his observation that there are two major themes in the books of Samuel and Kings—the first a theme of the promise to David and the second focusing on Jeroboam's sin—that converge in the narrative of Josiah's reign. With this, Cross recognizes the elements of the DH that are not overly pessimistic (contra Noth), and proposes that the first edition of the DH was redacted during the period of Josiah to serve as “a propaganda work for the Josianic reformation.”<sup>45</sup> Cross dates the **second** redaction of the DH to the Babylonian exile. Cross' postulation of a Josianic redaction not only significantly changes Noth's original dating for the DH, but also its purpose: according to Cross, the DH was originally propaganda material for Josiah rather than a history intended to teach what brought about the destruction of Israel. Richard Nelson continued to develop the double-redaction theory of the DH, arguing that the “DH combined the Deuteronomic conditional theology of obedience to the law with a theology of dynastic promise.”<sup>46</sup> In its pre-exilic context, this was motivational, while in the exilic setting, the message was heard as “an explanation for national catastrophe and as a theodicy that

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<sup>44</sup> Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), 274 – 289.

<sup>45</sup> Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 289.

<sup>46</sup> Richard D. Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* (JSOT 18; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1981), 334.

defended Yahweh's power and justice by laying the blame on a disobedient king and people.<sup>47</sup>

In Germany, proponents of the Göttingen School similarly identify multiple exilic redactions. Rudolph Smend isolates a secondary redactional layer in the DH, which he labels DtrN (the nomistic Deuteronomist) because of its interest in obedience to the law.<sup>48</sup> According to Smend, passages that exhibit this tendency in the book of Judges included 1:1-2:5; 2:20-21 and 23. Unlike the other texts in the book of Judges that concern the conquest, these passages espouse the notion that the Israelites did not achieve full conquest of the land. Smend's student, Walter Dietrich, identifies yet another exilic redactional layer characterized by an insistence on and interest in prophecy (DtrP; the prophetic Deuteronomist). According to Dietrich, an original DtrH (comparable with Noth's Dtr) created a work that painted a picture of Israel under Joshua conquering the entire land of Canaan. DtrN, a later nomistic redactor, added passages that alluded to the incomplete nature of the conquest, while DtrP added yet another redactional layer characterized by prophetic insertions intended to demonstrate that everything the deity announced through the prophets came to pass.

The proliferation of amendments to the Göttingen School continued with Timo Veijola's work, who, following in the footsteps of Smend and Dietrich, applied their redactional model to the books of Samuel with a focus on the monarchy. According to Veijola, the DtrH regarded the monarchy positively, while the DtrP took a critical stance

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> R. Smend, "The Law and the Nations: A Contribution to Deuteronomistic Tradition History," in *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History* (eds. G.N. Knoppers and J.G. McConville; trans. P.T. Daniels; SBTS 8; Winona Lake: IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 95-110.

against the monarchy, and the DtrN, though largely critical of the monarchy, attempted to smooth over the stories of David and Solomon. For the book of Judges, Veijola argues—contra Noth—that the DtrG was responsible for Judges 17-21.<sup>49</sup> Scholars regularly treat these final five chapters of the book, which mention no heroes/deliverers such as Gideon, as a separate section from what comes before, often ascribing them to a later, secondary author. Yet Veijola argues that these chapters demonstrate a favorable attitude toward the monarch, an attribute Veijola thinks belong to the original DtrG.<sup>50</sup> Of the Gideon story, Veijola argues that the intention of the author in the insertion of 8:22-23 was to argue against the idea of a hero/deliverer appointed by the deity becoming a lasting ruler, but not to argue against monarchy per se.<sup>51</sup>

Üwe Becker also adopts the basic framework of the Göttingen School, identifying an initial DtrH work in Judges (2:11-16:31) that was expanded by a DtrN (1:21, 27-36; 2:1-5; 12aα, 13-14a, 16b, 17-18aα, 19-21; 3:5-6; 8:24-27; 9:16b-19a, 24, 56-57; 17-18) and then again by a DtrP redactor who added the framework material in 1:1-18, 22-26 and 19:21, 25.<sup>52</sup> According to Becker, DtrP saw the monarchy as the necessary development following the period of the judges: the premonarchic period was a total failure, and only the monarchy could rectify the dire situation. In the Gideon-Abimelech narrative, Becker identifies two earlier traditions underlying the present text: local traditions about Gideon and his battle against the Midianites and a narrative detailing the

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<sup>49</sup> Timo Veijola, *Das Königtum in der Beurteilung der deuteronomistischen Historiographie Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1977).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 137-138.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 112-114.

<sup>52</sup> Üwe Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum: redaktionsgeschichtliche Studien zum Richterbuch* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1990).

rise and fall of a character named Abimelech. Becker argues that the Dtr linked the two stories by adding the renaming scene in 6:25-32, thereby emphasizing a contrast between the rule and reign of Yahweh through Gideon and the failure of a human king as embodied by Abimelech.

Reinhold Müller continues to explore the relationship between human and divine kingship in texts from Deut-Kgs that address issues of monarchy: Judg 8:22-23, the framework of Judges 8-9; 1 Sam 8; 10:17-27;12; Deut 17:14-20; Josh 24.<sup>53</sup> He argues that only the Jotham fable in Judg 9:8-20 dates to the period of the monarchy, while the rest of the texts he dates to the post-monarchic period and Persian periods. For Müller, the above anti-monarchic texts grew in stages within their literary setting—they did not exist outside of that setting. These anti-monarchic blocks postdate the book of Kings, upon which the book of Judges is dependent. The references to *Heilsgeschichte* situate these texts in a period after the codification of the Torah, during which the monarchy was under criticism and stood in sharp contrast to Yahweh’s sovereignty. Müller forgoes the various sigla that so characterizes German scholarship on the DH (although he does sometimes call the redactional layers “late-Deuteronomistic”). In this ways, Müller’s work answers some of the charges of unnecessary complication and endless sigla raised against diachronic scholarship by its opponents.

Finally, the most recent commentary on Judges, *Richter: übersetzt und ausgelegt* by Walter Groß (with maps by Erasmus Gaß), continues in the tradition of the Göttingen School.<sup>54</sup> Groß identifies five layers in the Gideon narrative, beginning with fragments of

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<sup>53</sup> Reinhard Müller, *Königtum und Gottesherrschaft: Untersuchungen zur alttestamentlichen Monarchiekritik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

<sup>54</sup> Walter Groß, *Richter: übersetzt und ausgelegt* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2009).

the pre-deuteronomistic Gideon story. Added to this are the frame elements in 6:1, 2a, 6b and 8:28, various younger additions, later additions to the framed Dtr narrative, and post-deuteronomistic passages connecting Gideon with the Abimelech story of Judges 9.<sup>55</sup> Groß writes, “Für einen aufmerksamen Leser enthält die Großerzählung Ri 6-8 daher deutlich, nicht wegretuschierte Wachstumszeichen. Deswegen kann sie nur sachgemäß vernommen werden, wenn die je älteren Textteile in ihrer je individuellen Aussage, aber zugleich auch in ihrer Einbindung in die jüngere übergreifende Darstellungsebene bis hin zum ‘Endtext’ wahrgenommen werden.”<sup>56</sup>

Any thorough reading or interpretation of the Gideon narrative must recognize that the material from the book of Judges is a part of the larger discussion of the DH in biblical studies, a discussion inherently diachronic in perspective. For Noth, Richter and the Cross and Göttingen Schools the issue is not whether or not there is something called the DH, but rather how to best understand its purposes and the layers of redactional material present in it.

### 1.3.3 Problems with the “So-Called” Deuteronomistic History

The various amendments and modifications to Noth’s original theory highlight the fact that there is a cacophony of disagreeing perspectives over issues such as purpose, date, number of redactional layers present, and unity in the texts of Deut-Kgs. The largely undefined and contentious nature of the DH construct fuels arguments against it, and a number of scholarly voices maintain that Noth’s theory—despite its longevity and

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 388-389; In many ways, my study draws on the works of Groß and Becker.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 367.

influence—is, simply, wrong. The arguments of Claus Westermann,<sup>57</sup> Ernst Axel Knauf,<sup>58</sup> and Hartmut Rösel<sup>59</sup> highlight the central points of the argument often posed against the DH: (1) the proliferation of authors/redactors, such as that recognized by the Göttingen School, seriously calls into question the idea of Deut-Kgs as a unified and coherent work; (2) there is no unanimity on any comprehensive themes connecting Deut-Kings; and (3) there is debate over whether the differences in character and ideology of the narratives comprising the DH separates them to such a degree that they cannot be reconciled.

Westermann argues against the traditional limits of the DH as well as its supposed unity. First, he argues that the DH needs an origins story that the book of Deuteronomy does not provide, but which the book of Exodus does: “Das häufige Vorkommen des Exodusmotivs, das der Dtr gekannt haben, muß, macht es äußerst unwahrscheinlich, daß es ein die Geschichte Israels umfassendes Geschichtswerk gab, das nicht mit der Herausführung aus Ägypten began.”<sup>60</sup> Additionally, Westermann argues that the books of Deuteronomy-Kings exhibit characteristics indicating that they were composed and edited in different ways. While Westermann argues there was some form of a Dtr editor, he maintains that the books are only loosely held together and that this editor only

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<sup>57</sup> Claus Westermann, *Die Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments: Gab es ein deuteronomistisches Geschichtswerk* (ThB.AT 87; Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1994).

<sup>58</sup> E.A. Knauf, “Does ‘Deuteronomistic Historiography’ (DtrH) Exist?” in *Israel Constructs Its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research* (eds. A. de Pury, T. Römer and J.D. Macchi; JSOTSup 306; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 388-389.

<sup>59</sup> H.N. Rösel, “Does A Comprehensive ‘Leitmotiv’ Exist In The Deuteronomistic History?” in *The Future of the Deuteronomistic History* (BETL 147; Leuven: Leuven University Press-Peeters, 2000), 195-212.

<sup>60</sup> Westermann, *Die Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments*, 40.

slightly edited the books.<sup>61</sup> Of Judges 3-16, which contains the main body of stories about the hero/deliverers, Westermann writes, “Diese Erzählungen gehören zu dem Übergang von der familiär bestimmten zu der politisch bestimmten Gemeinschaftsform, die Retter werden in ihrem Herkommen aus der Familie gesehen.”<sup>62</sup>

E.A. Knauf summarizes his position bluntly, “I stopped believing in the existence of a ‘Deuteronomistic historiographical work’ (DtrH) some time ago.”<sup>63</sup> Knauf identifies several problems with the idea of a DH stretching from the book of Deuteronomy through the book of Kings, noting several categorical problems. First, Knauf disagrees with introducing the idea of “theoretical authors,” since, as he argues, the biblical text is a literature of tradition rather than a literature of authors.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, the category of “history” is misleading: what the biblical texts are doing is not, for Knauf, history in the sense von Ranke and Droysen.<sup>65</sup> Thus, according to Knauf, the so-called “DH” was neither written by a “deuteronomistic author” nor is it history. Of Judges, Knauf thinks the core of the book (Judges 3-16) suggest confirmation of Richter’s “book of saviors” and “could definitely have been composed at Bethel after 720 BCE,” with additions attributable to “several Dtr schools.” These schools ranged from anti-royalist (Judges 9) to pro-royalist (Judges 17-21), and included the addition of a chronology adapted in part to both the Priestly chronology and the chronology in Kings (this group was “the history

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 97-124.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 54; Cf. pp. 53-57 for Westermann’s complete discussion of Judges.

<sup>63</sup> Knauf, “Does ‘Deuteronomistic Historiography’ (DTRH) Exist?”, 388.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 390-391.

<sup>65</sup> Knauf, “Does ‘Deuteronomistic Historiography (DTRH) Exist?”, 391.



teachers of the Second Temple school”).<sup>66</sup> Knauf concludes, “the general framework in which the book was inserted by this school is not the ‘DtrH’, but the whole ‘historical library’ of Genesis to 2 Kings.”<sup>67</sup>

Finally, H.N. Rösel challenges the idea of a DH by arguing there are no comprehensive *Leitmotifs* spanning and connecting the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, first focusing on sin and punishment as they are treated across the various books, and then on reform and reforms in the cult. In both cases, he finds no uniform treatment of these *Leitmotifs*. Rather, he writes, “On the contrary, central motifs appear in different and sometimes even contradictory formulations. This is one reason for concluding that one should abandon the theory of a single and uniform deuteronomistic history.”<sup>68</sup>

The challenges posed to the concept of a DH have several implications for the book of Judges and an understanding of the Gideon narrative. The following work assumes that Noth’s hypothesis—without significant modification—is too simplistic to account for the diversity of materials and the multivalent perspectives in the books that comprise the books of Deuteronomy through Kings. Rather, there appear to have been multiple authors who worked on the text—authors who often shared the ideology and/or language of the book of Deuteronomy, but who did not necessarily work uniformly across the books of Deuteronomy-2 Kings. Accordingly, the following work takes seriously the unique character of the book of Judges and the manifold way in which the

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 396.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> H.N. Rösel, “Does A Comprehensive ‘Leitmotiv’ Exist In The Deuteronomistic History?” in *The Future of the Deuteronomistic History* (BETL 147; Leuven: Leuven University Press-Peeters, 2000), 211.

text of Gideon connects to both the book of Judges and its larger context. Judges alone of the books of the so-called DH is characterized by stories similar in feel and content to some of the patriarchal tales of Genesis, and it alone of the books stretching from Deuteronomy to Kings embraces a theology of war in which the wars are punitive—punishment for Israel’s sins against its deity.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, the ensuing study will demonstrate how the Gideon narrative is well connected both to its immediate context within the larger book of Judges and to other stories from the so-called DH (and outside of it).

#### 1.3.4 Synchronic Studies

If the Gideon narrative is firmly situated in a discussion of the DH, to locate it on the larger map of contemporary biblical studies is also to discover that Gideon—and the book of Judges—is also firmly situated in the on-going use and discussion of synchronic analysis. This, however, was not always the case. The introduction to Robert Polzin’s *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History* describes the predominance of diachronic approaches to the biblical texts at that time.<sup>70</sup> In that work, Polzin cites Robert Alter’s 1975 assessment of biblical studies in order to foreground his own position on the importance of (and need for) synchronic analysis of the biblical texts:

It is a little astonishing that at this late date there exists virtually no serious literary analysis of the Hebrew Bible. By serious literary analysis, I mean the

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<sup>69</sup> Jacob Wright, conversation with the author, August 2010.

<sup>70</sup>Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History, Part One: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges* (New York: Seabury, 1980); cited in Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 5.

manifold varieties of minutely discriminating attention to the artful use of language, to the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tone, sound, imagery, narrative viewpoint, compositional units, and much else; the kind of disciplined attention, in other words, which through a whole spectrum of critical approaches has illuminated, for example, the poetry of Dante, the plays of Shakespeare, the novels of Tolstoy.<sup>71</sup>

Polzin then echoes Alter's assessment as a valid critique of then current biblical scholarship.<sup>72</sup> However, not only did Polzin assume that quality literary analysis of the biblical texts had not yet occurred at that time, he also argued:

diachronic and synchronic study of the Bible, historical critical and literary structural approaches, possess a complementary relationship to each other. Neither constitutes, a priori, the fundamental basis for the other's existence, neither occupies by intrinsic right an academic throne to which the other must bring its conclusions for scholarly approbation, for a scientific *nihil obstat*.<sup>73</sup>

According to Polzin, the "literary lacuna" at the time of his writing was the "primary reason why historical critical analysis of biblical material [has] so often produced disappointing and inadequate results."<sup>74</sup> For him, the methodological priority (but not rank) goes to literary analysis—in other words, literary analysis is necessary for quality historical critical work.<sup>75</sup> Polzin espouses the view that "scholarly understanding of biblical material results from a *circular* movement that begins with a literary analysis, then turns to historical problems, whose attempted solution then furnishes further

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<sup>71</sup> Robert Alter, "A Literary Approach to the Bible," *Commentary* 60 (1975): 70.

<sup>72</sup> Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 5.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

refinements and adaptations of one's literary critical conclusions."<sup>76</sup> Polzin argued that in order to study the historical process by which a text was produced, there must first be a "preliminary understanding of the literary composition of the work as a *product*."<sup>77</sup>

It would be an understatement to claim that the field of biblical studies has undergone a radical paradigm shift since Polzin's appraisal of diachronic and synchronic studies in 1980.<sup>78</sup> Rather than a dearth of synchronic readings of the book of Judges—in other words, studies which treat Judges as a self-contained work—there is now abundance. The list is long: D.W. Gooding,<sup>79</sup> Barry G. Webb,<sup>80</sup> Lillian Klein,<sup>81</sup> J. Cheryl Exum,<sup>82</sup> Robert O'Connell,<sup>83</sup> Yairah Amit,<sup>84</sup> Gregory Wong,<sup>85</sup> and, of course, Polzin (to name only a few). The same trend is also present in recent commentaries on Judges, which largely ignore issues of the growth of the text: Daniel Block,<sup>86</sup> Trent Butler,<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>79</sup> D.W. Gooding, "The Composition of the Book of Judges," in *Harry M. Orlinski Volume* (eds. Baruch A. Kevine and Abraham Malamat; *ErIsr* 16; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society in Cooperation with Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1982) 70-79.

<sup>80</sup> Webb, *The Book of Judges*.

<sup>81</sup> Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* (JSOTSup 68; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988).

<sup>82</sup> J. Cheryl Exum, "The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges," *CBQ* 52 (1990) 410-31.

<sup>83</sup> Robert O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* (VTSup 63; Leiden: Brill, 1996).

<sup>84</sup> Yairah Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing* (BIS 38; Leiden: Brill, 1999).

<sup>85</sup> T. K. Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges: An Inductive, Rhetorical Study* (VTSup 111; Leiden: Brill, 2006).

<sup>86</sup> In his commentary, Block does acknowledge the concept of the DH, but argues that the book of Judges is the creation of a Judean writer who wrote during the reign of Manasseh (Daniel I. Block, *Judges* [NAC 6; Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1999], 44-67).

Tammi Schneider,<sup>88</sup> and (to some degree) Susan Niditch.<sup>89</sup> These commentaries stand in stark contrast to their forbearers, such as the work of Moore, Boling, or Soggin, which focused in detail on source and/or redaction issues. An example of this trend is perhaps most evident in Gale A. Yee's edited volume entitled *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*. As the title suggests, the ten chapters in the second edition of the book offer introductory essays on various literary critical and reader-response methodologies (such as narrative criticism, feminist criticism, and ideological criticism), but are not concerned with diachronic issues.<sup>90</sup> The same trend is also evident in dissertations and monographs, including those of Phillip McMillion,<sup>91</sup> Wolfgang Bluedorn,<sup>92</sup> and Elie Assis,<sup>93</sup> who all privilege synchronic analysis in their analyses of the Gideon narrative.

Scholars regularly cite J.P.U Lilley's 1967 article, "A Literary Appreciation of the

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<sup>87</sup> Butler includes a thorough discussion of the state of the DH in biblical research and explains the various perspectives. He concludes that the book of Judges is "an artful narration ... for an audience experiencing the opening years of the divided monarchy and having to decide which king to follow and which sanctuary to recognize as the true center of worship [The writer] places Judah first and condemns ... the entire northern kingdom ... because of their idolatrous worship" (Trent C. Butler, *Judges* [WBC 8; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009], lxxiv).

<sup>88</sup> Tammi Schneider, *Judges* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000).

<sup>89</sup> Niditch identifies three "voices" in Judges, including one that she calls the "voice of the theologian," but does not "attempt to distinguish between various contributors within this layer or to deal with the knotty larger issue of Deuteronomism" (Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary* [OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008], 10).

<sup>90</sup> Gale A. Yee, ed. *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

<sup>91</sup> Phillip McMillion, "Judges 6-8 and the Study of Premonarchic Israel" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1985).

<sup>92</sup> Wolfgang Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism: A Theological Reading of the Gideon-Abimelech Narrative* (JSOT 329; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

<sup>93</sup> Eliyahu Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest: An Ideology of Leadership in the Gideon, Abimelech, and Jephthah Narratives* (Judg. 6-12) (VTSup 106; Leiden: Brill, 2005).

Book of Judges” as the defining moment at which point scholarly focus shifted from a largely diachronic approach to a synchronic approach to the book of Judges.<sup>94</sup> In that article, Lilley called for a “fresh appraisal of Judges as a literary work, starting from the assumptions of authorship rather than of redaction.”<sup>95</sup> This move he hoped “could lead to a more satisfying interpretation of the book than is to be found in the standard commentaries, and could help to resolve some of the major problems which have been raised.”<sup>96</sup> Lilley identified the conflicting scholarly views on the book’s purpose and the refusal to look at the whole work instead of its parts as the central problem offered by the “standard commentaries” of his time (represented by the works of Moore, Burney, Simpson, and Eissfeldt). According to Lilley, the “old methodology” sees in the second part of the introduction to Judges (2:6-3:6) “a theme of recurrent rebellion and disaster” and then “extracts those parts of the book which do not contribute directly to this cyclic pattern (e.g. 1:1-2:5; chapters 17-21, the minor judges).”<sup>97</sup> Lilley explained, “This quasi-literary analysis, once established, is likely to inhibit any wider estimate of the theme of the book. Since the part is easier to see than the whole, such an approach has an inherent bias towards fragmentation.”<sup>98</sup> Lilley traced this train of thought throughout the book, arguing first that Judg 2:1-5 provides a clear transition between what is normally identified as two separate introductions in Judges 1 and 2 (which historical-criticism attributes to different redactors). Second, Lilley maintained that the pattern of decline

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<sup>94</sup> J.P.U. Lilley “A Literary Appreciation of the Book of Judges,” *TynBul* 18 (1967): 93-94.

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

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-96.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

identified in the book of Judges is not merely repetitive, but rather that it “develops; mere repetition is artistically avoided; incidentals are systematically woven in.”<sup>99</sup> Finally, Lilley saw Judges 17-21, chapters normally considered later additions by a different author/redactor that are not well integrated with the preceding chapters, as playing an essential part in the literary thrust of the overall book. According to Lilley’s interpretation, the stories in Judges 17-21 depict the state of utter disrepair in premonarchic Israel and anticipate the need for the monarchy that follows in the subsequent biblical books. Lilley argues that when readers attend to the whole book of Judges, and not only to its individual parts, the artistic design with which an author arranged all of the source material—from Judges 1 to Judges 21—becomes evident. Lilley’s work is helpful for an understanding of the Gideon narrative, for it plays an important role in the larger book of Judges. In short, seeing how Judges 6-8 functions within the larger book sheds light on some of the redactional decisions made during the composition of the narrative.

Following Lilley’s work, there has been no shortage of synchronic studies of the book of Judges. A few examples: Gooding argues that the chiasmic structure of the book (with Gideon at its center) suggests internal cohesion and thematic connections.<sup>100</sup> Webb argues that the book of Judges is a discrete literary unit whose unfolding is like a musical score: 1:1-3:6 are the overture, 3:7-16:31 contains the variations, 17:12-21:25 is the coda, and the climax is in the Samson narrative.<sup>101</sup> Like Webb, Polzin also locates the climax of

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>100</sup> Gooding, “The Composition of the Book of Judges”

<sup>101</sup> Barry Webb, *The Book of Judges*

the book of Judges in the story of Samson, and sees Judges as a book whose textual ambiguities and discordant viewpoints are an intentional artistic device meant to reflect the growing chaos in premonarchic Israel.<sup>102</sup> Klein explores the literary convention of irony: Gideon, often portrayed as a coward, is also ironically a deliverer.<sup>103</sup> O’Connell identifies a pro-David, pro-Judah, and anti-Saul rhetoric in Judges by examining plot and character.<sup>104</sup> Many final form works focus on the entire book of Judges, identifying and tracing a “downward spiral” they see outlined in the book. For example, Block maintains that the book is the word of a single mind, which has “deliberately selected, arranged, linked, and shaped the sources available to him in order to achieve a specific ideological agenda.”<sup>105</sup> For Block, Judges is organized to reflect “the downward spiraling of the Israelite condition during this period.”<sup>106</sup> Olson argues that the book “holds together seemingly opposed or disjunctive viewpoints on the same subject,” with the narrative in 6:1-10:5 functioning as the transition to the downward slide.<sup>107</sup> Likewise, Schneider sees a progressive deterioration in the book, arguing that each cycle shows “a generation beginning yet lower on the scale of legitimate behavior regarding the Israelites’ relationship to their deity.”<sup>108</sup>

Specific to the Gideon narrative, Assis presents a broad literary analysis of the

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<sup>102</sup> Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*

<sup>103</sup> Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*

<sup>104</sup> O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*

<sup>105</sup> Block, *Judges*, 49.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>107</sup> Olson, “Judges,” 726-727.

<sup>108</sup> Schneider, *Judges*, xii.



stories of Gideon, Abimelech, and Jephthah, arguing that these stories represent the negative aspects of leadership.<sup>109</sup> Assis states that the hypothesis underlying his work is that “the editor of the accounts collected the material, adopted it, added to it, and gave it a new form. In my opinion, this editor should be seen as a kind of relative artist who left his imprint on his work and on his sources. My main assumption is that there is a synchronic logic in the text in our possession.”<sup>110</sup> Bluedorn also operates within a synchronic model, offering an extensive “literary-theological” analysis of the Gideon-Abimelech narratives. The thrust of his argument is that a close reading of Judges 6-9 reveals that the primary aim of the narrator is to portray Yahweh as “the only true God.”<sup>111</sup> Bluedorn’s reading of the Gideon (and Abimelech) narratives places the struggle between Yahweh and Baal at its center, focusing on passages like 6:7-10, 6:25-32, and 8:33. Finally, McMillion’s doctoral dissertation on Judges 6-8 is primarily a literary study of the Gideon narrative, examining the literary techniques employed by the narrator, including the use of anticipation, repetition, dialogue, and irony. Although McMillion declined to draw an overarching conclusion based on his work, his attention to the use of the aforementioned literary techniques provides a helpful foundation for further literary analysis of the narrative.<sup>112</sup>

The abundance of synchronic studies listed above offer various ways of reading the book of Judges and/or the Gideon narrative as a discrete, coherent literary unit. Yet these studies all focus primarily or exclusively on synchronic readings, never bridging the

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<sup>109</sup> Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 3.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>111</sup> Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 273.

<sup>112</sup> McMillion, “Judges 6-8,” 260.

widening gulf between final form studies and diachronic approaches. Simply put, synchronic studies do not consider how the final form of the text came to exist as it does. Yet even a cursory reading of Judges 6-8 suggests that to do this is to do a methodological disservice to the text. In order to understand the Gideon narrative in all its complexity, both diachronic and synchronic perspectives need to be addressed.

Second, and connected to the issue of the so-called DH, is the question of whether or not the book of Judges is a distinct literary unit intended to stand-alone. A perfunctory glance at the book reveals that Judges 1 and 2, the individual stories of the different hero/deliverers in Judges 2-16, and the final stories in Judges 17-21 are linked in a number of intricate ways. Additionally, as Serge Frolov notes, the book of Judges is linked to its broader literary context as well: Judges 1 picks up where the book of Joshua ends, the pattern of apostasy-crying out-deliverance that makes up the central portions of the book does not begin until Judges 3 and then extends into the book of Samuel, and additional “judges” appear through 1 Sam 8.<sup>113</sup> Judges points even further back than Joshua, however: Judg 6:7-10, not to mention the similarities between 6:11-24 and Exodus 3, indicate that the writers of Gideon knew parts of a late stage of the book of Exodus as well.<sup>114</sup> Finally, as Frolov notes, “instead of providing, as befits an epilogue, some kind of resolution, Judges 17-21 further contributes to the mounting tension; rather than wrapping up what precedes it, the fragment further opens up the narrative toward what follows.”<sup>115</sup> Judges is a book that closely connects with—and in some ways, a book

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<sup>113</sup> Serge Frolov, “Rethinking Judges,” *CBQ* 71 (2009): 25-41.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

that depends on—the larger body of literature in which it is set.

Finally, the second point raises yet a third: is the coherence discerned in the book of Judges by its final form readers in fact “coherence imposed”?<sup>116</sup> In other words, is there really coherence to the book of Judges? Marc Brettler makes this argument in his discussion of Gooding’s literary study of the book of Judges.<sup>117</sup> Gooding proposes that Judges is a chiasmic structure, with the Gideon narrative in the center. He argues that in the book of Judges “there is every evidence to suggest that each piece of source material has been selected and arranged with a careful eye to its contribution to the effect of the whole” and that the book is almost certainly “the work of one mind.”<sup>118</sup> Yet Brettler makes several counter-arguments: 1) the Gideon material is far from the (physical) center of the book; 2) Othniel and Samson are hardly parallel in either form or content; 3) Gooding’s parallels center on themes (a category that Brettler thinks is too subjective) rather than linguistic similarities; and 4) there is arbitrariness in Gooding’s structure (why does Shamgar not get his own unit, but Othniel does? Should Abimelech be considered separate from Gideon?). For these reasons, Brettler concludes that the model offered by Gooding is “coherence imposed,” writing:

Judges has been compiled from a very broad range of sources, as broad or perhaps even broader than that found in any other biblical book. As such, it would have been impossible for any editor to bring this material together into a symmetrical structure, and only by using the vaguest thematic criteria and by ignoring counter-evidence, especially concerning the lack of size balance between the various

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<sup>116</sup> Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, 106.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-106; D. W. Gooding, “The Composition of the Book of Judges,” *ErIsr* 16 (1982): 70-79.

<sup>118</sup> Gooding, “The Composition of the Book of Judges,” 77.

units, can a symmetrical structure be composed.<sup>119</sup>

The point is this: there are significant challenges to both reading the book of Judges from a synchronic perspective as well as Polzin's suggestion that synchronic analysis is necessary for competent diachronic analysis. Brettler proposes that attempts by literary scholars to read the biblical texts from a purely synchronic standpoint "are accomplished on the basis of a certain amount of violence to the text."<sup>120</sup> These literary methodologies, argues Brettler, privilege the thematic and ignore criteria that are more formal. While Brettler raises an important point, it needs to be nuanced: theme is an important consideration in arguments about the so-called DH. Nevertheless, Brettler is correct in noting that current literary readings often fail to ask how the redactor "as creative rather than as a hack, might have reworked and reframed earlier materials to convey a message."<sup>121</sup> It is on precisely the redactor as "creative rather than hack" that the ensuing work will focus.

The divorce of diachronic and synchronic analyses of the biblical texts results in lopsided studies of the narratives contained therein, especially as the methodologies move from "healthy tension" to near divorce. In short, in addition to a concern with the diachronic development of the text, a thorough exploration of the Gideon narrative must also explore the final form of the text.

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<sup>119</sup> Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, 106; As Brettler notes, Mieke Bal makes a similar argument in her work *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 32; Frolov agrees, echoing Brettler's judgment when discussing Gooding as well as Globe (Frolov, "Rethinking Judges," 40).

<sup>120</sup> Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, 15.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

## 1.4 Contents of the Present Study

In view of the fact that there is already a wide-range of literary studies on the book of Judges/Gideon, the following material primarily addresses diachronic issues. Yet any diachronic study must begin with the text itself, and so an initial synchronic reading of the Gideon narrative will precede the following text-critical and redaction-critical analyses of Judges 6-8. Chapter 2 contains a survey of Judges 6-8, sketching the structure of the Gideon narrative and outlining the inconsistencies and incoherencies in the text that indicate multiple hands have been at work to produce the final form of the text.

Chapter 3 then turns to 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>, a fragment of the book of Judges discovered at Qumran. 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> seems to offer empirical evidence for the diachronic growth of the Gideon narrative. Chapter 3 explores the relevance of 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> for an understanding of the compositional growth of the text. Chapters 4-8 will then offer a compositional analysis of Judges 6-8, beginning with the most recent additions to the text, and removing verses from the map in an attempt to work backwards to the oldest remaining stories about Gideon of Ophrah. Chapter 4 demonstrates how the Qumran evidence aids in the employ of redaction criticism and a discussion of the significance of the addition of Judg 6:7-10. After laying the groundwork for exploring the compositional growth of the text in chapter 4, I continue to map out the expansion of the text in chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8. These chapters address the question of the different strata identifiable in the Gideon narrative. Since a biblical text is often the result of the work of more than one authorial hand, the text exhibits evidence of how the various authors leave evidence of their presence behind in the landscape of the text. These traces, or “bumps” in the terrain, are evident in the various lacunae, the competing voices and themes, and in some of the formal features of

the Gideon narrative. A compositional analysis of the text provides the reader with a glimpse of what the territory constituting the Gideon narrative looked like in its various stages of growth. Since “[e]very map is a reflection of the group that makes it,”<sup>122</sup> chapters 4-8 will identify the various aims and viewpoints of the various author(s)/redactor(s) who shaped the text.

In this study, I identify six levels of compositional growth, working backwards from the final form of the text in order to discover its oldest elements. The discussion of each pericope will begin with a stratification table, in which the bold face indicates the oldest stratum, and the indentation signifies later additions. These six strata comprise material through which various authors transformed an earlier, largely profane tale about a “mighty warrior” (*gibbôr hayil*)<sup>123</sup> and his local exploits into a hesitant farmer dependent on divine assurance for action. As a result, the final form of the narrative contains multiple views on issues of orthopraxy, warfare, monarchy, and even the character of Gideon himself. The use of redaction criticism allows for a focus on both the *creatio continua* character of the Gideon narrative and the final form of the narrative: in

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<sup>122</sup> Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination*, 146.

<sup>123</sup> When the messenger appears to Gideon in Judges 6:12, he declares him a “גִּבּוֹר הַחַיִּל” or a “*gibbôr hehayil*,” normally translated as “mighty warrior.” Usually found without the definite article, this is a title that Gideon shares with Jephthah (Judg 11:1), David (1 Sam 16:18), and Jeroboam (1 Kgs 11:28), among others. Niditch translates this Hebrew phrase, “mighty man of valor” (Susan A. Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary* [OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press], 83). Boling translates it as “you aristocrat” (Robert G. Boling, *Judges: An Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* [AB 6a, Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1975], 131. Soggin contests Boling’s rendering of the term, translating the phrase instead as “mighty warrior,” and writing, “‘Mighty warrior’: the free man, well-off and able-bodied (Richter \*\*, 1963, 147; Gray\*, 1967); hence it becomes synonymous with ‘warrior’ and in this sense is an expression for a sociological category. Boling wants to render it ‘you aristocrat’, but this goes beyond the sense of the expression, all the more since it is not clear what such a term in a structure that was still tribal” (J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary* [OTL; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981], 115). Schneider simply records, “The messenger of the deity appeared to Gideon calling him ‘mighty man of valor’ (KJV and RSV; ‘valiant warrior’ JPS)” (Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* [Berit Olam, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2000], 104). “Mighty warrior” seems to capture the Hebrew aptly, and I will refer to Gideon as a *gibbôr hayil* (without including the definite article) throughout the dissertation, as this is how the term is frequently found and used in scholarly literature.

other words, it facilitates attention both to the compositional layers of the text and to the aesthetic qualities of each individual layer.<sup>124</sup>

Chapter 9 then returns to a literary analysis of Judges 6-8, acknowledging that both the book of Judges and the Gideon narrative have long existed—and been read—as a coherent literary unit. Focusing on the final form of the Gideon narrative, this chapter will explore why the authors of the Gideon narrative included certain passages, arranged them as they are now, and emphasized certain *Leitwörter* and *Leitmotifs*. Related to the decisions about presentation is the fact that every map “intends not simply to serve us but to influence us.”<sup>125</sup> In chapter 9, I will survey the literary trope of ambiguity, illustrating how the final tradents of the Gideon narrative, who wrote during the uncertain period of Persian rule over Judah and in face of the loss of the Israelite monarchy, allowed a cacophony of voices to remain in the text. The centrality of the Gideon narrative in Judges consequently locates the climax of the book in precisely this state of perpetual ambiguity. This literary reading of Judges 6-8 will build upon the previous literary analyses of Polzin, Klein, and McMillion, among others.

Chapter 10 presents conclusions about the Gideon narrative, as well as on the place and purpose of the Gideon narrative within the book of Judges.

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<sup>124</sup> The term *creatio continua* is borrowed from Jacob L. Wright, who uses the phrase to describe the process of the composition of the books of Ezra-Nehemiah. Cf. Jacob Wright, *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah-Memoir and its Earliest Readers* (BZAW 348; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 3, 330.

<sup>125</sup> Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination*, 88.

## Chapter 2 Surveying Judges 6-8

*[T]he Gideon material contains confusing repetitions, a meandering plot, and multiple endings.<sup>1</sup>*

### 1.1 Surveying Judges 6-8

A study of the book of Judges 6-8 begins with the text itself. Where are its beginning, middle, and end? What are the exposition, the driving conflict, the climax, and the resolution of the narrative? How is the narrative organized? A preliminary understanding of the Gideon narrative provides the foundation for exploring the text more thoroughly from both diachronic and synchronic perspectives.

The narrative found in Judges 6-8 is divisible into two major acts. The first acts in 6:11-8:3 takes place in the Cisjordan and ends with the Ephraimites capturing and executing two Midianite captains. The second begins in 8:4, when Gideon and his men cross the river into the Transjordan and ends in 8:27 with Gideon's construction of an ephod in his hometown. A lengthy introduction in 6:1-10 and an equally lengthy conclusion in 8:28-35 frame the two episodes.

### 1.2 The Story

#### 1.2.1 The Introduction (6:1-10)

The introduction to the Gideon narrative begins in 6:1-6. The story opens with a *waw*-consecutive: *יעשו בני־ישראל הרע בעיני יהוה*; “Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of Yahweh,” suggesting a continuation with the preceding chapters. The Israelites are forced

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory Mobley, *The Empty Men: The Heroic Tradition of Ancient Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 114.



to hide in “the mountains, caves, and strongholds,” and whenever they plant seed, “the Midianites and the Amalekites and the Easterners” come up against them, “destroy[ing] the produce of the land as far as Gaza,” leaving neither sustenance nor “sheep nor ox nor donkey.” The enemy is “as thick as locusts, and neither they nor their camels could be counted.” Israel is impoverished, as expected, and predictably cries out to Yahweh for help.

The introduction continues in 6:7-10, a new scene that continues with a *waw*-consecutive, repeating the ending of the previous verse: ויהי כִּי־זָעַקוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יְהוָה עַל אֲדוֹת מִדְיָן, “When the Israelites cried out to Yahweh on account of the Midianites” (6:7).

Something unexpected occurs next: Yahweh sends a prophet rather than a deliverer in response to the Israelite’s cry. The prophet then states:

Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of slavery, and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians, and from the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. I said to you, ‘I am Yahweh your God, you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.’ But you have not listened to my voice.

The scene then ends.

### 1.2.2 Gideon in Cisjordan (6:11-8:3)

Following the introduction, the first act of the Gideon narrative begins with the entrance of a new character, this time a מַלְאֲךְ יְהוָה, “messenger of Yahweh.” The messenger introduces Gideon, the son of Joash the Abiezrite, as he is beating out wheat in a wine press in order to hide from the Midianites (6:11). The messenger says, “Yahweh is with you, גִּבּוֹר הַחַיִּל” (6:12). The title *gibbôr heḥayil*, “mighty warrior,” is a surprising designation for a man beating out wheat in a winepress—even to Gideon himself, who

replies, “But sir, if Yahweh is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, ‘Did not Yahweh bring us up from Egypt?’ But now Yahweh has cast us off, and given us into the hand of Midian” (6:13).<sup>2</sup>

The scene begun in 6:11 continues as Gideon asks for a sign that the deity is on his side, “If now I have found favor with you, then show me a sign (אֵימָה) that it is you who speak with me. Do not depart from here until I come to you, and bring out my present, and set it before you” (6:17-18). The messenger says he will stay, and the text then reports, “Gideon went into his house and prepared a kid, and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour; the meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the oak and presented them.” When he returns, it is a מַלְאֲכַי הָאֱלֹהִים, “messenger of God,” rather than a “messenger of Yahweh,” who speaks to him, saying, “Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour out the broth.” Gideon does as he is commanded, and then the (once again) messenger of Yahweh “reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes; and the messenger of Yahweh vanished from his sight” (6:21). Gideon then becomes aware of with whom he had been speaking, exclaiming, “Help me, Lord God, for I have seen the messenger of Yahweh face to face!” (6:22). Yahweh (sans intermediary) responds, “שְׁלוֹמִים לְךָ,” “Peace to you! Do not fear, you will not die” (6:23). The scene concludes as Gideon builds an altar in that spot for Yahweh, naming it יְהוָה שְׁלוֹמִים, “Yahweh is peace” (6:24).

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. n. 125 in Chapter 1.

Following the initial altar scene, the story continues as Yahweh commands Gideon to tear down another, different altar (6:25). The second altar belongs to Gideon's father Joash, and is dedicated to the god Baal. Gideon is also instructed to cut down the Asherah that is beside the altar, and to offer up a bull as a burnt offering along with the Asherah. Gideon, too afraid of his family and the townspeople to commit these acts in broad daylight, does so at night along with ten of his servants (6:27). The following morning the men of the city awaken to find the altar torn down and the Asherah cut, and, after "searching and inquiring," discover that the guilty party is none other than Gideon, the son of the man to whom the Baal altar belongs. As a result, the men of the city demand that Joash bring out his son so that he may die (6:30). Joash refuses and says, "Will you contend for Baal? Or will you defend his cause? Whoever contends for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been pulled down" (6:31). The narrative next describes how its protagonist receives his second name, "Therefore on that day Gideon was called Jerubbaal, that is to say, 'Let Baal contend against him,' because he pulled down his altar" (6:32).

After the renaming scene, the story returns to the collective enemy threat that was originally introduced in 6:1: "Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the Easterners came together, and crossing the Jordan they encamped in the Valley of Jezreel" (6:33). The "spirit of Yahweh" then clothes Gideon and he calls out the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali to fight against the impending enemy threat (6:34). Here he rallies troops from his own tribe (Manasseh) as well as from three other tribes, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali.

In 6:36-40, Gideon seeks further assurance that the deity is with him. First,

Gideon asks God (Elohim and not Yahweh) to make the ground dry while the fleece is wet (6:36). Second, Gideon requests that the deity make the fleece dry while the surrounding ground remains wet (6:39). God acquiesces to both requests without a word.

Judges 7:1 briefly returns to the battle preparations, “Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the troops that were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod, and the camp of Midian was north of them, below the hill of Moreh, in the valley.” Absent from the enemy forces are the Amalekites and the Easterners, while the narrative reminds the reader of Gideon’s second name, not used since its introduction in 6:32. Yahweh (once more without an intermediary) speaks to Gideon, saying, “The troops with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand. Israel would only take the credit away from me, saying, ‘My own hand has delivered me’” (7:2). For this reason, Yahweh instructs Gideon to downsize his army of 32,000 men. The ensuing verses detail this reduction in two steps. First, Gideon is to let anyone who is “fearful and trembling” return home (7:3). Then, with 10,000 fighting men remaining, the deity downsizes the army through a puzzling water test where 300 men who lap the water with their tongue as dogs lap water remain with Gideon to fight the Midianites.

With 300 men left and the camp of Midian below in the valley, the deity commands Gideon to “Get up, attack the camp; for I have given it into your hand” (7:9). Yet what immediately follows is not the battle scene. Instead, Yahweh continues by stating, “But if you fear to attack (וואם-יירא אתה לרדת), go down to the camp with your servant Purah; and you shall hear what they say, and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to attack the camp” (7:10-11). Gideon does as Yahweh commands, going down to where “The Midianites and the Amalekites and the Easterners lay along the

valley as thick as locusts; and their camels were without number, countless as the sand on the seashore” (7:12-13). Standing on the edge of the enemy camp, Gideon overhears one Midianite guard telling another of a dream he had, in which “a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian, and came to the tent, and struck it so that it fell; it turned upside down, and the tent collapsed” (7:13). The Midianite guard offers an interpretation, identifying the barley cake as Gideon and stating that the deity (referred to here as Elohim rather than Yahweh) has given Midian and all the army into Gideon’s hand (7:14). In 7:15, Gideon returns to the Israelite camp and commands, “Get up; for Yahweh has given the army of Midian into your hand” (7:15).

Judges 7:16 begins the battle scene anticipated since the introduction of the enemy in 6:1. The text reports that Gideon divides the remaining 300 hundred men into three companies, puts trumpets into the hands of all the men, along with jars containing torches, and commands them to do as he does when they reach the Midianite camp. In 7:19, Gideon and the 300 men come to the outskirts of the camp, cry out “For Yahweh and for Gideon!” while simultaneously blowing their trumpets and smashing the jars in their hands. The Midianite army (the Amalekites and the Easterners do not appear here) cries out and flees (7:21). The deity makes one final appearance in 7:22, “When they blew the three hundred trumpets, Yahweh set every man's sword against his fellow and against all the army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath” (7:22).

In 7:23, the troops of Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh are recalled. In 7:24, Gideon also summons the Ephraimites to come to his aid, stating, “Come down against the Midianites and seize the waters against them, as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan”

(7:24). The men of Ephraim come out, they seize the waters as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan. They also capture and kill the captains of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb, bringing their heads to Gideon “beyond the Jordan” (7:25).

Judges 8:1-3 continues to feature the Ephraimites, who complain to Gideon that they were not called out earlier to fight against the Midianites. Gideon pacifies them with a parable, saying, “What have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? God has given into your hands the captains of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb; what have I been able to do in comparison with you?” (8:2-3). Gideon’s words mollify the Ephraimites, who subsequently disappear from the story.

### **1.2.3 Gideon In the Transjordan (8:4-21)**

Judges 8:4 resumes the story of Gideon and his 300 men once they cross the river and are in the Transjordan, beginning the second major act in the Gideon narrative. “Exhausted and famished,” Gideon and his men arrive at the town of Succoth, where Gideon announces that he is now pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the heretofore-mentioned kings of Midian. Gideon requests food for his troops from the people of Succoth, who refuse. Denied food from the people of Succoth, Gideon declares that when he has successfully caught the Midianite kings he will punish the people of Succoth: “Therefore, when Yahweh gives Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will trample your flesh with thorns of the wilderness and briars” (8:7). In 8:8, the scene repeats in a new locale, the city of Penuel, where Gideon makes the same request and again the people of the Transjordan refuse. To the people of Penuel Gideon announces that when he returns

victorious he will destroy their defenses: “When I return in peace, I will tear down this tower” (8:9).

Judges 8:10-12 focuses again on the enemy: “Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with their army, about 15,000 men, all who were left of the army of the Easterners, for 120,000 arms bearing men had fallen.” Gideon goes up “by the caravan route east of Nobah and Jogbehah and attacked the army, for the army was off its guard” (8:11). Unlike the battle scene in 7:16-22, here the details are sparse. The text only reports that “Zebah and Zalmunna fled and he [Gideon] pursued them.” Gideon captures the kings and “threw all the army into a panic” (8:12).

Following the capture of the kings, the text returns to the cities of Succoth and Penuel. Gideon captures a lad of Succoth, questions him, and the lad writes down for Gideon the names of the leaders of Succoth. Subsequently, Gideon returns to both the cities of Succoth and Penuel to carry out his threats. When he comes to the people of Succoth, who taunts them with their earlier words, “Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me, saying, ‘Do you already have in your possession the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna, that we should give bread to your troops that are exhausted?’” (8:15). He then takes the elders of the city and tramples the people of Succoth with thorns of the wilderness and briers. Returning to Penuel, he breaks down their tower and kills the men of the city (8:16-17).

After Gideon exacts his revenge on Succoth and Penuel, the narrative records a short dialogue between the Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna and Gideon, which reveals the true motive behind Gideon’s interest in capturing these two men in the second episode of the story. The text reads:

Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, “What about the men whom you killed at Tabor?” They answered, “As you are, so were they, every one of them; they resembled the sons of a king.” And he replied, “They were my brothers, the sons of my mother; as Yahweh lives, if you had saved them alive, I would not kill you.” (8:18-19)

Gideon’s interest in defeating the Midianites in this scene is personal—they murdered his brothers. The scene continues with Gideon commanding Jether, his son, to kill the kings. However, the narrative reports, “the lad would not draw his sword for he was afraid because he was still a lad” (8:20). When Jether refuses to obey his father’s order to slay the Midianite kings, the captured kings speak one final time, saying to Gideon, “You come and kill us; for as the man is, so is his strength” (8:21). Gideon acquiesces, kills the kings, and takes the crescents from the necks of their camels.

Following the execution of the Midianite kings, the narrative immediately shifts again to the Israelites, who offer Gideon dynastic rule, “Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also; for you have delivered us out of the hand of Midian” (8:22). Gideon refuses, stating, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; Yahweh will rule over you.” Gideon’s refusal appears unambiguous, but the following verses shed aspersions on his preceding words. After his refusal of kingship, Gideon takes from each of the Israelites an earring, taken from the enemy as booty, now identified as Ishmaelites. He makes from these spoils an ephod, and places the ephod in his hometown of Ophrah. The scene ends with a statement regarding the ephod, reporting that, “all Israel prostituted themselves to it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family” (8:27).



### **1.2.4 The Conclusion (8:28-35)**

Judges 8:28 then begins the conclusion of the narrative: for the last time in the book of Judges, the text reports that the land has “rest”: “And Midian was humbled before the descendants of Israel and they did not continue to lift their heads, and the land had rest for forty years in the days of Gideon” (8:28). The narrative closes with the report that Gideon had seventy sons from his many wives, and that his concubine from Shechem bore him a son named Abimelech (8:31). Gideon dies at a “good old age” and is buried in the tomb of Joash his father in Ophrah (8:32). The story ends with the Israelites relapsing into unacceptable behavior, this time prostituting themselves with the Baals, “making Baal-berith their god” (8:33). The final verse identifies Gideon with Jerubbaal one last time, “Nor did they [the Israelites] show loyalty to the house of Jerubbaal-Gideon in return for all the good he had done for Israel” (8:35).

### **1.3 Issues in the Text**

An initial examination of the text reveals that the Gideon narrative is a complex story. The materials that comprise these three chapters are rife with evidence that redaction has taken place: The narrative uses two names for the main protagonist, yet the use of these names is inconsistent and erratic. Likewise, the deity has two names, used in a similarly haphazard fashion. The chapters contain two altar scenes (Judg 6:11-24, 25-32), which occur in succession, but without acknowledging the other or explaining the relationship of the first to the second. The designation of precisely who the enemy is fluctuates, from Midian alone to the larger combined forces of Midian, Amalek, and “the Easterners,” and then back to Midian again. There are repeated requests for proof of

divine assistance by the protagonist, but using different means and different names for the deity. The chapters contain two stories with remarkably similar pursuits, captures, and executions of two different pairs of Midianite leaders on opposite sides of the Jordan. Additionally, the story awkwardly alternates between a pan-Israelite engagement in the affairs and a more localized, tribal engagement, with a similar tension existing between the participation of a tribal league (7:1-8:3) and only the Abiezerites (Judg 8:4-21) fighting the enemy. Similarly, a tension exists between the time when the members of various tribes are called out to help (6:33-35) and the fact that they are almost immediately sent home (7:3-6) only to be summoned to return (7:23). Gideon both calls upon the Ephraimites for aid (7:24) and they later complain that they were not called out (8:1-3). The battle scene described in Judges 7 is redundant and confusing: how do Gideon's men manage to hold horns, jars, and swords in their hands? Furthermore, Judg 8:4-21 is not the sequel to the foregoing narrative; Judg 7:24-8:3 ends by noting that the fight with the Midianites is finished, yet Judg 8:4-21 recounts how Gideon and his army again take up arms against the Midianites. In 8:22-23 Gideon unequivocally turns down the offer for dynastic rule offered to him by the Israelites (writ large), but subsequently goes on to act in a very king-like manner in vv. 24-27. On par with this dichotomy is Gideon's changing personality. The protagonist is hesitant, often afraid, and highly reliant on the deity in Judges 6-7, but then quick to action and unafraid in Judges 8, in which he never converses with the deity.

In short, the text contains evidence that can be used to formulate a hypothesis about the diachronic growth of Judges 6-8. The next chapters will offer a compositional analysis of the Gideon narrative.

## Chapter 3 Gideon at Qumran

*Because all texts and because all versions of the Bible are historically conditioned documents, textual criticism must not only try to recover the best text but also attempt to reconstruct the history of the transmission of texts and versions. In this sense, textual criticism addresses another aspect of the question explored by literary, form and tradition criticism: what course did the history of the Bible take? <sup>1</sup>*

### 1.1 Introduction

It seems appropriate to begin a study devoted to employing several of the methods that make up the traditional *Methodenkanon* of biblical scholarship with textual criticism, since textual criticism is the method frequently hailed as the necessary starting point of any thorough inquiry into a biblical text.<sup>2</sup> As Gene M. Tucker explains, “In one sense, translator and interpreter alike must always view textual criticism as their first and most basic step. *Which* text of a book, chapter, or verse will be translated? Which interpreted?”<sup>3</sup> In other words, in order to read, study, and interpret a biblical text it is necessary to begin with a clear understanding of the character of the text at hand.

Furthermore, textual criticism intersects with and informs other methodological approaches to the biblical texts. As Johan Lust writes:

Discussions may arise concerning the sequence in which the respective critical methods should be applied. It is probably preferable to start with textual criticism. Indeed, when one tries to define the relation between different forms of a text ... one deals with the history of the text. Such a historical study is not the first aim of rhetorical criticism or of structuralism ... Nevertheless, literary criticism is to be based on a “critical text,” i.e. a text which has been submitted to a text-critical

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<sup>1</sup> Gene M. Tucker, “Editor’s Foreword,” in Ralph W. Klein, *Textual Criticism of the Old Testament: From the Septuagint to Qumran* (GBSOTS; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), iii-iv.

<sup>2</sup> Tucker, “Editor’s Forward,” iii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, iv.

analysis. For these reasons textual criticism seems to offer the best entrance to the study of the textual phenomenon in question.<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, I will begin my study of the Gideon narrative by exploring an important text-critical issue related to Judges 6-8: 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>.

The overarching goal for this chapter is to explain the divergence between the MT and the Qumran fragment 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>, which lacks 6:7-10. This fragment is the most significant—or, at least, the most debated—textual variant of the Gideon narrative. The following question will serve as a guideline along the way: how should textual critics evaluate the unique reading of 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>?

## 1.2 Setting the Stage

Briefly summarized, textual criticism attempts to explore the origin and character of a text. To begin, any discussion of textual criticism must consider the question of the proper goal of the method. Traditionally, the goal of textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible has been to recover an earlier, and therefore supposedly more “authentic,” form of the biblical text under question. In other words, textual critics have sought to find the *Urtext* behind the extant copies of the biblical texts, in order to account for the variants—both accidental and intentional—in the existing textual evidence. Textual critics have attempted to recover these early forms of the biblical texts by studying the Masoretic Text (MT), the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) and the extant versions, including the Septuagint (LXX), the Old Latin (OL), the Vulgate (Vg), the Targumim (Tg), the Peshitta (P), and, most recently, the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS). It was with the discovery and study

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<sup>4</sup> Johan Lust, “Methodological Remarks,” in *The Story of David and Goliath: Textual and Literary Criticism, Papers of a Joint Research Venture* (OBO 73; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 121.

of the latter that a significant shift began to occur within biblical studies concerning the aim of textual criticism.<sup>5</sup> These Judean desert findings posed a challenge to the old consensus about the goal of textual criticism—that of recovering the *Urtext*—by illuminating the diachronic complexity of the biblical texts and their pluriform character both before and after the first century B.C.E.

Prior to the discovery of the DSS, scholars depended on the other aforementioned versions in their attempts to establish the *Urtext*: the SP, LXX, OL, Vg, Tg, and P.<sup>6</sup> Out of these versions, the LXX was easily the most important: it contains more variants than the rest of the versions combined.<sup>7</sup> However, the finding of the scrolls, a discovery that consists of some 200 mss of biblical texts, radically transformed text-critical approaches and the available evidence for textual variation from the MT.<sup>8</sup> In short, the number and significance of the variants found in the Judean desert are far greater than any previously known and upon which scholars were primarily dependent. That granted, and while the importance of Qumran cannot be overstated, the LXX remains significant for textual

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<sup>5</sup> See Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible* (Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 99-120; Emanuel Tov, *Text Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 313-50; D. Barthelemy, et al., *The Story of David and Goliath: Textual and Literary Criticism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 122.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>8</sup> So Michael Thomas Davis and Brent A. Strawn: “It would be a vast understatement to say that the Dead Sea Scrolls have revolutionized scholarly understanding on a number of fronts, including especially the textual criticism of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible and the history of early Judaism in the late Second Temple Period” (“Introduction” in *Qumran Studies: New Approaches to New Questions* [eds., M.T. Davis and B.A. Strawn; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007], xxiii).

criticism of the Hebrew Bible; occasionally the LXX reflects textual traditions found neither in the MT nor at Qumran.<sup>9</sup>

Of the fragments discovered at Qumran, many demonstrate textual variability around the first century B.C.E. In other words, these finds provide evidence that during the period of the first century B.C.E. there was textual *plurality* rather than *uniformity*. In short, the number of variants found at Qumran poses a significant challenge to the aforementioned and oft-cited goal of textual criticism: that of reaching a text that is most “authentic,” the “original” or the *Urtext* itself. The Qumran finds suggest that any such thing, if it ever existed, is probably irrecoverable.

### 1.2.1 Reexamining the Goal of Textual Criticism

With the discovery of the scrolls, renewed debate about the method of textual criticism arose, with a transformed interest in determining the goal of studying textual variants. To date, biblical scholars do not readily agree upon the goal of textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible, and it is common to find scholars opining multifarious views on the subject. An important aspect of this debate is the issue of whether or not there was ever an *Urtext* from which all other texts derive.

The two voices who perhaps best epitomize the scholarly views on the correct goal of textual criticism are Emanuel Tov and Eugene Ulrich. For Tov, the goal of the method is textual criticism of the “final and canonical edition” of a text.<sup>10</sup> By this he means, “At a certain point in time the last formulations [of the biblical books] were

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<sup>9</sup> Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 122.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

accepted as final from the point of view of their content and were transmitted and circulated as such.”<sup>11</sup> He thus somewhat modifies the *Urtext* theory, recognizing that books undergo gradual developments, but arguing that textual criticism should engage with the transmission of the text after its achievement of a final, authoritative status. Ulrich, on the other hand, moves farther away from the concept of an *Urtext* than Tov, and argues that the purpose of textual criticism should not be to reconstruct an “original” text, but rather to reconstruct the *history* of the texts that eventually became the biblical collection. Though he recognizes Tov’s monumental achievements in the field of textual criticism, Ulrich challenges Tov, noting that at any given time “not one but two or possibly more editions of many of the biblical books were in circulation” and that “for some books two variants editions ‘stood at the beginning of a process of copying and textual transmission.’”<sup>12</sup> Despite their differences, it is helpful to recognize that both Tov and Ulrich moved away from the older goal of establishing an *Urtext* and open up new possibilities for textual criticism.

Ultimately, it is Ulrich’s position that is more attractive, especially in light of the discovery of the DSS, for the following reasons: with the discovery of the DSS and the realization of the plurality and fluidity of the biblical texts in that early period, Ulrich’s question, “What *form* of the text should be the object of our search?” becomes essential.<sup>13</sup> As Ulrich states, “because the text of each book was produced organically, in multiple layers, determining the ‘original text’ is a difficult, complex task; and, arguably, it may

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>12</sup> Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 14.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 12; Italics mine.

not even be the correct goal.”<sup>14</sup> Ulrich argues that the goal of textual criticism should be reconstructing the *history* of the texts that eventually became the biblical collection, writing, “Should not the object of . . . text-critical study be, not the single collection of MT texts [and versions] of the individual books, but the organic, developing, pluriform Hebrew text—different for each book—such as the evidence indicates?”<sup>15</sup> Tucker makes a similar claim:

Because all texts and because all versions of the Bible are historically conditioned documents, textual criticism must not only try to recover the best text but also attempt to reconstruct the history of the transmission of texts and versions. In this sense, textual criticism addresses another aspect of the question explored by literary, form and tradition criticism: what course did the history of the Bible take?<sup>16</sup>

In short, with both Ulrich and Tucker, I want to stress that the course of history of the biblical text is an essential component of textual criticism, more essential than establishing “the” text.

Furthermore, what makes Ulrich’s reformulation of the goal of textual criticism attractive is that it takes seriously both the diachronic nature of texts as well as their pluriform nature. Rather than postulating some hypothetical *Urtext*, Ulrich’s understanding of the goal of textual criticism permits a bracketing of any concerns as to whether or not there ever was, historically speaking, anything like an “original” text, and allows for an exploration of texts as they might have been. Such an understanding of textual criticism has direct implications for the study of the Gideon narrative because, as

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 16.

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

<sup>16</sup> Tucker, “Editor’s Foreword,” iii-iv.



this study intends to demonstrate, the narrative contained in Judges 6-8 has a complex history that begins already *within the text* itself.

### **1.3 Textual Criticism of the Book of Judges**

From the outset, the question arises: why does textual criticism matter for a study of any biblical text, and the Gideon narrative in particular? The above formulation—that the narrative contained in Judges 6-8 contains a complex history that begins already within the text itself—hints at the answer.

Textual criticism is foundational for gaining an understanding of the history of the book of Judges in all its guises, including its compositional growth. A more complete understanding of the compositional growth and development of the book of Judges—with a focus on the Gideon narrative—provides further insight into the theological and ideological foci of the story both in its final form and in its hypothetical developmental stages. Additionally, in a quest to understand how the stories that comprise the current form of the book of Judges came to exist as one book, textual criticism aids in answering certain basic questions that inevitably arise: was there ever one single version of Judges that branched out into different textual traditions? Or, rather, were there various textual traditions that were eventually absorbed into a single version?

#### **1.3.1 Extant Versions of the Book of Judges**

The scholarly consensus maintains that the preserved manuscripts of the book of Judges do not provide significantly different versions of the text. Susan Niditch can thus write, “When exploring the preserved and transmitted written manuscript traditions of

Judges, one rarely encounters radically different versions; rather, the relatively set content exhibits more subtle variations in terminology and phrasing and differences in relative length.”<sup>17</sup>

In brief, the following statements about the various manuscript traditions of the book of Judges are accurate: The MT of the book of Judges is, according to Alberto Soggin, “particularly pure,” by which he presumably means lacking in textual variants.<sup>18</sup> The Tg, Vg, and P are all related to the MT, and all appear to be based largely on it.<sup>19</sup> The Tg contains much material that is generally regarded as expansionistic and thus not directly germane to textual criticism.<sup>20</sup> P shows fewer variants than the LXX but more than either the Tg or Vg.<sup>21</sup> The LXX is more important for the study of the book of Judges than the Tg, Vg, or P. Two different text-types have been preserved in LXX: one in Codex Alexandrinus (LXX<sup>A</sup>) and the other in Codex Vaticanus (LXX<sup>B</sup>). The variation between these two manuscripts is significant enough that Alfred Rahlfs, in his *Septuaginta*, printed them both, placing the LXX<sup>A</sup> and LXX<sup>B</sup> texts on the same page, and providing a critical apparatus for each. Soggin describes the case of the two versions as follows: “So great are the discrepancies, that we might speak of two different translations.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 22.

<sup>18</sup> J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1981), 12. Soggin notes that Moore calls it the “best” of the historical books (cf. George F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976], xliii).

<sup>19</sup> Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 148-153.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 148-151.

<sup>21</sup> Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 152.

<sup>22</sup> Soggin, *Judges*, 12.

Yet recent scholarship on the LXX has modified Rahlfs' classifications, recognizing that LXX<sup>A</sup> and LXX<sup>B</sup> include many nearly identical passages, suggesting that that the two mss derived from one original. Perhaps one ms used the other, or perhaps both mss developed out of a common original. According to Natalie Fernández Marcos, the similarities “indicate a common archetype, which through its successors and, apparently, independent stages of revision, has ended up producing the texts of A and B that we have.”<sup>23</sup> Most modern scholars agree, favoring the argument that the LXX<sup>A</sup> and LXX<sup>B</sup> contain two recensions of the book of Judges.<sup>24</sup> Yet there are significant differences between LXX<sup>A</sup> and LXX<sup>B</sup>. Walter R. Bodine draws the following conclusion in his work on the Greek texts of Judges:

it can now be said assuredly that the peculiar problem presented by the extensive differences between the texts of the A and B families is resolved in large measure. The latter constitutes a part of the revision of the Old Greek toward the developing Hebrew text carried out near the turn of the era and known as the *καίγε* recension, while the former represents a later form of the text which is influenced primarily by Origen's fifth column.<sup>25</sup>

LXX<sup>A</sup> appears to be closer to the “Old Greek” (OG) and the later of the two, influenced by Origen's hexaplaric revision. LXX<sup>B</sup>, the earlier form, reflects the type of Hebraizing revision called *kaige*, attributed in antiquity to Theodotion, and named thus because one of its distinctive features is that the Hebrew *כֵּן*, “also,” is frequently translated with the Greek *καίγε*, “at least.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Natalio Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Versions of the Bible* (Boston: Brill, 2001), 94.

<sup>24</sup> So Walter R. Bodine, *The Greek Text of Judges: Recensional Developments* (Harvard Semitic Monographs 23, Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1980) and Sidney Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 280-283.

<sup>25</sup> Bodine, *The Greek Texts of Judges*, 186.

<sup>26</sup> Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 145.

In addition to the LXX, the OL of Judges is also significant for textual criticism of the book. The best authority for the text of the OL of the so-called Heptateuch is found in the Lyons Manuscript, which contains portions of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and the whole of Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Judges (minus the last chapter and a half).<sup>27</sup> According to Niditch, this version of the book of Judges contains variations “most unexpected and rich.”<sup>28</sup> A few examples: in Judges 6, these variations include the omission of “camels” in 6:5 (an omission that the OL shares with 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>), the fuller “messenger of the Lord” rather than simply the deity himself in 6:14, an omission of the phrase about the sign from 6:17, and that Gideon himself brought the offerings to the messenger in 6:19.<sup>29</sup> In Judges 7:2, the OL reads “the people are great, and I will hand Midian into their hands.”<sup>30</sup> As Niditch notes, the OL reading omits “any sense of the deity’s insecurity” (where the MT continues, “Israel would only take credit away from me, saying, ‘My own hand has delivered me.’”)<sup>31</sup> Additionally, the OL clarifies in several places that remain ambiguous in the MT of Judges 7, including the addition of the parallel phrase “on the other side” in 7:5 and in reading “more concisely” in 7:13 that the barely loaf “came to the tent of Midian, and struck it, and the tent fell.”<sup>32</sup> In Judges 8:11 the OL expands, reading “The camp was in the place that they trusted,” reuses the verb “thresh” from 8:7 in 8:16 (rather than the MT’s “taught”), includes the question “Who

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<sup>27</sup> Billen, *The Old Latin Texts of the Heptateuch*, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Niditch, *Judges*, 25.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-96.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 95

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-96.

and what kind?” in 8:18, and has the concubine name Gideon’s son in 8:31, which Niditch suggests perhaps reflects the concubine’s “ambitions for a dynasty.”<sup>33</sup> As Jennifer M. Dines note, the OL of the book of Judges is important because scholarly opinion maintains that it is probably the best witness to the original LXX.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, the DSS fragments of the book offers tantalizing, if incomplete, evidence for exploring the textual history of the book of Judges. The DSS fragments preserve only portions of the book: 1QJudg (6:20-22; 8:1 [?]; 9:1-6, 28-31, 40-43, 48-49), 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> (Judg 6:2-6, 11-13), and 4QJudg<sup>b</sup> (19:5-7; 21:12-25). Of the DSS fragments discovered at Qumran, 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> is—if not the most important—than at least the most controversial, with Trebolle Barrera writing, “The long omission of vv.7-10 places by itself 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> among the more important Qumran biblical texts although it is preserved only in a single fragment.”<sup>35</sup> Barrera’s remark is certainly radical given the incomplete nature of the DSS fragments from the book of Judges, and his far-reaching claims about the significance of 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> for reconstruction the textual growth of the entire book of Judges sparked off great debate within text-critical circles. His comment raises the question: do the DSS mss from Judges suggest the same kind of textual diversity for the book as the Qumran evidence makes clear for other biblical books? A closer inspection of 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> and the scholarly debate surrounding the 7.7cm by 4.8cm fragment will pave the way to answering that question.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 102-103.

<sup>34</sup> Jennifer M. Dines, *The Septuagint* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 16.

<sup>35</sup> Barrera, “Textual Variants,” 238.

### 1.4 The Significance of 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>

4QJudg<sup>a</sup> contains portions of Judg 6:2-13, minus vv. 7-10.<sup>36</sup> What is captivating and significant about this fragment is that scholars long observed—prior to its discovery—that the verses found in 6:7-10 interrupt the normal cycle of apostasy, oppression, repentance, and deliverance as found in the book of Judges. In these verses, rather than immediately sending a hero to deliver the errant Israelites after their cry for help, Yahweh first sends a prophet to rebuke them. It is only after the arrival of this prophet and his formulaic reprimand invoking the Exodus tradition that the narrative introduces the newly appointed Gideon as the expected hero. Yet this prophetic appearance is missing in 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>. Such a minus suggests a confirmation of scholarly opinions that these verses might be a later addition to the text. For now, the absence of these verses from the Qumran fragment point to one of the many ways in which traditional biblical methodologies connect and intersect: textual criticism can inform redaction criticism.

The aforementioned explicit example from Qumran has specific significance for the book of Judges overall and the Gideon narrative in particular. In short, as posed in one of the guiding questions above: How should textual critics evaluate 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>? Does 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> provide support for the idea that there were various textual traditions of the book of Judges—various traditions only later standardized into a single version? Is the fragment an example of the early textual pluriformity Ulrich discusses? Alternatively, is it an isolated example from Qumran?

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<sup>36</sup> For a description of the fragment, see Julio Treballe Barrera, “4QJudg<sup>a</sup>” in *Qumran Cave 4 IX: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Kings* (DJD 14; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 161.

Prior to an assessment of 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>, it is important to establish the significance of the pericope attested, in part, on this fragment from Qumran. Scholars have frequently observed that the verses in 6:7-10 do not appear to fit into their immediate context: out of nowhere arrives an unnamed prophet, invoking the Exodus, and making the strange claim that the Israelites should not “pay reverence to the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live” (6:10). The prophetic appearance and the prophet’s puzzling speech do not make sense in the context of Judges 6: the immediate and pressing concern of the Israelites is the Midianites, not the Amorites, and no mention unto this point has been made of worshipping Amorite gods (or any gods, for that matter). Likewise, as noted, scholars have long recognized that these verses deviate from the “normal” cycle of apostasy, repentance, and delivery found within the book of Judges. In Judg 6:7-10, unlike the preceding cases of Ehud (Judges 3) and Deborah and Barak (Judges 4-5), the deity does not immediately send a deliverer to answer the cries of the distressed Israelites. Instead, the deity first sends a prophet to rebuke the Israelites prior to the arrival of Gideon, the to-be deliverer, upon the scene, a move entirely out of order with the flow of the book. On the macro level, the scene with the prophet is the *lectio difficilior*, but not the *lectio brevior*.

For these reasons, as early as Julius Wellhausen, scholars have identified the verses as a later insertion. Thus, Wellhausen wrote that the anonymous prophet was an “insertion in the last redaction.”<sup>37</sup> What is fascinating, of course, is that Wellhausen made his redaction-critical observation solely based on the text as preserved in the MT: no other textual witness has a minus here (though 6:7a is missing from LXX<sup>B</sup> and P). With

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<sup>37</sup> Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 234.

Wellhausen, most of the major commentaries that take up issues of either textual or redaction criticism consider these verses to be the work of a later editor/redactor.<sup>38</sup> For instance, Gray writes:

This passage is a late insertion in the Gideon tradition, as is indicated by the repetition of v. 6*b* at 7*a* and by the irrelevance of the assurance not to fear the gods of the Amorites (v. 10) to the context of the Midianite situation ... The passage is significantly wanting in 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>, which indicates that it was recognized as redactional in a text still current in the first century AD.<sup>39</sup>

Boling, who wrote before the publication of 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> but who was nonetheless aware of the fragment, notes:

These verses are generally attributed to an ultimate *E* source. Through skillful redaction of older material they now appear as part of a larger and highly unified Deuteronomic vignette. These verses are missing in 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>, which may therefore be witness to an early preexilic, textual tradition.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, Niditch succinctly summarizes the issue thus:

Judg 6:6-10 [*sic*] is not found in 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>, which follows the end of v. 6 with v. 11. Like the opening verses of ch. 2, these verses formulaically invoke the language of Deuteronomy. Judges 6:7-8 includes interlocking subordinate clauses, evocative of a late style of Hebrew. The message of covenantal disloyalty, delivered by a prophet, and the formulaic medium point to the theologian's voice. This particular shaping of the Gideon story is not in the tradition preserved at

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<sup>38</sup> Soggin alone argues for the possible *antiquity* of vv.7-10 because he claims it lacks a "logical" conclusion. Soggin argues that if the verses had been inserted later, they would have included such a conclusion (Soggin, *Judges*, 112-113). To the best of my knowledge, Soggin is unique in making this claim.

<sup>39</sup> John Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1986), 206, 285; Also see F.M. Cross, "The Contribution of the Qumran Discoveries to the Study of the Biblical Text," *IEJ* 16 (1966): 81-95.

<sup>40</sup> Boling, *Judges*, 125. He points the reader to his introduction where he reports what Frank M. Cross communicated to him concerning the Qumran fragments from the book of Judges, "There are two manuscripts, one represented by a single fragment (4Q Judg<sup>a</sup>) and a short group of badly preserved fragments (4Q Judg<sup>b</sup>). 4Q Judg<sup>a</sup> preserves 6:3-13 in part; it does reflect the type of text in the better Septuagint tradition. The second manuscript preserves 21:12-25 plus a very small fragment of 16:5-7. There are no remarkable readings in 4Q Judg<sup>b</sup>. In 4Q Judg<sup>a</sup> in verse 3 note the omission of *w'wlv 'lyw*. Verse 7*a* is omitted. However, 4Q has a much larger omission extending apparently from the beginning of verse 7 down to verse 10. In vs. 13 the text reads *βlhym* instead of *yhwh*. In vs. 13 we have the strange reading *šsprw*" (Boling, *Judges*, 40).



Qumran, which follows without interruption the dominant recurring pattern in Judges of oppression, calling out to Yahweh, sending of help.

In short: noting the oddity of the verses in their context, along with the minus of 6:7-10 in 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>, frequently leads scholars to argue that the passage is a later addition to the Gideon narrative, and that the fragment may witness to a textual tradition of Judges that did not yet contain this pericope.

Within studies devoted to redaction criticism of Judges, the same sentiment holds sway. For example, Groß, Veijola, O'Brien, and Nelson (to name a few) also see in this passage a later updating of an earlier composition, reemphasizing that the majority of interpreters of Judges 6-8 see the passage as a later insertion into the narrative. Groß concludes, "6:7-10 ist ein junger, nachdr Zusatz, der auf den Zusatz 6:13 reagiert."<sup>41</sup> Veijola, following Dietrich, attributes these verses to the work of his DtrN, along with three other passages: Judg 10:6-16; 1 Sam 7:3-4; and 1 Sam 10:18abg-19a.<sup>42</sup> Of Judg 6:7-10 Veijola writes, "Er ist bereits von *Dietrich* als der späte DtrN erkannt worden, dem wir schon früher in 1 Sam 7, 3-4 begegnet sind."<sup>43</sup> O'Brien likewise sees Judg 6:7-10, as well as Judg 10:10-16, as belonging to the work of a later redactor, writing, "A reassessment of these texts shows that all of Judg 6:7-10 and significant portions of 10:10-16 belong to a later redaction."<sup>44</sup> Nelson maintains that Judg 6:7-10 is the work of

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<sup>41</sup> Groß, *Richter*, 370.

<sup>42</sup> Timo Veijola, *Das Königtum in der Beurteilung der deuteronomistischen Historiographie: eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Helsinki : Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1977), 43-44.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 44. In the end, Veijola attributes four texts to his DtrN, based on the use of similar terms in all four. These texts are Judg 10:6-16; Judg 6:7-10; 1 Sam 7:3-4; and 1 Sam 10:18abg-19a.

<sup>44</sup> Mark A. O'Brien, *The Deuteronomistic History Hypothesis: A Reassessment* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 88, n. 24. Cf. also n. 21.

Dtr<sup>2</sup> (along with Judg 2:1-5, possibly Judges 1, and, additionally, 2:17, 20-23). In his own words:

Judg. 6:7-10 is isolated from its context. While vv. 2-6 and 11-24 are connected together by the movement from crisis to salvation, they neither prepare for nor follow up on 7-10. Literary seams are visible at both ends. V.7a picks up and repeats 6b, while after v. 10 the expected announcement of judgment does not occur and the oracle breaks off abruptly. In fact, the subject of foreign gods from 7-10 does not come up again until 6:25-32. Judg. 6:7-10 could drop out and not be missed.<sup>45</sup>

The point is this: there is overwhelming scholarly consensus regarding the secondary nature of 6:7-10. Yet despite this overwhelming consensus about the secondary nature of these four verses, there nevertheless remains much debate regarding the implications of their absence in 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>.

The basis of the debate resides precisely in the fragment itself. Barrera, who describes the fragment, is worth quoting in full:

The solitary fragment preserved from 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>, consisting of two contiguous pieces, contains portions of Judg 6:2-13. The leather of the manuscript is light brown with some darkening and it has suffered wrinkling from the top left side to the bottom right. The leather, 0.4 mm thick, measures 7.5 cm high and 4.8 cm wide. It is inscribed on the hair side as usual, and the back is also smooth and well-prepared. The surface is nearly worn away at the central portion of lines 1-3 and at the beginning of line 7. Traces of stitching can be observed at the lower right margin of the arrangement, where a right margin of 1.1 cm and a bottom margin of 1.8 cm occur. A vertical ruling at the right margin is faintly discernible, although no traces of horizontal dry lines are visible. The distance between lines varies from 6 to 7 mm, and the height of the letters is 2mm. The number of letters per line determined by reconstruction according to MT ranges between 59 and 65 letters per line. The space between words normally corresponds to the width of the letter *waw*.<sup>46</sup>

Although fragmentary, 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> contains portions of vv. 2-6, 11-13. Completely absent

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<sup>45</sup> Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* (JSOT 18; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), 47.

<sup>46</sup> Barrera, "4QJudg<sup>a</sup>," 161.

are vv. 7-10. The fragment begins with בהרים, “in the mountains” (6:2), and runs through אשר ספרו־לנו אבותינו לאמר, “which our fathers recounted to us, saying” (6:13). However, where the anonymous prophet appears in v. 7 of the MT, the Qumran fragment instead begins immediately the introduction of Gideon: when he is beating out the wheat in the wine-press that אשר ליואש אבי העזרי , “... belonged to Joash the Abiezerite.” Minus vv. 7-10, the narrative unfolds according to the dominant patten in the book of Judges: the Israelites are oppressed, they cry out to Yahweh, and Yahweh introduces a deliverer, in this case Gideon.

#### **1.4.1 The Debate Over 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>**

Since the discovery of 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>, scholarly debate about its significance has flourished, producing two opposing theories on the absence of vv. 7-10 from the fragment. The first theory is that the fragment is a piece of an earlier example of a Judges text in which vv. 7-10 were not yet a part of the narrative. The second theory argues against this, proposing that the minus of the verses is due to a different reason—scribal error, perhaps, or reflective of an ideological issue or liturgical purpose of the original scroll from which the fragment came. This leaves the question: how convincing are the arguments both for and against 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> as a distinct literary edition of the book of Judges?

In support of the argument that the fragment is a piece of an earlier literary form of the book of Judges stand both Barrera and Ulrich. Barrera argues that 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> proves the fragment is “an earlier literary form of the book than our traditional texts,” different

from either the MT or LXX.<sup>47</sup> For Barrera, the verses are not missing because of scribal error, for a liturgical reason, or because of ideological differences, but, rather, is an earlier text that did not yet include the theological passage now found in 6:7-10. According to Barrera, there are six places where 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> disagrees with other manuscripts of the Hebrew and Greek traditions (these include the minus of “and they would come up against them” in 6:3, the minus of the *waws* in 6:4, and the minus of the entirety of 6:7-10).<sup>48</sup> Additionally, there are two variants in the fragment where 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> agrees with the OG (including the minus of “camels” in 6:5 and the different spelling of “Abiezer” in 6:11).<sup>49</sup> Finally, Barrera finds the common omission of 6:7a in the Qumran fragment and the B group (and suggests that this might mean that the B group reflects the original LXX).<sup>50</sup> Ulrich echoes Barrera’s argument, stating, “4QJudg<sup>a</sup> is an earlier form of Judges that does not have a Deuteronomistic theological passage long considered to be a secondary addition by Wellhausen and others.”<sup>51</sup> Therefore, according to Barrera and Ulrich, the many literary critics of the book of Judges who have argued that vv. 7-10 are a later literary insertion are correct and the text-critical evidence provided by 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> offers concrete proof of that. My own conclusions generally concur with this position.

Yet scholars disagree on the significance of 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> for determining the textual history of the book of Judges, largely because of the fragmentary and singular nature of

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<sup>47</sup> Barrera, “4QJudg<sup>a</sup>,” 162.

<sup>48</sup> Barrera, “Textual Variants,” 236-237.

<sup>49</sup> Barrera also reconstructs one, in v. 5 (cf. “Textual Variants,” 236-237).

<sup>50</sup> Barrera, “Textual Variants in 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>,” 236-237; Barrera defines the OG as that attested by the Lucianic group of mss. and/or the OL version (236).

<sup>51</sup> Ulrich, *The Scrolls and the Study of the Hebrew Bible*, 32.

the evidence. Contra Barrera, both Marcos and Richard Hess argue against the notion that 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> represents an earlier literary form of the book. Though Marcos is conciliatory, writing, “I agree with Treballe in emphasizing the importance of 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>, fragmentary as it may be, for the present discussion on textual criticism and literary criticism of the Bible,” he nevertheless comes to a very different conclusion about the fragment.<sup>52</sup> He maintains that it is impossible to prove that the fragment represents an ancient piece of some form of pre-Dtr redaction.<sup>53</sup> Opposing Barrera, Marcos fails to find sufficient textual evidence to postulate two editions/literary strata for the book of Judges.<sup>54</sup> He summarizes his findings, in part, with the following:

1) We cannot rely on such tiny fragments as those contained in 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> to support such diverse issues as a) the existence of “independent texts” at Qumran, b) the theory of a different, shorter edition of the book as reflected in 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> and some traces of omissions in Antiochene and the Old Latin and, c) the hypothesis of a shorter text, extended this time to the Vorlage of codex Vaticanus, that is, of the καίγε Palestine revision.<sup>55</sup>

Additionally, Marcos goes on to state: (1) that the omission of the four verses from 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> “might represent a late, secondary abbreviation for liturgical or other purposes” rather than be a piece of pre-Dtr redaction; (2) that the hypothesis for a shorter text for Judges “is not shared by any other extant witnesses of the book”; (3) that it “cannot be stated that the Old Greek of Judges, represented mainly by the Antiochene text and the Old Latin, is a typologically shorter text as compared with the Masoretic one”; and,

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<sup>52</sup> Natalio Fernández Marcos, “The Hebrew and Greek Texts of Judges” from *The Earliest Text of the Hebrew Bible: The Relationship between the Masoretic Text and the Hebrew Base of the Septuagint Reconsidered* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 4.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 16.

finally, (4) that “the most difficult text in the case discussed above is still the Masoretic one, and the attempts to solve the difficulties presented by the Septuagint are best explained, in my opinion, as translational or exegetical facilitations rather than reflecting a different, shorter Hebrew Vorlage.”<sup>56</sup>

Hess is likewise wary of drawing such a conclusion from 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>. He offers three reasons for avoiding the assertion that 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> might be a genuine example of an earlier literary stratum of the book of Judges in the conclusion to his article. First, “the fragment itself is too small to warrant such a far-reaching conclusion.”<sup>57</sup> Second, he notes:

the comparable evidence from the other fragments of Joshua and Judges suggests that the omission of 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> follows a tendency to insert, omit, and change sections of paragraphs of biblical text at what would become the Masoretic *parashoth* divisions of the text.<sup>58</sup>

Third, Hess writes:

when no other evidence of a pre-deuteronomistic text is at hand, it seems less likely that this lone fragment should preserve a pre-deuteronomistic text than that the fragment is part of a larger manuscript that was never intended to present the whole book of Judges but rather may have been a collection of biblical texts serving a particular liturgical purpose for the community who read it.<sup>59</sup>

Despite Hess’ conclusion, his article is helpful in outlining why both haplography and theology are inadequate explanations for the omission of 6:7-10 in 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>. While Hess notes that it is possible that the absence of 6:7-10 is simply an omission—either

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Hess, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and Higher Criticism of the Hebrew Bible: The Case of 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>,” in *The Scrolls and Scripture: Qumran Fifty Years After* (JSOT 26; eds. Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 127.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

unintentional or intentional—due to scribal activity, he then goes on to outline why such an explanation is unlikely.<sup>60</sup> For the possibility of haplography, Hess explains it is an unlikely explanation for the omission of vv. 7-10 for the following reasons:

Verse 11 begins as *וַיבֹּא מִלֹּאךְ יְהוָה* in the Hebrew text. The first words of v. 11 that are preserved in the Dead Sea Scroll fragment are *אֲשֶׁר לִיּוֹאֵשׁ הָאֲבִיעִזִּירִי*. Neither of these phrases from v. 11 are similar to the end of v. 6 or the beginning of v. 7. Therefore, haplography seems an unlikely explanation for the omission of vv. 7-10.<sup>61</sup>

Haplography therefore discounted, Hess then turns to a second possible explanation for intentional omission: theological reasons held by the scribe. Yet as Hess himself writes:

The themes of deliverance from Egypt and guidance by God are found both in the omitted vv. 7-10 and in the included vv. 11-13. There is the presence of a prophet and emphases on the gift of the land and the presence of idolatry, which are found in vv. 7-10 but not in vv. 11-13. However, none of these themes would be omitted by any Jewish group of the turn of the era, for whom the importance of the prophetic word, God's blessing of the land and the judgments of idolatry were foundational parts of their faith.<sup>62</sup>

Then, since neither haplography nor theological explanation remains likely for the absence of 6:7-10 from 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>, Hess offers a different reason: scribal rearrangement of the material for scribal purposes “liturgical or otherwise.”<sup>63</sup> He bases this argument on the fact that the “comparable evidence from the other fragments of Joshua and Judges suggests that the omission of 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> follows a tendency to insert, omit, and change sections of paragraphs of biblical text at what would become the Masoretic *parashoth*

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 126.

divisions of the text.”<sup>64</sup> Of the division of the Hebrew text into *parashoth*, Hess asks: “Does this oddity have any bearing on the study of Qumran fragment 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>?”<sup>65</sup> As Hess explains, in the MT of Judg 6:2-13 there are two *parashoth*, which occur after v. 6 and v. 10, and this is “exactly where a portion of the biblical text is missing in 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>.”<sup>66</sup> Hess then outlines the various other fragments from the books of the Former Prophets found at Qumran and notes whether the divisions in these fragments match up with the *parashoth* of these books in the MT. He offers the following judgment: what has been reconstructed as Judg 21:12-25 from the Qumran fragment 4QJudg<sup>b</sup> contains an empty space, according to the reconstruction, after v.12. This matches the occurrence of a *parashah* in the MT. Likewise, 4QKgs, when reconstructed, has empty spaces after 7.26, 37, 39, 50, 51, and 8:11, all of which are points that coincide with the *parashoth* in the MT. Thus, Hess brings to the table an important observation concerning the later *parashoth* of the MT and the blank spaces found in some of the Qumran fragments of the Former Prophets. Thus, Hess’ main argument against the idea that 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> represents some form of a pre-Dtr text rests upon the later divisions of the text by the Masoretic *parashoth*. The idea that 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>, with its absence of 6:7-10, belonged to a collection of biblical texts serving a particular liturgical purpose is, of course, a possibility, although Hess fails to offer a convincing liturgical reason *why* the Qumran community might remove the prophetic appearance in vv.7-10.

In the end, a definitive judgment on 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> is difficult due to the small size of

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.



the fragment and its singular nature. The conservative approach of Hess and Marcos is one possibility, but it is not the only one. As Hess himself writes, “the absence of a valid text-critical and theological reasons for the omission of vv. 7-10 *leaves the literary critical explanation as a possibility.*”<sup>67</sup> If both text-critical and theological/ideological reasons do not account for the minus in 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>, then the literary critical explanation remains (and is as equally plausible as a hypothetical liturgical explanation).

The possibility remains that 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> offers us a glimpse at the compositional history of the *Gideon* narrative. (Far-reaching arguments about the entire book of Judges based on the fragmentary evidence discovered at Qumran are beyond the scope of this chapter). That 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> is witness to a different version of the Gideon narrative than that found in the MT and the LXX remain a valid hypothesis. Of course, as Marcos notes, it is important to remember the chronological evidence, since as Barrera himself writes, 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> is written in a “late Hasmonaean or early Herodian book hand from c. 50-25 BCE.”<sup>68</sup> Barrera’s dating thus makes the DSS fragment much later than the LXX, and while, as Marcos notes, it is not impossible for a late manuscript to transmit an earlier textual form, this fact complicates the picture.<sup>69</sup> Perhaps 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> is proof that even as late as Qumran the text of Judges remained fluid, with more than one version of the Gideon story in existence. In either case, 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> suggests a rich and complex compositional history for the Gideon narrative, and although drawing conclusions about the textual history of the entire book of Judges is difficult in light of the limited evidence, 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> nevertheless provides a physical manuscript that suggests textual fluidity and/or

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 124; Italics mine.

<sup>68</sup> Barrera, “4QJudg<sup>a</sup>,” 161; Cf. Marcos, “The Hebrew and Greek Texts of Judges,” 6.

<sup>69</sup> Marcos, “The Hebrew and Greek Texts of Judges,” 6.

textual growth for the Gideon narrative. The possibilities suggested by 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> open the door for further speculation on the growth of Judges 6-8.

### 1.4.2 Conclusions

The goal of textual criticism—concerned here only with 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>—is to (re)ask the question of the possibilities of change as attested in ancient mss of Judges 6-8. The absence of 6:7-10 at Qumran suggests—in the form of a single MS—what redaction critics have long presupposed about this central portion of Judges: the Gideon narrative developed over time. Textual criticism opens the door to further hypothesis on the growth of the text. The discovery of the fragment, in addition to the literary evidence evident in the many tensions and inconsistencies found within Judges 6-8, substantiates the hypotheses that these chapters are the work of many hands rather than just one.

The absence of 6:7-10 in 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> opens the door for further exploration of the hypothetical compositional growth of the Gideon narrative. To return to Tucker's statement "all texts and all versions of the Bible are historically conditioned documents," textual criticism must attempt to reconstruct the history of transmission in addition to the so-called "best" text of a biblical narrative.<sup>70</sup> The text-critical evidence from Qumran suggests that different forms of Judges 6-8 existed at least as late as the turn of the millennia. The extant form of Judges 6-8 as we now possess it in the MT (which contains within it various doublets [e.g., Oreb and Zeeb, Zebah and Zalmunna] and other factors [e.g., contrasting portraits of the protagonist, jumbled syntax, divergent details]) points to a rich redaction history behind the existing text. From here, the question of what course the history of Judges 6-8 took can now be explored via redaction and literary criticism.

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<sup>70</sup> Tucker, "Editor's Foreword," iii-iv.

## Chapter 4 The God of the Amorites?

*Judg. 6:7-10 could drop out and not be missed.<sup>1</sup>*

### 1.1 Introduction

The previous chapter asked the question: what course has the text of Judges 6-8 taken over time? The absence of 6:7-10 in the fragment discovered at Qumran provides physical evidence for what redaction critics have long presupposed about this central portion of Judges: the final form of the Gideon narrative developed throughout an extended period. The text existed in different forms during different periods of that history. Textual criticism thus opens the door to further investigation on the growth of the text beyond the addition of 6:7-10.

While 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> substantiates the claim that Judges 6-8 is a text that especially warrants diachronic analysis, the various ambiguities, tensions, and incongruities found throughout the Gideon narrative further indicate that an author (or authors) combined, molded, and expanded the text until it reached its final form. The next chapters will offer a redaction-critical analysis of the Gideon narrative, mapping its compositional history through a diachronic lens.

### 1.2 Judges 6:7-10

The scene is set thus: At the end of v.6, the text reads, “Israel was laid low because of Midian, and the Israelites called out to Yahweh for help.” Judges 6:7 repeats the ending of v.6, “When the Israelites cried out to Yahweh on account of the

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<sup>1</sup> Richard D. Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* (JSOT 18; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), 47.

Midianites,” subsequently introducing the first speaking character of the narrative: an unnamed prophet. Speaking for Yahweh, the prophet then rebukes the Israelites, citing all the things the deity has done for them, including bringing them up from Egypt and delivering them from slavery. He goes on to admonish them to “not fear the gods of the Amorites,” and ends claiming that the Israelites “did not listen to my voice” (6:10). With that, the scene terminates.

### **1.2.1 The Literary Horizon of Judges 6:7-10**

In order to map the territory created by 6:7-10, it is helpful to be familiar with the landscape that surrounds these four verses. In other words, how does 6:7-10 connect with the Gideon narrative, other passages in the book of Judges, and the biblical corpus more broadly? What texts does it presuppose?

The prophet’s words connect to their immediate context through the mention of the Exodus, which Gideon himself will invoke in 6:13. In 6:8, the prophet conveys the words of Yahweh, “I led you up from Egypt, and brought you out of the house of slavery, and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians.” Already in the beginning of the prophet’s speech, the greater story of the Israelite’s relationship to Yahweh is noted, invoking a rich list of other texts, including from Deuteronomy, Exodus, and 1 Samuel.

Within the broader context of the book of Judges, 6:7-10 shares features with several other stories. In the preceding stories of Ehud (Judges 3) and Deborah and Barak (Judges 4-5), the deity immediately sends a deliverer to answer the cries of the distressed Israelites. Although the prophet who appears in Judges 6 has no similar counterpart in any of the other hero/deliverer stories in the book, there are similarities between 6:7-10

and some of these other stories. For instance, in the Deborah narrative, the text introduces Deborah as a prophet with the Hebrew phrase *אשה נביאה*, literally, “a woman, a prophetess” (4:4). The text in 6:8 introduces the anonymous prophet with nearly the same Hebrew phrase *איש נביא*, “a man, a prophet.” Both figures appear at exactly the same point in the narratives.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, it is only here and in the Deborah story that the Hebrew Bible uses the phrase “a man, a prophet/a woman, a prophetess,” a fact that suggests that the phraseology is not a coincidence.<sup>3</sup>

While the Amorites play no other role in the Gideon narrative, they do figure in other places in the book of Judges: they appear in Judges 1 and Judges 3 as part of the peoples left in the land after the initial conquest. They appear again Judges 10 and in Judges 11, prior to the beginning of the story of Jephthah. Within the larger biblical narrative, the Amorites often show up in narrative accounts of Israel’s history—just as they do here in Judges 6. However, the phrase “the gods of the Amorites,” with the relative clause *אשר אתם יושבים בארצם*, “in whose land you are living,” occurs only here in the Gideon narrative and in Josh 24:15. These verses situate Israel’s current oppression within the larger trajectory of the story that begins with Egypt and the exodus from slavery, and speaks to Israel writ large rather than just one small tribe as the ensuing verses will do.

Finally, as Assis notes, the pericope in 6:7-10 shares features with the introduction to the book of Judges in 2:1-5.<sup>4</sup> Both include the similar Hebrew phrases

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<sup>2</sup> Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 178.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Assis, *Self-Interest*, 25.

אנכי העליתי אתכם ממצרים in (6:8), “I brought you up out of Egypt” (6:8). Both recount the Exodus from Egypt, the giving of the land, and both rebuke the Israelites for straying after other deities.<sup>5</sup> The next part of 6:7-10 expresses the deity’s disappointment with the words ולא שמעתם בקולי, “you did not listen to my voice,” in the same Hebrew as the deity’s words in 2:2. However, there is a significant theological difference between 2:1-5 and 6:7-10.<sup>6</sup> In the former, the Israelites respond to the messenger’s speech by weeping and offering a sacrifice to Yahweh: “When the angel of Yahweh spoke these words to all the Israelites, the people lifted up their voices and wept. So they named that place Bochim, and there they sacrificed to Yahweh” (2:4-5). In stark contrast, the pericope in 6:7-10 ends abruptly, and records no response on the part of the people after the prophet’s speech. It simply terminates with, “You have not listened to my voice.”

### 1.2.2 Bumps in the Terrain

If the Gideon narrative constitutes a kind of map, the land depicted therein contains certain irregular features, creating various “bumps” in the terrain. The most noticeable of the bumps created by the presence of 6:7-10 is simply this: “Judg. 6:7-10 could drop out and not be missed.”<sup>7</sup> There are several reasons for this: the prophet plays no other role in the ensuing narrative and the prophet’s warning against “the gods of the Amorites” makes no sense in the immediate context, in which the Midianites and not the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>7</sup> Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History*, 47.

Amorites are the enemy.

In fact, the narrative makes more sense—at least, according to the pattern established in the book of Judges—without 6:7-10 than it does with its inclusion. The interlard nature of 6:7-10 is further emphasized by the fact that 6:2-6 and 6:11-24 make sense without 6:7-10. The fact that v. 7a repeats 6b suggests that vv. 7-10 are a later interpolation. Block notes this, writing, “In fact, vv.11 ff. provide a much more logical sequel to vv.1-6 than the present paragraph.”<sup>8</sup> Gideon’s response confirms this, “But, sir, if Yahweh is with us, then why has all this happened to us?” (6:13). There is no mention of the prophetic appearance or the prophet’s explanation for the current situation, indicating that an earlier form of the narrative did not know 6:7-10.

Moreover, the reference to the “Amorites” makes little sense in the context of Judges 6-8, chiefly because the Amorites play no other part in the Gideon narrative, either before or after 6:7-10. Already the rabbis sensed the incongruity of the inclusion of the Amorites, explaining in *Daas Mikra* that the phrase “gods of the Amorites” was used as a collective name for the Canaanite nations.<sup>9</sup> Alternatively, Gray offers a diachronic explanation, writing, “this passage is a late insertion in the Gideon tradition, as indicated ... by the irrelevance of the assurance not to fear the gods of the Amorites (v.10) to the context of the Midianite situation.”<sup>10</sup> The presence of the phrase, found elsewhere only in Josh 24, suggests that it might be a later addition to the Gideon narrative.

Finally, formal features of the text also suggest that the material is supplemental.

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<sup>8</sup> Block, *Judges*, 254.

<sup>9</sup> Avrohom Fishelis and Shmuel Fishelis, *Judges: A New English Translation* (New York: The Judaica Press, Inc., 1983), 50.

<sup>10</sup> Gray, *Judges*, 284

The language of the verses is similar to that found in the book of Deuteronomy, as regularly noted. For instance, Bluedorn observes the correlation between curses and theological statements in the book of Deuteronomy and the opening of Judges 2, with which the verses found in 6:7-10 implicitly share a theological theme.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, “Judges 6:7-8 includes interlocking subordinate clauses, evocative of a late style of Hebrew.”<sup>12</sup> Becker also notes, “Zahlreiche sprachliche Indizien weisen in den spät-dtr Literaturbereich.”<sup>13</sup> The distinct linguistic evidence points toward the supplemental nature of 6:7-10. These verses know and draw on the language of Deuteronomy, indicating authorial familiarity with that book.

The prophetic rebuke suddenly and abruptly ends in v.10 with the words, “But you have not given heed to my voice.” The abrupt ending is surprising and, after the prophet speaks, nothing happens. Judges 6:11 begins as though the events of the preceding four verses did not occur. The unexpected insertion, the fact that it has little to do with the immediate story, and the linguistic and intertextual clues signal the supplemental nature of the verses, which only loosely sit in their immediate context. All signs point to 6:7-10 as late addition to the Gideon narrative.

### **1.2.3 Functions and Conclusions**

If 6:7-10 is a later addition to the Gideon narrative, as the linguistic and intertextual clues suggest, then what is the purpose of its insertion? How does the inclusion of these verses affect the larger narrative? Why has it been included and when?

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<sup>11</sup> Bluedorn, *Yahweh vs. Baalism*, 66.

<sup>12</sup> Niditch, *Judges*, 87, n. m.

<sup>13</sup> Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum*, 144.



First, to return to Nelson's claim that the verses "could drop out and not be missed," what would the Gideon narrative look like without it? Most obviously, if 6:7-10 disappears from the narrative, then some of the intricate literary ties between Gideon, the book of Judges, and biblical literature outside of Judges are lost. This is especially the case with the connection to the book of Joshua. Second, the inclusion of 6:7-10 directly introduces anticipation into Israel's relationship with Yahweh in both the Gideon narrative and the larger book of Judges. This introduction of anticipation into Judges 6 happens in several ways. First, the shared wording with the previous account in the Deborah narrative creates in the Gideon pericope the expectation that things will resolve in a similar way. When Deborah the prophet is introduced in 4:4, she immediately begins to remedy the problem facing the Israelites. She summons Barak and sends him out to defeat the Canaanite army. The prophet introduced into Judges 6 creates a false sense of hope that this episode will resolve in a fashion similar to the episode of Judges 4. With the inclusion of vv. 7-10, Judges 6 does not immediately meet this expectation. Instead of aiding the Israelites, the anonymous prophet rebukes them, reminding them that to call upon Yahweh is to invoke a relationship—specifically, a relationship that is a two-way street, and which requires action on the part of both deity and people. When the prophet speaks and then abruptly disappears, leaving the Israelites in their distress, the text crushes the expectation raised by his presence.<sup>14</sup> The insertion of the verses into Judges 6 thus serves as a reminder that not all prophets come to save, or bearing good news. In short, when the Gideon narrative includes 6:7-10, the story begins with a warning: not every lament by the Israelites results in Israel's immediate deliverance.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 50.

Scholars frequently comment on the lack of response by the people: the prophet comes, accuses, and then the Israelites fail to speak up—either to defy the accusation or to ask for forgiveness. The similarity between the scene in Judges 6 and the previous scene in Judges 2 once again creates an expectation. As with the similarity between Judges 4 and the prophetic appearance in Judges 6, the similarity between the words of the angel of Yahweh in Judges 2 and the words of the anonymous prophet in Judges 6 creates a false sense of hope. The reader expects this episode to resolve in a fashion analogous to the last: the Israelites will realize their wrongdoing, lift up their voices, and sacrifice to Yahweh in order to reestablish the balance of things. As in the previous scene, this expectation is not met. In Judges 6, the people do not respond.

For Wolfgang Bluedorn, 6:7-10 conveys the theme of the entire Gideon narrative.<sup>16</sup> According to Bluedorn, the entirety of Judges 6-8 (and Judges 9) is about “Israel’s apostasy and YHWH’s claim to be worshipped instead of the Canaanite gods,” which is expressed in the unnamed prophet’s rebuke.<sup>17</sup> The Gideon narrative, unlike its predecessors in the book, thus focuses not on the deliverance from the Midianites, but rather on Israel’s apostasy and disobedience towards Yahweh.<sup>18</sup> For Bluedorn, this is self-evident because the prophet does not address the Midianite oppression in his speech and never mentions Gideon.<sup>19</sup> Bluedorn argues that the issue of apostasy as discussed in the Gideon narrative is a new development in the book of Judges: according to him, the

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<sup>15</sup> Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 145.

<sup>16</sup> Bluedorn, *Yahweh vs. Baalism*, 69.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

stories of Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, and Deborah and Barak do not feature the theme of Israel's apostasy and idolatry, but focus instead on the act of deliverance.<sup>20</sup> The Gideon narrative, he continues, is different: it focuses not on the deliverance from the Midianites, but rather on Israel's apostasy and disobedience towards Yahweh.<sup>21</sup> Bluedorn contends that "the absence of any reference to a foreign god and the focus on Israel's general idolatry instead further points to the interpretation that the narrative deals with Israel's idolatry in general."<sup>22</sup>

There are several counter-arguments to Bluedorn's case that 6:7-10 defines the theme of the Gideon (and Abimelech) narrative. The most obvious is that the entire pericope can be removed from Judges 6-8 without significantly affecting the unfolding plot in any way. As demonstrated, 6:7-10 does not appear directly related to the Gideon account, and the Gideon account does not appear to know 6:7-10. Although the following material does take up the issue of other gods, it does this only in supplemental, secondary passages such as 6:25-32 and 8:33-35. Furthermore, these passages concern a specific god, namely Baal, and not "idolatry in general." If 6:7-10 were necessary for the developing plot, than it would mention Baal specifically, as the ensuing narrative does when issues of idolatry arise, rather than "the gods of the Amorites." The latter reference functions largely to connect Judges 6-8 to a broad number of other biblical narratives outside of Judges. In short, 6:7-10 is hardly necessary, much less does it define the theme of the Gideon-Abimelech account. The issue of idolatry—with Baal or otherwise—is a secondary addition to the text, largely confined to the perimeters of the narrative..

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 68-69.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 69.

Bluedorn is correct, however, in noting that the Gideon narrative itself “provides a new beginning in Judges.”<sup>23</sup> Although the focus of the Gideon narrative is not simply idolatry (and, besides, the book of Judges has already introduced the theme of idolatry in a number of ways, including most specifically in Judges 2), the Gideon narrative offers something new in the book. The distinctive nature of the Gideon narrative is already apparent in the amplified introduction in 6:1-6, in addition to the unique appearance of the reproachful prophet in 6:7-10. Something new is happening in Judges 6-8, something radically different from what precedes these chapters and radically different from what follows. For the first time in the book of Judges, the deity does not immediately answer the cry of the oppressed Israelites.

The passage in 6:7-10 is easily identifiable as a supplement to the Gideon narrative. It stands alone therein, sharing few features with the other passages in Judges 6-8. It is impossible to determine whether there was an original ending now missing from the present text, but it is quite clear that the ensuing narrative beginning in v. 11 did not know these four verses, which suggests that 6:11 begins a narrative that is older than 6:7-10. The literary horizon of 6:7-10 is very broad, and the passage links the Gideon narrative in quite concrete ways with the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy, as well as the introduction to the book of Judges (Judges 2) and the book of Joshua. The broad literary horizon of 6:7-10 suggests that the hand that added this passage wanted to incorporate the Gideon narrative into the larger trajectory of the Israelite story, beginning with the Exodus and including the narrative of Joshua 24.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 71.

Judges 6:7-10 is a late addition to the Gideon narrative. The insertion may be a response to 6:13, further emphasizing Gideon's invocation of the deliverance from Egypt already present in Gideon's speech in that verse, and further elaborating on it while also connecting the narrative to a broad range of other biblical themes and interests.<sup>24</sup> It is the most recent addition to the Gideon narrative, inserted after an author formed the stories about Gideon and placed them within the larger book of Judges. It shares no features with its immediate context, but knows the passages outside of Judges 6-8, both within the book of Judges and outside of it.

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<sup>24</sup> Groß, *Richter*, 370.

## Chapter 5 Gideon of Ophrah, Jerubbaal of Shechem

*The story begins, as we expect all the stories in Judges to begin, with the framework report of Israel's evil and the formulaic announcement that Yahweh handed them over to an enemy, in this case Midian.<sup>1</sup>*

*It is the framework scheme which first brings together what are timeless legends and thus completely unconnected episodes into a single epoch in the history of Israel, the epoch of the 'judges' of Israel, which precedes the epoch of the kings of Israel and Judah.*

*Consequently the epoch of the Judges is not a historical fact but a redactional construction.<sup>2</sup>*

### 1.1 Introduction

To discover what material in Judges 6-8 preserves the oldest fragments of the Gideon tradition requires working backwards from the final form of the text, removing passages that clearly emphasize similar themes or motifs, share related features such as vocabulary and syntax, or demonstrate otherwise that they belong to the same literary strata. The text-critical evidence from Qumran provides the starting place for such an exploration: 4QJudg<sup>a</sup> suggests that the pericope in which the anonymous prophet appears in the Gideon narrative is a later addition. Moving further back through the compositional layers is aided by the fact that, as Kratz notes, the “redactional passages dominate the structure.”<sup>3</sup>

Any reader familiar with the cyclical nature of the book of Judges knows precisely the so-called “redactional” passages dominate the intervening accounts of the

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<sup>1</sup> Butler, *Judges*, 196.

<sup>2</sup> Reinhard G. Kratz, trans. by John Bowden, *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 188.

<sup>3</sup> Kratz, *Composition*, 187.

heroes/deliverers from Israel's pre-monarchic days. In these passages, the Israelites do some (unspecified) evil in the eyes of Yahweh, resulting in the deity giving them into the hands of an enemy, following which the Israelites cry out to Yahweh for help. Yahweh then sends a deliverer to rescue them, and once the delivery takes place, the land has “rest (וַתִּשְׁקַט)” (3:11, 30; 5:31; 8:28). Subsequently, the divinely appointed deliverer dies, and the Israelites backslide into evil once more. Judges records these analogous opening “frameworks” in 3:7-11 (Othniel); 3:12-15 (Ehud); 4:1-3 (Deborah); 10:6 (the minor judges); 11:1 (Jephthah) and 13:1 (Samson), although the latter only contains parts.<sup>4</sup>

The intervening material in the central portions of the book of Judges (chapters 2-16), while hardly homogenous, shares in the general depictions of diverse and often imperfect heroes/deliverers. At first glance, the various, individual narratives appear to be held together only by this framework material. That there is, in fact, a significant amount of shared themes, ideas, and formal features within the various stories, serving to connect them with each other in more ways than simply the framework. The various connections will be explored in the “Literary Horizons” portions of each chapter devoted to the compositional history of the text. Although Greenspahn demonstrates that the framework is not as unified as it first appears, it is nevertheless possible to cull from the edges of the Gideon territory some basic framework verses that it shares with some of the other judges' accounts.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Frederick E. Greenspahn, “The Theology of the Framework of Judges,” *VT* 36, 4 (1986): 389. Greenspahn suggests that the incomplete nature of the Samson narrative might mean that it was not part of the original “book” or that its incompleteness “signals the cycle’s end and the coming of a new period” (389).

<sup>5</sup> Greenspahn, “The Theology of the Framework,” 388.

These framework elements are like “signposts,” found in each of the stories of the major heroes/deliverers in the book. The signposts inform the reader where they stand in the unfolding pattern of the book. Each of the central hero/deliverer accounts contains (more or less) this same basic material, allowing the reader to ascertain where they are in the topographical world created by the book. The reader can thus ask certain basic questions based on the predictable pattern: Have the Israelites sinned yet? Has Yahweh delivered them into the hands of an enemy? Have the Israelites cried out for help? Has Yahweh appointed a deliverer? The answer to these questions assures the reader that they know where they are in the predictable pattern of the book of Judges, while changes in the pattern signal that something new is occurring in the terrain.

## 1.2 Judges 6:1-6<sup>6</sup>

**<sup>1</sup> The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and Yahweh gave them into the hand of Midian for seven years. <sup>2</sup> The hand of Midian prevailed over Israel,** and because of Midian the Israelites made for themselves hiding places in the mountains, caves and strongholds.

<sup>3</sup>For whenever the Israelites put in seed, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the Easterners would come up against them.

<sup>4</sup> They would encamp against them and ruin the produce of the land, until Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel, and no sheep or ox or donkey. <sup>5</sup> For they and their livestock would come up, and they would even bring their tents, as thick as locusts; neither they nor their camels could be counted; so they destroyed the land as they came in. <sup>6</sup> Then Israel was laid very low because of Midian,

**and the Israelites cried out to Yahweh for help.**

Judges 6:1-6 sets the scene for the ensuing narrative, recording how the Israelites have done evil in the eyes of Yahweh, with the predictable consequence of Yahweh

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<sup>6</sup> As noted in Chapter 1 (cf. pp. 40-41), the discussion of each pericope will begin with a stratification table, in which the bold face indicates the oldest stratum, and the indentation signifies later additions. I will outline the proposed strata in further detail in the “Functions and Conclusions” sections and in the more general conclusions provided at the end of each chapter.



giving them into the hand of an enemy, and, following the subsequent oppression, the Israelites crying out to Yahweh for help. Reading these opening lines, readers know precisely (or, they think they know) where they are now located within the pattern of the book of Judges: Yahweh will appoint a hero/deliverer to end the Midianite oppression. Following the previous tales of Othniel, Ehud, and Deborah and Barak, the plot of the overarching book appears predictable. However, the introduction found in 6:1-6 contains several surprises in the expected pattern, both because the introduction lacks the anticipated “again” (וַיִּסְפֹּר) found in the other openings and because 6:1-6 contains a significant expansion of the previous iterations of the pattern.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.2.1 The Literary Horizon of Judges 6:1-6

That the various stories comprising the bulk of the book of Judges follow an easily identified, recurring four-fold pattern is now a commonplace. In order to understand how 6:1-6 both conforms to the pattern and diverges from it, it is necessary to examine the literary horizon of the passage. In other words, what other territories from the book of Judges—and and beyond—does the beginning of Judges 6 know?

Scholars regularly label the short episode concerning the character Othniel, recounted in 3:7-11, as the “normal” judge’s cycle; that is, a fourfold series of events that conforms to the aforementioned pattern without variation. Judges 3:7-11 reads:

The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, forgetting Yahweh their God, and worshiping the Baals and the Asherahs. Then the anger of Yahweh burned against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram-naharaim. The Israelites served Cushan-rishathaim eight years. Then when the Israelites cried out to Yahweh, Yahweh

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<sup>7</sup> Scholars regularly comment on the expanded nature of 6:1-6. For various examples, see Auld, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 161; Assis, *Self-Interest*, 17-21; Bluedorn, *Yahweh vs. Baalism*, 59-61; Moore, *Judges*, 177, etc.

raised up a deliverer for the Israelites, who delivered them, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. The spirit of Yahweh came upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and Yahweh gave King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram into his hand, and his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. Then the land was quiet for forty years and Othniel son of Kenaz died.

With the four-fold formula in mind, it is easy to separate the strata of material in the Gideon narrative that resembles 3:7-11: specifically, 6:1-2a, 6b, 34; 8:28, and 32. Judges 6:1-2a records Israel's wrongdoing (also an unspecified "evil" in the sight of Yahweh) and the punishment of the people by the deity (in 6:1 Yahweh gives them into the hands of the Midianites). The beginning of the Gideon narrative ties the story into the larger framework of Judges especially through 6:1, when Yahweh gives the Israelites into the "hands" of the Midianites. As Amit notes, "While the phrase 'sold/gave into the hand of' runs like a thread throughout the book," the number of times it appears in the Gideon cycle is striking.<sup>8</sup> In 6:6b the Israelites cry out to Yahweh for help. In 6:24, Yahweh imbues Gideon with his spirit, and in 8:28 and 32 the text reports that the land has rest and Gideon dies. It seems therefore that terrain of 6:1-2a, 6b is the same as the other introductory formulas, as are the closing verses similar to other endings.

### 1.2.2 Bumps in the Terrain

The opening verses of the Gideon narrative (6:1-6), with its significantly expanded character, often leads to scholarly postulation that 6:1-2a, 6b contain the original opening, while 6:2b-6a represents an expansion of the original framework material. However, a closer examination of the material in 6:1-6 suggests that the verses are both different in some respects from the other opening framework elements in the

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<sup>8</sup> Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 265.

book, and that 6:2b-6a do not stem from the same hand. Several internal bumps in the terrain hint at the composite nature of the pericope.

The first bump in the terrain occurs in the opening of the chapter, “The Israelites did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh, and Yahweh sold them into the hands of the Midianites” (6:1). Unlike the other, analogous openings to the various stories about the major judges, 6:1 lacks the “again” or “to continue” in the opening formula concerning the unspecified evil (cf. the use of  $\eta\sigma\iota$  in 3:12; 4:1; 10:6; 13:1). Early rabbinic commentators noticed the lack of  $\eta\sigma\iota$  here, with Rashi explaining that its absence was because “with this [Deborah’s song], they were forgiven for all they had done”; in other words, here at the beginning of Judges 6, the Israelites began again with a clean slate.<sup>9</sup>

The differences between the opening of the Gideon narrative and the other similar openings in the book of Judges continue. Unlike its counterparts, 6:1-6 is detailed, a fact that creates more uneven terrain in the land. The passage specifies the nature of the oppression and ties it to the agricultural life of Israel, adds a verse explaining that the Israelites were forced to hide themselves, names not one but three enemies, and includes a metaphor, noting that the enemy force was as “numerous as locusts.” Additionally, 6:2-4 includes replications of various items, hinting at redactional expansion: three hiding places (“mountains, caves, and secluded places”), three enemies (“Midianites, Amalekites, and the Easterners), and three animal groups affected (“sheep, ox, and donkey”).

In addition to the unusual detail, the verb tenses within the pericope hint at the composite nature of the material. Judges 6:3 uses the perfect, while 6:4 switches to the

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<sup>9</sup> Midrash Tehillim 18:6.

imperfect.<sup>10</sup> The bump created by the use of different verbal tenses in vv.3-4 is perhaps the most significant clue in the text:

והיה אם־זרע ישראל ועלה מדין ועמלק ובני־קדם ועלו עליו  
ויחנו עליהם וישחיתו את־יבול הארץ עד־בואך עזה ולא־ישאירו מחיה בישראל ושה ושור וחמור

In v. 3, the text reads, “Whenever Israel had sown, Midian and Amalek and the Easterners used to come up, and they used to come up against it,” while v.4 reads, “Then they encamped against them and they ruined the produce of the land, as far as Gaza, and left no sustenance in the land, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey.” Judges 6:5 continues in the imperfect, leaving only 6:3 in the imperfect. The use of different tenses suggests that v.3 derives from a different authorial hand than the verses immediately surrounding it and .is a later addition

### 1.2.3 Functions and Conclusions

An examination of 6:1-6 yields the following conclusions: 6:1-2a, 6b are “frame” elements, usually attributed to the “Dtr,” and were not part of the original Gideon narrative. In the quest to divide the Gideon narrative into its original pericopes and the secondary additions, 6:1-2a and 6b fall into the latter category.

The intervening material found in 6:2b, 4-6a may have belonged to the earlier Gideon narrative and a later author simply provided the outer framework now found in 6:1-2a and 6b. Alternatively, and more likely, a later editor created (or at least greatly expanded) 6:2b-6a and attached it to what follows in the remainder of Judges 6-8. The subtle reference to the Exodus tradition in 6:5 supports this assumption. Judges 6:3, however, is likely the latest addition to the pericope. Its secondary status is indicated both

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<sup>10</sup> Moore, *Judges*, 178.

by the use of the perfect tense, which is without parallel in the immediately surrounding material, and because of the inclusion of “Amalek and the Easterners,” which expands the enemy threat from just the original Midianites (cf. 6:33a; 7:12; 8:10) and is widely regarded as a later addition to the text.<sup>11</sup>

The result of the expansions in 6:1-6 is that the Gideon narrative noticeably stands out within the book of Judges: something new and different is occurring within Judges 6-8, signified by the lengthy introduction.

### 1.3 Judges 6:25-32

<sup>25</sup> That night Yahweh said to him, “Take the young bull of the head of cattle which belongs to your father, the second bull seven years old, and tear down the altar of the baal which belongs to your father and cut down the asherah that is beside it <sup>26</sup> and build an altar to Yahweh your god upon (the) top of this stronghold in the proper order and take the second young bull and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the asherah which you cut down. <sup>27</sup> And Gideon took ten men from his servants and he did as Yahweh spoke to him. But because he feared the house of his father and the men of the city to do it by day, he did it by night. <sup>28</sup> And the men of the town rose early in the morning, and, behold, the altar of the baal was torn down and the asherah that was next to it was cut down, and the second young bull was offered on the altar that had been built. <sup>29</sup> And they said, each man to his neighbor, “Who did this thing?” They searched and they sought out and they said, “Gideon, son of Joash, did this thing.” <sup>30</sup> Then the men of the town said to Joash, “Bring out your son so that he may die because he tore down the altar of the baal and because he cut down the asherah that was next to it.” <sup>31</sup> But Joash said to all who stood against him, “Will you contend for the baal? Will you save him? Whoever contends for him, he shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god he will contend for himself because his altar was pulled down.” <sup>32</sup> On that day they called him Jerubbaal, saying, “Let the baal contend with him because he pulled down his altar.”

After removing 6:1-6 from the map, the next pericope sits in 6:25-32, the second of the two altar stories in the Gideon narrative (the first is in the material immediately preceding it [6:11-24]). The scene in 6:25-32 is without parallel in both the Othniel pericope and the other narratives about the major judges that include the so-called

<sup>11</sup> Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum*, 143; Groß, *Richter*, 369; Soggin, *Judges*, 110.

framework material, but scholars regularly attribute 6:25-32 to the same hand that they claim provided those: the “Dtr.” For example, Kratz writes, “But the zeal of Gideon for Yhwh and against Baal in 6:25-32, which was kindled by the altar building in 6:11-24 and the battle cry ‘For Yhwh and for Gideon’ in 7:8, 20 and prompted the name Jerubbaal in 9:1f. can hardly have been sparked off outside the Deuteronomistic book of Judges.”<sup>12</sup> For this reason, I will consider 6:25-32 with the other materials from the Gideon narrative that largely conform to the standard framework elements.

The scene is thus: Yahweh commands Gideon to tear down his father’s Baal altar, along with the Asherah next to it, and to build in their place an altar to Yahweh. Gideon goes with ten of his servants to do as commanded, but by night because he “was too afraid of his family and townspeople to do it by day” (6:27). The townspeople arise the next morning, see the destruction, search out the responsible party, and upon discovering it was Gideon call for Joash to bring out his son so that he can die. However, Joash defends Gideon, while also calling into question Baal’s power: “Will you contend for Baal? Or will you defend his cause? Whoever contends for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been pulled down.” The narrator then reports that “Therefore on that day Gideon was called Jerubbaal, that is to say, ‘Let Baal contend against him,’ because he pulled down his altar” (6:32).

### **1.3.1 The Literary Horizon of Judges 6:25-32**

The edges of the terrain created by 6:25-32 touch a broad range of other biblical territories, both within the book of Judges and outside of it. Such rich intertextuality

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<sup>12</sup> Kratz, *Composition*, 203; I will consider 6:11-24 and 7:8 and 20 in the ensuing pages.

suggests that the passage belongs to a supplemental stratum of material; in other words, it was added by a redactor familiar with a wide range of other biblical texts. However, within the Gideon narrative itself, 6:25-32 fits only loosely with the preceding altar story in 6:11-24 via the redactional phrase בלילה ההוא, “that night” at the start of v.25.<sup>13</sup>

Otherwise, the narrative in 6:25-32 does not address the question of why Gideon is building yet another, second altar to Yahweh (cf. 6:24). Yet the narrative does introduce a central *Leitwort* of the Gideon narrative ירא, “to fear,” providing a brief glimpse into the inner-workings of the protagonist’s mind and connecting the verse to the other places the verb appears in the narrative.

The most obvious literary connection between 6:25-32 and the book of Judges is with the story of Abimelech, Gideon’s son, which follows in Judges 9. The altar story in 6:25-32 introduces into the narrative for the first time the idea that Gideon is the same person as Jerubbaal, the named father of Abimelech. In 6:25-32, Gideon destroys, at the behest of Yahweh, the Baal altar in his hometown of Ophrah. Judges 6:32 reports, “Therefore on that day, Gideon was called Jerubbaal, that is to say, ‘Let Baal contend against him, because he pulled down his altar.’” This second name for Gideon occurs only four times in Judges 6-8 (6:32; 7:1; 8:29; 8:35), but subsequently nine times in Judges 9, where the name Gideon is never used. The only places explicitly linking the two names are within the main Gideon narrative, in 6:32; 7:1; and 8:35.

By explaining that Gideon was the same person as Jerubbaal, the pericope in 6:25-32 thus connects to several other biblical texts. Within the Hebrew Bible, there are references to Jerubbaal outside of the book of Judges, but never any specific references to

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<sup>13</sup> For “that night” as redactional, cf. Soggin, *Judges*, 123.

Gideon. Jerubbaal is mentioned once in 1 Sam 12:11 (“And Yahweh sent Jerubbaal and Barak, and Jephthah, and Samson, and rescued you out of the hand of your enemies on every side; and you lived in safety”) and another time in its distorted form in 2 Sam 11:21 (“Who killed Abimelech son of Jerubbaal?<sup>14</sup> Did not a woman throw an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died at Thebez? Why did you go so near the wall?’ then you shall say, ‘Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead too’”).<sup>15</sup> Jerubbaal, not Gideon, makes appearances in the broader biblical corpus.

Finally, the narrative in 6:25-32 shares several features with other biblical narratives. For instance, the narrative in 6:25-32 shares with the books spanning from Deuteronomy-2 Kings an interest in a specific orthopraxy; namely, the worship of Yahweh alone. The kind of ancient Israelite religion it rails against is routine, with Baal as the paradigmatic and stereotypical Canaanite deity that leads Israel astray (e.g., Deut 4:3; Judg 2:11; 3:7; 1 Sam 7:4; 12:10; 1 Kgs 18:18; 1 Kgs 22:53; 2 Kgs 17:16, etc.). It is precisely this sort of routine attack on Baal that ties the Gideon narrative to that of Elijah in 1 Kgs 18, which like 6:25-32 paints a portrait of the Canaanite deity as powerless and impotent.<sup>16</sup> Wurthwein notes this, stating “Beide sind dtr Lehrerzählungen, die zeigen, daß Baal nicht Gott ist, wie hier durch Gideon, dort durch Elija bewiesen wird.”<sup>17</sup>

In sum, 6:25-32 is a text with a broad literary horizon, both within the book of Judges and outside of it. It unites the stories of Gideon and Abimelech through the name

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<sup>14</sup> Hebrew ירבושׁב, where the Baal element of Gideon’s new name is replaced by the Hebrew בִּשְׁת, meaning “shame.” Thus Gideon’s name is recorded as “Jerubbesheth” instead of “Jerubbaal,” meaning, “Let shame contend.” This change reflects later unease with a name containing a Baalistic theophoric element.

<sup>15</sup> Auld, “Gideon,” 264.

<sup>16</sup> Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum*, 160.

<sup>17</sup> Wurthwein, *Studien zum Deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk*, 15.



and figure of Jerubbaal, and knows the prevailing rhetoric against Baal found throughout the territory of Deut-2 Kgs, including the Elijah narratives with their focus on Baal worship and portraying the Canaanite deity as impotent. The combination of such intertextuality suggests that the passage belongs to a secondary stratum of material within the Gideon narrative, one that is late enough to be familiar with a broad range of other biblical narratives.

### 1.3.2 Bumps in the Terrain

The presence of 6:25-32 interrupts the anticipated flow of the story, which, if following the normal judges pattern established by the Othniel pericope, would continue from 6:1-6 to 6:34 and then on to 7:1. As such, it creates a rather prominent bump in the terrain. Furthermore, 6:25 seems to know the story from 6:11-24 only peripherally, in the redactional inclusion of the phrase בלילה ההוא, “that night,” connecting Gideon’s dialogue with the deity from 6:11-24. Apart from that connection, however, the ensuing passage gives no indication that it knows its predecessor.

Additionally, textual issues in the passage may point to the work of more than one authorial hand. Scholars regularly comment on the problematic nature created by the various issues in vv.25.<sup>18</sup> In 6:25, the text indicates that there are two bulls: both פר and את-פר-השור. However, the narrative recounts the sacrifice of only one bull in 6:28. *Preliminary and Interim Report* proposes the following solution: the description of the second bull “indicates the quality of the only bull sacrificed.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, the *waw* in v.25

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<sup>18</sup> *Preliminary and Interim Report*, 2:89; for various explanations see Bluedorn, *Yahweh vs. Baalism*, 91-96; Butler, *Judges*, 186-187; Harlé, *Les Juges*, 142-143.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

should be understood as epexegetic, and v.25 should be translated as “take your father’s young bull, <that is> the second bull, seven years old.”<sup>20</sup> Yet Becker offers a different, and more likely, understanding of the issue: the second bull can be deleted as a scribal insertion, perhaps inspired by 1 Kings 18.<sup>21</sup> Not only does Becker’s explanation take into account the fact that the narrative utilizes routine elements about non-Yahwistic ancient Israelite religious practices, especially about Baal, that are strikingly similar to the scene of Elijah and the prophets at Mt. Caramel, but his explanation also fits with the general *Tendenz* of the Gideon narrative to expand. The original narrative may have known only one bull.

In addition to the problem of the number of bulls presented by the text, the beginning of Joash’s speech in v. 31 through the end of v. 32 is difficult to translate due to the wordplay on Gideon’s new name, “Jerubbaal.” The difficulty exists, in part, to the uncertain etymology of the appellation. The name, possibly derived from ירב, a form of ריב, means, “may Baal plead for me.”<sup>22</sup> Alternatively, the name derives from רבה, and so therefore means, “may Baal prove himself to be great.”<sup>23</sup> Either way, the meaning of Gideon’s new name is problematic: it privileges the Canaanite deity rather than Yahweh. The narrative tackles the problem inherent in the suspect name by providing a new interpretation for it in 6:32, where the narrator intervenes, explaining “Therefore on that

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum*, 160.

<sup>22</sup> HALOT, “ירבעל,” 2:434.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

day Gideon was called Jerubbaal, that is to say, ‘Let Baal contend against him,’ because he pulled down his altar.’<sup>24</sup>

The question of how to interpret best the use of the name Jerubbaal is a significant issue. What is most clear, even from the outset, is that this is the work of an author with a clear theological agenda.<sup>25</sup> The name Jerubbaal is theologically troubling, and therefore needs explanation. Thus, the rabbis explain:

‘Let Baal contend ...’ – Joash said this to deceive the people by implying that the Baal would contend for itself. Thus he convinced them that there was no need to pursue Gideon. Others explain that Joash actually meant that the Baal should *fear* Gideon (ירא בעל גידעון), not (ירב בעל), since ירב בעל has only one “beth”, rather than two. However, the people interpreted his comment as ירב בו הבעל, “Let Baal contend with him.”<sup>26</sup>

A more contemporary explanation is Smith’s: “The negative interpretation of the name as anti-Baal shows the tradents’ assumption that the theophoric element refers to the god Baal.”<sup>27</sup> The very inclusion of the name Jerubbaal and the altar scene in vv. 25-32 is revealing, because the scene is an attempt to explain an unambiguous theophoric element in the name: for the authors of vv. 25-32 the theophoric element is for the wrong deity. The fact that the name needs an explanation in the first place suggests that the Baal name is firmly rooted in a tradition or source that the author of the Gideon narrative felt compelled to use. Thus, with Smith, it seems appropriate to recognize that “Some proper

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<sup>24</sup> Judges 6:25-32 simultaneously functions as an etiology for the name Gideon. Gideon, meaning “Hacker” or “Chopper,” in this story pulls down the Baal altar and cuts down the Asherah beside it. Strangely, the expected Hebrew גִּדְעַ is not used, but rather בִּרַת.

<sup>25</sup> So Würthwein, who writes, “Diese Erzählung ist nach Terminologie und Inhalt durch und durch deuteronomistisch” (Würthwein, *Studien zum Deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk*, 15).

<sup>26</sup> Fishelis and Fishelis, *Judges*, 57.

<sup>27</sup> Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 45.

names with *Baal* as the theophoric element probably did refer to the god Baal, which would explain the redactor's alterations."<sup>28</sup>

In contrast, Guillaume claims, "Because the BS [Book of Saviors] only knew Gideon and Abimelech, radically opposing them, it was necessary to give Gideon a second name and two aetiologies of this name before Gideon could convincingly be Abimelech's father."<sup>29</sup> In short, Guillaume suggests that an author created the Jerubbaal name out of thin air. However, it is possible to nuance this argument, since introducing the name Jerubbaal into the narrative seems to cause more problems than it solves. Instead, it seems more likely that the problematic name is likely part of an earlier tradition of which an author of the Gideon narrative could not dispose. Becker explains, "Ein Bestandteil der Grunderzählung dürfte sicher alt sein. Es ist der Name "Jerubbaal", an dessen Entschärgung DtrH ja besonders gelegen war."<sup>30</sup> The text as it stands betrays the work (and, perhaps, reworking) of an author, evidenced by the explanation of Gideon's Baal name in v. 32. Nevertheless, it is possible that there are older elements underlying this reshaping that remained disconcerting to later tradents, and for this reason, an author extensively modified the older text.

The inclusion of the name Jerubbaal in the narrative, and the related manner in which an author molded the story to fit a different theological agenda, strikes at one of the key issues frequently discussed in synchronic readings of the text: the inconsistency with which both names for Gideon and of the deity are used. Final form readings of

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<sup>28</sup> Smith, *The Early History of God*, 46.

<sup>29</sup> Philippe Guillaume, *Waiting for Josiah: The Judges* (JSOTSup 385; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 55.

<sup>30</sup> Becker, *Richterzeit und Konigtum*, 158.

Judges 6-8 often focus on the use of names in the narrative, attaching much significance to the way in which Gideon/Jerubbaal and Yahweh/Elohim occur throughout, and thereby making claims for intentional literary artistry based on the employ of the names. Such synchronic readings warrant further consideration, especially because Judg 6-8 also uses two names for the deity: both “Yahweh” and the more generic “Elohim.”<sup>31</sup> That the narrative calls both the deity and the hero/deliverer by two different names raises two possibilities: (1) an author used the different names deliberately, in order to highlight themes or ideas in the narrative or (2) the names are evidence of the preservation of different traditions or the work of different authorial hands in Judges 6-8.

Recent synchronic scholarship consistently attempts to explain away the confusion caused by the duplication of names according to the first option. Thus, for example, 7:1 links the two names of the protagonist, with the little phrase ירבעל הוא גדעון, “Jerubbaal—that is, Gideon.” Rather than see in this a reflection of different sources or traditions now merged, Assis attempts to harmonize the confusion:

The use of both the names here indicates the internal tension related to Gideon’s struggle against the Midianites. When he set out for battle some saw him as Jerubbaal—a man who will be punished by the Baal; others saw him as Gideon—a deliverer set by God. This increases the tension prior to commencement of the combat: what will the results of the battle be and which expectations will be fulfilled?<sup>32</sup>

Thus, for Assis, the use of both names in the narrative is purposeful, and the intentional result of an author. However, Assis’ argument that the use of both names for the protagonist “increases the tension prior to commencement of the combat,” provoking the

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<sup>31</sup> The narrative uses Yahweh thirty seven times, but Elohim occurs only eleven times (in reference to the deity) within Judges 6-8.

<sup>32</sup> Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 57.

question, “what will the results of the battle be and which expectations will be fulfilled?” can be questioned. The conclusion of the Gideon narrative contains considerable inconsistency in the use of the names therein: 8:29 only mentions “Jerubbaal,” 8:30, 32, and 33 only identify “Gideon,” while 8:35 names both, “Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon).” According to Assis, the use of Jerubbaal in 8:29 “is not fortuitous” but rather illustrates “that ultimately Gideon failed in his attempt to restore the people’s belief in God.”<sup>33</sup>

Yet there are several reasons why the conclusion of the Gideon narrative complicates an unambiguously negative reading of Gideon’s character. First, the narrative reports that Gideon dies “at a good old age” and is “buried in the tomb of his father Joash at Ophrah of the Abiezerites” (8:32). While Assis notes that the only other characters in the Hebrew Bible to die at a “at good old age” are Abraham (Gen 15:15; 25:8) and David (1 Chron 29:28), he then argues that the use of “Gideon son of Joash” in this passage should not be taken as a compliment since Joash is portrayed as a worshiper of Baal.<sup>34</sup> However, the use of “at a good old age” suggests otherwise, and there is no indication in the text that the phrase “buried in the tomb of his father Joash at Ophrah of the Abiezerites” is meant to be read negatively. Assis does note that many of the narratives about the kings report that they were buried with their fathers or ancestors. However, as Assis also notes, this is true of many important biblical figures, including Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 2:14), David (1 Kings 2:10), Solomon (1 Kings 11:43), Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:31), Abijam (1 Kings 15:8), and Asa (15:24). The phrase does not carry an unequivocally negative connotation if it applies to such lofty figures as David and Solomon as well as other, less reputable figures. Additionally, the book of Judges

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 113-114.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

also records that Samson was buried in the “tomb of his father” (16:31) with no editorial judgment. Furthermore, the report of Gideon’s burial (alongside the mention of his father’s name and his numerous progeny) bears a striking resemblance to the details usually associated with the so-called “minor” judges in the book. The implications of the narrative’s use of more than one name does not appear to be a subtle yet sophisticated literary attempt to guide the reader to acknowledging which deity “won” in these chapters. Instead, it seems that at some stage an author merged two different characters into one. Judges 8:32 positively evaluates Gideon’s tenure as a hero/deliver, despite any later additions that cast Gideon in a negative light. The concluding verse informs the reader that the Israelites “did not exhibit loyalty to the house of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in return for all the good that he had done to Israel.” Jerubbaal—linked specifically to Gideon—is, in the end, remembered “for all the good that he had done to Israel.”

To recapitulate: the presence of two names for the protagonist, introduced through the clever renaming story now in 6:25-32, does not appear to be an indication of deliberate patterning but rather a clear signpost that at some point in the compositional history of the Gideon tradition, an author merged it with a different tradition about a figure named Jerubbaal. The attempt to make the second name for the hero/deliverer more acceptable according to later theological agendas betrays the fact that the tradition about Jerubbaal was both older and indispensable, despite any embarrassing or theologically difficult ramifications there might be in keeping it and incorporating it into the Gideon narrative. As Auld explains, the scene “culminates in an explanation of the name Jerubbaal which is able with impressive sophistication to make a virtue out of the

problem inherent in any theophoric name compounded from a suspect *theos*, and overcome the embarrassment which in 2 Sam. xi 21 caused the name to be distorted into Jerubbesheth.”<sup>35</sup>

### 1.3.3 Functions and Conclusions

The most obvious function of 6:25-32 is to provide a link between Judges 6-8 and Judges 9 via the renaming of Gideon as Jerubbaal, while also creatively redefining the meaning of the name Jerubbaal and thus eliminating its problematic nature. Additionally, the story functions to augment Gideon’s personality change, from *gibbôr hayil* to timid, hesitant hero (and eventually back to *gibbôr hayil* again). Gideon as emerging hero becomes evident in the subsequent verses, which depict the troops rallying around him (6:33-35). A secondary function addresses the issue of idolatry introduced primarily as a means to identify Gideon as Jerubbaal and to explain the suspect theophoric element in the name. In other words, idolatry and Baal worship figure in the narrative primarily because an author needed to explain the name Jerubbaal.<sup>36</sup>

In sum, 6:25-32 is a later addition to the Gideon narrative. The primary purpose of the passage is to connect Gideon with Jerubbaal, the father of Abimelech, and thus to form a bridge between the Gideon material now in Judges 6-8 and the Abimelech material which follows in Judges 9. Elements of this material might be older, but it is difficult to decide with any certainty. This is especially the case because of the stereotypical character of the ancient Israelite religion depicted in 6:25-32. The real focus of the narrative pericope is in the renaming scene of v.32, not in the idolatry.

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<sup>35</sup> Auld, “Gideon,” 264.

<sup>36</sup> This is contra Bluedorn’s argument.



#### 1.4 Judges 6:33-35

<sup>33</sup> **Then all the Midianites**

and the Amalekites and the Easterners

**assembled together, and crossed over and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel.**

<sup>34</sup> **Then the spirit of Yahweh clothed Gideon; and he blew the horn, and the Abiezrites were called out after him.**

<sup>35</sup> Then He sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, and they too were called out to follow him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they went up to meet him.

Judges 6:1-6 provides the beginnings of the cyclical formula interspersed throughout the book of Judges, noting that Israelites did evil in the eyes of Yahweh and that they were subsequently sold into the hands of an enemy. Following the pattern in the Othniel, Ehud, and Deborah accounts, the reader next expects the text to record the appointment of a hero/deliverer by Yahweh, who the deity will raise up to aid the errant Israelites. However, the parallel appointment of such a hero/deliverer is delayed in the Gideon narrative until 6:34, where the text reads ורוח יהוה לבשה את־גדעון ויתקע בשופר ויזעק אביעזר אחריו, “And the spirit of Yahweh clothed (לבש) Gideon and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezerites were called out to follow him.” In the final form of the narrative, 6:34 and 6:35 now frame the typical appointment scene.

The scene is set thus: 6:33-35 finally returns the narrative to the problem at hand, that of the looming enemy threat originally introduced into the narrative in 6:1. The text records that “all the Midianites and Amalekites and the Easterners” crossed the Jordan and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. Next, the spirit of Yahweh “clothes” Gideon, he sounds his horn, and the Abiezerites come out to follow him. Messengers are then sent throughout Manasseh, who also comes out to follow him, as do Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali.

#### 1.4.1 The Literary Horizon of Judges 6:33-35

Judges 6:33-35 once again expands the enemy forces beyond simply Midian, but scales back the Israelite forces to a local purview beyond Gideon's own clan but not as broad as "all Israel." The inclusion of the Amalekites and the Easterners in v. 33, the summons to all of Manasseh in v. 34b, and the tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali in v. 35 indicate a wider focus than simply Gideon's own clan, although the verses do not share the pan-Israelite focus found at the beginning of the narrative in 6:1. This seems to confirm Auld's explanation, "The introductory formula (6:1) may have talked about "Israel", but the conflict when it happens involves a fairly locale muster."<sup>37</sup> Within the immediate context of the Gideon narrative, 6:33 most obviously sounds like 6:3 and 7:12, the only other two verses in Judges 6-8 that describe the enemy coalition as consisting of the Midianites, Amalekites, and the Easterners.

In v. 34, the text notes, "the spirit of Yahweh clothed (לִבַּשׁ) Gideon." The verse shares an unusual combination of language with both other hero/deliverer accounts within the immediate context of the book of Judges as well as with narratives from outside the book. Most immediately, various formulations of the phrase "spirit of Yahweh" introduce the means by which the deity appoints the heroes/deliverers throughout the book, including Othniel (3:10) before Gideon, and Jephthah (11:29) and Samson (13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14) after him. However, the various formulations of the appointments provide internal evidence that the passages may not all stem from the same hand. Specifically, the verb used in conjunction with the phrase "spirit of Yahweh" is

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<sup>37</sup> Auld, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, 170.

inconsistent in the different passages. Both the Othniel and Jephthah narratives simply use the Hebrew היה, reading, “the spirit of Yahweh came (ותהי) upon him” in 3:10 and “the spirit of Yahweh came (ותהי) upon Jephthah” in 11:29. In the Samson narrative, however, “the spirit of Yahweh” comes to Samson in two ways, both times using a different verb. In 13:25 the text reads ותחל רוח יהוה לפעמו, “the spirit began to stir in him,” while in three other places the text reads ותצלח עליו רוח יהוה, “the spirit of Yahweh rushed on him” (14:6, 19; 15:14).

Additionally, while the notion of the “spirit of Yahweh” somehow taking hold of a hero/deliverer is a frequently occurring event within the book, the exact phrase employed in 6:34 occurs only twice more in the biblical corpus, both times outside of the book of Judges. In 1 Chron 12:19 (English 12:18) the text records ורוח לבשה את-עמשי, “And the spirit clothed (לבשה) Amasai.” Additionally, 2 Chron 24:20 reads ורוח אלהים לבשה את-זכריה, “And the spirit of God clothed (לבשה) Zechariah.” Thus, while the idea of the “spirit of Yahweh” clothing Gideon and empowering him shares a motif employed in some of the other stories of the major heroes/deliverers within the book of Judges, the manner in which the act occurs to Gideon is idiosyncratic in Judges, found elsewhere only in Chronicles.

Finally, 6:35 shares an interest with the larger book of Judges; namely, in demonstrating that the various tribes worked in conjunction as they attempted to conquer the land in the pre-monarchic period. In short, 6:35 shares the theme of the extensive participation of neighboring tribes in local battles: not just Gideon’s immediate clan comes out to fight, but also the tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali.

### 1.4.2 Bumps in the Terrain

Read within the larger context of Judges 6, there are several bumps within the terrain that point to the secondary nature of the verses, eliminating them from the oldest material of the Gideon traditions retained in Judges 6-8. The secondary nature of both 6:33 and 6:35 is especially apparent, while 6:34 clearly belongs to the same strata of material normally labeled as the “framework.”

First, 6:33 is similar to 6:3, which reads, “For whenever the Israelites planted seed, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the Easterners would come up against them.” Only in 7:12 are all three members of the enemy coalition mentioned again. That all three occur only in these three verses suggests that perhaps 6:3, 33, and 7:12 stem from the same authorial hand. All three verses share in an amplification of details, increasing the size of the enemy forces to the point of hyperbole. Additionally, 6:3 stands out from its immediate context in the introductory verses because of its use of the perfect tense, an indication perhaps of its later insertion.

Perhaps most significant is the fact that while 6:33-35 finally returns the Gideon narrative to the problem at hand—namely, the looming enemy threat introduced in 6:1-3—these verses do not share the pan-Israelite focus exhibited in the introduction to the narrative (cf. 6:1-6). Rather, 6:35 demonstrates that those affected are simply Manasseh and the immediate neighboring tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. Still, 6:35 has a wider focus than other verses in the narrative that only center on Gideon and his 300 men (cf. 7:16-22; 8:4-21).

The presence of 6:34, which imbues Gideon with the power of the deity, conforms to the general pattern of the book. After the Israelites do evil, Yahweh delivers

them into the hands of an enemy oppressor, they subsequently cry out to Yahweh, following which the deity raises up a hero/deliverer to come to their aid. Judges 3:10 records how this happened with Othniel before Gideon, while 11:29 depicts the same scene in the Jephthah narrative, and the Samson narrative includes the phrase an unprecedented four times in 13:25; 14:6, 19; and 15:14. Although each of the stories depicts the event in its own way, the presence in all four illustrates a general pattern to which the diverse narratives about Israel's early heroes/delivers conformed.

The bumps in the terrain created by the insertion of 6:33 and 6:35 illustrate how the Gideon narrative now shares in the tendency of Judges 6-8 to amplify, especially the presence and number of the enemy forces. Judges 6:35 also shares the larger book of Judges' interest in demonstrating the eager participation of various tribes, which counters the Gideon material that focuses only on Gideon and his 300 men as well as the verses about "all" Israel. The presence of 6:34, with its unique use of the verb *לבש*, both makes Gideon like other hero/deliverer accounts while, at the same time, setting him apart. However, the narrative creates another bump in that the Gideon story already contains an appointment scene prior to the conferral of power through the spirit of Yahweh recorded in 6:34: the lengthy call narrative in Judg 6:11-24, modeled closely after Moses' call narrative in Exodus 3.<sup>38</sup>

### 1.4.3 Functions and Conclusions

Judges 6:33-35 functions in three ways within the broader narrative of Judges 6-8. Most obviously, 6:34 illustrates how Yahweh imbues Gideon with his divine power in

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Norman Habel, "The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives," ZAW 77 (1965): 297-323.

(more or less) the same way as Othniel before him and Jephthah and Samson after him. However, because of the amplified, extended nature of the Gideon material in its final form, Gideon's imbuelement does not occur in the expected place within the plot. Instead, it appears to be the second time that Yahweh appoints Gideon as a hero/deliverer, following the first instance in 6:11-24.

Second, the addition of 6:33 to the narrative broadens the enemy threat: it is not just the Midianites poised on the edges of the territory of Manasseh, waiting to pounce on Gideon and his men, but also the Amalekites and the Easterners (cf. 6:3; 7:12). Finally, the second half of v.34, along with the whole of v.35, functions to increase the number of troops at Gideon's disposal, as well as to illustrate that in the Cisjordan multiple tribes are eager and willing to come to the hero's aid when called out for battle. The state of affairs will be drastically different once the Gideon narrative moves across the river and the story plays out in the Transjordan.

Finally, as a whole, the pericope functions as the necessary preamble to the battle. The reader now knows that Yahweh has imbued the hero with his power (by the typical means for the book of Judges) and the narrative finally returns to the looming enemy threat. Judges 6:34 is a signpost in the territory created by the Gideon narrative, which allows the readers to locate their position in the terrain of the book of Judges: Gideon now has Yahweh's power, and a battle scene will surely follow next (cf. 3:10).

The literary horizon of 6:33-35 indicates that these verses are largely secondary additions to the Gideon narrative. Both 6:33 and 6:35 nearly duplicate other verses, with 6:33 sharing in the interests of 6:3 and 7:12 to expand the enemy forces, while 6:35 echoes the book of Judges' larger interest in illustrating the enthusiastic participation of

the various tribes in the attempt to (re)conquer the land. Judges 6:34 is part of the so-called framework material, providing the necessary imbuelement of Gideon with the spirit of Yahweh, and thus paralleling the stories of Othniel, Jephthah, and Samson. However, the particular language employed therein shares more with the later book of Chronicles than with the more immediately similar passages in the Othniel, Jephthah, and Samson narratives.<sup>39</sup>

In sum, 6:33-35 consists of three different verses from three different layers of the literary tradition that now comprises Judges 6-8. Judges 6:34 is the earliest verse, stemming from the same hand that provided the framework material in Judg 6:1-2, 6b and 8:28 (the latter will be discussed in the following section). Both 6:33 and 35 are later supplements to the Gideon narrative, each of indeterminate nature, although most likely from before the pan-Israelite focus found in 6:1 (and therefore before the passage's incorporation into the book of Judges as it now stands).

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<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the stories of Othniel, Jephthah, and Samson all also contain what scholars frequently consider later supplements to earlier narratives. Biblical scholars regularly note that the pericope about Othniel is a construction designed to serve as the paradigmatic example of a tribal leader in the book of Judges by the exilic "Deuteronomists" (Römer, *The So-Called Deuteornomistic History*, 138). Additionally, various opinions regulate portions of the Samson narratives as late, perhaps even Hellenistic (Ibid.). Finally, the Jephthah narrative clearly exhibits features that expanded over time (Thomas Römer, "Why Would the Deuteronomists Tell about the Sacrifice of Jephthah's Daughter?" *JSOT* 77: 1998, 27-38). In sum, scholars regularly consider portions of all of the narrative that contain the phrase "spirit of Yahweh" in conjunction with some sort of imbuelement of power upon the hero/deliverer as additions to earlier texts. Additionally, scholars also regularly ascribe the phrase "the spirit of Yahweh" to the author (normally the so-called "DtrH") responsible for the framework elements. The combination of the aforementioned factors suggests that the framework material is a relatively late newcomer to the stories of the major judges.

### 1.5 Judges 8:28 -35

**28 Then Midian was humbled before the Israelites,**

and did not continue to lift up their heads.

**So the land had rest forty years in the days of Gideon.**

29 Jerubbaal son of Joash went to live in his own house.

30 Now Gideon had seventy sons, the issue of his loins, for he had many wives. 31 His concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he named him Abimelech.

**32 Then Gideon son of Joash died at a good old age, and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash at Ophrah of the Abiezrites.**

33 As soon as Gideon died, the Israelites relapsed and prostituted themselves with the Baals, making Baal-berith their god. 34 The Israelites did not remember Yahweh their God, who had rescued them from the hand of their enemies all around, 35 and they did not exhibit loyalty to the house of Jerubbaal—that is, Gideon—in return for all the good that he had done to Israel.

Following Yahweh’s appointment of a hero/deliverer, the pattern established in the Othniel pericope winds down: Othniel goes out to war, and Yahweh gives Cushan-rishathaim of Aram into his hand; and his hand prevails over Cushan-rishathaim. The land then has “rest” for 40 years, the divinely appointed hero/deliverer dies, and the Israelites backslide into faithlessness once more. Like the beginning of the Gideon narrative contained in 6:1-6, the conclusion of the Gideon account shows evidence of expansion, with the various closing elements established in the Othniel account scattered throughout 8:28-35.

Upon reaching 8:28-35, readers find themselves in a territory that contains some familiar signposts from the previous stories, but now these signposts stand further apart. The land has rest, signaling that the delivery successfully occurred (cf. 8:28), the hero/deliverer dies (cf. 8:32), and then the Israelites backslide, which brings the cycle fully around to its beginning (cf. 8:33-35). However, interspersed between these verses in



the Gideon narrative is a report describing Gideon's return to his own house and a statement on his familial relationships, including his progeny (8:30-31).

### **1.5.1 The Literary Horizon of Judges 8:28-35**

Judges 8:28-35 is related to the broader territory of the book in several ways. Verse 28, like many of the other narratives about the heroes/deliverers, contains the phrase "and the land had rest" (Judg 8:28; cf. Judg 3:11, 30; 5:31; Josh 11:23; 14:15; 2 Chron 14:1, 6; 1 Ma 14:4). The phrase, also paired with the niph'al of the Hebrew כָּנַח in 3:30 as it is in 8:28, is widely regarded as the closing formula of the editor responsible for the framework material surrounding the hero/deliverer stories found in the early chapters of the book of Judges. Yet similar to 6:1-6, there is expansion, contained in the addition of the phrase "and they did not continue to lift up their heads."

Judges 8:29 is notably uneven terrain, for only in this verse is Jerubbaal, and not Gideon, identified as the son of Joash: "Jerubbaal son of Joash went to live in his own house." The short verse thus links Jerubbaal, who will be important in Judges 9, to the patrimony of Judges 6: Gideon, and hence, Jerubbaal, is the son of Joash, resident of Ophrah. The presence of the verse helps to elucidate the confusing evidence surrounding Jerubbaal's geographical home: he is otherwise always associated with Shechem, but never with Ophrah, which is regularly associated with Gideon. With the addition of 8:29, Judges 6-8 now associates Gideon with two distinct geographical locations.

Next, the verses comprising 8:30-32, which name only Gideon, contain elements connecting Gideon, a "major" judge, to the "minor" judges. The general formula (at times slightly altered or modified) for the six minor judges more or less follows this pattern:

“After him (name and origins) judged Israel. He judged Israel for (specified number of) years. Then X (name) died and he was buried in (site).” At times, the formula also contains additional assorted details: the number of progeny, associated marriages, or the cities from whence the minor judge came. Though these closing verses in 8:30-32 lack a specified amount of time that Gideon “judged” Israel, these verses do share several elements with the minor judges’ formula found elsewhere in the book, including a report of the death of the protagonist and his burial.

In sum, the literary horizon of 8:28-35 is largely that of the larger book of Judges, specifically intersecting the Gideon account both with the material concerning the minor judges and, more significantly, with the Abimelech story that follows in Judges 9.

### **1.5.2 Bumps in the Terrain**

Navigating the territory that comprises 8:28-35 is not easy: the pericope contains signposts pointing in different directions, and pulling apart the intersecting, and often confusing, layers of the text is difficult. Only two of the verses—vv. 28, 32—align with the similar signposts that indicate the end of the repetitive pattern in the early chapters of the book of Judges: the land has rest, and the hero/deliverer dies. Yet in both of these cases within the Gideon narrative, the formula expands in comparison with other similar verses. Furthermore, the differences in v.32 are intriguingly similar to the end of some of the depictions of the so-called “minor” judges in the book.

In the Othniel pericope, the narrative ends with the following: “So the land was quiet for forty years. Then Othniel son of Kenaz died” (3:11). Like the preceding framework material from the stories of Othniel, Ehud, and Deborah/Barak, the Gideon

narrative also contains the Hebrew phrase ותשקט הארץ, “and the land had rest” (8:28; cf. Judg 3:11, 30; 5:31; Josh 11:23; 14:15; 2 Chron 14:1, 6; 1 Ma 14:4). The phrase is widely regarded as the closing formula applied by the author responsible for inserting the framework material into the traditions used in the early chapters of the book of Judges.<sup>40</sup> Specifically, scholars regularly attribute this verse to the so-called DtrH.<sup>41</sup> Its presence in the Gideon tradition is secondary, conforming the once independent material with the stories that now surround it in its larger context within the book of Judges.

Following the notice that the “land had rest,” the reader expects the next signpost to be the death notice of the protagonist. Yet it is precisely at this point that the closing features of the Gideon map become potholed, and the reader finds v.29 instead, “Jerubbaal son of Joash went to live in his own house.” The death notice of Gideon does not occur until 8:32; in its place, the intervening verses create a bridge between the foregoing material about Gideon and the ensuing material about Abimelech in the next chapter of the book. Only v. 29 identifies Jerubbaal, rather than Gideon, as the “son of Joash,” where otherwise simply Gideon is said to be Joash’s son (6:11, 29; 7:14; 8:13; 8:32). The result is that 8:29 appears out of context. Thus, Groß describes the verse as “einer seltsam unbestimmten, inhaltsarmen Bemerkung.”<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Moore observes, “the verse stands singularly out of place.”<sup>43</sup> The bump in the terrain is the result of attempting to fuse two separate traditions: one about Gideon of Ophrah, the other about

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<sup>40</sup> For other similar instances of כָּנַעַן, cf. Judg 11:33 and 1 Sam 7:13.

<sup>41</sup> Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 300; Moore identifies this conclusion with the pre-Deuteronomic book of Judges (Moore, *Judges*, 104); Soggin writes, “The conclusion has the Dtr chronology, v.28b, but otherwise, v. 28a, could well have been the conclusion of the original cycle” (Soggin, *Judges*, 160).

<sup>42</sup> Groß, *Richter*, 388.

<sup>43</sup> Moore, *Judges*, 233.

Jerubbaal of Shechem.

Judges 8:30-32 also appears more closely related to Judg 9 than to the preceding material about Gideon. Intriguingly, 8:30-32 also share certain characteristics with the minor judges' formula found in Judg 10:1-5, 12:8-15. Unlike v.29, these verses name Gideon twice without any mention of Jerubbaal, resulting in strikingly uneven ground. Most unusual about these verses, however, is their similarity to the various stories about the "minor" judges.<sup>44</sup> As noted, the general formula (at times slightly altered or modified) for the six minor judges essentially adheres to the following pattern: "After him (name and origins) judged Israel. X judged Israel for (specified number of) years. Then X (name) died and he was buried in (site)." Thus, for example, the record of the minor judge Jair found in 10:3-5 reads:

After him came Jair the Gileadite, who judged Israel twenty-two years. He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys; and they had thirty towns, which are in the land of Gilead, and are called Havvoth-jair to this day. Jair died, and was buried in Kamon.

The closing verses about Gideon/Jerubbaal found in 8:30-35 read:

Now Gideon had seventy sons, the issue of his loins, for he had many wives. His concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he named him Abimelech. Then Gideon son of Joash died at a good old age, and was buried in

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<sup>44</sup> The so-called "minor" judges include Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon and appear in Judg 10:1-5 and 12:7-15. According to Noth, Jephthah is the only figure who appeared in both of the traditions that the Dtr had to work with – the first being a series of stories from different sources which had already been collected before reaching the Dtr and the second a list of judges with only some minor details about their lives. These two traditions were combined "because they intersect at one point, namely in the figure of Jephthah. Undoubtedly Dtr. came across this character in a story of a tribal hero, one of a series of such stories. On the other hand, he certainly found him also in the list of '(minor) judges' and from this list took the information given in Judg. 12.7. It is very conspicuous that Dtr. finishes his account of Jephthah not as he usually does, by saying that there was 40 years of 'rest' after the victory of the hero concerned, but with details that follow the system used in the list of '(minor) judges': a statement concerning his six-year period of office, then the report of his death and burial place" (Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 70-71). For more on the minor judges, see Alan J. Hauser, "The 'Minor Judges' – A Re-Evaluation" *JBL* 94 (1975): 190-200; Richard D. Nelson, "Ideology, Geography, and the List of Minor Judges" *JSOT* 31.3 (2007): 347-364.

the tomb of his father Joash at Ophrah of the Abiezrites. As soon as Gideon died, the Israelites relapsed and prostituted themselves with the Baals, making Baal-berith their god. The Israelites did not remember the Yahweh their God, who had rescued them from the hand of all their enemies on every side; and they did not exhibit loyalty to the house of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in return for all the good that he had done to Israel.

Like the minor judges Jair (10:4), Abdon (12:14), and Ibzan (12:9) Gideon/Jerubbaal's progeny is specified (8:30). Additionally, like Tola (10:2), Jair (10:5), Ibzan (12:10), Elon (12:12), and Abdon (12:15), the narrative reports the death of the protagonist and his burial. Thus, the closing verses of the Gideon narrative share a great deal in common with the formula associated with the so-called "minor" judges.

Scholars generally regard the list of minor judges as the remnant of an earlier source used in the composition of the book of Judges.<sup>45</sup> Fragments of certain elements of the minor judges' formula appear in the conclusion of the Gideon/Jerubbaal narrative, including "Gideon had seventy sons ... and Gideon son of Joash died ... and he was buried ... in Ophrah."<sup>46</sup> However, the Gideon narrative is not unique in containing similar language to the minor judges' formula. Similar elements also occur in the narrative about Samuel in 1 Sam 7:15-17 and 25:1.<sup>47</sup> Nelson hypothesizes that the entire original list of minor judges did not survive, as attested by the elements in the Gideon narrative (as well as the Samuel narrative): in other words, there were additional characters in the primary list.

In short, the material in 8:29-35 constitute irregular terrain. It is difficult to parse out exactly what elements might be the creation of an author attempting to bridge the

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<sup>45</sup> Nelson, "Ideology, Geography, and the List of Minor Judges," 349-350.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 352, n. 8

Gideon narrative and the Abimelech narrative via a character named Jerubbaal, about whom some traditional material not unlike the minor judges formula remained intact. For instance, the mention of the concubine in Shechem and his son Abimelech may originally belong to a Jerubbaal tradition, and as such they may represent missing portions of the original minor judges list. At best, though, retracing the history of the pericope in order to identify an original Jerubbaal tradition is difficult.

Following 8:32, with its similarity to both the endings of the major judges' stories before it and the pericopes about the minor judges that follow, is 8:33-35, which report:

As soon as Gideon died, the Israelites relapsed and prostituted themselves with the Baals, making Baal-berith their god. The Israelites did not remember Yahweh their God, who had rescued them from the hand of all their enemies on every side;<sup>35</sup> and they did not exhibit loyalty to the house of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in return for all the good that he had done to Israel.

Even a cursory glance at these final verses of the Gideon narrative illustrate that the contents patently differ from the other closing framework materials about the major judges while the material also does not resemble the pericopes about the minor judges. Furthermore, the end of the Gideon narrative lacks the normal "and the Israelites again did evil in the eyes of Yahweh" formula, which does not appear again until 10:6. Instead, Judges 8 records that the Israelites clearly quickly lapse into apostasy (again) following Gideon's death.

Yet even the apostasy reported in 8:33 creates another unexpected bump in the terrain. That the text identifies a specific god (Baal-berith) as the subject of Israelite devotion is of particular note: nowhere else in the book of Judges is a particular god mentioned in the predictable apostasy of the Israelites. At times the text notes the more general "Baals and Astartes" (Judg 2:11, 13), the "Baals and the Asherahs" (3:7), and the

“Baals and the Astartes, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines” (Judg 10:6). Nonetheless, such passages name only emblematic figures for the kind of non-Yahwistic worship against which the so-called “Dtr” author rebukes, typical stock elements used throughout the book like the “Baal” and the “Asherah.” Elsewhere in the book, the Israelites simply do an unspecified “evil” in the eyes of Yahweh after the demise of the appointed hero/deliverer (cf. 3:12; 4:1; 6:1; 13:1).

The narrative that follows in Judges 9 concerning Gideon’s son Abimelech is anything but normal within the book of Judges, although when read in light of the end of Judges 8 it makes a certain amount of sense. Judges 9:4 explicitly mentions a specific god whom the Israelites worship; namely, the same god mentioned at the end of Judges 8: “They gave him [Abimelech] thirty pieces of silver out of the temple of Baal-Berith with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows, who followed him.” Ironically, the bump created at the end of Judges 8 stems from the attempt to connect seamlessly the Gideon narrative with the ensuing Abimelech narrative. In other words, the attempt to make a fluid transition between the heretofore-unrelated narratives, in which an author set up the worship of Baal-Berith at the end of the Gideon narrative to avoid incongruity when encountering the name of the deity in Judges 9, by its very inclusion creates incongruity. Yet the same author who inserted the scene in which Gideon becomes Jerubbaal (6:25-32) must have created the episode about Baal-Berith, thereby reshaping the final framework elements so that Gideon, who originally had nothing to do with Judg 9, is responsible for Abimelech’s flaws. Thus, scholars regularly attribute 8:33-35 to the so-called “Dtr.” Yet, as noted, what is expected after 8:28 is a recounting of the death of

the deliverer (found at the beginning of Judg 8:33) and then the familiar “and the Israelites again did evil in the eyes of Yahweh” (Judg 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). Boling, who places these verses at the beginning of his commentary on Judges 9, therefore rightly notes the connection between the end of Judges 8 and the subsequent chapter “After the statement, ‘The land was calm for forty years,’ in 8:28b, we should have expected something like 3:12, 4:1, and 6:1, a statement that the Israelites did evil. Indeed, that is the thrust of our unit, but it is differently formulated according to the nature of the case.”<sup>48</sup>

Finally, it is only here and in Judges 9 that the book of Judges offers an editorial evaluation of a hero/deliverer’s story (although, strictly speaking, Abimelech is neither of those things). The final verse in the Gideon narrative reads, “they did not exhibit loyalty to the house of Jerubbaal (Gideon) in return for all the good that he had done to Israel.” Likewise, the end of the Abimelech narrative in Judg 9:56-57 reads:

Thus, God repaid Abimelech for the crime he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers, and God made all the wickedness of the people of Shechem fall back on their heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham son of Jerubbaal.

Both Gideon/Jerubbaal and his son—alone out of all the characters in the book of Judges—receive judgment by the narrator, and the judgment proffered at the end of the Gideon narrative marks that pericope as something distinct and separate from the other narratives with their similar framework elements. Something different from simply the typical “Dtr” framework material is occurring at the end of the Gideon narrative in Judges 8: present are both elements from the typical framework ending and elements whose function is clearly to tie Gideon to Jerubbaal, and thus Judges 6-8 to Judges 9.

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<sup>48</sup> Boling, *Judges*, 169-170.



### 1.5.3 Functions & Conclusions

Navigating the territory created by 8:28-35 is no easy task, especially since the material serves multiple purposes within both the Gideon narrative and within the larger book of Judges. Verse 28 concludes the Gideon narrative according to the “typical” formula employed regularly by the book, but in an expanded form: the enemy is subdued and the land has rest, but also “they [the Midianites] did not continue to lift up their heads.” Verses 29, 30, and 31 all function to connect the Gideon narrative with the following narrative about the would-be king Abimelech, while also sharing many elements of the minor judges’ formula. Judges 8:32 contains the expected death notice of the hero, while also sharing some features with the minor judges’ formula, as well as linking Gideon to Abraham and David (“good old age”). Judges 8:33-35 introduce the expected apostasy, but also tie the narrative to the Abimelech story once again, as well as offering a heretofore unheard of evaluation of the hero/deliverer’s tenure: Gideon did טוב, “good,” for the Israelites.

Determining the compositional history of the last verses of the Gideon narrative is a convoluted process, and it is difficult to parse out the literary history of these verses precisely. Judges 8:29-31 clearly belongs to a stratum of the narrative that functions to tie the Gideon and Abimelech narratives together, as do vv. 33-35, while 8:28 and 8:32, though expanded in comparison, largely coincide with the normal concluding framework material of the book. The question remains as to whether the framework was added to an older Gideon tradition at the same time that the Gideon narrative and the Abimelech narrative were sutured together, or whether these two events happened at different times during the compositional history of the book of Judges. Similarly, it is also difficult to

ascertain the exact relationship between the Gideon narrative and the minor judges pericopes—or, even, whether it is instead the Jerubbaal tradition that belongs to the minor judges rather than the Gideon tradition.

## 1.6 Conclusions

Akin to the other stories about the major judges (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah and Barak, Jephthah, and Samson) in the book, the Gideon narrative includes various elements identifiable as parts of the “framework” material. Largely unique to the Gideon narrative, however, is how the author of the Gideon narrative either extensively expanded an older narrative or initially introduced into the book a much more elaborate form of the framework elements. Judges 6:1-2a, 6b contain the expected formula, but the intervening material is an amplified version of the usual opening formula. The conclusion of the formula occurs in 8:28 and 32, and in both verses, amplification is present. Not only is Midian subdued, but also “did not continue to lift up their heads,” while 8:32 provides additional details to accompany Gideon’s death notice. The expected appointment and conferral of the deity’s spirit occurs in 6:34, when the “spirit of Yahweh” clothes Gideon. Scholars regularly attribute these verses (6:1-6, 34; 8:28, 32) to the so-called DtrH. There are hints, though, as to the composite nature of even that stratum of material: 6:1-6 likely contains further additions (including v. 3 [cf. 6:33; 7:12]).

However, anyone familiar with scholarship on the book of Judges knows that these framework verses are not the only verses generally credited to the so-called DtrH. Scholars also regularly credit the same author who is responsible for the framework material with the pericope in 6:25-32 and for the concluding verses in 8:29-31, 33-35.

Mapping the compositional history of the Gideon narrative becomes more complex with these latter verses. Like the expanded introduction to the four-fold pattern found in 6:1-6, the notice of the protagonist's death is also expanded, including a description of Israel's immediate fall into apostasy, naming a specific deity to whom this apostasy is directed, and also offering an evaluation of Gideon's contribution to Israel's well-being. The addition of 6:25-32 and 8:29-31, 33-35 into the Gideon tradition bridges Judges 6-8 and Judges 9 through the transposition of the name Jerubbaal. The purpose of this later addition was to connect the Gideon narrative with the Abimelech narrative. The Abimelech connection may have occurred concomitantly with 6:25-32 and 8:29-31, 33-35, or it may belong to an independent layer of material. There are tantalizing hints about the formula routinely used for the minor judges and these last verses of Judges 8, but confidently charting out that territory solely on that observation is impossible.

## Chapter 6 Signs in Cisjordan

*The exchange of a sign ('oth) against a gift is what must establish Gideon's status as a gibbor. The sign is to mark him, provide him with the distinctive features that show, without a doubt, that he is the chosen one.<sup>1</sup>*

*The significance and importance of the appearance of signs and wonders are to strengthen the faith of the individual or the public. Signs and wonders thus serve proof of the power and supremacy of God and of the truth conveyed by his messengers.<sup>2</sup>*

### 1.1 Introduction

The so-called framework elements of the Gideon narrative exist largely on the periphery of the map the narrative creates, serving as signposts so that the perceptive reader knows where they stand in the formula that marks the larger territory of the book of Judges. Therefore, with these framework elements taken off the map, the questions become “what elements still remain on its surface?” as well as “do any of these elements reveal evidence of literary patterning, shared features, and/or treatment of ideas or themes that indicate that they are of the same piece?”

With 6:1-6, 7-10, 25-32, 33-35, and 8:28-35 removed from the map, the Gideon narrative still contains the following: 6:11-24, 36-40; 7:1-8, 9-15, 16-22, 23-24; 8:1-3, 4-21, 22-23, and 24-27. The most obvious theme that spans throughout many of the separate episodes is the “divine assurance motif” interspersed throughout 6:11-24, 36-40;

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<sup>1</sup> Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 102.

<sup>2</sup> Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 233.

7:1-8, and 9-15: the pericopes all center on the giving of divine assurance to Gideon.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2 Judges 6:11-24

**6:11** Now the messenger of Yahweh came and sat under the oak at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, and Gideon, his son, was beating out wheat in the wine press, to hide it from the Midianites. **12** The messenger of Yahweh appeared to him and said to him, “Yahweh is with you, mighty warrior.”

13 Gideon answered him, “Please, my Lord, if Yahweh is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, ‘Did not Yahweh bring us up from Egypt?’ But now Yahweh has left us, and given us into the hand of Midian.”

**14** Then Yahweh turned to him and said, “Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian—have I not sent you?”

15 He responded, “But sir, how can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.” 16 Yahweh said to him, “But I will be with you, and you shall strike down the Midianites, every one of them.” 17 Then he said to him, “If now I have found favor with you, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. 18 Do not depart from here until I come to you, and bring out my present, and set it before you.” And he said, “I will stay until you return.”  
Judg 6:19 So Gideon went into his house and prepared a kid, and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour; the meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the oak and presented them. 20 The messenger of God said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour out the broth.” And he did so. 21 Then the messenger of Yahweh reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes; and the messenger of Yahweh vanished from his sight. 22 Then Gideon perceived that it was the messenger of Yahweh. And Gideon said, “Alas, my Lord Yahweh, for I have seen the messenger of Yahweh face to face.” 23 But Yahweh said to him, “Peace to you; do not fear, you will not die.” 24 Then Gideon built an altar there to Yahweh, and called it, “Yahweh is peace.” To this day, it still stands at Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

<sup>3</sup> For a different but helpful exploration of the “signs” in the Cisjordan, cf. Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 222-266.

Judges 6:1-6 set the scene: the Israelites do evil in the eyes of Yahweh, Yahweh gives them into the hand of an enemy, and, following the subsequent oppression by the hands of the Midianites, the Israelites cry out to Yahweh for help. Judges 6:7-10, with the story of the unnamed prophet, is a brief, unexpected interlude in the normal progression of plot in the book of Judges. Thus, it is not until the reader reaches Judg 6:11-24 that the anticipated introduction and appointment of a hero occurs, and the reader following the signposts established by the Othniel pericope awaits a scene in which Yahweh imbues Gideon with his spirit (3:10). However, the episode in which the deity first commissions Gideon is quite different; the expected scene about the spirit of Yahweh does not occur until 6:34. In fact, in contrast to other hero/deliverer accounts, the introduction and appointment of Gideon in 6:11-24 is significantly longer than that of his predecessors in the book and markedly different from the heroes/deliverers that follow him. Indeed, it is an altogether new feature on the map created by the book of Judges.

The landscape in 6:11-24 looks like this: a messenger of Yahweh appears to Gideon, identified as the son of Joash the Abiezrite, in a place called Ophrah. There Gideon is beating out wheat in a winepress in order to hide it from the Midianite enemy. The messenger declares to Gideon both that Yahweh is with him and that he is a *gibbôr ḥayil* (גבור חיל). Gideon objects to the first declaration, moving the focus from himself (“with you”) to his collective community (“with us”). The messenger then speaks again, ignoring Gideon’s objection, and instead referring to Gideon’s strength (כח). The messenger commissions Gideon to go and deliver (ישע) Israel from the hand (כף) of Midian. Gideon continues his protests in a scene that is strikingly similar to Moses’ call narrative in Exodus 3. Yahweh himself (and not, now, a messenger of Yahweh) declares

that he will be with Gideon (כי אהיה עמך). Gideon responds by asking for a sign (איות), a request to which the deity acquiesces. Gideon then prepares a meal of a kid, unleavened cakes, and broth, and brings them out to the visitor. The messenger (first—and for the only time—of Elohim, and then again of Yahweh) reaches out his staff to touch the offerings, which are immediately consumed. The messenger then disappears from the scene. Gideon suddenly realizes with whom he has been speaking and fears for his life. He is comforted by the deity (“You shall not die”), and subsequently builds an altar, naming it “Yahweh-Shalom.” The passage concludes with, “To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites,” bringing the reader full circle to the beginning of the pericope: 6:11-24 both begins and ends at Ophrah.

### **1.2.1 The Literary Horizon of Judges 6:11-24**

Even a cursory reading of 6:11-24 suggests that the passage may have been influenced by a wide range of other biblical literature, including significant portions of the book of Judges outside of the Gideon narrative. The similarities between this passage and the stories of Jephthah and Samson, heroes who follow Gideon according to the chronology of events depicted within the book, are significant. Most noteworthy, however, are the echoes of the Moses story within 6:11-24.

Judges 6:11 opens with the announcement that an angel of Yahweh appeared in Ophrah, under the oak that belonged to a man named Joash of the Abiezerites as his son was beating out wheat in the wine press to hide it from the Midianite enemy. In Judg 6:12, the angel declares to Gideon, “Yahweh is with you, mighty warrior (גבור החיל).” The introduction to the Gideon account parallels the introduction to the Jephthah account via

the presence of the Hebrew designation גבור החיל: “Now Jephthah the Gileadite, the son of a prostitute, was a *gibbôr ḥayil* (11:1)” (גבור חיל). Only Gideon and Jephthah in the book of Judges share the title of *gibbôr ḥayil*.

Additionally, Gideon invokes the memory of the Exodus in v. 13, as he audibly doubts the presence of the deity in his current situation, a reference that links the Gideon and Jephthah narratives yet again. The book of Judges explicitly mentions Egypt in only a few other places: 2:1, 12; 6:8; 11:13, 19 and 19:30.<sup>4</sup> In 11:13 the king of Ammon claims that the Israelites, in their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, took his land from “the Arnon to the Jabbok and to the Jordan,” a charge that Jephthah denies in 11:16. In a book relatively devoid of references to Egypt, it seems unlikely to be a coincidence that the Gideon and Jephthah stories, which have so many other common elements, both refer to the Exodus.

Judges 6:11-24 also shares features with Judges 13.<sup>5</sup> In both the Gideon story and the introduction to the Samson narrative, a “messenger of Yahweh” appears; in the first account to Gideon alone, and in the second to Samson’s to-be parents.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the theophanies that occur in 6:11-24 and in Judges 13 are similar, with the scene in each passage following an analogous pattern. An offering is made to the divine messenger (6:17-21; 13:15), the messenger disappears with the flame of the altar (6:21; 13:20), and the human characters are subsequently afraid for their lives (6:22; 13:22). Apart from a brief note in the Song of Deborah (5:3), the only other mention of a “messenger of

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Judg 19:30 where the Levite speaks to “all the Israelites” when he sends his message about the death of his *pilegesh* and invokes the Exodus as a sort of rallying cry.

<sup>5</sup> Kratz, *Composition*, 215.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. 6:11;13; 2:1, 4; 5:23



Yahweh” in the book of Judges occurs in 2:1-5. The shared feature of the divine messenger, along with other similarities between the Gideon and Samson accounts surrounding the messengers, suggest that these two texts have a relationship.

According to Kratz, the original Samson narrative probably consisted of only 13:2, 6-7, and 24a.<sup>7</sup> A redactor then expanded the story so that the “man of God” became a “messenger of Yahweh” in 13:3-5, while the addition of 13:8-23 assimilated the encounter with the “messenger of Yahweh” with the beginning of the Gideon narrative in Judg 6.<sup>8</sup> Turning from Kratz’ hypothesis about the growth of the Samson narrative back to 6:11-24, permits the following observation: 6:11-24, as it now stands, is replete with miraculous events, including a divine messenger and speech from the deity himself. The pericope is radically different in tone from the later profane battle stories about Gideon that are present in Judges 7-8. In this way, the Gideon story seems very similar to the Samson narrative: both consist of older, profane accounts whose only introduction in the text as it now stands appear to be later additions. The evidence from the additions may indicate that the redactor of the Gideon narrative heavily reworked only the introductions to his sources, leaving intact larger segments of earlier, traditional materials.

Additionally, a “messenger of Yahweh” is also present in 2:1-5, the only other place besides the Samson and Gideon stories where a “messenger of Yahweh” plays a significant role in the book. While the מלאך־יהוה serves as a link between 6:11-24, 13:3-5, and 2:1-5, the latter is also the only remaining place in the book of Judges that invokes the Exodus. In 2:1-5 the messenger of Yahweh recalls the Exodus when indicting the

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<sup>7</sup> Kratz, *Composition*, 215.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Israelites (specifically, “all the Israelites” [אל-כל-בני ישראל] in 2:4) for their apostasy.

Gideon, too, focuses on all Israel in response to his divine messenger, asking “Please, my Lord, if Yahweh is with us, why then has all this happened *to us*? And where are all his wonderful deeds that *our* ancestors recounted to *us*, saying, ‘Did not Yahweh bring *us* up from Egypt?’”<sup>9</sup> As a result, 2:1-5 and 6:11-24 are connected not only by the presence of a מלואד-יהוה but also through the similar invocation of the Exodus with a pan-Israelite, rather than tribal, focus.

In sum, 6:11-24 contains material—like the presence of a messenger of Yahweh—that occurs in only a small number of texts in the book of Judges, signaling either that the Gideon narrative knew these other passages or that these other passages knew the Gideon narrative. The similar material in the stories of Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson appears on the edges of these stories, suggesting reworking of older material used throughout.

Most significantly, as scholars regularly note, 6:11-24 contains numerous similarities with the call story of Moses from Exodus 3.<sup>10</sup> Both Judg 6:11-24 and Exodus 3 involve the protagonist hiding from an enemy and working for a father/father-in-law, and both include the same word of endorsement (שלהחיד in Judg 6:14 and Exod 3:12). In each account the protagonist protests his election (Judg 6:16, Exod 3:11), and an assurance of divine help follows: “for I will be with you” (כי אהיה עמך) in Judg 6:16 and “for I will be with you” (כי-אהיה עמך) in Exod 3:12. Each scene includes a refusal on the part of the protagonist, claiming that they are not up to the task (Judg 6:15; Exod 3:11),

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<sup>9</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 51; Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 148

and both contain a request for a sign and its subsequent granting (Judg 6:17, Exod 3:12). Finally, both contain a story about a theophany accompanied by fire (Judg 6:22, Exod 3:6).

The similarities pave the way for the suggestion of three different possibilities regarding the relationship between 6:11-24 and Exodus 3, each of which affect the understanding of the compositional growth of the narrative. Gregory T.K. Wong thoroughly and helpfully explores the options in his article “Gideon: A New Moses?”<sup>11</sup> First, it is possible that the call narratives of Moses and Gideon are so strikingly similar simply because they both belong to the same type-scene.<sup>12</sup> Alternatively, it is possible that the author of the Moses story knew the Gideon story and intentionally alluded to it. Conversely, it is possible that the author of the Gideon story knew the Moses story and deliberately expanded the introduction of the Gideon account so that the protagonist of Judges 6-8 was unmistakably recognizable as Moses-like.<sup>13</sup>

As Wong notes, the first option is easily dismissed; the similarities are too many and too exact to attribute to type-scene.<sup>14</sup> Rather, the evidence points to the third option rather than the second, for three reasons.<sup>15</sup> First, the Gideon narrative clearly mentions the Exodus, both in 6:7-10 and in 6:13 (“Gideon answered him, ‘But sir, if Yahweh is

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<sup>11</sup> Gregory T.K. Wong, “Gideon: A New Moses?” in *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld* (eds. A. Graeme Auld, Robert Rezetko, Timothy H. Lim and W. Brian Aucker; VTSUP 113; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 529-546

<sup>12</sup> Auld, “Gideon,” 258; Daniel Block, *Judges, Ruth* (NAC 6; Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 253. 257; O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 148; Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, 148; and Gregory T.K. Wong, “Gideon: A New Moses?” from *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 530.

<sup>13</sup> Auld, “Gideon,” 258; Boling, *Judges*, 132; Wong, “Gideon,” 535.

<sup>14</sup> Wong, “Gideon,” 531.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 535-536

with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, “Did not Yahweh bring us up from Egypt?” But now Yahweh has cast us off, and given us into the hand of Midian.”).<sup>16</sup> Second, there are other similarities within the larger Gideon narrative to the Moses story beyond that of Moses’ call, as Wong outlines. For example, both texts use the same phrase for seeing the deity face-to-face: פנים אל-פנים.<sup>17</sup> Though the phrase also reminds readers of the story of Jacob in Gen 32:31, the Hebrew phrase פנים אל-פנים, “face-to-face,” also occurs twice in the Hebrew Bible in connection with Moses: Exod 33:11 and Deut 34:10. The only other time this phrase is used is in Ezek 20:35. Thus, the phrase closely links to the figure of Moses.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, Wong argues that the description of the enemy as being “as thick as locusts” in 6:5 (כדי-ארבה לרב) and 7:12 (כארבה לרב) summons the image of the plague of locusts that descends upon Egypt in Exod 10:1-20.<sup>19</sup> Finally, in 8:24-27, Gideon constructs a golden ephod, an episode that shares features with the Exodus story; namely, Aaron’s construction of the Golden Calf in Exod 32:1-6.<sup>20</sup> The widespread clues indicate that an author shaped the Gideon narrative after the Moses story from the book of Exodus, and not the other way around.

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<sup>16</sup> As Wong notes, “In fact, given the similarities between the two call narratives already noted, one cannot help but wonder if Gideon’s overt reference to the exodus tradition may not represent the author’s subtle invitation to his readers to continue to making comparisons between the present deliverer and the one who once brought Israel out of Egypt” (Wong, “Gideon,” 535). Wong’s point is an important one, but I would modify it and argue that the author is not making a subtle invitation, but a very overt and clear invitation for the reader to compare Gideon with Moses.

<sup>17</sup> Wong, “Gideon,” 536.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 536.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Thus, the similarities between 6:11-24 and Exodus 3 are clearly allusions. These allusions and the other similarities between 6:11-24 and biblical texts both within and outside the book of Judges suggest that authors of the pericope knew these other texts. The intersection of the various texts, and the Gideon narrative's dependence upon the Moses story, supports the idea that the *creatio continua* of Judges 6-8 persisted until relatively late in the period of biblical composition; in other words, the Gideon narrative in 6:11-24 presupposes the story of Moses as found in the book of Exodus.

### 1.2.2 Bumps in the Terrain

In addition to the connections with biblical literature from both within and outside the book of Judges, several other important issues surface upon a reading of vv. 11-24 that also indicate that the text underwent a growth process. Evidence of the reworking of the text is most noticeable in the considerable discrepancy concerning with whom Gideon is speaking. In vv. 11, 12, 21 (x), and 22 (x2) it is an "angel of Yaweh," in vv. 14, 16, and 23 it is Yahweh sans intermediary, and in v. 20 it is an "angel of God (Elohim)."<sup>21</sup>

Contained within the beginning of the pericope is the only introduction to Gideon to be found in Judges 6-8 (6:11, 12, and 14b).<sup>22</sup> The oldest elements introduce the anticipated, divinely elected hero, providing the necessary setting and background information for the older elements of the Gideon story that will follow: Gideon, the son of Joash the Abiezerite, is in Ophrah. A messenger of Yahweh appears to him, declares

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<sup>21</sup> This odd use of "Elohim" in the midst of a passage that otherwise uses "Yahweh" is suspect, suggesting perhaps that it stems from the same hand responsible for 6:36-40.

<sup>22</sup> Kratz adds 6:24b to the original Gideon narrative, but its similarity with 6:11 suggests that it is the work of a redactor (Kratz, *Composition*, 203).

him a *gibbôr hayil*, and commissions him to deliver Israel from Midian.

Several points of tension and correspondence between the pericope and its immediate and broader contexts illustrate how Gideon's introduction sits awkwardly in its current setting. First, this passage lists only the Midianites as an enemy of Israel (vv. 11, 13, 14), without the addition of the Amalekites and the Easterners (6:3, 33; 7:12), suggesting that it may stem from a different hand than that responsible for the passages that list all three. Second, the pericope contains the first of two altar stories in the Gideon narrative, a fact that is significant because the two stories, though side by side, do not appear to know the other. The second altar story detailing the destruction of a Baal altar that belongs to Gideon's father Joash and the construction of an altar to Yahweh in its place immediately follows in vv. 25-32. A redactor loosely linked the two accounts by the inclusion of the phrase *ויהי בלילה ההוא* in 6:25a, but otherwise the passages make sense without each other. Finally, 6:11-24 is concerned with the deliverance of "Israel" as a whole (v.14), rather than with the deliverance of just a tribe or small federation of tribes as is most of the Gideon narrative.<sup>23</sup> Scholars regularly observe that this "pan-Israelite" concern is a later addition to narratives that comprise the book of Judges.<sup>24</sup> The combination of these three factors yields the conclusion that an author expanded the original elements of Gideon's introduction in 6:11-24.

As a final point, what is unique about Gideon's commission in 6:11-24 in its final form is that the pericope features a significantly longer introduction and appointment of

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<sup>23</sup> "Israel" writ large is only mentioned in a smattering of places within the Gideon/Jerubbaal narrative, mostly in Judg 6 and 7: cf. Judg 6:2, 4, 6, 8, 14, 15, 36, 37; Judg 7:2, 8, 14 (here Gideon is called a "man of Israel"), and 15. Judg 8 shows no concern for all Israel, apart from the brief mention in 8:22nd in the concluding verse of 8:35.

<sup>24</sup> Soggin, *Judges*, 117; Kratz, *Composition*, 223.

the hero than that of his predecessor in the book—or any of his successors.<sup>25</sup> The lengthy introduction, combined with the manifold connections with other biblical literature that the passage displays, signals the importance of 6:11-24 in the Gideon narrative as well as the importance of the Gideon narrative overall within the book of Judges.

### 1.2.3 Functions and Conclusions

The scene depicted in 6:11-24, in its final form, functions in several ways. Most significantly, the scene serves as the beginning of the transformation of Gideon from a *gibbôr hayil* (a designation that 7:16-22 and 8:4-21 confirm) to a character who is “least” in his family, and who needs a series of assuring signs and acts before he will act (vv.11b-18, 20, 22-23). Connected to the first function is the introduction of the divine assurance motif into the Gideon narrative, an essential feature of the final Gideon narrative. The divine assurance motif stresses that Gideon is the chosen hero, who works through the power of the deity.

Third, it is only Gideon, out of all of the heroes/deliverers in the book, who speaks directly with the deity. Yahweh is personally involved with a protagonist only in Judges 6-7 (though the deity also visits Samson’s parents, Yahweh never speaks directly to Samson). In fact, all the discourse in the Gideon narrative between the protagonist and Yahweh intricately relates to the divine assurance motif. In all of the pericopes that draw on the divine assurance motif, Yahweh and Gideon are in conversation. The deity’s personal, on-the-ground involvement in providing signs to assure his protagonist to action in the Gideon narrative is unparalleled in the rest of the book of Judges. The Gideon narrative thus represents the pinnacle of the deity’s involvement in the world of the

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<sup>25</sup> The Jephthah introduction is also long in comparison with other accounts in the book of Judges.

judges, and the conversation between Gideon and the deity in 6:11-24 introduces this into the account.

Although 6:11-24 contains evidence of reworking, it is in vv. 11, 12, and 14 that the only introduction to the Gideon account survives in Judges 6-8. The verses stem from an older narrative about Gideon, a *gibbôr hayil*, commissioned by the deity to deliver Israel from the oppressive hands of the Midianites. Even these older, introductory verses, however, appear to be relatively late, and are distinguishable from other introductions in the book in several ways, including the presence of the messenger (found elsewhere in the book of Judges only in chs. 2 and 13).

Judges 6:11-24 may contain elements of an original Gideon narrative, but appears to have undergone later redactional expansion. Judges 6:11, 12, and 14 preserve the only introduction to the Gideon account still in the narrative, introducing a local hero into the story. These verses are the oldest in the pericope, and may pre-date the divine assurance material. Judges 6:13, 14-24 introduce the role of divine signs into the narrative.



### 1.3 Judges 6:36-40

6:36 Then Gideon said to God, “In order to see whether you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said, 37 I am going to lay a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said.” 38 And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water. 39 Then Gideon said to God, “Do not let your anger burn against me, let me speak one more time. Let me, please, make trial with the fleece just once more; let it be dry only on the fleece, and on all the ground let there be dew.” 40 And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew.

Following 6:11-24, the next pericope to demonstrate an interest in divine assurances is in 6:36-40. The scene is thus: Gideon requests further proof that the deity will deliver Israel by his hand, following the signs already demonstrated in 6:11-24. First, he asks that the deity make wet a fleece that he leaves out overnight on the threshing floor, while the ground all around the fleece remains dry. Following this, he asks for the sign in reverse, namely, for the ground to be wet but the fleece to be dry. The deity grants both wishes without speaking and the pericope then ends abruptly, while 7:1 returns to the imposing Midianite threat last mentioned in 6:35.

#### 1.3.1 The Literary Horizons of Judges 6:36-40

Although the narrative encapsulated in 6:36-40 is unusual and only sits very loosely in its context, it does already appear to know the call narrative now in 6:11-24. As Becker notes, 6:36 and 37 utilize the Hebrew phrase *כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ*, “as you said,” presumably referring to the deity’s words in 6:14. Furthermore, the passage also uses the *Leitwort* *יָשַׁע*,

“to save, deliver.”<sup>26</sup> Even though the root occurs only eight times within the Gideon narrative (6:14, 15, 31, 36, 37; 7:2, 7; 8:22), always in the hiphil, it frequently occurs within the passages that elaborate on the motif of divine assurance, and therefore connects 6:36-40 with 6:11-24 and 7:1-8. Thus, 6:36-40 intersects in several ways with its immediate context.

The pericope also has some connections with other biblical material outside the book of Judges. For example, the use of נסה (“to test”) in v. 39 recalls the narrative where Israel tests Yahweh at Rephidim in the book of Exodus.<sup>27</sup> There the text reads, “The people quarreled with Moses, and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’ Moses said to them, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test Yahweh (מה־תנסון את־יהוה)?’” (Exod 17:2) and, “He [Moses] called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested Yahweh (נסתם את־יהוה), saying, ‘Is Yahweh among us or not?’” (Exod 17:7).<sup>28</sup> Once again, as in 6:11-24, the Gideon narrative exhibits a strong resemblance to the Moses story. Similarly, the use of the verb in 6:39 also unites the narrative to various episodes from the accounts of the desert wanderings following the Exodus from Egypt (Num 14:22, Pss 78:17, 42, 56; 95:9; 106:14).<sup>29</sup>

The literary bridges continue. In 6:36-40, where only Gideon speaks, he says as he requests the second fleece sign, “Do not let your anger burn against me, but let me speak one more time (6:39) ”(אֶל־יַחַר אַפְךָ בִּי וְאִדְבַרְהָ). As Boling notes, his words here allude

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<sup>26</sup> For more on “to save/deliver” as a Leitwort in the Gideon narrative, cf. Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 265-266.

<sup>27</sup> Block, *Judges*, 273.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

to Gen 18:32, where Abraham approaches the deity in an attempt to save the people of Sodom, saying, “Do not let Yahweh be angry if I speak just once more (אל-ינא יחר לאדני (ואדברה אולי). Suppose ten are found there?”<sup>30</sup> The link between Abraham and Gideon is yet another instance of the rich intertextuality that Judges 6-8 exhibits.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, the motif of testing the deity is found in a wide range of extra-biblical texts, where a similar motif also occurs. Thus, for example, at Ugarit there are examples of testing the gods by human characters in order to remove doubt or to settle a question by means of a sign.<sup>32</sup> Dijkstra translates one such Ugaritic account of a sign requested from El in KTU 1.6III:

And if Baal, the Almighty is alive and if his Highness, the Lord of the Earth, exists, in a dream of the Benevolent, El, the Good-Hearted, in a vision of the Progenitor of creation (?) the skies will rain oil, the wadies will run with honey, and I shall know that Baal, the Almighty, is alive, and that his Highness, the Lord of Earth, exists.<sup>33</sup>

The similarity, of course, to the Gideon account is striking. In the ancient Near Eastern narratives, these tests are simply indicative of the way that the relationship between humans and the deities worked, shedding light on Gideon’s various tests of the deity. Synchronic readings usually evaluate Gideon’s tests of the deity negatively, but the Ugaritic account suggests that Gideon’s response may actually have been the expected, normal reaction of a character called by the deity. The story of King Ahaz in Isa 7:10-25,

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<sup>30</sup> Boling, *Judges*, 141; Soggin, *Judges*, 133.

<sup>31</sup> Gideon also connects to both Abraham and David, for these three figures are the only ones in the Hebrew Bible who the text reports died “in a good old age (בשיבה טובה).: See Gen 15:15, 25:8; Judg 8:32; and 1 Chron 29:28.

<sup>32</sup> M. Dijkstra, “KTU 1.6 (= CTA). III.1ff. and the So-called Zeichenbeweis [Proof by a Token],” *VT* 35 [1985] 105-9. Block cites Dijkstra in his commentary (Block, *Judges*, 273).

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

which features the prophet reprimanding the king for refusing to ask for a sign from the deity, confirms the idea that asking for a sign from the deity was expected rather than frowned upon.<sup>34</sup> As Soggin notes, “such proofs ... are by no means thought to be illegitimate or even strange in the Old Testament.”<sup>35</sup>

### 1.3.2 Bumps in the Terrain

Yet even with its connection to 6:11-24 by means of the divine assurance motif and the numerous correlations to both biblical and extra-biblical literature, 6:36-40 sits oddly out of place within the whole of the overall Gideon narrative. Instead of the expected battle scene following 6:33-35, 6:36 starts a new scene concerned with divine assurance. The passage is decidedly incongruous. The central reason for this incongruity is the use of אלהים rather than יהוה throughout the pericope: here and only here the Gideon narrative consistently uses the generic אלהים when referring to the deity.<sup>36</sup> The deity is here twice referred to as האלהים, “the God,” with the definite article prefixed to the Hebrew noun (6:36, 39) and only once referred to simply as אלהים, “God,” without the definite article (6:40). The use of the appellation is unusual in the Gideon narrative, which otherwise almost uniformly uses the Tetragrammaton. There are three exceptions to this. First, it is the “messenger of (the) God (מלאך האלהים)” who speaks to Gideon in

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<sup>34</sup> Soggin, *Judges*, 121.

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

<sup>36</sup> There are three exceptions to this: One, it is the “messenger of (the) God” who speaks to Gideon in Judg 6:20; secondly, when the Midianite recounts his dream to his comrade in Judg 7:14 he says that “(the) God” has given the camp into Gideon’s hand, and; third, when Gideon appeases the angry Ephraimites in Judg 8:3 he tells them that “God” (without the definite article) has given the Midianite leaders into their hands.

Judg 6:20. Secondly, when the Midianite recounts his dream to his comrade in Judg 7:14 he says that “(the) God (האלהים)” has given the camp into Gideon’s hand. Finally, when Gideon appeases the angry Ephraimites in Judg 8:3 he tells them that “God” (without the definite article) has given the Midianite leaders into their hands.

The bump in the terrain created by the use of אלהים throughout the four verses in 6:36-40 rather than the expected יהוה has led to two reactions amongst scholars. The first is a diachronic response, in which scholars regularly ascribe 6:36-40 to a different source or redactional layer of the Gideon narrative than its counterparts. Thus, for instance, early interpreters habitually ascribed the pericope to an “E” source.<sup>37</sup> More recent diachronic analysis, despite no longer assigning any verses in the book of Judges to the traditional four Pentateuchal sources, nevertheless continue to attribute these verses to a different authorial hand than its immediate surroundings. Generally speaking, 6:36-40 is “nur sehr locker mit dem Kontext verknüpft.”<sup>38</sup> Despite this, Becker notes the connections between 6:11-24 and 6:36-40, correctly arguing that the latter knew the former, and that, “Ordnet man die Berufungsgeschichte DtrH zu, kommt man für 6:36-40 in spätere, wohl am ehesten nach-dtr Zeit.”<sup>39</sup> Still, it seems best to simply conclude with Groß, “6:36-40 ist ein Zusatz. Alter und literarische Herkunft sind nicht zu bestimmen.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Boling notes that these verses are usually attributed to E, but cautions against pressing “very far in this case,” though he also notes that “Like the great *E* source stratum of the Tetrateuch, this pericope displays a heightened interest in the miraculous” (Boling, *Judges*, 140); also cf. Moore, *Judges*, 198.

<sup>38</sup> Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum*, 161.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>40</sup> Groß, *Richter*, 379.

The second response is synchronic, centering on the use of the divine name in the pericope and argues that the use of the different appellations is not the result of the text's growth, but rather reflects deliberate decisions signaling narrative intentionality on the part of the author. Such arguments about authorial intention constitute a considerable amount of space in synchronic readings of the Gideon narrative because it is not only the deity who has an identity crisis vis-à-vis his given name: the same happens with Gideon via the insertion of 6:25-32. The differing names for both the deity and the protagonist raise certain questions, including whether an author utilizes the different names in order to highlight a theme of the text or the theological message of Judges 6-8. Alternatively, are the names evidence of the preservation of different traditions or literary strata now connected within the larger whole of Judges 6-8? Synchronic readings argue for the former. For example, Butler writes:

Here the narrator makes a subtle shift. The deity's personal name *Yahweh*, which has dominated the story almost entirely to this point slips from view. The more generic, less personal, transcendent term *Elohim*, 'God,' is used. By replacing *Yahweh* with *Elohim*, the narrator places some distance between Gideon and God, distance that had not been there when Gideon was making his commitments and following God's leadership.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, Block argues that Gideon's request for signs "is not a sign of faith but of unbelief."<sup>42</sup> Therefore, according to Block, the narrator, who knows that Gideon has already been empowered by the deity:

apparently recognizes the incongruity of the situation by deliberately referring to God by the generic designation *Elohim* rather than his personal covenant name *Yahweh*. Gideon has difficulties distinguishing between *Yahweh*, the God of the

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<sup>41</sup> Butler, *Judges*, 209.

<sup>42</sup> Block, *Judges*, 273.

Israelites, and God in a general sense.<sup>43</sup>

Likewise, Polzin, keeping in line with his theory that ambiguity is the ideological theme of the entirety of the book of Judges, argues that the alternation between the names Gideon and Jerubbaal highlights a tension over the protagonist's loyalty to the deity. For Polzin, the use of "Elohim" throughout Judges 6-8 is strategic, underlying the inability of the protagonist to distinguish which deity delivered him.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, Polzin argues that the use of "Elohim" throughout the chapters is a reference to a deity that is not Yahweh, and that this ambiguity serves as a means by which Gideon's courage increases: "not only has Yahweh pledged deliverance (vii 9), but the 'god' referred to by the Midianite has prophesied the same in a dream (vii 14)."<sup>45</sup> In other words, for Polzin, the different divine names attest that the narrative about Gideon intentionally implies that the character believes there are multiple deities on his side.

Assis argues in a similar fashion about the use of both Yahweh and Elohim in Judges 6-8, claiming that the use of the two names for the deity expresses Gideon's alienation from God. Assis addresses the change in appellations at the end of chapter six, beginning with the phrase "the spirit of Yahweh enveloped Gideon," to the use of the more generic Elohim in Judges 6:36-40:

In the description of God's nearness to Gideon the Tetragrammaton is used: 'The spirit of the LORD enveloped Gideon.' Gideon's brusque transition from a state of nearness to God to a state of doubt is expressed in Gideon's appeal to 'Elohim': 'And Gideon said to God (Elohim)'; this name is used in the entire

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 261.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

passage until verse 40. Subsequently, when the bond is again strengthened between Gideon and God, the use of the Tetragrammaton is also resumed (7:3).<sup>46</sup>

Again, Assis' argument implies that the use of the different names for the deity was meant to convey something specific about its protagonist; namely, about the relationship between Gideon and Yahweh.

Although Butler, Block, Polzin, and Assis maintain that the presence of different names for the deity is due to intentional narrative artistry, it is not entirely clear that this is the case. The use of the phrase “the angel of God” (6:20), unique amidst the use of the phrase “the angel of Yahweh” (6:11, 12, 21 and 22) and a few instances of simply “Yahweh” (6:14, 16, 23 and 25), does not seem to relate to Gideon's physical or psychological proximity or alienation from the deity. Gideon asks for proof of whether the deity is on his side in 6:36-40 when only Elohim is used, but Gideon also asks for a sign in 6:17, where the aforementioned occurrences of “angel of God,” “angel of Yahweh,” and “Yahweh” occur. Although there is certainly a considerable amount of ambiguity around the use of names in Judges 6-8 (both for Gideon and for the deity), at times Gideon talks and interacts directly with Elohim—just as he does with Yahweh.

### 1.3.3 Functions and Conclusions

In short, 6:36-40 build suspense before the expected and long-anticipated battle scene that still will not occur until 7:16-22. By adding the passage found in 6:36-40, an author thus prolongs Gideon's suspension of action, once more transforming the *gibbôr ḥayil* into a tentative farmer who is “least” in his family. However, the addition also depicts yet another personal, one-to-one, and face-to-face interaction between Gideon and

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<sup>46</sup> Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 54.



the deity like that found in 6:11-24 and the beginning of 6:25-32. This suggests that Gideon's testing of the deity does not need to be read in an entirely negative light; after all, the ancient Near Eastern parallel and other biblical texts suggest that gaining assurance of divine favor is a perfectly reasonable, and even expected, course of action for a divinely appointed leader.

That this passage extends and expands the divine assurance motif is apparent, but beyond that observation, it is difficult to know how to explain 6:36-40 when mapping out the compositional history of the Gideon traditions. The writer of 6:36-40 appears to have known sections of 6:11-24, suggesting that a writer added 6:36-40 in light of some form of 6:11-24. Nevertheless, the anomalous use of "Elohim" over and against "Yahweh" is challenging, and only has one parallel within the book (in the first chapter of the Samson narrative). Judges 6:36-40 is likely a late addition to the Gideon narrative, tacked onto an already formed narrative centered on divine assurance. It is of an indeterminate literary addition.

#### 1.4 Judges 7:1-8

**7:1 And Jerubbaal – that is, Gideon – rose early and encamped by the spring of Harod, and the camp of Midian was north of them, below the hill of Moreh, in the valley.**

<sup>2</sup> And Yahweh said to Gideon, “The people who are with you are too many to allow me to give Midian into their hand, lest Israel glorify itself against me, saying, ‘My hand has delivered me.’” <sup>3</sup> So now call, I pray you, in the hearing of the people, saying, ‘Whoever is afraid and trembling, let him return (home)! And so Gideon tested them, and twenty-two thousand of the people returned home, while ten-thousand remained.’ <sup>4</sup> And Yahweh said to Gideon, “Still the people are too many. Bring them down to the waters and I will test them there for you. And so it will be – when I say to you, ‘This one will go with you,’ he will go with you. And anyone about whom I say to you, ‘This one will not go with you,’ he will not go.” <sup>5</sup> And he brought the people to the waters. And Yahweh said to Gideon, “Everyone who laps the water like dog laps – place him to one side. And everyone who kneels upon his knees to drink – place him to one side.” <sup>6</sup> And the number of lappers (with their hand to their mouth) was three hundred men, and the remainder of the people knelt upon their knees to drink water. <sup>7</sup> And Yahweh said to Gideon, “With the three hundred men who lapped, I will deliver you, and I will give Midian into your hand. And all the (other) people – they shall go, each man to his home.” <sup>8</sup> And the people took provision in their hand, and their horns, and (every other) man of Israel he sent off, (each) man to his tent, but he retained the three hundred men.

**And the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.**

Following 6:36-40, the next pericope containing material concerned with divine assurance is in 7:1-8. Judges 7:1 sets the scene, “Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon), and all the troops that were with him rose early and camped beside the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them, below the hill of Moreh, in the valley.” Judges 7:8b makes a similar statement, closing with “The camp of Midian was below him the valley.” By beginning with the looming Midianite threat (though minus any mention of the Amalekites or Easterners), the narrative thus picks up where 6:33 finished; namely, with the problem of the gathering Midianite army, “Then all the Midianites and the

Amalekites and the people of the east came together, and crossing the Jordan they encamped in the Valley of Jezreel.” It seems inevitable that the newly appointed hero/deliverer will now address the enemy threat, especially with Gideon persuaded following a series of assurances (cf. 6:17-23, 36-40) that proved that the deity is on his side.

Yet the intervening material in vv. 2-8a does not provide the long-awaited battle account. Instead, the story details the expurgating of the 32,000 men that are encamped with Gideon beside the spring of Harod (cf. 7:1, 3) through a strange series of reductions administered by the deity. The narrated reduction of troops occurs—in the final redaction of the story—at the behest of Yahweh because the troops with Gideon are “too many”: if the troops were to remain so large when the deity delivers Midian into their hand, “Israel would only take the credit away from me, saying, ‘My own hand has delivered me’” (7:2). The redactional technique of *Wiederaufnahme* found in v. 1 and 8b suggests that an author expanded the superseding verses in 7:2-8a.

Judges 7:1-8 continues to expand on the motif of divine assurance. Thus, for example, Amit writes, “It follows that the two stages of turning a mass army of 32,000 into a brigade of three hundred lappers of water is tantamount to a sign, which advances and prepares the sign of victory.”<sup>47</sup> The expansion between v. 1 and v. 8b shares several similarities with the other pericopes containing more explicit examples of the divine assurance motif. Like 6:11-24 and 36-40 before it, and 7:9-15 after it, the verses found in 7:1-8 contain two central characters: Gideon and the deity. Furthermore, like the aforementioned other passages, the fundamental concern of 7:1-8 is to establish that the

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<sup>47</sup> Amit, 234; also see pp. 257-260.

deity—and not Gideon—is responsible for the forthcoming victory. Finally, like the other passages, the evidence suggests that an author superimposed a theological story over an earlier, mundane account.

#### 1.4.1 The Literary Horizon of Judges 7:1-8

Reminiscent of the previous individual pericopes in the Gideon narrative that contain elements of the divine assurance motif, the literary horizon of 7:1-8 is extensive, connecting the passage both to its immediate and broader contexts. The narrative intersects with other verses in the Gideon narrative, while also containing echoes of the Deborah and Barak story, and sharing certain features with the book of Deuteronomy.

Within the Gideon narrative itself, the episode in 7:1-8 connects to other pericopes within Judges 6-8 in two significant ways. First, many suggest that 7:1-8 and 6:36-40 connect. Müller calls both these passages “Midrashic,” while both Bluedorn and Becker comment on the structural similarities between the two pericopes.<sup>48</sup> The argument, put simply, is that 6:36-40 is Gideon’s part in the conversation, while 7:1-8 is the deity’s response.

Second, 7:1-8 shares the use of the *Leitwort* ירא, “to fear,” with other pericopes in the Gideon narrative. Judges 7:1 begins with Gideon’s troops encamped next to the spring of Harod, with the camp of Midian to their north, below the hill of Moreh (7:1). The famous reduction-of-the-troops scene then takes place, in which Gideon first tells anyone who is “fearful and trembling (ירא וחורד)” to return home. Boling notes, “yr’ w-*hrd*, lit. ‘fearful and frightened,’ [are] synonyms which are here treated as a hendiadys, in a

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<sup>48</sup> Bluedorn, *Yahweh vs. Baalism*, 113-114.

play upon the name *'n-hrd*, 'Harod's Spring...'”<sup>49</sup> The word play demonstrated by the setting of Harod literally puts fear on the verbal map that Judges 6-8 creates. The world play connects the individual verses (7:1, 2-3) with several other verses in Judges 6-7 (6:23, 27; 7:3, 10).

Additionally, 7:1-8 shares in yet other ways with the larger book of Judges. One significant point of correspondence is with the preceding account of the battle of Deborah and Barak against the enemy Sisera in Judges 4. In 7:1-8, Yahweh reduces the troops who have gathered around Gideon via two methods: first, based on the principle found in Deut 20:8 (invoking the fear motif) and then by a strange water test. In the first reduction, the militia goes from 32,000 to 10,000. The latter number is precisely the size of Deborah and Barak's tribal militia in Judg 4: 6, 10, and 14 (and in both cases, the number is also schematic).

Yet although the Deborah and Barak story and the Gideon story both contain a militia consisting of 10,000 men, there are significant differences between the two, and the use of the same number draws attention to these differences. The most obvious difference is that Gideon will not, in the end, fight with a troop of 10,000 soldiers. Instead, his army will eventually be composed of only 300 men. Second, though, is the difference between a concern with numbers versus a concern with military technology and skill.<sup>50</sup> In the account of Deborah and Barak, the narrative is primarily concerned with contrasting portraits of skill and experience. Deborah and Barak have a militia of ten thousand Israelite men from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun (4:6), called out by Barak exactly for this particular encounter with Sisera. Sisera, on the other hand, is the

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<sup>49</sup> Boling, *Judges*, 144; See also Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 56.

<sup>50</sup> Jacob L. Wright, in conversation with the author, August 2010.

commander of Jabin's army (שר־צבא יבין) and as such has 900 chariots of iron (רכב) along with proper "troops" (המון) rather than a ragtag team of volunteers (4:7). Thus, the scene in Judges 4 is one concerned with military technology and skill: the ragtag team of volunteers that comprise the Israelite army versus the organized, skilled, and equipped army of Sisera. The difference is this: because Yahweh is on the side of the volunteer Israelite troops, they prevail despite their lack of military technology and skill.

Nevertheless, within the Gideon narrative, the issue at hand is not military technology and skill but rather size. The inclusion of 7:1-8 stresses the importance of numbers and size for Judges 6-8. The concern with numbers is supplemental, highlighted by the repeated mention of the vast number of enemy troops that pose a threat, who are "thick as locusts, countless in numbers, both they and their camels" (6:5; 7:12; also cf. 8:10 and the 135, 000). Gideon manages to prevail over the larger Midianite army by utilizing subterfuge and ploys (7:16-21, 22b; 8:10-12).

However, in order to align the Gideon narrative with the larger narrative of the book of Judges, a redactor transforms Gideon's clever victories to reflect instead a divine miracle. In addition to Gideon's various trickster strategies (7:22a; 8:10), Yahweh also confuses the enemy and thereby initiates a massive self-inflicted destruction prior to their flight. Gideon's large volunteer army, first composed of 32,000 troops, then reduced to 10,000 and then reduced to only 300 men manage to fight—and win—against their bigger enemy. Thus, as in the Deborah and Barak narrative found in Judges 4, the victory goes to the underdog. Here, rather than being the underdog in terms of technological weaponry and skill, Israel is the underdog in number. The inevitable conclusion is the

same in both stories: Yahweh brings about the victory to the unlikely winner. The insertion of Judg 7:1-8 sets the scene for that victory.

The means by which Yahweh reduces the rallied troops from 32,000 to 10,000 also connects the pericope to material outside of the book of Judges. Specifically, the episode echoes the stipulation for the officers in the Deuteronomic law code of Deuteronomy 20.<sup>51</sup> The following verses illustrate the connection:

<b>Deut 20:8</b>	The officials shall continue to address the troops, saying, “Is anyone afraid or disheartened (הירא ורך)? He should go back to his house, or he might cause the heart of his comrades to melt like his own.”
<b>Judg 7:3</b>	So now call, I pray you, in the hearing of the people, ‘Whoever is fearful and trembling (מיירא וחרד), let him return home.’ So Gideon tested them, and twenty-two thousand of the people returned home, while ten thousand remained.

Within the Gideon narrative, fear as a *Leitwort* is a thread running throughout chapters six and seven and intersects with the motif of divine assurance (6:23, 27; 7:3, 10). When Gideon is afraid, he looks for assurance from the deity. Similarly, fear plays a central role in Deuteronomy 20, where the Israelite army is instructed not to fear because Yahweh goes with them (20:1, 4; compare with Judg 6:12, 16). Deuteronomy 20:8 provides the answer for why the person who is afraid in Judges 7 should be sent home: “or he might cause the heart of his comrades to melt like his own.”

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<sup>51</sup> Jacob L. Wright, in conversation with the author, August 2010.

### 1.4.2 Bumps in the Terrain

In its present context, 7:1-8 is unexpected. Immediately preceding it is the episode of the fleece test, which includes only the characters of Gideon and God (יהוה not אלהים). Judges 7:1 then begins, “Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the troops who were with him rose early in the morning and encamped beside the spring of Harod,” immediately connecting the passage through word play to the other pericopes in Judges 6-8 that use the *Leitwort* ירא. The transition between the episode of the fleece tests and the beginning of the ensuing battle is sudden, and the dramatis personae significantly expand in the new scene: Gideon (identified as “Jerubbaal that is, Gideon”), the troops, and down below them in the valley “the camp of Midian” (7:1). In 7:2, the deity will once again be present, though again as Yahweh rather than Elohim.

According to Gray, 7:1 originally followed 6:34-35.<sup>52</sup> Groß makes a similar observation, writing “7:1 kann somit ebensogut der erste Satz der Vordergrunderzählung nach den Hintergrund-schilderungen 6:33-35 sein.”<sup>53</sup> These reflections are logical: by beginning with the looming Midianite threat in 7:1, the narrative resumes the scene detailed in 6:33-35, where an army composed of members from the various Israelite tribes assembles to fight. Yet throughout Judges 6-8, there is a great deal of incongruity in the text about exactly whom Gideon calls out to fight and when they are called. The story reads as follows: Gideon first has troops called out from Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali (6:33-35). Next, some of the troops are sent home, first based on the principle from Deut 20:8 and then through the strange water test administered by the

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<sup>52</sup> Gray writes of 7:1-25, “A historical tradition, continued from 6:33-35” (Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 290).

<sup>53</sup> Groß, *Richter*, 379.



deity (7:2-8). Following the battle recounted in 7:16-22, the troops are then increased once again, this time from Naphtali, Asher, Manasseh, and Ephraim (7:23-25). When the story resumes in 8:1, the number of troops with Gideon is once again 300 (8:1-21). Literarily, Judg 6:33-35 and 7:2-8 are similar, but 7:23-25 is of a different piece. The latter is primarily interested in showing that neighboring tribes enthusiastically respond to Gideon's request for aid, while, as Wright argues, 6:33-35 is more interested in illustrating the nature and character of Gideon's eventual army of 300.<sup>54</sup>

Despite how 7:1-8 resumes the narrative left off in 6:33-35, the story in 7:1 does not entirely appear to be a continuation of 6:33-35. Rather, 7:2-8a is an expansion. As Müller observes, "Die Passagen 6:36-40 und 7:2-8 lassen sich außerdem aus literarkritischen Gründen eindeutig als späte midraschartige Ergänzungen erkennen und dürften für die Grundkonzeption kaum infrage kommen."<sup>55</sup> Judges 7:1-8, like 6:36-40, appears to be a later theological expansion to an earlier Gideon tradition.

The second issue that arises upon a reading of 7:1 is that Gideon is first identified by his second name, Jerubbaal, which the text then glosses by adding the phrase הוּא גִדְעוֹן, "that is, Gideon." By identifying Gideon as Jerubbaal, the text in 7:1a returns to the story of Gideon's second name in 6:25-32.<sup>56</sup> Throughout Judges 6-8, it is only in 6:32, 7:1, and 8:35 that the text explicitly links Gideon and Jerubbaal. From 7:2 forward until 8:35, the text only uses the name Gideon. These insertions connect Judges 6-8 with what will follow in the story of Abimelech in Judges 9. Groß concludes, "7,1a (nur: Jerubbaal):

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<sup>54</sup> Jacob L. Wright, in conversation with the author, August 2010.

<sup>55</sup> Müller, *Königtum und Gottesherrschaft*, 51.

<sup>56</sup> So Groß, "In 7:1a ist die Identifikation Jerubbaals mit Gideon spätere Zutat, wohl im Zusammenhang mit der Einfügung von 6:25-32" (*Richter*, 378).

junger Zusatz, der der Verbindung der von DtrR bearbeiteten Gideon erzählung mit der Abimelecherzählung dient.<sup>57</sup> In short, all clues point to the presence of Gideon's Baal name in 7:1a as supplemental.

However, the difficulties encountered in 7:1-8 do not stop with the presence of Gideon's suspect second name. While the passage is, according to Soggin, "one of the best known of the Old Testament,"<sup>58</sup> Several questions surface when reading 7:1-8: First, what is the precise significance of the two episodes that reduce the number of troops, especially the strange water test recounted therein? Second, what is the significance of the 300 men?

The final, expanded form of Judges 6-8 must explain how Gideon has an army of only 300 men in several of its most central and important passages, despite how the focus of the entire book of Judges in its final form is in presenting war as a collective effort of Israel's unified tribes. The best explanation for the strange reduction of troops in 7:1-8 then becomes that a later redactor inserted the present pericope in order to alter the original, older account of Gideon and his 300 men into an account describing how Gideon fights with only a remnant of 300 men from the original 32,000 volunteers (cf. 6:34-35). Twenty-two thousand troops depart, leaving Gideon with ten thousand men. Yahweh himself explains the reason for the deduction: "The army with you is too large for me to deliver the Midianites into their hands. Israel might claim for itself the glory due to me, concluding, 'My own hand has brought me this victory'" (7:2).

However, Yahweh does not stop when the troops number only 10,000. Instead, Yahweh repeats his earlier proclamation. The text reads, "Then Yahweh said to Gideon,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 381.

<sup>58</sup> Soggin, *Judges*, 135.

‘The troops are still too many’” (7:4). The deity thus instructs Gideon to take the troops down to the water, where “I will sift them out (ואצרפנו) for you there. When I say, ‘This one shall go with you,’ he shall go with you; and when I say, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ he shall not go” (7:4). What follows is one of the most famous scenes in the book of Judges: the men who lap water with their tongues as a dog laps water are set to one side, totaling 300. Those who scoop up water with their hands are set to the other side.

Yahweh then declares to Gideon, “With the three hundred that lapped I will deliver you, and give the Midianites into your hand. Let all the others go to their homes (7:7)” (למקמו).

The reduction occurs because certain traditions about Gideon only knew of him and 300 men fighting the Midianites, as evidenced by 7:16-22 and 8:4-21. In the two battle stories in 7:16-22 and 8:4-21, Gideon does not have a large army but only a small group of soldiers. The presence of 7:16-22 and 8:4-21 within the final form of the narrative requires an explanation for why Gideon only has a small force with him, when 6:33-35 and 7:23-25 paint a radically different picture. Yet even if the older narrative only knew of 300 men, thus necessitating a reduction in troops like the story in 7:1-8, the means by which the reduction takes place is bizarre. Unlike the earlier portion of the story, where Yahweh is explicit about his intentions (“the troops with you are too many ... they would only take credit”), here the text is silent on explanations, and the question remains: why are the men who lap water like dogs the men that Yahweh tells Gideon he shall take with him to fight?

The history of interpretation of the Gideon narrative is rich with various (and often conflicting) explanations for the choice, beginning as early as Josephus, who wrote:

but for all those that drank tumultuously, that he should esteem them to do it out of fear, and as in dread of their enemies. And when Gideon had done as God had suggested to him, there were found three hundred men that took water with their hands tumultuously; so God bid him take these men, and attack the enemy.<sup>59</sup>

For Josephus, the ones who drank “tumultuously” represent the men most frightened by the prospect of battle: if Yahweh delivers Israel through 300 terrified soldiers, then Gideon’s victory is even more miraculous. Rabbinic tradition explains the reduction in terms of idolatry: the ones who kneel are accustomed to kneel before idols.<sup>60</sup> Boling writes, “The test in the story is one of alertness; the men who lap the water scooped up with their hands, instead of lying down, show themselves more watchful and ready to meet any sudden emergency, such as an attack from the rear.”<sup>61</sup> Niditch summarizes, “In any case, God is now pictured satisfied that no one will confuse miraculous victory with mere human prowess.”<sup>62</sup> The text is ambiguous as to why the men are divided accordingly, but the point is clear: Gideon can only have 300 men with him when the fight against the Midianites begins because this is what is retained in the oldest stories.

Once the troops that will accompany Gideon finally total 300 men, Yahweh proclaims, “With the three hundred that lapped I will deliver you, and give the Midianites into your hand. Let all the others go to their homes” (7:7). This much seems clear: the heart of the story that will follow is about Gideon and his 300 men (vv. 16-22), and the surrounding material about the various other tribal participation is secondary. Gray suggests as much, writing that the selection of the forces, which reduces the army to only

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<sup>59</sup> Josephus, *Ant.*, 5.6.3

<sup>60</sup> Yalqut 2.62.

<sup>61</sup> Boling, *Judges*, 145.

<sup>62</sup> Niditch, *Judges*, 97.

300 men, may be “a literary device to reconcile the original tradition of the exploit of Gideon and his followers from Abiezer (cf. 8:2) with the later tradition of the victory of all Israel.”<sup>63</sup> The following story about Gideon and the pursuit of the enemy will also focus on only Gideon and his 300 men. The consistent focus on 300, apart from the editorial additions around the seams of Judges 7, contains the original tradition.

### 1.4.3 Functions and Conclusions

In sum, the scene now located in 7:1-8 provides yet another pause before the ensuing battle scene that follows in 7:16-22. The pericope once again introduces the *Leitwort* “to fear” is so central to the secondary passages in the Gideon narrative, although now the fear is not Gideon’s, but belongs to the extraneous troops that flocked to him.

Additionally, 7:1-8 functions by continuing to modify Gideon’s character. The change in characterization in 7:1-8 happens in line with the transformational elements found in Judges 6, especially vv. 11-24, and the subsequent pericope of the enemy soldier’s prophetic dream in 7:9-15. The consequence of these additions is a change in Gideon from a once valiant warrior (6:12, 14) into a fearful and reluctant leader who requires numerous divine assurances before he begins his campaign against the Midianite enemy (6:15, 17-23, 36-40; 7:1-8, 9-15).

Moreover, the addition of the literary stratum comprising 7:2-8a explains how a victory attributed to a broad segment of Israel occurred even though the core of the story that follows in vv. 16-22 focuses only on Gideon and his army of 300 men (cf. 7:6-8, 16, 22; 8:4). The addition of 7:1-8 and the reduction of the troops from 32,000 to 300

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<sup>63</sup> Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 290-291.

corresponds to the later addition into the story that marks Gideon as the youngest in the weakest clan. So writes Groß, “Der kleinen Gruppe der 300 entspricht ihr Anführer, der jüngste seiner Familie aus der schwächsten Sippe seines Stammes (6:15).”<sup>64</sup>

In short, the function of 7:2-8 is greater than simply illustrating that the various tribes were willing to come out to participate in the ensuing battle, although the addition of 6:34-35 and 7:2-8 do serve that purpose. The call up of Manasseh and the other tribes reconfigures the nature of Gideon’s band of 300 soldiers, no longer making it possible to assume, with these additions, that the band of 300 soldiers existed prior to the recruitment of the other tribes. This quells any fear that readers might have over whether Gideon hired these men or that the men are an independent military company.<sup>65</sup> Instead, they become just a tiny fraction of the 32,000 troops who flocked to Gideon following 6:34. By reducing the number to 300 through the events recounted in 7:2-8, an author reshaped the account so that all glory for the victory will go to Yahweh alone, and not to the troops themselves (7:22b). As the scene now illustrates, it is Yahweh, and not any human actors, who brings victory to the unlikely winner, as in the story of Deborah and Barak. The final narrative is especially adamant on this point: Yahweh, not Gideon, deserves the credit for the victory that happens next.

Judges 7:1-8 is an expansion of an earlier story with specific theological motivations. The addition was necessary because the original tradition only knew of Gideon and his 300 men, but later additions to the text included the enthusiastic participation of the neighboring tribes, resulting in a much larger army. Judges 7:1 (minus Jerubbaal) probably stems from the oldest Gideon narrative, followed

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<sup>64</sup> Groß, *Richter*, 431.

<sup>65</sup> Jacob L. Wright, in conversation with the author, August 2010.

immediately by the earliest elements of the battle scene depicted in 7:16-22. The passage, though not explicitly about a sign in the way that the pericopes in 6:11-24, 36-40 and 7:9-15 are, nevertheless exhibits a similar theological motivation and also shares the use of the *Leitwort* “to fear” found in the other pericope. Judges 7:1 (without Jerubbaal) belongs to the earliest Gideon battle accounts. Judges 7:2-8 is an interpolation, expanding the earlier battle account to include a divine sign of assurance.

### 1.5 Judges 7:9-15

<sup>9</sup> And so it happened on that night that Yahweh said to him, “Arise, go down into the camp, for I have given it into your hand. <sup>10</sup> If you are afraid to go down, go down, you and Purah your lad, to the camp. <sup>11</sup> You will hear what they say and afterward your hands will be strengthened and you will go down against the camp.”

**Then he and Purah his lad went down to the edge of the battle arrays, which were in the camp.**

<sup>12</sup> And Midian and Amalek and the Easterners lay in the valley as thick as locusts, and their camels were without number, as many as the sands that are on the shore of the sea.

<sup>13</sup> **Then Gideon went and behold, a man was recounting to his friend a dream. And he said, “Behold! I had a dream, and behold, a loaf of barley bread was turning every way in the camp of Midian. It came to the tent and struck it and fell. It upturned it and the tent fell.” <sup>14</sup> And his friend answered and said, “This is none other than the sword of Gideon, son of Joash, a man of Israel.**

God has given Midian and all of the camp into his hand.”

<sup>15</sup> **And so it was when Gideon heard the tale of the dream and its interpretation, he worshipped.**

Then he returned to the camp of Israel and said, “Arise! For Yahweh has given the camp of Midian into your hand.”

The next and last passage within Judges 6-8 that includes the divine assurance motif is in 7:9-15, which recounts how Gideon, at the behest of Yahweh, approaches the enemy camp at night in order to hear one of the Midianite soldiers recounting a dream that foretells the Israelite victory in the upcoming battle. Scholars regularly agree that the

scene of the Midianite soldier's dream now found in vv.9-15 contains fragments of some of the oldest material within the Gideon narrative, but an author expanded the earlier, shorter piece into the passage as it now stands.<sup>66</sup>

The narrative begins in v. 9 with the temporal marker בלילה ההוא, “on that night,” connecting the pericope to 7:1-8, which began by noting that Gideon and the troops arose early (וישכם) and encamped beside the spring of Harod, with the Midianite army below them in the valley. In words markedly like Deborah's command to Barak in 4:14 and the command to Ehud in 3:28, Yahweh tells Gideon in 7:9 to arise and go down to the enemy camp, for the deity has given it into Gideon's hand. However, in a statement that anticipates Gideon's by now characteristic hesitancy, Yahweh then adds a conditional clause: “But if you fear (ואם-ירא) to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah, and you shall hear what they say, and afterward your hand will be strengthened to attack the camp” (7:10-11). Gideon, with his heretofore-unmentioned attendant Purah, goes down to the camp. The narrative is then briefly interrupted in v.12 with a recapitulation of the enemy's presence and force: “The Midianites and the Amalekites and the Easterners lay along the valley as thick as locusts, and their camels were without number, countless as the sand on the seashore” (cf. 6:3, 33). Next, in v.13, the narrative returns to Gideon, who upon arriving at the enemy camp overhears one soldier recounting a strange dream to his comrade, who subsequently offers an interpretation. The dream is of a loaf of barley bread that descends into the camp of Midian, “turning every way,” even upturning the enemy tents (7:14). The interpretation offered by the second soldier that

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<sup>66</sup> Scholars almost unanimously agree that the narrative found in 7:9-15 contains signposts from the oldest Gideon tradition. For example, Groß writes “In der Traumszene wurden vielleicht eine ältere Erzählung verwendet, die aber nicht mehr rekonstruiert werden kann” (Groß, *Richter*, 381). See also Kratz, *Composition*, 203; Moore, *Judges*, 204.



“this is nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, the man of Israel; God has given Midian, and all the camp, into his hand” (7:13) serves to convince Gideon (finally!) to act. He returns to the Israelite camp and calls out the troops to attack the Midianite camp (7:15), saying, “Arise, for Yahweh has given the army of Midian into your hand!” In its final form, the narrative encapsulated in 7:9-15 closely intersects with the divine assurance motif that superimposes the Gideon narrative as it now positioned in Judges 6-8.

### **1.5.1 The Literary Horizon of Judges 7:9-15**

Within the context of Judges 6-8, 7:9-15 slows down the narrative: following the elimination of the surplus troops in the preceding verses, it seems inevitable that the battle with Midian will follow. Like the other passages that take up the divine assurance motif, the short narrative encapsulated in 7:9-15 connects with passages both in and outside the book of Judges.

Within the Gideon narrative itself, the pericope seems familiar with 7:1-8 (“that night” at the start of 7:9 is presumably meant to recall the opening of the chapter in 7:1). Furthermore, 7:12, which interrupts a passage otherwise concerned only with a dream, connects to 6:3 and 33 (“and Amalekites and Easterners”). These indications point toward the secondary nature of at least portions of the material in 7:9-15.

Additionally, the passage intersects with others within the book of Judges: 7:9-15 shares language with Deborah’s command to Barak in 4:14 as well as the story of Ehud in 3:28. In 3:28, Ehud declares to the Israelites he has sounded out, “Follow after me, for Yahweh has given your enemies the Moabites into your hand” (את־מוֹאָב בְּיַדְכֶם רָדְפוּ אֹחֵרַי) (כִּי־נָתַן יְהוָה אֶת־אֵיבֵיכֶם). Immediately following 3:18, the narrative reports, “So they went

down after him (וירדו אחריו) and seized the fords of the Jordan against the Moabites and allowed no one to cross over” (3:29). Moab is accordingly subdued and the land has rest for eighty years (3:30). In 4:14, Deborah commands Barak, “Arise! For this is the day on which Yahweh has given Sisera into your hand ... (קום כי זה היום אשר נתן יהוה את־סיסרא בידך)” Following this, “Barak went down (וירד ברק) from Mount Tabor with ten thousand warriors following him” (4:14). A battle ensues, and 4:16 reports, “All the army of Sisera fell by the sword, no one was left.”

Given the pattern established in 3:28 and 4:14, it should follow that Gideon will hear the announcement that Yahweh has given his enemies into his hand and then go down to attack the Midianites.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, this would be the case if v.15b immediately followed v.9, “That same night Yahweh said to him, ‘Arise, attack the camp, for I have given it into your hand’ ... He (Gideon) returned to the camp of Israel, and said, ‘Arise, for Yahweh has given the camp of Midian into your hand!’”<sup>68</sup> Instead, the narrative pauses again, similar to in 7:1-8. In that pericope, with the winnowing of the surplus troops, the issue was the potential of Israel attributing a victory to itself rather than to the deity (cf. 7:2). In the pericope in vv.9-15, the story returns to an earlier theme: the fearful and hesitant nature of the protagonist (cf. 6:11-24, 36-40).<sup>69</sup> By returning to the *Leitwort* “to fear,” the narrative in 7:9-15 pauses yet another time and postpones the expected battle.

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<sup>67</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 278.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, especially n. 600.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, cf. 278.

### 1.5.2 Bumps in the Terrain

Like the pericopes that surround it, the territory created by 7:9-15 contains several bumps. The opening clause ויהי בלילה ההוא, “that same night,” connects the story to the previous pericope in 7:1-8, and suggests the work of a redactional hand. Furthermore, 7:15b repeats 7:1, suggesting that the intervening material expands an older story. Block goes so far as to call the intervening verses found in 7:10-15a “quite superfluous.”<sup>70</sup> However, vv. 10-15a represent an expanded version of older material by a later author, who added to vv. 9-11 and vv. 13-15. Only v. 12 is blatantly superfluous, interrupting an otherwise oneiric story that serves to remind the reader of the exact nature of the enemy threat.

Judges 7:12 disrupts the flow of the pericope, reading, “The Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the east lay along the valley as thick as locusts, and their camels were without numbers, as countless as the sand of the seashore.” The presence of 7:12 interrupts the scene that depicts Yahweh’s command to Gideon that he go down to the edge of the enemy camp in v. 11 and the resumption of that narrative in v. 13. The content is secondary and an expansion of the original threat that was at first only composed of the Midianites.<sup>71</sup> Additionally, a formal feature of the text also suggests its supplemental nature. The verse ends with the phrase “as countless as the sand of the seashore,” which contains the Hebrew phrase של־שפת, literally, “that is upon the edge of [the seashore].” The presence of the relative pronoun ך is significant, for as Waltke and O’Connor note, “This pronoun presents a curious history: it is attested in the older layer

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>71</sup> Groß, *Richter*, 381.

of biblical Hebrew (e.g., Judg 5:7) and in the later books, but rarely in between.”<sup>72</sup> The use of the relative pronoun *ש*, attached to the Hebrew *על*, suggests that this verse is either very old or supplemental. In light of the other evidence in the text, it seems more likely that the verse is supplemental.

Another bump in the terrain of 7:9-15 occurs in v.15a, where the narrative continues, “When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation (*וּזְמַת־שְׁבָרֵי*), he worshipped (*וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה*).” However, it is only in 7:15a that the term *שבר*, translated as “interpretation,” but literally meaning “breaking,” occurs in connection with a dream in the Hebrew Bible. Secondly, the *hishtaphel* of *חזה*, “to worship,” occurs only here within the book of Judges for worship of the Israelite deity rather than for worshipping other gods.<sup>73</sup> The other occurrences of the verb in the book are all located in Judges 2 (vv.12, 17, and 19) and speak broadly of worshipping “other gods,” but never Yahweh. The combination of these unusual occurrences perhaps suggests the antiquity of some of the material preserved therein.

Verse 15b returns Gideon to the Israelite camp, where he then declares, “Arise! For Yahweh has given the camp of Midian into your hand.” In 7:15b, Gideon repeats the deity’s words to him in v. 9, words that recall both Ehud’s command to his troops (3:28) and Deborah’s command to Barak (4:14). The repetition of the statement forms an *inclusio* that suggests interpolation—the material that originally followed the command was a battle scene. This is confirmed by the fact that the material that follows in 7:16-22

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<sup>72</sup> Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 332. Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi assert this as well, “In poetry or later texts, the prefix *-v* identifies the relative clause” (Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 185).

<sup>73</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 280.

conforms to the expected pattern established by the Ehud and Deborah/Barak stories: having called out the troops (קומו) and declared that Yahweh has given the enemy into their hands (כִּי־נָתַן יְהוָה בְּיַדְכֶם אֶת־מַחֲנֵה מִדְיָן), Gideon and his army will attack the enemy camp.

### 1.5.3 Functions and Conclusions

In sum, 7:15b repeats 7:1, and the intervening material is an expansion on an older narrative about Gideon. Judges 7: 9 echoes 3:28 and 4:14, and the careful reader expects a battle to follow immediately. Instead, there is intervening and unexpected material. Judges 7:9-11a contains the key for understanding the literary function of the pericope in its expanded, final form. First, the pericope functions by continuing to emphasize the hesitant and timid nature of Gideon in the Cisjordan as portrayed in the final form of the story. The deity now anticipates Gideon's fear and provides yet another sign of assurance, this time unbidden by the protagonist. Thus, 7:9-15 builds suspense in the story before the ensuing battle takes place. Furthermore, as a whole 7:9-15 provides yet another scene in which Gideon must be convinced of his following victory, once again distancing Gideon from his initial identity as *gibbôr hayil* and changing him into one who is "least."

Like the other scenes that take up the divine assurance motif, the narrative in 7:9-15 yet again emphasizes that it is Yahweh, and not a human protagonist, who is responsible for the outcome in the conflict between the Israelites and the Midianites. In addition, 7:9-15 features both the last instance of a sign and the last time the deity speaks within the Gideon narrative; in fact, the narrative only mentions the deity as an actor once more after 7:15 (cf. 7:22). Furthermore, the pericope functions as a prediction that confirms Yahweh's promise stated in v.9: the deity will deliver Midian, and victory, into

Gideon's hand. The next verses are simply an elaborate confirmation of this promise delivered through the conversation between two enemy soldiers. As Husser writes, "the narrative context implies that the dream was effectively sent by Yahweh."<sup>74</sup> More broadly, the final narrative includes the symbolic dream report not simply to confirm that the deity will deliver Midian into Gideon's hand, but to remind the reader once again that the deity—and not the human characters—is responsible for everything that happens in the narrative. Hence, the final words of the interpreter reinforce this notion, "God has given Midian and all of the camp into his hand": the ensuing victory belongs to the deity, not Gideon.

Although the pericope probably contains elements of some of the oldest Gideon material, the dream sequence functions like the other pericopes that contain the divine assurance motif in Judges 6-8; this time, though, the deity initiates the "test." The earliest form of the story made no mention of the deity and was explicitly concerned only with the outcome of the mundane battle that followed. Most likely, the original story included Gideon and his servant overhearing an enemy's dream and its interpretation, which served as the incentive for Gideon to command his army to arise and attack (thus conforming to the pattern established in the stories of Ehud and Deborah (cf. 3:28 and 4:17)). As such, the earliest elements are in vv. 11b, 13-14, and 15a. Later authors added vv. 9, 10, and 11a in an effort to align the story with a later interest in illustrating that the deity is responsible for the victory, while also serving to underscore yet again the fearful, hesitant nature of the later characterization of Gideon.

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<sup>74</sup> Husser, *Dream and Dream Interpretation*, 117.

In sum, 7:9-15 contains some of the earliest Gideon material. However, the earliest form did not overtly concern the deity and was more interested in the outcome of the battle. These elements are in vv. 9-11 and vv. 13-15; perhaps the earliest is in vv. 11b, 13-14a, 15. A redactor added vv.9, 10, and 11a so that the story would align with their theological agenda, while underscoring Gideon's (secondarily added) fearful, hesitant nature. Verse 12 is possibly a later addition, confirmed by both its content and its formal features.

## 1.6 Conclusions

Judges 6:11-24, 36-40; 7:1-8 and 9-15 share a number of traits and make up the third stratum of material added to the Gideon narrative. Most significantly, each pericope expands and elaborates on the divine assurance motif that spans Judges 6-7. The observation that the Gideon narrative displays an avid interest in divine assurance is by no means novel. Indeed, Polzin argues that the central theme of the narrative found in Judges 6-8 is precisely a concern with these signs and tests, writing:

The Gideon story depicts the excessive concern men exhibit who seek by signs and tests to insure the success of their ventures ... Almost every incident in the story concerns its characters' attempts to solve hermeneutic problems through some sort of *test* that will illumine or explain aspects of their lives.<sup>75</sup>

Polzin includes the same pericopes as those analyzed above: Gideon asking for a sign in 6:17 to clarify with whom he is speaking, the double fleece tests of 6:36-40, the downsizing of the army by the strange water test given by Yahweh in 7:4-7, and, finally,

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<sup>75</sup> Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 168.

the sign of the dream and its interpretation that Gideon overhears in 6:13-14.<sup>76</sup>

However, the entirety of Judges 6-8 is not about signs and tests. The material through 7:14 does display just such an interest, and included among these incidents are Gideon's request for a sign in 6:17, the double fleece tests of 6:36-40, the water trial by the deity in 7:1-8, and, finally, the sign of the Midianite soldier's dream and its interpretation as overheard by Gideon in 7:13-14. However, the narrative's interest in divine signs and tests ends with the shift in Gideon's character that occurs after he overhears the last of these signs provided to him by the deity. Following the sign of the Midianite dream and its interpretation, the narrative world of Gideon ceases to include miraculous signs or divine tests, and the stories take on a much more profane and mundane tone. Both the interest in divine signs and the presence of the deity in the story drop out when Gideon and his men cross the river into the Transjordan.

Amit's work on the book of Judges, and in particular the Gideon narrative, also focuses on the central role played by signs. According to her:

the biblical concept of 'sign' refers to a phenomenon that is unusual, surprising and arousing astonishment, which is therefore considered an indication of divine involvement in the routine chain of events. The significance and importance of the appearance of signs and wonders are to strengthen the faith of the individual or the public. Signs and wonders thus serve proof of the power and supremacy of God and of the truth conveyed by his messengers.<sup>77</sup>

Additionally, Amit explains the purpose of the signs as "to lead the readers, together with the heroes of the narrated world, to the conclusion that Israel was saved by God's will and power, and that Gideon the deliverer is none other than a messenger set up by God,

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<sup>76</sup> For a list of events within the Gideon narrative that Polzin identifies as signs/tests, cf. Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 168ff. For a description of what Amit identifies as signs within the Gideon narrative, cf. Amit, *The Art of Editing*, 233-235.

<sup>77</sup> Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 233.



and who relies entirely upon God's encouraging signs."<sup>78</sup> Accordingly, the signs function to prove that Gideon is a messenger sent by Yahweh, and are therefore not a negative reflection upon the character.

Yet many questions remain, including: How do Gideon's requests for signs differ here and elsewhere within the Gideon narrative? Why did an author expand the original Gideon account to include such clear allusions and connections, an expansion that results in a theological narrative at odds with the profane battle accounts associated with Gideon in 7:16-22 and 8:4-21? Why does Gideon alone out of all of the heroes in the book of Judges need signs? At face value, the most significant effect of expanding the introduction to the Gideon story is that it transforms Gideon from a *gibbôr hayil* (6:12) to a character that is "least" in his family, one who requires a divine sign of assurance to act (6:11b-18, 20, 22-23). In order to understand the reason for transforming Gideon, it is helpful to explore Gideon's request for signs and assurance throughout Judges 6-7. The individual episodes of divine assurance, though alike because they share in the divine assurance motif, nevertheless exhibit, at times, disparate characteristics. The variations suggest that the divine assurance motif spanning throughout the Gideon narrative may not come from a single hand, but rather from a progressive updating of the chapters' material.

Gideon himself makes the initial appeal for a sign in 6:17, in the only place in the Gideon narrative that employs the Hebrew word for "sign" (תּוֹכָח). Yet the verse contains a particularly significant linguistic clue about its late character. The text reads, "Then he [Gideon] said to him [the deity], 'If now I have found favor with you, then show me a sign that you are the one who speaks with me.'" The Hebrew second masculine singular pronoun תּוֹכָח ("you") is here preceded by the relative pronoun שֶׁ meaning "that you are the

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 235.

one.” As such, the presence of the relative pronoun suggests 6:11-24 underwent redaction at a late stage.<sup>79</sup>

The second sign episode is in 6:36-40, though it is unlike 6:11-24 in that this pericope does not contain the Hebrew word  $\text{נִיח}$ . There are also additional factors that separate this pericope from Gideon’s first specific request for a sign in v. 17 and the dénouement of that scene in v. 22. Placed after the second altar story/renaming scene in 6:25-32 and a brief reminder of the looming enemy threat and a rallying of various tribes in 6:33-35, the nature of 6:36-40 is unlike both the first sign episode and the intervening material. With the anomaly of 6:20 (“the messenger of God”), all of the Gideon material up until this point consistently utilizes Yahweh when speaking of the deity. However, the pericope found in 6:36-40 employs only the generic appellation for “God,” and never the divine name of Yahweh. Unlike in 6:11-24, which records in full the dialogue between the appointed but still hesitant hero and the deity, 6:36-40 only records the speech of Gideon. The differences between this sign scene and the one in 6:11-24 are obvious, and it is clear that the episode stems from a different hand.

Judges 7:1-8 is a redactional development of an earlier, profane account that described the beginning of Gideon’s defeat of the Midianite enemy. The theological agenda of a later author of the Gideon narrative motivated the expansion, while the addition was necessary because the original tradition only knew of Gideon and his 300 men, but later additions to the text included the enthusiastic participation of the neighboring tribes, resulting in a much larger army. Judges 7:1 (minus Jerubbaal) probably stems from the oldest Gideon narrative, followed immediately by the earliest

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<sup>79</sup> This is contra Boling, who asserts that the “immediate didactic freedom from which the history of Moses is drawn” is a sign of the antiquity of Judg 6:11-24 (Boling, *Judges*, 135-136).

elements of the battle scene depicted in 7:16-22. The passage, though not explicitly about a sign in the way that the pericopes in 6:11-24, 36-40 and 7:9-15 are, nevertheless exhibits a similar theological motivation and also shares the use of the *Leitwort* ירא and the saving/delivering motif found in those passages.

The final sign Gideon receives is not one that he requests, but rather brought about by the initiative of Yahweh. The episode in 7:9-15 begins with the same redactional phrase that introduces 6:25-32, “that same night” (ויהי בלילה ההוא), connecting the event that will unfold in 7:9-15 with the day of the strange water test described in 7:1-8. Here Yahweh commands Gideon to go down and attack the Midianites, preempting yet another request for divine assurance from Gideon by proclaiming, “But if you fear (ירא) to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah, and you will hear what they say. Afterward your hand will be strengthened to attack the camp” (7:10-11). The verse introduces the fear motif into the narrative once again through the deity’s speech. Gideon goes, along with the heretofore-unmentioned Purah, with a brief interruption in v. 12, “The Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the east lay along the valley as thick as locusts; and their camels were without number, countless as the sand on the seashore.” The punctuating reminder of the looming threat is comparable to 6:3-5 and 6:33, the only other places in the Gideon narrative to identify all three groups as the enemy oppressor—the rest of chapter seven names Midian alone (7:1-2, 8, 13-15, 23-25). The sign in the episode is in the form of a dream, when Gideon overhears a Midianite soldier recount his dream to his companion, and his companion deftly interprets it. Judges 7:9-14 focuses on all Israel: the Midianite guard identifies Gideon as a “man of Israel” (איש ישראל) in v. 14 and Gideon returns to the “camp of Israel” (אל-מחנה ישראל) in v. 15.

The focus on all Israel contrasts with the narrower focus on Gideon and his 300 men that bracket the dream story in vv. 8 and 16. In short, the final sign story is different from its predecessors in part because it occurs at the behest of the deity rather than Gideon, and due to the unusual inclusion of a dream report in the book of Judges.<sup>80</sup>

In sum, the sign episodes illustrate the concern exhibited by the first half of the Gideon narrative with the question of power and the insistence that power comes from the deity, providing Gideon with the assurance he needs to deliver Israel from the Midianites. Through this point in the narrative, Gideon relies entirely, if only hesitantly, upon the deity. The cumulative effect of the fourfold series of signs is a portrayal of Gideon as hesitant and unsure, and he is certainly nothing like the *gibbôr hayil* 6:11 proclaims him to be. Gideon's hesitancy, however, is not necessarily negative: after all, even Moses asked for two signs, and other ancient Near Eastern parallels confirm that asking for proof was a regular aspect of divine-human affairs.

The effect of this series of divine assurances and signs is two-fold. First, the deity, in whichever guise he appears—Yahweh, Elohim, or a messenger of one or the other—is directly involved in the narrative. He is commanding, patient, and, most importantly, powerful. Alongside Gideon, the deity thus becomes one of the central characters in the narrative. Judges 6-7 is the only place in the book of Judges where the deity speaks directly to one of his appointed heroes, yet another distinguishing factor in the Gideon material.

The words uttered in 7:10-11 are the last recorded words from the deity in the Gideon narrative. Once Gideon has overheard the dream and its interpretation, the deity no longer functions as an active character in the narrative, but recedes into the

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<sup>80</sup> Kratz includes 7:13-14 and 15a as part of the original story (Kratz, *Composition*, 203).

background of the story. Moreover, the addition of the divine assurance motif in 6:11-24 (as well as in the subsequent sign passages, different in character as they are) radically transforms Gideon from a *gibbôr hayil* to a character whose claim that he is the “least” in his family is well founded. The redactional expansion serves to illustrate exactly to whom the power rightly belongs in the narrative – not to Gideon but to Yahweh, not with the people, but with the deity.

The layers of material already explored are later theological additions in the book of Judges, which is largely concerned with the correct attribution of power. No confusion over to whom the power truly belongs can remain in the text. Thus, later redactional expansions to the stories about Gideon add a series of divine sign scenes to clarify any remaining obscurity about this: Gideon is, yes, a warrior and, in the end, an efficient and effective one at that. Nevertheless, all power stems from his deity, as illustrated repeatedly throughout the first half of Judges 6-8.

Yet the question remains: why add a series of sign episodes to the material in Judges 6-7 and not to any of the other narratives depicting the various tribal heroes/deliverers recounted in the book? No hero/deliverer but Gideon speaks directly to the deity and no other hero/deliverer needs repeated assurance of his divine election. Furthermore, the addition of the divine assurance motif jars with the idea that Gideon is a *gibbôr hayil*, transforming him into something else altogether. The answer to this question resides in the unique character and function of the Gideon narrative within the book, which serves as a turning point in the larger book of Judges.

In conclusion, the author(s) of Judges 6-7 radically expanded the original Gideon materials. In their final form, the first two chapters of the Gideon narrative are

theologically driven. The narrative encapsulated in Judges 8, however, will be of a markedly different character than the first two chapters of the Gideon narrative. Boling succinctly observes this, writing, “Chapter 7 tells a story to provide a theological perspective for reading the events recorded in ch. 8.”<sup>81</sup> Judges 7, like Judges 6, depicts Gideon as relying on the deity extensively, and nothing happens in the story without the deity’s aid. Both Judges 6 and 7 contain episodes related to the divine assurance motif. Judges 8, however, radically changes the narrative world, shifting the focus of events from the Cisjordan into the Transjordan. Judges 6:11, 12, 14; 7:1, 9-11, 13-15 retain elements of some of the oldest Gideon material and represents the second stratum of material, which added a commissioning scene to the story and began the theological expansion and updating of the primary profane materials. Judges 6:13, 15-24; 7:2-8 all expand the Gideon narrative to include the divine assurance motif. Judges 6:36-40 and 7:12 both belong to a literary stratum that is difficult to determine precisely.

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<sup>81</sup> Boling, *Judge*, 148.

## Chapter 7 Returning to Ophrah

*Gideon establishes idolatry and returns home.<sup>1</sup>*

*And Gideon made it into an ephod—To serve as a reminder of the great victory, by showing how immense their army was that the nose-rings of the nobles amounted to all this gold.<sup>2</sup>*

### 1.1 Judges 8:22-27

8:22 Then the Israelites said to Gideon, “Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson, for you have delivered us out of the hand of Midian.”<sup>23</sup> Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you. Yahweh will rule over you.” <sup>24</sup> Then Gideon said to them, “Let me make a request of you; each of you give me an earring he has taken as booty.” (For the enemy had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) <sup>25</sup> And they said, “We will surely give (them).”

**So they spread a garment, and each threw into it an earring he had taken as booty. <sup>26</sup> The weight of the golden earrings that he requested was one thousand seven hundred shekels of gold**

(apart from the crescents and the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian, and the collars that were on the necks of their camels).

**<sup>27</sup> Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah,**  
and all Israel prostituted themselves to it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family.

With 6:7-10, 6:1-6, 6:11-24, 25-32, 36-40; 7:1-8, 9-15, and 29-35 removed from the map, that leaves the battle accounts (7:16-22; 8:4-31) that are connected by 8:23-8:3 and 8:22-23, 24-27, the verses that introduce the issue of monarchy into the Gideon account and, thereby, the book of Judges. This chapter will focus on these latter verses.

<sup>1</sup> Bluedorn, *Yahweh vs. Baalism*, 181.

<sup>2</sup> Fishelis and Fishelis, *Judges: A New English Translation*, 74.

The scene is thus: In the previous pericope, Gideon successfully routes the Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, captures them, and slays them. He also returns to the cities of Succoth and Penuel, meting out the punishments as he promised. In 8:22 the *אִישׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל*, “men of Israel,” ask Gideon to “Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have delivered us out of the hand of Midian” (v. 22). Gideon declines the offer in v. 23, saying, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you. Yahweh will rule over you.” In the next verses, however, the narrative depicts Gideon making an ephod from the spoils of war, an act that leads both his family and “all Israel” (*כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל*) astray, and that becomes a “snare” to them (8:24-27). With that, the scene ends.

### **1.2 The Literary Horizon of Judges 8:22-27**

The literary horizon of 8:22-27 is quite broad. First, the verses in 8:22-23 and 8:24-27 intersect with the larger Gideon narrative in several ways. To begin, the offer of kingship the men of Israel make in 8:22 and Gideon’s decline of the offer in 8:23 continues the theme of kingship introduced in 8:18-19. In 8:18, Zebah and Zalmunna answer Gideon’s question on the whereabouts of his brothers by stating, “As you are, so were they, every one of them; they resembled the sons of a king,” suggesting that perhaps there is more to Gideon than the timid, “least-in-his-family” farmer portrayed in Judges 6. Additionally, 8:24-27 connect back to 8:21, where Gideon initially takes the crescents from the necks of Zebah and Zalmunna’s camels, setting the scene for the building of the ephod.



The passage also intersects with the other places in the book of Judges that take up the issue of kingship, including the Abimelech narrative in Judges 9 and the concluding chapters of the book in Judges 17-21. The concern with monarchy in the Gideon narrative raises the question of whether to understand the book as pro-monarchic or anti-monarchic. Judges explicitly mentions the issue of monarchy and kingship only in the final chapter about Gideon (8:22-23), the story of Abimelech (Judges 9), and in the repeated refrain, “In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes,” found in the five concluding chapters (Judges 17-21). However, Judges 8, 9, and 17-21 do not present a uniform view on the question of monarchy, and so complicate the issue.

Judges 17-21 is widely regarded as a late addition to the book of Judges, what Römer identifies as “post-Deuteronomistic.”<sup>3</sup> The repeated refrain therein—“in those days there was no king in Israel and every man did what was right in his own eyes”—prepares the reader for what comes next in the book of Samuel: the beginning of the establishment of the monarchy. For these concluding chapters, monarchy does not appear to be a negative institution, but rather the necessary next step needed to stop the chaos and violence with which the period of the Judges (as depicted in the book) ends. The story of Abimelech stands at the opposite end of the spectrum, often cited as anti-monarchical. However, Judges 9 does not challenge the institution of monarchy, but only criticizes who became king and how he did so. Gideon’s reply in 8:23, nevertheless, opposes the neutral or pro-monarchic attitudes found in Judges 9 and Judges 17-21. In response to the Israelite’s request, Gideon answers, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; Yahweh will rule over you.” Judges 8:22-23 appears to be a late(r)

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<sup>3</sup> Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 141 n. 73.

addition to the book of Judges.<sup>4</sup> In short, the stories in 8:22-23, 9, and 17-21 mean that the final form of the book of Judges contains several points of view on the issue of kingship rather than a monotone perspective.

Moreover, the literary horizon of 8:22-23 is broader than just the Gideon narrative, connecting 8:22-23 with passages from the book of Samuel, where the issue of monarchy has center stage. First, the explicit interest in monarchy and its ultimate rejection in 8:22-23 may speak with an awareness of the ultimate failure of the Israelite monarchy: it seems to know proleptically that human kingship will fail, which allows for a Persian period dating of the verses. Gideon's refusal in 8:23 resembles how monarchy is depicted in 1 Sam 8:7, where the deity laments to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them." However, Samuel is to do so only before warning them about the harsh realities of having a human king.

The literary dependency between the Saul narrative in 1 Sam and these verses in Judges 8 is debated. For example, O'Connell thinks that the Gideon narrative was composed in light of the Saul story.<sup>5</sup> Block disagrees, stating, "the Saul narrative was composed against the backdrop of the book of Judges."<sup>6</sup> The idea that the author of 8:22-23 already knew the narrative from 1 Samuel, paired with the request by אִישׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל, "the men of Israel" as a unified group supports the assertion that Judg 8:22-23 is a late addition to Judges 6-8. In sum, Gideon's assertion that Yahweh alone is suitably fit to

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<sup>4</sup> Müller, *Königtum und Gottesherrschaft*, 37-42; Soggin, *Judges*, 160.

<sup>5</sup> O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 291.

<sup>6</sup> Block, *Judges*, 297, n.694.

rule implies knowledge of 1 Sam 8, and reinforces the notion that the book of Judges underwent a redaction after the book of Samuel.<sup>7</sup>

In 8:24-27, the narrative reports Gideon's actions after he declines the offer of dynastic rule. In short, the actions described in 8:24-27 are decidedly king-like, throwing aspersions on Gideon's speech in the preceding verses. In addition to how the scene is at odds with the verses immediately preceding it, the narrator's insertion in v.24 is jarring, "For the enemy had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites." Like the odd insertion of the Ephraimites in 8:1-3, the mention of the Ishmaelites here seems out of place, since the preceding verses were largely concerned with the Midianites (and occasionally with the Amalekites and Easterners). However, certain passages from the book of Genesis clarify the reference, explaining that the term Midianite and Ishmaelite is interchangeable (cf. Gen 25:1-6, 37:25-36).<sup>8</sup> Otherwise, the verses refer the reader back to the preceding story of Zebah and Zalmunna, in which Gideon took the crescents from their camels (8:21). Finally, the closing verse brings the narrative full circle geographically: Gideon is once again in Ophrah, where the story about him began (6:11).

In addition to the connections with its immediate literary context, the pericope in 8:24-27 also shares features with other stories in the book of Judges, especially the story of Micah in Judges 17. Judges 8:27 reads, "Gideon made an ephod (אֶפֹּד) of it [the golden shekels] and put it in his town, in Ophrah; and all Israel prostituted (וַיִּזְנוּ) themselves to it there, and it became a snare (מִוֶּקֶשׁ) to Gideon and to his family." The exact nature of the

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<sup>7</sup> Wright, "Military Valor and Kingship," 51; Würthwein, *Studien zum Deuteronomistische Geshichtswerk*, 1-11.

<sup>8</sup> Soggin, *Judges*, 159; also cf. Block's discussion on p. 299, n. 700.

ephod in the passage is not clear; normally the ephod is a piece of priestly clothing, but within the Gideon narrative, its description sounds more like an object of worship—perhaps a statue or an idol—than a garment. The only other occurrence of the term ephod in the book of Judges is in the story of Micah in Judges 17-18, where the text is also vague on the ephod’s exact nature. In both narratives, each of the protagonists makes (עִיִּם) an ephod (8:27; 17:5). In fact, it is only in these two stories, along with a reference in Hos 3:4, that the ephod appears to be a cultic object for inquiry rather than a vestment worn by a priest.<sup>9</sup> The passage from the book of Hosea is less vague, equating the ephod with the teraphim, reading, “For the Israelites shall remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim.” As Block notes, the Akkadian evidence helps to unravel the mystery of what exactly the ephod is in Judges 8: the Akkadian cognate *epattu* describes costly garments worn by high priests and/or draped over the images of gods.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, Block suggests, “The narrator does not reveal the nature of the image, but it seems most likely that he has reconstructed the shrine to Baal he earlier had torn down at Yahweh’s command (6:25-32).”<sup>11</sup> While the text here says nothing about Baal worship, Block is correct that the term for ephod can also refer to an object of worship.

The closing verse in 8:27 also ties the Gideon narrative back to the beginning of Judges, where the Israelites were said to have “prostituted themselves (2:17)” (זָנְאוּ) and

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<sup>9</sup> Contra Boling, who argues that the ephod is an elaborate priestly vestment (Boling, *Judges*, 160, n. 27) and Bluedorn, who concludes that “the ephod appears to be a golden replica of a priestly garment that Gideon publicly lays down in his own town” (Bluedorn, *Yahweh vs. Baalism*, 176).

<sup>10</sup> Block, *Judges*, 300. Also cf. Carol Meyers, “Ephod,” in ABD 2.550; H.A. Hoffner, “Hittite Equivalents of Old Assyrian *kumrum* and *eppattum*,” *WZKM* 86 [1996]: 154-156.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

where Yahweh proclaimed that the people of the land would become a “snare (מוקש)” to them (2:3). The passage in Judges 8 uses the same Hebrew vocabulary, including the verb “to prostitute” and “snare.” Once again—as in the prophetic speech recorded in 6:7-10 – there are strong similarities between the Gideon account and the theological introduction to the book in Judges 2.

Additionally, 8:24-27 shares many similarities with the Golden Calf episode in the book of Exodus, providing yet another link between the Moses story and the Gideon account. However, in 8:24-27 Gideon is unequivocally more Aaron-like than Moses-like. The construction of the ephod—whatever its exact nature—conjures the negative images associated with Aaron; namely, Aaron’s construction of the Golden Calf in Exod 32:1-6.<sup>12</sup> Similar to both Gideon and Micah, Aaron also “makes” (עשה) the Golden Calf. Furthermore, in both accounts, the making of the ephod/calf results in disaster for the Israelite people.

Judges 8:24-27, like 8:22-23, shares features with both its immediate and larger context. The connection with other texts within the Hebrew Bible, including 1 Sam 8 and the Golden Calf episode, points toward a later insertion for, at least, parts of these verses as well as an awareness of the other narratives from the book of Judges.

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<sup>12</sup> Wong, “Gideon,” 536.

### 1.3 Bumps in the Terrain

Most scholars agree that 8:22-23 is a late addition to the Gideon narrative.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, scholars often ascribe 8:24-27 to a later author. The impetus behind these assertions is that 8:22-23 (and perhaps 8:24-27) introduce the idea of monarchy through dynastic rule, which scholars often argue reflects the interests of a later author. However, the terrain even here is potholed, suggesting a more complicated compositional history than wholesale late insertion.

The pericope opens with the men of Israel saying to Gideon, “Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also; for you have delivered us out of the hand of Midian” (8:22). First, the use of “men of Israel” in v.22, with its pan-Israelite focus, hints at the supplemental nature of the text – gone are Gideon’s 300 men. Yet as Boling observes, the description is “probably hyperbole.”<sup>14</sup> The pan-Israelite perspective belongs to a later stratum of material in the text, and not to the earliest texts which focused only on Gideon and his men, or the intermediary texts that added various tribes to the coalition (cf. 7:23-25).<sup>15</sup> The “pan-Israelite” perspective is a later addition to the text.<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, the verse includes the two *Leitwörter* that often appear together within the Gideon narrative: יד (hand) and the verbal root ישׁ (to save, deliver). Judges

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<sup>13</sup> In contrast, Lindars ascribes these verses to an original Jerubbaal strand, writing “The application of this method leads to the conclusion that the equation of Gideon and Jerubbaal is the result of the fusion of separate traditions, that the offer of kingship in viii. 22 belongs to the Jerubbaal strand, and that the present text of the two verses is the result of the compiler’s effort to fit the traditions into the frame of his own concept of salvation-history” (Lindars, “Gideon and Kingship,” 317).

<sup>14</sup> Beyerlin argues that the “men of Israel” denoted the militia of the sacral tribal union that finds its unity in the Lord cult (Beyerlin, “Geschichte und Heilsgeschichte Traditionsbildung im Alten Testament” VT 13 [1963]: 4-5).

<sup>15</sup> Soggin, *Judges*, 117.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

8:22 reports that precisely what the deity feared would happen has ensued: the Israelites attribute their success to their own (through Gideon's) hand (cf. 7:2), and, in asking Gideon to reign, neglect the deity. The verb expected here is מלך, but instead the verse reads, "Rule (משל) over us, you and your son and your grandson also; for you have delivered us out of the hand of Midian." The threefold repetition of משל in Gideon's response emphasizes that it is not מלך: "I will not rule (לא-אמשל) over you and my sons will not rule (לא-ימשל) over you, but Yahweh will rule (ימשל) over you."<sup>17</sup> The use of משל is also found in 9:22 and the story of Abimelech.<sup>18</sup> Although Soggin argues that Israelites do not use מלך because it is only used for the deity's rule, the various instances משל in the biblical texts indicate that the two verbs are used often as though they have equivalent meanings.<sup>19</sup> The use of משל in Gen 37:8, Isa 49:7, Jer 34:1, and Ps 22:29 attest to their similar meanings.<sup>20</sup>

Gideon's response inserts yet another bump in the terrain. At face value, Gideon refuses the offer of dynastic rule. However, scholars frequently assume that the text indicates that Gideon does not mean what he says in 8:23. After all, within the final form of the narrative, Gideon at times acts like a king, particularly in his dealings with Zebah and Zalmunna and the people of Succoth and Penuel in 8:4-21. Judges 8:18-19 is especially pertinent, where the captured Midianite kings claim to have slain Gideon's brothers at Tabor. The text records their words as follows, "As you are, so were they,

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<sup>17</sup> Boling calls this repetition "especially solemn" (*Judges*, 159-160).

<sup>18</sup> Soggin, *Judges*, 158.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*; Assis, *Self-Interest*, 103, n. 167.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 103, n.167.

every one of them; they resembled the sons of a king.” The description of Gideon’s brothers—and, by default, Gideon himself—as kingly diverges from the portrait of Gideon in Judges 6, where he claimed to be the “least” in his family and of the weakest tribe.

According to some rabbinic traditions, Gideon does the right thing: he refuses the offer. In fact, according to *Yalkut Shimoni*, Abimelech was permitted three years of rule (cf. 9:22) precisely because of the merit of Gideon’s refusal in three parts, “I shall not ... my son shall not ... the LORD will rule.”<sup>21</sup> Other interpreters are less positive about Gideon’s refusal. Block entitles the section in his commentary on 8:22-27 “Gideon’s Sham Rejection of Kingship,” hardly a positive assessment of the protagonist’s words in 8:23.<sup>22</sup> Block also offers the following observation, “As already suggested, coming after this series of events, it appears the Israelite offer of kingship to Gideon simply seeks to formalize *de jure* what is already *de facto*.”<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Webb notes that Gideon had already been acting like a king, “From the moment he crossed the Jordan he has been acting more and more like a king, especially in his dispensing of summary punishments on those who resist his authority.”<sup>24</sup> Finally, of course, Gideon’s refusal here contrasts with Abimelech’s claim in Judg 9:2, which implies that the sons of Jerubbaal (i.e., Gideon) rule over the people. How to understand 8:22-23 depend on the compositional history of the narrative and the relationship between this pericope and the one that

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<sup>21</sup> Fishelis and Fishelis, *Judges*, 73-74.

<sup>22</sup> Block, *Judges*, 296.

<sup>23</sup> “This series of events” = ruthless treatment of countrymen in vv.5-9, 13-17; Gideon’s actions being driven by personal motivation; ridiculous demands made of the people in v. 20; and Gideon’s claim of the symbols of royalty for himself (Block, *Judges*, 299).

<sup>24</sup> Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 152.



follows in 8:24-27.

The verses that follow in 8:24-27 continue the regnal theme: Gideon requests (and receives) the spoils of war from his loyal followers. Yet already in 8:24 the terrain is uneven, because the text adds an unexpected aside: “For the enemy had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.” The identification of the enemy as Ishmaelites rather than Midianites happens only here.<sup>25</sup> Following Gideon’s request for the booty in v.24 and the willing handing over of the earring to Gideon by his soldiers in v.25, the end of v.26 is surprising. Judges 8:26 records that the weight of the golden earrings was “one thousand seven hundred shekels of gold” and then notes, “apart from the crescents and the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian, and the collars that were on the necks of their camels.” The verse introduces new items that Gideon did not ask for in v.24: crescents, pendants, and purple garments. For Assis, the listing of these objects not requested of the people is significant: “The nature of the crescents, the pendants, the purple raiment and the chains as an addition to what was collected appears also syntactically, ‘... beside the ... and beside the ...’ The listing of these objects separately was designed to emphasize them.”<sup>26</sup> The addition of the extra items conforms with the general tendency of later redactors of the Gideon narrative to amplify earlier material (like in the introduction to the account in 6:1-6), suggesting that the end of v.26 is a later addition.<sup>27</sup> Judges 8:26 also contains an unusual formal feature in the use of the relative pronoun *ש*. The verse ends with “ובגדי הארגמן שעל מלכי מדין,” “and the garments of

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<sup>25</sup> Assis, *Self-Interest*, 104, n.169.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>27</sup> Moore, *Judges*, 232.

purple that was upon the kings of Midian.” The use of the relative pronoun  $\psi$ , attached to the Hebrew  $\text{עַל}$ , and normally occurring only in the later layers of material in the Hebrew Bible, provides additional evidence suggesting that the verse is a later addition.<sup>28</sup> A similar use of the pronoun occurs in 6:17 and 7:12.

In 8:27, the text reports what happens with all of the gold: “Gideon made an ephod ( $\text{אֶפֹּד}$ ) of it [the golden shekels] and put it in his town, in Ophrah; and all Israel prostituted ( $\text{וַיִּזְנוּ$ ) themselves to it there, and it became a snare ( $\text{שִׁקְמוֹ$ ) to Gideon and to his family.” Judges 8:27 returns the Gideon narrative, once again, back to the introduction of the book in Judges 2 with identical language, both passages utilizing both  $\text{זָנָה}$  and  $\text{שִׁקְמוֹ}$ . The four verses from 8:24-27 complicate Gideon’s answer in 8:23, creating yet another bump in the terrain. In the former verses, Gideon acts very much like a king, despite his refusal in the latter. In early scholarship on the book of Judges, both Kuenen and Budde made convincing arguments for the antiquity of vv. 24-27a based on the lack of disapproval from the narrator on the subject of the ephod.<sup>29</sup> Judg 8:27b, though, which negatively evaluates the ephod, they attribute to a later hand.<sup>30</sup> Groß, however, assigns 8:24a-c, 25-27 to a post-Dtr hand, while 8:24de is an addition, perhaps dating to the first attempt to link the Gideon and Abimelech narratives.<sup>31</sup> Becker argues that 8:22-23 belong to the DtrH, who linked the Gideon-Abimelech narratives, in order to demonstrate that there were two opposed principles at work in pre-monarchic Israel: (1) Yahweh as king,

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<sup>28</sup> Waltke and O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 332; Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 185.

<sup>29</sup> Moore, *Judges*, 231.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Groß, *Richter*, 387, 457-460.

acting through Gideon as illustrated in Judges 6-8 or (2) the ruler of a human king, as illustrated through the story of Abimelech in Judges 9. The pericope in 8:22-23 illustrates how Gideon offers an alternative to kingship. Becker argues that a later author, his DtrN, expanded the earlier account created by the DtrH, adding 8:24-27, and with it, a certain orthopraxy that was not part of the original DtrH narrative. Müller dates 8:22-23 to the postexilic, Persian period (along with 8:24-27).<sup>32</sup> He argues that the gradual development of an increasingly anti-monarchical attitude can be lined up with the events of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, when Judah, under Persian control, begin to lose hope for the rebirth of any form of native and dynastic control over the land.<sup>33</sup> Römer claims that the insistence on seeing Yahweh as sovereign in 8:22-23 illustrates an attempt on the part of the Israelites to accept Babylonian and Persian rule over Judah.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the consensus is that 8:22-23 and 8:24-27 are later additions to the Gideon narrative, although they do not stem from the same authorial hand and appear to have different views on Gideon.

The creation of the ephod once again evokes the Moses story. That authors reshaped an earlier Gideon story in part based on the Moses story and not the other way around is clear, but the insertion of the ephod incident raises the question of whether an author intentionally shaped the text to ask “whether or not Gideon would turn out to be a new Moses for the nation.”<sup>35</sup> Wong concludes, “Gideon was no new Moses,” a judgment he reaches largely because of the story of the ephod in the Gideon narrative.<sup>36</sup> According

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<sup>32</sup> Müller, *Königtum und Gottesherrschaft*, 37-42.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 245-246.

<sup>34</sup> Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 141.

<sup>35</sup> Wong, “Gideon,” 544-545.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 545.

to Wong, the “skillful storyteller” of the Gideon narrative “took care to leave subtle clues” about the answer to this question.<sup>37</sup> Wong’s “skilful storyteller” did this through several means. First, while Gideon carries out the deity’s instructions detailed in 6:25 to destroy his father’s Baal altar, he only does so in 6:27 under the cover of darkness “because he was too afraid of his family and the townspeople to do it by day.” Wong argues that the narrator places this detail into the narrative in order to set up “a certain tension as one wonders whether Gideon will in the end live up to his potential as a Moses-like deliverer who would deliver Israel in a way his predecessors in the book could not.”<sup>38</sup>

Second, Wong’s author inserts 8:24-27, a scene which undeniably resonates with the Golden Calf story from Exod 32:1-6 (interestingly, as Wong and others have noted, only Aaron’s Golden Calf and Gideon’s golden ephod in the Hebrew Bible are made from golden earrings). Accordingly, “Gideon is, after all, not a new Moses, but just an old Aaron, and Aaron at his worse.”<sup>39</sup> Finally, the narrator describes the Midianite oppressors with the same term for locusts used in the Exodus story, which Wong argues draws attention to Israel’s real problem: apostasy.

Wong is correct that the narrative does contain the following elements: Gideon only hesitantly tears down his father’s altar, and there are a series of tests for “signs” made by Gideon to ensure that the deity will support him. Likewise, the language of locusts used to describe the Midianite oppressors is undeniably similar to the Hebrew terms used in the Exodus traditions. The story of Gideon making the ephod in 8:24-27

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 544.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 543.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 544.

also strongly resonates with the story about Aaron and the Golden Calf. The rhetorical purpose of these various flourishes warrants analysis. Perhaps the final author of the Gideon narrative created a story in which Gideon appears Moses-like at the beginning, only to lead the people astray and appear more Aaron-like at the end. However, there are also elements at the end of the three chapters that definitively depict Gideon in a positive light, and there are additional elements that point to a connection between not only Gideon and Aaron, but also Gideon and Jeroboam. (In fact, the incident of the ephod causes Butler to observe, “Thus Gideon foreshadows the full-blown cultic apostasy that Jeroboam will inaugurate at Dan and Bethel.”<sup>40</sup>) Finally, apostasy is a theme throughout the book of Judges, directly related to the familiar framework of apostasy, crying out, and deliverance followed again by apostasy that shapes the larger pattern of the book.

A closer look at 8:22-23 and 8:28-35 helps to see how both depict Gideon positively—even as the narrative ends. In 8:22-23, Gideon refuses the offer of dynastic rule. Likewise, the end of the Gideon narrative also the protagonist positively: in 8:28 the “land has rest,” a sign of a successful deliverer in the book of Judges (cf. 3:11, 30; 5:31). Furthermore, Gideon goes on to have “seventy sons” and “many wives” in 8:30, and dies at “a good old age,” an honor that he shares with only Abraham and David in the Hebrew Bible. Finally, in 8:35, the narrator reports that the Israelites, upon Gideon’s death, “did not exhibit loyalty to the house of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in return for *all the good* that he had done to Israel.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, the end of the Gideon narrative contains somberly contrasting portraits of the main protagonist: he is both humble and wise enough to refuse

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<sup>40</sup> Butler, *Judges*, 222.

<sup>41</sup> Italics mine.

kingship and yet foolish enough to set up an ephod that becomes a snare to him and his family. Still, the chapter closes with an undeniably positive conclusion about Gideon's legacy: he had done good.

There are additional elements of the Moses narratives that can also be noted, complicating the picture of Gideon as only Aaron-like. As Webb notes, the Gideon of Judges 8 might not be as compliant as the Moses of the Exodus story might, but “this does not necessarily mean he [Gideon] ceases to be a Moses figure.”<sup>42</sup> During the wilderness period Moses at times “overreach[ed] his authority,” and the tradition in 2 Kgs 18:14 suggests that Moses made a bronze serpent that became the focus of Israelite idolatry—a story with obvious similarity to Gideon's.<sup>43</sup> A full portrait of Moses needs to address these less meek portrayals of him, while a full portrait of Gideon must address the conflicting elements found at the end of the Gideon narrative as well. An unambiguous case for a Moses-Aaron dichotomy is not clear in the text of Judges 6-8, where Gideon is both brave and timid, both good and bad, both hero and anti-hero.

The Gideon narrative in 8:24-27 ends with the protagonist back in Ophrah. For Assis, “The fact that the monument [the ephod] was set up in Ophrah, Gideon's town, shows that its aim was to glorify Gideon.”<sup>44</sup> Instead of arguing that the “prostitution” in v.27b refers to an idolatrous cult, Assis argues, “It may well be a personality cult of Gideon.”<sup>45</sup> However, there is nothing in the text to indicate such a “personality cult.” However, the final form of 8:24-27 is, as Assis rightly notes, critical of Gideon—and

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<sup>42</sup> Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 153.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Assis, *Self-Interest*, 107.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

perhaps of “Gideon’s personal motivations [in 8:4-21].”<sup>46</sup> The criticism of Gideon’s ephod at the end of Judges 8 is likely a later addition, which changes the narrative so that it focuses on Gideon and the danger of human power and rule unmediated by divine guidance.

As the narrative returns to Ophrah, things are much different than they were in the scene depicted in 6:11-24. In Judges 6, Gideon destroyed the idolatrous altar that belonged to his father, and set up a new altar to Yahweh. In Judges 8, Gideon creates the atmosphere for idolatry that he destroyed through the deity’s incentive in Judges 6 by building the ephod.<sup>47</sup> Geographically, the story has come full circle.

#### **1.4 Functions and Conclusions**

Both Judg 8:22-23 and 8:24-27 function in several ways. Most notably, 8:22-23 introduces the issue of monarchy and dynastic rule into the book of Judges for the first time, a theme that continues in Judges 9 and in Judges 17-21. Additionally, 8:24-27 reintroduces the issue of idolatry and orthopraxy into the Gideon account, absent since its initial introduction in 6:25-32. The two pericopes paint very different portraits of the protagonist: on the one hand 8:22-23, read at face value, portrays a Gideon who refuses the offer to rule according to good Yahwistic standards. Judges 8:24-27, on the other hand, depict a Gideon who acts in a regnal manner despite the previous refusal.

Furthermore, 8:22-23 sees the merging of two central issues in the Gideon narrative: kingship and war. There is a direct correlation between these two concepts: in the verbal map created by the author(s) of the book of Judges, war breaks out because

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>47</sup> Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 153.

Israel sins (hence, the familiar refrain: “And then the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and Yahweh gave them into the hand of X”).<sup>48</sup> In other words, “If Israel would remain faithful to YHWH, it would not need a judge or a king to rescue it.”<sup>49</sup> It is in the context of a concluding war, after Gideon slays the last two Midianite kings (8:21), that these two themes merge for the first time in the book of Judges, when the Israelites ask Gideon, after the successful culmination of the war with the Midianites, “to rule” over them (8:22). The war hero appears a fitting candidate for dynastic rule and the introduction of kingship ties inextricably to Gideon’s success as a war hero.

Judges 8:24-27 depicts a less Moses-like and more Aaron-like Gideon, a hero/deliverer who leads both his family and his people astray. Furthermore, 8:24-27 puts Gideon – and the narrative – back in the Cisjordan. Geographically, the story comes full circle, but here instead of destroying an idolatrous altar, Gideon builds an idolatrous ephod. He is no longer the timid farmer beating out wheat in the winepress, afraid of his enemies, which he was in Judges 6. From a synchronic perspective, a new man returns to Ophrah. From a diachronic perspective, this is the oldest portrait of Gideon—a “distinguished and royal man,” “remarkable for irrepressible energy.”<sup>50</sup> With Wellhausen, it seems that much of vv.22-27 are a “secondary product, in which the original features of the story are distorted so as to make them suit later tastes.”<sup>51</sup>

In conclusion, all evidence points toward 8:22-23 as a very late addition to the Gideon narrative. Determining the literary history of 8:24-27 is, however, more complex.

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<sup>48</sup> Wright, “Military Valor and Kingship,” 52

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 243-244.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 240.



It is possible that 8:25b, 26a, and 27a (minus the expansion found in v. 26b) remains from an older Gideon account, especially because there is no judgment of the ephod in these verses, suggesting they existed before an editor reused the material to warn against the dangers of unmitigated human rule. Judges 8:27b is later, as illustrated by the inclusion of “all Israel.”

## Chapter 8 Battles on Both Sides of the Jordan

*One can never be too careful in instances of this kind, especially in view of the fact that to a certain degree 7:22-8:3 and 8:4-12 are parallels: they have in common the element of the pursuit, capture, and killing of two Midianite princes, but differ over the location, the first being situated in Cisjordan and the second in Transjordan. There remains the problem whether we have the same episode transmitted twice with different details, or whether we have four distinct people, killed in different historical and topographical circumstances.<sup>1</sup>*

### 1.1 Introduction

Only two pericopes remain on the Gideon map: 7:16-22 and 8:4-21, along with the verses that connect them in 7:23-8:3. The two narratives are both battle accounts and are similar in many ways. In both, Gideon is a *gibbôr hayil*. In both, Gideon attacks an unsuspecting Midianite army and throws them off their guard and into a panic. In both, there are two Midianite leaders and in both these leaders are executed.

Yet for all their similarities, the two pericopes also have notable differences. The most significant is that the battles occur on opposite sides of the Jordan River: in 7:16-22 Gideon fights in the Cisjordan, while in 8:4-21 Gideon fights in the Transjordan. The inclusion of 7:23-8:1 explains how Gideon got from one side of the river to the other. Additionally, the battle account in 8:4-21 lacks the theological element found in the battle account in 7:16-22. Apart from Gideon's references to the deity in 8:7, 19, and 23, the deity plays no role in Judges 8. Furthermore, while the battle recounted in 7:16-22 describes the battle techniques employed by Gideon and his men in detail, 8:4-21 merely reports that Gideon went up "by the caravan route" and "attacked the army, for the army was off its guard" (8:11). No mention is made of strategy employed as in 7:16-22. The

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<sup>1</sup> Soggin, *Judges*, 152.

*deus ex machina* of 7:22 is absent in 8:4-21, and the deity does not sweep in at the end of the battle. Instead, the fleeing Midianite army is the result of Gideon's pursuit. The pericope in 8:4-21 describes the unwillingness of the people of Succoth and Penuel to come to Gideon's aid, which contrasts sharply with the helpful tribes described in the Cisjordan battle account. Judges 8:4-21 is also different in that it introduces a familial element into the Gideon account absent from Judges 7. In 8:4-21, Gideon seeks revenge for the death of his heretofore-unmentioned brothers (8:19), and counted among his troops is Jether his heretofore-unmentioned son (8:20). Finally, in 7:16-22 the battle occurs only at the behest of the deity, while in 8:4-21 the attack is motivated by Gideon's thirst for blood-revenge.

These observations on the discrepancies between the battle accounts are not new. As early as Julius Wellhausen, scholars noted divergences, explaining the differences by positing that the accounts represent fragments of competing literary traditions about a hero named Gideon who hailed from Ophrah of the Abiezerites.<sup>2</sup> This appears to be the stratum of material in which the oldest Gideon traditions are found.

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<sup>2</sup> Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 242-244.

## 1.2 Judges 7:16-22

16 After he divided the three hundred men into three companies,  
**and he put horns into the hands of all of them,**  
 and empty jars, with torches inside the jars,  
**17 he said to them, “Look at me, and do the same; when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. 18 When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then you also blow the horns around the whole camp, and shout, ‘For Yahweh and for Gideon!’”**  
**19 So Gideon and the hundred who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just set the watch; and they blew the horns** and smashed the jars that were in their hands.  
 20 So the three companies blew the horns and broke the jars,  
 and they held in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the horns to blow; *and they cried, “A sword for Yahweh and for Gideon!”*  
**21 Every man stood in his place all around the camp, and all the men in camp ran, they cried out, and fled.**  
 22 When they blew the three hundred horns, Yahweh set every man’s sword against his fellow and against all the army;  
**and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abelmeholah, by Tabbath.**

The first battle account is in 7:16-22, which contains the anticipated encounter with the Midianite army whose threat the narrative introduced originally in 6:1. The verses quickly recount the so-called “battle,” although perhaps the term is not apposite since no battle actually takes place. Instead, Gideon and his men pull off an “elaborate prank,” scaring the enemy into flight so that hand-to-hand combat between the Israelites and Midianites never occurs.<sup>3</sup> In its present literary setting, the battle “is almost an afterthought.”<sup>4</sup>

The episode unfolds as follows: After the dream scene in 7:9-15, Gideon returns to the Israelite camp and commands his army, “Arise! Yahweh has given the army of Midian into your hand” (7:15). He divides the three hundred men (those who remain

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<sup>3</sup> Niditch, *Judges*, 147.

<sup>4</sup> Mathews, *Judges and Ruth*, 93.

following the reduction scene of 7:1-8) into three companies, and “puts horns (שופרות) into the hands of all of them, and empty jars (בדים רקים), with torches inside the jars (ולפדים 7:16)” (בתוך הכדים). Next, in a line of direct speech that encapsulates Gideon’s (seemingly new) self-confidence, he commands, “Look at me, and do the same; when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. When I blow the horn, I and all who are with me, then you also blow the horns around the whole camp, and shout ‘For Yahweh and for Gideon!’” (7:17-18).

In short, the verses comprising 7:16-22 narrate a rapid, densely packed scene: Gideon’s army does as he commands, surprising the enemy forces in a night attack. The Midianites take flight, setting their swords against one another in their terror, while those not killed flee towards the Jordan. The long-awaited battle is thus over in four action packed verses, and the Israelites are the victors, despite their inferior numbers and technology. The underdog prevails.

### **1.2.1 The Literary Horizon of Judges 7:16-22**

Within Judges 6-8, 7:16-22 details the first encounter between the Israelites and the Midianites. Within the context of the larger book of Judges, 7:16-22 is consistent with the overarching storyline of how the Israelites (following their “evil” deeds, their deliverance into the hand of an enemy by Yahweh, and their subsequent crying out to the deity for deliverance) fight and defeat the enemy. Predictably, the battle scene in 7:16-22 follows Gideon’s announcement in v.15b, “Arise! For Yahweh has given the army of Midian into your hand.” As in the previous stories about Ehud and Deborah, a battle in which the Israelites emerge victorious follows such a command (cf. 3:28; 4:14).

In addition, 7:16-22 shares certain features with stories from outside the book of

Judges (e.g., the battle at Jericho recounted in Joshua 6.). These include various elements common to stories about war within the biblical corpus, such as the use of similar tactics, the recurring motif that the outcome of the battle belongs to Yahweh (and not to human action) and the use of noun יָד, “hand,” in battle accounts, through which the deity controls the players (cf. 1 Sam 17: 46; 23:4, etc). Though ancient Israel certainly had diverse war traditions that do not fit one mold, the Gideon narrative nonetheless contains aspects common to Israelite war stories in general. Foremost, the tactics employed in 7:16-22 connect this pericope to other stories outside of the book of Judges. The division of the troops into three companies is a traditional stratagem; it appears with some frequency throughout the biblical corpus. Within the book of Judges itself, such a threefold division occurs in Judges 9, where Abimelech, Gideon’s son, divides his troops into three companies (9:43). Outside of Judges, the book of Samuel records the use of a similar strategy on more than one occasion, both by Israelites (1 Sam 11:11, 2 Sam 18:2) and by their enemies (1 Sam 13:17-18). Additionally, the physical tactics utilized in the Gideon narrative are, as is frequently observed, strikingly similar to those used in Josh 6:6-7. In both stories, the armies use horns, shouting, and encircling the enemy camp. In these respects, the Gideon narrative falls well within the larger category of biblical war stories, drawing upon what appear to be standard battle tactics (at least as depicted in the narratives).

Beyond the apparently traditional division of the troops and the tactics reminiscent of Jericho, 7:16-22 also utilizes themes common to various war-centered narratives within the Hebrew Bible. For example, the narrative about Gideon (in its final form) draws on the prevalent extra-biblical and biblical motif that the battle belongs to

the deity and is the root of the people's success: Yahweh aids the Israelites in their military undertakings. Such a portrayal of a deity reflects the common understanding of the divine role in warfare throughout the ancient Near East: gods accompanied armies into battle and thus subsequently received the credit for victory.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.2.2 Bumps in the Terrain

Even a cursory analysis of 7:16-22 reveals contradictory details that suggest diachronic growth. These tensions include the number of Israelites involved in the attack; the number of instruments taken into the battle by Gideon's men and the precise function of the equipment; whether the Israelites are responsible for the victorious outcome or whether the victory comes from divine intervention; and the fact that the Midianite army flees twice. All of these inconsistencies make the final form of the text "redundant and confused."<sup>6</sup>

The battle scene begins in 7:16, where Gideon divides the troops into three companies. The presence of three hundred men, a number with known significance from the story of the reduction of the troops in 7:1-8, may be a later addition to a story originally only about Gideon and one hundred men, as suggested by the formulation of 7:19. However, three hundred is a number that appears to reflect traditional military organization within other biblical texts.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the figure corresponds to the number of troops with Gideon in the battle story that takes place across the Jordan in 8:4-21. The focus on numbers in 7:16-22 mirrors the larger interest in numbers and size throughout the entire Gideon narrative (cf. 6:5; 7:1-8, 12; 8:10). The three hundred men

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<sup>5</sup> Bolin, "Warfare," 48-49.

<sup>6</sup> Moore, *Judges*, 207.

<sup>7</sup> Judg 9:43; 2 Sam 18:2.

with Gideon, though small in number, will provide a “Thermopylae-like” stand against the Midianites in the ensuing verses, reinforcing the idea that even a small army can prevail.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond the size of Gideon’s army, one of the principle issues of confusion in 7:16-22 is the matter of the accoutrements wielded by Gideon’s three hundred men as they approach the enemy camp. Judges 7:16 records, “After he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and put *horns* into the hands of all of them, and *empty jars*, with *torches* inside the jars.”<sup>9</sup> In 7:20, the soldiers cry out, “A sword for Yahweh and for Gideon!”—despite the fact that nowhere else in the pericope do the Israelite soldiers have swords. Horns, empty jars, and torches—even without the swords mentioned in v.20—are more than an ordinary soldier could carry into battle with him, and the narrative exhibits difficulty in explaining how Gideon’s men managed to do so.

In the final form of the narrative, the soldiers both blow the horns and shout war slogans, while also breaking jars containing lit torches inside them while simultaneously holding the horns. As Soggin notes, “to sound a trumpet holding a torch in the other hand, and alternating between blowing the horns and uttering the war-cry is a complex operation at the best of times.”<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Wellhausen observes, “The men do not have a hand left to hold swords... and the hostile army has accordingly to do itself the work of its own destruction.”<sup>11</sup> From a literary perspective, the use of such “weapons” underscores the difference between the Israelites and the Midianites already set up at the

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<sup>8</sup> Jacob L. Wright, in conversation with the author, August 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>10</sup> Soggin, *Judges*, 145-146.

<sup>11</sup> Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 244; Italics mine.



beginning of the narrative: this is a battle between the underdogs [Israel] vs. their technologically superior [Midianite] opponents.

Additionally, the narrative is inconsistent regarding the distribution and purpose of these various “weapons.” Gideon’s instructions to his men in 7:17-18 lacks any mention of the torches or clay jars from 7:16 (“Look at me, and do the same; when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then you also blow the horns around the whole camp, and shout, 'For Yahweh and for Gideon!'”). The horns, in contrast, have a clear function throughout the narrative and are the only instrument mentioned in Gideon’s initial instructions (7:18). In fact, throughout the pericope, the seven-fold mention of the horns is surprisingly consistent about their purpose: the horns are to be blown (vv. 16,18,19,20,22). The horns (along with the jars) are also found in the first narrative pericope of Judges 7: “So he took the jars of the troops from their hands, and their horns; and he sent all the rest of Israel back to their own tents, but retained the three hundred; The camp of Midian was below him in the valley” (7:8). Becker suggests that the horns were original to the story, while the jars and torches are later additions.<sup>12</sup>

Like the horns, the jars also appear in 7:8, connecting the pericope to the dispersal of the troops in 7:1-8. However, unlike that of the horns, the precise function of the jars is less clear. The narrative mentions the jars only in vv. 16; 19; 20 and they are absent from

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<sup>12</sup> Soggin explains the puzzle of vv.16-23 by identifying a two-phase development in the narrative: there was an initial story about the war strategy employed by Gideon and his men, in which torches, hidden in the jars that were later broken outside the enemy camp at night. This, in combination with the war cry, resulted in the confusion and flight of the enemy. The second phase involved updating the narrative to include the appropriate theological elements: a later (dtr?) editor added the horns to produce a scene not unlike the narrative about Jericho (cf. Josh 6:1) and Yahweh receives credit for the victory via the insertion of v.22 (Soggin, *Judges*, 146). Moore wrongly attributes the proliferation of weapons not to editorial expansion but to a combination of sources: trumpets derive from *E*, the jars and torches from *J* (Moore, *Judges*, 207-208).

Gideon's tactical command in v.18.<sup>13</sup> In v. 16, the jars conceal hidden torches, but v. 19 does not mention a flame. Instead, the soldiers sound the horns and smash the jars, perhaps indicating that the original function of the jars in the narrative was to create a startling noise outside the enemy camp. The combination of sounding horns and smashing jars thus yielded a powerful occurrence of sonic warfare.<sup>14</sup> Verse 20 mentions both the jars and the torches, but it is unclear whether the jars originally covered the torches the soldiers carried in their left hands. Becker's conclusion is best: the original function of the jars in the narrative was not to conceal lit torches, but rather to produce noise.<sup>15</sup> The torches come later.

Verse 20a clarifies the problem created by the overabundance of weaponry, explaining how the soldiers managed to wield concurrently horns, torches, and clay jars: "So the three companies blew the horns and broke the jars, holding in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the horns to blow."<sup>16</sup> With the explanation that the jars hid the torches, the original function of the jars – to make noise when broken and thus add to the clamor outside the enemy camp – changes.<sup>17</sup> As Becker notes, it seems likely that v.16bβ is from the same hand as v. 20, while v. 16ba contains the original function: the empty jars were broken to create clamor.<sup>18</sup> By eliminating v. 20, the problem of the proliferation of weaponry found in v. 16-23 disappears: the torches were a later addition to the original story.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum*, 167.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

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

<sup>16</sup> Soggin, *Judges*, 144- 145.

<sup>17</sup> Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum*, 171.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 171-172.

Ascribing v. 20 to the work of a later hand within the narrative resolves the problem created by v.20b as well. In v. 20b, the Israelites repeat the battle cry from v. 18b, “For Yahweh and for Gideon (ליהוה ולגדעון)” but the Hebrew text in v. 20b adds the word *hereb*, “sword,” to the beginning of the battle cry, producing “A sword for Yahweh and for Gideon (חרב ליהוה ולגדעון).” According to von Rod, a battle in a biblical “holy war” traditionally opened with a battle cry, an example of which he finds preserved in 7:20.<sup>20</sup> Thus, this twice-uttered war cry (v.18, 20) gives the battle account yet another realistic stamp. The battle cry is also noteworthy because while it nods to the importance of Yahweh, it also establishes that Gideon’s men fight “for Gideon!”<sup>21</sup> The Gideon narrative employs the common combination of war cry with the use of other acoustic devices—such as horns or drums. In the narrative, the soldiers cry out, blow the horns, and break the clay jars simultaneously (which the original narrative depicted as functioning to create a startling noise rather than to reveal hidden torches). The result is a narrative example of sonic warfare: sounding horns, breaking jars, flashing torches, and shouting men creates chaos and the enemy soldiers “awake with a start” (v. 21).<sup>22</sup> Even though various incongruities or “bumps” litter the narrative in 7:9-15, certain elements of it nevertheless resemble real-life warfare and tactics.

However, the battle cry twice preserved in the Gideon narrative is not identical in

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel* (William B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 1991), 48. He points readers to Josh 6:5; 1 Sam 17:20, 52, as well as an “extremely spiritualized form” of this element in 2 Chron 20:21-22.

<sup>21</sup> Jacob L. Wright, in conversation with the author, August 2010.

<sup>22</sup> *BHS* suggests emending וירקן to read ויקקן, “and they awoke” instead of “and they ran.” *Preliminary and Interim Report* suggests against this, translating the verb as it stands in the MT, “and they ran” (2:94). There is a literary reason to follow *BHS*: the attack occurs at nighttime, during the middle watch, so it makes sense that the camp would “awake” as Gideon and his men attacked them. For other views, see Block, *Judges*, 282 n. 625; Moore, *Judges*, 212; Soggin, *Judges*, 144.

its two appearances, creating yet another bump in the text. The second instance of the battle cry in v. 20 adds a sword to the story, which does not otherwise record that the Israelites carried swords; in fact, the narrative depicts only the Midianites as sword-wielding (v. 22). Thus, the battle cry “A sword (חרב) for Yahweh and for Gideon!” is a surprising addition. Its presence raises several possibilities: is חרב a remnant of an earlier story about Gideon, in which his soldiers did carry swords? Or is it a later addition to the text, added because it inserts a well-known Hebrew idiom common to war stories into the Gideon account? Additionally, the presence of חרב in v.20b also raises pertinent questions from a text critical perspective. *BHS* suggests replacing “horns to blow (השופרות לתקוע)” in the first half of the verse with “the sword (חרבה)” so that the complete verse would instead read, “So the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars, holding in their left hands the torches, and in their right hand the sword, and they cried, ‘For Yahweh and for Gideon.’” However, no textual witness supports the deletion of the horns in favor of *harab*.<sup>23</sup> Moore suggests that the addition of “sword” in v.20 is a gloss by a redactor, with “For Yahweh and for Gideon!” being the original form of the cry.<sup>24</sup> The addition of “sword” to v.20b is likely an addition, and there is no firm basis for deleting the phrase “horns to blow” from earlier in the verse and replacing it with חרב. However, it is difficult to move further upstream in order to determine whether the war cry was an original part of the attack story, although the inclusion of the deity aligns with the later theological updating of the narrative. Yet 7: 20 does connect 7:16-22 with the oneiric account found in 7:14: “And his comrade answered, ‘This is no other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, a man of Israel; into his hand God has given Midian and all the army.’” All evidence points toward 7:20 as a later addition to an older narrative.

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<sup>23</sup> Soggin, *Judges*, 143-144.

<sup>24</sup> Moore, *Judges*, 210.

The text is also unclear over who is ultimately responsible for the enemy's flight and the Israelite victory. In v. 21, it is the human soldiers, through their employ of trickster tactics. However, v.22 ascribes the victory to Yahweh, who causes the Midianites to set their own swords against themselves (v.22). Reading the final form of the narrative, the battle unfolds accordingly: Gideon's men approach the camp at night (7:19). Then the 100 men with Gideon blow (ויתקעו) the horns and smash the clay jars in their hands (7:19). Next, all three companies blow their trumpets (ויתקעו) and hold up the torches that were concealed in the clay jars and they all shout, "[A sword] for Yahweh and for Gideon!" (7:20). The Israelites then remain in their places all around the camp while inside the camp the Midianites run, cry out, and flee to an unspecified location (7:21). A third (and final) blowing of all three hundred of the trumpets occurs (ויתקעו), at which point Yahweh sets the swords of the men inside the camp against their fellows, and the Midianites again flee, this time toward the Jordan (7:22).

In this account, no battle ever actually occurs. Instead of a proper battle, the series of events adds up to an attack strategy centered on psychological warfare. The narrative depicts Gideon and his men using trickery to route the enemy: a surprise attack under cover of darkness, dividing the small Israelite forces into groups to surround the enemy camp and give the impression of a much larger force, and the sounds of loud cries, breaking jars, and the blowing of horns to scare the enemy awake. Verses 16-21 recount the actions of the Israelite soldiers, never once mentioning the deity apart from the reference in the (later) battle cry. The result of these tactics creates pandemonium in the Midianite camp: while all of Gideon's men stand in their places around the camp, in 7:21 the Midianite camp awakes (וירץ), cries out (ויריעו),<sup>25</sup> and flees (וינסו).<sup>26</sup> Swords do not

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<sup>25</sup> The subject of the verb—whether Israelite or Midianite—is difficult to ascertain. The hiphil form of the verb is usually found as a sort of war cry, which would make more sense if attributed to Gideon's men. Cf. Soggin, *Judges*, 144.

clash, the deity does not intervene, and the battle is over without ever having begun.

Judges 7:22, on the other hand, offers a different account: “When they blew the three hundred trumpets, Yahweh set every man's sword against his fellow and against all the army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath.” Like the addition of חרב in 7:20, the repetition of the blowing of the horns and the fleeing army stands out in 7:22. Why do the three hundred blow the horns a third time, when the previous verse records of the enemy “and they cried out and fled” following the previous blowing of the horns? Who, precisely, remains to flee in v.22? After all, the camp has already fled in the previous verse.

The difference between these accounts is one of determinant: “When they blew the three hundred trumpets, *Yahweh set every man's sword against his fellow and against all the army* (וישם יהוה את חרב איש ברעהו ובכל-המחנה).”<sup>27</sup> The deity, not the Israelite soldiers, is responsible for the flight of the enemy camp. In isolation, v.22 appears to serve as a corrective to the impression created by 7:16-21, in which the positive outcome of the battle is a result of Gideon's effective war strategy and nothing more. Von Rad calls the activity by Yahweh in 7:22 an “intervention” by the deity that instills a “divine terror” in the army, illustrating that “Without question it was the intention of the narrator to attribute the causation of the victory to Yahweh alone.”<sup>28</sup> Judges 7:22a stems from a later

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<sup>26</sup> The MT contains both a ketiv (ויניסו) and a qere (ויניסו) reading. The qere reading makes more sense here, and implies “Israelite causation” (Block, *Judges*, 283).

<sup>27</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>28</sup> Von Rad, *Holy War*, 48-49; Little of von Rad's thesis has escaped criticism, as per Bolin, “Most importantly, further examination of the battle reports from countries surrounding ancient Israel show the Bible's understanding of the divine as an active participant in battle (and history in general) to be part and parcel of ancient Near Eastern belief ... Put another way, one expects the Israelite battle account to claim that their god fights for them because that is the norm for such accounts from the region and epoch” (Bolin, *The Biblical World*, 49-50).

theological reworking of an earlier battle account.

The pericope ends with a return to a focus on geography: the Midianite raiders scatter in retreat as far as “Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abelmeholah, by Tabbath” (7:22b). Although the location of these places is uncertain, the flight appears to have been toward the Jordan River, since Gideon and his men will cross over the Jordan in their pursuit of the Midianites in 8:4. One tension prevalent throughout the book of Judges is the question of the unity of the tribes of Israel as they attempt to conquer the land, with a central portion of the conflict occurring between the tribes on the eastern and western sides of the Jordan River. In the unfolding story, the narrative repeatedly portrays the residents of the Transjordan negatively. The remainder of v. 22b fills in the lacunae left from v. 21 by providing the geographical destination to which the enemy army flees: toward the Jordan. By adding this information, the narrative can thus connect the two available Gideon narrative war stories: 8:4-21 takes place beyond the Jordan, and Gideon and his three hundred arrive there by pursuing the fleeing army from 7:22.

Irony runs rife in the closing pericope of 7:16, especially in the final battle scene: that some of the Midianites should die by sword is, of course, “magnificently ironic” since neither Gideon nor his soldiers even carried a sword.<sup>29</sup> Gideon, so anxious and fearful prior to 7:15b, now becomes fearless, and the numerically superior enemy comically flees from a band of three hundred unarmed soldiers.<sup>30</sup> In 7:16-22, the fear comes full circle: Gideon is no longer afraid. But fear has not disappeared from the narrative: now the enemy, previously described as immeasurable in number and as thick as locusts (6:5), experiences fear (cf. 7:12).

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<sup>29</sup> Block, *Judges*, 282.

<sup>30</sup> Butler, *Judges*, 215.

### 1.2.3 Function and Conclusions

The passage in 7:16-22 has three significant functions. Most importantly, Gideon in these verses finally becomes the *gibbôr hayil* the divine messenger dubbed him in 6:12. With the battle in 7:16-21, the hesitant farmer has turned into a clever, self-assured leader and tactician. The hero/deliverer depicted in 7:16-21 provides a glimpse at the earliest Gideon, what his character looked like before the addition of the divine assurance motif that takes up so much space in Judges 6 and the first verses of Judges 7, and thus his transition into a hesitant and fearful leader. That the clever and self-assured Gideon is the original Gideon will be confirmed by the second battle account in 8:4-21.

Second, 7:22 functions to correct the older Gideon narrative in 7:16-21, which did not mention the deity (except perhaps in the battle cry), so that Yahweh is responsible for the ultimate victory against the Midianites. The addition is clearly a later (and theologically motivated) update: the narrative knew a version of events where Gideon had already scared away the enemy troops through his employ of psychological warfare, as v. 21 attests. The addition makes it clear that Yahweh is responsible for the battle.

Finally, 7:16-22 adds a significant element of irony to the narrative. Gideon wins without swords, and, in fact, only the enemy had swords in the narrative. Furthermore, fear applies in this passage to the enemy, who flees while the once doubtful and hesitant Gideon remains confident. The terrain of the Gideon narrative changes considerably in 7:16-22. What is encapsulated within a now theologically updated narrative are elements of the oldest battle account, which focused on a clever leader from Ophrah and his 300 men. The older account had little to do with the deity, as evident from vv. 16-21 and the manner in which v. 22 is tacked on to the end. The narrative has swelled over time, indicated by the overabundance of “weapons.” Verse 20 is an attempt to smooth out this



problem, and 16b is probably from the same hand. Verse 22 is clearly secondary and theologically motivated: Yahweh is the reason why Gideon wins the battle.

Judges 7:16-22 contains within it a complex compositional history, including elements of the older Gideon narrative, although v.16b $\beta$  and v.20 stem from a later authorial hand that added the torches and an explanation for how the soldiers handled all the equipment. The jars may have been part of an earlier addition to the older narrative, but it seems certain from v.18 that the original narrative knew *only* the trumpets. Verse 22 is also a later addition, in which Yahweh causes the flight of the enemy and the ensuing victory, not Gideon or his employ of a clever stratagem. An examination of the narrative yields the conclusion that v.22 is a theological corrective added to an earlier literary stratum of the narrative. Without v.22, the narrative found in v.16-21 does not attribute the success of the battle to the deity, whom the passage never mentions apart from the battle cries, which are of dubious origin. With its addition, there is no doubt that the credit for the success of the midnight raid belongs to Yahweh. Such a theological corrective is in tune with the later updating of the Gideon narrative, which sought to impose the sacred on an otherwise largely mundane literary tradition.<sup>31</sup> Judges 7:16-21 belongs to the earliest Gideon traditions, with 7:16b, 17-19a,b, 21 and 22b being the oldest. Various additions added further weaponry to the battle in 7:16c, 19a, and 20. Judges 7:22 is a later addition, perhaps added along with the divine assurance motif, to attribute the victory to Yahweh and not the human actors.

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<sup>31</sup> von Rad, *Holy War*, 48-49; Additionally, the narrative is now connected to a host of other biblical stories through the crediting of the deity for a battle's success, especially when the redactors impose von Rod's divine terror into the story (cf. Exod 23:27; Deut 7:23; Josh 10:10,11: 24:7; Judg 4:15; 1 Sam 5:11; 7:10; 14:15, 20).

### 1.3 Judges 7:23-8:1

23 And the men of Israel were called out  
from Naphtali and from Asher and from all Manasseh,

**and they pursued after the Midianites.**

24 Then Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, “Come down against the Midianites and seize the waters against them, as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan.” So all the men of Ephraim were called out, and they seized the waters as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan. 25 They captured the two captains of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb; they killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the wine press of Zeeb,

and they pursued the Midianites.

They brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon  
beyond the Jordan.

8:1 Then the Ephraimites said to him, “What have you done to us, not to call us when you went to fight against the Midianites?” And they upbraided him violently. 2 So he said to them, “What have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? 3 God has given into your hands the captains of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb; what have I been able to do in comparison with you?” When he said this, their anger against him subsided.

Standing between the two battle accounts now in 7:16-22 and 8:4-21 is 7:23-8:3.

The pericope begins in 7:23, which contains the unexpected: the previously disbanded tribes are now called back to pursue the fleeing Midianite army. Judg 7:23 is noteworthy because the Hebrew phrase used to specify the Israelites in this verse is not the more common “sons of Israel” (בני־ישראל; cf. 6:1, 2, 6, 7, 8; 8:28, 33, 34), but the less frequent “men of Israel” (איש־ישראל; cf. 7:14, 23; 8:22). These “men of Israel” are called out from Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh to pursue after the Midianites. In v.23, Gideon also sends out messengers to call out Ephraim for a particular task: to cut off the retreat of the Midianites by defending the waters of the Jordan (cf. 3:27; 5:12). The narrative then briefly recounts that the Ephraimites capture and kill two captains of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb, before detailing an encounter between the Ephraimite tribe and Gideon, in which

the Ephraimites berate the protagonist for not calling them out earlier to participate in the war against the Midianites (8:1-3). Gideon, in a surprisingly deft act of diplomacy for the previously hesitant and fearful leader, pacifies the angry Ephraimites with a proverb, “Is not the gleanings of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?” With this flattery, the Ephraimites’ anger subsides, and the narrative in 8:4 picks up where 7:23 paused: with the pursuit of the Midianites across the Jordan. Several issues, including inconsistency, syntax, and textual clues, indicate that these verses are a later addition to Judges 6-8.

### 1.3.1 The Literary Horizon of Judges 7:23-8:3

Within the Gideon narrative, the pericope in 7:23-8:3 connects to its immediate context in several ways. Judges 7:23-24 resembles 6:35 (minus Zebulun). The opening, in 7:23-7:24, resembles 6:35 (“He sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, and they too were called out to follow him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they went up to meet them”). Although the verse preserved in 7:23 lacks the addition of Zebulun present in 6:35, they are otherwise the same: Manasseh, Asher, and Naphtali are all called out (ויצקק) to fight. Furthermore, 6:35 and 7:25 are syntactically similar: the object precedes the verb in both cases (the Hebrew literally reads “messengers he sent” [ומלאכים שלח]). Judges 7:23 also resembles 7:8, 14, 23 and 8:22: these verses use the expression “men of Israel” (אִישׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל) to refer to the Israelites as opposed to “sons of Israel (בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל).”<sup>32</sup> In these verses, the tribes are called out for a second time, recalling 6:34-35.

The literary horizon of 8:1-3 is broader, and knows at least the book of Judges.

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<sup>32</sup> The phrase “men of Israel” also occurs in 7:8, 14, 23; 8:22.

The introduction of the Ephraimites in the Gideon narrative—who never appear again after this scene—makes 8:1-3 sit oddly in its context. However, their introduction does connect this passage to the larger book of Judges. The passage is similar to Judges 12, which recounts Jephthah’s encounter with the Ephraimites. First, in both the Gideon and Jephthah narratives, the river Jordan plays a central role. Furthermore, angry Ephraimites confront the protagonists of the stories in both narratives, complaining because either Gideon (Judges 8) or Jephthah (Judges 12) did not call the Ephraimites out to fight alongside them (in Gideon, against the Midianites [8:1-3]; in Jephthah against the Ammonites [12:1-6]). Judges records the accusations hurled against Gideon and Jephthah by the Ephraimites with similar wording in 8:1 and 12:1. Judges 8:1 reads במדין מה-הדבר הזה עשית לנו לבלתי קראות לנו כי הלכת להלחם מדוע עברת להלחם בבני-עמון ולנו לא קראת ללכת עמך, “What have you done to us, not to call us out to fight against the Midianites?” Judges 12:1 reads מדוע עברת להלחם בבני-עמון ולנו לא קראת ללכת עמך, “Why did you cross over to fight against the Ammonites, and did not call us to go with you?” Yet despite their similarities, the two confrontations end very differently. In Judges 8, Gideon pacifies the angry Ephraimites with a parable, while in Judges 12 Jephthah goes to war with them. At the heart of both accounts stands the tension that undergirds the entirety of the book of Judges; namely, the question of the unity of the tribes of Israel as they attempt to conquer the land. A central portion of this conflict is between the tribes on the eastern and western sides of the Jordan.<sup>33</sup> In the world of Judges, the Transjordan is the home of the enemy and the uncooperative Israelite tribes who threaten the unity of Israel.

Finally, the use of the verb “to contend” (ריב) is shared by the stories of Gideon and Jephthah. The Ephraimites demand of Gideon, “What have you done to us, not to call

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<sup>33</sup> This conflict goes back to the book of Joshua, although Phinehas peacefully settled the conflict reported there (Josh 22:7-33).

us when you went to fight against the Midianites?" The text then inserts the following commentary, "And they upbraided (ויריבו) him violently." The word translated as "upbraided" stems from the same root (ריב) as Gideon's second name (ירבעל). In the Gideon narrative, apart from the initial use of the verb in the altar story that gives Gideon his second name (6:25-32), the verb is only also found here in the story about the Ephraimites. Conspicuously, the verb also occurs twice in the Jephthah narrative: once in the story of the conflict with the Ammonites (11:25) and once in the similar scene concerning the Ephraimites found in both the Gideon and Jephthah narratives (12:2).<sup>34</sup> All of these factors indicate that the Gideon narrative and Jephthah narrative share several features.<sup>35</sup>

Texts outside the book of Judges are familiar with the events from this passage in the Gideon narrative; namely, Ps 83:9-12 (which mentions Oreb and Zeeb) and Isa 10:26. The pursuit and capture of the Midianites is chiefly what biblical texts outside of Judges remember about the Gideon narrative. For example, Ps 83:9-12 alludes to the victory over Midian, specifically mentioning the two captains (along with Zebah and Zalmunna from 8:4-21):

Do to them as you did to Midian, as to Sisera and Jabin at the Wadi Kishon,  
 who were destroyed at En-dor, who became dung for the ground.  
 Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna,  
 who said, "Let us take the pastures of God for our own possession."

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<sup>34</sup> Judges 21:22 also contains this verb in the story about the women of Shiloh and the Benjaminites that closely relates to issues of the participation of the Transjordan tribes mentioned above. There the Benjaminites are told that if the father or brothers of the women of Shiloh "come to complain (לרוב) to us" about the kidnapped women, then they will tell them "Be generous and allow us to have them; because we did not capture in battle a wife for each man. But neither did you incur guilt by giving your daughters to them [the Benjaminites]."

<sup>35</sup> As Wright notes, "the transition of the larger framework to the Gideon story proper (6:11 with 11:1), as well as the Ephraimite episodes (8:1-3 with 12:1-6) seem to know each other" ("Military Valor and Kingship," 45). Both the Gideon and Jephthah stories, in the end, cast what Wright calls a "dark shadow" on their protagonists.

Isaiah 9:4 also alludes to the victory over Midian: “For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.” Additionally, a more specific reference to the Gideon tradition is found in Isa 10:26, which specifically mentions the toponym Oreb: “Yahweh of hosts will wield a whip against them, as when he struck Midian at the rock of Oreb; his staff will be over the sea and he will lift it as he did in Egypt.” Traditions about Gideon outside the book of Judges principally remember the Gideon account for the protagonist’s success over the Midianites. This is, yet again, another argument against Bluedorn’s claim that the deliverance from Midian is not the theme of the Gideon narrative—in fact, this is chiefly for what Gideon is remembered.

### 1.3.2 Bumps in the Terrain

Evidence in the text suggests that it is not all of one piece. The pericope is divisible into two parts: 7:23-25 and 8:1-3. Judges 7:23-25 describes how Gideon calls out the Ephraimites to aid in the pursuit of the fleeing enemy army, assigning them a specific role: “Come down against the Midianites and seize the waters against them, as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan” (7:24). The Hebrew Bible nowhere else mentions Beth-barah and its location is unknown. However, the specification of the Jordan is important; the ongoing negative portrayal of the Transjordanian people will continue once Gideon crosses the river in 8:4.

The Ephraimites carry out their assignment with apparent success, in the process capturing and killing two Midianite captains (שׁר), Oreb and Zeeb. They consequently bring the heads of the captains to Gideon “on the other side of the Jordan” (מעבר לירדן). Mention of the Ephraimites is somewhat surprising since they have played no previous

role in the narrative. Following the resolution of the ensuing conflict in 8:3, the Ephraimites drop out of the narrative entirely, not to be mentioned again. The presence of the Ephraimites in the pericope thus seems to be a later addition, tacked onto the Gideon narrative but not woven throughout it. They only appear elsewhere in the book of Judges within the Jephthah account.

In many respects, 7:25 leads the reader to expect the culmination of the Gideon narrative—the enemy has been defeated and their leaders executed. However, the narrative nevertheless continues. Yet the addition of the clause “and they pursued after Midian” at the end of 7:25—which happens after the capture and execution of Oreb and Zeeb—indicates that there is more story to follow. Judges 7:25 serves as a bridge harmonizing 7:23-8:3 with 8:4, which depicts a continued pursuit of the Midianites.<sup>36</sup> As such, it is probably a later addition to the text. Moore explains, “The redactor’s representation is that the main body of the Midianites escaped across the Jordan; the Ephraimites, bearing their trophies, followed them over, and there fell in with Gideon.”<sup>37</sup>

Additionally, the vignette in 8:1-3 provides yet another unexpected twist, momentarily slowing down the narrative action before the ensuing pursuit scene: the Ephraimites, who successfully captured and killed the Midianite captains in 7:25, now accost Gideon: “‘What have you done to us, not to call us when you went to fight against the Midianites?’ And they upbraided him (ויריבון) violently.” Gideon, now confident, appeases the angry Ephraimites in 8:2-2-3. His response contains one of the rare uses in Judges 6-8 of Elohim for the deity rather than Yahweh, again suggesting a different authorial hand.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Moore, *Judges*, 215.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Cf. 6:20, 36, 39, 40; and 7:14.

The most obvious contradiction is in the complaint of the Ephraimites themselves, since Gideon had in fact called them out to pursue the Midianites with a very specific purpose in v.24 (i.e., to defend the fords of the Jordan). Gideon responds by telling the Ephraimites that they are better than he (or, at least, his tribe). Capturing the enemy captains, rather than routing the enemy camp, is the more important and impressive feat. The use of Gideon's proverbial reply is frequently a subject of scholarly debate, with scholars largely agreeing that that the narrative here employs a traditional proverb used in a new setting.<sup>39</sup> The narrative thus abates the quarrel brought forward by the Ephraimites through inserting Gideon's quick-witted use of the traditional proverb; Gideon utters the words, and "their anger against him subsided" (8:3). Thus ends the somewhat disruptive scene that introduces the Ephraimites into the Gideon narrative; Judg 8:4 picks up where 7:22 left off as Gideon and his 300 men pursue the fleeing Midianites across the Jordan.

### 1.3.3 Functions and Conclusions

The addition of v. 23 creates the impression that various tribes participated enthusiastically in the pursuit of the fleeing enemy army. However, 8:4-21, which only knows that Gideon and his men pursue the Midianites, makes it clear that the earliest accounts did not know about post-battle assistance from various tribes, suggesting that v. 23 is a later addition, added to the narrative to increase Israelite involvement even further. The addition of 7:23 to the narrative diversifies the tribal involvement, returning the story to one that is pan-Israelite in nature rather than simply focused on Gideon's 300 men (and only his tribe).

Judges 7:24-25, which recount the inclusion of the Ephraimites, might have been

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<sup>39</sup> Boling, *Judges*, 151; Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 308; Richter, *Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, 208; Soggin, *Judges*, 147.



added prior to v.23, but are a later addition to the earliest Gideon tradition. These verses neatly conclude the narrative and the reader expects the refrain “and the land had rest for X years” to follow. Instead, a redactor has inserted several phrases (“as they pursued the Midianites” and “beyond the Jordan” in v. 25) into the story of the Ephraimites and the capture of Oreb and Zeeb to connect this material (and what precedes it) with the second pursuit narrative encapsulated in 8:4-21.

It is relatively easy to identify 7:23-8:3 as supplemental, with 7:24-8:3 probably added to the Gideon tradition first, and 7:23 added only later. What then is the function of these passages? In both cases, the most obvious function of the supplements is simply to increase the number of tribes who were involved in the pursuit of the Midianites. Judges 7:24-8:3 only marginally increases the involvement, adding the tribe of Ephraim to the participation of the Abiezerites. It appears to be an older addition than 7:24 because in it Gideon does not reference the broader participation of tribes as indicated in that verse. The addition of 7:25 increases the number of tribes involved in the pursuit even further. A depiction of such broader tribal mustering and participation is a central theme of the larger book of Judges.

Judges 8:1-3 also appears to be an addition to an earlier Gideon narrative. Boling notes, “This transitional unit, however, sits loose in its context. After showing the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon as proof of their prowess, the Ephraimites are talked out of their resentment against Gideon’s allegedly preferential treatment of tribes. They simply drop out of the picture.”<sup>40</sup> The unit only loosely fits into the immediate literary horizon of the Gideon account and the Ephraimites play no other role in any part of Judges 6-8. Looking at the larger literary horizon of the entire book of Judges, however, the inclusion

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<sup>40</sup> Boling, *Judges*, 152.

of the Ephraimites connects the Gideon pericope to other units, particularly the strikingly similar account in the Jephthah narrative. Thus, 8:1-3 appears to be supplemental, but it might be older than the addition found in 7:23. In his reply, Gideon mentions only the tribe of Abiezer, without the larger body of soldiers that 7:23 indicates Gideon had called back to him.

However, the inclusion of 8:1-3 functions as more than a bridge: it presents Gideon as the positive example of a leader with whom the reader can contrast the later character of Jephthah.<sup>41</sup> Gideon, unlike Jephthah, deftly handles the troublesome Ephraimites. Instead of tribal warfare, Gideon's diplomacy maintains peace amongst the tribes. Jephthah's incompetence and ineptitude on this front will be all the more evident with Gideon as his foil. Ultimately, the inclusion of 7:23 and 7:24-8:3 broadens the number of tribes involved in the pursuit, with 7:23 especially illustrating how various tribes enthusiastically participated. In the end, having more tribes involved in the pursuit of the Midianites does not ultimately change the plot, but it does significantly alter the theological thrust of the story.<sup>42</sup> On the one hand, the mustering of additional tribes goes directly against their disbanding—at the deity's behest—depicted in 7:1-8. On the other hand, the depiction of a broad segment of Israelite tribes mustering and working together addresses one of the central themes in the book of Judges: namely, the pan-Israelite participation of the tribes and their unity (or lack thereof). The passage describes the kind of large-scale, voluntary, and collective community effort that the book of Judges is interested in conveying, addressing one of the book's central concerns: national unity verses territorial disputation.

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<sup>41</sup> Jacob L. Wright, in conversation with the author, August 2010.

<sup>42</sup> Soggin, *Judges*, 148

## 1.4 Judges 8:4-21

Judg 8:4 Then Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over, he and the three hundred who were with him, exhausted and famished.

5 So he said to the people of Succoth, "Please give some loaves of bread to my followers, for they are exhausted, and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian." 6 But the officials of Succoth said, "Do you already have in your possession the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna, that we should give bread to your army?" 7 Gideon replied, "When Yahweh has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will trample your flesh on the thorns of the wilderness and on briars."

8 From there he went up to Penuel, and made the same request of them; and the people of Penuel answered him as the people of Succoth had answered. 9 So he said to the people of Penuel, "When I come back in peace, I will break down this tower."

**Judg 8:10 Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with their army, about fifteen thousand men,**

all who were left of all the army of the people of the East; for one hundred twenty thousand men bearing arms had fallen.

**11 So Gideon went up by the caravan route east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and attacked the army; for the army was off its guard. 12 Zebah and Zalmunna fled; and he pursued them and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and threw all the army into a panic.**

Judg 8:13 When Gideon son of Joash returned from the battle by the ascent of Heres, 14 he caught a young man, one of the people of Succoth, and questioned him; and he listed for him the officials and elders of Succoth, seventy-seven people. 15 Then he came to the people of Succoth, and said, "Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me, saying, 'Do you already have in your possession the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna, that we should give bread to your troops who are exhausted?'" 16 So he took the elders of the city and he took thorns of the wilderness and briars and with them he trampled the people of Succoth.

17 He also broke down the tower of Penuel, and killed the men of the city.

**Judg 8:18 Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "What about the men whom you killed at Tabor?" They answered, "As you are, so were they, every one of them; they resembled the sons of a king." 19 And he replied, "They were my brothers, the sons of my mother; as Yahweh lives, if you had saved them alive, I would not kill you." 20 So he said to Jether his firstborn, "Go kill them!" But the boy did not draw his sword, for he was afraid, because he was still a boy. 21 Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, "You come and kill us; for as the man is, so is his strength." So Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna; and he took the crescents that were on the necks of their camels.**

In 8:4-21 the scene shifts to the Transjordan, a geographical location that brings a very different Gideon to the forefront of the narrative. The scene unfolds as follows:

“Then Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over, he and the three hundred who were with him, exhausted and famished” (8:4). The tribes called out to aid Gideon in 7:23 are absent; only Gideon and his 300 men are the primary actors in the remaining material.<sup>43</sup> Judges 8:5-9 and 13-17 provide two brief episodes only tangentially related to the pursuit. Verses 5-9 record how Gideon stops in Succoth and Penuel to request aid. The people of both cities refuse, and Gideon threatens to retaliate once he has successfully captured the fleeing Midianite leaders. Verses 13-17 detail Gideon’s eventual retaliation. He tramples the people of Succoth and breaks down the tower of Penuel, while also killing the men of the city.

In 8:10-11, Gideon and his men pursue the Midianite leaders, eventually causing “the enemy camp to panic (8:11) ”(והמחנה היה בטח). Gideon then returns to Succoth and Penuel, declaring his victory over Zebah and Zalmunna (8:15). Verses 18-21 return to his dealings with the Midianite kings, where Gideon reveals his true motive for their pursuit: they have killed his brothers at Tabor (8:18-19). The turn toward the familial continues in 8:20-21, as Gideon instructs his (heretofore-unmentioned) youngest son Jether to slay the captured kings. The boy refuses, and Zebah and Zalmunna speak, appealing to Gideon’s honor: “You come and kill us, for as a man is, so is his strength” (8:21). Gideon acquiesces, and the scene concludes with Gideon taking the crescents from the necks of the slain king’s camels.

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<sup>43</sup> Only Judg 8:4 specifies the 300. Elsewhere, it is simply Gideon and his “followers” (8:5). Furthermore, v. 10 only specifies the Easterners in the army, although elsewhere Gideon refers to Zebah and Zalmunna s the kings of Midian.

A cursory reading of 8:4-21 makes it evident that the passage is composed of two different stories. These two stories are “verschränken kunstvoll,” separate yet interrelated, and organized in an ABAB pattern to form a coherent plot.<sup>44</sup> The sections concerning Succoth and Penuel (vv.5-9, 13-17) share many concerns with the larger book of Judges, and can thus easily be labeled as supplemental.<sup>45</sup> The sections dealing with Zebah and Zalmunna, on the other hand, contain elements of the oldest Gideon accounts: this is Gideon as *gibbôr hayil*.

#### 1.4.1 The Literary Horizon of Judges 8:4-21

Within the immediate context of Judges 6-8, 8:4-21 is strikingly similar to the battle scene recounted in 7:16-22. In Judges 8, however, as Soggin notes, “Gideon arrives in the camp, which he destroys, thus exterminating the root of all evil. In the present text much is left to the initiative of Gideon, and there are no traces of a substantial theological revision. This is one more feature which supports the probable authenticity and antiquity of this section.”<sup>46</sup> The repeated story of the chase after and murder of two Midianite leaders—first Oreb and Zeeb in Judges 7, then Zebah and Zalmunna in Judg 8es—leaves, for Soggin, “the problem [of] whether we have the same episode transmitted twice with different details, or whether we have four distinct people, killed in different historical and topographical locations.”<sup>47</sup> It seems, as Wellhausen already observed, that the two stories

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<sup>44</sup> Groß, *Richter*, 384.

<sup>45</sup> Jacob L. Wright, in conversation with the author, August 2010..

<sup>46</sup> Soggin, *Judges*, 152.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

represent competing literary traditions about the protagonist.<sup>48</sup>

Judges 8:4-21 shares some concerns with the larger book of Judges, especially in the layers about Succoth and Penuel found in vv. 4-9 and vv. 13-16.<sup>49</sup> These include the question of the unity of the tribes of Israel and the negative depiction of the tribes in the Transjordan (cf. also 5:15-18; 12; 21). The inclusion of Succoth and Penuel also reminds the reader of other stories, including the Jacob story at Penuel and Jeroboam's association with Penuel in 1 Kgs 12:25. (In fact, Penuel only occurs in the Jacob, Gideon, and Jeroboam stories.) The tower in Penuel also calls to mind 9:52-53, and serves as another connection between the Gideon and Abimelech narratives. Finally, the *Leitwort* ט , “hand,” appears again in this pericope when the people of Succoth's question of whether he already has the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna connects this passage to the other places in the story that link the *Leitwörter* ט and שׁוּי.<sup>50</sup>

#### 1.4.2 Bumps in the Terrain: Zebah and Zalmunna

There are several indications of the disparate nature of the material. First, the story in 8:4-21 lacks a beginning.<sup>51</sup> In v.5, Gideon is suddenly talking to the people of Succoth, a location not otherwise introduced into the narrative. Additionally, there is no background information provided for Gideon's personal vendetta, introduced

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<sup>48</sup>Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 242-244.

<sup>49</sup> Jacob L. Wright, in conversation with the author, August 2010.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 265-266.

<sup>51</sup> Groß, *Richter*, 384-385.

unexplained into the narrative in 8:19.<sup>52</sup> Finally, there are many place names in these verses (Succoth, Penuel, Ascent of Heres, Karkor, Nobah and Jogbehah, Tabor), but the actual location for the blood feud remains unclear.<sup>53</sup> The missing elements suggest that an author did not reproduce the original, older story in full.<sup>54</sup>

Judges 8:4 begins the passage with the story of Gideon and his 300 men. Other elements hint at the work of a redactor, especially the anomalous use of the Qal participle, “Then Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over (עָבַר).” With Moore, the more regular phrase the reader expects is “and crossed over.”<sup>55</sup> The use of the circumstantial participle may be a gloss.<sup>56</sup> As such, it serves to place Gideon and his men on the correct side of the Jordan for the material that will follow. With Gideon on the correct side of the river, 8:5 then begins an unexpected narrative about the people of Succoth and Penuel. It is not until 8:10 that the original story about Zebah and Zalmunna begins. Scholars almost unanimously agree that 8:10 is the beginning of a discrete story because it opens with a disjunctive circumstantial clause in Hebrew, thus marking the beginning of a new episode.<sup>57</sup> The narrative that follows, as Butler notes, is “told without introducing narrative tension or complication. It is also told without YHWH ...”<sup>58</sup> Thus, it is the opposite of its predecessor in 7:16-22.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 452.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 384-385.

<sup>55</sup> Moore, *Judges*, 218.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>57</sup> Butler, *Judges*, 219; Anderson, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 79.

<sup>58</sup> Butler, *Judges*, 219.

The narrative about Zebah and Zalmunna divides into two discrete units: vv. 10-12, and vv. 18-21. The story that begins with the episode marker in vv. 10-12 is simple and straightforward, unlike 7:16-22. However, like the previous battle narrative, the pericope in 8:4-21 displays an avid interest in both geography and numbers. Judges 8:10 places the heretofore-unmentioned Zebah and Zalmunna in Karkor, whose exact contemporary location remains unknown.<sup>59</sup> The ensuing account lacks detailed background material, but is perhaps loosely connected to the previous battle account (7:16-22) by the mention of the number of the “the fallen (הנפלים)” soldiers. Here only 15,000 of the 120,000 “sword drawing men (איש שלף חרב)” remain. Boling suggests that “the fallen,” the referent of which is not entirely obvious, was taken by a redactor from 7:22.<sup>60</sup> Thus, it appears an author expanded and reworked v. 10 to connect the second, independent battle account about Gideon with the theologically expanded account in 7:16-22. Alternatively, it is also possible that “the fallen” men referred to here are from the original introduction to the battle account now located in 8:4-21, no longer preserved in the current form of the biblical narrative. The soldiers who remain belong to the “army of the Easterners (בני־קדם מכל מחנה),” who are otherwise only mentioned in connection with the Midianites and Amalekites (cf. 6:3, 33; 7:12), and whose inclusion is a later addition to the text, indicating that a redactor has expanded and reworked v. 10.

Verse 11 reports Gideon’s attack. He goes up by the “caravan route east of Nobah and Jogbehah,” two unknown locations.<sup>61</sup> As the narrative continues, the geographical

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<sup>59</sup> Gaß, *Die Ortsnamen des Richterbuchs*, 449-451.

<sup>60</sup> Boling, *Judges*, 156.

<sup>61</sup> Gaß, *Das Ortsnamen des Richterbuch*, 452-458.



locations become more obscure. The text in v. 11 lacks detail, and Gideon employs no clever battle tactics here as he did in 7:16-22, but “simply follows the main trade route to the apparently unsuspecting army.”<sup>62</sup> The Hebrew at the end of v.11 reads והמחנה היה בטח, literally, “And the camp was secured (בטח).” The only details to follow in v.12 are that “Zebah and Zalmunna fled,” using the same verb for the fleeing army in 7:21. Gideon pursues them (וירדף; cf. 7:23, 25; 8:4, 5)—no mention is made now of the 300—and takes them (וילכד; cf. 8:12 and the boy of Succoth where the same verb is used), throwing the whole army into a panic (החריד). The use of the root חרד connects the pericope back to Gideon’s command to his troops in 7:3 (“Whoever is fearful and trembling (וחרד), let him return home”) as well as to the toponym in 7:1, where the troops encamped next to the spring of Harod (עין חרד). Now the enemy, not Gideon, is afraid. The inclusion of this word ties the passage to other passages in the Gideon narrative. As Wright aptly notes, the whole cycle about Gideon has been shaped and unified by the themes of fear and trust (cf. Gideon’s doubt in 6:13-14 and the series of tests in 6:17-224, 36-40, as well as the enemy’s fears in 7:13-14, 21-22; 8:12).<sup>63</sup> Perhaps its use in the oldest of the Gideon material spurred the further use of fear as a way to characterize Gideon in the final form of the narrative.

A later author spliced the narrative concerning Zebah and Zalmunna, and included the intervening verses found in 8:13-17. Those verses interrupt the story to have Gideon return to Succoth and Penuel in order to carry out his threats from 8:5-9. The story about Zebah and Zalmunna is picked up again in vv.18-21, verses which introduce new

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<sup>62</sup> Butler, *Judges*, 219.

<sup>63</sup> Jacob L. Wright, in conversation with the author, August 2010.

elements into the Gideon narrative. These new elements include an explanation for Gideon's pursuit of Zebah and Zalmunna, the introduction of a new familial theme, and—perhaps most importantly—the issue of kingship. The latter element occurs immediately in vv.18-19, where both the blood vendetta and kingship take center stage. Nowhere in the older account are Zebah and Zalmunna given a title; rather, the text only calls them kings in the supplementary verses concerning Succoth and Penuel, which might suggest that those passages know 8:22-23, verses that directly introduces the issue of dynastic rule.

Connected to the issue of kingship is that 8:18-19 depict Gideon acting in a regnal manner, with an attitude far removed from the hesitant and anxious farmer depicted in Judg 6. The text reads:

Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, “What about the men whom you killed at Tabor?” They answered, “As you are, so were they, every one of them; they resembled the sons of a king.” And he replied, “They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As Yahweh lives, if you had saved them alive, I would not kill you.”

The exchange introduces three very significant elements into the Gideon narrative that were not present before: (1) that Gideon's pursuit of the Midianites is one of personal vendetta; (2) related to the first, the issue of family: Gideon is seeking revenge for his otherwise unmentioned brothers; and (3) the issue of kingship: Gideon's brothers resembled the “sons of the king (בני המלך).”<sup>64</sup>

The ensuing dialogue continues the familial theme, introducing Gideon's first born, Jether, into the story (8:20). Commanded by his father to slay the two captured

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<sup>64</sup> The question word used in the Hebrew is difficult. In other passages in the HB it means “where,” but the answer Zebach and Zalmunna give is a response to “what?” See Block, 293, n. 675; HALOT 1.43; Moore, *Judges*, 226.

enemy leaders, the boy fearfully refuses, for “he is still a lad.” In this way, he is reminiscent of the Gideon in 6:27 and 7:10.<sup>65</sup> In 7:21 Zebah and Zalmunna appeal to Gideon’s honor, stating, “You come and kill us; for as the man is, so is his strength.” The challenge to Gideon’s strength returns the reader to 6:12, where Gideon was designated a *gibbôr hayil* by the divine messenger. Boling suggests that vv.1-21 “sit loosely in the context,” correctly noting that v.18 could easily follow v.12 for a consistent and coherent story, with the insertion of vv.13-17 breaking this connection<sup>66</sup>

The material found in v.11-12 and 18-21 is largely of one piece and does not appear to have undergone any significant reworking at the hands of a redactor. Only v. 10 has perhaps been glossed and reworked. Scholars readily agree that 8:4-21 is drawing upon an older Gideon narrative that focused on Gideon’s personal vendetta against the Midianite kings for their slaying of his brothers. Groß maintains that portions of the narrative found in Judg 8:4-21 are pre-Deuteronomistic (8:4, 7b, 10-12, 18bR), while others (8:5-7a, 7c-9b, 12c?, 13-17, 18ab.bR.c – 21) are “Fragmente der königszeitlichen Blutrache-Erzählung” added by the Dtr.<sup>67</sup> Becker also thinks that the story is drawing on older material, but identifies vv. 4, 10-13 as the hand of the Dtr.<sup>68</sup> Herein sits the oldest traditions about Gideon.

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<sup>65</sup> Block, *Judges*, 295.

<sup>66</sup> Boling, *Judges*, 157.

<sup>67</sup> Groß, *Richter*, 386.

<sup>68</sup> Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum*, 174.

### 1.4.3 Bumps in the Terrain: Succoth and Penuel

The material in vv.13-17 disrupts what would otherwise be a seamless (if lacking an introduction) story about Gideon and his personal vendetta against Zebah and Zalmunna, Midianite leaders who killed his brothers at Tabor. The story contained in vv. 5-9 and vv. 13-17 unfolds as follows: in vv. 5-9, Gideon arrives in Succoth and demands of the men of Succoth (אנשי סכות), “Please give some loaves of bread to my followers, for they are exhausted (עיפים), and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings (מלכי) of Midian.” The people of Succoth refuse (8:6), and so Gideon threatens to return and punish the city after he successfully captures the Midianite kings. The episode is repeated in Penuel (8:8). Judges 8:13-17 describe how Gideon returns and carries out his threat. What is immediately clear is that the stories about Succoth and Penuel rely on the Zebah and Zalmunna narrative to make sense: the punishment of the people of Succoth and Penuel requires the arrest of Zebah and Zalmunna and Gideon’s powerful position and apparent nobility explain the demands he makes on the two cities. Additionally, the sections about Succoth and Penuel (vv.5-9, 13-17) share many concerns with the larger book of Judges, also suggesting that they are later additions.<sup>69</sup>

However, there are several noteworthy inconsistencies in these pericopes, not least of which are the way the narrative describes the inhabitants of the two cities. The narrative sometimes uses the phrase “men of Succoth (אנשי סכות)” to refer to its inhabitants (cf. 8:8, 15, 16). However, in 8:6, it is the “officials (שרי) of Succoth” who answer Gideon, in 8:8 the “men” again, in 8:14 the “officials and elders (את־שרי סכות ואת־זקניה),” and in 8:16 the “elders” and the “men.” The diversity of names for the people

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<sup>69</sup>Jacob L. Wright, in conversation with the author, August 2010.

of Succoth contrasts with the static appellation used for the inhabitants of Penuel throughout vv.5-9 and 13-17: “people of Penuel (אֹנְשֵׁי פְנוּאֵל; cf. 8:8, 9). Confusion reigns, most likely due to expansion.

Verse 5 also gives Zebah and Zalmunna a title, which they lack in the older accounts now encapsulated in vv.10-12 and 18-21. Judges 8:5 names them “kings” of Midian. The narrative in Judges 7, with Zebah and Zalmunna’s equivalents Oreb and Zeeb, names them only “leader” or “official” (שָׂר). The change in title for the Midianite leaders adds a kingly element to the narrative, which will be expanded upon in vv. 18-21, and then again in vv. 22-23. Gideon, who acts in a regnal manner in vv. 18-19 and to whom “all Israel” offers dynastic rule in v. 22-23, is depicted here as dealing with two Midianite kings in an ensuing conversation that clearly makes the characters equals. By calling Zebah and Zalmunna “kings” in 8:5, an author further imbues the Gideon narrative with a royal theme.

The narrative provides no significant details about the cities of Succoth and Penuel: why should these cities help Gideon to begin? Are they Israelite cities? Why do they so adamantly refuse to come to his aid? However, given the tendency of the book of Judges to portray people on the eastern side of the Jordan as uncooperative, it seems safe to assume that for the purposes of this narrative the inhabitants of Succoth and Penuel can be understood as Israelites.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the scene in which Succoth and Penuel refuse to abet Gideon functions on a much larger rhetorical level. Block explains how the inclusion of the scene “exposes the fractures in Israel’s tribal constitution,” and, more importantly, that:

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Josh 22 for an earlier incidence of such inhospitality.

[b]y citing these two examples the narrator demonstrates that the reaction of Succoth was not an isolated event but reflective of the general Transjordanian disposition toward Gideon. At the same time the reader cannot help but notice the contrast between the willingness of the northern Cisjordanian tribes to answer Gideon's call to rid them of the Midianite yoke and the cynical response to Gideon's campaign in the east.<sup>71</sup>

The story about Succoth and Penuel shares in the thematic concern about an inherent tension that undergirds the entirety of the book of Judges of the question of the unity of the tribes as they attempt to conquer the land.

The dialogue in vv. 5-9 contains a rapid exchange of words between Gideon and the inhabitants of the two cities and contains several elements of note. First, v. 5 shares some similarities with v. 4, which read "Then Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over, he and the three hundred who were with him, exhausted (עִיפִים) and pursuing (רֹדְפִים)." Judges 8:5 reads, "Then he said to the people of Succoth, 'Please give some loaves of bread to my followers, for they are exhausted (עִיפִים), and I am pursuing (וְאֲנִי רֹדֵף) Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian.'" The officials of Succoth reply, "Do you already have in your possession the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian?" Gideon, upon his return in v.15, uses the officials' own words against them: "Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me, saying, 'Do you already have in your possession the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna, that we should give bread to your troops who are exhausted?'"

Gideon returns successfully, by the "Ascent of Herus."<sup>72</sup> The passage that follows has produced much scholarly speculation about the presence and prevalence of literacy in

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<sup>71</sup> Block, *Judges*, 290.

<sup>72</sup> Gaß, *Das Ortsnamen des Richterbuchs*, 458-459.

pre-monarchic Israel: “When Gideon son of Joash returned from the battle by the ascent of Heres, he caught a young man, one of the people of Succoth, and questioned him; and he listed for him the officials and elders of Succoth, seventy-seven people” (8:13-14). However, the presence of youth who can write is an indication of the late nature of the Succoth and Penuel material, and not a reflection of literacy rates in early Israel. Gideon then returns to the two cities and carries out his threats. He speaks to the people of Succoth, using their own words from v. 6 against them, “Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me, saying, ‘Do you already have in your possession the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna, that we should give bread to your troops who are exhausted?’” Judges 8:16 then reports that Gideon “took the elders of the city and he took thorns of the wilderness and briers and with them he *trampled* the people of Succoth.” “Trampled” here, however, is not precisely what the Hebrew text says, which instead reads “And with them he taught the men of Succoth (וידע בהם את אנשי סכות), using the hiphil of ידע. He next returns to Penuel, breaking down the tower there, and killing the men of the city. The narrative cites no reason for the murder in Penuel. However, the narrative decidedly spends less time on Penuel than it does on Succoth. Perhaps this is an indication of the later nature of the Penuel material, added by a later author to further tie Gideon with the Jacob story from the book of Genesis (cf. Gen 32:22-32; 33:17), but also to Jeroboam (cf. 1 Kgs 12:15).

Gideon promised to return in peace, but, ironically, he returns in war. The text as it now stands leaves the reader with many questions: where did the timid Gideon of Judges 6-7 go? Why did the theological editing so prevalent in Judges 6-7 not continue into this narrative? Judges 8 portrays Gideon as confident and uncompromising, and

certainly at a far remove from the anxious farmer of Judges 6. There is no hesitation here: Gideon requests food, the people of Succoth and Penuel both deny him his request, he makes a threat, successfully captures the Midianite leaders, returns to carry out his threat, and subsequently slays his captives. The pericopes are utterly lacking in the divine assurance motif so prevalent in the first two chapters concerning Gideon.

#### 1.4.4 Functions and Conclusions

What then is the function of 8:4-21, which introduces a number of new elements into the Gideon narrative? The deity drops out, the protagonist changes from humble, insecure farmer to confident leader; and kingship and family become central issues. The geography changes radically, moving Gideon and his men across the river and into the Transjordan. New cities, with theological import and significant intertextual links, take center stage. The divine assurance motif is completely absent, as is the deity (except in speech).

The story in 8:4-21 functions in several ways. Most significantly, the transition from hesitant farmer with Moses-like characteristics to *gibbôr hayil* ends with the close of v. 21. In this transition, Gideon shifts from his depiction as a new Moses-like figure in Judges 6-7, a man in close, personal contact with the deity, seeker and receiver of divine assurance, who is deftly able to avert inter-tribal confrontations to a much more mundane figure who succeeds on his own in battle. In 8:4-21, Gideon is a man who acts for and by himself, without the aid (and barely any mention) of the deity. He defeats both peoples and cities and behaves in a regnal fashion (8:18-19, 24-27). The fearful and hesitant farmer depicted in Judges 6-7 is disappeared. From a synchronic perspective, a new



Gideon has arrived on the Transjordanian scene, in which the question of Gideon as a leader acting without the deity is explored.<sup>73</sup> From a diachronic perspective, Judges 8 appears to depict the original Gideon, as Wellhausen suspected.

In its final form, the pericope also depicts the attitudes of the people of the Transjordan and the question of tribal tensions and unity in contrast to the unity of the tribes depicted in Judges 6-7. Succoth and Penuel contribute to the negative portrayal of the Transjordan, but they also offer rich intertextual allusions, calling to mind figures as diverse as Jacob and Jeroboam, the first a figure who like Gideon saw the deity “face-to-face,” the second a figure who like Gideon led Israel astray. While the divine assurance motif is absent, the pericope continues to demonstrate an avid interest in geography and numbers. Finally, 8:4-21 introduces the issue of kingship, which the narrative will pick up again in 8:22-27.

In conclusion, the Zebah and Zalmunna passages are the oldest remaining elements from the Gideon tradition, and remain largely untouched by the later theological updating of Judges 6-7. However, the narrative is missing elements, including a beginning and the story of what happened to Gideon’s brothers at Tabor. Judges 8:4 is redactional (although it might contain original elements), and 8:10 has been reworked by a later author as well. The Succoth and Penuel stories in 8:5-9, 13-17 are supplemental and share concerns with the larger book of Judges. (The addition of Penuel might be even after Succoth, given the lack of detail in comparison with Succoth.) As a whole, 8:4-21 both retains elements of the oldest Gideon materials while also connecting the Gideon account to much broader literary horizons. It marks a significant turning point in the book of Judges: things will go considerably downhill from the end of Judges 8 forward.

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 241-244.

## 1.5 Conclusions

By moving backwards through the Gideon narrative, the reader discovers the original stories associated with the figure now in the central portion of the book of Judges. In so doing, Gideon as the earliest traditions knew him emerges from the pages: a cunning, clever, and at times ruthless tactician and military leader. Furthermore, here the reader encounters the original thrust of the Gideon narrative: to depict the Israelites routing and defeating the Midianite army, particularly his capture and execution of two Midianite kings for personal reasons. The biblical references to Gideon/Jerubbaal outside the book of Judges illustrate that this was the original concern of the earlier story. By only focusing on additional elements, readers miss this key aspect of the text: the original narrative was not concerned with idolatry or proving that Yahweh is the only deity. Idolatry and proper Yahwism is a secondary theme, added to the narrative later.

The latest additions considered in this chapter occur in 7:23-25 and 8:1-3. In both cases, the most obvious function of the supplements is simply to increase the number of tribes who were involved in the pursuit of the Midianites. Judges 7:24-8:3 increases the involvement, adding the tribe of Ephraim to the participation of the Abiezerites. It appears to be an older addition than 7:24 because in it Gideon does not reference the broader participation of tribes as indicated in that verse. The addition of 7:25 increases the number of tribes involved in the pursuit even further. A depiction of such broader tribal mustering and participation is a central theme of the larger book of Judges.

Judges 8:1-3 also appears to be a later addition to the Gideon narrative. The primary function of 8:1-3 is as a bridge, transporting Gideon and his men across the Jordan. However, the inclusion of 8:1-3 serves an even more important function to

present Gideon as the positive example of a leader with whom the reader can contrast Jephthah.<sup>74</sup> Gideon, unlike Jephthah, deftly handles the troublesome Ephraimites. Instead of tribal warfare, Gideon's diplomacy maintains peace amongst the tribes. Jephthah's ineptitude on this front will be all the more evident with Gideon to serve as his foil.

Ultimately, the inclusion of 7:23 and 7:24-8:3 broadens the number of tribes involved in the pursuit, with 7:23 illustrating how various tribes enthusiastically participated in conquering the land during the pre-monarchic period. In the end, however, having more tribes involved in the pursuit of the Midianites does not ultimately change the plot, although it does significantly alter the theological thrust of the story.<sup>75</sup> The mustering of additional tribes goes directly against the disbanding, at the deity's behest, depicted in 7:1-8. As far as assessing Gideon's character goes, this calling out of the various tribes indicates that the deity's fears in 7:2 have come true.

Judges 7:16-22 and 8:4-21 contain the oldest elements of the Gideon narrative. The hero/deliverer depicted in 7:16-22, the later of the two oldest pericopes, is the original Gideon: what Gideon looked like before the addition of the divine assurance motif that takes up so much space in the Judges 6-7, thus depicting his transition into a hesitant and fearful leader. Judges 7:22 functions to correct the older Gideon narrative in 7:16-21, which did not mention the deity (except perhaps in the battle cry), so that Yahweh is responsible for the ultimate victory against the Midianites. The narrative in 8:4-21 contains the very oldest traditions about Gideon, which is now spliced by the later additions about Succoth and Peniel. Although the oldest part of the narrative is missing elements, 8:4, 10-12, and 18-21 retain portions of it. Judges 8:4 and 10 have been

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<sup>74</sup> Jacob L. Wright, in conversation with the author, August 2010.

<sup>75</sup> Soggin, *Judges*, 148

reworked by later authors, and 8:5-9 and 13-17 contains pieces that reflect knowledge of the larger book of Judges. The material here functions in several ways, including the depiction of Gideon's transition from a Moses-like farmer to a *gibbôr hayil*. Additionally, the passage depicts the attitudes of the people of the Transjordan and the question of tribal tensions and unity in contrast to the unity of the tribes depicted in Judges 6-7, an interest of the later authors of the book of Judges. Succoth and Penuel contribute to the negative portrayal of the Transjordan, but they also offer rich intertextual allusions, calling to mind figures as diverse as Jacob and Jeroboam.

In sum, Judges 7:16b, 17-19ab-21, 22b and 8:10a, 11-123, 18-21 belongs to the earliest Gideon traditions. The material in Judges 8 appears older than that in Judges 7. Various additions added further weaponry to the battle in 7:16c, 19a, and 20, as well as a conclusion attributing the victory to Yahweh in 7:22. Judges 7:23-8:3 are supplemental additions of indeterminate strata, added before the "all Israel" intro and conclusions, but after the narratives that only know Gideon and his 300 men. Judges 7:23 is later than 7:24-8:3. Judges 8:4-9, 10b, 13-17 contain later additions, also of an indeterminate strata, but that share the concerns of the larger book of Judges.

### **1.6 The Compositional History of the Gideon Narrative: Conclusions**

An examination Judges 6-8 reveals that the narrative is the result of repeated updating and reshaping. The narrative strata total six layers, along with several miscellaneous verses that are difficult to map out precisely. The earliest materials focus on a character named Gideon of Ophrah, son of Joash of the Abiezerites, and detail his battles against the Midianites. The first stratum likely consisted of 7:16b, 17-19ab-21,

22b; 8:10a, 11-13 and 18-21. Other early verses include 8:25b, 26a, 27a belong to the older layer of Gideon materials (later expanded in 8:24-25a, 26b, and 27b). A second stratum built on the first, adding an introduction and appointment scene along with the earliest fragments of the dream scene (6:11, 12, 14; 7:1, 9-11, 13-15).

The third stratum introduces the divine assurance motif into the older stories about Gideon's war exploits, transforming him from the a mighty warrior into the ever-hesitant and fear-filled farmer who is "least" in his family and needs repeated signs of assurance from the deity before he acts. The narratives that comprise the third stratum include parts of 6:13, 15-24; 7:2-8; and parts of 7:9-15 (and maybe 7: 22a). All evidence points to this layer of material as an exilic addition of the story, familiar with other stories from the book of Judges. This is especially the case because it shares with many of the other major heroes/deliverers the *Leitwörter*  $\gamma$  and  $\psi$ , which run like a thread through the book.

The fourth stratum includes the addition of the "framework" material so familiar from other parts of the book of Judges, present in 6:1-6, 34; and 8:28. Unlike other places where the framework material occurs in the book, its presence in Judges 6-8 is marked by elaboration and addition. The subsequent, fifth stratum connected the character Gideon with the figure of Jerubbaal, the father of Abimelech and the narrative in Judges 9 (and may have been added at the same time as the fourth stratum). In this stage, an author linked these two figures via the insertion of 6:25-32 and the concluding materials in 8:29-31 and 33-35. Judges 8:22-23 and Gideon's refusal of kingship may also to this stratum, inserted to serve as a foil to Abimelech. However, determining the precise literary stratum of those verses are difficult in light of the reworking and reshaping by 8:24-27.

These two strata presuppose the larger book of Judges as we now have it and function to suture earlier stories into one book with an overarching pattern of sin-oppression-crying out-deliverance.

Finally, a sixth stratum comprising of at least 6:7-10 was added to the narrative. The insertion of the prophet in 6:7-10 is a very late addition, probably added to the already framed book of Judges (perhaps along with parts of Judges 2 and Judges 10) and knows late stages of the books of Exodus and Joshua. There are no other similar verses to these three within the Gideon narrative. The insertion of 6:7-10 makes the Gideon story a part of the larger trajectory beginning with the Exodus from Egypt, and contains a focus on the law absent from the rest of Judges 6-8. Other later additions include the expansions to Judges 8 in vv. 24-27, including v. 8:24-25a, 26b, and 27b. These expansions to the end of the chapter cast shadows on Gideon's refusal of the kingship in 8:22 and are an indeterminate (but perhaps Persian Period?) stratum.

Other miscellaneous expansions broadened the participating enemy forces in 6:3, 33; 7:12, while 6:35 expanded the range of participating Israelite tribes who came to Gideon's aid. Judges 6:36-40, although including the divine assurance motif, is difficult to place because it exhibits markedly different characteristics. Finally, 7:23-8:3 serves as a bridge between the Cisjordan and Transjordan narratives, while introducing the Ephraimites into the Gideon narrative (and thus making it so that Gideon serves as a foil to Jephthah). Judges 8:4-9, 10b, 13-17 appear to contain later additions, of an indeterminate strata, but that share the concerns of the larger book of Judges.

**Chapter 9**  
**Ambiguous Territory:**  
**A Literary Analysis of the Gideon Narrative<sup>1</sup>**

*For rhetorical reasons the narrator chooses to ambiguat where he could elucidate.<sup>2</sup>*

*We are not told to whom we are indebted for the Book of Judges, but whoever he was, he was a master of the pen, and story of Gideon is his masterpiece.<sup>3</sup>*

### **1.1 Introduction**

An initial synchronic reading of the Gideon narrative established that there is significant evidence within the text to show that it is the work of many hands rather than one. The diachronic analysis of the preceding chapters identified six levels of literary strata in Judges 6-8, beginning with the oldest material that depicts Gideon as a *gibbôr hayil* and ending with the youngest addition to the text in 6:7-10. Yet even if the text contains evidence of multiple layers of editorial and authorial work, the question becomes how to read and understand the final form of the narrative.

This chapter returns to a literary analysis of Judges 6-8, acknowledging that both the book of Judges and the Gideon narrative have long existed—and been read—as a coherent literary unit. In the introduction, I argued that the narrative found in Judges 6-8 forms a verbal map, verbally charting the adventures of Gideon in ancient Israel during the pre-monarchic period. This chapter takes that idea further, arguing that the story of

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<sup>1</sup> That the Gideon narrative—or the broader book of Judges—often employs ambiguity is by no means a new insight. For example, Polzin writes, “ambiguity is the ideological theme of the entire book” (*Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 169), while also noting the role that ambiguity plays in the Gideon narrative. I hope to further Polzin’s (and other’s) insights.

<sup>2</sup> Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1985), 455.

<sup>3</sup> Whyte, *Bible Characters*, 181.

Gideon is itself a map “because, like a map, it is not a world, but it evokes one.”<sup>4</sup> This map details the ambiguous territory of the pre-monarchic period of the book of Judges, and the role and function that Gideon plays in that story.

Of course, “any single map involves hundreds of decisions about presentation.”<sup>5</sup> By focusing on the final form of the Gideon narrative, I explore why and how the final author of the narrative shaped the Gideon “map.” The map created by Judges 6-8 reflects both the artistry and care of this final author, who put together in a meaningful way all of the materials at their disposal. To take seriously the role of the final author of the narrative “as creative rather than as a hack” requires journeying through the final text, asking what message the narrative conveys and how it does this.<sup>6</sup>

## 1.2 Exploring Judges 6-8

This chapter will pose the following questions: Why has an author arranged the structure and plot, setting, role of the narrator, character and characterization, theme, and repetition as they are? What is the result of this presentation? How does an exploration of the literary features of the Gideon narrative inform us about the purpose of the map created by Judges 6-8?

Reading Judges 6-8 as a story artfully and carefully created by a final author is immediately supported three factors that connect the beginning and ending of the narrative. The narrator identifies Gideon as the son of Joash both when Gideon is first introduced into the narrative (6:11) and at the end of the narrative with Gideon’s death

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<sup>4</sup> Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination*, 166.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>6</sup> Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, 14.



(8:32). Additionally, the narrative both begins (6:11) and ends (8:27) at Ophrah. Finally, the text begins with a notice about the oppression of the Israelites by the hand of the Midianites (6:6) and ends by noting that the Midianites are no longer a threat (8:28). These three elements together form a triple inclusio that gives the Gideon narrative a clear beginning and a clear ending.

Furthermore, there is a whole network of interconnections within 6:1-8:35 that unite and shape the Gideon narrative. These interconnections include the repetition of three key *Leitwörter* (יָשַׁע, “to save, deliver”; יָרָא, “to fear”; and יָד, “hand”), three words that shape and mold the narrative, the *Leitmotiv* of divine assurance, the development of the three major characters (the deity, Gideon, and the enemy force), the function of geography in the evolving plot, and the use of speech and dialogue. In addition, the author of the Gideon narrative employed the literary techniques of anticipation, irony, and ambiguity to shape the final narrative. The following pages will explore these interconnections in detail.

To enter the territory of the Gideon narrative is to enter a world of war, religion, and concern over questions of leadership and power. It is also to enter a world defined by geography—this is a story that begins and ends at Ophrah of the Abiezerites and whose characters are defined by their location with respect to the Jordan River. The following pages will explore the four main sections of the Gideon narrative and the individual scenes that compose the structure: the introduction to the story in 6:1-10, the first episode in 6:11-8:3, the second episode in 8:4-27, and the conclusion in 8:28-35.

### 1.2.1 The Introduction (6:1-10)

Judges 6:1 begins as the reader expects a story in the world of the book of Judges to begin: יעשו בני־ישראל הרע בעיני יהוה, “Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of Yahweh,” suggesting a continuation with the preceding chapters (2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1). The narrative then reports, “and Yahweh gave them into the hand (יד) of Midian seven years and the hand (יד) of Midian prevailed over Israel” (6:1b-2). The two-fold repetition of יד, the Hebrew noun for “hand,” immediately introduces one of the central *Leitwörter* of both the Gideon narrative and the larger book of Judges. The word יד runs like a thread throughout the book, which opens with Yahweh promising to give the unconquered land into the hand of Judah (1:1) and closes with Yahweh’s final speech promising that he will give the Benjaminites into the hands of the other Israelites (20:28). As Amit notes, in the world of Judges, hands symbolize power.<sup>7</sup> The beginning of the narrative, which focuses on the hands of the Midianites, immediately connects the Gideon story to its larger context. The frequency of the word in the Gideon narrative is an indication both that the story plays an important part in the overall book of Judges and that power is a central concern in the story. Furthermore, the frequent repetition of the word at the beginning of the narrative immediately piques the reader’s curiosity: what does the repetition signal? Whose hand controls the power in this story?

Yet despite its similarity with the preceding stories in the book of Judges, the introduction to the Gideon narrative and the world described therein is also immediately and noticeably different. First, 6:1 lacks the expected ויספו, “again” found in the previous narratives of Ehud and Deborah/Barak, both of which open with בני ישראל לעשות הרע בעיני יהוה

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 265

ויספו: “The Israelites *again* did evil in the eyes of Yahweh” (3:12; 4:1).<sup>8</sup> The introductions to the Jephthah and Samson accounts will also open with “again” (10:6; 13:1). Only the world of Gideon lacks this detail. The lack of the “again” in 6:1 alerts the reader that something new and different will unfold in the following chapters.

Second, while Yahweh predictably gives the Israelites into the hands of an enemy—in this instance, the Midianites—the narrative in 6:1-6 provides more details about the ensuing oppression than the previous narratives featuring Othniel, Ehud, and Deborah. In the world of Gideon, the Israelites are forced to hide in “the mountains, caves, and strongholds,” and whenever they plant seed, “the Midianites and the Amalekites and the Easterners” come up against them, “destroy[ing] the produce of the land as far as Gaza,” leaving neither sustenance nor “sheep nor ox nor donkey” (6:4). The hiding places, the enemy, and afflicted animals all occur in threes—an unusual wealth of detail for a normally concise Hebrew narrative. Furthermore, the narrator reports that the enemy is “as thick as locusts, and neither they nor their camels could be counted” (6:5). The detail-laden introduction makes two points clear. First, to enter the world of the Gideon narrative is to enter an agriculturally based world. Second, to enter this world is to enter a world undergoing a severe oppression and facing a severe threat, which is emphasized by the narrator’s use of repetition and detail: the Israelites are hiding, the enemy is approaching, no sustenance or animal remains, and the enemy (and even their camels!) are innumerable. This abundance of detail “retards the narrative and adds to the feeling of the weight of the oppression by piling up details.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>9</sup> McMillion, “Judges 6-8,” 175-176; Klein also notes the intensification (*The Triumph of Irony*, 49), as does Webb (*The Book of Judges*, 145).

The expansion of the enemy forces from simply the Midianites (vv. 1-2) to the “Midianites and the Amalekites and the Easterners” in 6:3 not only intensifies the severity of the threat but also reestablishes the conflict driving the narrative. In the world of Gideon, the military problem facing the Israelites is an aggressive, encroaching enemy force now tripled in size. The collective enemy will be one of the main characters in the unfolding drama, but their precise identification fluctuates throughout the story. At times the narrator identifies all three as the enemy (6:33, 33; 7:12), at other times only the Midianites (6:1, 2, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, 16; 7:1, 2, 7, 8, 13-15, 23, 24, 25; 8:1, 3, 5, 12, 22, 26, 28), once only as the Easterners (8:10), and once as “Ishmaelites” (8:24). Through this oscillation, the narrator renders the precise identity and make-up of the enemy ambiguous, although one thing is always clear—the enemy comes from across the Jordan River.

The narrative continues and the enemy oppresses Israel, who predictably cry out to Yahweh for help in the face of the enemy threat—not once but twice (6:1, 2), indicative of the severity of the situation. The reader expects that the next scene will begin with the appointment of a hero/deliverer—an Othniel, an Ehud, a Deborah or Barak. At first glance, the story reads like a repeat of the Deborah narrative—at the exact same point in the story as in Judges 4, Judges 6 introduces a prophet into the account.<sup>10</sup> In Judges 4:4 Deborah is identified as אִשָּׁה נְבִיאָה, literally “a woman, a prophetess.” In the Gideon narrative, immediately following the Israelite’s second cry to Yahweh, אִישׁ נְבִיאַ, literally, “a man, a prophet,” appears. The allusion creates anticipation that the narrative

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 145; Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 50. “The reader is primed for expectations. If a woman prophetess could be as effective as Deborah, what will ‘a man, a prophet’ be able to achieve?”

is unfolding as the Deborah narrative before it did. Yet the prophet's words in 6:7-10 immediately crush any anticipation that events will follow the pattern established in Judges 4. The unnamed prophet in 6:7-10 does not appear in the narrative to appoint a leader who will deliver Israel from their enemy; rather, the prophet in Judges 6 appears to rebuke the Israelites. As soon as the prophet finishes his speech, he disappears as abruptly as he appeared and does not figure in the narrative again. His appearance, speech, and disappearance are something new and unexpected in the book of Judges as a whole.

The prophet's speech alludes directly to the Exodus, but the contrast between that deliverance and the present situation is clear. In the Gideon narrative, "The deliverance of Israel from Egypt is being reversed because of their failure to serve the Lord."<sup>11</sup> While in 6:1 Yahweh gives Israel into the hand of the Midianites, the prophet reminds the readers that before this, Yahweh delivered the Israelites "from the hand of Egypt" and "from the hand of" their oppressors. The Gideon world is an upside-down world, in which Yahweh gives Israel into the hands of others instead of delivering them from their enemies' hands. As McMillion notes, "In verse 9 the Lord gives Israel the land for a possession. In verse 1, however, it is Israel who is the possession being given into the hand of Midian."<sup>12</sup> Things are amiss in the world of Gideon, and here "Yahweh's frustration begins to show for the first time" in the book of Judges.<sup>13</sup> After all, to call upon Yahweh is to invoke a relationship, "but this relationship (acknowledged in the speech) is one which lays certain obligations upon Israel, obligations which she has not fulfilled (v.10)."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> McMillion, "Judges 6-8," 178.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>13</sup> Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 145.

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

The prophet instructs the Israelites to “not fear (תיראו) the gods of the Amorites in whose land [they] are dwelling” (6:10). The suggestion is that the Israelites are to fear Yahweh, although “this implication is not stated in this text; it is such a central part of the faith of Israel, however, that it is surely understood by the audience as a corollary to the prohibition against other gods.”<sup>15</sup> The presence of the verb ירא in 6:10 introduces one of the other central *Leitwörter* of the narrative: “to fear.”<sup>16</sup> The ensuing Gideon narrative will explore the concept of fear in greater depth.

The anonymous prophet arrives and accuses in Judges 6 but is met with no response. The Israelites fail to speak up—either to defy the accusation or to ask for forgiveness. The resemblance of the scene in Judges 6 and the previous scene in Judges 2 once again creates anticipation. In Judg 2:1-5 the angel of Yahweh says:

I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you into the land that I had promised to your ancestors. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you. Do not make a covenant with the inhabitants of this land; tear down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed my command. See what you have done. So now I say, I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become adversaries to you, and their gods shall be a snare to you.

The Israelites then respond: “the people lifted up their voices and wept. So they named that place Bochim, and there they sacrificed to Yahweh,” thus restoring their relationship with the deity. Reminiscent of the correspondence between Judges 4 and the prophetic appearance in Judges 6, the similarity between the words of the angel of Yahweh in Judges 2 and the words of the anonymous prophet in Judges 6 creates anticipation. The reader expects this episode to resolve in a fashion analogous to the last: the Israelites will realize their wrongdoing, lift up their voices, and sacrifice to Yahweh in order to

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<sup>15</sup> McMillion, “Judges 6-8,” 179-180.

<sup>16</sup> See McMillion, “Judges 6-8,” 179-180.

reestablish their relationship. However, 6:7-10 does not meet this expectation: the people do not respond.

Similar to the introduction to the book of Judges itself, the Gideon narrative introduces two problems facing the Israelites at its beginning: a military problem (vv.1-6) and a religious problem (vv.7-10). The reader anticipates that the subsequent narrative will solve both of these problems. As the prophet disappears, the reader is left with a question: what will happen next?

### 1.2.2 Gideon in Cisjordan (6:11-8:3)

The first act in the Gideon narrative begins in 6:11 and runs through 8:3. Its first scene, stretching from v. 11 to v. 24, takes place in Ophrah of the Abiezerites and does not refer to the unnamed prophet's speech in the foregoing verses; in fact, the scene begins as though vv. 7-10 did not precede it. Yet despite the prophet's rebuke in 6:7-10 and the Israelite's lack of response, the story that begins in 6:11 makes it clear that Yahweh will nevertheless rescue Israel once again.<sup>17</sup>

Judges 6:11 opens by introducing two new characters into the story. The first is a מלאך יהוה, "messenger of Yahweh," who upon his arrival goes and sits "under the terebinth which belonged to Joash the Abiezerite which is in Ophrah, while Gideon, his son, was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from Midian" (6:11). The narrative thus returns to the problem and the agricultural world introduced in 6:1-6, where the Israelites—here represented by Gideon—must hide from their oppressors. The identification of Joash the Abiezerite places the reader in the territory of Manasseh, which lies close to the middle of the book's portrait of pre-monarchic Israelite geography

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<sup>17</sup> Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 146.

and allotment of tribal territories. The position of the messenger under the tree suggests that perhaps this is the scene anticipated in 6:7: the appointment of a deliverer. After all, the book also introduced Deborah when she was sitting under a tree: “At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment” (4:4-5). After that initial scene, Barak arrives, setting into motion Israel’s deliverance. Once again, the narrator sets up—only to let down—the reader’s anticipation.

The second character introduced in 6:11 is the protagonist of the narrative: Gideon the son of Joash the Abiezerite (6:11). The messenger of Yahweh finds Gideon beating out wheat in a wine press in order to hide it from the Midianites, and speaks, saying, “Yahweh is with you, 6:12) ” (גבור החיל). The title גבור החיל, “mighty warrior,” is a surprising designation for a man beating out wheat in a winepress and hiding from his enemies. Still, the designation leads the reader to anticipate that Gideon is the expected hero who will save the Israelites from the enemy threat introduced in 6:1. The initial dialogue between Gideon and the divine messenger foreshadows the importance of speech in the developing story, especially speech between Gideon and the deity. Out of all of the heroes/deliverers in the book of Judges, only Gideon speaks directly with the deity. Speech functions to emphasize the unique relationship between Gideon and the deity, and to slow down the narrative and build suspense before the battle with the Midianites.

Gideon responds to the messenger’s words with, “But sir, if Yahweh is with us, why then has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonderful deeds that our



ancestors recounted to us, saying, ‘Did not Yahweh bring us up from Egypt?’ But now Yahweh has cast us off, and given us into the hand (ט) of Midian” (6:13). For a second time, the narrator invokes the story of the Exodus, while also reintroducing the *Leitwort* ט. The sketch of Gideon here, in which the protagonist is unafraid to be completely forward with his new guest, hints that there is more at work within his character than the initial hesitant, fearful farmer depicted in Judges 6:1.

Gideon’s response shifts the focus from himself to all of Israel: he uses the first person plural seven times in v.13, apparently ignoring the messenger’s use of the second person singular.<sup>18</sup> As McMillion notes, there are two possible conclusions implicit in Gideon’s reply to the divine messenger: “either the Lord is no longer with Israel, or the Lord is no longer able to act decisively as in the past. The fathers tell of great deliverance in ancient times, but no such events are to be seen in Gideon’s day. Since Gideon has experienced only oppression, haunting doubts arise. Is God indeed still with Israel?”<sup>19</sup> In other words, the deity has given Israel into the hand of Midian, and Gideon’s reply questions exactly how much power the deity has and who exactly wields the power in Gideon’s current situation. Ironically, Gideon’s challenge will be answered in his own call and the role he subsequently plays in delivering Israel.<sup>20</sup>

Judges 6:14 records that Yahweh himself—and not a divine messenger—turns to Gideon and answers him, לך בכח זה, “Go in this might of yours.” From 6:14 until the beginning of the second episode in 8:4, the deity’s participation is clouded in ambiguity,

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<sup>18</sup> McMillion, “Judges 6-8,” 185.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 185-186.

<sup>20</sup> Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 148.

with the narrator identifying the divine participant sometimes as Yahweh (6:14, 16, 23, 25), sometimes as Elohim (6:36, 39, 40), other times as a messenger of Yahweh (6:11, 12, 20, 21 [x2]), and once as a messenger of Elohim (6:20).<sup>21</sup> The confusion over the precise name and identity of the deity will continue in Judges 7-8. It is never entirely clear with whom Gideon is speaking and acting, and the alternating identity of the deity is a technique that further adds to the ambiguity of the story. Does Gideon ever realize with whom he is really speaking?

With his words in 6:14, the deity returns the focus of the conversation to Gideon—“this might of *yours*”—and reiterates that the real Gideon is a man of strength, not a hesitant, hiding farmer. The reader is left with the question: can Gideon, a farmer hiding in a wine press from his enemies, live up to this expectation? The deity continues, “and deliver (וְהוֹשַׁעַת) Israel from the hand (מִכַּף) of Midian. Is it not I who sent you?” The deity’s words introduce a second significant *Leitwort* of the book of Judges into the Gideon narrative: יָשַׁע, “to save/deliver.” Within the book of Judges as a whole, the established pattern is that Israel is given into the hand of their enemies and then the deity raises up a hero/deliverer to save them from this oppression. Human leadership requires the deity. Yet the unfolding Gideon narrative questions exactly whose hand saves Israel, as the way the *Leitwörter* connect throughout the narrative will indicate. The question remains: whose hand will deliver Israel from its enemy?

Meanwhile, Gideon remains unconvinced: “But sir, how can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family” (6:15). Gideon’s reply continues to heighten the contrast between who Gideon thinks he is and who the deity

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<sup>21</sup> In all of the cases where Elohim occurs, with the exception of the case of 6:40, it is prefixed by the definite article.

thinks Gideon is, although here, instead of questioning his visitor or focusing on all of Israel, Gideon returns the focus to himself. According to Gideon, he is “no mighty hero. He is not powerful; in fact, he is just the opposite.”<sup>22</sup> Once again Yahweh answers, “But I will be with you and you shall strike down the Midianites, every one of them” (6:16). The allusions to the Moses call story are clear.<sup>23</sup> Both include the same word of endorsement (שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ in Judg 6:14 and Exod 3:12). In each account, the protagonist protests his election (Judg 6:16, Exod 3:11) and an assurance of divine help follows: “for I will be with you” (כִּי אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ) in Judg 6:16 and “for I will be with you” (עִמָּךְ כִּי־אֶהְיֶה) in Exod 3:12. The similarities continue: each scene includes a refusal on the part of the protagonist, who claims that he is not up to the task (Judg 6:15; Exod 3:11), and both contain a request for a sign and its subsequent granting (Judg 6:17, Exod 3:12). Finally, both contain a theophany accompanied by fire (Judg 6:22, Exod 3:6). Through the allusions to Moses, the narrator raises the question: will Gideon be a new Moses for Israel?

Gideon’s request for a sign is “If (אם) now I have found favor with you, then show me a sign (אֹת) that it is you who speak with me. Do not depart from here until I come to you, and bring out my present, and set it before you” (6:17-18). Gideon’s first request for a sign begins with the conditional אם, “if,” a word that occurs in a number of the “testing” situations of the unfolding narrative: when Joash tests the followers of Baal (6:31), before Yahweh sends Gideon down to the Midianite camp (7:10), and when Gideon interrogates the Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna (8:19). Polzin explains that these conditional

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<sup>22</sup> McMillion, “Judges 6-8,” 187.

<sup>23</sup> Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 148.

statements “emphasize the story’s ‘iffy’ situations.”<sup>24</sup> The repetition of “if” in the Gideon world emphasizes its upside-down nature, in which nothing is certain. Additionally, Gideon’s request for a sign introduces one of the prominent *Leitmotivs* of the narrative into the story—that of divine assurance, which the narrative introduces in 6:17 and which (with the exception of the pericope in 6:25-32) is the guiding motif until the start of the anticipated battle in 7:15. The chapters detail two other sign stories in addition to the consuming of the unleavened cakes and meat in 6:21: the signs of the fleece in 6:36-40 and Gideon’s overhearing of the Midianite guard’s dream in 7:9-15. With the divine assurance motif, the narrator transforms Gideon from a hesitant farmer into the *gibbôr hayil* the messenger of Yahweh declared him to be in 6:11—the divine signs convince Gideon to act.

Judges 6:19-24 continues the second half of the first scene. Rather than the back-and-forth of 6:11-18, 6:19-24 contains little dialogue.<sup>25</sup> In the next six verses, the divine messenger, Gideon, and Yahweh each speak only once.<sup>26</sup> Instead of speech, action takes center stage, evident by the “multiplication of action verbs.”<sup>27</sup> The narrative reports in 6:19 that “Gideon went into his house and prepared a kid, and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour; the meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the oak and presented them.” All in one verse, Gideon “goes, prepares, places, brings, and presents, all without a word.”<sup>28</sup> א מלאך האלהים, “messenger of God,”

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<sup>24</sup> Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 168.

<sup>25</sup> McMillion, “Judges 6-8,” 189.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

rather than a “messenger of Yahweh,” speaks to him when he returns, saying, “Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour out the broth.”

Again, the emphasis is on action: “take,” “put,” and “pour.”<sup>29</sup> Judges 6:21 continues to emphasize action as the divine messenger “reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes; and the messenger of Yahweh vanished from his sight” (6:21). Gideon is becoming a man of action.

Gideon then becomes aware of the one he had been speaking with, exclaiming (in his only recorded speech in the second half of the scene), “Help me, Lord God, for I have seen the messenger of Yahweh פנים אל-פנים, face-to-face!” (6:22). The Hebrew phrase פנים אל-פנים, “face-to-face,” reminds the reader of several other texts in the biblical corpus in which a character comes face-to-face with the deity. The first is the scene in which Jacob wrestles with the angel in Gen 32:31, naming that place “Peniel,” “For I have seen God פנים אל-פנים, ‘face to face.’”<sup>30</sup> The only other character who sees the deity face-to-face is Moses (Exod 33:11 and Deut 34:10). Gideon stands in good company. Yahweh himself (sans intermediary) responds, “שלום לך,” “Peace to you!” followed by, “Do not fear (אל-תירא), you will not die” (6:23). The deity’s words underscore the importance of what has just happened in this scene: “Gideon has been commissioned, not by the prophet (contra Barak), nor by any human agency, but by Yahweh in person, and Yahweh and Gideon will be in almost constant dialogue with one another in the sequence of events

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Wong, “Gideon,” 536.

leading up to the battle (6:25, 36, 39; 7:2, 4, 7, 9).<sup>31</sup> The relationship between Yahweh and Gideon—who see and speak to one another—is unprecedented and unparalleled in the book of Judges, and the close contact and repeated dialogue between the two characters emphasize this. The scene concludes as Gideon builds an altar there for Yahweh, naming it יהוה שלום, “Yahweh is peace,” which the narrator informs the reader remains in Ophrah “until that day” (6:24). By the end of 6:24, “Gideon has been transformed from a talkative cynic to one who builds a lasting altar to the Lord.”<sup>32</sup> Gideon is now a man of action—or so it seems at first.

In 6:25, a new scene begins. Following Gideon’s commissioning in 6:11-24, the reader anticipates that the newly appointed hero, now convinced, will confront the looming enemy threat. After all, Gideon has just proven himself to be a man of action and a man who stands in good company—the company of Moses and Jacob, who have also both seen God “face-to-face.” Instead, the narrator slows down the narrative by inserting more dialogue. In 6:25, the deity speaks to Gideon again and commands Gideon to tear down another, different, and heretofore unmentioned altar: “Take your father’s bull, the second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal that belongs to your father, and cut down the sacred pole that is beside it and build an altar to Yahweh your God on the top of the stronghold here, in proper order; then take the second bull, and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the sacred pole that you shall cut down” (6:25-26). Speech divides the scene into two halves: vv.25-27 include God’s command to Gideon, while vv.28-32 detail the confrontational dialogue between Gideon’s father Joash and the

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<sup>31</sup> Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 148.

<sup>32</sup> McMillion, “Judges 6-8,” 192.

men of the city, following Gideon's action.<sup>33</sup> Yahweh's command to Gideon returns the narrative to the conflict outlined by the unnamed prophet in 6:7-10, namely, that the Israelites are not being faithful to Yahweh and are repeatedly worshipping other gods. However, in this case it is the Canaanite deity Baal, not the gods of the Amorites as introduced into the narrative by the unnamed prophet in 6:7-10. Again, the details included in the final form of the narrative render it ambiguous. Yet Yahweh's active presence in the narrative alongside Baal's silence clearly spells out to whom the power truly belongs.

The task commanded by Yahweh appears simple enough—in fact, Gideon's name, derived from the Hebrew root גרע, meaning “to cut down” or “to cut to pieces,” suggests he is the perfect man for the job. Yet the narrator reintroduces the *Leitwort* ירא, “fear,” in 6:27: “And Gideon took ten men from his servants and he did as Yahweh spoke to him. But because he feared (ירא) the house of his father and the men of the city to do it by day, he did it by night.” Judges 6:27 is one of only two places in the Gideon narrative where the narrator utilizes an internal point of view (the other is in 8:20 and also draws on the *Leitwort* ירא): for the first time in the narrative, the reader gets a sense of Gideon's internal thoughts and feelings. The momentary insight into Gideon's emotions indicates the importance of the scene: Gideon is too afraid to cut down the Asherah openly and in broad daylight. When the deity gives Gideon his instructions, the verb used is כרת and not גרע—Gideon does not live up to his own name, and he will only later become a “hacker,” although not of idols.

The following morning, the men of the city awaken to find the destroyed altar and

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 194.

ask, “Who has done this?” (6:30).<sup>34</sup> The narrative reports that after “searching and inquiring,” the men discover that the guilty party is Gideon, the son of Joash, the man to whom the Baal altar belonged. As a result, the men demand that Joash bring out his son so that he may die (6:30). Yet the scene unfolds in a surprising way. Joash’s name is Yahwistic, meaning, “my father is help.” However, despite his Yahwistic name, the narrator introduces him as the proprietor of a Baal altar, and thus not as an exclusive worshipper of Yahweh. For this reason, it is shocking when he rushes to Gideon’s aid following Gideon’s desecration of the Baal altar. The figure of Joash is ironic, as “the one who would be expected to oppose Gideon’s actions becomes his public defender.”<sup>35</sup> Nothing is as expected in the upside-down world of Gideon.

Refusing to hand Gideon over, Joash declares, “Will you contend (תריבון) for Baal? Or will you defend his cause? Whoever contends (ריב) for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend (ירב) for himself, because his altar has been pulled down” (6:31). As the men of the city speak and Joash answers, the use of dialogue in vv. 30-31 again slows down the narrative: “the demand of the people is countered by the reply of Joash. Charge and countercharge face each other in a stalemate.”<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, speech plays an important role in highlighting the difference between the power of Yahweh and the power of Baal: “in the first episode, the Lord speaks and Gideon carries out his directions. In the second episode the men of the city are ready to act on Baal’s behalf but Baal does not speak.”<sup>37</sup> Joash’s speech “ends the confrontation with the

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<sup>34</sup> See McMillion, “Judges 6-8,” 198.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 195.



demand which cannot be answered, ‘If he is a God, let Baal contend for himself.’”<sup>38</sup>

Ironically, neither Gideon, whose nighttime action caused a “furor” in the community, nor Baal, whose altar has been destroyed and whose followers are so vocal, speaks.<sup>39</sup>

From Joash’s speech comes Gideon’s second name: “Therefore on that day Gideon was called Jerubbaal, that is to say, ‘Let Baal contend against him,’ because he pulled down his altar” (6:32). The narrative tackles the problem inherent in the suspect name by providing a new interpretation for it in 6:32, where the narrator intervenes, explaining, “Therefore on that day Gideon was called Jerubbaal, that is to say, ‘Let Baal contend against him,’ because he pulled down his altar.”<sup>40</sup> The meaning of Gideon’s new name becomes ironic: Baal never speaks, and Gideon eventually restores idolatry in Ophrah (8:28).

Following the renaming scene, a new scene begins as the narrative returns to the collective enemy threat that the narrator originally introduced in 6:1: “Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the Easterners came together, and crossing the Jordan they encamped in the Valley of Jezreel” (6:33). The “spirit of Yahweh” clothes Gideon and he calls out the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali to fight against the impending enemy threat (6:34). The idea of the “spirit of Yahweh” imbuing the heroes/deliverers with his power is a common trope in the book, but the use of the verb *לבש*, “to clothe,” in 6:34 is distinctive, signaling that once again something unusual is

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>40</sup> Judg 6:25-32 simultaneously functions as an etiology for the name Gideon. Gideon, meaning “Hacker” or “Chopper,” in this story pulls down the Baal altar and cuts down the Asherah beside it.

happening in the Gideon narrative.<sup>41</sup> As quickly as the narrative reports Gideon's new empowerment, the narrative describes a picture of a localized, regional war as Gideon then rallies troops from his own tribe (Manassesh) as well as from three other tribes, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. The scene is set for the anticipated battle—the enemy has crossed the Jordan into the valley of Jezreel, and Gideon has an army of Israelites from the local tribes assembled, ready, and willing to fight.

Yet what the reader expects to happen after the spirit of Yahweh empowers the hero—the battle—does not occur next. Instead of a battle, the narrative in 6:36-40 returns to the motif of divine assurance as Gideon seeks further assurance that the deity is with him. Klein notes, “Then, just when action is expected, Gideon hesitates. Surrounded by Yahweh's spirit, assembling an army of the peoples, he suddenly ‘becomes’ Jerubbaal the contender, asking for proof of Yahweh's powers.”<sup>42</sup> Gideon once again contends—however politely—with the deity. Thus, the scene creates yet another pause in the story before the expected battle, once again heightening the sense of anticipation.

The scene in 6:36-40 also returns to the agricultural setting in which Gideon was first introduced. Now Gideon is on the threshing floor (6:37), and similar to how Gideon used the wine press for something other than producing wine, here once again the narrator depicts an agricultural setting being used for something other than its intended purpose. Gideon threshes in a wine press, and “fleeces” on a threshing floor.<sup>43</sup> In other words, “Gideon d[oes] nothing in the appropriate place.”<sup>44</sup> In short, the narrator uses the

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. 3:10; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:15

<sup>42</sup> Klein, *The Triumph of Yahweh*, 55.

<sup>43</sup> Schneider, *Judges*, 110.

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

setting of the threshing floor to underline the disorder of life in the narrative world of Judges 6-8: this is an upside-down world.

As in the previous the scenes depicted in 6:11-24 and 6:25-32, speech plays an important role in 6:36-40. However, unlike in 6:11-24 and 6:25-32 in which there were multiple speakers, here only Gideon speaks. Additionally, Gideon speaks to Elohim rather than Yahweh, a switch in names for which the narrator gives no explanation, heightening the uncertainty of Gideon's world. When asking for the initial fleece test, the narrator has Gideon use the Hebrew clause  $\text{אם}$ , "if" (6:36, 37): "If you will deliver ... If there is dew," once again reflecting the uncertainty of the situation.<sup>45</sup> First, he asks that the deity make wet a fleece that he leaves out overnight on the threshing floor, while the ground all around the fleece remains dry. Following this, he asks for the sign in reverse, namely, for the ground to be wet but the fleece to be dry. The deity grants both wishes without a word, and the pericope then ends abruptly, while 7:1 picks up the theme of the imposing Midianite threat last seen in 6:35.

Judges 7:1 abruptly begins a new scene, returning to the Midianite threat, and yet again heightening anticipation that the battle will shortly ensue: "Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the troops that were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod, and the camp of Midian was north of them, below the hill of Moreh, in the valley." By beginning with the looming Midianite threat in 7:1, the narrative returns to where 6:33 finished, namely, with the problem of the gathering Midianite army: "Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east came together, and crossing the Jordan they encamped in the Valley of Jezreel." The precise identity of both the hero and the enemy are ambiguous in 7:1—suddenly Gideon, identified as Jerubbaal,

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<sup>45</sup> McMillion, "Judges 6-8," 211.

reenters the story, unseen since 6:32, and the narrator lists the enemy forces only as Midianites rather than the fuller tripartite description of Midianites, Amalekites, and Easterners. Furthermore, in 7:2 the deity will once again be present, though this time in the guise of Yahweh rather than Elohim, an abrupt switch from 6:36-40. No reason for the change in appellation is given. Identities in the story continue to fluctuate and shift.

It seems inevitable that the newly appointed hero/deliverer will now address the enemy threat, especially with Gideon persuaded following a series of signs and assurances that proved that the deity is on his side. Yet the setting of army encampment by the spring of Harod, עין חרוד in Hebrew, introduces fear onto the map created by the narrative and the battle is postponed once more. The name of the spring, from the Hebrew חרד, plays on the meaning of the root: “trembling, terror, fear.” It reminds the reader of Gideon’s earlier fears while also slowing down the narrative yet again.<sup>46</sup>

Encamped by the “spring of fear,” the battle does not begin. Instead, speech becomes the focus, with Yahweh saying to Gideon, “The troops with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand. Israel would only take the credit away from me, saying, 'My own hand has delivered me'” (7:2). Once more, the *Leitwörter* י and ישע are present. In this verse, the narrator spells out the exact relationship of the two words and highlights the present concern: whose hand will deliver Israel? More importantly, who will get the credit for this act? Furthermore, with the deity’s speech, the narrator introduces the idea that Gideon is not the only character who is afraid in the narrative: the deity fears that the Israelites will not rightly ascribe their coming victory to him. To prevent this, Yahweh instructs Gideon to downsize his army of 32,000 men. The ensuing

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<sup>46</sup> Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 56.

verses detail this reduction in two steps.

First, Gideon is to let anyone who is “fearful and trembling (ירא וחרד)” return home (7:3). Although Gideon is now convinced that Yahweh is on his side, apparently the gathered Israelite forces do not all share this conviction. Gideon tells anyone who is “fearful and trembling” to return home.<sup>47</sup> These men depart, and Gideon is left with 10,000 men. Yet the deity repeats himself, “The troops are still too many” (7:4). Gideon is to take them down to the water where the deity will “sift them out for you there. When I say, ‘This one shall go with you,’ he shall go with you; and when I say, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ he shall not go” (7:4). In 7:1-8, unlike in 6:36-40, only the deity (now as Yahweh rather than Elohim) speaks. The troops are reduced until only 300 men remain, and 7:8 concludes with the camp of Midian, bringing the narrative back to 7:1 in a “neat inclusion.”<sup>48</sup> Both anticipation for the coming battle and fear dominate the passage in 7:1-8, but now Gideon is now longer afraid—only his army and his deity are.<sup>49</sup> The story ends on an ironic note: Gideon is a reluctant leader with the worst soldiers imaginable.<sup>50</sup>

With 300 men left and the camp of Midian below in the valley, the deity commands Gideon to “Get up (קום), attack the camp; for I have given it into your hand (7:9)” (בידך). Yet what immediately follows is not the expected battle scene. Instead, Yahweh continues by stating, “But if you fear to attack (ואם-ירא אתה לרדת), go down to the camp with your servant Purah; and you shall hear what they say, and afterward your

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Deut 20:8

<sup>48</sup> McMillion, “Judges 6-8,” 217.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 222.

hands shall be strengthened to attack the camp” (7:10-11). These are the final words the deity speaks in the Gideon narrative.

Gideon does as Yahweh commands, going down to where “The Midianites and the Amalekites and the Easterners lay along the valley as thick as locusts; and their camels were without number, countless as the sand on the seashore” (7:12-13). The story thus refocuses on the enemy forces as a collective threat, invoking the opening scene of 6:1-6. Standing at the edge of the enemy camp, Gideon overhears one Midianite guard telling another of a dream he had. In the dream “a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian, and came to the tent, and struck it so that it fell; it turned upside down, and the tent collapsed” (7:13), reinforcing once again the agricultural world of 6:1-6. The Midianite guard offers an interpretation, identifying the barley cake as Gideon and stating that the deity (referred to here as Elohim rather than Yahweh) has given Midian and all the army into Gideon’s hand (7:14). Once again, the precise identity of the deity is ambiguous. Gideon was previously talking to Yahweh, who assured him of his victory and sent him to the Midianites for final proof; the Midianites ascribe the coming victory to Elohim, not Yahweh.

In 7:15, Gideon returns to the Israelite camp, finally assured of his success, and commands the Israelites, “Get up (קוּמוּ); for Yahweh has given the army of Midian into your hand (7:15)” (בִּידְכֶם). In this verse, Gideon repeats the deity’s earlier command to him, and tells the Israelites that the deity has given the Midianites into *their* hand. However, nowhere in the narrative does the deity say this. The deity only said that he gave the Midianites into Gideon’s hand. The narrator thus provides a glimpse of the

Transjordanian Gideon that is to come following the last of the divine assurances in 7:9-15. In a flash, the uncertain Gideon of the first episode disappears.

In Judges 7:16, the battle scene anticipated since the introduction of the enemy in 6:1 finally begins. The narrative reports that Gideon divides the remaining 300 men into three companies, puts trumpets into the hands of all the men, along with jars containing torches, and commands them to do as he does when they reach the Midianite camp. Events transpire quickly in the conventional economic language of biblical narrative, and the expected “battle” is recounted in only a few verses. The narrator underscores Gideon’s newfound confidence in 7:17, when he tells his assembled army, “Look at me, and do the same—when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do.”<sup>51</sup> The repetition of the first person singular is striking, especially when compared with Gideon’s insistence on using the first person plural in 6:12. Gideon is suddenly a commander, capable of giving orders—he is even a model for action. In other words, Gideon has finally grown into what the messenger declared him to be at the start of the narrative—a *gibbôr hayil*.

The narrator employs direct speech to emphasize the new Gideon as the battle begins. In 7:18, Gideon commands his army to cry, “For Yahweh and for Gideon!” when they surround the enemy camp. Suddenly the hero—and instigator—of the battle becomes ambiguous: as Niditch writes, “The battle cry at vv. 18 and 20 juxtapose the divine and human heroes.”<sup>52</sup> Exactly who is responsible for the ensuing victory becomes increasingly unclear as the battle unfolds, with both Gideon and the deity playing a part.

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<sup>51</sup> This verse, along with v. 16 and vv. 18-20, exhibit a high ratio of repetition in vocabulary and syntax.

<sup>52</sup> Niditch, *Judges*, 98.

Gideon's actions foreshadow his role in the Transjordan. As Klein comments, "Indeed (prayer) and word (battle cry) Gideon follows Yahweh at this point in his narrative; but, unlike Deborah, he includes his own name as a leader—suggestive of subsequent actions."<sup>53</sup>

The battle unfolds accordingly: Gideon's men approach the camp at night (7:19). Then the 100 men with Gideon blow the horns and smash the clay jars in their hands (7:19). Next, all three companies blow their trumpets and hold up the torches that were concealed in the clay jars, shouting, "A sword for Yahweh and for Gideon!" (7:20). The Israelites then remain in their places all around the camp while inside the camp the Midianites run, cry out, and flee to an unspecified location (7:21). A third and final blowing of all 300 of the trumpets occurs, at which point Yahweh sets the swords of the men inside the camp against their fellows, and the Midianites again flee, this time toward the Jordan (7:22).

The narrative depicts Gideon and his men using trickery to route the enemy: a surprise attack under cover of darkness; dividing the small Israelite forces into groups to surround the enemy camp and give the impression of a much larger force; and the sounds of loud cries, breaking jars, and the blowing of horns to scare the enemy awake. Verses 16-21 recount the actions of the Israelite soldiers, never once mentioning the deity apart from the reference in the battle cry. The result of these tactics creates pandemonium in the Midianite camp: while Gideon's entire army stands in its place around the camp, in 7:21 the Midianite camp awakes, cries out, and flees. Swords do not clash, the deity does not intervene, and the battle is over without ever having begun. As Gideon becomes more confident and Yahweh fades into the background, the enemy also experiences a decisive

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<sup>53</sup> Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 57.



shift in characterization.

Then in 7:22, the narrator reports, “When they blew the three hundred trumpets, Yahweh set every man's sword against his fellow and against all the army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath.” Here the deity, not the Israelite soldiers, is responsible for the flight of the enemy camp. Yahweh sweeps in and wins the battle in 7:22. Yet already the deity is unnecessary here—Gideon implemented and arranged a successful battle strategy, apparently without divine instruction, and the enemy army has already fled. As Webb notes, “unlike Joshua, Gideon does not receive the strategy ready-made from a heavenly visitor, it is apparently his own idea.”<sup>54</sup> The addition of 7:22 renders the whole battle scene ambiguous—who really brought about the victory? After all, the enemy fled twice—once before the deity even arrived on the scene. This is the last time the deity appears as an active character in the Gideon narrative. From here forward, he will only occur in Gideon’s speech. The scene ends with a return to a focus on geography: the Midianite raiders scatter in retreat as far as “Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath” (7:22).

Irony runs rife in the battle scene: that some of the Midianites should die by sword is, of course, “magnificently ironic,” since neither Gideon nor his soldiers even carried a sword.<sup>55</sup> Gideon, so anxious and fearful prior to 7:15, now becomes fearless, and the numerically superior enemy comically flees from a band of 300 unarmed

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<sup>54</sup> Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 149.

<sup>55</sup> Block, *Judges*, 282.

soldiers.<sup>56</sup> In 7:16-22, fear comes full circle: Gideon no longer seems afraid, but fear has not disappeared from the narrative: now the enemy, previously described as immeasurable in number and as thick as locusts (6:5), experiences fear (7:12). With the battle in 7:16-21, the hesitant farmer has turned into a clever, self-assured leader and tactician. Ironically, by providing the repeated divine signals of his presence at Gideon's side, the narrator ultimately writes the deity out of the story. Once the enemy has fled, Gideon no longer interacts with the deity.

The first episode begins to wind down in 7:23, when the troops of Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh are recalled. Once again, the narrator adds details that make the final form of the story ambiguous—after all, Gideon sent the extra troops away in 7:1-8, and 7:21-22 indicate that the battle is won. The story, at this point, should be finished. Yet it continues. In 7:24, Gideon also summons the Ephraimites to come to his aid: “Come down against the Midianites and seize the waters against them, as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan” (7:24). The narrative reports that the Ephraimites do as commanded: they come out, seize the waters as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan, and capture and kill the captains of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb, bringing their heads to Gideon “beyond the Jordan” (7:25). The setting of the wine press is reiterated briefly when Zeeb, one of the two Midianite captains captured and killed by Gideon's troops, is mentioned in 7:25 (“and they killed Zeeb at the Wine press of Zeeb”). Ironically, the Midianite captain loses his life in the same kind of locale in which Gideon hid.

Judges 8:3 continues to feature the Ephraimites, who complain to Gideon that they were not called out earlier to fight against the Midianites. The use of the verb “to contend,” is a component of Gideon's second name, Jerubbaal. In the Gideon narrative it

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<sup>56</sup> Butler, *Judges*, 215.

occurs twice: once in 6:25-32 and then again in 8:1. Judges 8:1 demonstrates the change in Gideon as he deftly handles the Ephraimites' ire for not having been called out previously. when they complain, "What is this thing you have done to us, not to call us when you went to wage war against Midian?" Gideon, once so unsure of himself, now answers his fellows with a proverb, explaining, "What have I done now in comparison with you? Are not the gleanings of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? God gave the chiefs of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb, into your hand. What have I been able to do in comparison with you?" (8:2). Gideon is now quick to flatter and assuage; he has become a diplomat. Schneider elaborates:

Gideon's pacification of the Ephraimites reestablishes the upside-down nature of situations in this story. When Gideon was first introduced he was threshing wheat in a wine press, according to the text, because of the Midianite threat (6:11). This is often interpreted to mean that he is unable to thresh the wheat out in the open where it should be done. In his speech with Ephraim he notes how their wheat is better than Abiezerite wine. Yet the text makes no reference to the Abiezerites' wine and the winepress is only mentioned in terms of threshing wheat. If this reference means that the Abiezrites were known for wine, then the wine press reference means that they were reduced to raising wheat. In either case, both references reinforce the unusual nature of the period.<sup>57</sup>

Gideon's newfound abilities as a leader are manifest in this bit of flattery that creates even further ambiguity in the narrative. Who exactly won the battle: the deity, Gideon, or the Ephraimites? Why does Gideon credit Elohim here rather than Yahweh? Gideon's words mollify the Ephraimites, who subsequently disappear from the story.

It seems then that the Gideon story should be finished: Gideon has become the *gibbôr hayil* that the messenger declared him to be in 6:11. The Midianites flee, and the Israelites capture and execute the enemy leaders. The conflict introduced in the beginning

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<sup>57</sup> Schneider, *Judges*, 118.

of the narrative is now resolved, and intertribal relations are restored to peace. However, things are rarely as they seem in the world of Gideon, and so the story continues.

### 1.2.3 Gideon in Transjordan (8:4-27)

Judges 8:4 begins the second major act in the Gideon narrative, and the first scene begins, “Then Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over, he and the three hundred who were with him, exhausted and famished.” The troops who were called out for a second time at the end of Judges 7 disappear again without explanation, and the story returns to Gideon and his 300 men. Everything changes once Gideon and his men cross the river into the Transjordan.

The narrative then repeats: “exhausted and famished,” Gideon and his men arrive at the town of Succoth, where Gideon announces that he is now pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the heretofore-unmentioned kings of Midian: who are these kings, and why did the narrative not mention them before? The narrator is silent and the suspense builds. Gideon requests food for his troops from the people of Succoth, who refuse his request. Denied food from the people of Succoth, Gideon declares that when he has successfully caught the Midianite kings he will punish the people: “Therefore, when Yahweh gives Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand (בידי), I will trample (ודשתי) your flesh with thorns of the wilderness and briars” (8:7). The root for “trample (ודש)” is the same as the root for threshing grain, returning the story to its original focus on Gideon as a farmer.<sup>58</sup>

However, the Gideon of Judges 8 will thresh men, not grain—the farmer has become a

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<sup>58</sup> Soggin, *Judges*, 155-156; He points the reader to Amos 1:3, which reads “Thus says Yahweh: For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have threshed (ודש) Gilead with threshing sledges of iron.”

warrior. Gideon's mention of Yahweh is the first of only three appearances that the deity makes in the Transjordanian portion of the Gideon narrative. Each occurrence is only in speech—the deity himself never appears and plays no active role in the story.

Nevertheless, Gideon acts and speaks as if Yahweh is on his side—and the narrator does not intervene to inform the reader that the situation is otherwise. In 8:8, the scene repeats in a new locale, the city of Penuel, where Gideon makes the same request and again is denied. To the people of Penuel Gideon announces that when he returns victorious he will destroy their defenses: “When I return in peace (בשלום), I will tear down this tower” (8:9). Ironically, Gideon will return in peace—however, he will be “in peace with the enemy, but not with his own people.”<sup>59</sup>

The introduction of Succoth and Penuel into the world of Gideon is curious: neither city is mentioned elsewhere within the book of Judges. Furthermore, the narrative is ambiguous as to the ethnic identity of the two cities. The story provides no indication as to whether or not Gideon is in fact entitled to receive aid and supplies from these cities. Yet this much is clear: in contrast with the troops depicted in Judges 6-7 (all from Cisjordanian tribes), the people of the Transjordan are uniformly unhelpful. The narrative is equally ambiguous in its descriptions of the inhabitants of the two cities. The narrator sometimes uses the phrase “men of Succoth (אנשי סכות)” to refer to its inhabitants (cf. 8:8, 15, 16). However, in 8:6, it is the “officials (שרי) of Succoth” who answer Gideon, in 8:8 the “men” again, in 8:14 the “officials and elders (את-שרי סכות ואת-זקניה),” and in 8:16 the “elders” and the “men.” The diversity of names for the people of Succoth contrasts with the static appellation used for the inhabitants of Penuel throughout vv. 5-9 and 13-17:

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<sup>59</sup> Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 61.

“people of Penuel (אנשי פנואל; cf. 8:8, 9). Exactly to whom Gideon speaks in Succoth is never clear.

Toponyms abound as the narrative unfolds and Gideon pursues the Midianite kings. Judges 8:10 reintroduces the pair into the story: “Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with their army, about fifteen thousand men, all who were left of all the army of the Easterners; for one hundred twenty thousand bearing arms had fallen.” In 8:5 Gideon told the people of Succoth that he was pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the “kings of Midian”—but no mention is made in 8:10 of the Midianites, and instead the narrative reports that Zebah and Zalmunna are with an army of soldiers comprising solely Easterners. Once again, the narrator renders the precise identification of the enemy ambiguous. Furthermore, Karkor is an uncertain location, occurring only here in the biblical world.

Gideon then goes up “by the caravan route east of Nobah and Jogbehah” (8:11) to attack the enemy army. The inclusion of “caravan route” reminds the reader of the story of Jael in 5:6: “In the days of Shamgar son of Anath, in the days of Jael, caravans ceased and travelers kept to the byways.” Both Nobah and Jogbehah are also ambiguous locations, cities which otherwise only occur in the book of Numbers. Whereas the battle narrative recounted in Judges 7 was detailed, Judges 8 is terse—apart from geographical details, the narrator provides little information, and the ambiguity of these otherwise largely unknown locales emphasizes the lack of detail. The narrator simply reports that having followed the caravan route Gideon “attacked the army, for the army was off its guard” (8:11). The narrative provides no details of Gideon's strategy, only that “Zebah and Zalmunna fled” (8:12). Gideon pursues them and captures them, and throws “all the

army into a panic (8:12) ”(החריד). The repetition of חרד recalls 7:1 and 7:3, where Israel encamped next to עין חרד, literally, “the spring of fear,” and in which Gideon then had to send home the ירא וחרד, literally, the “fearful and trembling.” In the final use of the root in Judges 6-8, it is no longer the Israelites who tremble, but the enemy army. Fear has come full circle in the Gideon narrative.

Now victorious as he had predicted, Gideon “returns by the ascent of Heres” (8:13). “Heres” literally means “the sun,” but like Karkor is otherwise unknown. The land of the Transjordan is ambiguous—it belongs to the enemy and the unhelpful Israelites, but that is all the reader learns. As promised, Gideon then returns to the cities of Succoth and Penuel to carry out his earlier threats against their inhabitants. In Succoth he repeats the words of the elders, “Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me, saying, ‘Do you already have in your possession the hands (הכף) of Zebah and Zalmunna, that we should give bread to your troops who are exhausted?’” Gideon then does as he promised he would: he tramples the people of Succoth with the thorns of the wilderness and briars. Ironically, “the scoffing of the men of the city has come back against them.”<sup>60</sup> He then returns to Penuel, where he not only tears down their tower as he promised in 8:8 but also kills the men of the city. The narrator provides no reason why the punishment of Penuel was harsher than Gideon’s initial threat and offers no evaluation of the deed—is Gideon acting as a warrior should, or is he overstepping his bounds?

Finally, Gideon promised to return in peace, but, in reality he returns in war against his own people. The text as it now stands leaves the reader with many questions: why the heavy retaliation? Where did the timid Gideon of Judges 6 and the beginning of Judges 7 go? What is certain, however, is how these verses continue to portray Gideon as

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<sup>60</sup> McMillion, “Judges 6-8,” 245.

confident and uncompromising. There is no hesitation here: Gideon requests food, the people of Succoth and Penuel both deny him his request, he makes a threat, successfully captures the Midianite leaders, and returns to carry out his threat.

The next scene returns to the captured Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna. Gideon interrogates them, asking what happened to the men that they killed at Tabor, a location (and a scene) not otherwise described within the Gideon narrative (8:18).<sup>61</sup> The narrative then records a short dialogue between Gideon and the Midianite kings, which reveals Gideon's true motive for pursuing the two men and introduces something new into the narrative: Zebah and Zalmunna killed his brothers at Tabor (8:19). Unlike the Gideon of the Cisjordan, the Transjordanian Gideon's motivation for pursuing and defeating the Midianites is personal. In the Cisjordan, Gideon acted only at the behest and constant reassurance of Yahweh. In the Transjordan, Gideon is dominant, vengeful, and assertive, but never consults the deity. Judges 8 tells a story that is not part of the divine plan but rather is a story of blood-revenge. It is also an ambiguous, incomplete story for which the reader does not have all the necessary background information to evaluate Gideon's next actions.

Although Gideon has not conversed with Yahweh since 7:9, he nevertheless repeatedly invokes Yahweh's name in Judges 8. After the Midianite kings tell Gideon that they killed the men at Tabor, who like Gideon had "the appearance of kings," he says, "As Yahweh lives, if you had saved them alive, I would not kill you" (8:19). For McMillion, "According to the narrative therefore, Gideon is no hard-hearted killer; he is

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Josh 19:22; Judg 4:6, 12, 14; 1 Sam 10:3; 1 Chron 6:77; Psa 89:12; Jer 46:18; Hos 5:1-2



only carrying out the requirements of clan justice.”<sup>62</sup> The narrator, however, makes no comment on Gideon’s action, neither condoning nor condemning.

The next scene slows down the narrative and builds suspense.<sup>63</sup> Gideon instructs Jether, his eldest (and heretofore-unmentioned) son, to kill the kings: “So he said to Jether his firstborn, ‘Arise, kill them!’ But the boy did not draw his sword, for he was afraid, because he was still a boy” (8:20).<sup>64</sup> Again, everything is radically different in Judges 8 than it was in Judges 6-7. In the Cisjordan, Gideon was a son, not a father. Now, in the Transjordan, Gideon is a father with a son. Like Joash, Jether is only a minor figure in the narrative. Yet with Jether, for only the second time in the narrative, the narrator assumes an internal point of view and reports that he does not obey his father’s command to slay the kings because he was “afraid (ירא) because he was still a lad” (8:20). Jether’s fear—and the repetition of the Hebrew verb ירא—return the reader to the fearful Gideon of the Cisjordan (6:23, 27; 7:10). The reintroduction of the *Leitwort* ירא highlights Jether as a counterpoint to Gideon’s new fearlessness; in other words, Jether “serves as a foil for his father and points up the contrast between Gideon as he was and Gideon as he is now.”<sup>65</sup>

The Midianite kings then repeat Gideon’s initial command to Jether: “Arise (קום).”<sup>66</sup> They continue, “you kill us, for as the man is, so is his strength (גבורתו)” (8:21). If Gideon is a *gibbôr hayil*, then he needs to act accordingly. Gideon acquiesces and kills

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<sup>62</sup> McMillion, “Judges 6-8,” 240.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>64</sup> For Jether as an allusion to Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, see Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 62.

<sup>65</sup> Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 151.

<sup>66</sup> McMillion, “Judges 6-8,” 248.

Zebah and Zalmunna. Unlike in Judges 8:3, where the narrator has Gideon tell the Ephraimites that God gave the captains Oreb and Zeeb into their hands, the narrator here does not connect the justice enacted to the deity. However, Gideon's words hang in the air: "They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As Yahweh lives, if you saved them, I would not kill you."

The next scene shifts back to the pursuers, as the "men of Israel" (now expanded from the 300 men with Gideon in his pursuit) offer Gideon something heretofore unheard of in the book of Judges: dynastic rule. They say, "Rule over us—you, your son, and also the son of your son, because you have delivered us (הוֹשַׁעְתָּנוּ) from the hand (מִיָּד) of Midian" (8:22). The narrative here reintroduces the two interconnected *Leitwörter* of שׁוֹר and מִדְיָן. Gideon, according to the men of Israel, saved them from the hand of the Midianites. As Webb observes, "The slayer of kings has *ipso facto* achieved a kingly status in the eyes of his followers, who now attribute their escape from the Midianite yoke directly to Gideon."<sup>67</sup> Ironically, the very thing the deity was afraid would happen has happened—the Israelites attribute their deliverance not to the deity's intervention, but to their own, human, hands.

Gideon invokes Yahweh one last time, refusing the offer and repeating the three-fold repetition of the Israelite's request: "I will not rule over you and my son will not will rule over you; Yahweh will rule over you."<sup>68</sup> The offer of kingship in 8:22-23 thus serves as a counterpoint to Gideon's encounter with the Ephraimites in 8:1-3; in both scenes, he is a diplomatic leader. Yet Gideon's answer, which appears to be an unequivocal no at

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<sup>67</sup> Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 152.

<sup>68</sup> The irony of this statement is, of course, that his son's name, Abimelech—"my father is king"—suggests something very different, and the issue of kingship will become central in the following chapter.

first, becomes ambiguous following his actions in the ensuing verses. After his refusal of kingship, Gideon says to the Israelites, “Let me make a request of you; each of you give me an earring he has taken as booty” (8:24). As an aside, the narrator offers the following: “For the enemy had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.” The introduction of the Ishmaelites into the narrative is surprising—they make no other appearance in the story. Once again, in the narrative world of Gideon, it remains unclear exactly with whom the enemy is to be identified.

Judges 8:25 reports the Israelite’s response: “We will willingly give them.” The narrative then records that they spread a garment, and each threw into it an earring he had taken as booty. Again, the narrator employs speech: the men of Israel make a request and Gideon refuses. Gideon then makes a request, but the men of Israel agree.<sup>69</sup> As McMillion notes, “The refusal of the first request is reversed by the agreement to the second request.”<sup>70</sup>

From these spoils, Gideon makes an ephod in Ophrah, the exact nature of which remains unspecified. Webb explains, “Gideon’s request for materials to make an ephod is a logical sequel to his assertion that Yahweh shall rule Israel. If Yahweh is to rule, he must be inquired of.”<sup>71</sup> However, it is “an act of piety that goes wrong,” for the ephod becomes an object of worship: “all Israel prostituted themselves to it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family” (8:27).<sup>72</sup> Geographically, the story has come full circle: Gideon is now back in Ophrah. Thematically, the story has also come full circle:

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<sup>69</sup> McMillion, “Judges 6-8,” 251.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 152.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 152.

in Judges 6 the Israelites worshipped Baal; in Judges 8 the mysterious ephod becomes a “snare” that leads Israel into idolatrous worship again. As the narrative draws close, it is not clear that anything has changed under Gideon’s leadership.

#### 1.2.4 The Conclusion (8:28-35)

Yet in 8:28, the narrative reports that Midian (without mention of the Amalekites or the Easterners) was “subdued before Israel and lifted their heads no more.” The land then has rest for 40 years, following the predictable pattern established thus far in the book of Judges. With that, the reader expects the story to end: even if the religious problem was not solved by Gideon, the military problem has been.

Yet the narrator intervenes and provides more information about Gideon. Judges 8:29 reconnects Gideon to his second name, “Jerubbaal son of Joash went to live in his own house,” and 8:30-31 adds the following details, “Now Gideon had seventy sons, the issue of his loins, for he had many wives. His concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he named him Abimelech,” foreshadowing the story in Judges 9. Thus, the hero of Judges 6-8 not only brings quiet to the land of Israel for 40 years, but he also sires seventy sons, “a sign of divine blessing.”<sup>73</sup> Additionally, the narrator includes that “Gideon son of Joash died at a good old age, and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash at Ophrah of the Abiezrites” (8:32), an indication that he was “a hero fully deserving of God’s favor and blessed with the internment of a good man.”<sup>74</sup> Whatever the problems with the ephod, Gideon dies at a “good old age,” an honor he shares with only

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<sup>73</sup> Niditch, *Judges*, 106.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

David and Abraham (Gen 15:15, 25:8; 1 Chr 29:28).

However, “As soon as Gideon died, the Israelites relapsed and prostituted themselves with the Baals, making Baal-berith their god. The Israelites did not remember Yahweh their God, who had rescued them from the hand (יָמָ) of all their enemies on every side, and they did not exhibit loyalty to the house of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in return for all the good that he had done to Israel” (8:33-35). In the end, as Polzin summarizes, “The story of Gideon portrays how Israel even in the very process of being delivered by Yahweh vacillates between allegiance to him and allegiance to another God. More than this, it develops the irony that the result of Yahweh’s deliverance through Gideon is Israel’s transition from partial to total worship of Baal-Berith after Gideon’s death (8:33).”<sup>75</sup> The reader is left confused: did Gideon do good for Israel, or bad? Still, Gideon is remembered “for all the good that he had done to Israel”—a favorable conclusion. The narrative ends where it begins, in Ophrah of the Abiezerites: but have things really changed?

### 1.3 Conclusions: Ambiguous Territory

The Gideon narrative, in its final form, reflects the careful crafting of a final redactor who used the materials at his or her disposal to create a story that remains, in the end, largely ambiguous. Nothing is determined in the story. The narrator continually redefines the characters, never sticking to one name for Gideon, one appellation for the deity, or single identity for the enemy. Gideon’s character is both praiseworthy and blameworthy, and the narrator evaluates him both positively and negatively accordingly.

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<sup>75</sup> Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 171.

The question of leadership is not resolved—Gideon refuses the offer of kingship in words, but the narrator portrays him acting in a strikingly kinglike manner, and the Israelites forget that Yahweh—not Gideon—saved them from the hands of their enemy. The office of the “judge” as leader has failed.

The use of dialogue repeatedly slows down the narrative and builds suspense, while also depicting how the Gideon of the Cisjordan had a close relationship with the deity. It also functions to illustrate Gideon as an appropriate human leader, when he as a warrior leads the Israelites through the hand and power of Yahweh. As Amit notes, the narrator’s use of the *Leitwörter* “hand” and “to save” emphasizes repeatedly that power belongs to Yahweh.<sup>76</sup> The hand of the Midianites prevails over Israel only because Yahweh gives Israel into their hand; the Midianites are given into the hand of the Israelites through Gideon’s leadership only because Yahweh endows Gideon and his army with the ability to succeed. Gideon’s actions in the Transjordan illustrate the dangers of human leadership unmitigated by divine aid. When the Israelites later confuse their deliverance from their enemy and attribute it to the hand of Gideon (8:22), Yahweh’s fears are realized. Furthermore, Gideon’s actions in 8:24-27 emphasize the dangers of human rule without the divine. The story concludes with a reminder that the Israelites do not remember that Yahweh delivered them (8:36), foreshadowing the continual descent into chaos in the book of Judges and Yahweh’s receding role.

To enter the world of Gideon is to enter ambiguous territory. What is clear is that the narrator uses the geography from the earliest Gideon traditions to underscore this ambiguity. The world of Judges 6-8 is a world divided by geography, its characters defined in relation to which side of the Jordan River they stand. In the Transjordan,

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 264-266.

divine action and participation recede into the background while much more mundane affairs take center stage. The on-going dialogue between the deity and Gideon ceases, and the signs and miraculous events with which the first half of the story was preoccupied are noticeably absent from the second. Similarly disappeared is the deity himself, who, apart from mention by Gideon in three verses (8:7, 19 and 23), is no longer an active character in the tale. This draws a stark contrast with the first half of the narrative, where the deity played a central role in the plot and in which human leadership was complemented by divine guidance.

Yet although geography functions to define “good” Israel (the Cisjordan) from “bad” Israel (the Transjordan), and to illustrate Gideon’s changing personality, it functions too to remind the reader of how ambiguous the world of Gideon really is. As Webb explains, “The way in which we are pointedly returned, at length to Gideon’s ‘own city, Ophrah’ in 8.27 is a classic example of a ring composition which invites us to read the end of the story in the light of its beginning.”<sup>77</sup> Although it is in Ophrah that the story concludes favorably concerning Gideon, it is also in Ophrah that Gideon sets up the ephod that leads Israel astray. Does Gideon’s leadership really change anything, despite “all the good he had done for Israel”? In the end, Gideon remains an ambiguous figure: “Under Yahweh’s guidance Gideon does become a hacker of the enemy, revising his original name from ironic to literal,” but he also eventually becomes “a hacker of Israel, Yahweh’s people and his own, lending yet another ironic aspect to his name.”<sup>78</sup> Through the deity’s help, he saves the Israelites from the Midianites, yet the Israelites confuse human rule and divine rule and forget the saving act—and power—of their god. The

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<sup>77</sup> Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 153.

<sup>78</sup> Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 67.

story of Gideon ends in disrepair.

The question remains: why leave so much ambiguous when presenting the story of Gideon? The intentional use of ambiguity in the narrative functions as a powerful device, leaving the narrative undetermined on several fronts and opening up multiple possible worlds of meaning. The final tradents of the Gideon narrative, who wrote during the uncertain period of Persian rule over Judah and in face of the loss of the Israelite monarchy, allowed a cacophony of voices to remain in the text. The centrality of the Gideon narrative in Judges consequently locates the climax of the book in precisely this state of perpetual ambiguity. The book of Judges, which links the book of Joshua to the books of Samuel and Kings and the beginning of the monarchy, asks how things will turn out for Israel as they attempt to conquer the land and be faithful to their proper leader, Yahweh. Judges shows how Israel's unity lies not in the possibilities of monarchy and human leadership but in its common God—after all, the monarchy will fail, but Israel will always have Yahweh. By including both “good” Gideon and “bad” Gideon in the book of Judges, the final author illustrated the growing ambiguity of the period of the Judges as the Israelites forget their true leader and move toward chaos, which necessitates the turn toward monarchy. The ambiguity illustrates the possibilities of the world of Judges, too, though, in which leaders might be successful—although only if they worked with, and not without, their god.



## Chapter 10 Conclusions

### 1.1 Conclusions

An examination Judges 6-8 reveals that the narrative is the result of repeated updating and reshaping. The earliest materials focus on a character named Gideon, who leads a small group of 300 men in battle against enemy forces on both sides of the Jordan. This Gideon was a *gibbôr hayil*, a great warrior. The picture of Gideon as *gibbôr hayil*, however, is deconstructed by a layer of secondary additions to the text, a sort of theological character reduction that shifts the focus of the story from the exploits of the *gibbôr hayil* to a focus on the power of the deity. The stratum of material that develops the motif of divine assurance transforms Gideon into a hesitant, fearful farmer instead of an assured tactician. In this stratum of material, Gideon acts only through the power of the deity, who commissions Gideon to do his work. Gideon asks for and receives divine assurance in this layer of material to assuage his newly introduced fear (6:10, 23, 27; 7:10), and the stories emphasize and reemphasize that the ability to save (6:14, 36, 37; 7:2, 7) comes from the hand of the deity—as does Gideon’s leadership abilities.<sup>1</sup> The result of the previous analysis suggests that two different sets of traditions about Gideon are the oldest material: 7:16b, 17-19ab-21, 22b, 8:10a, 11-12, 18-21, plus 8:25b, 26a, 27a. A second stratum built on the first, adding an introduction and appointment scene along with the earliest fragments of the dream scene: 6:11, 12, 14; 7:1, 9-11, 13-15.

The third stratum introduces the motif of divine assurance into the older stories about Gideon’s war exploits, transforming him from the a mighty warrior into the ever-hesitant and fear-filled farmer who is “least” in his family and needs repeated signs of

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 264-266.

assurance from the deity before he acts. The narratives that comprise the third stratum include parts of 6:13, 15-24; 7:2-8; parts of 7:9-15; and perhaps 7:22a. The third strata shares with the other stories in the book of Judges that feature the *Leitwörter*  $\tau$  and  $\psi$  and presupposes the earlier battle accounts. The fourth stratum includes the addition of the framework material so familiar from other parts of the book of Judges, present in 6:1-6, 34; and 8:28, although the framework material in Judges 6-8 is marked by elaboration and addition. A subsequent, fifth stratum connected the character Gideon with the figure of Jerubbaal, the father of Abimelech, and thus to the story in Judges 9 (and may have been added at the same time as the fourth stratum). In this stage, an author linked these two figures via the insertion of 6:25-32 and the concluding materials in 8:29-31 and 33-35. Judges 8:22-23 and Gideon's refusal of kingship may also belong here, inserted to serve as a foil to Abimelech. However, the message of these verses is radically changed by the later reshaping of what is now in 8:24-27, which recast Gideon so that he acts in a kingly manner despite his refusal of dynastic rule in the previous verses.

Finally, a sixth stratum comprising of at least 6:7-10 may have been added to the narrative, perhaps along with parts of Judges 2 and Judges 10. The insertion of 6:7-10 includes the Gideon in the larger narrative trajectory beginning with the Exodus from Egypt. Other later, post-book additions may include the expansions to Judges 8 in vv. 24-27, including v. 8:24-25a, 26b, and 27b. These supplements to the end of the chapter cast shadows on Gideon's refusal of the kingship in 8:22, utilizing the largely untouched older traditions about Gideon from the Transjordan to voice a clear didactic message that is both anti-idolatry and anti-monarchy attitudes. These verses presuppose the Moses/Aaron story from the book of Exodus and also perhaps the Jeroboam story from the book of

Kings, casting a dark shadow over Gideon's refusal to rule and his subsequent actions. The broad literary horizon of these verses suggests that their author may have known advanced stages of the books of Exodus, Samuel, and Kings. The late additions of anti-monarchic sentiments to the Gideon story may reflect historical events of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., when Judah remained under the control of the Persian Empire and the people experienced increasing repression of hope for the recovery of indigenous dynastic rule.<sup>2</sup> From the point of view of this author, only Yahweh could truly rule.

Other miscellaneous expansions broadened the participating enemy forces in 6:3, 33; 7:12, while 6:35 expanded the range of participating Israelite tribes who came to Gideon's aid. These reflect the interest of the book of Judges in depicting the different tribes working together as one as they attempt to conquer the land. Judges 6:36-40 builds upon the motif of divine assurance, but is difficult to place with any precision since these verses exhibit markedly different characteristics from the other stories that take up the issue of Gideon's fear and requests for divine confirmation. Finally, 7:23-8:3 connects the Cisjordan and Transjordan narratives, while also introducing the Ephraimites into the Gideon narrative (and thus making it so that Gideon serves as a foil to Jephthah). Judges 8:4-9, 10b, 13-17 also appear to contain later additions of indeterminate strata but that share the concerns of the larger book of Judges. These interests include addressing the question of tribal unity and tension and the negative portrayal of the Transjordan.

The possibilities for absolute dating indicate the Persian Period, although the narrative is undoubtedly drawing on much earlier, perhaps pre-literary traditions of Gideon as warrior. Although Auld's suggestion of a Persian Period insertion of the

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<sup>2</sup> Müller, *Königtum und Gottesherrschaft*, 245-256.

Gideon narrative is provocative, with Becker it needs to be noted that “Die Datierung der *gesamten* Gideon-Überlieferung in spät-bzw. nach-dtr Zeit durch Auld, Gideon 257-267, mutet—trotz vieler interessanter Beobachtungen—zu pauschal an.”<sup>3</sup> The most significant additions appear to have taken place prior to the Persian Period in the form of the motif of divine assurance. These stories speak to the hope that the deity will act in history and that the deity is with his people.

The Gideon story, in its final form, is part of a the larger arc of Israelite history, stretching from the Exodus (6:7-10, 13) but also looking forward and speaking to the dangers of the monarchy (8:22-27). The evidence suggests that various authors and redactors repeatedly and continually updated the story throughout a long period so that the final product found in Judges 6-8 now provides a glimpse into several stages of Israelite history and theology, with a specific focus on the right relationship between deity and leader. What is clear from this study is that the Gideon narrative and the book of Judges is, although related to its surrounding literary environment, also unique in many ways. The idea that a “DtrH” is responsible for the Gideon narrative is untenable; the book of Judges (and the Gideon story itself) is simply too different from the books of Deuteronomy-2 Kings (which it nevertheless surely knew in some form) to be considered “Deuteronomistic” in the simplest sense. In the end, the idea of a DH creates more problems than it solves; the foundations laid out here provide the starting place for future research on the compositional growth of the book of Judges as a discrete literary text. This text has its own interests and concerns, but was undoubtedly written with an eye toward the larger trajectory of Israelite history, stretching from advanced stages of the book of Exodus through the books of Kings. This suggests that Judges was intended to

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<sup>3</sup> Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum*, 208 n. 244.

form a bridge from the conquest narrative of Joshua to the beginnings of the monarchy, while placing that story squarely in the realm of an “all Israel” history.

This study confirms what scholars frequently posit: that Judges 6-8 is unique among the stories of the heroes/deliverers detailed in the book of Judges. It is in the story of Gideon that we read the first detailed narrative about a hero in the book of Judges; the book does not afford Othniel, Ehud, and or even Deborah this kind of attention.

Additionally, Judges 6-8 exhibits an overwhelming familiarity with other biblical figures and events. Gideon recalls Moses, but also Aaron; like both Moses and Jacob, Gideon saw God face-to-face. However, like Jeroboam, Gideon is a “mighty warrior” destined to fall: both Gideon and Jeroboam build cultic objects that lead their people astray. Within the Gideon narrative, an entire continuum of leaders is encapsulated in the character and actions of one man.

Moreover, the location of the Gideon narrative within the book of Judges is equally significant: the narrative is a turning point in the book.<sup>4</sup> The story about Gideon is at once a high point and a low point in the book. These chapters alone depict the deity as actively and personally involved with his appointed deliver—the deity visits Gideon, speaks with him, comforts him, and repeatedly assures him. Yet despite the deity’s involvement in the story, the Gideon narrative also begins the downward spiral of the book. Once the deity disappears from the story after 7:22, the narrative largely returns to its profane beginnings. The presence of the divine assurance motif and the abrupt ending

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<sup>4</sup> Amit writes, “Looking at the totality known as the book of Judges from ‘above,’ we see that the Gideon cycle functions as a climax and turning point in its dramatic and thematic sequence” (Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing*, 263). Likewise, J. Paul Tanner makes a similar argument, noting, “The Gideon narrative seems to mark a notable turning point” (Paul J. Tanner, “The Gideon Narrative as the Focal Point of Judges” (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, April-June 1992), 150). Auld, as already cited above, states, “Such a well connected story must be close to the centre of the Old Testament” (Auld, “Gideon: Hacking at the Heart of the Old Testament,” 257).

of the giving of assurance from the deity, along with the change in Gideon's character, marks the point in the book at which the hero/deliver begins to be a questionable figure. In the end, Judges 6-8 is both the climax of the deity's relationship with the Israelites in the book of Judges and the turn of events for the worse.

The result of the multiple layers that comprise Judges 6-8 is a final narrative that remains purposefully ambiguous when read alone, a characteristic that I submit is a direct result of the circumstances of the period during which the narrative received its final editing. Gideon is both Moses-like and Jeroboam-like, and the text does not harmonize these opposing extremes. The final redaction of the text leaves readers unsure what to take away from the narrative, an uncertainty reflective of how its final editors of struggled with the less than ideal realities of a failed monarchy, Persian control, and diminishing hope for a renewal of any form of native, dynastic reign over their former land. The Gideon narrative thus locates the climax of the book of Judges precisely in this state of perpetual ambiguity—will the period of the judges succeed or fail? Was Gideon good or bad? What kind of leader does Israel need, and what relationship should that leader have with Yahweh? Is the office of “judge” tenable?

However, when the Gideon narrative is read within the broader context of the entire book of Judges, it sets the scene for the story to come. By keeping the older, largely profane battle account in Judges 8 untouched, the deity can be written out of the story—and the dangers of a godless leader illustrated. By including the problematic nature of the Transjordanian tribes and Gideon's ultimate failure as a leader when he acts without divine aid, Judges 6-8 becomes the turning point in the book. The story in Judges 8 illustrates how Israel's unity lies in its deity, not in human leadership—and especially

not in monarchy and dynastic rule. With the deity, Gideon can pacify the Ephraimites and enjoin aid from a number of diverse tribes; without the deity, Gideon destroys Israelite cities and peoples and leads the Israelites into idolatry. Read within the larger book of Judges, the land will no longer have “rest” after Gideon. His son, neither a judge nor a deliverer, and not counted among the leaders of the book of Judges, will introduce further inter-tribal disharmony into the land. The heroes/deliverers following Gideon will be less and less admirable—like Gideon, Jephthah casts aspersions on the office, sacrificing his own daughter, while Samson pursues a woman and personal gain rather than the desires of the deity. With the beginning of the disintegration of the role of the appointed leader in the character of Gideon, the eventual descent into the chaos found in Judges 17-21 begins. The book sets up for the need for monarchy; but the final traditions of Judges 6-8 know the monarchy would ultimately fail: only Yahweh can truly rule Israel.

The story of Gideon begins with expectation and the hope of a new leader, one who sees Yahweh “face to face.” However, the story of Gideon ends in despondency and disrepair. Even before the death of the hero/deliverer, the Israelites have already strayed from Yahweh and have forgotten his role in the unfolding chain of events. The Gideon story, in all its intricacy and ambiguity, attests to Israel’s complex history and its need to update and redefine the traditions about its leaders in light of changing circumstances and theology. In the end, alongside Gideon the hero, the would-be new Moses, who did good for Israel, Judges 6-8 also leaves the reader with a memory of Gideon as the one who led Israel astray.

Appendix 1  
The Primary Compositional Layers of Judges 6-8

**STRATUM 1:**

7:16b, 17-19ab-21, 22b; 8:10a, 11-13, 18-21; 8:25b, 26a, 27a  
—*The earliest portions of the Gideon story.*

**STRATUM 2:**

6:11, 12, 14; 7:1, 9-11, 13-15  
—*Secondary additions that introduce Gideon's commissioning by the deity.*

**STRATUM 3:**

6:13, 15-24; 7:2-8; parts of 7:9-15; perhaps 7:22a (?)  
—*Earliest elements of the divine assurance motif.*

**STRATUM 4:**

6:1-6, 34; 8:28, 32  
—*Framework elements that tie Gideon into a larger book of Judges.*

**STRATUM 5:**

6:25-32; 8:29-31, 33-35; perhaps also 8:22-23 (?)  
—*Addition of Abimelech story and connection between Gideon and Judges 9.*

**STRATUM 6:**

6:7-10  
—*Insertion of the anonymous prophet.*

**INDETERMINATE ADDITIONS:**

6:35, 36-40; 7:12, 16c, 19a, 20, 23-24; 8:1-3; 4-9, 10b, 13-17  
—*Various additional elements added to the narrative. 6:35 belongs to a stratum of material added after the individual Gideon narrative was put together, but before its incorporation into the final book; 6:36-40 and 7:12 both belong to an indeterminate literary strata developing the signs motif; numerous additions added further weaponry to the battle in 7:16c, 19a, and 20; Judges 7:23-8:3 are supplemental additions of indeterminate strata, added before the "all Israel" intro and conclusions, but after the narratives that only know Gideon and his 300 men. Judges 7:23 is later than 7:24-8:3; Judges 8:4-9, 10b, 13-17 contain later additions, also of an indeterminate strata, but that share the concerns of the larger book of Judges.*



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