

**YAHWEH *VERSUS* BAALISM**  
**A THEOLOGICAL READING**  
**OF THE**  
**GIDEON-ABIMELECH NARRATIVE**

**WOLFGANG BLUEDORN**

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# ABSTRACT

This study attempts to describe the contribution of the Abimelech narrative for the theology of Judges. It is claimed that the Gideon narrative and the Abimelech narrative need to be viewed as one narrative that focuses on the demonstration of YHWH's superiority over Baalism, and that the deliverance from the Midianites in the Gideon narrative, Abimelech's kingship, and the theme of retribution in the Abimelech narrative serve as the tangible matter by which the abstract theological theme becomes narratable.

The introduction to the Gideon narrative, which focuses on Israel's idolatry in a previously unparalleled way in Judges, anticipates a theological narrative to demonstrate that YHWH is god. YHWH's prophet defines the general theological background and theme for the narrative by accusing Israel of having abandoned YHWH despite his deeds in their history and having worshipped foreign gods instead. YHWH calls Gideon to demolish the idolatrous objects of Baalism in response, so that Baalism becomes an example of any idolatrous cult. Joash as the representative of Baalism specifies the defined theme by proposing that whichever god demonstrates his divine power shall be recognised as god. The following episodes of the battle against the Midianites contrast Gideon's inadequate resources with his selfish attempt to be honoured for the victory, assign the victory to YHWH, who remains in control and who thus demonstrates his divine power, and show that Baal is not present in the narrative. Yet Gideon continues the battle against the Midianites on his own in the narrative complication, which culminates in Gideon's establishment of idolatry, shows that YHWH is still in control, and sets the background for the Abimelech narrative.

Following the introduction of Israel's idolatry, the focus of the Abimelech narrative on Baal and Shechem defines them as examples of Israel's general idolatry. Abimelech is crowned on a Baalist basis and becomes Baal's chief representative. The theological theme is specified and its effect for the narrative outlined by Jotham as YHWH's representative; Abimelech's success or failure as king will show Baal's power or absence. The following episodes suggest that Baal is not present at all, that Baalism is a self-destructive religion, and that YHWH is in control of the mutual destruction of the Baal worshippers, who are nevertheless held accountable.

By the end of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative the narrator has demonstrated YHWH's supreme power to deliver Israel from their enemies, his permanent control over the events, the inability of man to accomplish YHWH's work on their own, the absence of other gods, and the self-destructive force of idolatry. Therefore, YHWH is god and should be worshipped as god.

# DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is entirely my own work, that it was not conducted in collaboration with, or with the assistance of others, that it is not being submitted for a comparable academic award, and that the views expressed in this thesis are my own views.

Wolfgang Bluedorn

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# ABBREVIATIONS

## General Abbreviations

abs.	absolute (state)
acc.	accusative (case)
akk.	Akkadian
arab.	Arabic
aram.	Aramaic
<i>BHS</i>	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
ch.	chapter
cit.	cited, quoted; citation
cons.	consecutive
contr.	contrast with, contrary to
dir.obj.	direct object, accusative object
esp.	especially
fem.	feminine (gender)
Ⓢ	Septuagint, ed. A. RAHLFS
Ⓢ <sup>A</sup>	Codex Alexandrinus
Ⓢ <sup>B</sup>	Codex Vaticanus
Ⓢ <sup>O</sup>	Origen's recension of Ⓢ
hebr.	Hebrew
hif.	hif'il (stem)
hišt.	hištafel (stem)
hitp.	hitpa'el (stem)
ʾ	noun (any gender)
incl.	including, inclusive
inf.	infinitive (mood)
ipf.	imperfect (tense); describing the affirmative ( <i>yiqṭōl</i> ) conjugation
ipv.	imperative (mood)
<i>K</i>	<i>Kēṭîḇ</i>
ℓ	Latina
lit.	literally
Ⓜ	Massoretic Text
masc.	masculine (gender)

**Yahweh versus Baalism: Abbreviations**

n.	note, footnote
N/A	not applicable
nif.	nif'al (stem)
obj.	object (if not focused on as → dir.obj)
וְ	verb
pf.	perfect (tense); describing the preformative ( <i>qāṭal</i> ) conjugation
pi.	pi'el (stem)
pl.	plural (number)
pred.	predicate
ptc.	participle (mood)
Q	<i>Q<sup>e</sup>rê</i>
Q	Qumran
S	Peshitta
sf.	suffix
sg.	singular (number)
שׁוֹ	(personal) name, proper noun
subj.	subject
Ⓒ	Targum
ⒸJon	Targum Jonathan, ed. W. F. SMELIK (see the bibliography)
Ⓕ	Vulgate, ed. B. FISCHER
<	derived from
\	without, apart from
†	all passages of the Hebrew Scriptures are mentioned; if only all passages of a specific part of the Hebrew Scriptures are mentioned, this part is given in parentheses, e.g., † (Judges)
↔	contrast, contrasting
→	see
*	conjectured/proposed original form or phrase
•	separates different parallels
	parallel
∅	nothing, not present, not stated
√	root
< >	encloses words in translations that are not found in the Hebrew text
{ }	encloses roots or phrases that are used conveniently either instead of the actual forms or phrases, or to mark them as a unit

## Books of the Hebrew Scriptures

Gen	Genesis	Ezek	Ezekiel
Exod	Exodus	Hos	Hosea
Lev	Leviticus	Mic	Micah
Num	Numbers	Hab	Habakkuk
Deut	Deuteronomy	Hag	Haggai
Josh	Joshua	Ps	Psalms
Judg	Judges	Prov	Proverbs
1/2 Sam	1/2 Samuel	Lam	Lamentations
1/2 Kgs	1/2 Kings	Dan	Daniel
Isa	Isaiah	Neh	Nehemiah
Jer	Jeremiah	1/2 Chr	1/2 Chronicles



## Secondary Literature

AASF	Annales Academiæ Scientiarum Fennicæ
AB	The Anchor Bible
<i>ABD</i>	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>AbrN</i>	<i>Abr-Nahrain</i>
AGE	Allgemeine Geschichte in Einzeldarstellungen
<i>AJSLL</i>	<i>The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</i>
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANETS	Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
ATh	Arbeiten zur Theologie
AThANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
ATSAT	Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament
AUS	American University Studies
<i>AusBR</i>	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BaL	Bible and Literature
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BAT	Die Botschaft des Alten Testaments
BBB	Bonner Biblische Beiträge
BCAT	Biblischer Kommentar über das Alte Testament
BDB	<i>The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>
BEATJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums
<i>BetM</i>	<i>Beth Mikra</i>
<i>BibArch</i>	<i>The Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation
<i>BiTod</i>	<i>The Bible Today</i>
<i>BiTr</i>	<i>Bible Translator</i>
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
<i>BS</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BV</i>	<i>Biblical Viewpoint</i>

Yahweh versus Baalism: Abbreviations

BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CThM	Calwer Theologische Monographien
<i>Dor</i>	<i>Dor le Dor</i>
EB	Echter Bibel
EHAT	Exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
<i>EncB</i>	<i>Encyclopædia Biblica</i>
<i>Eretz</i>	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
<i>ETHL</i>	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
EVEN-SHOSHAN	<i>A New Concordance of the Bible</i> , ed. A. EVEN-SHOSHAN
<i>ExpT</i>	<i>The Expository Times</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FCB	The Feminist Companion to the Bible
FCI	Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
FzB	Forschung zur Bibel
GB <sup>17</sup>	W. GESENIUS, <i>Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament</i> , ed. F. BUHL, 17 <sup>th</sup> ed.
GK	W. GESENIUS, <i>Hebräische Grammatik</i> , ed. E. KAUTZSCH
GTS	Gettysburg theological studies
<i>HALAT</i>	<i>Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament</i> , ed. L. KOEHLER, W. BAUMGARTNER, J. J. STAMM, and B. HARTMANN
<i>HAR</i>	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HBAG	Handbücher der alten Geschichte
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HSAT	Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HThS	Harvard Theological Studies
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	The International Critical Commentary
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>IJT</i>	<i>Indian Journal of Theology</i>

Yahweh versus Baalism: Abbreviations

<i>IKZ</i>	<i>Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JANES</i>	<i>The Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBL.MS</i>	Journal of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
<i>JE</i>	<i>The Jewish Encyclopedia</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JLT</i>	<i>Literature &amp; Theology</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JPOS</i>	<i>Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society</i>
<i>JRR</i>	<i>A Journal from the Radical Reformation</i>
<i>JSNT.S</i>	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOT.S</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JThS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>KAT</i>	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>KEHAT</i>	Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
<i>KHCAT</i>	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
<i>KK</i>	Kurzgefaßter Kommentar zu den heiligen Schriften Alten und Neuen Testaments sowie zu den Apokryphen
<i>LISOWSKY</i>	<i>Konkordanz zum Hebräischen Alten Testament</i> , ed. G. LISOWSKY
<i>Loeb</i>	The Loeb Classical Library
<i>NAC</i>	New American Commentary
<i>NEB</i>	Die Neue Echter Bibel
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
<i>OBO</i>	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
<i>OBTh</i>	Overtures to Biblical Theology
<i>OTM</i>	Old Testament Message
<i>OTS</i>	Oudtestamentische Studiën
<i>OTS</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>POS</i>	Pretoria Oriental Series



Yahweh versus Baalism: Abbreviations

<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
SABH	Studies in American Biblical Hermeneutics
SAT	Die Schriften des Alten Testaments in Auswahl neu übersetzt und für die Gegenwart erklärt
SBL.DS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBL.SS	Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies
SIC	Scripture in Context
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SSN	Studia Semantica Neerlandica
SSU	Studia Semitica Upsaliensia
TAB	Texte und Arbeiten zur Bibel
<i>THAT</i>	<i>Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i>
ThB	Theologische Bücherei
THBW	Theologisch-homiletisches Bibelwerk
<i>Theol</i>	<i>Θεολογία</i>
<i>ThLZ</i>	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
<i>ThR</i>	<i>Theologische Rundschau</i>
ThRel	Theology and Religion
<i>ThStKr</i>	<i>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</i>
<i>ThWAT</i>	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i>
<i>ThZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>TynB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VT.S	Vetus Testamentum Supplement
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WCB	World Christian Books
WHJP	The World History of the Jewish People
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>WZVK</i>	<i>Wiener Zeitschrift für Volkskunde</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZDPV</i>	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>
<i>ZThK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

# NOTES AND DEFINITIONS

## Notes

- 1 Translations of Biblical passages are mine throughout the thesis.
- 2 The verse numbering follows מ.
- 3 Bible verses with no book indicated refer to the book of Judges.
- 4 Page numbers or footnotes with no publication indicated refer to this thesis.
- 5 The noun אֱלֹהִים is translated as 'god' (with lower case 'g') throughout the thesis to allow for the application of the noun both to YHWH as the only true god (in this case it can be substituted with 'God') and to any other deity or to focus on the supreme power of YHWH or any deity as 'god'.

## Definitions

Abimelech narrative	Judg 8:29–9:57
Baalist	Follower or worshipper of Baal
Complication of the Gideon narrative	Judg 7:23–8:27
Gideon narrative	Judg 6:1–8:28
Gideon-Abimelech narrative	Judg 6:1–9:57
Main Abimelech narrative	Judg 9:25–9:55
Main Gideon narrative	Judg 6:1b–7:22
Yahwist	Follower or worshipper of YHWH

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In reading the second introduction of the book of Judges (2:6–3:6), one expects a book that illustrates a theological spiral. The spiral starts with Israel's apostasy, which will cause YHWH to sell Israel into the hand of oppressors, whom YHWH uses to test Israel whether they obey him. Israel will cry to YHWH for help, and YHWH will raise up a judge, who will deliver Israel from their oppressors. Yet after the judge's death, Israel will again fall into idolatry and the cycle will start anew.

Therefore, one will not only expect a book of deliverer stories. Since the cycle starts, is driven, and ends with the opposing poles of idolatry and YHWH worship, one will rather expect a book that focuses on Israel's changing relationship to YHWH. This expectation is indeed met when one reads the narratives of Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Barak, and Gideon. These narratives are framed by a similar framework that refers to the book's introduction, they tell stories of judges who successfully deliver Israel from external enemies, and they are driven by statements that identify the overarching theological theme. The narratives can thus easily be understood as part of the book.

However, when one reaches the Abimelech narrative, one cannot help wondering how this narrative fits into this context. There is no indication of YHWH's initiative to have Israel oppressed by a foreign nation or of Israel's outcry to YHWH; there is no explicit reference to YHWH as the driving force or at least to his involvement as expected from the overarching theological theme, it rather appears as if Baalism has taken over; there is no oppression by external enemies, the enemy is rather the protagonist himself; the protagonist is not a judge but rather appears to be a king; he is not called by YHWH, but appointed by the Baal worshipping citizens of a city; the city is not delivered from the enemy, the citizens rather kill the enemy by chance; and there is no record of the rest or peace achieved, but instead a justification for the casualties in the Abimelech narrative.

Following the Abimelech narrative and the record of the judgeships of Tola and Jair, the framework is not applied in full any more. While it is applied to the beginning of the Jephthah narrative (10:6-7), following the episodes of the deliverance from the enemy that give way to civil war in Israel, it is lacking at the end of that narrative. At this point, once again a few records of judgeships are interwoven in the book (12:8-15), before the long Samson narrative completes the main body of Judges. Yet although the narrative framework is at first applied to the Samson narrative (13:1), the narrative neither tells a story of a successful deliverance from the enemies, nor is concluded with the appropriate



element of the framework. Similarly, the judges following Abimelech are not said any more to successfully deliver Israel from their enemies; instead, eventually the oppressors even survive the judge (15:20).

These features not only make the Abimelech narrative appear strange in the context of Judges, it even appears that the pattern of the book changes after the Abimelech narrative. Yet it was the strange presentation of the Abimelech story that led most commentators to ignore this narrative within the context of the book of Judges. This tendency is found throughout the scholarly discussion, regardless of whether the writer used a diachronic-historical or a synchronic-literary approach.<sup>1</sup> Thus, for example, for M. O'BRIEN the Abimelech narrative gained its significance only from the larger deuteronomistic context,<sup>2</sup> and B. WEBB in his highly appreciated integrated reading of Judges treated the Abimelech narrative in a mere two and a half pages only, though he admitted that it contributed to the main theme 'infidelity' of the Gideon narrative.<sup>3</sup> It was only in recent years that C. ARMERDING employed a new, theological approach to define the significance of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative for Judges,<sup>4</sup> though this approach has not yet found adequate entry into the scholarly discussion.

When we survey the main body of Judges (3:7–16:31), we find that the Abimelech narrative occupies a rather prominent place. First, as already indicated, the structure and content of the judges narratives changes from the accurate application of the framework and the positive description of the protagonists and their achievement before the Abimelech narrative to its rather incomplete application and their negative

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<sup>1</sup>Since JAMES BARR, "The Synchronic, the Diachronic, and the Historical: A Triangular Relationship?", in *Synchronic or Diachronic?: A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis. Papers Read at the Ninth Joint Meeting of Het Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap in Nederland en België and the Society for Old Testament Study Held at Campen, 1994*, ed. JOHANNES C. DE MOOR, OTS 34 (Leiden [et al.]: Brill, 1995), 1-14, has convincingly demonstrated that one can not speak of 'diachronic' or 'synchronic' without acknowledging the historical implications of both methods, I refer to the diachronic approach in the sense that it is concerned about the compositional history of the text, and to the synchronic approach in the sense that it is concerned about the text in its final form and its meaning independently from the author; JACOB HOFTIJZER, "Holistic or Compositional Approach?: Linguistic Remarks on the Problem", in *ibid.*, 98, n. 2; see also the considerations on 'Interpreting the Gideon-Abimelech Narrative', p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>MARK A. O'BRIEN, *The Deuteronomistic History Hypothesis: A Reassessment*, OBO 92 (Doctoral dissertation, Melbourne College of Divinity, 1987; Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 91; *IDEM*, "The 'Deuteronomistic History' as a Story of Israel's Leaders", *AusBR* 37 (1989): 23.

<sup>3</sup>BARRY G WEBB, *The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading*, JSOT.S 46 (PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1985; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 154-156.

<sup>4</sup>CARL EDWIN ARMERDING, "A Charismatic Theology of the Judges", in *Gott lieben und seine Gebote halten = Loving God and Keeping His Commandments: In Memoriam Klaus Bockmühl*, ed. MARCUS BOCKMUEHL and HELMUT BURKHARDT (Gießen: Brunnen, 1991), 9-20.



characterisation after the Abimelech narrative. It is reasonable, therefore, to argue that this change is somehow effected by the Abimelech narrative. Second, leaving aside the note of Ehud's death in the introduction to the Barak narrative (4:1), Abimelech is the only character who is referred to in any introduction to a succeeding narrative; and more surprising, there it is the strange character Abimelech and not the judge Gideon who is referred to (10:1).<sup>5</sup> Third, the Abimelech narrative (8:29–9:57) is the longest single narrative in Judges. With its 63 verses, it is considerably longer than the narratives of Othniel (3:7-11; 5 verses), Ehud (3:12-30; 19 verses), Shamgar (3:31; 1 verse), Barak (4:1–5:31; 55 verses)—and even more so as more than half of the Barak narrative is occupied by the song of Barak and Deborah—, Tola/Jair (10:1-5; 5 verses), and Ibzan/Elon/Abdon (12:8-15; 8 verses),<sup>6</sup> it is approximately as long as the Jephthah narrative (10:6–12:7; 60 verses), so that only the narratives of Gideon (6:1–8:28; 93 verses) and Samson (13:1–16:31; 96 verses) clearly exceed the length of the Abimelech narrative. Seen as just one narrative, the Gideon-Abimelech narrative (6:1–9:57; 156 verses) is even the longest narrative in the whole book of Judges, being about as long as the entire appendix (17:1–21:25; 154 verses). Finally, the Gideon-Abimelech narrative is found right at the centre of the judges narratives, with the narratives of Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, and Barak preceding it and the narratives of Tola/Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan/Elon/Abdon, and Samson following it.

It appears, therefore, that the narrator puts a certain stress on the Abimelech narrative and the Gideon-Abimelech narrative within the context of Judges. Since this stress has so far not been sufficiently accounted for in research, the aim of this thesis is to investigate the contribution of the Abimelech narrative for the understanding of Judges. Departing from the assumption that Judges is a theological book, this thesis will propose a theological reading of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative and define its contribution to a theological understanding of Judges.

After a stock-taking of the history of research on Judges and especially on the Gideon-Abimelech narrative, we shall reflect on the methodology to be employed. These objectives shall be accomplished in chapter I. The main chapters II and III will contain a close reading of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative with an emphasis on its theology. Finally, chapter IV will summarise the findings, describe the Gideon-Abimelech narrative

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. also 2 Sam 11:21, where the Abimelech narrative is given a certain importance.

<sup>6</sup>For a similar view on the interpretation of the minor judges narratives (3:31; 10:1-5; 12:8-15) as blocks, see, for example, E. THEODORE MULLEN, JR., "The 'Minor Judges': Some Literary and Historical Considerations", *CBQ* 44 (1982): 185-201; and BEVERLY G. BEEM, "The Minor Judges: A Literary Reading of Some Very Short Stories", in *The Biblical Canon in Comparative Perspective*, ed. K. LAWSON YOUNGER, JR., WILLIAM W. HALLO, and BERNARD F. BATTO, SIC 4, ANETS 11 (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1991), 147-172.



as a theological narrative, reflect on the narrator's technique of narration, outline the place of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative within Judges, and provide a brief contextualisation of the narrative within the wider Old Testament context.

## A The Background to the Study

The past decades<sup>7</sup> have seen a number of reviews of research on Judges, whose results shall not be repeated here. Following on N. SNAITH's recapitulation of the research within historical-critical lines in 1951,<sup>8</sup> the first significant overview was done by E. JENNI, who in 1961 focused on scholarly research from 1939-1959.<sup>9</sup> JENNI aimed to provide a complete list of scholarly commentaries and publications that deal with larger parts of Judges, thus excluding special publications. He gave a brief characterisation of each publication mentioned and categorised them according to the methodology employed. Twenty years later, in 1981, a more limited overview of Judges was published by H. RÖSEL, who reviewed the question of the definition of the term and office of a 'judge' since NOTH.<sup>10</sup> The broader historical-critical research from NOTH onwards was next reviewed by B. WEBB in 1985, when he drew lines from the historical critical approach to a literary reading of Judges.<sup>11</sup> Referring to those literary approaches in 1989, J. SPRINKLE's survey began with J. MUILENBURG and culminated in an extensive treatment of M. STERNBERG.<sup>12</sup> Yet still, the neglect of Judges in research was nicely illustrated in 1988 by M. KLOPFENSTEIN, who did not list any theme of the book of Judges in his overview of "Old Testament themes in current research".<sup>13</sup> Yet major bibliographical work on Judges was carried out by A. HASTOUPIS in 1989,<sup>14</sup> before R.

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<sup>7</sup>For a brief overview of commentators from Origen to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see GEORGE FOOT MOORE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges*, ICC 7 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895; reprint, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), xlvii-l.

<sup>8</sup>N. H. SNAITH, "The Historical Books", in *The Old Testament and Modern Study: A Generation of Discovery and Research*, ed. HAROLD HENRY ROWLEY (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), 84-114.

<sup>9</sup>ERNST JENNI, "Zwei Jahrzehnte Forschung an den Büchern Josua bis Könige", *ThR* N.S. 27 (1961), no. 1: 1-32, no. 2: 97-146.

<sup>10</sup>HARTMUT N. RÖSEL, "Die 'Richter Israels': Rückblick und neuer Ansatz", *BZ* 25, no. 2 (1981): 180-203.

<sup>11</sup>WEBB, *Book*, 19-36.

<sup>12</sup>JOE M. SPRINKLE, "Literary Approaches to the Old Testament: A Survey of Recent Scholarship", *JETS* 32, no. 3 (1989): 299-310.

<sup>13</sup>MARTIN A. KLOPFENSTEIN, "Alttestamentliche Themen in der neueren Forschung", *ThR* 53, no. 4 (1988): 331-353.

<sup>14</sup>ATHANASIOS P. HASTOUPIS, "Τὸ βιβλίον τῶν κρίτων", *Theol* 60, no. 4 (1989): 572-592.



BARTELMUS published his review of research on thematic issues on Judges since NOTH in 1991.<sup>15</sup> Unlike JENNI, BARTELMUS incorporated publications that treated minor parts of Judges only, while on the other hand he concentrated on works that handled Judges as a literary-religious document or interpreted Judges along form-critical or redaction-critical lines. The methodological counterpart to this review was provided a few years later by M. O'BRIEN, who in 1994 reviewed and discussed the development of the Deuteronomistic History from NOTH to BECKER and the literary interpretations of WEBB, KLEIN, and POLZIN, before he reflected on future prospects.<sup>16</sup> Aside from these reviews of themes and methodologies, R. BAYLEY published a brief overview of commentaries in 1992, where he emphasised the expository value of the discussed commentaries,<sup>17</sup> and in 1996, P. DERYN GUEST compiled a history of research concentrating on historical approaches and ranging from WELLHAUSEN to SOGGIN and AHLSTRÖM.<sup>18</sup>

The following overview of selected literature will attempt to draw a sketch of research on Judges and especially on the Gideon-Abimelech narrative from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present by building on early approaches and then concentrating on major representatives of the diachronic and synchronic approaches of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in order to locate our study within current research. Greater attention will be paid to the literature following M. NOTH's *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* and the different interpretations within the synchronic approach. The objective is to draw a picture of the theological scene with regard to the interpretation of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative in the context of Judges. Hence publications that focus on smaller scale issues will only be included if they reflect on the hermeneutics or methodology employed or illustrate the state of research and thus provide a significant contribution to the overall picture of interpretation of Judges and especially the Gideon-Abimelech narrative.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>RÜDIGER BARTELMUS, "Forschung am Richterbuch seit Martin Noth", *ThR* 56, no. 3 (1991): 221-259.

<sup>16</sup>MARK A. O'BRIEN, "Judges and the Deuteronomistic History", in *The History of Israel's Tradition: The Heritage of Martin Noth*, ed. STEVEN L. MCKENZIE and M. PATRICK GRAHAM, JSOT.S 182 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 235-259.

<sup>17</sup>RAYMOND BAYLEY, "Which is the Best Commentary?: 14. The Book of Judges". *ExpT* 103, no. 5 (1992): 136-138.

<sup>18</sup>In her thesis written under her married name PAULINE ELIZABETH HODGETTS, "In Search of the Judges" (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1996), 28-56.

<sup>19</sup>In the overview, the first edition of any publication will be mentioned along with the most recent edition; any following reference will always be to the most recent edition.



## 1 In Search of an Acceptable Approach

We begin with the seven-volume work in which H. EWALD<sup>20</sup> retold Israel's history as it is presented in the Bible as a historical source. Naturally, the Abimelech story received the same treatment as any other story. Perhaps the most influential scholarly works of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, which were quoted by commentators down to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, were the commentaries by G. STUDER, P. CASSEL, and—to a much lesser extent—the later English counterparts written by G. BUSH and A. FAUSSET.<sup>21</sup> All four distinguished themselves from EWALD by including theological, narrative, and—in the case of CASSEL and especially FAUSSET—also expository observations into their merely historical explanation of the text.<sup>22</sup> Thus STUDER recognised that the Abimelech story was written from a “Standpunkt religiöser Weltanschauung”,<sup>23</sup> FAUSSET claimed that the Abimelech story illustrated a “spiritual lesson”,<sup>24</sup> and BUSH further explained that the book of Judges “exhibits the contest of true religion with superstition; displays the benefits that flow from the former; and represents the miseries and evil consequences of impiety”.<sup>25</sup> Even C. F. KEIL,<sup>26</sup> who was widely praised for his detailed work with the text, remained in the main wake of research and offered a merely historical interpretation, though he also offered semantic and grammatical explanations. On the other hand, B. STADE<sup>27</sup> fell back into a purely historical interpretation of the Scriptures when he confined himself to retelling Israel's history.

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<sup>20</sup>HEINRICH EWALD, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel bis Christus*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 5 vols. (1843-1855); *IDEM*, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 7 vols. (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1864-1868). In the 1<sup>st</sup> ed., Judges is treated in vol. 2 (1845) of the main work, and in the 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., in the separately titled vol. 2: *Geschichte Mose's und der Gottherrschaft in Israel* (1865).

<sup>21</sup>GOTTLIEB LUDWIG STUDER, *Das Buch der Richter: Grammatisch und historisch erklärt* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1835; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Bern [et al.]: Dalp, 1842); PAULUS CASSEL, *Das Buch der Richter und Ruth: Theologisch-homiletisch bearbeitet*, THBW 5 (Bielefeld: Belhagen und Klasing, 1865); GEORGE BUSH, *Notes on Judges* (New York: Newman & Ivison, 1852; reprint, Minneapolis, Minn.: James & Klock Publishing, 1976); ANDREW ROBERT FAUSSET, *A Critical and Expository Commentary on the Book of Judges* (London: James Nisbet, 1885; reprint, n.p.: James & Klock, 1977).

<sup>22</sup>Also, LUKE HOLT WISEMAN, *Men of Faith: or, Sketches From the Book of Judges* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1870).

<sup>23</sup>STUDER, *Richter*, 232; followed by JULIUS WELLHAUSEN, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Berlin: Reimer, 1899; reprint [= 4<sup>th</sup> ed.], Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963), 223.

<sup>24</sup>FAUSSET, *Judges*, 9.

<sup>25</sup>BUSH, *Judges*, vi.

<sup>26</sup>CARL FRIEDRICH KEIL, *Biblischer Commentar über die prophetischen Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments*, BCAT, pt. 2, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1863).

<sup>27</sup>BERNHARD STADE, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, AGE, 1<sup>st</sup> main section, pt. 6, vol. 1 (Berlin: Grote, 1887).



As influential as STUDER's commentary was the second thoroughly revised edition of E. BERTHEAU's commentary,<sup>28</sup> in which he followed DE WETTE's monumental work on the diachronic approach<sup>29</sup> and which already identified elements that would later be categorised as source critical and redaction critical elements. BERTHEAU argued that while the Gideon story had its place in Judges, the Abimelech story, which stood outside the framework of the judges narratives, did not belong to the stories of the judges and "ist erst von dem Redaktor zu dem Buche hinzugekommen, in welchem die Geschichten der einzelnen Richter in gleichmäßigem Rahmen vorgeführt waren".<sup>30</sup>

This view of the Abimelech narrative as an independent story prepared the way for its exclusion from the other judges stories. Yet it was recognised that the Gideon story and the Abimelech story were bound together by a redactor. Consequently, the Abimelech story was contrasted with the Gideon story. While the Gideon story was described as a theocratic story with several supernatural episodes, implying a rather unhistorical interpretation of the assumed historical events, the Abimelech story was attributed the highest historical value within Judges,<sup>31</sup> and it was this evaluation of the Abimelech story that would limit further research on Judges 9 for nearly a full century.<sup>32</sup>

Yet now that Judges had been opened up for its interpretation along source critical lines, the radical shredding of the text into three or more sources was just the logical consequence. First advanced by J. WELLHAUSEN,<sup>33</sup> who, however, still recognised the

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<sup>28</sup>ERNST BERTHEAU, *Das Buch der Richter und Ruth*, KEHAT 6 (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1845; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Leipzig: Hirzel, 1883).

<sup>29</sup>WILHELM MARTIN LEBERECHE DE WETTE, *Lehrbuch der historisch-kritischen Einleitung in die kanonischen und apokryphischen Bücher des Alten Testaments, sowie in die Bibelsammlung überhaupt* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1817, as *Lehrbuch der historisch kritischen Einleitung in die Bibel Alten und Neuen Testaments*; 8<sup>th</sup> ed., rev. EBERHARD SCHRADER, Berlin: Reimer, 1869); see also the more comprehensive work by A. KUENEN, *Historisch-kritische Einleitung in die Bücher des alten Testaments hinsichtlich ihrer Entstehung und Sammlung*, vol. 1, pt. 2: *Die historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* (Leipzig: Reisland, 1890). — On the significance of DE WETTE's work, see JOHN W. ROGERSON, "Synchrony and Diachrony in the Work of De Wette and Its Importance for Today", in *Synchronic or Diachronic?: A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis. Papers Read at the Ninth Joint Meeting of Het Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap in Nederland en België and the Society for Old Testament Study Held at Campen, 1994*, ed. JOHANNES C. DE MOOR, OTS 34 (Leiden [et al.]: Brill, 1995), 145-158.

<sup>30</sup>BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 176.

<sup>31</sup>STUDER, *Richter*, 231; SAMUEL OETTLI, *Das Deuteronomium und die Bücher Josua und Richter: Mit einer Karte Palästinas*, KK A2 (München: C. H. Beck, 1893), 262-264.

<sup>32</sup>Similarly, DAVID M. GUNN, "New Directions in the Study of Biblical Hebrew Narrative", *JSOT* 39 (1987): 66, claimed this state for western biblical criticism for even two centuries, and BARR, "Synchronic", 1, stated with a general view on the application of the diachronic approach from the late 1910s to the early 1960s, "these ideas were slow to have any effect on biblical studies".

<sup>33</sup>JULIUS WELLHAUSEN, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1878, as *Geschichte Israels*, vol. 1; 6<sup>th</sup> ed., 1905; reprint, Berlin [et al.]: de Gruyter, 1927); *IDEM*, *Die Composition des*



overall theological character of Judges and accordingly hesitated to separate the sources widely from each other,<sup>34</sup> the separation was carried through by K. BUDDE, H. WINCKLER, and G. MOORE, who extended the pentateuchal *Quellen* J, E, and R<sub>JE</sub> into Judges.<sup>35</sup> The unifying feature of these interpretations with regard to the Gideon-Abimelech narrative was that the former was divided into several sources and the latter was either assigned to E, as held by WELLHAUSEN,<sup>36</sup> or to a separate independent source, as preferred by MOORE, BUDDE, and NOWACK.<sup>37</sup> In discussing these approaches, O. EISSFELDT<sup>38</sup> identified three sources, namely, L, J, and E, which all led through the Abimelech narrative, while A. BRUNO<sup>39</sup> followed BUDDE and interpreted the Gideon and Abimelech stories on the basis of the two absolutely independent sources J and G. The separation of several sources within Judges and the Gideon-Abimelech story further led to commentaries that focused on the interpretation of the sources and the history of the text rather than on the interpretation of Judges as a whole,<sup>40</sup> whereby the holistic interpretation was left to expositions and lay commentaries,<sup>41</sup> which nonetheless drew on the results of source critical interpretations.

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*Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1889; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Berlin: Reimer, 1899; reprint [= 4<sup>th</sup> ed.], Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963); *IDEM*, *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1885 [?]; 9<sup>th</sup> ed., Berlin: Reimer, 1958).

<sup>34</sup>WELLHAUSEN, *Prolegomena*, 223-241.

<sup>35</sup>KARL FERDINAND REINHARDT BUDDE, *Die Bücher Richter und Samuel, ihre Quellen und ihr Aufbau* (Giessen: Ricker, 1890); *IDEM*, *Das Buch der Richter*, KHCAT 7 (Freiburg i. Br. [et al.]: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1897); HUGO WINCKLER, "Die quellenzusammensetzung der Gideonerzählungen", chap. in *Altorientalische Forschungen* 1 (Leipzig: Pfeiffer, 1893), 42-62; MOORE, *Commentary*; *IDEM*, *The Book of Judges: Critical Edition of the Hebrew Text, The Sacred Books of the Old Testament* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1900). — For an exemplary study of discerning the relationship of a segment in Judges to a source in the Pentateuch, see W. BÖHME, "Die älteste Darstellung in Richt. 6, 11-24 und 13, 2-24 und ihre Verwandtschaft mit der Jahveurkunde des Pentateuch", *ZAW* 5 (1885): 251-274.

<sup>36</sup>WELLHAUSEN, *Composition*, 223.

<sup>37</sup>MOORE, *Commentary*, 237-240; BUDDE, *Buch*, 69-70; WILHELM NOWACK, *Richter, Ruth und Bücher Samuelis*, HKAT 1, no. 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1902), 57-58.

<sup>38</sup>OTTO EISSFELDT, *Die Quellen des Richterbuches: In synoptischer Anordnung ins Deutsche übersetzt samt einer in Einleitung und Noten gegebenen Begründung* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1925).

<sup>39</sup>ARVID BRUNO, *Micha und der Herrscher aus der Vorzeit* (Leipzig [et al.]: Deichert; Uppsala [et al.]: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1923), 107-175.

<sup>40</sup>E.g., GRIFFITHES WHEELER THATCHER, *Judges and Ruth: Introduction; Revised Version With Notes, Giving an Analysis Showing From Which of the Original Documents Each Portion of the Text is Taken; Index and Map*, The Century Bible (Edinburgh: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1904).

<sup>41</sup>E.g., JOHN SUTHERLAND BLACK, *The Book of Judges: With Map, Introduction and Notes*, The Smaller Cambridge Bible for Schools (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1892); GEORGE ALBERT COOKE, *The Book of Judges in the Revised Version: With Introduction and Notes*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge:



The interpretation of the sources inevitably led to the question of their *Sitz im Leben* and subsequently to the question of their date, the situation in which they arose, and the history of the text from the sources to their final form. As a result texts from different parts of the Tetrateuch, Pentateuch, Hexateuch, and even Heptateuch were treated and interpreted together rather than in their respective textual contexts. The basis was, to be sure, a historical question. What events lay behind the sources, how did the redactor work with them, and what can be said about the history of the text? The climax of this line of interpretation was reached with the commentary by H. GRESSMANN,<sup>42</sup> who interpreted the books Exodus to Judges as legends solely on historical and source critical grounds. Writing his volume for GUNKEL's commentary series, GRESSMANN sought the contribution of each source to the postulated history of Israel. The historical quest was thus reduced to the quest for the "Urgestalt" and the initial meaning of the legends.<sup>43</sup> The main purpose of the interpretation was, however, "die Geschichte zu schildern, welche die Sagen bis auf ihre gegenwärtige Form beim Jahvisten, Elohisten, und Priesterkodex und darüber hinaus in den letzten Redaktionen erlebt haben", so that the stories became a "Geschichte des Geistes Israels selber".<sup>44</sup> It was not the historical significance of the texts that was dealt with; whether the meaning is intended either by an author or by the text itself, was not even a question. Nor was the text in its final form focused on; this was rather described as a distortion of the meaning of the texts. Instead, the interpretation of the history of the different texts and the explanation of the view of each of the redactors as they used their sources and contributed to a postulated history of Israel in different periods was focused on. As one obvious consequence, the books had to be split into their sources and interpreted along with other texts, which were postulated to have been added at about the same period.

GRESSMANN, however, was not as radical in his interpretation of Judges. While he still based his commentary on GUNKEL's guidelines, he took the liberty of focusing on the interpretation of the texts as history. For him, the aim of the interpretation of the text was to assess the historical intention of the original text, which he postulated to be free of any unhistorical additions. To emphasise the historical value of the text and to simplify its interpretation, GRESSMANN sorted out any historically insignificant texts as 'fillings' and

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University Press, 1913). Because of its extensive expository chapters, FAUSSET, *Judges*, might also fit into this category.

<sup>42</sup>HUGO GRESSMANN, *Die Anfänge Israels (von 2. Mose bis Richter und Ruth)*, SAT, pt. 1, vol. 2 (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1914; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1922).

<sup>43</sup>HERMANN GUNKEL, *Die Urgeschichte und die Patriarchen (das erste Buch Mosis)*, SAT, pt. 1, vol. 1 (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1911; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1921), vi; GUNKEL's preface to the series (*ibid.*, v-vii) also introduced GRESSMANN's volume.

<sup>44</sup>GUNKEL, *Urgeschichte*, vi (emphasis by GUNKEL).



then interpreted the historical texts separately. The 'fillings' were identified as the notes on the minor judges, but also as several additions that

zum Teil den Text verdeutlichen, indem sie Subjekt und Objekt hinzufügen auch an Stellen, wo der verständnisvolle Leser das Fehlende ohne Schwierigkeit ergänzt; zum Teil aber sollen sie den Text einheitlicher gestalten. Sie sind daher oft von der einen Quellenschrift in die andere übertragen worden. Der ästhetische Geschmack ebenso wie die Pietät gegen die ursprünglichen Verfasser verlangen die Entfernung dieser Auffüllungen.<sup>45</sup>

Yet since these additions are part of the final form of the book, they must not be forgotten, though they should be treated separately from the historical texts, which thus contained the message of the original author. Eventually, the separation of the sources gave way to a theory of their composition, as carried through by H. WIENER, who based his analysis of Judges on the sources and attempted to explain their significance for the composition of the book.<sup>46</sup>

There have been two main attempts to replace this rather unsatisfying approach. The one attempt was made by C. BURNEY.<sup>47</sup> Although BURNEY still based his translation on the sources, he focused on grammatical and semantic features in the transmitted Massoretic text, while at the same time he emphasised the historical value of the story. The commentary is thus a call back to an interpretation that concentrates on the Hebrew text rather than on the assumed sources. A similar call was made by V. ZAPLETAL,<sup>48</sup> who, however, interpreted the book merely as a poetic text with a theological component. Yet the presumption of a poetic text made it necessary to emend the text whenever the meter demanded it.

The other attempt was the renaissance of the historical interpretation of Judges by R. KITTEL and A. SCHULZ.<sup>49</sup> Already at the start of the source-critical research, they preferred a historical interpretation of the text; yet while KITTEL still maintained the

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<sup>45</sup> GRESSMANN, *Anfänge*, 17.

<sup>46</sup> HAROLD MARCUS WIENER, *The Composition of Judges II 11 to I Kings II 46* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1929).

<sup>47</sup> CHARLES FOX BURNEY, *The Book of Judges: With Introduction and Notes*, The Library of Biblical Studies, ed. HARRY M. ORLINSKY (1918; reprint, New York: KTAV, 1970).

<sup>48</sup> VINCENZ ZAPLETAL, *Das Buch der Richter*, EHAT 7, no. 1 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1923); three decades later a similar approach was applied by ARVID BRUNO, *Die Bücher Josua • Richter • Ruth: Eine rhythmische Untersuchung* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1955).

<sup>49</sup> RUDOLPH KITTEL, "Die pentateuchischen Urkunden in den Büchern Richter und Samuel", *ThStKr* (1892, no. 1): 44-71; *IDEM*, "Das Buch der Richter", in *Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments: Übersetzt von E. Kautzsch*, vol. 1 (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1894; 4<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. ALFRED BERTHOLET, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1922); *IDEM*, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, HBAG 1, no. 3, vol. 2: *Das Volk in Kanaan: Geschichte der Zeit bis zum Babylonischen Exil* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1909 [?]; 6<sup>th</sup> ed., Gotha: Koltz, 1925); ALFONS SCHULZ, *Das Buch der Richter und das Buch Ruth*, HSAT 2, 4/5 (Bonn: Hanstein, 1926).



assignment of the text to different sources, SCHULZ neglected them. Similarly, C. GOSLINGA<sup>50</sup> interpreted Judges as a historical book, though with a theological intention. While Gideon's call manifested the struggle of YHWH and Baal, the following story was concerned with Israel's deliverance and Gideon's completion of the battle. The Abimelech story was an appendix to the Gideon story to illustrate the decline after Gideon's death.

This interpretation gave way to a search for a theme of the stories. A first and well known attempt to define such a theme for the Gideon-Abimelech narrative was made by M. BUBER.<sup>51</sup> He first argued that Gideon refused the offer of the kingship in favour of the leadership of YHWH, and then interpreted the Jotham fable as the "stärkste antimonarchische Dichtung der Weltliteratur" and as "das Gegenstück zum Gideonspruch".<sup>52</sup> He thus defined the theme of 'kingship' for the Gideon-Abimelech narrative. BUBER's merit was, therefore, that he introduced the thematic study of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative into the discussion. This new focus on a thematic study in combination with the prominent theme of kingship as defined by an anti-monarchical understanding of the Jotham fable was of course tempting. It therefore became a major point of departure for many subsequent interpreters of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative.<sup>53</sup>

Following on these commentaries in the 1920s and 1930s, there was a gap of more than a full decade, in which there were no significant publications.<sup>54</sup> It seemed as if everything had been said. The historical approach had sufficiently explained the historical events just as the source-critical approach had sufficiently explained the history of the text. Both approaches were more or less accepted side by side, since at the end of the day, both approaches used a historical method. The main difference was the object of the investigation. While the historical approach concentrated on the historical events that lay behind the text or sources and tried to explain these events within their historical context, the source-critical approach concentrated on the historical events that led to the writing, editing, and collection of the sources and tried to explain the significance of these events for the shape of the sources and the final text.

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<sup>50</sup>C. J. GOSLINGA, *Het Boek der Richteren: Opnieuw uit den grondtekst vertaald en verklaard*, 2 vols., Korte verklaring der Heilige Schrift (Kampen: Kok, 1933-1938); the English translation, which is referred to in this thesis, was published as C. J. GOSLINGA, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, trans. RAY TOGTMAN, Bible Student's Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1986).

<sup>51</sup>MARTIN BUBER, *Königtum Gottes* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1932; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1956).

<sup>52</sup>BUBER, *Königtum*, 24.

<sup>53</sup>E.g., for CRÜSEMANN, DUMBRELL, GERBRANDT, JOBLING, O'BRIEN, and O'CONNELL.

<sup>54</sup>Cf. JENNI, "Zwei Jahrzehnte Forschung", pt. 1: 4, who mentioned BURNEY's commentary as the last scholarly commentary for forty years.



This deadlock, however, formed the basis for M. NOTH's monumental theory of the Deuteronomistic History,<sup>55</sup> when he argued with respect to the structure of Judges:

Für die Darstellung der Zeit der "Richter" vor Samuel hat Dtr zwei Überlieferungskomplexe als Grundlage verwandt, die er miteinander kombinierte. Der eine war eine Reihe von Erzählungen über verschiedene Stammeshelden und ihre siegreichen Taten, die obzwar je von verschiedener literarischer Vorgeschichte, ihm vermutlich bereits zusammengestellt vorlagen, wenn auch noch nicht miteinander formell und sachlich verknüpft, so daß Dtr erst jeweils den zwischen ihnen verbindenden Text begeben mußte. Der andere war eine Liste von "Richtern" (den von uns sogenannten "kleinen Richtern") mit kurzen Angaben über deren Herkunft, Amtszeit und Begräbnisort und teilweise noch über diese oder jene Einzelheit aus ihrem Leben; diese Liste beruhte offenbar auf alten Aufzeichnungen über ein von lückenlos aufeinander folgenden Trägern bekleidetes Amt, [...] dem das Hüten des Rechts anvertraut war.<sup>56</sup>

The Deuteronomist combined these two separate lists because they overlapped in the person of Jephthah, and he further made a selection from the judges found in those lists to provide a list of twelve judges. The major judges were all portrayed in the same way as if they all fulfilled the same task, namely, to deliver Israel from their oppressors. Hence although NOTH noticed the expanded introduction to the Gideon story that "auf das im Laufe der Geschichte immer größer gewordene Mißverhältnis zwischen den hilfreichen Taten Gottes und dem Ungehorsam des Volkes hinweist (6, 6b-10)", he concluded that the Gideon story demonstrated that YHWH was nevertheless prepared to help.<sup>57</sup> The purpose of the Gideon story was, therefore, to demonstrate YHWH's willingness to deliver Israel despite their disobedience.

Yet the dissatisfaction in research on the Gideon-Abimelech narrative was not removed with NOTH's approach. J. SLOTKI,<sup>58</sup> for example, still interpreted Judges along historical lines, though he also began to use a synchronic approach; H. W. HERTZBERG<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>MARTIN NOTH, *Das System der zwölf Stämme Israels*, BWANT 4, 1 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1930); *IDEM*, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien: Die sammelnden und bearbeitenden Geschichtswerke im Alten Testament* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1943; reprint [= 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.], Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1967); *IDEM*, *Geschichte Israels* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1950; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1956; reprint [= 10<sup>th</sup> ed.], Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986); *IDEM*, "Zur Geschichtsauffassung des Deuteronomisten", in *Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Congress of Orientalists*, vol. 2: *Communications*, ed. Z. K. TOGAN, 558-566 (Leiden: Brill, 1957).

<sup>56</sup>NOTH, *Studien*, 47-48.

<sup>57</sup>NOTH, *Studien*, 48-52, cit. p. 51.

<sup>58</sup>JUDAH J. SLOTKI, "Judges: Introduction and Commentary", in *Joshua and Judges: Hebrew Text & English Translation With Introductions and Commentary*, ed. ABRAHAM COHEN (London [et al.]: Soncino, 1950).

<sup>59</sup>HANS WILHELM HERTZBERG, *Die Bücher Josua, Richter, Ruth*, ATD 9 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953; reprint [= 6<sup>th</sup> ed.], Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985); similarly, JOHN LAWRENCE MCKENZIE, *The World of the Judges* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966; London: Land. & c., 1967); FREDERICK FYVIE BRUCE, "Judges", in *The New Bible Commentary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. DONALD GUTHRIE (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1970), 236-257; HERBERT



based his commentary entirely on a historical method and the results of NOTH's assumption of twelve judges; C. SIMPSON<sup>60</sup> revived WELLHAUSEN's theory, actualised it in the view of NOTH's results, and then carried the pentateuchal *Quellen* over to the interpretation of Judges; E. TÄUBLER<sup>61</sup> interpreted the Judges stories mainly as collections of legends and reconstructed Israel's history on the basis on these; W. BEYERLIN<sup>62</sup> focused on the question how the traditions of Judges relate to real history; and B. LINDARS<sup>63</sup> applied both the tradition and form critical method to Judges. Similarly, the Abimelech story received different treatments. While HERTZBERG described Abimelech as a minor judge<sup>64</sup> and hence interpreted the Abimelech story as part of Judges despite his argument that the Shamgar story was designed to replace "den ganz unrichterlichen Abimelech",<sup>65</sup> A. CUNDALL ignored the Abimelech story as part either of the major or the minor judges stories,<sup>66</sup> and hence was able to ascribe a pro-monarchical view to the final editor<sup>67</sup>. Other commentators still included the Abimelech story in their comments. L. WOOD,<sup>68</sup> for example, used an entirely historical approach and saw Abimelech as an example of a bad king, while E. J. HAMLIN<sup>69</sup> applied a theological method, focused on the theme of 'liberation', and interpreted the Abimelech story as an account of the betrayal of the liberation achieved by Gideon.

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WOLF, "Judges", in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* 3, ed. FRANK E. GAEBELEIN (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), 373-506.

<sup>60</sup>CUTHBERT AIKMAN SIMPSON, *Composition of the Book of Judges* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957).

<sup>61</sup>EUGEN TÄUBLER, *Biblische Studien: Die Epoche der Richter*, ed. HANS-JÜRGEN ZOBEL (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1958).

<sup>62</sup>WALTER BEYERLIN, "Geschichte und heilsgeschichtliche Traditionsbildung im Alten Testament: Ein Beitrag zur Traditionsgeschichte von Richter VI-VIII", *VT* 13 (1963): 1-25.

<sup>63</sup>BARNABAS LINDARS, "Gideon and Kingship", *JThS* N.S. 16, no. 2 (1965): 315-326; *IDEM*, "Jotham's Fable—A New Form-critical Analysis", *JThS* N.S. 24, no. 2 (1973): 355-366.

<sup>64</sup>HANS WILHELM HERTZBERG, "Die kleinen Richter", *ThLZ* 79, no. 5 (1954): 287.

<sup>65</sup>HERTZBERG, *Richter*, 142.

<sup>66</sup>ARTHUR E. CUNDALL, "Judges: An Introduction and Commentary", in *Judges, Ruth*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. WISEMAN (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1968), 22.

<sup>67</sup>ARTHUR E. CUNDALL, "Judges—An Apology for the Monarchy?" *Expository Times* 81 (1969/70): 178-181.

<sup>68</sup>LEON JAMES WOOD, *Distressing Days of the Judges* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1975).

<sup>69</sup>E. JOHN HAMLIN, *At Risk in the Promised Land: A Commentary on the Book of Judges*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans; Edinburgh: Handsel, 1990).



## 2 The Diachronic Approach

A breakthrough in the diachronic approach was finally accomplished by W. RICHTER.<sup>70</sup> Working inductively, RICHTER identified several *Gattungen* in the text for which he defined their *Sitz im Leben* not merely in the context of tradition, but also in the literary context, depending on the defined *Gattung*. Taking his point of departure in NOTH's theory of a Deuteronomistic History, he tried to identify the redactor and his methodology and aim in putting together the units to form the final text. He concluded with a description of the tradition historical development of the text. RICHTER's merit was that he liberated the diachronic approach from the prison of the source critical interpretation using the traditional sources J, E, D, and P. His approach was instead a development of the source critical approach as he focused on units defined by form rather than content and interpreted them using a tradition historical method.

Regarding the Gideon-Abimelech story, RICHTER argued that it belonged to the pre-deuteronomistic 'Retterbuch', that contained stories framed around traditions. Having discovered these stories, the Deuteronomist put a framework on them and incorporated them along with several recurring formulas into a book. By identifying Gideon with Jerubbaal and furthermore adding a framework and a transition from the Gideon story to the Abimelech story, the Deuteronomist further connected the Gideon traditions both with the other stories and the Abimelech traditions, which still remained strange to Judges.

Following RICHTER, T. VEIJOLA took up BUBER's theme of 'kingship' and treated it in the Deuteronomistic History.<sup>71</sup> He argued in the light of Gideon's refusal of the leadership that the Deuteronomist's polemic was not directed against monarchy as such but rather against the conversion of the status of the deliverer, who was sent by god, into that of a permanent ruler. In contrast, the Jotham fable, which originated in the Northern Kingdom, condemned an existing monarchy; inserted into the present context, the fable gained another meaning, however, as it questioned the moral legitimacy of Shechemites' action and loosely connected the Abimelech story with the Gideon story.

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<sup>70</sup>WOLFGANG RICHTER, *Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Richterbuch*, BBB 18 (Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1963); *IDEM*, *Die Bearbeitung des 'Retterbuches' in der deuteronomischen Epoche*, BBB 21 (Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1964); *IDEM*, "Zu den 'Richtern Israels'", *ZAW* 77, no. 1 (1965): 40-72. — RICHTER's approach was followed, for instance, by CROSSAN, DALGLISH, and especially UWE BECKER, *Richterzeit und Königtum: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Studien zum Richterbuch*, BZAW 192 (Doctoral dissertation, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, 1989; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), who developed it further and identified several redactional stages in Judges. — For a fine summary of the significance of RICHTER's work for the redaction history of Judges, see IGNAZ SCHLAURI, "Wolfgang Richters Beitrag zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Richterbuches", *Biblica* 54, no. 3 (1973): 367-403.

<sup>71</sup>TIMO VEIJOLA, *Das Königtum in der Beurteilung der deuteronomistischen Historiographie: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, AASF, Ser. B, Tom. 198 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1977); see esp. pp. 102, 112-114.



In contrast, and in response to RICHTER, R. BOLING upheld the historical approach and drew on the traditional source critical results.<sup>72</sup> Hence he distinguished between a “‘Deuteronomic’ (i.e., Josianic) and ‘Deuteronomistic’ (i.e., exilic) work on the historical traditions”.<sup>73</sup> While the historical traditions were formed by J, E, and L, and contained the main body of Judges, the introductory and concluding stories of Judges were assigned to the Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic work.<sup>74</sup> BOLING concluded:

The structure of the Book of Judges is primitive by modern literary standards; blocks of successive editorial remodeling are piled around the edges of the nuclear stories. The result is that old Israel’s narrative art survives in its purest form in the Book of Judges, where theological updating across the centuries was confined almost exclusively to the connectives between units; rarely did it invade their essential contents. This means that the stories stemming from the early days were fixed in all their essentials before they were ever employed in telling the authoritative story of Israel’s life in Canaan.<sup>75</sup>

Therefore, Judges provided the exilic generation with an authoritative historical source that covered the time before the united kingdom and contained theological explanations in the form of an introduction and conclusion. Yet BOLING also introduced literary art into the interpretation of Judges, as he argued for the interpretation of Judges as comic stories that depend on exaggeration.<sup>76</sup> Hence while he maintained a historical interpretation of Judges, he at the same time opened it up for a literary appreciation.

Within this general context of discerning an evaluation of the monarchy in Judges, F. CRÜSEMANN produced a study of the anti-monarchical texts of the Old Testament.<sup>77</sup> He contrasted the Gideon and Abimelech stories and argued for a differentiated picture of the monarchy in these stories, which were deliberately combined by the author.

Durch die Verbindung von Ri 6–8 mit Ri 9 werden zwei Gestalten einander bewußt gegenübergestellt. Dem von Jahwe berufenen, von ihm geleiteten Gideon, der Israel errettet und danach die angebotene Königsherrschaft ablehnt, steht der eigenmächtige Abimelech gegenüber, der gewaltsam die Herrschaft an sich reißt und nie auch nur nach Jahwes Weisung fragt. Der eine stirbt in hohem Alter, reich gesegnet, in seinem Heimatort, der andere kommt schmachlich von Frauenhand getötet in der Blüte seiner Jugend vor Thebez um. Der eine errettet Israel mit Hilfe Jahwes, der

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<sup>72</sup>ROBERT G. BOLING, “In Those Days There Was No King in Israel”, in *A Light Unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers*, ed. HOWARD N. BREM, RALPH D. HEIM, and CAREY A. MOORE, GTS 4 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 33–48; *IDEM*, *Judges: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, AB 6A (New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975).

<sup>73</sup>BOLING, “In Those Days”, 34.

<sup>74</sup>See also the schematic outline of Judges in BOLING, *Judges*, 30.

<sup>75</sup>BOLING, *Judges*, 29.

<sup>76</sup>BOLING, *Judges*, 31.

<sup>77</sup>FRANK CRÜSEMANN, *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum: Die antiköniglichen Texte des Alten Testaments und der Kampf um den frühen israelitischen Staat*, WMANT 49 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1978).



andere bringt für seine Untertanen nur Vernichtung, da er Jahwes Zorn auf sie zieht.<sup>78</sup>

Hence while Gideon's decline of the Israelites' offer assumed YHWH as the only king over Israel, the Abimelech narrative demonstrated the unproductivity of a kingship that is alienated from YHWH. With this interpretation, CRÜSEMANN recognised that the Gideon narrative and Abimelech narrative describe different sides of the same theme, and he thus accounted for the inclusion of the latter after the former. However, he still maintained 'kingship' as the main theme of this narrative and thus did not answer the question why the combined Gideon-Abimelech narrative was included in Judges rather than in Samuel.

Nevertheless, following RICHTER's groundbreaking work, there was no way of interpreting Judges without paying adequate attention to RICHTER's tradition critical results and NOTH's Deuteronomistic History, which still received more extensive attention than RICHTER's work. Even commentators who stressed the historical character of Judges still drew on NOTH's results. Hence J. MARTIN<sup>79</sup> aimed to use both the historical approach and the redaction critical approach, though he emphasised the historical interpretation of the stories. To a much greater extent, A. MAYES<sup>80</sup> interpreted Judges as a historical book written from a Deuteronomistic standpoint. Having separated the Deuteronomistic changes from the proposed historical stories, he described a history of Israel as found in these stories and argued for a tribal confederation in Palestine before the establishment of a dynasty. Other commentators interpreted Judges entirely on the basis that it reflected the exilic<sup>81</sup> or even post-exilic<sup>82</sup> situation, though the redactor might have used earlier sources. Similarly, J. GRAY based his commentary on NOTH's Deuteronomistic History and accordingly treated Abimelech as Gideon's successor and his story only as an "incident";<sup>83</sup> yet the question remains why the Deuteronomist would devote the longest chapter of Judges to such an unimportant 'incident'.

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<sup>78</sup>CRÜSEMANN, *Widerstand*, 42.

<sup>79</sup>JAMES D. MARTIN, *The Book of Judges*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge [et al.]: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

<sup>80</sup>ANDREW DAVID HASTINGS MAYES, "Israel in the Pre-Monarchy Period", *VT* 23 (1973): 151-170; *IDEM*, *Israel in the Period of the Judges* (London: SCM Press, 1974); *IDEM*, "The Period of the Judges and the Rise of the Monarchy", in *Israelite and Judean History*, ed. JOHN H. HAYES and J. MAXWELL MILLER, Old Testament Library (London: S.C.M. Press, 1977), 285-331; *IDEM*, *Judges*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985).

<sup>81</sup>E.g., LESLIE HOPPE, *Joshua, Judges: With an Excursus on Charismatic Leadership in Israel*, OTM 5 (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1982).

<sup>82</sup>E.g., A. GRAEME AULD, "Gideon: Hacking at the Heart of the Old Testament", *VT* 39, no. 3 (1989): 257-267.

<sup>83</sup>JOHN GRAY, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, New Century Bible Commentary (Basingstoke: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1986), cit. p. 222.



Similarly, J. A. SOGGIN based his research on RICHTER's work while at the same time paying attention to NOTH's Deuteronomistic History and the historical concerns of Judges.<sup>84</sup> He thus tried to combine different ways of interpretation. While he at first argued for a monarchical theme in the Gideon-Abimelech story,<sup>85</sup> he later defined a different theme.<sup>86</sup> He observed that the Abimelech story lacked the Deuteronomistic framework, so that it might have been placed at its present place by the redactors who joined it to the Gideon cycle "by means of the statement that their protagonist, Abimelech, is a son of Jerubbaal/Gideon".<sup>87</sup> SOGGIN continued:

The present text has little interest in theological themes, in particular in the basic themes of the history of salvation; it does not even seem to be particularly interested in problems connected with divine intervention: vv. 23f. it is God who, by means of an evil spirit, sows dissension between the king and the assembly, with the aim of punishing the mass murder committed by Abimelech at the beginning of the career; it is thus a variant of the Dtn and Dtr concept of retribution, which is also to be found in wisdom literature. In vv. 56f. God brings down their sins on the heads of the king and his Shechemites, as in the preceding instance. [...] it is now these scanty elements which offer the key for reading the present text.<sup>88</sup>

SOGGIN thus suggested the theme of retribution as the key to interpret the Abimelech narrative. As this new theme was built on a concept of the Deuteronomistic History yet above all provided an answer to the question of the place of the Abimelech story in Judges by establishing a direct link from the Abimelech story to the Gideon story, it gained considerable acceptance in subsequent years especially by authors using a synchronic approach.<sup>89</sup>

Basing his work on NOTH's Deuteronomistic History and on RICHTER's results, M. O'BRIEN next argued for the interpretation of Judges as a book contributing to the theme of kingship in the wider Deuteronomistic History. Accordingly, he interpreted the Abimelech story within the larger deuteronomistic context, arguing that it introduced "the notion of monarchical rule"<sup>90</sup>:

The story of Abimelech and its aftermath provides a climax to the cycle of the judges' stories begun in Judg 3:7. The story of Abimelech tells of an attempt to

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<sup>84</sup>JAN ALBERTO SOGGIN, *Judges: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1979; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: SCM; Philadelphia, Penn.: Westminster, 1987); cf. also *IDEM*, *Das Königtum in Israel: Ursprünge, Spannungen, Entwicklung*, BZAW 104 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967). Similarly, though to a lesser extent, MANFRED GÖRG, *Richter*, NEB 31 (Würzburg: Echter, 1993).

<sup>85</sup>SOGGIN, *Königtum*.

<sup>86</sup>SOGGIN, *Judges*.

<sup>87</sup>SOGGIN, *Judges*, 163.

<sup>88</sup>SOGGIN, *Judges*, 164.

<sup>89</sup>E.g., by FRITZ, BOOGAART, WEBB, EXUM, OGDEN, and BLOCK.

<sup>90</sup>O'BRIEN, *Hypothesis*; *IDEM*, "'History' as a Story"; *IDEM*, "Judges", cit. p. 23.



change the leadership of Israel from that of judges raised up by Yahweh to that of a king. The attempt causes strife in Israel and order is mercifully restored by Yahweh through a return to the judges (Judg 10:1-5). Within the larger sweep of the period of Israel from the judges to the monarchy, this first stage serves to introduce the question of monarchical rule. Nevertheless, Abimelech's failure and the return to the judges suggests that it can only be established on Yahweh's terms and in his good time. It should be noted that kingship itself is not condemned in the story, only the way Abimelech set out to become king.<sup>91</sup>

O'BRIEN's merit was that he demonstrated that the Abimelech narrative was not just a sequel to the Gideon narrative that was inserted by a redactor for some unexplained reason but that it rather contributed to the wider context of the Deuteronomistic History. Yet he still argued that the main contribution of the Abimelech narrative was the introduction of the theme of kingship. Hence while O'BRIEN explained the Abimelech narrative in the context of the Deuteronomistic History, he did not explain its place within the book of Judges.

In summarising the diachronic approach, we find that it has failed to explain the Abimelech narrative as an integral part of Judges. The main argument remained the observation that Abimelech, being Gideon's son, killed his seventy brothers and set up a kingship which his father rejected. Yet the message of the Abimelech narrative was then separated from this finding by some commentators through a focus on retribution, which despite its recognition as a Deuteronomistic concept is a theme within the Abimelech narrative only, and, above all, on Abimelech's kingship, which similarly is defined only within the Deuteronomistic History. With that interpretation, however, one might ask, why the narrator included the Abimelech narrative in the book of Judges and not at a later place, such as in the first part of the books of Samuel. Is it really enough to argue that Abimelech's descent from the judge Gideon suffices? The narrator could easily have omitted any explicit reference to Gideon and his sons in the Abimelech narrative and could have just stated that Abimelech killed seventy rivals. Jotham's fable would still be applicable, though admittedly some of the force of its explanation would be lost. Yet still, the connection of the Abimelech narrative to the Gideon narrative and its place in Judges is reduced to circumstantial observations, which only connect the narratives superficially and do not help to integrate the Abimelech narrative in Judges.

### 3 The Synchronic Approach

Already in the 1950s there was a sense that a new approach was necessary to interpret Judges. Research had been limited to the interpretation of different sources, while the understanding of Judges as a literary product fell behind. As a response to this

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<sup>91</sup>O'BRIEN, *Hypothesis*, 31.



development, F. NÖTSCHER,<sup>92</sup> who nevertheless remained in the historical interpretation, and—to a greater extent—J. LILLEY<sup>93</sup> advanced a literary approach by deductively starting from the unit of Judges as a whole and then working towards the interpretation of smaller units. LILLEY argued that the introduction to Judges established the theological theme of the book as God's charge against Israel that "they failed to stamp out the Canaanite religion in the territory which they [occupied]".<sup>94</sup> By briefly outlining the structure of Judges and especially paying attention to the deteriorating trend described in the book, his merit was a literary appreciation of Judges as a unit. The Abimelech narrative occupied a special place in his interpretation as the turning point of Judges, since following the Abimelech narrative, "the land does not recover its peace [and] deliverance is less complete".<sup>95</sup> The reasons for this change, however, remained unexplained.

Despite this shortcoming, LILLEY established the separation of two lines within the synchronic approach to interpret Judges, as he applied a literary method to interpret Judges as a theological book. Both lines have been refined in subsequent decades, as further research was carried out to define the character of Judges as a literary work or to describe the theology of Judges.

#### *a The Focus on Judges as a Literary Work*

Following the establishment of the new literary criticism to the interpretation of the Old Testament, research began to focus on the composition and the purpose of Judges. D. GOODING, for example, identified a chiasmic structure of the whole book with the Gideon story in its centre and the surrounding stories arranged in an A-F-A' pattern,<sup>96</sup> while V. FRITZ and T. BOOGAART picked up SOGGIN's theme of retribution, developed it further, applied it to the interpretation of Abimelech's and the Shechemites' crime, and assumed this key theme as the main theme of the Abimelech narrative.<sup>97</sup> Yet this theme would still apply if the Abimelech narrative were treated entirely on its own and outside of its present context, so that it does not provide an answer for the inclusion of this narrative in

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<sup>92</sup>FRIEDRICH NÖTSCHER, "Das Buch der Richter", chap. in *Die Heilige Schrift in deutscher Übersetzung*, EB 1 (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1948 [?]; 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Würzburg: Echter, 1965), 631-714.

<sup>93</sup>J. P. U. LILLEY, "A Literary Appreciation of the Book of Judges", *TynB* 18 (1967): 94-102.

<sup>94</sup>LILLEY, "Appreciation": 97.

<sup>95</sup>LILLEY, "Appreciation": 98.

<sup>96</sup>D. W. GOODING, "The Composition of the Book of Judges", *Eretz* 16 (1982): 70\*-79\*.

<sup>97</sup>VOLKMAR FRITZ, "Abimelech und Sichem in Jdc. IX", *VT* 32, no. 2 (1982): 129-144; THOMAS A. BOOGAART, "Stone for Stone: Retribution in the Story of Abimelech and Shechem", *JSOT* 32 (1985): 45-56.



Judges. One may argue, however, that the connection to Gideon is necessary, since Abimelech kills Gideon's seventy brothers, but this alone does not necessarily lead to Gideon as the father of Abimelech and his brothers. Similarly, the threat of an oligarchy does not need to follow on Gideon's rejection of the kingship; it may well follow on any leadership as described in Judges. Hence any theme defined within the Abimelech narrative alone would not account for the insertion of the Abimelech narrative immediately following the Gideon narrative.

Also G. GERBRANDT's widely noted monograph<sup>98</sup> needs to be viewed in this context. Beginning from an anti-monarchical interpretation of Deuteronomy, GERBRANDT looked for the significance of the Israelites' offer of the leadership and of Jotham's fable for the issue of kingship. He concluded that in their present context, neither passage condemned kingship as such, but rather asserted the leadership of YHWH, to which Gideon rightly referred, and the announcement of destruction for Abimelech's and the Shechemites' crime. Accordingly, in the wider context of Judges, GERBRANDT contrasted Gideon and Abimelech and concluded that while Gideon fulfilled his function as Israel's leader, Abimelech failed as leader.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, D. JOBLING<sup>100</sup> focused on the Deuteronomist's conviction concerning monarchy, though he concluded that the Deuteronomist's argument is complex rather than simple. Eventually JOBLING concluded that, although the narrator evaluated kingship positively, the Abimelech narrative condemned Abimelech's kingship because it was based on heredity and excluded YHWH's initiative in choosing a king.<sup>101</sup>

B. WEBB's integrated reading was a further landmark in the study of Judges.<sup>102</sup> Taking a narrative approach, WEBB focused on the plot of Judges rather than on its historicity. He based his study on the unity of Judges in its final form and tried to interpret each narrative in its place within the book. He respected the literary unity of Judges and tried to define an overall theme of the book, in which all narratives should find their proper place. It is the more surprising then, that WEBB regarded the longest single chapter in Judges only as a sequel to the Gideon story, and devoted but a few lines between them. While with GROS LOUIS he recognised "Israel's infidelity to Yahweh" as the theme of the Gideon narrative, WEBB reduced this theme to the "חסר" due to Gideon

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<sup>98</sup>GERALD EDDIE GERBRANDT, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*, SBL.DS 87 (Th.D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, Virginia, 1979; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1986).

<sup>99</sup>GERBRANDT, *Kingship*, 133-134.

<sup>100</sup>DAVID JOBLING, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Structural Analyses in the Hebrew Bible II*, JSOT.S 39 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986).

<sup>101</sup>JOBLING, *Sense*, 83, 85.

<sup>102</sup>WEBB, *Book*.



for ‘all the good he has done for Israel’ and the way this was totally disregarded by those who made the murderer of Gideon’s sons their king”.<sup>103</sup> The main theme of the Abimelech narrative was, therefore, retribution for the crime towards Gideon’s sons, which was a manifestation of Israel’s apostasy.

The significance of a story of such thorough and exact retribution appearing at this point in the book must be sought in the context of the serious and rapid deterioration in Israel’s relationship with Yahweh to which the Gideon episode has drawn our attention, and of the connection made in 8.34-35 between the unfaithfulness of the Israelites towards Yahweh and their unfaithfulness towards Gideon’s household.<sup>104</sup>

The explanation, how this significance, which as far as it goes conforms with our interpretation of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative, is spelled out in the Abimelech narrative, was only provided in his commentary on Judges several years later, where he claimed that “the theme of this sequel to the Gideon episode is divine retribution” for the crime of Abimelech and the Shechemites against the Baal-fighter Gideon.<sup>105</sup> With this explanation, however, he remained in the main wake of research, treating the Abimelech narrative as but a sequel to the Gideon narrative that has only a right to exist as a separate entity and that does not contribute to the theology of the whole book of Judges.

On the contrary, L. KLEIN claimed that the main feature of Judges was to demonstrate Israel’s spiritual condition by telling stories about Judges that mirror Israel and their relationship to YHWH.<sup>106</sup> With regard to the Gideon-Abimelech narrative, she observed that, “as Yahweh is most in evidence in the story of Gideon, so is he least present in the following narrative, that of Gideon’s son Abimelech”.<sup>107</sup> In particular, Gideon mirrors Israel as he departed from a stage of unbelief, was convinced of YHWH’s power after his call, and thus became a bold man of war under YHWH’s leadership; then, however, he continued his war on a human level without YHWH. “The central and critical narrative of Abimelech” then “marks the ironic climax of the book of Judges. It serves to warn the Israelites, at this formative phase of their history, of the hazards implicit in liaisons with non-Israelites.”<sup>108</sup> Hence the full significance of the Abimelech narrative was the demonstration of Israel’s covenants with foreign nations and the resulting

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<sup>103</sup>WEBB, *Book*, 156-157.

<sup>104</sup>WEBB, *Book*, 158.

<sup>105</sup>BARRY G WEBB, “Judges”, in *New Bible Commentary*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. DONALD A. CARSON [*et al.*] (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 261-286, cit. p. 274; this view was adopted by OGDEN.

<sup>106</sup>LILLIAN RAE KLEIN, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, JSOT.S 68, BaL 14 (Sheffield: Almond, 1988), see p. 17-21.

<sup>107</sup>KLEIN, *Triumph*, 70.

<sup>108</sup>KLEIN, *Triumph*, 15, 78.



apostasy as a reason for YHWH's imminent neglect of Israel in the introduction of the Jephthah narrative. Nevertheless, KLEIN explained the significance of the Abimelech narrative for the book of Judges and defined its position in the book of Judges as an anti-thesis following the thesis of the Gideon narrative.

A rhetorical analysis of Judges was proposed by M. BRETTLER, who built his interpretation of Judges on the common observation that the scenes of the main body of Judges move from the south to the north and argued for a composition of Judges in the period of the Davidic monarchy.<sup>109</sup> Within this setting, Judges served to elevate David's position. Thus only the judges from the tribe of Judah were chosen to achieve a deliverance and were pictured in positive terms; the other judges were pictured rather negatively. Similarly, R. O'CONNELL detected a "tribal-political arrangement of Judges [that] was designed to enjoin its readers to endorse Judah as the tribe divinely appointed to lead the other tribes in Israel".<sup>110</sup> The book was designed "not only to legitimise the Davidic monarchy through a portrayal of the preeminence of the Judah tribe but also to vilify the Saulide monarchy".<sup>111</sup> Hence, in terms of interpreting Judges, the stories of the non-Judahites Gideon and Abimelech would evaluate the portrayal of Saul through deuteronomic foreshadowing, so that the deuteronomistic theme of kingship determined the whole Gideon-Abimelech narrative.

At the same time, other individual voices stressed different topics; by way of example, some will be mentioned here. J. C. EXUM<sup>112</sup> focused on the ambiguous relationship between Israel and their God as described in Judges rather than on the cycle as outlined in the introduction to Judges, yet she still failed to include the Abimelech narrative adequately into her argument as she treated it as a sequel to the Gideon narrative, focusing on retribution; J. WILLIAMS<sup>113</sup> proposed a cyclical structure of the twelve judges narratives, excluding Abimelech as a judge and treating the Abimelech narrative as a sequel to the Gideon narrative; and W. NELSON<sup>114</sup> expressed his view of a deteriorating trend in Judges with the experiment in the monarchy at its centre to anticipate the theme of monarchy in the final chapters of the book. Quite contrarily, J. P.

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<sup>109</sup>MARC BRETTLER, "The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics", *JBL* 108, no. 3 (1989): 395-418.

<sup>110</sup>ROBERT H. O'CONNELL, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, VT.S 63 (PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1993; Leiden [et al.]: Brill, 1996), cit. p. 3.

<sup>111</sup>O'CONNELL, *Rhetoric*, 8.

<sup>112</sup>J. CHERYL EXUM, "The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges", *CBQ* 52, no. 3 (1990): 410-431.

<sup>113</sup>JAY G. WILLIAMS, "The Structure of Judges 2.6-16.31", *JSOT* 49 (1991): 77-85.

<sup>114</sup>WAYNE S. NELSON, "The Book of Judges: Its Structure and Paradigmatic Figures", *JRR* 1, no. 4 (1992): 34-49, and vol. 2, no. 1 (1992): 49-60.



TANNER,<sup>115</sup> who also argued for the Gideon narrative as the focal point of Judges, defined Gideon's struggle to believe as the centre of the Gideon narrative; yet in this picture, the Abimelech narrative occupies only a marginal place in Judges.

Recently, D. BLOCK stressed "the Hebrew historian's understanding of the period" of the judges.<sup>116</sup> Using a synchronic approach in his commentary, he provided a historical interpretation of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative as seen by the narrator.<sup>117</sup> He emphasised the connection between both parts of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative and interpreted the Abimelech narrative as the climax of the Gideon narrative since it illustrated the effects of Gideon's misconduct. Yet while the narrative demonstrated that God remained in firm control regardless of whether the characters recognised it, BLOCK maintained that the narrative was nevertheless driven by the theme of 'retribution'.<sup>118</sup>

### *b The Focus on the Theology of Judges*

Parallel to the research on Judges as a literary work, the literary method began to be applied to the book to define the theology of Judges. One of the first to carry out this task and apply it to the Gideon and Abimelech narrative was K. GUTBROD, who argued for an interpretation of the Gideon narrative that was led by the question whether YHWH or Baal is god.<sup>119</sup> In his interpretation of the Abimelech narrative, however, he unfortunately fell back into a historical analysis. Still applying the results of source-critical analyses, GUTBROD argued that the introduction to the Gideon narrative made it fairly clear that Israel's apostasy was the key to understand the oppression by the Midianites. Depending on the source one interprets, YHWH called Gideon to deliver Israel both from the Midianites and from the worship of Baal.<sup>120</sup> Unfortunately, however, GUTBROD seemed so much occupied by his presupposition of two different sources in the Gideon narrative

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<sup>115</sup>J. PAUL TANNER, "The Gideon Narrative as the Focal Point of Judges", *BS* 149, no. 594 (1992): 146-161.

<sup>116</sup>DANIEL I. BLOCK, "The Period of the Judges: Religious Disintegration Under Tribal Rule", in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. AVRAHAM GILEADI (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1988), 39.

<sup>117</sup>I am indebted to DANIEL BLOCK for making a photocopy of the manuscript of his treatment of Judges 6-9 available to me, which will appear within his commentary on Judges and Ruth to be published in the *New American Commentary* series (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman). To enable the verification of any reference in the commentary, which has not yet been published, in this thesis I shall use the subheadings instead of the page numbers of the manuscript.

<sup>118</sup>DANIEL I. BLOCK, "Judges", typewritten manuscript (photocopy), s.v. '9:1-57' and 'theological implications' of 9:22-57.

<sup>119</sup>KARL GUTBROD, *Das Buch vom Lande Gottes: Josua und Richter*, BAT 10 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1951; 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Stuttgart: Calwer, 1985).

<sup>120</sup>GUTBROD, *Buch*, 237-241, 241-244.



that he failed to see a connection between the two calls. He thus interpreted them solely on their own and within the context of the introduction to the Gideon narrative. Hence GUTBROD also separated the Abimelech narrative from the Gideon narrative and followed the main line of his time by interpreting it as an anti-monarchical narrative.

A humoristic-theological interpretation was introduced by A. CROWN, who defined the moral of the Abimelech narrative as “the moral that no rule can replace that of Jahweh. When Jahweh so wills it, even a woman can act as his agent in the overthrow of military might.”<sup>121</sup> Hence a further purpose of the Abimelech story was to discredit the monarchy. CROWN’s merit was that he demonstrated that a literary interpretation of the Abimelech narrative supports its understanding in the context of Judges.

Other authors set different theological emphases. Thus, for example, K. GROS LOUIS defined the topic of ‘infidelity’ as the main theme of Judges.<sup>122</sup> In the Gideon narrative this theme was illustrated in Gideon’s lack of faith, which led to the fleece test, the reduction of the army, and the dream of the Midianite soldier as YHWH’s three signs of confirmation for Gideon; and in Israel’s idolatry in playing the harlot after Gideon’s ephod. W. DUMBRELL<sup>123</sup> defined the question of kingship as the books centre and argued that kingship was not an option to be desired by the exilic generation; B. CHILDS<sup>124</sup> discerned a “radically theocentric emphasis” of Judges with a focus on divine grace, which became manifest in the deliverer stories; and B. STANDAERT<sup>125</sup> explained the Gideon-Abimelech narrative as a demonstration of YHWH’s ability as a god of residential people settled in their land. Also the feminist interpretations of P. TRIBLE, M. BAL, A. BRENNER,<sup>126</sup> and others, belong under this heading. Yet while the book of Judges found

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<sup>121</sup>A. D. CROWN, “A Reinterpretation of Judges IX in the Light of Its Humour”, *AbrN* 3 (1963): 90-98, cit. p. 91.

<sup>122</sup>KENNETH R. R. GROS LOUIS, “The Book of Judges”, in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, ed. KENNETH R. R. GROS LOUIS, JAMES STOKES ACKERMAN, and THAYER S. WARSHAW, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), 141-162; this theme was later picked up by WEBB.

<sup>123</sup>W. J. DUMBRELL, “‘In those Days There Was no King in Israel; Every Man Did what was Right in his own Eyes’: The Purpose of the Book of Judges Reconsidered”, *JSOT* 25 (1983): 23-33.

<sup>124</sup>BREVARD S. CHILDS, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (London: SCM, 1985), 113.

<sup>125</sup>BENOÎT STANDAERT, “Adonai Shalom (Judges 6–9): The Persuasive Means of a Narrative and the Strategies of Inculturation of Yahwism in a New Context”, in *Rhetoric, Scripture, & Theology: Essays from the 1994 Pretoria Conference*, ed. STANLEY E. PORTER and THOMAS H. OLBRICHT, *JSNT.S* 131 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 195-202.

<sup>126</sup>PHYLLIS TRIBLE, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, *OBTh* 13 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); MIEKE BAL, *Death & Dissymetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago; [et al.]: University of Chicago Press, 1988); *IDEM*, “Murder and Difference: Uncanny Sites in an Uncanny World”, *JLT* 5, no. 1 (1991): 11-19; ATHALYA



considerable attention as a book focusing on a social revolution in terms of “marriage, [...] relations between men and women, sexuality, procreation, and kinship”<sup>127</sup>, apart from notes on Abimelech’s mother or the woman with the millstone,<sup>128</sup> the Gideon-Abimelech narrative did not catch further attention.

In 1985, J. JORDAN published his humanistic-theological and expository interpretation of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative.<sup>129</sup> He argued for the theme of YHWH’s war against Baal being the prominent theme in Judges, which particularly dominated the Gideon-Abimelech narrative. While the Gideon narrative focused on YHWH’s battle against Baal, which was already won when Gideon replaced the Baal altar with an altar to YHWH so that the battle against the Midianites illustrated YHWH’s power over man, the Abimelech narrative demonstrated that Baalism is humanistic and self-destructive. A similar though more theological than expository approach was undertaken nearly a full decade later, when F. WOODS<sup>130</sup> claimed that certain episodes, such as that of Gideon’s test with the fleece, thematised a polemic against Baal as the Canaanite water and storm god and instead attributed control to YHWH.

Along these lines, C. ARMERDING too proposed a theological reading of Judges.<sup>131</sup> He observed the difference between the judges narratives preceding the Abimelech narrative and those following it. The earlier judges lacked any major flaw, and the narrator applied  $\sqrt{עשׁ}$  to all but one of these judges and concluded these narratives with a record of the rest achieved. All these features were missing in the narratives of the later judges, where the judges were not said to succeed in delivering Israel and where a record of achievement was missing.<sup>132</sup> Hence ARMERDING interpreted the Abimelech narrative as the starting point of the period of decline that was already initiated with Gideon’s establishment of idolatry.<sup>133</sup>

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BRENNER, ed., *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, FCB 4 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

<sup>127</sup>BAL, *Death*, 5.

<sup>128</sup>BAL, *Death*, 197-230.

<sup>129</sup>JAMES B. JORDAN, *Judges: God’s War Against Humanism* (Tyler, Tex.: Geneva Ministries, 1985).

<sup>130</sup>FRED EMMETT WOODS, *Water and Storm Polemics Against Baalism in the Deuteronomic History*, AUS 7, ThRel 150 (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Utah, 1991; New York [et al.]: Peter Lang, 1994), 63-69.

<sup>131</sup>CARL EDWIN ARMERDING, “Judges”, in *The International Bible Commentary with the New International Version*, ed. F. F. BRUCE [et al.] (London: Pickering; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1986): 309-339; *IDEM*, “Theology”, 9-20.

<sup>132</sup>ARMERDING, “Theology”, 13-14.

<sup>133</sup>ARMERDING, “Judges”, 326.



*c The Literary-Theological Approach*

Already in the late 1970s, B. CHILDS claimed that Judges should “make literary and theological sense in the context of the canon”,<sup>134</sup> although he still preferred a theological approach to the Scriptures. Most important in this approach was R. POLZIN, who—according to his own words—was influenced by the literary readings of PERRY, STERNBERG, and ALTER.<sup>135</sup> POLZIN argued for an integration of the historical-critical and literary interpretation. Both methods were necessary for a proper understanding of the final text. He read the final text from the perspective of the narrator who gave authority to other characters within the narrative and thus paid adequate attention to the historical and literary development of the text and to the text as a literary artefact. The focus of POLZIN’s attention was not the stages of the development of the text but the aim of the final editor or author. He thus defined a theological concern of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative when he explained that the switch between YHWH and Elohim in the Gideon narrative like the Gideon/Jerubbaal alternation

depicts in a graphic manner not only the indecision of Gideon and the Israelites whether to worship Yahweh or one of the gods of the Canaanites, but also and more fundamentally their inability to distinguish at times who the god was who was delivering them from the Midianites, Yahweh or another.<sup>136</sup>

The Gideon-Abimelech narrative thus served to demonstrate who of the gods is the real god. This theme was also dominant in the Abimelech narrative as the climax to the Gideon story, since in this narrative the scene is left to Baal and there is no involvement of YHWH any more.<sup>137</sup> Yet all the characters in the Abimelech narrative were eventually punished and received their deserved end. POLZIN thus overcame the long-standing assumption that the Abimelech narrative was just a historical account without any literary function, only loosely connected to the Gideon narrative and woven into Judges. He demonstrated instead that it contributes to the proper understanding of the Gideon narrative and the theology of the whole book of Judges and is indeed the essential climax of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative. He was thus the first who applied the literary method to define the theology of Judges. Hence, in subsequent years the theological interpretation of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative received further consideration.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup>BREVARD S. CHILDS, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM, 1979), 262.

<sup>135</sup>ROBERT POLZIN, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History*, pt. 1: *Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1980; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1993); see p. xi.

<sup>136</sup>POLZIN, *Moses*, 170.

<sup>137</sup>POLZIN, *Moses*, 173-175.

<sup>138</sup>E.g., by JORDAN, WOODS, and ARMERDING, who focused on the theology of Judges, and MASSOT, DERYN GUEST, and MARAIS, who applied the literary method to describe the theology of Judges.



Both methods were thoroughly combined in the early 1990s to describe the theology of Judges. Thus R. MASSOT provided a detailed sequential examination of the episodes of the Gideon story and discussed its narratology.<sup>139</sup> He detected the deliverance of Israel as its main theme, which developed through the appointment of Gideon as the divine deliverer and YHWH himself as the ultimate provider of that deliverance. The theology of the Gideon story was found in the demonstration of YHWH's claim to the absolute right to be recognised and worshipped as god instead of Baal. Hence YHWH reminded Israel of their covenant with him, called Gideon to dissociate himself from Baal, empowered Gideon, and finally fought the holy war by himself. However, eventually Israel fell back into idolatry. Unfortunately, MASSOT did not include the Abimelech story in his study, though he recognised that the concluding verses of Judges 8 served as an introduction for, or transition to, the Abimelech story rather than as a postscript to the Gideon story.<sup>140</sup>

Recently, P. DERYN GUEST observed that Judges presented itself as a thoroughly coherent unit.<sup>141</sup> The coherence might be explained with the assumption that the author of Judges produced “a crafted ‘history’ of a judges period” by presenting “an ideological representation of a largely imaginary past”, which was “intentionally designed to fill a ‘gap’ period between the conquest of the land and the onset of the monarchy”.<sup>142</sup> Hence the “largely fictional” book of Judges was mainly concerned with “*ideological* matters [...] contemporary to the writer”,<sup>143</sup> which could be summarised in the issue of Israel's identity as an ethnically and maritally pure united nation under YHWH's leadership during the Persian period.<sup>144</sup> Within this ideological framework the Abimelech narrative served as the climax of the priestly writer's negative portrayal of the monarchic rule of someone other than YHWH. DERYN GUEST thus recognised the theological character of Judges, yet she failed to explain why an author would write a fictional narrative of a king Abimelech that seems out of place in a book that concentrates on judges, especially when this book was written after the failure of the kingdom as at length recorded in Samuel, Kings, and—taking her assumption of a priestly writer into account—Chronicles.

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<sup>139</sup>RANDAL MARK MASSOT, “Gideon and the Deliverance of Israel: A Literary and Theological Analysis of the Gideon Narrative in Judges 6–8” (PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1994; Microfilm).

<sup>140</sup>MASSOT, “Gideon”, 137.

<sup>141</sup>PAULINE ELIZABETH HODGETTS [DERYN GUEST], “In Search of the Judges” (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1996); *IDEM* (as DERYN GUEST), “Dangerous Liaisons in the Book of Judges”, *SJOT* 11, no. 2 (1997): 241-269; *IDEM* (as DERYN GUEST), “Can Judges Survive without Sources?: Challenging the Consensus”, *JSOT* 78 (1998): 43-61.

<sup>142</sup>DERYN GUEST, “Can Judges Survive?": 59-61.

<sup>143</sup>HODGETTS, “In Search”, 158 (emphasis by HODGETTS).

<sup>144</sup>HODGETTS, “In Search”, 184-254.



Most recently, J. MARAIS proposed to read Judges as a paradoxical book that coupled the “downward historical, social, religious and moral spiral” and the “positive world of people in relationship to Yahweh”.<sup>145</sup> This theme was expressed through juxtaposed narratives illustrating the continuous strife for power between Israel and YHWH. Within this interpretative frame, the main concern of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative was the corruption of power that became self-serving. While the power was attributed to YHWH in the Gideon story, in the anti-monarchical Abimelech story “the needs of the children of Israel were subordinated under the need of individuals for power”.<sup>146</sup> Therefore, MARAIS recognised the theological character of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative, though he failed to discern Israel’s idolatry as the reason for her failing relationship with YHWH and instead concentrated on the effects of Israel’s idolatry.

#### *d Summary: The Synchronic Approach*

In overviewing the results of the synchronic interpretation, we find a twofold picture. First, the sole application of the new literary criticism in itself did not lead to a widely accepted explanation of the position of the Abimelech narrative within Judges. Although several attempts have been made to discern links from the Abimelech narrative to other narratives, explain the Abimelech narrative as a necessary sequel to the Gideon narrative, or interpret the Gideon-Abimelech narrative as a coherent unit within Judges, the question of the contribution of the Abimelech narrative and the Gideon-Abimelech narrative for the understanding of Judges is still much debated. In fact, the results of this line of interpretation do not differ much from the results of the diachronic interpretation, as both approaches depend on the narrator’s explicit connections between the Gideon and Abimelech narratives, which are described as the identification of Abimelech as Gideon’s son, the establishment of the monarchy by Abimelech that Gideon had rejected, and the killing of Gideon’s seventy sons by Abimelech. Yet the proposed message of the Abimelech narrative, namely, retribution for Abimelech’s and the Shechemites’ crime and the introduction of kingship into the Deuteronomistic History, is still found within the narrative alone without any necessary connection to the Gideon narrative.

Second, the more promising contribution to understand the Abimelech narrative within the context of Judges was started by POLZIN, who applied a literary approach to define the theology of Judges. It was used by JORDAN and WOODS, who interpreted the Gideon-Abimelech narrative as a theological narrative that focused on the theme of

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<sup>145</sup>JACOBUS MARAIS, *Representation in Old Testament Narrative Texts*, BibInt 36 (Leiden [et al.]: Brill, 1998), 59-167, cit. pp. 59, 60.

<sup>146</sup>MARAIS, *Representation*, 117.



'YHWH versus idolatry', and by ARMERDING, who assumed a charismatic interpretation of Judges and held the Gideon-Abimelech narrative to be the theological turning point of the judges narratives. This line of interpretation offered a plausible explanation of the purpose of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative for the book of Judges. The approach was then extensively combined with the literary approach and applied to the Gideon narrative by MASSOT, to both the Gideon narrative and the Abimelech narrative by DERYN GUEST, and to Judges as a whole by MARAIS. Yet MASSOT still defined 'deliverance' as the main theme of Judges, though he recognised that this theme contributed to the theology of Judges, and he did not include the Abimelech narrative in his considerations; DERYN GUEST failed to account for the inclusion of the Abimelech narrative in the book of Judges; and MARAIS despite his recognition that the Gideon-Abimelech narrative illustrated the theological introduction of Judges, treated the narrative under the heading of the uneasy relationship between YHWH and Israel, thus failing to observe that the reason for this uneasy relationship lies in Israel's idolatry.

#### 4 This Thesis in Current Research

As we have seen, both the diachronic and the synchronic interpretations of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative have struggled to properly define the position of the Abimelech narrative within the book of Judges. The former has failed because it did not sufficiently answer the question why the Abimelech narrative was included in Judges, apart from the assumption that Abimelech was the son of a historical person named Jerubbaal, who was, however, perhaps not identical with Gideon. The latter approach answered the question of the significance of the Abimelech narrative by proposing that it provided the key narrative for a pro-monarchical or anti-monarchical understanding of Judges or by assuming the theme of 'retribution' as its connecting theme. Yet the controversial understandings of Judges left it open whether the Abimelech narrative supported the anti-monarchical character of Judges, or whether it provided a negative example within a pro-monarchical book of Judges; and similarly, the theme of retribution connects the Abimelech narrative rather loosely to the Gideon narrative. The most promising approaches, however, discerned the theological theme of YHWH's relationship with Israel in the combined Gideon-Abimelech narrative as the key to understanding the judges narratives. Yet while they explained the place and significance of the Gideon narrative in Judges, they failed to define the contribution of the Abimelech narrative for the book of Judges.

Therefore, there still remain open questions regarding the Gideon narrative and the Abimelech narrative. To mention only a few, how does the long call episode (6:11-32) fit into the Gideon narrative, if this narrative focuses on the deliverance from the



Midianites? How does the name 'Jerubbaal' function in this concept? What function have the episodes of Gideon's continuation of the battle (7:23–8:27) after the record of YHWH's complete victory (7:19-22)? What connection is there between the Gideon narrative and the Abimelech narrative? How can the Abimelech narrative, which focuses on a king in midst the book of the judges, be understood as integral to Judges? If 'retribution' is the main theme of the Abimelech narrative, how is this theme related to the Baal-fighter Jerubbaal as the hero of the Gideon narrative (9:56-57)?

This thesis will aim to answer these and similar questions by beginning from the results of the literary-theological approach and proposing a theological interpretation of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative. It is claimed that the Gideon-Abimelech narrative does not merely focus on YHWH's kingship, his deliverance, his relationship with Israel, or retribution, but rather identifies YHWH as Israel's god instead of Baal and voices YHWH's claim to be worshipped as god. In this context, the themes of deliverance, kingship, and retribution serve as minor themes within the theological topic, as the deliverance and kingship is attributed to YHWH and retribution is used to demonstrate that abandoning YHWH and worshipping other gods will rebound on the idolaters and lead to mutual destruction. This thesis thus goes a step further in the literary-theological approach by focusing on the theological theme that lies behind the deliverer stories and is most crucial for the understanding of Judges, namely, the identification of YHWH as Israel's god, the demonstration of his divine power, his claim to be worshipped as god, and the condemnation of any self-reliance and idolatry.

## B Interpreting the Gideon-Abimelech Narrative

This study will pick up the literary-theological approach and apply it to the Gideon-Abimelech narrative as one narrative. It will aim to demonstrate how the theme of 'YHWH versus idolatry' is developed in the Gideon-Abimelech narrative and how, therefore, both parts of the narrative contribute to the theology of Judges. In particular we shall argue that both narratives demonstrate YHWH's superiority over Baalism in that the former demonstrates YHWH's presence and divine power and the latter demonstrates Baal's absence and Baalism's failure. The Gideon-Abimelech narrative is thus seen in the same category as the narrative of Elijah's demonstration of YHWH's superiority over Baal (1 Kgs 18), and it occupies a central place in Judges, demonstrating that only following YHWH leads to a better life and that the deteriorating trend in Judges is due to Israel's continued idolatry.



Following our objective to define the significance of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative within and for the book of Judges, we shall take Judges as a literary unit in its final form and focus on the so-called Massoretic Text (M). This basis bears several implications. First, we shall take as our starting point the Hebrew text in its final form<sup>147</sup> and use a synchronic approach. That is, we shall not be concerned about assumed sources or the stages through which the text was developed; our concern is rather the final text of Judges, since it is this final text that was handed down as the authoritative text until it was incorporated into a larger unit.<sup>148</sup>

Second, we shall take the unity of Judges within the Hebrew Scriptures as a working assumption.<sup>149</sup> This means, we shall presume the boundaries of the book of Judges, including its appendices. While the beginning of Judges refers to the end of Joshua and thus appears as its sequel, the end of Judges is defined by the recurring phrase of the appendices, that there was no king in Israel (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). The beginning of first Samuel, however, resembles themes of Judges and the appendix, so that it continues Judges. Nevertheless, since book boundaries must be established, we shall take the Hebrew canon as our point of departure and regard the appendix of Judges as the conclusion of Judges. Yet because of the connections of Judges to the preceding and following books, we shall still allow for references to other books and narratives, especially of the so-called Deuteronomistic History. Yet by demonstrating such links, we shall not attempt any allegation regarding sources or the composition of the books.

Third, these two presumptions lead to a view of the narratives in Judges as coherent units.<sup>150</sup> There are no questions left that need to be resolved for a proper understanding of the plot; rather, the plot is complete. That is not to say that there is nothing more to tell about the subject addressed in the book; the assumption is rather that the narratives incorporated in Judges have been deliberately chosen to be there to contribute to the

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<sup>147</sup>BREVARD S. CHILDS, "The Canonical Shape of the Prophetic Literature", *Int* 32 (1978): 46-55; *IDEM*, *Introduction*; KENNETH R. R. GROS LOUIS, "Some Methodological Considerations", in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives II*, ed. KENNETH R. R. GROS LOUIS and JAMES STOKES ACKERMAN (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 14-15; ROLF RENDTORFF, "Between Historical Criticism and Holistic Interpretation", in *Congress Volume Jerusalem 1986*, ed. JOHN A. EMERTON, VT.S 40 (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 298-303; MARK ALLAN POWELL, *What is Narrative Criticism?: A New Approach to the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990; London: SPCK, 1993), 7; M. J. OOSTHUIZEN, "Narrative Analysis of the Old Testament—Some Challenges and Prospects", *JNSL* 18 (1992): 154; DAVID M. GUNN and DANNA NOLAN FEWELL, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, Oxford Bible Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 9.

<sup>148</sup>CHILDS, "Shape": 46-49; MASSOT, "Gideon", 2-3.

<sup>149</sup>GUNN, "Directions": 65-75; for a similar interpretation of Judges, see WEBB, *Book*.

<sup>150</sup>GROS LOUIS, "Considerations", 15; WEBB, *Book*; POWELL, *What*, 7; cf. RENDTORFF, "Criticism", 302.



nature of the book as a coherent unit. Further, they have their place within the book at exactly the correct place where they contribute to the message of Judges in the best way in the eyes of the one who was responsible for the shape of the book. This means, in turn, that the subject addressed in any narrative does not need to be treated in that narrative alone, but may be carried over into a following narrative. The narratives may have, therefore, both a significant meaning in themselves and in the context of the book. On the other hand, other themes or questions might not have been addressed; yet still, the plot in its final form is a complete unit that can be understood and interpreted as it stands.

These considerations lead to the fourth presumption of a meaning within the text.<sup>151</sup> This means, the text as such gives pointers to its meaning and relays this meaning to the audience, so that the audience understands the text in a certain way. The audience's understanding is thus guided by the text,<sup>152</sup> so that one perceives, for example, that the narrator approves one recorded action and disapproves the other; or that he gives a straight account of one event and enjoys telling the other with humour or irony.<sup>153</sup> The meaning of the text is thus independent from the audience in that it ignores the specific circumstances of the audience and instead conveys its own meaning. This means, that we shall not ask about the author or reader, that we shall not even be concerned about an implied author or an implied reader, although the text might have been written for an implied and/or a real audience. Our approach shall in the first instance not be reader-oriented, therefore. What we shall be concerned about, is simply the text as it is formed by the narrator, who is a character both outside or within the text;<sup>154</sup> and in those rare instances where we shall refer to the reader or the audience, this is meant to refer to anyone who reads or listens to the text as it is in its own setting. But since any audience would interpret the text within their context, in concluding our study we shall briefly discuss possible implications of the text for likely audiences.

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<sup>151</sup>MEIR STERNBERG, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985), 7-23; LOUIS ALONSO-SCHÖKEL, "Trends: Plurality of Methods, Priority of Issues", in *Congress Volume Jerusalem 1986*, ed. JOHN A. EMERTON, VT.S 40 (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 287-288; POWELL, *What*, 7; OOSTHUIZEN, "Analysis": 146-147; ADELE BERLIN, "The Role of the Text in the Reading Process", *Semeia* 62 (1993): 143-147.

<sup>152</sup>Or, as BERLIN, "Role": 144, put it, "no reading is free of input from the text"; cf. TREMPER LONGMAN III, "The Literary Approach to the Study of the Old Testament: Promise and Pitfalls", *JETS* 28, no. 4 (1985): 397.

<sup>153</sup>FRANK CHARLES FENSHAM, "Literary Observations on Historical Narratives in Sections of Judges", in *Storia e tradizioni di Israele: Scritti in onore di J. Alberto Soggin*, ed. DANIELE GARRONE and FELICE ISRAEL (Brescia: Paideia, 1991), 79.

<sup>154</sup>STERNBERG, *Poetics*, 153-185; JEAN LOUIS SKA, "Our Fathers Have Told Us": *Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives* (Roma: Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1990), 46-47; GUNN [et al.], *Narrative*, 53.



Fifth, this presupposition directly leads to an intertextual interpretation of the text with the text as its own interpreter. This means we shall interpret the text above all with the help of its own hints and signs.<sup>155</sup> On a small scale, these include semantic signs such as word choice including repetitions, paronomastic plays and puns, grammatical clues like an unusual form of a word,<sup>156</sup> but also syntactical and stylistic issues such as word order and sentence construction; on a larger scale, these include signs such as *Leitwörter*, *Leitmotive*, and themes,<sup>157</sup> as well as hints, allusions, paronomastic plays, analogies, repetitions, and puns on and with other roots, words, sentences, paragraphs, or even full narratives;<sup>158</sup> further, structural markers such as plot structure, monologue, and dialogue.<sup>159</sup> Some of these signs and hints are quite easily recognised in the immediate context though their explanation might need to refer to the wider context while others are not expressively marked. Yet they are still present and might even give the text a second meaning within the plot, which will justify itself as the plot develops.<sup>160</sup> Hence in order to contribute to the understanding of a given unit where it is found, this second meaning always needs to justify itself at some point in the narrative. This means, for example, that any meaningful second meaning of the text within the plot of the Gideon narrative will need to contribute to the understanding of the Gideon narrative, its complication, or the Abimelech narrative, at least by way of an introduction or a better awareness of the character. Yet this second meaning must already be recognisable in the narrative when it emerges, although it might gain its full significance for the narrative only at a later point and might even be fully evident only in retrospect. To give an example, Gideon's selfish intention in the battle against the Midianites becomes fully evident only when he executes the kings, although it is already identifiable in Gideon's fleece test. In retrospect, this connection appears clear, while the audience in their first encounter with the fleece test episode only wonder why Gideon addresses YHWH in such a complicated way and whether Gideon's motives are really as pure as they seem. Yet the presupposition of a meaning within the text does not exclude references to information found outside of the

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<sup>155</sup>ROBERT ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 10-11, 88-113; ALONSO-SCHÖKEL, "Trends", 287-288; SHIMON BAR-EFRAT, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, trans. DOROTHEA SHEFER-VANSON, JSOT.S 70 (Sheffield: Almond, 1989), 197-237; OOSTHUIZEN, "Analysis": 151-153; BERLIN, "Role": 143-147; GUNN [*et al.*], *Narrative*, 3; MASSOT, "Gideon", 3-4.

<sup>156</sup>ALTER, *Art*, 89-91; BERLIN, "Role": 145.

<sup>157</sup>ALTER, *Art*, 91-97.

<sup>158</sup>ROBERT ALTER, *The World of Biblical Literature* (London: S.P.C.K., 1992), 107-130.

<sup>159</sup>FENSHAM, "Observations", 78-80.

<sup>160</sup>Similarly, EXUM, "Centre": 410, with view on different interpretations of Judges; and MARAIS, *Representation*, 64-71, with view on different viewpoints within Judges.



text. Thus, for example, when the text refers to Baal, it is important to notice that Baal is the chief pagan god of the geographical place which the text implies as its setting. The reference to Baal has, therefore, a function in the plot, and it is this function that interests us rather than the historical implications of Baal being the god of the Canaanites.

## C An Outline of the Study

In narrating the story as a demonstration of YHWH's superiority over Baal, the narrator divides the Gideon-Abimelech narrative into two main parts. The first part, the Gideon narrative (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 himself. It is framed by the deuteronomic framework recording Israel's idolatry (6:1) and Gideon's achievement (8:28). This part may be further divided into the setting and definition of the theological theme (6:1–32), the episodes of the demonstration of YHWH's divine power (6:33–7:22), and the transition to the second part (7:23–8:28). In the second part (8:29–9:57), the Abimelech narrative, the narrator focuses on Baalism. This part may be further divided into the setting and specification of the theme (8:29–9:21) and the demonstration of the self-destructive nature of Baalism and YHWH's involvement even in an idolatrous context (9:22–57). Its boundaries are defined by the record of achievement at the end of the Gideon narrative (8:28) followed by the reference to Jerubbaal's retirement (8:29) on the one hand, and the concluding reference to Jerubbaal (9:57) and the reference to Abimelech at the beginning of the Tola narrative (10:1) on the other. At the same time, the reference to Jerubbaal as the hero of the Gideon narrative (9:57) binds the Gideon narrative and Abimelech narrative together as one unit.

Despite our treatment of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative as one narrative, in this thesis we shall devote separate chapters to the Gideon narrative and the Abimelech narrative. This is done mainly for practical reasons, since otherwise the main body of the thesis would consist of just one large chapter, which would make it rather difficult to find one's way through. Because of this decision, however, we shall encounter a major break between the two parts of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative. Yet this break can not be clearly defined in the text, as we shall argue, so that the arrangement of the thesis does not presume the division of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative into two independent narratives. It is rather regarded as one narrative, though with a different emphasis in each part; the Gideon narrative focuses on YHWH, the Abimelech narrative on Baalism, and both together show that YHWH has divine power and is god instead of any other god.



# CHAPTER II

## THE GIDEON NARRATIVE (6:1–8:28): YHWH'S DIVINE POWER

Introductory remarks. In the context of Judges, the Gideon narrative follows on the record of the rest achieved after Barak's victory over the Canaanites (5:31). It begins with the usual pattern found in Judges (6:1). The Israelites do evil in the eyes of YHWH (cf. 3:7; 3:12; 4:1; 10:6; 13:1) and YHWH sells them into the hand of an enemy (cf. 3:8; 3:12-14, 4:2-3, 10:7-9; 13:1). With this opening, the narrator up to this point in the book set the background for each new deliverance story. Hence the repetition of the starting phrase in 6:1 and the record of the oppression by an enemy raise the expectation that the cycle will start once more and once more YHWH will raise up a deliverer.

However, there is also a significant difference. Following the first deliverer account, which is introduced with the 'new beginning formula' *וַיַּעַשׂוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל (אֶת־)הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה* (3:7), the following narratives that lengthily record a deliverance all start similarly with the 'continuation formula' *וַיַּסְפּוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲשׂוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה* (3:12; 4:1; 10:6; 13:1) that emphasises that the Israelites *continue* to do evil. The only exception to this rule is the introduction of the Gideon narrative (6:1),<sup>1</sup> which follows the introduction of the Othniel narrative (3:7). It appears, therefore, that the preceding sequence of judges narratives, where the deliverances of Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, and Barak are recorded, is concluded with the song of Deborah and Barak, and that the Gideon narrative begins a new sequence of judges narratives that will end with the Samson narrative.<sup>2</sup>

The 'new beginning formula' of the Gideon narrative might also imply that the Israelites do not only continue their evil, they might do evil as such, maybe even worse than before. The introductory phrase thus makes one aware that the Gideon narrative may take a different course, follow a different plot, or have a different emphasis. This expectation will indeed be verified, as for the first time in Judges the narrative continues with a theological assessment where YHWH appears to be reluctant to respond to Israel's outcry and accuses them of apostasy (6:8-10).

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<sup>1</sup>Similarly, LILLEY, "Appreciation": 98.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. LAWSON GRANT STONE, "From Tribal Confederation to Monarchic State: The Editorial Perspective of the Book of Judges" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1988; Microfilm), 302, 308.



Hence the prophet's speech appears to be breaking the pattern of the judges narratives. The different nature of the prophet's speech is confirmed by the observation that it is separated from the preceding narrative part by two juxtaposed references to Israel's outcry to YHWH (6:6,7). While the first reference appears as the logical consequence of the lengthy description of Israel's oppression by the Midianites (6:1-6), the second reference is naturally followed by the advent of YHWH's prophet (6:7-10). The double reference to Israel's outcry thus separates these two parts of the introduction. The first part, which narrates the situation of Israel at the outset of the narrative, may then be described as the setting of the narrative background, which leads to Israel's cry for help, and the second part, which contains the prophet's theological assessment of Israel's situation, may be described as the setting of the theological background. With this structure, the introduction of the Gideon narrative follows the pattern of the introduction of Judges, which concentrates on the narrative background first (1:1–2:5) and then on the theological background (2:6–3:6).<sup>3</sup> Since it is the first narrative that addresses in a sustained way Israel's apostasy, and since it begins a new sequence of judges narratives, the Gideon narrative is identified as a narrative that unlike the preceding narratives will primarily focus on the theological element of the book's introduction; indeed, it will even lead the sequence of narratives that will similarly focus on the theology and will hence suggest a theological understanding of Judges.<sup>4</sup>

## A Setting the Background, Defining and Specifying the Theme (6:1-32)

### 1 Setting the Narrative and Theological Background (6:1-10)

#### *a Setting the Narrative Background (6:1-6)*

Having set the general background of the narrative (6:1a), the narrator deviates from the usual pattern in Judges by extensively describing both the oppression and Israel's suffering (6:1b-6).<sup>5</sup> This extensive description invites a comparison with the descriptions

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<sup>3</sup>For a similar reading of the introduction of Judges, see MARAIS, *Representation*, 71-91.

<sup>4</sup>Similarly, MARAIS, *Representation*, 106.

<sup>5</sup>MARAIS, *Representation*, 106, claimed that the record of the oppression in the Gideon narrative is the longest in the whole book of Judges; however, the corresponding record in the Jephthah narrative



of the oppressions in the preceding narratives. In the account of Othniel (3:7-11) the eight-year oppression is recorded merely as a summary before the narrator states that the Israelites cry out to YHWH. Immediately YHWH responds by raising up Othniel and empowering him with his spirit, so that Othniel instantly sets out to deliver Israel. The account of Ehud (3:12-30) extends the description of Israel's oppression by including the record of how the Moabites made the Israelites subject to them, namely, by attacking Israel and seizing Jericho. At eighteen years the oppression lasts more than twice as long as the previous one, before the Israelites cry out to YHWH, who immediately responds to their cry of distress by sending a deliverer. The Barak account (4:1–5:31) starts similarly to the Ehud account. However, the record of Israel's oppression is even more expanded, as it also includes a reference to the military strength of the Canaanite king and to Israel's suffering. The account stresses that the Canaanites oppress Israel violently by use of their nine hundred iron chariots. This assumes a more severe oppression, as the Ehud account has not focused on the description of the violence nor any means of the oppression. Furthermore, the narrator now records that the Israelites cry to YHWH because of the military strength of the Canaanites during their twenty-year long violent oppression. While up to this point Israel's motive for crying to YHWH has not been elaborated, the narrator now implies that they seek help because they fear the Canaanites and they are really distressed by them. YHWH again responds by sending a deliverer, though this time the actual call of the deliverer is postponed to a later stage within the plot; it is not the judge Deborah who will deliver Israel, but rather Barak, whom she calls.

This increased attention to each oppression, each of which lasts longer than the previous one and which each seems to be more violent and severe than the previous one, leads to the impression that Israel's oppressions become increasingly severe, and the postponed call of a deliverer in the Barak narrative raises the question of how long YHWH's patience might still last. Yet all three oppressions seem to have compelled the Israelites to cry to YHWH for help against their oppressors, and in all three narratives YHWH responds to the cry by sending a deliverer.

The account of the oppression by the Midianites (6:1-6) begins, like the accounts of the preceding oppressions, with the record of the evildoing of the Israelites and the record that YHWH sells the Israelites into the hand of an enemy, this time, Midian. Yet the movement from brief to prolonged accounts of the oppression is expanded even further. Although the oppression by the Midianites lasts only seven years, the Israelites appear to be more distressed by the Midianites than by any of the previous oppressors.<sup>6</sup> Moreover,

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is, although briefer, even more severe (10:6-10) and on top of that contains YHWH's warning that he will not deliver Israel any more (10:11-14).

<sup>6</sup>Cf. KEIL, *Commentar*, 246.



Israel does not seem to belong to the side of the strong victor any more, who may oppress ( $\sqrt{\text{זע}}$ ) the Canaanite nations (3:10), but rather to the side of the weak loser, who is being oppressed ( $\sqrt{\text{זע}}$ ) by these nations (6:2).<sup>7</sup> This implies that YHWH withdraws his support from Israel and now supports the nations, in particular the Midianites. Thus Israel's oppression by the Midianites reverses Israel's role in the promised land from the victor on YHWH's side to the oppressed, and YHWH seems to have switched sides. The severity of Israel's oppression is further underlined by the narrator who spends five full verses on describing the oppression, Israel's suffering, and their attempts to ease the effects of the oppression. The fourfold explicit mention of Midian in these verses (6:2[twice],3,6) together with the manifold description of the enemies further stresses the severity of Israel's oppression. Two nations, Midian and Amalek, plus the nations east of Canaan, collectively named 'sons of the East'<sup>8</sup> and implying many nations, are coming up in abundance ( $\text{וְעָלוּ עִלָּיו} \dots \text{וְעָלוּ}$ , 6:3) against Israel like locusts with their cattle, their tents, and with numberless camels. They indeed appear to overrun the land. Through the oppression, the Israelites lose all their livestock, including their sheep, oxen, and donkeys, as well as their land, which the Midianites destroy. This prolonged and dramatic description of the oppression gives the impression that the oppression by the Midianites is the worst so far in Judges, so that the necessity of a deliverance is highlighted even more.

The Israelites try to alleviate the effects of the oppression by fleeing into cisterns, caves, and strongholds in the mountains to protect themselves, their livestock, and their harvest. Yet as they are about to harvest what they have sown, the Midianites come and destroy everything they possess. It seems, therefore, that the Israelites only manage to save their lives but not their harvest. As a result,<sup>9</sup> Israel becomes passive<sup>10</sup> and very insignificant ( $\sqrt{\text{לל}} \text{ nif.}$ ; 6:6) before Midian. The oppression is literally complete, a point which the narrator underlines with the inclusion formed with  $\text{בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל}$ ,  $\text{יְהוָה}$ , and  $\text{מִדְיָן}$  (6:1,6) around the description of the oppression.<sup>11</sup> Only at this late stage, when their very existence in the promised land is threatened,<sup>12</sup> the Israelites eventually cry to YHWH for help.

<sup>7</sup>† (Judges). Cf. BUSH, *Judges*, 79.

<sup>8</sup>KEIL, *Commentar*, 248.

<sup>9</sup>MATS ESKHULT, *Studies in Verbal Aspect and Narrative Technique in Biblical Hebrew Prose*, SSU 12 ([PhD dissertation, Uppsala University, 1990]; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1990), 79.

<sup>10</sup>KLEIN, *Triumph*, 50.

<sup>11</sup>PHILLIP EUGENE MCMILLION, "Judges 6–8 and the Study of Premonarchical Israel" (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1985; Microfiche), 175.

<sup>12</sup>NÖTSCHER, "Richter", 656; HOPPE, *Judges*, 140-141; GUTBROD, *Buch*, 236; BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 141.



*b Setting the Theological Background and Defining the Theme (6:7-10)*

When the Israelites once more cry to YHWH for help, YHWH once more responds. This time, however, YHWH does not send a deliverer as on previous occasions. YHWH's new reaction is already anticipated in the introductory וַיְהִי, which signals a new development, and the repetition of the mention of Israel's outcry. This repetition causes a retarding moment in the narrative and gives the impression that the Israelites continue to cry to YHWH, but that YHWH does not respond immediately. Also the addition that they cry to YHWH because of Midian (6:7) seems to underline that Israel's distress caused by the Midianites is their motive for their outcry. Israel cries to YHWH only because of the Midianites and it seems that they tell YHWH that the Midianites are oppressing them and urge him to send a deliverer.

Yet instead of raising up a deliverer, YHWH only sends a prophet as his answer to the cry. This prophet, who appears at precisely the same point in the plot as Deborah,<sup>13</sup> is uniquely described as 'a man, a prophet' (אִישׁ נְבִיא, 6:8). In such a way the narrator draws a further parallel to the introduction of Deborah (אִשָּׁה נְבִיאָה, 4:4), whom he had introduced with a similarly constructed *hapax legomenon*.<sup>14</sup> This parallel raises the expectation that like Deborah, this prophet will call a deliverer. However, this expectation is disappointed when the prophet only addresses Israel in the name of YHWH and delivers a rebuking message from him (6:8b-10; outline 1).

This message points out that Israel's cry (וַעֲקֹב, 6:6) is not an outcry of repentance, but rather a cry for help only.<sup>15</sup> Yet the prophet does not address the oppression as the reason of the cry for help, or Israel's suffering; he rather describes YHWH's deeds in Israel's history and thus suggests that YHWH is able to rescue them from the new oppressor as well. Yet instead of acknowledging that and worshipping YHWH as a result, Israel abandons YHWH. The prophet accordingly identifies the reason for this oppression in Israel's apostasy and addresses this theme in his speech. He thus suggests that the Israelites repent and return to YHWH, their covenant god.

<sup>13</sup>WEBB, *Book*, 145; BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '6:7-10'.

<sup>14</sup>Similarly, BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '6:7-10'.

<sup>15</sup>WOOD, *Days*, 204; FREDERICK E. GREENSPAHN, "The Theology of the Framework of Judges", *VT* 36, no. 4 (1986): 392-395; BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '6:6'; cf. G. HASEL, "וַעֲקֹב zā' aq: וַעֲקֹב zē' āqāh; וַעֲקֹב zā' aq: וַעֲקֹב zē' āqāh", in *ThWAT*, vol. 2: 631-632. — Against JAMES FREDERICK CREASON, JR., "A Biblical Theology of Judges" (Ph.D. dissertation, Bob Jones University, 1985; Microfiche), 219-222; SOGGIN, *Judges*, 4. Yet the meaning of וַעֲקֹב in itself does not include repentance; see R. ALBERTZ, "וַעֲקֹב zē' q schreien", in *THAT*, vol. 2: 568-575; STONE, "Confederation", 311-326, who after a good discussion of וַעֲקֹב in the Ancient Near East, the Hebrew Scriptures, and the Greek translations concluded that in Judges, וַעֲקֹב merely indicated a cry for help, which, however, "is confidently expected to be efficacious" (*ibid.*, 326); see also the discussion of further passages by MASSOT, "Gideon", 23-25.



Outline 1.—The Prophet's Rebuke (6:8b-10)

	כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל		
	מִמִּצְרַיִם	אֶתְכֶם	אֲנֹכִי הֶעֱלִיתִי
1			
	מִבֵּית עֲבָדָיִם:	אֶתְכֶם	וְאֶצִּיא
2			
	מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם	אֶתְכֶם	וְאֶצִּל
3			
	וּמִיַּד כָּל־לְחָצִיכֶם		
	מִפְּנֵיכֶם	אוֹתָם	וְאֶגְרֹשׁ
4			
	אֶת־אֲרָצָם:	לְכֶם	וְאֶתְּנָה
5			
	אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	לְכֶם	וְאֶמְרָה
6			
	לֹא תִירָאוּ אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי הָאֲמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם יוֹשְׁבִים בְּאֲרָצָם		
			וְלֹא שָׁמַעְתֶּם בְּקוֹלִי:
7			

Thus says YHWH, the god of Israel:

1	I have led-up	you	from Egypt,
2	and have brought-out	you	from the house of slavery,
3	and have rescued	you	from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors,
4	and have driven-out	them	from before you,
5	and have given	to you	their land,
6	and have said	to you:	I am Yahweh, your god, do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living;
7	and not have you listened to my voice.		

This focus is accomplished through several structural features and several allusions of the rebuke to YHWH's covenants with Israel. First, the speech is introduced as a message from YHWH, which stresses that YHWH is Israel's covenant god. Second, it displays a significant structure. It may be grouped into two groups of three lines each and a final line. The first six lines begin with an emphasised reference to YHWH's deeds in the grammatical first person singular and stress YHWH's initiative and responsibility in the mentioned deeds. In the first group this is followed by a reference to Israel in relation to YHWH's deeds in the grammatical second person plural (אֶתְכֶם) and an indication of Israel's former state from which (מִ) YHWH has delivered them; YHWH has rescued them from Egypt, the house of slavery, and from the hand of all their oppressors. The second group focuses on the benefits that Israel received from YHWH's initiative in exchange; YHWH has driven their oppressors out of the land, has given them their land, and has revealed himself as their god. It hence becomes clear that YHWH's self-characterisation in the third line of the second group, which parallels the second line of that group (לְכֶם), is integral to the second group, which thus consists of three lines like the first group. YHWH's self-characterisation as Israel's god and the subsequent command not to fear the gods of the Amorites is thus inherent in YHWH's concern for Israel that is evident in every mentioned deed and is its logical consequence. Therefore, the last line, which structurally



stands out as it begins with the negation לֹא followed by a reference to Israel with the predicate in the second person plural which is set in relation to YHWH's voice, contains YHWH's accusation that Israel has not listened to him, and it thus contrasts with the evidence of YHWH's concern for Israel, as it implies that the Israelites ignore him despite his deeds in their history. The message of the speech is, therefore, that the Israelites should worship YHWH instead of the gods of the Amorites whom they actually worship.

Further, there are several allusions to YHWH's covenants with Israel that underline YHWH's claim to be recognised as Israel's covenant god. First, by using the emphatic form אֲנִי, YHWH generally emphasises that he, YHWH, has led Israel up (עָלָהּ hif.) and brought them out (יָצָא hif.) from Egypt, the house of slavery (בֵּית עֲבָדִים). This phrase, however, is unique to the account of the exodus, the Deuteronomic Law, and the covenant at Shechem,<sup>16</sup> so that YHWH identifies himself as the god who has founded Israel and he reminds the Israelites of this. Second, YHWH has rescued (נִצַּל) Israel from the hand (מִיַּד) of Egypt and from the hand of all their oppressors. By rescuing them from Egypt, he has founded Israel and has given them Israel an identity as a nation. Third, he has driven Israel's oppressors out from before them (גָּרַשׁ; cf. Exod 23:31; Josh 24:12) and has given them their land; he has thus given the new nation a land to live in. Hence YHWH claims to be the founder of Israel and their provider, who has consequently the right to be honoured by the Israelites. Fourth, by expelling the Canaanites from their land, YHWH has proven that he is at least superior to the Canaanite gods if not the only god at all. Finally, the introduction אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם of YHWH's final reproach of Israel strongly alludes to YHWH's deliverance from Egypt (Exod 6:7; Num 15:41) and to the covenant laws that YHWH has given Israel through Moses,<sup>17</sup> and likewise, the wording {יִרְאֵ} אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי הָאֲמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם יוֹשְׁבֵי בְּאֶרְצָם picks up similar words at the covenant of Shechem (Josh 24:15),<sup>18</sup> thus indicating a contrast between Israel's promise to serve YHWH and their disobedience as described in Judges. Hence these two covenants are uniquely inherent in the prophet's reproach. A violation of YHWH's claim to be Israel's god therefore indicates a denial of YHWH's works in Israel's history and a violation of the covenants, and expresses a complete denial of YHWH as Israel's god.<sup>19</sup> As a further

<sup>16</sup>Exod 13:3,14; 20:2; Deut 5:6; 6:12; 7:8; 8:14; 13:6,11; Josh 24:17 (cf. Jer 34:13; Mic 6:4); †.

<sup>17</sup>The phrase is used 23 times in Leviticus.

<sup>18</sup>Similarly, BEYERLIN, "Geschichte": 11-12; GÖRG, *Richter*, 37; MASSOT, "Gideon", 23.

<sup>19</sup>In Ezekiel, YHWH accuses Israel of not having understood the claims and the implications inherent in the phrase {אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם}, namely, that YHWH has delivered Israel from Egypt and that Israel should not worship foreign gods but should instead keep YHWH's commandments (4 times in Ezek 20:1-26). It thus appears that these two themes are tightly connected with that phrase (cf. also Exod 16:12; cf. Deut 29:5; Num 10:10; and in an eschatological context, Joel 2:27; 3:17; †). These themes are even more uniquely combined in the related phrase {אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ} as



reminder YHWH even describes the land, where the Israelites are living, collectively as the land of the Amorites,<sup>20</sup> thus implying that Israel occupies foreign land which the Amorite gods are not able to defend against YHWH. Therefore, the Israelites should recognise YHWH as their god and should not fear the weak or even non-existent foreign gods. Yet in addressing the Israelites, the prophet accuses them of not having obeyed YHWH, not having worshipped him as god, not having honoured him for his deliverance out of Egypt, not having accepted his claim on his people, and not having kept his commandments but having broken his covenant and having worshipped the foreign gods. Thus they have clearly forsaken YHWH as their god and YHWH's claim, אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, in combination with the accusation that Israel has not listened to his voice (cf. Josh 24:24), is at the same time YHWH's claim on Israel to be his people, with whom he has formed a covenant, and his accusation that Israel has forsaken him.

Because YHWH's accusation follows on the record of Israel's violent oppression, it implies that the oppression is caused by Israel's rejection of YHWH and their worship of other gods instead.<sup>21</sup> This is the more evident as the prophet does not continue his speech so that the answer must be found in the context of the narrative, which is Israel's oppression by the Midianites. Yet since the prophet does not address the oppression, but instead focuses entirely on YHWH as Israel's god, the theme of the narrative will not be the deliverance from the Midianites but rather Israel's apostasy and disobedience towards YHWH, YHWH's claim to be worshipped as god, and his efforts to call Israel back.

At the same time, the prophet does not mention any specific god as the object of Israel's worship; his rebuke is rather based on Israel's general apostasy and idolatry (6:10). This indicates that the narrative deals with Israel's idolatry in general, so that the following episodes that above all refer to Baal as a foreign deity appear to use the worship of Baal as the primary foreign god as an example for Israel's general idolatry. Similarly, the prophet's accusation of Israel indicates that the narrator will use Gideon and the other Israelites as examples for Israel as a nation; not only they but Israel in general worships other gods. This interpretation is supported by the inclusion formed by the focus on Israel at the beginning (6:2,3,6,7,10) and the end of the Gideon narrative, where the אִישׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל offer Gideon the kingship (8:22) and where all the Israelites (כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל) play the harlot after the ephod (8:27). The audience should, therefore, identify themselves with the Israelites in the narrative, apply the narrative to their relationship to YHWH and avoid the mistakes the Israelites make in the narrative.

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used in the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:2,5; Deut 5:6,9; cf. also Ps 81:11; Hos 12:9; 13:4; Isa 51:15 [eschatological], where it is used in similar contexts; †).

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Gen 15:16; Josh 24:15. KEIL, *Commentar*, 249.

<sup>21</sup>Similarly, HERTZBERG, *Richter*, 190.



This theological theme is also implicit through allusions to several other curses and theological statements in Deuteronomy and Judges. First, the prophet's speech resembles the curses in Deuteronomy (Deut 29:21-27) and the theological introduction to Judges (2:11-15). In Deuteronomy, the Israelites are warned not to abandon (עזב) the covenant (ברית) that YHWH has made with them when he brought them out (יצא hif.; Deut 29:24) of Egypt; in the theological introduction to Judges the Israelites are described as abandoning (עזב) YHWH, the god of their fathers, who has brought them out (יצא hif.) of Egypt, and serving the Baalim instead (2:11-12); and in the prophet's speech the Israelites are described as forgetting YHWH, who has led them up (עלה hif.) from Egypt and has brought them out (יצא hif.) of the house of slavery (6:8). Since the curses in Deuteronomy centre in YHWH's anger (אף), and the theological introduction to Judges refers to YHWH's anger (אף, 2:14) as well, it is implied that similarly Israel's oppression by the Midianites is an expression of YHWH's anger about Israel's disobedience as addressed in the theological introduction to Judges.

This theologically motivated judgement conforms with the announcement of such a judgement in Lev 26 and in the curses of Deut 28. There Israel is warned not to worship other gods but to fear YHWH, for, if they do not listen to the voice of YHWH their god (אם-לא תשמע בקול יהוה אלהיך), the land will be laid waste, Israel will be brought very low, a strong (עז; cf. ותעזו, 6:2) nation will fall upon the nation like locusts, eat all the land's provision, and leave nothing for Israel (Lev 26:16; Deut 28:30,33,38,43,50-51).<sup>22</sup> This, however, is exactly how the narrator describes Israel's situation. Israel has not listened to YHWH's voice (ולא שמעתם בקולי, 6:10) and accordingly the appropriate curse has come upon them. Yet Israel does not appear to recognise this link.

The connection to yet another address in Judges at which the prophet's address hints needs to be explicated in a similar sense. This allusion is to the rebuke of an angel of YHWH after the Israelites have increasingly failed to occupy the promised land (2:1-5).<sup>23</sup> In that rebuke YHWH claims to have brought Israel up from Egypt (אעלה אתכם ממצרים, 2:1) into the promised land. In the prophet's speech, set into the context of the oppression by the Midianites, YHWH similarly claims and even emphasises that he has led Israel up from Egypt (אנכי העליתי אתכם ממצרים, 6:8) and has willingly given them the land of their oppressors.<sup>24</sup> The verbal accusation in both cases is also parallel, ולא (י) שמעתם בקולי, 'you have not listened to my voice' (2:2; 6:10), thus providing a direct

<sup>22</sup>PAUL P. ENNS, *Judges*, Bible Study Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1982), 61-62; WEBB, *Book*, 251, n. 79; BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '6:1b-5'.

<sup>23</sup>BLACK, *Judges*, 50; ENNS, *Judges*, 62; GÖRG, *Richter*, 37.

<sup>24</sup>SLOTKI, "Judges", 206, argued that the cohortative in this verse described a forceful act of YHWH as he gave the Israelites the promised land.



correspondence between both speeches. The transgressed commands, although formulated differently and with a different emphasis, are similar, too. In the first speech, YHWH accuses Israel of having entered into a covenant with the inhabitants of the land instead of breaking down their altars. This rebuke implies that the Israelites have indeed broken the covenant with YHWH and have worshipped Canaanite gods. The second speech then explicitly mentions this sin, and through the use of the covenant-related phrase *אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם*, it explains it as a violation of Israel's covenant with YHWH, who does not tolerate any other god beside him (cf. Exod 20:3; Deut 5:7).<sup>25</sup> Thus despite their different emphasis, both speeches contain the same message, that the Israelites should not fear the gods of the Canaanites.

The first speech, however, is continued with the announcement that YHWH would not continue to cast out the Canaanites before Israel (2:3) as YHWH's response to Israel's disobedience. This, however, is exactly the background of the Gideon narrative, so that the Midianite oppression appears not only as the consequence of the curses mentioned in Deut 28 and the narrator's introduction to Judges, but also as a consequence of the angel's speech in Judg 2:1-5.

Hence in 6:7-10, the prophet's speech does not contain any announcement of consequences. Rather, it closes abruptly with the accusation that Israel has not listened to YHWH's voice. Further, while the narrator has recorded Israel's—probably only superficial—repentance after the first speech of the angel (2:1-5), this time no mention of any reaction whatsoever is found. These observations together with the narrator's introductory implication that YHWH has switched sides and is now acting against Israel (6:2), give rise to the expectation that YHWH would react here as announced in the angel's speech (2:3) and not deliver Israel from their oppressors.<sup>26</sup> The prophet's final statement that Israel has not listened to his voice, is thus a death sentence for Israel.<sup>27</sup> Yet the expectation that he will not deliver Israel any more will be shown as wrong and the death sentence will not yet be implemented, as the narrator immediately introduces an angel of YHWH in place of an announcement of consequences, who creates the expectation that he will deliver YHWH's reaction to Israel's disobedience.

The oppression is thus identified as YHWH's judgement upon his peoples for abandoning him and serving other gods. This, however, is a new development within Judges. Up to this point the oppression by the enemy seems to have led YHWH to deliver his people. Thus Othniel's and Ehud's only tasks appear to be to deliver Israel from the

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<sup>25</sup>Cf. BEYERLIN, "Geschichte": 12-13.

<sup>26</sup>Similarly, WELLHAUSEN, *Composition*, 214.

<sup>27</sup>GUTBROD, *Buch*, 237.



enemies (3:9,15); Shamgar's great achievement is that he delivered Israel (3:31); and Barak is explicitly called to defeat Israel's oppressors (4:6-7). Israel's apostasy and idolatry, though mentioned as the grounds for the oppression, are not, as such, themes in these narratives. The Gideon narrative, on the contrary, focuses from its beginning on Israel's apostasy and idolatry, and this time the oppression is clearly identified as YHWH's judgement over Israel for their abandonment of YHWH.<sup>28</sup>

*c Summary: The Background and Theme of the Narrative*

Before we go on with the interpretation of the Gideon narrative, we shall briefly summarise our findings so far. We have argued that the introductory formula to the Gideon narrative implies that the Gideon narrative provides a new beginning in Judges. We have further demonstrated that the introduction focuses on the theological theme of Israel's apostasy and YHWH's claim to be worshipped instead of the Canaanite gods. This, however, is a new development in Judges, as in the preceding deliverer narratives this claim has not yet been fully developed.

Since the appearance of the prophet at this point in the plot replaces the narrator's record of YHWH's raising up of a deliverer, the narrator adopts the speech of the prophet as his own setting of the narrative. Therefore, the following narrative will not focus on the deliverance from Israel's oppressors but rather on YHWH's claim to be worshipped as god; and this different emphasis would further explain why the Gideon narrative is introduced not with the 'continuation formula' but rather with the 'new beginning formula' (6:1; cf. 3:7).

It also needs to be noticed that the theme of the narrative is defined without any reference to Gideon. This contrasts with the preceding narratives, where not only a specific definition of the theme is lacking, but where the delivers are called soon after the record of the oppression and Israel's outcry. This evidence implies that the prophet defines the theme independently from the following Gideon narrative as a broader theme than the one that the Gideon narrative will follow; and as we shall see, the theological theme will indeed be carried into the Abimelech narrative as well and from there even into the Jephthah narrative. That is, the theme defined by the prophet serves as the theological theme first for both the Gideon narrative and the Abimelech narrative.

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<sup>28</sup>Similarly, TANNER, "Narrative": 153-154; HODGETTS, "In Search", 211.



## 2 Specifying the Theme for the Gideon Narrative (6:11-32)

Introductory remarks. Having abruptly ended the prophet's speech, the narrator continues by recording the advent of an angel of YHWH, who calls Gideon into the service of YHWH. Yet this passage not only tells of Gideon's call by YHWH, it also illustrates the state of Israel's apostasy in a manner unmentioned elsewhere in the judges narratives by mentioning a cultic terebinth (6:11), an altar to Baal (6:25-30), and an Asherah (6:25-30). This serves to emphasise Israel's idolatry and underlines the reason for the rebuking speech of the prophet. It thus once more defines the nature of the forthcoming narrative as a narrative that deals with the discrepancy between YHWH worship and idolatry. With Gideon being called by YHWH under the pagan terebinth to demolish these idolatrous cult objects, the conflict is defined and solved at the same time. YHWH is the god who has the right to be worshipped alone, since he is more powerful than the pagan gods, who are unable to prevent Gideon from demolishing their cult objects.

As already mentioned, not only the prophet's speech remains open-ended compared with the first angel's speech (2:1-5), also the record of Israel's repentance is missing. If further evidence can be found in the course of the narrative, this omission may indicate Israel's unwillingness or unpreparedness to repent. In that case, however, more reasoning will be needed to convince the characters that they do wrong by following other gods and abandoning YHWH as they break the fundamental command of the covenant (Exod 20:2-6; Deut 5:6-10) and because the other gods are not gods at all. The following narrative will support this contention by providing evidence of YHWH's divine power and demonstrating at the same time that the other 'gods' are not gods at all.

### *a Specifying the Narrative Theme: YHWH Promises to Deliver Israel through Gideon (6:11-24)*

The angel of YHWH is introduced as he comes and sits under a tree on Joash's property. Once again the introduction contains a hint at Deborah, who was also introduced as sitting under a tree (4:5). This newly established parallel to Deborah raises the new hope that the angel would do what the prophet fails to do, namely, to call a deliverer.<sup>29</sup> The description of the tree as *הָאֵלֶךְ* (6:11), though, gives this place a cultic character (cf. Gen 35:8, *הָאֵלֶן*), where the Canaanite gods are worshipped.<sup>30</sup> This place thus rather

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<sup>29</sup>Similarly, DENNIS T. OLSON, "The Book of Judges: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections", in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. LEANDER E. KECK [et al.], vol. 2 (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1998), 796.

<sup>30</sup>This interpretation of the terebinth will become important in the course of the call episode (6:19-21). It is also the generally accepted interpretation; see, for example, BURNEY, *Judges*,



contrasts with Deborah's place. While Deborah is sitting under her palm to judge Israel in the name of YHWH, Joash owns a terebinth where the Canaanite gods are worshipped. The worship of foreign gods, however, lets the name *יְהוָה* (< *יְהוָה*, 'YHWH gave/provided')<sup>31</sup> appear ironical, since Joash does not expect YHWH to provide help but rather foreign gods. By choosing that place as the setting of Gideon's call in the name of YHWH, the narrator stresses that the Canaanite gods are unable to prevent YHWH from using their place; instead YHWH is a god who is superior to them. Moreover, in this setting YHWH is even able to call Gideon to demolish the Baal cult objects, which underlines the powerlessness of foreign gods in contrast to YHWH's power; also, the naming of Gideon with the programmatic Baalist name 'Jerubbaal' does not bear any negative consequences for him, but will instead reflect negatively on Baal.

Yet since the angel appears in place of an announcement of consequences for Israel's disobedience, another possibility regarding the angel's mission arises; this time, he might actually intend to announce consequences for Israel's disobedience, for example, that YHWH would not deliver them from the Midianites. This possibility is further substantiated as at his previous appearance the angel has indeed announced consequences (2:1-5). But this time the angel just comes and sits under a tree, appearing to seek protection from the sun. He gives the appearance of a figure who calmly waits as he watches Gideon beating out wheat.

The syntax of this sentence (*וַיֵּשֶׁב תַּחַת הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר בְּעֶפְרָה אֲשֶׁר לְיוֹאָשׁ אֲבִי הַעֲזָרָי*, 6:11), however, deserves more attention, since the apposition *אֲבִי הַעֲזָרָי* seems to refer to Joash rather than to Ophrah (6:24; 8:32) and since Ophrah rather than the terebinth seems to belong to Joash. The phrase *אֲבִי הַעֲזָרָי*, which is not grammatically easy, is usually treated together with *אֲבִיעֶזֶר* and translated as 'Abiezrite'.<sup>32</sup> Since this translation takes into account that Joash's son Gideon appears as a member of the Manassite clan of *אֲבִיעֶזֶר* (Josh 17:2) elsewhere (Judg 6:34; 8:2), it should be accepted. However, it needs to be noticed that the name as spelled in 6:11 is separated into two parts with the predicative part furthermore carrying the definite article.<sup>33</sup> Thus the full name is given more

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187; BOLING, *Judges*, 130; J. GRAY, *Judges*, 272. Other commentators referred to the terebinth as a general place of worship, e.g., MOORE, *Commentary*, 184; CUNDALL, "Commentary", 104; while earlier commentators did not see any cultic association, e.g., CASSEL, *Richter*, 63; BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 134.

<sup>31</sup> HALAT, s.v. *יְהוָה* and *יְהוָה*; MARTIN NOTH, *Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der gemeinsemitischen Namengebung*, BWANT 3, 10 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1928; reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1966), 171.

<sup>32</sup> E.g., NOTH, *Personennamen*, 15-16, 17-18, 154.

<sup>33</sup> *אֲבִי הַעֲזָרָי* is attested 6:11,24; 8:32 (†), and *אֲבִיעֶזֶר*, Josh 17:2; Judg 6:34; 8:2; 2 Sam 23:27; 1 Chr 7:18; 11:28; 27:12; †.



emphasis by the narrator, who stresses its assonance with the noun עֹזֵר and thus invites the paronomastic association 'Father of help'.<sup>34</sup> By now observing that this spelling of the expression appears only in comments of the narrator (6:11,24; 8:32), it might be the narrator's artificial construct to express a specific idea. It also appears only in immediate connection with Ophrah and only as an apposition either to Joash at Ophrah (6:11) or to Ophrah itself (6:24; 8:32).<sup>35</sup> It thus seems to be closely connected with that place. Moreover, it appears only at the end of a sentence before a break in the flow of the narrative. Thus following the apposition in 6:11 the narrator introduces Gideon as a new character with a *waw* adversative, and immediately following the appositions in 6:24 and 8:32 he begins a new paragraph with an introductory וַיְהִי (6:25; 8:33). In these positions, the phrase and its meaning becomes even more emphasised.

With the intention of emphasis in mind, the narrator has now chosen to alter the syntax of the sentence. Given that the apposition אָבִי הָעֹזֵרִי describes Ophrah, as it does elsewhere, rather than Joash, we would expect it to follow immediately after עֵפְרָה.<sup>36</sup> However, in that position, some of the stress intended for the apposition would get lost. Thus to maintain its intended stress, the narrator has chosen to include it as the last part of the sentence. Now with אָבִי הָעֹזֵרִי being the last part of the sentence, the narrator could have inserted אֲשֶׁר לְיוֹאָשׁ immediately after הָאֵלֶּה, as obviously the terebinth rather than Ophrah belonged to Joash,<sup>37</sup> so that עֵפְרָה would be followed by אָבִי הָעֹזֵרִי, thus also

<sup>34</sup>The narrator has used the same technique already when he stresses that Ehud is a Benjamite (בֶּן הַיְמִינִי), thus inviting the paronomastic association 'son of the right <hand>', before he gives that meaning a strong ironical touch by mentioning Ehud's left-handedness (3:15); cf. the spelling בְּנֵימָן elsewhere in Judges (1:21; 5:14; and some 40 times in 20:1-21:25); on the legitimation of assonance for the interpretation of a name, see further FRANZ M. TH. BÖHL, "Wortspiele im Alten Testament", *JPOS* 6, no. 4 (1926): 196-212.

<sup>35</sup>NOTH, *Personennamen*, 154, assumed (against BRUNO, *Micha*, 177-190), that the addition of אָבִי הָעֹזֵרִי distinguished this Ophrah from another Ophrah in Benjamin (Josh 18:23; 1 Sam 13:17). However, while this might be so, it does not explain the separated spelling.

<sup>36</sup>Thus also BUDDE, *Buch*, 53, despite his efforts to emend the text to read בְּעֵפְרָת אָבִי הָעֹזֵרִי אֲשֶׁר לְיוֹאָשׁ. This reading, however, would separate הָאֵלֶּה and אֲשֶׁר לְיוֹאָשׁ further and would even more encourage the unlikely understanding that Ophrah rather than the terebinth belonged to Joash. HERBERT HAAG, "Gideon–Jerubbaal–Abimelek", *ZAW* 79, no. 3 (1967): 310, on the other hand, argued that the text chiefly connected Abiezer to Joash alone. However, with this assumption HAAG needed to explain the double connection of Ophrah with Abiezer (6:24; 8:32) as a subsequent harmonisation, so that the assumption is not convincing.

<sup>37</sup>COOKE, *Judges*, 73, drew a parallel to 6:25-32, where the altar rather than the town is said to belong to Joash and argued that 6:11 needed to be interpreted similarly; cf. MOORE, *Commentary*, 185; ARNOLD B. EHRLICH, *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel: Textkritisches, sprachliches und sachliches*, vol. 3: *Josua, Richter, I. u. II. Samuelis* (Leipzig, 1910; reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1968), 90; and others. — Against KEIL, *Commentar*, 250; BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 134; and others, who held that אֲשֶׁר לְיוֹאָשׁ was dependent on עֵפְרָה, so that Joash was described as lord or owner of Ophrah. However, the extent of the outrage of the Ophrahites against Joash's son (6:29-30) is difficult to explain if Joash was lord of Ophrah and the Ophrahites were subject to him.



maintaining the obvious description of Ophrah as an Abiezrite town. Yet by inserting *לְיוֹאֵשׁ אֲשֶׁר לְעִפְרָה* between *עִפְרָה* and *אָבִי הָעֲזָרִי* and thus positioning *אָבִי הָעֲזָרִי* immediately after *לְיוֹאֵשׁ*, the narrator syntactically connects *אָבִי הָעֲזָרִי* chiefly to Joash and suggests the idea that Joash is the 'father of help'. With the cultic character of the place and Joash's ownership assumed, this resemblance might characterise Joash as the priest of this idolatrous place, so that help is above all sought from the pagan god. Hence with *עִפְרָה* ('dust-place', or 'deer-place')<sup>38</sup> as its reference, *אָבִי הָעֲזָרִי* refers to YHWH as the ultimate provider of help in the desert; yet with *לְיוֹאֵשׁ*, the owner of this cultic place, as its reference, it refers to a foreign god as the one from whom help is expected instead.

The ambiguous reference opens the narrative for the narrator's theological theme to suggest that only YHWH and no foreign god can really provide help. At the same time the name *עִפְרָה* hints at the desolating effect of the oppression (cf. 6:4-5), and since the oppression is put down to Israel's apostasy (6:7-10), the reference also assumes Israel's apostasy, idolatry, and ultimately foreign gods as those who are responsible for Israel's distress. Thus the whole sentence becomes mainly theological, hinting at the original commitment to YHWH inherent in the names which, however, is now replaced by a commitment to foreign gods.<sup>39</sup> Then, however, also the town name *עִפְרָה* gains a theological component. Not only is the town deserted because of the oppression, it is also deserted by YHWH, who accuses the Israelites of having abandoned him (6:7-10) rather than promising to be with them and deliver them.

At this point the narrator introduces *גִּדְעוֹן* ('Hacker, Hearer'),<sup>40</sup> the son of Joash, who beats out (*חִבַּט*) wheat, and provides food for his family.<sup>41</sup> The angel comes to Gideon to

<sup>38</sup>HALAT, s.v. *עִפְרָה* II: 'Staubort', 'rötlich weißer Platz' (because of its reddish-white dust, < *עִפְרָה*) or 'Reh-/Gazellenort' (< *עִפְרָה*); J. GRAY, *Judges*, 284, translated as 'ash-coloured'. It seems that the name *עִפְרָה* is an artificial name created by the narrator to highlight the place's deserted appearance; cf. HERBERT DONNER, "Ophra in Manasse: Der Heimatort des Richters Gideon und des Königs Abimelech", in *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte: Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. ERHARD BLUM, CHRISTIAN MACHOLZ, and EKKEHARD W. STEGEMANN (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990), 194-195, who demonstrated that a town named *עִפְרָה* did not appear in any other list, nor could it be located by any of the early Jewish and Christian interpreters. DONNER further assumed that the name *עִפְרָה* ceased as a name no later than 722 B.C. and was substituted by another name (ibid., 205).

<sup>39</sup>This new mainly theological meaning of *אָבִי הָעֲזָרִי* in its unique spelling may explain why the narrator takes care to include the otherwise unnecessary information by Gideon that he is a Manassite (6:15), since this information might have got lost here.

<sup>40</sup>BOLING, *Judges*, 130; similarly, BUDDE, *Buch*, 54: "Fäller, Vernichter"; NOWACK, *Richter*, 62: "Fäller"; GÖRG, *Richter*, 37: "Haudegen"; similarly, KITTEL, "Richter", 381; SLOTKI, "Judges", 207; MOSHE GARSIEL, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns*, trans. PHYLLIS HACKETT (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 106.

<sup>41</sup>Although no verbal connection is established between Gideon's name and his action, his name may still hint at his action, as both describe heavy labour; CASSEL, *Richter*, 64.



call him into the service of YHWH. This call episode is unparalleled in Judges as Gideon is the only hero whom YHWH personally commissions,<sup>42</sup> and only the Samson narrative will start with a similar stress on the authorisation of the hero. This extensive focus on Gideon lets his commission appear as integral to the narrative and at the same time moves the oppression into the background. Hence the call episode will not focus on the oppression and Israel's deliverance from it but rather on Gideon and the commission he receives from YHWH, so that the theological theme of the narrative is further underlined.

As a whole, the call episode of Gideon follows the pattern of the call episode of Moses.<sup>43</sup> When they receive their call, their nations suffer from severe oppressions (Exod 1; Judg 6:1-6), and the Israelites cry for help (זעקו, Exod 2:23-24; Judg 6:7); both, Moses and Gideon, are hiding from their enemies (Exod 2:15–3:1; Judg 6:11); both are working for their father-in-law or father (Exod 3:1; Judg 6:11), who maintain a sanctuary to their god (Exod 3:1; Judg 6:11), so that both are placed into an idolatrous context; both divine agents are first introduced as מלאך יהוה (Exod 3:2; Judg 6:11,12), but then described as יהוה (Exod 3:4,7,15, *et al.*; Judg 6:14,16,17) and אֱלֹהִים (Exod 3:4,5,11, *et al.*; cf. Judg 6:20); both, Moses and Gideon, are called to deliver Israel from their oppressors (Exod 3:10; Judg 6:14); both receive the same authorisation that YHWH has sent them (שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ, Exod 3:12; Judg 6:14); both oppose the call twice with the same word (בִּי, Exod 4:10,13; Judg 6:13,15) and protest that they are inadequate for this task (Exod 3:11; 4:10,13; Judg 6:15); both receive the same assurance of divine support (בִּי אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ, Exod 3:12; [cf. 4:12]; Judg 6:16); both are given a miraculous sign (אֹת) to reassure them that it is YHWH who sends them (Exod 3:12; Judg 6:17); and both theophanies include fire (Exod 3:2-3; Judg 6:21). Hence both episodes stress that YHWH instead of anyone

<sup>42</sup>EXUM, "Centre": 416; MASSOT, "Gideon", 151; to a lesser extent, also WEBB, *Book*, 148.

<sup>43</sup>WEBB, *Book*, 148; N. HABEL, "The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives", *ZAW* 77, no. 3 (1965): 305, 316-320. — The pattern of call narratives was defined by ERNST KUTSCH, "Gideons Berufung und Altarbau Jdc 6,11-24", *ThLZ* 81, no. 2 (1956): 79-80, and further developed by HABEL, *ibid.*: 297-323, who even based his description of the call narratives on the episodes on Moses' and Gideon's calls, and WOLFGANG RICHTER, *Die sogenannten vorprophetischen Berufungsberichte: Eine literaturwissenschaftliche Studie zu 1 Sam 9,1–10,16, Ex 3f. und Ri 6,11b-17*, FRLANT 101 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 137-169. See also BEYERLIN, "Geschichte": 9; RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 151-152; LUDWIG SCHMIDT, *Menschlicher Erfolg und Jahwes Initiative: Studien zu Tradition, Interpretation und Historie in Überlieferungen von Gideon, Saul und David*, WMANT 38 (Doctoral dissertation, Kirchliche Hochschule Berlin, 1969; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1970), 40; KLEIN, *Triumph*, 50-51; DAVID KENNETH JAEGER, "The Initiatory Trail Theme of the Hero in Hebrew Bible Narrative" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Iliff School of Theology and The University of Denver [Colorado Seminary], 1992; Microfiche), 78-194; HANS-CHRISTOPH SCHMITT, "Das sogenannte vorprophetische Berufungsschema: Zur 'geistigen Heimat' des Berufungsformulars von Ex 3,9-12; Jdc 6,11-24 und 1 Sam 9,1–10,16", *ZAW* 104, no. 2 (1992): 202-216; MASSOT, "Gideon", 30-43; BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. footnote under '6:11-24'.



else calls the deliverer, so that the shown parallels authorise Gideon as YHWH's representative and awaken high expectations of Gideon's performance.

But there are also differences between the two episodes. First, while Moses gets the affirmation that YHWH has sent him in the form of a statement (Exod 3:12), Gideon receives the same affirmation in the form of a rhetorical question (הֲלֹא שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ, Judg 6:14),<sup>44</sup> thus emphasising that Gideon knows or would surely accept that YHWH has sent him.<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, and contrarily to Moses, who has two reasonable objections (Exod 3:13; 4:1) before he voices two personal objections based on doubt and introduced with כִּי (Exod 4:10,13), Gideon only voices two personal objections based on doubt and introduced with כִּי (Judg 6:13,15). These differences reduce the high expectations again and call for a more convincing sign to Gideon that YHWH has commissioned him than the sign Moses receives. This more convincing sign is indeed provided at the end of the call episode, when the angel lets the rock consume Gideon's offering, when Gideon recognises that he has seen the angel of YHWH face to face—Moses only sees the fire and hears the voice of the angel of YHWH (Exod 3:2-6)—, and when Gideon still receives YHWH's assurance that he will live and not die (Judg 6:20-24). This more convincing sign also elevates Gideon to a supreme position among the judges.<sup>46</sup>

Second, while in the Moses episode YHWH uses fire to attract Moses at the outset of the call (Exod 3:2-3), in the Gideon episode he uses fire to underline his authority to Gideon at the end of the call (Judg 6:21). Hence the fire motif does not serve as the point of departure but rather as a confirmation of YHWH's presence to Gideon, thus underlining the different point of departure between Moses and Gideon. While Moses is aware of YHWH's presence, Gideon needs additional proof that it is YHWH who calls him.

Third, Gideon's sign (תִּמְנָה) that he receives in watching the offering being consumed does not parallel the sign mentioned in Moses' call episode; both signs are arranged rather chiastically. Moses first receives the sign that the Israelites will worship YHWH at the very mountain where Moses is called (Exod 3:12) and then he receives two signs of authorisation (Exod 4:1-9). Moses' first—future-related—sign is a double sign to prove in retrospect first, that YHWH and not any other god has delivered Israel,<sup>47</sup> and second, that YHWH has foretold to be honoured and worshipped for his deliverance; and his second—present-related—sign consists of two signs to authorise Moses before the

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<sup>44</sup>This difference seems to have led RICHTER, *Berufungsberichte*, 158, to separate 6:14 from the pattern.

<sup>45</sup>For this rhetorical use of the interrogative particle הֲ, see GK §150e.

<sup>46</sup>MASSOT, "Gideon", 151.

<sup>47</sup>UMBERTO CASSUTO, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. ISRAEL ABRAHAMS (1967; reprint, Jerusalem: Magnes, 1987), 32.



Israelites. Gideon, on the contrary, only receives a sign of confirmation that it is indeed YHWH who commissions him; a sign that YHWH should be worshipped is missing. Yet it is provided in the following episode (6:25-32) where YHWH demands to be worshipped instead of Baal, who is—as already argued—mentioned as the primary example of any foreign god worshipped in Israel.

Hence the episode of Gideon's call provides a sufficiently clear parallel to the episode of Moses' call to let Gideon and his commission appear as on a par with Moses' call and his commission, so that Gideon's performance in delivering Israel from the Midianites and establishing YHWH worship will be compared and contrasted with Moses' success in delivering Israel from Egypt and establishing YHWH worship.<sup>48</sup> This expectation, however, will be disappointed at the end of the Gideon narrative when the narrator stresses the difference between the Moses and the Gideon episodes. While in the Moses narrative YHWH gets credited for his deliverance (Exod 14:30-31), in the Gideon narrative Gideon is honoured for YHWH's deliverance and Gideon's self-made idol will be worshipped instead of YHWH (Judg 8:22-27).

Let us now return to the beginning of the call episode. To soothe Gideon's fear that he must have felt when he realised that he had been discovered in the wine press by a stranger, the angel of YHWH immediately greets Gideon with a reference to YHWH. The first part of the greeting (יְהוָה עִמָּךְ וְגַדְתָּ הַקָּל, 6:12) may either be understood as the salutation 'YHWH be with you' or as the statement 'YHWH is with you'<sup>49</sup>. The angel may have meant it as a greeting, merely hinting at Gideon's courage and strength that he shows in beating out the wheat despite the danger of being discovered by the Midianites, yet he could also have meant that Gideon's strength is ultimately provided by god.<sup>50</sup> In this case the greeting attributes Gideon's performance in the forthcoming episodes to YHWH,<sup>51</sup> who accordingly should be honoured for the victory. Hence at this point, the

<sup>48</sup>BEYERLIN, "Geschichte": 9, drew a similar parallel, though he stressed the parallels in the deliverances from the oppressions rather than the parallels in Moses and Gideon as the deliverers.

<sup>49</sup>Thus, e.g. FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS *Jewish Antiquities* 5.213; similarly, KUTSCH, "Gideons Berufung und Altarbau": 77; followed by BEYERLIN, "Geschichte": 6; also HABEL, "Form": 297-323. KEIL, *Commentar*, 250, maintained its ambiguity, yet emphasised that the greeting served as a promise to Gideon; BOLING, *Judges*, 131, rather distinguished between fact and wish. — On the meaning of יְהוָה עִמָּךְ cf. Josh 1:14; 6:2; 8:3; 10:7; further, BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 135. — On the contrary, RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 147, n. 105, despite his brief but good discussion, described a יְהוָה עִמָּךְ as a "freien Grundbesitzer mit Weltpflicht und politischen Rechten"; and H. EISING, "הַקָּל *hajil*", in *ThWAT*, vol. 2: 906, advanced the meaning 'tüchtiger Mann'. RICHTER and EISING, however, did not distinguish between יְהוָה עִמָּךְ as in our text and יְהוָה עִמָּךְ as in many other passages (incl. 11:1), where their proposed meaning may well be intended.

<sup>50</sup>EISING, "הַקָּל *hajil*": 909-911, demonstrated that הַקָּל is frequently associated with God.

<sup>51</sup>HABEL, "Form": 299.



deliverance from the Midianites is defined as the means by which YHWH will call the Israelites to worship him alone.

This greeting first characterises Gideon as a mighty warrior, as the phrase גִּבּוֹר הַחַיִּל has a military connotation. However, it also contains a hint at Deut 8:18, where YHWH demands that the Israelites should remember that YHWH has given them the strength to produce wealth (חַיִּל). Gideon's courage to hide wheat from the oppressors, his strength to beat out wheat in a wine press, and the resulting comparative wealth of his family is thus perceived as ultimately coming from YHWH. The established hint further identifies Gideon's strength and wealth as YHWH's confirmation of his covenant with Israel that he had sworn to Israel's forefathers (אֲבֹתֶיךָ, Deut 8:18), and that he still upholds.

Gideon, however, interprets the angel's greeting either ironically or as a statement, but the general circumstances in which Gideon finds himself allow only for an ironical interpretation. Thus Gideon, not at all happy with this bitter irony, decides to take the greeting at face value and objects (בִּי)<sup>52</sup> both allegations.<sup>53</sup> Having picked up the angel's greeting (וַיֵּשׁ יְהוָה עִמָּנוּ, 6:13), however, Gideon will himself become an object of irony, when YHWH confirms that he will indeed be with Gideon (אֲדַרְכֶּךָ עִמָּךְ, 6:16) and equip him with his strength (6:14) to deliver Israel. In the narrative this confirmation ensures that it will be YHWH who will perform the deliverance through Gideon.

Yet first, Gideon argues that if indeed YHWH was with the Israelites, as the angel claims, they would not suffer under the Midianite oppression (6:13). This argumentation has a sarcastic or ironic undertone to it,<sup>54</sup> which shows that Gideon does not believe his visitor. It also hints at the prophecy recorded in the introduction to the Song of Moses (Deut 31:17), where Israel's suffering under their oppressors and their accusation of YHWH of having abandoned them is predicted.<sup>55</sup> This hint at the Deuteronomic Song of Moses, however, reveals that the narrated situation is a result of Israel's disobedience and it implies that Israel might be released from this situation when they repent and return to YHWH. Yet Gideon seems to be unaware of this connection as he does not question the reasons for the apparent absence of YHWH, but rather expects YHWH to continue his

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<sup>52</sup>While בִּי אֲדַרְכֶּךָ introduces a subservient request mostly to ward off an impending danger (Gen 43:20; 44:18; Num 12:11; Judg 6:13; 1 Sam 1:26; 1 Kgs 3:17,26; †), בִּי אֲדַרְכֶּךָ implies a polite objection towards YHWH combined with a request to eliminate the cause of the objection, since the objection implies that one is prepared to bear its consequences (Exod 4:10,13; Josh 7:8; Judg 6:[13,]15; 13:8; †); IRENE LANDE, *Formelhafte Wendungen der Umgangssprache im Alten Testament* (Doctoral dissertation, Universität Zürich, 1949; Leiden: Brill, 1949), 16-19.

<sup>53</sup>BUDDE, *Buch*, 54.

<sup>54</sup>MOORE, *Commentary*, 185, argued that וַיֵּשׁ here carried the meaning of "if he really is, as you say"; and BURNEY, *Judges*, 187, found a touch of sarcasm in the use of וַיֵּשׁ.

<sup>55</sup>KEIL, *Commentar*, 250.



mighty wonders. He thus becomes a model and representative of the Israelites, who after all have not yet shown any sign of repentance.

In his claim, Gideon takes up the words of the angel, who has addressed him personally (עָמַדְךָ, sg., 6:12), as if he had referred to the Israelites (עָמַדְכֶם, pl., 6:13). Yet it seems that Gideon does not simply misunderstand the angel because of a wrong comprehension of the angel's greeting, but rather that he deliberately quotes him incorrectly to avoid the apparent implication that the angel addresses and calls him personally to action. In his accusation, Gideon explicitly refers to YHWH's mighty wonders (נִפְלְאוֹת, 6:13) in Israel's narrated history that their fathers have passed on to Gideon's generation, and he points to the account of the exodus and in particular to YHWH's wonders in rescuing Israel out of Egypt (Exod 3:20), in driving out the Canaanites before the Israelites (Exod 34:10-11), and in bringing Israel into their land (Josh 3:5).<sup>56</sup> Thus Gideon seems to have understood the angel's hint at YHWH's covenant with his forefathers (6:12; cf. Deut 8:18), so that he rhetorically or ironically (אֵלֶיךָ, 6:13)<sup>57</sup> uses YHWH's miraculous acts in the narrated history, which were recalled in the prophet's rebuke of Israel (6:9), to prove YHWH has abandoned Israel and that accordingly the angel has not spoken correctly and must have meant his greeting ironically. With this reference Gideon also attempts to force YHWH to repeat his deliverance without involving him.

While Gideon recognises that the present oppression is due to YHWH's judgement, he blames YHWH for the oppression rather than recognising the prophet's message that only repentance and obedience to YHWH would lead to a better life.<sup>58</sup> Further, by not accepting the angel's claim that YHWH is with him despite the oppression, Gideon refers to the narrated situation rather than to the prophet's speech, so that it appears that Gideon has not heard the prophet's message.<sup>59</sup> Here Gideon once more becomes a model for the Israelites who now appear not to have listened to the prophet's speech at all.<sup>60</sup> Thus the narrator's omission of any record of Israel's repentance after the prophet's speech (6:7-10) indeed turns out to be a description of Israel's unwillingness and/or

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<sup>56</sup>MOSHE GARSIEL, "Homiletic Name-derivations as a Literary Device in the Gideon Narrative: Judges VI–VIII", *VT* 43, no. 3 (1993): 304, held that Gideon's reference to the fathers openly played on the name אָבִי הָעֶזְרָא; it seems, however, that in that name YHWH (or, Baal) is hinted at as father who is expected to provide help and that Gideon just referred to his forefathers who have told about YHWH's help in the past. The two references seem thus too far apart to interact with great significance.

<sup>57</sup>For this use of אֵלֶיךָ see GK §150e. The ironical sense of Gideon's speech is also supported by the use of אֵלֶיךָ in his earlier question; MOORE, *Commentary*, 185.

<sup>58</sup>Cf. BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '6:13'.

<sup>59</sup>Similarly, MARTIN, *Judges*, 81.

<sup>60</sup>KLEIN, *Triumph*, 50, pointed out that the prophet remained nameless and ineffective in the narrative.



unpreparedness to repent, and the required evidence that YHWH is god will indeed need to be provided in the following narrative.

In his reaction to Gideon's objection, the angel, now described as 'YHWH' by the narrator, turns his attention to ( $\{\sqrt{\text{פנה}} + \text{אָל}\}$ ) Gideon. While the narrative switch from the angel to YHWH underlines that YHWH himself is concerned about Gideon, the use of  $\{\sqrt{\text{פנה}} + \text{אָל}\}$  implies that YHWH directs his full attention towards Gideon with a favourable intention and that he accepts him and his objections.<sup>61</sup> This favourable intention is also expressed in the following call of Gideon that emphasises that Gideon shall deliver Israel in his own strength ( $\text{בְּחַדָּךְ זֶה}$ , 6:14).<sup>62</sup>

As opposed to  $\text{חֵיל}$ , the word that the angel uses in his greeting (6:12),  $\text{בָּה}$  is in particular used in connection with Israel's deliverance out of Egypt,<sup>63</sup> thus again hinting at the similarity of Gideon's commission to Moses' to deliver the Israelites from the oppression and implying that Gideon's strength is indeed YHWH's strength given to him for his task to deliver ( $\sqrt{\text{ישע}}$ ) Israel from the palm of Midian<sup>64</sup>. Hence the deliverance will be YHWH's, so that he alone should be given credit for the deliverance, though Gideon will perform it as YHWH's agent. The angel thus corrects Gideon's incorrect quotation of him (6:13) and emphasises that YHWH wants to involve Gideon personally. Yet at the same time the expression  $\{\text{בְּחַדָּךְ זֶה}\}$  (6:14) describes Gideon's strength as his own strength, and it thus also opens up the possibility for him to understand the call as if he will deliver Israel himself. This interpretation might be supported by the characterisation of Gideon as a mighty warrior (6:12) and by the observation that Gideon is commissioned to deliver Israel from exactly the state that he has observed and mentioned before, namely, from the  $\text{בְּרֵי מִדְיָן}$  into which Israel fell, according to him, because YHWH has

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<sup>61</sup>The meaning of  $\{\sqrt{\text{פנה}} + \text{אָל}\}$  does not necessarily include a physical motion of the subject towards the object. It rather expresses that the subject directs one's attention favourably to the object (i.e., of YHWH to Israel or the Psalmist, Lev 26:9; 1 Kgs 8:28; 13:23; Ps 25:16; or of Israel to idolatry, thus expressing their commitment to idolatry, Lev 20:6; Deut 31:20), whereas without the preposition it may also include an unfavourable intention (e.g., 2 Kgs 2:24) or the physical turn towards a direction (e.g., Judg 18:26). If a physical turn towards the object is still involved while it is described with  $\{\sqrt{\text{פנה}} + \text{אָל}\}$ , the expression merely serves to indicate the purpose of the physical turn, namely, to pay more attention to the object; the outcome of such an investigation, which may be positive or negative, is then given with  $\text{וְהִנֵּה}$  (Num 12:10; 2 Chr 26:20). Thus in 6:14, where the angel has already been talking to Gideon and is not turning to Gideon for the sake of an investigation, is not primarily the point that the angel turns physically to Gideon, as if he had been hiding himself or his face somehow before (KLEIN, *Triumph*, 51), but rather that he accepts Gideon and his objections. JORDAN, *Judges*, 118, even went a step further and implied that YHWH restored true fellowship with Gideon, but this is not evident in the text.

<sup>62</sup>NOWACK, *Richter*, 63.

<sup>63</sup>E.g., Exod 9:16; 32:11; Num 14:13; Deut 4:87; 9:29; 2 Kgs 17:36. HELMER RINGGREEN, "בָּה *koah*", in *ThWAT*, vol. 4: 135.

<sup>64</sup>Similarly, ENNS, *Judges*, 63.



abandoned Israel (6:13,14) and is not with them any more. Therefore, while the angel clarifies that YHWH is the source of Gideon's forthcoming performance, Gideon could have understood his commission as his call to deliver Israel himself, that is, to do YHWH's work with his own strength.<sup>65</sup>

The angel's final, possibly rhetorical, question, 'Have I not sent you' (אֵלַי, 6:14) thus becomes ambiguous as well. On the one hand, the angel picks up and reverses Gideon's rhetorical objection (6:13). Despite Gideon's perception that YHWH has abandoned Israel the angel stresses that YHWH sends and equips Gideon, so that not Gideon but rather YHWH will deliver Israel.<sup>66</sup> He underlines that YHWH demands a personal commitment from Gideon, he unveils Gideon's perception as false, and he reveals that YHWH is anxious about Israel again and is now sending Gideon to deliver Israel. However, with Gideon's interpretation that he will deliver Israel in his own strength, the question becomes separated from YHWH. Because YHWH has abandoned Israel and is not present any more, the angel sends Gideon to do YHWH's work and deliver Israel.

Yet by picking up the reference to *ישע*, Gideon again opposes the angel (6:15). This time, however, Gideon does not accuse the angel or YHWH any more; instead he becomes more careful in his response.<sup>67</sup> He opposes the angel's second point in his greeting where the angel has described him as a mighty man of strength, a mighty warrior. Instead of being strong, Gideon claims to be a member of the weakest (הַדָּל, 6:15; cf. 6:6)<sup>68</sup> clan in Manasseh and being the least in his family. The reference to his father's house (בֵּית אָבִי, 6:15) ironically further plays both on Joash's name and the narrator's introduction of his clan as *הַעֲזָרָי אָבִי הַעֲזָרָי* (6:11), and it indicates that Gideon does not expect anything good from his father's clan despite the Yahwistic names.<sup>69</sup> Through these hints, Gideon emphasises his weakness to present himself as the wrong choice for the deliverance. It is impossible for him, he appears to tell the angel, to accept the call and achieve the deliverance. Further, Gideon's hesitation demonstrates that he may well not succeed in the task of delivering Israel, so that the deliverance will be solely YHWH's work.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Similarly, BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 177, n. 128.

<sup>66</sup> Similarly, HABEL, "Form": 299.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. MCMILLION, "Judges 6–8", 185-192, who pointed to three steps of Gideon's encounter with the angel, as Gideon moved from belligerent rejection of the angel's claim that YHWH is with him through mild protest against his call to deliver Israel to the final recognition of YHWH as the god of Israel.

<sup>68</sup> HEINZ-JOSEF FABRY, "*דַּל* *dal*: דָּלָל *dālal*, דָּלָה *dallāh*, זָלָל *zālal*", in *ThWAT*, vol. 2: 231; usually the unworthiness is described with other words, such as קָטָן or נָעָר (ibid.).

<sup>69</sup> GARSIEL, "Name-derivations": 305.

<sup>70</sup> Similarly, HABEL, "Form": 300.



Therefore, in his response YHWH refuses to accept Gideon's argumentation either because his objection does not seem to be true in the first instance, since he has at least ten servants (6:27) and his father Joash is described as a wealthy man who despite the seven year long oppression still possesses valuable cattle (6:25) and exercises great influence in the Ophrahite community (6:31),<sup>71</sup> or because this point has already been dealt with by emphasising that YHWH has sent Gideon. This latter interpretation seems to be in mind, since YHWH repeats the angel's greeting (יהוה עִמָּךְ, 6:12) and ensures Gideon that he will be with him (אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ)<sup>72</sup> as he has been with Moses (cf. Exod 3:14) and Joshua (Deut 31:23; Josh 1:5; 3:7) and that, therefore, Gideon with YHWH's support will smite (√נכה hif.) the Midianites thoroughly as one man (בְּאִישׁ אֶחָד, 6:16). Gideon's objections are, therefore, invalid. It is not Gideon who will deliver Israel in his own strength, but rather YHWH who will empower him for his task of delivering Israel.<sup>73</sup> Although Gideon may take advantage of his personality and his clan, the deliverance will originate in and be achieved by YHWH. Furthermore, the parallels of √נכה hif. to Ehud's and Shamgar's successful attacks (3:29,31) puts Gideon on the same level as these two judges who are both said to have successfully delivered Israel.

Yet the addition, that Gideon will smite the Midianites as one man (בְּאִישׁ אֶחָד), introduces a new element into the narrative. This phrase recalls Num 14:15-16, where Moses predicts that if YHWH kills the Israelites בְּאִישׁ אֶחָד the other nations might assign this to YHWH's inability to provide for his nation. Hence this expression suggests a theological element that illustrates the superiority of one god over the other. The promise that YHWH will be with Gideon who will then smite the Midianites as one man, therefore, contains a strong hint at YHWH's decisive involvement in the victory and at the superiority of YHWH over the gods of the Midianites.

Having realised that his visitor means what he says, Gideon wants to validate that it is indeed YHWH who calls him and promises this tremendous support. He requests a sign of assurance that it is YHWH who is speaking to him and thus departs to prepare and ambiguously set a מִנְחָה before his visitor (וְהִנַּחְתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ, 6:18) to test whether it is YHWH or just a superior man who is speaking to him and is commissioning him.<sup>74</sup> Since the phrase {√נח + לְפָנַי} occurs in the Hebrew Scriptures only to describe a gift being deposited

<sup>71</sup>CUNDALL, "Commentary", 107; MASSOT, "Gideon", 34; BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '6:11'.

<sup>72</sup>RAYMOND ABBA, "The Divine Name Yahweh", *JBL* 80 (1961): 325, claimed that אֶהְיֶה served as the divine name that emphasised "a new covenant relationship between God and the people of Israel. God has visited his people; he has seen their afflictions and heard their cry; he knows their sufferings and is now about to deliver them".

<sup>73</sup>Similarly, HABEL, "Form": 301.

<sup>74</sup>Similarly, HERTZBERG, *Richter*, 192.



before YHWH,<sup>75</sup> the narrator gives Gideon's action a clear theological intention. On the other hand, a מִנְחָה is usually presented by a subject to a superior person (cf. 3:15,17,18) or to a god,<sup>76</sup> so that Gideon keeps open the option that he is bringing a present/offering either to YHWH or just to his (human) visitor.<sup>77</sup> The ambiguous meaning is further supported as Gideon prepares a food offering of unleavened bread, which might be presented/offered to either potential recipient; but the huge quantity of flour, far in excess of the needs of the occasion, might indicate Gideon's religious intention.<sup>78</sup> The whole scene thus gives the impression that Gideon allows for both a divine and a human visitor.

The decisive moment comes when Gideon returns and brings his present/offering. Here the narrator describes Gideon's action not as a presentation before a divine messenger (√חנן, cf. 6:18), but rather ambiguously as 'setting down/offering' (√שג, 6:19). He also repeats the already given information that this scene takes place under the terebinth, thus setting the issue of the present/offering directly into an idolatrous context. Thus Gideon may appear to intend to bring his gift to a foreign god, so as to test how his visitor would react on his intention. However, by having described the angel as YHWH and having recorded Gideon's preparation of an ambiguous מִנְחָה, the narrator has invited the audience, who already knows the true identity of the visitor, to understand the מִנְחָה as an offering to YHWH, which Gideon intends to place before the divine messenger. Therefore, through the setting of the offering into an idolatrous context, the narrative gains an unexpected tension, since now also the audience wants to know how the angel would react in order to prove his divine commission. By further describing Gideon's action with the ambiguously vocalised שָׁגַי (6:19), indicating a combination<sup>79</sup> of 'to draw near' (\*שָׁגַי, qal)<sup>80</sup> and 'to bring <an offering>' (\*שָׁגַי, hif.)<sup>81</sup>, the narrator even draws

<sup>75</sup>Exod 16:33,(34); Num 17:22; Deut 26:4,10; 1 Sam 10:25; †.

<sup>76</sup>LEONHARD ROST, *Studien zum Opfer im Alten Israel*, BWANT 113 (Stuttgart [et al.]: Kohlhammer, 1981), 18; cf. RICHARD E. AVERBECK, "מִנְחָה", in *NIDOTTE*, vol. 2: 978-990. — GB<sup>17</sup>, 961, 980, lists מִנְחָה as the only word that may mean both 'present' and 'offering'; however, שָׁג may also be used to describe gifts to YHWH, even though in a non-cultic context only (Isa 18:7; Ps 68:30; 76:12; †), so that מִנְחָה remains as the only word used for an ordinary 'present' and a cultic 'offering'.

<sup>77</sup>Cf. MOORE, *Commentary*, 187-188; KITTEL, "Richter", 381. — While ROST, *Studien*, 20-22, allowed only for the cultic intention, WOLFGANG ZWICKEL, *Der Tempelkult in Kanaan und Israel: Studien zur Kultgeschichte Palästinas von der Mittelbronzezeit bis zum Untergang Judas*, FAT 10 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1994), 286-287, strongly argued for a purely profane intention.

<sup>78</sup>BURNEY, *Judges*, 192; A. EHRLICH, *Randglossen*, 91. D. R. AP-THOMAS, "The Ephah of Meal in Judges VI. 19", *JThS* 41 (1940): 176, observed that "the rich Abraham only ordered this quantity to be baked for three guests".

<sup>79</sup>Thus SOGGIN, *Judges*, 116.

<sup>80</sup>Thus Ⓞ<sup>B</sup>.



Gideon's uncertainty before the audience. The tension is further heightened through the lack of the object of the verb<sup>82</sup> and through the position of the verb at the end of the verse. Thus the sentence ambiguously opens the options that Gideon sets down/offers his present/offering either to a foreign god (under the terebinth) or to the angel (being his visitor), but not to YHWH (as it is not offered on any altar). These ambiguous elements together function to create a tension in the narrative that is similar to Gideon's tension. However, since the audience already knows the identity of the angel, their attention is directed towards the question how the angel will confirm that he is representing YHWH, that is, that YHWH and not any other god accepts the offering and hence calls Gideon.

This tension created, the narrator records that the angel declines Gideon's offering under the terebinth and instead instructs him to take up the offering again and place it on a rock (עֲלֵךְ) instead (6:20). The qualification of the rock as רֶקֶב describes it as being located nearby, but out of the reach of the terebinth (cf. 2 Kgs 4:25; Dan 8:16).<sup>83</sup> Only there, away from the terebinth, does the angel allow the offering. However, the angel does not accept the food offering as a personal present that he would eat, but rather initiates its consumption by fire. It is thus made evident that YHWH accepts (אָכַל; lit., 'eats') it.<sup>84</sup> The narrator further stresses this interpretation by using the noun צֹר here (6:21) instead of the noun עֲלֵךְ that is used to record the angel's command (6:20), as צֹר is frequently used in connection with the immediate presence of YHWH.<sup>85</sup> Following YHWH's acceptance of the meal, Gideon recognises the visitor as a divine messenger, so that his מִנְחָה is identified as an offering to YHWH rather than to any other god or as a gift to his human visitor.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Thus  $\vartheta$ ;  $\varsigma$ ;  $\tau$ ; cf. the probably theologically motivated rendering of  $\Theta^A$ , προσεκύνησεν.

<sup>82</sup> SCHMIDT, *Erfolg*, 28, proposed to add  $\text{לֵךְ}$  or  $\text{לְפָנָיו}$ ; yet both proposals would remove the ambiguity of the text, as they would exclude the reference to the terebinth (אֵלֶּה, fem.), which the narrator has just mentioned.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 137: "Der Engel befiehlt dem Gideon die Speise auf den Felsen da zu legen" (italics by BERTHEAU); A. EHRLICH, *Randglossen*, 91.

<sup>84</sup> This implication would still be valid if Baal was also seen as a god of fire as outlined by LEAH BRONNER, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha as Polemics against Baal Worship*, POS 6 (D.Lit. thesis, Pretoria University, [1966?]; Leiden: Brill, 1968), 54-65, since the narrator establishes a contrast between the pagan terebinth and the offering on the rock out of reach of that terebinth. In fact, it is even suggested that YHWH and not Baal has the power over fire (cf. *ibid.*, 63); therefore, Gideon is convinced that indeed YHWH accepts the offering.

<sup>85</sup> Exod 17:6 (cf. Ps 78:15; 105:41); 33:21,22; Deut 32:4,15,18,30,31<sup>2nd</sup>(31<sup>1st</sup>,37, of foreign gods) (cf. 2 Sam 22:3,32,47 || Ps 18:3,32,47; Isa 17:10; 26:4; 30:29). A. S. VAN DER WOUDE, "צֹר *šūr* Fels", in *THAT*, vol. 2: 538-543; E. HAAG, "עֲלֵךְ *sæla*", in *ThWAT*, vol. 5: 872-880; HEINZ-JOSEF FABRY, "צֹר *šūr*", in *ThWAT*, vol. 6: 973-983.

<sup>86</sup> ROLF RENDTORFF, *Studien zur Geschichte des Opfers im Alten Israel*, WMANT 24 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1967), 194.



Hence the episode of Gideon's offering has mainly a theological purpose. Although Gideon presents his offering under the terebinth dedicated to a foreign god, the angel takes action and advises Gideon to remove it from the presence of this god and place it onto a rock, which represents YHWH. Only there, in a context completely away from any other god does the angel accept the offering, where, of course, it is not the angel, but rather YHWH who accepts it. This is to ensure that no god accepts the offering, although the offering is first presented to him. Instead, the offering is taken away from the god, offered according to the instructions of the angel of YHWH, and then actively taken by YHWH. YHWH, so to speak, snatches away the offering to the foreign god and takes it for himself. This implies that this god, who appears to be unable to accept an offering or to prevent an offering presented to him from being snatched away, is not god, and that YHWH, who takes the offering for himself, is rather god.

The narrator also establishes a link to the Deuteronomic Song of Moses (Deut 32) once more, where צור is used as a *Leitmotiv*.<sup>87</sup> In this song, YHWH is primarily described as a caring and protecting god, who has created Israel and protects, nurtures and provides for the people of god. Hence the hint at that song ascribes characteristics to YHWH that demonstrate that he will care and provide for Israel according to their needs. In our context, by having YHWH accept the offering as the צור, the narrator describes YHWH as promising to care for Israel despite Gideon's different conception (6:13) and providing sufficient food again by removing the obstacle (cf. 6:3-6) through the deliverance of Israel from their oppressors. The reference to Moses' song thus supports the description of YHWH as the god of deliverance (cf. 6:14,16). Furthermore, in the Song of Moses YHWH is described as the real, solid, and only true צור, before the poet gradually switches to the ironic description of foreign gods as צור, indicating that they are in fact 'not-צור'<sup>88</sup>, or, non-gods. In our context, this reference condemns Israel's choice of foreign gods and calls for Israel's repentance and their return to YHWH as the only and true rock. Further, the song predicts Israel's idolatry and the waste of the land. The link to the Song of Moses, therefore, assesses Israel's narrated situation once more as the consequence of their idolatry and abandonment of YHWH as their god. Yet by now recording with the *hapax legomenon* פַּרְה־צוֹר (6:21) that fire comes out from the rock, which is located out of the reach of the foreign god, the narrator stresses that YHWH has taken extraordinary action to reveal that he himself is the god who accepts the offering.<sup>89</sup> This extraordinary

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<sup>87</sup>For the interpretation of צור in the Song of Moses, see the extensive study of VESTA MARIE HOREJS KOWALSKI, "Rock of Ages: A Theological Study of the Word *Tsur* צור as a Metaphor for Israel's God" (Ph.D. dissertation, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1996; Microfiche), 196-215.

<sup>88</sup>KOWALSKI, "Rock", 211 *et seq.*

<sup>89</sup>Cf. KOWALSKI, "Rock", 73.



action persuasively assures Gideon that he is indeed called by YHWH and not by any other god or any human visitor to deliver Israel, so that he can not ignore his call any more and does not need to be concerned about his own incapability any more.

Accordingly, Gideon recognises his visitor as the angel of YHWH and he is afraid that he must die therefore. Yet YHWH offers him his peace (שָׁלוֹם) and so ensures him that he is safe<sup>90</sup> and will not die (6:23). This expresses that Gideon is safe in the presence of YHWH<sup>91</sup> despite seeing him and talking to him and despite the oppression by the Midianites. Hence Gideon builds an altar to YHWH, which he calls יהוה שָׁלוֹם, 'YHWH is Peace' (6:24). This altar thus becomes a symbol of YHWH's promise to deliver Israel from their oppressors<sup>92</sup> and a symbol for the renewal of YHWH's covenant with Israel. The added emphasis by the narrator, that the altar is there 'to this day', which is achieved through its emphasised position at the beginning of the sentence, underlines in retrospect that YHWH has kept his word and has indeed delivered Israel, that YHWH's claim, that his presence is secure, is still valid, and that, therefore, YHWH's covenant with Israel is still valid. In contrast, the terebinth is not mentioned any more in the narrative.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, only YHWH is god and should be worshipped.

Hence in this episode YHWH calls Gideon out of an idolatrous context and makes him a YHWH worshipper amidst a still idolatrous community,<sup>94</sup> though Gideon remains a reluctant worshipper, who will continue to oppose and test YHWH.<sup>95</sup> The second mentioning of Ophrah as a town of the Abiezrites in this episode (עִפְרַת אֲבֵי הָעֶזְרָי, 6:24) echoes the first reference (6:11) and forms an inclusion around the account of Gideon's call.<sup>96</sup> Since in the first reference the expression stands for the idolatry in Gideon's home town, the second reference reminds one of this idolatrous setting of Gideon's call. Further, it is significant that the name עִפְרַת is not used in the following narrative any more before it reappears when Gideon re-establishes idolatry (8:27). It seems, therefore,

<sup>90</sup>MOORE, *Commentary*, 189; BOLING, *Judges*, 134.

<sup>91</sup>Thus SOGGIN, *Judges*, 122.

<sup>92</sup>MASSOT, "Gideon", 38.

<sup>93</sup>The terebinths mentioned 9:6,37 do not have any narrative connection with those mentioned 6:11,19, since the narrator names each terebinth in ch. 9, which distinguishes them from the nameless terebinths in ch. 6; against KLEIN, *Triumph*, 53.

<sup>94</sup>Similarly, WILHELM FRANKENBERG, *Die Composition des deuteronomischen Richterbuches (Richter II, 6 – XVI), nebst einer Kritik von Richter XVII – XXI* (Marburg: Elwert, 1895), 14.

<sup>95</sup>MCMILLION, "Judges 6–8", 173, recognised this "question of the relationship between Gideon and the Lord" when he asked, "Why is there no further dialogue between Gideon and the Lord after 6:11-24? Is everything settled there? Do these two have an uneasy peace between them? Each makes demands or sets tests for the other, but there is no dialogue".

<sup>96</sup>BOLING, *Judges*, 134; WEBB, *Book*, 148-149; MASSOT, "Gideon", 34, 42.



as if the narrator carefully avoids any reference to עִפְרָה in the episodes of YHWH's deliverance and instead refers to Ophrah simply as הָעִיר (6:27,28,30); a city with YHWH as its god is, so to speak, not deserted.

Hence following the reprimanding speech of the prophet, in the call episode Gideon is called out in the midst of a constantly idolatrous community to deliver Israel with YHWH's strength. The call episode emphasises Gideon's reluctance and weakness, so that it is not Gideon who will deliver Israel, but rather YHWH, who calls him and promises to equip him with his divine power. The episode of the presentation and acceptance of Gideon's offering underlines Gideon's call and reveals that the foreign gods are powerless or even not existent, and that it is YHWH who accepts the offering. The forthcoming deliverance of Israel will thus be achieved by YHWH alone, though only with Gideon as his agent.

*b Identifying the Theological Theme: YHWH is God rather than Baal  
(6:25-27)*

Having recorded how YHWH, being the real god, calls Gideon to worship him and to deliver Israel from the Midianites, the narrator continues the narrative by recording YHWH's immediate demand to be worshipped exclusively instead of any foreign god. Yet this episode is not necessary for the understanding of the plot if the narrative had the deliverance from the Midianites as its theme. Therefore, the very presence of this episode supports the theological theme of the narrative as a narrative to show that YHWH is god instead of any foreign god.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, following the rather general references to foreign gods and idolatry in the introduction and the call episode, this episode contains the first reference to Baal in the Gideon narrative. This implies—as already said—that the narrative will now focus on Baalism as an example of Israel's general idolatry.

At the outset of the scene and thus immediately following on Gideon's call, YHWH requests Gideon to take immediate action and pull down the sacred places of Baal, namely, Baal's altar and the Asherah, build an altar to YHWH on that very place, and offer a sacrifice to YHWH on it (6:25-26). Thus Gideon shall proclaim that YHWH has proven to him that he is god rather than Baal and a god who does not tolerate any Baal cult but rather demands to be worshipped exclusively.<sup>98</sup>

These verses, however, have been subject to much discussion. Especially YHWH's first command, the extensive description of the bull, which does not seem to provide any important information for the narrative, and in particular the description of the bull as the

<sup>97</sup>Cf. O'CONNELL, *Rhetoric*, 139-171 (esp. 152); BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '6:25-32'.

<sup>98</sup>KEIL, *Commentar*, 254; GOSLINGA, *Judges*, 329; SCHMIDT, *Erfolg*, 18.



'second bull' (מ השני) require clarification.<sup>99</sup> The command reads קח את־פֶּרֶה־הַשּׁוֹר אֲשֶׁר לְאָבִיךָ וּפֶרֶה־הַשּׁוֹר שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים (6:25αα-β). Since שׁוֹר may be used as a collective noun,<sup>100</sup> פֶּרֶה־הַשּׁוֹר may easily be rendered 'the bull of the herd'. But what is the significance of the second description of the same or another bull as being both מ השני and שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים? And what is the relationship between 'the bull of the herd, that belongs to your father' (פֶּרֶה־הַשּׁוֹר אֲשֶׁר לְאָבִיךָ) and 'the second bull, seven years old' (וּפֶרֶה־הַשּׁוֹר שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים)? Is this only one bull or are these two different bulls? For in the following verses only הַפֶּרֶה הַשֵּׁנִי is mentioned (6:26,28 מ) with no first bull even hinted at.

These problems have been dealt with extensively.<sup>101</sup> For example, with regard to the understanding of מ השני, some commentators delete the problematic מ השני in all three verses and read the second part either as an explication of the one bull or allow for two bulls.<sup>102</sup> However, since this emendation would involve changes in no less than three verses, it seems unlikely that it reconstructs the original text.<sup>103</sup> Further, the addition of מ השני to a *Vorlage* can not be explained easily, so that מ should be given preference as the *lectio difficilior*. Similar objections may be held against an emendation of מ השני to read דָּשָׁן\* (6:25; 'fat'), דָּשָׁן\* (6:28; 'fat'),<sup>104</sup> or הִשְׁמִין\* ('fattened'),<sup>105</sup> each following ⓐ (τὸν στυγερόν, 6:25; ὁ στυγερός, 6:28),<sup>106</sup> that, however, still involves three changes. Others retain the problematic מ השני but read אֶת־פֶּרֶה־הַשּׁוֹר\* for אֶת־פֶּרֶה־הַשּׁוֹר, thus deleting the determination of the attribute, and וּפֶרֶה הַשֵּׁנִי\* for הַפֶּרֶה הַשֵּׁנִי, thus replacing the *waw* with the

<sup>99</sup>Thus, e.g., RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 157-160, capitulated after a good discussion of the options when he remarked that the extensive seemingly unimportant introduction of the one bull remained striking. — For a recent summary of the main proposals to understand YHWH's first command, see NUNZIO FARANDA BELLOFIGLIO, "The Gideon and Abimelech Narratives: The Contribution of Form Critical Analysis to the Current Debate on the Late Dating of Biblical Historiography as Illustrated in a Study of Judges VI–IX" (PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 1994), 204-216.

<sup>100</sup>GB<sup>17</sup>, s.v. שׁוֹר; HALAT, s.v. שׁוֹר; JEFFREY S. LU, "שׁוֹר", in *NIDOTTE*, vol. 4: 72, with references.

<sup>101</sup>For a discussion of ⓐ and a proposal to reconstruct the history of מ, see OTTO PRETZL, "Septuagintaprobleme im Buch der Richter: Die griechischen Handschriftengruppen im Buch der Richter untersucht nach ihrem Verhältnis zu einander [*sic*]", *Biblica* 7 (1926): 371-372; and for a summary of several proposals to understand מ, see JOHN ADNEY EMERTON, "The 'Second Bull' in Judges 6, 25-28", *Eretz* 14 (1978): 52\*-55\*.

<sup>102</sup>E.g., OETTLI, *Richter*, 251; BURNEY, *Judges*, 194-195; and, more recently, SCHMIDT, *Erfolg*, 6.

<sup>103</sup>ALFRED GUILLAUME, "A Note on הַפֶּרֶה הַשֵּׁנִי, Judges VI. 25, 26, 28", *JThS* 50 (1949): 52; EMERTON, "Second Bull": 52\*.

<sup>104</sup>WERNER CARL LUDWIG ZIEGLER, "Bemerkungen über das Buch der Richter aus dem Geist des Heldenalters: Nebst Beurtheilung der griechischen Versionen und ihrer Abweichung vom Originaltext", chap. in *Theologische Abhandlungen* (Göttingen: Dietrich, 1791), vol. 1, 318.

<sup>105</sup>J. GRAY, *Judges*, 288.

<sup>106</sup>The attributes are missing in 6:26, and ⓐ<sup>AO</sup> add τὸν δεύτερον in 6:25. ⓐ<sup>B</sup> renders τὸν μόσχον τὸν ταῦρον (6:25) and τὸν μόσχον τὸν δεύτερον (6:26,28), following מ more closely.



definite article, so that only one bull is described throughout the command.<sup>107</sup> Yet this explanation does not provide an answer to the question why the bull is described as the second bull while no mention is made of a first bull. Still other proposals suggest extensive emendations that, however, are not supported by any of the versions, require too many changes, and even involve contextual problems.<sup>108</sup> Again others retain the text and interpret the *waw* as an explicative or exegetical *waw*.<sup>109</sup> This reading explains that there is only one bull, namely, the פֶּרֶה־שֵׁנִי that belongs to Gideon's father and that is the second bull (ז' הַשָּׁנִי), seven years old. This solution would account for the determined ז' הַשָּׁנִי (ז'), since the reference would be to the just mentioned פֶּרֶה־שֵׁנִי.<sup>110</sup> Yet again, this solution does not explain why the bull, being the only bull mentioned in the narrative, is three times described as the second bull.

Accordingly there have been proposals to re-vocalise the problematic ז' הַשָּׁנִי (ז'). One attempt was to read ז' הַשָּׁנִי\* (שְׁנֵה, 'aged'), thus 'and an aged bull, [aged] seven years'.<sup>111</sup> But this proposal has not been accepted since the expected wording would include בֵּן<sup>112</sup> and the proposed translation does not explain that the word occurs twice without any reference to the bull's age. A widely overlooked proposal derived ז' הַשָּׁנִי (ז') from שְׁנֵה III, vocalised it \*הַשָּׁנִי, and translated it "glänzend von Fett";<sup>113</sup> the advantage of this proposal is that it would allow for the rendering of ⓐ (τὸν μόσχον τὸν στυτυτόν). A full century later a similar and then widely accepted solution proposed that the problematic ז' הַשָּׁנִי (ז') be derived from a שְׁנִי II not found in Hebrew but in Arabic (شنى) and hence be

<sup>107</sup>Cf. BOLING, *Judges*, 129, 134.

<sup>108</sup>E.g., KUENEN, cit. in BUDDE, *Buch*, 56, proposed to read קח עֲשֶׂה אֲנָשִׁים מֵעֲבָדֶיךָ וּפָר שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים\*; this view was adopted, for example, by NOWACK, *Richter*, 66, and BURNEY, *Judges*, 194-195. FRIEDRICH DELITZSCH, *Die Lese- und Schreibfehler im Alten Testament: Nebst den dem Schrifttexte einverleibten Randnoten klassifiziert. Ein Hilfsbuch für Lexikon und Grammatik, Exegese und Lektüre* (Berlin [et al.]: de Gruyter, 1920), §153c, interpreted פֶּרֶ שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים as an accidentally inserted marginal note that subsequently had been harmonised with the original text by the threefold insertion of ז' הַשָּׁנִי; JOSEPH SCHREINER, *Septuaginta-Massora des Buches der Richter: Eine textkritische Studie*, AnBib 7 (Doctoral dissertation, Universität Würzburg, n.d.; Roma: Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1957), 33-34, started from ⓐ's τὸν μόσχον τὸν στυτυτόν (6:25); EMERTON, "Second Bull": 54\*-55\*, who was followed by BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '6:25-26', read שֶׁבַע\* ('to be exalted, of high rank') for שֶׁבַע; and J. GRAY, *Judges*, 288, proposed קח אֶת־פָּרָה הַזֹּכִיר אֲשֶׁר לְאַבְדִּי\*, although Purah does not reappear before 7:10 and there only as a minor character. — On a general evaluation of these proposals, see RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 158.

<sup>109</sup>E.g., KEIL, *Commentar*, 253; MOORE, *Commentary*, 192; BOLING, *Judges*, 129; cf. GK §154a, n. 1b.

<sup>110</sup>Cf. GK §134k.

<sup>111</sup>EWALD, *Geschichte*, 540, n. 3.

<sup>112</sup>MOORE, *Commentary*, 192.

<sup>113</sup>STUDER, *Richter*, 186; cf. HALAT, s.v. שְׁנֵה III.



vocalised \*הַשְּׂנִי ('to be full-grown').<sup>114</sup> Both solutions, which are somewhat related since they assume a well-fed bull, keep the consonantal text and provide a solution for the threefold occurrence of that word. If in the following discussion further inner evidence can be found to support these proposals, they should be accepted.

By closely reading the first part of YHWH's command one may detect a parallel structure that may be outlined as follows (6:25 מ):

קח	את־פַּר־הַשּׁוֹר	אֲשֶׁר	לְאָבִיךָ	A
	וּפַר	הַשְּׂנִי	שֶׁבַע	שָׁנִים
	וְהִרְסָתָּ	אֶת־מִזְבַּח	הַבַּעַל	אֲשֶׁר
	לְאָבִיךָ			B
	וְאֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרָה	אֲשֶׁר־עָלְיוֹ	תְּכַרֵּת:	B'

As the outline shows, 6:25 is composed of two parallelisms. The second parallelism (B) displays an outer chiasmic structure and an inner synthetic parallelism. Gideon shall pull down the altar of Baal and the Asherah he shall cut down. Both objects are further distinguished as the altar of Baal that belongs to Gideon's father and the Asherah that stands beside the altar. With the second command being identified as a parallelism, it seems likely now that the first command (A), which describes the bull or bulls, displays a parallelism, too. There we find the predicate קח of the first line as the governing verb for both the parallel descriptions of the bull or bulls. The second line begins with a *waw* that in conjunction with the determined attribute הַשְּׂנִי might be interpreted as an explicative or emphatic *waw*. Both parallel lines are continued with the undetermined head noun פַּר followed first by a determined and then by an undetermined attribute. Hence both lines may indeed be interpreted as parallels that should complement each other rather than describe two different objects. The described object would then be one bull only, described in both lines. However, this interpretation of the outer structure needs to be supported by further inner evidence, which we shall try to find in a close reading of the command. If we can find this evidence, the major stress lies on the parallel structure of the command and its interpretation as a parallelism, which would indicate that there is only one bull described.

First, the reference is to a פַּר־הַשּׁוֹר that belongs to Gideon's father. While this *hapax legomenon* describes the animal as a young bull<sup>115</sup> of Joash's herd, the reference is still remarkable and deserves more attention. The discussed emendations of the consonantal text require extensive changes of the text and introduce a new character or a different setting that do not reappear in this context, so that they are not satisfactory. By investigating this expression, we find that an offering to YHWH frequently consists of a

<sup>114</sup>GUILLAUME, "Note": 52-53; followed by HALAT, s.v. שְׂנִי II; cf. טJon, that translates השני twice, first as הַשְּׂנִי and then as הַשְּׂנִי, and thus reads וְהוֹרָא תַנִּינָא דִּאֲחַפְסִים שֶׁבַע שָׁנִין.

<sup>115</sup>GB<sup>17</sup>, s.v. פַּר; HALAT, s.v. פַּר.



פָּר,<sup>116</sup> so that the reference to the bull as פָּר qualifies it as an animal that ought to be offered to YHWH alone. In that case, the use of the noun אָב alone, despite the evident reference to Joash, also allows for YHWH as Gideon's father and might indicate that the real owner of the bull is YHWH, or that YHWH claims the bull for himself. In that case, YHWH's claim on the bull would parallel the command in the second line to sacrifice it. Further, with the further description of the bull as of הַשּׂוֹר the narrator draws a link to the only other evidence of this noun in Judges, where it is used to illustrate the severity of the oppression, when the Midianites do not leave any שׂוֹר (6:4). Thus this bull as a member of the still spared שׂוֹר is left along with the Israelites and so becomes a sheltered symbol of the oppression.

The second line refers to פָּר הַשְּׁנִי שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים. The second attribute, שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים, describes the bull as being seven years old and thus exactly as old as the Midianite oppression (6:1). That this hint is intended is obvious if one observes that the age is normally given as {שָׁנָה + בֵּן}, so that the omission of בֵּן leaves the same wording as in 6:1 (שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים). Furthermore, a sacrifice of a seven year old bull is nowhere commanded in the Law. Hence the symbolic character of the bull being as old as the oppression takes precedence over the observance of the Law, and the attribute qualifies the bull as a reminder of the length of the oppression. With this intention it parallels the first attribute of the first line, which also functions as a reminder of the oppression.

The first attribute of the second line, הַשְּׁנִי, might then be interpreted as the reference to the bull that is seven years old and that, according to the Massoretic vocalisation הַשְּׁנִי, happens to be the second one. Only this highly symbolic bull and not any other bull should be taken. However, as in the course of the narrative only one bull is mentioned, it would seem odd that the narrator records three times that it is the second bull that is in focus (6:25,26,28), which leads to the question, why the narrator mentions this seemingly unimportant designation rather than the characterisation that suits better his theological purpose, namely, that the bull is seven years old and thus as old as the oppression. It seems, therefore, that הַשְּׁנִי characterises the bull similarly well or even better. These considerations let it appear more likely even on internal grounds that הַשְּׁנִי (ז) should rather be derived from שְׁנָה III ('shining') or שְׁנִי ('full-grown') and be vocalised \*הַשְּׁנִי. It would then refer to a full-grown, or, fattened animal, perhaps at an age where it may be

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<sup>116</sup>Lev 4; 16; Num 7; 28; 29; *et al.* HALAT, s.v. פָּר, and JEFFREY S. LU, "פָּר", in *NIDOTTE*, vol. 3: 671, demonstrated that פָּר described a 'sacrificial animal' in most occurrences in the Hebrew Scriptures; that the bull is designed to be sacrificed was also seen by SLOTKI, "Judges", 211, and JORDAN, *Judges*, 124, who even described it as an atonement offering for Israel's apostasy; yet the description of the offering as an עֲלָה (6:26) describes it in a rather general sense so that it might rather serve the general purpose as an offering to YHWH in the context of Israel's general apostasy.



sacrificed.<sup>117</sup> Since the context draws a rather Baalist picture, the bull might be destined to be sacrificed to Baal,<sup>118</sup> perhaps at the time the oppression would end; yet the first line declares YHWH's claim on the bull, thus anticipating that YHWH and not Baal will end the oppression and supporting YHWH's claim to be worshipped instead of Baal.<sup>119</sup> As the bull is furthermore described as 'full-grown' exactly at an age that corresponds to the duration of the oppression, this attribute may also be applied to the oppression, which then appears as 'full-grown', too; like the bull, that is ready to be sacrificed to YHWH, the oppression is ready to be terminated by YHWH.

It seems, therefore, that there is one bull only that is characterised as the young bull of the herd that belongs to Gideon's father, namely, the full-grown bull, seven years old. The one bull is characterised four times, and hence receives an extraordinarily complex treatment in the narrative, which lends the bull a remarkable importance. The importance, of course, lies in him being a symbol of Israel's oppression and a potential offering to Baal at first, yet through his sacrifice to YHWH instead of Baal becoming a symbol for YHWH's forthcoming deliverance of Israel and his claim to be worshipped as god instead of Baal. The bull thus indeed becomes a symbol for YHWH's power and his superiority over Baal.

With the introduction of the bull identified as a promise that YHWH will deliver Israel and as the manifestation of YHWH's claim to be worshipped instead of Baal, the second command, namely to pull down Baal's altar and to cut down the Asherah beside it, appears as the logical consequence. If YHWH manages to deliver Israel as he has promised (6:14,16), he is god and Baal is not. Therefore, the worship of the foreign gods should cease and its cult objects be destroyed (6:25). On their very place (הַקָּדָשׁ) an altar to YHWH should be built on top of the rubble and the highly symbolic bull offered upon it with the wood of the Asherah (6:26). This arrangement further reveals that YHWH is superior to the Canaanite gods,<sup>120</sup> as his altar is built on top of the rubble of the Baal altar, and the fire is fed by the wood of the Asherah, so that the Asherah is burned on YHWH's altar and sacrificed to YHWH.

In this scene, the narrator once more seems to play on the name גִּדְעוֹן, as Gideon completely crushes Baal's altar and grinds up the Asherah. Therefore, although once again no verbal connection is established between Gideon's name and his action, his

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<sup>117</sup>GUILLAUME, "Note": 52, n. 5.

<sup>118</sup>BUSH, *Judges*, 90; FAUSSET, *Judges*, 108; CUNDALL, "Commentary", 107; ENNS, *Judges*, 65.

<sup>119</sup>Similarly, ENNS, *Judges*, 65, who, however, only recognised one side, as he only claimed that Gideon's action was "a judgement on the Canaanite deity"; cf. A. EHRlich, *Randglossen*, 92-93.

<sup>120</sup>Similarly, SCHMIDT, *Erfolg*, 15: "Es liegt [...] eine Abwertung Baals vor, eine Bestreitung des Anspruches, daß auch Baal Gott ist".



name still hints at his action. Gideon becomes the 'Hacker, Hearer' of the Baal cult objects and the 'Destroyer' of the Baal cult as such.<sup>121</sup>

Gideon obeys YHWH's command, cuts down the altar, builds an altar to YHWH in its place, and offers the full-grown bull on it (6:27-28). However, as the narrator emphasises (6:27), Gideon only acts as the agent of YHWH, so that not Gideon is in the foreground of the narrative, but rather YHWH.<sup>122</sup> Instead of immediately obeying YHWH's command, Gideon first gathers ten men of his servants to support him. He then tears down the altar only at night, for he is afraid of his father and the citizens of his town, who still worship Baal; and what Gideon feared indeed becomes reality when the offended Baalists demand his death because of his action.<sup>123</sup> Thus the narrator once more indicates that Gideon would not have broken down Baal's altar, had he not been called by YHWH, who appears as the main character in the narrative. Further, by commanding Gideon to build the altar to YHWH on the very place of the former altar to Baal, YHWH replaces Baal worship with YHWH worship. The purpose of YHWH's command is thus recognised as a two-sided theological theme, namely, the removal of idolatry as represented by the Baal-altar, and the establishment of the worship of YHWH instead. Since Gideon's action leads to the explicit specification of this theme (6:30-32), YHWH's command prepares it.

With this action, however, YHWH's claim to be worshipped instead of Baal is achieved. YHWH has destroyed the altar to Baal and has established the prerequisites to be worshipped as god instead. Hence YHWH's position for the subsequent narrative is defined, though the theme of the narrative still needs to be specified and made tangible in the narrative. Hence the following episode will focus on the specification of the theme.

*c The Theological Theme is Specified and made Tangible (6:28-32)*

Following on Gideon's destruction of the Baal altar and the building of the altar to YHWH, the Baalists only recognise (following וְהִנֵּה) that their cult objects have been demolished, that is, the altar to Baal has been broken down (נִהְרָס), the Asherah cut down, and another altar built on which the bull has been sacrificed (6:28). By recording at

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<sup>121</sup> Similarly, SCHULZ, *Richter*, 41; GARSIEL, "Name-derivations": 305; DANIEL I. BLOCK, "Will the Real Gideon Please Stand Up?: Narrative Style and Intention in Judges 6–9", *JETS* 40, no. 3 (1997): 356. — It may be conjectured, therefore, that neither 'Gideon' nor 'Jerubbaal' is the real name of Joash's son, but that both names are coined by the narrator. The full replacement of a real name through an artificial name is not uncommon in Judges, as, for instance, Othniel's enemy carries an artificial name (3:8), the king of the Moabites is referred to with the belittling name עֲגֹלָן ('calf', 3:12), and in the Gideon narrative the Midianite princes and kings carry coined names (7:25; 8:6). For further examples, see p. 146, n. 13.

<sup>122</sup> Similarly, SCHMIDT, *Erfolg*, 19.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. SCHMIDT, *Erfolg*, 9.



length the Baalists' perception the narrator indicates that Gideon has fully carried out YHWH's command and has indeed built the altar to YHWH and offered the bull on it.<sup>124</sup>

The expression {מְזַבֵּחַ + נִתְחַן}, which occurs only 15 times in the Hebrew Scriptures, supports the theological understanding of the narrative as it reminds one of YHWH's order to break down the Canaanite altars (Exod 34:13; Deut 7:5; 12:3), which is repeated in the introduction of Judges (2:2), where it is accompanied by the command not to enter into (כרת) a covenant with the Canaanites. Hence when Gideon cuts down (כרת) Baal's altar, his action might be further theologically interpreted as breaking the covenant with Baal and establishing YHWH worship instead.<sup>125</sup>

The Baalists, however, only perceive Gideon's action to a limited extent<sup>126</sup> as they only recognise the static result of his action—indicated through the passive forms נִתְחַן, כָּרַתָּה, and הִעֲלָה (6:28), expressing 'rest' as opposed to 'motion',<sup>127</sup> and as they recognise neither the identity of the new altar, nor the significance of his action, which is to disclose that YHWH is god instead of Baal. They only see that their god has been offended. So they wonder, 'who has done this thing', they search and inquire, and finally they discover, 'Gideon has done this thing' (6:29). The details given in this account contrast with the rather brief account of Gideon's implementation of YHWH's instructions and thus vividly portrays the confusion and emotional disturbance of the Ophrahites.<sup>128</sup> Further, the described action with the sequence of three verbs (וַיִּדְרְשׁוּ וַיִּבְקְשׁוּ וַיֵּאמְרוּ) (6:29) contrasts with the observation of the static result<sup>129</sup> and implies that Baal remains silent so that the Ophrahites need to take action on his behalf. They search, inquire, find the answer, and ask Gideon's father to surrender Gideon. This implies that they do not have the power to punish him immediately and that they, and Baal, are weaker than Joash.

<sup>124</sup>It is often overlooked that the record of the Ophrahites' perception substitutes an explicit description of Gideon's correct completion of YHWH's command by the narrator and instead allows for a brief record that Gideon does as YHWH has told him (6:27; similarly, 6:20,40. BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '6:29b-30'); see RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 162 (followed by SCHMIDT, *Erfolg*, 11), who did not distinguish between the narrator's comment that Gideon did as YHWH had told him (6:27)—which implies that Gideon indeed builds an altar to YHWH—and the limited perception by the Ophrahites (following וְהִנֵּה), who only recognise a new altar where the bull has been offered. Hence RICHTER could argue that nothing in the narrative hinted at a conflict between Baal and YHWH (ibid.). Similarly, MASSOT, "Gideon", 48, 52, defined the focus of the call episode as merely anti-Baal and failed to see the pro-YHWH component.

<sup>125</sup>Cf. WOODS, *Polemics*, 67, who interpreted the story as "express conflict between Yahwism and Baalism".

<sup>126</sup>Similarly, STERNBERG, *Poetics*, 404.

<sup>127</sup>ESKHULT, *Studies*, 94-95.

<sup>128</sup>MARAIS, *Representation*, 111.

<sup>129</sup>ESKHULT, *Studies*, 95.



The Baalists ask Joash to surrender his son not because he has built another altar, but because he has broken down the Baal cult objects (6:30).<sup>130</sup> Their behaviour reveals that Baal can not defend himself but rather needs his supporters to avenge Gideon's offending action.<sup>131</sup> This implies that Baal is powerless or even that without his supporters he is non-existent, having an existence only through them.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, by demanding the death penalty for Gideon, the Baalists demand the very punishment that in the Deuteronomic Law is intended for idolatrous worship of gods other than YHWH (Deut 13:6-11).<sup>133</sup> This parallel shows that the Israelites have completely reversed their worship, and it underlines that the Gideon narrative will focus on YHWH's attempt to have Israel abandon Baal, obey YHWH, and worship him again.

Being confronted with the danger of losing his son,<sup>134</sup> Joash, as the representative of the idolatrous cult and the offended party, specifies the theme for the following narrative and addresses the underlying theological question, whether Baal is god or not (6:31):

וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹאֲשׁ לְכָל אֲשֶׁר-עָמְדוּ עָלָיו			
הֲאִתֶּם תִּרְיֹבֹן לְבַעַל	A	1	
אִם-אַתֶּם תּוֹשִׁיעוֹן אוֹתוֹ	A'	2	
אֲשֶׁר יִרְיֵב לוֹ יוֹמַת עַד-הַבֶּקֶר		3	
אִם-אֱלֹהִים הוּא יִרְבֵּ לֹ		4	
כִּי נִתַּן אֶת-מִזְבְּחוֹ:		5	

This outline of Joash's speech reveals that the first two lines of Joash's speech are parallel. The parallel structure indicates that defending Baal means saving him from his offenders. It also prepares for the theme of the Gideon narrative, in which Baal is expected to save himself (יִשְׁעוּ) by competing (רִיב) against YHWH and Gideon. Yet by first emphatically addressing the Ophrahites (אַתֶּם), Joash distinguishes between them and Baal and challenges them whether they indeed wanted to act on their god's behalf. He rhetorically asks them whether they wanted to legally defend Baal ( $\{\text{ל} + \text{רִיב}\}$ )<sup>135</sup> or

<sup>130</sup> Similarly, NÖTSCHER, "Richter", 659; JOHN JAMES DAVIS, *Conquest and Crisis: Studies in Joshua, Judges, and Ruth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1969), 114; SOGGIN, *Judges*, 127-128.

<sup>131</sup> Similarly, BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 157.

<sup>132</sup> ERNST WÜRTHWEIN, "Abimelech und der Untergang Sichems — Studien zu Jdc 9 —", chap. in *Studien zum Deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk* (Berlin [et al.]: de Gruyter, 1994), 15; cf. MCMILLION, "Judges 6-8", 196.

<sup>133</sup> WOLF, "Judges", 422.

<sup>134</sup> WEBB, *Book*, 149 (followed by MASSOT, "Gideon", 49), claimed that, as Joash was being confronted with the choice between his god and his son, he decided to save his son. However, Joash refers the case to his god Baal, who has been offended by his son, and thus invites Baal to take action against his son. He thus endangers him even further.

<sup>135</sup> The expression  $\{\text{ל} + \text{רִיב}\}$  implies that the subject acts on behalf of the object by legally defending or delivering the object; see Deut 33:7; Job 13:8. Similarly, JAMES LIMBURG, "The Root רִיב and the Prophetic Lawsuit Speeches", *JBL* 88 (1969): 294, 296-297, argued that רִיב carried the



deliver ( $\sqrt{עש}$ ) him, and proposes instead that Baal can defend and deliver himself if he is god, and should do so in order to prove it.<sup>136</sup> Joash thus questions Baal's divine power<sup>137</sup> and calls the Ophrahites to let Baal prove that he is god. If Baal is god, Joash argues, he may defend himself against YHWH and Gideon; therefore, the Ophrahites should not take up the case by themselves. Joash thus recognises more than the Ophrahites as he goes beyond the recognition of the offence of Baal to the recognition of YHWH's claim to be honoured as god instead of Baal. The second line's  $\sqrt{עש}$  furthermore implies that Baal needs to be delivered from his opponent, suggesting that Baal has been overpowered already by the replacement of his altar with YHWH's altar.

Joash's speech contains much irony. First, it bears on the Ophrahites, who appear to trust in the powerless Baal, himself in need of salvation, rather than in YHWH who will save Israel (6:14-16);<sup>138</sup> and it takes the definition of the issue by the Ophrahites ironically, as the theme is not the deliverance of Baal from YHWH but rather the deliverance of the people from Baal.<sup>139</sup> Second, it bears on Baal, whose powerlessness has already been demonstrated, so that the question, whether he is god, can only be understood ironically and the Ophrahites' action would not alter the result of Gideon's action and more.

Following the argument between Joash and the Baalists, Gideon is called יִרְבֵּעַל (6:32).<sup>140</sup> The meaning of this name is rather ambiguous.<sup>141</sup> While the second part (בֵּעַל) does not cause any difficulty—it refers to Baal the god of the Canaanites, whom Israel serves frequently<sup>142</sup>—the first part is not as easy to trace. It has been derived from

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primary meaning 'to make a complaint, accusation' and got our meaning only through the preposition לְ, which meant 'for/on behalf of'.

<sup>136</sup>Cf. EWALD, *Geschichte*, 537-541; SLOTKI, "Judges", 213, who paraphrased the question, "Is it for human beings to be avengers of an outraged deity?"; RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 162: "Joas [fordert] eine Kraftprobe des Baal heraus"; CUNDALL, "Commentary", 107: "A god who was really God could vindicate Himself, without the necessity for human interference"; SCHMIDT, *Erfolg*, 13: "Jedes menschliche Eingreifen zugunsten Baals [müßte] offen lassen [...], ob Baal wirklich Gott ist"; BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '6:31'.

<sup>137</sup>Similarly, SCHMIDT, *Erfolg*, 14; TAKAMITSU MURAOKA, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Doctoral dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1970; Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University; Leiden: Brill, 1985), 16; WEBB, *Book*, 149.

<sup>138</sup>BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 157-158.

<sup>139</sup>Cf. BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '6:31'.

<sup>140</sup>This is the only record within the Hebrew Scriptures where a pagan name is imposed onto an Israelite living in Israel.

<sup>141</sup>For discussions of different meanings of the name יִרְבֵּעַל, see BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 141; BURNEY, *Judges*, 201-202; JOHN ADNEY EMERTON, "Gideon and Jerubbaal", *JThS* N.S. 27, no. 2 (1976): 290-292.

<sup>142</sup>Judg 2:11,13; 3:7; 6:25-32; 8:33; 9:4; 10:6,10.



ריב<sup>143</sup> from the possible derivative ירב<sup>144</sup> from ירה I,<sup>145</sup> רבב I,<sup>146</sup> רבה I,<sup>147</sup> and רבב II;<sup>148</sup> it has also been seen as having cultic connotations<sup>149</sup>. The following discussion of the name ירבֵּעַל will take these proposals at the point of departure and shall discuss the name in the alphabetical order of the roots; thus, first on the basis of ירה I, then on רבב I/רבה I, and finally on ריב.

The interpretation that derives ירבֵּעַל from ירה I proceeds from the fact that there are a number of names attested in the Hebrew Scriptures that derive from that root, namely, מורה, ירואל, ירושלים, and יריאל.<sup>150</sup> It stands out that two of these names contain אל as their second part, thus providing a parallel to ירבֵּעַל with the בעל as the second part, and that two names—ירואל and ירושלים, one of which contains אל—may be interpreted as containing a plene writing (\*ירו). It seems also possible that the name ירבֵּעַל is the defective writing of ירובֵּעַל, which is constructed like the names mentioned above. The name would then need to be rendered 'Foundation of Baal'. Yet it needs to be observed that the name ירבֵּעַל contains a *dagesh forte* to signify the doubled consonant *beth*, which points to the existence of the preposition ב if ירה I was used as the first part of that name.<sup>151</sup> By investigating the use of {ירה I + ב}<sup>152</sup> it is evident that there are no similarly constructed names attested in the Hebrew Scriptures, so that it becomes less likely that the name is derived from that root.

The second explanation interprets the name as derived from רבב I or רבה I. The name would then be formed like the name ירבֵּעַם that carries the profane meaning 'the

<sup>143</sup>E.g., GB<sup>17</sup>, s.v. ירבֵּעַל; BDB, s.v. ירבֵּעַל; KEIL, *Commentar*, 255; GOSLINGA, *Judges*, 330; SCHMIDT, *Erfolg*, 10-14; BOLING, *Judges*, 130; BARUCH HALPERN, "The Rise of Abimelek Ben-Jerubbaal", *HAR* 2 (1978): 85; BLOCK, "Will": 360. It appears, however, that this derivation is led by the explanation in the text rather than by the name itself.

<sup>144</sup>HALAT, s.v. ירבֵּעַל.

<sup>145</sup>E.g., JULIUS WELLHAUSEN, *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1872), 31; followed by MOORE, *Commentary*, 196; BUDDE, *Buch*, 54.

<sup>146</sup>E.g., OETTLI, *Richter*, 252; KITTEL, "Richter", 380; WILLIAM FOXWELL ALBRIGHT, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1956), 206; SOGGIN, *Judges*, 125; JAN P. FOKKELMAN, "Structural Remarks on Judges 9 and 19", in "*Sha'arei Talmon*": *Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East presented to Shemaryahu Talmon*, ed. MICHAEL FISHBANE and EMANUEL TOV (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 35.

<sup>147</sup>NOTH, *Personennamen*, 207.

<sup>148</sup>M. TSEVAT, "Ishboshet and Congeners", *HUCA* 46 (1975): 82.

<sup>149</sup>JOHANNES FICHTNER, "Die etymologische Ätiologie in den Namengebungen der geschichtlichen Bücher des Alten Testaments", *VT* 6 (1956): 391-392.

<sup>150</sup>HALAT, s.v. ירה I.

<sup>151</sup>This observation excludes the rendering of ירבֵּעַל as 'Baal founds'; see EMERTON, "Gideon": 290.

<sup>152</sup>This use occurs only twice in the Hebrew Scriptures; Exod 15:4; 2 Chr 26:15.



people may become many'.<sup>153</sup> It is possible, therefore, that יִרְבֵּעַל with its doubled consonant *beth* is derived from רָבַב I. In its twenty-four occurrences in the Hebrew Scriptures, רָבַב I carries the meaning 'to increase, to be/become increased/many/numerous'.<sup>154</sup> While on the one hand these renderings attribute greatness and mightiness to Baal and impose the expectation onto Baal to demonstrate his greatness and mightiness, they might on the other hand be understood as an ironic characterisation of Baal; 'Baal is great', just look what is left of his altar and the Asherah beside it, which shows that Baal is anything but great.<sup>155</sup> This ironical understanding would also be adopted by the narrator, whose intention is to reveal that Baal is not god, so that the name יִרְבֵּעַל would summarise the theological theme of the narrative. The expectation 'let Baal compete with / contend against him' immediately following the introduction of the new name may then be understood as an explication of this theme.<sup>156</sup>

In turning to the explanation of יִרְבֵּעַל with רִיבַל, we immediately recognise a discrepancy between the spelling of the name and the grammatical forms of רִיבַל, for the imperfect of that root is יִרִיב rather than יִרֹב\*, with the latter existing only as *Kēṯib* in Biblical Hebrew (יִרֹב).<sup>157</sup> It also needs to be recognised that there are no similarly derived names attested in the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>158</sup> Thus it is unlikely that the name יִרְבֵּעַל is derived from this root. However, as רִיבַל is used several times in the immediate context and in particular in the explanation of the name 'Let Baal contend against him' (יִרְבֵּעַל בּוֹ הַבַּעַל, 6:32), the assonance of the name to the explanation still justifies a paronomastic use of רִיבַל and describe Gideon as 'Baal-fighter'. Since the reason for the name (כִּי נִתַּח אֶת־מִזְבְּחוֹ, 6:32) corresponds exactly to the motive for Joash's speech (כִּי נִתַּח אֶת־מִזְבְּחוֹ, 6:31), both sentences appear to describe the same subject, though from different perspectives. If Baal is god, he should defend himself (לְ + רִיבַל, 6:31) and rebuke or

<sup>153</sup>NOTH, *Personennamen*, 207, based the meaning on aram. and arab. 'being great'; yet this reference is not necessary since רָבַב I may also carry this meaning in Hebrew; see HALAT, s.v. רָבַב I.

<sup>154</sup>HALAT, s.v. רָבַב I, rendered Isa 6:12 as 'groß sein', but this passage may still be translated in the usual sense of 'being much/many'.

<sup>155</sup>Similarly, SLOTKI, "Judges", 213: "If Baal cannot punish an insult, what sort of god is he!"

<sup>156</sup>Cf. GARSIEL, "Name-derivations": 307, who held the explanation to be a "homiletic derivation" from the name יִרְבֵּעַל.

<sup>157</sup>לָרֹב (Judg 21:22; *Q<sup>r</sup>rē*: לָרִיב) and תָּרֹב (Prov 3:30; *Q<sup>r</sup>rē*: תָּרִיב), †. The form יִרִיב is also the normally used imperfect in Judges (6:31; 8:1; †), so that the Massoret's reading seems plausible. Similar objections against the derivation of the name יִרְבֵּעַל from רִיבַל have already been raised by OETTLI, *Richter*, 252; MOORE, *Commentary*, 196; and BUDDE, *Buch*, 56.

<sup>158</sup>The name יִרְבֵּשֶׁת (2 Sam 11:21) is seen as a theological interpretation of יִרְבֵּעַל and may, therefore, not be counted as an independent name; see GEORGE BUCHANAN GRAY, *Studies in Hebrew Proper Names* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1896), 121; cf. also EMMANUEL TOV, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1992), 268.



contend against ( $\{\sqrt{\text{רִיב}} + \text{ב}\}$ , 6:32) his offender;<sup>159</sup> if, however, he is not god, this will be proven by his failure to do so. In this latter case, the paronomastic explanation of the name  $\text{יְרֻבְעֵל}$  will turn out to be ironical, as Baal could be said to be great only inasmuch he has demonstrated that YHWH is great instead.

We may conclude, therefore, that the name  $\text{יְרֻבְעֵל}$  should be derived from  $\sqrt{\text{רִיב}}$  I, yet paronomastically plays on  $\sqrt{\text{רִיב}}$ . The name ascribes YHWH's characteristics greatness and mightiness to Baal, while the narrator uses it to mock Baal who has just demonstrated anything but greatness and mightiness. The paronomastic play on  $\sqrt{\text{רִיב}}$  in conjunction with the reason for the name (6:32) at the same time defines the theme for the forthcoming narrative in that it challenges Baal to demonstrate his attributes and hence his godhood. Hence the name 'Jerubbaal' summarises the theological motivation of the narrative that was already addressed in the prophet's speech (6:7-10) and explicated in the angel's call of Gideon (6:11-24), and explicates it as the theme of the narrative. Thus Joash specifies the rather abstract theme of the narrative and makes it tangible: YHWH's power and Baal's impotence will be demonstrated in the following combined Gideon-Abimelech narrative, where YHWH will demonstrate his divine power through his victory over the Midianites as recorded in the Gideon narrative and where the Baalists will demonstrate Baal's absence and Baalism's self-destructive force through Abimelech's civil war as recorded in the Abimelech narrative.

However, since Baal's opponent is not mentioned in the speech, and the explanation for Gideon's new name describes the opponents as Baal and one person rather than two ( $\text{ב}$ , sg.), the singular predicate  $\text{הָרַס$  could refer either to Gideon or to YHWH; either Gideon has demolished Baal's altar, or YHWH has done that by having commanded Gideon to do so, which makes him ultimately responsible for Gideon's action.<sup>160</sup> Hence for the narrator, Gideon is just YHWH's agent and YHWH is Baal's opponent; but for the Ophrahites, who do not recognise the nature of the new altar and hence do not recognise that YHWH stands behind Gideon's action, the opponent is Gideon. Accordingly, the theme as specified by Joash gains a twofold meaning. The narrator's intention is to show that YHWH is god and Baal is not, and that YHWH rather than Baal should be worshipped.<sup>161</sup> The second intention requires Gideon's participation in the narrated

<sup>159</sup> Apart from these verses,  $\{\sqrt{\text{רִיב}} + \text{ל}\}$  is attested Deut 33:7; Job 13:8, and  $\{\sqrt{\text{רִיב}} + \text{ב}\}$  is attested Gen 31:36; Hos 2:4 (twice), †.

<sup>160</sup> Hence KEIL, *Commentar*, 255, translated ambiguously, "denn man hat seinen Altar zerstört".

<sup>161</sup> It is not often noticed that Joash defines only one side of the theme, whereas YHWH by demanding Baal's altar to be destroyed and an altar to him built instead defines both sides; see, for example, MASSOT, "Gideon", 48, 50, 52-54, who with reference to others argued that the narrative only showed that Baal is not god.



events to prove that Baal has not eliminated Gideon. Further, since the oppression as the narrative background is not mentioned in the specification of the theme, it is not the main focus of the narrative, though it is still part of it, since YHWH will use it to demonstrate his divine power. This interpretation is further supported if one observes the structure of the ongoing narrative, where the account of the battle is reduced to a mere four verses (7:19-22) so that it does not play any major part in the narrative. Furthermore, if the deliverance from the oppression was the major theme, the Gideon narrative would need to be counted as a narrative that only records Israel's deliverance. One must then ask why the narrator spends so much time on the description of Israel's suffering (6:1-6), stresses Israel's apostasy and idolatry in the prophet's speech (6:7-10), emphasises Gideon's call (6:11-24), records the demolishing of Baal's altar (6:25-32), and mentions Gideon's new name יְרֵבֶעַל and its explanation (6:31-32), all of which would not be needed if the deliverance was the purpose of the Gideon narrative. Similarly, Gideon's unparalleled double reassurance that YHWH will keep his promise (6:36–7:8), followed by YHWH's third reassurance of his support (7:9-15) needed not be stressed so much. Also the purpose of the Abimelech narrative (8:29–9:57) remained unclear with such an approach, and it is significant, that authors who hold this view widely struggle with this narrative.<sup>162</sup> Thus it rather seems that in the Gideon narrative the oppression by the Midianites and the deliverance from it does not constitute the main theme but rather a secondary theme that at the same time serves as the tangible, narratable instrument by which the abstract theological theme can be narrated.

We thus find a twofold specification of the theme for the Gideon narrative, containing an abstract theological theme to demonstrate that YHWH is god instead of Baal and demands to be worshipped as god and a tangible narrative theme to demonstrate that YHWH delivers Israel with Gideon as his agent. This theme is summarised in Gideon's programmatic new name יְרֵבֶעַל and it is imposed onto Gideon who will carry it into the following narrative.

### 3 Summary: The Background and Theme of the Gideon Narrative

Unlike the preceding narratives, the Gideon narrative has a clearly theological purpose. It is not merely a narrative where YHWH delivers Israel, but rather a narrative to suggest that YHWH and no other god does so. Hence the Gideon narrative begins a new section in the judges narratives and starts off with an extensive description of Israel's oppression, which

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<sup>162</sup>Thus, e.g., WEBB, *Book*, treated the Abimelech narrative on only two and a half pages (pp. 154-156).



highlights its severity. This, however, is not referred to by the prophet. Instead, his speech identifies the reason for Israel's severe oppression as Israel's continuous idolatry and abandonment of YHWH combined with Israel's unwillingness and unpreparedness to repent. Hence the theme of the narrative is specified as a theological theme: YHWH will demonstrate his divine power by delivering Israel from the Midianites. He thus demands to be recognised and worshipped as the true god, who delivers Israel, instead of the foreign gods whom Israel worships. The Israelites' due response should be to repent and return to YHWH as demanded in the prophet's speech.

An angel of YHWH calls Gideon and stresses that Gideon will deliver Israel only in YHWH's strength. Gideon, on the other hand, is described as a doubting and hesitating Israelite who is reluctant to accept responsibility for the suffering and does not want to accept the call. Yet Gideon's hesitation to accept the call also highlights that YHWH will deliver Israel. The episode of Gideon's offering, which he brings under the pagan terebinth and which YHWH takes for himself, introduces the theological theme as it demonstrates that YHWH is superior to other gods. Then the narrative focuses on Baal worship as an example of Israel's idolatry. Gideon is called to destroy the Baal cult objects and establish YHWH worship instead. The sacrifice of the symbolic bull to YHWH instead of Baal demonstrates YHWH's superiority over Baal and further contains the promise that YHWH will end the oppression. Finally, the theme of the narrative is explicitly specified in form of the proposal that Baal, if he is god, should defend himself against Gideon and YHWH. However, since the narrator has already hinted at YHWH's superiority over Baal, the following narrative will rather demonstrate that YHWH has indeed divine power and hence is indeed god instead of the foreign gods and should, therefore, be worshipped as god.

## **B The Narrator Demonstrates YHWH's Divine Power (6:33–7:22)**

Introductory remarks. Before we begin an analysis of these episodes we shall briefly analyse a structural problem. Following the resumptive reference to enemy invasion (6:33) and Gideon's empowerment with YHWH's spirit (6:34), one expects Gideon's approach to the enemy and the account of the battle. Yet instead, the record of the preparation for the battle (7:15-18) and the battle itself (7:19-22) is repeatedly postponed in favour of several signs to Gideon, consisting of the fleece test (6:36-40), the reduction of his army (7:2-7), and the overhearing of a Midianite dream (7:9-14). Since the episode of the reduction of the army becomes necessary only because of the preceding episode of



Gideon's recruitment of a large army, we need to include Gideon's recruitment of the extended army (6:35)<sup>163</sup> into our considerations.

All four inserted episodes seem to contain the theme of fear and reassurance of divine support. First, Gideon recruits a large army which appears to have a better chance to win against the Midianites than the originally recruited Abiezrites (6:35). Second, Gideon explicitly addresses YHWH's intent to deliver Israel through him in his request for a sign of confirmation (6:36-40). Third, YHWH too mentions his intent to deliver Israel as the reason for his reduction of Gideon's army (7:2-8), so that the reduction of the army, which might otherwise work towards the amplification of Gideon's fear, rather takes Gideon's fear away by underlining YHWH's promise to deliver Israel himself. And finally, YHWH explicitly mentions Gideon's fear as the reason for his permission to overhear the Midianite's dream, whose interpretation in turn reassures Gideon of YHWH's support (7:9-15). This theme of fear and YHWH's repeated reassurances of his support highlight Gideon's inability to achieve the victory by himself and attribute the battle and victory to YHWH, who will through his victory demonstrate his power.

Yet there remain open questions. First, if all these episodes point to Gideon's fear and YHWH's reassurance of his support as a central theme,<sup>164</sup> why does the narrator include the recruitment of Gideon's extended army (6:35) only to tell subsequently how YHWH reduces it again (7:2-7)? The fleece episode and the permission to overhear the dream would certainly suffice to illustrate Gideon's fear; they even address this theme more clearly than the recruitment and reduction episodes. Yet one might argue that the narrator intended to underline Gideon's fear by recording the recruitment of his army; Gideon, after all, would feel more confident to fight with a large army than with a small army. Then, however, both the recruitment of the extended army and the fleece test would serve the same purpose, so that either the recruitment or the fleece test may be discarded as redundant. Second, the fleece test episode seems to be out of place in the present context, as it separates Gideon's effort to recruit a large army from YHWH's annulling of that effort.<sup>165</sup> It would appear more natural if the fleece test served a

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<sup>163</sup>On the restriction on 6:35 only, see below. Similarly argued, though without further reasoning, RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 121.

<sup>164</sup>Thus, e.g., KEIL, *Commentar*, 256; BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 142; FAUSSET, *Judges*, 117; DAVIS, *Conquest*, 116; GROS LOUIS, "Judges", 153-154; HOPPE, *Judges*, 146; ANDREW C. BOWLING, "Judges", in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, ed. WALTER A. ELWELL (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1989), 166; WOLF, "Judges", 422; OLSON, "Judges", 802; MARAIS, *Representation*, 110.

<sup>165</sup>Hence the fleece test episode has frequently been relocated or described as a variant of Gideon's call as recorded in 6:11-24, 6:11-17, or 6:17-24; see, for example, BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 142-143; MOORE, *Commentary*, 198; NOWACK, *Richter*, 68; MARTIN, *Judges*, 90-91; J. GRAY, *Judges*, 206-207; and SOGGIN, *Judges*, 131-132. On the contrary, RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 116-117,



different purpose which would fit better into the context of the narrative. Third, if the fleece test and the reduction of the army mainly focused on Gideon's fear to fight and YHWH's repeated reassurance of his support, why does the narrator not mark this theme with a prevalent *Leitwort* or motif?<sup>166</sup> Up to this point in the narrative the narrator has explicitly mentioned Gideon's fear when it was in focus (6:27; cf. also 6:23), and he will do so again in the introduction to the fourth episode (7:10). It would, therefore, seem strange if Gideon's fear was in the foreground in any of the three preceding episodes, where such an indication is missing. Fourth, the reassurance of YHWH's support in three episodes would appear superfluous, since the narrator has already made sufficiently clear that YHWH will deliver Israel through Gideon (6:14,16), something that even Gideon knows (6:36); YHWH has, after all, given Gideon a sign of confirmation (6:21) and his spirit to fulfil this task successfully (6:34), and Gideon has even taken action himself by recruiting a fairly large army (6:34-35).<sup>167</sup> Hence Gideon is left with no legitimate need for (re)assurance;<sup>168</sup> and similarly, the audience too does not need any further (re)assurance of YHWH's support for Gideon. Further, if the narrator wanted to highlight Gideon's fear, it would be completely sufficient to record YHWH's instruction to approach the camp and YHWH's permission based on Gideon's fear (7:9-15) immediately after Gideon's recruitment of his clan (6:34). Nothing would be lost, the audience would not miss anything, and the plot would still appear consistent and complete.

Therefore, the episodes of Gideon's recruitment of his army (6:35), of the fleece test (6:36-40), and of YHWH's reduction of the army (7:2-8) might have a different focus, while the episode of Gideon's approach to the camp (7:9-15) might still address Gideon's fear and YHWH's leading role in the deliverance. This new focus might be sought in the theological theme as developed and defined in the preceding episodes, where the purpose of the narrative is specified as a demonstration of YHWH's divine power. Then the episodes of the fleece test and the reduction of the army will primarily be part of the demonstration of YHWH's divine power and his superiority over foreign gods. With this purpose, however, another option opens up, namely, that Gideon fears that following his call to deliver Israel in his strength (6:14) the victory would still not be his but YHWH's.

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demonstrated that 6:36-40 is not parallel to 6:11-17 but rather forms a single, but not entirely independent unit. — For a recent summary of the discussion of the fleece test episode, see MASSOT, "Gideon", 65-66.

<sup>166</sup> ALTER, *Art*, 95, held that a recurring theme might emphasise a moral-psychological point, but that this was normally associated with the repetition of a *Leitmotiv* or a motif. Cf. also 7:10 and 8:20, where the narrator explicitly mentions fear as the character's motive to act.

<sup>167</sup> Similarly, BUSH, *Judges*, 94; COOKE, *Judges*, 80; MASSOT, "Gideon", 67.

<sup>168</sup> MASSOT, "Gideon", 67; yet he soon departed from his insight by maintaining that Gideon nevertheless requested a sign of reassurance (*ibid.*, 70-72).



With this fear, however, both the fleece test and the subsequent reduction of Gideon's army become the means by which Gideon negotiates with YHWH over the victory; Gideon wants to wring the promise from YHWH that he will be the victor. Hence the episodes of the fleece test and the reduction of the army follow a twofold, closely related but contradicting theme, which is not YHWH's deliverance from Israel's enemies as in the previous narratives, and they thus underline the theological intention of the narrative.

However, since these episodes are set in the context of the presence of the Israelite army (6:34-35; 7:1), the army appears to observe Gideon's fleece test and the reduction of their force. Hence Gideon's fleece test may also serve to encourage his army, ward off their fear, assure them of divine support, and ensure them that YHWH has already given Midian into Gideon's and their hand.<sup>169</sup> Hence we find a twofold theme of the narrative. On the one hand, it will demonstrate YHWH's divine power and his superiority over foreign gods through his victory over the Midianites as well as the Israelites' fear of losing the battle and their inability to achieve the victory on their own; and on the other, it will emphasise Gideon's fear of not achieving the victory on his own account.

## 1 The Narrative Background is Recalled (6:33)

Let us now look at the narrative in more detail. Having in the setting specified the theme for the Gideon narrative as a narrative to demonstrate YHWH's divine power and his superiority over Baal, who serves as an example of any foreign god, the narrator now reintroduces the oppression through the Midianites as the narrative background, by which the abstract theological theme becomes tangible. This reintroduction is accomplished by mentioning the allies with a similar wording as in the introduction (וְכָל-מִדְיָן וְעַמְלֵק וּבְנֵי-קָדָם || 6:33, 6:3). The narrator also intensifies the extent of the oppression by adding that all (כָּל) the Midianites are involved.<sup>170</sup> Furthermore, the allies do not simply come (עָלָה, 6:3) but they join forces (יִחָדּוּ + אִסְרָם, 6:33) against Israel. Finally, while in the setting of the narrative the narrator has not mentioned any locality,<sup>171</sup> he now draws the seriousness of the oppression before one's eyes. All Midian, Amalek, and the sons of the East cross (עָבְרוּ) the Jordan and camp in the promised land where they would set out to destroy the harvest. They thus take the same approach that Israel has taken for the invasion of the land,<sup>172</sup> so that Israel's possession of the land is in danger of being reversed by the new invaders.

<sup>169</sup>Similarly, BUSH, *Judges*, 94; ZAPLETAL, *Richter*, 113; NÖTSCHER, "Richter", 659-660.

<sup>170</sup>Similarly, MARAIS, *Representation*, 107.

<sup>171</sup>The mention of Gaza (6:4) serves to describe the extent of the destruction rather than a locality.

<sup>172</sup>עָבְרוּ is used 20 times in Josh 3; 4 to describe the Israelites who cross the Jordan to enter the land.



## 2 YHWH Sends his Spirit, but Gideon Challenges YHWH (6:34-35)

First, the יהוה ירוח takes possession (לבש) of Gideon. The unusual use of לבש (6:34) to describe the giving of YHWH's spirit implies that the spirit completely clothes and even overwhelms Gideon.<sup>173</sup> Hence only YHWH should be recognisable, and Gideon's actions and strength will originate in YHWH and must be attributed to him.<sup>174</sup>

Having received YHWH's spirit, Gideon immediately summons his clan to join him in the march against the Midianites. The mention of Gideon's action by the use of an imperfect consecutive (ויקרא) following the leading perfect לבש (6:34) lets his action appear as the logical consequence of his reception of the spirit. Gideon thus acts correctly in calling out his clan. However, instead of going ahead against the Midianites now, he appears to hesitate. He presumably thought that he dare not fight against an enemy that falls upon the land like locusts (6:5). Hence one after the other he calls out his tribe first, then Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali (6:35). Since this extended recruitment follows naturally on the recruitment of his clan, it appears at first glance to be a further consequence of the sending of YHWH's spirit.<sup>175</sup> Yet in the description of the extended recruitment the narrator departs from the usual grammatical pattern of an imperfect consecutive following the leading perfect and instead starts afresh twice with a *waw* adversative (6:35a,b). This twofold break in the narrative sequence throws an unexpected emphasis on the summoning of the other tribes and might thus indicate the narrator's evaluation that Gideon's extended recruitment is not the consequence of his calling any more but rather forms a contrast to his clothing with the spirit and his subsequent recruitment of his clan.<sup>176</sup> This interpretation is supported by the similar description of the extended recruitment in two steps that lets Gideon appear as if he was determined to recruit an army as large as possible before he would set out against the Midianites. Through the repeated emphatic position of מלאכים (6:35a,b) he is furthermore pictured as intentionally choosing messengers for his extended recruitment, presumably to give his call more weight; and by mentioning that Manasseh is called out after him (אחריו, with sf.

<sup>173</sup>See 1 Chr 12:19; 2 Chr 24:20; † (Judg 6:34); the roots elsewhere used in Judges are היה (3:10; 11:29) and צלח (14:6,19; 15:14). — For a discussion of the meaning of this expression in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Ancient Near Eastern Literature, see NAHUM M. WALDMAN, "The Imagery of Clothing, Covering, and Overpowering", *JANES* 19 (1989): 161-170; and for an inner-biblical explanation, see MASSOT, "Gideon", 62-64.

<sup>174</sup>Thus  $\text{\textcircled{B}}$  translates ἐνεδυσάμωσεν; cf. WALDMAN, "Imagery": 165-167.

<sup>175</sup>Similarly, ESKHULT, *Studies*, 70-73, 99, on syntactical grounds.

<sup>176</sup>Cf. MURAOKA, *Words*, 39; A. EHRLICH, *Randglossen*, 95; similarly, MASSOT, "Gideon", 64, 71-72, merely on syntactical grounds. This break was also observed by ESKHULT, *Studies*, 73, though he held the view that this structure rather bound together 6:33-35.



sg.; 6:35a) and that the last three tribes come to meet the tribes already gathered with him (לְקָרְאֵתָם, with sf. pl.; 6:35b), the narrator even emphasises that Gideon takes two separate steps for his recruitment. Hence while for the characters in the narrative the extended recruitment may follow from Gideon's clothing with YHWH's spirit, in the eyes of the narrator it may have been excessive. But with his extended army Gideon could still contribute to YHWH's victory; or it could at least seem as if his army contributed to it, so that the victory could be attributed to Gideon as well. Then, however, the demonstration of YHWH's divine power through the victory would fail and his aim of being recognised and worshipped as god could not be reached.

### 3 Gideon's Negotiation with YHWH (6:36–7:8)

Introductory remarks. Before we analyse the encounter between Gideon and YHWH, it is necessary to outline its structure to define its significance. The boundaries are marked by the introduction of the first direct speech (6:36) of this part of the narrative, which starts with the reintroduction of Israel's enemies (6:33), and the particle וַיְהִי that introduces a new scene (7:9). The encounter thus properly stretches from 6:36 to 7:8. Within these boundaries, we find a reference to the allies in 7:1 and 7:8. In combination with a similar reference in 6:33, these verses mark the boundaries of subsections; 6:33 reintroduces the narrative background, and 7:8 reintroduces it immediately before Gideon's first encounter with the allies. Similarly, 7:1 contains a change of subject to separate two distinct sub-scenes, which may be described as the two parts of a negotiation between Gideon and YHWH as the two involved parties. The encounter thus properly extends over 6:36-40, where Gideon's part is recorded, and 7:2-7, where YHWH's part is recorded. YHWH's promise to deliver Israel (7:2,7) further forms an inclusion around his turn and marks the boundaries of his part. The overall structure of the encounter is further defined by the formula {וַיֹּאמֶר גִּדְעוֹן אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים}, which is applied twice to Gideon (וַיֹּאמֶר גִּדְעוֹן אֶל־שׁוֹמְרֵי הַמַּצְעֵבִים; 6:36,39) and four times to YHWH (וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־גִּדְעוֹן; 7:2,4,5,7). This formula introduces each part of the encounter, binds them together as a coherent unit and defines the encounter as a dialogue in which both parties directly address the other party. However, since the encounter consists not of a direct dialogue but rather of a conversation in which each party speaks twice,<sup>177</sup> it appears to have been carefully constructed to allow each party in turn to request two actions from the other party and allow each party to answer the requests accordingly. This double structure therefore identifies the encounter described in this double episode as a negotiation based on a double interrogation.

<sup>177</sup>Cf. MCMILLION, "Judges 6–8", 218, who observed this structure for 7:1-8 only as he failed to compare 6:36-40 with 7:1-8 and recognise the similar structure of both episodes.

Overview 1.—The Negotiation between Gideon and YHWH (6:36-40; 7:2-7)

	Initiator: Gideon (6:36-40)	Respondent: YHWH (7:2-7)
<u>General similarities</u>		
Number and extent of turns	1 <sup>st</sup> turn: 6:36-38 2 <sup>nd</sup> turn: 6:39-40	1 <sup>st</sup> turn: 7:2-3 2 <sup>nd</sup> turn: 7:4-7
Description of each method of approach to each turn	1 <sup>st</sup> : וַיֹּאמֶר גִּדְעוֹן אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים (6:36) 2 <sup>nd</sup> : וַיֹּאמֶר גִּדְעוֹן אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים (6:39)	1 <sup>st</sup> : וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־גִּדְעוֹן (7:2) 2 <sup>nd</sup> : וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־גִּדְעוֹן (7:4,5,7)
Topic	√שע hif. (6:36,37)	√שע hif. (7:2)
Test method	√צג (6:37)	√צג (7:5)
<u>Similar 1<sup>st</sup> turn</u>		
	<u>6:36-38</u>	<u>7:2-3</u>
Definition of the proposal at the outset and introduction of the test 'object' by each party	"If you are truly delivering (√שע) Israel by my hand (בְּיָדִי) as you have said, [...] I am laying out a fleece (גִּזָּה) [...] you will deliver (√שע) Israel by my hand (בְּיָדִי) as you have said" (6:36-37)	"Too many are the people (רַב הָעָם) that are with you for me to give Midian into their hand, lest Israel will boast against me, saying 'my hand (יָדִי) has delivered (√שע) me'" (7:2)
Natural reaction requested from the 'object'	From the fleece (6:37): אִם טַל יִהְיֶה עַל־הַגִּזָּה לְבִדָּה וְעַל־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ חֶרֶב ...	From the soldiers (7:3): מִיֵּינָא וְחֶרֶד יֵשֵׁב ...
Anticipated result attained	(6:38) וַיְהִי־כֵן	(7:3) וַיֵּשֶׁב ...
<u>Similar 2<sup>nd</sup> turn</u>		
	<u>6:39-40</u>	<u>7:4-7</u>
The proposal and object are transferred unmodified	"Let me test, I pray, only once more with the fleece (גִּזָּה)" (6:39)	"The people (הָעָם) are still too many" (7:4)
Unusual action requested from the opponent	יִהְיֶנָּה חֶרֶב אֶל־הַגִּזָּה לְבִדָּה (6:39) וְעַל־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ יִהְיֶה טַל	(7:4) חֶרֶד אֹתָם אֶל־הַמִּים
Requested action answered precisely	וַיְהִי־חֶרֶב אֶל־הַגִּזָּה לְבִדָּה (6:40) וְעַל־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ הָיָה טַל	(7:5) וַיִּזְרַד אֶת־הָעָם אֶל־הַמִּים
<u>Similar results</u>		
Same rationale for the anticipated response	1 <sup>st</sup> : natural 2 <sup>nd</sup> : not natural	1 <sup>st</sup> : natural 2 <sup>nd</sup> : not natural
Same rationale for the result achieved	1 <sup>st</sup> : explicable 2 <sup>nd</sup> : not explicable	1 <sup>st</sup> : explicable 2 <sup>nd</sup> : not explicable
Same interpretation of the result	1 <sup>st</sup> : limited success 2 <sup>nd</sup> : full success	1 <sup>st</sup> : limited success 2 <sup>nd</sup> : full success



Both parts of the negotiation show extensive similarities (overview 1).<sup>178</sup> In the first episode (6:36-40), Gideon addresses Elohim, and in the second (7:2-7), YHWH addresses Gideon. Therefore, the first episode describes Gideon's part as the initiator of the negotiation, while the second episode records YHWH's part as the respondent in similar terms. Both, Gideon and YHWH, voice two requests, which are both introduced similarly with {וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁפוּ אֶל־שָׁמַיִם} and both requests are answered as requested without any further discussion. This indicates that each time the respective speaker dominates the scene. Both negotiators also take two turns. YHWH, however, speaks to Gideon four times (7:2,4,5,7), while Gideon speaks to god only twice (6:36,39). But since YHWH's third speech is only necessary to instruct Gideon what to do regarding the second request, and his fourth speech interprets the result of the second request, and since Gideon does not verbally interact with YHWH but rather follows his instructions accurately, both speeches rather continue YHWH's second speech and may not count as independent speeches. Hence YHWH also takes two turns.

In taking up their part, both parties define the topic of the negotiation as the question who will deliver Israel (יִשְׁעוּ, 6:36,37; 7:2). Gideon, at the outset of his part, defines his proposal for the negotiation, that YHWH should deliver Israel through his hand (6:36; also 6:37), and similarly, YHWH defines his proposal, that there are too many people with Gideon for him to give Midian into their hand, at the outset of his part (7:2). Yet the repetition of Gideon's words in YHWH's proposal (יִשְׁעוּ and יָדִי) reveals where the proposals are at odds with each other. Either YHWH will give the allies into Gideon's hand, so that Gideon will be regarded and honoured as the deliverer, or YHWH will do so only after having ensured that he will be recognised and honoured as Israel's deliverer. Therefore, the negotiation will not only focus on Gideon's doubt and fear and YHWH's reassurance of his support, but rather on the issue who will deliver Israel and be honoured for the deliverance.

Both parties apply the same technique similarly more than once, as while Gideon places (יָצַי, 6:37) a fleece only once to separate it from the surrounding,<sup>179</sup> it is implied that he also places it for the second test after having removed it to verify the result of the first test; similarly, while YHWH places (יָצַי, 7:5) only one group to separate it from the

<sup>178</sup>Cf. MASSOT, "Gideon", 77-78, who modified the similarities defined by STERNBERG, *Poetics*, 365-366, and applied them to the six speeches in 6:36-40 and 7:1-8 as follows: On the thematic level, he identified the idea of deliverance; on the plot level, divination; on the linguistic level, the use of יִשְׁעוּ (hif.; 6:36,37; 7:2) and יָצַי (6:37; 7:5); and on the structural level, the recurring pattern introduction-speech-result. See also, on a more general level, SHIMON BAR-EFRAT, "Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative", *VT* 30, no. 2 (1980): 154-173.

<sup>179</sup>This is the usual context of יָצַי; see, for example, Gen 30:38; Deut 28:56; 1 Sam 5:2; 2 Sam 6:17; Jer 51:34; Hos 2:5; 1 Chr 16:1.

other group,<sup>180</sup> it is implied that he also places the other group.<sup>181</sup> As this second use of  $\sqrt{\text{צג}}$  is quite unusual,<sup>182</sup> it appears that this root is deliberately chosen to make sure that YHWH's action is understood as an equal part in the negotiation with Gideon.

Each anticipated result of each negotiator's first request is naturally expected. Instead of addressing the opponent, each negotiator addresses the 'object' with the request to 'behave' in the expected way; accordingly, the response to the first request is rationally explicable. An objective interpretation of the results, however, reveals that each first result fails to reach the goal and is, therefore, objectively not successful, although it still contributes to the aim and may, therefore, be regarded as having limited success. In particular, Gideon first requests a wet fleece on dry ground (6:37), which would occur naturally, which does indeed happen, and which, therefore, taken alone does not really help Gideon. Similarly, YHWH first requests all fearful soldiers to leave (7:3), which is not only demanded in the Law (Deut 20:8), but which is also understandable and explicable, for fearful soldiers might dishearten their comrades. The soldiers respond naturally as anticipated; yet as still a large number of soldiers remains (7:3), this reduction taken alone does not help YHWH since the people are still too many (7:4).

Hence both negotiators take a second step with a similar proposal, and the proposals of the first request are carried unmodified into the second request. Accordingly, Gideon does not mention his proposal at all but instead makes sure that the second request repeats the first (6:39); similarly, YHWH explicitly states that the proposal for the first turn is still valid, as the people are still too many (7:4). Both negotiators also carry the test object into the second turn; Gideon begs to repeat the test with the fleece (6:39) and YHWH requests to take the soldiers down to the water (7:4). This time each negotiator explicitly requests one unusual action directly from his opponent, and the opponent is expected to respond without questioning or intervening at all.<sup>183</sup> The anticipated result of each of these second requests can not be expected on natural grounds any more, so that the actual response is rationally not explicable. Yet the positive and precise response reaches its

<sup>180</sup>MASSOT, "Gideon", 77, n. 209, claimed instead that in each instance Gideon was the implied subject of  $\sqrt{\text{צג}}$ . However, Gideon separates the soldiers only in obedience to YHWH's instruction, so that rather YHWH is the implied subject in 7:5.

<sup>181</sup>Cf.  $\text{Ⓜ}^A$ ,  $\text{S}$ , and  $\text{P}$ , that add  $\text{לְקַדֵּם אֹתוֹ לְפָנָיו}$  at the end of 7:5 to make this implication plain (see *BHS*). This clause, however, while it would complete the parallels to the previous sentence, would make the negotiation more unequal, as YHWH would be described as having placed two groups and Gideon only one fleece. Hence it appears to have been left out intentionally by the narrator to emphasise the character of the episodes as an equal negotiation.

<sup>182</sup>In the Hebrew Scriptures,  $\sqrt{\text{צג}}$  is used only once more in a comparable context (Gen 33:15; cf. also  $\{\sqrt{\text{צג}} + \text{לְפָנָיו}\}$ , Gen 43:9; 47:2).

<sup>183</sup>This was also seen (in 6:36-40 only; cf. p. 81, n. 177) by MCMILLION, "Judges 6-8", 211.



intention, so that the second turn of each negotiator turns out to be successful. In particular, Gideon addresses YHWH explicitly and requests a dry fleece on wet ground, which can not be achieved in a natural way. YHWH grants the sign precisely as requested, so that the sign serves Gideon's intention. Similarly, YHWH addresses Gideon explicitly and makes one request.<sup>184</sup> He asks him to take the soldiers down to the water, and Gideon obeys precisely as requested. There YHWH sorts out the soldiers based on their drinking performance. Yet this criterion works in a rationally inexplicable way, which the narrator underlines by making it impossible to assign either group that actually drinks (7:6) precisely to any of the predicted groups (7:5).<sup>185</sup> But the result of the second request serves YHWH's intention, so that his turn is successful, too.

Hence both negotiators take up their same chance as they both take two turns, apply the same test method, use the same technique, and request similarly rationalised steps that provide similarly interpreted results. Therefore, the negotiation must be regarded as fair. This means, however, that its outcome should be accepted by both parties, regardless how it will turn out. Yet the different references to Gideon's opponent reveal where the narrator puts the stress in the narrative. It is significant after all that Gideon is described as having an encounter with אֱלֹהִים, yet that the narrator has יהוה taking the part in the negotiation. The narrator thus pictures Gideon as if he doubted who answers his requests, yet by having YHWH responding to Gideon in the second part of the negotiation, he himself removes every doubt that it could be another אֱלֹהִים, i.e., Baal, who answers.<sup>186</sup>

<sup>184</sup>YHWH's request in 7:5 (תְּצִיג) continues the second request by applying the test method.

<sup>185</sup>If those who are predicted to kneel down (כָּרַעוּ, 7:5bβ) to drink match those who are being sent home because they kneel down (כָּרַעוּ, 7:6b) to drink, then those who are predicted to lap (לָקְטוּ, 7:5bα) with their tongue like a dog do still not match those who lap (לָקְטוּ, 7:6a) with their hands, since a dog does not use hands to drink (cf. Ⓞ<sup>A</sup>, that replaces אֶל־פִּיהֶם [7:6a] with ἐν τῆ γλώσσῃ αὐτῶν and thus enables a clear assignment; similarly, DELITZSCH, *Fehler*, §153c); likewise, if those who are predicted to kneel to drink (7:5bβ) match those who lap with their hands (7:6a), then those who are predicted to lap like a dog (7:5bα) match those who kneel to drink (7:6b), and the confusion is perfect; similarly, BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '7:4'. As the simplest solution it appears that all soldiers kneel down to drink and YHWH selects the groups in an inexplicable way. However, given the parallel to the rationally inexplicable second sign to Gideon, it appears that any attempt to rationally explain the means by which the three hundred were selected among the soldiers is destined to fail just as the dry fleece on the wet ground can not be explained rationally. — Against BOLING, *Judges*, 145, who assumed several scribal errors due to homoioteleuton, re-moved אֶל־פִּיהֶם (7:6a) to 7:5bβ, and added בְּלִשְׁוֹנָם (following Ⓞ<sup>A</sup>) and מִים (7:6a) from 7:6b; yet it appears that these attempts require too extensive changes of the text, which to a large extent are not supported by any manuscripts or translations. Most recently, BLOCK, *ibid.*, explained the second phrase of 7:5 as a clarification of the first phrase that is introduced with an epexegetical *waw*. Although this explanation would remove the problems with the identification of the groups, the repetition of בַּל אֲשֶׁר (7:5) might rather indicate that two different groups are described; see GK §154a, n. b., who did not list any example of an explicative *waw* where the subject is repeated.

<sup>186</sup>Similarly, POLZIN, *Moses*, 176; STANDAERT, "Adonai Shalom", 199-200.

*a Gideon's Turn (6:36-40)*

Gideon initiates the negotiation. He starts his first address (6:36) with a rather complicated apodosis where he tries to include all his thoughts and statements.<sup>187</sup> He also avoids any direct request to YHWH and only asks for the sign that there will be dew on the fleece alone, however this will be caused. Similarly, his second address (6:39) is introduced with a *Besänftigungsformel*, before he addresses YHWH directly with two cohortatives, followed by the request; he thus appears to approach YHWH rather cautiously and carefully with both requests.<sup>188</sup> Since Gideon is aware of YHWH's calling and of his divine power, his careful address seems to attest either to Gideon's doubts as to whether YHWH will indeed answer, to his intention to test whether YHWH or Baal answers, or even to his deceitful intention as he requests these two signs.

On the surface, Gideon seeks a confirmation of YHWH's deliverance. Since Elohim grants both signs, Gideon and the Israelites can be confident of winning against the Midianites. The request thus serves to strengthen Gideon and the Israelites for the forthcoming deliverance. A more careful analysis of the requests, however, reveals Gideon's real intention. Gideon does not address the theological theme of the narrative; instead, he twice diminishes YHWH's role in the forthcoming deliverance and elevates his own role instead, before he asks YHWH twice with similar words to confirm his intention to deliver Israel as promised (אִם-יִשָּׁדֶךָ מוֹשִׁיעַ/כִּי-תוֹשִׁיעַ בְּיָדִי אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ, 6:36,37). Gideon thus redefines the theme of the narrative as a narrative of deliverance rather than a theological narrative to demonstrate YHWH's superiority over foreign gods. He further elevates his own role in the forthcoming deliverance, so that it will not be YHWH's deliverance any more, but rather Gideon's.

This switch in emphasis is achieved through a careful selection of words and a careful syntax of the request. Gideon begins by stating the condition as 'if you are truly delivering through my hand Israel as you have said' (6:36),<sup>189</sup> thus indicating his expectation that YHWH would surely provide the deliverance as defined.<sup>190</sup> Yet while the deliverance is originally defined as YHWH's deliverance (6:14,16), as Gideon phrases the condition he is the one who achieves the deliverance through his hand (בְּיָדִי) and YHWH is

<sup>187</sup>SCHULZ, *Richter*, 45; RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 212.

<sup>188</sup>RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 212.

<sup>189</sup>This literal translation attempts to capture the significance of the rarely used {שׁי-sf. + ptc.} (also Gen 24:42; 43:4; 24:49; Deut 13:4; 29:14) and the unusual syntax of the apodosis; see the discussion of this expression—excluding Deut 29:14, though—by MURAOKA, *Words*, 77-82. Similarly translated KEIL, *Commentar*, 259, "wenn du rettend bist"; BURNEY, *Judges*, 204, "if you art to save" (emphasis by BURNEY); and GOSLINGA, *Judges*, 345, "if you are active and ready to save".

<sup>190</sup>MURAOKA, *Words*, 78-79; cf. GK §116q.



simply degraded to the one who silently has to provide Gideon's deliverance without intervening visibly.<sup>191</sup> Accordingly, Gideon withholds from YHWH any visible action in his first address (6:36-37), so that YHWH is meant to remain in the background during the deliverance. Further, by juxtaposing *מושיע* (6:36) and *תושיע* (6:37) next to *בְּיָדִי* and before *אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל*, Gideon defines his own role in the deliverance rather than YHWH's role as the focus of the proposal. The mention of Israel as the object of the deliverance just before the reminder of YHWH's promise to deliver Israel (*כִּי־אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ*) underlines Gideon's intention, as it separates Gideon's real intention from the reminder to YHWH and instead connects the reminder merely with the deliverance of Israel, which YHWH has indeed promised (6:14,16). In this way Gideon tries to conceal his real intention and deceive YHWH into accepting his condition. Further, the reminder merely functions to support the proposal of the main sentence; Gideon tries to oblige YHWH to grant the requested sign according to his promise.<sup>192</sup>

Gideon first requests that the fleece alone should be wet and the ground remain dry (6:37). However, as the fleece would naturally assimilate more dew than the surrounding ground and would in the morning keep the dew for longer than the ground, it appears that this first test can not count as a test. It rather seems that Gideon either makes a mistake in requesting this sign and that he subsequently recognises his mistake and requests a new sign with reversed results,<sup>193</sup> or he deliberately requests a fake sign. With the first option the question arises, why the narrator bothers to record Gideon's mistake, for the second, successful test would obviously suffice. The second option avoids this difficulty by implying that Gideon, knowing that YHWH's proposal and objective substantially differ from his own, would already have intended to take the natural, positive result of the 'test' as point of departure for his second request, in which he would ask YHWH to perform a miracle in order to not contradict himself. This miracle would at the same time support Gideon's proposal.

To clarify the condition of the first request, Gideon repeats the request and the reminder with only a slight but significant change; he replaces the participle *מושיע* with the imperfect *תושיע* (6:37). He thus picks up YHWH's earlier promise (*הושיעת*, ipf., 6:14), which YHWH has meant as a promise that Gideon will deliver Israel in YHWH's strength but which Gideon has interpreted as an indication that he would deliver Israel merely on his own. Accordingly, in his reference to the earlier promise, Gideon explicitly adds that

<sup>191</sup>MASSOT, "Gideon", 67, recognised this "issue of agency", although he interpreted it in line with most commentators as an expression of Gideon's doubtfulness, who still needed to be assured of YHWH's support (ibid., 67-68).

<sup>192</sup>Later in Judges, Jephthah similarly tries to manipulate YHWH through his vow (11:30-31).

<sup>193</sup>CASSEL, *Richter*, 69.

the deliverance should be achieved by his own hand (בְּיָדִי, 6:37). He thus requests a sign to ensure that YHWH's original promise (6:14) rather than the correcting interpretation (6:16) applies and that Gideon will be the one who will in fact deliver Israel.

The next morning Gideon finds his request answered. The fleece is wet and the ground dry. However, as the narrator reveals, god is not involved in that sign; rather what Gideon has requested simply happens (וַיְהִי־כֵן, 6:38).<sup>194</sup> Therefore, this successful 'sign' reveals nothing and should objectively be regarded as unsuccessful not only for Gideon's proposal but also for the Israelites, who may argue that the result was anticipated, does not prove god's involvement, and hence does not guarantee a victorious battle. Gideon, however, squeezes the fleece and wrings dew from it, filling a bowl of water (6:38). The expanded record of the verification of the test gives the impression that Gideon verifies it with a sense of satisfaction. He delights in the result and regards the sign as successful.

Following the subjectively successful first test, Gideon repeats it, requesting the reversed result (6:39-40). This repetition appears only as a test to reassure Gideon of YHWH's support according to Gideon's definition, since Gideon does not repeat the condition but only asks for a reversed outcome of the test. The condition as defined for the first test remains valid, therefore, and since Gideon has—although only verbally—referred the outcome of the first test to YHWH (6:37), he now requests YHWH to grant this second sign, too; for if YHWH does not, Gideon could argue that YHWH was fickle in granting one sign—or at least not hindering the natural result—and refusing the other although the conditions have not changed. Therefore, since YHWH has indeed promised to deliver Israel (6:14,16), Gideon tries to compel YHWH to grant this second sign if he does not want to contradict himself.

The second test is, therefore, Gideon's real test—although viewed objectively it is not a test at all, as the result is set already—, while the first test serves to prepare the second test. Seen in this light, however, both tests merely serve to advance Gideon's own proposal, according to which he will deliver Israel with YHWH remaining in the background, and even force YHWH to accept it. Yet it seems that Gideon is aware that his undertaking is inadequate. He appears to have a bad conscience when he requests the second sign, since he not only tries to ward off YHWH's anger, but also mentions twice that this would be his very last request (6:39). Unlike Abraham, who announces his last request only after long negotiations (Gen 18:32), Gideon already seems to have gone too far. This is also reflected in Gideon's choice of words, as he appears to literally beg YHWH to grant the second request, נִאֲדַבֵּרְךָ הַפֶּעַם ... אֵךְ הַפֶּעַם (6:39). This reveals, however, that Gideon is aware of the natural result of the first test perhaps even before he set it, so

<sup>194</sup> Contrast God's explicit involvement in granting the second sign (וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים כֵּן, 6:40).



that the first test is not a mistake on Gideon's side but as a fake test rather serves its well-thought purpose to prepare the second test where he compels YHWH to accept his proposal. But in granting the second request, YHWH at the same time agrees to Gideon's proposal. There can be only one winner of the fleece test, and that is Gideon.

Yet the narrator disapproves Gideon's tests. By letting Gideon use  $\sqrt{\text{נסה}}$  pi. (6:39), he draws an ironical parallel to the only other evidences of this root in Judges, where it is applied to YHWH, who tests ( $\sqrt{\text{נסה}}$  pi.) Israel whether they obey him or not (2:22; 3:1,4). This parallel to the theological introduction of Judges is enforced by a number of words that play a major role in the call narrative and the theological introduction, such as the references to the fathers (אבות) of Israel (6:13; cf. 2:22; 3:4) and to the commandments given through the hand (יד) of Moses (6:8-10; cf. 3:4). But instead of recognising that YHWH tests Israel through the oppression to make them aware that they do not obey his commandments (cf. Deut 8:2) but rather fall into idolatry, Gideon tests YHWH whether he will keep his promise and thus even contradicts the Deuteronomic Law (Deut 6:16). Gideon's test is therefore judged inappropriate, since it reverses YHWH's due judgement for Israel's apostasy into an improper accusation of YHWH for his judgement.

Nevertheless, YHWH grants the requested sign (וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים בְּיָדוֹ, 6:40).<sup>195</sup> The expanded description of the answer (וַיִּהְיֶה חֶרֶב אֶל־הַגָּזָה לְבָדָה וְעַל־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ הָיָה טָל, 6:40) stresses that the result is unnatural and thus underlines that it is performed by god, who hence has the power to perform difficult tasks. Gideon, however, who also recognises god's involvement, interprets it in his way and now feels confirmed in his proposal of reversed roles so that he himself may claim the victory.

Hence Gideon wins the first round in his negotiation with YHWH. No longer will Gideon be YHWH's tool after the fleece test, but YHWH will be Gideon's tool. Similarly, no longer will YHWH's demonstration of his divine power constitute the theme of the narrative, but rather the deliverance from the Midianites will be focused on.<sup>196</sup> Through the fleece test, Gideon rather makes the deliverance, which the narrator defined as a secondary theme only and as the instrument to narrate the abstract theological theme, the real theme of the narrative. Yet YHWH did not promise to give Midian into Gideon's hand, but rather to be with Gideon so that YHWH's superiority over foreign gods will be proven when Gideon—empowered by YHWH—smites Midian as one man (6:14,16). Accordingly, YHWH in his turn of the negotiation against Gideon will need to reverse the roles again, redefine the theme, and reinforce his objective with the deliverance.

<sup>195</sup> Similarly, RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 213.

<sup>196</sup> Note that in 6:36-40 the theme is defined by Gideon and not by the narrator and that in 7:2-8 this theme is rejected by YHWH and replaced by his own theme.

*b The Narrative Background is Recalled (7:1)*

Having received the desired answer, Gideon rises early and immediately sets out against the Midianites. His immediate action indicates that the fleece test has served its purpose for him, so that he now hurries to complete YHWH's instruction to fight against the Midianites and deliver Israel. However, as his sudden departure forms a stark contrast to his twofold hesitation to fight (6:35,36), it might also attest to Gideon's bad conscience. Gideon believes, after all, that he has compelled YHWH to agree to a proposal which evidently contradicts YHWH's stated objective. Hence although Gideon seems determined at first as he rises early, instead of marching against the Midianites, he stops and camps at the well *קָרַד* ('Well Fearful', 7:1). This name might either reflect Gideon's hesitation after his sudden departure, which would indicate that Gideon does indeed not recognise the fleece test as a sign of YHWH's ability to use him to deliver Israel, or the fear (*קָרַד*, 7:3) of those Israelites, who return home. In either case, Gideon and the Israelites would fear about their success, so that the name of the well accurately reflects Gideon's and the Israelites' state of mind.<sup>197</sup> This fear is even heightened by the increased threat of the Midianite camp assumed in this verse (7:1; cf. 6:33), as the Midianites are no longer just camping in the valley of Jezreel, but are now north of Gideon's army. This additional information makes the Midianite army appear close to Gideon's army, where they even aggravate Gideon's fear.

*c YHWH's Turn (7:2-7)*

This focus on the Midianite army (7:1) also gives YHWH's turn in his negotiation with Gideon (7:2-7) an additional significance. Even after the heightened threat of the enemies, YHWH still annuls every previous effort of Gideon to recruit an army as large as possible, contribute to the victory and claim the glory for himself, as he reverses Gideon's recruitment of his extended army in two steps to just three hundred men. Hence YHWH appears to have seen through Gideon. The episode further serves to highlight YHWH's contribution to the victory as it makes it impossible for Gideon and his limited army to win the battle against the Midianites and their allies (6:34), who are described as coming like locusts to destroy the land (6:5), on their own.

In his proposal, YHWH emphasises that the deliverance will serve to demonstrate his divine power when he rather than Gideon delivers Israel, so that neither Gideon nor Israel may claim the victory nor the honour for it; instead, YHWH should be recognised as god and worshipped instead of foreign gods. This emphasis is achieved through several features. First, both times YHWH gives the same reason for the reduction of the army; the

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<sup>197</sup>Similarly, BUSH, *Judges*, 97; cf. BEYERLIN, "Geschichte": 14; GÖRG, *Richter*, 42.



people are too many (רַב/רַב, 7:2,4) for him to give Midian into the Israelites' hands since Israel could boast against YHWH. Thus YHWH explicitly refers to the danger, which is inherent in Gideon's request (6:36), namely, that Israel would boast against YHWH, saying, that their hand has delivered them (פְּנֵי־יַחַדְפָּאֵר עָלַי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאמֹר יְדֵי הוֹשִׁיעָה לִּי, 7:2). The use of the singular יְדֵי in spite of the plural בְּיָדָם earlier in the same verse especially hints at Gideon's reference to his יָד (6:36) that would deliver Israel. YHWH thus shows that he realises Gideon's real intention to achieve the victory by himself despite Gideon's reference to YHWH's earlier promise (6:14). However, with Israel as the subject of יָד, YHWH avoids accusing Gideon directly and opens a back door for Gideon that allows him without losing his face to let YHWH be honoured for the victory.

Second, the expression {יְדֵי פִּי לִי} (7:2) refers to Deut 8 ({יְדֵי פִּי לִי}, Deut 8:17) as a passage that the angel has referred to already (חֵיל, 6:12; cf. Deut 8:18 • אֲבֹתֶיךָ, 6:13; cf. Deut 8:18) and that was alluded to in Gideon's second request as well (נִסְחָה pi., 6:39; cf. Deut 8:2). There YHWH warns Israel against both believing in their own strength to produce wealth for them ({יְדֵי פִּי לִי}, Deut 8:17) and worshipping other gods (Deut 8:19-20). Instead, the Israelites should remember YHWH, their god, for he has given them the strength to produce wealth (Deut 8:18). The reference to the Israelites' hand (7:2) thus sets the narrative into the Deuteronomic context of forgetting or worshipping YHWH and implies that instead of exalting themselves against YHWH and forgetting him, Gideon and the Israelites should remember and honour YHWH who will give Midian into their hand and worship him as their god. YHWH thus clarifies that the forthcoming deliverance from the Midianites is his work rather than Gideon's or the Israelites' work.

Third, the syntactical structure of YHWH's apprehensions, where the fear that Israel might boast against him is the main statement and the explicit danger that Israel might say that they have delivered themselves is added with לְאמֹר to describe in more detail Israel's boasting (7:2), underlines that YHWH's main concern is not which god will deliver Israel, but rather, that Israel might boast against him by saying that they have delivered themselves. This shows that for YHWH it is not the deliverance which is in the foreground, but rather the demonstration of his power and his claim to be recognised and worshipped as god.

YHWH thus rejects Gideon's objective and upholds his own objective, which the narrator has already defined as the theme of the narrative. Accordingly, using the same technique as Gideon, who emphasised that the deliverance would be carried out through him (אִם־יִשֶׁה מוֹשִׁיעַ/בִּי־תוֹשִׁיעַ בְּיָדִי, 6:36,37), which would let YHWH remain passive or at least in the background, YHWH emphasises that he will deliver Israel and give Midian into Gideon's hand (אֲחֻכֶּם וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־מִדְיָן בְּיָדְךָ, 7:7), so that Gideon remains passive.

To accomplish his goal, YHWH reduces Gideon's army to make it impossible for him to fight against the Midianites on his own. First, he reduces his army on the *הַר הַגִּלְעָד*<sup>198</sup> by sending those home who for any reason are fearful<sup>199</sup> in anticipation of the near battle (*מִי־הָאִישׁ הִירָא* ... *יָשָׁב*) (7:3). This request, which follows the Deuteronomic Law (*מִי־הָאִישׁ הִירָא* ... *וַיֵּשֶׁב*, Deut 20:8), is answered naturally, and twenty-two thousand soldiers withdraw, leaving ten thousand men with Gideon. Since more than twice as many soldiers leave as remain, it appears that YHWH's first reduction annuls Gideon's second extended recruitment, where Gideon calls out three times as many tribes as in the first extended recruitment (6:35). Yet Gideon's extended recruitment is not fully annulled then, so that a second reduction becomes necessary.

This second reduction, which is also introduced with YHWH's assessment that the people are too many, serves to reduce Gideon's army to a ridiculously small number by removing (*צָרַף*) any additional and undesired, that is, fearful soldiers (7:4), so that Gideon can not defeat the allies by himself any more.<sup>200</sup> Although the reason why the army is too large is not explicitly stated here, the assessment that the people are still too many (*עוֹד הָעָם רַב*, 7:4), which repeats the assessment before the first reduction, implies that they could still boast against YHWH. Further, given the hint that YHWH's first reduction annulled Gideon's second extended recruitment, it appears reasonable to argue that YHWH's second reduction annuls Gideon's first extended recruitment and reduces the army presumably to the size it originally had after the recruitment of the Abiezrites alone (6:34; cf. 8:2).<sup>201</sup> Since this recruitment is approved by YHWH, the reduction of the army

<sup>198</sup>The name of the hill may paronomastically play on *גלעד* (cf. Prov 17:14; 18:1; 20:3; †) to describe it in anticipation of the forthcoming battle as the 'hill of the breaking out [of the battle]' (CASSEL, *Richter*, 71) or on akk. *galâdu* ('to be afraid, to tremble'; BURNEY, *Judges*, 207-209 ['Mount Trembling'], followed by BOLING, *Judges*, 145 ['Mount Fearful']).

<sup>199</sup>*יָרָא וְהָרָד* is a hendiadys to include all who for any reason are afraid to fight; BOLING, *Judges*, 144.

<sup>200</sup>In the Hebrew Scriptures, *צָרַף* usually describes the smelting of metal to purify it from any additional and undesired materials. Therefore, this root seems to be appropriate to describe YHWH's effort to reduce Gideon's troops by removing any soldiers that might be in YHWH's way; SLOTKI, "Judges", 216. — On the discussion on the means of the reduction see esp. p. 85, n. 185. Here it might be added that it appears that YHWH wants to reduce Gideon's army as much as possible so that the three hundred men might just have been chosen because they were the smaller group that furthermore possibly matches the original size of Gideon's army; similarly, KEIL, *Commentar*, 259; SCHULZ, *Richter*, 45; HERTZBERG, *Richter*, 195; MARTIN, *Judges*, 94; HOPPE, *Judges*, 148; cf. also MOORE, *Commentary*, 202: "It is doubtful [...] whether the character of the three hundred is in the writer's mind at all".

<sup>201</sup>Similarly, BUDDE, *Buch*, 57; HOPPE, *Judges*, 148. In this light, the three hundred soldiers might represent the Abiezrites that were called out first, although they are not necessarily identical with them; cf. NORMAN K. GOTTWALD, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 1250–1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979; London: SCM, 1980), 276, who suggested that the three hundred men were Manassites.



to this accepted size underlines that Gideon will still succeed as YHWH's agent in the battle. Accordingly, only now, after YHWH has annulled all of Gideon's efforts and when Gideon no longer has sufficient resources to win the battle, YHWH repeats his promise to deliver Israel and give the Midianites into Gideon's hand (7:7); he will do so, therefore, only on his terms. By stressing that he will give the enemies into Gideon's hand alone (בְּיָדְךָ, sg., 7:7), YHWH even implies that he does not at all need Gideon's troops, regardless of their size. He thus ensures that he himself will fight the battle, gain the victory, and be recognised as the victor, and that neither the Israelites nor Gideon—being only one man against numberless enemies—can contribute to the success. He will thus demonstrate his divine power and should, therefore, be recognised, honoured, and worshipped as god.

*d The Outcome of the Negotiation (7:8)*

Hence Gideon sends home the *אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל* (7:8a). If within the Gideon narrative *אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל* describes Israel's military levy,<sup>202</sup> this second record of the soldiers leaving appears to describe Gideon's subjective feelings as he sees the soldiers and with them also his military strength depart. He loses all his hope, for he apparently did not achieve what he sought when he began negotiations with YHWH. Yet he takes every effort to keep (חִזְקוּ לִי, hif. + כֹּה, 7:8a) the remaining three hundred soldiers, so that it appears that even these soldiers feel a desire to leave.<sup>203</sup> At the same time, Gideon's effort, mirroring his fear, hands over all responsibility for the forthcoming battle to YHWH. By furthermore observing the Midianite camp below him, Gideon might have even lost any hope that anything would give him back the opportunity to fight.

With the repetition of the presence of the Midianite army in the valley (7:8b; cf. 6:33) the narrative of the preparation of Gideon's army is completed. Each time, however, the threat of the Midianites is described in more severe terms as to give the impression of an increased oppression, while Gideon's troops are even more reduced each time. First Midian camps in a valley some distance away (6:33), then at the opposite slope of a separating hill (7:1), and finally below Gideon (7:8); Gideon's army, on the contrary, is reduced from thirty-two thousand soldiers (7:1) to ten thousand soldiers (7:3) and finally to just three hundred men (7:8). Hence it is clear that Gideon by no means can defeat the Midianites on his own.

<sup>202</sup>BEYERLIN, "Geschichte": 4-5. Within Judges, the expression *אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל* occurs only in the Gideon-Abimelech narrative (7:8,14,23; 8:22; 9:55) and the second appendix (14 times in Judg 19-21).

<sup>203</sup>WOLF, "Judges", 425.

#### 4 YHWH Demonstrates his Divine Power (7:9-22)

Introductory remarks. With the reduction of Gideon's army (7:2-8) following the confirmation of the deliverance at a time when Gideon's army was still complete (6:36-40), one could argue that a new sign becomes necessary that YHWH will indeed deliver Israel as he has promised, since the promise might have been reasonable only with a larger army; the following episode would then serve to implement this promise.<sup>204</sup> Yet it needs to be observed that the reduction of the army has been justified with the argument that a large army could lead Israel to boast against YHWH (7:2), while the deliverance was repeatedly promised during and even following the reduction episode (7:2,7). Israel's deliverance is, therefore, not affected by the reduction of Gideon's army, and the episode of Gideon's eavesdropping might serve a different purpose.

As already observed, this episode is the only episode in the context of the preparation for the battle that explicitly addresses and nicely accentuates Gideon's fear (7:10-11a). YHWH's permission to eavesdrop on the Midianites and its ready acceptance by Gideon (7:11b) not only demonstrates that YHWH is responsive to Gideon's fear, it also highlights Gideon's inability and thus strengthens YHWH's position for the forthcoming battle and his leading role in delivering Israel. Moreover, after he has overheard the dream with a witness (7:13-15), Gideon will no longer have any reason not to follow YHWH's instructions. So far YHWH has only spoken privately to Gideon about the battle and the promise that he has given the enemies into his hand (6:11-24; 7:2,7). But after YHWH's permission to take Purah with him, Gideon is denied any possibility of ignoring YHWH's promise, because it will be given to Gideon together with a fellow Israelite. Gideon will rather need to go ahead therefore and attack the camp.

##### *a YHWH Confirms his Victory (7:9-14)*

Just as Gideon had set out immediately after the successful fleece test (7:1), YHWH requests Gideon's immediate action the very night after the successful reduction of his army (וַיְהִי בַלַּיְלָה הַהוּא וַיֹּאמֶר לֹ/אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה, 7:9 || 6:25). The nearly identical wording of the introductions to YHWH's command to demolish Baal's altar (6:25) and his command to approach the Midianite camp confirms the expectation that once more YHWH will use Gideon to demonstrate his superiority. As in the first episode Gideon was YHWH's agent to demolish the Baal cult objects and install YHWH worship instead, so this time Gideon will be YHWH's agent in his demonstration of his supreme power.

First, YHWH commands Gideon to arise and enter ( $\{\sqrt{\text{דד}} + \text{ב}\}$ , 7:9) the camp, promising that he has given the enemy camp into Gideon's hand. As opposed to  $\{\sqrt{\text{דד}} +$

<sup>204</sup>EXUM, "Centre": 418.



אָל}, that simply indicates an approach, {√ירד + ב} implies an attack on the camp, as it implies that Gideon should enter the camp. In combination with YHWH's promise that he has given the camp into Gideon's hand, it shows that YHWH expects Gideon to defeat the enemy in the camp.<sup>205</sup> Yet neither Gideon alone, whom YHWH addresses (ג, sg.), nor his three hundred men are a sufficiently large force to defeat the numberless Midianites, so that YHWH's command confirms his proposal (7:7), according to which he will take the initiative and actively give the Midianites into Gideon's hand. Hence YHWH rather than Gideon is the guarantor and giver of the victory over the Midianites, which will be witnessed by Gideon and his troops.

YHWH continues his address to Gideon by directly addressing Gideon's fear for the first time. If he fears to go down ({√ירד + ∅}, 7:10a), which can only be a reference to the earlier command to attack the camp (7:9), Gideon may take his servant Purah, and they may together approach the camp ({√ירד + אָל}, 7:10b). Through the separation of the preposition אָל from the predicate and the postponement of the important difference with regard to Gideon's type of approach (אָל, 'approach' [7:10] instead of ב, 'attack' [7:9 and implied in 7:10a]) to the end of the permission, the postponed clarification appears as YHWH's additional permission to Gideon. Gideon, who is nevertheless fearful, may be relieved to hear that they should only approach it. Furthermore, by stressing Gideon's personal fear (וְאַתָּה יָרָא אֶתָּה, 7:10) through the addition of the personal pronoun to the protasis, YHWH's permission highlights Gideon's fearfulness and ironically plays on Gideon's characteristic as a mighty warrior or man of strength (6:12), since Gideon does not at all appear as such. Although Gideon is convinced that the battle will be won, now that he approaches the battle with a reduced army, Gideon is overcome by his fear again. He readily accepts YHWH's permission that is based on the acknowledgement of his fear, and thus agrees that he is too fearful to fight by himself. YHWH further promises that when Gideon will arrive at the camp, he will hear what the Midianites say, his hands will be strengthened, and he will then attack the camp ({√ירד + ב}, 7:11a). The repetition of {√ירד + ב} draws a parallel to its first mention (7:9), from where the additional information may be added that Gideon can attack the camp only because YHWH has already given it into his hand. Hence YHWH repeats his promise, and—giving Gideon the choice to listen to the Midianites first—commands him to attack the camp.

Gideon readily accepts the permission to take his servant with him and approach the camp only (7:11b). Yet even together they still do not go directly to the camp but rather

<sup>205</sup> Similarly, e.g., JOSEPHUS *Antiquities* 5.218; KEIL, *Commentar*, 260, 261; BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 146; FAUSSET, *Judges*, 129; OETTLI, *Richter*, 253; BUDDE, *Buch*, 59; NOWACK, *Richter*, 71; A. EHRLICH, *Randglossen*, 96; BURNEY, *Judges*, 213; KITTEL, "Richter", 383; SLOTKI, "Judges", 218; MARTIN, *Judges*, 97; OLSON, "Judges", 803; BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '7:14'.

stop at the outskirts of the armed forces of the camp that is even further away from them. This once more highlights Gideon's fearfulness and demonstrates that the following battle by no means can be won by Gideon but will be won by YHWH alone.

As he goes down, Gideon observes the allies (7:12). Although the narrator does not include a verbal marker<sup>206</sup> to indicate that Gideon observes the Midianite army as described, the mention of Gideon departing for (7:11) and arriving at the camp (7:13) provides a sufficiently clear context that justifies the interpretation that Gideon, as he goes down, observes the Midianite army from the slope of the hill. He finds them camping in the valley like locusts, so many (לָרֹב), and with numberless camels like the sand at the seashore, so many (לָרֹב). The description of the enemies as Midian, Amalek, and the sons of the East (מִדְיָן וְקַלְמִיק וְעַמְלֵק וְבְנֵי־קְדָם, 7:12 || מִדְיָן וְקַלְמִיק וְעַמְלֵק וְבְנֵי־קְדָם || 6:33) further draws the multitude of the enemies before ones eyes, so that the audience observes the threat from the enemies just like Gideon. This threat is literally increased through the inclusion of כָּל to describe the multitude of the sons of the East that Gideon observes<sup>207</sup> rather than the multitude of one nation only (6:33), whose camels are without number like the sand at the seashore (7:12).<sup>208</sup> Moreover, this time the alliance is not described as coming (עָלָה, 6:3) or joining forces (אָסַף, 6:33) against Israel, but even as falling upon (נָפַל, 7:12) the land like locusts (cf. 6:5). Their invasion is, therefore, described in really threatening terms. The twofold mention of לָרֹב in the description (7:12), which intensifies this perception even more, further draws a parallel to YHWH's twofold reduction of Gideon's army because the soldiers were too many (רַב/רָב, 7:2,4). It also seems to add a subjective momentum to the description of the enemies as it appears that Gideon contrasts his limited army with the Midianites' large army and fearfully concludes that he will not have the slightest chance of winning the battle, let alone being honoured for the victory.

Yet still, as Gideon and his servant arrive at the outskirts of the camp and hear the account of the dream and the interpretation, Gideon perceives that even this large army will be defeated by god, who has already given Midian and the whole camp into his hand (7:14).<sup>209</sup> Since furthermore they arrive at the very moment of the conversation, it appears that the entire conversation is staged purely for their ears and that YHWH has sent them to the camp (7:10) only to listen to the dream, so that Gideon's hands might be

<sup>206</sup>E.g., וְהָיָה (7:13; also 6:28 of the Ophrahites).

<sup>207</sup>Similarly, RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 169.

<sup>208</sup>Cf. 6:5, where the narrator states that the camels can not be counted, thus assuming at least an attempt to count them. In 7:12, on the contrary, even an attempt to count them is vain, since they are without number.

<sup>209</sup>Similarly, WEBB, *Book*, 151; also, BEYERLIN, "Geschichte": 19.



strengthened for the forthcoming battle (7:11).<sup>210</sup> As Gideon perceives that he is being described as a *אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל* (7:14), he might even be relieved to hear that the soldier mentions him as a man belonging to Israel's levy whom he has sent home earlier (7:8).<sup>211</sup> He should now be convinced that he can defeat the Midianites, and his hands should, therefore, indeed be strengthened to attack the camp as promised (7:11). Further, since Gideon overhears the dream not alone but rather with a witness, he can no longer argue that his troops should not attack the camp, since now a fellow Israelite knows that YHWH has already given the camp into Gideon's hand.

At this point we need to halt for a moment and analyse the dream and its interpretation in more detail. The dream may be categorised as a symbolic dream.<sup>212</sup> As such, it belongs to the same category as Joseph's dreams (Gen 37:5-8,9-10), the dreams of the two imprisoned Egyptian officials (Gen 40:9-15,16-19), Pharaoh's dream (Gen 41), and Nebuchadnezzar's dreams (Dan 2; 3:31–4:34). Being symbolic, the dream does not lend itself to a straightforward understanding but rather demands an interpretation by which the symbols of the dream are transferred properly to the narrated reality.<sup>213</sup> Hence the interpretation of a symbolic dream is always based on the account of the dream in such a way that characteristic features of the dream lead to its interpretation. Therefore, the account of the dream and its interpretation share certain features.<sup>214</sup> These features may lie in matching actions,<sup>215</sup> corresponding numbers,<sup>216</sup> the identical quality of the symbol(s) and their counterpart(s),<sup>217</sup> or even paronomastic associations of similarly

<sup>210</sup>KEIL, *Commentar*, 262; RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 189; MASSOT, "Gideon", 91-92.

<sup>211</sup>Cf. BEYERLIN, "Geschichte": 4-5.

<sup>212</sup>JOH. HEMPEL, "Jahwegleichenisse der israelitischen Propheten", *ZAW* 42 (1924): 82-83; OSKAR GREYER, *Name und Wort Gottes im Alten Testament*, BZAW 64 (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1934), 95; ERNST LUDWIG EHRLICH, *Der Traum im Alten Testament*, BZAW 73 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1953), 58-124, esp. 85-90; WOLFGANG RICHTER, "Traum und Traumdeutung im AT: Ihre Form und Verwendung", *BZ N.F.* 7 (1963): 205; MICHAEL FISHBANE, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 450-452, esp. 451; STERNBERG, *Poetics*, 396.

<sup>213</sup>STERNBERG, *Poetics*, 396, mentioned as examples that in Pharaoh's dream the cows rather than the heads of grain emerge from the Nile (Gen 41).

<sup>214</sup>HEMPEL, "Jahwegleichenisse": 82.

<sup>215</sup>E.g., the bowing down of the brother's sheaves of grain before Joseph's sheaves (*√חיה II hišt.*, Gen 37:5-8) matches their bowing down before Joseph (*√חיה II hišt.*, Gen 42:6; 43:26) in Egypt. Similarly, E. EHRLICH, *Traum*, 65-73, demonstrated that the cup bearer in Gen 40 dreams a dream where he acts in his office whereas the baker dreams a dream where he remains passive; accordingly the interpretation predicts that only the cup bearer will be reinstated into his office.

<sup>216</sup>E.g., the numbers three (Gen 40), seven (Gen 41), or four (Dan 2; 3-4). HEMPEL, "Jahwegleichenisse": 83.

<sup>217</sup>E.g., the good and bad cows and heads of grain match the years of wealth and famine respectively (Gen 41). HEMPEL, "Jahwegleichenisse": 83.

sounding words.<sup>218</sup> The task of the interpreter is then to detect the feature that provides the key for the understanding of the dream, apply it to the given situation, and so interpret the dream.<sup>219</sup>

According to the soldier's account of the dream, a  $\text{לֶחֶם שְׂעִירִים}$ <sup>220</sup>  $\text{צָלִיל}$  tumbles into the Midianite camp and strikes ( $\sqrt{\text{נכה}}$  hif.) the tent; the tent falls ( $\sqrt{\text{נפל}}$ , ipf. cons.) and is turned upwards; and so the tent fell ( $\sqrt{\text{נפל}}$ , pf. cons.; 7:13). The translation of the *hapax legomenon*  $\text{צָלִיל}$ , which describes the barley bread that tumbles into the Midianite camp, is uncertain. However, it is clear, that the bread rolls into the camp, so that the noun may well describe a round cake.<sup>221</sup> Yet it is not clear where the bread comes from; it is suddenly there, apparently coming from nowhere. Further, it does not simply roll, it rather 'tumbles' ( $\sqrt{\text{הפך}}$  hitp.), which describes its action as an unpredictable motion. This motion is furthermore made explicit by the soldier who uses similar sounding words ( $\text{וַיִּכְהוּ וַיִּהְפְּכוּ} \dots$ ) and thus imitates the tumbling of the bread even in his account. The prolonged description of how the tent falls highlights its complete destruction; it falls and is turned upwards.

The dream supports YHWH's promise in three ways. First, the use of  $\sqrt{\text{נכה}}$  hif. to describe the effect of the bread together with the observation that the bread strikes just one tent, which represents the whole camp, strongly hints at YHWH's promise to Gideon that he will smite ( $\sqrt{\text{נכה}}$  hif.) Midian as one man (6:16); the dream thus attributes the destruction of the Midianite camp to YHWH. The subsequent lengthy description of the extent of the destruction emphasises its completeness, so that the last phrase with the verb in the perfect tense ( $\text{וַיִּפֹּל הָאֵהָל}$ ), indicating the result of the strike, might be intended as the summary of the dreamt action, which is added to intensify the effect.<sup>222</sup> Second, the

<sup>218</sup>E.g.,  $\text{שָׁבַע}$  and  $\text{שָׁבַע}$  (Gen 41:29),  $\text{קָץ}$  and  $\text{קָץ}$  (Amos 8:2), or  $\text{שָׁקַד}$  and  $\text{שָׁקַד}$  (Jer 1:12). HEMPEL, "Jahwegleichnisse": 83; FISHBANE, *Interpretation*, 451.

<sup>219</sup>HEMPEL, "Jahwegleichnisse": 83; cf. E. EHRLICH, *Traum*, 65-85, who demonstrated that the symbols in the dreams of the Egyptian officials (Gen 40) and of Pharaoh (Gen 41) match the foretold reality.

<sup>220</sup> $Q^e r\acute{e}$ ;  $K^e \ddot{u}b$ :  $\text{צָלִיל}$ .

<sup>221</sup>STUDER, *Richter*, 202, interpreted  $\text{צָלִיל}$  as an adjective that is used as a noun and translated 'the rolling down of a barley bread'; CASSEL, *Richter*, 75, assumed that  $\text{צָלִיל}$  was interchangeable with  $\text{גָּלָל}$  ('round'); NOWACK, *Richter*, 71, drew a parallel to a not further specified Arabic word 'to roll'; and OETTLI, *Richter*, 254, claimed that  $\text{צָלִיל}$  and  $\text{צָלָה}$  might be closely related (cf.  $\text{רָבַח/רָבַב}$ ,  $\text{רָדַח/רָדַד}$ , etc.) and, following  $\text{C}$ , derived  $\text{צָלִיל}$  from  $\sqrt{\text{צלה}}$  ('to roast' [of meat]); while the paronomastic play of  $\text{צָלִיל}$  on  $\text{צָלָל}$  ('das Klingeln, Klirren' [JOHANNES GABRIEL, "Die Kainitengenealogie: Gn 4, 17-24", in *Studia Biblica et Orientalia*, vol. 1: *Vetus Testamentum*, AnBib 10 {Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1959}, 282; and accepted as a possibility in HALAT, s.v.  $\text{צָלָה}$ , <  $\sqrt{\text{צלל}}$  I, [of ears,] 'to ring' [1 Sam 3:11; 2 Kgs 21:12; Jer 19:3. KEIL, *Commentar*, 261]) does not help the understanding.

<sup>222</sup>Similarly, KEIL, *Commentar*, 261.



unpredictable motion of the bread resembles the unpredictable result of YHWH's method to reduce Gideon's army (7:4-7) and by thus implying YHWH's involvement in the motion of the bread, it anticipates YHWH's victory over the Midianites (7:22). Third, since the bread comes from nowhere, it anticipates YHWH's sudden appearance in the Midianite camp (7:22). Hence the dream assigns the victory to YHWH alone.

Despite the dream being a symbolic dream, the symbols in the dream do not have any apparent equivalent in the interpretation; the only obvious link between the account of the dream and the interpretation is the mention of the Midianite camp, and it does not need much sense to transfer the explicit mention of the camp in the dream to its equivalent in the narrated situation. Further, the soldier uses the feminine demonstrative pronoun זאת (7:14) to link his interpretation to the dream, which indicates that he does not interpret the שְׁעָרִים (7:13) that causes the destruction of the camp, but rather refers his interpretation to the dream in its entirety.<sup>223</sup>

According to the interpretation, the dream refers to Gideon, who will destroy the Midianite camp because god has given Midian and the whole camp into his hand. Hence the soldier attributes the victory to YHWH, but still refers an important role in the destruction of the camp to Gideon, who is seen as YHWH's agent. Hence both the dream and the interpretation indicate that YHWH, being symbolised by the suddenly approaching and unpredictably moving bread, strikes the Midianite camp and destroys it completely. Therefore, both the account and the interpretation should remind Gideon of YHWH's leading involvement and his own role as YHWH's agent only, and the interpretation should further remind him that god has already given the Midianites into his hand, so that YHWH is both the provider of the deliverance and the one who carries it out.

Having heard the interpretation of the dream, Gideon delights in it (7:15). However, as the narrator implies, Gideon misunderstands the interpretation. Using the noun שֶׁבֶר I for the interpretation as Gideon perceives it (7:15) and thus alluding at שֶׁבֶר II ('grain, corn'; = 'bread'),<sup>224</sup> the narrator might indicate that Gideon understands the interpretation and hence also the dream as if he himself represented the bread and destroyed the Midianite camp. Therefore, with this wrong understanding of the dream, Gideon is impressed, as he sees his proposal revived, according to which YHWH will give Israel into his hand and he himself will deliver Israel (6:14,36).<sup>225</sup>

<sup>223</sup> Similarly, MOORE, *Commentary*, 207; THATCHER, *Judges*, 84; cf. CUNDALL, "Commentary", 113; BOLING, *Judges*, 146; SOGGIN, *Judges*, 141; GÖRG, *Richter*, 44; MASSOT, "Gideon", 92.

<sup>224</sup> Cf. GB<sup>17</sup>, s.v. שֶׁבֶר I, who assumed only one noun שֶׁבֶר. Within the Hebrew Scriptures, שֶׁבֶר I is used only here for the interpretation of a dream, the normally used noun being פְּתָרִין (5 times in Gen 40; 41; cf. the verb פָּתַר, 8 times in Gen 40; 41; and aram. פִּשְׂר in Dan).

<sup>225</sup> Similarly, BOLING, *Judges*, 146.

*b Gideon Delights in his Interpretation of YHWH's Promise (7:15)*

After Gideon has heard the account of the dream and, equally important for him, its interpretation, he bows down (√חרה hišt., 7:15).<sup>226</sup> For Purah, who like the other Israelites most likely is unaware of Gideon's real intention to fight against the Midianites on his own account and who hence has only heard that god has given the camp into Gideon's hand, Gideon's gesture appears as his worship of YHWH. However, since in Judges √חרה hišt. is used only in the introduction to Judges to describe Israel's bowing down before other gods instead of YHWH (2:12,17,19), and since furthermore YHWH is not mentioned as the recipient of Gideon's worship, one may suspect that his worship, which outwardly is directed towards YHWH,<sup>227</sup> is not really focused on him. It might instead express his joy that his proposal will be implemented. Gideon's gesture is, therefore, ambiguous. For the Israelites' representative Purah, who interprets it as worship of YHWH, it demonstrates Gideon's piety; yet the narrator implies that Gideon's worship is not entirely directed towards YHWH but is rather centred in Gideon himself.

Following his ambiguous bowing down, Gideon calls out his three hundred men with the promise that YHWH has given the Midianite camp into their hand. Given Gideon's ambiguous worship gesture, it appears that his reference to YHWH serves to encourage his troops rather than attribute the victory to YHWH. His sudden haste to fight against the Midianites (7:15) also forms a stark contrast to his previous tactic of postponing the battle (6:35,36),<sup>228</sup> while it parallels his hurried expedition against the Midianites after the successful fleece test (7:1). Yet Gideon's behaviour is understandable if one considers that both of his postponements were motivated by his attempt to achieve the victory by himself and his hurry to fight was motivated by his understanding that YHWH has just agreed to his proposal. Since now the interpretation of the dream has subjectively confirmed his proposal, it appears only natural that Gideon would again hurry to fight, perhaps even to forestall YHWH in his possible attempt to correct his understanding of the interpretation once again just as he has corrected his understanding of the fleece test.

<sup>226</sup>Despite its frequent analysis as hithpal'el of שחה (e.g., GB<sup>17</sup>, s.v. שחה; LISOWSKY, 1420-1421; EVEN-SHOSHAN, 1129-1130), וישתחו should rather be analysed as a hištaf'el of חרה II (so HALAT, s.v. חרה II; H.-P. STÄHLI, "חרה hwh hišt. sich niederwerfen", in *THAT*, vol. 1: 530-533; H. D. PREUSS, "חרה hwh; השתחוה hištaḥ<sup>a</sup>wāh", in *ThWAT*, vol. 2: 785; TERENCE E. FRETHEIM, "חרה", in *NIDOTTE*, vol. 2: 42), since the hithpal'el of שחה should appear as השתחה without the intrusive waw (PREUSS, *ibid.*).

<sup>227</sup>Thus Ⓞ, followed by BOLING, *Judges*, 146, and most commentators, *ad loc.*, who have at least implied YHWH worship. MASSOT, "Gideon", 98, even went a step further as he depicted Gideon as most faithful to YHWH in paying the appropriate homage to him and obeying his instructions to deliver Israel; cf. ⓄJon (√דא); GUTBROD, *Buch*, 248; PREUSS, "חרה hwh": 789; and FRETHEIM, "חרה": 43, who assumed that Gideon offered a prayer of thanksgiving to YHWH.

<sup>228</sup>Similarly, MASSOT, "Gideon", 96.



Yet while YHWH has promised to give the Midianites into Gideon's hand (בְּיָדְךָ, 7:7,9; בְּיָדוֹ, 7:14; cf. 6:14,16; 7:11; all sg.), Gideon quotes the promise as if YHWH had given them into the troops' hand (בְּיָדְכֶם, pl.; 7:15). This understanding directs the attention away from Gideon and to YHWH and the troops, but it also excludes Gideon as the receiver. In this way Gideon appears to avoid any direct reference to his real intention and at the same time keeps the option open to be honoured for the victory himself because he will lead the troops. Hence despite the statement that YHWH has given the enemies into the troops' hand, before his troops Gideon will emerge as the one through whom YHWH will do so. As the troops' commander, Gideon will then appear as the one who is responsible for the victory. The readers of these episodes, however, repeatedly read that YHWH will give the Midianites into the Israelites' hand (cf. 7:7,9,14), so that it can not be overlooked that it will be YHWH and not Gideon who will establish the victory; Gideon will only serve as the receiver of the Midianites and as YHWH's agent and witness.

*c Gideon Prepares to Fight by Himself (7:16-18)*

Dividing his small army into three units, Gideon takes the position of a commander. He provides them with horns, empty jars, and torches, and instructs them to do exactly what he shows them to do (7:16-18). Yet even now, Gideon does not carry out YHWH's command faithfully. While YHWH instructs him to attack the camp (7:9,11), Gideon even only approaches the outskirts of the camp with his troops (7:19), either because he is fearful or because he has already made the plan<sup>229</sup> to set the Midianites into panic himself. However, since Gideon knows that the Midianites will be defeated, he does not need to be fearful. Furthermore, by telling his troops to watch him continuously, he appears to have already made a plan to defeat the Midianites by himself.

In the instructions to his troops, Gideon emphasises his own role. First, he carefully formulates (מִמְנֵי תִרְאוּ וְכֵן תַּעֲשׂוּ, 7:17aβ) and repeats (וְהָיָה כִּאֲשֶׁר-רָאִיתֶם עֲשׂוּ, 7:17bβ) his instructions. Especially in the first version, which through its rhyme and rhythm is easy to remember, Gideon lays special emphasis on himself as he places the reference to himself first (מִמְנֵי). Second, by asking his troops to do exactly whatever they see (רְאוּ) him doing, he does not tell his troops what to do but only refers them to himself.<sup>230</sup> Third, the threefold use of the empty and meaningless עֲשׂוּ<sup>231</sup> lets the instruction to

<sup>229</sup>S. TOLKOWSKI, "Gideon's 300' (Judges vii and viii)", *JPOS* 5 (1925): 73.

<sup>230</sup>Later Abimelech will copy Gideon's tactics, when he asks his men to watch (רְאוּ) what he is doing (עֲשׂוּ); see the comments on 9:48.

<sup>231</sup>RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 190.

watch him (7:17aβ) and the double reference to him (7:17aβ,bβ) become the only meaningful elements of Gideon's instruction. Gideon instructs his troops to watch him continuously and he thus pushes himself into the leading position and makes his troops completely dependent on him. Fourth, in the battle cry Gideon refers to himself along with YHWH (לַיהוָה וְלִגְדֵעִוָן, 7:18) in open defiance of YHWH's intention to fight and be honoured for the victory alone (7:2);<sup>232</sup> and given Gideon's intention to be honoured himself for the victory, it appears that his reference to YHWH is a device to encourage the Israelites rather than a confession to YHWH. Fifth, the instruction to "say" (אָמַר, 7:18) the battle cry rather than to cry it out (cf. קָרָא, 7:20) is remarkably bland and might reflect Gideon's attempt to conceal his real intention.<sup>233</sup> Finally, by observing that now Gideon's instructions begin and end with a reference to himself, one concludes that Gideon is the main character in his instruction and hence will also be the main character in the battle, so that he should be honoured for the victory.

Hence Gideon takes YHWH's position in the battle. He is no longer dependent on YHWH, but rather the small Israelite army is dependent on Gideon, who emerges as their independent commander. Gideon thus passes on the dependence he should show towards YHWH to those who are under his control, so that the Israelite army takes the position under Gideon that he should take under YHWH. Just as his troops silently obey him and let him take the lead, watch him, follow his instructions, and fear him, so Gideon should silently obey YHWH and let him take the lead, watch him, follow his instructions, and fear him. Hence their behaviour demonstrates with a strong irony how Gideon should behave towards YHWH and be dependent on YHWH for the battle. However, with himself in the commanding position, Gideon makes sure that he will be the one who will be credited with the victory although neither he nor his troops but rather YHWH will fight the battle, as even Gideon knows (6:36,37; 7:2,7,9,14).

It is significant that YHWH stops giving Gideon instructions and rather remains silent in this scene. YHWH's silence could be interpreted positively, in which case Gideon—now fearless—finally sets out to deliver Israel according to YHWH's plan.<sup>234</sup> However, one would then expect first, that Gideon would have already begun after an even better assurance of success by receiving YHWH's spirit (6:34), and second, that Gideon does not

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<sup>232</sup>Cf. Moses' sin of not honouring YHWH for providing water from the rock (Num 20:9-12); MASSOT, "Gideon", 98-99, 113. A further interesting parallel was observed by OLSON, "Judges", 803, who compared the account of Gideon's battle with that recorded in Josh 2 and concluded that in contrast to Joshua, whose command to shout gave glory to YHWH alone, Gideon desired to claim credit along with god.

<sup>233</sup>MOORE, *Commentary*, 209, described the verb as "colourless"; and THATCHER, *Judges*, 85, observed that the verb was "very tame".

<sup>234</sup>MASSOT, "Gideon", 96.



emphasise his own role in the battle and place himself on a par with YHWH. Furthermore, since Gideon sets out only after he has received the desired confirmation that he could fight the battle, it is more likely that YHWH's silence should be interpreted negatively. In this case Gideon through his hastened beginning gives YHWH no more time to act before the battle; and indeed, YHWH is not mentioned any more in conjunction with Gideon for the remainder of the narrative, so that it appears as if Gideon successfully manages to trick YHWH by calling out his troops and approaching the Midianite camp immediately after his eavesdropping.

*d YHWH Demonstrates his Power (7:19-22)*

Thus Gideon and his troops set out for the Midianite camp yet come to a stop already at its outskirts. Hence Gideon does not fully implement YHWH's instructions to attack the camp; it rather seems that he is still fearful. It appears, therefore, that he lets YHWH fight the battle, yet at the same time prepares to contribute to the victory by throwing the enemies into great fear (7:19). To achieve this, in the middle of a dark and silent night he and his troops blow their horns, smash their jars, hold their torches, and cry out their battle cry. By emphasising the number of the blown horns rather than the number of the Israelites (7:22)<sup>235</sup> the narrator emphasises the loud sound of three hundred horns; also the repetition of both the smashing of the jars (7:19,20) and the blowing of the trumpets (7:19,20,22) in addition to the remark that the Israelites shout (קראו, 7:20) the battle cry instead of saying it (אמרו, 7:18) as instructed—if this is not simply a stylistic variation—, add to the perception of a very loud noise. The lengthy description of the action of Gideon's troops (7:19b-21a) in combination with the final assessment that the troops stand rooted to the spot around the camp furthermore adds to the perception that the troops appear somewhat lost in their chaos of activities<sup>236</sup> and are so preoccupied that they can not and do not fight against the Midianites.<sup>237</sup> This impression is supported by the observation that the Israelites securely hold (חזקו, hif. + כּ) the torches in their left hands and their horns in their right hands (7:20). They are thus described as having both their hands occupied, so that they are unable to pick up their swords to fight, let alone to

<sup>235</sup>If שלש מאות referred to the Israelites it should be followed by איש (cf. 7:6,16,19; 8:4); BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 149.

<sup>236</sup>Cf. BUDDE, *Buch*, 60: "Eine brennende Fackel in einem darüber gestülpten Topfe zu tragen, braucht man zwei Hände, man hat dann für die Posaune keine mehr übrig, oder umgekehrt ähnlich. Ebenso kann man nicht zugleich ins Horn stoßen und das Schlachtgeschrei erheben (v. 18-20). Diese Überfüllung kennzeichnet das ganze Stück und stiftet die schlimmste Verwirrung darin." — For an overview of different attempts to interpret the obvious overcrowding in these verses, see MASSOT, "Gideon", 94-95.

<sup>237</sup>WELLHAUSEN, *Prolegomena*, 240.

deliver Israel through their hands (cf. 6:36,37; 7:2).<sup>238</sup> Only YHWH is left with empty hands; therefore, only YHWH will be able to fight the battle and deliver Israel and indeed does so (7:22).<sup>239</sup>

The troops' actual battle cry (חָרַב לַיהוָה וְלִגְדֵעוֹן, 7:20) thus becomes ambiguous. By referring both to YHWH and to Gideon, the troops follow Gideon's instruction and refer to him together with YHWH as the commander. At the same time, they go beyond Gideon's instructions and add a reference to the sword. The sword, standing for the battle, corresponds to Gideon's intention that the battle against the Midianites rather than YHWH's demonstration of his divine power is the focus of the narrative.<sup>240</sup> Yet while Gideon leaves the nature of the battle open, allowing for both the interpretation that the deliverance is the main issue and the interpretation that the battle is rather a demonstration of YHWH's power, the troops define the purpose of the battle purely in terms of the deliverance. Hence already at this point the narrator anticipates that the following narrative might record the effect of the deliverance from the Midianites rather than that of the demonstration of YHWH's power.

However, placing the sword at YHWH's disposal first, the Israelites invite YHWH to fight the battle. The battle cry thus expresses YHWH's intention according to which he and not Gideon will fight the battle. And indeed, the episode of the battle shows that YHWH fights the battle, so that the troops' possibly unintentional variation of the battle cry becomes true. YHWH, so to speak, figuratively wields the sword that the Israelite troops can not wield and refer to him (7:20); in this case, YHWH's promise, according to which he will deliver Israel with Gideon as his agent, would become true with a remarkable accuracy. Yet since the narrator has the Midianites fight against each other, he implies that YHWH does not need to intervene actively. Instead, the swords in the hands of the Midianites become YHWH's swords, and he sets these against each Midianite (7:22). Therefore, not Gideon and his troops but rather YHWH fights the battle.

With their swords, YHWH throws the Midianites into a chaos and causes them to jump up in fear,<sup>241</sup> cry, flee,<sup>242</sup> and fight against each other (7:22). By at the same time having Gideon's troops just stand on their place and blow their horns, the narrator

<sup>238</sup>RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 195, observed that no weapon is mentioned in the description of Gideon's troops (7:16-21); similarly, J. GRAY, *Judges*, 293, noticed that the only weapon mentioned in the narrative is the sword of the Midianites.

<sup>239</sup>Similarly, RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 170-172, in his argumentation against BUDDE (see p. 103, n. 236).

<sup>240</sup>Similarly, KLEIN, *Triumph*, 57.

<sup>241</sup>BOLING, *Judges*, 147.

<sup>242</sup>Accepting the *Q<sup>erê</sup>* (וַיָּרֶם); the *K<sup>erîb</sup>* (וַיִּירֶם) would have the Israelites cause the Midianites to flee.



clarifies that YHWH rather than Gideon and his troops fights against the Midianites, so that it is evident that YHWH is the real victor in the battle, and Gideon's wrong quotation of the angel and the resulting accusation of YHWH, that he is not with Israel (6:13), is proven false at this point in the narrative. Fearful Gideon, on the other hand, together with his incapable troops only scare the Midianites, but they do not achieve the victory.<sup>243</sup> The prolonged description of the destination of the Midianites' flight (7:22b) might possibly serve to enhance the completeness of YHWH's victory.<sup>244</sup> The Midianites flee towards their home rather chaotically, until they reach *שַׁפְת־אֲבֵל מְחוּלָה* (7:22). Since in geographical contexts the noun *שַׁפְת* usually refers to the shore of a river or the sea,<sup>245</sup> it is assumed that the Midianites flee towards the Jordan. As their threat originated only when they crossed the Jordan before (6:33), so now, fleeing towards the Jordan, they return to their home land and no longer threaten Israel. YHWH's victory is thus complete.

Given the Midianite's dream and its interpretation as the prediction of the victory, Gideon ought to recognise that YHWH has indeed achieved the victory, since the destruction of the camp is clearly caused by YHWH, even if Gideon argued that he contributed to the self-murderous chaos. With the dream predicting the implementation of YHWH's promise, its fulfilment at the same time is the fulfilment of YHWH's promise to deliver Israel from the hand of the Midianites; and this deliverance in turn convincingly demonstrates YHWH's divine power.

Yet it is unclear how Gideon's troops perceive the outcome. On the one hand, by watching the panic in the Midianite camp, they serve as first-hand witnesses of YHWH's fight and they ought to recognise that it was YHWH who won the victory. Yet on the other hand, as they made as much noise as possible, they might get the impression that they and Gideon as their leader played a decisive role in throwing the enemies in the camp into panic, and they might accordingly attribute the victory to Gideon. Hence the attribution of the victory to Gideon following Gideon's personal victory later in the narrative might already be foreshadowed at this point.

## 5 Summary: The Demonstration of YHWH's Divine Power

Hence YHWH gains a limited success only. On the one hand, he clothes Gideon with his spirit, stresses that he will achieve the deliverance independently from Gideon's troops,

<sup>243</sup>HERTZBERG, *Richter*, 196, indicated that the Israelite troops should not even be described as actors, but rather as bystanders.

<sup>244</sup>So far every attempt to locate most of these localities has failed; GARSIEL, "Name-derivations": 312, assumed hints at Num 25:1 and Josh 3:16.

<sup>245</sup>STUDER, *Richter*, 207, refers to 2 Kgs 2:13 as a parallel; similarly, HALAT, s.v. *שַׁפְת*.

makes it impossible for Gideon to contribute to the victory, and finally demonstrates convincingly and with three hundred witnesses that he rather than Gideon fights the battle in an unintelligible way. Accordingly, YHWH is repeatedly described as the deliverer while Gideon is never described so.<sup>246</sup> By literally intervening in the Midianite camp on himself and causing the Midianites to fight against each other, which no soldier would do under normal circumstances, YHWH also demonstrates his supreme and divine power. Therefore, there should be no discussion about who has fought the battle, won the victory, and delivered Israel.

On the other hand, Gideon tries to recruit an army large enough to achieve the victory himself, and despite YHWH's reduction of the army to its original size, he manages to terrify the enemy so that it may appear to the Israelites that the Midianites' confusion and turning against each other was the natural result of their sudden and unexpected noise. Hence Gideon manages to take his part in YHWH's victory. He puts forward his claim to be recognised as victor and be honoured for the victory and thus fails to honour YHWH for his deliverance. But if Gideon is being credited for the victory, YHWH's demonstration of his divine power will be left without consequences.

Hence while the narrator attributes the victory to YHWH and has the Israelites even witness YHWH's victory, the Israelites might still ignore YHWH's involvement and attribute the decisive role and the honour for the victory to Gideon.

## **C The Narrator Demonstrates Gideon's Limited Power (7:23–8:27)**

Introductory remarks. With YHWH's victory over the Midianites the deliverance is achieved, YHWH has demonstrated his divine power, and accordingly, the Gideon narrative should come to a close. But it is continued with a number of episodes (7:23–8:27) that considerably postpone the expected record of the achievement (8:28; cf. 3:11; 3:30; [3:31b]; 4:23; 5:31). These episodes, therefore, form a complication.

The complication displays a manifold structure. On first sight, it appears to have a chiasmic form. Gideon calls out several tribes to pursue the Midianites and kill their two officials (7:23-25; A), negotiates with the Ephraimites about the honour for the victory (8:1-3; B), demands support from Succoth and Peniel (8:5-9; C), and attacks the Midianites and captures their two kings (8:10-12; D); he then returns from the victory and punishes Succoth and Peniel (8:13-17; C'), reasons with the Midianite kings about their

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<sup>246</sup>Cf. BOLING, *Judges*, 170.



fate (8:18-19; B'), and finally executes them (8:20-21; A'). This structure centres in Gideon's capture of the Midianite kings; however, the final outcome of Gideon's battle is their execution. Hence the chiastic structure centres in a different scene than Gideon's narrated actions. The chiastic structure, which displays the narrator's purpose with these episodes, focuses on the capture of the kings by Gideon and evaluates it rather negatively as we shall argue; the narrated actions, however, display Gideon's purpose with capturing the kings and prepare the path for the Israelites' offer of the leadership to him.

Following the verbal decline of the Israelites' offer (8:22-23), Gideon establishes the worship of his ephod which he makes from the spoil of the Israelites (8:24-27). This episode, which suddenly focuses on the theological theme as defined in the first part of the Gideon narrative (6:1-32), namely, to worship YHWH as god instead of other gods, stands outside of the chiastic structure and catches the audience by surprise.<sup>247</sup> Further, the complication could easily end with Gideon plundering the executed enemy kings (8:21) followed by the record of achievement (8:28), so that the offer of the leadership and the establishment of idolatry catches the audience's full attention; and since it naturally follows on Gideon's performance as recorded in the preceding episodes, it appears to be the narrator's ultimate climax of the complication, which at the same time is its theological climax. With this theological climax, the narrator invites a theological interpretation of the entire complication; and since it contrasts with the climax of the preceding episodes, it may be described as the anti-climax of the Gideon narrative.

In overviewing the complication, we find first, that while the plot focuses on YHWH's performance, the complication entirely focuses on Gideon, who pursues his selfish goals on his own.<sup>248</sup> There is no indication that YHWH is involved, he rather appears to be absent,<sup>249</sup> and Gideon is not at all fearful any more. Second, Gideon's drawn-out continuation of the battle goes beyond the prediction of the victory at one blow in the Midianite's dream and its interpretation (7:13-14), which assumes a negative evaluation of Gideon's actions. Third, the complication continues the plot. Gideon calls out several tribes to pursuit the fleeing Midianites, so that the episode of the YHWH's battle sets the background for Gideon's continuation of the battle. The main victory is thus still YHWH's despite the focus on Gideon in the complication. Fourth, the narrator recalls YHWH's victory over the Midianite army (8:10b) before the account of Gideon's victory over the Midianite kings. This invites the assessment of Gideon's victory in the light of

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<sup>247</sup>MASSOT, "Gideon", 123.

<sup>248</sup>MASSOT, "Gideon", 119, observed that in 8:5-21 Gideon is mentioned overwhelmingly 21 times as the subject of a verb.

<sup>249</sup>Similarly, WEBB, *Book*, 151; KLEIN, *Triumph*, 58; GÖRG, *Richter*, 45; MASSOT, "Gideon", 120.

YHWH's victory. Fifth, the rather brief account of Gideon's victory over the Midianite kings in the complication as the narrator's climax of Gideon's continued battle (8:11-12) contrasts with the much longer account of YHWH's victory in the plot (7:19-22) and assesses it as insignificant compared with YHWH's victory. Hence the narrator's climactic stress on Gideon's victory underlines the theological purpose of the complication, as it contains Gideon's victory as the counterpoint to YHWH's victory. Finally, Gideon's final achievement, the execution of the kings, also receives an unfavourable assessment from the narrator. In the episodes leading up to the execution, Gideon is depicted as a rather violent despot who has only personal revenge in mind. He punishes the disobedient Israelites and eventually executes the Midianite kings who appear to have killed his brothers. Gideon thus rapidly deteriorates, which is underlined by the chiasmic structure of the complication, by which these episodes form the backward line C' to A'. Following Gideon's personal achievement, which completes the narrator's chiasmic structure and is seen as the anti-climax, the following episode of the establishment of idolatry goes beyond this structure. On the one hand, it continues Gideon's achievement; for the narrator, however, it is the ultimate anti-climax of the complication, so that the narrative continuously moves away from YHWH's victory to Gideon's establishment of idolatry, thus constituting the theological switch from YHWH to idolatry.

## 1 Gideon Achieves his own Victory (7:23–8:21)

### *a Gideon Re-recruits his Army (7:23-25)*

Immediately following YHWH's initial victory, Gideon calls out four Israelite tribes to pursue Midian (7:23-25). These verses continue the narrative of YHWH's defeat of the allies, which is further made evident by use of the imperfect consecutive  $\text{קָרָאָהוּ}$  (7:23). Yet Gideon's action appears dubious in the light of the extensive description of the flight of the allies (7:22), which indicated that YHWH has completed the victory. Furthermore, Gideon's sudden willingness to fight against the allies contrasts with his previous hesitations to fight (6:35,36; 7:8,12) and parallels his sudden willingness (7:1,15), which both times was due to his subjective conviction that YHWH would leave him the victory. These parallels establish the assumption that Gideon's new fanaticism is based on similar reasons; it appears as if Gideon makes a second attempt to win the victory on his own account. Hence the record of the final preparation for Gideon's attack (7:23-24) appears rather condensed, straightforward, and pressing as opposed to the prolonged parallel record of the first attack, which at length describes Gideon's approach to the Midianite camp and his preparations for the battle.



The account of the second recruitment (7:23-24) appears to parallel the account of the first recruitment (6:34-35).<sup>250</sup> However, as can be deduced from overview 2, it

Overview 2.—Gideon's Recruitments (6:34-35; 7:23-24)

	First recruitment (6:34-35)	Second recruitment (7:23-24)
Number and extent of the steps	1 <sup>st</sup> step: 6:34b 2 <sup>nd</sup> step: 6:35a 3 <sup>rd</sup> step: 6:35b	1 <sup>st</sup> step: 7:23 2 <sup>nd</sup> step: 7:24
Authorisation	1 <sup>st</sup> : Spirit of YHWH 2 <sup>nd</sup> : ∅ 3 <sup>rd</sup> : ∅	N/A 1 <sup>st</sup> : ∅ 2 <sup>nd</sup> : ∅
Recruited groups	One clan and four tribes: 1 <sup>st</sup> : Clan of Abiezer 2 <sup>nd</sup> : Manasseh 3 <sup>rd</sup> : Asher, Zebulun, Naphtali	Four tribes: N/A 1 <sup>st</sup> : Naphtali, Asher, Manasseh 2 <sup>nd</sup> : Ephraim
Method of recruitment	1 <sup>st</sup> : וַיִּצְעַק 2 <sup>nd</sup> : וַיִּצְעַק ... וּמִלְאָכִים שָׁלַח 3 <sup>rd</sup> : ... וּמִלְאָכִים שָׁלַח	1 <sup>st</sup> : וַיִּצְעַק 2 <sup>nd</sup> : וַיִּצְעַק ... וּמִלְאָכִים שָׁלַח

appears rather difficult to trace any direct parallel between the individual steps of each recruitment. On the one hand, the matter of authorisation and the number of the recruited tribes favour the interpretation that Gideon's second recruitment (7:23-24) parallels the two latter steps of his first recruitment (6:35a-b) only, since only these are—like the second recruitment—not authorised by the spirit of YHWH, and only there Gideon recruits whole tribes like in the second recruitment.<sup>251</sup> On the other hand, the first steps of each recruitment are recorded with parallel words (וַיִּצְעַק, 6:34b || וַיִּצְעַק, 7:23), while the second step of the second recruitment parallels the second and third step of the first recruitment (וַיִּצְעַק ... וּמִלְאָכִים שָׁלַח, 6:35a,[35b] || וַיִּצְעַק ... וּמִלְאָכִים שָׁלַח, 7:24).<sup>252</sup>

This confusion lets it appear that while it may not be possible to trace any direct parallel between the individual steps of each recruitment, the recruitments need to be viewed and compared as a whole and in their respective contexts. Then, however, the differences between the accounts stand out, and Gideon's second recruitment (7:23-24)

<sup>250</sup>RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 117, 239; MASSOT, "Gideon", 105-107.

<sup>251</sup>Cf. RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 117; BOLING, *Judges*, 150-151; MASSOT, "Gideon", 105.

<sup>252</sup>Similarly, RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 175; MASSOT, "Gideon", 106.

appears in an even more dubious light than his recruitment of the extended army (6:35a-b). First, the narrator avoids any reference to the spirit of YHWH that could let Gideon appear as if he had YHWH's support at least at the beginning so that it is assumed that Gideon recruits the Israelites entirely on his own.<sup>253</sup> Second, with his second recruitment of three tribes Gideon annuls YHWH's reduction of the army and works against YHWH's intention;<sup>254</sup> while YHWH has reduced the army by sending all *אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל* home (7:8), Gideon now re-recruits those *אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל* (7:24). He ignores YHWH's aim as he goes back to the stage previous to the reduction of his army and to his selfish ambition in recruiting his extended army (6:35). Hence his new recruitment appears unjustified.

On the contrary, the Ephraimites follow Gideon's instructions and pursue Midian. The unique use of the preposition *אֶל* in combination with *רָדְף* (7:25)<sup>255</sup> in the summary of their pursuit as opposed to the earlier used phrase {*רָדְף* + *אֶחָדִי*} (7:23) might indicate that, having been successful, the Ephraimites terminate their pursuit and bring the heads of the Midianite officials to Gideon. They thus faithfully and innocently obey Gideon's command and acknowledge his leadership, which is underlined by the narrator, who repeats Gideon's orders almost exactly in the report of the Ephraimites' action.<sup>256</sup> Therefore, Gideon can not accuse them of not having followed his instructions. The narrator thus appears to suggest how Gideon should have implemented YHWH's command to fight against the allies without questioning or complaining and how he should have acknowledged YHWH's leadership without attempting to get his share of the honour, and he thus assesses Gideon's behaviour in the initial battle as wrong.

At this point we need to pay attention to an at first sight seemingly unimportant observation, namely, that the narrator draws attention to *הָרָג* by using it twice in just one verse to say that the Ephraimites kill the Midianite officials Oreb and Zeeb<sup>257</sup> (7:25). This observation is the more striking, as so far the narrator has avoided any use of *הָרָג* within Judges despite the rather violent content of the book. A closer investigation of the use of this root within Judges reveals further that it is used extensively in the complication of the Gideon narrative and in the Abimelech narrative but only twice in

<sup>253</sup> RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 117, listed this as one of the differences between the two accounts, though he claimed that Gideon's three steps of the first recruitment were sanctified by the spirit of YHWH (ibid.).

<sup>254</sup> MASSOT, "Gideon", 106. JORDAN, *Judges*, 134; and BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '7:22b', suggested that Gideon re-recruited those soldiers that were sent home by YHWH.

<sup>255</sup> †; elsewhere in Judges {*רָדְף* + *אֶחָדִי*} (1:6; 3:28; 4:16; 7:23; 8:5,12), {*רָדְף* + acc.} (4:22; 9:40), or {*רָדְף* +  $\emptyset$ } (8:4) is used; † (Judges).

<sup>256</sup> MCMILLION, "Judges 6–8", 235.

<sup>257</sup> עֹרֵב ('raven') and זֶאֵב ('wolf') appear to be nicknames for the Midianite princes to diminish them as black predators; BÖHL, "Wortspiele": 203; similarly, STUDER, *Richter*, 210.



subsequent parts of the book, where the narrator quotes other characters as accusing others of cruelly plotting to kill them.<sup>258</sup>  $\sqrt{\text{הרג}}$  thus appears to have a negative connotation for the narrator, and since he extensively uses it only in the complication of the Gideon narrative and in the Abimelech narrative, it appears that he wants to emphasise it there. Since the episode of the Ephraimites' behaviour gives the impression that the Ephraimites kill the Midianite officials in cold blood and bring their heads to Gideon, the use of  $\sqrt{\text{הרג}}$  might have the negative connotation of a cold-blooded murder, so that they and their commander Gideon are depicted in a rather negative light.

*b Gideon Negotiates about YHWH's Victory (8:1-3)*

With the Ephraimites killing the Midianite officials, Gideon still remains without personal victory, and therefore, without honour. Furthermore, after they have brought their heads to Gideon, it soon becomes clear that the Ephraimites do so not only to acknowledge Gideon's leadership but rather with a different motive. This is underlined by the narrator who adds the comment that the Ephraimites rebuke ( $\{\text{את} + \sqrt{\text{ריב}}\}$ , 8:1b) Gideon strongly. Although they acknowledge his leadership, they do not submit to Gideon. They rather use their obvious success to accuse him that instead of calling them out for the initial battle, he has only included them in the mopping-up action.<sup>259</sup> As the addition of the self-reference  $\text{לנו}$  in their question  $\text{מִהֲהַדְבָּר הַזֶּה עָשִׂיתָ לָנוּ}$  (8:1) reveals, they feel discriminated against by Gideon and would have preferred to be included in the battle to obtain their share of the honour. They are hence not willing to honour Gideon, let alone YHWH, for the victory, and they thus parallel Gideon, who is not willing to honour YHWH for his victory but rather prefers to get honoured himself.

The comment by the narrator also echoes the theme of the Gideon narrative as specified in Joash's speech and the explanation of Gideon's second name  $\text{יִרְבֵּעַל}$  (6:31,32), where  $\sqrt{\text{ריב}}$  has been used several times,<sup>260</sup> and invites a comparison with it, which, however, sheds a rather bad light on Gideon. The name is given to Gideon after he has obeyed YHWH's command and has broken down Baal's altar (6:25-32). In response to the Baalists' question  $\text{מִי עָשָׂה הַדְבָּר הַזֶּה}$  (6:29a), their conclusion  $\text{גִּדְעוֹן בְּזִיּוּאֵשׁ עָשָׂה הַדְבָּר}$  (6:29b), and their subsequent demand for Gideon's death, Joash defends Gideon and thus saves his life (6:31). In contrast, Gideon, being confronted with the Ephraimites' similar question  $\text{מִהֲהַדְבָּר הַזֶּה עָשִׂיתָ לָנוּ}$  (8:1), fails to defend YHWH, assign the victory to him,

<sup>258</sup> Within Judges,  $\sqrt{\text{הרג}}$  is used in the Gideon-Abimelech narrative, 7:25[twice]; 8:17,18,19,20,21; 9:5,18,24[twice],45,54,56; and elsewhere 16:2; 20:5; † (Judges).

<sup>259</sup> MCMILLION, "Judges 6–8", 235.

<sup>260</sup> Similarly, WOLF, "Judges", 430; MASSOT, "Gideon", 107; cf. also O'CONNELL, *Rhetoric*, 156.

and honour him for the victory. Instead, he contrasts the Ephraimites' achievement in killing the officials with his own in the initial victory (8:2-3), and claims YHWH's victory as his own. He thus negotiates with the Ephraimites about the victory. Both Gideon and the Ephraimites boast against YHWH and hence do exactly what YHWH wants to prevent (7:2);<sup>261</sup> and the narrator might even use the Ephraimites' accusation to imply his own accusation that Gideon thus contends (רִיב) against YHWH.

In particular, Gideon assigns the greater victory to the Ephraimites. Returning their rebuke, he argues that he and his clan Abiezer have done nothing that could be compared with their achievement (מִהַעֲשִׂיתִי עִתָּה כָּכֶם, 8:2; מִהַיְכַלְתִּי עֲשׂוֹת כָּכֶם, 8:3). Several observations appear significant in Gideon's argument. First, Gideon compares his victory with that of the Ephraimites. The emphatic בְּיָדְכֶם emphasises the Ephraimites' role in capturing the Midianite officials; they have played the major role and have made a greater contribution to the victory than Gideon has.<sup>262</sup> In this way Gideon successfully abates the Ephraimites' anger and avoids a further clash.<sup>263</sup> Second, by recording Gideon's allusion to his victory as the vintage of אֲבִיעֶזֶר (8:2), the narrator alludes to the separated spelling אֲבִי הָעֶזְרִי (6:11,24) and contrasts the argument of Gideon, the Abiezrite, with YHWH, the ultimate provider of help, so that it strikes that YHWH as the real winner in the initial battle is not mentioned at all in Gideon's speech. Further, attributing the Ephraimites' success to god, Gideon appears to be quite happy to speak of god when he wants to placate the Ephraimites, but he himself is not ready to honour YHWH for the victory. Third, by admitting that he and his clan have achieved less than the Ephraimites, Gideon ironically admits that he did not contribute to YHWH's initial victory, for if he did, his destruction of the whole Midianite army would obviously exceed the Ephraimites' execution of the two Midianite princes, which is only possible as a consequence of the initial victory. Hence the narrator subtly turns Gideon's defense against him, attributing the victory to YHWH and at the same time accusing Gideon of twisting the cause of the victory; he might even use the Ephraimites' accusation to imply his own accusation that Gideon contends (רִיב) against YHWH, whom he should honour. Fourth, Gideon's acknowledgement of YHWH's victory may at the same time explain his determination to continue the battle in order to get honoured himself. Finally, the mention of אֱלֹהִים instead of יהוה echoes Gideon's address of Elohim in the fleece test (6:36-40) and the mention of Elohim by the Midianite soldier (7:14).<sup>264</sup> Gideon thus leaves the interpretation to the

<sup>261</sup> Similarly, BOLING, *Judges*, 144.

<sup>262</sup> Hence the reading כָּכֶם is to be preferred before \*כָּכֶם (8:2,3; cf. *BHS*).

<sup>263</sup> MCMILLION, "Judges 6–8", 235, 236, 274.

<sup>264</sup> Similarly, BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '8:2-3', who, however, observed the reference to 7:14 only.



Ephraimites, which god has given the princes into their hand, and he would willingly accept their choice in order to prevent any further clash. Yet this option raises the question whether Gideon is willing to accept that YHWH has achieved the deliverance, for like Gideon, the Ephraimites are Israelites who should acknowledge YHWH and worship him but who have abandoned YHWH and worshipped other gods instead (6:7-10). Hence the continuation of the narrative with a demonstration that apart from YHWH no-one else has divine qualities,<sup>265</sup> is already foreshadowed at this point.

*c Gideon Demands to be Recognised as Israel's Leader (8:4-9)*

Having recorded Gideon's negotiation over YHWH's victory, the narrator records Gideon's attempt to demand obedience from the Israelites. Gideon continues his pursuit of the Midianites, who, however, appear to have already left Israel's territory and have crossed the Jordan, so that they no longer constitute a threat to Israel (8:4).<sup>266</sup> Yet Gideon and his army also cross the Jordan. They overstep their calling, and Gideon's continued pursuit exceeds his competence. The similar sounding participles to describe the crossing and the pursuing (עִיפִים וְרַדְּפִים, 8:4) add to the perception that Gideon and his troops need some time to cross the Jordan; they literally seem to set one foot before the other and moan while doing so. This is underlined by the narrator's description of the pursuit with רַדְּף (8:4) which only here in the Hebrew Scriptures lacks the object that would tell who is being pursued;<sup>267</sup> Gideon and his troops are described as pursuing the Midianites for the sake of pursuing rather than to complete the victory. Gideon thus redirects the focus away from YHWH's victory and to his personal battle.

The notice that Gideon and his men cross the Jordan weary (8:4) might also reflect on Gideon's own strength and contain the narrator's evaluation of his continued pursuit. First, as soon as he oversteps his vocation, YHWH leaves him; and thus relying on himself only, he becomes weary. The narrator thus underlines that Gideon and the Israelites can not defeat the enemies by themselves but rather need YHWH's support. Second, the three hundred weary men (8:4), who accompany Gideon, parallel the three hundred men who

<sup>265</sup>This will be the theme of the Abimelech narrative; see ch. III.

<sup>266</sup>Similarly, MASSOT, "Gideon", 117. However, contrary to MASSOT, it can not be deduced that Gideon's crossing of the Jordan (8:4) begins a new plot, since the Ephraimites' crossing of it (7:25) and the Midianites' flight towards it (7:22) has been recorded already. It rather appears, therefore, that both notes bind the Ephraimites' pursuit and Gideon's pursuit together, so that both episodes should be assigned to the same narrative stage.

<sup>267</sup>The usual constructions are {רַדְּף + acc.} (51 times) and {רַדְּף + אֲחֵרִי} (46 times). Hence אֲחֵרִי assumes וְרַעְבִּים and renders καὶ πεινῶντες. Yet the recurrence of both עָיַף and רַדְּף in Gideon's demand (8:5) confirms that אֲחֵרִי should be retained; BOLING, *Judges*, 155. Cf. MOORE, *Commentary*, 218, who despite his general readiness for emendations kept אֲחֵרִי here.

witness YHWH's victory (7:6,7,8,16,19-22).<sup>268</sup> By now describing a similar group as weary and as being in need of support to pursue two kings only, the narrator invites the interpretation that Gideon could by no means have achieved the great victory over the Midianites with his three hundred men alone. On the other hand, for the characters within the narrative, the honour for the victory would ultimately be given to Gideon if these men have success.

As he goes on in his pursuit of the Midianites, Gideon first demands support for his army from two Israelite cities (8:5-9), which, however, is declined with the argument that Gideon has not yet proven his success. In this encounter Gideon does not appear as a diplomatic figure as previously but rather as a demanding commander who exercises authority over his fellow Israelites;<sup>269</sup> he is interested only in securing support for his army. It appears, therefore, that Gideon chooses between diplomacy and authority as it fits his purposes; he is diplomatic when necessary, yet else tries to exercise authority. Hence, having been unsuccessful with his first request, Gideon threatens to punish the Succothites yet still tries to secure support from the Penielites. But his second request remains unanswered, too, so that he threatens to punish the Penielites, too. Gideon is thus unsuccessful in both attempts. By recording both attempts, however, the narrator stresses that Gideon desperately needs support; and since YHWH has promised to support him (6:14,16; 7:11) in the battle against the Midianites, Gideon's desperate need for support reveals that YHWH has left him.<sup>270</sup>

The stress on Gideon is underlined by the structure of both encounters. Each part of the negotiation with the Succothites is introduced rather briefly (וַיֹּאמֶר, 8:5-7), so that Gideon's response, being introduced with a longer introduction that explicitly mentions him (וַיֹּאמֶר גִּדְעֹן, 8:7), stands out and makes it the main part. Similarly, the encounter with the Penielites (8:8-9) is briefly summarised, before the narrator draws all attention to Gideon's answer by emphatically introducing the answer first as a summary (וַיֹּאמֶר גִּדְעֹן) and then quite unexpectedly as a direct speech (לְאֹמֶר, 8:9).<sup>271</sup> Hence not only is all the stress placed on Gideon's response once more, the narrator also assesses Gideon's threat against the Penielites as an overreaction. It appears that Gideon does not accept the negative outcome of each request but rather demands a positive answer when he recognises that he will not be able to pursue his goal without support. Yet even without support from the Israelites, he seems determined to capture the Midianite kings.

<sup>268</sup> Similarly, MASSOT, "Gideon", 102.

<sup>269</sup> WEBB, *Book*, 151.

<sup>270</sup> Cf. WEBB, *Book*, 151.

<sup>271</sup> This is the first time in Judges that the sequence {וַיֹּאמֶר – לְאֹמֶר} is used with the same subject.



In his demand for support, Gideon contrasts his people (עַם), who are weary (עֵיפִים הֵם), with himself, who pursues the kings of the Midianites (וְאֶנְכִי רֹדֵף, 8:5). This dissimilarity contrasts with the narrator's description of Gideon and his men (הוּא וְשָׁלְשֵׁי מֵאוֹת הָאִישׁ) as weary and pursuing (8:4) and it thus stands out. This has two implications. First, by naming his troops his 'people'<sup>272</sup> who are at his heels (עַם אֲשֶׁר בְּרַגְלֵי, 8:5) rather than his 'soldiers' (שָׂרִיר, אִישׁ) or 'army' (צָבָא, 8:6) as the Succothites do, Gideon emphasises his leadership and further describes himself as their caring leader, who provides for those who are under his responsibility. Second, the contrast between his people and himself, which is even underlined by the use of the corresponding pronouns הֵם and אֶנְכִי and the *waw* adversative to mark the contrast (8:5), gives the Succothites the impression that Gideon is not weary. Indeed, Gideon separates himself from his troops, and by adding that he alone pursues the Midianites, he further elevates his own position and at the same time claims that his troops instead of supporting him rather hinder him in his pursuit. Gideon thus describes himself as a selfless leader, who puts his job first, denies himself, and only works towards Israel's well-being; the Israelites should therefore be happy to support such a selfless leader. Yet third, at the same time Gideon emphasises his personal commitment to pursue the enemies (... וְאֶנְכִי רֹדֵף אֲחֵרֵי, 8:5). This stress on Gideon himself shows on the one hand that Gideon relies on himself only, so that the narrator turns Gideon's demand for support against him. On the other hand, it contrasts with YHWH's aim to be recognised and honoured as god through his victory and foreshadows Gideon's recognition as victor.

However, both citizens decline the request with the argument that Gideon has not yet captured the two Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna<sup>273</sup> (8:6). Gideon, however, interprets their reluctance to help as an affront against him and he is, therefore, angry. He threatens to discipline them when he returns victoriously (שָׁלוֹם, 8:9). Given his earlier reference to YHWH that we identified as a pragmatic device to encourage his small army (7:15), his reference to YHWH in his threat (8:7) similarly serves to support his argument. He claims that YHWH has authorised and instructed him to pursue the Midianites. Any Israelite reluctance to support him is, therefore, an affront to YHWH, as is any reluctance to acknowledge his leadership. However, his reference to YHWH giving the enemies into his hand (בְּיָדִי, 8:7) hints back at his proposal to YHWH to do just this (בְּיָדִי; 6:36,37) and at YHWH's apprehensions that Israel might boast against him saying that their hand has delivered them (יָדִי, 7:2). Hence once again Gideon boasts against YHWH; yet this time he

<sup>272</sup> Although עַם is a quite normal word for 'army', the contrast with the Succothites' description of the same group as צָבָא might give Gideon's choice of words some significance.

<sup>273</sup> זָבָח ('sacrifice, offering') and צִלְמֻנָּע ('shelter withheld') appear to be nicknames for the Midianite princes, which allude to their fate; BURNEY, *Judges*, 229; BÖHL, "Wortspiele": 203-204.

actually intends to get honoured for YHWH's victory in open violation of YHWH's objective.

Gideon's behaviour is, therefore, put into a rather unfavourable light by the narrator. It appears that Gideon defines his mission as the fulfilment of YHWH's promise, although according to the narrator, it clearly is not. Gideon relies on himself only and even wants to be honoured for YHWH's victory. He thus distorts YHWH's promise and claims exactly what is due to YHWH and what YHWH does not want him to claim.

*d Gideon Achieves his Victory (8:10-13)*

Following the narration of Gideon's failed negotiations with the Israelites, the narrator focuses on the Midianites. This focus recalls the previous three descriptions of the allies (6:3,33; 7:12). However, while these records increase the threat of the army step by step by verbally intensifying the multitude of the allies, this time the narrator describes the enemies rather briefly and functionally, thus indicating that they do not constitute a threat to Israel any more.

The two Midianite kings are in Karkor, accompanied by their left-over army. The record of the vast number of those who have fallen by YHWH's sword in contrast to the small number of survivors adds to the perception that the Midianites have suffered a devastating loss. This seemingly displaced recall of YHWH's initial victory time separates the preceding episodes of Gideon's failed negotiations and approach to the enemy from the following episodes of his battle and revenge. Yet in the present position it foremost elevates YHWH's victory and provides the background against which Gideon's battle against the Midianite kings should be interpreted.<sup>274</sup> Before Gideon has even started to attack the enemies, it is clear that anything that Gideon might do will not even come near to YHWH's success; after all, there is only a limited number of soldiers left compared with the vast number that have already fallen through YHWH's sword.

As soon as he reaches the enemy army, Gideon attacks it twice (8:11b,12b). In the light of the comparatively long episode of YHWH's victory over the Israelites (7:19-22), the episode of Gideon's attack is reduced to the minimum length necessary. This might indicate the narrator's evaluation of this event compared with YHWH's victory. First, while YHWH's victory is significant, Gideon's continuation of the battle does not deserve the audience's attention. It is, after all, only Gideon's personal revenge; just as the Midianites have terrified the Israelites (cf. חָרַד, 7:3), so Gideon now terrifies (חָרַד hif., 8:12) the Midianites and gets his own back on them.<sup>275</sup> Second, by recording two attacks

<sup>274</sup>Cf. RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 239, who claimed that 8:10-13 paralleled 7:19-22.

<sup>275</sup>Similarly, WOLF, "Judges", 432.



of Gideon (8:11b,12b $\alpha$ ) and separating them with the notice that the Midianite kings flee (8:12a), the narrator implies that Gideon needs two attempts to defeat the enemy, while YHWH needs only one (7:22). While YHWH scatters the whole enemy, kills most of them, and makes the rest flee, Gideon first only manages to make two kings flee before he captures them. This reveals once more that Gideon is less successful as soon as YHWH leaves him and he relies on himself, and that he could not have won the initial victory at all, since there the Midianite army is not only aware of the presence of his army, but it is also much greater in number. He would, therefore, have had a far more difficult task to win the initial victory, which in turn confirms that YHWH has achieved the greater victory. Hence also the angel's characterisation of Gideon as a mighty man of strength (6:12) is not applicable any more, since Gideon is not at all a man of strength after YHWH has left him, although he still claims to be strong. Rather, it is clear that the characterisation is true only as long as YHWH supports him (cf. 6:14,16).

The narrator's description of Gideon's first attack ( $\sqrt{\text{נכה}}$  hif., 8:11) further hints at YHWH's promise that Gideon would smite ( $\sqrt{\text{נכה}}$  hif.) the Midianites as one man (6:16), because he would be with him, and at the Midianite's dream where the barley bread smites ( $\sqrt{\text{נכה}}$  hif.) the tent with only one approach (7:13). This hint might thus identify YHWH's approval of Gideon's attack. Yet despite surprising the secure, reliant, and undefended ( $\text{בְּטָח}$ , 8:11b; cf. 18:7,10,27) Midianites,<sup>276</sup> Gideon needs two attempts to capture the kings, so that YHWH's promise to achieve the victory with only one attempt is not fulfilled here. Again it is evident that despite his personal success Gideon lacks YHWH's support in his continued battle.

Having achieved his selfish goal, Gideon returns from the victory (8:13) with the captured kings, whom he not only needs to present to the Succothites and Penielites to underline his authority,<sup>277</sup> but also to the Israelites to demonstrate that he has captured higher authorities than the Ephraimites, who have only killed two officials.<sup>278</sup> The narrator's expanded reference to Gideon as  $\text{בֶּן־יֹאָשׁ}$  (8:13), which reflects on its preceding uses (6:29; 7:14), however, reveals the narrator's different point of view. In these two verses, Gideon is referred to as 'Gideon son of Joash' by the Ophrahites who recognise that Gideon has broken down the altar to Baal and has replaced it with an altar to YHWH (6:29). Their reference identifies Gideon as YHWH's agent, who offends Baal

<sup>276</sup>KEIL, *Commentar*, 268; BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 156; MOORE, *Commentary*, 222; GOSLINGA, *Judges*, 345; HERTZBERG, *Richter*, 197; YEHEZKEL KAUFMANN, "הסיפורים על גרעון = The Gideon Stories", *Tarbiz* 30, no. 2 (1960-1961): 139-147, + summary, IV-V; BOLING, *Judges*, 156; SOGGIN, *Judges*, 151; WOLF, "Judges", 431.

<sup>277</sup>Similarly, GRESSMANN, *Anfänge*, 209; ZAPLETAL, *Richter*, 131.

<sup>278</sup>MCMILLION, "Judges 6-8", 236.

and defends YHWH. Similarly, the Midianite soldier interprets the dream of his comrade and refers the victory to 'Gideon son of Joash', into whose hand YHWH has given the Midianites (7:14). Again the reference reflects on Gideon's relationship to YHWH in such a way that Gideon is YHWH's agent, implementing YHWH's promise. The new reference (8:13), however, contrasts with this impression. Gideon does not appear as YHWH's agent any more, but rather as an agent of his own goals and objectives. He ignores his call and works against YHWH's purpose. With this assessment, however, the narrator implies that Gideon returns to the state before YHWH's victory and even before his call and his affront against Baal. The effect of YHWH's victory and of Gideon's call to be YHWH's agent is thus annulled and the ensuing episodes reflect on Gideon before his call. YHWH's demonstration of his divine power, on the other hand, is forgotten and no longer plays any role in the narrative.

*e Gideon Demands Recognition of his Authority (8:14-17)*

After the brief record of Gideon's accomplishment (8:11-12), the narrator continues with extensive episodes of Gideon's return. These episodes thus receive greater attention. In overviewing these episodes, it strikes that Gideon does not simply return by the way he set out.<sup>279</sup> While he pursued the Midianite kings on the caravan trail (8:11), he now returns from above the ascent of Heres (8:13).<sup>280</sup> He therefore reaches Succoth before he arrives at Peniel. In this way he surprises the Succothites who are therefore helplessly at his mercy.<sup>281</sup> The narrator seems to stress this interpretation, since it would be more elegant if he recorded Gideon's return by the same way as his pursuit, because then the record of his threats and punishments would form a chiasmic inclusion around the episodes of his capture of the Midianite kings and support the chiasmic structure of the first part of the narrative complication.

As he returns from the battle against the Midianites, Gideon punishes the Succothites and Penielites for not having supported him. These episodes show that Gideon acts rather authoritatively as he appears as the leader of Israel who does not tolerate any disobedience and consequently punishes all those who do not support him. The episodes also play on Gideon's promise to return in peace (8:9), as they show that Gideon brings only war.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Similarly, EWALD, *Geschichte*, 547; GOSLINGA, *Judges*, 346.

<sup>280</sup> An emendation of מְלָמְעָלָה to \*מִמְעָלָה (see BHS) does not alter the sense; DELITZSCH, *Fehler*, §98b. Cf. SCHREINER, *Septuaginta-Massora*, 42, who explained: "Beide Lesarten sind möglich. Übersehen und Eindringen des Lamed konnte wegen der graph Ähnlichkeit leicht erfolgen".

<sup>281</sup> MOORE, *Commentary*, 223-224.

<sup>282</sup> Cf. KLEIN, *Triumph*, 68.



First Gideon forcefully seizes (לכד) a lad from Succoth just as he captured the Midianite kings before (לכד, 8:12) and requests him to write down for him the officials and elders of the city (8:14). He then repeats the words of the Succothites, confronts them with their insult against him, and punishes them for that. Yet while the Succothites deny him provision for his army (צבא, 8:6), Gideon twists their words and accuses them of having taunted him with the fact that his men were weary and having failed to support his weary men (אנשיך היעפים, 8:15); and by thus emphasising the weariness of his men, he stresses the hardship their denial has caused.<sup>283</sup> The description of the punishment with  $\sqrt{\text{ידע}}$  hif. (8:16) appears to emphasise Gideon's intention to teach the Israelites to obey him.<sup>284</sup> This aim might also be intended by his brutality that demonstrates that the Israelites should fear him because he does not allow any disobedience. Gideon thus eagerly works towards his aim of being regarded as Israel's leader at this point.

Similarly, as he turns to the Penielites and punishes them, Gideon exceeds his threat to break down the tower (8:9) as he not only does this but also kills (הרג) the Penielite men (8:17).<sup>285</sup> The reminiscence of the first use of הרג in Judges for the cool-blooded killing of the Midianite officials (7:25) indicates the narrator's assessment that Gideon kills the Penielites in cold blood, which describes him as a brutal despot who fights against his own citizens for his personal desires. Gideon thus becomes the 'Hacker' of his own people,<sup>286</sup> who treats the Israelites as his enemies like the Midianites. Gideon, so to speak, replaces the oppression by the Midianites and becomes Israel's new oppressor; and as the narrative is continued, Gideon will indeed appear to have levelled the path for the next oppression under Abimelech.

Therefore, through these two episodes Gideon is pictured as Israel's new oppressor who is incapable of keeping his own words and instead exaggerates the punishment for disobedience beyond his own threat. Yet he appears to do so to set an example of what

<sup>283</sup> Similarly, BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 156; GOSLINGA, *Judges*, 346; STERNBERG, *Poetics*, 420.

<sup>284</sup> An emendation of  $\sqrt{\text{ידע}}$  to read \* $\sqrt{\text{ידע}}$  (< aram.  $\sqrt{\text{רעע}}$ , 'and he broke', cf. hebr.  $\sqrt{\text{רצץ}}$ ; JOSEPH REIDER, "Etymological Studies:  $\text{ידע}$  or  $\text{רעע}$ ", *JBL* 66 [1947]: 316) or \* $\sqrt{\text{ידש}}$  (ZIEGLER, "Bemerkungen", 327; DELITZSCH, *Fehler*, §131; BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 157; MOORE, *Commentary*, 226) is hence not necessary; see KEIL, *Commentar*, 268; CASSEL, *Richter*, 82; and SLOTKI, "Judges", 227, who implied the object 'a lesson'. See also D. WINTON THOMAS, "The Root  $\text{ידע}$  in Hebrew", *JThS* 35 (1934): 298-306, who explained  $\sqrt{\text{ידע}}$  as a cognate with arab.  $\sqrt{\text{ودع}}$  and rendered it 'to make quiet (submissive)' (ibid.: 305), and the intensive discussion of JOHN A. EMERTON, "A Consideration of Some Alleged Meanings of  $\text{ידע}$  in Hebrew", *JSS* 15, no. 2 (1970): 145-180, who proposed a second root  $\text{ידע}$  'to become quiet, still, at rest'; yet this meaning may still be implied in the usual rendering 'to teach [i.e., in order to make one quiet, still]'.

<sup>285</sup> Similarly, BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 158; OETTLI, *Richter*, 257.

<sup>286</sup> Cf. KLEIN, *Triumph*, 61, 62; BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '8:4-27'.

would happen if the Israelites do not obey him or submit to him. If they want to benefit from him, they should rather acknowledge his authority and leadership.

*f Gideon Demonstrates his Power over Enemy Kings (8:18-21)*

Having taught the Israelites that he does not tolerate any disobedience, Gideon confronts the captured Midianite kings with a public show trial at Ophrah<sup>287</sup> to demand recognition of his power over foreign kings. Gideon thus appears to have deliberately suspended their execution to demonstrate his own victory publicly as the climax in his plan to be honoured for the victory through the recognition of his leadership or even kingship.<sup>288</sup> Yet at the same time the inclusion of the trial into the narrative serves as an episode to describe Gideon's son as a fearful lad and not as a man of strength; but if he is not strong, this reflects on his father Gideon as well, and then also the victory achieved should not be attributed to Gideon, but rather to YHWH.

In the trial episode, the narrator makes extensive use of  $\sqrt{\text{הרג}}$ , which he uses once in each of the four verses. The verb thus serves as a *Leitwort* in this episode. The earlier negative understanding of the verb with a connotation of a cruel plot to murder and of unreasonable and cold-blooded killing, is maintained in this episode, when Gideon assumes that the Midianite kings have plotted to kill ( $\sqrt{\text{הרג}}$ ) his brothers (8:18) and when Gideon declares that he will kill ( $\sqrt{\text{הרג}}$ ) them (8:19), commands his son to kill ( $\sqrt{\text{הרג}}$ ) them (8:20), and eventually kills ( $\sqrt{\text{הרג}}$ ) them himself in cold blood (8:21).

Gideon asks the kings where his brothers were (8:18). Yet this question seems to be a rhetorical question, since he appears to know that the kings have killed them.<sup>289</sup> The kings in turn seem to have understood Gideon's underlying accusation, too, as they merely describe the brothers and thus acknowledge the murders.<sup>290</sup> However, their description of the brothers as kings in appearance ( $\text{תֵּאָר}$ ) like Gideon (8:18) is surprising, since nothing in the narrative has hinted at Gideon's appearance<sup>291</sup> or at his family as being royal.<sup>292</sup> Instead, up to this point in the narrative the audience gets the impression

<sup>287</sup>Thus CASSEL, *Richter*, 82, with view on the presence of Jether, whom, he assumed, Gideon did not take on his pursuit; followed by BURNEY, *Judges*, 234; and ZAPLETAL, *Richter*, 131.

<sup>288</sup>Similarly, BUDDE, *Buch*, 65; MCMILLION, "Judges 6–8", 244.

<sup>289</sup>Similarly, STERNBERG, *Poetics*, 312.

<sup>290</sup>Similarly, BURNEY, *Judges*, 234.

<sup>291</sup>This is the usual connotation of  $\text{תֵּאָר}$ ; yet since this noun can not clearly be derived from any verb (see HALAT, s.v.  $\text{תֵּאָר}$ ), and since it occurs only here in Judges and a total of 15 times in the Hebrew Scriptures, its exact meaning and its possible connotations remain disputable.

<sup>292</sup>Against KITTEL, "Richter", 385; and SCHMIDT, *Erfolg*, 43, who argued from this passage that Gideon's family was of a good social status; yet they fail to see that this description is the subjective description of the two Midianites kings and not the narrator's characterisation.



that Gideon belongs to one of many ordinary families living in Ophrah (6:11-27). Although his father maintains a sanctuary to Baal and might occupy a prominent position and although Gideon has several servants at hand, other citizens of Ophrah may demand his death and Joash manages to save his life only by referring the case to a higher authority (6:28-32). A royal status is, therefore, not evident in the narrative. Against this background Gideon's description by the Midianite kings (8:19) might not be based on his family or status in Ophrah but rather on his appearance as described in the preceding episodes. There Gideon demonstrates his potential as a commander who does not satisfy himself with the victory over the army but rather demands the capture of the kings; returning to Israel with his captives, he appears as a demanding officer who rigorously disciplines everyone who does not obey him; and arriving as victor, he carries out a trial to punish the captured kings. Therefore, it seems likely that the kings refer to these actions when they describe Gideon's behaviour as that of a king.<sup>293</sup>

As far as his brothers are concerned, Gideon fully understands the kings' answer. He accuses them of having killed his brothers, and by killing the murderers now, Gideon takes revenge (8:19). However, he does so only after he has claimed that he would have shown mercy to the captured kings had they not killed his brothers. He thus gives himself the appearance of conducting a fair trial. He furthermore describes himself not as a hard-hearted killer; he rather only carries out the requirements of clan justice.<sup>294</sup> In this way he uses his show trial to demonstrate his potential as a righteous judge and king of Israel. This self-portrait, however, contrasts with the narrator's description of Gideon's return from the battle in violent terms. Furthermore, by postponing Gideon's revenge to the end of the episode of Gideon's return, the narrator reveals that Gideon considers the execution of the kings as the climax and goal of his personal victory. The narrator's description of Gideon thus directly contradicts Gideon's own claim; instead of being a righteous judge and king of Israel, Gideon is a violent, self-centred despot.

Yet Gideon kills the kings only after his son Jether<sup>295</sup> has refused to kill them because of his young age and after Gideon has been challenged by the Midianite kings,

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<sup>293</sup> Whether Gideon gets the idea of being a king only through this description can not be determined. The preceding narrative has depicted Gideon as someone who single-mindedly works towards his honour, so that he is at least working towards some sort of leadership. Yet given Gideon's self-assessment as a member of the least clan in Manasseh and the least in his family (6:15), and further reflecting on Gideon's continued expression of his fear (6:27; 7:10), it seems that Gideon at least at that point does not think of himself as a leader and does not claim to act as one. Hence Gideon seems to have changed his mind in the course of the events (STERNBERG, *Poetics*, 324); but whether he thought of kingship before 8:22, can not be determined from the narrative.

<sup>294</sup> MCMILLION, "Judges 6–8", 240.

<sup>295</sup> BOLING, *Judges*, 146, further assumed that Jether was Gideon's armour bearer; if this assumption is correct, the parallel to the narrative of Saul's death (1 Sam 31:4) will gain further significance.

‘arise yourself (קוּם אֶתָּה) and fall upon us, for as is the man, so is his strength’ (כַּאֲשֶׁר אִישׁוֹ, 8:21). The kings’ statement measures a man by his strength, and it is thus nothing other than a highly ironic scorn against Jether, who does not draw his sword and does not demonstrate a man’s strength, and who is, therefore, not a man. At the same time, this evaluation sheds a rather adverse light on Jether’s father Gideon, who appears not to teach his eldest son to be brave and strong. The implication, in the wider context, is that Gideon himself does not have these qualities and himself is a fearful lad, too.<sup>296</sup> This is verified by the preceding narrative, where apart from 6:10, where  $\sqrt{\text{אִישׁ}}$  is used as part of an idiom, all the remaining occurrences of  $\sqrt{\text{אִישׁ}}$ , even including the standing expression 6:23, describe Gideon’s fear (6:27; 7:10), and where Gideon’s fear to fight and resulting continued need for reassurance of YHWH’s support was highlighted. Hence the narrator underlines the assumption that once again Gideon is fearful.

Accordingly, the kings extend their diminishing characterisation to Gideon despite their earlier description of Gideon as a king by stressing that Gideon himself should arise and fall upon them,<sup>297</sup> for only cowards, they imply, ask other people to kill men. The kings thus make fun of Gideon’s hesitation and attribute the strength of a man to him, perhaps even the strength of a king, for Gideon does not appear to have any strength. It echoes ironically with the greeting of the angel of YHWH (גִּבּוֹר הַקֹּהֵל, 6:13), who has attributed strength and might to Gideon, and also mocks Gideon’s subsequent efforts to exercise his strength by fighting against the Midianites to be honoured for the victory.

This irony and its consequences can not have escaped Gideon. Therefore, in order to keep his own dignity, to demonstrate his strength, and to prove that he can act as a king, Gideon immediately arises, executes the kings, and takes their belongings (8:21).<sup>298</sup> With the execution, however, Gideon not only attains his goal of personal revenge, he also publicly demonstrates that he himself is capable of exercising power over foreign kings and thus publicly qualifies himself as king.

Gideon’s instruction to Jether to arise and kill the kings and Jether’s subsequent refusal to answer the request also reflects on Gideon’s previous behaviour towards YHWH. Gideon subsequently plunders the possessions of the Midianite kings and thus takes the reward for the executions. His behaviour, however, demonstrates that he knows that the victor should be honoured for his victory. He thus admits that he should honour YHWH for his victory, so that the subsequent offer of the leadership to Gideon gives him the opportunity to ascribe the victory to YHWH and honour him for it.

<sup>296</sup> <sup>B</sup> makes this wider meaning apparent: ὡς ἀνδρὸς ἡ δύναμις σου.

<sup>297</sup> RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 228.

<sup>298</sup> Similarly, WEBB, *Book*, 152; MASSOT, “Gideon”, 125, 126.



## 2 Summary: The Narrator's Assessment of Gideon's Victory

In the light of Gideon's appearance in the narrative, the Israelites' offer of the leadership to Gideon (8:22) is hardly surprising. After all, despite the narrator's demonstration that Gideon is self-centred, Gideon desires to be recognised as a successful diplomat (8:2-3); despite the narrator's assessment that Gideon's pursuit is selfish and he is weak and weary without YHWH's support (8:4), Gideon describes himself to be a caring and selfless leader of his people and a strong pursuer of Israel's enemies (8:5); despite the narrator's evaluation that Gideon exceeds his vocation as a member of YHWH's people, Gideon claims to be a good Israelite and demands obedience from his fellow Israelites (8:5-9); despite the narrator's indication that YHWH has left Gideon, Gideon affirms to follow YHWH and professes his authorisation through him (8:6-9); despite the narrator's report that Gideon is a helpless raider who needs two attempts to capture two already defeated kings, Gideon arises as a skilful commander who captures two powerful kings (8:10-12); despite the narrator's portrait of Gideon as Israel's new oppressor, Gideon exercises power and authority over Israel (8:14-17); and despite the narrator's implication that the kings' execution is the climax of Gideon's personal warfare and demonstration of his own potential, Gideon proclaims himself to be the righteous judge who executes the captives only according to their wrongdoing and only after a fair trial (8:18-21). Therefore, in contrast to Gideon's self-characterisation as YHWH's obedient agent, the narrator pictures Gideon as an agent of his own objectives and a worker against YHWH's objectives.

At the same time, the narrator contrasts Gideon's battle with YHWH's battle. While YHWH's leadership does not endanger any Israelite, Gideon's leadership exhausts his troops and brings death to the citizens of two Israelite cities; and while YHWH's battle results in Israel's deliverance from the Midianites and peace for Israel as promised, Gideon's battle ends in the personal success for Gideon and civil war for the Israelites despite his promise of peace. Hence Gideon's leadership is identified as reprehensible compared with YHWH's leadership; despite Gideon's final success, the more skilful commander and more desirable leader is still YHWH.

## 3 Gideon Claims YHWH's Honour for Himself (8:22-27)

Following Gideon's publicly successful execution of the Midianite kings as the climax of his warfare, the Israelites offer Gideon the leadership (8:22). Hence the offer is set into the background of the execution of the kings.<sup>299</sup> By using the full introductory formula

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<sup>299</sup>Similarly, GWYNNE HENTON DAVIES, "Judges VIII 22-23", *VT* 13 (1963): 154; LINDARS, "Gideon": 322; MCMILLION, "Judges 6-8", 247.

(וַיִּאמֶר אֶל-שׂפָּו אֶל-שׂפָּו, 8:22 || וַיִּאמֶר אֶל-שׂפָּו sf. שׂפָּו, 8:23,24)<sup>300</sup> for this negotiation for the first time since the episodes of Gideon's negotiation with YHWH (6:36–7:8), the narrator draws all attention to this argument and defines it as the real climax of the narrative complication. Hence the complication as a whole does not culminate in the execution of the Midianite kings but rather in the offer of the leadership and above all in Gideon's subsequent construction of the ephod, so that even the Israelites' offer is merely one step in the movement towards Gideon's establishment of idolatry and its consequences.<sup>301</sup> Since these consequences are ultimately put down to YHWH, the complication points to YHWH's controlling power even in Gideon's self-reliant battle. Hence the narrator uses Gideon's appearance in his personal warfare and his personal victory both to demonstrate YHWH's divine power and to set the background for the establishment of idolatry and subsequently of Baal worship.

Yet the Israelites do not base their offer on Gideon's performance as recorded in the immediately preceding episodes, but rather on the deliverance (יִשְׁעוֹ) from the Midianites, which they ascribe to Gideon (8:22).<sup>302</sup> With this conviction they reverse the narrative that demonstrates that YHWH rather than Gideon delivered Israel and arrive at the very conclusion that YHWH wants to prevent (7:2).<sup>303</sup> However, by honouring Gideon as the one to whom they assign the deliverance, they also admit that the deliverer should be leader over them. Therefore, since the previous uses of יִשְׁעוֹ stress that it is YHWH's deliverance (6:14,15,36,37; 7:2,7), the narrator suggests that at this point in the narrative not Gideon, but rather YHWH should be offered the leadership<sup>304</sup> and should be honoured and worshipped as god. But instead of that the narrative continues with Gideon being honoured for the victory. Therefore, the narrator makes clear that the Israelites act correctly as they honour the deliverer though they honour the wrong person.

Despite the fact that מִלְכּוּת is avoided in this passage, the Israelites' offer is usually understood as an offer of the hereditary or dynastic kingship to Gideon, which he accepts in time despite the verbal rejection of the offer.<sup>305</sup> It is argued that the extension of the

<sup>300</sup> While the order {pred.-subj.-obj.} (8:22) indicates the beginning of a new subsection, the order {pred.-obj.-subj.} (8:23-24) continues this subsection.

<sup>301</sup> Similarly, MASSOT, "Gideon", 125.

<sup>302</sup> Similarly, CASSEL, *Richter*, 84; GERBRANDT, *Kingship*, 128, n. 81; WEBB, *Book*, 152; MASSOT, "Gideon", 129.

<sup>303</sup> Similarly, WEBB, *Book*, 152.

<sup>304</sup> Similarly, WEBB, *Book*, 152; MASSOT, "Gideon", 129; cf. GERBRANDT, *Kingship*, 128-129.

<sup>305</sup> Thus recently, for example, LINDARS, "Gideon": 323; H. HAAG, "Gideon": 306; EMERTON, "Gideon": 296-299, despite some objections; VEIJOLA, *Königtum*, 100; WALTHER ZIMMERLI, "Die Spendung von Schmuck für ein Kultobjekt", in *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l'honneur de M Henri Cazelles*, ed. ANDRÉ CAQUOT and MATHIAS DELCOR, AOAT 212



offer to Gideon's son points to a dynastic kingship, that Gideon despite the rejection of the offer acts as a king, that he accepts the work fit for a king, that he adopts a king-like lifestyle with his harem in his own house, that he names his son 'Abimelech', and that a dynasty is established after his death (cf. 9:2). However, a close examination of the offer (8:22) sheds doubt on this interpretation. Three observations appear to be significant. The Israelites do not verbally offer Gideon the kingship ( $\sqrt{\text{מלך}}$ ) but rather the leadership ( $\sqrt{\text{משל}}$ );<sup>306</sup> they extend the offer to one of his descendants in the two following generations; and they defend their offer by claiming that Gideon has delivered them from the Midianites.

First,  $\sqrt{\text{מלך}}$  and  $\sqrt{\text{משל}}$  express different things. On the one hand,  $\sqrt{\text{מלך}}$  focuses on one person alone,<sup>307</sup> who reigns,<sup>308</sup> on the geographical region of the kingship,<sup>309</sup> on the specific form of the leadership as one of the people's chief executive,<sup>310</sup> or on all of these,<sup>311</sup> rather than on one's act of reigning,<sup>312</sup> so that the narrator of Judges might use  $\sqrt{\text{מלך}}$  to focus on the person who reigns (9:6) or on the oppressor who causes Israel's

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(Kevelaer: Butzon and Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981), 513; JORDAN, *Judges*, 148-149; JOBLING, *Sense*, 67, 79; GERBRANDT, *Kingship*, 123; J. GRAY, *Judges*, 298; BOWLING, "Judges", 167; O'CONNELL, *Rhetoric*, 291; HODGETTS, "In Search", 189-190; BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '8:22' and '8:29-32'. — MOORE, *Commentary*, 229-230, 239; and ENNS, *Judges*, 74, held that Gideon was offered the kingship but that he did not accept it and did not become king; and DOMINIC M. CROSSAN, "Judges", in *The Jerome Bible Commentary*, ed. RAYMOND E. BROWN, JOSEPH A. FITZMYER, and ROLAND E. MURPHY, vol. 1: *The Old Testament* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1970), 156, claimed that Gideon accepted the power but not the title. SOGGIN, *Königtum*, 15-20, argued that Gideon rejected the hereditary rule yet assumed a king-like position; similarly, BURNEY, *Judges*, 184; and TÄUBLER, *Studien*, 267-269, thought that Gideon became ruler, leader, or head; and HALPERN, "Rise": 83-88, explained that Gideon became priest of YHWH.

<sup>306</sup> Similarly, JAN ALBERTO SOGGIN, "משל *mšl* herrschen", in *THAT*, vol. 1: 933; GÖRG, *Richter*, 48.

<sup>307</sup> HELMER RINGGREEN, K. SEYBOLD, and HEINZ-JOSEF FABRY, "מלך *mælæk*; מלך *mālak*: מלוכה *m<sup>e</sup>lūkāh*, מלכות *malkūt*, ממלכה *mamlākāh*, ממלכות *mamlākūt*", in *ThWAT*, vol. 4: 936.

<sup>308</sup> Up to this point in Israel's narrated history  $\sqrt{\text{מלך}}$  is used with this emphasis only once of any leader in Israel, namely, for YHWH (Exod 15:18; † [Gen – Josh]); following YHWH's rejection as king of Israel (1 Sam 8:7),  $\sqrt{\text{מלך}}$  is frequently used for Israelite leaders in the books of Samuel (1 Sam 8:9,11; 11:12; *et al.*), Kings, and Chronicles.

<sup>309</sup> Up to this point in Israel's narrated history,  $\sqrt{\text{מלך}}$  is used with this emphasis only of foreign kings (Gen 36:31-39; [37:8, as an expression of the brother's negative prospect of Joseph's ambitions to reign]; Josh 13:10,12,21; † [Gen – Josh]); following YHWH's rejection as king of Israel (1 Sam 8:7),  $\sqrt{\text{מלך}}$  is also frequently used of Israelite kings in the books of Samuel (2 Sam 3:21; 5:5; 8:15; *et al.*), Kings, and Chronicles. RINGGREEN [*et al.*], "מלך": 936.

<sup>310</sup> RINGGREEN [*et al.*], "מלך": 936.

<sup>311</sup> First in Israel's rejection of YHWH as king (1 Sam 8:7) and then frequently in the narratives on Israel's kings in the books of Kings and Chronicles.

<sup>312</sup> One of the few exceptions is Isa 32:1, where the act of reigning is emphasised through  $\sqrt{\text{מלך}}$ ; yet this passage emphasises the contrast between the coming righteous king and the present evil kings.

suffering rather than on Israel's suffering (4:2).<sup>313</sup> In contrast,  $\sqrt{\text{משל}}$  moves either the act of leading into the centre,<sup>314</sup> whereby the person of the leader and the geographical extent of the leadership are regarded as less important, or the power that is exercised,<sup>315</sup> whereby the leader and the office of leadership are less important than the effect of the leadership,<sup>316</sup> so that Abimelech might use  $\sqrt{\text{משל}}$  to focus on the negative effect of the leadership for the subjects (9:2) rather than on the leaders, and the narrator of Judges might use  $\sqrt{\text{משל}}$  to describe the devastating effect of Israel's oppression (14:4; 15:11)<sup>317</sup> rather than the oppressors who cause it. Hence  $\sqrt{\text{משל}}$  seems to stress the leading as act or the effect of the exercised power by a leader or ruler for his subjects. Therefore, it appears that the Israelites are not as much interested in Gideon's person nor in the position he should fill nor in the geographical extent of his leadership as they are interested in his capacities as a deliverer. Accordingly, the recorded offer is neither restricted to one person nor includes any geographical element, since both would support the idea of personal and geographical kingship over against the idea of an ability-based leadership. Therefore, the offer appears not to be an offer to reign over the Israelites in their land as a king but rather an offer to lead them in subsequent times of trouble.

Second, the offer is extended to Gideon's heirs, which implies that Gideon is expected to pass on his abilities to them. And indeed, the narrator has just recorded Gideon's attempt to teach his first-born son (8:20), and although Jether fails to learn the lesson, the offer apparently does not disqualify him. Yet the extension of the offer to one son ( $\text{בן}$ , sg.) and to one grandson ( $\text{בן}$ , sg., 8:22) means that the Israelites offer Gideon and his descendants a hereditary leadership. This leadership thus appears to be defined as a dynastic kingship in spite of the avoidance of  $\sqrt{\text{מלך}}$  in the offer. In that case the Israelites might use  $\sqrt{\text{משל}}$  only to avoid the controversial issue that indeed YHWH rather than Gideon should be king although they really mean to offer Gideon the kingship.

Finally, the Israelites do not defend their offer by arguing that they want Gideon as their leader, but rather by arguing that Gideon has delivered them from their oppressors. This reason corresponds to the use of  $\sqrt{\text{משל}}$  as an ability-based verb as well as to the typical role of a king, so that the Israelites appear to offer Gideon the kingship so that he

<sup>313</sup> † (Judges \ 9:8,10,12,14,16,18 [= Jotham's speech]).

<sup>314</sup> E.g., Gen 4:7; 2 Sam 23:3. H. GROSS, “ $\text{משל}$  *māšal* II:  $\text{משל}$  *mošael*,  $\text{משל}$  *mimšāl*,  $\text{משל}$  *māemšālāh*”, in *ThWAT*, vol. 5: 74; PHILIP J. NEL, “ $\text{משל}$ ”, in *NIDOTTE*, vol. 2: 1137.

<sup>315</sup> Gen 3:16; 24:2; Exod 21:8; Deut 15:6; also Josh 12:2,5 where the object of  $\sqrt{\text{מלך}}$  mentions the extent of the kingdom and  $\sqrt{\text{משל}}$  introduces the description of the enormous power of the kings; BUBER, *Königtum*, 6.

<sup>316</sup> Cf. BUBER, *Königtum*, 6.

<sup>317</sup> † (Judges \ 8:22,23).



might use his abilities for Israel's benefit and repeat the deliverance should it become necessary. Yet since they ignore Gideon's violent punishment of the Israelites, where Gideon does not act as a desirable king in Israel but rather identifies himself as a violent despot, the stated reason as well as the use of the  $\sqrt{\text{משל}}$  might point to the assumption that the Israelites do not want Gideon as a violent despot but only as a deliverer. This distinction might then also be taken up by the narrator to contrast a kingship with an ability-based leadership, which is preferred over against an autocratic kingship.

These considerations imply that the Israelites offer Gideon the position of a king, who should continue to lead ( $\sqrt{\text{משל}}$ ) them because of the effect his leadership has brought about.<sup>318</sup> However, whether they want him to permanently rule ( $\sqrt{\text{שפט}}$ ) them as a social group in a particular region as a king,<sup>319</sup> remains debatable. It appears likely, though, that they expect him to continue using his abilities for their benefit without reigning over them as a despot.

Yet at first, Gideon verbally rejects the offer in favour of YHWH's leadership ( $\sqrt{\text{משל}}$ , 8:23).<sup>320</sup> Gideon's response appears rather pious, so that one might argue that the narrator uses it to imply that YHWH possesses the capacities the Israelites assign to Gideon, that is, YHWH was able to deliver the Israelites (cf. 7:2,7). But Gideon's response emphasises the person who should lead rather than his ability. This switch in emphasis is made evident through the stress on Gideon achieved through the personal pronoun  $\text{אֲנִי}$ , that focuses on Gideon, who declines the offer, and the emphatic position of  $\text{יְהוָה}$ , who should lead instead (8:23).<sup>321</sup> It thus appears that Gideon takes the ability-oriented  $\sqrt{\text{משל}}$  from the offer but fills it with the content of the person-oriented  $\sqrt{\text{מלך}}$ . Hence he attributes not only the leadership to YHWH but also the kingship. Yet instead of leaving YHWH the leadership and kingship and honouring him for the victory, Gideon continues his response to the Israelites and makes a request. Therefore, Gideon's request is closely connected to his rejection of the offer,<sup>322</sup> and this close connection raises the

<sup>318</sup>Similarly, NÖTSCHER, "Richter", 666; HANOCH REVIV, "The Government of Shechem in the El-Amarna Period and in the Days of Abimelech", *IEJ* 16, no. 4 (1966): 256

<sup>319</sup>This is the Israelites' demand recorded in the first passage in Israel's narrated history that clearly speaks of kingship (1 Sam 8). There the Israelites reject Samuel as judge and instead ask him to give them a king ( $\sqrt{\text{מלך}}$ ) to rule ( $\sqrt{\text{שפט}}$ ) them as a nation in their land; see MOSHE GARSIEL, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies and Parallels*, trans. PHYLLIS HACKETT (Ramat-Gan: Revivim Publishing House, 1985), 58-75.

<sup>320</sup>Similarly, STONE, "Confederation", 387.

<sup>321</sup>MURAOKA, *Words*, 33; DAVIES, "Judges VIII 22-23": 154. — Against O'BRIEN, *Hypothesis*, 271; and O'CONNELL, *Rhetoric*, 291, who both argued that Gideon did not refuse kingship *per se* but kingship by popular appointment only. However, the emphatic subjects  $\text{אֲנִי}$  and  $\text{יְהוָה}$  rather invite the interpretation that the leading person is the main difference between the offer and rejection.

<sup>322</sup>Similarly, MOORE, *Commentary*, 231; MASSOT, "Gideon", 130.

expectation that it will continue and back up Gideon's rejection of the leadership in favour of YHWH's kingship.

Further, while Gideon rightly assigns the leadership and kingship to YHWH, he does not reject the Israelites' reason for their offer, namely, that he has delivered them from their enemies. He therefore implicitly agrees with it.<sup>323</sup> Consequently, the expectation that his request will support his rejection of the offer and the confirmation of YHWH's kingship will be disappointed. Instead of assigning the leadership to YHWH, Gideon bases his request on the recognition of his own leadership in the victory; and similarly, despite his rejection of the offer, by requesting his share of the spoil from the Israelites, he acts as one would expect a leader to do. He asks the Israelites to give him the golden earrings of their spoil (8:24; cf. Deut 17:17), which they readily do (נָתַן נָתַן, 8:25-26).<sup>324</sup> The Israelites' willingness to grant Gideon's request underlines the close connection of their offer, based on their conviction, and Gideon's request, for one gets the impression that the request is meant as an alternative to the offer of the Israelites. In making it, Gideon thus accepts a reward from the Israelites for the deliverance assigned to him.<sup>325</sup> Therefore, the Israelites, who have demonstrated that they are willing to honour Gideon, and whose own offer is declined by Gideon, are now driven to accept Gideon's offer instead and hand the requested gold over to him.

Yet Gideon makes the gold into (עֲשֶׂה I + acc. + לְ) an ephod (אֶפֹּד). He lays it down (יָצַג) in his own town (בְּעִירוֹ) in Ophrah (בְּעַפְרָה), where all the Israelites (כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל) play the harlot (זָנְהוּ I) after it (אֶחָרָיו, 8:27). There are various problems in this verse, which all centre around the interpretation of אֶפֹּד. This ephod has been interpreted<sup>326</sup> as a priestly garment,<sup>327</sup> its replica,<sup>328</sup> an idol or image of a god,<sup>329</sup> or a cultic device or oracle

<sup>323</sup>Similarly, MASSOT, "Gideon", 130.

<sup>324</sup>Similarly, MOORE, *Commentary*, 233.

<sup>325</sup>Similarly, LINDARS, "Gideon": 322; MASSOT, "Gideon", 130.

<sup>326</sup>For a fine summary of the 19<sup>th</sup> century discussion on the nature of the ephod, see THEODORE C. FOOTE, "The Ephod", *JBL* 21, no. 1 (1902): 1-7.

<sup>327</sup>E.g., by KEIL, *Commentar*, 271-272; BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 162-163; BURNEY, *Judges*, 236-243, after a fine exegetical discussion; KITTEL, *Geschichte*, 31; ERNST SELLIN, "Noch einmal der alttestamentliche Efad", *JPOS* 17, no. 3-4 (1937): 236-251; MENAHEM HARAN, "צורת האפוד = במקורות המקראיים = The Ephod According to Biblical Sources", *Tarbiz* 24, no. 4 (1955): 380-391, + summary, II-III; BOLING, *Judges*, 160; and JORDAN, *Judges*, 150.

<sup>328</sup>E.g., by WOLF, "Judges", 434.

<sup>329</sup>E.g., by CASSEL, *Richter*, 86; MOORE, *Commentary*, 230-234, 379, esp. 380-382, with a discussion of older commentaries; BUDDE, *Buch*, 67-68; NOWACK, *Richter*, 81; IMMANUEL BENZINGER, "Ephod", in *JE*, vol. 5: 185-186; H. J. ELHORST, "Das Ephod", *ZAW* 30 (1910): 259-276; BUDDE, "Ephod und Lade", *ZAW* 39 (1921): 1-42, esp. 38-39, who, in response to W. ARNOLD (see p. 129, n. 330) replaced אֶפֹּד with אֲבִיר; SCHULZ, *Richter*, 53; and GUTBROD, *Buch*, 255. —



used for divination<sup>330</sup>. Yet if the ephod is a priestly garment, that naturally should be worn, how can Gideon make such a vast amount of gold into a garment {עשה I + dir.obj. + לאפוד} that would be too heavy to be worn?<sup>331</sup> Further, how can Israel play the harlot (זנה I) after it (אחריו)? If, on the other hand, the ephod is an image of a god, why does Gideon lay it down (יצג) rather than erect or place (קום hif., שים I) it? Why does he place it in his town (עיר) rather than in his house or in a temple (בית), and what is gained by repeating what one already knows, that Gideon's home town is Ophrah (עפרה, 6:11,24)? Finally, what is signified by the narrator's negative comments that Israel plays the harlot after it ({זנה I + אחריו}) and that it becomes a snare to Gideon and his house (ויהי לגדעון ולביתו למוקש)?

As we begin our interpretation, we first recognise that Gideon makes (עשה I) it (אותו, sg. sf., 8:27), i.e., the gold, into an ephod. Since Gideon has requested gold only (8:24) and the narrator distinguishes between the gold and the other gifts (8:26), Gideon appears to deliberately request only gold and take only the gold to create the ephod. He also seems to take all the collected gold.<sup>332</sup> By doing so, he might not intend to make a garment to be worn but rather a cultic object to be seen and worshipped. Further, although עשה I describes his action in a rather general sense, this root appears to have a negative connotation when it evokes Aaron's making (עשה I) of the golden calf (Exod 32:1,4,20) that becomes an object of worship and brings about YHWH's wrath upon the Israelites.<sup>333</sup> There the high priest Aaron makes a golden calf from golden earrings

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BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '8:27', assumed a synecdochic figure of speech in which the word אפוד represented the garment and the image over which the garment was draped and that this image was an image of the shrine to Baal which Gideon had destroyed earlier.

<sup>330</sup>E.g., by FOOTE, "Ephod": 1-7; ERNST SELLIN, "Das israelitische Ephod", in *Orientalische Studien: Theodor Nöldeke zum siebzigsten Geburtstag (2. März 1906) gewidmet von Freunden und Schülern*, ed. CARL BEZOLD (Gießen: Töpelmann, 1906), vol. 2, 711; GOSLINGA, *Judges*, 351; HERTZBERG, *Richter*, 198; WEBB, *Book*, 152; HAMLIN, *At Risk*, 100; GÖRG, *Richter*, 49; and MASSOT, "Gideon", 132-133. — WILLIAM R. ARNOLD, *Ephod and Ark: A Study in the Records and Religion of the Ancient Hebrews*, HThS 3 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1917), interpreted it as an instrument of priestly divination and identified it on the basis of a conjecture of 1 Sam 14:18 following ע<sup>B</sup> (ibid., 10-17) with one of two proposed arks (ibid., 24-27); accordingly he emended Judg 8:27 to read ויעש אתו גרעון לארון\* (ibid., 125).

<sup>331</sup>Hence it has been proposed that either the text needed to be emended to allow for a lesser amount of gold, or that the text should be interpreted to say that Gideon did not make all of the gold into an ephod; see, for example, BUSH, *Judges*, 115-117; BUDDE, *Buch*, 67; ZAPLETAL, *Richter*, 135; SCHULZ, *Richter*, 53; SIMPSON, *Composition*, 38; J. GRAY, *Judges*, 314.

<sup>332</sup>Contrast 17:2, where Micah's mother takes only part of the returned silver to create an idol.

<sup>333</sup>Similarly, HALPERN, "Rise": 87; HANS-DETLEF HOFFMANN, *Reform und Reformen: Untersuchungen zu einem Grundthema der deuteronomistischen Geschichtsschreibung*, AThANT 66 (Doctoral dissertation, Universität Zürich, 1979; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1980), 351-352; GUTBROD, *Buch*, 254; BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 181; NELSON, "Judges": 45; GÖRG, *Richter*, 49; OLSON, "Judges", 809.

(נְזָמֵי הַזָּהָב, Exod 32:2), which presumably are part of the Israelites' spoil from the Egyptians (Exod 12:35-36), and here Gideon makes an ephod from golden earrings (נְזָמֵי זָהָב) that are taken from the Israelites' spoil (8:24). This parallel favours the interpretation that the ephod, though a garment, is perceived and worshipped as an idol, and the narrator strongly invites a comparison of Gideon's deed with Aaron's deed and prepares the audience not only for a negative evaluation and negative consequences of Gideon's ephod,<sup>334</sup> but also for a designation of Gideon as high priest, since he performs a similar act to the first high priest Aaron.

Turning now to the interpretation of the ephod, we find that in the Hexateuch אֵפֹד describes a priestly garment.<sup>335</sup> This straightforward picture, however, is now interrupted for the first time (8:27). After this episode the narrator of Judges draws a rather ambiguous picture of an ephod. He describes Micah who makes an ephod along with idols and installs one of his sons as his priest (17:5). Here the ephod could equally well describe either a garment for his priest or an idol. While the former interpretation would be supported by the mention of the priest, the latter might be supported by the mention of the idols in the same line as the ephod. Yet the very mention of the ephod together with the idols distinguishes it from them and allows also for the interpretation that the ephod is not an idol, but rather a priestly garment.<sup>336</sup> Therefore, despite its ambiguity it seems quite possible that here too אֵפֹד describes a priestly garment. Thus when the Danites come and steal וְאֶת־הַמִּסְכָּה וְאֶת־הַפֶּסֶל וְאֶת־הַתְּרָפִים וְאֶת־הָאֵפֹד (18:14,[17,18,20]) along with the priest, they steal all the utensils that are required for a successful priest. Here again, it is not necessary to interpret the ephod as an image of a god; it rather appears that אֵפֹד may still describe a priestly garment.<sup>337</sup> As a priestly garment, it represents the worship of YHWH, though the narrator indicates that YHWH is not worshipped appropriately.

If אֵפֹד describes a priestly garment, it makes full sense that Gideon lays it down (√ יצג, 8:27) in his home town, as √ יצג usually expresses the laying down of an object (cf. 6:37; 7:5);<sup>338</sup> if, on the other hand, the ephod is an image, the use of this root for the

<sup>334</sup>BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 181.

<sup>335</sup>Frequently in the Sinaitic Law (Exod 25; 28; 29; 35; 39; Lev 8).

<sup>336</sup>CASSEL, *Richter*, 85; BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 164; BURNEY, *Judges*, 242.

<sup>337</sup>This interpretation holds also true 1 Sam 21:9, since a long sword could easily be hidden behind a garment that hangs on a wall but not as easily behind an image that stands on a table or on the floor (similarly, BURNEY, *Judges*, 242), and 1 Sam 22:18; 23:6,9; 30:7, where David requests an ephod to seek YHWH; cf. also Hos 3:4. Similarly, HARAN, "צורת" 380-391, II-III.

<sup>338</sup>See the discussion on 6:37. Similarly, ZAPLETAL, *Richter*, 139; SELLIN, "Israelitische Ephod", 707-708. — ARNOLD, *Ephod*, 127, argued on the basis of this root and 1 Sam 5:2; 2 Sam 6:17; 15:24, that אֵפֹד described the ark (similarly, HERBERT G. MAY, "Ephod and Ariel", *AJSL* 56 [1939]: 45-52); yet he ignored the use of √ יצג elsewhere in Judges and in the Hebrew Scriptures.



erection of an idol would be unique in the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>339</sup> Hence the use of  $\sqrt{\text{צג}}$  supports the interpretation of the ephod being a priestly garment that Gideon lays down in his own town,<sup>340</sup> while the vast amount of gold used to craft the garment identifies the ephod as a golden replica of a garment rather than as a garment that may be worn. Since earlier the narrator has recorded both Gideon's challenge of YHWH (6:37) and YHWH's response (7:5) with  $\sqrt{\text{צג}}$ , the description of Gideon's action as a new laying down ( $\sqrt{\text{צג}}$ )<sup>341</sup> invites the additional interpretation that Gideon once again challenges YHWH through the erection of the ephod. This theological explanation of  $\sqrt{\text{צג}}$  is supported by the use of the sequence { $\sqrt{\text{צג}}$  + אָתָּוּ + בָּ + בָּ + sacred place} in the episode of the ark's return to Jerusalem, where the ark is placed on its place inside the tent (וַיִּצְגּוּ אֹתוֹ בְּמִקְוֹמוֹ) (וַיִּצְגּוּ אֹתוֹ בְּמִקְוֹמוֹ, 2 Sam 6:17).<sup>342</sup> Using the same sequence, the narrator describes Gideon as establishing a cult object in his home town in Ophrah (וַיִּצְגּוּ אֹתוֹ בְּעִירוֹ בְּעֹפְרָה, 8:27), the town of the public sacred terebinth (6:11). This place for the ephod stresses the intended public character of the ephod<sup>343</sup> and directs attention to Gideon. In Ophrah the ephod should publicly demonstrate that Gideon as the one, who crafted it and set it up, has delivered Israel, and it invites the Israelites to acknowledge Gideon's deliverance and leadership.<sup>344</sup> The ephod thus becomes a memorial to remember Gideon's achievement.

But who do the Israelites worship at Ophrah and what role does Gideon play in this worship? At this point one should recall first, that Gideon has demolished the altar to Baal and has built an altar to YHWH in its place, where he offered a sacrifice to YHWH (6:25-32), and that now no reference is made to any worship to Baal. The Israelites do not worship Baal, therefore.<sup>345</sup> Second, as already shown, elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures, the אִפְסוֹד is part of Yahwistic worship, even if only in distorted worship like in the first appendix to Judges (Judg 17–18). Gideon's establishment of the golden ephod appears, therefore, rather Yahwistic, even though in a rather distorted way. Further, Gideon establishes the cult at the very place where he has publicly demolished the altar to Baal and built an altar to YHWH (6:25-32), and he has just turned down the offer of the kingship in favour of YHWH's kingship (8:22-23), so that the establishment of public

<sup>339</sup>KEIL, *Commentar*, 271.

<sup>340</sup>That the ephod is laid down rather than hung up ( $\sqrt{\text{צג}}$  I,  $\sqrt{\text{תלה}}$ ) might have been due to its great weight; but see also below on the implication that the use of  $\sqrt{\text{צג}}$  implies that Gideon once more challenges YHWH.

<sup>341</sup>† (Judges).

<sup>342</sup>MAY, "Ephod": 51.

<sup>343</sup>Cf. A. EHRLICH, *Randglossen*, 105.

<sup>344</sup>Cf. KLEIN, *Triumph*, 65.

<sup>345</sup>Against GRESSMANN, *Anfänge*, 210; MARAIS, *Representation*, 111-112, 113.

YHWH worship appears indeed reasonable.<sup>346</sup> Hence for the Israelites, Gideon appears as the great YHWH-worshipping hero. Yet third, the narrator spells out that the Israelites do not worship YHWH, they rather play the harlot ( $\{\sqrt{\text{זנה}} \text{ I} + \{\text{אֶהָרִי}\}\}$ ) after the ephod; and further, the ephod becomes a snare to Gideon and his house ( $\text{וַיְהִי לְגִדְעוֹן וּלְבֵיתוֹ לְמוֹקֵשׁ}$ ). The narrator explains thus that the ephod removes attention away from YHWH and to itself. It seems, therefore, that not YHWH but rather the ephod as a cultic idol is worshipped.<sup>347</sup> In this worship, it appears that Gideon, who requests gold from the Israelites to craft his ephod and thus, as already observed, performs the same duty as Aaron at Mount Sinai who crafted his idol, makes himself priest<sup>348</sup> or even high priest<sup>349</sup> of whatever god is represented by the idol. The priestly office is not strange to Gideon, who earlier in the narrative has already performed priestly duties by offering the sacrificial bull on the newly built altar to YHWH (6:26-28).<sup>350</sup> As priest of the worship of the idol, however, Gideon may indeed act as priest-king and in this way accept the Israelites' offer of the kingship (8:22). Hence again, Gideon is the natural focus point of the Israelites, not only because of the golden ephod, but also because of his role in the worship of it.

In this context, the reference to  $\text{עַפְרָה}$  as Gideon's town makes full sense when one recalls that the name  $\text{עַפְרָה}$  refers to Gideon's town as a place of idolatry that ultimately has become deserted because of this idolatry (6:11,24), and that is referred to only as  $\text{הָעִיר}$  (6:27,28,30) after YHWH's promise to turn Israel's fate and deliver Israel from their oppressors has been recorded. By now referring to Gideon's home town with the double reference  $\text{בְּעַפְרָה בְּעִירוֹ}$ , the narrator stresses the discrepancy between his earlier reference to it as  $\text{הָעִיר}$  in anticipation of YHWH's deliverance (6:27,28,30) and his still earlier reference to it as  $\text{עַפְרָה}$  (6:11,24), the deserted place of idolatry. The implication of the inclusion formed by  $\text{עַפְרָה}$  is that despite YHWH's deliverance, Gideon's home town is still deserted by YHWH at the end of the Gideon narrative, as it is still a city of idolatrous

<sup>346</sup>Similarly, ZIEGLER, "Bemerkungen", 326; KEIL, *Commentar*, 272; BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 163; GOSLINGA, *Judges*, 351-352; ZIMMERLI, "Spendung", 514; HAMLIN, *At Risk*, 100.

<sup>347</sup>Cf. GEORGE FOOT MOORE, "Ephod", in *EncB*, vol. 2: 1308; similarly, KITTEL, *Geschichte*, 31; WOLF, "Judges", 435. WEBB, *Book*, 153, argued that Gideon's "act of piety ... goes wrong, for the ephod becomes an object of worship".

<sup>348</sup>BUSH, *Judges*, 117; HALPERN, "Rise": 83-88; cf. also MARTIN NOTH, "Das Amt des 'Richters Israels,'" in *Hebräische Wortforschung: Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Alfred Bertholet*, ed. WALTER BAUMGARTNER [*et al.*] (Tübingen: Mohr, 1950), 404-17, who claimed that the office of a judge was a priestly office.

<sup>349</sup>CAROL MEYERS, "Ephod", in *ABD*, vol. 2: 550, mentioned that the ephod "is one of four items of apparel reserved for the high priest alone, in addition to what he wore in common with the other priests".

<sup>350</sup>Similarly, HAMLIN, *At Risk*, 100.



worship despite the leadership of YHWH's former representative (8:27).<sup>351</sup> Gideon has, therefore, not only reversed YHWH's victory into his own, at the end of the narrative YHWH's aim to be worshipped exclusively is even pushed further away as now the idol is worshipped as the result of YHWH's deliverance. Hence the name עֶפְדָּה focuses on the theological component as it points to Israel's missing relationship to YHWH; in the course of the Gideon narrative universal idolatry (6:11) is replaced by exclusive worship of YHWH in a general idolatrous context (6:24) which is again replaced by the universal worship of Gideon's idol (8:27). In this context the notice that all the Israelites play the harlot ( $\{\sqrt{\text{זנה}} \text{ I} + \{\text{אֶתְרִי}\}\}$ ) there (8:27) indicates that they play the harlot after the ephod as an idol; and since it is Gideon who lays down the ephod in his own town, by coming there and worshipping the ephod, the Israelites also acknowledge Gideon's role as their worship leader.<sup>352</sup>

We therefore conclude that the ephod appears to be a golden replica of a priestly garment that Gideon publicly lays down in his own town. There it serves several functions. First, for the Israelites, this ephod, being a device normally used in Yahwistic worship and set up in the town where Gideon has build the altar to YHWH, testifies of Gideon's piety towards YHWH. Second, Gideon, who sets it up publicly in his home town, appears to use it as a memorial to remind the Israelites of his deliverance and he thus directs Israel's attention away from YHWH and to himself. Third, the narrator describes the ephod as an idol, which the Israelites worship and which becomes a snare for its maker Gideon.

Two references in this climax of the narrative complication further explain the significance of the complication for the following narrative and thus justify its inclusion in the Gideon narrative. First, the notice that Israel plays the harlot after Gideon's ephod ( $\{\sqrt{\text{זנה}} \text{ I} + \{\text{אֶתְרִי}\}\}$ , 8:27), while it clearly condemns Israel for worshipping the idol, also refers to the theological introduction of Judges. There the phrase  $\{\sqrt{\text{זנה}} \text{ I} + \{\text{אֶתְרִי}\}\}$  is applied to disobedient judges (2:17), so that the narrator not only condemns Israel, but also Gideon for erecting and worshipping it. This reference furthermore identifies Gideon as the first judge who establishes idolatry and who thus already starts a new round in the theological cycle during his lifetime. Hence the following narrative does not need to be introduced with the usual notice of Israel's evildoing and YHWH's reaction;<sup>353</sup> Israel is already set for the next oppression even before the previous cycle is formally

<sup>351</sup> Similarly, WEBB, *Book*, 153, who, however, claimed that Gideon was still YHWH's representative.

<sup>352</sup> Similarly, HALPERN, "Rise": 83-88; WEBB, *Book*, 153.

<sup>353</sup> Similarly, BOLING, *Judges*, 169; against JOBLING, *Sense*, 67; and KLEIN, *Triumph*, 70, who both failed to recognise this and claimed that the new cycle began with 8:33.

completed with the record of achievement, so that the following narrative will describe how Israel's idolatry leads to disaster.

Second, in closing, the narrator forewarns that the ephod will become a snare (וַיִּהְיֶה לְמוֹקֵשׁ) to Gideon and his house (8:27). On the one hand, this comment reveals that YHWH remains in control of the events even when Gideon seeks his honour for the victory. YHWH is hence superior to Gideon, so that Gideon's selfish continuation of the battle and his claim of YHWH's honour will bear consequences. On the other hand, the comment echoes the first rebuking speech of the angel of YHWH where he announces that foreign gods will become a snare (לְמוֹקֵשׁ) to Israel (2:3). Yet while the Israelites at that point react to the angel's speech (2:4-5), this time no reaction is recorded. Israel's idolatry will have consequences, too, therefore.

Hence the closing sentences of the Gideon narrative calls for a continuation of the narrative; in other words, the Gideon narrative is not yet complete at this point. At the same time, they defines the theme of the continued narrative as a theological theme, so that the climax of the narrative complication may be recognised as the theological setting for the Abimelech narrative, which thus will record the consequences of Gideon's failure to honour YHWH and the consequences of Israel's idolatry.

## D The Record of the Achievement Confirms YHWH's Power (8:28)

Following the pattern of the preceding narratives, the Gideon narrative is concluded with the record of the rest achieved (8:28; cf. 3:11; 3:30; 5:31). With its explicit reference to YHWH's victory over the Midianites, this record concludes the main Gideon narrative rather than the narrative complication. It thus ignores Gideon's selfish battle and his establishment of idolatry; yet since it is given immediately after the disapproval of Israel's idolatry, it plays on it. Israel appears to live in peace as long as they worship the idol; this, of course, is ironic, since Israel does not live in peace with YHWH at all and will soon sink into civil war.

There is one significant change and two additions to the usual formula of the record of achievement. First, the narrator states with the *nif'al* וַיִּכְנַע that Midian is subdued before (לְפָנֵי) the Israelites (8:28). In contrast to the use of the *nif'al* וַתִּכְנַע in the record of the achievement in the Ehud narrative, which explicitly mentions that Moab is subdued under (תַּחַת) the Israelites (3:30), the record of achievement in the Gideon narrative does not mention any victor. Yet the narrator has repeatedly emphasised that YHWH is the one who has subdued the Midianites, and he now underlines this by stating that the Midianites



are subdued before (לְפָנָי) the Israelites, including Gideon, who remains passive in this statement.

Second, the two additions are that the Midianites no longer lift up their heads, and that the land enjoys rest only in the days of Gideon. The first addition describes the effectiveness of the victory,<sup>354</sup> which is due solely to YHWH's initial victory. Yet the second addition finally draws attention to Gideon again,<sup>355</sup> although Gideon is never said to have delivered Israel.<sup>356</sup> However, with Gideon being ascribed the achievement of peace, and with the peace being limited to Gideon's lifetime, it is only temporary peace that might not last after Gideon's death. Hence again, the narrator prepares for the unrest narrated in the Abimelech narrative.

Only after lasting peace is established, Gideon's return home is recorded (8:29). Although this verse stands outside of the framework of the Gideon narrative, it still focuses on its hero. It may hence be regarded as a second conclusion of the Gideon narrative.<sup>357</sup> Further, by letting Gideon retire as the 'Baal-fighter' יִרְבֵּעַל, the narrator indicates that Gideon retires as YHWH's agent and as the witness of YHWH's victory, which, therefore, will not influence the following Abimelech narrative any more. Hence although this verse concentrates on the hero of the Gideon narrative, it primarily provides the background and thus prepares for the Abimelech narrative,<sup>358</sup> so that it may be seen as a transition from the former to the latter.

The double function of these verses supports our interpretation that the Gideon narrative and Abimelech narrative are regarded as just one narrative, where the separating verse can not be defined clearly. At the same time, the formal conclusion of the Gideon narrative points to the interpretation that both narratives are distinguished from each other. Yet at this point, the nature of the connection between both narratives can only be assumed. Gideon's idolatry will bear consequences; and it will be these consequences that will be recorded in the Abimelech narrative.

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<sup>354</sup>SLOTKI, "Judges", 230, observed that "after this period the Midianites scarcely appear in the sacred literature"; similarly, HODGETTS, "In Search", 211.

<sup>355</sup>Cf. KEIL, *Commentar*, 272. JAEGER, "Theme", 180-181, observed that of the treated hero stories the "Gideon's story is the only one with a denouement motif that does not mention Yahweh".

<sup>356</sup>BOLING, *Judges*, 170.

<sup>357</sup>This was also seen by those authors, who divided the Gideon narrative into two sources using the names 'Gideon' or 'Jerubbaal' respectively; according to these authors, the 'Gideon source' is concluded with the record of the achievement (8:28) and the 'Jerubbaal source' with the record of Jerubbaal's retirement (8:29); see, for example, BOLING, *Judges*, 169-170.

<sup>358</sup>Therefore, and because we have to make a choice, we shall assign 8:29 to the Abimelech narrative.

## E Summary: The Demonstration of YHWH's Divine Power

The Gideon narrative is driven by the theological question whether YHWH or some other god has the right to be worshipped as god. In accordance with this theme, already the introduction to the Gideon narrative uses the oppression by the Midianites only as the background for the prophet's reprimanding speech as its climax, that in turn culminates in the theological theme as defined by the prophet, quoting YHWH (6:10): *"I am YHWH, your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But you have not listened to my voice"*. The following call of Gideon centres around YHWH's promise that he will deliver Israel through Gideon as his agent. That the deliverance is not the main theme of the Gideon narrative is then made evident in YHWH's subsequent command to replace Baal worship, which functions as an example for the worship of any foreign god, with YHWH worship, which appears as the logical consequence of Gideon's call. Eventually the theme of the narrative is explicitly specified in Joash's speech, who does not at all refer to the oppression but only to the question whether YHWH or Baal is god (6:31): *"Will you contend for Baal or will you deliver him? [...] If he is god, he will contend for himself; because he has broken down his altar"*. This theme is then summarised in Gideon's new name 'Jerubbaal' and laid upon Gideon, who carries it into the following narrative.

Following this definition of the theme, the narrator focuses on YHWH's involvement and clarifies that Gideon can not at all contribute to YHWH's success. YHWH enables Gideon to perform the deliverance and allows him to approach the Midianites only with a hopelessly small army. On the other hand, Gideon repeatedly needs signs of reassurance, thus demonstrating his inability to fight the battle. In the end, it is YHWH, who defeats the Midianites and thus achieves the deliverance (7:22): *YHWH set the sword of each man against his friend and against the whole army. And the army fled*. Yet at the same time, Gideon repeatedly tries to get his share of the victory. He recruits a large army, tries to compel YHWH to leave him the victory, and eventually frightens the Midianite army just before YHWH defeats them, giving the Israelites the impression that they cause the enemies to fight against each other. Hence while the narrator assigns the victory to YHWH, the Israelites assign it to Gideon.

The following episodes display a rather different Gideon, who relies on himself while YHWH is not involved in the actions. Not fearful any more, Gideon pursues the Midianites to take personal revenge. He takes the honour from YHWH and negotiates about the victory. He even demands support from the Israelites for his selfish goals and punishes them for their disloyalty. Eventually he manages to capture the Midianite kings,



faces them with a show trial and executes them. Accordingly, Gideon is being assigned the victory and offered the leadership. Although Gideon verbally declines the offer, he establishes an ephod as a memorial for himself. Yet as the narrator confirms (8:27), this ephod *became a snare to Gideon and his house*. The complication thus calls for a continuation of the narrative, but at the same time it already foreshadows the greater disaster in the Abimelech narrative. Hence, while YHWH's prominence in the plot is beneficial for Israel, Gideon's prominence in the complication leads to disaster in Israel and will lead to even worse disaster after Gideon's death. Yet at the same time, the conclusion of the Gideon narrative suggests that YHWH is still in control, so that Gideon's actions will bear fatal consequences. With this prospect, the entire complication becomes the transition for the following narrative of even greater disaster.

The concluding remark of the Gideon narrative thus transfers the theological theme from the Gideon narrative into the following Abimelech narrative. Gideon establishes idolatry and returns home. These verses, while they conclude the Gideon narrative, also prepare for the Abimelech narrative. There the narrator will suggest that Gideon's self-reliance is wrong since it does not give to YHWH what belongs to him. He will further show that the worship of foreign gods leads to disaster. The Abimelech narrative thus contains the anti-thesis of the Gideon narrative; while in the Gideon narrative the narrator demonstrates YHWH's divine power and Gideon's failure when he acts without YHWH's support, in the Abimelech narrative he demonstrates the capacity, or rather, the inability of foreign gods, while YHWH does not intervene visibly. Overviewing the Gideon narrative and the Abimelech narrative at the end of the combined Gideon-Abimelech narrative, the audience will then be in a position to compare the performance of YHWH with that of the foreign gods and draw appropriate conclusions.

# CHAPTER III

## THE ABIMELECH NARRATIVE (8:29–9:57): BAALISM'S DISASTROUS POTENTIAL

Introductory remarks. As already argued, the complication calls for a continuation of the Gideon narrative for several reasons. First, although YHWH has demonstrated his divine power, Israel worships Gideon's idol at the end of the Gideon narrative; some further development is therefore needed to correct this outcome. Second, the narrator closes the Gideon narrative with the comment that Israel's idolatry has consequences; these consequences are expected to be addressed in the Abimelech narrative. Third, the record of Israel's idolatry corresponds to the records of Israel's idolatry at the beginning of the previous narratives, so that it already sets the stage for the following narrative. Fourth, the comment that Israel has rest during Gideon's lifetime only predicts a narrative that focuses on unrest and war. Fifth, following Israel's choice to worship Baal despite the narrator's demonstration of YHWH's divine power, it seems reasonable for the narrator to describe what effect Baal worship has, for only then can one compare the power of the two gods properly. Finally, only after the narrator has given the record of achievement (8:28), which he furthermore connected to Gideon's lifetime, he tells us that Gideon, the son of Joash, returns home (8:29). In view of the preceding narratives which have been concluded with the record of the achievement (3:11; 3:30; 5:31), Gideon's return after the record of achievement appears rather late;<sup>1</sup> yet since this record transfers the main character of the preceding narrative to the narrative that is about to follow, it identifies the Abimelech narrative as a continuation of the Gideon narrative.

Hence following the Gideon narrative as a demonstration of YHWH's divine power, and its complication, where Gideon proceeds on his own initiative and establishes idolatry, the Abimelech narrative has a double function. First, as the continuation of the complication, it will show what effect idolatry, which is exemplified in Baal worship, has for Israel. Yet second, the Abimelech narrative will go further and provide the other side of the theological theme started with the Gideon narrative. It will demonstrate that Baal, who serves as an example for any other god, does not have divine power. Indeed, these gods are not even present, and the worship of them only leads to mutual destruction.

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<sup>1</sup>MOORE, *Commentary*, 233.



Overview 3.—Parallels between the Gideon Narrative and the Abimelech Narrative  
(6:1–8:28 || 8:29–9:57)

	Gideon Narrative (6:1–8:28)	Abimelech Narrative (8:29–9:57)
<u>The general theological introduction: Israel's apostasy</u>		
Israel's apostasy	<u>Israel does evil in YHWH's eyes (6:1a)</u>	8:22-27: <i>Israel's idolatry;</i> → <i>Gideon narrative</i>
<u>The setting: The narrative background, theological background, and theme are set</u>		
The setting of the narrative background	<b>The Midianites oppress the Israelites (6:1b-6)</b>	<b>Abimelech is born and Gideon dies (8:29-32)</b>
The setting of the theological background: a Similar introduction b Similar theological background c Similar theological assessment	a <b>וַיְהִי + verbal reference to the preceding sentence (6:7)</b> b <b>(YHWH's covenant with the Israelites [בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל]; 6:8-10)</b> c <b>The Israelites (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) abandon YHWH who has rescued (√ נצל) them from the hand (מִיַּד) of all (כָּל) their oppressors (6:8-10)</b>	a <b>וַיְהִי + verbal reference to the preceding sentence (8:33a)</b> b <b>Baal's covenant with the Israelites (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל; 8:33b)</b> c <b>The Israelites (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) abandon YHWH who has rescued (√ נצל) them from the hand (מִיַּד) of all (כָּל) their enemies (8:34-35)</b>
<u>The exposition: YHWH / the Baalists enter(s) into a covenant with the appointed representative</u>		
An agent of the god appoints the god's representative from the opponent's side, who enters into a covenant with the god / his worshippers	<b>YHWH's angel calls Gideon, son of the Baal representative Joash, as YHWH's representative, and YHWH enters into a covenant with him (6:11-24)</b>	<b>The Baalists appoint Abimelech, son of the YHWH-representative Jerubbaal, as their representative and enter into a covenant with him (9:1-3)</b>

(continued)

Key: Types (partially combined): underlined condensed – headings; **bold** – plot, *italic* – complication, words underlined – comments of the narrator.

Vertical lines: grey – verbal or thematic parallels, black – other parallels.

Horizontal lines: black – disruption, grey – continuation of the narrative on a different level.

Overview 3.—(continued)

	Gideon Narrative (6:1–8:28)	Abimelech Narrative (8:29–9:57)
<u>The theme: Its specification by the offended party</u>		
The god appoints his representative, who appoints helpers and replaces the leadership of the opponent	<b>YHWH appoints Gideon, who takes ten אנשים, tears down Baal’s altar, and builds an altar to YHWH (6:25-27)</b>	<b>The Baalists appoint Abimelech, who hires reckless אנשים, executes Jerubbaal’s sons, and is crowned (9:4-6)</b>
The offended party perceives the offence	<b>The Ophrahites discern the offence (6:28-29)</b>	<b>Jotham learns of the offence (9:7a)</b>
A representative of the offended party specifies the theme	<b>Baal’s representative Jash specifies the theme (6:30-32)</b>	<b>YHWH’s representative Jotham specifies the theme (9:7b-21)</b>
<u>The development: The preparation for the demonstration of the god’s power</u>		
The narrative background	<b><u>The Midianites invade the land (6:33)</u></b>	<b><u>Abimelech rules Israel for three years (9:22)</u></b>
God intervenes directly and effectively	<b>יהוה clothes Gideon with his spirit (רוח), and Gideon recruits his army (6:34-35)</b>	<b>אֱלֹהִים sends an evil spirit (רוח) between the Baalists, who act treacherously against Abimelech (9:23)</b>
The narrator justifies the main Abimelech narrative	<i>N/A</i>	<b><u>The Baalists bear the consequences for their idolatry (9:24)</u></b>
The representative fails to fight against the enemy	<b>Despite his call, Gideon is fearful and fails to fight against the Midianites (6:36–7:14)</b>	<b>Despite the Shechemites’ assaults, Abimelech fails to fight against them (9:25-33)</b>
The representative gains courage to fight	<b>(Gideon eavesdrops on the Midianites; 7:9-14)</b>	<b>Abimelech encounters Gaal (9:34-41)</b>

(continued)

Key: Types (partially combined): underlined condensed – headings; **bold** – plot, *italic* – complication, words underlined – comments of the narrator.

Vertical lines: grey – verbal or thematic parallels, black – other parallels.

Horizontal lines: black – disruption, grey – continuation of the narrative on a different level.



Overview 3.—(continued)

	Gideon Narrative (6:1–8:28)	Abimelech Narrative (8:29–9:57)
<u>The climax: The demonstration of the god’s capacities</u>		
The demonstration of the capacities	<b>Gideon divides (חצה) his troops into three groups (שְׁלֹשָׁה קְאָשִׁים), who ‘fight’ outside of the enemy camp, while YHWH defeats the Midianites (7:15-22)</b>	<b>Abimelech divides (חצה) his troops into three groups (שְׁלֹשָׁה קְאָשִׁים) and kills the Shechemites (9:42-49)</b>
The outcome of the battle	<b>The Midianites are defeated and flee (7:22)</b>	<b>Abimelech is killed (9:50-54)</b>
<u>The complication: Gideon continues the battle</u>		∅
The representative continues the battle	<i>Gideon continues the battle against the Midianites and kills their kings (7:23–8:21)</i>	N/A
<u>The outcome: Israel’s reaction</u>		
Israel’s reaction on the battle	<i>The Israelites (אִישׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל) honour Gideon, who in turn establishes idolatry (8:22-27a)</i>	<b>The Israelites (אִישׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל) recognise Abimelech’s death and return to their homes (9:55)</b>
<u>The conclusion: The theological assessment</u>		
The conclusion	<u><i>Israel enjoys rest during Gideon’s lifetime, but their idolatry bears consequences (8:27b-28)</i></u>	<u><b>God has punished the idolaters according to Jotham’s curse (9:56-57)</b></u>

Key: Types (partially combined): underlined condensed – headings; **bold** – plot, *italic* – complication, words underlined – comments of the narrator.

Vertical lines: grey – verbal or thematic parallels, black – other parallels.

Horizontal lines: black – disruption, grey – continuation of the narrative on a different level.

A first overview of the Abimelech narrative reveals extensive parallels between the Gideon narrative and the Abimelech narrative as shown in overview 3. From there it is evident, that up to their climax both narratives are structured remarkably similarly, and these structures are furthermore filled out similarly. Both narratives begin with the setting of the narrated and theological background (6:1b-10 || 8:29-35) that focuses on Israel's (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) idolatry and describes the relationship to the respective god as a covenantal relationship (6:8-10 || 8:33b) and that at the same time defines the theological theme of the narrative; this is followed by the exposition outlining the relationship of the god to his appointed representative (6:11-24 || 9:1-3); the challenge of the opponent through the replacement of his altar or leadership with the help of ten men (אֲנָשִׁים; 6:25-27 || 9:4-6); the specification of the theme by a representative of the offended party who questions whether the challenge was justified (6:28-32 || 9:7-21); the development containing the preparation for the demonstration of the god's power (6:33–7:15 || 9:22-41), where the god intervenes through his spirit (רוּחַ; 6:34-35 || 9:23) and where the representative fails to proceed against the enemy (6:36–7:8(14) || 9:25-33); and the climax, where the representative divides (חֲצָרָה) his troops into three groups (שָׁלֹשָׁה רֵאשִׁים; 7:15-22 || 9:42-54) and where YHWH and Baalism demonstrate their capacities. Both narratives are concluded with a record of Israel's (אִישׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל) reaction (8:22-27a || 9:55) and a theological conclusion that refers to Israel's idolatry (8:27b-28 || 9:56-57).

These features define the Abimelech narrative as a theological narrative like the Gideon narrative. The parallels also reveal the character of both narratives as examples for Israel as a nation. Like the Gideon narrative, that is framed by theological reflections containing general references to Israel (יִשְׂרָאֵל; 6:8-10; 8:22-27a), so the Abimelech narrative is framed by similar reflections and references (8:33-35; 9:55). This contrasts with the focus on individuals in both narratives, who thus serve as examples for Israel.

Yet there are also differences, which, however, underline the theological nature of the Abimelech narrative and the combined Gideon-Abimelech narrative. First, the Gideon narrative focuses on YHWH, who takes an active part in the narrative, while the Abimelech narrative focuses on Baal, although it is not Baal who acts but only his representatives and worshippers, the Baalists, who act for him. Hence, while YHWH intervenes directly and demonstrates his divine power, Baal does not intervene and so demonstrate his power. Second, while YHWH's action is directed at Gideon's and Israel's well-being and leads to peace in Israel, Abimelech's action is directed at his own advantage at the cost of civil war in Israel and the extinction of the Shechemites; and eventually, even Abimelech becomes a victim of his own warlike actions. These observations in combination with the narrator's Yahwistic perspective as expressed through the setting of both narratives in an idolatrous background (6:8-10 || 8:34-35)



underline the narrator's assessment that following YHWH brings peace and prosperity while following Baal brings only war and chaos. Third, the narrator's justification of the main Abimelech narrative (9:24) does not have any explicit counterpart in the Gideon narrative. The addition of this element to the Abimelech narrative seems justified, however, when one observes that the following episodes tell a violent story, in which YHWH appears to be absent, but which the narrator nonetheless wants to be understood as YHWH's judgement on the Baal worshippers. The narrator thus provides the audience with the key for the interpretation of the episodes by stressing that the Baalists dominate the scene only because YHWH, being still in control, allows them to do so. Fourth, Abimelech's fight against Gaal (9:34-41) does not have any obvious counterpart in the Gideon narrative. Yet it appears that this episode whets Abimelech's appetite to fight against the Shechemites, so that it fulfils a similar purpose in the Abimelech narrative as Gideon's eavesdropping on the Midianites (7:9-14) fulfils in the Gideon narrative. While Gideon proceeds against the Midianites, however, Abimelech fights against his fellow Israelites. Fifth, the demonstration of the god's power as the climax of each narrative contains YHWH's one successful battle against Israel's oppressors, while the counterpart in the Abimelech narrative narrates Abimelech's several fights against Israelites, before he himself is killed. This shows on the one hand that YHWH is more successful than Abimelech, and on the other hand, that while in the Gideon narrative the Midianites are identified as Israel's enemies, in the Abimelech narrative Abimelech himself appears as Israel's enemy. Sixth, the episodes of the complication of the Gideon narrative (7:23–8:27) do not have any counterpart in the Abimelech narrative. This underlines their double purpose both as a complication of the Gideon narrative and as the transition to the Abimelech narrative. Finally, although the conclusions of both narratives (8:27b-28 || 9:56-57) refer to idolatry, they each have a different function. While the conclusion to the Gideon narrative calls for a continuation because of Israel's idolatry, the conclusion of the Abimelech narrative provides an explanation for the violence in the main Abimelech narrative. But since this violence is identified as the result of YHWH's punishment of Israel for deserting him, it appears as the natural consequence of the conclusion of the Gideon narrative. It thus concludes both the Gideon narrative and the Abimelech narrative.

Hence the Abimelech narrative builds on the Gideon narrative and provides its theological counterpart. While YHWH's performance is described in the Gideon narrative, Baal does not interact at all in the Abimelech narrative, so that the Baalists' performance is recorded instead. Yet YHWH is in control even in an environment dominated by Baalism. Therefore, in the Gideon-Abimelech narrative, the only god, who proves his existence and demonstrates his divine power even over other gods, is YHWH.

## A Re-Setting the Background and Specifying the Theme (8:29–9:21)

### 1 Re-Setting the Narrative and Theological Background and Theme (8:29-35)

#### *a Re-Setting the Narrative Background (8:29-32)*

Following the anticipation that the theologically motivated Gideon narrative will be continued with a narrative that similarly concentrates on the theological theme concerning whether YHWH or Baal is god, the narrator first re-sets the narrative background for the Abimelech narrative. The record of Gideon's retirement as the 'Baal-fighter' יְרֵבֶעֶל, the focus on his private life as גִּדְעוֹן, and the episode of the birth of his son Abimelech at Shechem constitute a change in the narrative, so that these records may be seen as the transition from the Gideon narrative set in Ophrah to the Abimelech narrative set in Shechem. The main function of this transition is to prepare for the Abimelech narrative,<sup>2</sup> since the focus on Gideon's descendants, especially on the number of his own sons (8:30), and the name and origin of his son Abimelech (8:31), is significant mainly for the interpretation of the Abimelech narrative and not for the interpretation of the Gideon narrative. Gideon's seventy sons (8:30) will, indeed, be mentioned again in Abimelech's speech (9:2), in the narrator's notice of their execution (9:5), in Jotham's speech (9:18), and twice in the narrator's explanation of the narrative (9:24,56); and Shechem, the home of Gideon's concubine (8:31), will become significant as the setting of the entire Abimelech narrative. Hence while the Abimelech narrative breaks with the narrative theme of the Gideon narrative, it continues the theological theme. Yet this theological theme will then need to be carried out through a new narrative theme, which will need to be specified at the outset of the Abimelech narrative.

Having returned home, Gideon gains great wealth and founds a wealthy family. He has seventy sons, who are described as coming from his thigh (יֵצְאֵי יָרְכוֹ, 8:30),<sup>3</sup> and one

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<sup>2</sup>Similarly, KEIL, *Commentar*, 272; MOORE, *Commentary*, 234.

<sup>3</sup>Apart from this passage, within the Hebrew Scriptures the expression {יֵצְאֵי יָרְכוֹ} occurs only to mention Jacob's seventy sons (Gen 46:27; Exod 1:5; †); BOLING, *Judges*, 162. Since there it assumes the full number of the descendants (cf. 6's 75 for 70), the narrator might refer to Gideon's sons as the full number as well. The number seventy appears to be a round figure anyway, as Gideon has seventy sons (8:30), and in addition to them (גִּמְתִּיא, 8:31; RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 236) one son from his concubine, and as Abimelech kills Gideon's seventy sons (9:5) except of Jotham and himself. Cf. BOLING, *ibid.*, who argued for a political meaning of the number seventy; FRANK CHARLES FENSHAM, "The Numeral Seventy in the Old Testament



son from his concubine at Shechem (8:31). This description has two implications. First, although all the sons have Gideon as their father, the narrator makes a distinction among them.<sup>4</sup> The seventy sons are described as Gideon's sons, while the one, who is given the name אֲבִימֶלֶךְ, is described as the son of his concubine at Shechem. Since the concubine remains nameless in the narrative, the stress is laid on Shechem as the named city and on Abimelech who is born there. This expanded focus on Shechem on the one hand draws attention to the scene of the Abimelech narrative; while on the other hand it appears that the narrator deliberately contrasts Abimelech's home town with Gideon's home town 'Ophrah of the Abiezrites' (עֹפְרָה אֲבֵי הָעִזְרִי, 8:32),<sup>5</sup> which he expressly mentions as the town where Gideon dies and is buried. This contrast underlines the contrast between the Gideon narrative and the Abimelech narrative. Second, although the narrator does not directly refer back to the introduction of Judges, Gideon's wife in another town reminds one of the accusation that the Israelites marry their offspring to foreigners and serve their gods (3:6). Yet Gideon is even worse as he himself unites with a foreign woman; and sure enough, as the narrative continues, the son born of this union will indeed serve the god of his home town (9:1-6). Therefore, the contrast between the Gideon narrative and the Abimelech narrative established through the contrast between the two mentioned cities will be filled with a focus on YHWH's judgement for Israel's disobedience towards him and their idolatry.

The son from Gideon's concubine at Shechem is named Abimelech (וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת־שְׁמוֹ אֲבִימֶלֶךְ, 8:31). This record, however, deserves more attention. The expression {שֵׁם + שֵׁם} occurs only eighteen times in the Hebrew Scriptures, the usual phrase to express the naming of a person being {שֵׁם + קָרָא}.<sup>6</sup> In twelve instances {שֵׁם + שֵׁם} refers to YHWH, who places his name in a location where he wants to be worshipped and where he establishes a name for himself;<sup>7</sup> when it stands for the naming of a person, it appears to describe a re-naming with the focus on the meaning of the name for the bearer or for the narrative.<sup>8</sup> Although it appears that Abimelech is the subject of וַיִּשֶׂם (8:31),<sup>9</sup> since he is

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and the Family of Jerubbaal, Ahab, Panammuwa, and Athirat", *PEQ* 109 (1977): 113-115, who interpreted it as "a larger group of people taken as a whole" (*ibid.*: 115); and BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 188, who reckoned that it was an ideal number.

<sup>4</sup>BURNEY, *Judges*, 264-265; EISSFELDT, *Quellen*, 56-57; CUNDALL, "Commentary", 124; WEBB, *Book*, 154.

<sup>5</sup>As already indicated (see p. 49, n. 38), Ophrah can not be located; on the location of Shechem, see G. ERNEST WRIGHT, *Shechem: The Biography of a Biblical City* (London: Duckworth, 1965).

<sup>6</sup>EVEN-SHOSHAN, 1026-1029, 1135-1138.

<sup>7</sup>Deut 12:5,21; 14:24; 1 Kgs 9:3; 11:36; 14:21; 2 Kgs 21:4,7; 2 Chr 6:20; 12:13; 33:7. 1 Chr 17:21.

<sup>8</sup>2 Kgs 17:34; Neh 9:7; Dan 5:12 aram.; see below. — In the remaining two instances, the power of YHWH is emphasised (Num 6:27) or the person is meant (2 Sam 14:7); † (Judg 8:31).

mentioned immediately before the record of the naming, so that Abimelech might refer to his father Gideon with that name as king, in the context it appears to be Gideon,<sup>10</sup> who is also mentioned in this verse as a minor figure, who names his son.

When it stands for the re-naming of a person, the expression {שִׁים} {אֶת־} שָׁמוֹ שׁפּ, which is attested only three times in the Hebrew Scriptures,<sup>11</sup> implies that the name is given as a secondary name or an honorary name not at the time of birth but at a later stage instead of or in addition to the previous name.<sup>12</sup> The new name implies a rejection of the previous name and instead imposes the naming person's new contrasting characterisation onto the bearer of the name. Yet in the narrative we do not find any information about Abimelech's previous name, so that Abimelech's renaming for the sake of a contrasting characterisation seems unjustified. It appears instead that Abimelech is characterised with this name independently of any other name. The name then defines either any character's or the narrator's<sup>13</sup> perspective for Abimelech and thus establishes a meaning of the name for the Abimelech narrative. Yet the meaning of the name אֶבְיִמֶלֶךְ is rather ambiguous as shown in overview 4.<sup>14</sup> The name could either be a sentence name as shown as the first seven options, or a construct-nominal phrase as shown as the eighth option.

First, as a sentence name, אֶבְיִמֶלֶךְ could be a title for Gideon's son. The interpretation of the name as a title would also fit to the previous uses of אֶבְיִמֶלֶךְ in the Pentateuch, where אֶבְיִמֶלֶךְ is used as a title for Canaanite city kings.<sup>15</sup> This connection would not only

<sup>9</sup>MARTIN, *Judges*, 110; BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '8:29-32'.

<sup>10</sup>KEIL, *Commentar*, 273; FAUSSET, *Judges*, 151; NOWACK, *Richter*, 82; BOLING, *Judges*, 162; MARTIN, *Judges*, 110; JORDAN, *Judges*, 155-156; KLEIN, *Triumph*, 70; MASSOT, "Gideon", 134; BLOCK, "Will": 362; MARAIS, *Representation*, 114.

<sup>11</sup>It is used only for YHWH's renaming of Abram (Neh 9:7) and Jacob (2 Kgs 17:34) and of Nebuchadnezzar's renaming of Daniel (Dan 5:12 aram.); see KEIL, *Commentar*, 273; NOWACK, *Richter*, 82; A. EHRLICH, *Randglossen*, 106. — GOSLINGA, *Judges*, 353, n. 120; and BOLING, *Judges*, 162, listed Dan 1:7 in addition to or instead of Dan 5:12; however, Dan 1:7 is constructed differently ({וַיִּשֶׂם לְשֵׁמוֹ שֵׁפַח}) and may therefore not be regarded as a parallel expression.

<sup>12</sup>KEIL, *Commentar*, 273; FAUSSET, *Judges*, 151; A. EHRLICH, *Randglossen*, 105-107; EISSFELDT, *Quellen*, 57; GOSLINGA, *Judges*, 353, n. 120; SLOTKI, "Judges", 231; BUBER, *Königtum*, 23; BOLING, *Judges*, 162; ENNS, *Judges*, 75.

<sup>13</sup>Throughout the book, the narrator characterises several characters through their name without mentioning their original name; e.g., בּוֹשֵׁן רִשְׁעוֹתַיִם ('Cushan Double-Wickedness', 3:8), עֲגֹלֹן ('Calf', 3:12), דְּבוּרָה ('Honey Bee', 4:4), בְּרֶק ('Lightning', 4:6), זָבַח and צִלְמֶנֶע (8:6), גַּעַל בְּדַעְבָּד (9:26), and—last but not least—יִרְבֵּעַל/גִּדְעוֹן (6–9); see also the concise discussion in HODGETTS, "In Search", 166-179.

<sup>14</sup>Thus already KITTEL, "Richter", 385. Cf. the discussions of FOKKELMAN, "Remarks", 33-34; and BLOCK, "Will": 362.

<sup>15</sup>Gen 20 (10 times); 21 (6 times); 26 (7 times); also Ps 34:1; † (\ Judges; 2 Sam 11:21; 1 Chr 18:16).



Overview 4.—Interpretations of the Name אַבִּימֶלֶךְ

1 <sup>st</sup> reference	2 <sup>nd</sup> reference	Interpretation
		<u>A title: ‘Father-King’</u>
Abimelech	∅	<i>A title for Abimelech: Abimelech is divine (or, first) king</i>
Abimelech	YHWH	‘[My] <u>divine/human Father is מֶלֶךְ (or, king)</u> ’
Abimelech	Baal	‘[Abimelech’s] father [i.e., Baal] is מֶלֶךְ (or, king)’
Abimelech	Gideon	‘[Abimelech’s] father [i.e., Gideon] is מֶלֶךְ (or, king)’
		<u>‘[The] divine/human king is [my] Father’</u>
YHWH	Abimelech	‘The king [i.e., YHWH] is [Abimelech’s] father’
Baal	Abimelech	‘The king [i.e., Baal] is [Abimelech’s] father’
Gideon	Abimelech	‘The king [i.e., Gideon] is [Abimelech’s] father’
		<u>‘Father of מֶלֶךְ (or, of [a] king)’</u>
Abimelech	Abim.’s son	‘[Abim. is] father of מֶלֶךְ (or, of [a] king [i.e., Abim.’s son])’

emphasise the description of Abimelech as king over one city only,<sup>16</sup> it would above all give his kingship a Canaanite and thus idolatrous interpretation. With this interpretation Abimelech is described as the ‘Father-King’ of the Shechemites or as their first king<sup>17</sup>, and since מֶלֶךְ might refer to a Canaanite god, Abimelech might be described as a divinely elected king or even as a divine king himself. As a divinely elected king, Abimelech would parallel Gideon, who is divinely called. Yet while Gideon is called by YHWH, Abimelech is appointed by the Baalists, who take money out of Baal’s temple (9:4), so that Abimelech represents Baalism in the Abimelech narrative as Gideon represents YHWH in the Gideon narrative. Hence the name אַבִּימֶלֶךְ would appear as the narrator’s description of Abimelech’s kingship as Baalism’s kingship by which the narrator invites a Baalist interpretation of the Abimelech narrative.

The second meaning as a sentence name, ‘[My] divine/human Father is מֶלֶךְ (or, king)’,<sup>18</sup> describes the father of Gideon’s son as king, whereby the father could be YHWH, Baal, or Gideon.<sup>19</sup> The same interpretation is appropriate for the meaning ‘The

<sup>16</sup>ERNST SELLIN, *Wie wurde Sichem eine israelitische Stadt?* (Leipzig [et al.]: Deichert, 1922), 27.

<sup>17</sup>A. EHRlich, *Randglossen*, 107.

<sup>18</sup>JOBLING, *Sense*, 69; WEBB, *Book*, 154; HANS RECHENMACHER, *Personennamen als theologische Aussagen: Die syntaktischen und semantischen Strukturen der satzhaften theophoren Personennamen in der hebräischen Bibel*, ATSAT 50 (St. Ottilien: EOS-Verlag, 1997), 21; MARAIS, *Representation*, 114.

<sup>19</sup>Similarly, KITTEL, “Richter”, 385; BUBER, *Königtum*, 23; and KLEIN, *Triumph*, 71, left the options open, that the name refers to YHWH or Gideon.

divine/human king is [my] Father',<sup>20</sup> so that both meanings shall be treated together. First, the name might carry a theological meaning and refer to a divine father<sup>21</sup> yet leave it open whether YHWH<sup>22</sup> or any other god, namely, Baal is meant.<sup>23</sup> This interpretation applies to similar names such as אַחִימֶלֶךְ, אֱלִימֶלֶךְ, and נְתַן־מֶלֶךְ, but also to אֲבִיָּה, אֲבִיאֵל, and אֲבִים.<sup>24</sup> Being set into an idolatrous context, the name אֲבִימֶלֶךְ might refer to a foreign god as the divine father in the first instance. This interpretation is supported by the following narrative, which will focus on Baal as Covenant-Baal (8:33) and will describe Abimelech as a representative of Baal (9:4). On the other hand, the Gideon narrative has suggested that not Baal but rather YHWH is king, so that the narrator, who might even have coined the name, would favour a Yahwist interpretation of it and refer it to YHWH as the real king. Hence like the name יְרֻב־עַל, which specifies the theme of the Gideon narrative, the name אֲבִימֶלֶךְ would specify the theme of the Abimelech narrative by asking who is divine king. While the narrator is convinced that YHWH is god, the narrative will consider the premise that Baal is god and will demonstrate his failure to act as such. Second, the name might refer to Gideon as king.<sup>25</sup> This interpretation would take into account that Gideon has already been assigned king-like attributes (8:18) and that his wealth and activities could be interpreted as those of a king.<sup>26</sup> The name would then either reflect the concubine's and the Shechemites' opinion, in that they elevate Abimelech's position as a son of a king,<sup>27</sup> or Gideon's desire to be recognised as king despite his earlier rejection of the kingship.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Gideon himself would then be honoured through his royal son, and the name might be "an ironic comment on the contradiction between Gideon's public pronouncements and private practice".<sup>29</sup> Yet since the name אֲבִימֶלֶךְ is introduced at the beginning of the Abimelech narrative, which will focus on the bearer of the name,

<sup>20</sup>G. GRAY, *Studies*, 75-86; COOKE, *Judges*, 97.

<sup>21</sup>THEODOR NÖLDEKE, *Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* (Straßburg: Trübner, 1904), 103; SOGGIN, *Judges*, 167; GÖRG, *Richter*, 50.

<sup>22</sup>GOSLINGA, *Judges*, 353, n. 120; BOLING, *Judges*, 163; MASSOT, "Gideon", 134; cf. NOTH, *Personennamen*, 70-71, 143, who claimed that אֲבִימֶלֶךְ originally was a name for a godhead, but that it later expressed YHWH's claim to power.

<sup>23</sup>THATCHER, *Judges*, 93; COOKE, *Judges*, 97; BURNEY, *Judges*, 265.

<sup>24</sup>NOTH, *Personennamen*, 70-71; BOLING, *Judges*, 163; for an extensive list of similar names see RINGGREEN [*et al.*], "מֶלֶךְ": 934.

<sup>25</sup>EISSFELDT, *Quellen*, 57.

<sup>26</sup>WEBB, *Book*, 154.

<sup>27</sup>BUSH, *Judges*, 118; CASSEL, *Richter*, 86.

<sup>28</sup>SCHULZ, *Richter*, 53; JORDAN, *Judges*, 155-156; OLSON, "Judges", 810; BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '8:29-32'.

<sup>29</sup>WEBB, *Book*, 154; cf. also OGDEN, "Fable": 302, for a like interpretation.



it appears that like the name יִרְבֵּעַל, which is introduced at the beginning of the Gideon narrative and which focuses on the bearer of this name, the name primarily אָבִימֶלֶךְ looks forward to the Abimelech narrative rather than backwards to the Gideon narrative. Hence, while there may be overtones of Gideon's claim to kingship, it appears that rather the first mentioned, theological meaning predominates. The name אָבִימֶלֶךְ would then contain the theme of the Abimelech narrative by proposing that Baal is king yet at the same time reveal the narrator's conviction that YHWH is king. Eventually the narrator's conviction would be proven right as Abimelech's death would suggest that YHWH is indeed king, and Abimelech's name would interpret his own death as YHWH's due judgement for abandoning him.<sup>30</sup>

Third, with the meaning 'Father of מֶלֶךְ (or, of [a] king)',<sup>31</sup> the name אָבִימֶלֶךְ is interpreted as a construct-nominal phrase, where אָבִי describes the bearer of the name, i.e., Abimelech, as the father of a king, so that the king is Abimelech's son. The name may then express Gideon's or the Shechemites' hope that Abimelech or his son becomes king and hint at the possibility that Abimelech will establish a dynasty. It would also reflect Gideon's claim to be recognised as Israel's ruler, which the narrator has condemned as a violation of YHWH's claim to be recognised as king, and would thus carry the theme of Gideon's wrong leadership into the Abimelech narrative.

To summarise our argument, we find that the name אָבִימֶלֶךְ might refer to YHWH, Baal, or Gideon as Abimelech's king, or to a proposed dynastic kingship in contradiction to YHWH's kingship. In all cases, however, the name contains a strong theological aspect as it addresses YHWH's kingship and contrasts it with either Baal's or Abimelech's kingship. While the narrator will adopt the interpretation that YHWH is divine king, the narrative will consider the premise that Baal is divine king. Departing from that premise, the narrator will show, however, that not Baal but rather YHWH is god. Hence it seems that with all interpretations the monarchical topic serves to decide the theological topic, which thus appears to supersede the former. Therefore, not kingship as such is at stake in the Abimelech narrative<sup>32</sup> but rather the theological theme, which asks which of the two gods demonstrates his divine power; in other words, Abimelech's kingship will be condemned only as a kingship that contrasts with Gideon's pious attribution of the kingship to YHWH and that is owed to a foreign god. Hence like the deliverance from the

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<sup>30</sup>BUBER, *Königtum*, 23.

<sup>31</sup>MOORE, *Commentary*, 235, 236.

<sup>32</sup>Against FRITZ, "Abimelech": 129-144, who defined the Abimelech narrative as an example narrative for the "Scheitern eines auf Mord gegründeten Königtums" (ibid.: 137). For further arguments that not the monarchical issue but rather the theological issue is the focus of the Abimelech narrative, see the interpretation of the Jotham fable.

Midianites that served as the matter by which YHWH proves his divine power in the Gideon narrative, Abimelech's kingship will serve as the matter by which Baal's or rather Baalism's power will be measured. If Abimelech succeeds as king and brings peace and prosperity to Israel as YHWH did in the Gideon narrative, Baal is god; if he doesn't, YHWH is god because he has already demonstrated his divine power in the Gideon narrative.

The frequent references to גִּדְעוֹן בֶּן-יִזְבֵּאל in the record of Gideon's death and the comment that he is buried in the tomb of יִזְבֵּאל אָבִיו seems to have a positive connotation in combination with the record of Gideon's good age (בְּשִׁיבָה טוֹבָה, 8:32), which places him on the same level as Abraham (Gen 25:8; cf. Gen 15:15) and David (1 Chr 29:28), who are both said to have died בְּשִׁיבָה טוֹבָה, too,<sup>33</sup> and who despite their mistakes and faults are both described as examples of YHWH-fearing men. It seems, therefore, that the narrator at the transition from the Gideon narrative to the Abimelech narrative pictures Gideon as a YHWH worshipper despite his establishment of idolatry, so that the record of Gideon's burial marks the end of YHWH worship and the beginning of Baal worship in the Gideon-Abimelech narrative. It thus constitutes a break within the Gideon-Abimelech narrative. This interpretation would gain additional weight from the observation that the narrator continues by stressing that Israel turns (שׁוֹבֵר) and falls into idolatry only after Gideon's death and that they do not remember Gideon's good deeds (8:33-35); it appears, therefore, that Gideon's presence guarantees YHWH worship or at least prevents Baal worship.

Gideon is buried in his father's tomb at Ophrah of the Abiezrites (וַיִּקְבֹּר בְּקִבְרֵ יִזְבֵּאל, 8:32). This reference, as it is the first notice of the burial of any judge in Judges, deserves more attention.<sup>34</sup> The nif'al וַיִּקְבֹּר emphasises Gideon's burial rather than the person or persons who bury him, and the extensive reference to the place of Gideon's burial<sup>35</sup> draws attention to Joash and Ophrah, the town where Gideon has replaced Baal worship with YHWH worship (6:25-32). As Gideon has now died and is buried there, it appears that his achievement to establish YHWH worship, his status, and the possibility of honouring YHWH for the victory, is symbolically buried with him and has thus come to an end. This expectation gains support through the theological introduction to Judges which starts with a reference to the burial of Joshua (וַיִּקְבֹּר pi., 2:9) and is immediately followed by the extensive record of Israel's apostasy and idolatry

<sup>33</sup>†. CASSEL, *Richter*, 86; WOLF, "Judges", 435.

<sup>34</sup>After the Abimelech narrative, the judge's burial is recorded in every narrative; see Tola (10:2), Jair (10:5), Jephthah (12:7), Ibzan (12:10), Elon (12:12), Abdon (12:15), and Samson (16:31).

<sup>35</sup>Observe that within Judges וַיִּקְבֹּר nif. is used several times (8:32; 10:2,5; 12:7,10,12,15; † [Judges]), though only here in combination with the noun קִבְרֵ to draw attention to the place of burial.



(2:10-15).<sup>36</sup> Hence like the record of Joshua's burial that signals that the Israelites forget both him and his deeds and thus fall away from YHWH, the narrative following the record of Gideon's death records Gideon's failure<sup>37</sup> and expects—especially following Gideon's death that anticipates the end of the period of peace (cf. 8:28)—the worst for the Abimelech narrative.

Finally, the reference to *עֲפָרָה אֲבִי הָעֶזְרָי* (8:32) echoes similar references in the call episode (6:11,24). There the expression referred to YHWH as the ultimate provider of help, who, however, has been abandoned by the Israelites. Hence the new reference reminds the audience that YHWH is still absent from Israel and suggests that help should be sought from YHWH. In anticipation of a rather violent narrative that takes Israel's idolatry as its point of departure, it thus implies that Israel's return to YHWH to seek help from him would stop the violence. Hence this expression relates the Gideon narrative to the Abimelech narrative in that it defines the latter as the counterpart of the former. It suggests that YHWH is still in control of the events when he allows Baalism to take over; further, only Israel's repentance and return to YHWH would stop the violence and lead to peace again.

*b Re-Setting the Theological Background and Theme (8:33-35)*

After the narrative background has been set (8:29-32), the narrator once more refers to Gideon's death (8:33). By introducing the setting similarly to the setting of the theological background of the Gideon narrative (6:7) with *וַיְהִי* and a direct reference to the preceding sentence, he at the same time begins a new section within the introduction.<sup>38</sup> Having completed the Gideon narrative with a narrative conclusion that culminates in the record of Gideon's death, the second reference to Gideon's death, which is followed by a reference to Israel's apostasy, signals that the new section focuses on the theological theme, which is continued from the Gideon narrative. This setting (8:33-35) at the same time parallels the setting of the theological theme of the Gideon narrative (6:7-10), which is supported by the use of the same key words *נִצַּל*, *מִיָּד*, and *כָּל* (6:9 || 8:34), followed by a general reference to the enemies (*לְהִצִּיבָם*, 6:9 || *אֲבִיָּהֶם*, 8:34). This parallel confirms that the Abimelech narrative follows the same theme as the Gideon narrative.

<sup>36</sup>Cf. WOLF, "Judges", 435. Similar implications may be found in the other two passages where the wording {*בְּקִבְרָו* nif. + *קָבַר*} occurs in the Hebrew Scriptures; see 2 Sam 17:23, where not only Ahithophel is buried but also his good advice is finally and symbolically turned down and the disaster on Absalom is sealed; and 2 Chr 35:24, where not only Josiah is buried but also the last fear of YHWH in Judah's recorded history is symbolically buried.

<sup>37</sup>Similarly, BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 183.

<sup>38</sup>BOLING, *Judges*, 169; JEFFREY SCOTT ANDERSON, "The Nature and Function of Curses in the Narrative Literature of the Hebrew Bible" (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1992), 168.

After Gideon's death the Israelites (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) turn (שׁוּבוּ), play the harlot (cf. 8:27) after the Baalim (הַבְּעָלִים, 8:33a), and set up for themselves Baal-Berith (בְּעַל בְּרִית) as their god (יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם), who has rescued (נִצַּל) them from the hand (מִיַּד) of all (כָּל) their enemies surrounding them (כָּל-אֹיְבֵיהֶם מִסָּבִיב, 8:34) and they do not deal graciously (לֹא-עָשׂוּ חֶסֶד) with Jerubbaal-Gideon (יְרֻבְעֵל גְּדֵעוֹן) for all the good (טוֹב) that he has done with (עִם) Israel (8:35).

Several observations appear to be significant here. First, the recurrent emphasis on Israel (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, 8:34; cf. 9:22,55), which follows the focus on Israel in the establishment of idolatry (8:27) and which frames the Abimelech narrative, stands out, since the Abimelech narrative will focus on the Shechemites alone.<sup>39</sup> This emphasis on Israel is especially striking in the references to בְּעַל בְּרִית, who is first introduced as the Covenant-Baal of the sons of Israel (8:33) and only later of the Shechemites (9:4), and in the references to Gideon, whose good deeds are first forgotten by Israel (8:35) and only later by the Shechemites (9:1-21). This contrast in the identification of Abimelech's subjects may point to his failure as king; although Baal is worshipped by the Israelites, Abimelech will become king only over the Shechemites. Further, the frame of references to Israel (8:34-35; 9:22; 9:55) around a focus on the citizens of one town only, which follows the similar pattern in the Gideon narrative (6:8-10; 8:22-27a), indicates that in the Abimelech narrative, the narrator sets the Shechemites as an example for Israel,<sup>40</sup> and their Baal worship as an example of general Israelite idolatry<sup>41</sup>. Not only the Shechemites, but Israel as a nation is idolatrous (cf. 8:27), so that in the Abimelech narrative the idolatrous Shechemites represent idolatrous Israel.<sup>42</sup> The audience should therefore be enabled to identify themselves with the Shechemites, whose fate should warn them not to make the same mistake, abandon YHWH, and replace him with Baal.

Similarly, Israel's sudden turn (שׁוּבוּ) to Baal is striking, since it shows Israel's quick relapse into Baalism, although the preceding narrative does not clearly show that Gideon establishes Baalism. This allows for the conclusion that the Abimelech narrative focuses on the worship of Baal as the main example for Israel's general apostasy and idolatry as described at the end of the Gideon narrative (8:27) and as practised in Israel (6:8-10). Hence the Abimelech narrative will not just demonstrate how Baalism leads to disaster, but rather how apostasy and idolatry in general lead to disaster.

<sup>39</sup>MOORE, *Commentary*, 253.

<sup>40</sup>Cf. MOORE, *Commentary*, 236; NOWACK, *Richter*, 83; BURNEY, *Judges*, 266; ZAPLETAL, *Richter*, 139; GOSLINGA, *Judges*, 355; MCKENZIE, *World*, 139.

<sup>41</sup>Similarly, JORDAN, *Judges*, 158; BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 189.

<sup>42</sup>See esp. 2:6ff and the framework of the judges narratives (3:7,8,9; 3:12,14,15; 4:1,3,23,24; 6:1,2,6; 10:6,8,10; 13:1).



The Israelites make  $\text{בְּעֵל בְּרִית}$ <sup>43</sup> their אֱלֹהִים (8:34) and thus fully replace YHWH with Baal with whom they make a covenant.<sup>44</sup> Since within the Hebrew Scriptures the term  $\text{בְּעֵל בְּרִית}$  occurs only in the Abimelech narrative, the Shechemites' reference to a foreign deity as a covenant-god emphasises the exceptional concept of the narrative, where Baalism is given a chance. As the covenant-god, Baal is pushed into YHWH's position, which is further underlined by a reference to YHWH's covenant with Israel recorded in Deuteronomy, where YHWH is said to give Israel rest from all their enemies surrounding them ( $\text{מְסַבֵּיב מְסַבֵּיב}$ , Deut 12:10; Judg 8:34).<sup>45</sup>

The direct reference in Judges, however, which is emphasised through the repetition of two key words ( $\{\text{נִצְלָה} + \text{מִיַּד קָלִי}\}$ , 6:8 || 8:34), is to the beginning of the Gideon narrative where a prophet describes YHWH's position as Israel's covenant-god,<sup>46</sup> who has rescued Israel from all their oppressors (6:7-10). Further, YHWH has demonstrated his potential once again by rescuing them from the Midianite oppression (7:22). Hence the theological introduction to the Abimelech narrative emphasises YHWH's deeds as Israel's deliverer as recorded in Israel's history and exemplified in the preceding Gideon narrative.<sup>47</sup> At the same time the characterisation of Israel's opponent as אֹיְבִים (8:34) instead of לְהַצִּים (6:9) points to the interpretation that YHWH can not only deliver them from external oppressors but indeed from any enemy. Since in retrospect Abimelech is identified as the enemy in the Abimelech narrative,<sup>48</sup> and since Abimelech represents Baal and Baalism represents idolatry in general, idolatry is identified as Israel's enemy. Further, the attribution of the deliverance from such enemies to YHWH implies that YHWH

<sup>43</sup>Cf. 9:4,  $\text{בְּעֵל בְּרִית}$ , †; and 9:46,  $\text{אֵל בְּרִית}$ , †.

<sup>44</sup>KEIL, *Commentar*, 273; GOSLINGA, *Judges*, 353; WOLF, "Judges", 436. — Against JOHN NOEL SCHOFIELD, "Judges", in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, ed. MATTHEW BLACK and HAROLD HENRY ROWLEY (London; New York: Nelson, 1962), 310, who claimed on the basis of NOTII's amphictyony that YHWH was the Baal-Berith. However, the introduction of Baal in the call episode (6:11-24) and the contrast between the emphasis on YHWH in the Gideon narrative and on Baal in the Abimelech narrative speak against such an interpretation and favour the application of  $\text{בְּעֵל בְּרִית}$  to Baal; MCKENZIE, *World*, 139.

<sup>45</sup>BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 165.

<sup>46</sup>With his speech the angel refers to YHWH's covenant with Israel; see the treatment of 6:7-10. On the contrary, CASSEL, *Richter*, 88, assumed a reference of 8:34 to 2:2, where the angel of YHWH reminds Israel not to make any covenant ( $\text{בְּרִית}$ ) with the Canaanites; yet apart from the similar noun  $\text{בְּרִית}$  in 2:2 and 8:34 both verses are not linked to each other. Similarly, BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 165, established a link to  $\text{אֹיְבֵיהֶם מְסַבֵּיב}$  (2:14), yet there YHWH is said to sell Israel into the hand of enemies rather than to rescue them from their hand. More likely is the general reference to the cycle described 2:12 *et seq.* as proposed by NOWACK, *Richter*, 83, who based this assumption on the similar syntax of 8:34 || 2:12a and on the already identified link of  $\text{אֹיְבֵיהֶם מְסַבֵּיב}$  (2:14) to  $\text{אֹיְבֵיהֶם מְסַבֵּיב}$  (8:34).

<sup>47</sup>Similarly, BOLING, *Judges*, 170.

<sup>48</sup>Cf. GROS LOUIS, "Judges", 155; OLSON, "Judges", 818.

has delivered Israel from foreign gods as well, so that Israel's return to idolatry is interpreted as the return to bondage (cf. 6:8).

The reference to Baal-Berith is followed by the interpretation that the Israelites do not remember יהוה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם, who has rescued them from all their enemies and who stands in a covenant with the Israelites (8:34). Here the description of YHWH as Israel's אֱלֹהִים accentuates the contrast to the preceding reference to Baal-Berith as their אֱלֹהִים (8:33). The narrator thus underlines that YHWH remains the true god and Israel's god,<sup>49</sup> and that he is improperly replaced by Baal, because his replacement ignores YHWH's deliverance and Baal's silence in the Gideon narrative. Therefore, for the characters within the Abimelech narrative<sup>50</sup> Baal is god, while for the narrator YHWH remains Israel's god.

The narrator continues his theological introduction to the Abimelech narrative with the note that the Israelites do not deal graciously (לֹא־עָשׂוּ חֶסֶד) with Gideon and his house. They not only ignore YHWH's deeds (8:34), but also Gideon's deeds (8:35). These tensions lead the audience to expect some resolution in the following episodes. The reference to יִרְבֵּעַל גִּדְעוֹן (8:35) further reminds one of Gideon's two names and especially of his assumed name יִרְבֵּעַל. With its meaning 'Baal is great' the name יִרְבֵּעַל ironically refers back to the Gideon narrative, where YHWH proves that he rather than Baal is great; and with its paronomastic meaning 'Baal-contender' it reflects on YHWH's and Gideon's contest against Baalism. Against that background, the notice that the Israelites do not show kindness to 'Baal-is-great-Gideon' or 'Baal-contender-Gideon' warns the audience that the Israelites do not honour Gideon as the Baal-contender<sup>51</sup> and do not continue his anti-idolatrous deeds but instead fall back into idolatry in form of Baal worship.

The final summary of Gideon's accomplishment as all the good deeds (כָּל־הַטּוֹבָה, 8:35) that he has done with (עִם) Israel is surprising when one considers that Gideon is said to have contended against YHWH, have taken YHWH's honour for the victory, and have established idolatry; indeed, with this evaluation of Gideon's accomplishment the narrator draws a rather positive picture of Gideon despite these negative records. Hence it seems once more that the narrator deliberately refers to Gideon as a man of good deeds at the outset of the Abimelech narrative to establish a contrast to Abimelech's and the Baalists' evil deeds as recorded in the Abimelech narrative. As their opposite pole, Gideon is characterised as anti-Baalist; and it is as this anti-Balist that Jerubbaal-Gideon will be referred to in the Abimelech narrative.

<sup>49</sup>Similarly, MASSOT, "Gideon", 139.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. CASSUTO, *Exodus*, 32, who argued similarly with view on the use of יהוה and אֱלֹהִים in Exod 3:1-16; and BOLING, *Judges*, 131, who agreed with CASSUTO and argued similarly on 6:14.

<sup>51</sup>Similarly, KEIL, *Commentar*, 273; BOLING, *Judges*, 170.



Before we enter the Abimelech narrative, we need to pause for a moment and reflect on three names that occur several times throughout the Abimelech narrative and one name that does not occur at all, namely, the name אֲבִימֶלֶךְ, that is used overwhelmingly thirty-one times,<sup>52</sup> the name יִרְבֵּעַל, that is the only name used for Gideon in the Abimelech narrative from now on,<sup>53</sup> the continuous and extensive description of the Shechemites as בְּעָלִי (שָׁכֶם) <sup>54</sup> and the complete absence of the name יהוה after the record that the Israelites forget YHWH, their god (8:34). First, as already argued, the name אֲבִימֶלֶךְ reflects the theme of the Abimelech narrative by posing the question whether YHWH or Baal is king in Israel. The strong emphasis on that name thus keeps this theme alive in the rather disturbing narrative. Second, the name יִרְבֵּעַל recalls the circumstances in which it was introduced. After Gideon has demolished the altar to Baal and has built an altar to YHWH on its place, he is given the name יִרְבֵּעַל (6:31-32). With the contrast between its rendering 'Baal is great' and paronomastic meaning 'Baal-fighter', this name describes the contrast between Baal as god and Gideon or YHWH as Baal-fighter. In the Gideon narrative, YHWH has identified himself as god and hence also as Baal-fighter. In the Abimelech narrative, however, Baal will be allowed to take over, so that the rendering 'Baal is great' will be tested; yet since Baal will fail to act, it will be unveiled as incorrect. Third, the name יִרְבֵּעַל and the description בְּעָלִי שָׁכֶם both contain the element בְּעַל. The strong emphasis on this element either directly or paronomastically identifies the Abimelech narrative as dominated by Baalism as represented by Abimelech and the Shechemites,<sup>55</sup> and the concurrent absence of the name יהוה at the same time lets YHWH appear silent, though not absent, as the narrator's explanation (9:23-24) and concluding remarks (9:56-57) reveal. With the near-absence of YHWH and the full presence of Baalism, however, the Abimelech narrative will attempt to demonstrate Baalism's power. Hence following the Gideon narrative as a demonstration of YHWH's power, the Abimelech narrative provides the second answer to the theological question, who is god; but since Baal will fail to act, it will provide a negative answer. YHWH remains the only god who acts anywhere in the entire Gideon-Abimelech narrative. However, the term בְּעָלִים for the Shechemites may also describe the citizens of Shechem

<sup>52</sup>BOLING, *Judges*, 170.

<sup>53</sup>Judg 9:1,2,5[twice],16,19,24,28,57; † (Judg 9).

<sup>54</sup>Judg 9:2,3,6 (all בְּעָלִי שָׁכֶם); 9:7,18,20[twice], 23[twice], 24,25,26,39 (all בְּעָלִי שָׁכֶם); 9:46,47 (both בְּעָלִי מְגִדֵּל שָׁכֶם); 9:51 (בְּעָלִי הָעִיר); † (Judg 9). Apart from these sixteen occurrences in Judg 9, the noun בְּעַל refers to people only three more times in Judges (19:22,23; 20:5).

<sup>55</sup>Similarly, JORDAN, *Judges*, 158; and BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 189, who interpreted the recurring references to בְּעַל in a more general sense as idolatry; and FOKKELMAN, "Remarks", 35, who argued for the introduction of a Baal motif.

as 'lords' in a general sense.<sup>56</sup> But since the Israelites make *בְּעַל* their god (8:34) and pay Abimelech with silver from his temple (9:2), and since elsewhere in Judges the noun *בְּעַל* is predominantly used as the name for the Canaanite god Baal,<sup>57</sup> it appears that the description *בְּעַלִּים* (שָׂרָם) describes the Shechemites as Baal worshippers rather than just as 'lords'. This description calls for an interpretation of *בְּעַלִּים* that reflects the relationship between Baal and the Shechemites, and the designation 'Baalists'<sup>58</sup> to describe the Shechemites as worshippers of Baal seems to convey that relationship best.

*c Summary: The Background and Theme of the Abimelech Narrative*

Following the conclusion of the Gideon narrative with the expectation that the Abimelech narrative will continue the theological theme of the Gideon narrative with a different narrative background, the Abimelech narrative begins with the setting of the narrated background; it is set in Shechem and will focus on Abimelech as Baalism's representative. With the ambiguous name 'Abimelech' the narrator already prepares for the theme of kingship in the Abimelech narrative and raises the question whether YHWH or Baal is king. In defining the theological theme, the narrator explicates idolatry as the already determined theological background by having the Israelites enter into a covenantal relationship with Baal. Hence Baalism is seen as an example of idolatry in general. Therefore, the Abimelech narrative will record what effect Baal worship and hence idolatry in general has for Shechem and for Israel in general.

At the same time, the narrator guides the audience by displaying his Yahwistic perspective. Hence the information that the Israelites neither remember YHWH, who has rescued them, nor show kindness to the Baal-fighter Jerubbaal-Gideon for all the good he has done with them, introduces the narrator's intention to evaluate the Baalists' actions in the following narrative in a Yahwistic light.

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<sup>56</sup> ⚔Jon translates the noun *בְּעַלִּים* with *יְתָבִי* throughout if the noun does not denote the god Baal, a place, or an individual; WILLEM F. SMELIK, *The Targum of Judges*, OTS 36 (Doctoral dissertation, Theologische Universiteit Kampen, 1995; Leiden [et al.]: Brill, 1995), 519.

<sup>57</sup> Judg 2:11,13; 3:7; 6:25,28,30,31,32; 10:6,10. Other uses are as part of the name of a mountain (3:3) or another place (20:33), or to name the owner of a house (19:22,23) or the rulers of Gibeah (20:5); † (Judges \ Abimelech narrative).

<sup>58</sup> O'CONNELL, *Rhetoric*, 153. — JORDAN, *Judges*, 157-158, argued for a syncretistic context and rendered *בְּעַלִּים* even as 'Baals'; there is no indication, however, of appearances of many gods in the narrative.



## 2 Specifying the Theme for the Abimelech Narrative (9:1-21)

### *a The Narrative and Theological Theme: The Baalist Abimelech Claims to be Shechem's Legitimate King (9:1-6)*

Following the setting of the narrative and theological background, the Abimelech narrative starts with Abimelech, the son of יִרְבֵּעַל, addressing the lords of Shechem (בְּעָלֵי שֵׁכֶם, 9:1-3). Abimelech is then paid from the temple of Baal-Berith to kill his brothers (9:4-5) before he is made king by the Shechemites (9:6). The whole narrative thus focuses on Abimelech, and the other characters act only in relation to him.<sup>59</sup> The choice of Shechem as the setting of the Abimelech narrative further reminds the audience of Israel's renewal of the covenant with YHWH, that is set in Shechem, too (Josh 24). This invites an evaluation of the Abimelech narrative in the light of this covenant, and since the Israelites are said to have abandoned YHWH and have made Baal their covenant god at the beginning of the Abimelech narrative (8:33-34), the narrative will foremost show what happens if Israel breaks their covenant with YHWH.<sup>60</sup>

As he approaches the Shechemites, Abimelech does not directly address them. He rather sends a delegation of his relatives to them to submit his proposal which is based on his relation to them (9:1-3). In this way he makes it easier for them to accept his proposal. He then introduces his proposal (9:2) with the question מִהֵטוֹב לָכֶם, by which he asks for an evaluation of the two options, which are the leadership (מִשְׁלָל) of the Baal-contender Jerubbaal's seventy sons and his own leadership (מִשְׁלָל) as one son only. By using מִשְׁלָל as the key word in his proposal, he refers to the Israelites' offer of the kingship to Gideon and one of his sons in each subsequent generation (8:22-23) that uses the same key word,<sup>61</sup> and he thus proposes himself as the one son of Gideon to succeed him as Israel's king. In this way, he legitimises his own desire to rule as the logical consequence of the Israelites' proposal to Gideon and implies that he has the capacity to deliver them from external enemies. The Shechemites, being faced with the choice of being exclusively ruled either by Abimelech or by Jerubbaal's seventy sons, are therefore compelled to accept Abimelech's proposal on the grounds of the earlier proposal to Gideon. Further, Abimelech establishes a contrast between his brothers as the sons of יִרְבֵּעַל, thus calling them the sons of the 'Baal-contender' and making them the enemies of

<sup>59</sup>ERICH ZENGER, "Ein Beispiel exegetischer Methoden aus dem Alten Testament", in *Einführung in die Methoden der biblischen Exegese*, ed. JOSEF SCHREINER (Würzburg: Echter, 1971), 126.

<sup>60</sup>Later in the narrative, when Gaal rebels against Abimelech, the narrator will allude at Gen 34 as another episode that is set in Shechem.

<sup>61</sup>Similarly, BOLING, *Judges*, 171.

the Baalists,<sup>62</sup> and himself, who is only one man (אִישׁ אֶחָד) of their bone and flesh, that is, their 'brother', and not a son of the 'Baal-contender'. He thus implies that the Baal-contender's seventy sons would fight against the Baalists, but that he, being only one man, being one of them, and being a Baalist like they are, would seek their best.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, the centralised rule of one man, he implies, would certainly be better for Shechem than the oligarchic rule of seventy men.<sup>64</sup> By arguing that he is their 'brother', Abimelech is literally right, because he is the son of a Shechemite woman. However, since the book of Deuteronomy frequently uses this noun to describe all Israelites in their covenant with YHWH, the narrator uses Abimelech's proposal ironically; although the Israelites have abandoned the covenant with YHWH, Abimelech still describes himself as their 'covenant-brother'.

Yet the narrator's initial characterisation of Abimelech as the son of Jerubbaal (9:1) proves Abimelech's argument wrong. Specifically, his implication of a legislative assembly<sup>65</sup> or oligarchy<sup>66</sup> is not even hinted at by the narrator,<sup>67</sup> so that it appears that he makes up this threat to become leader himself.<sup>68</sup> Further, by raising the question what is good (טוֹב) for the Shechemites, Abimelech reverses the narrator's evaluation that Jerubbaal-Gideon has brought good (טוֹב) to Israel (8:35). Both observations put Abimelech in an unfavourable light and evaluate his proposal as wrong. Since this proposal serves as the basis for Abimelech's kingship, it evaluates his kingship as one without proper basis; and indeed, the narrative will demonstrate that Abimelech's leadership will not lead to any good for the Shechemites.

Abimelech's plan works. Inclining after him (אֶחָדֵינוּ + נִמְהָלֵנוּ)<sup>69</sup> because he is their 'brother', the Shechemites accept his proposal (9:3). As their 'brother', however, Abimelech is about to kill his biological half-brothers, who represent Jerubbaal's line of descent, so that the brotherhood between Abimelech and the Shechemites is identified as

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<sup>62</sup>Similarly, KEIL, *Commentar*, 274; JORDAN, *Judges*, 158.

<sup>63</sup>Hence Abimelech uses מְשַׁלֵּם according to its usual implications to describe the effect of the leadership for the subjects; see the discussion on מְשַׁלֵּם in 8:22-23.

<sup>64</sup>Similarly, JORDAN, *Judges*, 158.

<sup>65</sup>HALPERN, "Rise": 88.

<sup>66</sup>As far as I am aware, this term was first applied to the Abimelech story by SELLIN, *Sichem*, 23-29.

<sup>67</sup>Cf. RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 301; FENSHAM, "Seventy": 114.

<sup>68</sup>Similarly, KEIL, *Commentar*, 274; GOSLINGA, *Judges*, 355; ENNS, *Judges*, 77; JORDAN, *Judges*, 158. — Against STUDER, *Richter*, 234; BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 185, 188.

<sup>69</sup>Apart from this verse, the expression {אֶחָדֵינוּ + נִמְהָלֵנוּ} occurs only Exod 23:2; 1 Sam 8:3; 1 Kgs 2:28 [twice] within the Hebrew Scriptures. There it has a rather negative undertone, so that the narrator might assess the Shechemites negatively here.



a brotherhood of similar characters rather than a biological brotherhood.<sup>70</sup> Hence, while on the surface the Shechemites follow the Deuteronomic Law to elect one of their brothers as king (Deut 17:15), they above all violate it, since Abimelech is their 'brother' according to criteria quite other than those of the Deuteronomic Law. The crowning of Abimelech is thus condemned in the light of the Deuteronomic Law.<sup>71</sup>

Having accepted Abimelech as their leader, the Shechemites pay Abimelech with seventy pieces of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith (9:4a). Given the non-existence of Baal as suggested in the Gideon narrative (e.g., 6:19-21; 6:25-29), the narrator once more takes the Baalists as those who act for Baal. In the narrative, it is therefore not Baal who acts but rather the Baalists, who take Abimelech into their service, make a contract, and enter into a covenant with him. Abimelech is, therefore, no longer just an ordinary Baal worshipper, but actually a representative of Baalism, as Gideon becomes a representative of YHWH when he is called (6:24); Abimelech's appointment thus parallels Gideon's call.

Abimelech takes the money and hires companions (אֲנָשִׁים) with it (9:4b), enters the house of his father at Ophrah (עֶפְרָה) and kills (הֲרִג) his brothers (אָח), the sons of the Baal-fighter (יִרְבָּעַל), seventy men on one stone (אָבֶן אֶחָת, 9:5). The reference to Ophrah as the place where the Israelites remember Gideon's achievement of the deliverance from the Midianites (8:27) points to the dissent of Abimelech, who is based in Shechem, from the Yahwistic Baal-fighter Jerubbaal's and—as the narrator identifies it—YHWH's achievement. Further, Abimelech kills all the seventy sons of Jerubbaal that the narrator has mentioned earlier (8:30), thus extinguishing the Baal-fighter's family and every representative of YHWH. That Abimelech does so at the very place where the deliverance is remembered assumes that he wipes out any remembrance of YHWH's deliverance as well, so that there will be "absolutely nothing Yahwistic" in the Abimelech narrative,<sup>72</sup> not even in the memory of the characters; YHWH is, so to speak, eradicated from the narrative. At the same time, the mention of Abimelech's men (אֲנָשִׁים), whom he hires to kill Jerubbaal's sons, contrasts with Gideon's servants (אֲנָשִׁים, 6:25), whom he hires to break down Baal's altar, and thus adds to the negative evaluation of Abimelech's executions. Furthermore, the use of the negatively loaded הֲרִג, the identification of the victims as Abimelech's brothers, the stress on the number of them, and the emphasis on their execution on one stone emphasises the cruelty and unnaturalness of the execution.

<sup>70</sup>Similarly, BOOGAART, "Stone": 55, n. 8.

<sup>71</sup>Similarly, DAVID DAUBE, "One From Among Your Brethren Shall You Set King Over You", *JBL* 90 (1971): 481.

<sup>72</sup>POLZIN, *Moses*, 175.

The narrative also assumes that the murdered men are treated like sacrificial victims, sacrificed “as a particularly disastrous perversion of Yahwist sacrificial cultus”, by which “Abimelech expresses his contempt by using his own brothers as sacrificial victims at the establishment of his new covenantal relationship at Shechem”.<sup>73</sup> The murder is, therefore, not only a murder of Jerubbaal's sons by one of their brothers, it is above all an affront to YHWH and his covenant with Israel by the forces of Baalism.

Yet, as the narrator adds, יִתְּחַם, youngest son of the Baal-contender, is hidden (חִבְּאֵל nif.), so that he escapes his fate. Yet one is left wondering how Abimelech can forget one of his brothers. Further, the ambiguous nif'al נִחְבְּאֵל leaves it open whether Jotham hides himself or whether he is hidden by some other agent<sup>74</sup>, in which case it may be argued that YHWH hides him so that he could not be found by Abimelech.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, the name יִתְּחַם, meaning ‘YHWH is/shows himself honest/upright’<sup>76</sup> or ‘YHWH is perfect’<sup>77</sup>, becomes real in the Abimelech narrative, as it attributes the characteristics ‘honest, upright’ to YHWH and thus contrasts with and condemns Abimelech's and the Shechemites' abandonment of YHWH as well as Abimelech's execution of his brothers as not honest/upright. YHWH, after all, does not kill any Baal worshipper in the Gideon narrative, he rather offends Baal only by having his altar replaced with an altar to himself. The Baalists, on the other hand, not only offend YHWH by replacing his covenant with a covenant with Baal, they also kill the sons of YHWH's representative. The ‘better’ god is, therefore, YHWH. Since he will soon defend Jerubbaal's reputation, Jotham acts as Jerubbaal's representative in the narrative,<sup>78</sup> and the name יִתְּחַם gains a third meaning. It may paronomastically play on יָתוּם (‘orphan’)<sup>79</sup> and describe Jotham as an orphan of his father Jerubbaal, and hence as Jerubbaal's legitimate representative, whose situation is further worsened through the massacre of his seventy brothers.

After Abimelech has removed the assumed threat by the sons of the Baal-contender, all the Baalists of Shechem (כָּל-בְּעָלֵי שֶׁכֶם) and all (כָּל) the house of Millo gather (אִסְתָּף) and crown Abimelech as king (וַיִּלְכוּ וַיִּמְלִיכוּ אֶת-אַבְיָמֶלֶךְ לְמֶלֶךְ) at the pagan terebinth (עֵץ)

<sup>73</sup>BOLING, *Judges*, 171; similarly, BUDDE, *Buch*, 72; THATCHER, *Judges*, 94; KITTEL, *Geschichte*, 33, n. 5; SCHULZ, *Richter*, 55; SLOTKI, “Judges”, 234; CUNDALL, “Commentary”, 127; ENNS, *Judges*, 77; JORDAN, *Judges*, 159.

<sup>74</sup>For this interpretation see Job 5:21. Similarly, HALPERN, “Rise”: 92. Cf. 2 Kgs 11:1-3.

<sup>75</sup>TEMBA L. J. MAFICO, “Judges”, in *The International Bible Commentary*, ed. WILLIAM R. FARMER (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998), 561.

<sup>76</sup>NOTH, *Personennamen*, 189-190; similarly, FOKKELMAN, “Remarks”, 37.

<sup>77</sup>BOLING, *Judges*, 171; RECHENMACHER, *Personennamen*, 63.

<sup>78</sup>ANDERSON, “Nature”, 178, saw Jotham as Jerubbaal's representative only.

<sup>79</sup>BOLING, *Judges*, 171.



אֱלֹהֵי קָצֵב) at Shechem (9:6) and thus officially appoint Abimelech as their representative. Several observations seem significant in this record. With the stress on the totality of the Baalists (כָּל) and the threefold repetition of מִלְךָ, that is introduced with the similarly sounding verb וַיִּלְכוּ, the whole verse focuses on the process of the crowning.<sup>80</sup> The people are determined to crown Abimelech. Although they do it of their own accord,<sup>81</sup> the initiative comes from Abimelech (9:1-3), which in retrospect is even highlighted through the narrator's introduction of the scene with similar words (וַיִּלְךְ אֲבִימֶלֶךְ, 9:1). By repeating these words, the narrator describes the Shechemites' behaviour with the same words as Abimelech's initiative, so that he invites the interpretation that they follow Abimelech's example.<sup>82</sup> Hence both parties play an equal part in Abimelech's crowning and kingship so that they will have to bear the consequences together.

The crowning has the setting in the context of a terebinth (אֵלֹן, 9:6) and thus in a similar context to YHWH's call of Gideon under a terebinth (אֵלֶּה, 6:11) and Joshua's renewal of the covenant under the terebinth at Shechem (אֵלֶּה, Josh 24:26).<sup>83</sup> With the qualifying noun קָצֵב hinting at a location near the temple of Baal-Berith,<sup>84</sup> the reference is not to YHWH though, but rather to Baal. Further, the play of קָצֵב on הַמְצַבָּה assumes that the terebinth is described as a place of idolatrous worship, since the latter noun generally describes such a place.<sup>85</sup> Hence the crowning of Abimelech is set in an idolatrous context, which the narrator appears to use to underline the setting of the Abimelech narrative in a full-scale Baalist cult.

Therefore first, like Gideon, Abimelech is called within a Baalist context, but unlike Gideon, who is called out of a Baalist context to worship YHWH, Abimelech is called within a Baalist context to serve the Baalists. Second, since the Shechemites' covenant with Abimelech is sealed under a terebinth at Shechem like Joshua's covenant, their

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<sup>80</sup>Similarly, ZENGER, "Beispiel", 126; cf. DAVID FALCONER PENNANT, "The Significance of Rootplay, Leading Words and Thematic Links in the Book of Judges" (PhD dissertation, Council for National Academic Awards, 1988; Microfiche), 184; BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 189.

<sup>81</sup>BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 189.

<sup>82</sup>PENNANT, "Significance", 184, similarly proposed that 9:1 foreshadowed 9:6.

<sup>83</sup>KITTEL, "Richter", 386; HERTZBERG, *Richter*, 205; WOLF, "Judges", 438; to a limited extent also KLEIN, *Triumph*, 72. — A reference to Deborah's judgeship under her tree (4:5) might not be implied since first, Deborah's tree is referred to as הָרֵךְ, and second, Deborah is described as a prophet of YHWH, who might not sit under a pagan tree.

<sup>84</sup>GOTTWALD, *Tribes*, 566.

<sup>85</sup>Similarly, BUDDE, *Buch*, 72; and FRITZ, "Abimelech": 136, who argued that the frequently proposed emendation to read הַמְצַבָּה instead of the rare קָצֵב (9:6; also Isa 29:3; †; cf. Θ, πρὸς τῇ βαλάνῳ τῆς στάσεως) did not help the understanding of the passage; see also GOTTWALD, *Tribes*, 566. Further, the text critical evidence for the emendation is restricted to Θ and Μ is the *lectio difficilior*, so that Μ is to be preferred.

covenant with Abimelech replaces Joshua's covenant between Israel and YHWH.<sup>86</sup> Third, by saying that the Shechemites crown Abimelech '(in fellowship) with the terebinth' (עץ אלון, 9:6), the narrator suggests that Baal, who might be worshipped at that terebinth, in the mind of the Shechemites participates in the crowning. Finally, while Gideon is chosen by YHWH yet is reluctant to accept the call, Abimelech offers himself as king and becomes king through intrigue,<sup>87</sup> so that YHWH's active and peaceful role in calling Gideon contrasts with Baal's passive and Baalism's brutal role.<sup>88</sup> Hence the Abimelech narrative contrasts with the Gideon narrative by focusing on Baal instead of YHWH.

*b The Theme is Specified by Jotham (9:7-21)*

After Baalism has been introduced as the religion of the Shechemites and Abimelech has been appointed as Baal's representative, the Abimelech narrative continues with the specification of the theme through a speech of the representative of the offended party (6:29-32 || 9:7-21). Just as Joash as Baal's representative decides that Baal should demonstrate that he is god by defending himself and contending against Gideon (6:29-32), Jotham as YHWH's representative determines that Abimelech's kingship should be assessed by its outcome (9:7-21).<sup>89</sup> Hence like Joash's speech that is essential for an understanding of the significance of the Gideon narrative, Jotham's speech is essential for an understanding of the Abimelech narrative.<sup>90</sup>

The choice of Mount Gerizim as the scene of Jotham's speech (9:7) following the Shechemites' covenant with Baal at Shechem (9:6) has a strong ironical meaning. In Deuteronomy, Mount Gerizim appears within YHWH's command regarding Israel's settlement within Canaan. Having entered the promised land, Israel is to set the blessing on Mount Gerizim, while the curse is to be pronounced on Mount Ebal (Deut 11:29). The

<sup>86</sup>Similarly, JORDAN, *Judges*, 161-162.

<sup>87</sup>Similarly, HERTZBERG, *Richter*, 204; GUTBROD, *Buch*, 259; GERBRANDT, *Kingship*, 133.

<sup>88</sup>Cf. SOGGIN, *Königtum*, 24, who described Abimelech's crowning as a purely administrative act without any divine designation.

<sup>89</sup>WEBB, *Book*, 155, argued instead that the speech of Jotham paralleled the speech of the prophet in the Gideon narrative (6:7-10), since both speeches brought a lawsuit in covenant language. Yet there is no verbal reference to that speech, so that it appears that the narrator does not stress this parallel, although he might nevertheless imply that the prophet's accusation is once again valid. Similarly, O'CONNELL, *Rhetoric*, 151-152, claimed that Jotham's curse played the same rhetorical role as the Israelites' outcry to YHWH for help. Yet Jotham does not represent the Israelites and does not address YHWH, so that this parallel appears unjustified.

<sup>90</sup>Against FRITZ, "Abimelech": 132, who held that it was not necessary for the understanding of the narrated plot, since it did not bring any new action and could be deleted without leaving a gap in the plot. Yet the point of the Abimelech narrative would be missed if the explanation provided in Jotham's speech was lacking.



Israelites are further instructed to be arranged into two groups of six tribes, each of which is to stand on these two mountains, whereby, together with five other tribes, Joseph should take his stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people (Deut 27:12-13; cf. Josh 8:33). Therefore, when Jotham, being the son of Jerubbaal, from the tribe of Manasseh (6:15), and therefore belonging to the tribe of Joseph, appears on Mount Gerizim to announce an important and authoritative message of god to the people (9:7), one might expect him to continue the tradition and pronounce a blessing. However, Jotham only applies the Deuteronomic curses (Deut 27:15-26) to Abimelech and the Shechemites and condemns the Shechemites for anointing Abimelech as king (9:16,19). Especially the second curse ('Cursed is the one who treats his father and mother with contempt', Deut 27:16) and the penultimate curse ('Cursed is the one who takes a bribe to slay an innocent person', Deut 27:25) are applicable to Abimelech as he brings his father Jerubbaal into disrepute and accepts silver to kill his seventy sons.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, the choice of Mount Gerizim as the platform for Jotham's curses shows that Israel can not expect any blessing from Baalism but rather should expect a curse. By binding Jotham's fable tightly into the narrated context despite its apparent independence of the context of Jotham's speech and the whole Abimelech narrative,<sup>92</sup> by letting Jotham claim divine authority, and by adopting Jotham's curse in his explanation of the narrative (9:23-24,56-57), the narrator further signals that he accepts the viewpoint of Jotham's speech.<sup>93</sup> The speech thus articulates the theme for the Abimelech narrative as Joash's speech does for the Gideon narrative.

Jotham begins his address by calling the בְּעָלִים of Shechem to listen to him so that אֱלֹהִים might listen to them (9:7). As YHWH's representative, Jotham refers to YHWH as אֱלֹהִים. Implicitly he thus calls the Shechemites to listen to and follow YHWH rather than Baal. By avoiding the name יְהוָה in his address, however, Jotham makes it easier for the Baalists to accept his address, as they might apply the reference to Baal. As they have crowned Abimelech on a Baalist basis, they would expect Baal to bless them and Jotham, appearing on Mount Gerizim, to proclaim his blessing. Hence Jotham's introduction makes the Shechemites listen to him carefully and it gives his speech a significant weight.

<sup>91</sup>PENNANT, "Significance", 191.

<sup>92</sup>Similarly lately, among others, RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 248-251; LINDARS, "Fable": 358; BOLING, *Judges*, 172-173; CRÜSEMANN, *Widerstand*, 19-20; FRITZ, "Abimelech": 139; GERBRANDT, *Kingship*, 129-131; BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 191; JOBLING, *Sense*, 70-76; WEBB, *Book*, 155; SOGGIN, *Judges*, 174-175; WÜRTHWEIN, "Abimelech", 24. For a more detailed argumentation on the independence of the fable, see below.

<sup>93</sup>Similarly, EDUARD NIELSEN, *Shechem: A Traditio-Historical Investigation* (DTh thesis, University of Aarhus, 1955; Copenhagen: Gad, 1955), 145; JOBLING, *Sense*, 70; WEBB, *Book*, 156; ANDERSON, "Nature", 175.

Yet since his speech will condemn the Shechemites' behaviour, he at the same time implies that only their return from Baal to YHWH will lead to god's blessing. Therefore, only if the Shechemites abandon Abimelech and Baal and return to YHWH as their god, god will listen to them and bless them.

The structure of the fable may be described as shown in outline 2.<sup>94</sup> From this outline it emerges that the fable consists of the introduction (... הלוך הִלְכוּ, 9:8a)<sup>95</sup>, the

Outline 2.—The Jotham Fable (9:8-15)

Introduction (9:8a)	הלוך הִלְכוּ הָעֵצִים לְמִשְׁחָה עֲלֵיהֶם מֶלֶךְ
1st - 3rd offer (9:8b,10,12)	וַיֹּאמְרוּ (הָעֵצִים) <sup>a</sup> לְשֹׁפֵב <sup>b</sup> (לְכִי־אַתָּה) <sup>c</sup> מְלֻכָה/מְלֻכָי <sup>cd</sup> עָלֵינוּ
1st - 3rd response (9:9,11,13)	וַיֹּאמְרוּ/וַתֹּאמֶר <sup>c</sup> לָהֶם הַשֹּׁפֵב <sup>b</sup> הַחֲנֻלְתִּי אֲתוֹז־י ... וְהִלְכְתִּי לְנוֹעַ עַל־הָעֵצִים
4th offer (9:14)	וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָל־הָעֵצִים אֶל־שֹׁפֵב <sup>b</sup> לָדָּ אַתָּה מֶלֶךְ־עָלֵינוּ
4th response (9:15a)	וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֶסְדָּ אֶל־הָעֵצִים אִם בְּאֵמַת אַתֶּם מִשְׁחִים אֵתִי לְמֶלֶךְ עֲלֵיכֶם בְּאוֹ חָסוּ בְצַלִּי
Resolution (9:15b)	וְאִם־אֵין תִּצַּא אֵשׁ מִן־הָאֶסְדָּ וְתֹאכַל אֶת־אֲרֹזֵי הַלְּבָנוֹן

<sup>a</sup>The subject is probably missing in 9:8b because the trees have just been mentioned (9:8a).

<sup>b</sup>Since the trees are personified in the fable, the references to them are treated as proper nouns.

<sup>c</sup>The exhortation is probably added in 9:10,12 to transfer the previously declined offer to the next tree.

<sup>d</sup>Accepting the *Q<sup>erê</sup>* in 9:8,12; *K<sup>erîb</sup>*: מְלֻכָה/מְלֻכָי.

<sup>e</sup>The different gender of the verb is due to the different gender of the subject.

main body containing the four respectful offers of the kingship to one of the trees, the rejection of that offer by the first three chosen trees and its acceptance by the bramble (9:8b-15a), and the resolution (9:15b). Since the fable stands out from the rest of Jotham's speech, it appears as a separate unit that seems to have been introduced into the narrative as the foundation for Jotham's argument. The fable appears to include the introduction, the offers of the kingship to all four trees, the rejection of the offer by the first three trees, and its acceptance by the bramble including the threat of a punishment if the trees did not mean the offer sincerely (thus, 9:8-15).<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup>Cf. RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 282; JOBLING, *Sense*, 73; OGDEN, "Fable": 302-303.

<sup>95</sup>The inf. abs. הִלְךְ is not emphatic but it rather introduces the fable; GK §113o; MURAOKA, *Words*, 88, 88 n. 18; MOORE, *Commentary*, 249; SLOTKI, "Judges", 235.

<sup>96</sup>Thus BUDDE, *Buch*, 72-73; NOWACK, *Richter*, 87-88; RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 248-251; MARTIN, *Judges*, 117; VEIJOLA, *Königtum*, 103-104; HOPPE, *Judges*, 159; RÜDIGER



A closer analysis of the fable reveals, however, that there are problems with this interpretation when one compares the first three offers and responses with the fourth offer and response. The first three offers are introduced (וַיֹּאמְרוּ [הַעֲצִים] לֵשׁׁפ) and formulated identically (וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְהֵם) [לְכִי־אֶתְּ, מְלָכָה/מְלָכִי עָלֵינוּ] 9:8b,10,12)<sup>97</sup> as are the first three refusals (וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְהֵם) [לְכִי־אֶתְּ, מְלָכָה/מְלָכִי עָלֵינוּ] 9:9,11,13).<sup>98</sup> The speaker thus establishes a pattern for the offer and the refusal, so that the different introduction to the fourth offer (וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל־הַעֲצִים אֶל־שׁׁפ), emphasising the entirety of the trees,<sup>100</sup> and the different formulation of it (לֵךְ אֶתְּהָ מֶלֶךְ־עָלֵינוּ), emphasising that the kingship is indeed offered to the bramble (לֵךְ אֶתְּהָ), stand out as the fable's climax and compel attention (9:14). This aim to catch the attention calls for an interpretation of the first three offers and refusals as one unit that leads the audience to the fourth offer and response.

The recorded fourth response corresponds to the other responses in that the bramble as the speaker refers to itself in the grammatical first person (9:15a) like the other trees in their response (9:9,11,13). There, however, the similarities end already. For the most part the bramble's response differs from the preceding three responses. It is introduced slightly differently (וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַשׁׁפ אֶל־הַעֲצִים), the bramble takes up the trees' objective of anointing a king over them and claims to fulfil it (לְמַשְׁחָ עָלֵיהֶם מֶלֶךְ, 9:8), it demands a proof of the sincerity of the offer (אִם בְּאֵמֶת אַתֶּם מְשַׁחִים אֹתִי לְמֶלֶךְ עָלֵיכֶם), it accepts the offer by making an offer in return (בְּאוֹ חֶסֶד בְּצִלִּי), and it threatens consequences if its offer is declined (תֵּצֵא אִשׁ מִן־הָאֶטֶד וְתֹאכַל אֶת־אֲרוֹזֵי הַלְּבָנוֹן, 9:15). It has been suggested, therefore, that the bramble's response is not originally part of the fable, and that the fable would,

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BARTELMUS, "Die sogenannte Jothamfabel — Eine politisch-religiöse Parabelichtung: Anmerkungen zu einem Teilaspekt der vordeuteronomistischen israelitischen Literaturgeschichte", *ThZ* 41 no. 2 (1985): 97-120; J. EBACH and U. RÜTERSWORDEN, "Pointen in der Jothamfabel", *BN* 31 (1986): 11; GERBRANDT, *Kingship*, 129-130; WEBB, *Book*, 155; GÖRG, *Richter*, 52; BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '9:8-15'.

<sup>97</sup>In the recorded first offer מְלָכָה is emphatic (GK §§46b, 48i-k), probably to introduce the topic of the fable; the assumption of CASSEL, *Richter*, 91, that the rare forms מְלָכָה (9:8 Q) and מְלָכִי (9:10,12 Q) expressed respect for the trees that was lacking in the offer to the bramble (מֶלֶךְ, 9:14), can not be accepted, since מְלָכִי may be treated as an ordinary 2. fem. ipv.; GK §46d.

<sup>98</sup>הַחֲדַלְתִּי is probably a *forma mixta* either of the qal הַחֲדַלְתִּי with interrogative ה and the hif'il הַחֲדַלְתִּי (JAN JOOSTEN, "הַחֲדַלְתִּי *forma mixta*?" *ZAW* 102, no. 1 [1990]: 96-97), or of the hif'il הַחֲדַלְתִּי and the hof'al הַחֲדַלְתִּי with interrogative ה (mentioned as one option by STUDER, *Richter*, 240-242); it is treated as qal (for {חֲדַלְתִּי qal + acc.}; see Job 3:17) by GK §63k; STUDER, *ibid.*, 242; and BOLING, *Judges*, 173; as hif'il by MOORE, *Commentary*, 249; BUDDE, *Buch*, 73; and NOWACK, *Richter*, 87; and as hof'al by MOORE, *Book*, 45, although neither the hif'il nor the hof'al occur elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures.

<sup>99</sup>Cf. HANNA LISS, "Die Fabel des Yotam in Ri 9,8-15 — Versuch einer strukturellen Deutung", *BN* 89 (1997): 16.

<sup>100</sup>BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 167, assumed that the fourth offer was even joined by those trees who have declined the offer.

therefore, consists of the first three offers and refusals and the fourth offer only (thus, 9:8-14);<sup>101</sup> its original ending would then have been replaced by the bramble's present response (9:15).

A closer analysis of the bramble's speech reveals, however, that its first part (9:15a) picks up the theme of the fable by repeating the key words  $\sqrt{\text{משח}}$ ,  $\text{עֲלֵ}$ , and  $\text{מֶלֶךְ}$  of its introduction (9:8a $\beta$ )<sup>102</sup> and sticking to the key words  $\text{עֲלֵ}$  and  $\text{מֶלֶךְ}$  of the recorded offers (9:8b,10,12,14). The chiasmic arrangement of the latter two key words ( $\text{עֲלֵ} - \text{מֶלֶךְ}$ , 9:8a $\beta$   $\leftrightarrow$   $\text{מֶלֶךְ} - \text{עֲלֵ}$ , 9:15a $\alpha$ ) identifies the introduction to the fable and the first part of the bramble's response as inclusion around the fable,<sup>103</sup> so that the introduction appears as the beginning of the fable and the first part of the bramble's response as its conclusion. The following invitation to the bramble to come ( $\sqrt{\text{בוא}}$ , 9:15a $\beta$ ) then corresponds to the beginning of the fable, where the trees go ( $\sqrt{\text{הלך}}$ , 9:8a $\alpha$ ) in search of a king and the bramble invites the trees, who continue to go<sup>104</sup> searching, to stop and accept it as their king. Hence it appears that the fable has come to a natural conclusion with the bramble's acceptance of the offer (9:15a).

The second part of the bramble's response (9:15b) is then contrasted with the first part, as it unexpectedly mentions an alternative to the first part, and also refers to the bramble in the grammatical third person ( $\text{מִן־הָאֵשׁ}$ ),<sup>105</sup> speaks of fire that comes out from the bramble, and introduces the cedars of the Lebanon into the fable.<sup>106</sup> It seems, therefore, that the second part of the bramble's response (9:15b) is not part of the bramble's speech. It may rather reflect Jotham's view,<sup>107</sup> and since the narrator adopts Jotham's speech, also the narrator's view. The fable's poetic structure may even support this interpretation, since it contrasts with the prosaic second part of the bramble's response.<sup>108</sup> Then, however, the second part of the bramble's response is not part of the

<sup>101</sup>Thus LINDARS, "Fable": 355-362; BOLING, *Judges*, 173; JOBLING, *Sense*, 73-76; SOGGIN, *Judges*, 175.

<sup>102</sup>Cf. BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '9:8-15'; also LINDARS, "Fable": 362, although he nevertheless attributed 9:15a solely to the narrator when he argued that the offer of the shade should be taken literally, which, however, did not make sense in the fable. However, unfortunately LINDARS missed the possibility that the offer could be understood ironically; see below.

<sup>103</sup>Thus also BOLING, *Judges*, 173, though he still regarded the whole v. 15 as the narrator's addition to the fable.

<sup>104</sup>Cf. the repetition of  $\sqrt{\text{הלך}}$ , 9:10,12,14.

<sup>105</sup>CRÜSEMANN, *Widerstand*, 19; GERBRANDT, *Kingship*, 131, n. 92; BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 191; LISS, "Fabel": 13.

<sup>106</sup>CRÜSEMANN, *Widerstand*, 19; BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 191; JOBLING, *Sense*, 72-73.

<sup>107</sup>JOBLING, *Sense*, 75-76.

<sup>108</sup>Cf. LINDARS, "Fable": 359.



original fable but has rather been added by Jotham or the narrator to fit its intended purpose.<sup>109</sup> The original fable then consists of 9:8-15a<sup>110</sup> and forms a coherent unit.

This coherent fable seems not to fit fully into any of the narrated situations.<sup>111</sup> First, the narrator neither hints at the Israelites' offer of the kingship to Gideon (8:22-23), nor does the fable hint at an application of that offer to Gideon or his seventy sons,<sup>112</sup> since in the Gideon narrative the Israelites do not search for a king as assumed in the fable but they rather want to keep Gideon and his heirs as their leaders. Moreover, Gideon's reason for his refusal as recorded in the Gideon narrative does not correspond to the reason given in the fable.<sup>113</sup> Second, in the Abimelech narrative the Shechemites are not described as searching for a king, offering the kingship to many candidates, or approaching Abimelech to become king; the narrative rather describes Abimelech as himself conceiving the idea of his own kingship and who approaches the Shechemites to crown him.<sup>114</sup> Finally, the fable does not postulate an oligarchy as Abimelech's proposal does (9:2); it rather postulates a monarchy.<sup>115</sup> Similarly, the application of the fable (9:16-20) does not fully correspond to the fable itself. First, the fable questions the sincerity of the offer towards the bramble, that is, Abimelech, while the application questions whether the crowning corresponds well with the deeds of Jerubbaal, the father of Abimelech.<sup>116</sup> Second, in the fable the anointing of the bramble is decisive for the trees' fate only, while in the application it is decisive for the fate of both the Shechemites and Abimelech.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Similarly, CRÜSEMANN, *Widerstand*, 20; GERBRANDT, *Kingship*, 131; BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 191; LISS, "Fabel": 13.

<sup>110</sup> Similarly, CRÜSEMANN, *Widerstand*, 20; FRITZ, "Abimelech": 139; GERBRANDT, *Kingship*, 131; JOBLING, *Sense*, 72-76; LISS, "Fabel": 13-15.

<sup>111</sup> Similarly, LINDARS, "Fable": 358; WÜRTHWEIN, "Abimelech", 24. Jotham's 'fable' is, therefore, indeed a fable and not a parable since a parable should correspond to the (narrated) situation that it illustrates; LINDARS, *ibid.*: 361. For a different view, see URIEL SIMON, "משל יותם—המשל", *מסורת* 34, no. 1 (1965): 1-34, I-II; BARTELMUS, "Jothamfabel": 97-120.

<sup>112</sup> Against MOORE, *Commentary*, 248; COOKE, *Judges*, 102-103; cf. SELLIN, *Sichem*, 28; CUNDALL, "Commentary", 128; ENNS, *Judges*, 79; JOBLING, *Sense*, 76; JAN DE WAARD, "Jotham's Fable: An Exercise in Clearing Away the Unclear", in *Wissenschaft und Kirche: Festschrift für Eduard Lohse*, ed. KURT ALAND and SIEGFRIED MEURER, TAB 4 (Bielefeld: Luther, 1989), 368-369.

<sup>113</sup> STUDER, *Richter*, 242-243; BUDDE, *Buch*, 72.

<sup>114</sup> ZAPLETAL, *Richter*, 146; RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 249; SOGGIN, *Judges*, 174; BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '9:8-15'; cf. GÖRG, *Richter*, 52.

<sup>115</sup> RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 249.

<sup>116</sup> STUDER, *Richter*, 244-245; MOORE, *Commentary*, 245; GOSLINGA, *Judges*, 360.

<sup>117</sup> GOSLINGA, *Judges*, 361; RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 251; MARTIN, *Judges*, 118-119; JOBLING, *Sense*, 73; SOGGIN, *Judges*, 174.

Therefore, the fable (9:8-15a) appears to have been originally independent. As such, it gains its meaning for the narrative from the added second part of the bramble's response (9:15b) and the application (9:16-20). Then, however, there are several points that should be observed in the interpretation of the fable. First, we should not try to interpret the fable out of its context and in its own proposed setting but rather in its context within the Abimelech narrative and especially in the light of the second part of the bramble's response and the application of that response to Abimelech and the Shechemites.<sup>118</sup> We should, therefore, not focus on its structure, since it has served its rhetorical purpose when it climaxes in the second part of the bramble's response;<sup>119</sup> nor should we focus on its interpretation as an anti-monarchical fable describing kingship as a form of leadership of the most useless members of the society or condemning the worthy candidates who refuse the kingship so that the kingship is offered to unworthy candidates instead, since the bramble's response and the application focus on a narrower issue, namely, the motive for Abimelech's crowning.<sup>120</sup> Second, we do not need to pay attention to every detail of the fable, since the application applies the fable as a whole rather than individual parts of it.<sup>121</sup> Third, we do not need to focus on the interpretation of the obscure *הִחַדְרָתִי* (9:9,11,13),<sup>122</sup> apart from the obvious understanding that the trees contrast this term together with *לָנוּעַ הִלְכָתִי* to describe their unwillingness to become king.

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<sup>118</sup>Thus STERNBERG, *Poetics*, 246-247, 385, 428-429, with view on the different genre of the narrative and the fable and the generic modulation from the bramble to Abimelech; similarly, GERBRANDT, *Kingship*, 131; JOBLING, *Sense*, 69; OGDEN, "Fable": 303; and already NIELSEN, *Shechem*, 151, who claimed that the "so-called original application of the fable is actually secondary". — For attempts to interpret the fable on itself and out of its present context, see NIELSEN, *ibid.*, 147-150, who so demonstrated that it should not be interpreted out of its context; LINDARS, "Fable": 362-364; CRÜSEMANN, *Widerstand*, 19-32; FRITZ, "Abimelech": 139-140; and EBACH [*et al.*], "Pointen": 11-18; also LISS, "Fabel": 15-18, who nonetheless recognised a relation to the context; and BARTELMUS, "Jothamfabel": 116-117, who, however, failed to define the point of the independent fable.

<sup>119</sup>Similarly, OGDEN, "Fable": 303. — For an attempt to analyse the significance of the fable's structure for its own intention, see LISS, "Fabel": 12-18.

<sup>120</sup>Similarly, GERBRANDT, *Kingship*, 131; WEBB, *Book*, 159; O'BRIEN, "'History' as a Story": 23; cf. FRITZ, "Abimelech": 140, who recognised that 9:15b re-interpreted the fable. — Against BUBER, *Königtum*, 24, who described the fable as the "stärkste antimonarchische Dichtung der Weltliteratur"; RINGGREEN [*et al.*], "מִלְךָ": 943; EUGENE H. MALY, "The Jotham Fable—Anti-Monarchical?" *CBQ* 22 (1960): 303-304; CRÜSEMANN, *Widerstand*, 19-32; LINDARS, "Fable": 365-366; HOPPE, *Judges*, 160; CLAUS WESTERMANN, *Vergleiche und Gleichnisse im Alten und Neuen Testament*, CThM, pt. A, no. 14 (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1984), 19; BARTELMUS, "Jothamfabel": 97-101; EBACH [*et al.*], "Pointen": 11-18; DE WAARD, "Fable", 368; BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 188, 190-197; HAMLIN, *At Risk*, 102; LISS, "Fabel": 18.

<sup>121</sup>NÖTSCHER, "Richter", 669; similarly, though with a different argumentation, reasoned RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 284-285. — Against MALY, "Fable": 301-303.

<sup>122</sup>Against DE WAARD, "Fable", 364.



Finally, we do not need to be surprised at the allusions to the 'gods'<sup>123</sup> in 9:9,13, since these expressions could have their origin in an originally Canaanite,<sup>124</sup> perhaps even Shechemite<sup>125</sup> *Sitz im Leben*;<sup>126</sup> if this hypothesis is correct, the fable would appear even more ironic, since the Canaanites' or even Shechemites', that is, the Baalists' own fable is then taken up and applied by the Yahwist Jotham as their enemy to condemn their own behaviour.

But if the fable is not used to condemn the institution of a monarchy, then the whole Abimelech narrative, which is based on the application of the fable, is not a narrative to condemn kingship.<sup>127</sup> This theme would be unfitting to the overall theme of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative anyway, according to which the Abimelech narrative records the Baalists' attempt to demonstrate Baal's power. Within this theme, the issue of kingship has its place in the Abimelech narrative only insofar as Baalism disputes YHWH's right to be king (cf. 8:22-23). The fable thus supports our interpretation that the issue of the kingship only serves as the instrument by which Baalism's failure will be demonstrated.

Let us now proceed to the interpretation of Jotham's fable. It begins with the introductory sentence that the trees go (√הלך) to anoint a king over them (9:8a). Since the narrator has just recorded the crowning of Abimelech and has furthermore introduced it with the same √הלך (9:6), the fable assumes that the trees stand for the Baalists who crown a king over them. Yet since the narrative rather gives the impression that Abimelech offers himself to be king, the assumed reference to the Baalists as if they are searching for a king might reflect Jotham's interpretation, in that he assumes that the Baalists seek a king to replace YHWH's kingship.

One after the other the trees offer the kingship first to three fruit trees, namely, to the olive tree, to the fig tree, and to the wine (9:8b-13).<sup>128</sup> All three trees decline the offer by

<sup>123</sup>The plural אֱלֹהִים favours the rendering of אֱלֹהִים as a plural as well.

<sup>124</sup>LINDARS, "Fable": 366.

<sup>125</sup>Cf. SELIN, *Sichem*, 29, who made similar observations though he did not identify the fable as originally independent. Basing his argumentation on source critical grounds, he argued instead that not Jotham but rather a surviving Shechemite wrote the fable especially for this situation (ibid.).

<sup>126</sup>Cf. RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 286-293, who suggested a *Sitz im Leben* of the Northern Kingdom; cf. also URIEL SIMON, "משל = Parable", *Tarbiz* 34, no. 1 (1965): 1-34, I-II; CRÜSEMANN, *Widerstand*, 29-32; and SOGGIN, *Judges*, 177, who argued for an origin in Israel.

<sup>127</sup>Similarly, GERBRANDT, *Kingship*, 132; also WEBB, *Book*, 159, who extended this observation to the whole Gideon-Abimelech narrative. — Against BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 188-189; MARAIS, *Representation*, 115.

<sup>128</sup>For references to the wine in combination with other fruit trees, see Num 20:5; Deut 8:8; Hab 3:17; Hag 2:19; *et al.*; HALAT, s.v. נֶבֶךְ; and for parallels to other Ancient Near Eastern fables, see CRÜSEMANN, *Widerstand*, 23-27.

pointing out the value of their fruit and the unattractiveness of the kingship in exchange. Finally, all trees approach the bramble (9:14). Departing from the usual pattern by inserting לָכֵן to stress that all the trees are involved, the speaker marks this offer as something new. He thus catches the attention of the audience, who are now expecting the point of comparison.<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, this particle parallels its frequent use in the reference to the Shechemites (9:6) and it thus underlines the application that the trees represent the Baalists. In contrast with the seemingly sensible offers of the kingship to the useful trees, this offer appears senseless at first, since compared with the other trees, a bramble is the lowest plant and the very opposite of the other noble trees; it is, in fact, not even a tree.<sup>130</sup> On further consideration, however, and taking the reason for the trees' decline into account, the offer appears reasonable indeed, as the bramble does not need to give up anything;<sup>131</sup> instead, the offer of the kingship would honour the bramble and elevate its position.<sup>132</sup> It appears, therefore, that the trees have only one thing in mind, namely, to anoint a king over them; and following the failure of the first three offers, all the trees approach the one plant that does not belong to them and that is so useless that it does not need to give up anything and hence does not have any excuse not to accept the offer. Applied to the narrated situation, we find that the fable indeed assumes that the Shechemites are searching for a king, and that Abimelech, who is represented by the bramble, is described as a foreigner to the Shechemites, who is as useless as one can imagine and totally unworthy to be king.

The bramble's response (9:15) is then presented with a rather lengthy introduction compared with the previous three introductions (9:9,11,13). Like the longer introduction of the trees' offer to the bramble, this departure from the established pattern for the response marks the bramble's response as something new. It thus raises the expectation that the fable approaches its climax with this response.<sup>133</sup> And indeed, the bramble does not decline the offer of the kingship but rather accepts it, though it appears to question the sincerity of the offer as it asks for a confirmation (9:15).<sup>134</sup> Yet the bramble does not

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<sup>129</sup>Cf. SOGGIN, *Judges*, 176.

<sup>130</sup>COOKE, *Judges*, 102; FRITZ, "Abimelech": 140; EBACH [*et al.*], "Pointen": 16; JOBLING, *Sense*, 72.

<sup>131</sup>SCHULZ, *Richter*, 56.

<sup>132</sup>This idea would be substantiated by the observation of EBACH [*et al.*], "Pointen": 18, who observed that the buck thorn was frequently used as hedgerow and concluded with this comment on the implied irony: "Hier trifft ein Element des Witzes hinzu: Nicht die Gartenpflanzen werden König, sondern die Hecke!"

<sup>133</sup>DE WAARD, "Fable", 365.

<sup>134</sup>Similarly, BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 167; BUDDE, *Buch*, 73; NOWACK, *Richter*, 88; GOSLINGA, *Judges*, 359; SLOTKI, "Judges", 236; EDWARD R. DALGLISH, "Judges", in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, ed. CLIFTON J. ALLEN, vol. 2 (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1970), 426.



identify kingship with a useless activity as the other trees do, it rather perceives its function as king in relation to the other trees as it offers its shade as a refuge (√חסה) for them. But this offer is unrealistic and absurd, since a bramble by nature can not grant the offered shade and protection<sup>135</sup> and the tall trees by nature can not shelter under a low bramble.<sup>136</sup> Hence the fable identifies the offer of the kingship to the bramble as irrational and improper and the offered protection as an absurdity and mockery; “one receives, in effect, a choice between the nonshade of the thornbush or, even worse, its fiery onslaught—that is, either the useless or the dangerous”.<sup>137</sup> Therefore, the fable, that originally is not a curse, can be understood as a curse only because of the impossibility of the fulfilment of the bramble's offer as a blessing and the inevitability of the fulfilment of the attached curse.<sup>138</sup> But the bramble's response also suggests the narrator's viewpoint. Since in the Hebrew Scriptures √חסה is mainly used with reference to YHWH,<sup>139</sup> the narrator implies that the bramble offers a divine gift that it can not present, for only YHWH can give it.

The fable is resolved with a curse for dismissing the bramble as the trees' king. However, this curse is not based on the bramble's kingship but rather on the motive for anointing it as the emphasised adverb בְּאִמְלֶךְ indicates.<sup>140</sup> Since the introduction of the curse with וְאִמְלֶךְ (9:15b) parallels the introduction of the acceptance with אֵן (9:15a), the adverb בְּאִמְלֶךְ is transferred to the curse and defined as the point of reference between the

<sup>135</sup>The shade of a king probably stands for his protection for his peoples (cf. Lam 4:20); CRÜSEMANN, *Widerstand*, 22.

<sup>136</sup>Similarly, CUNDALL, “Commentary”, 129; MARTIN, *Judges*, 118; CRÜSEMANN, *Widerstand*, 21; JOBLING, *Sense*, 72; SOGGIN, *Judges*, 176.

<sup>137</sup>CROSSAN, “Judges”, 156; similarly, MOORE, *Commentary*, 249; SCHULZ, *Richter*, 56; HERTZBERG, *Richter*, 205; CUNDALL, “Commentary”, 129; BOLING, *Judges*, 174. — Against SELLIN, *Sichem*, 29; RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 310-311; and DALGLISH, “Judges”, 426, who argued that the fable left both options open. However, the nature of the bramble does not allow a positive resolution. WÜRTHWEIN, “Abimelech”, 26-27, thought that the noun אֵן described an evergreen, about 10 m tall tree with a thick treetop that could indeed offer shade; if that were the case, however, the second part of the bramble's response, which mentions fire that comes out from it, could not be understood that easily and the whole point of the fable would be missed; and further, the application of the fable to Abimelech would also lose its sting.

<sup>138</sup>Similarly, LINDARS, “Fable”: 359-360; CRÜSEMANN, *Widerstand*, 19; also ANDERSON, “Nature”, 170, although he still treated it as a curse only (*ibid.*, 125-132, 165-180).

<sup>139</sup>33 times, 25 of which occur in the Psalms; furthermore three ironical uses: once of other gods (Deut 32:37), once of men (Isa 30:2), and once of a bramble (Judg 9:15); these, however, cannot provide the desired protection.

<sup>140</sup>Cf. MURAOKA, *Words*, 43. Against KEIL, *Commentar*, 276, who applied {וְאִמְלֶךְ – אֵן} to the bramble's ability to offer the desired protection; and MOORE, *Commentary*, 250, who applied בְּאִמְלֶךְ to the king rather than to the anointing; it appears, however, that the predicate is the immediate reference in the context and that the object, which is introduced with לְ, only explicates the predicate.

fable and the application. The implication is, therefore, if the trees anoint the bramble with pure motives (בְּאֵמֶת), they should come and take refuge in it; but if they anoint it with impure motives, fire will come out from it and destroy the cedars of the Lebanon.<sup>141</sup>

The application of the fable (9:16-20; outline 3), which is introduced with וְעַתָּה to separate it from the fable,<sup>142</sup> immediately confirms the assumption that the motive rather

Outline 3.—The Ending of the Jotham Fable and Its Application (9:15 || 9:16,19-20)

The ending (9:15)	The application (9:16,19-20)
15 אִם בְּאֵמֶת אַתֶּם מְשַׁחִים אֹתִי לְמֶלֶךְ עָלֵיכֶם	16 וְעַתָּה אִם־בְּאֵמֶת וּבְתָמִים עֲשִׂיתֶם וְתִמְלִיכוּ אֶת־אֲבִימֶלֶךְ וְאִם־טוֹבָה עֲשִׂיתֶם עִם־יָרֵבֶעֶל וְעִם־בֵּיתוֹ וְאִם־כְּגֹמֹל יֵרֶוּ עֲשִׂיתֶם לוֹ:
(15) אִם בְּאֵמֶת אַתֶּם מְשַׁחִים אֹתִי לְמֶלֶךְ עָלֵיכֶם בָּאוּ חֲסוּ בְּצַלִּי	19 וְאִם־בְּאֵמֶת וּבְתָמִים עֲשִׂיתֶם עִם־יָרֵבֶעֶל וְעִם־בֵּיתוֹ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה שָׁמַחוּ בְּאֲבִימֶלֶךְ וַיִּשְׂמַח גַּם־הוּא בְכֶם:
וְאִם־אֵין תֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מִן־הָאֶסְדָּד וְתֹאכַל אֶת־אֲרָזֵי הַלְּבָנוֹן:	20 וְאִם־אֵין תֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מֵאֲבִימֶלֶךְ וְתֹאכַל אֶת־יָרֵבֶעֶל שְׁכֶם וְאֶת־בֵּית מְלֹא וְתֵצֵא אֵשׁ מִבְּעָלֵי שְׁכֶם וּמִבֵּית מְלֹא וְתֹאכַל אֶת־אֲבִימֶלֶךְ:

than the crowning will be focused on now. It thus emphatically repeats (אִם־בְּאֵמֶת, 9:15a || 9:16) and even intensifies the key word of the bramble's response with an intensifying hendiadys (אִם־בְּאֵמֶת וּבְתָמִים, 9:16), that apart from here occurs only in the narrative of Israel's covenant at Shechem (Josh 24:14),<sup>143</sup> and then repeats it once more (9:19). More explicitly, by taking up both protases of the bramble's response (אִם, 9:15a || 9:16,19 • וְאִם־אֵין, 9:15b || 9:20) and repeating the issue of 'sincerity' (בְּאֵמֶת, 9:15a || 9:16,19), the application takes up the entire response of the bramble<sup>144</sup> and explains that the case will

<sup>141</sup> Similarly, BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 168. — Against STUDER, *Richter*, 244; and ZAPLETAL, *Richter*, 148, who argued that the point of reference is the willingness of the trees to accept the brambles offer of the shade. Yet this interpretation can not be substantiated by the application of the fable that questions the motive of Abimelech's crowning and assumes the Shechemites' willingness to accept Abimelech as their king.

<sup>142</sup> OGDEN, "Fable": 305.

<sup>143</sup> Though in reversed order; BOLING, *Judges*, 174.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. OGDEN, "Fable": 303, who argued similarly with regard to the structure of the bramble's response and the application. — CRÜSEMANN, *Widerstand*, 19; and BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 191,



be decided according to whether the Shechemites treated the Baal-fighter and his house well. The noun  $\pi\eta\eta$  thus appears as *the* connecting element of the fable and its application<sup>145</sup> and as the point of comparison to the narrative. Furthermore,  $\pi\eta\eta$  is understood in the context of YHWH's covenant with Israel, so that the question is set against the background of YHWH's and Jerubbaal's deliverance of Israel from the Midianites (9:17-18) and of the Israelites' covenant with YHWH,<sup>146</sup> which they break anyway by making Baal-Berith their god (8:33). The real theme defined by the fable and its application is, therefore, whether the Shechemites were loyal to YHWH, their god and obeyed their covenant with YHWH when they conspired with Abimelech against the house of the Baal-fighter Jerubbaal-Gideon and based Abimelech's kingship on Baal.<sup>147</sup> This theme is further focused by the question whether the Shechemites treated Jerubbaal according to his accomplishment and crowned Abimelech with pure motives towards YHWH and Jerubbaal.<sup>148</sup> Yet since  $\pi\eta\eta$  is a known characteristic of YHWH and of a society in covenant with him, Jotham at the same time answers his question and predicts that the Shechemites, having abandoned honesty, will fail.

Hence the retribution in the Abimelech narrative serves only as the narratable matter to decide whether the motives for Abimelech's crowning are pure and sincere or not; in other words, the main theme of the Abimelech narrative is not retribution for the crime and wrongdoing of Abimelech and the Shechemites,<sup>149</sup> although retribution is used to resolve the real issue (cf. 9:56-57). In this the specification of the theme for the Abimelech narrative parallels the specification of the theme for the Gideon narrative, since both themes are specified to be carried out indirectly by means of a tangible, narratable matter. While in the Gideon narrative the deliverance from the Midianites suggests that YHWH is god, in the Abimelech narrative the failure of Abimelech's

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on the contrary, thought that the application was based on the second part of the bramble's response only.

<sup>145</sup> FOKKELMAN, "Remarks", 37; cf. already MALY, "Fable": 301.

<sup>146</sup> The described hint at the covenant at Shechem implies that this covenant is meant rather than an otherwise disregarded covenant between the Shechemites and Abimelech as suggested by HERBERT SCHMID, "Die Herrschaft Abimelechs (Jdc 9)", *Judaica* 26, no. 1 (1970): 7, and proposed by WÜRTHWEIN, "Abimelech", 25-26.

<sup>147</sup> Similarly, JORDAN, *Judges*, 153; WEBB, *Book*, 159; HAMLIN, *At Risk*, 102.

<sup>148</sup> Thus also LINDARS, "Fable": 356; WEBB, *Book*, 254, n. 95; FOKKELMAN, "Remarks", 37. — O'BRIEN, *Hypothesis*, 271, argued rather vaguely, that the fable judged "those who murder to attain (or retain) a kingship that has been renounced by God's spokesperson".

<sup>149</sup> Against DALGLISH, "Judges", 427; BOOGAART, "Stone": 45-56; STERNBERG, *Poetics*, 429; WEBB, *Book*, 154-159; JOO-JIN SEONG, "Retribution and Repentance in the Former Prophets: A Literary Study" (PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1989; Microfilm), 46; ANDERSON, "Nature", 176-177; WOLF, "Judges", 446; O'CONNELL, *Rhetoric*, 324-325; BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. 'theological implications' of 9:22-55.

kingship and the mutual destruction of Abimelech and the Shechemites suggest that Baal is not god. These observations allow for two conclusions. First, Jotham's speech has indeed the same theme-specifying function for the Abimelech narrative as Joash's speech has for the Gideon narrative; and second, the theme is the same for both narratives, namely, the demonstration of YHWH's divine power for Israel's advantage, Baal's absence, and Baalism's force for Israel's disadvantage.

At this point, Jotham interrupts his argument to explain Jerubbaal's achievement. He reminds the Shechemites that his father (בֶּאֱ) sacrificed his life and rescued (נִצַּל) them (אֶתְּכֶם) from the hand (מִיַּד) of Midian (9:17). This explanation is essential for the interpretation of the following episodes and the specification of the theme for the Abimelech narrative, since it condemns Abimelech's massacre of Jerubbaal's family, elevates Jerubbaal's achievement, and prepares for a theological understanding of the Abimelech narrative as a general example for all Israel.

First, by referring to Jerubbaal as his father (בֶּאֱ) rather than with his anti-Baalist name יִרְבֵּעֵל, Jotham focuses on the personal loss. In this way he authorises himself to deliver this rebuking speech and gives it more weight. In the context of the Abimelech narrative, this reference also raises the question who Jotham's father is, and since the name יְהוָה refers to YHWH, the reference could also be to him. The name would then form a stark contrast to Baal as Abimelech's and the Shechemites' father, would assign the deliverance to YHWH and condemn the Shechemites for ignoring that. In this way the narrator uses Jotham's speech to hint at YHWH's deeds in the Gideon narrative.

Second, Jotham elevates Jerubbaal's role in the victory. He claims that Jerubbaal risked his life when he fought for the Israelites, he refers to the victory with נִצַּל and avoids a direct reference to YHWH's deliverance (יִשַׁע, 6:14,15,36,37; 7:2,7), and he accuses the Shechemites of ignoring Jerubbaal's good deeds. Yet at the same time Jotham's explanation hints at the narrator's setting of the theological background for the Abimelech narrative, where the narrator credits YHWH with rescuing (נִצַּל) Israel from the hand (מִיַּד) of all their enemies (8:34) and warns the audience that the Israelites do not treat Jerubbaal well (8:35), and at the theological introduction to the whole Gideon-Abimelech narrative, where YHWH is said to have rescued (נִצַּל) Israel from the hand (מִיַּד) of all their oppressors (6:9). Hence the narrator once again uses Jotham's speech at this point to hint at YHWH's deeds as referred to in the Gideon narrative. Instead of Jerubbaal, the narrator tells us, YHWH has rescued (נִצַּל) the Israelites from the hand (מִיַּד) of Midian. Yet Jotham declares that Jerubbaal has risked his own life for them when he delivered them.<sup>150</sup> However, neither Gideon's eavesdropping (7:9-14), of which he is

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<sup>150</sup>SLOTKI, "Judges", 237; HERTZBERG, *Richter*, 205.



nevertheless afraid, nor the victory over the Midianites (7:19-22), nor Gideon's continued battle (7:23–8:21), are narrated as dangerous events for Gideon; rather, the only occasion in the narrative where Gideon's life is in danger, is when he breaks down the altar to Baal (6:28-30). Hence it appears that the narrator uses Jotham's words to hint at Gideon's replacement of the worship of Baal with the worship of YHWH. Since this point is only apparent in the whole Gideon-Abimelech narrative and is not spelled out in Jotham's speech, it is the narrator's accusation that the Shechemites reverse Jerubbaal's establishment of YHWH worship with Baal worship; once again the narrator uses Jotham's speech to refer to his theological theme.

Third, in the context of the Gideon narrative, where there is no mention of Shechem at all, and where YHWH delivers the whole nation, Jotham's reference to the deliverance as if only the Shechemites were rescued is conspicuous. It seems, therefore, that Jotham addresses the Shechemites, but that the narrator uses Jotham's address and in the context of the whole Gideon-Abimelech narrative applies it to Israel.<sup>151</sup> Jotham's address thus underlines that the fate of the Baalists of Shechem will serve as an example for idolatrous Israel and warns the audience that their fate will also be similar if they abandon YHWH and serve Baal.

Hence while Jotham's point is that Jerubbaal has rescued Israel and that, therefore, the execution of Jerubbaal's seventy sons is a crime, the underlying point at issue is that YHWH is the real deliverer and that the worship of YHWH is the real issue of the narrative. The Abimelech narrative will thus follow a double theme. On the one hand it will narrate the consequences of Abimelech's and the Shechemites' wrongdoing, which is based on their apostasy, and on the other hand it will suggest that Baal is not god and should, therefore, not be worshipped; rather YHWH as the god who has already demonstrated his divine power should be worshipped.

Having reminded the Shechemites of Jerubbaal's achievement, Jotham explains by accusing all the Shechemites (אֲחֵי, pl.) that they are as much responsible for the death of Jerubbaal's seventy sons as is Abimelech (9:18). By cruelly killing (√גָּרַם; cf. 9:5) the seventy sons of his father, Jotham argues, and by crowning Abimelech, the son of his maidservant (אֲמָתָא, 9:18), they have risen against his father and have not treated him well; by implication, they have also risen against YHWH as their real father and have not treated him according to his accomplishments either. Furthermore, Jotham opposes Jerubbaal's sons with the son of his maidservant, whom the Shechemites crown over them because he is perceived as their 'brother'. By ignoring the fact that Abimelech is Jerubbaal's son, too (8:31), and by deliberately referring to Abimelech's mother as a maidservant despite her

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<sup>151</sup> Similarly, CRÜSEMANN, *Widerstand*, 39.

apparently better social status<sup>152</sup> and despite the lack of any hint on her low status by the narrator,<sup>153</sup> Jotham further denounces Abimelech as a member of a lower social group who is not worthy to be king.<sup>154</sup> At the same time the description of Abimelech as the son of אֶמְתוֹ (9:18) plays on the keyword of the fable and its application (אֶמְתָּ), with which it shares the consonants, and gives Jotham’s explanation a strong ironical meaning.<sup>155</sup> The Shechemites do not make Abimelech king because of his honesty, but rather because he is their ‘brother’ (9:18); and Abimelech, being the son of אֶמְתוֹ, is not at all אֶמְתָּ as this origin might imply.

Hence Jotham accuses the Shechemites of three offences. They have ignored Jerubbaal’s good deeds for them, they have systematically executed his sons, and they have made his low-born son, who despite his description is not honest, king over them; they have, therefore, not acted in truth. Therefore, Jotham utters his curse. If they have dealt with Jerubbaal and his house with a pure and sincere motive, Abimelech and the Shechemites shall rejoice in each other (9:19); but if not, fire shall come out from each and devour each other (9:20). In his accusation Jotham picks up his entire earlier protasis<sup>156</sup> as he refers to it only in an abbreviated form and verbally picks up one part of each: the first condition (וְאִם-בְּאֶמְתָּ וּבְתָמִים עָשִׂיתֶם 9:16a || וְאִם-בְּאֶמְתָּ וּבְתָמִים עָשִׂיתֶם 9:19aα) and the second condition (עַם-יִרְבֵּעַל וְעַם-בֵּיתוֹ 9:16b || עַם-יִרְבֵּעַל וְעַם-בֵּיתוֹ 9:19aβ). He then resumes the application with extensive parallels to the ending of the fable. If the Shechemites have crowned Abimelech on a Yahwistic basis, they shall take refuge in Abimelech, that is, they shall rejoice in him; but if not, fire shall come out from the bramble, that is, Abimelech, and devour the cedars of the Lebanon, that is, the Baalists of Shechem.

On the surface, Jotham gives the Shechemites the opportunity to make amends for their wrongdoing. However, since only the second part of the bramble’s response is verbally applied to the narrated situation in that הָאֶמְתָּ (9:15b) is replaced first with אֶבְיִמְלֵךְ (9:20a) and then with בְּעֵלִי (9:20b), and אֶרְזֵי הַלְבָנוֹן (9:15b) is replaced first with בְּעֵלִי (9:20a) and then with אֶבְיִמְלֵךְ (9:20b), and since the first part of the fable is only applied very loosely,<sup>157</sup> Jotham assumes that only the second part will be fulfilled.<sup>158</sup>

<sup>152</sup>Thus, on the basis of 9:1-3, MOORE, *Commentary*, 235; NOWACK, *Richter*, 82; BURNEY, *Judges*, 276; KITTEL, “Richter”, 387; GOSLINGA, *Judges*, 355; SLOTKI, “Judges”, 232; CUNDALL, “Commentary”, 130; BRUCE, “Judges”, 266; SOGGIN, *Judges*, 173.

<sup>153</sup>SOGGIN, *Königtum*, 21.

<sup>154</sup>Similarly, CROWN, “Reinterpretation”: 95; GARSIEL, *Names*, 55.

<sup>155</sup>PENNANT, “Significance”, 190; GARSIEL, *Names*, 58.

<sup>156</sup>Similarly, MOORE, *Commentary*, 251.

<sup>157</sup>BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 193-194.



Yet the instrument of the destruction, *שן* (9:15b), is transferred unmodified to the application (9:20a,b). Given that fire is the only natural means by which brambles may destroy other plants—since it is normally the brambles that catch fire and set the forest ablaze—yet is only one means by which humans may destroy others, *שן* might be used metaphorically in the application to describe mutual destruction. Having furthermore assessed the Shechemites’ deeds as wrong, the narrator indicates that the first, positive part of Jotham’s speech can only be understood as a rhetorical and ironical, perhaps even sarcastic option, that has ceased to be a real alternative, that is expected not to be fulfilled,<sup>159</sup> that can not be fulfilled anyway by the bramble Abimelech, and with which Jotham therefore ridicules the Shechemites, while the second part, the curse, is threatened as a necessary consequence of the Shechemites’ undue behaviour.<sup>160</sup> Hence Jotham faithfully applies both parts of the bramble’s response to the narrated situation.<sup>161</sup>

It stands out, however, that the application applies the fable to both Abimelech and the Shechemites.<sup>162</sup> By predicting that fire shall not only come out from Abimelech but also from the Shechemites, Jotham describes the accomplishment of the Shechemites in similar terms as Abimelech’s accomplishment. This is to say, like Abimelech, the Shechemites are unproductive brambles as well.<sup>163</sup> They are not the worthy cedars of the Lebanon, as the ending of the fable might let them assume; it appears rather that Jotham uses this picture to pretend to honour the Shechemites as worthy cedars yet actually to mock them as unworthy brambles. Hence the application of the fable implies that the curse of the fable is directed at both parties and that, therefore, both parties belong together and are under the same curse.

Having delivered his curse, Jotham flees to *בְּאֵר* away from his brother Abimelech (9:21) and into security.<sup>164</sup> By letting Jotham, YHWH’s representative, retire from the scene, the narrator ensures that the outcome of the Abimelech narrative can not be put

<sup>158</sup>Cf. STERNBERG, *Poetics*, 429, who argued that Jotham’s speech is bound to fail, but that its failure is the narrator’s success, since he now gets the opportunity to narrate what effect Baal’s rulership as opposed to YHWH’s rulership has for the subjects.

<sup>159</sup>Similarly, MOORE, *Commentary*, 252; SLOTKI, “Judges”, 238; JOBLING, *Sense*, 71; WEBB, *Book*, 155; BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 194; ANDERSON, “Nature”, 172; WEBB, “Judges”, 275; OGDEN, “Fable”: 304, 305-306; OLSON, “Judges”, 817.

<sup>160</sup>Similarly, KEIL, *Commentar*, 277; GERBRANDT, *Kingship*, 132.

<sup>161</sup>Cf. ANDERSON, “Nature”, 165-180, who demonstrated that Jotham’s curse is resolved in the subsequent episodes.

<sup>162</sup>Cf. SCHULZ, *Richter*, 57; MARTIN, *Judges*, 119; JOBLING, *Sense*, 75.

<sup>163</sup>JORDAN, *Judges*, 167.

<sup>164</sup>The name *בְּאֵר* (‘well’), describing a watering place, might establish Jotham’s security from the anticipated fire at Shechem; it is, therefore, of no use trying to locate *בְּאֵר*.

down to any Yahwistic representative but rather must be assigned to Baalism.<sup>165</sup> It is Baalism, therefore, that will be held fully responsible for the disaster narrated in the main Abimelech narrative.

### **3 Summary: The Background and Theme of the Abimelech Narrative**

Having specified the theological theme of the Abimelech narrative already at the conclusion of the Gideon narrative, and having transferred it to the Abimelech narrative, the narrator begins the Abimelech narrative with the setting of the narrative background as the instrument by which the theological theme will be decided. Israel enters into a covenant with Baal. Hence the Abimelech narrative will not focus on the demonstration of YHWH's divine power but will illustrate the failure of Baalism in contrast to YHWH's success in order to suggest Baal's non-existence in contrast to YHWH's supremacy.

Abimelech proposes to become king over Shechem instead of the sons of the Baal-fighter Jerubbaal. The Shechemites, whom the narrator throughout the Abimelech narrative characterises as Baal worshippers to underline the Baalist character of the narrative, incline after him and take him into Baalism's service. Abimelech thus becomes Baalism's chief representative with the Shechemites as Baal worshippers. He exterminates the family of the Baal-fighter Jerubbaal and hence every Yahwist element in the narrative and is crowned by the Shechemites on the basis of their covenant with Baal.

Yet the YHWH-representative Jotham survives and delivers a rebuking speech, which at the same time is used by the narrator to specify the theme of the Abimelech narrative. He explains that Abimelech's attempt to become king and the Shechemites' acceptance of that proposal is an affront of YHWH's claim to be recognised as Israel's god in the first instance, since YHWH has delivered Israel from their oppressors, and Israel has left their covenant with YHWH and expects protection from Baal that only YHWH can provide. To demonstrate that this evaluation is correct, the narrator has Jotham specify the matter by which this theme will be decided as the success or failure of Abimelech's kingship. If Abimelech and the Shechemites benefit from each other, they have acted correctly in replacing YHWH with Baalism and YHWH is not god; but if they will be destroyed by their Baalist leader and destroy him, they have acted wrongly in replacing YHWH with Baalism because YHWH is god. Hence the following episodes, which illustrate the failure of Abimelech's kingship, demonstrate the failure of Baalism, so that YHWH is god.

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<sup>165</sup>Similarly, SCHMIDT, *Erfolg*, 11.



## B The Narrator Discloses Baalism’s Disastrous Potential (9:22-54)

Introductory remarks. Having specified the theological theme of the narrative, the narrator reintroduces the narrative background. The following episodes are framed by the narrator’s theological interpretation that it will demonstrate how Jotham’s curse is fulfilled (9:23-24,56-57). This frame identifies the theme of the whole narrative of Abimelech’s battles as a narrative to demonstrate the destructive force of Baalism and the superiority of YHWH over Baal and it gives the guideline for the interpretation of these episodes. At the same time, the episodes will henceforth only occasionally parallel the episodes of the Gideon narrative. Instead, the general impression of the Abimelech narrative as a rather violent narrative invites its interpretation in the light of Gideon’s continued battle against the Midianites, where Gideon is pictured as a violent despot. Hence it appears that Abimelech copies the selfish, negative nature of Gideon only, while YHWH’s performance as Israel’s deliverer finds no counterpart in the Abimelech narrative. Baalism is thus condemned as an ineffective and destructive religion.

### 1 The Narrative Background is Recalled (9:22)

However, the narrator resumes the Abimelech narrative by recalling the narrative background (9:22). Hence the plot is taken up again after its interruption by the specification of its theme (9:7-21), so that the following episodes will focus on Abimelech’s reign as a demonstration of Baalism: וַיֵּשֶׁר אֶבְיִמֶלֶךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים.

This record, however, deserves more attention. First, the narrator describes Abimelech’s reign with the verb וַיֵּשֶׁר. Although the context suggests the derivation from  $\sqrt{\text{שרר}}$  I (‘to rule, govern’), since Abimelech rules over Shechem,<sup>166</sup> the vocalisation points to a derivation from  $\sqrt{\text{שור}}$  I (‘to fight’).<sup>167</sup> The mention of יִשְׂרָאֵל as the object of the verb וַיֵּשֶׁר supports this derivation and assumes an interpretation of וַיֵּשֶׁר as a pun on  $\sqrt{\text{שרה}}$  I, since it is this root that is used for Jacob’s struggle with the divine angel at Peniel (Gen 32:29) that leads to his new name יִשְׂרָאֵל (< { $\sqrt{\text{שרה}}$  I + אֵל}).<sup>168</sup> This pun underlines that the narrator describes the Baal representative Abimelech as if he fights, struggles, or strives with YHWH as he governs over Israel, so that the nature of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative as a theological narrative is further underlined. With the context suggesting  $\sqrt{\text{שר}}$  I, that—apart from this passage—is attested only six times in the Hebrew

<sup>166</sup>SOGGIN, *Judges*, 179; cf. HALAT, s.v. שור I and שרר I.

<sup>167</sup>MOORE, *Commentary*, 254; cf. GK §72t.

<sup>168</sup>Also Hos 12:4,5; †. NIELSEN, *Shechem*, 154, n. 3; PENNANT, “Significance”, 185.

Scriptures,<sup>169</sup> the narrator might furthermore evaluate Abimelech's reign. His reign is described neither as that of a ruler although he proposes to rule (משל) the Shechemites (9:2), nor as that of a king although the Shechemites crown him as king (מלך, 9:6; cf. 9:16); it is rather described as that of a governor (שר) or representative of a higher authority,<sup>170</sup> who might also be described as a servant of this authority yet with a better status than a slave.<sup>171</sup> This description of Abimelech's leadership thus excludes the interpretation of the Abimelech narrative in terms of kingship;<sup>172</sup> it rather recalls Abimelech's position as Baalism's servant and representative, so that the following episodes will primarily focus on Baalism and Baal as represented by Abimelech. Abimelech's fate will thus enable the audience to draw conclusions about Baal as well.

Second, the duration of Abimelech's reign is given as three years only (9:22). This record is a surprise, because it is provided at the outset of the story of his leadership and not at its end as in the other narratives;<sup>173</sup> because it is a record of the duration of the leadership and not of the rest or peace achieved by the leader as in the preceding narratives;<sup>174</sup> and because it is the shortest period of any sort recorded in Judges. On the other hand, its place at the beginning of the narrative parallels the record of the duration of the oppressions by Israel's enemies at the beginning of each deliverer narrative<sup>175</sup> and thus suggests Abimelech's reign as an oppression and Abimelech as Israel's enemy.<sup>176</sup> These differences allow for the two conclusions that Abimelech rules as Israel's enemy and that his rule already comes to an end<sup>177</sup> at this point in the narrative. The brief mention of the short period of leadership contrasts with the rather long description of the following unrest and lets the civil war recorded in the main Abimelech narrative appear as Abimelech's main achievement. Since the civil war leads to mutual destruction, which is identified as the fulfilment of Jotham's curse, Abimelech's accomplishment in the

<sup>169</sup>Num 16:13 [twice]; Ezra 1:22; Prov 8:16; Isa 32:1; Hos 8:4; †.

<sup>170</sup>Cf. 4:2,7, where Sisera is titled שר צבא; 7:25; 8:3, where Oreb and Zeeb are characterised as שר of the Midianites; 8:6,14, where the officials of Succoth are described as שר and distinguished from the city's זקן; and 9:30, where the narrator describes Zebul as Abimelech's שר in Shechem; cf. 5:15; 10:18; † (Judges). DAVID W. BAKER and PHILIP J. NEL, "שר", in *NIDOTTE*, vol. 3: 1295.

<sup>171</sup>HERBERT NIEHR, "שר *sar*: שָׂרָר *sārār*, מִשְׂרָה *miśrāh*", in *ThWAT*, vol. 7: 861-863.

<sup>172</sup>Similarly, STONE, "Confederation", 381.

<sup>173</sup>Judg 3:11; 3:30; 5:31; 8:28; 10:2; 12:7; 12:9; 12:11; 12:14; 15:20; 16:31; contr. 10:3. BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '9:22'.

<sup>174</sup>Judg 3:11; 3:30; 5:31; 8:28.

<sup>175</sup>Judg 3:8; 3:14; 4:3; 6:1; 10:8; 13:1.

<sup>176</sup>Similarly, JORDAN, *Judges*, 157; also STONE, "Confederation", 381-382, with view on the absence of מלך in 9:22.

<sup>177</sup>Similarly, BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '9:22'.



narrative is the implementation of Jotham's and indeed YHWH's curse over the Baalists. This interpretation is then confirmed in the narrator's reference to YHWH's intervention immediately after the record of the duration of Abimelech's reign (9:23-25).

However, the narrative gains a second purpose, which is implied in the reference to Israel as the object of Abimelech's reign (9:22). Earlier in the narrative, Abimelech is made king over the Shechemites alone (9:6), although his reign might have included other surrounding cities such as Arumah (9:41). Nevertheless, Abimelech can hardly be described as king over the nation of Israel, so that it appears that the narrator deliberately uses this term to define the narrative as a general example for Israel.<sup>178</sup> The message is that Israel as a nation is idolatrous and worships Baal (cf. 8:27; 8:33-35); hence Israel will encounter the same fate as the Shechemites in the Abimelech narrative. Therefore, the second purpose of the Abimelech narrative is to describe how apostasy will eventually lead to disaster.

## 2 אֱלֹהִים Intervenes with his Spirit to Punish the Apostate Baal Worshipers (9:23-25)

Having specified the theme of the Abimelech narrative in Jotham's fable, the narrator begins the application of the fable with the record that אֱלֹהִים sends an evil spirit (רוּחַ רָעָה) between Abimelech and the Shechemites (9:23). Since the fable anticipates a narrative that focuses on a theological issue, the origin of the spirit in god marks the beginning of the application of the fable. By describing the spirit as an evil spirit that causes treachery between the Baalists (9:23b),<sup>179</sup> that is sent to repay the evil of Abimelech and the Shechemites who have cruelly killed (הָרַגוּ) the sons of Jerubbaal (9:24), and that supports Jotham's curse, the narrator identifies YHWH as the sender of the spirit. The identification of the spirit as an evil spirit (רוּחַ רָעָה) further complies with the theological introduction to Judges, where YHWH is said to be against the Israelites for evil (לְרָעָה, 2:15) because they forsake YHWH and serve other gods (2:11-15). This reference not only justifies the sending of the evil spirit between Abimelech and the Shechemites as a consequence of their previously described apostasy, it also condemns their apostasy and lets the following episodes appear as the due punishment.

Accordingly, the following theological explanation of the narrative focuses on this aspect. By picking up Jotham's argumentation (9:18), the narrator identifies the following episodes as the fulfilment of Jotham's curse (9:24) and as the legitimate

<sup>178</sup>Similarly, KITTEL, *Geschichte*, 33; BOLING, *Judges*, 175; WEBB, *Book*, 156; cf. O'CONNELL, *Rhetoric*, 166, n. 212.

<sup>179</sup>For an evil spirit from YHWH, cf. 1 Sam 16:14; 18:10; 19:9.

recompense for Abimelech’s and the Shechemites’ violence against the seventy sons of the YHWH-representative Jerubbaal. He thus supports Jotham’s fable in every respect. He supports the double-sided application of the fable both to Abimelech and the Shechemites, and he supports both the theological and the narrative theme of the fable. Hence he refers to Gideon’s sons first—picking up the theological theme—as the seventy sons of Jerubbaal to identify them as the sons of the Baal-contender, and only then—referring to the narrative theme—as Abimelech’s brothers to focus on both Abimelech’s and the Shechemites’ unjustifiable violence against them. With the second reference, Jotham furthermore establishes an ironic contrast with Abimelech’s identification of the Shechemites as his ‘brothers’ (cf. 9:2) and implies that their brotherhood does not save them from being killed. Yet since, as already argued, the narrative theme serves only as the narratable matter by which the theological theme is carried out, the narrative should still be interpreted as a theological narrative to demonstrate YHWH’s superiority over Baal by implementing Jotham’s curse upon Abimelech and the Shechemites.

By repeating both the full reference to the **בְּעַלְי שָׁכָם** along with the reference to Abimelech as the ultimate target of the Shechemites’ action, the plot is resumed with the explanation of how the Shechemites act treacherously against Abimelech (9:25a; cf. 9:23b). The Shechemites put men in ambush against Abimelech and rob every bypasser. The conflict is then made imminent through the record that this is reported to Abimelech (9:25b). Hence the narrator raises the expectation that Abimelech and the Shechemites will soon encounter a clash. Further, by having the Baalists of Shechem act against the Baal representative Abimelech, the narrator separates both parties from each other so that the Baalists are not unified any more in the narrative.

Yet apart from the narrator’s explanation that the foreshadowed conflict needs to be put down to YHWH’s evil spirit, there is no indication in the narrative of a reason why the Shechemites should treat Abimelech treacherously. The Shechemites’ behaviour is thus depicted as unjustified and the narrator invites the audience to condemn their behaviour. Therefore, like Abimelech’s treatment of Jerubbaal and his sons, which the narrator condemns in Jotham’s fable, the Shechemites’ treatment of Abimelech is condemned, too. All Baal worshippers are thus condemned, so that Baalism as such is condemned.

The relationship between the Baal representative Abimelech and the Baalists of Shechem thus becomes a picture for the disastrous consequences of apostasy and a mirror for the relationship between YHWH and Israel. It shows that idolatry leads to mutual destruction and needs to be condemned, while YHWH worship leads to peace, as demonstrated in the Gideon narrative. The Abimelech narrative thus also warns Israel not to make the same mistake as the Baalists by rebelling against YHWH, their god, but rather to accept him.



### 3 Baalism Leads to Mutual Destruction: Gaal Causes Abimelech to Fight against Shechem (9:26-41)

Introductory remarks. The following episode of Gaal's revolt against Abimelech at first sight appears to be connected rather loosely with the preceding notice that the Shechemites' unjust behaviour is reported (נָגַד) to Abimelech (9:25), since Abimelech himself is not in centre stage now, as might be expected following the focus on Jotham after the Shechemites' action is reported (נָגַד) to him (9:7), but rather the previously unmentioned foreigner Gaal. However, since he appears unexpectedly and enters the narrative and Shechem from nowhere (9:26), Gaal parallels the bread in the soldier's dream (7:14), that comes from nowhere and destroys the Midianite camp. His appearance in Shechem might, therefore, be due to YHWH's intervention, so that the destruction of Shechem as predicted in Jotham's curse will begin to materialise with Gaal's arrival.

Further, it appears that 9:42 picks up 9:25 in that it repeats that the Shechemites' action is reported (נָגַד) to Abimelech and in that both episodes begin with the record that the Shechemites go out into the field (הִשְׁקָה + יִצְעַל, 9:27 || 9:42). Hence source critics and redactional critics have frequently assigned the Gaal episode (9:26-41) to a different, parallel source, and the narrative is said to be continued after 9:25 only with 9:42.<sup>180</sup> And indeed, there are several parallels between the Gaal episode (9:26-41) and the following episode (9:42-45).<sup>181</sup> Both episodes begin with the report that the Shechemites go out into the field (הִשְׁקָה + יִצְעַל, 9:27 || 9:42), and in both episodes their activity is reported (נָגַד) to Abimelech (9:25; cf. 9:31 || 9:42). In the first episode Zebul then advises Abimelech to lie in ambush (אָרַב, 9:32) and make a dash (עָל + פִּשְׁטַל, 9:33) against the city (הָעִיר). Both episodes are continued with the focus on Abimelech who divides his men into groups (רֵאשׁ) and lies in ambush (אָרַב) against Shechem, though he first divides his men into four groups and then into three groups only (9:34 || 9:43); in both episodes the Shechemites come out (יִצְאוּ) from the city and by doing so give Abimelech the sign to arise (קוּם) and attack them (9:35 || 9:43); and in both episodes the opponents fight (לָחַם) against each other (9:39 || 9:45).

Yet it appears that 9:42 opens a different episode than 9:25. This assumption is already invited by the different form of נָגַד in both verses, as 9:25 has the hof'al נִגַּד and 9:42 the hif'il נִגְדוּ. Second, while in 9:25 the Shechemites recruit men who lie in ambush against Abimelech in the hills, in 9:42 the Shechemites simply go out into the field with

<sup>180</sup>E.g., MOORE, *Commentary*, 252-254; EISSFELDT, *Quellen*, 56-68, 26\*-29\*; MARTIN, *Judges*, 124, 126; HARTMUT N. RÖSEL, "Studien zur Topographie der Kriege in den Büchern Josua und Richter", *ZDPV* 92, no. 1 (1976): 25-28; FRITZ, "Abimelech": 130; J. GRAY, *Judges*, 306, 307. — See RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 256-259, for a different interpretation.

<sup>181</sup>Cf. RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 256-259.

the peaceful intention to work there. Hence not only does the narrator focus on a different group, he also sets both episodes in a different locality and implies a different motive for the recorded actions. Finally, the setting of the episode of Abimelech's destruction of Shechem (9:42-45) is set on the day following on the victory over Gaal (9:42), so that the narrator identifies the relation between both episodes as a succession rather than a parallel. It seems, therefore, that the narrator above all connects both episodes in such a way that the second episode (9:42-45) follows the first episode (9:26-41) as its organic continuation rather than parallels it.<sup>182</sup>

Further, Abimelech appears to continue to implement Zebul's advice even after the rebel has been expelled. Only in the second episode is Zebul's instruction to make a dash against ( $\{\sqrt{\text{פשת}} + \text{על}\}$ ) the city (9:33) followed when Abimelech makes a dash against ( $\{\sqrt{\text{פשת}} + \text{על}\}$ ) the city and those in the fields (9:44), while such a statement is missing in the first episode; and only in the second episode is there an answer to Zebul's instruction specifically to attack Gaal (9:33), who appears at the entrance of the gate of the city ( $\text{פְּתַח הָעִיר}$ , 9:35), when Abimelech advances his attack against Shechem to the entrance of the gate of the city ( $\text{פְּתַח שַׁעַר הָעִיר}$ , 9:44); in the first episode Abimelech had stopped at the entrance of the gate ( $\text{פְּתַח הַשַּׁעַר}$ , 9:40).<sup>183</sup> Yet since Gaal has already been defeated and driven out of Shechem (9:41), it appears as though Abimelech transfers Zebul's advice to a subsequent battle. Abimelech thus once more mirrors Gideon, who continues the battle against the Midianites even after they have been successfully defeated and driven out from Israel.

Within the Abimelech narrative, Gaal parallels Abimelech.<sup>184</sup> Both protagonists enter Shechem as foreigners (9:1 || 9:26); both conspire with the Shechemites against the (assumed) prevalent ruler, as Abimelech denounces the sons of Jerubbaal and Gaal denounces Abimelech (9:1-6 || 9:26-29); both refer to their line of descent to persuade the Shechemites of their legitimacy as king, as Abimelech stresses his genealogical descent from his Shechemite mother and Gaal claims that his ideological conviction is the same as that of the father of Shechem (9:1-3 || 9:28); both identify themselves with the Shechemites, as Abimelech describes himself as their 'brother' and Gaal refers to himself and his audience in the grammatical first person plural (9:2 || 9:28); both warn their

<sup>182</sup>NIELSEN, *Shechem*, 163-164; cf. RICHTER, *Untersuchungen*, 256-259, who denied the existence of two separate sources for these episodes.

<sup>183</sup>Although this might well have been the gate of the city (hence Q, G, and V adjust 9:40 to 9:35,44 by adding an explicit reference to the city; cf. BHS), the narrator might have deliberately avoided this specification to underline the impression that Abimelech completes Zebul's instruction only in his second attack.

<sup>184</sup>HERTZBERG, *Richter*, 207; NIELSEN, *Shechem*, 159; CUNDALL, "Commentary", 132; BOLING, *Judges*, 176, 178; BOOGAART, "Stone": 50-51; cf. KLEIN, *Triumph*, 68-80.



audience of the foreign rulership of the (remaining) sons of the Baal-fighter Jerubbaal, as Abimelech raises the spectre of the rulership of all the seventy sons of Jerubbaal before the eyes of the Shechemites and Gaal describes the rulership of the only remaining son of Jerubbaal<sup>185</sup> as that of a foreigner (9:2 || 9:28); both put themselves forward as the more suitable rulers of the city (9:2 || 9:28); both call for the opponent to be removed, as Abimelech is paid by the Shechemites to kill his brothers and Gaal openly proposes to remove Abimelech (9:4-5 || 9:29); and both represent Baalism, as Abimelech is appointed as Baal’s representative (9:4,6) and the name *אֶמֶל* resembles the name *בַּעַל* and associates Gaal with Baal. By thus picking up Abimelech’s qualities and arguments and applying them to himself, Gaal reverses Abimelech’s argumentation and claims that Abimelech is crowned on a false basis. Abimelech’s arguments are correct, Gaal argues, though Abimelech himself falls into the same category of dangerous rulers; he is not better than his seventy brothers. On the other hand, Gaal argues, he himself does not share the theology of the Baal-fighter Jerubbaal, but rather that of the founder of Shechem. Therefore, unlike Jerubbaal and his son Abimelech, Gaal proposes, he really belongs to the Baalists and is thus a better leader for the Shechemites.<sup>186</sup> Yet while Abimelech uses diplomacy to achieve his goals and sends a delegation of his relatives to Shechem, Gaal openly calls for a rebellion against Abimelech. Therefore, Gaal not only mirrors Abimelech, he is even pictured as a more degenerate form of the same character, who inflicts on Abimelech what Abimelech inflicted on Gideon.

Furthermore, the episode of Gaal’s revolt reflects on Abimelech’s character. Abimelech’s failure to react to the report of the Shechemites’ assault (9:25) parallels Gideon’s failure to attack the Midianites after he has been called and empowered by YHWH; and like Gideon, who needs an explicit affirmation that he should attack the camp, which is given in form of the Midianite’s dream and its interpretation that he overhears (*שמע*), Abimelech also needs an explicit instruction to attack the Shechemites, which is given in form of Zebul’s advice, after he overhears (*שמע*) Gaal’s revolt (9:30-33). However, while Gideon’s fear as the motive for his delay is understandable on a human level at least, there is no indication of Abimelech’s motives for his delay, so that he fails to attack the Shechemites for no apparent reason. Hence while Gideon’s delay—although unjustified in the light of his call and empowerment—still has sympathetic features, Abimelech’s failure to act does not find any excuse. It further appears that Abimelech is unmoved by the Shechemites’ assault against him and his subjects, which implies that he is unable or unwilling to protect those that are subject to him. As

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<sup>185</sup>Jotham, having already retired from the scene (9:21), is not present any more.

<sup>186</sup>Similarly, OGDEN, “Fable”: 307.

Abimelech is Baal's representative, it also allows conclusions about Baal, who appears to be unable to protect his worshippers. He thus contrasts with YHWH, who is not only able to protect his worshippers when they approach the enemy, but also able to actively fight against their enemy and deliver Israel from the oppression.

The Gaal episode (9:26-41) may be divided into two main scenes, which are framed by comments of the narrator. The narrator twice introduces a new character and reflects on the inner mind of the characters, as he introduces Gaal and records that the Shechemites trust him (9:26) and as he introduces Zebul and records that his anger burns (9:30). Each reflection introduces a new episode, namely, Gaal's revolt (9:27-29) and Abimelech's reaction (9:31-41).

*a Gaal Stirs up the Shechemites against Abimelech (9:26-29)*

Gaal is introduced as the son of עֶבֶד ('slave', 9:26). The diversity of the versions in recognising בֶּן-עֶבֶד as a name<sup>187</sup> underlines the assumption that it is an artificial construct of the narrator to condemn the Shechemites' apostasy and denounce Gaal. Its first element (גַּעַל) is derived from גַּעַל ('to loathe')<sup>188</sup> and characterises Gaal as one who abhors YHWH as god. This root also hints at Lev 26:15 (cf. vv. 30,43), where YHWH announces a blessing if Israel lives in obedience to YHWH, but a curse if Israel abhors (גַּעַל) his laws and breaks his covenant. Since the Shechemites have already broken YHWH's covenant, replacing it with a covenant with Baal (8:33,34), the name גַּעַל thus contains the narrator's assessment that the Shechemites abhor YHWH and stand under YHWH's curse. The name thus picks up Jotham's curse and carries it into the narrative. Yet the name might also paronomastically play on גָּאֵל, but it remains unclear whether the meaning of גָּאֵל I ('to redeem') or גָּאֵל II ('to defile') is played on. The second root would support the message contained in the derivation of the name, as it hints at Gaal's cursing of Abimelech in the sacred place of a temple, while the first root would gain an ironical meaning in the narrative, as the Baal worshipper Gaal starts off with the aim to redeem the Shechemites from the rule of Abimelech but only to replace it with his own even worse rule; and even his failure only leads to civil war. The message contained in this irony might be that a Baalist can only fail in any attempt to redeem Israel.

The second element of Gaal's name (בֶּן-עֶבֶד) denounces him as a slave,<sup>189</sup> so that his proposal (9:28), which is composed around עֲבַד as the only verb in it, ironically reflects his description as the son of Ebed; Gaal, the son of a slave, ironically proposes to

<sup>187</sup>See NIELSEN, *Shechem*, 155.

<sup>188</sup>BOLING, *Judges*, 176.

<sup>189</sup>GARSIEL, *Names*, 55, 56, claimed that {בֶּן שִׁפָּה} defined the social status of the 'son'.



terminate the slave-life of the Shechemites and to become ruler of Shechem himself. In this way Gaal mirrors Abimelech, whom Jotham denounces as a son of Jerubbaal's maidservant (בְּנֵי-אֶמְתּוֹ, 9:18), and whose claim to leadership is condemned by Jotham. By implication, Jotham's curse will hence apply to Gaal as well, and, therefore, also to Baal.

Gaal and his 'brothers' (אָח) <sup>190</sup> pass (עָבַר) into Shechem and win the Shechemites' trust (9:26). By introducing Gaal as he comes from nowhere and passes through (עָבַר + כָּ) Shechem, the narrator implies that Gaal is a traveller who does not intend to stay at Shechem for long but rather aims to continue his journey. This means, however, that Gaal is a foreigner to Shechem, <sup>191</sup> and since he is associated with Baal by the narrator, Baal is also identified as a foreign god to Shechem. Further, by having Gaal arrive with his 'brothers' (אָח), the narrator indicates that with this episode the judgement upon Abimelech and the repayment of his violence against his brothers (9:24) begins to materialise, as Gaal's 'brothers' pay back Abimelech's murder of his brothers. Like Abimelech, who kills Jotham's brothers with the help of his Shechemite 'brothers' and is made king on this basis, Gaal dissents Abimelech's 'brothers' with the help of his own 'brothers' and deserves to be made ruler on this basis.

After he has won the Shechemites' trust, Gaal and the Shechemites hold a festival of thanksgiving (הַלּוּלִים) for their god (9:27). This definition of the festival might be intended by the use of the noun הַלּוּלִים, which is derived from הָלַל II and hence has a religious connotation, and by the only other verse in the Hebrew Scriptures where the noun הַלּוּלִים is used. There it describes an offering of thanksgiving for YHWH (Lev 19:24, קָדַשׁ הַלּוּלִים); yet since the Shechemites are characterised as Baal worshippers and the festival is set in Baal's temple, the reference is probably to Baal. <sup>192</sup> The narrator further describes the meeting as a festival where the Baalists eat and drink (9:27), so that the word הַלּוּלִים might also play on הָלַל and provide a disparaging description of the festival. It thus appears that the narrator coins the word הַלּוּלִים for the context of the Abimelech narrative to express his point of view that the festival of thanksgiving (הַלּוּלִים) is rather an idolatrous festival of curses (הַלּוּלִים); <sup>193</sup> and indeed, although he uses a different root (קָלַל) to describe their cursing (9:27), the narrator still records that they curse Abimelech.

<sup>190</sup> Since it remains unclear whether אָח refers to Gaal's brothers, more generally to his relatives, or even to unrelated companions, we shall infer that the narrator deliberately chooses this noun to establish a parallel to other uses of אָח in the Abimelech narrative.

<sup>191</sup> BUSH, *Judges*, 129, assumed that Gaal was a citizen of Shechem who had ceased for a time to be a resident there and who now returned. Yet the expression {עָבַר + כָּ} as well as the lack of any hint by the narrator of Gaal being a Shechemite makes this assumption unlikely.

<sup>192</sup> Cf. 16:24; BURNEY, *Judges*, 279; WOLF, "Judges", 441.

<sup>193</sup> CROWN, "Reinterpretation": 95.

Having eaten and drunk, and perhaps drunk too much, Gaal and the Baalists of Shechem disparage or renounce (√קלל pi.) Abimelech in Baal's temple (9:27).<sup>194</sup> Since Abimelech has already been identified as Baalism's representative, the narrator implies that the Baalists renounce the representative of their own god. Hence at this point in the narrative it becomes further evident that the Baalists are divided among themselves, and the narrator tells these events to suggest that following Baal has no benefits but only leads to alienation.

There have been numerous attempts to explain the details of Gaal's proposal;<sup>195</sup> the main message, however, is clear insofar as Gaal stirs up the Shechemites against Abimelech and proposes to remove him as king. Gaal's speech, which centres around the threefold use of √עבד as the only verb in it, is divided into four lines, whereby lines one, two and four each consist of a question that prepare for line three that contains the proposal (9:28):

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| And Gaal, the son of Ebed, said:                             | וַיֹּאמֶר גַּעַל בֶּן־עֵבֶד                   |
| 1 Who is Abimelech and what Shechem that we serve him?       | מִי־אֲבִימֶלֶךְ וּמִי־שָׁכֶם כִּי נַעֲבָדֵנוּ |
| 2 Is he not the son of Jerubbaal and Zebul his commissioner? | הֲלֹא בֶן־דִּבְעֵל וּזְבֻל פְּקִידוֹ          |
| 3 Serve the men of Hamor, the father of Shechem!             | עֲבָדוּ אֶת־אֲנָשֵׁי חָמֹר אָבִי שָׁכֶם       |
| 4 But why should we serve him?                               | וּמָדוּעַ נַעֲבָדֵנוּ אֲנָחְנוּ:              |

The first line of Gaal's speech contrasts Abimelech with Shechem.<sup>196</sup> It appears that Gaal either implies that Abimelech is not worthy to be king over Shechem or that Shechem is too good to be subject to Abimelech. By using the grammatical first person plural to describe the Shechemites as they serve Abimelech (lines 1, 4), Gaal identifies himself with the Shechemites,<sup>197</sup> although the narrator introduces him as a foreigner who passes through Shechem (9:26). As already observed, Gaal thus parallels Abimelech, who also comes to Shechem as a foreigner (9:1) and claims to be a Shechemite (9:2).

<sup>194</sup>For this translation of √קלל pi., see HERBERT CHANAN BRICHTO, *The Problem of "Curse" in the Hebrew Bible*, JBL.MS 13 (Philadelphia, Penn.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1963), 138.

<sup>195</sup>For a fine discussion of 19<sup>th</sup> century solutions, see MOORE, *Commentary*, 257-258.

<sup>196</sup>For the impersonal use of מי, see Judg 13:17; Mic 1:5; GK §37a. — GRESSMANN, *Anfänge*, enclosure "Textkritische Anmerkungen", 10, favoured an emendation of שָׁכֶם in line 1 to read \*שָׁכֶם; and ROBERT G. BOLING, "'And Who Is Š-K-M?' (Judges IX 28)", *VT* 13 (1963): 479-482; *IDEM*, *Judges*, 177, similarly preferred to read \*שָׁכֶמי ('the Shechemite') and refer it to Zebul, taking in account both Ⓞ's ὑπὸς Συχεμ and the parallel to the second line, where Abimelech is described as the son of Jerubbaal and Zebul as his Shechemite commissioner; similarly interpreted KEIL, *Commentar*, 278-279, though without an emendation. With these renderings, however, two questions arise. First, how could Gaal contrast the rulership of Zebul as a Shechemite with the proposed rule of such Shechemites, who the sons of Hamor are (line 3)? Second, why does Gaal refer to Abimelech alone as the wrong ruler and not to both Abimelech and Zebul (line 4)?

<sup>197</sup>Similarly, SOGGIN, *Judges*, 185.



The second line of Gaal's speech provides an answer to the rhetorically asked question of the first line ("who is Abimelech?")<sup>198</sup> by diminishing Abimelech as the son of the Baal-contender Jerubbaal and identifying him as the enemy of the Baal worshippers.<sup>199</sup> Hence Gaal uses the same approach to denounce Abimelech that Abimelech uses to denounce Jerubbaal's seventy sons (9:2) and argues that, given the high esteem of Shechem, Abimelech and Zebul are not worthy to rule over Shechem and the Shechemites deserve better than to be subject to Abimelech and Zebul.

Yet this statement requires a solution in the form of a proposal concerning who should reign instead of Abimelech and Zebul. This proposal is provided in the third line, where Gaal advocates that the Shechemites should serve the men of Hamor, the father of Shechem (אֲנָשֵׁי חָמוֹר אָבִי שָׁכֶם). Since חָמוֹר אָבִי שָׁכֶם is mentioned as the founder and leader of Shechem (Gen 33:19; cf. Josh 24:32), Gaal seems to appeal to the pride of the Shechemites by proposing that they should be subject to their own rulers rather than to the foreigner Abimelech.<sup>200</sup> This line, which is enclosed by questions that lead to the proposal, and which is the only line that contains a proposal, contains Gaal's main argument. The line also stands out in a grammatical analysis, as it is the only line that uses עֲבַדְוּ in the grammatical second person plural imperative in contrast to the first and fourth lines where it is used in the first person plural indicative.<sup>201</sup> Hence Gaal argues that the Shechemites—including himself and his companions—should not serve Abimelech (lines 1, 4), rather they—excluding himself and his companions—should serve the Hamorites (line 3). He thus describes himself and his companions as fellow Shechemites and at the same time implies that they are the legitimate descendants of the Hamorites<sup>202</sup> and the legitimate rulers of Shechem. Yet since the narrator introduces them when they enter Shechem as foreigners (9:26), he identifies their claim to be descendants of the Hamorites as a claim not based on genealogical grounds but rather on ideological grounds; they worship Baal like the Shechemites.

The fourth line brings home the argument by assuming that it is nonsense to serve Abimelech. By postponing the personal pronoun אֲנִי to the end of the line and of the whole proposal, Gaal once more addresses his Shechemite audience, identifies himself

<sup>198</sup>Similarly, STUDER, *Richter*, 253, who, however, in addition sought the answer to the second question ("who is Shechem") in the third line ("the men of Hamor, the father of Shechem").

<sup>199</sup>CASSEL, *Richter*, 93; ENNS, *Judges*, 81.

<sup>200</sup>Similarly, MOORE, *Book*, 47.

<sup>201</sup>This imperative (עֲבַדְוּ) excludes the interpretation that the second and third line form just one question (⊗, for example, reads \*עֲבַדְוּ) or that the third line addresses Zebul, who should serve the men of Hamor (thus, EMIL KAUTZSCH, "Richter 9, 28", *ZAW* 10 [1890]: 299-300).

<sup>202</sup>Similarly, TÄUBLER, *Studien*, 273; BOLING, *Judges*, 176.

and his companions with them, and stresses the difference between their own high status and their servanthood under Abimelech. By conclusively identifying himself and his companions with the Shechemites, Gaal makes his proposal more acceptable for them and pushes them to accept it. After all, he invites them to think, none of them should be subject to Abimelech.

Gaal continues with a plan of procedure should his proposal be accepted (9:29):

Oh, if someone gave these people into my hand!	וּמִי יִתֵּן אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה בְּיָדִי
Then I would remove Abimelech!	וְאָסִירָה אֶת־אֲבִימֶלֶךְ
And he said to Abimelech:	וַיֹּאמֶר לְאֲבִימֶלֶךְ
Increase your army and ( <i>or</i> , great is your army; now,) come out!	רַבָּה צְבָאָךְ וְצֵאָה:

Using the particle  $\text{מִי}^{203}$  for the third time in his speech, Gaal expresses his desire to get hold of Abimelech and urges his audience to catch Abimelech and hand him over to him.<sup>204</sup> With  $\text{הָעָם הַזֶּה}$  Gaal could refer to Abimelech and his men as addressed immediately thereafter (9:29b) or to the Shechemites as his audience. Yet since after the record of Abimelech’s crowning (9:6) Abimelech has only appeared unaccompanied in the narrative and in Gaal’s speech, it is unlikely that Gaal would suddenly refer to many people and imply Abimelech and his men. Rather, by using the general noun  $\text{עָם}$  to imply many people, and by further calling for them to be given into his hand, he seems to refer to the Shechemites. Gaal thus directly demands the Shechemites to make him ruler over them so that he might remove ( $\sqrt{\text{סור}}$  hif.) Abimelech.<sup>205</sup>

Therefore, with his proposal Gaal attempts to replace Abimelech as ruler over Shechem. He thus challenges Abimelech by rhetorically addressing him<sup>206</sup> and calling him to increase ( $\text{רַבָּה}$ , 9:29)<sup>207</sup> his army and meet him. That Gaal first asks Abimelech to increase his army has a clearly disparaging connotation as it implies that Abimelech is unable to muster an army sufficiently large to resist Gaal’s attack. It also demonstrates that Gaal is confident of winning the battle against Abimelech.

The hif’il  $\text{הָסִיר}$  also echoes the covenant at Shechem, where it is used to urge the Israelites to throw away their foreign gods (Josh 24:14,23); and since the narrator of

<sup>203</sup>  $\text{וּמִי}$  indicates a new beginning in Gaal’s speech (GK §154b), containing the realisation of his proposal.

<sup>204</sup> GK §151b.

<sup>205</sup> Similarly, CASSEL, *Richter*, 93.

<sup>206</sup> Q reads  $\text{וַיֹּאמֶר}$ , cf.  $\text{ע}$  and  $\text{פ}$ ; similarly, G translates  $\text{καὶ ἔρω}$ ; cf. *BHS*. However, M should be retained as the *lectio difficilior*, since it can be explained as introduction to a rhetorical question.

<sup>207</sup> Whether the form  $\text{רַבָּה}$  is interpreted an unusual form of the pi’el imperative  $\text{רַבֵּה}$  or of the adjective  $\text{רַבָּה}$  (GK §48 l; cf. *BHS*) does not alter the sense, since in both cases the disparaging connotation is obvious as Gaal uses his challenge in an ironical sense and disputes Abimelech’s ability to recruit an army sufficient enough to encounter him effectively.



Judges uses the *hif'il* הִסִּיר apart from our passage only once more and there in this sense (10:16), it might be implied that he intends the religious connotation of the *hif'il* הִסִּיר also in this passage. This implication is not strange if one is reminded that Abimelech represents Baalism. The narrator’s message is, therefore, that not only Abimelech should be removed as the Shechemites’ leader but indeed Baal should be removed as their god and Baalism as their religion.

With this record of Gaal’s appearance, the narrator describes Gaal as an empty boaster against Abimelech. Gaal is thus worse than Abimelech, who still sticks to the truth in describing himself as a Shechemite and his brothers as sons of Jerubbaal, and who still leaves it to the Shechemites to accept or deny his proposal and to crown him as king or refuse to do so. This has two effects. First, Baalism is described as an empty boasting without real support; and second, the leadership of a Baalist encourages even worse rebels. Baalism is, therefore, described as a religion that instead of building up its followers, only leads to a spiral of deterioration.

*b Abimelech Fights against Gaal (9:30-41)*

Following Gaal’s boasting, the narrator introduces Zebul. Like Gaal’s sudden appearance, which pointed to YHWH’s involvement, Zebul’s sudden appearance might similarly point to YHWH’s involvement. It is YHWH, therefore, who remains in control in the narrative and who initiates every step in the Baalist’s mutual destruction so far.

Zebul is introduced by the narrator as the שָׂר of Shechem. The narrator thus corrects Gaal’s disparaging description of Zebul as commissioner (פְּקִיד, 9:28) and instead describes him as Shechem’s ruler. With the name זָבֹל (‘exalted’; or, ‘lord’, ‘prince’)<sup>208</sup> the narrator might also hint at the longer form זָבֹל בְּעַל (‘Baal-prince’),<sup>209</sup> describe Zebul as a Baal worshipper, and imply Baal’s rulership over the city.

Zebul listens to the words of Gaal, who curses Abimelech, and he gets angry. Hence at this point in the narrative the narrator has the Baalists get angry at themselves, thus suggesting that they do not support the representative of their own god and begin to fight against him. Once again, the Baalists are depicted as a disunited group. Yet to inform Abimelech, Zebul secretly<sup>210</sup> sends messengers to him to inform him of the events at Shechem, namely, that Gaal stirs up (צוֹרֵר; or, alienates) the city against him,<sup>211</sup> and to

<sup>208</sup>HALAT, s.v. זָבֹל, זָבֹל, זָבֹל I, and זָבֹל II.

<sup>209</sup>GARY V. SMITH, “זָבֹל”, in *NIDOTTE*, vol. 1: 1074.

<sup>210</sup>Accepting בְּתָרְמָה (מ), since the frequently proposed emendation to read בְּאִרְזָמָה\* (cf. *BHS*) is not supported by any text-critical evidence; see MOORE, *Commentary*, 259; similarly, KITTEL, *Geschichte*, 37; cf. BOLING, *Judges*, 178, who rendered, “by a ruse”.

<sup>211</sup>BURNEY, *Judges*, 282; BOLING, *Judges*, 178; SOGGIN, *Judges*, 187.

advise him how to react, namely, to lie in ambush (ארב, 9:32) in the fields and make a dash (פשט, 9:33) against the city. This advice parallels the narrator's description of the Shechemites' behaviour against Abimelech (ארב, 9:25),<sup>212</sup> which is identified as a direct consequence of YHWH's sending of an evil spirit between the Baalists, and it thus identifies Zebul's advice and Abimelech's obedience in similar terms. This root thus becomes an indication of the fulfilment of Jotham's curse, that is based on mutual destruction.

Abimelech follows Zebul's advice and lies in ambush (ארב) against the city in four groups (ראש, 9:34). However, contrary to Zebul's instructions, Abimelech does not lie in ambush in the fields surrounding Shechem but only on the hills (9:34); and he does not wait until the morning but immediately launches his attack as soon as he observes Gaal coming out of the city (9:35).<sup>213</sup> Standing in the gate of Shechem, Gaal discovers Abimelech and his groups as they descend the hills (9:35-38). Zebul, however, who joins Gaal, lulls him into a false sense of security as he suggests that he mistakes the troops as the shadow of the hills. Only when Gaal observes several groups descending from the hills and one group (ראשיאקד) coming from the diviner's terebinth (אלון מעוננים, 9:37), Zebul challenges him by confronting him with his own words and urging him to fight against Abimelech (בו, sg.; 9:38).

In this dialogue, Gaal refers to the separate group as ראשיאקד (9:37). Having separately focused on Abimelech and his group before (9:35b), the narrator identifies this group as Abimelech's group, and Zebul similarly assumes this interpretation as he refers to the group in the singular as if it were Abimelech only (9:38).<sup>214</sup> This dialogue exposes Gaal as an incapable leader, who is both unable to recognise his enemy on his own and unable to sense Zebul's trickery with him before it is too late. With the reference to the diviner's terebinth (אלון מעוננים, 9:37), which Gaal observes as the point of departure of the attacking group, the narrator hints at the Deuteronomic Law (Deut 18:10,14),<sup>215</sup> where the po'el participle מעונן is used in YHWH's condemnation of divination and sorcery. The narrator thus underlines the idolatrous context of the narrative and implies that pagan divination leads to disaster among the idolaters.

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<sup>212</sup>Similarly, WEBB, *Book*, 155.

<sup>213</sup>Observe that the narrator avoids any reference to daylight in the episode of Abimelech's attack. Although the reference to the shadows of the hills (9:36) may indicate that the attack took place at daylight or at least at dawn (SELLIN, *Sichem*, 13-14), it could also refer to the shadow caused by the moonlight, in which case it would be even easier for Gaal to mistake the groups as shadows of the hills and identify them only as they draw nearer.

<sup>214</sup>Similarly, J. GERALD JANZEN, "A Certain Woman in the Rhetoric of Judges 9", *JSOT* 38 (1987): 34-35.

<sup>215</sup>Also Lev 19:26.



To save his face, Gaal is now forced to fight against Abimelech. Yet Abimelech's army is stronger. Abimelech defeats and pursues him, and Gaal flees while his soldiers fall in the battle. Following his victory, Abimelech takes residence in Arumah, while Zebul drives the rebels out from Shechem (9:39-41). The plural וַיִּפְּלוּ to describe the fall of Gaal's warriors, which contrasts with the singulars וַיִּדְרֹכֵהוּ<sup>216</sup> with Abimelech as subject and וַיָּנֶס with Gaal as subject (9:40), does not include any information on their killer. Hence the focus remains on the description of the soldiers as Gaal's soldiers, and the narrative appears to characterise Gaal as a coward, who flees and runs for his own life and lets his soldiers be killed for him. Hence the record of the outcome of the battle (9:40a) not only attributes the victory to Abimelech, it also exposes Gaal's boasting (9:28-29) as vain.

*c Summary: The Significance of the Gaal Episode*

The Gaal episode serves several purposes. First, Baalism and hence idolatry in general is described as an unjust and dishonest ideology; Gaal's revolt, which is based on intrigue and his empty boasting, is shown to be unjustified, since nothing in the narrative hints at any bad rulership of Abimelech, so that Gaal appears with a dishonest attitude. Second, idolatry involves a downward spiral that eventually leads to mutual destruction; with Gaal mirroring Abimelech, the Baalists of the second generation are even worse than their predecessors. This agrees with Jotham's forecast of mutual destruction of the Baal worshippers, whom the narrator uses as examples of idolaters in general, so that it is implied that neither Baal nor any other pagan god can contradict YHWH's prophecies. Third, Baal and any idol is non-communicative and dependent on their own followers. Abimelech as the appointed representative of Baal never speaks or acts independently in this episode;<sup>217</sup> instead, the narrative is carried by his representative Zebul and his opponent Gaal. Finally, idolatry leads to destruction without any interference from outside; all the characters in the Gaal episode are Baal worshippers, and they fight against and kill each other for internal reasons, while Baal is pictured as a god who fails to protect his followers. The implied conclusions are that Baal does not possess sufficient power and is, therefore, not god, and that YHWH is more powerful than any foreign god.

These characteristics of idolatry have counterparts in the YHWH worship as described in the Gideon narrative. First, YHWH's unwillingness to deliver Israel is justified in the

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<sup>216</sup>Q has the plural וַיִּדְרֹכֵם, implying that Abimelech pursues Gaal and his companions; yet because of the following singular וַיָּנֶס for but one fleeing person (9:40), מ is to be preferred.

<sup>217</sup>SOGGIN, *Judges*, 188. FOKKELMAN, "Remarks", 37, even claimed that Abimelech was dependent on others between his crowning and his death; however, as we shall see, Abimelech takes the initiative after the initial victory over Shechem.

light of Israel's apostasy (6:8-10). Second, YHWH worship leads to Israel's deliverance from enemies (6:8-10; 7:19-22). Third, YHWH communicates with his followers (6:8-10,11-24,25-26; 6:36–7:8) and is not dependent on anyone (7:19-22). Finally, YHWH worship does not depend on any human to be successful (7:19-22). Hence the narrator contrasts YHWH worship with idolatry; and by picturing Baalism in the Gaal episode, he shows that YHWH worship, which leads to life and peace, is preferable to idolatry, which ends in death and destruction.

#### 4 The Fulfilment of Jotham's Curse: Abimelech and the Baal Worshipers Kill each Other (9:42-54)

Introductory remarks. Having introduced an internal reason for Abimelech's battle against Shechem, the narrator continues his narrative with the account of how Jotham's curse is implemented in three steps. Abimelech destroys the idolatrous city of Shechem (9:42-45), he kills the Baal worshippers of Shechem (9:46-49), and he is killed by the Baalists (9:50-54). These three episodes are closely connected to the context and to each other through the setting of the first episode on the day following Abimelech's victory over Gaal (9:42), through the reference to the refugees of the tower of Shechem as the **מִגְדַל־שֶׁכֶם** (9:46) despite the record of the complete destruction of Shechem in the preceding episode, and through the reference to the refugees of the tower of Thebez as **בֵּית־הָעֵיר** (9:51) despite the record of the extinction of all the Baalists of Shechem in the preceding episode. The narrator thus connects Abimelech's battles against Shechem and his own death with Gaal's revolt, which was the result of the sending of YHWH's evil spirit because of the evil deeds of the Baal worshippers as addressed in Jotham's curse. It follows that the surface reason for Abimelech's death is Gaal's revolt, while the underlying reason is YHWH's judgement on Abimelech and the Baal worshippers. The narrator thus suggests that, although YHWH's punishment for the Shechemites' apostasy and idolatry is the ultimate reason for their death, Baalism is nevertheless responsible for the mutual destruction recorded in these episodes.

In the light of the whole Gideon-Abimelech narrative, there are further parallels of Abimelech's continued battles (9:46-54) to Gideon's battles (7:19-22; 8:5-21). First, both protagonists fight against the already defeated enemy and two cities. Second, by referring to the Baalists as those of Migdal-Shechem (**מִגְדַל־שֶׁכֶם**, 9:46), the narrator keeps the connection to Shechem, so that it appears as if Abimelech continues to fight against Shechem even after its complete destruction (9:45). This is like Gideon, who continues to fight against the Midianites and to pursue them (8:10-13) even after YHWH's devastating victory over them (7:22). Third, both protagonists ask their companions to



watch (רָאָה) them and do (עָשָׂה) what they see them doing (7:17 || 9:48), and both use fire in their attack (7:20 || 9:49). Fourth, the episode of Abimelech's battle against Thebez (9:50-54) parallels the episode of Gideon's fight against Peniel (8:17) in that both episodes immediately follow on the preceding episodes rather unexpectedly without any further introduction and in that both episodes focus on the tower (מִגְדָּל) in the cities (8:9,17 || 9:51,52). Yet while Gideon's successful destruction of the tower of Peniel is recorded with only one sentence, Abimelech's failure to destroy the tower of Thebez and his subsequent death through the enemies hiding in it is given much more attention. Abimelech's death is, therefore, regarded more important than Gideon's selfish battles. The reason for this may lie in the concept of the Abimelech narrative as an illustration of Baalism's disastrous potential, while the Gideon narrative only diminished Gideon's role.

Finally, there are parallels between the climaxes of the Gideon narrative and the Abimelech narrative, as Abimelech's death parallels the death of the Midianite kings, which is the climax of Gideon's deeds. Both the Midianite kings and Abimelech are expecting their immediate death, the former because their death has been announced by Gideon (8:19), the latter because a millstone has already crushed his skull (9:53); and in both narratives the protagonist asks a lad (נֶעֱר) <sup>218</sup> to kill them (הָרַג, 8:20 || מוֹת, 9:54aα; cf. הָרַג, 9:54aβ). Yet while Gideon asks for the Midianite kings to be executed, Abimelech asks for himself to be killed; and while Jether does not draw his sword (שֶׁלֶף + הָרַב, 8:20b), Abimelech's armour bearer obeys, draws his sword (שֶׁלֶף + הָרַב, 9:54), and delivers the death blow to Abimelech. This appears to have an ironic touch. First, while Gideon's actions culminate in the death of the protagonist's enemies (8:18-21)—although the narrator sets the climax only in Gideon's establishment of idolatry (8:22-27)—, the narrator's climax of the Abimelech narrative matches the culmination of Abimelech's actions, which is the death of the protagonist himself; second, while the Midianite officials are executed only after the command to execute them is repeated, Abimelech is killed after one command only; third, while Gideon is honoured for the victory and Israel enjoys rest during Gideon's lifetime, Abimelech dies dishonourably and the Israelites return home after his death; and finally, while the rest in the Gideon narrative is a peaceful rest following on the victory over the oppressors, the rest in the Abimelech narrative appears to be due simply to the death of their leader. The first two elements, which establish parallels between the Midianite kings and Abimelech, may further point to the interpretation, that like the Midianites in the Gideon narrative, Abimelech is the aggressor in the Abimelech narrative and Israel's oppressor.

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<sup>218</sup>If BOLING's assumption is correct that Jether is Gideon's armour bearer (BOLING, *Judges*, 146), this parallel would be further supported.

*a The Partial Fulfilment of the First Part of Jotham's Curse: Abimelech Destroys the Idolatrous City (9:42-45)*

As already observed, the narrator sets the episode of Abimelech's victory over Shechem on the day following on Abimelech's battle against Gaal (9:42). Because of the improbability that the Shechemites dare to leave the city only one day after Abimelech's battle against them,<sup>219</sup> it appears that the narrator's aims are not purely chronological.<sup>220</sup> It rather appears that he deliberately connects both episodes to link Abimelech's destruction of Shechem to Gaal's revolt as the reason for the first attack on Shechem.

By describing the Shechemites' action in rather neutral terms as their going out (√יצא) into the field (הַשָּׂדֶה, 9:42), the narrator implies that they do so with no unusual intention but with the ordinary intention to work in the field,<sup>221</sup> or at least with an unspecified intention; but by repeating that Abimelech attacks those in the fields (בַּשָּׂדֶה, 9:44) rather than those who fight against him, the narrator underlines the peaceful intention of the Shechemites. Abimelech, however, who learns of their action, subjectively perceives (וַהֲיָה) the Shechemites as they come out (√יצא) from the city (מִן־הָעִיר, 9:43), interprets their peaceful behaviour in the light of Zebul's military advice to attack them when he would subjectively observe (וַהֲיָה) them coming out (√יצא) from the city (הָעִיר) against him (9:33), and hence assumes that they go out to fight against him. Accordingly, he attacks and kills them (9:44), utterly destroys the city, and sows it with salt (9:45).

Yet through the narrator's indication of the Shechemites' peaceful intention Abimelech's behaviour appears rather undue and exaggerated, so that the narrator seems to condemn Abimelech's behaviour when he describes him as a rather militant and brutal despot.<sup>222</sup> Since Abimelech is the Shechemites' appointed Baal representative (9:4-6), the implication is that Baalism does not give the conditions for a peaceful life. Instead, even peaceful intentions are endangered and subject to exaggerated violence; for Abimelech has no reason to fight against Shechem, but he nevertheless does so. Baalism is thus condemned as improper, undue, and loaded with unreasonable and exaggerated violence.

<sup>219</sup>SOGGIN, *Judges*, 191.

<sup>220</sup>Cf. GRESSMANN, *Anfänge*, 217, who saw a chronological gap between 9:41 and 9:42; and CUNDALL, "Commentary", 134-135, who assumed that this episode focused on one detail of Abimelech's battle against Shechem as just recorded.

<sup>221</sup>Similarly, for example, JOSEPHUS *Antiquities* 5.247; STUDER, *Richter*, 257; KEIL, *Commentar*, 280; CASSEL, *Richter*, 95; BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 173; OETTLI, *Richter*, 261; CUNDALL, "Commentary", 134; BOLING, *Judges*, 179-180; SOGIN, *Judges*, 192; WOLF, "Judges", 444; OGDEN, "Fable": 307.

<sup>222</sup>GÖRG, *Richter*, 57.



Having defeated the Shechemites, Abimelech breaks down the city and sows it with salt (9:45). While this explication implies the complete destruction of the city and lasting devastation of its surroundings, it also echoes the curse in the context of the renewal of the covenant in Deuteronomy, since both passages mention salt (מֶלַח, Deut 29:22; cf. Judg 9:45) as an element of YHWH's curse (קִלְלָהּ, Deut 29:26; cf. Judg 9:57).<sup>223</sup> This reference to YHWH's curse in Deuteronomy is supported by similar language in the introduction to the Abimelech narrative (8:33-35; cf. also 6:7-10) and in the context of the curse in Deuteronomy (Deut 29:21-27). There the Israelites are warned not to abandon the covenant (בְּרִית) that YHWH has made with them when he brought them out (יִצְאֵם hif.; Deut 29:24) of Egypt, and here they are said to make Baal-Berith their god (8:33) and forget YHWH, who has led them up from Egypt and brought them out (יִצְאֵם hif.) of the house of slavery (6:8). Shechem is thus put on a par with Sodom and Gomorrah, which are mentioned as points of reference in Deuteronomy (Deut 29:22),<sup>224</sup> and that encounter their fate, which also involves salt (מֶלַח, Gen 19:26), because of their immoral behaviour.<sup>225</sup> Therefore, the salting of Shechem similarly suggests that the city stands under YHWH's curse, so that YHWH's anger (אָרַץ), which is the key expression in Deut 29:21-27, comes upon the Shechemites (cf. Judg 10:7) as the fulfilment as Jotham's curse.<sup>226</sup> Accordingly, the term שָׁבַם בְּעַלֵי no longer appears in the subsequent episodes.

Yet the first part of Jotham's curse is not yet fulfilled with the destruction of Shechem. This is implied by three features in the narrative. First, one expects Abimelech destroy Shechem with fire (9:20); yet one finds that Shechem is broken down rather than burned (9:45). But one could still suppose that Abimelech breaks down the city and kills the citizens through the use of fire,<sup>227</sup> although this detail is not mentioned in this episode. Yet since the lack of the key word שָׁבַם contrasts with its use in the following episode of the destruction of the temple of El-Berith (9:49), it appears more likely that the narrator continues the narrative of the fulfilment of Jotham's curse in the following

<sup>223</sup> Similarly, BURNEY, *Judges*, 283; FRANK CHARLES FENSHAM, "Salt as Curse in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East", *BibArch* 25, no. 2 (1962): 48-50; BOLING, *Judges*, 180; BLOCK, "Judges", s.v. '9:42-45'.

<sup>224</sup> Similarly, BUSH, *Judges*, 134; FAUSSET, *Judges*, 163.

<sup>225</sup> Similarly, the second appendix to Judges (Judg 19–21) displays extensive references to Sodom and Gomorrah, which should be interpreted in the light of the idolatry recorded in the first appendix (Judg 17–18).

<sup>226</sup> The observations by MOORE, *Commentary*, 263; and BOLING, *Judges*, 180, that the destruction of Shechem somewhat resembled the destruction of Ai as recorded in Joshua (Josh 8), underlines this interpretation insofar as it places the Canaanite city of Ai on the same level as idolatrous Shechem, so that it may be assumed that YHWH turns against Shechem.

<sup>227</sup> This was indeed argued by ANDERSON, "Nature", 173.

episode. Second, in the next episode we still encounter Shechemites (9:46), so that their extinction is not yet accomplished with the destruction of Shechem. And third, for the only time in the Abimelech narrative, the narrator uses the noun עַם rather than בְּעָלִים to describe Abimelech's opponents (9:42,43,45), thus refusing to describe them with the word that is used in Jotham's curse (9:19,20) and avoiding the perception that the breaking down of Shechem and the killing of its citizens completely fulfils that curse.

Hence the destruction of Shechem, which continues Abimelech's battle against the treacherous Shechemites, should rather be interpreted as a partial fulfilment of the first part of Jotham's curse only. The episode above all links Gaal's revolt to the destruction of Shechem and identifies the internal dissension between the Baalists as the reason for the destruction. Hence on the one hand, the destruction is put down to YHWH's curse, yet on the other it is brought about by the Baal worshippers themselves.

*b The Complete Fulfilment of the First Part of Jotham's Curse: Abimelech Kills the Baal Worshippers (9:46-49)*

The narrator continues by focusing on the Baalists of the tower of Shechem (בְּעָלֵי מִגְדָּל־שֶׁכֶם) who seek refuge in the temple of their covenant-god. Following the episode of the destruction of Shechem, it appears that the naming of the lords as those of מִגְדָּל־שֶׁכֶם has the purpose of continuing the episodes of the killing of the Shechemites and those of the fulfilment of Jotham's curse. The beginning of the new section with the record that the Shechemites hear (שָׁמְעוּ) about danger (9:46; cf. 9:30,42) and that their reaction is reported (נִגְדָּל) to Abimelech (9:47) draws a parallel with the beginning of the previous sections (9:25,42),<sup>228</sup> where the Shechemites' action is reported (נִגְדָּל) to Abimelech. It thus underlines that the new episode 9:46-49 continues the preceding episodes 9:26-41 and 9:42-45, which are identified as a partial fulfilment of Jotham's curse. Furthermore, by setting נִגְדָּל and שָׁמְעוּ in conjunction with each other as in the introduction to Jotham's fable (9:7 || 9:46,47), the narrator emphasises the reference to Jotham's fable and curse<sup>229</sup> and indicates that the new episode will continue this theme of the fulfilment of the curse. At the same time, the parallel lets Abimelech's continued battle against the Shechemites appear as an exaggeration of the initial victory like Gideon's continued battle against the Midianites, and it receives the narrator's disapproval on similar grounds.

The lords of the tower of Shechem, hearing of the events, flee into the house of their אֵל בְּרִית (9:46). The identity of אֵל, however, is uncertain. The noun אֵל might be used as

<sup>228</sup>Similarly, NIELSEN, *Shechem*, 165.

<sup>229</sup>Similarly, NIELSEN, *Shechem*, 165. Elsewhere in the Abimelech narrative, both נִגְדָּל (9:25,42) and שָׁמְעוּ (9:30) appear only without correlation to each other.



proper noun for the god El (e.g., Ezek 28:2)<sup>230</sup> or as a common noun for any god (e.g., Deut 32:12,21).<sup>231</sup> If it is used as a common noun, it would either be used instead of  $\text{בַּעַל}$ <sup>232</sup> or as a general indication of any god.<sup>233</sup> In any case, the reference to  $\text{אֱל}$  is unexpected in the light of the Shechemites' covenant with Baal (8:33; 9:4) and gives it some weight. If  $\text{אֱל}$  is used as a common noun, the reference implies that the narrator now focuses more generally on the Canaanite deities as *gods*. If  $\text{אֱל}$  is used as a proper noun, however, the reference builds on the implication that Baal has failed to protect the Shechemites (cf. 9:42-45), so that they recognise that Baal is less powerful than YHWH and seek refuge in El's temple. This identification of the temple would be supported by the narrator's indication that the Shechemites hear of the events in Shechem and hence appear to be in a different locality.<sup>234</sup> In all cases, the reference to  $\text{אֱל בְּרִית}$  (9:46) prepares for the demonstration that the Canaanite gods are like Baal powerless gods who are unable to keep their covenant and protect their temple and their worshippers from being killed in the fire, that—if  $\text{אֱל}$  refers to Baal—has even been kindled by his own representative (9:49).<sup>235</sup> Then the narrator might even have a purpose in describing the dying Shechemites as  $\text{מְגֹדְלֵי-שָׁבָם}$  (9:49) rather than as  $\text{כָּל-בַּעַלֵי מְגֹדְלֵי-שָׁבָם}$  (9:46,47), implying that Baal fails to keep his covenant and protect them so that they cease to be his worshippers.

As soon as Abimelech hears of the gathering of the Baalists, he and all his people ( $\text{כָּל-הָעָם}$ ) climb a nearby hill, where Abimelech takes the axe,<sup>236</sup> cuts brushwood, lays it on his shoulder ( $\text{שָׁבָם}$ ), and asks his men to follow his example (9:48). There might be an

<sup>230</sup>Thus COOKE, *Judges*, 108; DALGLISH, "Judges", 430; SOGGIN, *Judges*, 192-193.

<sup>231</sup>Against CASSEL, *Richter*, 96; and BOLING, *Judges*, 180, who held that the term  $\text{אֱל בְּרִית}$  referred to YHWH. Yet in this case YHWH would be said to be unable to protect his temple from being destroyed by a representative of Baal, which would appear rather contra productive in the context of the Abimelech narrative.

<sup>232</sup>Thus Ⓞ; also STUDER, *Richter*, 259; KEIL, *Commentar*, 281; BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 174; FAUSSET, *Judges*, 163; OETTLI, *Richter*, 262; GOSLINGA, *Judges*, 372; CROSSAN, "Judges", 157; WEBB, "Judges", 276. — THEODORE J. LEWIS, "The Identity and Function of El/Baal Berith", *JBL* 115, no. 3 (1996): 415-416, claimed that  $\text{אֱל}$  was meant in the narrative even where  $\text{בַּעַל}$  was used.

<sup>233</sup>Thus MOORE, *Commentary*, 265; CUNDALL, "Commentary", 135; ENNS, *Judges*, 76.

<sup>234</sup>SOGGIN, *Judges*, 192.

<sup>235</sup>Cf. JORDAN, *Judges*, 174.

<sup>236</sup>The plural  $\text{הַקְּדָמוֹת}$  can be explained as an original dual to describe an axe with two blades (STUDER, *Richter*, 262), or as a reference to double axes (NIELSEN, *Shechem*, 165); KEIL, *Commentar*, 281, interpreted it as a *constructio pregnans* that refers to the axes that Abimelech and his men were holding; cf. SLOTKI, "Judges", 244. Since these are possible interpretations that make sense in the narrative, an emendation to read the singular  $\text{*קְדָמוֹ}$  or  $\text{*הַקְּדָם}$  (following Ⓞ<sup>A</sup>, ἀξίλην) is not necessary; against MOORE, *Commentary*, 267; IDEM, *Book*, 48; NOWACK, *Richter*, 94; BURNEY, *Judges*, 287; J. GRAY, *Judges*, 309; GÖRG, *Richter*, 58.

ironical connotation inherent in the narrative that Abimelech cuts brushwood; it appears that Abimelech, the king, takes the axes into his own hand, cuts branches of a thorn bush, and carries them on his shoulder (עַל-שִׁכְמוֹ, 9:48). Not only is this a degrading action of a king; it also reflects Jotham's curse, in which Abimelech is described as a bramble-king (9:15,20). Although the narrator uses different words to describe Abimelech and the brushwood, the implication remains that the bramble-king engages with his own sort, cuts his own sort, and uses his own sort to burn the tower of Shechem. Abimelech thus demonstrates how one should deal with him; he, the bramble, should himself be cut off and burned. The noun שִׁכְמוֹ ('shoulder', 9:48), which is used instead of the noun כְּתֵף (16:3)<sup>237</sup> to describe the place where Abimelech puts the brushwood, may also be an intentional choice, since it forms a pun with שִׁכְמוֹ ('Shechem') as the name of the city where the narrative is set. Abimelech is thus described as laying the brushwood onto 'his Shechem' (עַל-שִׁכְמוֹ, 9:48), that is, onto his city, and the narrator identifies Abimelech's burning of the lords of the tower of Shechem as a judgement and the fulfilment of Jotham's curse according to which Abimelech burns the Shechemites. Abimelech, the bramble and idolater, indeed directs his action against his own city, and fire comes out from the bramble Abimelech to burn the Shechemites with brushwood as foretold in Jotham's fable (9:15,20).<sup>238</sup> The irony should not be missed that the idolaters are burned by the chief idolater in the temple of their own covenant-god,<sup>239</sup> which points to the devastating consequences of idolatry.

Hence the first part of Jotham's curse (9:20a), by which Jotham announces the Shechemites' punishment through Abimelech, is completely fulfilled at this point.<sup>240</sup> This is underlined by the narrator who closes the episodes of Abimelech's battle with the number of the casualties (9:49)<sup>241</sup> and subsequently refers neither to Shechem nor to the lords of Shechem any more. Hence Shechem and the Shechemites are wiped out in the narrative and the first part of Jotham's curse is fulfilled; and ironically, it is fulfilled only when Abimelech fights against the Shechemites' covenant-god himself and burns his temple. This feature underlines the theological dimension of the Abimelech narrative as a demonstration the powerlessness and non-existence of these gods, the destructive force of idolatry, the uselessness of worshipping other gods, who can not protect their worshippers

<sup>237</sup>Both nouns, † (Judges).

<sup>238</sup>Similarly, SCHULZ, *Richter*, 61; NÖTSCHER, "Richter", 674.

<sup>239</sup>DALGLISH, "Judges", 430; and JORDAN, *Judges*, 174, applied the irony to Baalism only.

<sup>240</sup>Similarly, NÖTSCHER, "Richter", 674; MARTIN, *Judges*, 127-128; FRITZ, "Abimelech": 132-133; JANZEN, "Woman": 35; BECKER, *Richterzeit*, 194.

<sup>241</sup>Cf. 3:29; 4:16; 8:10, where a similar record closes those narratives.



from being killed in their own temple; and since the curse is delivered by a representative of YHWH, its fulfilment also demonstrates YHWH's superiority over foreign gods even in an idolatrous environment.

*c The Fulfilment of the Second Part of Jotham's Curse: The Baal Worshipers Kill Abimelech (9:50-54)*

The second part of Jotham's curse, however, according to which Abimelech must be killed by the Baalists, still remains to be fulfilled; accordingly, the narrator extends the term *בְּעָלִים* to the citizens of Thebez<sup>242</sup> in the following episode (9:50-54), thus allowing that despite the extinction of the Baalists of Shechem, they might still kill Abimelech. Further, the episode of Abimelech's campaign against Thebez displays extensive parallels to the preceding episode of Abimelech's battle against Shechem and Migdal-Shechem.<sup>243</sup> Both cities are besieged by Abimelech (9:43 || 9:50) and captured (*לכד*) by him (9:45 || 9:50); both cities have a tower (*מגדל*) into which all the men and women flee (9:46,49 || 9:51); and in both episodes Abimelech attempts to set the tower on fire (9:49 || 9:52). The episode thus continues the preceding episode, so that the implementation of Jotham's curse is continued.

Without further delay, Abimelech continues his battle against the Baalists with his campaign against Thebez; all the Thebezites, however, seek refuge in the tower of their city (9:50-51). By introducing the scene with *וַיֵּלֶךְ אֲבִימֶלֶךְ* (9:50) and referring to the Thebezites with *וְכָל בְּעָלֵי הָעִיר* (9:51), the narrator draws a parallel to the episode of Abimelech's rise, where he introduces Abimelech in his attempt to become king over Shechem in similar terms (*וַיֵּלֶךְ אֲבִימֶלֶךְ*, 9:1; *כָּל־בְּעָלֵי שָׁכֶם*, 9:2), so that Abimelech's fall has a similar setting to his rise. The implications are first, that Baal worship does not lead anywhere, it rather ends where it begins; and second, Abimelech is killed by those whom he invited to crown him.

As Abimelech approaches the tower to burn it, as he had burned the tower of Shechem (9:49), one nameless woman (*אִשָּׁה אֲחֹת*) throws an upper millstone (*פֶּלֶא רֶכֶב*) on his head (*רִאשׁוֹ*) and crushes (*וַתִּרְצֵץ*) his skull (9:53), so that Abimelech fears to become known as one who is killed (*וְהָרְגוּ*) by a woman (9:54). By describing the woman as one (*אֲחֹת*) woman, the narrator on the one hand recalls Abimelech's argumentation, according to which it is better for the Shechemites to be ruled by one man instead of seventy men

<sup>242</sup>The exact location of Thebez is uncertain; YOHANAN AHARONI, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Historiography*, trans. A. F. RAINEY (London: Burns & Oates, 1967), 242, and BOLING, *Judges*, 182, proposed the identification of Thebez with Tirzah, 6 miles north-east of Shechem.

<sup>243</sup>MARTIN, *Judges*, 128-129.

(9:2),<sup>244</sup> since quite apart from seventy men, one man can be killed and indeed is killed by just one woman. On the other hand, like Gaal, the woman comes from nowhere, so that it is assumed that YHWH uses her to repay Abimelech's deeds. By referring to the weapon as a stone, the narrator—despite using different words—draws a further parallel to the stone on which Abimelech kills his brothers (9:5).<sup>245</sup> Not only is the record of Abimelech's death only the second reference to one stone, therefore, quite conversely to the first record, this time the stone is not used by Abimelech to kill others but is used by a woman to kill Abimelech. Hence Abimelech is paid back according to his own deeds and with his own weapons; in other words, the retribution expressed in these verses indeed serves as the instrument by which YHWH's divine power over those who abandon him is demonstrated.

Further, within the context of the Abimelech narrative the verb *וְתָרַץ* (9:53)<sup>246</sup> might form a pun with the verb *וַיִּתֵּץ* (9:45), with which it shares two consonants and which describes Abimelech's breaking down of Shechem. It thus connects Abimelech's death with the destruction of Shechem and interprets his death as its parallel (cf. 9:56). Similarly, the use of the negatively loaded *וַהֲרֹג* (9:54) echoes Abimelech's killing (*וַהֲרֹג*) of the Shechemites (9:45) and his killing (*וַהֲרֹג*) of his brothers (9:5), and since the narrator puts this root into Abimelech's mouth now, it further reflects ironically on Abimelech, since he recognises that he will be remembered as having been cruelly killed as he killed his brothers and the Shechemites. As *וַהֲרֹג* is also used in Jotham's accusation that the Shechemites have killed Jerubbaal's sons (9:18) and also twice in the theological explanation of the Abimelech narrative (9:24), the narrator identifies Abimelech's death as the repayment of his executions, by which he comes to power, and hence as a parallel to the Shechemites' death as a partial fulfilment of Jotham's curse. Abimelech thus finds his death by the same means by which he comes to power,<sup>247</sup> and

<sup>244</sup>Cf. O'CONNELL, *Rhetoric*, 161.

<sup>245</sup>CASSEL, *Richter*, 97; BOOGAART, "Stone": 51; WEBB, *Book*, 155; JANZEN, "Woman": 35-36; FOKKELMAN, "Remarks", 39.

<sup>246</sup>*וְתָרַץ* is used only twice in Judges (9:53; 10:8). The unusual form *וְתָרַץ* (9:53) might be interpreted as a hif'il imperfect of *וַתְּרַץ* (GB<sup>17</sup>, s.v. *וַתְּרַץ*; BDB, s.v. *וַתְּרַץ*; STUDER, *Richter*, 264; KEIL, *Commentar*, 281; BERTHEAU, *Richter*, 175; MOORE, *Commentary*, 269; cf. HALAT, s.v. *וַתְּרַץ*) and be rendered 'to crush', as a qal imperfect of the same root (GK §67p; cf. HALAT, *ibid.*) and be rendered 'to ill-treat, to abuse', or as a hif'il imperfect of *וַתְּרַץ* (cf. HALAT, s.v. *וַתְּרַץ*; STUDER, *Richter*, 264) and be rendered 'to chase quickly off'. While the first rendering is evidently implied in the episode, since the millstone is thrown onto Abimelech's skull (9:53) so that he anticipates his near death (9:54), the third meaning might reflect the woman's intention to chase Abimelech off, and the second meaning might provide the narrator's denouncing assessment of the recorded events, by which the upper millstone abuses Abimelech.

<sup>247</sup>Similarly, JACOB M. MYERS and PHILLIPS P. ELLIOTT, "The Book of Judges", in *The Interpreters Bible*, ed. GEORGE ARTHUR BUTTRICK (New York [*et al.*]: Abingdon, 1953), vol. 2: 760.



Jotham's curse, which is based on the repayment of Abimelech's evil deeds, is fulfilled at this point in the narrative.

Hence Abimelech's last command to his armour bearer is used by the narrator to emphasise Abimelech's disgraceful death, since it provides the explanation for Abimelech's death by the sword. Abimelech is already fatally injured by the millstone, so that he would die anyway. Yet Abimelech's last command shows that his armour bearer does not kill him because he rebelled against his tyrannical master, he kills him only because Abimelech recognises that he is fatally wounded and wants to avoid an ignominious death. Hence Abimelech's death is indeed caused by the millstone thrown by the woman, so that Abimelech indeed dies by the hand of the woman (cf. 2 Sam 11:21).<sup>248</sup> The message is that the Baal representative Abimelech is not even given an honourable death, but dies in a disgraceful way.

By having Abimelech ask for his own death and by leaving both the woman and the armour bearer nameless, so that no-one may be credited with Abimelech's death,<sup>249</sup> the narrator kills several birds with one stone. First, he intensifies the ignominy of Abimelech's death, since an ordinary woman and an undistinguished man kill him;<sup>250</sup> and since Abimelech's death parallels that of Sisera (4:21; 5:26), Abimelech dies as dishonourably by the hand of a woman as Israel's enemy of the preceding narrative, so that the Baalist Abimelech is characterised as Israel's enemy. Second, the narrator denies the audience any opportunity of identifying oneself with any other character in the narrative and instead leaves all attention focused on Abimelech right up to his violent and disgraceful death, so that it is starkly obvious, in Abimelech's death, how a Baal worshipper, who stands under YHWH's curse, meets his just deserts. Finally, the narrator attributes Abimelech's death to YHWH as the one who causes the treachery between Abimelech and his subjects (9:23-25) that eventually leads to the extinction of both parties and hence also to Abimelech's death (cf. 9:56).

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<sup>248</sup>This interpretation is supported by the use of the polel *וּמִתְּנִי (מתן)* in the record of Abimelech's death (9:54), by which the narrator ensures that Abimelech's unnamed armour bearer only completes the work of the woman; cf. 1 Sam 14:13; 2 Sam 1:9,10,16; Ps 109:16. Similarly, A. EHRLICH, *Randglossen*, 115.

<sup>249</sup>Against BAL, *Death*, 217-224, who named the woman and arrived at the conclusion that she submitted Abimelech to her and hence was a major character in this episode; yet BAL still recognised that unlike Jael, this woman did not receive much attention from the narrator.

<sup>250</sup>Cf. URIEL SIMON, "Minor Characters in Biblical Narrative", *JSOT* 46 (1990): 11-19, who demonstrated that minor characters may serve to characterise major characters.

## 5 Summary: The Fulfilment of Jotham's Curse

Through the setting of Abimelech's battles in the context of Gaal's revolt, the narrator combines Gaal's revolt and Abimelech's battles and regards both as episodes that lead to the fulfilment of Jotham's curse, which is now eventually applied to all parties. First, Abimelech, the bramble, brings complete destruction upon Shechem and, as an indication of the curse upon it, sows it with salt. At the same time, the narrator draws parallels to the Deuteronomic curse and identifies the destruction of Shechem as YHWH's punishment for their apostasy. Then Abimelech kills all the Baalists of Shechem in the temple of their covenant-god and thus fully implements Jotham's curse. Again, the narrator takes Abimelech's actions and implies that the death of the Baalists suggests that a foreign god can not protect his followers from YHWH's curse; they are thus weaker than YHWH and hence not gods. At last, Abimelech is killed by the Baalists and dies disgracefully. Thus Jotham's curse, according to which both the Shechemites and Abimelech die by each other's hand, is precisely fulfilled. They kill each other, yet at the same time, YHWH is ultimately responsible for their death; in other words, the destruction is put down to YHWH's curse, yet it is set off and achieved through the Baal worshippers themselves.

## C The Record of the Achievement (9:55)

Following the record of Abimelech's death, the Abimelech narrative continues with the account of the Israelites' reaction. Here it is striking that the narrator describes the characters as *אִישׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל*, since the Abimelech narrative focuses on the Shechemites and Thebezites rather than on the Israelites. This description, however, parallels the earlier descriptions of the characters as *אִישׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל* (8:33-35; 9:22),<sup>251</sup> where the narrator indicates that the subsequent narrative exemplifies Israel's general apostasy. Hence the new focus on *אִישׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל* reminds the audience that they will encounter the same fate if they continue to worship foreign gods, and that the issue affects Israel as a whole.

It is also striking that apart from the record that the Israelites return home there is no record of any reaction on their part, nor is there any record of any peace or rest achieved. This might imply that despite the demonstration of YHWH's divine power in the Gideon narrative and the evidence that Baal is not god as suggested in the Abimelech narrative, Israel still fails to recognise and glorify YHWH as god, and that they still do not live in peace. Hence while the Gideon narrative ends with the record of the rest achieved which

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<sup>251</sup>Similarly, BOLING, *Judges*, 182.



is based on the defeat of Israel's enemy, the end of the civil war in the Abimelech narrative is not based on any peace or rest achieved but based on the death of the aggressor alone. Further, while the record of achievement in the Gideon narrative implies that the issue of the narrative is resolved through YHWH's victory, the lack of any such record in the Abimelech narrative implies that the issue in it is not resolved yet. The men of Israel just go home, they stop fighting; but Abimelech's death apparently does not lead to any good consequences; it appears, therefore, that they do not worship YHWH.

## **D Summary: The Demonstration of Baalism's Disastrous Potential**

The Abimelech narrative demonstrates the effects of idolatry for Israel. Following the general idolatrous setting of the narrative, the Israelites enter into a covenant with Baal, and the general reference to the Israelites gives way to the focus on the Shechemites. The narrator thus defines the Abimelech narrative as an example of general idolatry in Israel by which Baal represents the foreign gods and the Shechemites represent Israel. The narrative follows the theme as specified by Yahwist Jotham, who specifies it as the question whether it is right in the light of YHWH's and Jerubbaal's performance as recorded in the Gideon narrative to replace YHWH with Baal, or, in other words, whether YHWH or Baal is god. Yet since the narrator has already demonstrated that YHWH is god and Baal is not existent, the Abimelech narrative demonstrates the other side of the coin, namely, that Baal is not god and Baalism is a self-destructive religion that only leads to disaster and mutual destruction among the Baalists.

Hence the following episodes illustrate that Abimelech is paid back in his own terms. Abimelech's kingship fails; instead of bringing peace and prosperity to Israel, Abimelech brings war and death even though there is no foreign enemy. The narrator thus makes clear that Baalism leads to destruction even without any intervention from outside. Yet YHWH still remains in control at any time, so that it may be argued that he does not protect the Baalists from killing each other. Instead, YHWH appears to approve and even initiate the mutual killing. The foreigner Gaal, paralleling the foreigner Abimelech, wins the trust of the Shechemites and stirs them up against Abimelech. As a consequence Abimelech overcomes Gaal, who is driven out of Shechem. With Abimelech's appetite to fight against Shechem whetted, the following three episodes of the civil war record the implementation of Jotham's curse. First Abimelech destroys Shechem, then he kills the Baalists of Shechem, and finally the Baalists kill Abimelech. Hence Jotham's curse is precisely fulfilled. However, the record of achievement merely records the return of the

Israelites to their homes and lacks any measurable reaction of the Israelites, so that it is implied that they do not worship YHWH.

## E The Theological Conclusion (9:56-57)

Because of the lack of any clear recognition of YHWH as god, the narrator takes two more verses to resolve the theological background of the Abimelech narrative; and given the lack of any recorded reaction of Israel, this conclusion registers disapproval of Israel's behaviour. They should have recognised that Baal is not worthy to be god, that in fact he is not god and indeed not present at all, and in the light of YHWH's performance as recorded in the Gideon narrative, they should return to YHWH and worship him as god.

The key words of the theological conclusion are  $\sqrt{\text{שוב}}$  hif.,  $\sqrt{\text{רעה}}$  and  $\sqrt{\text{הרג}}$ . God ( $\text{אֱלֹהִים}$ ) lets Abimelech's crime ( $\sqrt{\text{רעה}}$ ) against his father, that he kills ( $\sqrt{\text{הרג}}$ ) his seventy brothers, return ( $\sqrt{\text{שוב}}$  hif.) to Abimelech and similarly lets the Shechemites' crime ( $\sqrt{\text{רעה}}$ ) rebound on them ( $\sqrt{\text{שוב}}$  hif.),<sup>252</sup> so that the curse of Jotham, son of Jerubbaal, comes over them. As already observed, the theological conclusion forms an inclusion with the narrator's introductory remarks (9:23-24), from where it repeats  $\sqrt{\text{הרג}}$  and the reference to the seventy brothers, and thus identifies the enclosed episodes as the proper fulfilment of Jotham's curse and as the just repayment of the evil of the Baal worshippers.

Several issues are resolved in these verses. First, the reference to  $\text{אֱלֹהִים}$  describes YHWH as god even in the Baal-dominated Abimelech narrative, so that it is implied that YHWH is the real god and Baal and hence any other foreign god is not god. Hence also the meaning 'My father <YHWH> is king' for the name  $\text{אֲבִימֶלֶךְ}$  is reinforced against the will of the bearer of the name.<sup>253</sup> Second, the repetition of  $\sqrt{\text{הרג}}$  (9:56) from Jotham's curse (9:18) and the theological explanation (9:24 [twice]) identifies this root as the instrument by which Jotham's curse is carried out; and indeed, this root is attested only at significant points in the narrative of the fulfilment of Jotham's curse, namely, when Abimelech kills the Shechemites (9:45) and when he is killed by the woman (9:54). Third, by referring to Jotham as the son of the Baal-fighter Jerubbaal (9:57), the narrator reminds the audience of the theme of the narrative as a demonstration of YHWH's divine

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<sup>252</sup>Similarly, OGDEN, "Fable": 308. — The *waw* ( $\text{וַאֲתָ בַל־רָעָה}$ , 9:57) introduces the description of the other side of the same subject by at the same time emphasising the evil of the Shechemites; WALTER GROSS, *Die Satzteilfolge im Verbalsatz alttestamentlicher Prosa: Untersucht an den Büchern Dtn, Ri und 2Kön*, FAT 17 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1996), 197.

<sup>253</sup>Cf. FOKKELMAN, "Remarks", 34.



power and the failure of Baal. Fourth, the reference to Abimelech’s father (אב, 9:56) as the target of Abimelech’s evil together with the explicit reference to Jerubbaal (יְרֻבְעַל, 9:57) as the last word of the Abimelech narrative implies that Abimelech’s father Jerubbaal, the Baal-fighter, and Jerubbaal’s son Jotham are the noblest characters in the narrative and its real heroes. Fifth, the name יְרֻבְעַל as the last word of the Abimelech narrative recalls the theme of the Gideon narrative (6:30-32) and thus connects both narratives. It literally lets the Baal-fighter Jerubbaal survive the narrative as a witness of “the complete impotence of Baal to defend himself, let alone his followers, and it utters boldly a taunting challenge of Yahwism to the vaunted Canaanite religion of Baal”.<sup>254</sup> Similarly, the reference to the Shechemites as אַנְשֵׁי שָׁכֶם rather than as בְּעָלֵי שָׁכֶם might once more (cf. 9:49) contain the assessment that the Shechemites are ordinary men, who worship a non-god rather than a god called Baal, since the narrative has proven that Baal does not exist at all. Hence the concluding word of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative contains the result of the narrative in that it states that YHWH rather than Baal is god.

With these implications, the theological conclusion concludes both the Gideon narrative and the Abimelech narrative. The Abimelech narrative is explicitly concluded with the reference to the fulfilment of Jotham’s curse, and the Gideon narrative is concluded with the reference to the Baal-fighter Jerubbaal as Jotham’s father and the implied reference to Jerubbaal’s good deeds for Israel as the background for the Abimelech narrative. Hence the theological conclusion supports the interpretation that the Gideon narrative and the Abimelech narrative should be seen as one narrative only which aims to demonstrate YHWH’s divine power, his superiority over any foreign god, the non-existence of any foreign god, and the self-destructive force of idolatry.

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<sup>254</sup>DALGLISH, “Judges”, 417.

# CHAPTER IV

## CONCLUSIONS

This study has demonstrated first, that the Gideon narrative and the Abimelech narrative should be regarded as one narrative with a theological theme by which the narrator shows that YHWH is god, so that he should be worshipped as god, that the Canaanite gods are not gods, and that idolatry leads to mutual destruction; and second, that the narrator uses several means to carry his argument and convey his message to his audiences. These points shall now be reflected on briefly, before we conclude with an outlook on the significance of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative for the book of Judges.

### A The Gideon-Abimelech Narrative as One Theological Narrative

The Gideon-Abimelech narrative is told as one theological narrative with a focus on YHWH in the Gideon narrative and on Baal, who serves as an example for Israel's general idolatry, in the Abimelech narrative. The content of the two narratives differs widely, allowing conclusions about the godhood of YHWH and Baal. First, while YHWH takes the initiative in the Gideon narrative, defeats the Midianites on his own, and controls the events in the Abimelech narrative, Baal remains silent throughout the Gideon-Abimelech narrative, while the Baal worshippers begin a civil war. Second, while YHWH cares for his worshippers and protects them by fighting against his worshippers' enemies himself, Gideon brings death and idolatry to Israel, and Baalism endangers and even kills the Baal worshippers in a battle against themselves. Third, YHWH is in control even when selfish humans take over and in an environment dominated by Baal, when he uses retribution to demonstrate that abandoning him only leads to disaster. YHWH is thus characterised as a powerful god, worthy to be followed and worshipped, while self-reliance is condemned, Baal is described as an anti-god who is not even present, and Baalism is identified as a self-destructive ideology. Hence the combined Gideon-Abimelech narrative strongly emphasises that YHWH is god, while Baal is not; and since Baalism serves as an example for idolatry in general, it is also emphasised that the idols are not gods either, and that idolatry leads to mutual destruction.

But how should Israel react to the evidence that YHWH is god? As negatively addressed in the introduction to the Gideon narrative, the Israelites have abandoned YHWH, have worshipped other gods, and have not listened to YHWH. Yet although YHWH



has demonstrated his divine power in the recorded history already, it could be argued that YHWH has abandoned Israel as god. In this context, the Gideon-Abimelech narrative shows that YHWH is still in control and is still Israel's god, that the other 'gods' are not gods, that no man but only YHWH can deliver Israel,<sup>1</sup> and that idolatry leads to disaster. Hence the Israelites should acknowledge YHWH as god and worship him. If they don't, their end will be disastrous as demonstrated, though they may at first prosper for a time like the Shechemites do for three years.

The study also demonstrates that a theological reading of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative, more than a purely literary or historical interpretation, accounts for the insertion of every episode in the Gideon and Abimelech narratives at their present place in the plot. Every episode is essential for the proper understanding of the combined Gideon-Abimelech narrative and contributes to its interpretation as a theological narrative that follows the double theme of the demonstration of YHWH's divine power and his claim to be worshipped as god on the one hand and the demonstration of the negative consequences of a human rulership without YHWH and of idolatry on the other hand.

This theological reading of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative also defines its location in the larger context of the so-called Deuteronomistic History and the Old Testament. First, when Gideon breaks down the altar to Baal, he is described similarly to the Judahite kings Joash (2 Kgs 11:18; 2 Chr 23:17), Josiah (2 Kgs 23:12,15; 2 Chr 34:4,7), and Hezekiah (2 Chr 31:1), who are the only other characters in the Hebrew Scriptures who are said to have actually broken down Canaanite altars and have re-established YHWH worship.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, second, Gideon's establishment of idolatry echoes Jeroboam's attempt to replace YHWH worship in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 12:26-33), since both establish an idolatrous cult close to their home in order to direct attention to themselves. In each case, the establishment of YHWH worship is praised and the establishment of idolatry is condemned, so that each episode demonstrates the first commandment, namely, that YHWH does not allow any other god beside him but rather demands to be worshipped alone. Third, Abimelech's crowning in Shechem and his fall through the revolt of the foreigner Gaal there resembles Rehoboam's crowning in Shechem and the revolt of the foreigner Jeroboam there (1 Kgs 11-12). Both episodes stress YHWH's involvement in the events and put down the disaster to the king's idolatry, and both kings engage in warfare against their adversaries. Hence both episodes illustrate the disastrous effects of idolatry. Fourth, Abimelech's death parallels Ahab's death (1 Kgs 22), since both die

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<sup>1</sup>See the following summary of the implications of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative as an integral part of Judges.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. also Jehu (2 Kgs 10), who extinguishes the Baal cult in Israel, but does not follow YHWH with all his heart, and Elijah (1 Kgs 18), who kills four hundred and fifty Baal priests.

seemingly by chance yet in both cases YHWH's hand can be discerned by the audience. In both cases, the death is announced through a representative of YHWH, so that both deaths can be understood as the due punishment for their sin. Fifth, the Gideon-Abimelech narrative as a whole follows the same theme as the narrative of Elijah on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18). Both narratives suggest that YHWH is god and wants to be worshipped, and that Baal is not even existent. Therefore, a theological reading of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative contributes well to a theological understanding of the Deuteronomistic History in particular and the Old Testament in general.

## B The Technique of Narration

### 1 Carrying the Argument

The narrator's argument is a theological one. To carry the argument, the narrator constantly keeps the theological questions of, who is god, and, are the narrated actions correct in the eyes of YHWH, alive in the audience's mind. He does so by several means, which shall be summarised and exemplified here.

First, the narrator describes some events rather ambiguously and thus invites different and even contrasting interpretations of the same events. For example, he draws Gideon's uncertainty before the audience's eyes when he describes him as bringing an offering to a god and presenting a gift to a human visitor in just one action (6:19); he draws a rather ambiguous picture of Gideon's ephod and the role that Gideon plays in that cult (8:24-27); and he gives Abimelech's gathering of brushwood on his shoulder (9:48) a wider meaning in the context of the narrative.

Second, the narrator invites different interpretations of the same event. With the help of puns and word plays he makes possible a literal interpretation of some events while at the same time he hints at a different, sometimes even contrasting interpretation. The name יְרֵבֶעֶל fits into this category, as it should be rendered 'Baal is great', yet in the narrative hints at the רִיבֹל and invites the paronomastic meaning 'Baal-contender' since Gideon has broken down Baal's altar, which then leads to the definition of the theological theme in the sentence 'Let Baal contend against him' (6:31-32). The name יְרֵבֶעֶל may thus carry a double meaning in the narrative, ascribing greatness to Baal, which he needs to demonstrate, and describing Gideon as Baal's enemy. Similarly, despite Gideon's establishment of idolatry (8:24-27), the narrator pictures him rather positively at the beginning of the Abimelech narrative (8:33-35) and in this way underlines the contrast with Abimelech.



Third, the narrator includes comments to assess the recorded events and invite the audience to evaluate the characters' behaviour. The narrator thus guides the audience to draw appropriate conclusions. For example, by describing Gideon and his three hundred men as weary (8:4), he reminds the audience of Gideon's three hundred men who approach the Midianites (7:19-22) and invites the interpretation that Gideon, who relies on himself in the complication, can do nothing without YHWH's support. He thus implies that Gideon's success is dependent on YHWH alone and not on his own strength.

Fourth, the narrator structures several episodes to guide the audience's understanding of the narrative. For example, he clarifies that for Gideon the execution of the kings (8:18-21) is the climax of his extended warfare, while the real climax is the capture of the kings (8:11-12). This real climax is then contrasted with YHWH's initial victory (7:22) and put into a rather bad light by the narrator, who thus disapproves Gideon's extended warfare, evaluates it as the anti-climax of the narrative and shows that the following disaster is due to Gideon's selfish goals.

Hence fifth, the narrator draws parallels from one episode to another and invites a comparison of both episodes. Thus, the episodes of Abimelech's warfare (9:25-55) parallel the episodes of Gideon's extended warfare (7:23-8:21) and invite a comparison of both episodes. This comparison reveals that Abimelech is worse than Gideon, since he parallels only Gideon's selfish nature; further, while Gideon reaches his personal goal, Abimelech reaches his own death only.

Sixth, at some points in the narrative, the narrator provides comments on the narrative and thus either invites the audience to evaluate the incidents or prepares them to read the narrative in a certain way. For example, he evaluates Gideon's idolatrous cult negatively (8:27) and prepares the reader for a rather shocking Abimelech narrative (9:23-24). He thus makes clear that humans that have previously been blessed by YHWH and seemingly acted according to YHWH's will, may soon act without YHWH's approval; but that YHWH has the events still in his hand even when his intervention is not overtly recognisable.

Seventh, the narrator gives examples that YHWH keeps his promises even when humans contradict YHWH's will. Hence YHWH delivers Israel according to his promise (7:22), although Gideon still contradicts YHWH's purpose and takes YHWH's honour for himself (8:22-27). This may warn the audience to keep in mind that a success that corresponds to YHWH's will does not always correspond to YHWH's intention. It rather needs to be evaluated in the light of YHWH's expressed will.

## 2 A Case Study: אֱלֹהִים—God in the Gideon-Abimelech Narrative

As an example, how the narrator uses literary devices to convey his theological message to the audience, we shall now summarise the implications of the use of the noun אֱלֹהִים throughout the Gideon-Abimelech narrative as found in our interpretation.

Within the Gideon-Abimelech narrative, the noun יְהוָה is attested 40 times, the noun אֱלֹהִים 20 times, the proper noun בַּעַל seven times, and the noun אֵל only once even in the whole book of Judges.<sup>3</sup> This evidence shows already that YHWH is the main character in the whole narrative, that Elohim and Baal are set in relation to YHWH, and that Baal is the least present in the narrative—and that the more as five out of the seven occurrences of the proper noun ‘Baal’ appear in a context where Baal suffers rather than acts, namely, when Gideon destroys his altar and is named ‘Jerubbaal’.

The relation between YHWH and foreign gods can be nicely illustrated in a summary of the use of אֱלֹהִים in the Gideon-Abimelech narrative. The noun אֱלֹהִים is used first in the accusing speech of the prophet where YHWH is described as the god of Israel (6:8) and contrasted with the gods of the Amorites (6:10). As the prophet’s speech introduces the theological theme into the narrative, the contrast between YHWH and the gods of the Amorites defines this theme as a theological theme. The reference to the angel of Elohim (6:20), which is surrounded by repeated references to that angel as that of YHWH, again identifies YHWH as Elohim. It is the angel of YHWH, the god, who calls Gideon to deliver Israel from the Midianites, to pull down the altar to Baal and the Asherah, and to build an altar to YHWH, his Elohim (6:26), on its place. Hence the narrator identifies YHWH as Elohim and Baal as non-god; and since Baal, being one of the main gods worshipped in Canaan, serves as an example of any foreign god, these gods are identified as non-gods as well. The Ophrahites, however, who worship Baal, hold Baal to be their god. Hence Joash picks up their conviction and rhetorically proposes to them that Baal should prove that he is god, if he indeed is god (6:31). This speech thus specifies the theme for the Gideon-Abimelech narrative as the question whether YHWH or Baal is god. However, having already identified YHWH as god and the other gods including Baal as non-gods, the narrator’s intention is to show that YHWH is indeed Elohim.

Hence the spirit of YHWH clothes Gideon and enables him to fulfil his call. Gideon, however, needing reassurance, asks Elohim for a sign that he will indeed deliver Israel

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<sup>3</sup> יְהוָה: 6:1[twice],6,7,8[twice],10,11,12[twice],13[3 times],14,16,21[twice],22[3 times],23,24[twice], 25,26,27,34; 7:2,4,5,7,9,15,18,20,22; 8:7,19,23,34; † (Judg 6–9).

אֱלֹהִים: 6:8,10[twice],20,26,31,36,39,40; 7:14; 8:3,33,34; 9:7,9,13,23,27,56,57; † (Judg 6–9).

בַּעַל: 6:25,28,30,31,32; 8:33; 9:4; † (Judg 6–9).

אֵל: 9:46; † (Judges).



(6:36,39), which Elohim provides (6:40). In the second part of the dialogue, however, the narrator ensures that it is YHWH and not Elohim who addresses Gideon (7:2,4,5,7). Hence one might argue that while Gideon ambiguously addresses Elohim, YHWH answers, so that the narrator identifies YHWH as *Elohim*, while Gideon still doubts, who has answered his request and is god. Also the interpretation of the Midianite soldier's dream by his comrade identifies YHWH as god. While the soldier only recognises that Elohim has given their camp into Gideon's hand (7:14), YHWH assures Gideon that he has done so (7:9). Hence again, the narrator identifies YHWH as god. Gideon too appears to acknowledge YHWH as god now, when he calls out his troops with a reference to YHWH, who has given the Midianites into their hand. However, in the light of Gideon's attempt to fight the battle by himself, this reference does not necessarily testify of Gideon's conviction but may also serve to persuade the Israelites of their forthcoming success. Yet the narrator affirms in the following episode that YHWH alone fights the battle (7:22).

In the episodes of Gideon's continuation of the battle, both the name יהוה and the noun אֱלֹהִים only appear in Gideon's mouth, and both times in similar contexts (8:3,7). Yet as the narrator makes clear, these episodes tell of Gideon's selfish continuation of the battle without YHWH's support. Gideon refers to Elohim when he defends himself against the Ephraimites (8:3) and thus leaves the interpretation to the Ephraimites, who has given the princes into their hand. He lets them choose their god and would willingly accept their choice in order to prevent any further clash. On the other hand, Gideon refers to YHWH when he threatens consequences for the denial of support by the Succothites (8:7). With this reference, Gideon claims that YHWH has authorised and instructed him to pursue the Midianites. Any Israelite reluctance to support Gideon is therefore, as Gideon declares, an affront to YHWH, as is any reluctance to acknowledge Gideon's leadership. Hence both nouns reflect Gideon's purpose rather than the narrator's evaluation.

Following Gideon's verbal acknowledgement of YHWH's rulership (8:22-23) yet factual establishment of idolatry (8:24-27), we enter the Abimelech narrative convinced by the demonstration of YHWH's divine power yet irritated by Gideon's establishment of idolatry. Then we find that Israel makes Baal their god (8:33) and forsake YHWH, whom the narrator still describes as their god (8:34); in other words, the Shechemites worship Baal as their god, while the narrator identifies YHWH as the true god in the Abimelech narrative. Therefore, unlike in the Gideon narrative, where YHWH is the god of the narrator and the characters are at least willing to accept him as god, in the Abimelech narrative it is only the narrator who is convinced that YHWH is god, while the characters confess Baal as their god. In this context, Jotham's address of the Shechemites (9:7) uses the noun אֱלֹהִים with both meanings. While Jotham—and with him the narrator—holds

YHWH to be god, the Shechemites might well apply the noun to Baal. Therefore, if Baal is god, the Shechemites have acted correctly when they killed the Baal-fighter's son, so that Jotham's address should result in blessing for them; but if YHWH is god, Jotham's address should result in a curse for them. The Abimelech narrative will hence address the theme who of the two gods is really Elohim; more specifically, the narrator will show that YHWH is Elohim.

Having thus identified YHWH as the true god and Baal as the Shechemites' god, the narrator refers to YHWH when he records that Elohim sends an evil spirit between Abimelech and the Shechemites (9:23), while the reference is to Baal when he records that the Shechemites hold a festival in their god's temple (9:27). The narrator's final reference to Elohim (9:56-57) follows the episodes of the disastrous outcome of the civil war between Abimelech and the Baalists including the destruction of the temple of the Shechemites' covenant-god (9:46), where the representative of Baal, all the Baalists, and the temple of their covenant-god are extinguished from the narrative. It is, therefore, again a reference to YHWH, which thus forms an inclusion with the narrator's introductory remark to YHWH's spirit as the spirit of Elohim (9:23).

Hence the narrator identifies YHWH as the god who not only initiates the civil war, but who also holds the narrated events in his hand. YHWH is the god in the Gideon narrative, who demonstrates his divine power through Israel's deliverance from the Midianites and controls the events even when Gideon pursues his own selfish goals, and the god in the Abimelech narrative, who extinguishes all the Baalists and destroys the temple of the foreign gods. Hence the only true god in the Gideon-Abimelech narrative is YHWH, so that YHWH alone should be worshipped.

Finally, a word must be said about the noun אֵל (9:46), which is used as part of the unique term אֵל בְּרִית and the proper noun בְּעַל בְּרִית (8:33; 9:4). These are the only three evidences in the Hebrew Scriptures where the noun בְּרִית follows on the construct of any of the possible identifications of a god such as אֵל or אֲדֹנָי, or any proper name for a god such as בְּעַל or יְהוָה.<sup>4</sup> Now, since the term אֵל בְּרִית parallels the term בְּעַל בְּרִית that is used at the outset of the Abimelech narrative, a reference to Baal is likely. However, with Shechem as the city of the temple of Baal-Berith just destroyed, the reference might also be to the Canaanite god El. Hence the narrator underlines his use of Baalism as a general example for idolatry, so that it should be applied not only to Baal but to any Canaanite god; and since Abimelech succeeds in burning the temple and the idolaters in it, it is evident that neither Baal nor El nor any other Canaanite god is god.

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<sup>4</sup>A search was performed for the constructs of any form of אֲדֹנָי, אֵל, אֱלֹהִים, אֱלִיל, אֱשֵׁרָה, בַּל, בַּעַל, יְהוָה, בְּעַל, בְּרִית, כְּמוֹשׁ, מֶלֶךְ, מִלְכָּם, מִרְדָּךְ, עֲשֵׁתֶרֶת, and שְׁעִירִים, each determined by any form of בְּרִית.



## C The Significance of the Gideon-Abimelech Narrative for Potential Audiences

A concept of potential audiences who might be addressed by the Gideon-Abimelech narrative within the book of Judges enhances the understanding of the significance of the narrative. We shall therefore now briefly outline what the Gideon-Abimelech narrative may mean for potential audiences in different periods of Israel's history. The extensive parallels between Saul's death and Abimelech's death<sup>5</sup> may define the starting point for our considerations. Yet the relationship between the stories of Abimelech and Saul and historical events is complex; a simple equation between events in the narratives and historical actuality can not be assumed. However, it is reasonable to suppose that the narratives do contain evidence of contention about kingship at the turbulent time when kings first entered Israel's history. It is plausible to imagine the stories first in that setting. We shall therefore propose audiences in the periods of the united monarchy, the divided monarchy, the single monarchy, the exile, and the restoration.

We start with the period of the united monarchy. For this audience, the question whether kingship is right or wrong and how it relates to YHWH's claim to be Israel's king was undoubtedly a major theme. The demand for the first king was indeed a rejection of YHWH as king (1 Sam 8:7), and one could argue, therefore, that Saul had to fail eventually. Yet Saul's successor David as well as David's successor Solomon prosper at the beginning of their reign, so that in addition to the general question of the kingship the more specific question arises, why was Saul's kingship wrong and David's right? In this situation, the Gideon-Abimelech narrative provides a theological answer by claiming that as long as the king relies on YHWH, he will be blessed by him; but as soon as YHWH is replaced by the king himself, in a self-reliant act of worship, or with an idol, YHWH will turn away, which in turn will lead to disaster and mutual destruction in Israel. Saul certainly committed the first of these (1 Sam 15)—according to the narrator—and possibly the second (1 Sam 28), though the latter is not strictly idolatry, but David did not, so that the Gideon-Abimelech narrative provides an answer to the different treatment of Saul and David by YHWH. Saul is rejected only after he has replaced YHWH's orders with his own form of worship, so that the parallels between his death and Abimelech's

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<sup>5</sup>See, e.g., HANS JOACHIM STOEBE, *Das erste Buch Samuelis*, KAT 8, pt. 1 (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1973), 526; RALPH W. KLEIN, *1 Samuel*, WBC 10 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983), 288; GARSIEL, *Samuel*, 76-99; ROBERT P. GORDON, *1 & 2 Samuel: A Commentary* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986), 202; and DIANA VIKANDER EDELMAN, *King Saul in the Historiography of Judah*, JSOT Supp. 121 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 285.

show that, as idolatry is the reason for Abimelech's failure, so not Saul's kingship but rather his rejection of YHWH is the reason for his failure. At the same time, the Gideon narrative might condemn Solomon's wealth and idolatry in the latter part of his reign and warn him not to rely on himself but rather on YHWH, lest he and Israel will need to bear the fatal consequences for abandoning YHWH.

During the period of the divided monarchy, the audience encounters different problems. The division of the kingdom is understood as the consequence of Solomon's idolatry (1 Kgs 11), so that Solomon bears consequences that are similar to the consequences that Abimelech bears. Moreover, the idolatry already encountered with Solomon takes over in the Northern Kingdom especially in form of Baal worship, while in the Southern Kingdom in addition to Baal worship, the long Davidic dynasty and in the Northern Kingdom the dynasty of Jehu may lead to the danger of the kings' self-reliance as well. At this time the audience may ask, Is kingship really the right form of leadership, and if yes, which form of kingship? What role does YHWH play in an institutional monarchy? The monarchies after all appear to prosper even under idolatrous kings. For this audience, the Gideon-Abimelech narrative may not only provide an explanation for the division of the monarchy, in that it defines Israel's abandonment of YHWH, their self-reliance, and their idolatry as the reason, it also contains advice on how to avoid similar catastrophes in the future. It warns the Israelites and especially their kings not to abandon YHWH, who is seen as the true king of Israel, and rely on themselves or idols, and calls them to repent and return to YHWH. Hence the monarchy as such is not condemned, but only a monarchy that is based on self-reliance and idolatry rather than on YHWH. The Gideon-Abimelech narrative thus also illustrates the prophets' continuous rebuke of Israel's idolatry.

After the fall of the Northern Kingdom, the theme of kingship may not be in the foreground for an audience in the Southern Kingdom, who still live in a successful monarchy. During this period, however, the Gideon-Abimelech narrative may well warn the Judaic audience not to rely on themselves or their idols on the grounds that they have been spared by the Assyrians. It indeed implies that the fate of the Northern Kingdom parallels the fate of the Shechemites in the Abimelech narrative, in that both times the citizens are killed and their homes are destroyed because of their self-reliance and idolatry. In this context, the fall of the Northern Kingdom also illustrates that YHWH's methods to discipline Israel are still the same, so that the message of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative may also apply to Judah. The narrative therefore warns the Judahites, that if they and their kings do not repent and return to YHWH, they will suffer the same fate as the Shechemites in the Abimelech narrative and the Northern Kingdom in their recent history. The narrative thus calls for Judah's and especially the kings'



repentance and return to YHWH as the only way that leads to peace for the nation, and it thus still supports the message of the prophets.

In the exile, the themes of kingship, self-reliance, and idolatry apply to Israel in so far as they underline the reason for the defeat of Judah and the exile. Since Israel did not follow YHWH, he turned against them as he turned against Shechem and the Northern Kingdom. As a result, Jerusalem was destroyed and the Judahites taken captive. In this context the Gideon-Abimelech narrative and its sequel, the Jephthah narrative, call the Israelites to repent, so that YHWH may turn to them and deliver them from the exile as he has honoured Israel's repentance at the beginning of the Jephthah narrative and has delivered them from their oppressors. After YHWH's recent punishment of Israel through the exile, Judges thus directs the way to Israel's restoration and gives the exiles new hope.

After Israel's restoration in their land, the Gideon-Abimelech narrative only applies marginally to the specific situation of the Israelites. It provides an interpretation of the history of past generations, reminds the Israelites not to rely on themselves, although this issue does not seem to be a major problem at this time, and warns them not to fall back into idolatry; the theme of kingship, on the other hand, is not an issue any more. Beginning with this period, therefore, the Gideon-Abimelech narrative may increasingly illustrate the Scripture's timelessly actual call to follow and worship YHWH instead of relying on oneself and worshipping idols.

These considerations indicate that the Gideon-Abimelech narrative may address audiences at all major periods in Israel's history from the united monarchy to the exile. Indeed, the narrative addresses audiences in every following period as it contains the ever important call not to abandon YHWH and rely on oneself or other gods, but to worship YHWH alone.

## D The Gideon-Abimelech Narrative as an Integral Part of Judges

This study will not be complete without a brief reflection on the contribution of the theologically interpreted Gideon-Abimelech narrative for the theology of the whole book of Judges to defend its place in Judges.

The Gideon-Abimelech narrative demonstrates in a more intensive way than before that it is YHWH and not any other god or any judge who delivers Israel from their oppressors. It thus provides essential background information for the appropriate understanding of the preceding deliverance narratives. This clarification might indeed appear necessary following the Othniel narrative with its centre in YHWH, since the Ehud

narrative centres in Ehud's brilliant assassination of Eglon (3:15-26), the Shamgar narrative attributes Shamgar's deliverance to his unusual weapon, and the Barak narrative celebrates Deborah's role and Jael's ingenious victory over Sisera (4:21; cf. 5:6,24-31a) despite the narrator's record that YHWH is the conqueror of the Canaanites (4:15). Accordingly, the song of Deborah and Barak (5:2-31a), which is introduced with an adoration of YHWH, does not foreground praise of YHWH for his victory, but rather attributes the preceding period of peace to Shamgar and the victory over the Canaanites to Deborah and Jael. On this background, the Gideon-Abimelech narrative shows that YHWH demands to be worshipped as god on the basis of his deliverances instead of the judges who were no more than his agents.

Also the deteriorating trend and the weakening realisation of the narrative framework in Judges can be much better comprehended with an appreciation of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative as a theological narrative. Prior to the Gideon-Abimelech narrative, there is only a weak deteriorating trend observable. Israel does evil, cries to YHWH, and is delivered by a judge raised up by YHWH. There seems to be no question about the appropriateness of any of these steps. The only deteriorating trend one observes is the increasing focus on the human agent. While Othniel delivers Israel purely in YHWH's strength (3:7-11), Ehud does so on his own account (3:15-26). Yet he still attributes the forthcoming victory to YHWH when he calls out the Israelites (3:28), and given the narrator's focus on YHWH at the outset of the Ehud narrative and on Ehud's handicap, and given the lack of any explicit comment by the narrator that YHWH has provided the deliverance, the audience does not have any reason to doubt Ehud's sincerity in attributing the victory to YHWH nor that the narrator agrees with him. Similarly, the deliverance attributed to Shamgar (3:31) might be put down to YHWH's power by the audience who observe the unusual weapon, though in the account Shamgar is given credit for it. This ambiguous picture is amplified in the Barak narrative, where the discrepancy between the narrator's explicit attribution of the deliverance to YHWH sharply contrasts with its attribution to Deborah and Jael in the song of Deborah and Barak (4:1-5:31).

In this context, the Gideon-Abimelech narrative constitutes a new beginning. Unlike the preceding narratives, that focused on the deliverance, it emphasises the theological implications of the deliverance narratives and thus initiates a new theme within Judges. It clarifies that every deliverance is ultimately YHWH's, although YHWH uses human agents. Yet even these agents do not deliver Israel on their own; they are rather called by YHWH and equipped by him, so that the deliverance is solely YHWH's work. On the other hand, the Canaanite gods only lead to an oppression by themselves and ultimately to mutual destruction, so that they can not at all deliver Israel. However, despite the successful proof that YHWH is god, that he has the power to deliver Israel, and that he is indeed



responsible for Israel's deliverances, the Gideon-Abimelech narrative does not contain any record of Israel acknowledging YHWH as god and worshipping him. The underlying problem of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative is not solved, therefore, and will need to be transferred into the following narratives.

This is indeed done with the following Tola narrative, which—apart from the reference to Ehud's death at the outset of the Barak narrative (4:1)—is the only narrative in Judges that refers back to any previous protagonist (10:1). Since the Abimelech narrative continues the Gideon narrative, the reference to Abimelech defines the Tola narrative as the continuation of the whole Gideon-Abimelech narrative. Further, the narrator states that Tola arises to deliver (לְהוֹשִׁיעַ) Israel, and that he rules (שָׁפַט) Israel for twenty-three years (10:1-2). It may be implied, therefore, that he delivers Israel from the effect of Abimelech's reign,<sup>6</sup> and perhaps also from idolatry, so that he makes up for Abimelech's three year reign in addition to further twenty years of ruling. Hence the Tola narrative carries the theological theme of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative into the following judges narratives. Yet soon Jair, the next judge, follows in Gideon's paths, accumulates great wealth, and leaves not just one but thirty memorials to himself (10:3-5). The result is the same as in the Gideon-Abimelech narrative. The Israelites serve the Baalim, the Ashtaroth, and five other foreign gods—altogether seven foreign gods, indicating the full number—, and they forsake YHWH and do not serve him (10:6; cf. 8:33-34); accordingly, YHWH sells them into the hand of new oppressors.

This time, however, there are two oppressors, who oppress Israel even more severely than the Midianites in the Gideon narrative; for example, the oppression in the Jephthah narrative lasts eighteen years and effects Israelites on both sides of the Jordan (10:6-9). Yet the brief mention of two oppressing nations does not outweigh the extensive mention of seven foreign gods whom the Israelites serve, so that it appears that Israel's idolatry is the real reason for their distress; and more importantly, these nations oppress Israel in the land of the Amorites, which has been defined as the land of the idols before (6:10). The implication is, therefore, that like the distress caused by the Baalist Abimelech, the oppression at the beginning of the Jephthah narrative is caused by idols, too. However, when the Israelites cry to YHWH for help (10:10), YHWH confronts them with their continued idolatry, threatens not to deliver them any more, and invites them to seek deliverance from their foreign gods (10:11-14). On the background of the Abimelech narrative, this invitation is pure mockery; foreign gods rather oppress Israel and make matters only worse. What is needed is a response to the lesson taught in the Gideon-Abimelech narrative. The proper response is described by the narrator when he has the

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<sup>6</sup>Similarly, BEEM, "Minor Judges", 148-149.

Israelites recognise that the other gods can not deliver them, put away their idols, and serve YHWH (10:15-16), thus going beyond their cry for help as recorded in the preceding narratives (3:9,15; 4:3) and even at the beginning of the Gideon narrative (6:6,7) and ultimately obeying the prophet's implication there (6:7-10). YHWH acknowledges their repentance, becomes impatient with their misery (10:16), and soon delivers them (11:21).

In this context, YHWH's request to seek deliverance from foreign gods and the Israelites' prompt reaction to the request can best be understood in the light of the combined Gideon-Abimelech narrative with its theological theme. If either narrative was not present or followed a different theme, the two options laid before Israel would not be evident. Only in the light of the Gideon narrative as a demonstration of YHWH's divine power as Israel's deliverer and in the light of the Abimelech narrative as a demonstration of Baal's absence and Baalism's destructive force can the audience for the first time understand the implication in the Jephthah narrative that only YHWH and no other god can deliver Israel and that YHWH's successful deliverance requires the worship of YHWH. It appears therefore, first, that the Gideon-Abimelech narrative as a combined narrative to demonstrate YHWH's divine power and superiority over the Canaanite gods is necessary as preparation for the Jephthah narrative and Israel's repentance recorded there, and second, that the theological theme of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative is indeed carried into the Jephthah narrative, so that the position of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative at the beginning of a new stage in the plot of Judges is validated.

However, there is more than just this positive side to Jephthah. This judge also echoes Gideon and Abimelech in that he seeks the leadership in Israel (11:1-11) like Abimelech, in that he manipulates YHWH just after he has received YHWH's spirit (11:29-31) like Gideon, and in that he sparks off a civil war (12:1-6) like Gideon and especially Abimelech. It appears, therefore, that the lesson to be learnt in the Gideon-Abimelech narrative is despite Israel's repentance not fully comprehended by the characters in the Jephthah narrative. While the Israelites acknowledge that only YHWH can deliver them, they still do not draw the right conclusions, submit under YHWH and honour him as their leader, but continue in the spirit of self-reliance and Baalism. This theme, however, was not evident in the narratives that precede the Gideon-Abimelech narrative, so that the Israelites can be blamed for their continued failure to acknowledge YHWH as god only following the Gideon-Abimelech narrative. Accordingly, the last part of the narrative framework which records the achievement of rest or peace, is not applied to the Jephthah narrative but is instead—following the Abimelech narrative—replaced with the record of the duration of the rulership, so that the Jephthah narrative ends at the same point at which the Abimelech narrative has ended, and it thus implicitly warns the audience not to make the same mistake and fail to honour YHWH for his provisions.



Accordingly, the accounts of Ibzan (12:8-10), Elon (12:11-12), and Abdon (12:13-15) share the focus on the rulership rather than on the rest or peace achieved, thus implying an unsuccessful rulership. Further, with the common focus on geographical elements, they imply Israel's increasing dominance by foreign nations. Ibzan is buried in Bethlehem, the 'Bread-house', indicating wealth in Israel; Elon is buried in the countryside of Ajalon, the 'Deer-field', and hence in wasteland within Israel; and Abdon is even buried in the hills of Amalek, Israel's enemy, and hence on foreign land. It appears, therefore, that the Israelites lose portions of the promised land.

Finally, when one arrives at the Samson narrative, one finds that the narrative framework is applied only in part to the narrative, which may appear surprising, since Samson is called to be a Nazirite from his birth (13:2-24), and YHWH continuously provides his spirit for him (13:25; 14:6,19; 15:14). Yet while Othniel and Gideon are successful whenever YHWH's spirit is on them, Samson relies on his strength, fails to acknowledge YHWH as his god, and even wilfully deserts him (16:1-21). Accordingly, the narrator no longer mentions any deliverance but instead states in the heart of the Samson narrative and prior to the episode of Samson's fall—thus following the pattern of the Abimelech narrative—that Samson rules Israel during the oppression by the Philistines (15:20). It is apparent that the lesson of the Gideon-Abimelech narrative has not been learnt by the characters in the narrative, so that their oppressors eventually survive the judges (16:31).

Hence the Gideon-Abimelech narrative should be interpreted as one narrative with a single theological theme, that shows that YHWH is god and demands to be worshipped, that Baal is not god, and that self-reliance and Baalism lead to self-destruction. Further, each part of the combined narrative is essential for the proper understanding of the other and of both as one narrative. Within the context of Judges, the Gideon-Abimelech narrative explains first, that because YHWH is Israel's deliverer both in the preceding narratives and in the Gideon narrative, he should be honoured and worshipped as god. Second, with regard to the succeeding narratives it prepares for an understanding of Tola's rulership as a positive rulership, for Jair's rulership as a negative rulership similar to Gideon's attempt to be honoured himself, and above all for an understanding of YHWH's hesitation to deliver Israel and Israel's first-time repentance in Judges as recorded in the Jephthah narrative. Third, it identifies the deteriorating trend in Judges and the lack of any record of rest or peace following the Gideon-Abimelech narrative as a direct consequence of Israel's continued denial of YHWH's superiority and their idolatry; following the demonstration of YHWH's superiority over Baalism, the absence of any foreign god, the weakness of humans, and the destructive force of idolatry in the Gideon-Abimelech narrative, Israel no longer has any excuse for abandoning YHWH and relying

### ***Yahweh versus Baalism: Conclusions***

on themselves or other gods. The Gideon-Abimelech narrative hence occupies a central place and has an essential key function in the book of Judges as it focuses on YHWH's provision of the deliverances that make up the main body of Judges, thematises YHWH's claim to be praised for the deliverances and worshipped as god, and explains the reason for the deteriorating trend in Judges (6:10):

אָנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם  
לֹא תִירָאוּ אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי הָאֻמֹּת אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם יוֹשְׁבִים בְּאֶרֶץ  
וְלֹא שִׁמְעֶתֶם בְּקוֹלִי:



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