

THE UNHEARD VOICE OF GOD:
A PENTECOSTAL HEARING OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES

by

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I declare that

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is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



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offer my scholarship first as worship to God, second as exhortation to the church, and third as participation in the academy.

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I trust that this study of Judges will be pleasing in the sight of God, a challenge to the church and a significant contribution to biblical scholarship.

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	<i>Anchor Bible</i>
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
AbrN	<i>Abr Nahrain</i>
AJPS	<i>Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies</i>
ANET	<i>Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i>
ANF	<i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
ASV	<i>American Standard Version (1901)</i>
ATJ	<i>Ashland Theological Journal</i>
ATR	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
AuOr	<i>Aula Orientalis</i>
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAGD	<i>Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich and Danker, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (3d ed., 2000)</i>
BAIAS	<i>Bulletin of the Anglo Israel Archaeological Society</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin for the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BCHL	<i>Brethren in Christ History & Life</i>
BDB	<i>Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew Lexicon</i>
BETS	<i>Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
BFC	<i>Bible en Français Courant (1997)</i>
BHS	<i>Kittel, Elliger, Rudolph, Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (4th ed., 1990)</i>
BI	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BIOSCS	<i>Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies</i>
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
BM	<i>Beth Mikra</i>
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BR	<i>Bible Review</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BT	<i>Bible Translator</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>

BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CC	<i>Christian Century</i>
CCur	<i>Cross Currents</i>
CGR	<i>Conrad Grebel Review</i>
COGE	<i>Church of God Evangel</i>
ConJ	<i>Concordia Journal</i>
ConsJ	<i>Conservative Judaism</i>
CovQ	<i>Covenant Quarterly</i>
CSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CT	<i>Christianity Today</i>
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
CTM	<i>Concordia Theological Monthly</i>
CurBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CurTM	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
CV	<i>Communio Viatorum</i>
DCH	<i>Clines, Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i>
DD	<i>Dor Le Dor</i>
DPCM	Burgess and McGee, <i>Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements</i>
DRA	Douay-Rheims Version (1899 American ed.)
DSar	<i>Daughters of Sarah</i>
ÉglTh	<i>Église et Théologie</i>
EP	<i>Ekklesiastikos Pharos</i>
ErIsr	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
ES	Even-Shoshan, <i>A New Concordance of the Old Testament</i>
EstBib	<i>Estudios Bíblicos</i>
ESV	English Standard Version (2001)
EvJ	<i>Evangelical Journal</i>
EvQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
EvRT	<i>Evangelical Review of Theology</i>
ExA	<i>Ex Auditu</i>
ExpTim	<i>Expository Times</i>
Fnd	<i>Foundations</i>
FV	<i>Foi et Vie</i>

GKC	Gesenius, Kautzsch and Cowley, <i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i>
HALOT	Köhler, <i>Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
HAR	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HBT	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HebSt	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
HHMBI	<i>Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters</i> , ed. McKim
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IB	Interpreter's Bible
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
IDBSup	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supplementary Volume</i>
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
IPHC	International Pentecostal Holiness Church
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JANES	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBQ	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
JBR	<i>Journal of Bible and Religion</i>
JEPTA	<i>Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association</i>
JES	<i>Journal of Ecumenical Studies</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JFSR	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
JHebS	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
JITC	<i>Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JNSL	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society Holy Scriptures (1917)
JPsyT	<i>Journal of Psychology and Theology</i>
JPT	<i>Journal of Pentecostal Theology</i>
JPTS	Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>

JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JRPR	<i>Journal of Religion and Psychological Research</i>
JRR	<i>Journal from the Radical Reformation</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSP	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JSSRel	<i>Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KB	Köhler and Baumgartner, <i>Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros</i>
KJV	Authorized King James Version (1769 ed.)
LA	<i>Liber Annuus: Annual of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Jerusalem</i>
LB	<i>Linguistica Biblica</i>
LBA	<i>La Biblia de Las Americas</i> (1986)
Lesh	<i>Leshonenu</i>
LN	Louw and Nida, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains</i>
LSJ	Liddell, Scott, Jones, <i>Greek-English Lexicon</i>
LT	<i>Literature and Theology</i>
LUT	Lutherbibel (1984 ed.)
LXX	Rahlfs, <i>Septuaginta</i> (1935)
NAB	New American Bible (1991)
NASB	New American Standard Bible (1977)
NAU	New American Standard Bible (1995)
NBG	Netherlands Bible Society Version (1951)
NedTTs	<i>Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift</i>
NEG	Nouvelle Edition de Geneve (1979)
NIDOTE	Van Gemeren, <i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
NIV	New International Version (1984)
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible (1985)
NKJV	New King James Version (1982)

NLH	<i>New Literary History</i>
NorTT	<i>Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift</i>
NPNF	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (1989)
NRV	La Sacra Bibbia Nuova Riveduta (1994)
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
Or	<i>Orientalia</i>
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
Par	<i>Paraclete</i>
PentC	<i>Pentecostalism in Context</i>
PEQ	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
Pers	<i>Perspectives</i>
PG	<i>Patrologiae Graecae</i>
PNEUMA	<i>PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies</i>
Pres	<i>Presbyterion</i>
Prf	<i>Prooftexts</i>
ProE	<i>Pro Ecclesia</i>
PRS	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
PSB	<i>Princeton Seminary Bulletin</i>
QRev	<i>Quarterly Review</i>
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RBibL	<i>Review of Biblical Literature</i>
Ref	<i>Reformatio</i>
RefRev	<i>Reformation & Revival</i>
RelS	<i>Religious Studies</i>
ResQ	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
RevistB	<i>Revista Biblica</i>
RevQ	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
RevRR	<i>Review of Religious Research</i>
RHPR	<i>Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses</i>
RL	<i>Religion in Life</i>
RSSSR	<i>Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version (1973)
RTh	<i>Religion & Theology</i>
RTR	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>

RUL	<i>Journal of the Rutgers University Libraries</i>
SBJT	<i>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
SCJ	<i>Sixteenth Century Journal</i>
Sjot	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SJOT	<i>Scandinavian Journal of Theology</i>
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SMR	<i>Studia Montis Regii</i>
SR	<i>Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses</i>
ST	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
StC	<i>Studia Canonica</i>
SWJT	<i>Southwestern Journal of Theology</i>
TDNT	Kittel, <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TDOT	Botterweck, <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
TGUOS	<i>Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society</i>
Theo	<i>Theology</i>
Theol	<i>Theologika</i>
ThT	<i>Theology Today</i>
TLOT	Jenni and Westermann, <i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
TLZ	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
TNK	Jewish Publication Society TANAKH (1985)
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
Tri	<i>Tricycle</i>
TRu	<i>Theologische Rundschau</i>
TS	<i>Theological Studies</i>
TStn	<i>Touchstone</i>
TWOT	Harris, Waltke and Archer, <i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>
TynBul	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
TZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
USQR	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>
VoxE	<i>Vox Evangelica</i>
VoxT	<i>Vox Theologica</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplement Series
VUL	Latin Vulgate (Weber ed., 1983)
WisLQ	<i>Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly</i>

WThJ	<i>Wesleyan Theological Journal</i>
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ZAH	<i>Zeitschrift für Althebraistik</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a Wesleyan-Pentecostal literary-theological reading of the book of Judges that examines the role of God in the narrative of Judges, giving primary attention to the narratives of divine speech in which Yahweh addresses the Israelites as a whole (Judg. 2.1-5; 6.7-10; and 10.6-16). The study is Wesleyan-Pentecostal¹ in the sense that I acknowledge both the conscious and unconscious influence that my Holiness-Pentecostal community of faith exerts upon my interpretation,² and I am attempting to produce a *pro nobis* study that will enrich the biblical component of Pentecostal life and practice.³ The methodology of the study is literary-theological

¹ I use the term 'Wesleyan' in order to place myself within the holiness stream of the Pentecostal tradition. Although Pentecostalism exhibits a common theological core, the movement is by no means monolithic. Cf. Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 1-18, 187; and Manuel A. Vasquez, *The Brazilian Popular Church and the Crisis of Modernity* (Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion, 11; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), p. 87. In fact, some streams of Pentecostalism have evolved into a form that no longer bears the qualities that were characteristic of the movement at its most distinctive phase. Those qualities are described by Steven Jack Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (JPTS, 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), p. 13. Cf. also Harvey G. Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the 21st Century* (London: Cassell, 1996), p. 76, who points out that many Pentecostals regret the move away from early Pentecostal theology and are calling the movement back to its roots. From this point forward, I will describe myself only as 'Pentecostal', with the understanding that I stand within the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. It should be stated at the outset that Pentecostalism does not lay claim to a distinctive methodology for the study of Scripture, but at the foundation of our Bible reading are the 'central narrative convictions' of the community of faith. Cf. Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic For The Twenty-First Century: Spirit, Scripture And Community* (JPTS, 28; London: T&T Clark International, 2004), pp. 114-26.

² This is not an ideological study, although it may be argued that every interpretation of Scripture is to some extent ideological. Cf. W. Dow Edgerton, *The Passion of Interpretation* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992). Ideological readings, however, often stand in judgment of the text; cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 10th anniversary edn, 1995), p. 155; but a Pentecostal would want to stand under the judgment of the text. Cf. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), p. 382, who writes that every reading is contextual (not disinterested) if not ideological. Furthermore, even a non-ideological reading can recognize what Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 34, calls 'ideological inscriptions' within the text.

³ The strictures of the academy required previous generations of Pentecostal scholars to detach themselves artificially from their faith confession in order to complete doctoral level studies. See John Christopher Thomas, *The Spirit of the New Testament* (Blandford Forum, UK: Deo Publishing, 2005),

inasmuch as I employ synchronic literary/rhetorical methods to the critical study of Judges as a narrative theological text.⁴ I chose to examine the role of God in the narrative of Judges because, although God is the most prominent character in Judges, his role has been largely overlooked by previous scholarship and because the Pentecostal worldview places God precisely in the center of life.⁵ The thesis gives primary attention to the speeches of God because of their crucial placement within the narrative framework of Judges and because of the Pentecostal emphasis on hearing the charismatic Word of the Lord.⁶ Furthermore, the root cause of Israel's failure in Judges is diagnosed by Yahweh in his rebuke: 'you have not heard my voice' (2.2; 2.20; 3.4).⁷ Therefore, it is by means of a Pentecostal literary-theological approach to Judges that I am striving to hear the voice of Yahweh and then to communicate that voice to the academy and to my community of faith.

pp. 3-6, who describes the four generations of Pentecostal biblical scholars and their challenges. Similar challenges have been faced by other scholars who have desired to work in the academy while acknowledging their context. These scholars who are seeking an authentic and distinctive voice include women, African Americans, and non-Western biblical scholars. Cf., Madipoane Masenya, 'An African Methodology for South African Biblical Sciences: Revisiting the Bosadi (Womanhood) Approach', *OTE* 18, no. 3 (2005), pp. 741-51; Stephen Breck Reid, 'Endangered Reading: The African-American Scholar between Text and People', *CCur* 44, no. 4 (1994), pp. 476-88; and Jonathan A. Draper, "'Less Literate are Safer': The Politics of Orality and Literacy in Biblical Interpretation', *ATR* 84, no. 2 (2002), pp. 303-18. An appreciation of the *pro nobis* reading of Scripture is called for by Daniel Patte, 'The Guarded Personal Voice of a Male European-American Biblical Scholar', *Personal Voice in Biblical Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 12-24, who suggests that all interpretations should acknowledge the 'personal voice' of the interpreter, and that all interpretations should be offered as tentative and 'guarded'. He does express a fear of subjective and illegitimate readings, a fear which could be lessened if he would take more of a communal rather than an individualistic approach to biblical interpretation. See John Christopher Thomas, 'Women, Pentecostalism and the Bible: An Experiment in Pentecostal Hermeneutics', *JPT* 5 (1994), pp. 31-32, who makes this clear.

⁴ See Rickie D. Moore, 'Canon and Charisma in the Book of Deuteronomy', *JPT* 1 (1992), p. 11, who explains that the combination of literary methods with theological interest offers a helpful approach for the Pentecostal biblical scholar; and Robert Christopher Waddell, 'The Faithful Witness of a Pneumatic Church: The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Apocalypse of John', (Ph. D., University of Sheffield, 2003), pp. 42-120, who combines a Pentecostal theological approach with the methodology of intertextuality. I will describe my methodology more fully in chapter three.

⁵ See Jackie David Johns, 'Pentecostalism and the Postmodern Worldview', *JPT* 7 (1995), p. 88, who describes the Pentecostal worldview and its relationship to the Bible and theology. Cf. also Rebecca Pierce Bomann, *Faith in the Barrios: The Pentecostal Poor in Bogotá* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), pp. 84, 128-50.

⁶ The Pentecostal view of Scripture as authoritative Word of God (canon), is consistent with the placement of Judges within the division of Scripture that the Jews call the Former Prophets. Judges, therefore, is not seen as historiography, but as narrative theology with a prophetic message that must be heard. Cf. Moore, 'Canon and Charisma', p. 12.

⁷ Unless otherwise stated, all biblical quotations are the author's translation.

The title of this thesis thus conveys a double meaning. First, the voice of Yahweh goes unheard by the Israelites within the narrative of the book of Judges. Second, that same voice has been largely ignored in contemporary scholarship on the book of Judges. The current openness of the academy to multiple approaches toward biblical interpretation suggests that the time is now right for a fresh hearing of the unheard voice of Yahweh.

1.1. MOTIVATION: PENTECOSTALS AND THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Pentecostals have always been intrigued with the Spirit passages in the book of Judges. In Judges the Spirit of the Lord comes upon chosen leaders, endowing them with supernatural abilities. In the past, Pentecostal and Charismatic writers such as Stanley Horton, John Rea, George Montague, and Wilf Hildebrandt have given attention to the Spirit of Yahweh in Judges;⁸ but otherwise, Judges has been mostly avoided. That avoidance is not surprising, given the troublesome themes found in the book. Judges is more about failure than success, more about defeat than victory, more about fear than faith, more about disobedience than obedience, and more about impurity than purity. There is little in Judges about worship, witness, eschatology, or a passion for God—themes that would resonate with Pentecostals.⁹

However, since the power of the Spirit is central to Pentecostal experience, the judges have been used by Pentecostals as Old Testament examples of Spirit empowerment.¹⁰ For Pentecostals, Judges could almost be called the Acts of the Old

⁸ Stanley M. Horton, *What the Bible says About the Holy Spirit* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Pub. House, 1976), pp. 33-42; John Rea, *The Holy Spirit in the Bible: All the Major Passages About the Spirit: A Commentary* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1990), pp. 48-55; George T. Montague, *The Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition* (An Exploration Book; New York: Paulist Press, 1976), pp. 17-18; Wilf Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), pp. 112-18.

⁹ For an extensive treatment of Pentecostal theology see Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*; and for a summary see Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, pp. 187-242.

¹⁰ E.g., Horton, *Holy Spirit*, p. 112, argues that the Spirit remained on the judges throughout their lives. Cf. Rea, *Holy Spirit*, p. 55, who goes so far as to say that the judges provide 'valuable insights into the work of the Holy Spirit in the modern renewal movement'; and Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (I Believe, 1; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 20, who directly applies the Judges

Testament. In the New Testament book of Acts the Holy Spirit comes upon Peter, and he preaches without fear (2.4; 4.8). When the Spirit comes upon the disciples they are full of boldness (4.31). Stephen preaches powerfully through the Holy Spirit, and sees a vision of Jesus (6.10; 7.55). The Spirit catches away Philip and transfers him to another location (8.30). The Holy Spirit sends Paul and Barnabas into missionary work and on many occasions speaks words of guidance (13.4; 16.6, 7). The Holy Spirit comes upon Paul, empowering him to strike the enemy of the Gospel with blindness (Acts 13.9-11) and to cast out evil spirits (16.16-18). In a similar episodic fashion, the Spirit of the Lord in the book of Judges comes upon these leaders, enabling them to accomplish feats that are beyond their normal abilities. When the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Othniel (3.10) he goes to war and triumphs against the enemy. Clothed by the Spirit, Gideon gathers an army and wins a miraculous victory (6.34). Jephthah also defeats the enemy by the power of the Spirit (11.29); and Samson rips apart a lion (14.6), kills a thousand Philistines (15.15), and snatches up the gates of Gaza (16.3).

Although the book of Judges has been a source of affirmation to Pentecostals, it has also been an embarrassment; it has been both a blessing and a curse. At times we have approached Judges with confidence, but at other times with trepidation. We have mixed feelings about the charismatic heroes who journey into the extraordinary as the Spirit of the Lord moves upon them, but who wander into failure as they follow their faulty desires. On the one hand, we have appreciated in Judges the many examples of Spirit empowerment; on the other hand, we have been disappointed with the moral deficiencies of those same judges. We are unable to

texts to the modern context, stating that the Holy Spirit should be expected to move with the same kind of force or power as he did in Judges. It should be noted here, however, that the book of Judges has played a very small role in the development of the Pentecostal theology of Spirit-baptism. Pentecostals have relied most heavily upon the New Testament for their theology of the Holy Spirit, and Judges has served as little more than Old Testament background.

reconcile the contradictory behavior of the judges.¹¹ The Spirit of the Lord comes upon Jephthah, but later his doubts precipitate a rash vow, the fulfillment of which results in the sacrifice of his own daughter. The Spirit is prominent in Samson's life, but he seems to be more interested in pursuing women than pursuing holiness. The personal lives of Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson are embarrassing to Pentecostals, who have commonly taught that God uses only those persons who are qualified by their purity of heart and holiness of life.¹² This tension in Judges is commonly explained by the fact that Judges is not a New Testament book. Thus, some Pentecostals have argued that in the New Testament the Holy Spirit empowers only those who are pure in heart through sanctification, but in the Old Testament a

¹¹ Interpreters from other traditions also have questioned how it is possible for the Spirit of God to come upon these judges who seem to be morally deficient. E.g., Herbert Wolf, 'Judges', in F. E. Gaebelin (ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), III, p. 381, calls this tension a 'problem'; and J. Clinton McCann, *Judges* (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2002), p. 1, admits that Judges is 'an embarrassment to most church folk'. On the other hand, one stream of the Jewish tradition asserts that God's choosing of the judges is evidence of their spiritual qualifications. See Nosson Scherman, *The Prophets: Joshua/Judges. The Early Prophets with a Commentary Anthologized from the Rabbinic Writings* (Artscroll; Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1st Rubin edn, 2000), p. xiv, who writes, 'The judges were chosen by God as individuals of outstanding merit'.

¹² Holiness-Pentecostals have a saying—'The Holy Ghost will not fill an unclean vessel', a saying meant to encourage believers to seek for God's sanctifying grace. The saying is often associated with Mt. 12.43-45; cf. James L. Slay, *This We Believe* (Church Training Course, 301; Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1963), p. 86. Cf. also James A. Cross, *A Study of the Holy Ghost* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1973), p. 104; who cites 2 Tim. 2.21; as does Ray H. Hughes, *What is Pentecost?* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1963), p. 55. Another version of the saying, which derives from 1 Cor. 3.17 and 6.19-20, is 'The Holy Ghost will not dwell in an unclean temple'; cf. Ray H. Hughes, *Church of God Distinctives* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1968), p. 120. The idea that spiritual purity precedes Spirit empowerment is pervasive in holiness-Pentecostal literature; e.g., Bennie S. Triplett, *A Contemporary Study of the Holy Spirit* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1970), p. 64, states, 'Holiness is a prerequisite to Pentecost'. The concept is formalized in the doctrinal statements of the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) and the International Pentecostal-Holiness Church. The Church of God states, 'We believe in the baptism with the Holy Ghost subsequent to a clean heart'; Gene D. Rice (ed.) *Minutes of the 68th General Assembly of the Church of God* (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 2000), p. 95. The IPHC's statement in IPHC, *Discipline of the Pentecostal Holiness Church* (Franklin Springs, GA: Board of Publication, Pentecostal Holiness Church, n.d.), p. 13, asserts that a believer must be 'fully cleansed' before Spirit baptism; and explanatory notes in John W. Swails, *Focus on Doctrine: A Detailed Study of the Major Tenets of the Pentecostal Holiness Church* (Franklin Springs, GA: Advocate Press, n.d.), p. 51, include the elaboration: 'we do not believe that God will fill an unclean temple or vessel with His Holy Spirit'. The idea that the Holy Spirit will not fill an unclean vessel can be found also outside of Pentecostal circles and may be traced at least as far back as Chrysostom (*Eph. Hom.* 15) and Augustine (*Tract. in Ep. Ioann.* 4.6).

person' can be inspired but not purified',¹³ a view which makes the Spirit's work in the New Testament essentially different from his work in the Old Testament.¹⁴

While it is not my goal to construct a theological treatment of the tension between purity and power, I mention it as the primary example where the content of Judges poses difficulties for the Pentecostal reader. I would suggest that the book of Judges can inform a theology of the purity/power theme when the narrative character of God is given due consideration. When Judges is taken into account, a theology of purity and power would both maintain and appreciate God's concern for the purity of his people and acknowledge God's role in the human struggle for power, without eliminating the essential friction that occurs when the two interests intersect.

Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that Pentecostals are not the only ones who struggle with the content of Judges. Neither Luther nor Calvin produced a

¹³ Harold D. Hunter, *Spirit-baptism: A Pentecostal Alternative* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), p. 25. Harold Hunter first helped me appreciate this tension between purity and power in the Old Testament. Hunter affirms that the Holy Spirit does have ethical connotations in many Old Testament texts, but he insists that in the Old Testament purity and power can be separated (p. 24). John Rea discusses the empowerment of the judges, but he does not even mention their questionable activities. See Rea, *Holy Spirit*, pp. 53-55. Stanley Horton acknowledges the failings of the judges, but he does not attempt to explain the relationship between purity and power. He comments merely that the Holy Spirit worked sometimes 'in spite of' the judges (*Holy Spirit*, p. 35).

¹⁴ We have failed to notice that this tension continues in the New Testament itself, where charismatically endowed believers are not morally infallible. In the Book of Acts, immediately following the unifying actions of the Jerusalem council, Luke relates the details of a sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabus (15.36-41). Their contention is so deep that neither person is willing to submit to the other, and they can no longer work together. In Paul's epistles to the Corinthians, he accuses a charismatically gifted church of being morally deficient (the only church that he describes as σαρκικός). Paul's rebuke of Peter as recorded in Galatians reveals Peter's hypocritical behavior toward the Gentiles (2.11-14). James accuses his readers of being 'sinners' and 'double minded' and calls upon them to purify their hearts (4.8-9). In his message to the seven churches of Asia Minor, the risen Christ rebukes the church for multiple sins and repeatedly summons them to repentance (Rev. 2.1-3.22).

Unfortunately, our Pentecostal history (as well as Christian history in general) includes numerous persons whose behavior was just as paradoxical as that of the judges. Many established leaders within Pentecostalism, who apparently served for many years with distinction, have fallen into immorality like the judges of the Old Testament. The testimony of history seems to call into question the view that in the era of the New Testament power and purity are inseparable and that power is a reward for purity. That is not to say that there is no relationship between purity and power, but it is possible that the relationship between purity and power is more nuanced in the Bible than we have recognized. It is possible that we have not wrestled sufficiently with the Biblical texts like Judges where purity and power are in tension.

commentary on Judges, and John Wesley did not preach from Judges.¹⁵ Apparently, many commentators would agree with Burney that Judges lacks ‘spiritual appeal’.¹⁶ It is, however, the Pentecostal ambivalence toward Judges that invites, even demands, my engagement, and provides the primary motivation for this thesis. My work here is an attempt to appropriate the message of Judges for the Pentecostal community of faith in light of the insufficiency of the prevalent views of Judges. Furthermore, the thesis contributes to the field of Old Testament studies by significantly advancing the discussion of the role of God within the narrative of Judges.

The book of Judges does not present an admirable picture of the people of God or of their judges, but I have chosen to focus my attention upon the God of Judges rather than upon the people of Judges. The God of Judges is a God who is faithful to his covenant and patient toward his people Israel, whom he saves time and time again. It is through a fresh hearing of the voice of God in Judges that Pentecostals can appropriate the message of the book and the academy can appreciate the importance of God's role in the narrative.

1.2. JUSTIFICATION: PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Although the book of Judges has seen an increase in scholarly attention in recent years, there remains a need for studies that address issues of interest to Pentecostals. According to Kenneth Craig, over two hundred journal articles on Judges were written in the last fifteen years, compared to only one hundred eighty-four that were

¹⁵ Neither the Scripture index nor the subject index in John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley* (14 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1958), XIV, pp. 367-532, includes any reference to Judges, although he does include a short commentary on Judges in his collection of notes on the Bible. See John Wesley and G. Roger Schoenhals, *Wesley's Notes on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1987), pp. 715-90.

¹⁶ C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges, with Introduction and Notes* (London: Rivingtons, 1918), p. cxxi. It is the violence in Judges that offends many contemporary interpreters.

produced in the preceding forty years (1950-1990).¹⁷ An investigation of these studies reveals that none of them appreciates the concerns of the Pentecostal community of faith nor serves adequately the needs of that community. As my review of research will show, historical critical studies have focused either on the compositional history of the book or on the history of pre-monarchic Israel. Furthermore, sociological studies have addressed issues relating to tribal organization, theories of settlement, and the nature of leadership in the time of the judges. More recent literary / rhetorical studies have tended to confine themselves to individual narratives rather than to the book as a whole, but even those works that encompass the entire book have overlooked the role of God as a character in the narrative. Finally, the narratives of Judges are a fertile field for a variety of ideological perspectives, including feminist readings, and liberationist readings. Although I would vigorously defend the validity of each of the above approaches, I would insist that none of them adequately addresses the concerns and interests of the Pentecostal community (a community that numbers between 300 million and 500 million adherents).¹⁸ Therefore, the need for this thesis is evident, given the fact that no one has interpreted Judges from a distinctively Pentecostal perspective and there exist few studies that would appeal to the specific interests of a Pentecostal reader.

Furthermore, in spite of the dramatic increase in Judges research, only three publications devote any substantial consideration to the role of God within the narrative of Judges. Richard Bowman's introduction to narrative criticism includes a brief summary analysis of God's role in Judges,¹⁹ L. Juliana M. Claassens' study of

¹⁷ Kenneth M. Craig, Jr., 'Judges in Recent Research', *CurBR* 1, no. 2 (2003), pp. 221-59. For the survey of research between 1950 and 1990, see Rüdiger Bartelmus, 'Forschung am Richterbuch seit Martin Noth', *TRu* 56 (1991), pp. 221-59.

¹⁸ See Douglas G. Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. ix; Cf. Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, pp. 11-14; and Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, p. 87.

¹⁹ Richard G. Bowman, 'Narrative Criticism: Human Purpose in Conflict with Divine Presence', in G. Yee (ed.), *Judges and Method* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 17-44.

the Gideon story examines the narrative activity of God in Judges 6-8 as a source for moral theology,²⁰ and J. Cheryl Exum's reading of Judges highlights the ambiguous nature of God's role in the book.²¹

Bowman begins with an introduction to the methodology of narrative criticism, and he completes the chapter by applying narrative criticism to the role of God in Judges. In his brief thirteen pages of application, Bowman considers only the actions of Yahweh and descriptions of the presence of Yahweh. His analysis of God's role in Judges is somewhat simplistic and superficial, and he does not include any evaluation of the speeches of Yahweh.

Claassens, on the other hand, has produced a much more detailed reading, focusing on just three chapters of Judges. Although her study is an exemplary treatment of God as a character in Judges, she does not examine adequately the speech of God in 6.1-10, and her narrow focus on the moral/ethical dimension of the story generates an interpretation that is somewhat limited theologically.

Exum's twenty-one page journal article is a summary of the book of Judges, interspersed with comments about the actions (or inaction) of God in the narrative. She is concerned specifically with the 'increasingly ambiguous role of the deity',²² arguing that as the behavior and fortunes of Israel decline throughout the book of Judges, the role of the God becomes more uncertain. She suggests that in Judges God acts paradoxically both to further and to thwart the fortunes of Israel. She offers an insightful reading, raises some important questions, and she rightly observes that the book moves toward structural incoherence.²³ However, she fails to see the key

²⁰ L. Juliana M. Claassens, 'The Character of God in Judges 6-8: the Gideon Narrative as Theological and Moral Resource', *HBT* 23, no. 1 (2001), 51-71.

²¹ J. Cheryl Exum, 'The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges', *CBQ* 52 (1990), pp. 410-31.

²² Exum, 'The Centre Cannot Hold', p. 411.

²³ This narrative movement toward the collapse of the cyclical pattern is recognized earlier by J. P. U. Lilley, 'A Literary Appreciation of the Book of Judges', *TynBul* 18 (1967), pp. 98-101.

role of 10.6-16 in this movement, and she does not recognize the narrative function of the three major speeches of God in the book. She devotes only three sentences to Judg. 2.1-5,²⁴ less than half a page to 6.6-10,²⁵ and only one short paragraph to 10.6-16. In all, she offers less than two pages of combined commentary on the three major speeches of God. The reason for her lack of scrutiny of speeches of God might be found in her purpose, which is to expose the 'problems in the presentation of God that disrupt the stable meanings some interpreters seek in the text'.²⁶ She admits that she focuses on the 'negative side of that presentation, since most commentators whether intentionally or not, pursue the positive'.²⁷ Possibly, Exum considers the speeches of God to be on the positive side of the presentation of God in Judges, but I would suggest that 10.6-16 is a major event in the shift toward ambiguity in God's role and the other speeches contain elements of ambiguity as well. Finally, while Exum's description of God's role is the most extensive study on the topic to date, she fails to examine the fundamental covenant relationship between Israel and Yahweh. That relationship forms the matrix that produces the meta-plot of Judges, which Exum describes accurately as collapsing by the end of the book. Exum, however, does not use relational terminology when speaking of the collapse of the relationship between God and Israel. Instead, she speaks in terms of the well-known cycle of rebellion and deliverance that forms the framework for the judges stories when she argues that the structural incoherence at the end of Judges is caused by the 'cycle's inability to sustain itself'.²⁸ Her personification of the 'cycle' as if it were an actor in the narrative obscures the fact that its continuance is dependent on the actions of Israel and Yahweh and the continuity of covenant relationship. I would prefer to

²⁴ Exum, 'The Centre Cannot Hold', p. 413.

²⁵ Exum, 'The Centre Cannot Hold', pp. 416-17.

²⁶ Exum, 'The Centre Cannot Hold', p. 430.

²⁷ Exum, 'The Centre Cannot Hold', p. 430.

²⁸ Exum, 'The Centre Cannot Hold', p. 414.

frame the question not in the impersonal terms of whether the cycle can sustain itself, but whether the people of Israel will continue to be unfaithful and whether Yahweh their God will continue to accommodate their unfaithfulness.

The works of Bowman, Claassens and Exum provide a point of departure for my work, but their incomplete coverage of the role of God in Judges serves to highlight the fact that studies of Judges have failed to take seriously the role of God as a character in the narrative. The lack of attention to the role of God (who acts and speaks more than any other character in the book) offers further justification for this thesis. Several factors combine to explain the lack of interest in the role that God plays as a character in the narrative of Judges. First, the greater part of the book of Judges is devoted to the lives of six major characters: Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech, Jephthah, and Samson. Therefore, many studies of Judges focus on these characters and their electrifying exploits. Second, other studies of Judges have approached Judges as history rather than theology. They have failed to appreciate the role of God as a central character in the book because of their governing concern for history and culture.²⁹ Third, the book's sheer quantity of violence, coupled with its concentrated involvement of women characters has drawn the attention of ideological critics from all persuasions.

The God-centered worldview of the Pentecostal³⁰ opens a window to the primacy of God's role in the narrative and the theological implications of that role.

²⁹ The Hebrew categories were reordered first by the Greek LXX, which located the historical books together. The move away from the Hebrew concept of prophetic literature was solidified by modernity's description of the corpus as the Deuteronomistic 'History'. I will address this issue in more detail in ch. 3 of the thesis.

³⁰ Again, for an insightful introduction to the Pentecostal worldview as God-centered, see Johns, 'Pentecostalism', pp. 73-96; and Scott A. Ellington, 'Pentecostalism and the Authority of Scripture', *JPT* 9 (1996), pp. 16-38, who writes, 'the central emphasis of Pentecostalism is . . . a God who must be reckoned with in direct encounter' (p. 17); that is, God is experienced. For a definition of the term 'experience' in Pentecostalism, see Peter Althouse, 'Toward a Theological Understanding of the Pentecostal Appeal to Experience', *JES* 38, no. 4 (2001), pp. 399-411. He concludes by saying, 'The charismatic experiences of the Spirit are transformative in that they create a deeper commitment to Christ through encounter with the divine. They are reconstructive in that they envision a community

Given the relative insignificance of God in most scholarly studies of Judges, it is somewhat surprising to learn that God is mentioned (אלהים or יהוה or a combination of names) two hundred twenty-four times within the six hundred eighteen verses of Judges. In fact, in spite of the apparent prominence of such judges as Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson, God is named more than all of the judges combined, and he is named in every chapter of the book.³¹ Clearly, God is a (the) major character in Judges.

In light of the fact that previous approaches to Judges have overlooked God as a character in the book, I suggest that a Pentecostal approach to Judges may provide opportunity for hearing the book within its context of the Former Prophets as a word of prophecy, a Word of the Lord. The Pentecostal desire to *hear* the voice of the prophetic text, leads to the appropriation of holistic literary methodologies as one way to hear that prophetic voice. One element within the narrative of Judges is the pervasive presence of God, both in his speeches and in his actions. Hopefully, this study will open the doors for conversation in the academy regarding the role of God in the book of Judges and the theological implications of his role.

1.3. PROBLEM FORMULATION

From the foregoing discussion, a formulation of the problem addressed by this thesis can now be summarized. I am addressing the problem of the role of God as a narrative character in the book of Judges while focusing specifically on the speeches of God to the Israelites (2.1-5; 6.7-10; and 10.6-16). Literary studies have begun to appreciate the role of God in the book, and I hope to add a significant contribution from a Pentecostal perspective. Although God is the most prominent character in

of God's people as the context for encountering God'. The fact that Pentecostal experience is both transformative and reconstructive may be applied as well to the hearing of Scripture.

³¹ The following list gives the major characters in the book along with the number of times that they are named: the Israelites 133, Abimelech 40, Gideon 39, Samson 38, Jephthah 28, angel 23, Micah 21, Deborah 9, Ehud 8, and Othniel 3. Since the angel speaks for God, one might argue that his role should be counted as a part of God's role.

Judges, his role has been largely overlooked by previous scholarship. Because the power of the Spirit is central to Pentecostal experience, the judges have been viewed by Pentecostals as Old Testament examples of Spirit empowerment, a view that has resulted in a limited appreciation of the book of Judges by Pentecostals.

A survey of previous studies of Judges reveals that none of them appreciates the concerns of the Pentecostal community of faith nor serves adequately the needs of that community. Therefore, the need for this thesis is evident, given the fact that no one has interpreted Judges from a distinctively Pentecostal perspective and there exist few studies that would appeal to the specific interests of a Pentecostal reader. Furthermore, the fact that the role of God in Judges has not been fully explored suggests that this thesis fulfills an obvious need from the perspective of the academic study of Judges.

1.4. GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The goal of this thesis is that I will hear the Word of God in the book of Judges through giving attention to his direct discourse within the narrative. I use the term 'hearing' (Heb. שָׁמַע) as a contrast to the commonly used term 'reading'. The objective of chapter three is to describe my understanding of 'hearing' and my motivations for choosing the term, but a few explanations may be appropriate here. In some ways the terms 'hearing' and 'reading' are similar—they both refer to a synchronic, holistic, contextual interpretation of the text. I prefer 'hearing', however, because: (1) it is a thoroughly biblical term; (2) it accords with the orality of the biblical and Pentecostal contexts; (3) it is relational, presupposing the existence of a 'person' who is speaking the Word; (4) it denotes a faithful adherence to the Word since in Scripture to hear often means to obey; (5) it implies transformation since the hearing of the Word always produces change; and (6) it demands humility because,

unlike the process of 'reading', the hearer submits to the authority of the biblical text.

In order to accomplish the goal of hearing the Word of God in Judges, my first objective is to construct a critical method that will create the conditions for such a hearing to take place, and my second objective is to apply that method to the book of Judges. Methodologically, 'hearing' is an attempt to appropriate the theological message of the Word of God through a careful and critical (discerning) attendance to the canonical biblical text. It presupposes that the book of Judges is a prophetic Word that was directed to the ancient people of Israel and functions presently as the Word of God to the Pentecostal community of faith. The 'hearing' of Judges is a conversation between the text and the hearer in a way that acknowledges the authority of the Word of God over the life of the hearer. It is by no means a license for incoherent and fanciful interpretations, since it demands a careful attendance to the text. In spite of the fact that the hearer brings a worldview, a history, and theological presuppositions to the interpretive task, all of these elements may be challenged and transformed through the hearing of the Word of God. In other words, the world within the text takes priority over the world behind the text (history) and the world in front of the text (the reader).³²

Since my overall goal is to hear the Word of God in Judges and since I acknowledge the influence of my Pentecostal context, it is essential that I utilize a critical methodology that is consistent with the Pentecostal ethos and is conducive to theological apprehension. The objective of chapter three, therefore, is the construction of a Pentecostal methodology for biblical study that integrates the three worlds of the text, while giving priority to the world within the text. I have chosen to utilize a holistic narrative approach, often called literary criticism or rhetorical

³² Cf. W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), p. xx, whose entire outline of hermeneutics is based on the differentiation of the three worlds of the text.

criticism.³³ While literary criticism examines the whole story in terms of plot, characters, setting and point of view; it also observes compositional, semantic, literary, and theological patterns such as comparison, repetition, progression, synonyms, antonyms, alliteration, figures of speech, allusions and theological movement. Because of a keen interest in exegesis, my application of literary criticism will involve a detailed examination of the Hebrew text.³⁴ In my formulation of a critical Pentecostal hermeneutic, I have been influenced by the work of Rickie D. Moore and Larry McQueen. Moore convincingly deconstructed the dichotomy between confessional reading and critical distance and demonstrated the fruitfulness of the narrative literary-theological approach in his seminal work on Deuteronomy.³⁵ McQueen successfully articulated and exemplified a Pentecostal 'prophetic hermeneutic' in his interpretation of the prophet Joel.³⁶

Literary criticism assumes that the compositional and rhetorical devices in the text combine to direct the reader toward certain themes and purposes; and because

³³ Cf. Barry G. Webb, *The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading* (JSOTSup, 46; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), pp. 36-37, who seems to draw a distinction between rhetorical criticism and literary criticism, but he also seems to indicate that they overlap. Biblical interpreters are not uniform in their use of the terms. The literary method as applied to biblical studies was called 'rhetorical criticism' by James Muilenburg, 'Form Criticism and Beyond', *JBL* 88 (1969), pp. 1-18, probably because at that time Source Criticism (*Quellenkritik*) was known as Literary Criticism; cf. Robert Henry Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper, 1948), p. 48. For a summary of the history of terminology and distinctions between terms see Richard N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1976), pp. 13-15, 168-69 and John Haralson Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), pp. 73-80. Traditionally, rhetorical criticism examined the text from the perspective of the author's purpose and argument. Recently, as Source Criticism has faded from prominence, and as the author-centeredness of rhetorical criticism has come under fire, 'literary criticism' has arisen as the preferred name for the synchronic study of the text as literature.

³⁴ I am by no means suggesting that my methodology is the only one that is appropriate for a Pentecostal interpreter. Every interpreter comes to the text with specific gifts, abilities, background and goals, which give rise to a particular emphasis or focus for that interpreter. Even within a given faith community, one member may be gifted to hear the social aspects of the text; another may hear the political ramifications; another may hear the moral/ethical dimensions; etc. Multiple voices do not diminish the meaning of the text, rather they enhance, deepen, and strengthen it. No interpretation has the right to assert itself as the only correct voice. This is particularly true in the hearing of narrative texts, which are inherently ambiguous and polysemic.

³⁵ Rickie D. Moore, 'Deuteronomy and the Fire of God: A Critical Charismatic Interpretation', *JPT* 7 (1995), pp. 11-23, 32-33. In ch. 3, I will discuss in further detail the contributions of Moore and McQueen.

³⁶ Larry R. McQueen, *Joel and the Spirit: The Cry of a Prophetic Hermeneutic* (JPTS, 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 107-12.

of my interest in the integrating of scholarship with the community of faith, my methodology will involve theological reflection. It is my objective to construct a literary critical methodology that advances the academic study of Judges and at the same time is relevant to the Pentecostal community of faith. Therefore, in order to accomplish the goal of hearing the Word of God in Judges, my first objective must be to construct a methodology that will create the conditions for such a hearing to take place. To my knowledge, few (if any) doctoral theses in Old Testament have successfully employed an integrative method along the lines that I am attempting. Therefore, the construction of the methodology itself constitutes a major contribution to the methodologies of Old Testament study.

My second objective is to apply my methodology to the book of Judges. Although my overall goal is to hear the Word of God in Judges, the scope of this thesis cannot encompass every aspect of the book of Judges. Numerous themes have been identified in Judges, and many of the individual narratives have been studied already in great detail. I have chosen, therefore, to limit the thesis to the heretofore neglected role of God within the narrative, focusing specifically upon God's three speeches to the Israelites (2.1-5; 6.7-10; and 10.6-16). Therefore, my second objective is to apply a literary-theological method to the speeches of God in Judges, with the goal of hearing the Word of God. It is through a fresh hearing of the voice of God in Judges that we can appreciate the message of the book.

The dual objectives of the thesis are to articulate an integrative Pentecostal approach to Scripture and to apply that approach to the speeches of God in the book of Judges, engaging the biblical text of Judges in a way that forwards the academic study of the Old Testament and at the same time is faithful to the ethos of my Pentecostal tradition. For me, the bridging of the gap between the academy and the Church is an imperative, not an option. My hearing of the voice of God in Judges

will benefit not only the community of faith but also will enrich and critically inform the academy, and will embody a method that allows scholarly research to be relevant in the post-modern environment.

1.5. RESEARCH QUESTION

This thesis addresses the question of the narrative-theological significance of the role of God in Judges. The question consists of two elements: (1) the role of God in the narrative; and (2) the theological significance of that role. The role of God must be determined by a careful study of the text, and the theological significance of that role must be determined by disciplined reflection and conversation between the text and the hearer.

The narrative role of God can be explored from a variety of perspectives. What is his function in the story? Is he predictable in his actions, words, and character? Since God is a referential character, is he consistent with previously known data?³⁷ Is he a flat character or a round character? How does he respond to conflict? Is he a static character or does he change within the process of the story? What effect does his presence or absence have upon the narrative?

The theological component of my goal proceeds from the assumption that narrative is no less theological in its purposes than any other genre of Scripture; in fact, Walter Brueggemann argues convincingly that story is Israel's 'primal mode' theological discourse.³⁸ W. Randolph Tate agrees when he distinguishes history from biblical story, describing the book of Judges as 'mimetic narrative' that

³⁷ A referential character is one who is already known to the hearer of the story. Cf. Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 83. See also, David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford Bible series; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 81-89, who address the difficulties of reconstructing God as a character.

³⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *The Creative Word: Canon as a Model for Biblical Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p. 17. Cf. also John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), pp. 15-41. Goldingay's two volumes on OT theology serve as a valuable and instructive example of reading OT narrative theologically. For a narrative theological method that focuses on the ethical implications of stories, see Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narrative Ethically* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Books, 2004).

embodies a theological message.³⁹ The theological significance of the role of God in the narrative will occupy a relatively small part of the thesis, but it is an important part. Both during and after engaging the text through a literary methodology, I will offer theological observations regarding the significance of the text for the Christian community in general and the Pentecostal community in particular. This does not mean that I will Christianize the Old Testament, but I will allow the book of Judges to speak from its context within the Former Prophets. The methodology of narrative theology that I employ does not address the text with a preconceived agenda or with a list of dogmas to prove, rather it allows the theology to emerge from the text. I must concede, however, that every discussion of theology is prejudiced by the preexisting theological commitments of the participants, and theological discussions that proceed from narrative are no exception to the rule. My theological reflection will interact with the view of God as found only in Judges and will not attempt to synthesize the voice of Judges with the voice of books that come after Judges in the canon. It will be assumed, however, that the implied reader of Judges is familiar with Genesis-Joshua, all of which precede Judges in the canon.

1.6. METHODOLOGY EXPLAINED

As stated above, the methodology for hearing the Word of God in Judges will be explained fully in chapter three. Nevertheless, since chapter three is concerned primarily with the concept of 'hearing', a few words regarding the literary method are in order at this point. Literary criticism begins with the assumptions that 'the final, present form of the text functions as a coherent narrative' and that the narrative 'has a literary integrity apart from circumstances relating to the compositional process, the historical reality behind the story, or the interpretive

³⁹ Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, p. 83.

agenda of the reader'.⁴⁰ Literary criticism is not a theological method,⁴¹ but in that it views the text as a coherent whole it is a favorable companion to canonical and theological approaches.⁴²

In the broad sense, literary criticism may be applied to any genre of literature, but when applied to narrative texts it may be called 'narrative criticism'⁴³ or 'narratology'.⁴⁴ Although I will use the theories of Robert Alter, Adele Berlin, Mieke Bal and others as a guide, my methodology is distinctively my own, with emphasis upon language and exegesis. I agree with Berlin's reason for claiming a unique approach: 'In most cases the slavish application of one particular method or approach to a text produces a mechanical, lifeless criticism. Rather, the starting point should be the text'.⁴⁵ I would add to Berlin's argument that the results proceeding

⁴⁰ Bowman, 'Narrative Criticism', p. 17. Barry Webb and others have demonstrated the legitimacy of reading Judges as a unified work. See Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, pp. 13-40; and Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), pp. xi-xxi. Influential monographs in the application of literary theory to the interpretation of biblical narrative begin with Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); and continue with Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Bible and Literature Series, 9; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985); and Shimeon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Bible and Literature Series, 17; Sheffield: Almond, 1989). A helpful contemporary introduction is J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999).

⁴¹ Cf. Adele Berlin, 'Characterization in Biblical Narrative: David's Wives', *JSOT* 23 (1982), p. 69, who points out that literary criticism is valid as an end in itself. It does not necessarily include the goal of reaching historical, moral, or theological conclusions. In this thesis, however, I am using literary criticism as a means to an end; the end (goal) is to hear the voice of God.

⁴² Robert Morgan and John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford Bible Series; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 203.

⁴³ Bowman, 'Narrative Criticism', p. 17.

⁴⁴ Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, p. 15. Cf. also Bal, *Narratology*, p. 3, whose purpose is to define the theory of narrative criticism with scientific precision. Her definitions are very helpful, but her work claims too much certitude. I would argue that analyzing narrative is much like analyzing language in general. As the norms of *la langue* are always changing in order to adapt to *la parole*, narrative theories can never exhaustively describe every possible literary alternative. Theories of narrative, therefore, are aids to interpretation, but they not definitive for determining meaning. Furthermore, like all good structuralists, Bal has a tendency to reduce the data to charts and graphs, a practice that I consider contrary to the nature of literary art, something akin to the charting of brush stroke directions in the *Mona Lisa*.

⁴⁵ Berlin, 'Characterization in Biblical Narrative', p. 69.

from any method will be enhanced by the integration into that method of the particular gifts and interests of the interpreter—the interpreter's 'personal voice'.⁴⁶

The standard approach of narrative criticism is to examine the text from the perspective of five formal elements:⁴⁷ (1) the narrator; (2) the plot; (3) the characters;⁴⁸ (4) the point of view; and (5) the setting. The presence of a narrator distinguishes narrative from drama. The narrator is the person who tells the story, and in the biblical stories the narrator is always anonymous.⁴⁹ The plot is the sequence of events that makes up the story. The characters may be human, divine, or even animals (e.g., the serpent in Gen. 3 and the donkey in Num. 22). Point of view is the perspective from which the story is told. The setting is the time and location in which the story takes place.

The first element of narrative, the narrator, is the person who tells the story, and in biblical narrative not only is the narrator anonymous, but he is authoritative and omniscient. The narrator sets the stage, relates events, describes characters, and allows characters to speak for themselves. Robert Polzin argues convincingly that the narrator claims a prophetic voice, so that the voice of the narrator is the voice of God. Polzin writes:

the Deuteronomistic History is indeed a *monologue*, that is, its ideological evaluation is carried out from a single dominating point of view which subordinates all others in the work. The Deuteronomistic History, viewed as the juxtaposition of two principal utterances, that of its narrator and that of God, is constructed as an utterance within an utterance: the reported word of God is found within the reporting word of the narrator . . . This is the narrator's obvious conclusion about the history of Israel. He says to the reader, 'In terms of what God and myself say, "I and the Father are one"'.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ See again the plea of Patte, 'The Guarded Personal Voice', pp. 12-24.

⁴⁷ Cf. Bowman, 'Narrative Criticism', pp. 20-30.

⁴⁸ A perceptive introduction to characterization in biblical narrative may be found in Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 114-30.

⁴⁹ There are, of course, embedded narratives where a character tells a story or reports an event, e.g., Jotham's fable in Judg. 9.

⁵⁰ Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980).

The second element of narrative, the plot, is the sequential arrangement of actions (events) that make up the story. The events in a plot are not random; they occur in a particular order. The events are not disconnected; they are joined by cause and effect. Normally, the events in the plot will involve conflict between characters that provokes rising tension in the story. The tension will continue to intensify until it reaches a climax, which is then followed by a *dénouement*, a resolution of the lines in the plot. A plot may include crucial turning points and more than one climax; and the climax may lead to tragedy rather than resolution. Often, a story may consist of a weaving together of multiple plots, which may be called sub-plots or 'plot-levels'.⁵¹ In biblical narrative, individual stories with their own plot may be joined together in a larger story to form a macro-plot.⁵² Bar-Efrat argues that the book of Judges has an overall plot, with the individual stories forming episodes,⁵³ and Polzin insists that the entire Deuteronomistic History is a 'unified literary work', which implies that it has an overarching macro-plot. I would suggest that the book of Judges has the same macro-plot theme as that of the Deuteronomistic History, which is 'the course of history as the embodiment of the relationship between the one God, the creator of the world, and His chosen people, the people of Israel'.⁵⁴

The third element of narrative, the characters, are the actors, the participants in the story; and characterization is the narrator's depiction of the characters. The characters may be described directly (by the narrator or by other characters) or indirectly (by their actions, by their thoughts, by their words, and by comparisons

⁵¹ Robert H. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* (VTSup, 63; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), p. 5.

⁵² Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, pp. 161-71.

⁵³ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, p. 139.

⁵⁴ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, p. 140. Cf. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 112-13, who insist that reading the narratives of Judges separately as individual stories may produce an interpretation that is quite different from the one which emerges from reading the narratives together as parts of one book.

with other characters).⁵⁵ The characters vary in the amount of information that is given about them. Based on the varying levels of development, characters may be classified as flat or round. According to Berlin, 'Flat characters, or types, are built around a single quality or trait. They do not stand out as individuals. Round characters, on the other hand, are much more complex, manifesting a multitude of traits'.⁵⁶ Berlin adds a third category of character, which she calls the 'agent'. The 'agent' is an actor without attributes, who enters and leaves the story more or less as a part of the setting. In addition to adding a third category of characters, Berlin chooses to abandon the traditional terminology of 'flat' and 'round' in favor of the terminology 'type' and 'character'. The 'type' is a stereotypical character, and the character is an actor who is more fully developed, who sometimes acts outside of stereotypical behavior. I object, however, to Berlin's categories on three fronts: (1) using the term 'character' as a sub-type of character in general is bound to result in confusion; (2) it is unnecessary to use the word 'type' as a category, since the reference to a character as 'a type' or 'stereotypical' would be easily understood, even without Berlin's categories; and (3) since these levels of character development are relative and inherently artificial, they could be multiplied infinitely into different categories—three categories, ten categories, or fifty categories; there is no necessity to stop at three.

Besides the classification according to level of development, characters may be classified according to their function in the events of the narrative, how they interact with other characters, and how they change and develop as the story unfolds. Bal, for example appreciates the actantial model of structuralism when

⁵⁵ Cf. Bal, *Narratology*, pp. 79-93; Bowman, 'Narrative Criticism', p. 30; Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 46-89; and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 59-71.

⁵⁶ Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, p. 23. In her chapter on characterization, Berlin fails to give any attention to the characterization of God. The categories 'flat' and 'round' are replaced with more specific functional terms by Berlin, 'Characterization in Biblical Narrative', p. 78.

describing function, and she argues for the importance of exploring other models as well. She suggests, for example, that characters may be juxtaposed in their psychological and ideological relations as well as paired in a variety of oppositions.⁵⁷

According to Alter, the biblical narrator is selective in the extreme when it comes to descriptions of character. Often, important bits of information are withheld, and the reader is kept in the dark about characters' motives. There seems to be a desire to maintain a 'mystery in character'. Regarding the character of God, sometimes the narrator will inform the reader of God's perspective on things and sometimes s/he will not.⁵⁸

On those occasions when the narrator chooses to reveal one or more pieces of information toward the development of a character, any element in the text may be used, but certain elements are utilized more often than others for this purpose. The common indicators of character may be divided into two categories, 'direct definition and indirect presentation'.⁵⁹ Direct definition is any description that is directly applied to the character by the narrator, by another character or by the character himself/herself. Indirect presentation defines character through the character's actions, which may be either 'singular' acts or 'repetitive' acts.⁶⁰ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan argues that singular, or one-time actions

evoke the dynamic aspect of the character, often playing a part in a turning point in the narrative . . . Although a one-time action does not reflect *constant* qualities, it is not less characteristic of the character. On the contrary, its

⁵⁷ Bal, *Narratology*, pp. 25-37, 79-93.

⁵⁸ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 126. The gender of the anonymous narrator is never stated in the text. Given the androcentric nature of the Bible, we may assume that the narrator is male, but I prefer to leave the question open.

⁵⁹ Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, p. 59. For the same categories, Bal, *Narratology*, p. 89, uses the terms 'qualification' and 'qualification by function'.

⁶⁰ Cf. Bal, *Narratology*, p. 90.

dramatic impact often suggests that the traits it reveals are qualitatively more crucial than the numerous habits which represent the character's routine.⁶¹

Both direct definition and indirect presentation may occur within the context of a comparison between characters, in which case the similarities and dissimilarities between them contribute to the character development of both characters.

Alter ranks the direct and indirect modes of characterization according to their trustworthiness when he contends that qualities that are revealed indirectly through actions are the most ambiguous and must be understood as inferences. On the other hand, direct definition either by the narrator or by a character, while it is often clear enough, must be evaluated carefully because it may or may not be trustworthy.⁶² It should be remembered that characters are not always reliable; therefore, direct definition should be accepted at face value only if it 'proceeds from the most authoritative voice in the text'.⁶³ Furthermore, what one character says about another may say as much about the speaker as about the one who is described. Inward speech of a character can be accepted as reliable, at least regarding the conscious thoughts and purposes of the character. When it comes to the 'narrator's explicit statement of what the characters feel, intend, desire; here we are accorded certainty', although the narrator's statements may be intentionally ambiguous.⁶⁴

In light of the discussion above, the narrative role of God may be evaluated on the basis of the following factors: (1) the presence or absence of God throughout the narrative; (2) the actions of God within the narrative; (3) the role of God as described by the narrator; (4) the role of God as described by other characters in the

⁶¹ Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, p. 61. Rimmon-Kenan adds that the actions of a character may be acts of 'commission' (acts performed), 'omission' (acts not performed), and 'contemplated act' (an unrealized plan or intention).

⁶² Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 117.

⁶³ Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, p. 60.

⁶⁴ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 117.

narrative; (5) the role of God when compared and contrasted to the role of other characters; (6) the role of God as characterized by his own speech (either direct speech or inward speech). Each of these elements may or may not be present in a given text, and each of these elements may vary in terms of clarity and completeness.

During any episode of Judges, God may participate or he may be absent; he may be a flat character or a round character;⁶⁵ and he is not always in the 'foreground' of the story.⁶⁶ In some narratives, God plays a dominant role, interacting frequently with the other characters, but in other narratives, God rarely appears. At times it appears that God is completely absent, and at other times we are informed that he is working in the background, as Judg. 14.4 testifies.

Furthermore, the testimony of another character may or may not be trustworthy, and may say more about the nature of the other character than about the nature of God. For example, when the angel says to Gideon, 'The Lord is with you . . .', Gideon replies, 'If the Lord is with us, then why has all this come upon us?' (6.12-13). The conversation between Gideon and the angel reveals to us that God has not forsaken Gideon and his people, but it also reveals that Gideon believed otherwise. Also, Gideon's response implies his timorous nature and foreshadows its domination over him for most of the story.

Meir Sternberg explains that in biblical narrative the character of God is developed with more reservation than is the case with other characters. Divine attributes are not revealed in an 'orderly form at the start but piecemeal and in their dramatic manifestations'⁶⁷ due to the fact that God is the object of description. The 'narrator first pretends to assume his reader's knowledgeability and then slips in the

⁶⁵ Cf. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 75-89.

⁶⁶ Richard L. Pratt, *He Gave us Stories: The Bible Student's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1990), p. 130.

⁶⁷ Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, p. 323.

necessary premises, under dramatic guise and often with corrective or polemical intent, as the need for them arises'.⁶⁸ Direct description of God would be equivalent to reducing him to the level of the other characters 'rather than a unique and enigmatic power, knowable only through his incursions into history'.⁶⁹ The method of indirect description 'reveals enough to make the divine order intelligible and impressive while concealing enough to leave it mysterious, transcendent, irreducible to terms other than itself'.⁷⁰ Furthermore, according to Bar-Efrat, 'The narrator does not often provide us with information about God's inner feelings. In consequence, we can assume that when such information is given, the matter is of special importance'.⁷¹ It may be said, according to Gunn and Fewell, that the character of God in Old Testament narrative is portrayed 'more elusively, positing of God the enigmatic ambiguities found in complex human characters'.⁷²

Another challenge to the discerning of the role of God in biblical narrative is that the hearer already possesses a certain portrait of God before s/he encounters God in the given text. Let us consider this fact from two perspectives. First, the implied reader already has formed a picture of God from earlier biblical narratives in which various roles are assigned to God. In Genesis, God is creator of the universe and sovereign over its affairs. He judges evil, but he shows grace to Noah. He calls Abram and promises to make of him a great people. In Exodus, God remembers his promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and he saves Israel from the bondage of Egypt, while exercising his mastery over the Pharaoh.⁷³ God appears on Mt. Sinai in an awesome display of power, but he makes a covenant with Israel and claims them

⁶⁸ Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, p. 323.

⁶⁹ Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, p. 323.

⁷⁰ Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, p. 323.

⁷¹ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, p. 19.

⁷² Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 85.

⁷³ Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 85-87.

as his people. In Leviticus and Numbers Israel tests the holiness of God and the patience of God, and God proves himself to Israel. In Deuteronomy, God affirms the covenant with a new generation, showing that his relationship to Israel is not temporary. In Joshua, God brings Israel into the promised land, defeats the Canaanites, and fulfills all of his promises. These readers who come to Judges searching for the nature of God's character 'bring to the story a conception of God from other stories'.⁷⁴ Second, today's readers who approach the text from the context of a community of faith (Jewish or Christian) can be tempted to construct the character of God based upon their preexisting theology and fail to give serious consideration to the features of the narrative that may challenge their views. When the text is allowed to speak in all of its complexity and polyphony, 'coming to some understanding of the character of YHWH is one of the great challenges of the Hebrew Bible . . . complex, mysterious, enigmatic, and quite often frustratingly elusive'.⁷⁵

The fourth element of narrative, the point of view, is the perspective from which a story is told. There are three points of view in any narrative: the view from the narrator, the view from the characters, and the view from the reader. The narrator, being omniscient, controls what the reader knows about the story and its characters.⁷⁶ Fokkelman argues for giving attention to the 'emotional' point of view of the characters.⁷⁷ Although affective impact forms an important part of art criticism (music, painting, sculpture, cinema, dance) in which emotive qualities of art (beauty,

⁷⁴ Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 85.

⁷⁵ Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 89.

⁷⁶ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, pp. 13-45.

⁷⁷ Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, pp. 143-47.

emotions such as hope, fear, dread, etc.) are fully appreciated, this affective dimension is often overlooked by critics of biblical literature.⁷⁸

The fifth element of narrative, the setting, includes both the spatial and temporal location of the story. Literary criticism monitors the location, how the location changes, and why the location might change. Meaningful references to spatial location in Judges include the geographical ordering of the tribal battles in chapter one, the tribal origin of each of the judges, the location of battles throughout the book, and the movement of the Angel of Yahweh from Gilgal to Bochim in 2.1. The temporal location of every narrative includes three kinds of time: (1) 'discourse' time is the length of the written narrative; (2) 'narrative time' is the length of time covered by the story, the 'time within the story'; and (3) chronological time is the order of events that are reported in the narrative. The narrative may or may not relate the events in chronological order.⁷⁹ Significant temporal references in Judges include the numbers of years that Israel suffered under oppression, the numbers of years that each judge ruled, and the numbers of years between episodes of oppression.⁸⁰

While literary criticism examines the whole story in terms of narrator, plot, characters, point of view and setting; it also observes compositional, semantic, literary, and theological patterns such as comparison, repetition, progression, dramatic irony and theological movement. In addition to these patternings in the text, other linguistic rhetorical devices are examined as an integral part of a holistic literary criticism. These linguistic devices include imagery, synonyms, antonyms, alliteration, figures of speech, allusions, paronomasia, double entendre, ambiguity

⁷⁸ The affective dimension of reading Scripture is explored by Robert O. Baker, 'Pentecostal Bible Reading: Toward a Model of Reading for the Formation of the Affections', *JPT* 7 (1995), pp. 34-38. For an explication of Pentecostal spirituality/theology as knowing, being, and doing integrated in the affections, see Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, pp. 32-45, 131-61.

⁷⁹ Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, pp. 35-44.

⁸⁰ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, p. 158.

and indicators of tone. Because of my keen interest in exegesis, my application of literary criticism will involve a detailed examination of the Hebrew text.

A literary-theological hearing of Judges from a Pentecostal perspective appreciates the role of God in the narrative. The method that I am pursuing assumes that biblical narrative should be allowed to perform a variety of functions within the community of faith. As Gunn and Fewell explain, narratives may 'order and reorder our experience'; they may create an alternative world; they may 'give meaning to life'; or they may be 'subversive', 'criticizing dominant patterns of thought and institution'.⁸¹ Thus, a hearing of Judges may serve the Pentecostal community and the academy as a confirmation or a critique, a comfort or a challenge. The hearer of the story must be open to any and all possibilities.

1.7. RESEARCH PROCEDURE AND STRATEGY

The research procedure and strategy for this thesis consists of two major projects. The first project is the constructing of a Pentecostal methodology for hearing the message of Judges. The second project is the application of that methodology to the book of Judges.

The first project, the construction of a Pentecostal methodology, is completed in two stages. The first stage is a survey of previous studies of the book of Judges, which results in the categorization of those studies, along with a discernment of their appropriateness for the Pentecostal study of Scripture. The second stage is study of and reflection on the distinctive goals of Pentecostal hermeneutics, and the construction of a methodology that is consistent with the nature of biblical narrative, faithful to the ethos of the Pentecostal community of faith and rigorous enough to push forward into new directions of Old Testament academic study.

⁸¹ Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 1.

The second major project, the application of my methodology to the book of Judges, involves three levels of investigation. Since narrative criticism reveals that characters are known by their words, by their actions, by the descriptions of other characters, and by the descriptions of the narrator; one level of the thesis consists of a brief survey of the book of Judges, with the character and role of God as the focus. The entire book of Judges is summarized from the perspective of God's desires, actions and character. The second level in the reconstruction of God as a character is the detailed examination of the three speeches of God to the Israelites in Judges chapters two, six, and ten by means of the literary-theological method. This analysis of the speeches of God forms the heart of the work. The third level in the study of God's role will be a summary of the findings and suggestions for further research.

1.8. THE CONTENTS OF THE RESEARCH

The thesis consists of eight chapters, beginning with an introductory chapter that outlines my motivations, purposes and plans for my investigation into a Pentecostal hearing of the book of Judges. Chapter one describes the thesis as a Wesleyan-Pentecostal literary-theological reading of the book of Judges that examines the role of God in the narrative of Judges, giving primary attention to the narratives of divine speech in which Yahweh addresses the Israelites as a whole (2.1-5; 6.7-10; and 10.6-16). The lack of a sufficient Pentecostal interpretation of Judges provides the primary motivation for this thesis, and the lack of a detailed study of the role of God in Judges provides sufficient justification for such a study. Chapter one introduces the Pentecostal approach to biblical study, explains the literary-theological method and clarifies the research procedure.

Chapter two offers a more detailed examination of previous approaches to Judges, and suggests that those approaches have followed the basic pattern of biblical studies in general. That is, the chronological development of approaches to

Judges reveals three fundamental paradigms: (1) precritical; (2) critical; and (3) postcritical. These paradigms overlap each other to some extent, so that current scholarship on Judges continues to include historical criticism, but is now dominated by sociological, literary and ideological approaches. The works of Bowman, Claassens and Exum provide a point of departure for my work, but their incomplete coverage of the role of God in Judges serves to highlight the fact that studies of Judges have failed to take seriously the role of God as a character in the narrative. Many studies of Judges have approached the book as history rather than theology. They have failed to appreciate the role of God as a central character in the book because of their governing concern for history and culture. Some biblical scholars oppose the post-modern paradigm arguing that it lacks scientific and objective standards. Other scholars, however, practitioners of post-critical methodologies, are gratified that they finally have a voice. I contend that the acceptance of a plurality of voices within the academy does not result in confusion; it results in understanding. It does not bring a weakening of critical precision; it brings a richness of critical perspectives. Within the current diversity of voices, I do not seek to discredit the voice of history, or the voice of sociology, or the voice of feminism, or the voice of archaeology; I seek only to add to all the other voices the unheard voice of God, as I hear it in the book of Judges.

Chapter three details my proposal for a Pentecostal hermeneutic. I construct a Pentecostal hermeneutic based upon the biblical concept of 'hearing' (Heb. שָׁמַע). I use the term 'hearing' as a contrast to the commonly used term 'reading'. In some ways the terms 'hearing' and 'reading' are similar—they both refer to a synchronic, holistic, contextual interpretation of the text. I prefer 'hearing', however, because: (1) it is a thoroughly biblical term; (2) it accords with the orality of the biblical and Pentecostal contexts; (3) it is relational, implying the existence of a 'person' who is

speaking the Word; (4) it denotes a faithful adherence to the Word since in Scripture to hear often means to obey; (5) it implies transformation since the hearing of the Word always produces change; and (6) it demands humility because, unlike the process of 'reading', the hearer submits to the authority of the biblical text. I propose that 'hearing' is an attempt to appropriate the theological message of the Word of God through a careful and critical (discerning) attendance to the canonical biblical text. It assumes that the book of Judges is a prophetic Word that was directed to the ancient people of Israel and functions presently as the Word of God to the Pentecostal community of faith. The 'hearing' of Judges is a conversation between the text and the hearer in a way that acknowledges the authority of the Word of God over the life of the hearer. It is by no means a license for incoherent and fanciful interpretations since it demands a careful attendance to the text. In spite of the fact that the hearer brings a worldview, a history and theological presuppositions to the interpretive task, all of these elements may be challenged and transformed through the hearing of the Word of God. An integrative Pentecostal methodology engages the biblical text of Judges in a way that is academically rigorous and at the same time is faithful to the Pentecostal tradition. This integration of rigorous study and faith commitment is possible partially because the heart of the Pentecostal pursuit of truth is different from the rationalist pursuit of truth. While religious rationalists (Evangelical Fundamentalists) define truth in terms of their dogma that is undergirded by the historicity and inerrancy of Scripture, Pentecostals define truth in terms of the genuineness of their encounter and continuing relationship with God through his Word and his Spirit.

Chapter four begins the study of Judges in earnest by overviewing the structure, themes and canonical placement of the book. The purpose of this chapter is to familiarize the reader of the thesis with the basic content and message of the

book of Judges, so that he or she might be better equipped to join the main discussions in chapters five, six and seven. In regard to the structure of Judges, scholars are virtually unanimous in their appraisal of the book, agreeing that it consists of three major sections: (1) a dual introduction that begins with unity and victory (1.1-3.6); (2) stories of the judges that spiral downward into unfaithfulness (3.7-16.31); and (3) a dual conclusion that ends in idolatry and anarchy (17.1-21.25). In regard to the theme of Judges, however, multiple options have been set forth. The theme of the book has been identified as: (1) idolatry brings punishment and repentance brings divine approval;⁸² (2) a defense of the Judahite/Davidic monarchy,⁸³ (3) the question of leadership,⁸⁴ (4) the 'failure of Yahweh's promise to the patriarchs' to give them the land,⁸⁵ (5) the question of Israel's faithfulness,⁸⁶ (6) an affirmation of God as the true judge,⁸⁷ (7) a celebration of death,⁸⁸ (8) the 'inefficacy of the judges',⁸⁹ (9) 'the Canaanization of Israelite society',⁹⁰ (10) 'signs and leadership',⁹¹ or (11) a *mélange* of traditions with no central theme or purpose.⁹² The reason for this diversity is found within Judges itself, which may suggest more than one purpose for the composition. Although the canonical placement of Judges has

⁸² Burney, *Judges*, p. cxxi.

⁸³ Lawson Grant Stone, 'From Tribal Confederation to Monarchic State: The Editorial Perspective of the Book of Judges', (Ph. D., Yale University, 1988), pp. 388-408. Cf. also Marvin A. Sweeney, 'Davidic Polemics in the Book of Judges', *VT* 47 (1997), 517-29.

⁸⁴ Schneider, *Judges*, p. 23.

⁸⁵ Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 208.

⁸⁶ McCann, *Judges*, p. 24; and Cheryl Anne Brown, 'Judges', *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), p. 151.

⁸⁷ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Judges: Grace Abounding* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 15.

⁸⁸ Mieke Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 1.

⁸⁹ Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 508.

⁹⁰ Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* (New American Commentary, 6; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), p. 141.

⁹¹ Yairah Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing* (trans. Jonathan Chipman; Biblical Interpretation, 38; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), pp. 23-119.

⁹² Exum, 'The Centre Cannot Hold', pp. 410-31.

garnered little attention, I consider it to be an important topic for consideration. I suggest that Judges can be seen as a counterpart to the book of Joshua, a preparation for the book of Samuel and a key ingredient to Israel's primary story (Gen.-Kings).

Chapters five through seven form the heart of the thesis, with each chapter focusing upon one of the three speeches of God to Israel. Chapter five begins with a survey of the role of God in Judges 1, and then examines Judg. 2.1-5, the first of three speeches from Yahweh to Israel. In his first speech, Yahweh sends his angel to confront Israel for their failure to keep the covenant. The fact that this speech occurs near the beginning of the book makes it the starting point for the rising action in the plot layer that focuses on Yahweh and Israel, and reinforces its importance as fundamental to the theme of the book. In other words, it sets the agenda for the narrative that follows.

The crucial theme for Judg. 2.1-5 is that while Yahweh has been faithful to his covenant with Israel, they have been unfaithful to him. He sums up Israel's unfaithfulness in the words of rebuke: 'you have not heard my voice' (2.2). At this point in Judges, the two main characters are Yahweh and Israel, with the Canaanites serving as the occasion for conflict. Yahweh is characterized as a powerful and faithful God, who responds to the actions of his covenant people. Yahweh's response to his people is not characterized as legalistic, mechanistic, or altogether predictable. His promise to Israel 'I will never break my covenant' (2.1) is a risky statement, putting Yahweh in a disadvantaged position in the negotiating process. Yahweh's faithfulness continues in the face of insult and injury and by confessing his reluctance to abandon Israel, he opens himself up to further injury. Israel does not escape punishment, however, for Yahweh allows the Canaanites to remain in the land to serve as discipline to Israel.

Chapter six begins with a survey of the role of God in Judges 2-5 and then examines Judg. 6.7-10, the second of the three speeches from Yahweh to Israel. In his second speech, Yahweh sends his prophet to confront Israel for their repeated episodes of unfaithfulness in Judges 2-5. As he did in his first speech, Yahweh reminds Israel of his saving acts, and his previous commands. In this case, the command that he reiterates is: 'You shall not fear the gods of the Amorites' (6.10). Like in the first speech, he declares, 'but you have not heard my voice' (6.10). In God's first speech the covenant was the fundamental issue, but in this second speech the threat of losing the land and syncretism are the fundamental issues. To fear the Canaanite gods is to deny to Yahweh's superiority over those gods, a superiority that was proven in the Exodus. Apparently, to the Israelites, the power of the enemy gods were held in higher esteem than the power of Yahweh. The speech ends rather suddenly, without any statement of consequences, but the theme of fear figures prominently in the Gideon story.

Chapter seven begins with a survey of the role of God in Judges 6.11-10.5 and then examines Judg. 10.6-16, the third of the three speeches from Yahweh to Israel. In his third speech, Yahweh presents his case in broken grammar, which is suggestive of his passion and his frustration with Israel. He declares that he will not save Israel again; and, for the first time, the Israelites put aside their idols in repentance. Israel pleads for mercy and surprisingly, Yahweh answers with silence, not with the expected word of salvation. More than the two earlier speeches, this speech demonstrates that God does not respond to his people automatically or mechanically; rather, he responds in ways that evidence a genuine relationship of care and risk.

Chapter eight of the thesis presents conclusions and implications of the Pentecostal hearing of Judges. My work offers a significant contribution to the field

of Old Testament studies both in its methodology and in its content. The integrative literary-theological methodology advances the academic study of Judges and at the same time is relevant to the Pentecostal community of faith. In order to hear the Word of God in Judges, I constructed a methodology that will create the conditions for such a hearing to take place. The methodology is consistent with the nature of biblical narrative, faithful to the ethos of the Pentecostal community of faith and rigorous enough to push forward into new directions of Old Testament academic study.

In terms of content, this fresh hearing of the voice of God will open the doors for conversation in the academy regarding the role of God in the book of Judges and the theological implications of his role. I offer the following conclusions: (1) God's actions in the book of Judges are not entirely predictable. Although the narrative is driven by the interplay between the behavior of Israel and God's response to that behavior, his response is not mechanical or automatic. At times God brings deliverance even though Israel has not repented, and at other times God withholds deliverance or is silent even though they demonstrate signs of genuine reform. (2) God's unpredictability, however, does not negate the consistency of his concern for the covenant. His pursuit of a covenant relationship that involves intimate knowing and being known is fundamental to his motivations. In his words and actions God expresses his responsibility both for maintaining his own faithfulness and for nourishing Israel's faithfulness through deliverance and discipline. (3) Although it is true that most of the action in Judges is attributed to the human characters, it is God who determines the course of events at almost every level of the narrative. (4) God relates both individually and communally, but the covenant community seems to take precedence in God's actions. This may explain how God can continue to use judges who are not morally /ethically fit for leadership. If the community can benefit

from the continued ministry of an individual, he may use them. Past studies of Judges have focused on the failure of individuals, but the book of Judges places Yahweh's concern for the community above that of the individual. Furthermore, the book of Judges demonstrates that the covenant is the central motivation out of which God relates to his people. Thus, one of the overarching themes of Judges is God's concern for his covenant relationship with Israel. He saves them from their oppressors time after time, but they continue to rebel against him. God's goal for Israel is that they dwell safely in the land that he promised to their ancestors, but their resting in the land is conditioned upon their faithful hearing of the Word of God. Yahweh instructed them to make no covenant with the enemy, but they did not hear his voice. Yahweh instructed them to fear no other gods, but they did not hear his voice. Israel's covenants with the enemy violated their covenant with Yahweh, and Israel's fear of the enemy's gods violated their trust in Yahweh's sovereignty and kingship. The God who had brought them out from the bondage of Egypt and had brought them into the promised land is now relegated to secondary status.

1.9. CONCLUSION

Chapter one has outlined the motivations, purposes and plans for my investigation into a Pentecostal hearing of the book of Judges. I have introduced the Pentecostal approach to biblical study, explained the literary-theological method, clarified the research procedure and summarized previous research on Judges. Chapter two will offer a more detailed and in-depth account of the major lines of study of the book of Judges.

CHAPTER 2

APPROACHES TO JUDGES: THE DEVELOPMENT AND PRESENT STATE OF JUDGES SCHOLARSHIP

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will overview the most significant approaches to the book of Judges and will summarize the implications of these approaches for the present study. The purpose here is not to supply a complete history of the study of Judges, but to outline the significant moves within Judges scholarship as they relate to the goals and methods of my thesis.¹ That is, as I follow the story of Judges scholarship, I will pay particular attention to ways in which previous methodologies might contribute to a Pentecostal approach to interpretation. I conclude that previous studies of Judges have progressed according to the basic paradigms of Old Testament studies in general: (1) precritical, (2) critical, and (3) postcritical.² These paradigms overlap each other to some extent, so that current scholarship on Judges that is dominated by literary, sociological and ideological approaches continues to include some historical critical concerns. I conclude further that the hermeneutical development in Judges research and the variety within contemporary models should welcome the inclusion of a Pentecostal approach.

¹ The history of Judges research has been detailed in Timothy K. Beal and David M. Gunn, 'Judges', in John Haralson Hayes (ed.), *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (2 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), I, pp. 637-47; Bartelmus, 'Forschung am Richterbuch seit Martin Noth', pp. 221-59; and Craig, 'Judges in Recent Research', pp. 159-85.

² Or, (1) premodern, (2) modern, and (3) postmodern. A transitional period could be added between the precritical and critical periods; cf. Mary C. Boys, 'Religious Education and Contemporary Biblical Scholarship', *Religious Education* 74 (1979), p. 191. I have omitted Rabbinical interpretation from my survey not because I consider it unimportant or unhelpful but because space is limited. In any case, Rabbinical interpreters exhibit the same precritical assumptions as the Christian interpreters but without the Christian applications. Furthermore, many Jewish scholars are full participants in the academy and are named below in the survey of historical critical, literary, social, and ideological approaches.

2.2. PRECRITICAL STUDIES

2.2.1. Ante-Nicene Fathers

The book of Judges receives little attention prior to the seventeenth century; therefore, virtually every significant precritical work on Judges can be mentioned here.³ The only lengthy commentary comes in the form of the nine homilies of Origen, covering Judges 1-8, and Augustine's *Questions on the Heptateuch*, of which fifty-six questions are devoted to Judges 1-16.⁴ Other Church Fathers referred to Judges numerous times, but most of the references are short, and they often serve only to illustrate another Scripture text.⁵ Examples from Origen, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian should be sufficient to demonstrate the approaches used in the ante-Nicene period.

³ It may appear that I am devoting too much space to the precritical period, but I thought it necessary in light of recent calls for a return to precritical methods. Cf., e.g., David C. Steinmetz, 'The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis', *ThT* 37 (1980), pp. 27-38; Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 96-131; and Richard G. Swinburne, 'Meaning in the Bible', in S. R. Sutherland and T. A. Roberts (eds.), *Religion, Reason and the Self* (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 1989), pp. 1-33.

⁴ Neither of these primary sources has been translated fully into English. Origen's *Homilies* are available in Latin as translated by Rufinus in J. P. Migne, *PG* (Patrologiae Cursus Completus; Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1969), XII, pp. 951-990; and Augustine's *Questions* can be consulted in Joseph Zycha (ed.) *Sancti Aureli Augustini Quaestionum in Heptateuchum Libri VII* (CSEL, 28 pt. 2.; Vindobonae: F. Tempsky, 1895), pp. 449-506. Selections from both Origen, Augustine and other ancient writers appear in English in John R. Franke and Thomas C. Oden, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel* (ACCOSOT, 4; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), pp. 99-180.

⁵ Many of these references are discussed in David M. Gunn, *Judges* (Blackwell Bible Commentaries; Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), which is the most extensive treatment of the reception history of Judges. The strength of Gunn's work is in the sheer volume of material that he accumulates and in his astute analysis. His weakness is in his lack of direct quotations from primary sources and in his complete omission of mainstream works such as Origen's *Homilies on Judges*, PG, XII; Wesley and Schoenhals, *Wesley's Notes on the Bible*; F. C. Cook and J. M. Fuller, *The Bible Commentary* (Barnes Notes on the Old Testament; 3 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953); C. F. Keil and Franz Julius Delitzsch, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (trans. James Martin; Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1872); Alfred Edersheim, *The Bible History* (7 vols.; Boston: Bradley & Woodruff, 1872); Beverly Carradine, *Gideon* (Bible Character Series; Philadelphia, PA: Pepper Pub. Co., 1902). The omission of Origen's *Homilies* is particularly surprising. Although Gunn includes music and art in his effective history, he does not mention Handel's oratorio entitled *Deborah*, and he omits important works of art, such as those of Lucas Cranach the Elder, Albrecht Dürer, Hans Speckaert, Anthony van Dyck and Mark Chagall. Gunn discusses Peter Paul Rubens, but does not show any prints of his work, and he gives us only one of Rembrandt's many paintings from Judges. On the other hand, he includes prints of artless copies and cartoons that he could have mentioned but which do not deserve illustration (plates 3.1b, 3.1c, 3.4c, 7.5d, 7.10c). Sadly, the failure to include any color plates (probably because of cost) betrays a general lack of appreciation for artistic interpretations.

Origen, the father of the Alexandrian School, set an important precedent in his interpretations of Judges, which were almost entirely allegorical and decidedly anti-Jewish. Although I would attribute his use of allegory primarily to his Hellenistic training, he justifies the search for the deeper spiritual meaning by citing 1 Cor. 10.11, where Paul states that the Scriptures of the Old Testament are 'written for our sake, upon whom the end of the ages has come'.⁶ Origen concludes that the literal sense of the Old Testament was addressed to Israel, and there must be a deeper sense that addresses the Church. Origen assumes that the Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit; they are a true record of history; and they testify at every point to Jesus Christ.

In his first homily on Judges, Origen finds meaning for the Church by allegorizing the elders who lived in the days of Joshua (Judg. 2.7), declaring that they are the Apostles of Jesus.⁷ In his second homily, he writes that the death of Joshua (Judg. 2.8) means that Jesus is dead in sinners and he lives in Christians.⁸ He states in his third homily that God's handing over of Israel to Cushanrishathaim (Judg. 3.8) teaches that God continues to deliver the proud over to the enemy for a humiliation that brings healing.⁹ Furthermore, Cushanrishathaim represents a spiritual enemy and Othniel the hero is his spiritual counterpart, one of the archangels who comes to bring deliverance to God's people (Judg. 3.10).¹⁰ In his fourth homily, Origen uses etymologies to bring out the allegory. Ehud means 'praise'; Eglon means 'round'; and Moabite means 'flow', thus Ehud is able with his praise to cut through the circle of evil ways that flows with the philosophy that

⁶ Migne, *PG*, XII, p. 958.

⁷ Migne, *PG*, XII, pp. 953-54.

⁸ Migne, *PG*, XII, pp. 956-57.

⁹ Migne, *PG*, XII, pp. 961-62.

¹⁰ Migne, *PG*, XII, pp. 963-64.

pleasure is the highest good (Judg. 3.15-30).¹¹ The fifth homily teaches that Jael, who kills Sisera with a stake, is the church, who kills the carnal man with the wood of the cross (Judg. 4.17-21).¹² The next homily declares that the kings who are called together in Deborah's song (Judg. 5.3) represent Christians who are made kings because Christ reigns in them.¹³ Origen writes in his seventh homily that just as Israel was handed over to Midian when they sinned against God (Judg. 6.1), so the church is handed over to demons when they neglect the commandments of God.¹⁴ In the eighth homily Gideon's wet fleece (Judg. 6.38) is the Jewish nation, blessed with the law and the prophets, and the dry fleece (Judg. 6.40) represents the Jews' rejection of Jesus Christ, with the wet ground being the preaching of the Gospel to the whole world.¹⁵ In his ninth and final homily, Origen concludes that Gideon's command for the fearful to go home (Judg. 7.3) symbolizes the Gospel's call to the Christian to deny self and bear the cross.¹⁶

Irenaeus, also pursuing the allegorical approach, writes that Gideon's ten servants (Judg. 6.27) mean that Gideon was helped by Jesus Christ,¹⁷ and that Gideon's fleece represents the people and the dew is the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ Irenaeus offers three comments regarding the Samson story. First, the jawbone of the ass that Samson uses to kill one thousand Philistines (Judg. 15.15) typifies the body of Jesus Christ. Second, in a non-allegorical comment, Irenaeus deduces that after Samson commits fornication (Judg. 16.1), the Spirit of the Lord does not come upon him

¹¹ Migne, *PG*, XII, p. 967.

¹² Migne, *PG*, XII, p. 971.

¹³ Migne, *PG*, XII, pp. 976-77.

¹⁴ Migne, *PG*, XII, pp. 978-79.

¹⁵ Migne, *PG*, XII, pp. 984-85.

¹⁶ Migne, *PG*, XII, pp. 986-87.

¹⁷ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A. D. 325* (10 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., American reprint edn, 1956), I, p. 571.

¹⁸ Roberts and Donaldson (eds.), *ANF*, I, p. 445.

again because fornication is a sin against the body, which is the temple of God.¹⁹

Third, allegorizing Samson's victory / death scene, Irenaeus writes:

The little boy, therefore, who guided Samson by the hand, pre-typified John the Baptist, who showed to the people the faith in Christ. And the house in which they were assembled signifies the world, in which dwell the various heathen and unbelieving nations, offering sacrifice to their idols. Moreover, the two pillars are the two covenants. The fact, then, of Samson leaning himself upon the pillars, this, that the people, when instructed, recognized the mystery of Christ.²⁰

Unlike Origen, both Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian lift up the literal sense of Judges. Clement constructs a chronology of Israel that includes Judges in order to prove that Jewish institutions predate the Greek culture.²¹ Tertullian comments on Israel's repeated idolatry and suggests that God used the enemy nations to inflict discipline on Israel, a conclusion that is little more than a restatement of the text of Judges.²²

These examples demonstrate that the ante-Nicene Fathers approached Judges primarily through the lens of allegory, and they assumed the nature of the book as inspired Scripture, its accuracy as sacred Jewish history, and the Christian significance of its deeper meaning. The deduction of Timothy Beal and David Gunn that the ante-Nicene writers referred to Judges 'primarily in regard to its recurring plot pattern of transgression-punishment-deliverance' is a mischaracterization of the Patristic exegesis of Judges, but it is an understandable statement in light of their complete neglect of both Origen and Irenaeus who contributed heavily to the allegorical tradition.²³

¹⁹ Roberts and Donaldson (eds.), *ANF*, I, p. 575.

²⁰ Roberts and Donaldson (eds.), *ANF*, I, p. 572.

²¹ Roberts and Donaldson (eds.), *ANF*, II, pp. 324-27.

²² Roberts and Donaldson (eds.), *ANF*, III, p. 636.

²³ Beal and Gunn, 'Judges', p. 637. Beal and Gunn also state erroneously that Augustine referred substantially to Judges only ten times (p. 638), when, as stated above, his *Questions in the Heptateuch* alone include 56 questions on Judges. The article is a helpful but unbalanced introduction to the interpretation of Judges. Regarding the ante-Nicene period, a period they do not seem to understand, they totally omit Origen and Irenaeus. Their discussion of Rabbinic exegesis is quite good, but the

The earliest Christians, especially those who were Jews and proselytes, accepted the Old Testament without difficulty because they had been made familiar with its content by its use in the synagogue. However, once the New Testament books had been written, and as more and more Greeks were converted, the place of the Old Testament grew uncertain. Allegorical interpretation was one attempt, based upon a Greek approach, to assure the Old Testament's relevance to the Church. The practice of allegorical reading was justified by Paul's statement in 2 Cor. 3.6 that 'the letter kills but the Spirit makes alive' (Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, III.5.9). David Steinmetz suggests that the Fathers used allegory for three reasons: (1) their belief that 'What appears to be history may be a metaphor or a figure instead';²⁴ (2) the relationship between Israel and the Church, which led to the assumption that the Old Testament was meant literally for Israel but spiritually for the church;²⁵ and (3) the difficulty of finding spiritual edification in many of the Old Testament stories.²⁶

2.2.2. Post-Nicene Fathers

Excerpts from Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine show that the allegorical method continues in the post-Nicene period. Ambrose writes that when Gideon was winnowing the wheat (Judg. 6.11) he was

separating the elect of the saints from the refuse of the empty chaff. For these elect, as though trained with the rod of truth, laying aside the superfluities of the old man together with his deeds, are gathered in the church as in a winepress. For the church is the winepress of the eternal fountain, since from it wells forth the juice of the heavenly Vine.²⁷

Protestant commentaries of the post-Reformation period are completely absent (Poole, Henry, Wesley, Cook, Clarke, Keil, etc.). Nearly forty percent of the article is devoted to the period from 1975 to the present, an amount that seems to be unnecessary since this period is most easily accessible to the article's readers. Furthermore, the bibliography is useful only in regard to recent works.

²⁴ Steinmetz, 'Pre-Critical Exegesis', p. 29.

²⁵ Steinmetz, 'Pre-Critical Exegesis', pp. 29-30.

²⁶ Steinmetz, 'Pre-Critical Exegesis', p. 30.

²⁷ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Second Series* (14 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1952), X, p. 93.

Further describing the Gideon story, Ambrose surmises that the squeezing of water from the fleece prefigures that 'Jesus Christ would wash the feet of his disciples in that heavenly dew'.²⁸ Also, Gideon's pitchers, torches and shouts are 'our bodies, fashioned of clay, which do not know fear if they burn with the fervor of the grace of the Spirit, and bear witness to the passion of the Lord Jesus with a loud confession of the voice'.²⁹

In his *Concerning Widows*, Ambrose offers a surprising interpretation of Deborah that takes into account the literal sense. He writes that Deborah was only one of many great women of her time, and he observes that she is the only one of the judges who is without fault. Assuming she is a widow, Ambrose says of Deborah:

And so one widow both ruled many thousands of men in peace and defended them from the enemy . . . I think that her judgship has been narrated and her deeds described, that women should not be restrained from deeds of valor by the weakness of their sex. A widow, she governs the people; a widow, she leads armies; a widow, she chooses generals; a widow, she determines wars and orders triumphs . . . It is not sex but valor which makes strong . . . And so according to this history a woman, that the minds of women might be stirred up, became a judge, a woman set all in order, a woman prophesied, a woman triumphed, and joining in the battle array taught men to war under a woman's lead.³⁰

Ambrose's interpretation assumes that Deborah's story serves as a theological precedent for women to accept responsibilities outside their traditional socially-assigned roles. Then, after his discussion of the literal meaning, he adds the allegorical interpretation that Deborah represents the 'battle of faith and the victory of the church'.³¹

Jerome continued the allegorical tradition in his references to Judges. He determined that Caleb's springs of water (Judg. 1.13-15) 'typify the redemption

²⁸ Schaff and Wace (eds.), *NPNF2*, X, p. 95.

²⁹ Schaff and Wace (eds.), *NPNF2*, X, p. 112.

³⁰ Schaff and Wace (eds.), *NPNF2*, X, pp. 398-99.

³¹ Schaff and Wace (eds.), *NPNF2*, X, p. 399.

which the sinner finds for his old sins in the waters of baptism',³² and that Gideon's fleece is the 'Lamb of God; whose fleece bright and clean was made wet with the dew of heaven'.³³

Augustine interprets Judges allegorically, but in addition to allegory, he utilizes numerology and the literal sense of Scripture. Regarding Gideon's fleece, his interpretation is almost identical to that of Origen, but with added material. The wet fleece represents Christ's coming first to the lost sheep of the Jews, and the dry fleece surrounded by wet ground is Christ's coming to the

other sheep who were not of the former people of Israel . . . We now understand that the nation of the Jews has remained dry of Christ's grace, and all the nations throughout the whole round world are being rained upon by clouds full of Christian grace.³⁴

Augustine's reading of the episode in which Gideon chooses only the soldiers who lap water like a dog (Judg. 7.4-7) is an example of allegory mixed with numerology. He concludes that the three hundred men who lap like a dog represent allegorically the sign of the cross, because the number three hundred is signified in Greek by the letter T, which forms the shape of the cross.³⁵ In his discussion of Jotham's parable of the bramble king (Judg. 9.8-15), Augustine reflects creatively on the value of fictional narrative to teach truth: 'Surely, all this is invented in order that we may reach the matter intended by means of a narrative [that is] fictitious, to be sure, but bearing a true and not a false signification' (*Against Lying* 13.28).³⁶

Augustine's interpretation of Jephthah and his vow (Judg. 11.30-40) is a quite lengthy and detailed examination of the text. He reaches several conclusions regarding the story: (1) human sacrifice is prohibited in Scripture; (2) Jephthah had a

³² Schaff and Wace (eds.), *NPNF2*, VI, p. 200.

³³ Schaff and Wace (eds.), *NPNF2*, VI, p. 200.

³⁴ Philip Schaff (ed.) *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. First Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. R. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1956), VIII, p. 329.

³⁵ Schaff (ed.) *NPNF1*, VIII, p. 295.

³⁶ Quoted in Franke and Oden, *Josh.-Sam.*, p. 133.

human victim in mind when making the vow; (3) Jephthah did indeed literally sacrifice his daughter; (4) the text's lack of evaluation of Jephthah's actions challenges the readers to judge for themselves; and (5) God was displeased with Jephthah's actions.³⁷ Augustine's close reading of the text demonstrates his concern to discover the literal sense before turning to the spiritual sense.

In addition to the writers that I have mentioned, Franke cites a number of other ancient and medieval scholars who commented upon Judges: Athanasius, Basil the Great, Caesarius of Arles, Ephrem the Syrian, Eusebius, Evagrius of Pontus, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory the Great, Isaac of Nineveh, John Cassian, John Chrysostom, John of Damascus, Maximus of Turin, Methodius, Paulinus of Nola, Procopius of Gaza, Prudentius, Salvian the Presbyter, and the Venerable Bede. At some points these writers value the literal sense of the text, but most of their comments perpetuate the allegorical interpretations of Origen.³⁸ In the post-Nicene period, however, both Ambrose and Augustine evince signs of movement toward a literal approach that appreciates the Old Testament narrative as theologically relevant to the Church.

2.2.3. Reformation and Post-Reformation

The lack of attention to Judges continues in the Reformation period, with neither Martin Luther nor John Calvin writing a commentary on Judges. In the *Works of Martin Luther*, the index shows fourteen references to Judges, all of which are brief citations used as support or illustrations of Luther's argument. In his introductory comments to the Old Testament, Luther describes the Pentateuch, wisdom literature, and the prophets; but he makes no comments on Joshua-Kings.³⁹ One of Luther's

³⁷ Zycha (ed.) *Augustini Quaestionum in Heptateuchum*, pp. 481-501. Cf. Gunn, *Judges*, pp. 138-39.

³⁸ Franke and Oden, *Josh.-Sam.*, pp. 99-180.

³⁹ Martin Luther, Henry Eyster Jacobs, and Adolph Spaeth, *Works of Martin Luther: With Introductions and Notes* (6 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, Philadelphia edn, 1982).

most lengthy references to Judges explains the reason that God allows trouble to come to the Christian. Citing Judg. 3, Luther refers to God's disciplining of Israel:

Wherefore also God let many of its enemies remain and would not drive them out, in order that they should not have peace and must exercise themselves in the keeping of God's commandments, as it is written, Judges iii. So he deals with us also when he sends us all kinds of misfortune: so exceedingly careful is He of us, that He may teach us and drive us to honor and call upon His Name, to gain confidence and faith toward Him, and so to fulfill the first two Commandments.⁴⁰

Luther's method includes historical investigation, study of the original languages, and movement away from allegory to an analogical application, which is one of the interpretational approaches of the New Testament.

Although Martin Luther's commentaries are at times brilliant, they lack consistency, often becoming too polemically caustic for continued usage. John Calvin, on the other hand, produced consistently sound exegesis, while only occasionally giving way to anti-Catholic or anti-Jewish polemic. Although Calvin did not write a commentary on Judges, he did compose commentaries on twenty of the thirty-nine Old Testament books, using an exegetical methodology that quickly became the dominant model for Christian biblical studies. Calvin's rejection of allegory insured its demise as a validated interpretive strategy. He expresses his distaste for allegory in the following comment on Zechariah's vision of four chariots that emerged from two mountains of brass (Zech. 6.1-3):

But as the vision is obscure, interpreters have given it different meanings. They who think that the four Gospels are designated by the four chariots, give a very frigid view. I have elsewhere reminded you, that we are to avoid these futile refinements which of themselves vanish away. Allegories, I know, delight many; but we ought reverently and soberly to interpret the prophetic writings, and not to fly in the clouds, but ever to fix our foot on solid ground.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Luther, Jacobs, and Spaeth, *Works of Martin Luther: With Introductions and Notes*, I, p. 214.

⁴¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets* (trans. John Owen; 5 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1950), V, p. 140.

Apparently, however, the practice of allegory was so deeply ingrained that even Calvin himself would occasionally slip back into its use. After mocking those who practice allegory and rejecting the view that the four chariots are the four Gospels, he insists that the mountains of brass are God's immutable decrees:

the two mountains where the chariots were seen were *mountains of brass*. The Prophet no doubt understood by these mountains the providence of God, or his hidden counsel, by which all things have been decreed before the creation of the world; and hence he says, that they were mountains of brass, as they could not be broken.⁴²

With the exegetical examples of Luther and Calvin, with the liberty granted by the Reformation, and with the influence of the Enlightenment *Zeitgeist*, post-Reformation interpretation divided gradually into two streams, one emphasizing rational scientific study of Scripture and the other emphasizing confessional (but still rational) investigation into the text.⁴³ Skeptics such as Spinoza and Voltaire questioned the historical accuracy of Judges,⁴⁴ while Protestant commentators also appealed to reason in their efforts at harmonizing the biblical voices. Matthew Poole, for example, published a two-volume commentary on the whole Bible (1685) which consisted of his translation from the original languages accompanied by annotations or explanatory notes. His stated purpose was to communicate the 'plain sense of the Scripture, and to reconcile seeming contradictions'.⁴⁵

The first major commentary on Judges was completed in 1708 by Matthew Henry, and his purpose for writing lies firmly within the tradition of the spiritual interpreters who came before him. According to Henry, he writes his commentary

in order to the reforming of men's hearts and lives. If I may but be instrumental to make my readers wise and good, wiser and better, more

⁴² Calvin, *Minor Prophets*, V, p. 141.

⁴³ I use the term 'Post-Reformation' in reference to the time between the reformation and the critical period.

⁴⁴ Gunn, *Judges*, pp. 20, 100.

⁴⁵ Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (3 vols.; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1962), I, p. vii.

watchful against sin and more careful of their duty both to God and man, and, in order thereto, more in love with the word and law of God.⁴⁶

In the face of Enlightenment skepticism toward the accuracy of biblical narratives, Henry, like Poole before him, includes an apologetic for the veracity of Scripture. Concerning alleged contradictions in the Bible, he states, 'I have not indeed met with any difficulties so great but that solutions might be given of them sufficient to silence the atheists and antiscriturists, and roll away from the sacred records all the reproach of contradiction and inconsistency with themselves'.⁴⁷ Henry's view of Scripture is adopted by conservative Protestant writers for the subsequent two hundred years. In five statements Henry describes his understanding of the nature of Old Testament narrative:

I. That it is history . . . we are sure that in this history there is no matter of fact recorded but what has its use and will help either to expound God's providence or guide man's prudence. II. That it is true history, and what we may rely upon the credit of, and need not fear being deceived in . . . III. That it is ancient history, far more ancient than was ever pretended to come from any other hand . . . IV. That it is church history, the history of the Jewish church, that sacred society, incorporated for religion, and the custody of the oracles and ordinances of God, by a charter under the broad seal of heaven, a covenant confirmed by miracles . . . V. That it is a divine history, given by inspiration of God, and a part of that blessed book which is to be the standing rule of our faith and practice . . . here we meet with many who were figures of him that was to come, such as Joshua, Samson . . .⁴⁸

In light of Henry's view of Scripture and his perceived role as commentator, it is not surprising to find that he shrinks back from any critical inquiry that might be deemed unfaithful or that might appear to disparage Scripture. His conclusion regarding Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter provides a case in point. Although he admits that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter, Henry is not alarmed by it and succeeds in finding positive lessons in Jephthah's actions. He insists (1) that 'it is

⁴⁶ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (6 vols.; New York: Fleming H. Revell, rev. and corr. edn, n.d.), II, p. iii.

⁴⁷ Henry, *Commentary*, II, p. iii.

⁴⁸ Henry, *Commentary*, II, p. iv.

very good, when we are in the pursuit or expectation of any mercy, to make vows';⁴⁹ (2) 'what we have solemnly vowed to God we must conscientiously perform';⁵⁰ (3) 'it well becomes children obediently and cheerfully to submit to their parents in the Lord';⁵¹ and (4) that Jephthah's daughter 'cheerfully submitted to the performance of his vow'.⁵²

John Wesley, who usually praised Matthew Henry, is incensed at Henry's apparent devaluation of human life. Wesley is so appalled at the thought of human sacrifice that he is unwilling to entertain even the possibility that a biblical hero could have considered such an outrageous act. Wesley writes:

It is really astonishing, that the general stream of commentators, should take it for granted, that Jephthah murdered his daughter! But, says Mr. Henry, "We do not find any law, usage or custom, in all the Old Testament, which doth in the least intimate, that a single life was any branch or article of religion." And do we find any law, usage or custom there, which doth in the least intimate, that cutting the throat of an only child, was any branch or article of religion? If only a dog had met Jephthah, would he have offered up that for a burnt-offering? No: because God had expressly forbidden this. And had he not expressly forbidden murder?⁵³

Both Henry and Wesley approach the Jephthah story with a concern to avoid indicting Jephthah the hero, but they use two different strategies in their efforts to save Jephthah's reputation. Henry admits to the human sacrifice but downplays its significance, and Wesley denies outright that the sacrifice ever took place. The precritical approach to Scripture usually prevents these and other writers from wrestling genuinely with the difficult texts of Judges.

Wesley's response to the Jephthah story may be symptomatic of his general lack of regard for the book of Judges. According to existing records, Wesley never preached a sermon from Judges, and he made few references to Judges within the

⁴⁹ Henry, *Commentary*, II, p. 196.

⁵⁰ Henry, *Commentary*, II, p. 196.

⁵¹ Henry, *Commentary*, II, p. 196.

⁵² Henry, *Commentary*, II, p. 196.

⁵³ Wesley and Schoenhals, *Wesley's Notes on the Bible*, p. 171.

body of his sermons.⁵⁴ Wesley had no desire to write a commentary on the Bible, but because of continual pressure from those around him, he finally consented and composed the work near the end of his life. His notes on Judges display his wide range of reading, but Wesley himself focused his comments mostly on his own interests, which included his theology of holiness and other Christian applications.⁵⁵

The nineteenth century witnessed a proliferation of Bible commentaries, most of which continued to pursue a confessional approach. Adam Clarke, a follower of Wesley, finished his commentary on the whole Bible in 1826.⁵⁶ Clark was a genuine scholar of Scripture and all the attendant disciplines, including languages, history, geography, culture, philosophy, archaeology. His commentary represents the transitional period between precritical and critical study of the Old Testament. Although Clarke clearly writes from a confessional stance, elements of his commentary suggest that he is moving toward a critical methodology in his interpretation. He incorporates the most recent discoveries in Ancient Near Eastern religions and writings. All of his citations of ancient languages are typeset in their original scripts. He compares numerous ancient versions and writings, including the Targums, the Vulgate, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Septuagint, Theodotian, Rabbinical texts, and classical Greek texts. Occasionally, he allows the LXX or another version to take precedence over the Masoretic Text (particularly if that version offers a less controversial reading).⁵⁷ He includes chronological data on almost every page, placing side-by-side the Jewish calendar, Greek calendar, and

⁵⁴ John Wesley and Albert Cook Outler, *The Works of John Wesley* (25 vols.; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, Bicentennial edn, 1984), I-IV. Outler's index of Wesley's works includes only twelve citations from Judges.

⁵⁵ See for example his application of Judg. 6.8-10: Wesley and Schoenhals, *Wesley's Notes on the Bible*, p. 168.

⁵⁶ Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testament: Including the Marginal Readings and Parallel Texts, with a Commentary and Critical Notes* (6 vols.; Syracuse, NY: Wesleyan Methodist Publishing Association, Ward, a new rev. and corr. edn, 1881).

⁵⁷ E.g., the reading of the LXX is more sympathetic toward Barak than is the MT. Clarke, *Commentary*, n.p. (Clarke's commentary has no page numbers).

Gregorian calendar. Although he includes a running chronology, he allows that the narratives of Judges may not be in chronological order, and he rejects allegorical and typological methods.

Clarke, therefore, comes very close to writing a critical commentary, but his precritical concerns continue to control much of his exegesis. Thus, he avoids discussing some difficult passages, such as Judg. 10.13, where Yahweh refuses to save Israel again. Also, he displays a tendency, like Henry and Wesley, to soften the rough edges of the characters, referring to Jephthah's mother as an innkeeper instead of a harlot (Judg. 11.1), and interpreting Jephthah positively by arguing for the appropriateness of his vow and by denying that he killed his daughter. Thus, dispelling any questions regarding Jephthah's faith and his integrity, Clarke writes, 'That Jephthah was a deeply pious man appears in the whole of his conduct'.⁵⁸

Other commentaries that appear later in the nineteenth century, including those by F. C. Cook⁵⁹ and C. F. Keil, follow the tradition of the Protestant commentaries that preceded them.⁶⁰ Keil's interpretation is the pinnacle of precritical exegesis, showing evidence of keen intellect, linguistic acumen, and broad knowledge of Scripture. Unfortunately, he refuses to engage historical criticism, believing it to be a passing fad. Keil's inability to face the difficulties in the text of Judges results in a commentary that lacks depth and creativity and suffers from the same precritical confessional shortcomings as Henry, Wesley, and Clark.

In summary, post-Reformation confessional commentators mostly ignore modern criticism, while choosing to insist upon the historical truth of the biblical

⁵⁸ Clarke, *Commentary*, n.p. In contrast to most other confessional readings, James M. Gray, *The Concise Bible Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), p. 307, circa 1930, ventures to condemn the behavior of the judges. He writes, 'No apology can be made for the action of Jael the Kenite woman of verses 17-21 . . . She was the meanest of maddest murderers. It must not be supposed that although her action was foreknown to God it was sanctioned by Him; neither that because Deborah praises it in her song (chap. 5), therefore she is pronouncing a eulogy on the moral character of the woman'.

⁵⁹ Cook and Fuller, *The Bible Commentary*.

⁶⁰ Keil and Delitzsch, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*.

narrative. They believe firmly in the divine inspiration of Scripture and the overall unity of Scripture while downplaying the human participation in the origin of Scripture and the divergent voices within Scripture. Although the post-Reformation writers abandoned allegory as a method, they continue to view the Old Testament primarily as a prophetic witness to Jesus Christ and they strain to find a direct Christological referent in every Old Testament word.

2.3. CRITICAL STUDIES

2.3.1. Historical Critical Approaches

The beginnings of the historical critical study of Judges overlap the precritical period. The roots of historical criticism were put down in the soil of the Protestant Reformation: a modern view of history, the rejection of allegorical hermeneutics, the principle of *Sola Scriptura*, renewed study of the original languages of Scripture, resistance to ecclesiastical control of interpretation, beginnings of humanism, moves towards individualism, and the rise of rationalism and the scientific method. These critical roots are evident in all of the commentaries on Judges in the post-Reformation era, but the confessional stance of the precritical writers prevents their complete adoption of historical critical method.

The separation quickly grew wider between the stream of confessional interpretation and the stream of critical inquiry as historical critics applied to Judges the same methods that they had used to analyze the Pentateuch. Source critics, recognizing the apparent compositional nature of Judges, sought to explicate the compositional history. Form critics, observing the multiplex of narratives in Judges, attempted to isolate the most primitive units within the book. Archaeologists and

historians created volumes of material in their efforts to discern the accuracy of the numerous political, geographical, and chronological references in Judges.⁶¹

Although the first critical commentary on Judges is G. L. Studer's *Das Buch der Richter* (1835),⁶² the first critical work with a lasting impact is George F. Moore's *ICC* commentary, published in 1895.⁶³ The importance of Moore's work is substantiated by the fact that to this day his commentary serves as a resource for virtually every writer on Judges. C. F. Kraft, writing in 1962, claims that Moore's commentary 'is still the most useful';⁶⁴ and Robert Boling in his *Anchor Bible Dictionary* article, dated 1992, cites Moore in one of his few references to commentaries.⁶⁵ The most recent works on Judges, including those by O'Connell,⁶⁶ Amit,⁶⁷ Block,⁶⁸ Schneider,⁶⁹ Brettler,⁷⁰ McCann,⁷¹ and Gunn⁷² continue to utilize extensively Moore's commentary. The continued presence of Moore's commentary is a testimony to his giftedness as a biblical scholar, but it also indicates a lack of genuine progress in the historical critical study of Judges subsequent to Moore. Given the monumental contributions of later scholars such as Albrecht Alt, Martin Noth, and Norman Gottwald, one would expect that the Nineteenth Century conclusions of Moore

⁶¹ For an insightful summary of the critical period (and beyond) from the perspective of Old Testament theology, see Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), pp. 1-115.

⁶² Cited in George F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), p. xlix.

⁶³ Moore, *Judges*.

⁶⁴ C. F. Kraft, 'The Book of Judges', in George Arthur Buttrick (ed.), *IDB* (4 vols.; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962), II, p. 1023.

⁶⁵ Robert G. Boling, 'Judges', *ABD* (6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992), III, p. 1114.

⁶⁶ O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*. O'Connell cites Moore 29 times, first on p. 49.

⁶⁷ Yairah Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing* (trans. Jonathan Chipman; *Biblical Interpretation*, 38; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999). Amit includes 30 references to Moore, the first citation is on p. 40.

⁶⁸ Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* (New American Commentary, 6; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999). Block cites Moore 14 times, the first citation is on p. 44.

⁶⁹ Schneider, *Judges*, has no author index, but she lists Moore in the bibliography (p. 295).

⁷⁰ Marc Z. Brettler, *The Book of Judges* (Old Testament Readings; New York: Routledge, 2002). Brettler cites Moore 8 times (pp. 40, 62-65, 67, 80, 103).

⁷¹ McCann, *Judges*. McCann has no author index, but he lists Moore in his bibliography (p. 141).

⁷² Gunn, *Judges*, pp. 25, 49-51, 86-87, 105, 116-17, 241, 271.

would have been rendered obsolete. It appears instead that, in spite the importance of recent critical discoveries, those historical critical advances do not always bear directly upon the interpretation of the biblical text of Judges.

The critical stance of Moore's commentary is made clear from the outset when he relegates the spiritual significance of Judges to three paragraphs in his introduction. On the one hand, he admits that the author's purposes in writing Judges are not 'historical, but religious'; but, on the other hand, he insists paradoxically that the 'interest and importance of the Book of Judges' consist in its contribution to historical reconstruction.⁷³ The precritical commentators assume that finding the spiritual significance of the text is their primary objective, but Moore considers his task to be wholly different from that of his predecessors. With Moore's commentary, the paradigm shift to scientific objectivity is complete; biblical scholarship on Judges is severed from the confessional approaches. Whereas in the precritical period the academy is controlled by the church, and nonconfessional study of Scripture is marginalized; in the critical period the opposite is the case. The academy is now controlled by nonconfessional perspectives, and confessional study of Scripture is marginalized. David C. Steinmetz, however, unfairly caricatures critical scholars when he accuses them of denying the spiritual meaning of Scripture. It would be more accurate to say that critical scholars do not deny the spiritual meaning but that they exclude the spiritual interpretation from the work of the academy.⁷⁴

Moore's commentary lifts up several concerns that continue to serve as focal points for the historical critical study of Judges. First and foremost, Moore devotes

⁷³ Moore, *Judges*, pp. xvi-xviii. Cf. also Burney, *Judges*, who entitles a section of his introduction 'The Permanent Religious Value of Judges' (pp. cxviii-cxxii).

⁷⁴ Steinmetz, 'Pre-Critical Exegesis', pp. 27-28. As evidence of their spiritual interests, it should be noted that scholars such as Gerhard von Rad, Sigmund Mowinckel, and Claus Westermann functioned as preachers in addition to their roles in the academy. Donald K. McKim, *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), pp. 505, 527, 535.

his energies to the questions of the authorship, date and compositional history of the book of Judges, including the relationship between Judges and the larger Deuteronomic (or Deuteronomistic) History.⁷⁵ He concludes that Judges was composed in six stages: (1) J, a 9th century work that included the basic history of Israel from Exodus through Samuel; (2) E, an 8th century version with the same stories but not as historically accurate as J; (3) E₂, a prophetic recension of E, influenced by Hosea, composed in the late 8th to early 7th centuries; (4) JE, a 7th century prophetic work that combined J and E (E₂); (5) D, a 6th century Deuteronomic work based on JE, but not including all of JE; and (6) the 5th to 4th century combination of JE and D along with added final touches.⁷⁶ Throughout his commentary, Moore carefully identifies each of the sources within the text and compares his conclusions with those of other scholars. Although numerous subsequent writers modify the compositional history in significant ways, the consensus continues to maintain that Judges was written in several stages, with each subsequent editor adding his own layer of material.⁷⁷

Another question addressed by Moore is the definition and function of the office of judge, including possible differences between the major and minor judges, but he gives the matter only a little attention.⁷⁸ Basing his argument upon the meaning of the Hebrew word שֹׁפֵט, Moore indicates that a judge could be either a

⁷⁵ Moore, *Judges*, pp. vi, xix-xxxvii.

⁷⁶ Moore, *Judges*, pp. xxxiii-xxxv. Moore's presentation of the compositional history follows the basic outlines of Karl Budde, *Die Bücher Richter und Samuel, ihre Quellen und ihr Aufbau* (Giessen: Ricker, 1890). He also adopts elements from Julius Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* (Berlin, 1889); and Abraham Kuenen, *Historisch-kritisch onderzoek naar het ontstaan en de verzameling van de boeken des Ouden Verbonds* (3 vols.; Leiden: Akademische boekhandel van P. Engels, 1861).

⁷⁷ See 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); Wolfgang Richter, *Die Bearbeitungen des 'Richterbuches' in der Deuteronomischen Epoche* (Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1964); and the recent discussion in O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, pp. 345-54. Occasionally, a writer will question the layered model; e.g., P. Deryn Guest, 'Can Judges Survive Without Sources? Challenging the Consensus', *JSOT*, no. 78 (1998), pp. 43-61.

⁷⁸ Moore, *Judges*, pp. xi-xiii, 88-89.

'deliverer' or a 'ruler', and he hints at the fact that the major judges function primarily as deliverers while the minor judges fulfill the more general role of ruler.⁷⁹ In both cases, the judge is a non-hereditary office that might be called a tribal 'chief'.⁸⁰ The argument for the distinction between the major and the minor judges was fully developed later by Albrecht Alt,⁸¹ and both the historical and literary functions of the minor judges continue to attract attention.⁸²

Moore's pursuit of historical accuracy causes him to posit a third critical observation, namely, the apparent contradiction between the models of conquest presented in Joshua and Judges. According to Moore, Judges 1 is the more accurate representation of Israel's history, and Joshua is an imaginative restatement.⁸³ He writes that Judges 1 'contains an account of the invasion and settlement of Western Palestine entirely different from that given in the Book of Joshua, and of vastly greater historical value'.⁸⁴ The consensus of scholarship continues to agree with Moore, but the topic is occasionally revisited and revised. Mark Brettler, for example argues that Judges 1.1-2.10 originally functioned as an appendix to Joshua,⁸⁵ while K.

⁷⁹ Moore, *Judges*, p. xi.

⁸⁰ Moore, *Judges*, p. xii.

⁸¹ Albrecht Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (trans. R. A. Wilson; Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), pp. 130-33. See also Martin Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien: die sammelnden und bearbeitenden Geschichtswerke im Alten Testament* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 2nd edn, 1957), pp. 47-50.

⁸² Cf. Alan J. Hauser, 'Minor Judges: A Re-Evaluation', *JBL* 94 (1975); Pietro Alberto Kaswalder, 'I Giudici Di Israele', *LA* 41 (1991); E. Theodore Mullen, 'The "Minor Judges": Some Literary and Historical Considerations', *CBQ* 44 (1982); Beverly G. Beem, 'The Minor Judges: A Literary Reading of Some Very Short Stories', in K. Younger, B. Batto, and W. Hallo (eds.), *The Biblical Canon in Comparative Perspective* (Lewiston, NY: Edward Mellen Press, 1991); Klaus D. Schunck, 'Falsche Richter im Richterbuch', in R. Liwak (ed.), *Prophetie und Geschichtliche Wirklichkeit* (1991), pp. 364-70; and Ellis Easterly, 'A Case of Mistaken Identity: The Judges in Judges Don't Judge', *BR* 13 (1997), pp. 41-43, 47.

⁸³ Moore, *Judges*, pp. 4-10.

⁸⁴ Moore, *Judges*, p. 7.

⁸⁵ Marc Z. Brettler, 'Judges 1:1-2:10: From Appendix to Prologue', *ZAW* 101 (1989), pp. 433-35.

Lawson Younger claims that Judges 1 is a 'highly stylized' account that is dependent upon Joshua.⁸⁶

A fourth concern of Moore is the accuracy of specific historical/geographical data in Judges as compared to external archaeological sources, including other ANE literature. Moore judges the accuracy of virtually every historical and geographical reference in Judges, including the account of the capture of Jerusalem (Judg. 1.8)⁸⁷ and the construction of the Canaanite chariots of iron (Judg. 1.19).⁸⁸ Although his conclusions are usually based upon specific evidence, he is guilty at times of making blanket statements lacking in evidentiary support. For example, regarding the Danite story (Judg. 17-18), Moore declares that its historical content 'bears every mark of truthfulness';⁸⁹ but concerning the tribal war narrative (Judg. 20-21) he insists 'in the whole description of the war there is hardly a semblance of reality'.⁹⁰ His evaluation of historical and geographical references belies his 19th century context, which allowed for the acceptance of Judges as a mostly reliable source for historical reconstruction. Many historians would now view Judges as mostly unreliable as an historical source.⁹¹

⁸⁶ Cf. K. Lawson Younger, 'The Configuring of Judicial Preliminaries: Judges 1.1-2.5 and Its Dependence on the Book of Joshua', *JSOT*, no. 68 (1995), p. 79.

⁸⁷ Moore, *Judges*, pp. 21.

⁸⁸ Moore, *Judges*, p. 38.

⁸⁹ Moore, *Judges*, p. 370.

⁹⁰ Moore, *Judges*, p. 405.

⁹¹ Cf. Philip R. Davies, *In Search of "Ancient Israel"* (JSOTSup, 148; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); Niels P. Lemche and Frederick H. Cryer, *Early Israel: Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite Society before the Monarchy* (VTSup, 37; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), 37; V. Philips Long, *Israel's Past in Present Research: Essays on Ancient Israelite Historiography* (Sources for Biblical and Theological Study, 7; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999); Mieke Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Eben Scheffler, 'Beyond the Judges and the Amphictyony: The Politics of Tribal Israel (1200-1020 BCE)', *OTE* 14, no. 3 (2001); Thomas L. Thompson, *The Bible in History: How Writers Create a Past* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999); and Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001).

A fifth concern of Moore (which may be considered a subset of the fourth) is the overall chronology of the premonarchic period in Israel's history.⁹² Moore attempts to harmonize the pre-monarchic chronology of Joshua and Judges with the 480-year total given in 1 Kgs 6.1, arguing that the narratives in Judges are not successive but overlap each other. He attempts this harmonization in spite of his deduction that the numbers in Judges are a 'systematic chronology, in which a generation is reckoned at forty years, and the period made to consist of twelve generations'.⁹³ Mieke Bal observes that even though more recent commentaries admit to the figurative role of the chronology in Judges, they continue to attempt a chronological reconstruction of the Judges period.⁹⁴ While I would readily subscribe to the value of historical reconstruction (for the study of history), I would plead for a valuing of the narrative construction as it is found in the text. The arrangement of the stories within a successive chronological framework is not without thematic significance, and to ignore the text in favor of historical reconstruction can result in a failure to hear the message of the text.

Moore, Burney and other early source critics occupied themselves with questions of the authorship, date, compositional history, and historical veracity of Judges; but they demonstrated little interest in the larger questions of theme and purpose. As a result of this atomistic approach, their works include virtually no reference to one of the most prominent historical critical concerns of recent years;

⁹² Moore, *Judges*, pp. xv-xix, xxxvii-xliii.

⁹³ Moore, *Judges*, p. xxxviii.

⁹⁴ Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, p. 5. Discussions of the chronology include those of Burney, *Judges*, pp. l-liv; John Garstang, *Joshua-Judges* (London: Constable & Co., 1931), pp. 51-66; John Gray, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth* (New Century Bible; Greenwood, S.C.: Attic Press, rev. edn, 1977), pp. 3-7; Robert G. Boling, *Judges: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), pp. xx-xxi; J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), pp. 6-12; and David L. Washburn, 'The Chronology of Judges: Another Look', *BSac* 147 (1990), pp. 414-25. On the other hand, cf. Barnabas Lindars, *Judges 1-5: A New Translation and Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), pp. 125-26; who, although he repeatedly refers to Judges as a 'history', argues that historical reconstruction of Judges is impossible and argues for a narrative understanding of the text. For a concise analysis of the historical relevance of Judges (and other texts), see Mieke Bal, *Murder and Difference: Gender, Genre, and Scholarship on Sisera's Death* (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature; Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 15-36.

namely, the political themes of Judges, especially the monarchy and the priority of the tribe of Judah.

The historical critical approach exemplified by Moore serves as the basic paradigm for the study of Judges throughout most of the 20th Century, but additional elements are contributed by Albrecht Alt and his student Martin Noth. Alt's major contribution to the study of Judges is his formulation of the immigration model of the Israelite settlement of Canaan. He argued that small semi-nomadic groups in search of grazing land moved gradually into Palestine over an extended period of time. Eventually, the encroachment of newcomers produced conflict with the Canaanite inhabitants. The settlers finally gained control of the area by the time of Saul and David.⁹⁵

Alt's immigration model is incompatible with the story of the conquest as recorded in the book of Joshua, but it can be accommodated by the book of Judges. As Alt's theory gained in popularity, Judges came to be accepted as the more accurate account of the Israelite settlement of Canaan, a replacement for Joshua instead of a sequel to Joshua. Alt's student, Martin Noth, added to the model by arguing that the early Israelite tribal organization was a loose-knit association similar to the Greek amphictyonic league.⁹⁶ Noth's theory of the Israelite amphictyony gained a large following but is no longer considered the best explanation for the tribal connections of premonarchic Israel.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Cf. Albrecht Alt, 'Die Landnahme der Israeliten in Palästina', *RUL* (1925), pp. 133-69; which was later published in English as a chapter in Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, pp. 73-221.

⁹⁶ Martin Noth, *Das System der zwölf Stämme Israels* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, [Unveränderter reprografischer Nachdruck der Ausg. Stuttgart 1930] edn, 1966), pp. 43-104. Both Ewald and Alt had furnished Noth with the foundation of his theory. Cf. Noth, *Das System*, p. 43, n. 1.

⁹⁷ Critics of Noth's theory include A. D. H. Mayes, 'Israel in the Pre-Monarchy Period', *VT* 23 (1973), pp. 151-170; C. H. J. de Geus, *The Tribes of Israel: An Investigation into Some of the Presuppositions of Martin Noth's Amphictyony Hypothesis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1976); Niels P. Lemche, 'Israel in the Period of the Judges: The Tribal League in Recent Research', *ST* 38 (1984), pp. 1-28; and Scheffler, 'Judges and the Amphictyony', pp. 494-509.

The wide acceptance of Alt's model and its ongoing opposition by William F. Albright created a long-standing division within the field of biblical history and archaeology.⁹⁸ George Mendenhall, a student of Albright, proposed a third alternative in place of the traditional conquest model and Alt's immigration model. Mendenhall proposed that a socio-political revolution had occurred within the Canaanite polytheistic, feudalistic society out of which emerged the monotheistic Israelite tribal society. This revolution was instigated by a group of Yahwistic refugees from Egypt.⁹⁹ Mendenhall's theory was taken up and modified by Norman Gottwald, whose more sociologically oriented model has become the dominant critical explanation for the Israelite emergence in Canaan.¹⁰⁰

The challenges by Albrecht Alt to the fundamental accuracy of Israel's primary history produced a major shift in the critical approach to Judges. Following Alt, the critical study of the Former Prophets was pushed even farther by Martin Noth, whose conception of the Deuteronomistic History as a purposeful redaction turned critical interest toward the thematic element in the Deuteronomistic corpus.¹⁰¹ The book of Judges was seen as a part of a larger exilic work, whose themes were embedded throughout Judges. The repeated cycle of idolatry and punishment within Judges fits well into the exilic theme of Yahweh's justification for imposing the Exile on Israel. Thus, the Exile is explained by the Deuteronomist as Yahweh's final punishment for Israel's continued idolatry. The study of the Deuteronomistic

⁹⁸ William F. Albright, 'Archaeology and the Date of the Hebrew Conquest of Palestine', *BASOR* 58 (1935), pp. 10-18. Albright's position is embodied in John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Westminster Aids to the Study of the Scriptures; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 3d edn, 1981); and George Ernest Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, new and rev. edn, 1962).

⁹⁹ George E. Mendenhall, 'Hebrew Conquest of Palestine', *BA* 25 (1962), pp. 66-87.

¹⁰⁰ Gottwald's sociological approach will be discussed below. Both the theoretical foundations and the details of the model are presented in Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979).

¹⁰¹ See Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*.

History has advanced significantly in recent years, fueled in particular by the literary approach of Robert Polzin.¹⁰²

Noth's concept of redactional purpose opens the door for investigation into further evidence of compositional purpose within the book of Judges. Two primary political themes emerge from subsequent critical studies: (1) the necessity of the monarchy as a means of achieving national unity, and (2) the primacy of the tribe of Judah (and the Judahite monarchy). The importance of these themes is evident in the massive work produced by Robert O'Connell, who combines several themes in formulating a statement of purpose. He concludes that the purpose of Judges is

to enjoin its readers to endorse a divinely appointed Judahite king who, in contrast to either foreign kings or previous non-Judahite deliverers in Israel, upholds such deuteronomic ideals as the need to expel foreigners from the land and the need to maintain intertribal loyalty to YHWH's cult and regulations concerning social justice.¹⁰³

2.3.2. Sociological Approaches

Mendenhall's approach to the Israelite settlement of Canaan was taken up and modified by Norman Gottwald, who relied more heavily upon the sociological factors of retribalization rather than the influence of a Moses refugee group to explain the Canaanite revolt. Gottwald argued that what cemented the Israelite society was the egalitarian nature of the Yahwist movement as it stood in contrast to the surrounding feudal city-states. Accordingly, Yahwism did not give rise to the Israelite society as much as the Israelite society gave rise to Yahwism. A larger methodological implication of his work is that the religion of Israel cannot be understood apart from the social world in which it functioned. Gottwald's view now

¹⁰² Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*. Polzin applies to the DH the methodology of modern Russian formalism.

¹⁰³ O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 1.

dominates the critical consensus as the most plausible explanation for the Israelite settlement of Canaan and the ensuing organization of the premonarchic period.¹⁰⁴

Although important foundations for sociological study of ancient Israel were laid by Louis Wallis¹⁰⁵ and Max Weber,¹⁰⁶ and although Alt, Noth and Mendenhall¹⁰⁷ operated with a degree of sociological understanding, it is Gottwald whose work brought sociological method to the forefront of Old Testament studies.¹⁰⁸ Because of Gottwald, Old Testament scholars can no longer afford to work without some knowledge of the sociology of ancient Israel. He demonstrated that the Old Testament cannot be understood apart from the socio-economic setting out of which it arose. This major intrusion of social sciences into what had been for one hundred years an historical enterprise marked a pivotal point in the critical study of the Old Testament, opening the door for the further incorporation of methodologies from psychology, anthropology, political science, literary criticism, and other disciplines.¹⁰⁹

2.4. POSTCRITICAL STUDIES

Sociological methods have been applied to the book of Judges not only as a means of describing the settlement and tribal organization of Israel, but also as a means of defining the role of the judges as charismatic leaders.¹¹⁰ In the wake of Gottwald's

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh*, pp. 489-650.

¹⁰⁵ Louis Wallis, *Sociological Study of the Bible* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1912).

¹⁰⁶ Max Weber, *Das antike Judentum* (Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie, 3; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1923).

¹⁰⁷ E.g., George E. Mendenhall, 'Social Organization in Early Israel', *Magnalia Dei* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co, 1976), pp. 132-51.

¹⁰⁸ See the more recent Robert R. Wilson, *Sociological Approaches to the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); and Charles E. Carter and Carol L. Meyers, *Community, Identity, and Ideology: Social Science Approaches to the Hebrew Bible* (Sources for Biblical and Theological Study, 6; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996).

¹⁰⁹ The line of demarcation between critical and postcritical is difficult to mark with exactness, but because the sociological approaches led the way forward, I have chosen to place the line at this point.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Abraham Malamat, 'Charismatic Leadership in the Book of Judges', in F. Cross, W. Lemke, and P. Miller (eds.), *Magnalia Dei, The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 152-68; Ze'ev Weisman, 'Charismatic

revolution, sociological approaches have been applied to individual narratives within the book of Judges¹¹¹ and to broader aspects of the book.¹¹² Furthermore, the prominent role of women in Judges provides a unique source for sociological investigation that intersects with other contemporary fields such as gender studies.

2.4.1. Literary/Rhetorical approaches

Even before Gottwald's work in the sociological study of the OT (1979), literary critics were beginning to apply their interpretive skills to the biblical text. James Muilenburg, in his 1968 Presidential Address to the Society of Biblical Literature, recognizes that literary criticism of Scripture was the appropriate next step in the progression of critical methodology. He argues that, although the conclusions of form criticism remain valid and useful, the method has reached the limits of its contribution to Old Testament studies; it 'has outrun its course'.¹¹³ The obsolescence of form criticism is based upon its inherent methodological boundaries and, paradoxically, upon its comprehensive success in application.¹¹⁴ Muilenburg suggests that it is time to move beyond the generalizing tendencies of form criticism

Leaders in the Era of the Judges', *ZAW* 89 (1977), pp. 399-411; Peter A. Munch, 'The "Judges" of Ancient Israel: An Exploration in Charismatic Authority', in W. Swatos (ed.), *Time, Place, and Circumstance: Neo-Weberian Studies in Comparative Religious History* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), pp. 57-69; Rodney R. Hutton, *Charisma and Authority in Israelite Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); and Timothy M. Willis, 'The Nature of Jephthah's Authority', *CBQ* 59 (1997), pp. 33-44.

¹¹¹ E.g., Marvin Lee Chaney, 'HDL-II and the Song of Deborah: Textual, Philological, and Sociological Studies in Judges 5, with Special Reference to the Verbal Occurrences of HDL in Biblical Hebrew', (Ph.D., Harvard, 1976); Susan Niditch, 'The "Sodomite" Theme in Judges 19-20: Family, Community, and Social Disintegration', *CBQ* 44 (1982), pp. 365-78; Jo Ann Hackett, 'In the Days of Jael: Reclaiming the History of Women in Ancient Israel', in C. Atkinson, C. Buchanan, and M. Miles (eds.), *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), pp. 15-38; Naomi Steinberg, 'Social Scientific Criticism: Judges 9 and Issues of Kinship', in G. Yee (ed.), *Judges and Method* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 45-64; and Heidi M. Szpek, 'Achshah's Story: A Metaphor for Societal Transition', *AUSS* 40, no. 2 (2002), pp. 245-56.

¹¹² E.g., Walter Brueggemann, 'Social Criticism and Social Vision in the Deuteronomistic Formula of the Judges', in J. Jeremias and L. Perliitt (eds.), *Die Botschaft und die Boten: Festschrift für Hans Walter Wolff zum 70. Geburtstag* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), pp. 101-114, later published in Walter Brueggemann, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), pp. 73-90. See also Alice A. Keefe, 'Rapes of Women/Wars of Men', *Semeia* 61 (1993), pp. 79-97; Corrine L. Patton, 'From Heroic Individual to Nameless Victim: Women in the Social World of the Judges', in L. Elder (ed.), *Biblical and Humane* (1996), pp. 33-46; and Donald Bruce Mackay, 'Ethnicity and Israelite Religion: The Anthropology of Social Boundaries in Judges', (Ph.D., University of Toronto (Canada), 1997).

¹¹³ Muilenburg, 'Form Criticism and Beyond', p. 4.

¹¹⁴ Muilenburg, 'Form Criticism and Beyond', p. 4.

into the study of specific formulations of individual texts.¹¹⁵ He calls this study of the literary structure and pattern of the text 'rhetorical criticism',¹¹⁶ and he takes note of previous studies that demonstrate movement toward the rhetorical approach. He characterizes W. F. Albright's archaeological study of the Song of Deborah as a stylistic approach, and he acknowledges Gerleman's 1951 stylistic study of the Song of Deborah.¹¹⁷ (In relation to Judges, he could have included Joseph Blenkinsopp's 1961 study of the Song of Deborah¹¹⁸ and his 1963 article on the Samson cycle.¹¹⁹) Muilenburg, however, was soon superseded by literary critics whose contributions moved beyond his proposal in two specific areas: (1) his focus on the individual pericope to the exclusion of the larger text; and (2) his search for authorial intent. Regarding authorial purpose he writes, 'a responsible and proper articulation of the words in their linguistic patterns and in their precise formulations will reveal to us the texture and fabric of the writer's thought, not only what it is that he thinks, but as he thinks it'.¹²⁰ In spite of Muilenburg's continued concern with the author behind the text, he is successful in pushing biblical studies toward methods that give attention to the text and are sensitive to the literary nature of the text.

Although Muilenburg made the greater impact upon biblical studies, he was actually preceded by J. P. U. Lilley, who advanced in 1967 a call for the literary interpretation of the book of Judges.¹²¹ Lilley bases his argument on the fact that

¹¹⁵ Muilenburg, 'Form Criticism and Beyond', p. 5.

¹¹⁶ Muilenburg, 'Form Criticism and Beyond', p. 8.

¹¹⁷ Muilenburg, 'Form Criticism and Beyond', p. 8. Cf. William F. Albright, 'The Song of Deborah in the Light of Archaeology', *BASOR* 62 (1936), pp. 26-31 and Gillis Gerleman, 'Song of Deborah in the Light of Stylistics', *VT* 1 (1951), pp. 169-80.

¹¹⁸ Joseph Blenkinsopp, 'Ballad Style and Psalm Style in the Song of Deborah', *Bib* 42 (1961), pp. 61-76.

¹¹⁹ Joseph Blenkinsopp, 'Structure and Style in Judges 13-16', *JBL* 82 (1963), pp. 65-76.

¹²⁰ Muilenburg, 'Form Criticism and Beyond', p. 7.

¹²¹ Lilley, 'Literary Appreciation of Judges', pp. 94-102. For a complete justification for the study of Judges as literary unit, see Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, pp. 13-40. As stated earlier, a short but very helpful survey of the literary study of Judges from 1970-1997 is Beal and Gunn, 'Judges', pp. 643-45; and a comprehensive summary covering 1990-2003 is Craig, 'Judges in Recent Research', pp. 159-85.

historical criticism has fragmented the text and has failed to interpret the text as a whole.¹²² He begins with a stinging critique of Source Criticism:

In Judges, the old-fashioned documentary analysis meets its Waterloo; following the fundamental disagreement of the chief English commentators, Moore and Burney, it has reached the sterile controversy between Simpson and Eissfelt, which seems to have lost all touch with reality.¹²³

Lilley does not deny the possibility of a long compositional history for Judges, nor does he challenge the possibility of identifying the underlying sources for Judges.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, he insists that the writers and/or editors of Judges have provided the reader with a coherent narrative that deserves attention.¹²⁵ Several of Lilley's conclusions are picked up by later scholars in their subsequent studies of Judges, and a few of his observations contribute to the goal of this thesis. For example, Lilley contends that: (1) Judges may represent more than one purpose;¹²⁶ (2) the two introductions to Judges (1.1-2.5 and 2.6-3.6) are compatible, and Judg. 2.1-5 contains elements compatible with both;¹²⁷ (3) Judg. 2.1-5 is the first of Yahweh's disputes with Israel which form a 'part of the author's scheme';¹²⁸ (4) the repeated pattern within the main body of the book represents more than a cyclical repetition; it is a progression downward;¹²⁹ (5) the meaning of the book is deeper than the simplistic theory that idolatry results in oppression and repentance brings deliverance;¹³⁰ and (6) the meaning of Judges unfolds not through the surface

¹²² Lilley, 'Literary Appreciation of Judges', pp. 94, 96.

¹²³ Lilley, 'Literary Appreciation of Judges', p. 94.

¹²⁴ Lilley, 'Literary Appreciation of Judges', p. 95.

¹²⁵ Lilley, 'Literary Appreciation of Judges', p. 95.

¹²⁶ Lilley, 'Literary Appreciation of Judges', p. 95.

¹²⁷ Lilley, 'Literary Appreciation of Judges', pp. 97, 101.

¹²⁸ Lilley, 'Literary Appreciation of Judges', p. 97.

¹²⁹ Lilley, 'Literary Appreciation of Judges', pp. 98-99.

¹³⁰ Lilley, 'Literary Appreciation of Judges', p. 99.

appearance of an editor's final scheme, but through the content and literary presentation of the whole work.¹³¹

Lilley's invitation to the literary study of Judges along with Muilenburg's more broadly recognized plea did not produce an immediate turn away from historical criticism in the study of Judges,¹³² but in the late 1970's and the 1980's, as the study of Judges increased, literary approaches began to dominate the scene. Early literary critics include Kenneth Gros Louis,¹³³ David Gunn,¹³⁴ J. Cheryl Exum,¹³⁵ and James Crenshaw.¹³⁶ Old Testament scholars in general and Judges scholars in particular were influenced by the methodologies espoused by literary critics Robert Alter¹³⁷ and Meir Sternberg,¹³⁸ who argued for the classic literary study of plot, characterization, and narrative artistry, and by Mieke Bal, who articulated an elaborate method based upon the more recent theories of Russian Formalism.¹³⁹

¹³¹ Lilley, 'Literary Appreciation of Judges', p. 99.

¹³² Historical criticism continued to dominate the study of Judges into the 1970's. Cf., e.g., Yigael Yadin, 'And Dan, Why Did He Remain in Ships', *Bib* 1 (1968); Peter C. Craigie, 'Song of Deborah and the Epic of Tukuulti-Ninurta', *JBL* 88 (1969); Jan Dus, 'Herabfahung Jahwes Auf die Lade und Entziehung der Feuerwolke: zu Zwei Dogmen der Mittleren Richterzeit', *VT* 19 (1969); A. D. H. Mayes, 'Historical Context of the Battle Against Sisera', *VT* 19 (1969); Gary G. Cohen, 'Samson and Hercules: A Comparison between the Feats of Samson and the Labours of Hercules', *EvQ* 42 (1970); Arthur E. Cundall, 'Judges: An Apology for the Monarchy?' *ExpTim* 81 (1970); Johann M. Schmidt, 'Erwagungen zum Verhältnis von Auszugs und Sinaïtradition', *ZAW* 82, no. 1 (1970); W. C. van Wyk, 'The Fable of Jotham in Its Ancient Near Eastern Setting', in W. Wyk (ed.), *Studies in Wisdom Literature* (1972); Z. Kallai, 'The Conquest of Northern Palestine in Joshua and Judges', in P. Peli (ed.), *Proceedings of the 5th World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1973); Mayes, 'Israel in the Pre-Monarchy Period'; Robert G. Boling, 'In Those Days There Was No King in Israel', in H. Bream, R. Heim, and C. Moore (eds.), *A Light unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974); A. Graeme Auld, 'Judges I and History: A Reconsideration', *VT* 25 (1975); Sean M. Warner, 'Dating of the Period of the Judges', *VT* 28 (1978).

¹³³ Kenneth R. Gros Louis, 'The Book of Judges; Elijah and Elisha', in K. Gros Louis, J. Ackerman, and T. Warshaw (eds.), *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974).

¹³⁴ David M. Gunn, 'Narrative Patterns and Oral Tradition in Judges and Samuel', *VT* 24 (1974), pp. 286-317.

¹³⁵ J. Cheryl Exum, 'Literary Patterns in the Samson Saga: An Investigation of Rhetorical Style in Biblical Prose', (Ph.D., Columbia University, 1976).

¹³⁶ James L. Crenshaw, *Samson: A Secret Betrayed, a Vow Ignored* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978).

¹³⁷ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.

¹³⁸ Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*.

¹³⁹ Bal, *Narratology*.

Although Lilley insisted upon the interpretation of Judges as a narrative unit, most of the subsequent literary studies have limited themselves to individual stories or persons within the book. For example, Exum focused her attention on Samson,¹⁴⁰ as did Crenshaw¹⁴¹ and Vickery,¹⁴² while Emerton studied Gideon,¹⁴³ and Tribble considered Jephthah's daughter.¹⁴⁴ The text of Judges continued to be interpreted mostly in fragmentary fashion until the publication of Barry G. Webb's influential literary study of the book as a whole.¹⁴⁵

Webb justifies his holistic study of Judges by demonstrating the standing of the book both in history and in the canon, and then he utilizes the Jephthah story as a model for the detailed application of his literary methodology. He finishes out his work with a less-exhaustive study of the entire book of Judges, following the same principles that he employs in his study of Jephthah. Webb's most important contributions to the study of Judges are not to be found in his overall conclusions about the theme of Judges but in his method. He establishes that valuable insights can emerge from the study of Judges as a unified whole, and he demonstrates a helpful model of literary criticism.

Literary studies of Judges continued to increase in the 1990's, as the work of Webb and other literary critics gained the acceptance of the academic community. Literary approaches sustained enough independent credibility by the year 2000 that

¹⁴⁰ Exum, 'Literary Patterns in the Samson Saga'; J. Cheryl Exum, 'Promise and Fulfillment: Narrative Art in Judges 13', *JBL* 99 (1980); J. Cheryl Exum, 'Aspects of Symmetry and Balance in the Samson Saga', *JSOT*, no. 19 (1981); and J. Cheryl Exum, 'The Theological Dimension of the Samson Saga', *VT* 33 (1983).

¹⁴¹ James L. Crenshaw, 'Samson Saga: Filial Devotion or Erotic Attachment?' *ZAW* 86 (1974); and Crenshaw, *Samson: A Secret Betrayed, a Vow Ignored*.

¹⁴² John Vickery, 'In Strange Ways: The Story of Samson', in B. Long (ed.), *Images of Man and God: Old Testament Short Stories in Literary Focus* (Decatur, GA: Almond Press, 1981).

¹⁴³ John A. Emerton, 'Gideon and Jerubbaal', *TS* 27 (1976); John A. Emerton, 'The "Second Bull" in Judges 6:25-28', in M. Haran (ed.), *H. L. Ginsberg Volume* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1978).

¹⁴⁴ Phyllis Tribble, 'A Meditation in Mourning: The Sacrifice of the Daughter of Jephthah', *USQR* 36 (1981); Phyllis Tribble, 'A Daughter's Death: Feminism, Literary Criticism, and the Bible', *QRev* 22 (1983); Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 13.

¹⁴⁵ Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*.

Tammi Schneider could produce a commentary on the entire book of Judges from a literary perspective without any discussion of historical critical concerns.¹⁴⁶

2.4.2. Ideological approaches

More recently, biblical scholarship has accepted not only literary criticism, but also a variety of other methodologies.¹⁴⁷ These newer postmodern (postcritical) approaches emphasize the interpretive importance of the reader, context and community; and Judges has provided ample opportunities for these readings. For example, the prominence of women in the book makes Judges a fertile field for feminist scholars including Exum,¹⁴⁸ Tribble,¹⁴⁹ Bal,¹⁵⁰ Brenner,¹⁵¹ Klein,¹⁵² Niditch,¹⁵³ and others.¹⁵⁴ Feminist interpreters often combine sociological methods with a literary/rhetorical analysis of the text, a combination that produces a distinct perspective. By exposing the patriarchal ideology of the text and the Western male bias in biblical scholarship,

¹⁴⁶ Schneider, *Judges*. Schneider's commentary is quite insightful and well-written.

¹⁴⁷ I hesitate to use the term 'ideological' to describe biblical studies because I realize that every reading of Scripture is to some degree ideological. For a helpful guide to understanding the ideologies of both text and reader, cf. Tina Pippin, 'Ideology, Ideological Criticism, and the Bible', *CurBR* 4 (1996), pp. 51-78.

¹⁴⁸ E.g., J. Cheryl Exum, 'Murder They Wrote: Ideology and the Manipulation of Female Presence in Biblical Narrative', *USQR* 43 (1989), pp. 19-39; and J. Cheryl Exum and Johanna W. H. Bos, 'Reasoning with the Foxes: Female Wit in a World of Male Power', *Semeia* 42 (1988), pp. 1-156.

¹⁴⁹ Tribble, 'A Meditation in Mourning', pp. 59-73; Tribble, 'A Daughter's Death', pp. 176-89; Tribble, *Texts of Terror*; and Phyllis Tribble and Hershel Shanks, *Feminist Approaches to the Bible: Symposium at the Smithsonian Institution, September 24, 1994* (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1995).

¹⁵⁰ E.g., Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature; Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987); Bal, *Murder and Difference*; and Mieke Bal, 'Dealing with Women: Daughters in the Book of Judges', in Regina M. Schwartz (ed.), *The Book and the Text* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 16-39.

¹⁵¹ Athalya Brenner, 'A Triangle and a Rhombus in Narrative Structure: A Proposed Integrative Reading of Judges 4 and 5', *VT* 40 (1990), pp. 129-38; and Athalya Brenner, *Judges: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (Feminist Companion to the Bible, 2nd ser., 4; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

¹⁵² Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* (Bible and Literature, 14; Sheffield: Almond, 1988); and Lillian R. Klein, 'The Book of Judges: Paradigm and Deviation in Images of Women', in A. Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 55-71.

¹⁵³ E.g., Niditch, 'The "Sodomite" Theme in Judges 19-20: Family, Community, and Social Disintegration', pp. 365-78; and Susan Niditch, 'Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael', in P. Day (ed.), *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (1989), pp. 43-57.

¹⁵⁴ See Tina Pippin, 'Ideological Criticism of Biblical Texts', *Semeia* 59 (1992), pp. 1-249; Keefe, 'Rapes of Women/Wars of Men', pp. 79-97; Patton, 'From Heroic Individual to Nameless Victim: Women in the Social World of the Judges', pp. 33-46; Esther Fuchs, 'Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter', *JFSR* 5 (1989), pp. 35-45; and Koala Jones Warsaw, 'Toward a Womanist Hermeneutic: A Reading of Judges 19-21', *JITC* 22 (1994), pp. 18-35.

they construct a valuable alternative view of the text as it interfaces with the concerns of the marginalized, disenfranchised and the oppressed.

The multiplicity of methods with which scholars can now approach the study of Judges is well-illustrated by Gale A. Yee's work entitled *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*.¹⁵⁵ The concept of Yee's book is quite simple—each chapter is written by a different author who interprets a portion of Judges through the lens of a recent methodology. Those methods are narrative criticism (Richard Bowman), social scientific criticism (Naomi Steinberg), feminist criticism (J. Cheryl Exum), structuralist criticism (David Jobling), deconstructive criticism (Danna Nolan Fewell), and ideological criticism (Gale Yee). Each chapter begins with an introductory description of the approach that is being utilized, which is then followed by the application of the method to a specific passage in the book of Judges. The methods that are embodied in Yee's book are now flourishing in the academy because of the movement toward postmodernity's judgment of truth, scholarship, and academic discourse.¹⁵⁶

Recent publications reflect this plurality of methods, interests and purposes within the academy; for example, Gregory Wong employs literary / rhetorical methods to question the existence of a Judahite polemic in Judges.¹⁵⁷ Pamela Tamarkin Reis argues that the Jael-Sisera episode is about Jael's sexual dominance over Sisera.¹⁵⁸ Bernard P. Robinson lifts up the history of interpretation as a way of

¹⁵⁵ Gale A. Yee, *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

¹⁵⁶ Not everyone, however, appreciates the present state of diversity; e.g., Daniel I. Block, 'Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies', *JETS* 42 (1999), pp. 105-106, feigns praise for Yee's book as an 'introduction to reader-response approaches' (p. 106), but concludes his review with several sarcastic statements and with a final judgment that Yee's contributors represent the illegitimate and faddish 'idiosyncratic and ideological perspectives of post-modernists' (p. 106).

¹⁵⁷ Gregory Wong, 'Is There a Direct Pro-Judah Polemic in Judges?' *Sjot* 19, no. 1 (2005), pp. 84-110.

¹⁵⁸ Pamela Tamarkin Reis, 'Uncovering Jael and Sisera: A New Reading', *Sjot* 19, no. 1 (2005), pp. 24-47.

making sense of Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter.¹⁵⁹ The analysis of Samson's riddle by Jeremy Schipper is informed by both form criticism and narrative criticism.¹⁶⁰ Paul Miller uses Judges as a resource for his investigation into the social and religious process of moral formation.¹⁶¹ The critique of biblical violence is an important part of Eric S. Christianson's article on the judge Ehud,¹⁶² and Steven Weitzman presents the Samson story as a legitimization of the social boundary between Israel and the Philistines.¹⁶³

2.5. CONCLUSION

This brief survey of the interpretation history of Judges reveals a chronological sequence of three fundamental hermeneutical paradigms: (1) precritical, (2) critical, and (3) postcritical. In the precritical period interpretation was controlled by the church and served the interests of the church, but in the critical period the academy determined what was acceptable in biblical studies. In the precritical period questions of spirituality and Christian doctrine dominated the study of Judges, but in the critical period questions of history became paramount. Unlike the move from precritical to critical study of the Bible, the move from critical to postcritical study has not yet reached a clear point of separation where the newer methods completely replace the previous methods. That is, historical critics completely abandoned the presuppositions and conclusions of precritical scholars, but the postcritical methods continue to retain many critical findings as a foundation for their approaches. At the

¹⁵⁹ Bernard P. Robinson, 'The Story of Jephthah and His Daughter: Then and Now', *Bib* 85, no. 3 (2004), pp. 331-48; Cf. Gunn, *Judges*, which is a complete commentary based upon the history of interpretation of Judges. Cf. also the studies of Josephus, including Christopher T. Begg, 'The Overture to the Period of the Judges according to Josephus', *LA* 54 (2004), pp. 235-54.

¹⁶⁰ Jeremy Schipper, 'Narrative Obscurity of Samson's HYDH in Judges 14.14 and 18', *JSOT* 27 (2003), pp. 339-53. For a more strictly form-critical approach, cf., Azzan Yadin, 'Samson's *hîdâ*', *VT* 52, no. 3 (2002), pp. 407-26.

¹⁶¹ Paul Miller, 'Moral Formation and the Book of Judges', *EvQ* 75, no. 2 (2003), pp. 99-115

¹⁶² Eric S. Christianson, 'A Fistful of Shekels: Scrutinizing Ehud's Entertaining Violence', *BI* 11 (2003), pp. 53-78; Cf. also C. S. Cowles, *Show Them No Mercy: 4 Views on God and Canaanite Genocide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003).

¹⁶³ Steven Weitzman, 'The Samson Story as Border Fiction', *BI* 10, no. 2 (2002), pp. 158-174.

present time, critical and postcritical approaches to Judges are utilized simultaneously. Critical scholars continue to investigate the world behind the text, while literary critics examine the world within the text, and advocates of newer approaches pay attention to the world in front of the text.¹⁶⁴

More than either of the previous periods, scholarship in the postcritical period, true to its inherent assumptions, appears to be more inclusive, allowing multiple methods of study and encouraging openness to divergent voices. Each methodology is designed to address unique issues and to answer specific questions. The legitimacy of diverse methods and approaches responds to the fact that the text itself encodes a diversity of overlapping information, including the historical, social, political, geographical, ideological, religious, theological, tribal, familial, rhetorical, literary, and artistic. The complexity of the text invites study from fields of history, archaeology, sociology, psychology, anthropology, political science, linguistics, literary criticism, and theology. I am suggesting that Pentecostal scholars should be encouraged to investigate those dimensions of the text that are important to the faith and practice of the Pentecostal community and in doing so their voices will accompany the voices of the historians, the sociologists, the feminists, the liberationists, and others in forming the diverse choir of biblical studies.

This chapter suggests at least three areas in which a Pentecostal might make a significant contribution to the study of Judges. First, biblical scholars have shown little interest in the study of Judges as a theological document. Outside of Deuteronomic studies, attempts to read Judges theologically are quite sparse.¹⁶⁵ Precritical interpreters see Judges as an illustration of Christ and the Gospel, but

¹⁶⁴ For a discussion of the three worlds of the text, see Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, pp. xx-xxvi.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Exum, 'The Theological Dimension of the Samson Saga', pp. 30-45; Barry G. Webb, 'The Theme of the Jephthah Story (Judges 10.6-12.7)', *RTR* 45 (1986), pp. 34-43; E. John Hamlin, *At Risk in the Promised Land: A Commentary on the Book of Judges* (International Theological Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990); Barry G. Webb, 'A Serious Reading of the Samson Story', *RTR* 54 (1995), pp. 110-20; Claassens, 'Character of God', pp. 51-71.

they do not devote any significant attention to Judges itself as narrative theology. For the most part, critical scholars divorce the study of Judges from the study of theology, viewing Judges as a historical document. Postcritical writers focus primarily upon the ideological and social implications of Judges, but they rarely show any interest in theology. Consequently, the role of God in the book of Judges has not been a topic of interest.

Second, Pentecostals themselves have devoted little effort to the study of Judges. I have been unable to locate any scholarly work on Judges from a Pentecostal perspective except for a few pages within works that are devoted to the study of the Holy Spirit,¹⁶⁶ in which the charismatic authority of the Judges is seen as a precursor to the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

Third, even though biblical scholarship now includes numerous methods and approaches, these methods are normally practiced in isolation from each other. Kenneth Craig claims that of all the journal articles that he surveyed, none of them attempted to integrate multiple approaches.¹⁶⁷ Thus, a Pentecostal approach that integrates a variety of methods can offer a unique contribution to the study of Judges.

I conclude from this survey that previous studies of Judges include a variety of elements that could be employed in a postcritical Pentecostal approach to Judges. Pentecostals can agree with the precritical assumption that the book of Judges holds canonical authority over the church. We can also appreciate the precritical desire to find spiritual meaning in Judges, thereby making Judges relevant to the church as theology and as a resource for spiritual and moral transformation. Furthermore, as

¹⁶⁶ Horton, *Holy Spirit*, pp. 33-42; John Sims, *Power with Purpose: The Holy Spirit in Historical and Contemporary Perspective* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1984), pp. 60-63; Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984), pp. 13-24; Rea, *Holy Spirit*, pp. 48-55; Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God*, pp. 112-18; Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, pp. 19-21.

¹⁶⁷ Craig, 'Judges in Recent Research', p. 175.

R. R. Reno argued, we should reclaim the precritical appreciation of the particularity of the text (as opposed to the critical tendency toward abstraction).¹⁶⁸ Walter Brueggemann's suggestion for an integrated approach to the study of Psalms is applicable as well to the study of Judges.

The devotional tradition of piety is surely weakened by disregarding the perspectives and insights of scholarship. Conversely, the scholarly tradition of interpretation is frequently arid, because it lingers excessively on formal questions, with inability or reluctance to bring its insights and methods to substantive matters of exposition . . . What seems to be needed (and is attempted here) is a *postcritical* interpretation that lets the devotional and scholarly traditions support, inform, and correct each other, so that the formal gains of scholarly methods may enhance and strengthen, as well as criticize, the substance of genuine piety in its handling of the Psalms.¹⁶⁹

It is clear, however, that Brueggemann's esteem for 'precritical passion, naiveté, and insight of believing exposition'¹⁷⁰ does not imply the abandonment of critical gains. A Pentecostal approach should exercise the rigor of critical methods and be informed by the discoveries of critical scholars, who, for example, have lifted up the historical and human dimensions of Scripture. Also, the findings of historical criticism can bear directly upon the understanding of specific biblical texts. Furthermore, although a Pentecostal approach might see itself as serving the Pentecostal church, it should not allow itself to be constrained by the fear of ecclesiastical powers, nor should it shrink from wrestling honestly with difficult biblical texts.

A Pentecostal approach should be informed not only by aspects of precritical and critical methodologies but by postcritical methods as well. Historically, Pentecostals have given little attention to academic discourse about hermeneutics until the introduction of canonical and literary approaches. These and other

¹⁶⁸ R. R. Reno, 'Biblical Theology and Theological Exegesis', in Craig G. Bartholomew and Elaine Botha (eds.), *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), p. 389.

¹⁶⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Augsburg Old Testament Studies; Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1984), p. 16.

¹⁷⁰ Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, p. 18.

postcritical approaches contribute to the Pentecostal study of Judges by pointing to the nature of the text as a literary narrative and by acknowledging the divergent voices within the text and in front of the text. Postcritical approaches have taught us that no interpretation is objective and free of ideology and that no methodology is neutral. The Pentecostal community will be strengthened by hearing from different communities and thus resisting academic isolation and theological insulation. A postcritical stance is particularly suited to the study of Judges, according to Don Michael Hudson, who rejoices in the confusion of Judges and declares it a postmodern book.¹⁷¹

Finally, although I suggest that Pentecostalism can reach back and claim elements of the precritical and critical approaches, I would insist that it is neither advisable nor even possible to revert to a previous era and to restore its methods of biblical interpretation. David Steinmetz argues vigorously for a return to precritical exegesis, but in spite of his valid criticisms of historical critical methodology (as proposed by Benjamin Jowett), he is not convincing in his broader argument. In arguing that the ‘medieval theory of levels of meaning in the biblical text . . . is true, while the modern theory of a single meaning . . . is false,’¹⁷² Steinmetz sets up an unnecessary dichotomy. First of all, Steinmetz unfairly caricatures historical criticism. As I mentioned earlier, even a cursory reading of the commentaries will demonstrate that many historical critical scholars recognize the spiritual meaning of the Old Testament text. Secondly, the choice between the medieval model and the historical critical model is not the only choice that is available. Current approaches to

¹⁷¹ Don Michael Hudson, ‘When Time Stumbled: Judges as Postmodern’, (Ph.D., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1999).

¹⁷² Steinmetz, ‘Pre-Critical Exegesis’, p. 27. A stronger proposal that includes a critique of historical criticism and offers a helpful way forward is presented by Pieter Martinus Wisse, ‘Scripture between Identity and Creativity: A Hermeneutical Theory Building upon Four Interpretations of Job’, (Ph.D., University of Utrecht, 2003), pp. 197-236. Wisse concludes that historical criticism can inform religious interpretation if it will refrain from atheistic reductionism and discontinue its dependence upon the criterion of dissimilarity (p. 236).

Old Testament study demonstrate that scholars are now recognizing multiple meanings of the text. Consequently, a third choice is to recognize the polyvalency of the text that emerges from the interface between the text and the reader (hearer). Most of the Bible is narrative, and by its very nature narrative evokes multiple meanings. Thirdly, although Steinmetz seems to understand the philosophical and theological reasons for precritical allegory, he fails to perceive the historical particularity of those reasons. In other words, even if allegory is seen as a legitimate method for Patristic exegesis and the fourfold model is acceptable for medieval interpretation, it does not follow automatically that those methods must be adopted by exegetes of this century. Every methodology contributes to and is conditioned by its historical context, and since the conditions that produced allegory no longer exist, the allegorical method is no longer appropriate as a hermeneutical approach. Brueggemann declares wisely, 'We are not precritical people. We are heirs of a scholarly consensus that must not only be taken into account, but must be embraced as our teacher',¹⁷³ and Mary Boys adds,

The contention that biblical studies need to move to an era of post-critical work mandates the acceptance of critical methodologies but also the recognition of their limitations. Obviously, this means not a return to a pre-critical fundamentalism but, to the contrary, conscious and systematic attention to the integration of contemporary scholarship into the life of the churches and synagogues.¹⁷⁴

Steinmetz's praise of the allegorical method and his calls for a return to medieval exegesis are based upon a romanticized view of the past and a misdirected vision of the future. We cannot and should not go back to old outdated methods, neither can we (or should we) prevent further progress. The best and most productive use of our energy is to take full advantage of the situation as it stands and to press forward with careful and creative work in the context of pluralism and global diversity.

¹⁷³ Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, p. 17.

¹⁷⁴ Boys, 'Religious Education and Contemporary Biblical Scholarship', p. 187.

Efforts to revert to the past or to restrain the future will amount to nothing more than striving against the wind.

CHAPTER 3

A PENTECOSTAL 'HEARING' OF JUDGES: THE GOAL OF PENTECOSTAL INTERPRETATION

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Although the methodological section in Chapter 1 together with the conclusions of Chapter 2 should serve as sufficient prerequisites for the commencement of my thesis proper, I have chosen to offer this chapter as further description of the goals of a Pentecostal hermeneutic. I propose in Chapter 1 an approach to Scripture that is theologically motivated, canonically based, and narrative oriented.¹ I conclude in Chapter 2 that a Pentecostal approach might pursue a theological study of Judges that appreciates the canonical authority, spiritual meaning, transformative power, and particularity of the text.

Furthermore, I embrace the thoroughness of critical methods and the appropriation of critical discoveries that include the historical (human) dimensions of the text. My approach claims the freedom to wrestle with difficult texts; to examine the narrative qualities of the text, and recognize the divergent voices within the text, utilizing an integration of multiple interpretive approaches. I take into account the three worlds of the text (behind, in, and in front of), but as a Pentecostal, I seek to enter the world of the living, dynamic, charismatic word of God, a world that is manifested through encounter with the God who is in, around, above, below, and in front of every text. In this charismatic encounter, the text is no longer the object of my critical critique, but I become the object of critique to the voice of God

¹ A combination of theological and narrative approaches is proposed and demonstrated by Goldingay, *OT Theology: Israel's Gospel*, pp. 15-41.

that speaks from the midst of the fire (Deut. 5.24).² Furthermore, this encounter itself must be submitted to the discernment of the community of faith so that interpretation is not allowed to be an individualistic mystical affirmation that is disconnected from the text and the covenant people.³

In this chapter I explore further the goals of a Pentecostal approach to Judges based upon the biblical concept of 'hearing' (Heb. שָׁמַע), which I use in contrast to the commonly used term 'reading'. In some ways the terms 'hearing' and 'reading' are similar—they both refer to a synchronic, holistic, contextual hermeneutic. The term 'hearing', however, more closely approximates the goals of my Pentecostal hermeneutic because: (1) it is a thoroughly biblical term; (2) it accords with the orality of the biblical and Pentecostal contexts; (3) it is relational, implying the existence of a 'person' who is speaking the Word;⁴ (4) it denotes a faithful adherence to the Word, since in Scripture to hear often means to obey;⁵ (5) it implies transformation, since the hearing of the Word produces change; and (6) it demands humility because, unlike the process of 'reading' Scripture, 'hearing' entails submission to the authority of the word of God (as per [4] above).⁶

² Moore, 'Canon and Charisma', p. 85-87. Moore's piece is not the most complete description of Pentecostal hermeneutics, but is the most pointed and powerful one.

³ Thomas, 'Women, Pentecostalism and the Bible', pp. 41-56. Thomas observes a hermeneutical paradigm in Acts 15 that integrates the voices of the text, the Spirit, and the believing community. See also Paul D. Hanson, 'Scripture, Community and Spirit: Biblical Theology's Contribution to a Contextualized Christian Theology', *JPT* 6 (1995), pp. 3-12.

⁴ Cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (5 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), I, pp. 132-43.

⁵ Cf. Francis Brown *et al.*, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (trans. Edward Robinson; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979), p. 1034; and William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, corrected 10th edn, 1988), p. 423.

⁶ It might be argued that the terminology is unimportant, but I would insist otherwise. In many ways the use of language shapes the development of ideas within the community. Feminists have helped us rethink gender relationships through the introduction of inclusive language, and minorities have created more a more healthy understanding between racial and ethnic groups through their resistance to bigoted language. Likewise, the language of interpretation will help to shape the content of the interpretation.

3.2. OPPORTUNITY FOR A PENTECOSTAL APPROACH TO JUDGES

The diversity of scholarly approaches to Judges suggests that the book is capable of functioning in an assortment of legitimate modes, with each mode affording unique opportunities for study. Gale Yee's aforementioned volume is an example of the current diversity within biblical studies, setting forth six different types of criticism that have been applied recently to Judges: narrative, social scientific, feminist, structuralist, deconstructive, and ideological.⁷ Surely, if this multiplicity of scholarly methods can be acknowledged, there must be room for a Pentecostal approach. According to Daniel Patte, the healthy practice of critical methods 'must allow us to affirm the legitimacy of a plurality of interpretations'.⁸

In the first issue of the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, Rickie D. Moore lamented the lack of models for the integrating of Pentecostalism and critical biblical scholarship, and the way ahead for him was 'far from clear'.⁹ In that same issue, Jackie David Johns and Cheryl Bridges Johns added, 'Pentecostals are only now beginning to formulate a hermeneutic which takes seriously the dynamics of the Pentecostal faith'.¹⁰ The situation is quite different today, and because of the creative and faithful work of Pentecostal scholars, who have wrestled with the issues of hermeneutics over the last few years, a newly constructed pathway leads forward.¹¹ To state the situation differently, the pathway is newly constructed only in some of its parts, while other parts of the path are actually ancient ways rediscovered, uncovered, and restored. After all, according to Rickie D. Moore, a charismatic hermeneutic was practiced as far back as the time of Moses and the book of

⁷ Yee, *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*.

⁸ Daniel Patte, *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: A Reevaluation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), p. 27.

⁹ Moore, 'Canon and Charisma', p. 76.

¹⁰ Jackie David Johns and Cheryl Bridges Johns, 'Yielding to the Spirit: A Pentecostal Approach to Group Bible Study', *JPT* 1 (1992), p. 110.

¹¹ Cf. the title of Kenneth J. Archer, 'Forging a New Path: A Contemporary Pentecostal Hermeneutical Strategy for the 21st Century', (Ph.D., St. Andrews University, 2001).

Deuteronomy.¹² Furthermore, John Christopher Thomas argues for the presence of a Pentecostal hermeneutic in Acts 15,¹³ and Kenneth Archer finds the charismatic approach in early Pentecostalism.¹⁴ It seems more accurate to say that some Pentecostal scholars have escaped the byway of Enlightenment methodologies and have returned to the main pathway of Pentecostal epistemology, where approaches to the Bible embody more holistic, relational conceptions of truth.¹⁵ Therefore, the recent advances in Pentecostal hermeneutics represent not so much a new *prescription* for biblical interpretation, but a critical *description* of the interpretive process that has been practiced in the past and is practiced currently by many Pentecostals.¹⁶

In addition, recent Pentecostal approaches enjoy the openness of postcritical methodologies as described by Patrick D. Miller:

Contemporary theology and biblical studies have opened wide the door to a multivalent reading of Scripture. That is, in general, a good development. We have broken out of a modern concern for the meaning of a text—a concern that many of our interpretive forebears did not share—and have come to recognize that any text is rich and open toward a breadth of interpretive inferences as well as that readers and audiences have much to do with what is heard from the text.¹⁷

Many Pentecostals would agree with Daniel Patte, who writes: 'Different readers, because of their specific interests, concerns, or backgrounds, perceive different yet coherent meanings in a text (or better, produce these meanings with the text) by

¹² Moore, 'Canon and Charisma', p. 90. See also Randall J. Pannell, *Those Alive Here Today: The 'Day of Horeb' and Deuteronomy's Hermeneutical Locus of Revelation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2004).

¹³ Thomas, 'Women, Pentecostalism and the Bible', pp. 41-56.

¹⁴ Kenneth J. Archer, 'Early Pentecostal Biblical Interpretation', *JPT* 18, no. 1 (2001), pp. 79-117.

¹⁵ Cf., e.g., the discussions of the Pentecostal worldview in Johns, 'Pentecostalism', pp. 73-96, and Ellington, 'Pentecostalism and the Authority of Scripture', 16-38; and the exploration of the relationship between Pentecostal theology and the interpretation of Scripture in Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*.

¹⁶ The most complete description of the Pentecostal approach, both its history and current practice, is Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*; and the best short overview is Robby Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation* (JPTS, 30; Blandford Forum: Deo Publishing, 2006), pp. 97-131.

¹⁷ Patrick D. Miller, 'Popularizing the Bible', *ThT* 53 (1997), p. 437.

selecting one of these dimensions of the text'.¹⁸ Allowing multiple interpretations, however, opens the door to improper, misinformed, and even dangerous interpretations, which means that the critical task is vital. All interpretations must be held accountable, and any legitimate interpretation must derive from the text itself. The Pentecostal approach is not tantamount to uncritical subjectivism, because, although Scripture can mean many things, it cannot mean anything and everything. In fact some interpretations are dangerous, even evil. Oppressors have used the Bible as an excuse to enslave peoples, persecute the Jews, and exterminate ethnic groups. Women and children have been subjugated and abused because of erroneous interpretations of the Bible.¹⁹ Robert P. Carroll pleads for the responsible and careful interpretation of the Bible as he alerts us to the 'desperate need for sustained critical readings of the Bible and that never again should a group of theologians be allowed to enslave a nation with their uncritical readings of the Bible'.²⁰

During the time of first and second generation Pentecostal scholars, the academy did not have a place nor a language for Pentecostal hermeneutics, but since 1992 over forty articles and books on the topic have been published.²¹ In light of the large number of recent works devoted to Pentecostal hermeneutics, including helpful summaries from Matthew Clark,²² Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen,²³ Kenneth

¹⁸ Patte, *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 28.

¹⁹ For numerous examples of the immoral use of the Bible, see Jim Hill and Rand Cheadle, *The Bible Tells Me So: Uses and Abuses of Holy Scripture* (New York: Anchor Books/ Doubleday, 1996).

²⁰ Robert P. Carroll, '(South) Africa, Bible, Criticism: Rhetorics of a Visit', in Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube Shomanah (eds.), *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 197.

²¹ The terminology of 'first generation' and 'second generation' Pentecostal scholars follows Rickie D. Moore, John Christopher Thomas, and Steven J. Land, 'Editorial', *JPT* 1, no. 1 (1992), p. 3.

²² Matthew S. Clark, 'An Investigation into the Nature of a Viable Pentecostal Hermeneutic', (D.Th., University of South Africa, 1996), pp. 167-77.

²³ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, 'Pentecostal Hermeneutics in the Making: On the Way From Fundamentalism to Postmodernism', *JEPTA* 18 (1998), 76-115.

Archer,²⁴ Matthias Becker,²⁵ and Robby Waddell,²⁶ an extensive discussion of the field is not necessary. Nevertheless, I should say that I find considerable agreement between Pentecostal scholars that a postmodern hermeneutic 'accords well with the original Pentecostal ethos',²⁷ an ethos that regards the Scripture as the dynamic and living 'Spirit-Word'.²⁸

Walter Brueggemann declares that 'a hermeneutic is not only necessary but inevitable. There are no uninterpreted events',²⁹ but one could question the need for a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic. I believe, however, that the inevitability of a hermeneutic requires Pentecostals to be intentional about their approach, otherwise they will be subjugated by the 'dominant rationality'.³⁰ Every faith community has a hermeneutic, whether they recognize it or not; and Pentecostals will have a hermeneutic, whether by default or by intention.³¹ We can choose either to adopt the current dominant models without considering the subsequent effect upon our tradition,³² or we can carefully and intentionally formulate contextual models of interpretation that integrate available contemporary methods with the ethos of our tradition. I propose that we follow the latter course, and construct a Pentecostal hermeneutic that employs the hermeneutical methods that are more conducive to

²⁴ Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, pp. 127-55.

²⁵ Matthias Becker, 'A Tenet Under Examination: Reflections on the Pentecostal Hermeneutical Approach', *JEPTA* 24 (2004), pp. 31-34.

²⁶ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 108-18.

²⁷ Kärkkäinen, 'Pentecostal Hermeneutics in the Making', p. 89.

²⁸ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, p. 100. For arguments against the 'uncritical adoption of theological method and forms which contain epistemological and theological perspectives that are inherently hostile to Pentecostal identity', see Kenneth J. Archer, 'The Pentecostal Way of Doing Theology: Manner and Method', 33rd Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Marquette University (2004).

²⁹ Walter Brueggemann, 'The Legitimacy of a Sectarian Hermeneutic: 2 Kings 18-19', *Interpretation and Obedience: From Faithful Reading to Faithful Living* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 62.

³⁰ Brueggemann, 'Legitimacy of a Sectarian Hermeneutic', p. 62.

³¹ Cf. Marius D. Herholdt, 'Pentecostal and Charismatic Hermeneutics', in Adrio König and S. S. Maimela (eds.), *Initiation into Theology: The Rich Variety of Theology and Hermeneutics* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1998), p. 417.

³² Note the lamentation of a critical scholar: 'In my case, critical biblical studies demanded that I disregard the transforming religious power of the biblical text upon me, upon others and upon society!' Patte, 'The Guarded Personal Voice', p. 14.

our ethos, theology and view of Scripture.³³ We cannot be precritical; we must not be anticritical; but we should be postcritical, pursuing the path that Iain Provan calls 'believing criticism', an approach that 'marries probing, reflective interpretation of the text to loyal biblical devotion and warm Christian affection'.³⁴ Thus, the central Pentecostal concern is to hear and obey the word of God, what Dirkie J. Smit calls 'a hermeneutics of consent, of engagement, of trust, of transformation; in short, a theological hermeneutics'.³⁵ Consequently, the Pentecostal approach to Scripture prefers obedience over correctness, openness over exactness, humility over certitude, and faithfulness over objectivity. Scott Ellington writes:

Doctrines may be challenged and even overturned without striking at the very heart of Pentecostal faith because the central emphasis of Pentecostalism is not a teaching which must be believed or a proof which can be deduced and defended against all challenges, but a God who must be reckoned with in direct encounter.³⁶

The integration of rigorous study and faith commitment is possible partially because the heart of the Pentecostal pursuit of truth is different from the rationalist pursuit of truth. While religious rationalists (Evangelical fundamentalists) define truth in terms of their dogma that is undergirded by the historicity and inerrancy of Scripture, Pentecostals define truth in terms of the genuineness of their encounter and continuing relationship with God through his Word and his Spirit.³⁷

³³ Herholdt, 'Pentecostal and Charismatic Hermeneutics', p. 428.

³⁴ Iain W. Provan, *1 and 2 Kings* (New International Biblical Commentary; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), p. x. Not all Pentecostals are enthusiastic about a postcritical approach. Cf. Robert P. Menzies, 'Jumping Off the Postmodern Bandwagon', *PNEUMA* 16 (1994), pp. 115-20; and Hannah K. Harrington and Rebecca Patten, 'Pentecostal Hermeneutics and Postmodern Literary Theory', *PNEUMA* 16 (1994), 109-14.

³⁵ Dirkie J. Smit, 'Biblical Hermeneutics: The 20th Century', in Adrio König and S. S. Maimela (eds.), *Initiation into Theology: The Rich Variety of Theology and Hermeneutics* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1998), p. 314.

³⁶ Cf. Ellington, 'Pentecostalism and the Authority of Scripture', p. 17.

³⁷ For this reason early Pentecostals displayed little interest in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy. Cf. Althouse, 'Toward a Theological Understanding of the Pentecostal Appeal to Experience', pp. 399-411. For other differences between early Pentecostals and Fundamentalists, see Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement*, pp. 356-58; and Kimberly Ervin Alexander, *Pentecostal Healing: Models in Theology and Practice* (JPTS; Blandford Forum, UK: Deo Publishing, 2006), pp. 65-66, 163-64, 218. Unfortunately, much of American Pentecostalism is now

Biblical interpretation certainly involves guidelines, rules, and principles but it is more than a step-by-step process. For a Pentecostal, every part of the process of interpretation is performed in the presence of God, who is Lord of past, present, and future. Prayer and worship fuse all the elements together into one pursuit, the pursuit of God himself. The mystery of this encounter is akin to what is described by Daniel Patte, who comes to the matter from a context that is other than Pentecostal:

My personal voice is truly heard in interpretations of the Bible that are transformative encounters with an Other who transcends me, that is, in *pro me* (or *pro nobis*) biblical interpretations which reflect experiences of a mysterious Otherness that I cannot control and encompass in my interpretations.³⁸

For the Pentecostal who sees God in all things, even the study of history, backgrounds, archaeology, linguistics, and other areas normally assigned to the realm of science, become a spiritual pursuit, when submitted to the ultimate authority of God, who created, sustains, and fills all things. History is God's history; sociology is the sociology of the community of faith, and the study of language is a means to hear the voice of God.

When I speak of a Pentecostal approach, I do not claim to speak for everyone in the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement, a movement that is worldwide and diverse. I do speak, however, as a practicing Pentecostal who for many years has struggled to integrate the critical interpretation of Scripture with the ongoing life of the Church.³⁹ Furthermore, I am not arguing that approaches other than mine are

aligned with Fundamentalist concerns, and I am calling for a return to the distinctive heart of Pentecostalism. Cf. Timothy B. Cargal, 'Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy: Pentecostals and Hermeneutics in a Postmodern Age', *PNEUMA* 15 (1993), pp. 163-87. For the influence of Fundamentalism on the Assemblies of God, especially in the area of eschatology, see Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2nd edn, 1997), pp. 207-209; and William W. Menzies and Robert P. Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundation of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), pp. 19-22.

³⁸ Patte, 'The Guarded Personal Voice', p. 13.

³⁹ My description of Pentecostal hermeneutics is based upon thirty years of daily participation in the Pentecostal church, education at a Pentecostal college and seminary, and teaching at a Pentecostal college and seminary. I have enjoyed close association with Pentecostals from many countries who came as students to the seminary, and I have taught courses in Korea and Puerto Rico. Furthermore, my hermeneutical model has been shaped by many years of pastoral praxis, where I have been forced

invalid, nor would I insist that Pentecostals will use only one method. As Willie Wessels writes, 'There is more than one correct method of interpretation and this is to the benefit of the believing community who should realize that interpretation is a dynamic, open-ended and ongoing process'.⁴⁰ I do not demand that every Pentecostal scholar utilize a Pentecostal approach. For example, a Pentecostal may be a historian who is using Judges as a resource for places, names, and events of history. A Pentecostal may be a sociologist who studies the customs and social structures of the pre-monarchic period. A Pentecostal may be an expert in literature who examines the narratives of Judges in light of their setting, plot, characterizations, and other rhetorical features. Different interpreters come to the text with different aims, and as W. Randolph Tate explains, 'Interpretive aims dictate interpretive methods'.⁴¹ Although there is no distinctive Pentecostal methodology for biblical studies, several methodologies seem to commend themselves to the Pentecostal ethos. Rickie D. Moore, for example, claims a literary-theological method,⁴² Kenneth Archer recommends a semiotic approach,⁴³ and Robby Waddell fuses the methods of intertextuality with goals of theological inquiry.⁴⁴

Recent scholarly discussions have called attention to the possibility of different *readings*, and most biblical scholars have admitted that all readings are

to integrate scholarship with spirituality, and where I have attempted to merge sound exegesis and prophetic preaching.

⁴⁰ Willie J. Wessels, 'Biblical Hermeneutics', in Adrio König and S. S. Maimela (eds.), *Initiation into Theology: The Rich Variety of Theology and Hermeneutics* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1998), p. 272.

⁴¹ Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, p. 195. For a deeper discussion of academic aims versus religious aims, see Morgan and Barton, *Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 8-26. Not only are different methods required depending upon the specific academic discipline, but different methods and approaches are required for the different genres in the Bible. See John Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995).

⁴² Moore, 'Canon and Charisma', pp. 75-92. See also Moore, 'Deut. and the Fire of God', pp. 11, 15, 16. Literary methods are approved also by Baker, 'Pentecostal Bible Reading', pp. 41-42, and Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, pp. 4, 5, 166.

⁴³ Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*.

⁴⁴ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*.

subjective and biased from their beginning. Pentecostals, like everyone else, have both conscious and unconscious presuppositions and agendas that affect their biblical interpretation. Pentecostals *read* the text, and they create *readings* of the text. The term 'reading', however, does not describe precisely enough the intent and goals of a Pentecostal approach to Scripture. In place of the word 'reading', I suggest that we utilize the word 'hearing', a term that is more prevalent in the Bible itself, and more consistent with Pentecostal practice. The use of the term 'hearing' is consistent with the critical aim of biblical exegesis, which is, according to Patrick D. Miller, 'to hear as much as one can and to avoid mishearing'.⁴⁵ The appropriateness of 'hearing' as a hermeneutical term is confirmed further by its frequent use within the titles of books and articles devoted to the subject of biblical interpretation.⁴⁶

3.3. JUDGES AS A PROPHETIC TEXT TO BE HEARD

Several important factors make 'hearing' a fitting paradigm for a Pentecostal approach to Judges. For most Pentecostals, Scripture is interpreted within the context of the believing, worshiping community. Consequently, Judges does not function as historiography to be examined or as ideology to be evaluated; rather, it functions as a prophetic voice to be heard. The function of Judges as a word of

⁴⁵ Miller, 'Popularizing the Bible', p. 437.

⁴⁶ Cf. Richard Aczel, 'Hearing Voices in Narrative Texts', *NLH* 29, no. 3 (1998), pp. 467-500; Richard Aczel, 'Understanding as Over-hearing: Towards a Dialogics of Voice', *NLH* 32, no. 3 (2001), pp. 597-617; Frederick H. Borsch, 'Ears that Hear and Do not Hear: Fundamental Hearing of the Bible', *Scripture Today* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1980), pp. 23-49; Robert A. Coughenour, 'Hearing and Heeding: Tasks for Old Testament Interpretation', *RefR* 41 (1988), pp. 117-38; Joel B. Green, *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995); John Alexander Hutchison, 'On Hearing the Word of God', *JBR* 19, no. 2 (1951), pp. 67-70; Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Whispering the Word: Hearing Women's Stories in the Old Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005); Arie C. Leder and David A. Vroege, 'Reading and Hearing Leviticus', *CTJ* 34 (1999), pp. 431-42; Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Hearing Mark: A Listener's Guide* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002); James Muilenburg and Thomas F. Best, *Hearing and Speaking the Word: Selections From the Works of James Muilenburg* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984); James Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney, *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000); Gerald T. Sheppard, 'Canonization: Hearing the Voice of the Same God Through Historically Dissimilar Traditions', *ExA* 1 (1985), pp. 106-14; Klyne Snodgrass, 'Reading to Hear: A Hermeneutics of Hearing', *HBT* 24, no. 1 (2002), pp. 1-32; Clarence Vos and Sierd Woudstra, *Hearing the Word of the Lord: The Prophets* (Revelation Series for Adults; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 1994). In most of these works, the concept of 'hearing' goes no further than the title. I could add another list of works that use the word 'listen/listening'.

prophecy is in harmony with the Jewish tradition, which places the book within the category 'Former Prophets'.⁴⁷ Many Christian scholars also classify Judges within the category of Former Prophets;⁴⁸ this is true even of Christian writers whose interests are primarily historical critical.⁴⁹ Judges, therefore, is more than history; it is 'salvation history',⁵⁰ 'counter-history',⁵¹ or prophetic history, whose purpose is not 'primarily to offer an explanation of the past, but to function as scripture for the new generation of Israel who are instructed from the past for the sake of the future'.⁵² According to Walter Brueggemann, the narrative that we call the Former Prophets 'does not intend to be historical reportage in any modern sense of the term . . . the material is theological testimony, that is, a believing effort to give an account of faith, an account of God'.⁵³ Terence Fretheim agrees, writing that the primary purpose of the Former Prophets is not historical, but 'religious . . . the biblical narrators used the materials at their disposal for theological (or kerygmatic-didactic) purposes. Their goal is to tell the story of the interaction between God and Israel in order to elicit a

⁴⁷ What the Jews call the Former Prophets—Josh., Judg., Sam., and Kings—scholars call the Deuteronomic History, and while the allusion to Deuteronomy is a valid theological equation, the use of 'History' distracts from the theological purposes of the corpus and produces a multitude of misconceptions from the very inception of its use, since it misrepresents the genre of Josh.-Kings.

⁴⁸ E.g., Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1st American edn, 1979); James L. Crenshaw, *Story and Faith: A Guide to the Old Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1986); William Sanford La Sor *et al.*, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, Rev. edn, 1996).

⁴⁹ See Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament; an Introduction, Including the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and Also the Works of Similar Type from Qumran: The History of the Formation of the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); Georg Fohrer and Ernst Sellin, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville,: Abingdon Press, 1968); Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*; Claus Westermann and Robert Henry Boyd, *Handbook to the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1967).

⁵⁰ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (2 vols.; New York: Harper, 1962), I, p. 344.

⁵¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment: Psalms, Modernity, and the Making of History* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 43.

⁵² Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, pp. 236-38. Cf. Provan, *1 and 2 Kings*, pp. 6-15.

⁵³ Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), p. 103. The New Historicism maintains that historiography itself is a fiction; cf. Joyce W. Warren and Margaret Dickie, *Challenging Boundaries: Gender and Periodization* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000), p. xii.

response from their audience'.⁵⁴ Consequently, as a part of the canonical Former Prophets, Judges is theologically intentional in its final, canonical form.⁵⁵ It is appropriate, then, for the interpreter to utilize 'the more confessional approach to Scripture, which, one could argue, is the context out of which the Bible arose and for which it was created'.⁵⁶

As prophecy, Judges presents a theological message to its original readers; but a Pentecostal would assume that Judges presents a message for today's reader as well. As a prophetic word, the book of Judges challenges and informs the hearer from outside himself/herself.⁵⁷ My goal as a Pentecostal reader is to seek for the theological message of the text, to be confronted by it, and to then to be conformed to it. Thus, Judges is an authoritative word for today; and as part of the canon a Pentecostal would hear the canonical text in its final form.⁵⁸ The term 'hearing', therefore, is consistent with the nature of Judges as a prophetic word that challenges and informs the hearer from outside himself/herself. Hearing Judges as prophecy means: (1) The text is a divine word confronting the human community; (2) The text is authoritative (canonical) for the believing community; and (3) The text will criticize/transform its hearers.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Terence E. Fretheim, *Deuteronomistic History* (Interpreting Biblical Texts; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), p. 30.

⁵⁵ It should be noted that the term 'canon' is not commonly used by Pentecostals outside the academy. In the Pentecostal church, the Scriptures are most often referred to as the 'Word of God'.

⁵⁶ Miller, 'Popularizing the Bible', p. 436.

⁵⁷ Regarding the implications of the Old Testament as prophetic literature, see John W. McKay, 'When the Veil is Taken Away: The Impact of Prophetic Experience on Biblical Interpretation', *JPT* 5 (1994), p. 30.

⁵⁸ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*; Bruce D. Chilton, 'Biblical Authority, Canonical Criticism, and Generative Exegesis', *The Quest for Context and Meaning* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997). For a Pentecostal understanding of canonical criticism, see Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (JPTS, 21; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000). Other Pentecostals who call for hearing the final form of the text include Moore, 'Deut. and the Fire of God', pp. 19-20, Baker, 'Pentecostal Bible Reading', pp. 35-36 and Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, pp. 163, 167.

⁵⁹ For the transformative effect of Scripture, see Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat this Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005). Cf. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, who writes, 'Even as the Spirit formed Christ in Mary, so the Spirit uses Scripture to form Christ in believers' (p. 100).

Not only is the text a prophetic word to the community of faith, but the Pentecostal community is a prophetic community,⁶⁰ and the Pentecostal interpretation is a prophetic interpretation. As mentioned above, prophetic interpretation begins in the canon as early as Deuteronomy, which is a reenactment of earlier events, making them present for a new generation.⁶¹ After Deuteronomy, the traditions of the Torah are continually being activated prophetically for each new generation.⁶² According to John McKay, the charismatic experience of Pentecostals means that they 'are prophets, or at least prophetically sympathetic, and so read the Bible with the eye and intellect of prophetic persons'.⁶³ Pentecostal interpretation is an attempt at Spirit empowered prophetic reappropriation of the Scriptures that flows out of the transformative experience of Pentecost. Regarding the prophetic nature of Pentecostal hermeneutics, Roger Stronstad writes:

. . . charismatic experience in particular and spiritual experience in general give the interpreter of relevant biblical texts and experiential presupposition which transcends the rational and cognitive presuppositions of scientific exegesis. Furthermore, this charismatic experience results in an understanding, empathy, and sensitivity to the text, and priorities in relation to the text which other interpreters do not and cannot have.⁶⁴

In other words, as a Pentecostal listens to the text he or she is made aware of textual features that are brought to the surface through the interaction of the text and the prophetic experience of the hearer.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Roger Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke's Charismatic Theology* (JPTS, 16; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); and McQueen, *Joel and the Spirit*.

⁶¹ Moore, 'Canon and Charisma', pp. 75-92.

⁶² Cf. Brueggemann, *The Creative Word*, pp. 40-66.

⁶³ McKay, 'When the Veil is Taken Away', p. 24.

⁶⁴ Roger Stronstad, 'Pentecostal Experience and Hermeneutics', *Par* 26 (1992), p. 17. The unique experiences of every interpreter act as a set of interpretive lenses through which that interpreter sees the text, with the result that certain elements of the text that are overlooked by one reader appear quite obvious to another.

⁶⁵ I do not suggest, however, that Pentecostal scholars are free to ignore the work of other critical scholars. Critical findings must be evaluated and applied to interpretation on a case-by-case basis. Cf. my discussion in Chapter 2.

3.4. 'HEARING', ORALITY AND LITERACY

3.4.1. 'Hearing' and the Orality of Scripture

Not only does the term 'hearing' accord with the nature of Judges as a prophetic book, but it also corresponds to the orality of biblical society, and it fits into the tradition of Pentecostalism as an oral community. Until modern times, the Bible was mostly encountered aurally, through teaching and preaching, or through one person who read the text within the hearing of the congregation (whether Jewish or Christian).⁶⁶ Before the time of Plato written texts were constructed based upon their aural effect rather than their visual effect.⁶⁷ Even in medieval times written texts were normally read aloud, even when read privately, which is the reason for Augustine's amazement that Ambrose should read without uttering the words.⁶⁸ Conventions of oral culture continued to exercise significant impact on literature until the Reformation period, and Marshall McLuhan has demonstrated that it was the printing press that converted the Western world from orality to literacy, producing what McLuhan calls 'typographic man'.⁶⁹

According to Walter J. Ong, the characteristics of communication within an oral culture include: simple sentence structures, frequent use of stock words and phrases, repetition of words, phrases, and ideas, importance of story over ideas, focus on situational particularity rather than conceptual abstraction, and episodic

⁶⁶ For biblical examples where one person acts as the reader, while others listen, cf. Exod. 24.7; Deut. 31.11; Josh. 8.34f; 2 Kgs 22.10; 23.2; 2 Chron. 34.18, 24, 30; Ezra 4.18, 23; Neh. 8.3, 8, 18; 9.3; 13.1; Est. 6.1; Jer. 29.29; 36.6, 10, 13, 21; Lk. 4.16; Acts 13.27; 15.21, 2 Cor. 3.14, 15; Col. 4.16; 1 Thess. 5.27; Rev. 1.3.

⁶⁷ Richard A. Jensen, *Thinking in Story: Preaching in a Post-literate Age* (Lima, Ohio: C.S.S. Pub., 1993), pp. 19-20.

⁶⁸ Jensen, *Thinking in Story*, pp. 32-33. *Confessions* 6.3.3. For the Latin text, see James J. O'Donnell, *The Confessions of St. Augustine: An Electronic Edition*, (accessed 6 June 2005); available from <http://www.stoa.org/hippo>. The central text reads: 'sed cum legebat, oculi ducebantur per paginas et cor intellectum rimabatur, vox autem et lingua quiescebant'.

⁶⁹ Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962).

narrative instead of linear logic.⁷⁰ Oral communication, because it requires the face-to-face confrontation between participants, suggests a relational model of knowledge, which is manifested in the Hebrew word for knowing (יָדַע).⁷¹ All of these characteristics assume the existence of community, for without community there is no oral discourse.⁷²

The Bible, because of its historical location, must be understood first as an oral performance text.⁷³ Just as in other preliterate communities, 'A strong tradition of oral transmission of stories existed in early Israelite society'.⁷⁴ John Goldingay proposes that the biblical narratives are 'speech-acts'; they are 'utterances'; and 'they issue a promise, a challenge, or an invitation that opens up a future or a possible world';⁷⁵ they are oral discourse in written form. It is likely that the first biblical writings were composed under the rules of orality,⁷⁶ and only later did literate discourse become the dominant model. Jaroslav Pelikan argues that 'the prophet writes the words in the book precisely for the purpose of their being spoken words again at some future time'.⁷⁷ Therefore, models of interpretation based on linear,

⁷⁰ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 31-49. For a limited but helpful approach to interpreting the Old Testament from an oral perspective, see Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), who lists three characteristics of oral style: repetition, formulas, and epithets (pp. 13-24). Niditch includes a chapter in which she applies her methodology to specific texts. See also Lou H. Silberman, *Orality, Aurality and Biblical Narrative* (Decatur, GA: Scholars Press, 1987). Battle reports in Judges and Samuel are seen as oral patternings by David M. Gunn, 'Battle Report: Oral or Scribal Convention?' *JBL* 93 (1974), pp. 513-18; but not by John Van Seters, 'Oral Patterns or Literary Conventions in Biblical Narrative', *Semeia* (1976), pp. 139-54.

⁷¹ Cf. Johns and Johns, 'Yielding to the Spirit', pp. 109-34.

⁷² McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, p. 193; and Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (Terry Lectures, Yale University; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 54.

⁷³ A possibility entertained by Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word*, pp. 2-5.

⁷⁴ Wessels, 'Biblical Hermeneutics', p. 262. Cf. Hermann Gunkel, *Die Israelitische Literatur* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963), p. 3.

⁷⁵ John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 65.

⁷⁶ Cf. Gunn, 'Narrative Patterns and Oral Tradition', pp. 286-317.

⁷⁷ Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, *Whose Bible Is It?: A History of the Scriptures Through the Ages* (New York: Viking, 2005), p. 21. Pelikan includes a helpful discussion of orality and literacy (pp. 13-25).

philosophical, and rational methods cannot do justice to the oral dimensions of the biblical text.

Numbers of scholars have recognized the deep significance of the Bible as a witness to God's speech. James Barr, for example, argues that the emphasis on God's actions has overshadowed God's speech;⁷⁸ Karl Barth asserts that the Bible is the speech of God, that it is spiritual in nature, and that it is personal speech;⁷⁹ and Walter Brueggemann insists that the speech of God 'is a given of the text and thus the material for theological interpretation'.⁸⁰ What Brueggemann discovers in the book of Genesis, I find also in the book of Judges:

. . . the God of the Bible is a God who speaks, one whose speaking is so sovereign and magisterial that it functions as decree, summons, invitation, order, command, assurance, and promise . . . The speech of Yahweh, the God of the Bible, is the source of the world that is called to be. The speech of Yahweh is the source of Israel, through Abraham and Sarah, who are called to be. Both the world and Israel are evoked by Yahweh's sovereign word.⁸¹

The God whose speech in Genesis creates Israel, speaks again in Exodus to join Israel to himself in covenant, and in Judges to challenge Israel to be faithful to that covenant. By using the term 'hearing', I seek to restore to my biblical interpretation a renewed awareness of and a reinvigorated attention to the speech of God, which has a prominence in Judges, as I intend to show, that has been scarcely noticed in modern scholarship.

⁷⁸ James Barr, 'Revelation through History in the Old Testament and in Modern Theology', *Int* 17 (1963), pp. 193-205; cited in Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 46. See also Pelikan, *Whose Bible Is It?: A History of the Scriptures Through the Ages*, who discusses the speech of God in his first chapter, which is entitled 'The God Who Speaks' (pp. 7-26).

⁷⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I, pp. 132-43.

⁸⁰ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 46.

⁸¹ Walter Brueggemann, 'Genesis', in Bernhard W. Anderson (ed.), *The Books of the Bible* (2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989), I, p. 22. See also Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 67, where he writes, 'the real world is the one that has its beginning and dynamic in the promising speech of God'.

3.4.2. 'Hearing' and the Orality of Pentecostalism

Early Pentecostals were mostly uneducated and they functioned primarily as an oral culture. Walter Hollenweger argues that Pentecostalism emerged out of the African-American oral context and that Pentecostal theology is primarily oral in nature.⁸²

'The major mode of Pentecostal theology has been from the beginning orality, a mode which still dominates in the Two Thirds World'.⁸³ Preaching and teaching are still a vital element in the Pentecostal experience, and Pentecostals tend to approach Scripture as if it were a spoken word from God himself.⁸⁴ As an oral culture, Gordon Anderson argues, Pentecostalism is in a position to contribute to the understanding of Scripture as oral discourse, particularly when it comes to narrative, non-propositional texts.⁸⁵

The Pentecostal theology of Scripture insists that the Holy Spirit communicates through the written Word, and that an encounter with the Scriptures is an encounter with the presence of God through the Holy Spirit. The tension that Rickie D. Moore finds between Deuteronomy's 'law so righteous' and 'God so near' may illustrate the tension between the written word and the oral word. Although modernity tempts us to eliminate the tension between Scripture and charisma, Moore claims that we should not do so, since the tension is present within the canon itself.⁸⁶ Many Pentecostal scholars who entered the academy were required to abandon their oral culture and to adopt the modes of literacy, logic, reason, and

⁸² Cited in Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, p. 26; Cf. also Ellington, 'Pentecostalism and the Authority of Scripture', pp. 20-26; Archer, 'Pentecostal Hermeneutical Strategy', pp. 106, 118, 119.

⁸³ Kärkkäinen, 'Pentecostal Hermeneutics in the Making', p. 79.

⁸⁴ For a discussion of the oral/aural element in Pentecostal hermeneutics see Michael B. Dowd, 'Contours of a Narrative Pentecostal Theology and Practice', 15th Annual Meeting of the SPS, Gaithersburg, MD (1985). The conflict between theological education and oral community in Africa is explored in Draper, "'Less Literate are Safer": The Politics of Orality and Literacy in Biblical Interpretation', pp. 303-18. The same challenge within the African-American community is highlighted in Reid, 'Endangered Reading', pp. 476-88.

⁸⁵ Gordon L. Anderson, 'Pentecost, Scholarship, and Learning in a Postmodern World', *PNEUMA* 27 (2005), pp. 120-22.

⁸⁶ Moore, 'Canon and Charisma', pp. 78-91.

linear thought. Those who accepted the Western Enlightenment model either (1) forsook their Pentecostal tradition entirely; (2) remained in the Pentecostal church but aligned themselves with evangelical fundamentalism as a rationalistically framed reaction against 'liberalism'; (3) separated their scholarly life from their spiritual life; or (4) adopted an elitist mentality of 'enlightened' Pentecostalism, attempting to retain a connection to the Pentecostal church, but no longer embracing the ethos of the movement.⁸⁷

The tension between orality and literacy exists not only between confessional interpreters (such as Pentecostals) and critical approaches, but also between critical approaches and postmodern culture. Postmodernism is entering a post-literate stage,⁸⁸ an age that is literate, but because of the prevalence of electronic media is secondarily oral.⁸⁹ Because of this secondary orality, the post-literate age is more appreciative of narrative discourse and relational modes of knowing. This contemporary openness to non-Enlightenment models means that Pentecostals no longer are forced to choose between the academy and their heritage. Instead, they can adopt integrative models of biblical studies that engage the academy, the Church, and the postmodern world. The approach that I call 'hearing' is a way to bring together in a holistic fashion, the Pentecostal tradition of orality, the postmodern culture of post-literacy, and the oral dimensions of biblical narrative.

⁸⁷ This tension between literacy and orality and its bearing on the education of Pentecostal ministers is explored by Jerry Camery-Hoggatt, 'The Word of God from Living Voices: Orality and Literacy in the Pentecostal Tradition', *The 35th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, Pasadena, CA (2006), pp. 25-33.

⁸⁸ Tony Schwarz, *Media: The Second God* (New York: Random House, 1981), p. 11.

⁸⁹ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 11.

3.5. 'HEARING' IN THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT

3.5.1. 'Hearing' as a Biblical Term⁹⁰

Pentecostals hold the Bible in high esteem, and they prefer to utilize biblical terminology whenever possible. In the Bible, hearing is the most frequent method of encounter with the word of God. The command to 'hear' (Qal imperative of שמע) is found two hundred one times in the Old Testament, and all forms of the verb together are found one thousand one hundred fifty-nine times.⁹¹ Thirty-one times the prophet declares, 'Hear the word of the Lord'. Moses called the people together and said, 'Hear (שמע), O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I speak in your hearing this day, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them' (Deut. 5.1).⁹² Joshua used a similar formula when he gathered Israel and said, 'Come and hear (ושמעו) the words of the LORD your God' (Josh. 3.9). This prophetic formula is used by Micaiah, who said to King Ahab, 'Therefore hear (שמע) the word of the LORD' (1 Kgs 22.19). Jeremiah cried out, 'Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob' (Jer. 2.4). Later, Isaiah prophesied to Hezekiah saying, 'Hear (שמע) the word of the LORD' (2 Ki. 20.16). Isaiah 55.3 expands the formula, saying, 'hear, that your soul may live'. This expansion of the formula shows that שמע calls for more than the act of listening, because the one who hears will have life. In biblical thought, to hear is to act upon that which is heard.⁹³ The root שמע is the most common Hebrew term for 'obey', and when expanded to משמעת, it means 'obedient band, body of subjects'.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ I presented parts of this chapter and most of this section in Lee Roy Martin, 'Purity, Power, and the Passion of God: A Pentecostal Hearing of the Book of Judges', *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* 87 (2005), pp. 274-300.

⁹¹ Avraham Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Old Testament* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, Baker/Ridgefield edn, 1983), pp. 1175-81.

⁹² Quotations from the Bible follow the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

⁹³ For the meaning 'obey', cf. Brown *et al.*, *BDB*, p. 1034; Holladay, *Lexicon*, p. 423; R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *TWOT* (2 vols.; Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), I, p. 938; Even-Shoshan, *Concordance*, p. 1175. There is no biblical Hebrew word that is equivalent to the English 'obey'. Some form of the word 'obey' is found 109 times in the RSV, and in 103 of those the Hebrew word is שמע. The other six cases use the words שמר, עשה, עבד, and יקדה. Cf. the New Testament word

Conversely, a failure to hear is a failure to obey. Those who are unwilling to obey the word of God are described in the following passages by using the verb שָׁמַע with the negative particle: Moses said to Pharaoh, 'behold, you have not yet obeyed (לֹא-שָׁמַעְתָּ)' (Exod. 7.16). Moses warned Israel, 'if your heart turns away, and you will not hear (וְלֹא תִשְׁמַע), but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you this day, that you shall perish' (Deut. 30.17-18). Jehoash the king of Israel 'sent word to Amaziah king of Judah . . . But Amaziah would not hear (שָׁמַע-וְלֹא)' (2 Ki. 14.11). Similarly, 'the LORD warned Israel and Judah by every prophet . . . But they would not hear (וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ), but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God' (2 Ki. 17.13-14).⁹⁵ In the Old Testament, a failure to hear the word of the Lord signifies the spiritual state of stubbornness or rebellion (Ezek. 12.2; Neh. 9.17). Zechariah goes so far as to claim that the cause of the Exile is Israel's unwilling stubbornness and hardness of heart that is expressed in their refusal to hear the voice of Yahweh as spoken through the 'law' and the 'former prophets':

Thus says Yahweh of hosts, Dispense true justice, and practice kindness and compassion each other; and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another. But they refused to *pay attention*, and turned a stubborn shoulder and closed their ears from *hearing*. And they made their hearts like flint so that they could not *hear* the law and the words which Yahweh of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from Yahweh of hosts. And it came about that just as he called and they would not *hear*, so they called and I would not *hear*, says Yahweh of hosts; but I scattered

ἀκούω, which means 'hear', but also include 'a clear inference of subsequent obedience'. The compound ὑπακούω even more clearly means 'to obey'. J. P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (2 vols.; New York: United Bible Societies, 2nd edn, 1989), II, pp. 467-68.

⁹⁴ Brown *et al.*, *BDB*, p, 1036.

⁹⁵ Other clear examples include Isa. 30.9 and 65.12. Cf. the New Testament word παρακούω, which means 'to refuse to listen to and hence to disobey,' Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, II, p. 469. There are many New Testament texts calling for the hearing of God's Word that could be added to the Old Testament examples found here.

them with a storm wind among all the nations whom they have not known (Zech. 7.8-14, emphasis showing the verb שָׁמַע).⁹⁶

3.5.2. 'Hearing' as Obedience and Transformation

Since the Hebrew שָׁמַע can signify hearing and obeying, it is well-suited as a paradigmatic term for the Pentecostal community who embraces a holiness tradition. We might say that the most crucial element in the study of the Bible is not the need for better understanding of the text, rather it is the need for willing obedience to the text. Gordon Fee remarks that the problem with the biblical text 'is not with understanding it, but with obeying it'.⁹⁷ Mary W. Patrick states the point another way when she insists, 'to understand a text you must first stand under the text'.⁹⁸ Marius Herholdt adds that 'interpretation only follows obedience';⁹⁹ and Brueggemann writes, 'Interpretation that seeks to let the old word be the live, authoritative word, if it is faithful to the material interpreted, must be an act of obedience'.¹⁰⁰

The hearing/obedience that is called for in Scripture is more than a legalistic response produced by a sense of duty or fear of punishment (even though both of these motivations are present to a degree). The hearing of the voice of God is the hearing of faith that produces a radical affective transformation of the hearer,¹⁰¹ just

⁹⁶ It seems unlikely that 'former prophets' is a description of Josh.-Kings, but rather the term probably refers to the pre-exilic prophets such as Isaiah and Micah.

⁹⁷ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2nd edn, 1993), p. 15.

⁹⁸ Mary W. Patrick, 'Understanding "The Understanding Distance" Today: The Love command of Jesus', in L. Dale Richesin and Larry D. Bouchard (eds.), *Interpreting Disciples: Practical Theology in the Disciples of Christ* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian Univ Pr, 1987), p. 102; cf. Johnson Lim Teng Kok, *Grace in the Midst of Judgment: Grappling with Genesis 1-11* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), p. 64.

⁹⁹ Herholdt, 'Pentecostal and Charismatic Hermeneutics', p. 424.

¹⁰⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation and Obedience: From Faithful Reading to Faithful Living* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 1. Brueggemann's chapter entitled 'The Legitimacy of a Sectarian Hermeneutic: 2 Kings 18-19' (pp. 41-69) should encourage Pentecostals to develop their own approach to Scripture. While Brueggemann sees imagination and obedience as necessarily inseparable, Paul Ricoeur, on the other hand, argues that revelation appeals to the imagination alone; it does not appeal to obedience. Paul Ricoeur and Lewis Seymour Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 73-117.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Herholdt, 'Pentecostal and Charismatic Hermeneutics', pp. 422-23.

as Isaiah is transformed by his encounter with the living God. Isaiah's audience, on the other hand, will not hear; therefore, they will not be healed (transformed):

And he said, go, and tell this people: keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand. Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed (Isa 6.9-10).

The word of the Lord (דבר יהוה) is more than sound waves in the atmosphere or letters on a scroll, it is an apocalyptic event that produces transformation.¹⁰²

Moses, in his farewell sermon, admits that the hearing of God's voice is terrifying, but his juxtaposition of hearing with love suggests it is also attractive. He challenges the Israelites to choose life, 'by loving the LORD your God, by hearing his voice, and by holding fast to him' (Deut. 30.20). The kind of devoted relationship expressed in this text supports Robert O. Baker's argument that the hearing of God's Word is a means of transforming and forming the affections.¹⁰³ Affective transformation is explored fully by Steven J. Land, who deconstructs the often cited oppositions of being vs. doing, and of head vs. heart, when he argues that the center of Pentecostal spirituality is the integration of orthodoxy and orthopraxy within orthopathy. Orthopathy refers to the affections that constitute the motivations and character of the believer in their relation to God. Regarding the affections, Land writes,

Affections are neither episodic, feeling states nor individualistic sentiments . . . Unlike 'feelings', these affections are distinctively shaped and determined by the biblical story and evidence the marks of particular communal and historical location.¹⁰⁴

A hearer of the word of God, therefore, not only will obey but will obey joyfully. A hearer of the Word not only will attend to the Torah but will 'rejoice' in it (Ps. 119.62), 'love' it (Ps. 119.97), hide it in the heart (Isa. 51.7; Ps. 119.1), and 'delight' in it

¹⁰² Moore, 'Canon and Charisma', p. 90.

¹⁰³ Baker, 'Pentecostal Bible Reading', pp. 34-38.

¹⁰⁴ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, p. 44. See pp. 141-72 for a full explication of the affections and how they are formed by the Spirit, the Word, the community, and the experience of Pentecost.

day and night (Ps. 1.2). To those who love God, his Word is treasured above their necessary food (Job 23.12) and is 'more to be desired' than fine gold (Ps. 19.10).

3.5.3. 'Hearing' and Covenant Community

Throughout the Old Testament, the challenge to hear the voice of God occurs within the relational context of covenant. While hearing the voice of God can and must be an individual act,¹⁰⁵ this faithful hearing of the word of God takes place within the community of faith.¹⁰⁶ After the Lord established his covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, Moses said to them, 'Hear, O, Israel the Lord our God is one Lord' (Deut. 6.4). They were to hear God's Word in light of their covenant, a covenant that formed them into a community. Biblical interpretation has functioned too often as an enterprise of the individual scholar, and Daniel Patte argues that critical scholarship should be accountable not only to the academy but also to 'those who are affected by their interpretations', that is, to the believing communities outside the academy.¹⁰⁷ For Patte, interpretation in the context of Christian community is a way of minimizing the 'hierarchical structure of oppression and marginalization' that places the experts in a position of superiority when deciding the legitimacy of interpretations.¹⁰⁸

The Bible itself seems to suggest that hearing the voice of the text is best accomplished when the community is involved. John Christopher Thomas has discovered a model of hermeneutics that includes the faith community as an integral part of the act of reading (or hearing) Scripture.¹⁰⁹ Thomas observes that in Acts 15 the community gathers together to consider the relationship between Jewish law and

¹⁰⁵ The singular form of the imperative occurs 76 times in the Hebrew Bible, while the plural is found 110 times; Even-Shoshan, *Concordance*, pp. 1179-80.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Herholdt, 'Pentecostal and Charismatic Hermeneutics', pp. 422-23.

¹⁰⁷ Patte, *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel Patte, 'Reading with Gratitude: The Mysteries of "Reading Communities Reading Scripture"', *Reading Communities, Reading Scripture* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press Intl, 2002), p. 378.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas, 'Women, Pentecostalism and the Bible', pp. 41-56.

the reception of Gentile converts. The community offers testimony and hears testimony about their experiences, which they attribute to the acts of God. Furthermore, although James is clearly the leader of the meeting, the final decision is regarded as 'coming from the community under the leadership of the Holy Spirit'.¹¹⁰ Thomas concludes that the faith community 'provides the forum for serious and sensitive discussions about the acts of God and the Scripture. The community can offer balance, accountability and support. It can guard against rampant individualism and uncontrolled subjectivism'.¹¹¹ Acts 15 demonstrates that contradictory claims about what God has revealed can and do arise within the faith community and that it is the role of the community to mediate these claims by submitting to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It should be said, however, that unity does not require uniformity. That is, while the Spirit-filled community must make every effort to provide accountability and to reach a common witness, small remaining differences must not be allowed to create divisions in fellowship.

This accountability and support serves not only as a guardian for proper interpretation, but also as a witness to the transformative effect of the Scripture. The aforementioned obedience and transformation that result from the hearing of God's Word are difficult to verify in a written forum; but within the community of faith these relational qualities are witnessed and confirmed.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Thomas, 'Women, Pentecostalism and the Bible', p. 49.

¹¹¹ Thomas, 'Women, Pentecostalism and the Bible', p. 55. Cf. Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, pp. 5, 99, 145, 152, 156-92, who agrees that interpretation must be performed through the integration of text, community, and the Spirit. Recent theories of learning emphasize the importance of community. Cf. Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Learning in Doing; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 72-85, who concludes that 'learning is fundamentally experiential and fundamentally social' (p. 227).

¹¹² The question might be asked how it can be verified that the interpreter has truly 'heard' the Word of God and has not constructed simply a clever argument. In other words, does the goal of 'hearing' really make any difference in the resultant interpretation? I would argue that deception and self-deception are always an obstacle to faithful exegesis, no matter what approach or method may be employed, but that a perceptive readership and a discerning community can detect the genuineness of the interpreter's 'hearing'.

The role of the community in biblical interpretation is shaped partially by its theology of mission, and since the Pentecostal community is very much a missionary fellowship, obedience to the voice of God implies faithfulness to the mission of God in the world. The missional emphasis of the Pentecostal interpretation of Scripture prefers practical application above philosophical speculation.¹¹³ Consequently, most Pentecostals seek to understand Scripture not in order to refine abstract theological ideas but in order to seize on the command of God, which in turn effectuates God's kingdom in the world.¹¹⁴ They read Scripture with the expectation of a personal and corporate revelation that will then be communicated to others through the oral/aural ministries of preaching and teaching.¹¹⁵ Biblical interpretation, therefore, goes hand in hand with evangelism and Christian formation.¹¹⁶

3.5.4. 'Hearing' and the Holy Spirit

Pentecostal theology claims that the kind of hearing that produces transformation of the affections, divine manifestation within the community and mission to the world is the kind of hearing that is a gift of God through his Spirit. In addition to utilizing historical data and linguistic evidence in biblical interpretation, Pentecostals, in every stage of biblical study, will seek for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in an attempt to hear the word of the Lord.¹¹⁷ A Pentecostal hermeneutic, as Larry McQueen observed, 'embraces the critical claim of the Holy Spirit'.¹¹⁸ John

¹¹³ Cf. Herholdt, 'Pentecostal and Charismatic Hermeneutics', p. 430.

¹¹⁴ The Pentecostal church is an eschatological missionary fellowship according to Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, pp. 122-81.

¹¹⁵ Although Pentecostals are writing more than ever before, the oral dimensions of mission take priority over written communication.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Brueggemann, *The Creative Word*, Johns and Johns, 'Yielding to the Spirit', pp. 109-34, and Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the Oppressed* (JPTS 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

¹¹⁷ A recent and helpful discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit in interpretation is Clark H. Pinnock, 'The Work of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics', *JPT* 2 (1993), pp. 3-23. See also, Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, pp. 40, 41, 71-77, 98, 100, 106, 118; and G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture* (trans. Jack B Rogers; Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1975), pp. 108-115.

¹¹⁸ McQueen, *Joel and the Spirit*, p. 112.

Christopher Thomas discovers in his aforementioned study of Acts 15 that it is the Holy Spirit who brings into creative dialogue religious experience (originating in the acts of God), the biblical text, and the discernment of the faith community, in order to form meaning.¹¹⁹ Thomas writes:

Such explicit dependence upon the Spirit in the interpretive process clearly goes far beyond the rather tame claims regarding 'illumination' which many conservatives (and Pentecostals) have often made regarding the Spirit's role in interpretation.¹²⁰

In the historical critical method, the interpreter (through human reason) controls the interpretation,¹²¹ but a Pentecostal prophetic interpretation cannot be controlled by the interpreter, because the God who reveals himself will do so at his own will and choosing. Thus, when taking on the attitude of a hearer, the interpreter is not passive, but neither is s/he in complete control, because 'the concentration of hermeneutical effort is on God's side, and not on human endeavor . . . It is God who speaks and makes his message known'.¹²² According to Steven J. Land, just such an approach characterizes the perspective of early Pentecostals: 'Reason could not produce revelation, and without revelation reason did not discover what was truly important'.¹²³

3.6. 'HEARING' AS A THEME IN THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Not only does 'hearing' serve as a fitting term for describing the goal of Pentecostal hermeneutics, it also emerges as a vital theme within the book of Judges. The underlying cause of Israel's problems in Judges is their lack of attention to the voice of God. The Angel of Yahweh appears to Israel with a stinging rebuke: 'I said . . .

¹¹⁹ Thomas, 'Women, Pentecostalism and the Bible', pp. 41-56.

¹²⁰ Thomas, 'Women, Pentecostalism and the Bible', p. 49.

¹²¹ Cf. Paul K. Feyerabend, *Farewell to Reason* (London: Verso, 1987), p. 301; who claims that the scientific appeal to 'reason' is destructive because it discourages diversity and claims unilateral superiority over other epistemologies.

¹²² Herholdt, 'Pentecostal and Charismatic Hermeneutics', p. 429.

¹²³ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, p. 105.

“you shall not make a covenant with the inhabitants of this land. You shall tear down their altars”. But you have not heard (שמע) my voice’ (Judg. 2.2). The Israelites had renewed their covenant with Yahweh in Joshua 24.23-25: ‘The people said to Joshua, “Yahweh our God we will serve, and to his voice we will hearken (שמע)”’. So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day’. According to the Angel of Yahweh, the people have now abandoned their promise, and no longer are they hearing the voice of Yahweh. The Israelites had vowed to hear his voice, but now their vows are broken. In refusing to hear Yahweh, they are refusing the covenant of their liberator, and they are rejecting the care of their benefactor. The charge against Israel is repeated three more times in Judges: ‘They would not hear/obey the judges’ (2.17a); ‘They have not heard/obeyed my voice’ (2.20); ‘You have not heard/obeyed my voice’ (6.10). In addition to the four direct accusations, the question of Israel’s obedience surfaces two other times. First, they are contrasted to their faithful ancestors when Yahweh laments that Israel ‘turned aside from the way walked by the ancestors, who had obeyed (שמע) the commandments of Yahweh’ (2.17b). Second, the narrator of Judges declares that the remaining Canaanites ‘were for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey (שמע) the commandments of Yahweh’ (3.4). Furthermore, the theme of hearing is found twice in the concluding chapters of the book: The Gibeonites would not listen to reason, but were intent on executing sexual molestation (19.25); and the Benjaminites would not ‘hear’ the other tribes, but insisted on pursuing civil war (20.13). Throughout Judges, the Israelites refuse to hear the voice of God, and they suffer because of their stubbornness. The demand for hearing the word of God, therefore, emerges from the biblical text as a theological concern that informs the Pentecostal hermeneutical task.

In light of the Pentecostal interpreter’s aim, which is to hear the prophetic voice of God speaking through the text, some critical methods immediately become

more appealing; for example, linguistic, literary, narrative, theological, and canonical approaches.¹²⁴ Approaching Judges as a Pentecostal, but armed with these critical methods, the interpreter is able to hear the voice that cries out from the prophetic text.¹²⁵

As a result of applying my approach to the book of Judges, I perceive that the role of God (and the speech of God) has received too little attention from critical scholars. According to John Goldingay, the role of God throughout the Old Testament narratives is not appreciated by interpreters as much as it should be. He maintains that the 'interpretation of biblical stories should focus more upon God and less upon the human participants'.¹²⁶ Concerning the book of Judges in particular, I would offer several reasons why there has been so little interest in the role that God plays as a character in the narratives. First, the greater part of the book of Judges is devoted to the lives of six major characters: Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech, Jephthah, and Samson. Therefore, many studies of Judges focus on these characters and their electrifying exploits. Second, other studies of Judges have focused on history rather than theology, and, given the modern historiographical presuppositions in play, God is not a verifiable participant in historical events. Thus, these studies have routinely depreciated and disregarded the role of God as a central character in the book because of their governing perspectives on history and

¹²⁴ On Pentecostals utilizing narrative methods, see Archer, 'Pentecostal Hermeneutical Strategy'; and Dowd, 'Narrative Pentecostal Theology'. For a description of narrative methodology, see my summary in Chapter 1. Cf. also, Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*; Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*; Shimeon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (JSOTSup, 70; Sheffield: Almond Press, Pbk. edn, 1989); Johannes C. de Klerk, 'Situating Biblical Narrative Studies in Literary Theory and Literary Approaches', *RTh* 4/3 (1997); Hans W. Frei, George Hunsinger, and William C. Placher, *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*.

¹²⁵ Cf. Patrick, 'Understanding "The Understanding Distance" Today', pp. 102-103, who suggests that literary methods are more likely to produce interpretations that exhibit 'humility'.

¹²⁶ Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture*, pp. 56-57.

culture.¹²⁷ Third, the book's sheer quantity of violence, coupled with its concentrated involvement of women characters, has attracted and dominated the attention of ideological critics from all persuasions,¹²⁸ leaving few scholars who choose to devote their energies to the study of an ancient deity.

To the Pentecostal scholar, however, Yahweh is not merely an ancient deity; he is an ever present God whose words and actions are more important than the ideologies of either ancient Israel or contemporary culture.¹²⁹ Birch states aptly:

To read the Old Testament theologically is to recognize that when we read as people of faith within a confessional community, we are interested in more than conveying information about an ancient community. [The Old Testament] is of interest because we read as a part of communities that still seek to stand in the presence of that same God.¹³⁰

As an apocalyptic movement, Pentecostalism sees God as the beginning and the end of all things; and it views itself as a participant in the drama of the last days.¹³¹ It is this God-centered worldview of the Pentecostal,¹³² therefore, that opens up a perspective on the primacy of God's role in the narrative and the theological implications of that role. Given the relative lack of attention to God in most scholarly studies of Judges, it is somewhat surprising to learn that God is mentioned (אלהים or יהוה or a combination of names) two hundred twenty-four times within the six hundred eighteen verses of Judges. In fact, in spite of the apparent prominence of

¹²⁷ Cf. Moore, 'Deut. and the Fire of God', p. 33, who frames this point in terms of the mutual exclusivity of the precritical and critical worldviews. Moore writes that the speech of God is regarded by critical scholars as not particularly 'noteworthy' or 'central' because it belongs to the commonplace notions of the precritical worldview.

¹²⁸ In the last ten years, ideological approaches have dominated the study of Judges.

¹²⁹ Cf. Herholdt, 'Pentecostal and Charismatic Hermeneutics', p. 420.

¹³⁰ Bruce C. Birch *et al.*, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), p. 2.

¹³¹ Cf. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, pp. 58-121, who asks 'How could one truly know the significance of the past and present . . . without an understanding of the purpose and goal of all existence?' (p. 105); and William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (JPTS, 10; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

¹³² For an insightful introduction to the Pentecostal worldview as God-centered, see again Johns, 'Pentecostalism', pp. 73-96. See also Anderson, 'Pentecost, Scholarship, and Learning in a Postmodern World', pp. 116-17.

such judges as Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson, God is named more than all of the judges combined, and he is named in every chapter of the book.¹³³ Clearly, God is the primary character in Judges. I would suggest further, that the Pentecostal goal of hearing the word of God brings to the fore the three speeches of God in Judges (2.1-5; 6.7-10; 10.10-16), and highlights, in a way that previous scholarship has not noticed, their importance to the overall message of the book.

3.7. CONCLUSION

I have argued that the goal of my Pentecostal hermeneutic, which is to hear the voice of Yahweh, is both justifiable and suitable as an approach to the study of Judges. I propose that 'hearing' is an attempt to appropriate the theological message of the word of God through a careful and critical (discerning) attendance to the canonical biblical text. The goal of 'hearing', though parallel in some ways to 'reading', is more descriptive of Pentecostal intentions toward biblical study. The location of Judges within the Former Prophets combined with the Pentecostal view of Scripture as divine word suggest that Judges functions not as historiography to be examined or as ideology to be evaluated but as a prophetic voice that demands to be heard.

Pentecostals, by virtue of their own prophetic experience, are well equipped to hear the voice of the prophetic text. I contend further that, by their recognition and use of the terms 'hearing' and 'listening', critical scholars have demonstrated their instinctual approval of 'hearing' as an attitude toward the text. Also, even though critical scholarship has not explored fully the implications of an oral dimension to biblical study, the importance of 'hearing' the text is acknowledged tacitly by the resurgence of emphasis on divine speech as a vital element of the Old Testament concept of God.

¹³³ The following list gives the names of major characters in the book along with the number of times that they are named: Israel 184, Abimelech 40, Gideon 39, Samson 38, Jephthah 28, angel 23, Micah 21, Deborah 9, Ehud 8, and Othniel 3.

I have shown that 'hearing' is an approach that coincides with the orality of Old Testament times, the orality of the Pentecostal church, and the secondary orality of postmodernity. It is likely that the first biblical writings were composed under the rules of orality; therefore, models of interpretation based on linear, philosophical, and rational methods cannot do justice to the oral dimensions of the biblical text. Pentecostals, because of their oral culture, are attuned to the text in ways that are foreign to modern literacy; and postmodernity, because of the new post-literacy, is more appreciative of oral modes of discourse. The approach that I call 'hearing' is a way to bring together in a holistic fashion, the Pentecostal tradition of orality, the postmodern culture of post-literacy, and the oral dimensions of biblical narrative.

The Pentecostal preference for biblical concepts over philosophical categories grants inherent authority to the goal of 'hearing', since 'hearing' is the most fundamental and most common biblical mode of encountering the word of God. The covenant community is commanded to 'hear' the word of the Lord. Furthermore, the holiness stream of Pentecostal theology is appreciative of the biblical conjunction of hearing, transformation and obedience. The 'hearing' of Judges, therefore, is a conversation between the text and the hearer in a way that acknowledges the authority of the word of God over the life of the hearer. In spite of the fact that the hearer brings a worldview, a history and theological presuppositions to the interpretive task, all of these elements may be challenged and transformed through the hearing of the word of God.

I argue further that the faithful hearing of the word of God is best accomplished within the context of the believing community and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The community offers accountability and support that serves both as a guardian for proper interpretation and as a witness to the transformative effect of the Scripture. The obedience and transformation that result

from the hearing of God's Word are witnessed and confirmed within the community of faith. Furthermore, the kind of hearing that produces transformation of the affections, divine manifestation within the community and mission to the world is a gift of God. To form meaning, the Holy Spirit brings into creative dialogue religious experience, the biblical text, and the discernment of the faith community.

Finally, my goal of hearing the word of God finds specific correspondence in the three speeches of God in Judges (2.1-5; 6.7-10; 10.10-16), in which the Israelites are reprimanded for failing to hear the voice of Yahweh. Like the Israelites, modern biblical scholarship has failed to hear the voice of Yahweh in the book of Judges. The challenge to hear God's voice is not forced upon the text by my presuppositions and my experience; rather, it emerges from the text itself and serves as a provocation to deepen my understanding and my experience. As a Pentecostal hearer of the voice of Yahweh, I echo the cry of the Psalmist: 'Let me hear what God the LORD will speak' (Psalm 85.8).¹³⁴

¹³⁴ I recently discovered that a journal article offering 'hearing' as a paradigm for hermeneutics was published soon after I had presented the first draft of this chapter at the annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies. Snodgrass, 'Reading to Hear', pp. 1-32, makes several points that parallel my own: (1) 'hearing' is the primary mode of communication in the Bible (pp. 11, 12, 23-27); (2) 'hearing' requires willing, humble attention; (pp. 28-29) and (3) 'hearing' demands obedience (p. 31). Unlike my proposal, however, Snodgrass focuses his hearing upon the original intent of the author (p. 19). His hermeneutic is rooted firmly in modernity and may be described as confessional rationalism.

CHAPTER 4

OVERVIEW OF JUDGES: STRUCTURE, THEMES, AND CANONICAL PLACEMENT

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins the study of Judges in earnest by overviewing the structure, themes and canonical placement of the book. The purpose of this chapter is to familiarize the reader of the thesis with the basic content of Judges and its function within the narrative progress of the Former Prophets. In this chapter I will outline the three-fold structure of the book and summarize its basic content,¹ provide an overview of the multiple themes of the book, and explore the relationship between Judges and the surrounding books of Joshua and Samuel.

4.2. STRUCTURE OF JUDGES

The book of Judges consists of three major sections: (1) a prologue (1.1-3.6); (2) the stories of the judges (3.7-16.31); and (3) an epilogue (17.1-21.25).² The prologue offers a theological reflection on the cause of the events that are found in Judges, a short summary of those events, and an evaluation of the behavior of the Israelites during the period of the Judges. The second section of the book sets forth the stories of the major judges and Abimelech along with brief accounts of the minor judges. The

¹ Given the recent prominence of canonical criticism, one would expect a number of scholarly reflections on the canonical shaping of Judges, but these reflections (beyond a few insignificant words) are not to be found. This weakness extends even to Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, pp. 254-62, who stumbles over Judges when it comes to the significance of the canonical shape of the book.

² McCann, *Judges*, pp. 5-11; Dennis Olson, 'Judges', *The New Interpreter's Bible: Numbers-Samuel* (12 vols.; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), II, pp. 728-29; O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 3; Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament; an Introduction, Including the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and Also the Works of Similar Type from Qumran: The History of the Formation of the Old Testament*, p. 258; and D. W. Gooding, 'The Composition of the Book of Judges', *Eretz-Israel, Archeological Historical and Geographical Studies*, XVI (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1982), pp. 70-79.

epilogue consists of two narratives that do not relate directly to any of the judges but are set within the pre-monarchic period.³

4.2.1. Prologue (1.1-3.6)

The first section of Judges may be divided further into two parts, in the form of a dual introduction. The first introduction (1.1-2.5) purports to document the warfare that continues against the Canaanites after the death of Joshua. Being without a leader, the Israelites seek for Yahweh's guidance (1.1), and he chooses Judah to lead the campaign against the Canaanites. The Israelites appear to be united in their opposition to the Canaanites and are acting in obedience to God. Their victories are attributed to God's power (1.4); and the presence of God is accompanying them (1.19, 22). The initial victories are led by the tribe of Judah, and the listing of subsequent tribal battles moves from south to north. Very quickly the narrative shifts toward Israel's failure to completely obey God's clear directions to destroy the Canaanites. First, the Benjaminites fail to 'drive out the Jebusites who dwelt in Jerusalem' (1.21). Then, Manasseh does not destroy the 'inhabitants of Bethshean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages' (1.27). The narrator then lists five other tribes who fail to drive out the Canaanites from their part of the land.

At the beginning of chapter two, the Angel of Yahweh visits the Israelites with a word of rebuke from Yahweh. According to this first of three direct addresses from Yahweh to the Israelites in the book, their failure to drive out the enemy is interpreted by the Angel of Yahweh as an act of disobedience that violates Israel's covenant with Yahweh (2.1-5), a covenant that the Lord himself would never break. Because of the Israelites' unfaithfulness, Yahweh will allow the Canaanites to

³ The first and still helpful overview of Judges from a literary perspective is the aforementioned Lilley, 'Literary Appreciation of Judges', pp. 94-102.

become 'adversaries' to the Israelites, and 'their gods shall be a snare' (2.3). Thus, the Canaanites will present a threat to the Israelites in a paradoxical fashion; they will be *enemies*, but they will be an *enticement* as well. The prologue, therefore, claims that the Israelites' idolatry is the cause of God's allowing the Canaanites to remain in the land. Throughout the book of Judges, the Israelites struggle against the military encroachment of the Canaanites; while, at the same time, they struggle to maintain their faithfulness to their covenant with Yahweh and their separation from the gods of those same Canaanites.

A second introduction begins with Judg. 2.6, which recounts the death of Joshua and the Israelites' subsequent apostasy. This second introduction focuses on the idolatry that results from cohabitation with the Canaanites, and the religion of the Canaanites is described as a perpetual test for the Israelites. This second introduction concludes with a preview of the cycle of rebellion that will be repeated throughout Judges. The pattern consists of the following elements: (1) the Israelites do what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, forsaking Yahweh and serving other gods (2.11); (2) God becomes very angry with Israel (2.14); (3) God gives the Israelites over to the power of the enemy who oppresses them (2.14-15); (4) The Lord raises up judges, but the Israelites do not hear/obey the judges (2.16-17); (5) The Lord has compassion on the Israelites on account of their suffering, and he delivers them through the leadership of the judge (2.18); (6) After the judge dies, the Israelites relapse into idolatry, with each generation growing worse than the one that precedes it (2.19). Thus, the reader is informed from the outset that the Israelites' spiritual state will spiral downward throughout Judges.

Walter Brueggemann, recognizing the tensions inherent in the cycle, argues that the cycle consists of two basic elements that arise from different historical contexts. He suggests that part one of the cycle is the Israelites' sin and subsequent

punishment and part two is the Israelites' cry and subsequent deliverance.⁴

According to Brueggemann, the first part of the cycle (sin and punishment) is based upon the 'correspondence of deed and consequence', and it reflects a dependable, orderly social structure.⁵ The second part of the cycle (cry and salvation) 'speaks of Yahweh as a source of political power who will liberate from another, lesser political power that oppresses'.⁶ This second part of the formula reflects the radical graciousness of Yahweh as enacted in the Exodus.⁷

Gerhard von Rad, however, choosing to look at the cycle as a whole, contends that the scope of the cycle embodies a significant theological point. On the basis of the narrative chronology, von Rad suggests that the entire cycle occurs within a single generation. Consequently, he writes,

every generation was confronted by Jahweh's whole historical revelation both in judgment and in salvation. It was not the case that one generation was subjected only to his wrath while the next was solely subjected to his will to save. It was rather that each generation experienced the whole Jahweh.⁸

The Israelites' lack of faithfulness to the covenant is a major theme of the introduction to Judges. Their lack of obedience incites God's anger; he is personally injured by the callous attitude of his people.⁹ He delivered them from the bondage of Egypt and offered his protection and covenant, a covenant that he would never break, but which they violate over and over. Because of their rebellion, God places the Israelites in the power of the enemy, whose gods they have chosen to serve. In the hand of the enemy, the Israelites suffer oppression and affliction, and soon they cry out to Yahweh for deliverance from their suffering. God responds once again

⁴ Brueggemann, *A Social Reading*, pp. 73-90.

⁵ Brueggemann, *A Social Reading*, p. 79.

⁶ Brueggemann, *A Social Reading*, p. 84.

⁷ Brueggemann, *A Social Reading*, p. 86. The two-part nature of the cycle and the tensions between the two parts give rise to the different interpretations of the cycle, which usually focus either on the causality within the cycle or the grace that is also within the cycle.

⁸ Rad, *OT Theology*, I, p. 332.

⁹ In Judges, God is not angry with the Canaanites. His anger is directed toward his covenant people who have broken faith with him.

with passion, but this time the passion is *compassion*. The sufferings of his people cause God to grieve (2.18). This is not a mechanical, automatic response to their repentance; for in fact, it is not at all clear that the Israelites truly repent. Except for Judg. 10.16, when they ‘put aside the foreign gods’, the text states only that they ‘cried’ unto the Lord for his assistance and deliverance. Apparently, it is the pity of God that leads him to deliver his people from their sufferings.¹⁰

The introduction prepares the reader for the stories that follow and offers, through the construction of a theological paradigm for the period, a rationale for the cycle of judges. The Israelites fail to vanquish the Canaanites completely, and subsequently engage in idolatrous syncretism. These two sins are distinct, yet they issue from one basic source, which is the Israelites' refusal to hear/obey the voice of God.¹¹ According to the introduction, therefore, the Israelites' root problem is their refusal to hear and obey God's word: ‘You have not obeyed (שמיע) my voice’ (2.2). The charge is repeated three more times in Judges: ‘They would not hear the judges’ (2.17a); ‘They have not heard my voice’ (2.20); ‘You have not heard my voice’ (6.10). The Israelites are unfaithful to their covenant with God and they suffer because of their rebellion as God hands them over to the enemy for discipline.

4.2.2. Stories of the Judges (3.7-16.31)

The second major section of Judges forms the greater part of the book and consists of a series of salvation narratives whose main characters are called *judges* (שֹׁפְטִים). These narratives follow the basic pattern or cycle that is detailed above. The narratives, however, utilize a variety of expressions when manifesting the elements of the pattern, and sometimes they include additional elements in the cycle. For example,

¹⁰ Cf. Frederick E. Greenspahn, ‘The Theology of the Framework of Judges’, *VT* 36 (1986), pp. 385-96. In addition to 2.18, see also 10.16 for a reference to God's compassion.

¹¹ James D. Martin, *The Book of Judges: Commentary* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 135.

in five of the cycles, the suffering of the Israelites results in their crying out to God for his help (3.9; 3.15; 4.3; 6.7; 10.10); and the first four narratives conclude with the words 'and the land had rest' (3.11; 3.30; 5.31; 8.28). Also, in the case of Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson, it is said that the 'Spirit of Yahweh' came upon them (3.10; 6.34; 11.29; 13.25; 14.6; 14.19; 15.14). Thus, the pattern is generally the same, but each narrative includes unique details and variations on the scheme.

4.2.2.1. *Othniel (3.7-11)*

The first and paradigmatic¹² judge is Othniel who is hailed already in Judg. 1.13 as a heroic warrior, and who, as nephew of Caleb, represents the tribe of Judah (Num. 13.6). Othniel delivers the Israelites from Cushan-rishathaim of Aram-naharaim, who had oppressed the Israelites for eight years (3.7-11). Othniel's victory is followed by forty years of tranquility.

4.2.2.2. *Ehud (3.12-30)*

The second judge, left-handed Ehud (3.12-30), defeats King Eglon of Moab, who had controlled the Israelites for eighteen years. Ehud, a Benjaminite, brings tribute money to the corpulent Eglon, and while in his presence, stabs him in the belly. Ehud sneaks out, leaving Eglon alone in on the roof chamber with his intestines leaking their contents. Eglon's servants hesitate to enter for some time, thinking that the king may be relieving himself. The Israelites defeat Moab, and they enjoy peace for eighty years.

4.2.2.3. *Shamgar, Deborah and Barak (3.31-5.31)*

After the brief mention of Shamgar, who saves the Israelites from the Philistines (3.31), the prophet Deborah is introduced as one who was 'judging Israel' (4.4, 5) in Ephraim. She summons Barak (of Naphtali) and commissions him to attack King Jabin of Canaan, who had oppressed the Israelites for twenty years. Because Barak

¹² Cf. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 149.

insists that Deborah accompany him to the battle, she proclaims that the glory of victory will go to a woman. That woman turned out to be Jael the Kenite, who drove a tent peg through the head of Sisera, the leader of Jabin's armies. The war is followed by a victory song that glorifies Yahweh, Deborah, Barak, and Jael, and makes a mockery of Sisera and his defeat. And the land has rest for forty years.

4.2.2.4. *Gideon and Abimelech (6.1-9.57)*

The Israelites rebel yet again, and Yahweh gives them into the hand of the Midianites, who for seven years rob the Israelites of their crops and livestock. As before, the Israelites cry out to Yahweh for help, but before he raises up a deliverer, he sends to them a prophet. The prophet reminds them that Yahweh had saved them from Egypt and given them the land of Canaan. Yahweh had commanded them that they should not fear the foreign gods, but they had not heard his voice.

After the prophetic rebuke, Gideon of Manasseh is approached by the Angel of the Lord, who commissions him as the next deliverer. Gideon's story is the longest to this point (Judg. 6-8) and includes repeated references to Gideon's timidity and to his need for divine assurance. After Yahweh reduces Gideon's army from 32,000 to 300, he executes a miraculous rout of the Midianites. Following the victory, the appreciative Israelites invite Gideon to rule (משל) over them, but he replies 'I myself will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you' (8.23). Unfortunately, Gideon chooses to commemorate the occasion by constructing a golden ephod, which later becomes the object of idolatry (spiritual harlotry, 2.17; 8.27, 33) and a 'snare' to Gideon and his family (8.27, cf. 2.3).

Upon Gideon's death, his son Abimelech¹³ claims the kingship of Shechem, and murders seventy of his brothers, leaving only Jotham, the youngest, who survives by hiding himself. Jotham confronts Abimelech with a parable that

¹³ Abimelech means in Hebrew 'my father is king'. We are not told whether the name is suggestive of Yahweh's rule or of Abimelech's (or Gideon's?) ambitions.

foreshadows his eventual downfall, which comes after Yahweh sends an evil spirit to create dissension between Abimelech and the lords of Shechem. While Abimelech is attempting to burn a tower filled with men and women, one of the women throws a stone upon his head and breaks his skull, thus accomplishing the retribution of Yahweh.

4.2.2.5. *Tola and Jair (10.1-5)*

The illegitimate rule of Abimelech is followed by the accounts of two minor judges: Tola and Jair. Tola, from the tribe of Issachar, arises 'to deliver Israel' (10.1),¹⁴ and he judges Israel for twenty-three years. Jair is from Gilead (in the transjordanian territory of Manasseh, according to Josh. 17.1), and he judges Israel for twenty-two years.

4.2.2.6. *Jephthah (10.6-12.7)*

The Israelites sin once again, and Yahweh gives them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites who oppress them for eighteen years. The Israelites cry out to Yahweh for his aid, but in light of the idolatry of Gideon, the dictatorship of Abimelech, and two more implied cycles of sin and deliverance, Yahweh speaks directly to the Israelites and angrily declares that he is finished with them (10.11-16). He reminds the Israelites that he has saved them from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, the Sidonians, the Amalekites, and the Maonites, yet they continue to forsake him and serve foreign gods. He furiously rebukes them and announces that he will save them no more, and he suggests sarcastically that they call upon the foreign gods whom they worship. Perhaps *they* will listen and bring

¹⁴ According to many historical critics, the minor judges function differently from the major judges. See Boling, *Judges*, p. 189, who declares that 'the minor judges were the successful administrators of the period, whose nonviolent administrations generated no blood-and-thunder tradition'. Besides the fact that Boling lacks any historical data to substantiate his claim, the text characterizes Tola as a judge who 'delivered Israel'. I would suggest that Tola could not have delivered Israel without engaging in some form of violence. Furthermore, it is said that Shamgar killed 600 Philistines with an ox goad (3.31).

salvation. For the first time in Judges, the Israelites confess their sin, put away the foreign gods, and renew their worship of Yahweh. Surprisingly, Yahweh does not respond to their overtures of repentance, but the narrator injects a faint note of hope: Yahweh 'could no longer bear to see Israel suffer' (10.16).

The Israelites need a deliverer, but Yahweh does not act. Reminiscent of Judg. 1.1, they inquire, 'Who will be first to fight against the Ammonites?' The elders of Gilead seek out Jephthah, who is the son of a prostitute but who is known as a mighty warrior (11.1). Jephthah accepts the challenge and pursues a diplomatic approach toward the Ammonite king. Diplomacy does not work, so the battle is joined between Jephthah and the Ammonites. Jephthah is armed with the Spirit of Yahweh (11.9), but he requires further assurance of victory, so he vows to offer up as a whole burnt offering the first person (or thing?) that greets him upon his victorious return. The first person to greet him is his daughter, whom he subsequently sacrifices, even though child sacrifice is clearly forbidden in the Torah of Moses (Exod. 20.13; 23.7; Lev. 18.21; 20.2; Deut. 12.30-32; 18.9-12). Jephthah's act is not challenged and not critiqued. The narrator falls silent. Yahweh remains silent (because of his previous refusal to help?). Jephthah judges Israel for six years, and he is buried.

4.2.2.7. Ibzan, Elon and Abdon (12.8-15)

Time moves forward as three more minor judges are named in order (12.8-15). Ibzan of Bethlehem judges Israel for seven years, and he is buried. Elon of Zebulun judges Israel for ten years, and he is buried. Abdon of Ephraim judges Israel for eight years, and he is buried.

4.2.2.8. Samson (13.1-16.31)

Once again the Israelites sin, and this time Yahweh gives them over to the Philistines for forty years, the longest period of oppression in Judges. Although the Israelites

seem content to live under the rule of the Philistines (15.11), and they do not cry out for deliverance, Yahweh chooses to raise up for them a deliverer from the womb. The Angel of Yahweh appears to a barren Danite woman and promises to give her a son who will be a nazirite to God and who will 'begin to deliver' Israel from the Philistines (13.5). Samson's twenty-year administration is a paradox. On the one hand, he is repeatedly empowered by the Spirit of Yahweh; but, on the other hand, he never leads an army, and his exploits seem to be motivated more by personal grievance than by a desire to save the Israelites. Samson's relationship with foreign women seems to parallel the Israelites' relationship with foreign gods. Samson violates his nazirite covenant by touching the dead lion (14.9) and by drinking wine,¹⁵ but God does not withdraw his Spirit. Thus, when Samson submits to the pleadings of Delilah, and she cuts his hair, he does not anticipate any negative consequence. However, just as Yahweh finally reached the breaking point with the Israelites (10.13), he now abandons Samson to his own devices. Samson is blinded by the Philistines and sent away to toil in their prison house until they call him out to their festival as a side show. Samson prays for renewed strength in order to bring down retribution upon the heads of his enemies,¹⁶ and, although Yahweh does not speak, he does strengthen Samson as he asked. Samson dies along with his enemies, and he is buried.

4.2.2.9. *Pattern of Decline in the Stories of the Judges*

Although it is said that these persons 'judged' (verb form) Israel, Yahweh alone is called a 'judge' (noun form, 11.27). The judges seem to be ordered in such a way that their personal characteristics and response to God mirror the downward spiral of

¹⁵ Inferred as a possibility from the feast of 14.10-20.

¹⁶ Cf. earlier references to retribution in 1.7 and 9.56.

Israel as a whole. The first judge, Othniel, is a Judahite war hero who has no faults.¹⁷ The second judge, Ehud, has a minor handicap; he is left-handed (described in the Hebrew text as 'infirm in his right hand'). The third judge, Deborah, is a woman, a fact that would present many obstacles to leadership in the society of that time (or of any time, for that matter). Because the general Barak is hesitant, the glory of victory is given to a woman, Jael. Next comes Gideon who is hesitant and even fearful, as is evident from the seven references to fearfulness that are found in chapters six through eight (6.10, 11, 23, 27; 7.3, 10; 8.20) and from his repeated requests for assurance from Yahweh. The Gideon cycle includes not only battles against the Canaanites but also intertribal conflict, and it ends with the Israelites' idolatrous worship of Gideon's ephod. Although Gideon refuses to serve as king, his son Abimelech seizes power and proclaims himself to be king. Abimelech's death comes at the hand of an unnamed woman who acts as the avenging hand of Yahweh. Jephthah, the next judge, is an outcast who makes a rash vow that results in the unlawful sacrifice of his daughter. Jephthah's victories, like those of Gideon, are marred further by intertribal dissension. Samson is the final judge, and although he is called by God and set apart as a Nazirite from birth,¹⁸ he pursues prostitutes, gives free reign to his anger, fails to deliver Israel. Samson is outwitted by a woman, becoming the only judge to be captured by the enemy. The series of Judges, therefore, concludes with Jephthah and Samson whose lives and behavior mirror the collapse of covenant in Israel.¹⁹ The Judges were ineffective in controlling the wandering passions of Israel; in fact, they could not control even themselves.

¹⁷ Like the listing of tribes in the prologue, the series of judges follows a south to north pattern.

¹⁸ While Jephthah's failure was in his keeping of a vow, Samson's failure was in breaking his vows.

¹⁹ Cf. Exum, 'The Centre Cannot Hold', pp. 410-31, who traces the pattern of decay through the book. Exum points to the lack of narrator comment in the final narratives, but does not appreciate the importance of the prologue nor does she recognize the role of the speeches of God within Judges. She observes Yahweh's lack of participation in the stories of Jephthah and Samson, but she does not make the connection to Yahweh's earlier statement that he will save Israel no more (10.13). See also Guest,

4.2.2.10. *The Speeches of Yahweh*

The theological dimension of Judges is amplified by two divine speeches that interrupt the narrative (in addition to God's speech in the prologue). The Gideon cycle that begins at Judg. 6.1 includes the visit of a nameless prophet (6.7-10), who rebukes the Israelites in a manner similar to that of the angel who spoke earlier (2.1-5). Likewise, after the introduction to the Jephthah cycle (10.6-10) but before Jephthah is introduced, Yahweh interjects a scathing reprimand into the narrative. He reminds the Israelites of the many times that he has saved them, and he declares angrily that he will save them no more (10.13). Apparently he follows through with his threat (at least partially) by refusing to raise up a deliverer for Israel—Jephthah is chosen not by Yahweh but by the Israelites. Furthermore, the land no longer enjoys periods of 'rest', and it is not reported again in Judges that Yahweh 'saves' Israel.²⁰ These speeches provide for the reader an additional resource layer for the creation of meaning in Judges. The first indicator of meaning is the narrator's evaluative commentary found in the prologue, and the second layer emerges from the reader's response to the narrative content of the stories themselves. Third, the epilogue contributes a layer that characterizes the period of the Judges as one of idolatry, dissension, and moral depravity. Fourth, the direct speech of Yahweh adds a note of seriousness and urgency that causes the reader to rethink the narratives in light of Yahweh's word.²¹

'Can Judges Survive Without Sources?', pp. 43-61, who denies the need for narrator comment in the final stories of Judges. He sees the prologue alone as a sufficient theological explanation of the Judges period.

²⁰ Jephthah, however, is empowered by the Spirit (11.29) and Yahweh 'gave' the Ammonites into his hand (11.32). The completeness of the victory is questionable since neither the Hebrew שמע nor נצל is used and since the Philistines (10.6) are not defeated. Thus, Yahweh's role continues to be ambiguous.

²¹ The speeches are actually included within the narratives themselves (after the Israelites call out to Yahweh for help), but they occur before the introduction of the respective judges.

4.2.3. Epilogue

The third major section of Judges (17.1-21.25) consists of two narrative appendices that seem to parallel the book's two introductions. In chapters seventeen and eighteen the Danites steal a household idol from a man named Micah, and they establish an idolatrous worship center in Dan. Chapters nineteen through twenty-one describe in gory detail the rape, murder, and dismemberment of a Levite's concubine. Because the Benjaminites were unwilling to punish the criminals, the other Israelites engage them in battle²² and nearly eradicate the tribe of Benjamin. Thus, the first of the concluding narratives is concerned with idolatry (paralleling the message of the second introduction), and the second concluding narrative depicts gross depravity and civil war. The book of Judges, therefore, begins with the Israelites' fighting against their enemies and concludes with their fighting each other. The civil war is followed by the abhorrent kidnapping of wives for the surviving Benjaminites, an act that parallels the giving of Achsah to Othniel in Judg. 1.13. These two concluding narratives serve as a commentary on the pre-monarchic period by suggesting that Israel had fallen to a state of chaos, violence, immorality, idolatry, and depravity. The conclusion of Judges punctuates the leadership void by the fourfold repetition of the phrase 'in those days there was no king in Israel' (17.6; 18.1; 19.1; and 21.25) and by the additional commentary 'everyone did what was right in their own eyes' (17.6 and 21.25). Although Judges names fourteen leaders altogether, the book closes just as it opened—with no leader in Israel.

Chapters seventeen through twenty-one might be perceived as superfluous to the book of Judges because their narratives do not include any judges as characters. The primary focus of the book of Judges, however, is not the judges themselves;

²² Before the Israelites enter the conflict, they inquire of Yahweh exactly as they had done in Judg. 1.1.

rather, the primary focus is on the relationship between Yahweh and the Israelites, and the narratives of the judges form the matrix in which the decline of that relationship is explored. Neither the prologue nor the epilogue of Judges is superfluous. On the contrary, the programmatic comments in the prologue, paralleled by the actions of the Israelites in the epilogue, confirm to the reader essential elements of the plot that bring unity and coherence to the larger narrative. The decline towards apostasy and chaos that commences in the prologue, continues through the stories of the Judges, and consummates in the epilogue, suggests that the character of Israel has changed since the days of Joshua. The people who fought in unity are now fragmented; the people who claimed the promises of covenant are now demoralized.

4.3. THEMES OF JUDGES

The preceding overview of Judges demonstrates the complexity of the book and the evidence for numerous themes. Several themes stand out immediately because of their persistence throughout the entire book. For example the relationship between the Israelites and Yahweh is one theme that runs throughout Judges. Important characters appear in quick succession, but the Israelites and Yahweh are the only characters that are present from the beginning to the end of the book, and they are the most frequently mentioned characters as well. The covenant relationship is threatened repeatedly by the Israelites refusal to hear the word of Yahweh. God's mercy continues to bind him to Israel, but by the end of Judges, God has suffered a grueling series of offenses, his patience has worn thin, and the covenant relationship is imperiled.

Another persistent theme is the question of leadership for the covenant people. The book begins with the question of leadership, ends with the question of leadership, and concerns itself with the stories of fourteen different leaders. God

chooses leaders; Gideon refuses monarchic leadership; Abimelech claims leadership; and lack of powerful leadership seems to cause anarchy (Judg. 21.25).

Idolatry is another theme that is found in every section of Judges. In fact, without the Israelites' preoccupation with foreign gods, there would be no story in the book of Judges. Coupled with the Israelites' idolatry, however, is Yahweh's salvation. In Judges, idolatry leads to bondage; bondage produces the Israelites' cry for help, and Yahweh's steadfast love brings salvation. Even in the final chapters, when idolatry and immorality reign, after the Israelites push Yahweh beyond his patience (11.13), he continues to answer when they call upon him (20.18).

A final theme that permeates the book is the prominent role of women. Nineteen different women are mentioned in Judges, and twelve of those are active participants in the narrative.²³ These women figure prominently in the prologue, in the main body of the book and in the epilogue. Achsah, Caleb's daughter, is given to Othniel as a prize for his military victory, and she presses her father for a gift of springs. Deborah is a prophet, a judge, and a song writer. Jael boldly strikes down Sisera, the enemy general. An unnamed woman throws a stone from the top of a tower and breaks the skull of Abimelech, who pleads with his soldiers to pierce him with a sword so that it might not be said that a woman killed him. Jephthah's daughter willingly submits to her father's foolish vow, and he offers her up to Yahweh as a whole burnt offering.²⁴ The Angel of Yahweh visits the barren wife of Manoah, mother of Samson, to announce his birth and his commission, and she appears to be wiser than her husband. Samson marries a Philistine woman who is

²³ The women are Achsah (1.12-15), the daughters of the Israelites (3.6), Deborah (4.4-5.31), Jael (4.17-31), the mother of Sisera (5.28-30), the mother of Gideon (8.19), Gideon's wives (8.29), Gideon's concubine (8.30 and 9.18), the woman who killed Abimelech (9.53-54), Jephthah's mother (11.1-2), Jephthah's daughter (11.34-40), Samson's mother (13.2-24), Philistine wife of Samson (14.1-15.6), a prostitute of Gaza (16.1), Delilah (16.4-20), Micah's mother (17.1-4), the Levite's concubine (19.1-30), the Gibeonite man's daughter (19.24), women kidnapped for wives (21.7-24).

²⁴ I wonder if the Jephthah story is within the view of Psalm 106.34-45, especially v. 37, 'they sacrificed their sons and their daughters'.

taken from him, he visits a prostitute, and he falls in love with Delilah, who becomes his downfall. Micah's mother commissions a silver idol, which eventually comes into the hands of the Danites. A Levite throws his concubine to a violent mob who rape and beat her all night. He cuts her into twelve pieces and sends the body parts to the twelve tribes. Finally, four hundred virgins from Jabesh-gilead and a group of unsuspecting young women who are celebrating in a festival are seized by the Benjaminites to be their wives. In Judges, it seems that the victimization of women grows more extreme as the spiritual condition of the Israelites declines.²⁵

In attempting to determine a single dominant theme for Judges, scholars have set forth multiple options that may be grouped together according to basic categories. The earliest statements regarding the theme of Judges proceed from an understanding of Judges as a religious book. According to Burney, Judges teaches that idolatry brings punishment and repentance brings divine approval,²⁶ McCann and Brown emphasize the question of the Israelites' faithfulness,²⁷ and Wilcock perceives an affirmation of God as the true judge.²⁸ Other interpretations of Judges focus on the political agenda of the book and see it as a defense of the Judahite/Davidic monarchy,²⁹ or a commentary on the 'inefficacy of the judges'.³⁰ Still other writers, pursuing even deeper ideological philosophies, claim that Judges is a celebration of death.³¹ Furthermore, a number of themes are set forth that may include elements of sociology, religion and history. For example, Schneider claims

²⁵ Cf. Brenner, *Judges: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, p. 13.

²⁶ Burney, *Judges*, p. cxxi.

²⁷ McCann, *Judges*, p. 24; and Cheryl Anne Brown, 'Judges', *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), p. 151.

²⁸ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Judges: Grace Abounding* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 15.

²⁹ Stone, 'From Tribal Confederation to Monarchic State'. See also Marvin A. Sweeney, 'Davidic Polemics in the Book of Judges', *VT* 47 (1997), pp. 517-29.

³⁰ Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 508.

³¹ Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, p. 1.

that Judges lifts up the whole question of leadership,³² and Amit agrees, observing the dual themes of ‘signs and leadership’.³³ Webb argues that Judges explains the ‘failure of Yahweh's promise to give them the land’,³⁴ while Block sees ‘the Canaanization of Israelite society’ as the major topic.³⁵ As mentioned earlier, Robert O'Connell is unable to settle on a single theme so he combines several themes in formulating a statement of purpose. He concludes that the purpose of Judges is

to enjoin its readers to endorse a divinely appointed Judahite king who, in contrast to either foreign kings or previous non-Judahite deliverers in Israel, upholds such deuteronomic ideals as the need to expel foreigners from the land and the need to maintain intertribal loyalty to YHWH's cult and regulations concerning social justice.³⁶

In his single statement of purpose, O'Connell identifies at least six themes: kingship, the priority of Judah, the presence of the Canaanites, national unity, covenant loyalty, and social justice.

The diversity of thematic statements is due to the diversity within Judges itself, since each of the themes mentioned above emerges from the text of Judges. Wilcox laments the difficulty in discovering the central message of Judges, but he still asserts, quite unreasonably, that ‘it does have a central message’.³⁷ I suggest that if the central message is so well hidden that no one can discern it, then it cannot be called ‘central’. Ryken and Longman perceive that biblical scholars have failed to appreciate the multiplicity of themes that are found in the narrative books of the Bible, and they accuse biblical scholars of being ‘reductionistic’.³⁸ In light of their charge, I propose that we allow the book of Judges to speak with its full complement

³² Schneider, *Judges*, p. 23.

³³ Amit, *Judges: Art of Editing*, pp. 23-119.

³⁴ Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 208. The land is a prominent theme in Judges that I have chosen not to discuss here since it will be discussed fully in Chapter 6.

³⁵ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 141.

³⁶ O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 1.

³⁷ Wilcock, *Message of Judges*, p. 12.

³⁸ Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman, *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), pp. 22-24.

of voices. Since the book of Judges shows evidence of numerous themes, to deny that multiplicity of themes would do an injustice to the narrative. Cheryl Brown is one of the few commentators who does not pursue a single theme; rather, she offers the following as important themes of Judges: covenant, obedience vs. sin, unity vs. disunity, leadership, and God's grace.³⁹

The hearer of Judges can discern its themes from several narrative mechanisms: 1. The explicit statements of the narrator and the characters; 2. The repetition of words, phrases, and topics; 3. The placement of narrative elements at crucial points in the story; and 4. The techniques of characterization, setting, and plot.⁴⁰ These multiple indicators of theme are found in every text, and the hearer ultimately chooses to emphasize those elements that are most appealing to the hearer. When listening for themes, a Pentecostal reader would give added importance to the words of God himself (2.1-5; 6.7-10; and 10.11-16), words that James Martin belittles as 'postscript'.⁴¹ Yahweh accuses the Israelites of failing to hear his voice. Is it possible that biblical scholars and the Church have also failed to hear the voice of Yahweh in the book of Judges?

4.4. CANONICAL PLACEMENT OF JUDGES

Although the themes of Judges must be allowed to emerge from the book itself, the canonical context of Judges may play a role in evaluating the importance of those themes for the hearer of the biblical story. The books of Joshua and Judges appear to

³⁹ Brown, 'Judges', pp. 132-33.

⁴⁰ O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*. O'Connell's massive work is the most detailed study to date on the plot lines of Judges. His work however, has two essential and fundamental flaws: (1) He argues that plot is the communicator of theme, but what he concludes to be the major theme of Judges (monarchy) is only a minor plot element in the book; and (2) His painstaking listings of plots and plot layers do not anywhere include the overall plot of the book of Judges; which, according to his claims, would convey the overall theme of Judges. He lists only the embedded sub-plots, which consist of the judge cycles and the epilogues.

⁴¹ Martin, *Judges*, pp. 29-31. I accept the validity of Martin's concern for etiology, geography, and the underlying sources of Judges, but I would insist that the voice of Yahweh should not be reduced to an afterthought.

represent two different and incompatible versions of the conquest. These two conquest models have claimed center stage in the modern critical discussions of the relationship between Joshua and Judges. Further implications of the canonical placement of Judges have attracted little interest from scholars, and my reflections here should be considered exploratory.⁴² In the Hebrew Bible, Judges is wedged between the books of Joshua and Samuel within the larger Former Prophets. I suggest that Judges functions narratively as a theological contrast to the book of Joshua and as a preparation for the book of Samuel and the monarchic period.

4.4.1. Judges as Theological Counterpart to Joshua

The narrative of Judges appears to flow seamlessly out of the book of Joshua.⁴³ The book of Joshua concludes with the death of Joshua and his contemporaries, and Judges continues the story: ‘And it happened after the death of Joshua that the Israelites inquired of Yahweh saying, “Who shall go up for us first against the Canaanites to fight against them?”’ (Judg. 1.1). The apparent temporal setting of Judges, therefore, is immediately subsequent to Joshua. Judges begins with the word ויהי, which is, according to Alviero Niccacci, a macrosyntactic sign that never begins a new narrative but functions to create a literary connection to the previous material.⁴⁴ Christo Van der Merwe agrees, arguing that ויהי ‘signals a new scene or

⁴² Even the recent work of Goldingay, *OT Theology: Israel's Gospel*, lacks significant discussion of Judges' place in the meta-narrative of Israel, save the aforementioned topic of the conquest, which, quite strangely, Goldingay discusses from an historical perspective (pp. 485-89). The same is true of Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, pp. 146-204, who recounts quite ably both the theology of the Deuteronomist and the narrative of Judges, but he does not adequately locate Judges within its immediate context from the perspective of the reader. For the relationship between Judges and the larger context of the Old Testament, see McCann, *Judges*, pp. 12-24.

⁴³ Cf. Carolyn Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 130.

⁴⁴ ‘In tutti i casi, dunque, appare che abbia la funzione di creare un collegamento letterario;’ Alviero Niccacci, *Lettura Sintattica Della Prosa Ebraico-Biblica: Principi e Applicazioni* (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum: Analecta, 31; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1991), pp. 57, 123; Cf. Alviero Niccacci, *The Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose* (trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson; JSOTSup, 86; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), pp. 56-57; and Alviero Niccacci, ‘Sullo Stato Sintattico del Verbo HĀYĀ’, *LA* 40 (1990), pp. 18-19. The book of Joshua begins with the same construction. The grammars that preceded the textlinguistic approach did not recognize any difference between the

episode subsequent to a previously mentioned scene, and that this scene is part of the mainstream of a larger episode or narrative'.⁴⁵

Not only does the chronological component of the narrative appear to be continuous, but also the agenda of conquest is carried forward from Joshua into Judges. Although Joshua had declared that Yahweh had fulfilled all his promises (Josh. 21.43-45) by giving the Israelites victory over the Canaanites, (23.3, 9) that is, over 'all their enemies' (23.1), he insisted that the conquest was not entirely complete.⁴⁶ He instructed the Israelites to disperse to the territories allotted as their inheritance and to defeat the 'surviving nations' (23.4), or the 'remainder of these nations' (23.12). At one earlier point he had even rebuked several of the tribes for their dereliction of duty. He said, 'How long will you be slack to go in and to take possession of the land that Yahweh, the God of your ancestors, has given you?' (18.3). If the Israelites would obey, however, Yahweh would push back the enemy, and 'expel them' from the land (23.5). This secondary stage of conquest begins in Joshua 13-21 and continues (with overlap) in Judges chapter one.

Although Judges begins after the death of Joshua, parts of chapter one had already been reported in the book of Joshua, before Joshua's death. For example, the story of Caleb was told in Josh. 14.6-15 as if it happened during the lifetime of Joshua. In Judges, the story is retold as if it happened after the death of Joshua.⁴⁷ Not only are battle accounts repeated, but some of the accounts in Judges sound quite different from the accounts in Joshua. Compare these three verses, one from Joshua and two from Judges:

macrosyntactic ויהי and verbal ויהי. Cf. Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Subsidia Biblica, 14; 2 vols.; Roma: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1991), II, p. 390; and Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), p. 554.

⁴⁵ Christo H. J. Van der Merwe, J. A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (Biblical Languages: Hebrew, 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), p. 332.

⁴⁶ Polzin argues that Joshua includes two perspectives on the conquest, one is the ideal and the other is the real; Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, p. 141.

⁴⁷ Cf. Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh*, p. 148.

The Judahites could not drive out the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have dwelt with the Judahites in Jerusalem unto this day (Josh. 15.63).

The Judahites fought against Jerusalem and captured it. They slew it with the edge of the sword and they set the city on fire (Judg. 1.8).

But the Benjaminites did not drive out the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have dwelt with the Benjaminites in Jerusalem unto this day (Judg. 1.21).

The text in Joshua tells us that Judah could not drive the Jebusites out of Jerusalem, but Judg. 1.8 declares that Judah captured Jerusalem and set the city on fire. After Judah had captured Jerusalem and set it on fire, we are told that the Benjaminites did not drive out the Jebusites from Jerusalem.⁴⁸

As mentioned in chapter two of this thesis, these and other variations have caused historical critics to suggest that Joshua and Judges represent competing and contradictory versions of the conquest.⁴⁹ It has been generally accepted that Judges is more accurate historically, and Joshua represents the ideal. As far back as 1895, George F. Moore claimed that Judges chapter one 'contains by far the oldest and most trustworthy account of the invasion of Canaan'.⁵⁰ Attempts to arrive at an accurate history of pre-monarchic Israel have led to two popular alternatives to Joshua's military conquest model. The peaceful migration or infiltration model was proposed by Martin Noth and refined by Manfred Weippert, and the peasant revolt model was suggested by George Mendenhall and given its popular expression by Norman Gottwald.⁵¹

⁴⁸ For a helpful and detailed guide to Judges 1 and its literary dependence on Joshua 13-19, see Younger, 'Judges 1.1-2.5', pp. 75-92.

⁴⁹ A few commentators argue that the accounts of Judges and Joshua are compatible. Cf. E. Theodore Mullen, 'Judges 1:1-36: The Deuteronomistic ReIntroduction of the Book of Judges', *HTR* 77 (1984), pp. 33-54, who argues that Judg. 1.1-36 is a summary of Josh. 14-19, with the material being modified to reflect the primacy of Judah and the failure of Israel. Cf. also Younger, 'Judges 1.1-2.5', pp. 75-92.

⁵⁰ Moore, *Judges*, p. v. Cf. Brown, 'Judges', p. 132.

⁵¹ Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (New York: Harper, 2d edn, 1960); Manfred Weippert, *The Settlement of the Israelite Tribes in Palestine: A Critical Survey of Recent Scholarly Debate* (Studies in

Some recent historians, however, have ceased any attempt to harmonize the biblical accounts with the witness of archaeology and other external sources. They argue that the biblical narrative is an ideological construct that has little, if any, value for the study of history.⁵² No doubt, historical certainty concerning conquest is difficult to establish because extracanonical data is lacking for the period in question, but when the books of Joshua and Judges are approached from a narrative perspective their differences regarding model of conquest are not as pronounced as historians contend.⁵³ Texts like Josh. 23.1-13 (along with 13.1-7; 15.63; 16.10; and 17.12-13) provide sufficient evidence to explain the narrative existence of two stages of the conquest.⁵⁴ The book of Joshua describes the first stage of the conquest as a united effort, with all the tribes engaged together in battle. According to Joshua, this unified Israelite army conquered all the major enemies in Canaan. Once the conquest was virtually assured, Joshua gathered the tribes for the allotting of their inheritances. Yahweh said to Joshua ' . . . very much of the land still remains to be possessed . . . I will myself drive them out from before the Israelites; only allot the land to Israel for an inheritance, as I have commanded you. Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance . . .' (Josh. 13.1-7). Joshua proceeds as instructed, dividing the land into allotments, and the tribes return to their territories to eliminate the remaining Canaanites. The second stage of conquest is then taken up as each tribe's

Biblical theology, 2d ser., 21; London: SCM Press, 1971); Mendenhall, 'Hebrew Conquest of Palestine', pp. 66-87; Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh*. Not everyone has accepted the alternate theories. Joshua's conquest model continued to garner support from William F. Albright and George E. Wright. William F. Albright, *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*. A recent and insightful summary of the conquest theories is Goldingay, *OT Theology: Israel's Gospel*, pp. 485-89.

⁵² Cf. Niels P. Lemche, 'Early Israel Revisited', *CurBR* 4 (1996), pp. 9-34; Thompson, *The Bible in History: How Writers Create a Past*; Finkelstein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*; and Davies, *In Search of "Ancient Israel"*.

⁵³ Cf. Boling, *Judges*, p. 66.

⁵⁴ Another option is presented by A. J. Mattill, 'Representative Universalism and the Conquest of Canaan', *CTM* 35 (1964), pp. 8-17, who argues that ancient narrative included the concept of representative universalism, in which two aspects of an event were depicted as if each aspect were the whole event rather than only one part. Joshua and Judges, therefore, may describe the conquest in different ways without being inherently contradictory.

battles are detailed (chs. 13-21). It is this second stage of the conquest that is continued (with overlap) in Judges chapter one.⁵⁵

Although this narrative approach to the conquest may suggest an overall compatibility of concept between Joshua and Judges, differences still remain (e.g. Judg. 1.9-13 vs. Josh. 10.36-40); overlap is obvious, and the theological viewpoints of Joshua and Judges are vastly different. While Joshua emphasizes the completeness of the conquest and the faithfulness of Israel (downplaying the Canaanite remnant), Judges emphasizes the incompleteness of the conquest and the unfaithfulness of Israel.⁵⁶ Gottwald suggests that these differences give insight into the purposes of the individual books and that the writer of Judges 'regarded this dissonance as not offsetting the advantage of being able to use the stories to dramatically [portray Israel's] departure from Yahweh after Joshua's death'.⁵⁷

In light of these tensions in chronology and in detail, the hearer might be inclined to look beyond the narrative of Judges as a chronicle of history, to see Judges as the narrative embodiment of theology.⁵⁸ That is, the hearer may be prodded to consider Judges as a theological interpretation of history rather than a simple chronology of the pre-monarchic period.⁵⁹ Since Judges is a part of the

⁵⁵ Cf. Pietro Alberto Kaswalder, 'Le Tribù in Gdc 1,1-2,5 e in Gdc 4-5', *LA* 43 (1993), pp. 89-90. See also Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, pp. 146-53.

⁵⁶ A third storyteller, Josephus, illustrates the tendency of ancient writers to shape the material to fit their ideology. According to Begg, 'The Overture to the Period of the Judges according to Josephus', pp. 235-54, Josephus omits some elements of Judges while adding to the story in other places. He also changes the order of events and modifies the story so that it focuses more on political and economic themes.

⁵⁷ Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh*, p. 149. In spite of the dissonance within ch. 1, Koert van Bekkum, 'De Historiografie van Israëls vestiging in Kanaän aan de hand van Richteren 1:1-2:5', *NedTTs* 54, no. 4 (2000), pp. 295-309, argues that Judg. 1.1-2.5 is a unified historiographical composition, probably from the 7th century BCE, written with a specific ideological message that reflects old Israelite traditions.

⁵⁸ From a literary perspective, Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 36, speaks of 'history-as-plot rather than history-as-chronicle'.

⁵⁹ Later accounts in Judges confirm that the narrative is overtly non-chronological. E.g., the story of Joshua's death and burial is repeated (2.8,9); the judges themselves are presented in a geographical pattern that works its way from south to north; symbolic numbers (40, 80, 20) are used to define time periods; parts of the epilogue that is found at the end of Judges (chs. 17-21) actually occurred at the beginning of the pre-monarchic age. Even Rabbinical writers such as *Rashi* acknowledge the non-

Former Prophets, Brown's comment regarding that portion of the Hebrew canon is applicable: the purpose of the biblical narratives as prophetic history

was to interpret events in the light of God's revelation, particularly embodied in the Torah (Pentateuch), to exhort God's people to keep their covenant commitments to God, to chastise them when they failed, and to encourage them when they needed a word of hope.⁶⁰

The conquest narratives of Judges, Gottwald contends, are intentionally different from those of Joshua for a theological reason: 'they vividly' present the 'bald, unvarnished weaknesses, divisions, and apostasies of the time'.⁶¹ Barry Webb adds that the connection to Joshua makes the narrative of Judges dependent on Joshua, but the variations make it independent from Joshua.⁶² Thus, after the first chapter of Judges, the hearer should be prepared to hear a message that is quite dissimilar from the message of Joshua.⁶³ The book of Judges, therefore, functions as a theological contrast to the book of Joshua. Given the placement of Joshua and Judges as the first two books to follow Deuteronomy, it would not be too great a stretch to see Joshua as a depiction of life under the blessings (Deut. 28.1-14) and Judges as life under the curses (Deut. 28.15-68).⁶⁴

4.4.2. Judges as a Transitional Book

In addition to its function as a theological contrast to Joshua, the canonical placement of Judges impacts the reader/hearer in at least three other ways. First,

chronological nature of Judges. The theological perspective of Judges is apparent as well in the selection of narratives that document only times of distress and conflict. No doubt important events occurred during the peaceful years of pre-monarchic Israel, but none of these events is recorded in Judges. In spite of the internal indications that Judges is not a chronological account, interpreters continue to create time lines for the events of Judges. Cf. Washburn, 'Chronology of Judges', pp. 414-25.

⁶⁰ Brown, 'Judges', p. 125.

⁶¹ Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh*, p. 149.

⁶² Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 81.

⁶³ Cf. Younger, 'Judges 1.1-2.5', p. 76, who writes that chapter one (and all of Judges) is a 'highly stylized account'.

⁶⁴ If Israel would obey Yahweh's commandments, their enemies would be defeated, and the peoples of the earth would fear them (Deut. 28.7), but if they would not 'hear' Yahweh, then they would be defeated by their enemies (Deut. 28.25), oppressed and plundered (Deut. 28.33). In classic literary terms, Joshua is a romance and Judges is a tragedy; cf. Leland Ryken, *The Literature of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974), p. 23.

Judges serves as a bridge between the conclusion of the book of Joshua and the opening of the book of 1 Samuel. The book of Joshua portrays Israel as a unified nation, almost entirely obedient to the commands of Yahweh,⁶⁵ which he spoke by the mouth of Moses.⁶⁶ The book concludes with a covenant renewal ceremony, followed by the declaration that the Israelites served God faithfully all the days of Joshua. Samuel, however, stands in stark contrast to Joshua, and presents an entirely different picture of Israel. In the opening chapters of 1 Samuel, the hearer learns that the word of the Lord is rare in those days and there is no revelation breaking forth (3.1). Furthermore, even the priests do not know Yahweh. They are 'scoundrels' (2.12) who treat the 'offerings of the Lord with contempt' (2.17), and who use their office to procure sexual favors (2.22). Standing between Joshua and 1 Samuel is the book of Judges, which delineates the progression whereby the Israelites moved from victory to defeat, from unity to fragmentation, and from faithfulness to idolatry.⁶⁷ Without the book of Judges the hearer of the biblical story would be shocked and perhaps skeptical of 1 Samuel's depiction of Israel's spiritual character. The radical shift from the ending of Joshua to the beginning of 1 Samuel is made believable by the transitional role of the book of Judges.⁶⁸

Second, the book of Judges supplies the hearer with other important information that serves as background to Samuel and Kings. It explains the reasons

⁶⁵ The only breach is the sin of one man, Achan (Josh. 7.1), and he is quickly judged.

⁶⁶ Even though the events of the book of Joshua postdate Moses, his role as lawgiver is featured prominently in the book. In fact, Moses is mentioned more often in Joshua (57 times) than in Deuteronomy (38 times). The continued role of the commands of Moses lends credence to Gerhard von Rad's proposal for a Hexateuch, and it might be inferred that Joshua was composed separately from Judges-Kings.

⁶⁷ The book of Judges is connected to 1 Samuel implicitly by the correspondences between Samson, the last judge in the book of Judges and Samuel, the final judge. See Appendix A: Samson and Samuel.

⁶⁸ Cf. Guest, 'Can Judges Survive Without Sources?', pp. 59-60.

for the continued presence of the Canaanites, an explanation that is needed in light of Joshua's victories, which had apparently annihilated the Canaanites.⁶⁹

Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers; and having taken possession of it, they settled there. And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers; not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the LORD had given all their enemies into their hands. Not one of all the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass (Joshua 21.43-45).

Judges provides detail regarding the subsequent conflict with the remaining Canaanites, and when the book concludes, the Philistines are the prominent enemy, the same enemy that is present when 1 Samuel opens.

Third, Judges anticipates a change in leadership, namely the move toward monarchy. Both Moses and Joshua had been divinely appointed as leaders, and their passing left a void in leadership that is voiced immediately in Judges chapter one, which says, 'After the death of Joshua the people of Israel inquired of the LORD, 'Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?'' (Judg. 1.1). There is no move toward the instituting of a monarchy, however, until chapter eight, when the Israelites invite Gideon to rule (גִּדְוֹן) over them.⁷⁰ Gideon refuses the invitation, saying, 'I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you' (Judg. 8.23). Nevertheless, Gideon's son Abimelech attempts to rule, appointing himself as king (Judg. 9.6). Abimelech is presented as a villain, and his rule ends violently.

Although it is possible to deduce a negative view of kingship from the comments of Gideon, a refrain found later in the book seems to imply the need for a

⁶⁹ A close reading of the text, however, shows that Canaanites were still present after the victories of Joshua. See, for example, Josh. 23.7, which mentions the nations 'left here among you'. See also, 23.12-13, 'For if you turn back, and join the remnant of these nations left here among you, and make marriages with them, so that you marry their women and they yours, know assuredly that the LORD your God will not continue to drive out these nations before you; but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a scourge on your sides, and thorns in your eyes, till you perish from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you'.

⁷⁰ Even though the text uses neither the verb *reign* (מָלַךְ) nor the noun *king* (מֶלֶךְ), the request seems to call for a monarchic dynasty that would be passed down from Gideon to his son.

king. Twice the narrator says, 'In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in their own eyes' (Judg. 17.6; 21.25). The first half of the statement ('In those days there was no king in Israel') is repeated a third and fourth time in 18.1 and 19.1. Although these declarations do not explicitly claim that a king is needed, they do at least bring the idea of the monarchy to a place of prominence at the end of the book, providing a link to 1 Samuel, in which the desire for a king becomes a major theme.

4.5. CONCLUSION

Judges consists of three major sections, and each section contributes uniquely to the fabric of the book. The prologue serves as a transition into the period of the judges, a preview of the book of Judges, and an evaluation of the Israelites' relationship to Yahweh during the time of the judges. The Angel of Yahweh appears with a reprimand, declaring that the Israelites have violated their covenant with Yahweh. Yahweh, therefore, allows the Canaanites to remain in the land as an adversary and as a snare to the Israelites. The main body of Judges consists of the stories of the Judges, which are presented within a cyclical framework that includes the following elements: (1) the Israelites do what is evil in the sight of Yahweh, forsaking Yahweh and serving other gods; (2) God becomes angry and gives the Israelites over to the power of the enemy; (3) the Israelites cry out to Yahweh, and the Lord raises up a judge who brings deliverance; (4) After the judge dies, the Israelites relapse into idolatry, with each generation growing worse than the one that preceded it. The cycle eventually breaks down, just as the Israelites' relationship to Yahweh breaks down toward the end of Judges. The third section of Judges, the epilogue, depicts the pre-monarchic period as a time of chaos, idolatry, and depravity. It was a time when 'there was no king in Israel, and everyone did what was right in their own eyes'.

The central narratives of Judges include two divine speeches (in addition to the speech in the prologue) in which Yahweh reminds the Israelites of the many times that he has saved them. In the final speech, Yahweh expresses frustration at Israel's continual rebellion, and he declares angrily that he will save them no more. These speeches provide the hearer with one of the significant resources for the construction of meaning in the book of Judges. Other elements of the book that contribute to meaning are the narrator's evaluative pronouncements found in the prologue, the core content of judges stories themselves, and the descriptive commentary in the epilogue.

Several themes that are prominent throughout the entire book of Judges: (1) the relationship between the Israelites and Yahweh, (2) the question of leadership, (3) idolatry, (4) Yahweh's salvation, and (5) the prominent role of women. Judges shows evidence of numerous themes, and each of these themes is worthy of consideration by the hearer of the book. A Pentecostal hearer, however, would give added importance to the words of God himself (2.1-5; 6.7-10; and 10.11-16), words that the Israelites refuse to hear, and that biblical scholarship has been unable to hear.

The book of Judges stands strategically in the canon between the books of Joshua and Samuel. I suggest that Judges functions narratively as a theological contrast to the book of Joshua and prepares the hearer for the book of Samuel and the monarchic period. While Joshua emphasizes the completeness of the conquest and the faithfulness of Israel (downplaying the Canaanite remnant), Judges emphasizes the incompleteness of the conquest and the unfaithfulness of Israel. Furthermore, Judges serves as a bridge between the conclusion of the book of Joshua and the opening of the book of 1 Samuel. The ending of Joshua presents a covenant renewal ceremony in which the Israelites recommit themselves to the worship of

Yahweh, but the opening chapters of 1 Samuel show the Israelite cult to be in a state of disarray. The book of Judges accounts for the decline that occurs between the time of Joshua and the time of 1 Samuel. Finally, Judges clarifies the reasons for the continued presence of the Canaanites, and it anticipates the move in 1 Samuel toward monarchy by bringing the idea of the monarchy to a place of prominence at the end of the book.

CHAPTER 5

'BUT YOU DID NOT HEAR': YAHWEH'S FAITHFULNESS AND ISRAEL'S FOUNDERING

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I offer an overview of the book of Judges and suggest its major themes and its canonical function. The overview, along with the earlier proposal for a Pentecostal hearing of Judges, identifies the speeches of God in Judges 2, 6, and 10 as important elements of the book that until now have not received sufficient treatment. It is to these three speeches that I now turn my attention, commencing in this chapter with a hearing of the first speech (Judg. 2.1-5). I begin with a brief examination of the events in chapter one that precipitate the speech, and then I proceed to a detailed analysis of the speech itself.

5.2. FINISHING THE CONQUEST: JUDGES 1

The first verse of the book of Judges introduces the reader to the setting of the narrative, the main characters in the story, and the apparent agenda for chapter one. The verse reads: 'And it happened after the death of Joshua that the Israelites inquired of Yahweh saying, "Who shall go up for us first against the Canaanites to fight against them?"' Therefore, the temporal setting of Judges is immediately subsequent to Joshua's death; the characters are the Israelites and Yahweh; and the agenda of chapter one is the completion of the conquest of Canaan.

5.2.1. Success in Battle

Before entering into battle, the Israelites seek Yahweh's direction, which is the first recorded instance of Israel's inquiring of Yahweh. In the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy, there was no need for such an inquiry, because Yahweh spoke face to

face with Moses. After the death of Moses, Yahweh again took the initiative to speak to Joshua quite directly.¹ After Joshua's death, however, the Israelites inquired of Yahweh by means of the High Priest.²

In response to Israel's inquiry, Yahweh names Judah as the tribe of leadership (Judg. 1.2).³ Judah responds by proposing to Simeon that they provide mutual assistance in claiming their inherited lands, and Simeon agrees to the arrangement (1.3). Judah's invitation to Simeon is reasonable, in light of Joshua 19.1-9, which tells us that Simeon's territory lies within the lands of Judah.⁴ Thus Judah and Simeon join together, and the next seventeen verses (1.4-20) are devoted to Judah's battles, in which he defeats numerous enemies and claims new cities. He conquers Bezek, Jerusalem, Hebron, Hormah, Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron; while Caleb (who is from the tribe of Judah) takes Kiriath-sepher (cf. Josh. 14.6-15 and 15.13-19).

5.2.2. Failure in Battle

The victories continue until verse nineteen, where it is said that although 'Yahweh was with Judah', he was not allowed to drive out the dwellers of the plain because they had iron chariots (1.19; cf. Josh. 17.18).⁵ This first admission of failure is followed by a long register of failures, which lists the tribes and their lack of success. We read of Benjamin, Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali that they 'did not drive out . . .' (1.21, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 22, 33). Although 'Yahweh was with'

¹ It is recorded fourteen times that Yahweh spoke to Joshua (Josh. 1.1; 3.7; 4.1, 8, 15; 5.2, 9; 6.2; 7.10; 8.1, 18; 10.8; 11.6; 20.1)

² Scherman, *Joshua/Judges*, p. 118.

³ Although chapter one does not mention the tabernacle or the priests, the verb יָשָׁא followed by the preposition אֶל, signifies the cultic ritual of 'inquiring, consulting'; Brown *et al.*, *BDB*, p. 982. Inquiring of Yahweh would involve the priest and would occur in the communal setting of the tabernacle. Soggin admits as much, but still wants to see an explicit reference to the tabernacle. Cf. J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 2nd edn, 1987), p. 20. This may have been the first use of the *Urim* and the *Thummim* (Exod. 28.30; Num. 27.21). Scherman, *Joshua/Judges*, p. 118.

⁴ Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 83.

⁵ Cf. the treatment of Judg. 1.1-21 by Jeffery S. Stevenson, 'Judah's Successes and Failures in Holy War: An Exegesis of Judges 1:1-20', *ResQ* 44 (2002), pp. 43-54, who shows that the slide toward apostasy begins with Judah.

Joseph and he captures Bethel, he allows an informant and his family to go free (1.22-26). Finally, we learn that some time after Dan had possessed his inheritance, the Amorites drive him out, leaving Dan without an inheritance (1.34).⁶

5.2.3. Features of Chapter One

According to Yairah Amit, chapter one functions as the 'first stage of reading' and imposes initial 'guidelines' on the reader.⁷ The content of the chapter provides clues for the shaping of the reader's expectations. Several narrative features that confront the reader/hearer in chapter one may prove to be beneficial guides to the hearing of Judges.

5.2.3.1. Leadership

First, Judges introduces a new structure of leadership for Israel. For the first time in the canonical story, the narrative lacks a central character. Genesis followed the lives of the patriarchs; and from Exodus through Deuteronomy, Moses was the primary human actor in the story. Joshua then succeeded Moses as the main character and leader of Israel; but after the death of Joshua, Yahweh does not choose a single person as leader. When the Israelites ask Yahweh, 'Who shall go up for us first?', the reader might expect Yahweh to name a successor to Joshua, but he does not.⁸ Instead, when Israel asks the question: 'Who shall go up for us first?', Yahweh answers, 'Judah shall go up'. Grammatically, 'Judah' is singular, but it is a collective

⁶ This event provides the setting for chapter eighteen of Judges. Ch. 1 does not mention Reuben and Gad because their inheritance was in Transjordan, and Levi is not mentioned because he did not inherit a territory. Yahweh was his inheritance (Josh. 13.33). Issachar is omitted as well. Obviously, the list in Judges 1 is not intended to be comprehensive.

⁷ Amit, *Judges: Art of Editing*, p. 134.

⁸ Cf. Judg. 10.18 where the leaders of Gilead asked, 'Who will begin the fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead', and Isa. 6.8 'Who will go for us?' Although the Hebrew word 'who' (מִי) can be either singular or plural, it is used here with a singular verb: 'go up' (יַעֲלֶה). The combination of מִי followed by a singular verb always asks for a singular response, as in Deut. 30.12 'Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?' On the other hand, in Exod. 10.8, מִי is followed by a plural, and the answer to the question comes in the plural. Pharaoh asks 'Which ones are to go?' (וְהַלְלִים) Moses replies, 'We will go with our young and our old . . .' (בְּנֵעֲרֵינוּ וּבְקִנְיֵנוּ יֵלְךָ); Exod. 10.8-9).

noun, representing the entire tribe. The continuing absence of a replacement for Joshua might give the reader a 'sense of uncertainty'⁹ about Israel's future paradigm of leadership. The theme of leadership, therefore, is raised at the outset of the book.

5.2.3.2. Characterization of Israel

Second, the characterization of Israel in chapter one deserves mention. Although each tribe has been assigned the responsibility for possessing its own inheritance, the narrative of Judges begins with the whole people, the 'Israelites' (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), inquiring after Yahweh. When they ask, 'Who will go up for us?', the question (especially the word לָנוּ, 'for us') indicates the narrative 'concept of a united Israel'.¹⁰ Israel is characterized as a union of tribes; they are one whole people, acting in harmony for the common good. As Judges begins, the narrative presents a tribal relationship of cooperation and unity of purpose. This perception of unity and cooperation is strengthened by the actions of Judah and Simeon, who engage and defeat the enemy jointly rather than separately.¹¹ The text does not reveal either the source of this unity of purpose nor the political structure of the tribes. The reader, however, would be aware of earlier parts of the canon, which locate both Israel's unity and their social and political structures in their covenant with Yahweh.

⁹ Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, p. 130.

¹⁰ Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 82. Neither I nor Webb would argue that this sense of unity is embodied historically in national political organization. Socially, Israel is a people, but politically, they are not a nation. Furthermore, scholars are correct when they describe the judges as tribal or regional leaders. The narrative, however, uses the term יִשְׂרָאֵל or בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, 'Israelites' (154 times) even when only one or two tribes are in view (E.g., Abimelech rules Shechem only, but the narrative says he 'ruled Israel' [9.22], and Jephthah leads Gilead alone, but the text says he 'judged Israel' [12.7]). Although the judges and their battles may be limited in scope, the narrative (by using 'Israelites') invests each episode with national significance, a feature observed as well by Rad, *OT Theology*, I, pp. 331-32; Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh*, p. 149; Kaswaller, 'Le Tribù', p. 89; and Goldingay, *OT Theology: Israel's Gospel*, pp. 531-33.

¹¹ In modern times the morality of conquest (genocide) has been questioned; e.g., Mark Harold McEntire, *The Blood of Abel: Violence in the Hebrew Bible* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999). A helpful survey of viewpoints on the ethical dimensions of the conquest can be found in Cowles, *Show Them No Mercy: 4 Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*. From his experience in the study of apocalyptic, Paul D. Hanson, 'War, Peace, and Justice in Early Israel', *BR 3* (1987), pp. 32-45, insists that the question of violence and war in the OT is too complex for an easy solution. He argues that the biblical view of war can be understood only within the context of a sense of justice that is born out of the experiences of slavery, suffering and deliverance.

5.2.3.3. *Relationship to Joshua*

As discussed in Chapter 4, a third important feature of chapter one is the incorporation of material from the book of Joshua. Although Judges begins after the death of Joshua, parts of chapter one had already been reported in the book of Joshua, before Joshua's death. I concluded in the earlier discussion that the similarities to Joshua may suggest to the reader that the same basic story is in view in both books, but the variations between Joshua and Judges indicate two different perspectives on the conquest. After chapter one, therefore, the reader of Judges might anticipate the unfolding of a message quite different from the message of Joshua.

5.2.3.4. *Failure to Complete the Conquest*

The fourth narrative element that stands out is the shift in chapter one from military success to military failure. The emphasis in the latter half of the chapter is upon the fact that Israel did not drive out the Canaanites, and the final third of the chapter is devoted entirely to a listing of failures. Thus, Judges begins with a united and victorious Israel but quickly transitions into a description of multiple defeats. The wording of the text is quite negative when compared to the parallels in Joshua. Joshua states that Judah 'could not' drive out the Jebusites (15.63), and Manasseh 'could not' possess the land. In Judges, however, the word 'could' is absent; the tribes 'did not' drive out their enemies.¹² A sense of intentionality on the part of the tribes is allowed by the words 'did not', while a sense of inevitability and helplessness may be inferred from the words 'could not'. This difference in wording is very slight, but it may be significant, in that the reader may hold open the

¹² The Hebrew for 'could not' is *לֹא יָכֻלְוּ*, literally, 'they were not able'. This point is made by Olson, 'Judges', p. 744.

possibility that these tribes failed to put forth their best efforts. Is it possible that these failures are a result of negligence?¹³

In the case of Judah, Yahweh himself may be implicated in the failure. The Hebrew text of Judg. 1.19 suggests that they were not 'allowed' to drive out the inhabitants of the plain. The verse seems to point back to Josh. 17.18, which says, 'you will drive out the Canaanites even though they have iron chariots and they are strong'. In Judg. 1.19, the negative particle is attached to an infinitive construct (לא להוריש), a grammatical construction that is found only two other times in the Hebrew Bible: 1 Chron. 15.2, 'it is not permitted to carry the ark'; and Amos 6.10, 'it is not permitted to mention the name of Yahweh'. The concept of ability or strength is not in view in either of these passages, rather the idea seems to be that of permission or acceptability of an action. With these parallels in mind, the meaning of Judg. 1.19 appears to be 'Yahweh was with Judah, and he possessed the hill country, but he was not permitted [by Yahweh?] to dispossess the inhabitants of the plain'. While the verse may mean that Judah is denied permission by the Canaanites, it may be that Yahweh himself would not allow the victory. Since Yahweh is 'with Judah', there should have been no obstacle too difficult to overcome. If Yahweh is with Judah, then any result must be attributed in some degree to the will of Yahweh, possibly in response to Judah's disobedience or lack of faith. Since the text does not condemn nor exonerate Judah, Olson's judgment is premature when he argues that events such as these are nothing more than 'delays or alternate routes' in Yahweh's plan that are caused by difficult circumstances, and that Judah should not be

¹³ Cf. Olson, 'Judges', p. 744.

accused of unfaithfulness or sin.¹⁴ In any case, although the exact meaning of 1.19 remains ambiguous,¹⁵ the Israelites' descent into defeat is quite clear.

Although chapter one begins with a mood of hope and promise, it ends with a mood of uncertainty and despair. At the end of chapter one, the reader is faced with the reality of Israel's failures. The narrative's rapid progression from a list of victories to a list of defeats is unsettling and somewhat confusing to the reader, who may question the import of such an unprecedented negative progression.¹⁶

5.3. CONFRONTATION WITH YAHWEH: JUDGES 2.1-5

As chapter two opens, the interpretation and ramifications of chapter one are revealed without delay:¹⁷

And the angel of Yahweh went up from Gilgal to Bochim, and he said, '[I said] "I will bring you up from Egypt", and I brought you into the land that I had sworn to your ancestors. And I also said, "I will not violate my covenant with you forever. As for you, you shall not make a covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars". But you have not heard my voice. What is this you have done?' And I also said, 'I will not drive them out from before you; and they will become [thorns] in your sides, and their gods will become snares to you'. And so it was, when the angel of Yahweh spoke these words unto all the Israelites, that the people lifted up their voice and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto Yahweh (2.1-5).

¹⁴ Olson, 'Judges', p. 739. Judah was the first tribe to exhibit unfaithfulness, according to the reading of Stevenson, 'Judah's Successes and Failures', pp. 43-54.

¹⁵ It is conjectured by Mitchell Dahood, 'Scriptio Defectiva in Judges 1:19', *Bib* 60 (1979), p. 570, that לֹא in 1.19 is a defective form of the verb לָאָה, which he claims means 'to be weak, unable'. He cites Gen. 19.11 (וַיִּלְאָה) and Exod. 7.18 (וַיִּלְאָה) as examples. Dahood's reconstruction is weakened by three flaws: 1. It requires unsubstantiated textual emendation; 2. The verb לָאָה does not mean 'to be weak, unable'. Usage demonstrates it means 'to give up trying, to grow weary', and its derivative noun (תִּלְאָה) means 'toil, hardship'. Cf. Ludwig Köhler, *HALOT* (2 vols.; Leiden: E. J. Brill, Study edn, 2001); and Brown *et al.*, *BDB*, p. 521; and 3. If the writer intended to say 'not able', the most natural Hebrew terminology would seem to be אֵל with the verb יָכַל, which is used in Josh. 7.12, 13; 15.63; 17.12.

¹⁶ Other less significant elements and themes of chapter one include the preeminence of Judah, the south to north arrangement of the tribal listing, the narratives surrounding Caleb, the characterization of women, and the theme of retribution. Cf. Schneider, *Judges*, pp. 22-23.

¹⁷ Cf. Brown, 'Judges', p. 151. Brown writes that 2.1-5 is God's response to Israel's disobedience as recorded in chapter one. Source critics have asserted that in one stage of redaction, Judges began with what is now chapter two. On the other hand, Kaswalder, 'Le Tribù', p. 108, argues that 1.1-2.5 is a pre-Deuteronomic introduction. For a summary of these theories, cf. Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, pp. 94-98; and Amit, *Judges: Art of Editing*, pp. 120-35. Brettler himself argues that in an earlier redaction Judg. 1 served as the conclusion to the book of Joshua. Brettler, 'Judges 1:1-2:10: From Appendix to Prologue'. The redactional history of Judges, however, has no impact on a canonical reading.

The angel of Yahweh arrives with a reprimand for the Israelites, a reprimand issued on account of their actions that were detailed in chapter one. Since chapter one does not include any type of evaluative comment, its rhetorical purpose is subtle and difficult to discern. The reprimand of chapter two is, therefore, 'essential to the purpose' of chapter one.¹⁸ Daniel Block, agreeing that the two chapters function as a larger unit, describes the connection between chapters 1 and 2 as 'two sides of one coin, report and interpretation respectively'.¹⁹

5.3.1. The Angel of Yahweh

The angel of Yahweh is mentioned seventeen times in Genesis through Numbers but has not appeared by explicit designation since Num. 22.35, when the angel rebuked Balaam. The mention of Gilgal, however, recalls the angel who is described as the 'captain of Yahweh's army' who appeared to Joshua at Gilgal (Josh. 5.13-15). The actions of the captain of the army of Yahweh there are similar to those of the angel of Yahweh as found in earlier canonical texts. He stands with his sword drawn as in Num. 22. He commanded Joshua, 'take the shoes off your feet, the place where you stand is holy' (Josh. 5.15), using wording identical to Exod. 3.5 except for the omission of the word 'ground'. Finally, if he is still present in Josh. 6.1-2, he speaks in the place of Yahweh (Josh. 6.2), as he does in Gen. 16.13; Exod. 3.4-7; and Judg. 6.14. Therefore, as Block suggests, the two characters are the same angel.²⁰ He who came to aid the Israelites at the beginning of the conquest now comes to enjoin them to finish the work.

Some interpreters, however, have argued that מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה who appears in Judg. 2.1 is not an angel at all. Since the Hebrew word for 'angel' (מַלְאָךְ) can be translated 'messenger', it is possible that a prophet or priest is implied. On this basis Rabbinical

¹⁸ Lindars, *Judges 1-5*, p. 73. Cf. Scherman, *Joshua/Judges*, p. 125.

¹⁹ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 109.

²⁰ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 111.

literature identifies this messenger of Yahweh as a prophet, namely Phinehas the priest.²¹ The Rabbinical view must be questioned, however, since the only biblical reference that unequivocally identifies מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה as a human is Haggai 1.13, which reads, 'Then Haggai, the messenger of Yahweh, spoke'. In the case of Haggai, he is clearly named before the appellation 'messenger'.

The actions of the biblical character known as the angel of Yahweh demonstrate that he is not a human being. He speaks from heaven (Gen. 22.11); he appears in a flame (Exod. 3.2); and he can be invisible to humans (Num. 22.22). In the book of Judges he appears to Gideon (6.12), lights a fire with the tip of his staff then disappears (6.21), and he ascends to heaven in a flame (Judg. 13.20). Therefore, in accordance with other usage, it seems likely that מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה of Judges is a supernatural character, manifested to declare a word from God.²²

Schneider understands the angel to be a sign of Israel's alienation from Yahweh. She writes, 'The rebuke did not come directly from the deity, because there was no longer a clear communication link with the deity, but through an unnamed messenger'.²³ I would suggest three obstacles to Schneider's interpretation. First, there is no signal in the text that Israel had lost their means of communicating with Yahweh. Second, Schneider's use of the word 'unnamed' suggests that the Israelites did not know the identity of the messenger, but in Hebrew, מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה is always a definite noun—'the' messenger of Yahweh, not 'a' messenger, which would be לַיהוָה מַלְאָךְ.²⁴ The fact that the messenger is unnamed does not mean that he is unknown.

²¹ *Lev. Rab.* 1.1 and *Judg. Rab.* 16.1. Cf. Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums, Bd. 42; Leiden: Brill, 1998), p. 162. Cf. David Lieberman, *The Eternal Torah: A New Commentary Utilizing Ancient and Modern Sources in a Grammatical, Historical, and Traditional Explanation of the Text* (River Vale, NJ: Twin Pines Press, 1979), II, pp. 80, 95.

²² I have chosen to utilize both 'Yahweh' and 'God' as appellations of Israel's deity, since both are used in the book of Judges.

²³ Schneider, *Judges*, p. 27.

²⁴ Cf. לַיהוָה in 1 Kgs 18.22; also 1 Sam. 3.20; 1 Kgs 22.7; 2 Kgs 3.11; 2 Chron. 18.6; 2 Chron. 28.9.

The biblical tradition surrounding the angel of Yahweh includes an aura of mystery, and part of that mystery is his reluctance to be named (cf. Gen. 32.29; Judg. 13.17). Even without a name, however, he would be recognized by the readers of Judges. Third, Schneider's view disregards the theophanic character of **יְהוָה מַלְאָךְ** throughout the entire tradition of the Hebrew Bible. The angel of Yahweh is well known in the biblical tradition, and if he is not the visible manifestation of Yahweh, he is at least nearly so. In Scripture, the persons to whom **יְהוָה מַלְאָךְ** appears react as if they have seen God.²⁵ As in other texts, the angel's speech here in Judg. 2.1 is cast in the first person, without the messenger formula, a fact which characterizes his appearance as a theophany.²⁶ For this reason, Pressler can say that **יְהוָה מַלְאָךְ** is 'an earthly manifestation of God, not an entity separate from Yahweh';²⁷ and James D. Martin can insist, 'it is God himself who is speaking';²⁸ and Block can say that the angel of Yahweh 'functioned as the alter ego of God'.²⁹ Therefore, the appearance of **יְהוָה מַלְאָךְ** does not indicate distance from Yahweh; rather, it represents his immanence.

5.3.2. From Gilgal to Bochim

It may seem unusual to hear of an angel traveling from one place to another, since the biblical tradition usually presents angels as messengers who simply appear on

²⁵ Gen. 16.13; 31.13; Exod. 3.4; 14.19-24; Judg. 6.16, 24; 13.22.

²⁶ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 111; Brown, 'Judges', p. 152.

²⁷ Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, p. 134. In the Rabbinical tradition, there is some disagreement over the identity of the messenger of Yahweh. One side of the tradition, reflected in the *Zohar*, allows that the angel is the manifestation of Yahweh: 'The scripture uses the words "The angel of the Lord" as a metaphoric appellation of the Divine Being, as did also Jacob when blessing Ephraim and Manasseh saying, "The angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads". In Gen. 48.16 and furthermore in Exodus 14.19 the Almighty is referred to and designated as "The angel of the Lord that went before the camps of Israel removed and went behind them"'. Nurho de Manhar, *The Sefer Ha-Zohar: Or The Book of Light* (New York: Theosophical Publishing Co., 1980 edn, 1900-14), p. 258. The other side of the tradition contends that the angel is a human messenger. Cf. Lieberman, *The Eternal Torah: A New Commentary Utilizing Ancient and Modern Sources in a Grammatical, Historical, and Traditional Explanation of the Text*, pp. 117-21, 144-47. In order to maintain this position, Lieberman must recast the miraculous acts of the angel as coming from the imagination of the observers. E.g., while the text of Judg. 13.20 says that the angel 'ascended in the flame of the altar', Lieberman says that Manoah and his wife 'assumed' that the angel ascended in the flames (p. 146). Other Jewish commentators leave the question open; e.g., Scherman, *Joshua/Judges*, pp. 197-99.

²⁸ Martin, *Judges*, p. 30. Cf. Brown, 'Judges', p. 151; and Burney, *Judges*, p. 35.

²⁹ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 110. Cf. Moore, who insists that **יְהוָה מַלְאָךְ** 'is not a prophet'; *Judges*, 57.

the scene (Gen. 16.7; 19.1; 22.11; Exod. 3.2; Num. 22.22; etc.). In most texts, however, the angel of Yahweh is invested with anthropomorphic qualities, and spatial movement is one of those qualities.³⁰ These humanlike qualities function as rhetorical devices, and in Judg. 2.1 the angel's movement is a narrative event that is 'loaded with meaning'.³¹

The angel's movement draws attention to Gilgal, a location that represents Joshua and his victories. The Israelites encamped at Gilgal after crossing the Jordan river (Josh. 4.19), and there Joshua erected the pillar of twelve stones that he had taken from the river (4.20). Joshua 4.20-24 recounts the setting up of the stones and expounds their memorial significance:

Those twelve stones, which they had taken out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal, saying to the Israelites, 'When your children ask their parents in time to come, "What do these stones mean?" then you shall let your children know, "Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground." For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we crossed over, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, and so that you may fear the LORD your God forever' (NRSV).

Furthermore, Gilgal served as the Israelites' base of operations during the first part of the book of Joshua as they were conducting their initial campaigns against the Canaanites (9.6; 10.6; 10.15; 10.43; 14.6).³²

Gilgal is also associated with the theme of obedience to the covenant. It was there that Joshua circumcised the Israelites (5.2-9) and celebrated the Passover (5.10). Circumcision and Passover are possibly the two most important rites in the biblical tradition, and both of these were restored into practice at Gilgal:

³⁰ E.g., in Num. 22.26 he 'went further' (מִלְאֲדֵי-יְהוָה עָבוֹר); in Num. 22.32 he 'went out' (יִצְאָהוּ); and in Judg. 6.11 he 'came and sat under an oak' (וַיָּבֹא מִלְאֲדֵי יְהוָה וַיֵּשֶׁב תַּחַת הָאֵלֶּה).

³¹ Wilcock, *Message of Judges*, p. 26.

³² Noted by Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, p. 134. Unfortunately, some scholars are concerned only with locating Gilgal and Bochim geographically, and they virtually ignore the narrative itself, possibly because they believe that 2.1-5 is 'obviously an interpolation'; Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary*, p. 31.

When the circumcising of all the nation was done, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. The LORD said to Joshua, 'Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt.' And so that place is called Gilgal to this day. While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho (Josh. 5.8-10 NRSV).

The reinstatement of circumcision was rewarded by Yahweh, who said to Joshua, **הַיּוֹם גִּלְגָּל אֶת-חַרְפַּת מִצְרַיִם מֵעַלְיֶיכֶם**, 'Today I have rolled the reproach of Egypt from you'. The Hebrew word **חַרְפָּה** means 'reproach which rests upon one, condition of shame, disgrace'.³³ An earlier passage specifically links **חַרְפָּה** to the state of being uncircumcised. Regarding Dinah's desire to marry Shechem, her brothers said, 'We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace (**חַרְפָּה**) to us' (Gen. 34.14). It seems likely that the 'disgrace of Egypt' is Israel's failure to circumcise their male children. We might deduce that, since the Pharaoh had ordered the death of all male infants, any ritual ceremony such as circumcision would have drawn unwanted attention to the presence of the young boys. The failure to perform the ritual circumcision would be linked, therefore, to the conditions of servitude in Egypt. Now that Israel had been delivered from servitude, they are emboldened to restore their traditional covenantal acts. To commemorate God's blessing on this restoration, the place was called Gilgal.³⁴

³³ Brown *et al.*, *BDB*, p. 358.

³⁴ The verb meaning 'to roll' is **גָּלַל**, and the word **גִּלְגָּל** may mean 'wheel'; cf. Earl S. Kalland, 'גִּלְגָּל', in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (eds.), *TWOT* (2 vols.; Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), I, pp. 162-655. Others have argued that Gilgal was a cultic center with characteristics similar to those of other cultures, and that **גִּלְגָּל** means 'circle of stones'; Köhler, *HALOT*, I, p. 191. There is no evidence, however, that the Israelites ever utilized circular cultic structures. Thus, other interpreters insist that **גִּלְגָּל** does not mean 'circle of stones', but 'rubble, stone heap', G. Munderlein, 'גִּלְגָּל', in G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (eds.), *TDOT* (trans. John T. Willis; 14 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), III, p. 222. Even at the level of lexicography, it seems that we bring our own ideology to the task of semantic determination. In fact, the word **גִּלְגָּל** does not occur in the Hebrew Bible except as a locative; therefore, its exact meaning cannot be determined. The most that can be said with certainty is that **גִּלְגָּל** has something to do with 'rolling', or 'roundness'. I would insist that the voice of the text must be heard above any other voice. If we are not careful, historical reconstruction can become a narrative obstruction.

In spite of the etiology in Josh. 5.9, historians have claimed that the name 'Gilgal' refers to a circle of stones used as a cultic center.³⁵ They argue that Josh. 4.20-24, which describes Joshua's erecting of twelve stones from the Jordan River, may reflect the tradition of such a circle of stones.³⁶ Block writes, 'naming the site Gilgal, The Circle, may reflect the arrangement of the stones'.³⁷ Later in his discussion, Block at least mentions the etiology of 5.9; but Wilcock, for example, speaks of the so-called 'circle' of stones but he does not even refer to 5.9 as the possible basis for naming Gilgal.³⁸ It may be true that Gilgal was named for a circle of stones, and I am not opposed to such an historical reconstruction if there were evidence to support the theory. The fact remains, however, that the narrative in Joshua associates the name with the rolling away of the reproach of Egypt.

Although the angel of Yahweh came from Gilgal, where he had encouraged Joshua at the beginning of the conquest, Heinz-Dieter Neef argues that the angel's appearance may hark back to an even earlier text, a text that is also connected to the conquest of the land. At the very beginning of the Israelites' journey toward the Promised Land, **יְהוָה מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה** appeared to aid them in reaching their goal (Exod. 14.19; 23.20), and he now appears at the end of the journey to urge them to complete that goal.³⁹ Block agrees, linking **יְהוָה מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה** to the events of Exod. 23.20-33; 32.34; 33.2; and 34. 11-15.⁴⁰ The following excerpts illustrate the linkage (Specific connections to Judg. 2.1-5 are in bold print):

³⁵ Moore, *Judges*, p. 57.

³⁶ Burney, *Judges*, p. 37.

³⁷ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 111.

³⁸ Wilcock, *Message of Judges*, p. 26.

³⁹ 'Das Auftreten des Engels des Herrn in Jdc 2,1-5 ist kein Zufall, denn so wie er in Ex 23,20-33 am Anfang der Wanderung Israels durch die Wüste mit dem Ziel der Landnahme ins gelobte Land steht, so steht er jetzt bei deren Abschluß'. Heinz-Dieter Neef, "'Ich Selber bin in ihm" (Ex 23,21): Exegetische Beobachtungen zur Rede Vom "Engel des Herrn" in Ex 23,20-22; 32,34; 33,2; Jdc 2,1-5; 5,23', *BZ* 39 (1995), p. 69.

⁴⁰ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 110. Cf. Moore, *Judges*, p. 57, who associates Judg. 2.1 with Exod. 32.20.

I am going to send an **angel** in front of you, to guard you on the way and **to bring you to the place** that I have prepared. Be attentive to him and **listen to his voice**; . . . When my angel goes in front of you, and brings you to the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, . . . you shall utterly demolish them and **break their pillars in pieces** . . . **I will not drive them out** from before you in one year, or the land would become desolate and the wild animals would multiply against you . . . You shall **make no covenant with them** and their gods. They shall not live in your land, or they will make you sin against me; for if you worship their gods, it will surely be **a snare to you** (Exod. 23.20-33 NRSV).

But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; see, **my angel** shall go in front of you (Exod. 32.34 NRSV).

I will send **an angel** before you, and **I will drive out** the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites (Exod. 33.2 NRSV).

Take care **not to make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land** to which you are going, or it will **become a snare among you**. You shall **tear down their altars**, break their pillars, and cut down their sacred poles (for you shall worship no other god, because the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God). **You shall not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land** . . . (Exod. 34.12-15 NRSV).

The Israelites were told that the angel would accompany them into the land that God had prepared and that they were to listen to him. Apparently, the angel led them through the wilderness, into Canaan, and then appeared to Joshua at Gilgal. He continued to aid the Israelites as they engaged the Canaanites in battle after battle. Therefore, the angel's appearance in Judg. 2.1 should come as no surprise, but the content of his message may be a surprise indeed.

The fact that the angel of Yahweh 'went up', may indicate a symbolic relationship between chapter 2 and chapter 1 through the use of the Hebrew verb עלה (to go up). The Israelites ask Yahweh, 'Who shall go up (עלה) first?' (1.1). The answer is 'Judah shall go up (עלה)' (1.2). Judah said to Simeon, 'Go up (עלה) with me' (1.3). So 'Judah went up (עלה)' (1.4). 'The descendants of the Kenite . . . went up (עלה)' (1.16). 'And the house of Joseph, they also went up (עלה) against Bethel' (1.22). Then, 'The angel of Yahweh went up (עלה) from Gilgal to Bochim' (2.1). Webb

observes that 2.1 corresponds to 1.1 where the word is used in relationship to the setting of the assembled Israelites.⁴¹ Since *עלה* is used in chapter one as an introduction to battle, the going up of the angel may serve as a harbinger of conflict.⁴² When Joshua had asked the angel, 'do you belong to us or to our enemies', he had replied, 'Neither' (Josh. 5.13-14), because the allegiance of the angel of Yahweh is to Yahweh alone. In light of the uncertainty of the angel's allegiance, Olson goes so far as to say that the angel's speech 'marks a dramatic reversal of the conquest of Canaan; previously God had gone up and fought *for* Israel, but now God goes up and fights *against* Israel'.⁴³

The angel travels from Gilgal to Bochim, which means 'weepers'.⁴⁴ The location of Bochim is unknown, and since this is the only place in Scripture where it is mentioned, there is some doubt about its actual existence. Most commentators believe that it is 'not an actual place name but an artificial construct, most likely as a pseudonym for Bethel'.⁴⁵ The evidence for this theory begins with the narrative connection in the Torah between Bethel and 'weeping'. 'And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried below Bethel under an oak: and the name of it was called the Oak of Weeping' (Gen. 35.8). Another piece of evidence linking Bochim and Bethel is found in the LXX, which expands Judg. 2.1, stating that the angel came 'to Weeping Place, even to Bethel, even to the house of Israel'.⁴⁶ Although the Greek

⁴¹ Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, pp. 102-103.

⁴² Cf. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 54, who writes that *עלה* is used in a 'military sense'.

⁴³ Olson, 'Judges', p. 733.

⁴⁴ Burney, *Judges*, p. 40.

⁴⁵ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 112. Others, however, associate Bochim with Shiloh, arguing that since the tabernacle was in Shiloh, any legitimate sacrifice (1.5) must have been performed there; cf. Moore, *Judges*, 58.

⁴⁶ The Greek reads: ἐπὶ τὸν Κλαυθμῶνα καὶ ἐπὶ Βαιθηλ καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Ἰσραηλ; Alfred Rahlfs (ed.) *Septuaginta: Id est, Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979), I, p. 411. It should be noted that in the handwritten text of Codex Leningrad, there remains an anomalous blank space after the word 'Bochim'. Cf. David Noel Freedman, Astrid B. Beck, and James A. Sanders, *The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 284. The space is long enough to accommodate the Hebrew equivalent to the text of the LXX,

text probably represents an addition to the original Hebrew, it demonstrates that, in at least one stream of tradition, Bochim was associated with Bethel. Still another indication that Bochim ('weepers') may be identified with Bethel is found later on in the book of Judges: 'Then all the Israelites, the whole army, went back to Bethel and wept, sitting there before Yahweh' (Judg. 20.26).

If Bochim is an alternative name for Bethel, then the arrival there of the angel of Yahweh may relate directly to the actions of the tribe of Joseph in chapter one. It was at Bethel that the tribe of Joseph offered freedom to a Canaanite inhabitant and his family in exchange for information about the city (1.22-26). By allowing the man and his family to go free, the tribe of Joseph was acting in disobedience to Yahweh's commands. If Bochim is Bethel, then 'Israel's unfaithfulness causes the "house of God" to become a "house of weeping"'.⁴⁷

Even if Bochim cannot be identified with Bethel, the movement of the angel of Yahweh still carries deep significance. In light of the associations of Gilgal as Joshua's victory headquarters and the place of Israel's renewal and blessing, the movement of the angel of Yahweh from Gilgal to Bochim recalls the victories of Joshua as they stand in sharp contrast to the defeats just recounted in Judges chapter one. In Gilgal the Israelites carry out the terms of their covenant with Yahweh, and he delivers them from the reproach of Egypt. They are free of the 'reproach of Egypt', but now (in Judges) they are burdened with the reproach of the Canaanites. The angel of Yahweh departs from the victorious camp of Joshua because the Israelites themselves no longer dwell there. The angel comes to the place where they now reside, to Bochim—'Weepers'. Since the name 'Weepers' is given at the beginning of the episode, Boling argues that the Israelites had assembled even before

but Moore argues that the space is 'probably connected with an older or discrepant division of the verses', not an indicator of a lacuna in the Hebrew text; Moore, *Judges*, pp. 60-61. Lindars, *Judges 1-5*, p. 88, agrees.

⁴⁷ Brown, 'Judges', p. 152.

the angel arrives and that they were weeping in an 'occasion of public lamentation'.⁴⁸ Even if they were not yet weeping, the naming of the location 'Bochim' sounds an ominous tone before the messenger himself has spoken.

5.3.3. Yahweh Who Saves

In spite of the ominous mood created by the going up of מִלֶּאֶךְ יְהוָה from Gilgal to Bochim, the first word of the angel is not a word of battle; it is a word of blessing:

אֵלֶּה אֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם וְאָבִיא אֶתְכֶם אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְתִּיכֶם
וְאָמַר לֹא־אֶפְרָר בְּרִיתִי אֶתְכֶם לְעוֹלָם (Judg. 2.1)

In three interconnected statements, Yahweh reminds the Israelites of his mighty deeds and his faithful character: '[I said] I will bring you up from Egypt; and I brought you into the land that I swore to your ancestors. I also said "I will never break my covenant with you forever"' (2.1). Thus, he addresses Israel based upon his antecedent relationship of savior, promisor, and covenantor.

5.3.3.1. I Will Bring You Up

The syntax of verse one is difficult, beginning as it does with אֵלֶּה, a *yiqtol* form. Out of the more than one hundred times where the past tense statements 'brought up' and 'brought out' are used in reference to the Exodus, this is the only place where the verb is a *yiqtol*. In direct speech, as we have in this case, the *yiqtol* signifies future tense, which is impossible here since the Israelites had already left Egypt. This incongruity leads the BHS critical apparatus to emend the text to read as a *wayyiqtol* (וַאֲעֵלֶה),⁴⁹ a move which is also incongruous syntactically, since *wayyiqtol* is not attested at the beginning of direct speech.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Boling, *Judges*, pp. 66-67.

⁴⁹ Rudolf Kittel *et al.*, *BHS* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 4th emended edn, 1990), p. 401. Cf. Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, II, p. 368, who call the *yiqtol* in Judg. 2.1 'odd'.

⁵⁰ Niccacci, *Lettura Sintattica*, p. 133.

After examining all the options and finding none of them satisfactory,⁵¹ Barnabus Lindars' insists that אֶעֱלֶה 'cannot be right';⁵² however, I would offer still another explanation of the syntax that is based upon the similarity between Judg. 2.1, 'He said, "I will bring you up from Egypt "' and Exod. 3.17, 'I said, "I will bring you up from the affliction of Egypt "' . The similarities in the Hebrew text are obvious:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶעֱלֶה אֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם (Judg. 2.1)

וַאֲמַר אֶעֱלֶה אֶתְכֶם מֵעֵנִי מִצְרַיִם (Exod. 3.17)

Moore proposes that Judg. 2.1 was copied from Exod. 3.17, but the initial וַאֲמַר ('I said') was accidentally omitted, or changed to וַיֹּאמֶר ('He said').⁵³

Since both texts are direct speech from the mouth of Yahweh, and Judg. 2.1 is worded similarly to Exod. 3.17, I would suggest that the form of the word אֶעֱלֶה may be read as an implicit quotation of Exod. 3.17. The quotation goes so far as to duplicate the verb form, which adds to the rhetorical effect of the speech. The phrase in question may be parallel to the final portion of the verse, which says, 'I said, "I will never break my covenant with you"' . Therefore, the reader might be expected to understand the first phrase as a quotation, even though the words 'I said' are absent.⁵⁴ The translation might be written in this manner:

The angel of Yahweh went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, '[I said,] "I will bring you up out of Egypt"', and I brought you into the land that I swore to your ancestors. I also said, "I will never break my covenant with you".⁵⁵

⁵¹ For a discussion of the options, cf. Appendix B: Anomalous *Yiqtol* in Judg. 2.1.

⁵² Lindars, *Judges 1-5*, p. 77.

⁵³ Moore, *Judges*, p. 61.

⁵⁴ G. L. Studer proposes that אֶמְרָתִי has dropped out through scribal error (cited in Lindars, *Judges 1-5*, p. 77).

⁵⁵ This fractured speech reminds me of a similar anacoluthon in Judg. 10.11; cf. my discussion of that text in Lee Roy Martin, 'God At Risk: Divine Vulnerability in Judges 10:6-16', *OTE* 18, no. 3 (2005), pp. 727-29.

According to Niccacci, this is the only explanation that is consistent with the Masoretic Text.⁵⁶ This kind of textual slippage is suggestive of oral performance discourse, a discourse that is difficult to transfer to the literary text. Dialogue functions often as a break in the narrative that allows the reader to pause and absorb the story. Dialogue that contains grammatical and/or semantic unevenness may cause the reader to examine meaning of the text even more deeply.⁵⁷ Efforts to smooth out the roughness and harmonize the dissonance actually distort the feel of the text and reduce its force. Smoothing the text also minimizes the sense of intensity and emotion that result from the discordant syntax. I would suggest that this first word from Yahweh is, in juxtaposition to the matter-of-fact mood of chapter one, a striking announcement both in its content and in its form.

While the syntax of אֵלֶיךָ heightens the intensity of the speech, an even greater impact results from the content of the verse, in which Yahweh reminds the people of Israel of their salvation from Egypt. This Exodus tradition serves as a powerful reference, whose mere mention poses a certain characterization of Yahweh. The description of Yahweh as the one who brought Israel up from Egypt is 'probably the earliest and at the same time the most widely used'⁵⁸ of Israel's confessions. Confessional statements become fixed formulas because of their supreme importance in the story and life of a people. Unfortunately, the formulaic and familiar character of Yahweh's words in Judg. 2.1 can create in the reader an insensitivity to the fundamental impact of the confession. A fresh look at the words

⁵⁶ Niccacci, *Lettura Sintattica*, p. 133, 'L'unica soluzione possibile per spiegare il testo consonantico mi sembra intendere come una citazione implicita. "[Ho detto:] Vi farò salire . . ."'.

⁵⁷ Cf. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, p. 65, who argues that cases of disjointed speech are rare in the Hebrew Bible, but he offers 2 Sam. 18.29 and 1 Sam. 4.16-17 as examples. Bar-Efrat's discussion of characters' speech (pp. 64-77) is quite helpful, but unfortunately he gives no attention to the speech of God. See also Lou H. Silberman, 'Listening to the Text', *JBL* 102, no. 1, pp. 3-26, who finds rhetorical significance in the grammatical irregularities of Judg. 14.18 (pp. 14-15) and Ps. 1.6 (pp. 15-16).

⁵⁸ Rad, *OT Theology*, I, pp. 121, 179. See also Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 173-75.

of the text within their context might enable us to hear the words of Yahweh in a new and engaging fashion.

The characterization of Yahweh that is highlighted by his statement, 'I will bring you up out of Egypt', includes the implication that he is not Israel's enemy; on the contrary, he is a benevolent God who delivered them from slavery. Therefore, his appearance must derive from positive motives. In addition, he is a powerful God, who overthrew the mighty armies of Egypt. His appearance, therefore, would inspire awe. Furthermore, he is the God of the Sinai covenant, which begins: 'I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery' (Exod. 20.2). Israel's covenant with Yahweh is founded upon his act of salvation. Because of his gracious salvation, he is Israel's covenant God and deserves their allegiance. Therefore, his appearance should awaken Israel's sense of gratitude and obligation.

Neef's suggestion that the appearance of the angel of Yahweh may hark back to the book of Exodus (14.19; 23.20) now takes on even greater significance.⁵⁹ Yahweh had promised, 'I will send an angel before you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared' (Exod. 23.20), and in Judg. 2.1 the angel appears again, reminding the Israelites that God had fulfilled his promises. An expansion of Neef's proposal might include Greenspahn's broader application of the Exodus tradition to the whole book of Judges. He understands the theology of the central portion of Judges (3.7-16.31) to be analogous to the theology of the Exodus, reflecting 'a theology of election and grace, that is to say God's free and unconditioned commitment to Israel, a commitment which is not ultimately bound to Israel's own actions'.⁶⁰ Yahweh's declaration, "I will bring you up out of Egypt",

⁵⁹ Neef, "Ich Selber bin in ihm", p. 69.

⁶⁰ Greenspahn, 'Framework of Judges', pp. 394-95. Greenspahn observes that in both Exodus and Judges Yahweh delivers Israel not when they repent but when they 'cry out' (קָרָא and its alternate

assumes his claim to an essential disposition of grace toward Israel. Thus, the Israelites are reminded that Yahweh saved them from the slavery of Egypt not because they deserved salvation, but because he chose them to be his people. Just as their salvation was based not upon their commitment to Yahweh but on his commitment to them, his present posture toward them continues to rest upon the same foundation—his grace and love.

Yahweh said, 'I will bring you up out of Egypt' (2.1); and he did. The reference to the Exodus recalls Yahweh's election of Israel, his mighty acts of judgment in the land of Egypt and his overthrowing of Pharaoh in the Red Sea. Israel's salvation from Egypt was a manifestation of God's power, and the God of the Exodus even now has the might to overthrow the Canaanites and to negate every power that would shackle Israel. The Exodus tradition, as Brueggemann writes, 'enunciates Yahweh's resolved capacity to intervene decisively against every oppressive, alienating circumstance and force that precludes a life of well-being'.⁶¹ Judges chapter one ended with a recital of Israel's weakness, but because weakness is not a characteristic of Yahweh, the Israelites may have hope that he will prevail in spite of their failures.

In addition to Yahweh's grace and his power, a third important theme is conveyed by the Exodus story—the theme of Yahweh's purpose. Brueggemann's testimony to 'Yahweh's resolved capacity' illuminates the integration of Yahweh's purposes and his power, because purpose is prerequisite to resolve.⁶² Yahweh's

form *נִצֵּק*) to him (Exod. 2.23; Judg. 3.9; 3.15; 4.3; 6.6; 10.10). Greenspahn's insightful article displays only one noticeable flaw, which could have been corrected had he consulted Brueggemann, 'Social Criticism and Social Vision in the Deuteronomistic Formula of the Judges', pp. 101-14. Greenspahn's weakness is his collapsing of the cyclical pattern into a single unified construction that manifests the Exodus perspective of 'oppression-and-salvation' (p. 395), whereas Brueggemann recognizes that the cycle is a combination of two perspectives, the first being sin-punishment and the second being cry-deliverance. I would add that the narrative of Judges holds together in tension these two perspectives and that this tension heightens as the book progresses.

⁶¹ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 174.

⁶² Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 174.

overall purpose in the Exodus is to liberate Israel for himself, to free them from the land of Egypt in order that they may live in the land of promise, to bring them out of the household of bondage that they might be the household of God. The mention of the Exodus, therefore, might suggest their plight 'as continuing the process initiated by the exodus in which Israel's suffering is dealt with by divine salvation'.⁶³ Yahweh aspires to liberate Israel from Egypt, from Canaan, and from every other power, in order that they may be his special possession (Exod. 19.5).

5.3.3.2. *I Brought You in*

In addition to his reminder of the Exodus, the angel of Yahweh points back also to the patriarchs and to the second of Israel's major credos⁶⁴ when he says, 'and I brought you into the land that I swore (נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי) to your fathers' (2.1).⁶⁵ The deliverance from Egypt and the promise of the land are interrelated in the Exodus narrative. When the Israelites cried out because of their suffering, 'God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob' (Exod. 2.24). Yahweh had promised explicitly to give the land of Canaan⁶⁶ unto Abraham's descendants: 'And Yahweh appeared to Abram, and said, "To your offspring I will give this land". So he built there an altar to Yahweh, who had appeared to him' (Gen. 12.7). The use of the verb נִשְׁבַּע ('swear') appears for the first time in relation to the land when Yahweh swore his oath to Abraham (Gen. 26.3). He then repeated his oath to Moses (Exod. 6.8) and to Israel (Deut. 1.8).

⁶³ Greenspahn, 'Framework of Judges', p. 395. As we read further into the book of Judges, we will observe the continued prominence of the salvation theme. The Hebrew root יָשַׁע (to save) is used 21 times in Judges, and the word נָצַל (deliver) is found 6 times.

⁶⁴ Rad, *OT Theology*, I, p. 121. On the terminology of 'brought out' and 'brought in', cf. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 202.

⁶⁵ The Hebrew phrase אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי אֲשֶׁר הָאָרֶץ (or a phrase very similar to it) is found in these texts: Gen. 26.3; Exod. 6.8; Exod. 13.5; Num. 14.30; Deut. 1.8, 35; 6.10, 18, 23; 7.13; 8.1; 11.9, 21; 19.8; 26.3, 15; 28.11; 30.20; and 31.23. From these examples, it is clear that Deuteronomy emphasizes Yahweh's oath to the patriarchs. Regarding the promise to Abraham, cf. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 164-78.

⁶⁶ Cf. Rad, *OT Theology*, I, p. 133, who writes, 'The most prominent item in the covenant with the patriarchs was the promise of land'.

This reference to Yahweh's faithful performance of his oath brings to mind at least four important themes: (1) The continuity of Yahweh's relationship to Israel; (2) Yahweh's integrity in fulfilling his purpose to give Israel the land; (3) The gravity of his promise to the fathers; and (4) The children who are to inherit his promises. Yahweh's claim that he has brought to fruition the plan that he set in motion generations earlier creates for the hearer a remarkable characterization of God. This is not a new God who speaks; he is the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. It is important that the Israelites recognize their long and beneficial association with Yahweh. He is faithful in his relationship with Israel over an extended span of time, and the appearance of the angel of Yahweh demonstrates the continuing reality of his presence with Israel even after their failures that were revealed in Judges 1.

Furthermore, Yahweh is a God of integrity who can be trusted to fulfill his promises. Even though many generations passed and many obstacles stood between the promise and its fulfillment, he has remained constant and faithful with regard to his promise to Israel's ancestors. He promised to give the land of Canaan to Abram's offspring (Gen. 12.7), and he has done so. He brought them out of Egyptian slavery; he brought them through the wilderness; he brought down the walls of Jericho; and he brought the Canaanite kings to their knees. The Israelites, therefore, should rely on his presence to go before them to complete the conquest of the land. Yahweh swore to their ancestors to give them the land of Canaan as an inheritance, and he has kept his promise. He said, 'I brought you into the land . . .' (2.1). Since Yahweh is characterized as trustworthy, it might be assumed, therefore, that the Israelite's problems do not originate in him. The source of their difficulties must be found elsewhere.

Another theme that emerges from the phrase 'I brought you into the land that I swore to your ancestors' (2.1) is the gravity or solemnity of Yahweh's oath. The Hebrew word *נשבע* (*nifal* of *שבע*), meaning 'swear', implies a serious, solemn, and weighty commitment. It is a verb that is loaded with passion, signifying 'a solemn, irrevocable promise';⁶⁷ it is a 'sacred unbreakable word'.⁶⁸ The biblical oath is more solemn, more fervent, more serious than a simple promise, because the biblical oath is a 'promise that is strengthened by the addition of a curse'.⁶⁹ The verb *נשבע* connotes 'self-imprecation when making a vow or oath'.⁷⁰ It can be used as a 'verb of aggression'⁷¹ meaning to 'imprecate, curse'.⁷²

The NRSV translates the word *נשבעתי* as 'promised', a word with some weight, but not heavy enough. Another translation for *נשבעתי* is 'promised on oath',⁷³ a phrase that transmits the seriousness of the act but lacks the intensity needed to translate *נשבעתי*. The English translation that is most common and that best captures the earnestness and the gravity of *נשבעתי* is 'swore'.⁷⁴

The seriousness of Yahweh's declaration in Judg. 2.1 may be demonstrated by comparing it with other texts that reiterate the promise of the land. Unlike Judg. 2.1, some other promissory texts do not include the verb *נשבע*; therefore, they are not as vigorous as the utterance in Judges. The first of these is in Exod. 12.25, which reads,

⁶⁷ Cf. Köhler, *HALOT*, II, p. 1397, who adds that 'שבע' in the sense of "to swear" is not attested anywhere else except Hebrew. The cognate languages use other, different words for the same idea'. In addition to 2.1, *נשבע* occurs in Judges five other times (2.15; 15.12; 21.1, 7, and 18).

⁶⁸ Victor P. Hamilton, 'שבע', in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (eds.), *TWOT* (2 vols.; Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), II, p. 900.

⁶⁹ T. W. Cartledge, 'שבע', in Willem Van Gemeren (ed.), *NIDOTE* (5 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), IV, p. 322.

⁷⁰ I. Kottsieper, 'שבע', in G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (eds.), *TDOT* (trans. Douglas W. Scott; 14 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), XIV, p. 313.

⁷¹ Kottsieper, 'שבע', p. 313.

⁷² Brown *et al.*, *BDB*, p. 989.

⁷³ NAB, NJB, TNK.

⁷⁴ KJV, NAU, ESV, JPS, ASV, NASB, NIV, RSV, LUT, and LXX. Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 165.

הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יתֵּן יְהוָה לָכֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר

Even closer to the Hebrew text of Judg. 2.1 is Deut. 19.8, which includes the phrase,

הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לָתֵת לְאֲבוֹתֵיךָ

These examples and others (Deut. 9.28; 19.8; 27.3; Josh. 23.5; and 1Ki. 8.56) establish the comparative forcefulness of Yahweh's words as recounted in Judg. 2.1.

Yahweh, therefore, is concerned deeply and passionately to fulfill his promise to Abraham. To the hearer of Judg. 2.1, Yahweh's solemn oath is a reminder of the

irrevocable nature of the land promise and thereby also of the land possession . . . In a situation in which the possession of the land was in very real danger . . . God does not simply promise the land to the fathers . . . but rather swears it to them, means that the promise is still in effect.⁷⁵

In light of Israel's defeats in Judges 1, Yahweh's swearing of an irrevocable oath to give them the land situates him in a precarious position. The responsibility to deliver the land to Israel is his and his alone, and if he cannot deliver on his promise, he opens up himself to criticism. His oath leaves him exposed to the risk of losing his integrity and his honor both in the eyes of Israel and in the eyes of the surrounding peoples. Moses utilized this very argument when God threatened to destroy the Israelites in the wilderness because of their continual murmuring and complaining:

'Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.' But Moses implored the LORD . . . 'Why should the Egyptians say, "It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?" . . . Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, "I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever. "' And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people (Exod. 32.10-14 NRSV).

The theme of children is the fourth theme that I find implicit in the promise to the fathers. Although Yahweh's promise is to the fathers (אֲבוֹתַי), fathers exist only in relation to their children, and the children are successors to the fathers as recipients

⁷⁵ Kottsieper, 'שבט', p. 328.

of God's promise.⁷⁶ In fact, Yahweh's original promise to Abram was to give the land of Canaan unto his children: 'And Yahweh appeared to Abram, and said, "To your offspring I will give this land"' (Gen. 12.7). Thus, although the oath was uttered to Abram, the promise extends to the children.⁷⁷ The integral connection between the land and the children is strengthened further by the designation of the land as their 'inheritance'.⁷⁸ Fifty times in Joshua the land that Yahweh promised to the Israelites is called *הַנְּחִלָּה*, a word that signifies 'inalienable, hereditary property'⁷⁹ that is handed down from the fathers to the children. The hearers assembled in Judg. 2.1 are the children of Abraham, and they are awaiting the reception of their full and unencumbered inheritance.

Furthermore, the relationship between fathers and children goes beyond the inheritance; it reaches to the question of identity. The self-identity of the Israelites proceeds out of their perception of the identity of their fathers. When Yahweh says, 'I brought you into the land that I swore to your fathers' (2.1), the hearers are compelled to recognize a familial web that connects them to their ancestors. They are obliged to rehearse the fateful course of events that brings them together on this

⁷⁶ The theme of the relationship between the generations appears again in Judg. 2.10, which includes the lament: 'there arose another generation after them, who did not know Yahweh, nor the works that he had done for Israel'. Cf. also 2.12, 'they forsook the Yahweh God of their fathers'; 2.17, 'they turned quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked'; 2.20, 'this people has transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers'; 2.22, 'I will test Israel, whether they will keep the way of Yahweh to walk in it, as their fathers kept it'; 3.4, '... the commandments of Yahweh, which he commanded their fathers'; and 6.13, 'if Yahweh is with us ... where are all his miracles which our fathers told us about?' The familial theme is evident also in the Caleb/Achsah narrative (1.12-15); in the Deborah story, where she is 'a mother in Israel' (5.7); in the Gideon cycle (6.30-31; 8.19-23, 31); in the Jephthah story (11.1-3; 34-40); in the accounts of the minor judges (12.9, 14); in the tales of Samson, who has women but no children (13.2-24; 14.2-5); in the narrative about Micah, who has a mother but no father (17.1-4); in the account of the resettlement of Dan, who have children, but no inheritance to give them (18.1-31); in the story of the Levite, who has a concubine but no wife (19.1-30); and in the account of the Benjaminites, of whom remain 600 men with no wives (21.1-25).

⁷⁷ Cf. the words of Moses who said to the younger generation of Israelites, 'The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day' (Deut. 5.3 KJV).

⁷⁸ The noun *הַנְּחִלָּה* occurs in the Hebrew Bible 244 times, including Judg. 2.6, 9; 18.1; 20.6; 21.23, and 24. The verbal form of the same root occurs in reference to Jephthah: 'You shall not inherit (*תִּנְחַל*) anything in our father's house' (Judg. 11.2).

⁷⁹ Köhler, *HALOT*, I, p. 687. Cf. David J. A. Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (7 vols.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), V, p. 659.

occasion to stand before the angel of Yahweh and to hear the voice of Yahweh. The question of Israel to his angel was 'What is your name?' (Gen. 32.29), but the more important question has always been 'What is Israel's name?'

5.3.4. 'I Will Never Break My Covenant'

5.3.4.1. *Breaking the Covenant*

Yahweh declares his integrity and reliability with three interrelated emphatic statements. First, he says, '[I said] "I will bring you up from Egypt"' ; second, he adds, 'and I brought you into the land that I swore to your ancestors'. Third, he continues his profession of reliability with these words: 'I said, "I will not break (פָּרַר) my covenant with you forever"'. The Hebrew פָּרַר means to 'invalidate, nullify, frustrate, foil, thwart';⁸⁰ to 'break, violate';⁸¹ to 'violate a contract'.⁸² It is used fifty-three times in the Hebrew Bible, twenty-three times the object broken is the covenant; therefore, it is 'the most important expression for the breach of a commitment'.⁸³ According to Victor Hamilton, the verb פָּרַר 'has a moral overtone',⁸⁴ so that the breaking of a covenant is seen as an immoral act, and by implication, the keeping of a covenant demonstrates moral rectitude.

Yahweh's declaration of steadfastness is in the form of a quotation—"I said, "I will not break my covenant with you forever"—but the exact words of the apparent quotation appear nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. Other statements carry the same basic meaning, but not the same wording. The statement closest to Judg. 2.1 is Lev. 26.44-45, which says,

⁸⁰ Tyler F. Williams, 'פָּרַר', in Willem Van Gemeren (ed.), *NIDOTE* (5 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), III, p. 695.

⁸¹ Köhler, *HALOT*, II, pp. 974-75.

⁸² L. Ruppert, 'פָּרַר', in G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (eds.), *TDOT* (trans. John T. Willis; 14 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), XII, p. 118.

⁸³ E. Kutsch, 'פָּרַר', in Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (eds.), *TLOT* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; 3 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), III, p. 1032.

⁸⁴ Victor P. Hamilton, 'פָּרַר', in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (eds.), *TWOT* (2 vols.; Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), II, p. 738.

Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them, or abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them; for I am Yahweh their God. But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am Yahweh.

This Leviticus text affirms the integrity of Yahweh in wording that is similar to and consistent with the Judges text, although the promise does not include the word עולם 'forever'; and Yahweh speaks of Israel in the third person rather than speaking directly to Israel in the second person. Yahweh's insistence that he will not break his covenant affirms that he is a God who can be trusted, a God of covenant faithfulness—forever.

5.3.4.2. Which Covenant?

The lack of an exact verbal parallel to Yahweh's promise not to break his covenant has generated uncertainty regarding the identification of the covenant in question. When Yahweh says, 'I will not break my covenant with you forever', do the hearers bring to mind the Abrahamic covenant or the Sinaitic (Mosaic) covenant? L. Ruppert writes that the covenant that Yahweh swore not to break is the promise of land to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.⁸⁵ Since the context of Yahweh's speech concerns the conquest of the land, the hearers would naturally think of the ancient promise to Abraham. Linington, on the other hand, claims that the covenant is not the covenant with the fathers but the Mosaic covenant of Exodus 34. She bases her conclusion on the words of Judg. 2.2 ('you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars'), which seem to be based upon Exod. 34.12 ('lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land') and 34.13 ('you shall tear down their altars').⁸⁶ Thus, although the context of chapter two includes the idea of the land, it also includes Yahweh's rebuke for disobedience. Linington's argument is

⁸⁵ Ruppert, 'פרר', p. 120. Cf. Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 104.

⁸⁶ Silvia Linington, 'The Term ברית in the Old Testament. Part III: An Enquiry into the Meaning and Use of the Word in Joshua and Judges', *OTE* 18, no. 3 (2005), pp. 677. Cf. also Moore, *Judges*, p. 58.

strengthened further by the canonical juxtaposition of the book of Judges and the covenant renewal ceremony of Joshua 24, in which the Israelites promise to obey the stipulations of the Sinaitic covenant.

In contrast to the positions of Ruppert and Linington, I propose that the identity of the covenant in question is not the Abrahamic nor is it the Sinaitic; rather it is the fusion of them. Yahweh's covenant with Israel at Sinai functions not as a replacement for the covenant with Abraham, nor does it stand as a second covenant between Yahweh and Abraham's descendants. Instead, the Sinaitic covenant both continues, absorbs, expands, and strengthens the covenant with Abraham.⁸⁷

The continuity between the Abrahamic covenant and the Sinaitic covenant first begins to come into focus when the Israelites cry out and groan because of their hard bondage, and 'God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob' (Exod. 2.23-24). Thus, the occasion for the Exodus (and the resultant covenant at Sinai) was Yahweh's recollection of his covenant with Abraham. The connections grow stronger when Yahweh says, 'I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land . . . [and] ye shall serve God upon this mountain' (Exod. 3.8-12). The Abrahamic promise of land is tied once more to the Exodus, with a further link to the Mosaic covenant—the meeting on the mountain of God. Then, regarding a more specific development that links the land with the Sinaitic covenant, Linington states:

⁸⁷ This narrative interpretation is not intended to deny the historical development of discrete and competing traditions expressed in the Abrahamic, Sinaitic, and Davidic covenants as discussed by Jon Douglas Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (New Voices in Biblical Studies; Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1985); R. E. Clements, *Abraham and David: Genesis XV and Its Meaning for Israelite Tradition* (Studies in Biblical Theology, 2nd series, 5; London: S.C.M. Press, 1967); and Walter Brueggemann, 'Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel', in Norman K. Gottwald (ed.), *The Bible and Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), p. 161, who, even though he insists that the Mosaic and Davidic covenants arose from two separate traditions, allows that the 'biblical tradition itself wishes to suggest that the two are continuous, so that the Davidic is a natural derivation from that of Moses and fully faithful to it'. At this point in the biblical narrative, of course, the Davidic covenant has yet to appear.

In Exodus 6.4 Yahweh speaks to Moses regarding the covenant he will make with the children of Israel, "to give them the land of Canaan". In the "Book of the Covenant" (Ex 20-32) the Lord delineates the borders of the land and then forbids Israel to make alliances with the inhabitants of Canaan lest they ensnare them to follow other gods.⁸⁸

Furthermore, Ellen Christiansen sees it as 'significant that in the Old Testament ברית is *never used in the plural*'.⁸⁹ Although interpreters of the Bible speak of numerous Old Testament covenants, the Bible itself always speaks of a singular covenant.⁹⁰ Deut. 29.10-13 shows that the Sinai covenant is a renewal and expansion of the Abrahamic covenant:

You stand assembled today . . . to enter into the covenant of the LORD your God, sworn by an oath, which the LORD your God is making with you today; in order that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your God, as he promised you and as he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Although the covenant renewal at Sinai emphasized Israel's 'responsibility where the Abrahamic covenant emphasized God's promise';⁹¹ all of Yahweh's covenants with his people are really one covenant—'God's Covenant of Grace'.⁹² I contend, therefore, that the hearers of Judg. 2.1 would understand God's promise in terms of a fusion of the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants.

5.3.4.3. *The Biblical Idea of Covenant*

Beyond the question of the identity of the covenant lies the deeper issue of the nature of the covenant. When Yahweh says, 'I will not break my covenant with you forever', the hearers' conception of 'covenant', is based upon the canonical narrative that precedes Judges. Within that narrative is found quite a wide range of covenant

⁸⁸ Linington, 'The Term ברית in the OT', p. 675.

⁸⁹ Ellen Juhl Christiansen, *The Covenant in Judaism and Paul: A Study of Ritual Boundaries as Identity Markers* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), p. 8.

⁹⁰ Deut. 29.1 and Josh. 24.25 suggest, however, that the one covenant must be renewed with each new generation, and even though the covenant is the same, each event is described as the making (ברת) of a covenant.

⁹¹ Elmer B. Smick, 'ברית', in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (eds.), *TWOT* (2 vols.; Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), I, p. 129.

⁹² Smick, 'ברית', p. 129.

enactments.⁹³ The Hebrew word בְּרִית ('covenant') occurs 283 times in the Old Testament,⁹⁴ but it is attested with the meaning 'covenant' nowhere else in the ancient Near East.⁹⁵ The concept of covenant, however, was well known in the ancient Near East, as were the correlative ideas of the oath and the curse; but the specific range of meaning expressed by the use of בְּרִית is a 'distinctively biblical' theological idea.⁹⁶

The uniqueness of the Hebrew use of בְּרִית may arise from its comprehensive range of application. The biblical use of בְּרִית corresponds to at least three types of ancient Near Eastern forms of contract: (1) The suzerain-vassal treaty of the Hittites; (2) The royal grant of the Assyrians and the Hittites; and (3) the marriage contract.⁹⁷

5.2.4.4. Narrative and Theological Implications of Covenant

When Yahweh declares, 'I will not break my covenant forever' (Judg. 2.1), the hearer is reminded of the biblical concept of covenant, especially as embodied in Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants; and the covenant renewal ceremony in Joshua 24 provides a fitting prelude to the angel's speech in Judg. 2.1-5. The hearer of Judges 2 would understand that Yahweh is the great king who has freely chosen to know the Israelites as his unique liberated covenant people and who has unconditionally pledged himself to be faithful to them even in the face of their disobedience to the stipulations to which they had agreed.

⁹³ George E. Mendenhall and Gary A. Herion, 'Covenant', in D. N. Freedman (ed.), *ABD* (6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992), I, p. 1179.

⁹⁴ Avraham Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kiryat Sefer, Baker/Ridgefield edn, 1989), pp. 205-206.

⁹⁵ Gordon J. McConville, 'ברית', in Willem Van Gemeren (ed.), *NIDOTE* (5 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), I, p. 747. Cf. E. Kutsch, 'ברית', in Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (eds.), *TLOT* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; 3 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), I, p. 256. Although several proposals have been advanced regarding the etymology of בְּרִית, they are all doubtful, and no consensus has been reached. The semantic range of בְּרִית, however, is quite clear from its usage in the biblical text.

⁹⁶ McConville, 'ברית', p. 753.

⁹⁷ M. Weinfeld, 'ברית', in G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (eds.), *TDOT* (trans. John T. Willis; 14 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), II, pp. 253-79. For further discussion of covenant in pre-monarchic Israel, see Appendix C: The Biblical Concept of Covenant.

On the part of Yahweh, the covenant is a 'self-imposed obligation'⁹⁸ (Exod. 23.32-33; 34.12, 15; Deut. 7.2; Josh. 9.15; Judg. 2.2), which issues from divine choice, not necessity.⁹⁹ Yahweh freely chose Israel to be his people, and Israel is the recipient of Yahweh's affection, without regard to their deservedness.¹⁰⁰ 'God's actions flow out of his own commitment, freely made, rather than as compensation for Israelite merit'.¹⁰¹ Studies of Judges have focused almost entirely on the actions of Israel, but Yahweh is the initiator and sustainer of the covenant relationship; he is the major actor. The existence of the covenant, both in its origins in Exodus or its challenges in Judges, is not dependent on the actions of Israel, but on the actions of Yahweh. As the suzerain, Yahweh is free to revoke the treaty at any time (see discussion above), but in spite of the fact that he is the superior party, he declares that he will never break the covenant.

God's promise reiterates his 'unswerving faithfulness to the covenant',¹⁰² and is a condescension to the Israelites' need for assurance, as Goldingay writes, 'People who have nothing or who are downcast because of their failure always need the reassurance that God is committed to them irrespective of their deserving'.¹⁰³ Through his covenant, God fills Abram's similar need for assurance (Gen. 15) when he appears to Abram and renews his promises regarding Abram's descendants and the possession of land. When Abram asks Yahweh 'How shall I know that I shall possess it?' (Gen. 15.8), he is seeking for some form of 'legal assurance'.¹⁰⁴ In

⁹⁸ Kutsch, 'ברית', pp. 258-59.

⁹⁹ John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), p. 186.

¹⁰⁰ Rad, *OT Theology*, I, p. 129.

¹⁰¹ Greenspahn, 'Framework of Judges', pp. 395-96.

¹⁰² Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, p. 134.

¹⁰³ Goldingay, *OT Theology: Israel's Gospel*, p. 373. Cf. also McConville, 'ברית', p. 749.

¹⁰⁴ Gottfried Quell, 'δαθηκη', in Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (eds.), *TDNT* (trans. G. Bromiley; 10 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), II, p. 116. Cf. also Smick, 'ברית', p. 129, who writes that the covenant 'gave Israel great assurance of a beneficent God in a time when the deities were considered arbitrary originators of evil'.

response to Abram's concerns, Yahweh proceeds to perform a covenant ceremony (15.9-17), at the end of which the narrator summarizes, 'So on that day Yahweh cut a covenant with Abram' (15.18-21).

The Exodus is Yahweh's most powerful act in the story of Israel, and the covenant is his most assuring act. Yahweh's covenant, freely offered, and Yahweh's faithfulness, steadfastly given, offer powerful assurance to the Israelites; but still the covenant is not a one-sided affair;¹⁰⁵ it demands obedience. The corollary to the fact that Yahweh is free and Yahweh is faithful is that if Israel will be faithful, Israel will be free. Goldingay reflects on the double-sided loyalty expected of the covenant:

The covenant means that Israel's security depends originally on Yhwh's sovereignty and commitment and not on Israel's fickleness, but that Israel's commitment is an absolutely necessary corollary of Yhwh's commitment to Israel. It is not exactly that Yhwh's commitment to Israel is conditional on Israel's commitment. Rather, it demands it.¹⁰⁶

The freedom that comes to Israel through the covenant is a second emphasis of Mendenhall's comparison of the Israelite covenant to the Hittite treaty form. His conclusions regarding the literary structure of the covenant are significant for Old Testament studies, and his parallel concern for the covenant as a radically new social structure is important as well. He argued that for Israel the covenant is not 'merely a theological concept, but is rather the original form of social and religious organization',¹⁰⁷ an organization that liberated Israel from the kinds of oppressive structures that surrounded them. Mendenhall's work suggests that the societal impact of the covenant enabled Israel to break with the religious totalitarianism of the age and to create 'a political *novum* in history'.¹⁰⁸ Israel is a new kind of

¹⁰⁵ So Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), I, p. 37.

¹⁰⁶ Goldingay, *OT Theology: Israel's Faith*, p. 188.

¹⁰⁷ George E. Mendenhall, 'Covenant', in George Arthur Buttrick (ed.), *IDB* (4 vols.; New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), I, p. 719. See also the later work of Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh*, pp. 599-602.

¹⁰⁸ Brueggemann, 'Trajectories', p. 311. Brueggemann's chapter was first published in *JBL* 98 (1979).

community that does not fit into any of the former categories. Goldingay points out, however, that Israel's freedom is not absolute; that is, Israel is liberated from Pharaoh in order to serve Yahweh.¹⁰⁹

By comparing the biblical covenant with the suzerain-vassal treaty form, we learn that

Yahweh was not conceived of as a king, but as a king of kings . . . This transference of suzerainty from a flesh-and-blood emperor to a supreme and unique deity was not only a religious revolution; it was simultaneously a protest against the feudalistic imperialisms of that time, a religious expression of the human striving for freedom from an oppressive external political control and exploitation.¹¹⁰

The gods of Egypt as well as the gods of Canaan are unlike Yahweh, in that they 'have no independent existence but are only an integral part of the social system',¹¹¹ but Yahweh stands separate and apart from the establishment. The uniqueness of the Mosaic covenant, according to Christiansen, is its ability to 'combine the two political authorities, the legislative and executive power, with the cultic and to hold these together within the idea of formalized God-given agreements'.¹¹²

The uniqueness of Yahweh's covenant may be the very feature that caused Israel's difficulties. Living within the context of ancient Near Eastern polytheism might make it difficult to grasp a treaty that required fidelity to only one God. Also, unlike other societies, Israel had no king who embodied the deity; for Yahweh was their only king. He had delivered Israel from the land of Egypt, where Pharaoh was not critiqued by the gods, because he was one with the gods. In Egypt the gods did not speak independently of Pharaoh, and in Canaan the same pattern prevailed. Yahweh, however, spoke from Mt. Sinai, and the people heard his voice; and now in

¹⁰⁹ Goldingay, *OT Theology: Israel's Gospel*, pp. 365-66, 373, 382.

¹¹⁰ Mendenhall, 'Covenant', p. 719.

¹¹¹ Brueggemann, 'Trajectories', p. 167.

¹¹² Christiansen, *Covenant*, p. 8.

Judges, through his angel, he speaks directly to the people. Brueggemann comments on the social ramifications of Mendenhall's insights:

Covenantal commitment to this God, unknown by name and without credential in the empire, carried with it a rejection of loyalty to the gods of the empire and a rejection of the ways of ordering that society. Thus, the theological vision, either as impetus or as justification, made possible a radical discontinuity in the social organization of Israel. Israel was no longer bound to the religion of the empire, which had now been effectively delegitimated, and Israel could no longer and need no longer rely upon the self-securing technology of the empire.¹¹³

Discovery of the ancient Near Eastern treaty forms strengthened Eichrodt's thesis that the Israelite belief in the kingship of God is not an idea that emerged during the time of the monarchy, but it 'is one of the most genuine and most ancient doctrines in Israel'.¹¹⁴ The belief that Yahweh is king, however, is more than a theory or a dogma. For ancient Israel, it is a liberating and empowering reconfiguration of life; it forms them into a people.¹¹⁵ Mendenhall laments that theologians have erred by concentrating on the covenant as an idea to be embraced by the mind, and he asks us to accept the covenant as the rule of God, which 'is an "enacted reality" that is either manifested in the concrete choices individuals make, or not'.¹¹⁶ In Judges the Israelites are faced with these concrete choices; and in chapter one, they fall away from the ideals embodied in their claim that 'Yahweh shall reign for ever and ever' (Exod. 15.18; cf. Num. 23.21).

¹¹³ Brueggemann, 'Trajectories', p. 311.

¹¹⁴ Weinfeld, 'ברית', p. 275. Weinfeld adds: 'In the period of the judges, the tribes resisted an earthly kingship because of the prevailing belief that God is the real king of Israel, and that the proclamation of an earthly king would constitute betrayal . . . Earthly kingship in Israel was finally accepted, but this was the result of a compromise. David's kingship was conceived as granted to him by the great suzerain (2 S. 7). Thus, the king and the people alike were considered as vassals of God, the real overlord (1 S. 12:14, 24f.; 2 K. 11:17)'; Weinfeld, 'ברית', p. 275. The social implications of Mendenhall's thesis were anticipated by Martin Buber, *Kingship of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1st American edn, 1967). Cf. also Martin Buber, *Moses: The Revelation and the Covenant* (New York: Harper, 1958), pp. 113-37, which is quite dated but reveals incipient perceptions of the social significance of the Mosaic covenant.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Elmer A. Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 67, who reminds us that the covenant is not individualistic; it is made with 'the people'.

¹¹⁶ Mendenhall and Herion, 'Covenant', p. 1201.

Linington notes that when Yahweh promises never to break his covenant, the phrasing of his word is 'cast in negative, rather than in positive terms',¹¹⁷ a figure of speech called a 'litotes', which emphasizes a point by denying its opposite. Earlier in the Torah Yahweh uses the positive form of the same promise: 'But for their sakes I will remember the covenant of their fathers, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am Yahweh' (Lev. 26.45; cf. also Gen. 9.15, 16; Exod. 6.5; Lev. 26.42). In the terminology of transformational grammar, the deep structure's kernel sentence is the same whether God promises to 'remember' the covenant or he promises 'not to break' the covenant. It is the surface structure, however, that reveals the mood, the impact of Yahweh's powerful statement that he will 'never break' his covenant, spoken at the very moment when his breaking the covenant appears to be a real possibility.

Furthermore, the emphatic quality of Yahweh's declaration is strengthened by the Hebrew word לְעוֹלָם ('forever'): 'I will not break my covenant forever'. The covenant faithfulness of God is not subject to time limitations. Greenspahn reflects on Yahweh's continued faithfulness:

one encounters then in Judges a patient God who chooses to endure endless frustration. The basis of this persistence can be ascribed only to the divine election of Israel for reasons unstated.¹¹⁸

From a narrative perspective, it seems significant that the angel first draws attention to the faithfulness of Yahweh before he addresses Israel's failure. Interpreters of Judges have virtually ignored God as a character in the narrative, preferring to center on the actions of the judges themselves and on the failures of Israel. The narrative of Judges, however, first attends to the character of God and to his integrity, before entering into the accounts of Israel's misbehavior. Since an initial theme of chapter two is Yahweh's faithfulness and integrity, the reader might be

¹¹⁷ Linington, 'The Term בְּרִית in the OT', p. 676.

¹¹⁸ Greenspahn, 'Framework of Judges', pp. 395-96.

inclined to anticipate further development of this theme as the narrative progresses.¹¹⁹ Brevard Childs observes that 'In stark contrast to Israel's faithlessness is God's faithfulness to the covenant'.¹²⁰ Unlike other ancient Near Eastern religions,

the OT knows of one god who freely enters into a relationship, at once historical and ethical, with a people of his choosing . . . Covenant, therefore, becomes a way of speaking of all life in subordination to a loving god . . . It reveals the unfathomable depth of the love of God, who endures a profound inner conflict . . . for the sake of sustaining his relationship with his people.¹²¹

When Yahweh says 'I will not break my covenant forever', he has put himself at risk. It immediately puts him in a disadvantaged position in the negotiating process. For Yahweh, however, the covenant is not a matter of negotiation; the covenant is a gift, not a negotiated agreement.¹²² A threat that he might break the covenant would be the strongest possible bargaining chip and the most powerful incentive for Israel's faithfulness. So why did he give away that option at the beginning of this dialogue? He does so perhaps for the same reason a parent does not threaten to abandon a child on account of the child's disobedience. For a loving parent, abandonment is not an option, and it is not an option for a loving God. Abandonment of his people is an extreme measure that is not a possibility for Yahweh. Yahweh's faithfulness continues in the face of insult and injury, and by confessing his reluctance to abandon the Israelites, he opens himself up to further injury; he becomes vulnerable to their insulting behavior. He does, however, threaten to remove his blessings.

¹¹⁹ Later in the narrative, Gideon will explicitly impugn the integrity of God: 'But sir, if Yahweh is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, "Did not Yahweh bring us up from Egypt?" But now Yahweh has cast us off, and given us into the hand of Midian' (Judg. 6.13). See also 2.20-23, which defends God's decision to allow some Canaanites to remain in the land.

¹²⁰ Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1st Fortress Press edn, 1993), p. 420.

¹²¹ McConville, 'ברית', p. 753.

¹²² Cf. Martens, *God's Design*, p. 73, who insists that 'negotiation has no place' in a covenant.

5.3.5. Israel Does Not Hear Yahweh's Voice

5.3.5.1. Covenant with the Canaanites

After *מְלֹאֲךְ יְהוָה* proclaims Yahweh's integrity, he immediately shifts the focus to the Israelites and their actions. 'I said . . . "But as for you, you shall not make a covenant with the inhabitants of this land. You shall tear down their altars". But you have not heard my voice. What is this you have done?' (Judg. 2.2). With this rebuke, the difference in function between chapter one of Judges and chapter two becomes evident. Since chapter one contains no evaluative comments regarding Israel's actions, it is mostly a 'reporting of events' while chapter two is a 'probing of motives and an exposing of attitudes'.¹²³ The verbs are plural in number, suggesting that the message is to all the Israelites. And the message is clear—they had been told to make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land because their covenant with Yahweh is an exclusive one. The angel's words bring to mind the warning of Exod. 34.12-13: 'Watch yourself lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you are going, lest it become a snare in your midst. Because you shall tear down their altars'.¹²⁴ Yahweh's prohibition against making a covenant with the Canaanites is joined with the injunction to tear down their altars, implying that a covenant with Canaan cannot be merely political and secular, as Linington notes: 'the prohibition of making a covenant with the inhabitants of the land . . . is coupled with the potential idolatry that would ensue from such a treaty'.¹²⁵

Further comparison of Judges 2 and Exodus 34 reveals that the verb *כרת* is plural in Judg. 2.2 but singular in Exod. 34.12. The command is in the singular form

¹²³ Wilcock, *Message of Judges*, p. 26.

¹²⁴ Also, Deut. 7.5 and 12.3. Both the content of the message and the angelic medium are reminiscent of Exod. 23.20-33 as well; cf. McCann, *Judges*, p. 30; and Linington, 'The Term *ברית* in the OT', p. 675. The Hebrew terminology used here, 'cut' a covenant, is an idiom that may be explained by Gen. 15.10.

¹²⁵ Linington, 'The Term *ברית* in the OT', p. 675; cf. also Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 114, who writes: 'Making covenants with the people of the land and leaving Canaanite institutions in place will lead to covenants with their gods'.

in Exodus (תְּכַרֶּת) because the Israelites under Moses' leadership acted as together as one nation, but the plural command in Judges (תְּכַרְחוּ) reflects Israel's new organizational structure. Although Israel may act as one, as in Judg. 1.1, they now find themselves facing individual conflicts within their tribal territories. Thus, while it is true that Israel as a nation did not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, individual tribes did so. The paradox is that the actions of one tribe make the entire nation culpable, a concept that some scholars call 'corporate solidarity'.¹²⁶

Yahweh, who will not break the covenant, now stands in stark contrast to Israel, whom he accuses of violating that covenant by the making of other covenants. In the Torah, Yahweh predicts Israel's treason: '[they] will forsake me, and break my covenant that I have made with them' (Deut. 31.16). He adds the following mournful note:

For when I bring them into the land which I swore unto their fathers, that flows with milk and honey, they will eat and will fill themselves and become fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and spurn me, and break my covenant (Deut. 31.20).

In light of the content of Judges 1, Yahweh's rebuke seems to be his 'response to the national failure' of the Israelites to drive out the Canaanites,¹²⁷ but, in fact, his censure does not charge Israel with 'failing to expel all the Canaanites but with coming to terms with them'.¹²⁸ While chapter one does not include any explicit statement that Israel had made covenants with the inhabitants of the land, Israel's accommodation of the Canaanites implies as much;¹²⁹ and, therefore, the conquest would have been completed if not for Israel's disobedience. Wilcock insists that the

¹²⁶ Cf. Martens, *God's Design*, p. 67, who uses the term 'group solidarity'. As stated earlier, the entire book of Judges holds the nation accountable for the acts of the individual tribes. The individual episodes in Judges do not involve the entire nation, but invariably the narrative designates the characters as 'the Israelites' (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל).

¹²⁷ Scherman, *Joshua/Judges*, p. 125.

¹²⁸ Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 104; cf. also Wilcock, *Message of Judges*, p. 26.

¹²⁹ Lindars, *Judges 1-5*, p. 78.

two sins, failing to expel the Canaanites and making covenants with them, 'cannot be separated'.¹³⁰

The first example of covenant making in Judges 1 occurs when the tribe of Joseph gives a man of Bethel his freedom (and the freedom of his family) in exchange for information (1.22-25).¹³¹ When the Israelites promise to deal 'kindly' with him, the Hebrew word is *חָסַד*, a word that is often associated with covenant loyalty; and which in some contexts is used in parallel with *בְּרִית* ('covenant'),¹³² as in Deut. 7.9 'Know therefore that Yahweh your God, he is God, the faithful God, who keeps covenant and mercy (*חָסַד*)'. In fact, the showing of *חָסַד* to the Canaanites was expressly forbidden: 'And when Yahweh your God shall deliver them before you, you shall strike them, and utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, nor show them mercy (*חָסַד*)' (Deut. 7.2). The arrangement with the Canaanite informer, although not encompassing an entire city or people, is an illegitimate covenant.

The episode between Joseph and the man of Bethel is similar to an earlier encounter that is found in Joshua 9.3-27. When the Gibeonites heard how Israel had defeated Jericho and Ai, they sent out a group of men disguised as travelers from a distant land, who found Joshua and established a covenant with him and the elders of Israel. Joshua asked explicitly if the men were inhabitants of Canaan, and they replied that they were not. Because of this covenant, when the Israelites came to Gibeah, they were obligated to let the inhabitants live. Block argues that Joshua

¹³⁰ Wilcock, *Message of Judges*, p. 26.

¹³¹ Cf. Wilcock, *Message of Judges*, p. 27.

¹³² See M. Weinfeld, 'Covenant, Davidic', in Keith R. Crim (ed.), *IDBSup* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), pp. 188-92, who goes too far by insisting that *חָסַד* and *בְּרִית* are synonyms. More likely, the words sometimes form a hendiadys (cf. Deut. 7.12; 1 Kgs 8.23; 2 Chron. 6.14; Neh. 1.5; 9.32; Ps. 89.28; 106.45; Isa. 54.10; Dan. 9.4). The meaning of the terms used together in such a hendiadys (e.g. Deut. 7.9) would constitute 'merciful covenant'.

violated Yahweh's command against making covenants with the Canaanites;¹³³ and technically, Block is correct, but Joshua did not enter into the agreement knowing that it was a violation. Since he was deceived, the worst criticism that Joshua and the Israelites receive in the text is that before they made the illicit covenant 'they did not ask for a word from Yahweh' (9.14).

The actions of Israel later in Judges 1 also suggest that they are making covenants with the inhabitants of the land. Barry Webb observes that the phrase 'inhabitants of the land', which is found in Yahweh's prohibition against making a covenant, may allude to the following verses in chapter one:¹³⁴

But the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, *the inhabitants of the land*: for they did not drive them out. Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Bethshemesh, nor the inhabitants of Bethanath; but he dwelt among the Canaanites, *the inhabitants of the land* (Judg. 1.32-33, italics mine).

The repetition of the phrase 'inhabitants of the land' in itself does not indicate the making of a covenant, but its redundancy perhaps suggests its rhetorical connection. Even more telling is the fact that Asher and Naphtali lived 'among' (בְּקִרְבָּם) the Canaanites. Not only did the Israelites fail to drive out the Canaanites, but also they lived within their communities. The Hebrew word בְּקִרְבָּם may be translated 'inside, within' or 'inward parts';¹³⁵ and it is used in the Torah to describe Yahweh's presence within the camp of Israel; e.g., 'they have heard that you, O Yahweh, are in the midst (בְּקִרְבָּם) of this people' (Num. 14.14), and 'Yahweh your God walks within (בְּקִרְבָּם) your camp' (Deut. 23.14). It is quite unlikely that the Israelites and the Canaanites could live in such close proximity without the existence of a formal agreement. The text could have indicated a less intimate relationship by saying they lived 'with' (עִם), 'beside' (עַל), or 'over against' (נִגַּד) the Canaanites. Offering an

¹³³ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 113.

¹³⁴ Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 103.

¹³⁵ Brown *et al.*, *BDB*, p. 899.

interesting contrast to the wording of the Judges texts is a verse from the wilderness period that states, 'Thus Israel lived in the land (בְּאֶרֶץ) of the Amorites' (Num. 21.31). I would argue that during the time the Israelites were engaged in the conquest, they lived 'in the land' of the Canaanites, but once they abandoned the conquest and accommodated the inhabitants, they lived 'among' the Canaanites.

In addition to the most likely examples of covenant making in Judges 1, Israel engages in other questionable deeds. Their first act of disobedience in chapter one is the capture and torture of Adoni-bezek. Rather than executing him as they should have done, they brought him to Jerusalem as a trophy (1.6-7). The second questionable act is performed by the Kenites, who 'went and dwelt among' the Canaanites (1.16). Then, the Benjaminites allowed the Jebusites to 'dwell' with them in Jerusalem (1.21). The tribe of Manasseh allowed the Canaanites to 'dwell' with them under conditions of tribute (1.27-28). The Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among the Ephraimites (1.29) and in Kitron and Nahalol among the Zebulunites, who put them under tribute (1.30). Finally, the Amorites came under tribute to the tribe of Joseph (1.35). According to Deut. 20.10-18, the Canaanites were to be destroyed completely, while it was only cities outside of Israel's borders who were allowed to become tributaries. J. Clinton McCann suggests that Israel's subjugation of the Canaanites 'represents Israel's collaboration with, rather than their demolition of, an oppressive system'.¹³⁶ Webb summarizes:

The messenger's speech makes it clear that this 'solution' is totally unacceptable to Yahweh. The whole process of 'coming to terms' with these Canaanites is denounced as the making of a covenant with the inhabitants of the land.¹³⁷

The final verses of chapter one had not disclosed with certainty that Israel's accommodation to the Canaanite presence was a case of disobedience; it had only

¹³⁶ McCann, *Judges*, p. 29.

¹³⁷ Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 104.

left open that possibility. Now, however, that which is implicit in chapter one is made explicit in chapter two.¹³⁸ Israel's failure to drive out the enemy 'is considered a form of treaty making and a violation of the covenant',¹³⁹ and these covenants with the Canaanites are treason against Yahweh. In comparison to the non-evaluative tone of chapter one, the angel's rebuke in chapter two seems quite severe and somewhat surprising. The angel of Yahweh indicates that the insubordination of Israel is not a matter to be taken lightly.

5.3.5.2. Tear Down Their Altars

The Israelites are reprimanded in terms of two specific commands, one stated in the negative ('You shall not make a covenant' with the Canaanites), and the other stated in the positive ('Tear down their altars'). The prohibition against making a covenant with the inhabitants of Canaan is given in Exod. 23.32 and 34.12, 15; and the command to tear down their altars recalls Exod. 34.13; Deut. 7.5 and 12.3. The Hebrew נָחַץ means to 'tear down, break down, demolish',¹⁴⁰ to 'pull down'.¹⁴¹ The New Jerusalem Bible translates it as 'destroy', but Barth argues that it is a vivid term whose 'concrete notion of "tearing down" is so strong that the more general meaning of "destroy" is wholly inappropriate'.¹⁴²

The angel's reference to tearing down the Canaanite altars is surprising, because it introduces a topic that had not been disclosed earlier in the narrative. Chapter one does not include any mention of altars or any examples of idolatry, so the angel's reference to the Canaanite altars is unexpected and adds a note of

¹³⁸ Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, p. 134.

¹³⁹ Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, p. 134.

¹⁴⁰ Cornelis Van Dam, 'נָחַץ', in Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (eds.), *TLOT* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; 3 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), III, p. 212.

¹⁴¹ Köhler, *HALOT*, p. 736. On the tearing down of altars, cf. Walter Brueggemann, *To Build, to Plant: A Commentary on Jeremiah 26-52* (International Theological Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 67-69.

¹⁴² Karl Barth, 'נָחַץ', in G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (eds.), *TDOT* (trans. John T. Willis; 14 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), X, p. 109. For the translation 'destroy', cf. also NLT.

harshness to the censure. The dissonance created by the unexpected reference to altars gives the impression of distance between the voice of the narrator and the voice of the angel. The angel seems to know more than the narrator knows and speaks with a voice that is distinct from that of the narrator.¹⁴³

The clause is quite terse—'Their altars you shall tear down'—since it lacks a conjunction. Asyndeton is rare in Hebrew prose and in the ancient world is associated with oral rather than written discourse.¹⁴⁴ Thus, the absence of the conjunction adds to the impact of the spoken discourse. In Hebrew the fronting of the direct object is not unusual as a way of introducing new information;¹⁴⁵ but this case is unusual because the sign of the object (את) is missing. It is very unusual to find an independent clause that begins with the direct object, with no conjunction, no preposition, nor any other introductory particle. When compared with the two earlier passages that include the same command, the Judges text is notably shorter, more concise:

וְאַתֶּם לֹא־תִכְרֹתוּ בְרִית לְיוֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת
מִזְבְּחוֹתֵיהֶם תִּהְיוּן תִּהְיוּן (Judg. 2.2a)

הַשָּׁמַר לְךָ פֶּן־תִּכְרֹת בְּרִית לְיוֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֵתָּה בָּא עָלֶיָּהּ פֶּן־יִהְיֶה לְמוֹקֵשׁ בְּקִרְבְּךָ
כִּי אֶת־מִזְבְּחֵיהֶם תִּהְיוּן תִּהְיוּן (Exod. 34.12-13)

כִּי־אִם־כֹּה תַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם מִזְבְּחֹתֵיהֶם תִּהְיוּן וּמִצְבֹּתָם תִּשְׁבְּרוּ וְאֲשִׁירָהֶם תִּגְדְּעוּן
וּפְסִילֵיהֶם תִּשְׂרֹפוּן בְּאֵשׁ (Deut. 7.5)

¹⁴³ This kind of dissonance often leads historical critics to attribute the text to different hands, but the ability of characters to have their own voice and speak independently from the narrator is a literary device known as 'polyphony', or 'dialogic' narrative and was first explored by Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (trans. R. W. Rotsel; Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1973), pp. 6, 17, 21, 69. Bakhtin's work was first published in Russian in 1929. The influence of Bakhtin's ideas on the interpretation of Judges is acknowledged by Olson, 'Judges', p. 725. Cf. also Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction* (Semeia Studies, 38; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), who lists a large number of biblical scholars who have been influenced by Bakhtin, and offers ways in which Bakhtin can be fruitful for biblical studies. Also, L. Juliana M. Claassens, 'Biblical Theology as Dialogue: Continuing the Conversation on Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Theology', *JBL* 122, no. 1 (2003), pp. 127-44, suggests ways that his insights can be applied to biblical theology.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, III.12.

¹⁴⁵ Van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, p. 347.

In the Exodus text, the direct object is preceded by a conjunction and the object sign (כִּי אֵת), and in the Deuteronomy text the object is preceded by the phrase 'Therefore, this is what you shall do to them . . .' (כִּי־אֵם־כֹּה תַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם). In the Judges text, the phrase 'You shall tear down their altars' stands alone, completely unconnected to the words that precede and to the words that follow. The shortness of the angel's rebuke, its conciseness, and its disjointed and dissonant tone, add to the highly charged emotional context of the speech. Clearly, Yahweh is not concerned here with politeness, temperance, tact, or diplomatic language.

5.3.5.3. *Israel Does not Hear.*

The Israelites had renewed their covenant with Yahweh in Joshua 24.23-25: 'The people said to Joshua, "Yahweh our God we will serve, and to his voice we will hearken". So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day'. According to the angel of Yahweh, they have now abandoned their promise, and no longer are they hearkening to the voice of Yahweh. The voice of Yahweh has become a distant memory, while the seductive solicitation of the ever-present Canaanite gods has gained their attention. Yahweh, the God who speaks, says, 'you have not heard my voice';¹⁴⁶ but the gods of Canaan, who cannot speak, are garnering the ear of Israel.¹⁴⁷ Israel had eagerly vowed to listen to the voice of Yahweh, but now their vows are broken.

Because the covenant is person-centered, Yahweh does not say, 'you have broken my laws' but rather he cries out, 'you not heard my voice'. Because the covenant is the bond of Yahweh's personal relationship to Israel, they are 'confronted in their experience with the person of Yahweh even more than by his

¹⁴⁶ For more on the significance of שָׁמַע for the interpretation of Judges, see chapter three above and Martin, 'Purity, Power, and the Passion of God'.

¹⁴⁷ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 115.

laws'.¹⁴⁸ In refusing to hear Yahweh, they are refusing the kingdom rule of their liberator, and they are rejecting the promises of their benefactor. Brueggemann, reflects on Israel's choices and the ramifications of those choices:

Much more is now seen to be at stake in the pressure of syncretism, for it is not just a choosing among gods or a matter of loyalty to this especially jealous one, but the shape and character of human community are in question along with the God question. Human society, as ordered by Moses, is covenantal . . . And Israel must resist every religion and every politics which would dismantle the covenant.¹⁴⁹

Yahweh said that he would bring them out from the land of Egypt, and he was powerful enough to bring them out. He swore to their fathers that he would bring them into the land of Canaan, and he was constant enough to bring them in. He promised that he would never break his covenant, and he was patient enough not to break it. His covenant word to Israel was, שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, 'Hear, O, Israel, Yahweh is your God; Yahweh is one' (Deut. 6.4); but Israel did not hear.

Then, in a rhetorical question that expresses surprise and amazement, Yahweh asks, 'What is this you have done?' The question is not 'Why have you done this?' as some versions translate it.¹⁵⁰ It is not a quest for information, expecting an answer, rather the phrase functions like an interjection, carrying 'emotional weight' and may include a degree of annoyance or exasperation.¹⁵¹ Yahweh is incredulous in the face of Israel's disobedience. The question may force the Israelites to reflect on their actions and subsequent 'implications for their ongoing relationship with Yahweh and their personal fortunes',¹⁵² just as the same question confronted Eve in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3.13). Most occurrences of this question reflect feelings of

¹⁴⁸ Martens, *God's Design*, p. 79.

¹⁴⁹ Brueggemann, 'Trajectories', p. 168.

¹⁵⁰ Moore, *Judges*, p. 59; e.g., KJV, ASV, DRA, NIV, NKJ, NLT.

¹⁵¹ Van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, pp. 259, 325. See also, Waltke and O'Connor, *Hebrew Syntax*, pp. 312-13. For some reason, the NRSV translates the question as an exclamation: 'See what you have done!', but in other occurrences of this phrase, they translate it as a question that expresses surprise (Gen. 3.13; 12.18; 26.10; 29.25; 42.28; Exod. 14.11; Jon. 1.10). The whole speech is 'a statement of exasperation', according to Boling, *Judges*, p. 62.

¹⁵² Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 115.

personal injury and injustice, as in the case of Pharaoh to Abraham (Gen. 12.18), Abimelech to Abraham (Gen. 26.10), Jacob to Laban (Gen. 29.25), Jacob's sons to God (Gen. 42.28), and Jethro to Moses (Exod. 18.14).¹⁵³ In Judges it is Yahweh who is injured and it is he who has suffered injustice.

5.3.6. Yahweh's Sanction of Israel

Yahweh's question, 'What is this that you have done?', may incite Israel to mount a defensive response; but they have no time to respond, because Yahweh is not finished with his speech. He continues, 'And also I said, "I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become adversaries (צָדִיִּים)¹⁵⁴ to you, and their gods shall become a snare (מוֹקֵשׁ) to you"' (2.3). Joshua had warned Israel of this scenario and the consequences of their disobedience. He declared,

if you turn back, and join the survivors of these nations left here among you, . . . Yahweh your God will not continue to drive out these nations before you; but they shall become a trap and a snare (מוֹקֵשׁ) for you, a whip on your sides (צָדִיִּים), and thorns in your eyes (Josh. 23.12-13).¹⁵⁵

Yahweh had issued a similar warning in the Torah:

if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land . . . those whom you let remain of them will become as barbs (שָׁבִיִּים)¹⁵⁶ in your eyes and as thorns in your sides (צָדִיִּים), and they shall trouble (וְצָרָר) you in the land in which you live (Num. 33.55).

¹⁵³ Brown, 'Judges', p. 152.

¹⁵⁴ The word 'adversaries' is based on the emendation of לְצָדִיִּים, 'for sides' to לְצָרִיִּים, 'for adversaries' (cf. Num. 33.55, וְצָרָר), an emendation that carries the support of the LXX, which reads *συναγὰς* 'distresses'; cf. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 799. According to Moore, *Judges*, p. 61, however, the Hebrew word צָר is never found in a similar connection'. I would argue that לְצָדִיִּים involves the shortening of a citation from Num. 33.55 or Josh. 23.13 involving the word בְּצָדִיִּיכֶם, 'in your sides'; the view adopted by Moore, *Judges*, p. 59; cf. Burney, *Judges*, p. 39. No consensus on this textual problem has yet been reached, but for a helpful discussion of all the options cf. Lindars, *Judges* 1-5, p. 79.

¹⁵⁵ Similar warnings are given in Exod. 23.33; 34.12; and Deut. 7.16; each using the Hebrew word מוֹקֵשׁ, 'snare'.

¹⁵⁶ Used only this once in the Hebrew Bible, שָׁבִי is apparently a synonym to צָנִין, 'thorn'. Cf. Brown *et al.*, *BDB*, p. 857.

5.3.6.1. *Past, Present, or Future Discipline?*

The meaning of verse three is not certain, some translations rendering אָמַרְתִּי as past tense ('I also said')¹⁵⁷ and others translating it as present tense ('So now I say').¹⁵⁸ If אָמַרְתִּי is past tense, then Yahweh is speaking of a warning that was issued previously, and his speech reads:

I said, 'I will not break my covenant . . . and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars . . .'. And also I said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become your adversaries' (2.1-3) [italics added].

Translated this way, verse three may help to explain why the Israelites were unable to defeat the Canaanites in chapter one—Yahweh had withdrawn his support, just as he had threatened to do. On the other hand, if אָמַרְתִּי is interpreted as present tense, the same speech reads:

I said, 'I will not break my covenant . . . and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars . . .'. So now I say, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become your adversaries (2.1-3) [italics added].

With this translation, Yahweh's refusal to drive out the enemy is confined entirely to the future as a judgment on Israel's past actions.

The *qatal* verb form,¹⁵⁹ אָמַרְתִּי, taken on its own, could be translated either past tense or present tense. The *qatal* is most often past tense, but it can be translated as present tense under certain circumstances, including the situation when speech and action occur simultaneously.¹⁶⁰ This performative use of the *qatal* may be found in the following examples: 'I declare today . . .' (Deut. 26.3); 'I lift my hand to Yahweh' (Gen. 14.22); 'Now behold, I release you today . . .' (Jer. 40.4).

¹⁵⁷ E.g., KJV, NASB, NET, LXX, LUT, VUL, and JPS.

¹⁵⁸ E.g., RSV, NRSV, ESV, NIV, NJB, NLT, and CSB.

¹⁵⁹ A *qatal* is a perfect (or suffix-conjugation) verb that has no conjunction attached.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Waltke and O'Connor, *Hebrew Syntax*, p. 489, who call this usage the 'instantaneous perfective'.

If אָמַרְתִּי is a performative *qatal*, then Brown is correct in saying that Yahweh's threat not to drive out the Canaanites is a 'punishment' for Israel's disobedience.¹⁶¹ Webb understands Yahweh's words to be the 'announcement of the sentence',¹⁶² that is given to Israel on account of their disobedience. In response to Israel's unfaithfulness, Yahweh might be expected to discard them entirely, but he has insisted that he will not break his covenant with them. Because of his devotion to his covenant, Linington argues, Yahweh will not 'completely abandon the nation, but . . . he will no longer help Israel fight and dispossess the Canaanites'.¹⁶³

Although אָמַרְתִּי may be interpreted as a performative *qatal*, which then means the threat of verse three is 'Yahweh's punitive response to Israel's failure to deal with the Canaanites in chap. 1 as Yahweh had prescribed',¹⁶⁴ the verb must be interpreted in light of the sentence in which it occurs. Within the immediate context of אָמַרְתִּי, there are lexical, grammatical, and thematic factors that mitigate against reading it as a present tense performative.

The present tense performative translation, 'So now I say' (RSV) is incorrect on lexical grounds, because וְגַם does not mean 'so' or 'now'; it means 'also, in addition'.¹⁶⁵ 'So now I say' would be in Hebrew וְעַתָּה אָמַרְתִּי. Neither does וְגַם mean 'therefore' (NIV),¹⁶⁶ a word that connotes reason, result, or conclusion. 'Therefore I say' would be either אָמַרְתִּי עַל-כֵּן or אָמַרְתִּי לְכֵן. For these and other reasons, both

¹⁶¹ Brown, 'Judges', p. 152.

¹⁶² Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 104.

¹⁶³ Linington, 'The Term בְּרִיחַ in the OT', p. 676.

¹⁶⁴ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 115.

¹⁶⁵ Brown *et al.*, *BDB*, p. 169.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Lindars, *Judges 1-5*, p. 78.

Moore and Van Der Kooij argue vigorously that אָמַרְתִּי should be translated in the past tense.¹⁶⁷

Furthermore, when followed by a *qatal*, וָגַם points to past time. In this case, וָגַם points back to the previous occurrence of 'I said' (2.1), which then parallels verse three, 'And also I said'. Also, it would be inappropriate grammatically in this context for וָגַם to precede a present tense translation of אָמַרְתִּי ('And also I say'); because there has not been a previous occurrence of 'I say'.¹⁶⁸ Since the previous parallel verb (וָאָמַר) must undoubtedly be translated 'I said' (2.1), אָמַרְתִּי וָגַם should be translated 'And also I said'. Just as the 'I said' of verse one introduces a quotation from the Torah, אָמַרְתִּי וָגַם in verse three introduces another quotation from a previous text.

The final reason for taking אָמַרְתִּי וָגַם as past tense is that syntactically it does not represent the Hebrew form of an introduction to a consequence or result. Normally, speeches that express an intention to act as a consequence or result do not include the verb 'speak' or 'say'. For example, in response to Pharaoh's stubbornness, Yahweh says, 'For now I will stretch out my hand and strike you and your people' (Exod. 9.15). The text does not include the words, 'I say'. Moses, speaking to Israel says, 'Now I will go up unto the Lord' (Exod. 32.30); not, 'I say, now I will go up unto the Lord'. The narrative of Judg. 2.1-5 is quite concise, and it includes no unnecessary words. In fact, at some places, it seems to be too concise. If the angel were speaking of a future consequence, the words אָמַרְתִּי וָגַם would be not be expected to appear. Instead, he would probably say, עַל-כֵּן לֹא-אֶגְרֹשׁ אוֹתָם, 'Therefore, I will not drive them out'. Thus the angel is speaking

¹⁶⁷ Moore, *Judges*, p. 59; Arie Van Der Kooij, "'And I also said": A New Interpretation of Judges 2.3', *VT* 45 (1995), pp. 294-306. Cf. also Boling, *Judges*, p. 53; Soggin, *Judges*, p. 20; Lindars, *Judges 1-5*, p. 78.

¹⁶⁸ The use of וָגַם to introduce the second of two or more parallel thoughts is illustrated in the following verses: Gen. 17.16; Gen. 30.6; Gen. 37.7; Exod. 3.9; Exod. 6.4; Exod. 6.5; Exod. 33.12; Deut. 26.13; Josh. 2.24; Judg. 2.10; Judg. 11.17; Judg. 17.2; 1 Sam. 13.4; 2 Sam. 2.7; 1 Kgs 1.46; 1 Kgs 1.48; 1 Kgs 16.7; 1 Kgs 21.19; 2 Chron. 12.12; 2 Chron. 21.13; 2 Chron. 24.7; Isa. 5.2; Amos 4.7

of a past warning, but it is a warning that may include both past and future consequences.

Consequently, as Block explains, 'this verse is not intended as an announcement of future judgment for failing to keep the covenant but as a warning reminder of a past declaration of the consequences of making such covenants'. Block argues that Yahweh has not yet decided to implement the threat.¹⁶⁹ I would differ somewhat from Block, however, by asserting that the consequences of Yahweh's 'reminder' have already been partially implemented and will continue to be applied in the future. Yahweh had already stopped aiding Israel to drive out the inhabitants, and already 'he is allowing the Canaanites and their gods to have their way with his people'.¹⁷⁰ Thus, Yahweh's statement explains Israel's failures of chapter one, and it also anticipates the subsequent content of the book of Judges.¹⁷¹

The speech of 2.1-5, in Webb's view, 'portrays Yahweh as impaled on the horns of a dilemma', because Yahweh seems to make contradictory statements.¹⁷² First, he says that he will never break his covenant, a covenant that includes his aid in securing the land. Second, he says that he will not drive out the Canaanites, thus reversing an action that is promised in the covenant. How then can Yahweh keep his promise to give the land to the Israelites and also fulfill his threat not to give it? This tension is more than a question of legal terminology or wrangling over words; the tension exists within the covenant and within God himself.¹⁷³ The covenant includes provision for discipline, and Yahweh's presence dwelling in relationship with Israel includes the possibility of restored assistance from his hand. The dilemma for

¹⁶⁹ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, pp. 112, 115.

¹⁷⁰ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 115.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Kaswelder, 'Le Tribù', p. 92.

¹⁷² Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 105.

¹⁷³ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 117; cf. also Olson, 'Judges', p. 749.

Yahweh is how to maintain (and even strengthen) the relationship with his people who have disobeyed his covenant and offended him by their obstinacy.¹⁷⁴

5.3.6.2. *Thorns and Snares.*

Yahweh had warned that Israel would 'face an increasingly hostile Canaanite population', and that hostility would confront Israel in two forms: (1) the Canaanite people; and (2) the Canaanite gods. Because the Canaanite inhabitants remain in the land, Yahweh will use them to press, prod, or irritate the Israelites like a stone in their shoe or a thorn in their sides.¹⁷⁵ In Hebrew, the snare is a trap for birds and small animals that is used here as a metaphor of the subtle and unexpected enticements of Canaanite religion. The snare, writes Brown, 'catches one off guard when he or she least expects it, imprisoning suddenly and completely'.¹⁷⁶ The dreadful result of Israel's cohabitation with the Canaanites will be that their gods will be 'not an occasion of sin only, but a cause of sudden and unexpected ruin'.¹⁷⁷ Israel had been saved by Yahweh from the bondage of Egypt. But now, under the influence of their polytheistic neighbors, they will once again be brought into the social and religious structures of bondage, 'a new enslavement'.¹⁷⁸

Yahweh's decision to allow the Canaanites to remain in the land suggests that he is not a static character; instead, he is a God who responds dynamically and relationally to the actions of Israel.¹⁷⁹ Israel's disobedience causes him to modify or adapt his behavior toward Israel. Since the Israelites had accommodated the Canaanites, so will Yahweh. He will employ them in his disciplinary plan for Israel,

¹⁷⁴ Wilcock, *Message of Judges*, p. 27.

¹⁷⁵ Regardless of how the Hebrew word נֶרֶךְ is translated, its meaning clearly signifies that the Canaanites will become an irritant to the Israelites.

¹⁷⁶ Brown, 'Judges', p. 152. Cf. also Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 116, who compares the snare to a spider's web.

¹⁷⁷ Moore, *Judges*, p. 59.

¹⁷⁸ Brown, 'Judges', p. 153.

¹⁷⁹ On Israel's witness to the relationality of Yahweh, see Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 225-26.

and the Israelites will reap the consequences of their actions. Yahweh, however, will not entirely abandon Israel. In Greenspahn's judgment, this interaction between Yahweh and Israel can be explained only in terms of the covenant:

the concept of a covenant seems the most appropriate explanation for this process in which God's actions flow out of his own commitment, freely made, rather than as compensation for Israelite merit.¹⁸⁰

5.4. WEeping AND SACRIFICE

The reprimand from Yahweh triggers an emotional outburst on the part of Israel.

'When the angel of Yahweh spoke these words to all the Israelites, the people lifted up their voices and wept. So they named that place Bochim, and there they sacrificed to Yahweh' (2.4-5).¹⁸¹ Olson points out that until now, the hearers of the angel's speech have not been specifically named, but now we learn that he is speaking to 'all the Israelites'.¹⁸² Even though the actions of Judah and Joseph had been described somewhat positively in chapter one, they are included in the rebuke. The expression 'the Israelites' (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), used in 1.1, does not occur again until now (2.4), thus forming an *inclusio*.¹⁸³ The Israelites who began the conquest together, and who enjoyed victory together, will now suffer discipline together. 'This place of wailing and weeping becomes a memorial to dashed hopes and forfeited futures because of the sinfulness of Israel'.¹⁸⁴ The fact that the angel's rebuke applies to 'all the Israelites' underlines once more the perspective that Israel is one people, bound together by their covenant with Yahweh.

The Israelites respond to the angel's rebuke with weeping and sacrifice, but surprisingly, they demonstrate no clear evidence of repentance and no rededication

¹⁸⁰ Greenspahn, 'Framework of Judges', pp. 395-96.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 105, who observes that in Judg. 20.26-27 and 21.2, the ark is located at Bethel and the Israelites go there again to weep and to sacrifice to Yahweh. The two occasions of weeping in 2.4 and 20.26 are the only references in Judges to 'all the Israelites'; therefore, the only activity in Judges explicitly involving the entire nation is the activity of weeping.

¹⁸² Olson, 'Judges', p. 748.

¹⁸³ Kaswalder, 'Le Tribù', p. 92.

¹⁸⁴ Olson, 'Judges', p. 748.

to the covenant. Rabbi Nosson Scherman insists that Israel's response 'testifies to their basic purity', and to their desire 'only to be perfect in God's eyes'.¹⁸⁵ Scherman's view, however, may be too optimistic toward Israel. Although their weeping indicates corporate sorrow that may suggest repentance, the narrative is ambiguous. The lack of terminology such as 're/turn', 'serve', 'worship', and 'obey' allows for uncertainty regarding the exact nature of Israel's action.

Wilcock, pleading in favor of the genuineness of Israel's repentance, observes that their tears signify remorse, their sacrifice demonstrates their devotion, and their naming of the location indicates an 'intent to remember their commitment into the future'.¹⁸⁶ Boling, citing Israel's sacrifice, claims that they enacted a covenant renewal ceremony on the order of the one reported in Joshua 24.¹⁸⁷ Although the offering of a sacrifice does not guarantee that Israel is truly repentant, it does leave open that possibility.¹⁸⁸ However, it was only recently in the canonical narrative that Israel had said, 'Yahweh our God we will serve, and him we will obey' (Josh. 24.24). If Israel is truly repentant in chapter two, we would expect them to offer a similar statement, but such a commitment is not forthcoming. Brown's argument that true repentance would have been accompanied by other actions is well-taken;¹⁸⁹ but given the extreme conciseness of the whole narrative it seems quite possible that their repentance is heartfelt and true.

Brown also points to the further narratives in Judges as evidence that Israel is sorry for the punishment that they must endure but they do not repent.¹⁹⁰ Block also

¹⁸⁵ Scherman, *Joshua/Judges*, p. 126. Other commentators affirm that Israel repented; cf. Schneider, *Judges*, p. 27; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 117.

¹⁸⁶ Wilcock, *Message of Judges*, p. 27.

¹⁸⁷ Boling, *Judges*, pp. 66-67.

¹⁸⁸ Brown, 'Judges', p. 154, argues that *זבח*, 'sacrifice' refers to a celebratory communal meal 'in contrast to a whole burnt offering', but usage shows that it can refer to whole burnt offerings; e.g., Exod. 20.24.

¹⁸⁹ Brown, 'Judges', p. 153.

¹⁹⁰ Brown, 'Judges', p. 153.

makes reference to the rest of Judges to prove that even though Israel's repentance is real, it does not last. He writes, 'the remainder of the book will reveal how shallow the present commitment was and how illusory the solution'.¹⁹¹ For two reasons, however, I would reject any arguments based on Israel's unfaithfulness in the later portions of Judges. First, the commitment of the generation of Israelites who are present in 2.1-5 cannot be discounted on the basis of a later generation of Israelites. Second, genuine commitment can deteriorate over time in the face of temptation, so that the Israelites who honestly turn to Yahweh in chapter two can turn away at a later time. Therefore, the later narratives of Judges have no decisive bearing on Israel's attitude in 2.4-5.

After coming to the end of this episode in Judges, the reader begins to form expectations and questions for the remainder of the book. Questions might include the following: (1) Did Israel truly repent?; (2) How will Yahweh respond to their acts of contrition?; (3) What will be the effect of the continued presence of the Canaanites?; and 4)'How far can Israel stray from the covenant before God gives up on Israel altogether?'¹⁹²

5.5. YAHWEH'S FAITHFULNESS AS A THEME OF JUDGES

For the following reasons I would argue that Judg. 2.1-5 is a crucial piece of evidence that contributes to the themes of Judges: (1) It is an event that belongs to the overall plot of the book of Judges. Judg. 2.1-5 clearly meets all recognized criteria for a functional narrative event (that is, an event that functions as an element of the plot). Mieke Bal, in developing her theory of narratology, lists three criteria for including an event as a functional element of plot. First, the event must result in change or the genuine possibility of change. Second, the actor / actors must exercise choice either

¹⁹¹ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 117.

¹⁹² Olson, 'Judges', p. 727.

during the process of the event or in reacting to the event. Third, there must be some kind of confrontation between narrative actors.¹⁹³ All three of these criteria are met by the event described in Judg. 2.1-5. (2) Judg. 2.1-5 is direct speech from God; who, through this speech, appears to be growing into the role of a major character in the book.¹⁹⁴ According to literary theorist Emile Benveniste, 'there is no other objective testimony to the identity of the subject except that which he himself thus gives about himself'.¹⁹⁵ (3) It is a speech that is not limited in its application to one or more tribes, but is directed to the entire nation of Israel. (4) It is the first of three speeches from Yahweh to Israel; and as the first speech, it serves as a reference point for the following speeches. Robert Alter observes:

the point at which dialogue first emerges will be worthy of special attention, and in most instances, the initial words spoken by a personage will be revelatory, perhaps more in manner than in matter, constituting an important moment in the exposition of character.¹⁹⁶

(5) The fact that it occurs near the beginning of the book makes it the starting point for the rising action in the plot layer that focuses on Yahweh and Israel,¹⁹⁷ and reinforces its importance as fundamental to the theme of the book. In terms of Freytag's model of dramatic structure, Judges 1 can be understood as the introduction to the drama ('*Einleitung*') and Yahweh's speech is the causal moment ('*das erregende Moment*'), which signals the beginning of rising action in the drama.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ Bal, *Narratology*, pp. 13-24. Narratology is a precise method for describing the elements of narrative. It includes the concepts of classical literary criticism, rhetorical criticism, and structuralism. Unfortunately, it introduces still another new set of taxonomies and new definitions for old taxonomies. I have intentionally avoided unnecessary technical terminology.

¹⁹⁴ Characters are developed through their words, through their actions, through the narrator's descriptions of them, and through other characters' descriptions of them. For a helpful guide to the reconstructing of characters, cf. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 46-81.

¹⁹⁵ Cited by Hugh S. Pyper, *David as Reader: 2 Samuel 12:1-15 and the Poetics of Fatherhood* (Biblical Interpretation Series, 23; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), p. 75.

¹⁹⁶ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 74.

¹⁹⁷ A plot layer unrecognized in the massive data of O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*.

¹⁹⁸ Gustav Freytag, *Die Technik des Dramas* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1897), p. 107. *Das erregende Moment* is given the name 'initiating action' by Lewis Turco, *The Book of Literary Terms: The Genres of Fiction, Drama, Nonfiction, Literary Criticism, and Scholarship* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), p. 41; and 'inciting moment' by Robert E. Longacre, *An Anatomy of Speech Notions* (Lisse: Peter

In fact it is Yahweh's professed commitment not to break the covenant forever that, together with Israel's recurring violations of the covenant, accounts for the dialectical forces that generate the long acknowledged cyclical motion of the rest of the book. Thus, Yahweh's speech sets the agenda for the narrative that follows. I will show that, as the narrative progresses, that agenda is strengthened by subsequent speeches and events.

According to McCann, Judges focuses on the question of Israel's faithfulness. McCann, however, fails to appreciate the theological importance of God's faithfulness.¹⁹⁹ The crucial theme for Judg. 2.1-5 is that while Yahweh has been faithful to his covenant with the Israelites, they have been unfaithful to him.²⁰⁰ At this point in Judges, the two main characters are Yahweh and Israel,²⁰¹ with the Canaanites serving as the occasion for conflict. Yahweh is characterized as a powerful and faithful God, who responds to the actions of his covenant people. He answers their prayers (1.1); he directs their actions (1.2); he leads them to victory (1.2-20); he sends his messenger (2.1); he is known as their savior (2.2); he has kept his promises (2.2); he is faithful to his covenant (2.2); he is dynamic in his relationship (2.3); he disciplines his people (2.3). Yahweh's response to his people is not characterized as legalistic, mechanistic, or altogether predictable. According to Pressler,

A mechanistic view of God's action is challenged by the phrase 'I will never break my covenant with you', a phrase in some tension with the assertion that God will no longer drive out the nations. The tension could be resolved by interpreting the former phrase to mean that God promised not to be the first to abandon the treaty with Israel. Elsewhere in Judges, divine judgment and

de Ridder Press, 1976), pp. 199-217. Cf. the description of plot structure by Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 102-103.

¹⁹⁹ McCann, *Judges*, pp. 24, 30-34.

²⁰⁰ Israel's unfaithfulness reaches its consummation at the end of Judges, where it is said, 'they all did what was right in their own eyes' (17.6; 21.25).

²⁰¹ Kaswalder, 'Le Tribù', p. 91.

divine mercy are held in tension in the very heart of God. Allowing the tension to remain unresolved in Judg. 2.1-5 is a better approach.²⁰²

At this point in the narrative, the evidence suggests Yahweh's covenant faithfulness as a major theme of Judges. Boling declares that 'treaty terminology is very much in the foreground' of the book,²⁰³ and Brown maintains that, while there are several themes in Judges, 'the theme of covenant underlies the entire story'.²⁰⁴ However, we must remain open to other possibilities as we hear the remainder of the book.

5.6. CONCLUSIONS

In his first speech to the Israelites, Yahweh sends his angel to confront them for their failure to keep the covenant. The fact that this speech occurs near the beginning of the book makes it the initial event in the rising action of the plot layer that focuses on Yahweh and Israel, and reinforces its importance as a fundamental feature of the narrative, setting the agenda for the story that follows. My hearing of the voice of Yahweh in Judg. 2.1-5 affirms the following narrative theological concerns.

5.6.1. Yahweh Adapts

Chapter 2 of Judges opens with the movement of the angel of Yahweh from Gilgal to Bochim. In light of the associations of Gilgal as Joshua's victory headquarters and the place of Israel's renewal and blessing, this movement of the angel of Yahweh recalls the victories of Joshua as they stand in sharp contrast to the defeats just recounted in Judges chapter one. Yahweh had accompanied the Israelites at Gilgal, where their reproach was rolled away; and now he visits them at Bochim, where they weep over their new reproach.

²⁰² Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, p. 135.

²⁰³ Boling, *Judges*, p. 24.

²⁰⁴ Brown, 'Judges', p. 132.

5.6.2. Yahweh Saves

Yahweh begins his speech by reminding Israel that he had saved them from Egypt. This Exodus tradition serves as a powerful reference, the mere mention of which characterizes Yahweh as Israel's savior.²⁰⁵ Because of his gracious salvation he deserves their allegiance, and his appearance should awaken the Israelites' sense of gratitude and obligation. Just as their salvation was based not upon their commitment to Yahweh but on his commitment to them, his present posture toward them continues to rest upon the same foundation—his grace and love.

Furthermore, the God of the Exodus even now has the power to save Israel from the Canaanites and to overthrow every power that would bind Israel. Yahweh's purpose in the Exodus is to liberate Israel for himself, to free them from the service of Pharaoh in order that they may serve Yahweh.

5.6.3. Yahweh Fulfills his Promise

In addition to his reminder of the Exodus, the angel of Yahweh points back also to the patriarchs when he says, 'and I brought you into the land that I swore to your fathers'. This mention of the patriarchs affirms God's continuing relationship with the people of Israel. This is not a new God who speaks; he is the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is faithful in his relationship with Israel over an extended span of time, and he will continue to fulfill his promises in spite of Israel's disobedience. Even though many generations passed and many obstacles stood between the promise and its fulfillment, he has remained constant and faithful with regard to his promise to Israel's ancestors. He promised to give the land of Canaan to Abram's offspring (Gen. 12.7), and he has done so.

²⁰⁵ The Exodus is mentioned nine times in Judges (2.1, 12; 6.8, 9, 13; 10.11; 11.13, 16; 19.30), a frequency that suggests its importance as a theological underpinning of God's actions in the narrative.

In light of Israel's defeats in Judges 1, however, Yahweh's swearing of an irrevocable oath to give them the land situates him in a precarious position. The responsibility to deliver the land to Israel is his and his alone, and if he cannot deliver on his promise, he opens up himself to criticism. His oath leaves him exposed to the risk of losing his integrity and his honor both in the eyes of Israel and in the eyes of the surrounding peoples. By laying the blame on Israel's disobedience, Judg. 2.1-5 serves as a defense of Yahweh's integrity.

5.6.4. Yahweh Keeps Covenant

Yahweh's speech harks back not only to the Exodus and to the patriarchs but also to the forging of his covenant with Israel. Yahweh's insistence that he will never break his covenant affirms that he is a God who can be trusted, a God of covenant faithfulness—forever.

When Yahweh declares, 'I will not break my covenant forever' (Judg. 2.1), the hearer is reminded of the biblical concept of covenant, especially as embodied in Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants; and the covenant renewal ceremony in Joshua 24 provides a fitting prelude to the angel's speech in Judg. 2.1-5. The hearer of Judges 2 would understand that Yahweh is Israel's great king who has freely chosen to know them as his unique liberated covenant people and who has unconditionally pledged himself to be faithful to them even in the face of their disobedience to the stipulations to which they had agreed.

Studies of Judges have focused almost entirely on the actions of Israel, but Yahweh is the initiator and sustainer of the covenant relationship; he is the major actor. The existence of the covenant, both in its origins in Exodus or its challenges in Judges, is not dependent on the actions of Israel but on the actions of Yahweh. The covenant, however, is not a one-sided affair; it demands obedience. In order to remain free, Israel must remain faithful to Yahweh.

From a narrative perspective, it seems significant that the narrative of Judges first draws attention to the faithfulness of Yahweh before it addresses Israel's failure. Interpreters of Judges have virtually ignored God as a character in the narrative, preferring to center on the actions of the judges themselves and on the failures of Israel. Judges, however, points first to the character of God and to his integrity before addressing Israel's failure. Yahweh said that he would bring them out from the land of Egypt, and he did so. He swore to the patriarchs that he would bring them into the land of Canaan, and he fulfilled his oath. He promised that he would never break his covenant, and he was patient enough not to break it. No doubt much of the book of Judges focuses on Israel's unfaithfulness; nevertheless, we should not fail to appreciate the theological importance of God's steadfastness. Consequently, the crucial theme for Judg. 2.1-5 is the contrast between the covenant loyalty of Yahweh and the disloyalty of Israel.

5.6.5. Yahweh Speaks, but Israel Does not Hear

When the angel of Yahweh turns his attention to the Israelites and their response to God, he says, 'As for you, you have not heard my voice' (2.2). Israel had vowed eagerly to listen to Yahweh (Josh. 24.24), but now their vows are broken. I conclude the following from Yahweh's word of rebuke: (1) Unlike the gods of Canaan, Yahweh is the God who speaks. (2) Yahweh's reference to the hearing of his 'voice' rather than to the keeping of his 'commands' suggests a personal relationship, a relational context. (3) The Israelites' failure to hear the voice of Yahweh is their fundamental and underlying error.

5.6.6. Yahweh Disciplines Israel

Although Yahweh promises that he will never break his covenant, a covenant that includes his giving of the land, he declares as well that he will discipline Israel by allowing the Canaanites to remain as thorns and snares. We might ask how Yahweh

intends to keep his promise to give the land to Israel and at the same time permit the Canaanites to remain in the land. The answer is to be found in the nature of Yahweh's covenant relationship with Israel. The covenant includes provision for temporary periods of discipline with the understanding that Yahweh will not completely abandon his people. In Judges, Yahweh attempts to maintain the relationship with his disobedient people through the means of Canaanite pressure. Yahweh's decision to allow the Canaanites to remain in the land suggests that he is a dynamic character who responds relationally to the actions of Israel. Since the Israelites had accommodated the Canaanites, he will employ them in his disciplinary plan for Israel, and the Israelites will reap the consequences of their actions. Yahweh, however, will not entirely abandon Israel.

5.6.7. Yahweh Governs

The assumption that lies behind the entire speech of the angel of Yahweh, an assumption to which I have alluded several times in this chapter, is that Yahweh himself is sovereign over the fortunes of Israel. Although the choices of Israel in Judges are a prominent theme of the book, we must not overlook the plans and purposes of Yahweh that are explicitly stated in 2.1-5 and elsewhere. The narrative attributes to Yahweh the authority to shape Israel's story; and even though Israel may claim the freedom to forsake him and serve other gods, it is Yahweh who chooses the consequences that are unleashed upon Israel. For every action that Israel takes, Yahweh reacts with a considered response. His first speech indicates that his original plan for the conquest and settlement of Canaan is modified because of Israel's compromise; however, the subsequent modifications of that plan come at the discretion of Yahweh alone.

5.6.8. Yahweh Suffers

Yahweh's question to Israel, 'What is this you have done?', is an expression of personal injury and emotional vulnerability to human offense. This question, coupled with the terse and laconic style of delivery, indicates that Judg. 2.1-5 is a passionate speech from a God who is invested in his covenant people. The words of Walther Eichrodt express eloquently the paradox of Yahweh's relationship with Israel:

*God's voluntary self-involvement is revealed as something transcending all human standards and shattering all men's categories of retribution. It means that God's covenant lovingkindness now becomes the free gift of mercy; his righteousness becomes that redeeming activity, which pleads even for the godless and restores not only Israel but the world; his holiness acquires its deepest meaning as the moral governance of the universe or the inconceivable power of love which suffers for the sake of the condemned, until it has achieved his salvation. Thus the ultimate secret of the divine personhood is manifested as love concealed in wrath, redeeming righteousness, the lovingkindness that remains constant despite the instability of the covenant.*²⁰⁶

When Yahweh says 'I will not break my covenant forever', he has put himself at risk; he has gone out on a limb; he has exposed himself to abuse; because he has given up his most powerful negotiating point, which is the possibility of abandoning Israel. The Israelites may weep, but they can breathe a little easier because they do not wonder if Yahweh is about to leave them altogether. For Yahweh, however, the covenant is not a matter of negotiation; the covenant is a gift, not a negotiated agreement. It is not a symbolic relationship, not a metaphor, not a philosophical idea. He has bound himself to Israel forever. He will be king even if Israel looks to other kings. He will be God even if Israel bows to other gods. He will be a husband even if Israel goes whoring after other lovers. With the covenant Yahweh frees Israel and binds himself. 'I will not break my covenant forever'—It is the greatest test of God's integrity. God tested Israel in the wilderness and Israel failed. Israel tested

²⁰⁶ Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 288.

God in the wilderness, and God almost failed; in Judges God is tested again. 'I will not break my covenant forever'—It is God's passion for his people, his jealousy for their affection. It is his promise to the fathers, and it is his promise to the children. 'Forever' means he is not a fickle God, not a flippant God, not a capricious God. 'I will be your God' . . . forever. 'You will be my people' . . . forever. 'I will not break my covenant forever'—It is God's loyalty to his people and his challenge to them to reciprocate that loyalty. It is a quintessential Word of God, a Word that carries the oath of Yahweh, who swears on himself because he can swear on none greater.

CHAPTER 6

'DO NOT FEAR' THE OTHER GODS: YAHWEH'S ASSURANCE AND ISRAEL'S ANXIETY

6.1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to hear Yahweh's second speech to Israel (Judg. 6.7-10), in which he once again confronts the Israelites for their lack of faithfulness to him. In addition to the analysis of the speech itself, I observe both (1) the setting for the speech, that is, the narrative that leads up to it; and (2) the connections of the speech to the Gideon cycle that follows. In Judg. 6, Yahweh utilizes as his messenger a nameless prophet, whose retelling of the Exodus culminates in the giving of the land to Israel. He then reminds the Israelites of Yahweh's earlier word not to 'fear' (יִרָא) the foreign gods, and he concludes his speech with the assessment that Israel does not 'hear' (שָׁמַע) the voice of Yahweh. Themes from the speech are carried forward into the Gideon story, suggesting that Yahweh's speech is an integral part of the larger cycle that spans Judg. 6.1-8.35.¹

6.2. RISING TENSION

Three cycles of idolatry, suffering, and salvation occur between Yahweh's first speech to Israel in Judg. 2 and his second speech in Judg. 6.² Yahweh raises up Othniel, Ehud, and Deborah as judges who facilitate Yahweh's deliverance over Israel's oppressors, and these judges are followed by tranquil periods of forty, eighty, and forty years respectively.³ With each cycle the narratives grow longer and the characters grow more numerous and more complex. Othniel's story is no more

¹ Cf. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 147, n. 178.

² As I stated in Ch. 4, the cycle does not indicate that Israel repents, only that they cry out to Yahweh. Cf. Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, p. 155; and Scherman, *Joshua/Judges*, p. 153.

³ The minor judge Shamgar is named after Ehud, but no chronology is attached to his rule.

than a summary of the cyclical pattern, a mere five verses: (1) The Israelites do evil in the sight of Yahweh (3.7); (2) Yahweh grows angry and delivers Israel to an oppressor (3.8); (3) The Israelites cry out to Yahweh (3.9); (4) Yahweh raises up Othniel as savior (3.9); (5) Yahweh delivers the enemy into the hand of Othniel (3.10); and (6) the land has rest for forty years (3.11). The next cycle, which tells the story of Ehud, consumes nineteen verses, in which every part of the cycle is expanded. Then, after the one verse devoted to Shamgar, the Deborah cycle requires fifty-four verses.

Deborah is introduced as a prophet who is 'judging Israel' (4.4, 5).⁴ She summons Barak and by the word of the Lord she commissions him to attack King Jabin of Canaan, who had oppressed the Israelites for twenty years. Because Barak insists that Deborah accompany him to the battle, she proclaims that the glory of victory will go to a woman.⁵ That woman turns out to be Jael the Kenite, who drives a tent peg through the head of Sisera, the leader of Jabin's armies. The war is followed by a victory song that glorifies Yahweh, Deborah, Barak and Jael, and makes a mockery of Sisera and his defeat. The song of victory is longer than the prose narrative, and its placement at the end of the Deborah cycle leaves the hearer quite hopeful concerning Israel's future. The song concludes with these words: 'Thus

⁴ I find it ironic that after the words of Deut. 18.15, 'The Lord will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers', the first person who is called a prophet is not a 'brother' but a 'sister'. Her prophetic role is downplayed by Gray, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, p. 171, who names the prophet of Judg. 6.7 as the 'first emergence of the prophet in Israel'. For the role of Deborah, see Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, pp. 209-210, who in reflecting on the role of Deborah observes that 'the only judge who combines all forms of leadership possible—religious, military, juridical, and poetical—is a woman and calls herself and/or is addressed as "a mother in Israel"'. Bal and other interpreters such as Elie Assis, 'Man, Woman, and God in Judg 4', *Sjot* 20, no. 1 (2006), p. 111, are correct to point out the uniqueness of Deborah's judgeship, but they fail to recognize that each of the judges is unique. I would argue that even though the narrative of Judges is carried forward by a cyclical pattern, there is no pattern for the judges themselves, and it is their divergencies not their correspondences that create depth in the story and sustain interest.

⁵ In the poetic version of the battle (Judg. 5), Deborah is portrayed as the leader of the army. Cf. Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (AB Reference Library; New York: Doubleday, 1998), p. 31.

all your enemies will perish, O Lord; but those who love you are like the rising of the sun in its strength' (5.31).⁶

The mood of hope and optimism created by the song of Deborah is replaced immediately by a mood of extreme desperation⁷ when the Israelites rebel yet again (6.1), and Yahweh gives them into the hand of the Midianites and Amalekites,⁸ who for seven years rob the Israelites of their crops and livestock, leaving the land impoverished and the people helpless.⁹ The narrative portrays Israel's suffering as more severe than in earlier cycles, a fact that builds the tension to a higher level, indicating that 'things may be getting worse'.¹⁰ For the first time in Judges, the Israelites resort to hiding in the hills and caves as protection from the invading enemy (6.2). Furthermore, the enemy destroys all crops (6.3-4) and livestock (6.4), and they encamp on Israelite land in massive numbers, 'like locusts for multitude; they and their camels without number, and they came into the land to destroy it' (6.5),¹¹ bringing their own livestock that graze on Israelite land (6.4,5). The fact that the Midianites repeatedly encamp on Israelite land, bring in their livestock for grazing and strip the land completely bare (6.4) suggests more than temporary military incursions.¹² Thus, the oppression of the Midianites and the Amalekites goes beyond occasional raids and beyond the actions of earlier enemies who are

⁶ This mention of Yahweh worshippers as 'those who love' him is a rare early acknowledgement of the emotional aspect of Israelite religion according to Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, I, p. 251.

⁷ Cf. Scherman, *Joshua/Judges*, p. 151; and Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 144.

⁸ Midianites and Amalekites are 'echoes from the past' according to Wilcock, *Message of Judges*, p. 76, who points out that Moses' wife was Midianite (Exod. 2.15-22) and that early in the Israelites wilderness journey they were attacked by the Amalekites (Exod. 17.8). See also Num. 31.1-12 and Deut. 25.17-19.

⁹ Archaeological evidence suggests that early Israelite settlements had little or no fortifications, therefore, the kind of conflicts described in Judg. 6.1-6 are believable. Cf. A. Graeme Auld, 'Gideon: Hacking at the Heart of the Old Testament', *VT* 39 (1989), p. 259.

¹⁰ McCann, *Judges*, p. 63.

¹¹ The enormity of the Midianite invasion is stressed again, later in the narrative, when the immensity of the Midianite army is placed in contrast (7.12) to the small number of Gideon's soldiers after God reduces Gideon's army of 32,000 down to a force of only 300 (7.2-7).

¹² The verb forms *וְהָיָה*, *וְעָלָה*, *וְעָלָה* (6.3), *וְעָלָה*, and *וְבָאוּ* (6.5) are repetitive/habitual. Cf. Wilcock, *Message of Judges*, p. 77; Niccacci, *Syntax*, pp. 181-83; and Van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, pp. 148, 169.

satisfied to rule over the Israelites and collect tribute. The Midianites are not content to rule or to rob the Israelites; apparently they are intent upon rendering the land uninhabitable for the Israelites, thus displacing them entirely.¹³ The intensity of oppression is amplified further by the repetition of the cry of the Israelites. In earlier cycles, their cry to Yahweh is mentioned only once, but in this cycle it is stated twice (6.6, 7).¹⁴

6.3. YAHWEH'S PROPHET

As before, the Israelites cry out to Yahweh for help, but he does not immediately raise up for them a savior: 'The Israelites cried to Yahweh because of the Midianites, and Yahweh sent a prophet to the Israelites' (6.7-8).¹⁵ The usual cyclical pattern is interrupted when, before he raises up a deliverer, Yahweh sends to them an unnamed prophet.¹⁶ This makes two consecutive cycles in which a prophet has entered the story at precisely the same point, and the reader might anticipate that this prophet would function as a judge, in much the same fashion as Deborah

¹³ Cf. Lieberman, *The Eternal Torah: A New Commentary Utilizing Ancient and Modern Sources in a Grammatical, Historical, and Traditional Explanation of the Text*, p. 116. This is contra Bernon Lee, 'Fragmentation of Reader Focus in the Preamble to Battle in Judges 6:1-7:14', *JSOT* 25 (2002), pp. 71-72, who limits his description of the Midianite threat as a 'series of raids'. Gaining control of the trade route may be the Midianite objective, which requires the removal of the Israelites. Cf. Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh*, p. 432.

¹⁴ See Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 145; who argues that the repetition is part of a literary technique that progresses from complaint to response.

¹⁵ Judg. 6.7-10 is not found in the Qumran scrolls. Only three short MSS of the book of Judges survive from Qumran, and only 4QJudg^a preserves the section of the scroll that would contain 6.7-10. The brief MS, however, omits Judg. 6.7-10, suggesting the existence of a text of Judges that is shorter than the MT. All other extant Hebrew and Greek witnesses include Judg. 6.7-10. The existence of a text that is different from the MT is not surprising, however, given the variations in the LXX of Judges, and the variety of text types that find witness among the scrolls of other biblical books. The Judges MSS are published in Eugene Ulrich and Frank Moore Cross, *Qumran Cave 4, IX: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Kings* (Discoveries in the Judaean Desert, 14; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). See Julio Trebole Barrera, 'Textual Variants in 4QJudg^a and the Textual and Editorial History of the Book of Judges', *RevQ* 14 (1989), pp. 229-45, who concludes that the Qumran MS represents a text that is earlier than the MT; but see also Richard S. Hess, 'The Dead Sea Scrolls and Higher Criticism of the Hebrew Bible: The Case of 4QJudg^a', *The Scrolls and the Scriptures* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 122-28, who argues that the evidence is too slim to make a determination.

¹⁶ Cf. Claassens, 'Character of God', p. 56. Cf. Olson, 'Judges', p. 792.

functioned in the previous cycle.¹⁷ This prophet, however, brings a new complication to the deepening narrative conflict and functions differently from Deborah in at least three ways: (1) the nameless prophet addresses the whole people of Israel, whereas Deborah addresses only Barak, an individual; (2) Deborah arises with an encouraging word of victory, but the anonymous prophet brings a stinging word of reprimand;¹⁸ and (3) the prophet of chapter 6 interrupts the cyclical pattern while Deborah functions within the pattern, fulfilling the role of judge.¹⁹

The prophet of Judg. 6 is the first anonymous prophet in the Hebrew Scriptures,²⁰ and according to Schneider 'the absence of name, place, and tribal affiliation may lend this prophet a pan-Israelite perspective'.²¹ Furthermore, his lack of identification and his flatness of character assigns to him the narrative role of 'agent' or functionary character rather than full-fledged character.²² Therefore, he is somewhat invisible to the hearer, who perceives him as nothing more than the voice of Yahweh. That is, since the prophet is not named, the hearer of the prophecy is not drawn to facts about the prophet's identity; and the attention of the hearer is devoted entirely to the content of the prophetic word. His identity is unimportant in any case since (unlike Deborah) his role does not continue in the larger narrative.²³

¹⁷ According to Klein, *Triumph of Irony*, p. 50, the reader may expect this prophet to be even more effective than Deborah, but he is not effective at all.

¹⁸ Cf. Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, p. 169.

¹⁹ Cf. Olson, 'Judges', pp. 795-96.

²⁰ Jewish tradition names Phinehas as the prophet here and throughout the book of Judges. Cf. Scherman, *Joshua/Judges*, p. 153.

²¹ Schneider, *Judges*, p. 102.

²² I adopt the term 'agent' from Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 23-32. Literary terminology can be confusing at times; cf., e.g., Mieke Bal, *Narratology*, pp. 23-32, who uses the term 'actor' instead of 'character' and who designates the narrator as 'agent'. Structuralists use the term 'actant' instead of 'character', but an actant is not really the same as a character. 'Actant' is the term used by A. J. Greimas, *Sémantique Structurale, Recherche de Méthode* (Paris: Larousse, 1966), p. 199, to designate a role whose function in the deep structure is anterior to the character who is manifested in the surface structure.

²³ Contra Claassens, 'Character of God', p. 56, who confuses the prophet of 6.7-10 with the angel of Yahweh who appears to Gideon in 6.11. Also, in claiming the support of Fretheim she misrepresents his view, since he makes no mention of the prophet but speaks only of the angel of Yahweh. Cf.

6.3.1. The Word of Yahweh

The prophet is sent by Yahweh in response to the cries of the Israelites, but the setting of the speech is not revealed. The scarcity of specifics about the prophet and the occasion of his speech stands in stark contrast to the preceding detailed account of the Midianite threat (6.1-6). Without delay, the prophet speaks the word of the Lord to the Israelites:

Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, 'I myself brought you up from Egypt, and I brought you out from the house of slavery. And I delivered you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors, and I dispossessed them from before you, and I gave you their land. And I said to you, "I am Yahweh your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell", but you did not hear my voice' (Judg. 6.8-10).

By introducing his speech with the messenger formula (כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה) the prophet declares his intention to speak words that are not his own; they are the words of Yahweh.²⁴ As words of Yahweh, they are words invested with ultimate authority and worthy of the hearer's undivided attention. At this point in the biblical narrative, the messenger formula serves as a prestigious introduction since it is used previously only by Moses and Joshua.²⁵ Its most recent appearance in Israel's story (Josh. 24.2) introduces a speech that bears numerous similarities to Judg. 6.7-10. Joshua's farewell address to Israel includes the following prophetic word:

'Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, . . . "I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea; . . . But when they cried out to Yahweh, He put darkness between you and the Egyptians . . . Then I brought you into the land of the Amorites who lived beyond the Jordan, and they fought with

Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Overtures to Biblical Theology, 14; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 93.

²⁴ Analysis of prophetic speech forms was begun by Hermann Gunkel, *Die Propheten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1917); and the standard work is Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (trans. H. C. White; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), who discusses the messenger formula on pp. 98-128. While recent works on prophetic speech are rare, see section 4 of Marvin A. Sweeney and Ehud Ben Zvi, *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 269-325, for a commendable attempt to place form criticism within the current *Sitz im Leben* of biblical studies.

²⁵ Exod. 4.22; 5.1; 7.17; 8.1; 8.20; 9.1; 9.13; 10.3; 11.4; 32.27; Josh. 7.13; 24.2. Although Joshua functions as a prophet, he is never designated as a prophet. Judg. 6.8 is the only occurrence of the messenger formula in Judges, and it appears next in the mouth of another nameless prophet who speaks a word of judgment to Eli (1 Sam. 2.27).

you; and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land when I destroyed them before you. Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel, . . . and I delivered you from his hand . . . And now, fear Yahweh and serve him . . . choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the **gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living** . . . And the people answered and said, 'Far be it from us that we should forsake Yahweh to serve other gods; for Yahweh our God is **He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, And Yahweh dispossessed from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land**' . . . Yahweh we will serve, and **his voice we will hear** . . . and Joshua made a covenant with the people. (Josh. 24.2-25, emphasis added to show parallels to Judg. 6).

Judg. 6.7-10 names seven specific aspects of the saving exploits of Yahweh, all of which are allusions to the passage in Joshua: (1) he brought up (הֶעֱלִיתִי) Israel from Egypt; (2) he brought them out (וַאֲצִיא) of Egypt; (3) he brought them out from the house of bondage (עֲבָדִים); (4) he delivered them (וַאֲצִל); (5) he delivered them from the hand (מִיַּד) of the enemy; (6) he dispossessed the inhabitants (וַאֲנָרַשׁ) from before Israel; and (7) he gave (וַאֲתַנְּה) Israel the land. Furthermore, unlike other recitations of the Exodus, both Josh. 24 and Judg. 6 name specifically the Amorites as the primary enemy, and they contain the identical phrase, 'the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living' (24.15) as well as the phrases 'thus says Yahweh' (24.2) and 'they cried unto Yahweh' (24.7). Furthermore, although Joshua does not include the exact words: 'You shall not fear the gods of the Amorites' (Judg. 2.10), the command is implied in Joshua's insistence that Israel 'fear' (יִרָא) Yahweh and that they choose either Yahweh or the gods of the Amorites (24.14, 15).²⁶ In light of the obvious parallels between Judg. 6 and Josh. 24, the hearer of Yahweh's second speech in

²⁶ It might be argued that these correspondences are coincidental allusions to a common traditional confession concerning the Exodus and the conquest. Although I agree to the existence of Israelite confessional formulas, I strongly resist the argument that the similarities of these two texts are accidental, since there is no other text in the Hebrew Bible that includes even half of the parallels mentioned above. The text that is most similar to Josh. 24.2-10 and Judg. 6.8-10 is 1 Sam. 10.18: 'Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you' (emphasis added to show parallels to Judg. 6). Another text includes three of the elements: (1) he brought them up; (3) he brought them out of the house of bondage; and (7) he gives them the land (Exod. 13.3-5). Seven other texts combine 'land of Egypt' and 'house of bondage' (Exod. 13.14; 20.2; Deut. 5.6; 6.12; 8.14; 13.5; and 13.10).

Judges might recall the covenant renewal ceremony of Joshua and Israel's subsequent violations of the covenant.²⁷ Also, it should not be overlooked that both passages depend heavily on the Exodus tradition, a theme that is carried forward from Yahweh's first speech (Judg. 2.1-5) and is continued into the Gideon narrative (6.13).

Just as surely as the messenger formula in Judg. 6.7-10 reveals that the speaker is Yahweh, the verb forms in the passage indicate that he is the primary character within the speech itself. The first six verbs have Yahweh as their subject: (1) 'I myself I brought you up (אָנֹכִי הֶעֱלִיתִי) from Egypt'; (2) 'I brought you out (וְאֶצִּיא) from the house of bondage'; (3) 'I delivered you (וְאֶצִּיל) from the hand of Egypt'; (4) 'I dispossessed them (וְאֶגְרֹשׁ) from before you'; (5) I gave to you (וְאֶתְּנֶה) their land'; and (6) 'I said to you, "You shall not fear (לֹא תִירָאוּ) the gods of the Amorites"'. Walter Brueggemann observes the prominence of these verbs in Israel's testimony and notes the fact that Yahweh serves as the subject of the action,²⁸ but in the narrative of Judges (and other texts as well) these declarations are more than Israel's testimony about Yahweh; they are represented as Yahweh's self-testimony. Thus, by this unbroken series of assertions, Yahweh claims to be Israel's God, Israel's savior, Israel's victor, and Israel's provider. There can be no doubt, therefore, that he has been faithful in the past; and, by implication, he continues to be faithful in the present. The emphasis upon the person of Yahweh is strengthened further by the emphatic pronoun that precedes the first verb. This combination of pronoun and

²⁷ Yahweh's first speech (Judg. 2.1-5) also alluded heavily to the final words of Joshua. See my discussion in Ch. 5. It has been argued that Yahweh's speeches in Judg. 6.8-10 and 10.6-16 and Jephthah's interchange with the king of Ammon in Judg. 11.11-28 have their origins in the covenant lawsuit, which has been adapted here to serve narrative purposes. Cf. Walter Beyerlin, 'Gattung und Herkunft des Rahmens im Richterbuch', in Ernst Würthwein and Otto Kaiser (eds.), *Tradition und Situation: Studien zur alttestamentlichen Prophetie. Artur Weiser zum 70 Geburtstag* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), pp. 27-29; and O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 193, who provides an extensive bibliography on the covenant lawsuit.

²⁸ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 176.

verb produces a phrase that occurs here for the first time in the Old Testament: 'I myself brought you up (אָנֹכִי הֶעֱלִיתִי) from Egypt'.²⁹ Yahweh alone is Israel's savior.

Because the Israelites are overpowered by the Midianites they cry out to Yahweh for his assistance, and because of their cry he sends the prophet who speaks a word that is both assuring and accusatory. It is a word of assurance in that Yahweh reaffirms his power to save, and it is accusatory in that once again he points the Israelites to their deafness and disobedience.

6.3.1.1. *Yahweh's Saving Power*

As in his first speech to the Israelites (2.1-5), Yahweh begins his address with a reminder of the Exodus: 'I myself brought you up (אָנֹכִי הֶעֱלִיתִי) from Egypt' (6.8).³⁰ Some four generations have passed since the first speech, however, and the Exodus is now an even more distant event than it had been when the angel of the Lord spoke of it. During that interim God has saved the Israelites from three enemies, demonstrating that 'the God of the exodus continues to effect a series of new exoduses throughout the book of Judges'.³¹ Nevertheless, the situation of the Israelites has deteriorated significantly, and this testimony of the Exodus serves as reassurance that Yahweh 'acts powerfully on behalf of Israel when Israel is helpless and has no power of her own',³² and that the power of Yahweh 'is more than a match for the powers of oppression',³³ powers which are embodied in the Midianite encampments.

In light of the severity of the hardships that are imposed upon the Israelites by the Midianites, the use of the verbs הלל and עלה (6.6 and 6.8) is suggestive. The

²⁹ This combination of pronoun and verb (אָנֹכִי הֶעֱלִיתִי) is found only in two other OT texts: 1 Sam. 10.18 and Amos 2.10.

³⁰ Although I will not repeat my entire foregoing discussion of the Exodus imagery (Ch. 5), a few additional comments are in order here.

³¹ McCann, *Judges*, p. 63.

³² Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible Makes Sense* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1977), p. 64

³³ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 174.

Israelites who are 'brought very low (דלל) because of Midian' (6.6, NASB),³⁴ are now reminded of the time when Yahweh brought them up (עלה) out of Egypt (6.8). The Hebrew verb דלל is used in other biblical texts in relation to conditions of suffering that lead to calls for divine aid: 'May your compassion come quickly to meet us; for we are brought very low' (Ps. 79.8); 'I was brought low, and he saved me' (Ps. 116.6); 'Give heed to my cry, for I am brought very low; deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me' (Ps. 142.6). By the oppressive acts of the Midianites, the Israelites are brought 'low', but they can be brought 'up' by the power of Yahweh, who brought them up from Egypt.

The Exodus theme is expanded further by Yahweh's second affirmation: 'I brought you out (ואצייא) from house of bondage' (6.8). The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt; they had belonged to the household of bondage; but Yahweh had brought them out. The reference to the slavery may cause the Israelites to compare their current extreme situation to the earlier Egyptian bondage. Is it possible that they had been brought so low by the Midianites that their condition was as woeful to them as slavery? Even so, Yahweh, who had brought them out from the house of bondage, is able to bring them out from their enslavement to the Midianites.

Yahweh continues his speech with a third reference to the Exodus: 'I delivered you (ואציל) from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors (לְהַצִּיבְכֶם)' (6.9).³⁵ Yahweh not only reiterates his act of delivering the Israelites from Egypt, but he expands that deliverance to include his rescue from their enemies subsequent to the Exodus. Because the two objects are predicated upon only one verb, the reader might infer that the Exodus serves as the paradigm for Yahweh's subsequent saving acts.

³⁴ Cf. Brown *et al.*, *BDB*, p. 195.

³⁵ The phrase 'from the hand of the Egyptians' (מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם) precedes Judg. 6.9 only in Exod. 3.8; 14.30; 18.9; and 18.10.

It is from the 'hand' (יד) of Egypt and subsequent enemies that Yahweh has delivered Israel. Forty-nine times in the book of Judges the word 'hand' serves as a metaphor for 'power'.³⁶ On one occasion the enemy is subdued under (תחת) the hand of the Israelites (3.30), and ten times a reversal of power is signified by either Israel or the Canaanites being sold (מכר) or given (נתן) into the hand of the other. Furthermore, the metaphorical use of the hand to signify power (6.9) combines with the term 'oppressors' (לְהַצִּיבֹתָם) to form a graphic depiction of Israel's plight. Since 'oppressors' is a participle of the Hebrew לחץ, which means literally 'squeeze',³⁷ the image is that of Israel being squeezed in the hand of the Midianites, causing both 'physical and psychological oppression'.³⁸ God, however, affirms that he has delivered the Israelites from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all other oppressors,³⁹ with the implication that he is now able to deliver them from the hand of the Midianites.

The interval between the Exodus and Judges 6 includes numerous episodes of divine intervention, in which Yahweh saves the Israelites by the agency of Joshua, Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, and Deborah; but this is the first use in Judges of the word 'deliver' (נצל).⁴⁰ The term is used fourteen times in the book of Exodus, for example: 'I have come down to **deliver** them from the hand of the Egyptians' (Exod. 3.8); 'I am Yahweh, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will **deliver** you from their bondage' (Exod. 6.6); and 'Blessed be Yahweh, who has

³⁶ Judg. 1.2; 1.4; 1.35; 2.14, 15, 16, 18, 23; 3.8, 10, 28, 30; 4.2, 7, 9, 14, 24; 6.1, 2, 9, 36, 37; 7.2, 7, 9, 11, 14, 15; 8.3, 7, 22, 34; 9.17, 29; 10.7, 12; 11.21, 30, 32; 12.2; 13.1, 5; 15.12, 13; 15.18; 16.23, 24; 18.10; 20.28. Also, the word 'palm' (פף) means 'power' in Judg. 6.13, 14; 8.6, 15; and 12.3. Cf. Brown *et al.*, *BDB*, p. 389; Holladay, *Lexicon*, p. 128; and Köhler, *HALOT*, I, p. 888.

³⁷ Brown *et al.*, *BDB*, p. 537. Cf. Clines, *DCH*, IV, p. 539.

³⁸ I. Swart, 'לחץ', in Willem Van Gemeren (ed.), *NIDOTE* (5 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), II, p. 792.

³⁹ The most recent enemy who is called an 'oppressor' of Israel is Jabin, king of Canaan (Judg. 4.3).

⁴⁰ In chs. 1-5, the idea of Yahweh's rescue is indicated by the phrases 'Yahweh saved (ישע) Israel' (2.16, 18; 3.9, 15, 31) and 'Yahweh subdued (כניע) the enemy' (3.30; 4.23).

delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians' (Exod. 18.10). The verb נָצַל is quite forceful, as Brueggemann explains, 'This verb references an abrupt physical act of grasping or seizing—often, as here, grasping or seizing in order to pull out of danger . . . Israel is "snatched" out of the danger of Egyptian slavery in a forceful, physical gesture by Yahweh'.⁴¹ The Israelites are now languishing in the 'hand of the Midianites' (6.1), but the same God who had snatched them from the 'hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all' their oppressors (6.9) can now snatch them away from the power of the Midianites.

6.3.1.2. *Yahweh's Giving of the Land*

Not only does Yahweh reassure the Israelites of his power to save, he also assures them of his power to secure the land of promise. In his first speech, he states that he brought them into the land that he swore to their fathers (2.2), putting the emphasis upon the inviolability of his oath and the fulfillment of his promise. There Yahweh stresses that the Israelites' entrance into the land is tied directly to the patriarchal promise and that their continued possession of the land is dependent upon their faithfulness to their covenant relationship to Yahweh. In his second speech, however, he concludes the Exodus narrative by highlighting two other elements of the Israelite settlement: (1) his removal of the Canaanite inhabitants and (2) his

⁴¹ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 174. Cf. Köhler, *HALOT*, I. 717, who offers the translation 'to tear from'.

granting of the land to the Israelites as a gift.⁴² He says, 'I dispossessed them (וַאֲנִי־גֵרַשְׁתִּי) from before you and I gave (וַאֲנִי־תַנְתֵּנָהּ)⁴³ to you their land' (6.9).

In Yahweh's first speech to the Israelites, he uses the same verb of dispossession (גֵרַשְׁתִּי) but with different effect. There Yahweh concludes that he will not dispossess the Canaanites but will allow them to remain as thorns and snares (Judg. 2.3). In Judges 6, however, the emphasis is on the completion of the conquest, apparently recalling the victories of Joshua's campaign. As far back as the book of Exodus, Yahweh promises to drive out the Canaanites in order to create a land for the Israelites.⁴⁴ In the wilderness of Sinai God says:

I will drive out (גֵרַשְׁתִּי) before you the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite. Beware, that you do not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, or it will be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves. For you shall worship no other god: for Yahweh, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God (Exod. 34.11-14).

After Yahweh dispossesses the inhabitants of Canaan he gives (נָתַן) their land to the Israelites (6.9), bringing to mind his earlier word: 'I will bring you to the land . . . and I will give (נָתַן) it to you for a possession; I am Yahweh' (Exod. 6.8).⁴⁵

Although the Canaanites are more numerous and stronger than the Israelites (Deut. 4.38), Yahweh promises to drive them out and give the land to the Israelites as an

⁴² For theological reflections on the land as a gift from Yahweh, see David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (JSOTSup, 10; Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1978), pp. 52-58; Norman C. Habel, *The Land Is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies* (Overture to Biblical Theology; Minneapolis, MN: John Knox Press, 1995); Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2nd edn, 2002); Goldingay, *OT Theology: Israel's Gospel*, pp. 451-528; and Martens, *God's Design*, pp. 97-116. On the historical critical questions surrounding the theme of land see Georg Strecker (ed.) *Das Land Israel in biblischer Zeit: Jerusalem-Symposium 1981 der Hebräischen Universität und der Georg-August-Universität* (Göttinger theologische Arbeiten, Bd. 25; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983).

⁴³ For וַאֲנִי־תַנְתֵּנָהּ and וַאֲנִי־גֵרַשְׁתִּי (6.10) see Wilhelm Gesenius, E. Kautzsch, and A. E. Cowley, *GKC* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2d English edn, 1910), p. 134, who writes that the ה is not unusual. The form וַאֲנִי־תַנְתֵּנָהּ is found 32 times in the OT, and וַאֲנִי־גֵרַשְׁתִּי is found 27 times. For a diachronic explanation of the forms, see Waltke and O'Connor, *Hebrew Syntax*, p. 576. That these forms are emphatic is claimed by A. Cohen, *Joshua and Judges: Hebrew Text and English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (London: Soncino Press, 1950), p. 206.

⁴⁴ See Exod. 23.27-31; 33.2; Num. 33.52-55; Deut. 4.38; 11.23-25; Josh. 3.10.

⁴⁵ For other examples of Yahweh's promise 'to give' the land to Israel, see Exod. 12.25; Lev. 14.34; 20.23-24; 23.10; 25.2; Num. 15.2; Deut. 1.8; 4.1.

inheritance. Martens writes, 'Israel cannot take the land or grasp it. The land is beyond her power to acquire. It can be hers only as a gift'.⁴⁶ The gift of land, however, must not be taken for granted, for all land ultimately belongs to Yahweh (Lev. 25.23), and as surely as he gives the land to the Israelites he can withhold it from them (Deut. 28.21). In order to maintain possession of the land, the Israelites must remain faithful to their Yahweh, their covenant king, who sets before the Israelites both promise and warning:

. . . you shall eat your bread until you are full, and dwell in your land safely. And I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid the land of evil beasts, neither shall the sword go through your land . . . I am Yahweh your God, who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves . . . But if you will not hear me . . . I will set my face against you, and you shall be slain before your enemies; they that hate you shall reign over you (Lev. 26.6-17).

In Judges 6 the promise of a fruitful and secure land is imperiled by the invasion of Midianites. Yahweh's promise to make the land fruitful (Lev. 26.4) is threatened by the Midianites, who destroy 'the increase of the land' (6.4), the fruit, the crops and the livestock. The Israelites should be eating bread until they are full (Lev. 26.5), but the Midianite strategy leaves nothing to support the Israelites and their families. The Israelites should be living in safety, without fear (Lev. 26.5, 6), but because of the Midianites, they flee to the caves and hiding places in the hills. If the Israelites had been faithful, the land would be free of conflict (Lev. 26.6), but in Judges 6 the hordes of Midianites enter 'the land to destroy it', driving the Israelites out of the land.

It is universally recognized that the theme of 'the land' is central to the book of Joshua, yet I would suggest that its importance to the book of Judges has not been fully appreciated. The fulfillment of Yahweh's promise of rest in the land is reflected

⁴⁶ Martens, *God's Design*, p. 104. Cf. Brueggemann, *The Land*, p. 3.

in the refrain, 'and the land rested' (3.11, 30; 5.31; 8.28).⁴⁷ The land is given to Israel as a place of rest, safety, and security (Deut. 12.9-10), thus the land is the place where Israel enjoys 'freedom from harassment of enemies'.⁴⁸ In Judges 6, the harassing attacks of the Midianites disturb the promised rest and threaten to destabilize the Israelites' settlement of the land and to endanger their future in Canaan.⁴⁹ I would suggest that Judges represents a significant time of transition between the conquest of Joshua and the settled period of the monarchy in which the Israelites face repeatedly the threat of losing the land because of their erratic and unfaithful behavior.⁵⁰

The word 'land' (אֶרֶץ) occurs sixty times in the book, and the theme of 'land' surfaces in crucial locations throughout Judges. The first verse of Judges points to the conquest of the land as the goal of the Israelites when they ask Yahweh, 'Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites?' Yahweh responds by appointing Judah as the leader and then announcing, 'Behold, I have delivered the land into his hand' (1.2). Chapter one concludes its listing of tribal battles by stating ominously

⁴⁷ Although Pentecostalism has not fully explicated the theological implications of the biblical promise of land, the images of land as salvation, land as blessing, land as home, and land as eschatological inheritance are pervasive within the Pentecostal ethos, particularly as it relates to the kingdom of God. In addition to the metaphorical significance of the land, Pentecostal theology has pressed the expectation of universal apocalyptic recreation in which Yahweh's claiming of the land for Israel stands as a foretaste of his ultimate redemption of the entire earth for his glory and for his people, who live in the present age as sojourners. These concrete images of hope account partially for the attractiveness of Pentecostalism to the poor and marginalized who receive in the church a place of belonging and a place of safety both now and in the world to come. Cf. Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Johns, *Pentecostal Formation*, pp. 62-110; Bomann, *Faith in the Barrios*, pp. 37-38; and Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, pp. 45, 59, 61, 82, 167, 170. On the apocalyptic vision of Pentecostalism, see Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, pp. 58-121. For a more political perspective, see Ogba Kalu, 'Modelling the Genealogy and Character of Global Pentecostalism: An African Perspective', The 35th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Pasadena, CA (2006), who challenges Pentecostals to embrace the 'reclamation, redemption, and liberation of the land'.

⁴⁸ Martens, *God's Design*, p. 107. Cf. Josh. 1.13, 15; 21.44; 22.4; 23. On the promised land as rest, cf. Goldingay, *OT Theology: Israel's Gospel*, p. 516.

⁴⁹ The importance of land can hardly be overstated since 'Land is a central, if not the central theme of biblical faith', Brueggemann, *The Land*, p. 3.

⁵⁰ The epilogue of Judges seems to use the idolatry and moral degradation of the Judges period as justification for the later institution of monarchy. Historically, however, it may be also the constant threat of losing the land that motivates the Israelites to inaugurate the monarchy. Cf. Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh*, p. 431, who writes, 'Possibly we should look to the role of the Midianites . . . as a decisive factor in hastening and strengthening monarchic institutions'.

that the Amorites have reclaimed their land from the Danites (1.34). Consequently, for the tribe of Dan, the loss of land is more than a possibility; it is a reality.⁵¹ Yahweh responds immediately to the loss of land with his first speech to the Israelites, in which he reminds them that he had sworn to their ancestors to give them this land (2.1). Then, at the beginning of the second part of the prologue, which retells the final days of Joshua, the narrator says, 'And when Joshua had let the people go, the Israelites went each to his inheritance to possess the land' (2.6). The prologue to Judges, therefore, establishes the land as an objective to be gained by conquest, as a possession that can be lost, as a fulfillment of Yahweh's promise, and as an inheritance to be obtained. Every subsequent cycle of sin and oppression conveys the possibility of loss of land; and at the end of the first four cycles comes the refrain, 'And the land rested' (3.11, 30; 5.31; 8.28).

A sustained concern for the land is evident in the Jephthah cycle. Jephthah himself is a man without land, having been disinherited by his family and expelled from his community (11.2-3). When the elders of Gilead decide to seek Jephthah as military leader, he is not even living in Gilead, so they go 'to fetch him from the land of Tob' (11.5). Having been received back into the community, Jephthah subsequently lays claim to the land in his diplomatic letter to the king of Ammon in which he writes, 'Why have you come against me to fight in my land?' (11.12). The Ammonite king responds to Jephthah with his own claim to the land, saying that the Israelites came up out of Egypt and 'seized my land' (11.13); therefore, he demands that the Israelites restore those lands to him. Jephthah argues in return that all lands east of the Jordan were taken by the Israelites in self-defense when the inhabitants refused to allow them to pass through peaceably (11.20-21); and, therefore, the Israelites 'possessed all the land of the Amorites' (11.21). Furthermore, Jephthah

⁵¹ Dan's quest for land is resumed and completed successfully in the epilogue to Judges (18.1-31).

credits Yahweh as the one who dispossessed the Amorites and gave the land to the Israelites (11.23), and Yahweh is the one to whom Jephthah looks for victory (11.9, 24, 27). Consequently, Jephthah will not surrender the land in which he now enjoys a new position of status and a reborn sense of belonging. Having suffered previously the loss of land and the pain of exile, he is not willing to relinquish that which has been restored to him. Immediately after Jephthah's fervent defense of Israel's claim upon the land and his submission of the case to Yahweh as judge (11.27); Yahweh, who had threatened not to help Israel any more (10.12), shows himself once again to be the God of surprising grace and sends his empowering Spirit upon Jephthah (11.29). Could it be that Jephthah's concern for the land awakens Yahweh to action and moves him to put his Spirit upon Jephthah?

The theme of land is explored further in two other texts that deserve mention. First, when the Philistines captured Samson and brought him to their festival for entertainment, they spoke of him as 'the destroyer of our land' (16.24). In doing so they reveal the question of perspective, for earlier it is the Midianites who are portrayed by the Israelites as oppressors who enter 'the land to destroy it' (6.5), but from the Philistine perspective it is Samson who is guilty of bringing destruction. Second, by making mention of the 'exile of the land' (18.30), the narrative makes explicit what is implicit throughout Judges—that the land can be lost.⁵²

The prophet's reminder of God's past acts of deliverance serves to highlight the plight of the Israelites in Judges 6. In Abraham the Israelites had sojourned throughout the land of promise. In Egypt they had suffered many years as slaves, and in the wilderness they had wandered in anticipation. Finally, Joshua had led

⁵² The consensus construes Judg. 18.30 as a reference to the exile of Israel's northern kingdom by Assyria (2 Kgs 17). Cf. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, pp. 512-13; Soggin, *Judges*, p. 276; and Boling, *Judges*, p. 266. Brown, however, argues that the verse refers to the exile of both northern and southern kingdoms; see 'Judges', p. 269. My point, however, remains valid, no matter which exile may be in view. For support of the view that the text should be amended to read 'exile of the ark' see O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 481, whose argument for an early date for the composition of Judges is placed in doubt by this reference to 'exile'. The emendation has no textual support whatever.

them into the promised land, and God had driven out the Canaanites to create a place for the Israelites. Now, however, the Israelites are in danger of being landless once again by reason of the Midianite attempts to move into the land and dispossess Israel (6.4, 5). Yahweh dispossessed the Canaanites in favor of Israel,⁵³ and now the Midianites are attempting to dispossess the Israelites.⁵⁴

6.3.1.3. *Yahweh's Claim to be Israel's God*

The recital of God's mighty acts should be sufficient to assure the Israelites of his good intentions toward them and his power to fulfill those intentions; nevertheless, he completes his self-testimony with one more word. He declares, 'I said to you, "I am Yahweh your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites"' (6.10). The first appearance of the phrase 'I am Yahweh your God (אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם)⁵⁵ is connected to the Exodus: 'Then I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians' (Exod. 6.7). Yahweh claims the Israelites as his people, and he gives himself to them to be their God. In Leviticus, his identification as the God of the Israelites extends in its connections to the giving of the land: 'I am Yahweh your God, who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God' (Lev. 25.38).

Since the complete phrase אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם does not occur in Joshua, its most recent appearance in the narrative is in Deuteronomy 29, where the narrator sets the scene by introducing the words of Moses as 'the words of the covenant' (29.1).

Moses begins by recounting the miracles in Egypt, the defeat of Pharaoh, and the wilderness wandering; all of which happened that the Israelites might know that 'I

⁵³ Yahweh's violent overthrow of an indigenous people has been the subject of intense scholarly debate, but it is not questioned in the book of Judges.

⁵⁴ Cf. Soggin, *Judges*, p. 106.

⁵⁵ Previous to Judg. 6.10, the Hebrew phrase אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם is used 22 times in Lev. and it is found in Exod. 6.7; 16.12; Num. 10.10; 15.41; and Deut. 29.5.

am Yahweh your God' (29.5).⁵⁶ Moses tells of the triumph over Sihon and Og, the Amorite kings, and continues by saying, 'And we took their land, and gave it for an inheritance unto the Reubenites, and to the Gadites, and to the half tribe of Manasseh' (29.7-8). He completes this portion of his speech with the commandment to 'keep the words of this covenant' (29.9), which suggests the fundamental integration of the Exodus, the covenant, and Israel's grateful obedience.

Yahweh's exclusive claim for the loyalty of Israel stands at the core of the Hexateuchal narrative. When God says, 'I am Yahweh your God', the hearers may be reminded of the *Shema*,⁵⁷ a word that occupies a prominent role in the biblical tradition. Moses begins the *Shema* with the words, 'Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one' (Deut. 6.4). Closer to the book of Judges, the affirmation of Yahweh as the God of the Israelites is confirmed by their repeated confession in the context of the covenant renewal of Joshua 24. There the Israelites confess 'Yahweh is our God' (24.17); 'we will serve Yahweh, because he is our God' (24.18); 'we will serve Yahweh' (24.21); and 'we will serve Yahweh our God and we will hear his voice' (24.24). In light of the covenantal connections of Yahweh's claim to be Israel's God, his renewal of that claim through the word of the prophet in Judg. 6 serves as a condemnation of the Israelites' idolatry that is implied in their doing of 'the evil' (Judg. 6.1), and it serves as a fitting prerequisite to the prohibition 'You shall not fear the gods of the Amorites' (6.10), in which Yahweh and the Amorite gods are set in juxtaposition.

⁵⁶ Moses begins by talking *about* Yahweh in the third person, then, without any introductory messenger formula, he speaks *for* Yahweh in the first person.

⁵⁷ Cf. Brown, 'Judges', p. 185.

6.3.2. The Demand of Yahweh

6.3.2.1 *Fear of the Enemy's gods*

Using the introductory phrase, 'And I said', Yahweh cites an earlier speech in which he said to the Israelites, 'You shall not fear the gods of the Amorites', but the exact wording of the prohibition is found nowhere else in the biblical text. The Amorites are well-known in the biblical narrative, being mentioned sixty times in Exodus through Joshua,⁵⁸ but the phrase 'the gods of the Amorites' appears in only one other text, in which Joshua challenges the Israelites, 'choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living' (Josh. 24.15). By offering only the three options: Yahweh, the gods beyond the river, and the gods of the Amorites, Joshua seems to be designating the gods of the Amorites as the paradigmatic or quintessential gods of Canaan. Joshua's paradigmatic usage of the phrase explains why it appears in Judg. 6.10, where the enemy is not the Amorites but is the Midianites. Furthermore, in the prologue to Judges, the Amorite gods are listed (along with others) as the objects of Israelite idolatry (3.6). Thus, although it is the Midianites who threaten the Israelites materially, it is the Amorite gods that threaten them spiritually. Furthermore, the description of these idols as the 'gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell' designates these gods as the gods of the land, which means that the Israelites' worship of the gods of the land is what endangers their continued possession of the land.

While it is true that Yahweh's command, 'you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites', does not appear verbatim in the Hexateuch, several passages include the juxtaposition of the Exodus, the word 'fear' and the prohibition against serving gods other than Yahweh. For example,

⁵⁸ As compared to 44 references to the Canaanites, 27 references to Midianites and 18 references to the Amalekites in the same material.

Then beware lest you forget Yahweh, who brought you out of the land of **Egypt**, out of the house of bondage. You shall **fear** Yahweh your God, and serve him, and shall swear allegiance to his name. You shall not go after **other gods**, of the gods of the people which are round about you (Deut. 6.12-14, emphasis added).

Since the Old Testament mentions the fear of Yahweh or the fear of God approximately one hundred times (mostly in Deut., Pss. and Prov.), it is somewhat surprising that the prohibition against 'fearing' (יִירָא) other gods is quite rare, occurring outside of Judg. 6 only in 2 Kgs. 17.35-38, and Jer. 10.5. When speaking of lifeless idols, Jeremiah intones, 'Do not fear them, for they will do no evil, neither can they do good' (Jer. 10.5), suggesting that since idols are powerless, they are undeserving of fear. The narrator of the Kings text, after the Assyrian deportation, accuses the inhabitants of Israel of not fearing Yahweh (2 Kgs. 17.34), and he reminds them of Yahweh's word to the Israelites of the past:

... with whom Yahweh made a covenant, and commanded them, saying, 'You shall not **fear other gods**, nor bow down to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them; but you shall **fear** Yahweh, who brought you up out of the land of **Egypt** with great power and a stretched out arm, and him shall you worship, and to him shall you sacrifice. And the statutes, and the ordinances, and the law, and the commandment, which he wrote for you, you shall observe to do forever; and you shall **not fear other** gods. And you shall not forget the **covenant** that I made with you; neither shall you **fear other gods**. But you shall **fear** Yahweh your God; and he will **deliver you out of the hand** of all your enemies' (2 Kgs 17.35-39, emphasis added).

The Kings text cites Yahweh's command not to fear other gods in terms very similar to Judg. 6.10, mentioning the Exodus and Yahweh's promise to deliver the Israelites from the hand of their enemies.

I would argue that the citation in Judg. 6.10 is not an exact quote, but is a paraphrase of the earlier prohibitions against idolatry, and the verb 'to fear' is used both here and in Kings with the meaning 'to worship', 'to reverence' and 'to serve'.⁵⁹ On several occasions Yahweh had commanded the Israelites not to worship other

⁵⁹ Cf. Clines, *DCH*, IV, p. 278, who includes the definition 'revere, be in awe of'. See also Köhler, *HALOT*, I, p. 433.

gods (Deut. 11.16), serve other gods (Deut. 13.6) or go after other gods (Deut. 6.14), and the Decalogue begins with this word: 'I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me' (Exod. 20.2-3).⁶⁰ The word 'fear', therefore, is substituted for other words denoting worship and service. Although it is impossible to determine the reason for the writer's choice of one synonym over another, the prominence of 'fear' in the Gideon story (6.11-8.31) may suggest that the word 'fear' is used in Judg. 6.10 as a foreshadowing of the Gideon narrative.⁶¹

The attitude of 'fear' is not necessarily absolute, as the case of the Samaritans of 2 Kings demonstrates. We are told that they 'were fearing Yahweh, but they were serving their own gods', which they had brought from other nations (2 Kgs. 17.33). The fear of Yahweh, therefore, 'does not always signify the ideal of exclusive worship'.⁶² We are told in the very next verse that those Samaritans, who are 'fearing Yahweh' (17.33), in fact 'do not fear Yahweh', because they 'do not follow the statutes or ordinances or the law or the commandments which Yahweh commanded the sons of Jacob' (17.34).⁶³ When understood in light of 2 Kgs. 17, genuine fear of Yahweh is tantamount to 'loyalty to the covenant',⁶⁴ and fear that is less than genuine amounts to syncretism, which is not acceptable to Yahweh as true worship.⁶⁵ In Judg. 6, Yahweh does not accuse the Israelites of forsaking him; he accuses them only of fearing other gods, which leaves open the possibility that they

⁶⁰ Cf. Boling, *Judges*, p. 126, who connects Judg. 6 with the Decalogue.

⁶¹ See Barnabas Lindars, 'Gideon and Kingship', *TS* 16 (1965), p. 317, n. 1, who writes that the prophet's speech is 'incorporated by the narrator to prepare for the dialogue in the call story'.

⁶² T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings* (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), p. 239. Cf. Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1988), p. 212.

⁶³ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 239.

⁶⁴ H. F. Fuhs, 'אִיר', in G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (eds.), *TDOT* (trans. John T. Willis; 14 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), VI, pp. 306-309. Cf. Hans-Peter Stähli, 'אִיר', in Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (eds.), *TLOT* (3 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), II, p. 575.

⁶⁵ Terence E. Fretheim, *First and Second Kings* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), p. 194.

were continuing to worship Yahweh and the Amorite gods simultaneously.⁶⁶ When compared to Yahweh's first speech (2.1-5), this second speech suggests that the Israelites have regressed in their covenant relationship to Yahweh although they have not abandoned him altogether. In the earlier speech, Yahweh rebukes the Israelites for their passive failure to tear down the Canaanite altars, but now he scolds them for a more active role in illicit worship.

The most basic meaning of the Hebrew term **אָרַא** is 'fear, be afraid',⁶⁷ and the command not to fear is found 'frequently in the context of war and battle',⁶⁸ in which the army is encouraged to be courageous in the face of the enemy because Yahweh is with them. For example, Moses instructs the Israelites on the procedure for the conquest of Canaan:

When you go out to battle against your enemies, and you see horses, and chariots, and a people more than you, do not **fear** them: for Yahweh your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of **Egypt** . . . let not your hearts faint, **fear not**, and do not tremble, neither be terrified because of them; for Yahweh your God goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you (Deut. 20.3-4, emphasis added).

In light of the prohibitions against fearing the enemy, which are set forth by Moses in connection to the conquest, Judg. 6.7-10 may present 'Israel's relationship with Yahweh as a reason why they ought to stand fearless before the Amorite deities'.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Historical, archaeological, and social research on early Israel suggests that the worship of multiple gods was the rule rather than the exception, and that the term 'syncretism' itself must be reconsidered. See Erhard Gerstenberger, *Theologies in the Old Testament* (trans. John Bowden; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, Fortress Press edn, 2002), pp. 274-81; Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Biblical resource series; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2nd edn, 2002), p. 7, 45; William G. Dever, *Recent Archaeological Discoveries and Biblical Research* (Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies; Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1990); William G. Dever, *Did God have a Wife?: Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), p. 269; Goldingay, *OT Theology: Israel's Faith*, pp. 38-40; and David Penchansky, *Twilight of the Gods: Polytheism in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), p. 33.

⁶⁷ Holladay, *Lexicon*, p. 142; cf. Brown *et al.*, *BDB*, p. 431. It can still retain the meaning, 'be afraid of', even when deity is the object, according to Clines, *DCH*, IV, p. 278.

⁶⁸ Fuhs, 'אָרַא', p. 304.

⁶⁹ Lee, 'Fragmentation', p. 72.

Although the Hebrew term **אָרָא** usually means 'worship' when its object is deity, its most basic meaning of 'fear, be afraid' is still present, because it is the awesomeness of divine power that generates admiration. Humans worship what they fear. Fuhs argues that 'Fear of the numinous embraces an inner polarity: terror, retreat, and flight on the one hand; attraction, trust, and love on the other'.⁷⁰ While I accept the fundamental polarity that Fuhs suggests, I would not take it quite as far as to include 'trust, and love'. Power attracts and provokes wonder, but it does not necessarily give rise to trust and love; and it is on this count that the fear of Yahweh is different from the fear of other powers. Yahweh asks that the Israelites worship him not only because of his might, but also because of his mercy. It is not enough that Yahweh defeats the gods of Egypt and shows himself superior in strength; his acts go beyond a simple demonstration of power. Yahweh's power is exercised toward salvific purpose in bringing the Israelites out of slavery, and the covenant is founded not upon the abstract notion of divine power but upon the concrete expressions of divine care. Moses declares to the Israelites that they are chosen by Yahweh, not because of their own attributes but

because Yahweh loved you and kept the oath which he swore to your forefathers, Yahweh brought you out by a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deut. 7.8).

Furthermore, although Yahweh's power is beyond description, Moses draws attention to his affection:

Behold, to Yahweh your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. Yet on your fathers did Yahweh set his affection to love them, and he chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is today (Deut. 10.14-15).

Consequently, Yahweh, in demanding a depth of worship that exceeds fear and reverence, calls for a human response of affection, devotion and love. Yahweh insists

⁷⁰ Fuhs, 'אָרָא', p. 298.

that his awesome acts of grace toward the Israelites are deserving of the joint responses of fear and love. Moses commands the Israelites:

. . . to fear Yahweh your God, to walk in all his ways and love him, and to serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Deut. 10.12).

You shall fear Yahweh your God; you shall serve him and cling to him, and you shall swear by his name. He is your praise and he is your God, who has done these great and awesome things for you . . . You shall therefore love Yahweh your God (Deut. 10.20-11.1).

Thus, when Yahweh says, 'I am Yahweh your God, you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites', he is insisting that his acts of salvation and his giving of the covenant establish him as the only deity who is deserving of the worship of the Israelites. His manifest love for the Israelites calls for their reciprocation, and his gracious acts of salvation require the Israelites' exclusive reverence.

6.3.2.2. *Failure of Israel to Hear*

As in his first speech (2.1-5), Yahweh here summarizes Israel's entire rebellion in one concise judgment: 'But you did not hear my voice' (6.10).⁷¹ The impact of this singular verdict is made all the more striking by its rude appearance following the long series of verbs that declare Yahweh's faithful deeds. Thus, the contrast between Yahweh's integrity and Israel's lack of integrity is sharpened. The speech focuses almost entirely on Yahweh, who says, 'I brought you up; I brought you out; I delivered you; I drove out the enemy; I gave you their land; and I said to you'. The only action attributed to Israel is found in the final clause of the speech, 'you did not hear my voice'.

Unlike the first speech, however, this speech comes abruptly to an end with no pronouncement of penalty, no statement of consequences for the unfaithfulness of the Israelites, and no response from the Israelites. Yahweh rebukes the Israelites

⁷¹ Although I will not repeat my entire foregoing discussion of the theme of 'hearing' (Ch. 5), a few additional comments are in order here.

for failing to hear his voice in the past, but they do not repent nor weep. Their lack of response leaves the impression that they are continuing to disregard Yahweh's voice. They have cried out to Yahweh for his aid, but they do not hear when he answers.⁷² Because of their unwillingness to hear the voice of God, this prophet, unlike Deborah in the preceding story, does not deliver the Israelites, he only rebukes them, which may be 'another subtle sign that things are getting worse'.⁷³

6.4. FORESHADOWING THE GIDEON STORY

After Yahweh's stinging speech, 'we might expect God to heap yet more punishment upon the people',⁷⁴ but the surprising mercy of God appears to be without limit,⁷⁵ and he moves to raise up another deliverer. The scene shifts suddenly from the nameless prophet to a man named Gideon, who is threshing his grain in the wine press so that he will not be discovered by the Midianites. He is approached by the angel of Yahweh, who commissions him as the next deliverer. Gideon's story (Judg. 6-8) includes repeated references to Gideon's timidity and to his need for divine assurance. After Yahweh reduces Gideon's army from 32,000 to 300, he executes a miraculous rout of the Midianites. Following the victory, the appreciative Israelites invite Gideon to rule (משל) over them, but he replies 'I myself will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you' (8.23). Unfortunately, Gideon chooses to commemorate the occasion by constructing a golden ephod, which later becomes the object of idolatry (spiritual harlotry, cf. Judg. 2.17; 8.27, 33) and a 'snare' (cf. Judg. 2.3) to Gideon and his family (8.27).

The placement of Yahweh's speech in the midst of the cyclical pattern, rather than outside the pattern, makes it an integral part of the Gideon cycle, and themes of

⁷² Is it possible that, in a similar fashion, we cry out for the biblical text to speak to us, but we hear what we want to hear and turn a deaf ear to the rest?

⁷³ McCann, *Judges*, p. 63.

⁷⁴ Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, p. 169.

⁷⁵ Cf. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 256.

the speech are continued later in the Gideon narrative. Wilcock argues that the speech is given to explain the oppressive presence of the Midianites: 'The prophet of Judges 6 is sent to make Israel understand what is going on'.⁷⁶ I contend, however, that the speech functions beyond the simple level of explanation, and, as shown above, indicates a downward turn within the unfolding of the overall narrative of Judges. Yahweh's verbal intrusion into the cycle anticipates the rising tension that develops in the narrative of Gideon as he struggles to hear the voice of Yahweh, who speaks directly and extensively to him.⁷⁷ Schneider argues that the speech 'contextualizes and to some extent counteracts Gideon's upcoming statements'.⁷⁸ Yahweh's speech, therefore, foreshadows the Gideon narrative in at least four ways: (1) it highlights the repetition of the Egypt/Exodus tradition;⁷⁹ (2) it portrays the Israelites as syncretistic worshipers; (3) it introduces the theme of fear; and (4) it calls attention to the continuing theme of hearing.

6.4.1. Egypt and the Exodus

Gideon is greeted by the angel of Yahweh, who says 'Yahweh is with you' (6.1), and Gideon replies with a reference to the Exodus:

'. . . if Yahweh is with us, then why has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonders that our ancestors recounted to us saying, 'Did not Yahweh bring us up from Egypt?' But now Yahweh has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites (6.13).

His response is the first indication of a narrative contrast between the perspective of Gideon and the perspective of Yahweh. Whereas Yahweh speaks of the deliverance from Egypt as a point of assurance, Gideon sees the same tradition as a point of

⁷⁶ Wilcock, *Message of Judges*, p. 78.

⁷⁷ Gideon is the only judge to whom Yahweh speaks directly, yet ironically, Gideon gains confidence not through Yahweh's direct word, but only through overhearing the dream of a Midianite soldier. Cf. Exum, 'The Centre Cannot Hold', p. 416.

⁷⁸ Schneider, *Judges*, p. 102.

⁷⁹ Egypt is mentioned in nine verses of Judges: 2.1, 12; 6.8, 9, 13; 10.11; 11.13, 16 and 19.30.

suspicion.⁸⁰ Bernon Lee observes that Gideon's response is the beginning of 'an ongoing conflict' between Gideon and Yahweh.⁸¹ Lee maintains that the narrative 'provides ample opportunity for reader participation in the suspension of belief in divine fidelity',⁸² it allows the reader to have 'a measure of sympathy for Gideon'⁸³ in his complaint. According to Lee, the reader and Gideon are united in the question of 6.13b, 'where are the wonders that our fathers told us about?'⁸⁴ I would disagree with Lee, however, and would suggest that a reader is more inclined to sympathize with Yahweh's position as stated in the prophetic speech (6.7-10) and less inclined to share Gideon's accusations of divine infidelity.⁸⁵ The reader knows that the cause of the Midianite oppression is to be found in the sin of the Israelites and not in the unfaithfulness of Yahweh.⁸⁶ The reader, therefore, might wonder if Gideon's protest is his way of motivating Yahweh to action,⁸⁷ or is it a foreshadowing of Gideon's pessimistic outlook that continues throughout the story.⁸⁸

The Exodus theme is strengthened considerably by the obvious similarities between the stories of Gideon and Moses,⁸⁹ which prompts Lindars to claim that

⁸⁰ Gideon had heard of the Exodus and Yahweh's faithfulness in the past, but not experienced Yahweh's wonders (נִפְלְאוֹת); cf. Judg. 2.10 '... And there arose a new generation after them who did not know Yahweh nor the works that he had done for Israel'.

⁸¹ Lee, 'Fragmentation', p. 70.

⁸² Lee, 'Fragmentation', p. 70.

⁸³ Lee, 'Fragmentation', p. 86.

⁸⁴ Lee, 'Fragmentation', p. 86.

⁸⁵ See Moshe Garsiel, 'Homiletic Name-derivations as a Literary Device in the Gideon Narrative: Judges vi-viii', *VT* 43 (1993), p. 304, who points out that Gideon's clan name Abiezer 'arouses associations with the help given by God to the patriarchs' and stands in contrast to Gideon's sarcastic response.

⁸⁶ A. Graeme Auld, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth* (Daily Study Bible--Old Testament; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), p. 162.

⁸⁷ Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, pp. 147-48.

⁸⁸ O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 149.

⁸⁹ Mark S. Smith, 'Remembering God: Collective Memory in Israelite Religion', *CBQ* 64, no. 4 (2002), pp. 634-38.

Gideon is the new Moses.⁹⁰ A comparison of the stories reveals the following points of contact, most of which involve the call narrative:

1. Gideon is working for his father while hiding from the Midianites (Judg. 6.11), and Moses is working for his father-in-law, a Midianite, while hiding from the Egyptians (Exod. 3.1)
2. The angel of Yahweh acts as initial agent of encounter (Judg. 6.11; Exod. 3.2)
3. Gideon mentions the deliverance from Egypt, and Moses is called to enact the deliverance from Egypt (Judg. 6.13; Exod. 3.10)
4. The speaker changes from the angel to Yahweh (Judg. 6.14; Exod. 3.4)
5. Both are called to save Israel (Judg. 6.14; Exod. 3.10)
6. Both are sent (שלח) by Yahweh (Judg. 6.14; Exod. 3.10)
7. Both offer objections to the call (Judg. 6.15; Exod. 3.11)
8. Both are given signs (Judg. 6.17; Exod. 4.2-8)
9. Yahweh says to Gideon, 'I will be with you', and to Moses he says, 'I will be with your mouth' (Judg. 6.16; Exod. 4.12)
10. Yahweh produces miraculous fire (Judg. 6.21; Exod. 3.2)
11. Both the angel in Gideon's story and Moses use a staff to produce a miraculous sign (Judg. 6.21; Exod. 4.2-3)
12. The initial acts of both Gideon and Moses were the cause of controversy among the Israelites (Judg. 6.25-32; Exod. 5.21)
13. Gideon collects gold to make an ephod that becomes an idol and Aaron collects gold to make an idol (Judg. 8.24-27; Exod. 32.2-4)⁹¹
14. Gideon names his firstborn 'Jether', which is one way of spelling the name of the father-in-law of Moses (Judg. 8.20; Exod. 4.18)⁹²
15. The stories of both Gideon and Moses include episodes of failure near the end. Gideon makes an object that leads to idolatry and Moses strikes the rock in anger (Judg. 8.27; Num. 20.11-12).

The references to the Exodus and the similarities between Gideon and Moses combine to place the 'Gideon saga in the framework of the Yahweh covenant'.⁹³

⁹⁰ Lindars, 'Gideon and Kingship', p. 317. Lindars summarizes the conclusions of Walter Beyerlin, 'Geschichte und Heilsgeschichtliche Traditionsbildung im Alten Testament: Ein Beitrag zur Traditionsgeschichte von Richter 6-8', VT 13 (1963), pp. 1-25.

⁹¹ Auld, 'Gideon', p. 257.

⁹² Klein, *Triumph of Irony*, p. 62.

6.4.2. Syncretistic worship

In Judg. 6, Yahweh does not accuse the Israelites of forsaking him; he accuses them only of fearing other gods, which leaves open the possibility that they were continuing to worship Yahweh and the Amorite gods simultaneously. This interpretation of Judg. 6.7-10 explains how Gideon can question Yahweh's faithfulness: 'If Yahweh is with us, why has all this happened to us?' (6.13). Until now, commentators have considered Gideon's question to be quite unreasonable, since he is well aware of the idolatry within his own community. The fact that his own father maintains an altar to Baal (6.25) provides Gideon with enough evidence that God is justified in his disciplinary action. However, if the worship of Yahweh is continuing alongside the worship of Baal,⁹⁴ then Gideon might assume that Yahweh is obligated to demonstrate his superiority, just as he demonstrated his power over all of the gods of Egypt. Furthermore, the simultaneous worship of Yahweh and Baal explains the answer of Gideon's father, Joash, who refuses to condemn Gideon after he destroys his father's idolatrous altar. The men of the city seek to execute Gideon, but Joash responds saying, 'If Baal is a god, let him contend for himself' (6.31). In other words, Gideon's father may be suggesting that they leave the matter in the hands of the two gods—Baal, whose altar has been desecrated, and Yahweh, whose altar now sits atop the ruins of Baal's altar.

6.4.3. Fear

When Yahweh ordered Gideon to destroy his father's idolatrous altar, Gideon obeyed, but he did the work surreptitiously by night 'because he was afraid' (6.27). Fear is another significant element in the Gideon story that is continued from

⁹³ Lindars, 'Gideon and Kingship', p. 317

⁹⁴ As affirmed by Arthur E. Cundall, *Judges: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968), p. 106; and Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, p. 171.

Yahweh's speech.⁹⁵ J. Paul Tanner argues that the Gideon narrative is structured to highlight Gideon's fear and to show the change that transpired in Gideon as God crafted the circumstances in such a way that Gideon moves from fear to faith.⁹⁶

The importance of fear to the Gideon story is evidenced by the repetition throughout the narrative of the Hebrew word **ירא**. Even before Gideon's nocturnal destruction of the Baal altar, he displays his fear in the sight of the angel of Yahweh, who says to him, 'Peace to you, do not fear; (**ירא**) you shall not die' (6.23). Then, when assembling the Israelite army, Yahweh gives the following instructions: 'Whoever is afraid (**ירא**) and trembling (**חרד**), let him return and depart from Mount Gilead' (7.3).⁹⁷ Also, before Gideon sneaks into the Midianite camp, Yahweh says to him, 'if you are afraid (**ירא**) to go down, go with Purah your servant down to the camp' (7.10). After the battle, when Gideon is no longer afraid, the theme continues to show itself. Gideon commands his son to execute two of the enemy leaders: 'So he said to Jether his first-born, "Rise, kill them". But the youth did not draw his sword, because he was afraid (**ירא**), because he was still a youth' (8.20).

The theme of fear is expressed not only by the repetition of **ירא**, but by the presence of another word for 'fear' in the episode at the spring of Harod (**עין חרוד**, Judg. 7.1). The verb **חָרַד** means 'to tremble' and the noun **חָרָד** means 'anxious' (Judg. 7.3).⁹⁸ The importance of the name of the spring is recognized by Auld, who translates it 'Fearful Spring'.⁹⁹ Gideon and his army pitch their tents beside the Fearful Spring (7.1), and it is there that Yahweh gives instruction for any who are

⁹⁵ Cf. Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 150.

⁹⁶ J. Paul Tanner, 'The Gideon Narrative as the Focal Point of Judges', *BSac* 149 (1992), p. 160.

⁹⁷ According to Boling, *Judges*, p. 145, the ref. to Mount Gilead (7.3) could be translated 'Mount Fearful', based upon a comparison with Akkadian coupled with the theme of fear that is prominent in this text.

⁹⁸ Köhler, *HALOT*, I, p. 350.

⁹⁹ Auld, 'Gideon', p. 264. See also Garsiel, 'Name-derivations', p. 310; and Tanner, 'Gideon Narrative', p. 158, n. 27.

afraid or 'trembling' (חָרַד) to return home (7.3). Yahweh's command for the fearful to depart, therefore, 'may be a deliberate echo of the place named in' Judg. 7.1.¹⁰⁰ It is also at the Fearful Spring that Yahweh tests Gideon's army the second time and chooses only the three hundred who lap water like a dog.¹⁰¹ The fact that the testing occurs at the Fearful Spring leads Lindars to conclude that the test ensures that only the bravest men will be retained in the army.¹⁰²

6.4.4. Hearing the Voice of Yahweh

The abrupt ending of the prophet's speech (6.10) suggests to some historical critical scholars that it was shortened by an editor before its insertion into the pre-existing text of Judges. For example, Moore argues that the Israelites' lack of response to the speech and Gideon's apparent unfamiliarity with the speech establish it as a later addition to the narrative.¹⁰³ Hearing the text as a rhetorical unit, however, provides the opportunity for an alternate interpretation. The Israelites' lack of response to Yahweh's pronouncement, 'You have not heard my voice', may be understood as a manifestation of their utter spiritual deafness, and Gideon's failure to acknowledge the same word of Yahweh may be symptomatic of his unwillingness or inability to hear God as well. The abrupt ending of Yahweh's speech, therefore, may be interpreted as a literary device whereby the rhetorical structuring of the narrative contributes to its meaning.

Although the theme of hearing is not overtly prominent in the Gideon story, Gideon does exhibit, on more than one occasion, a certain deafness toward the voice

¹⁰⁰ A Baumann, 'חָרַד', in G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (eds.), *TDOT* (trans. David E. Green; 14 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), V, p. 168.

¹⁰¹ The use of the word 'dog' (כֹּלֵב) suggests to me an allusion to Caleb (also כֹּלֵב), the only person besides Joshua who was unafraid of the Canaanites and who has already been featured prominently in Judges (1.12, 13, 14, 15, 20; and 3.9). The husband of Jael, the hero of Judg. 4-5, is a relative of Caleb (1 Chron. 2.55), and Jael kills Sisera at קִרְשָׁתַי (cf. Num. 13.26, the location of Caleb's faithful speech).

¹⁰² Lindars, 'Gideon and Kingship', p. 319.

¹⁰³ Moore, *Judges*, p. 177, 181. See also Martin, *Judges*, p. 81.

of God. As mentioned above, he acknowledges having heard of Yahweh's mighty deeds of the past, but he seems to be unaware of the present ministry of God's prophet (6.13). Also, throughout his initial encounter with the angel of Yahweh, Gideon is unable to perceive the identity of the messenger and asks for a sign that would serve as identifying proof (6.17). Consequently, Boling observes that 'Gideon was very slow to recognize the speech of Yahweh'.¹⁰⁴ Gideon's inability to hear correctly may be illustrated by his response to the angel, who says, 'Yahweh is with you' (יְהוָה עִמָּךְ). The angel addresses Gideon in the singular (עִמָּךְ), but Gideon responds in the plural: 'If Yahweh is with us (עִמָּנוּ)'.¹⁰⁵ In a later episode, after Yahweh speaks to Gideon directly, assures him of success, and clothes Gideon with his Spirit, even then Gideon requires the sign of the fleece, not once but twice (6.36-39). Then when Yahweh reduces Gideon's army from thirty-two thousand down to three hundred and declares, 'With the three hundred . . . I will deliver you' (7.7), Gideon remains unconvinced; he does not hear the voice of Yahweh. Finally, Yahweh instructs Gideon to go down and spy on the enemy troops, telling Gideon, 'And you will hear (שָׁמַעַתְּ) what they say; and afterwards your hands be strengthened to go down unto the host' (7.11). Gideon sneaks into the camp of the Midianites and overhears a Midianite soldier recounting a dream that symbolizes the Midianites' defeat at the hand of Gideon:

And so when Gideon heard (שָׁמַעַתְּ) the account of the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship. He returned to the camp of Israel and said, 'Arise, for Yahweh has given the camp of Midian into your hands' (Judg. 7.15).

Gideon's worshipful response and his confident declaration to his troops indicate that Gideon is now convinced of Yahweh's promise.

¹⁰⁴ Boling, *Judges*, p. 129.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Boling, *Judges*, p. 130, and Schneider, *Judges*, p. 104.

The fact that it is Yahweh who directs Gideon to go down into the camp of Midian suggests that Yahweh himself is the source of the prophetic dream. Yahweh's words, 'you will hear (שמע) what they say', may convey both the literal sense of Gideon's overhearing the Midianite soldier and the theological sense of Gideon's finally perceiving the authenticity of God's word. Ironically, although Gideon does not hear the declarations of the angel of Yahweh, and does not hear the voice of Yahweh himself, and he does not hear the confirmations inherent in multiple signs, he finally hears the voice of Yahweh speaking through an enemy soldier (Judg. 7.9-11).

6.5. CONCLUSION

In his first speech to the Israelites (Judg. 2.1-5) Yahweh announces that he will allow the Canaanites to remain in the land as snares and thorns to the Israelites. Three cycles of discipline ensue in which the Israelites commit idolatry, Yahweh sells them to an enemy who oppresses them, they cry out to Yahweh for deliverance, Yahweh raises up a deliverer, and the land enjoys rest for forty years or more. In the midst of the fourth cycle, after the Israelites cry out twice to Yahweh for salvation, he interrupts the expected sequence of events by sending a prophet who rebukes the Israelites for their unfaithfulness. The prophet's use of the messenger formula and his delivery of the speech in the first person indicate that his speech is the word of Yahweh.

This second speech of Yahweh serves multiple functions that may be perceived from two different perspectives. From the perspective of the Israelites within the story world, Yahweh's speech is a reminder of his power and faithfulness, and it informs them of the reason for their present distress. From the perspective of the hearer of Judges, the speech signals the rising tension in the book, points to Judges 6 as the beginning of a new division in the narrative, and foreshadows the

Gideon story. My hearing of the voice of Yahweh reveals three primary emphases in his speech: (1) Yahweh reaffirms to the Israelites his power over every other power; (2) Yahweh reassures the Israelites that he has given them the land; (3) Yahweh rebukes the Israelites for turning to other gods. My hearing of the speech of Yahweh within its narrative context and from the positions both inside the story and outside the story can be summarized in three further statements: the power of Yahweh is affirmed, the place of Israel is threatened, and the plot of Judges intensifies.

6.5.1. The Power of Yahweh is Affirmed

Chapter six of Judges opens with the report, 'The Israelites did evil in the sight of Yahweh, and Yahweh gave them into the hand of Midian' (6.1). The 'hand' represents power, and because of their sin the Israelites are squeezed in the hand of Midian until they cry out in pain. The power of the Midianites forces the Israelites from their homes and drives them into the caves and hiding places of the hills. The land is destroyed by the Midianite raids and encampments until there is no sustenance remaining for the Israelites and their livestock.

When the Israelites cry out to Yahweh, he sends a prophet who assures the Israelites that Yahweh is their God, and unlike the gods of the Amorites, he is with them and for them. The Amorites may be the gods of the land (2.10), but Yahweh is the God whose power transcends the lands. He defeated the gods of Egypt and brought the Israelites up from the land of Egypt. He defeated the binding forces of Pharaoh and brought them out of the slave house. He snatched them out of the gripping hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all other oppressors. Yahweh gave to the Israelites the land of their oppressors, an act that required the defeat of the local gods. There should be no doubt that the power of Yahweh is sufficient to snatch the Israelites out of the hand of Midian and to restore to them the land which

Yahweh had granted to them. The Israelites, therefore, must not give reverence to the local gods who are weaker and lower in stature than Yahweh.

6.5.2. The Place of Israel is Threatened

In my hearing of Yahweh's first speech, his promise never to break his covenant emerges as the underlying and unifying force that motivates all of Yahweh's actions. Yahweh's covenant faithfulness, however, is challenged by Israel's unfaithfulness, thereby producing the repeated cycle of sin and deliverance that continues throughout the central section of Judges. Although the covenant seems to be ever in the background of Judg. 6, it is the theme of the land that comes to the foreground and holds together all the elements of the second speech. The fact that the 'land' is mentioned four times in Judg. 6.5-10, and that the giving of the land is the climactic act of Yahweh's Exodus story, and that the forbidden gods are designated as the gods of the land may indicate that the land is a more significant theme in Judges 6-8 than previously recognized.

The severity of the Midianite oppression and the character of their sustained attack reveals that they are intent upon displacing the Israelites, removing them from the land. The Israelites, therefore, are a people who are anxious about losing the land, anxious about their future, and anxious about the ability of Yahweh to keep them secure in the face of local gods. Consequently, they divide their attention between Yahweh and the gods of the land, hoping they will find favor with both, but in doing so, they lose favor with Yahweh, who demands their undivided loyalty.

6.5.3. The Plot of Judges is Intensified

With each new cycle in Judg. 3-5, the narrative grows more detailed and complex, but the cycle that begins at Judg. 6.1 shows evidence that narrative tension is escalating and the plot of Judges is moving toward a crucial point in the action. Specific elements in the cycle point to its identification as a critical event within the

plot of Judges. First, the severity of the Midianite threat that is reported in Judg. 6.1-6 indicates an increasing level of conflict. Second, Yahweh's breaking into the cycle to speak directly to the Israelites further heightens the tension and may show that his anger is 'intensified'.¹⁰⁶ Olson argues that this speech marks a transitional point in the narrative of Judges and begins the second major section of the book.¹⁰⁷ Third, the foundering of Gideon places him in a category quite apart from his predecessors. At the beginning he is fearful, doubtful and hesitant; and at the end he contributes to the apostasy of his family and community. Although Gideon is finally successful in defeating the Midianites and bringing 'rest' to the land, Stone argues that Gideon is the transitional judge, placed between the victorious judges (Othniel, Ehud and Deborah) and the 'tragic' judges (Jephthah and Samson),¹⁰⁸ and Exum points out that 'Gideon and the important figures after him reveal disturbing weaknesses, if not serious faults'.¹⁰⁹

6.5.3.1. *The Devotion of Israel Deteriorates*

The Israelites' level of devotion to Yahweh is another area of significant movement in the plot of Judges. Once again, as in Judg. 2.1-5, the Israelites' fundamental error is their refusal to hear the voice of God. The Israelites are unfaithful to their covenant with Yahweh and they suffer because of their rebellion as he hands them over to the enemy for discipline. Yahweh's sending of the prophet before the call of Gideon underscores the fact that Israel's apostasy had fallen to a lower point.¹¹⁰ In response to Yahweh's first speech, the Israelites had wept and offered sacrifices to atone for their sins (2.5), but Yahweh's second speech seems to fall on deaf ears. The Israelites

¹⁰⁶ Klein, *Triumph of Irony*, p. 49.

¹⁰⁷ Olson, 'Judges', pp. 795-96. The third major section is begun by the speech in Judg. 10.11-16.

¹⁰⁸ Stone, 'From Tribal Confederation to Monarchic State', pp. 469-71. For a listing of Gideon's positive and negative traits, see Daniel I. Block, 'Will the Real Gideon Please Stand Up? Narrative Style and Intention in Judges 6-9', *JETS* 40 (1997), pp. 359-63.

¹⁰⁹ Exum, 'The Centre Cannot Hold', p. 412.

¹¹⁰ Tanner, 'Gideon Narrative', pp. 153-54.

offer no response to the voice of Yahweh; and furthermore, the narrative of Gideon shows him to be less than fully receptive to the word of Yahweh.

Furthermore, when compared to Yahweh's specific charges against the Israelites in his first speech, his charges in Judg. 6 demonstrate that the Israelites have declined in their devotion to Yahweh. In his first speech, Yahweh rebukes the Israelites for failing to tear down the Canaanite altars (2.2), thus allowing illicit worship to continue, but he does not accuse the Israelites of actively participating in that worship. In this second speech, however, Yahweh declares that the Israelites are actively engaged in the worship of the Amorite deities. When taken together with the subsequent Gideon narrative, Yahweh's speech can be understood as a condemnation of syncretism, with the Israelites worshiping both Yahweh and Baal simultaneously. The idolatry of chapter six involves a deadly circle of cause and effect. The worship of other gods is the cause of the Midianite crisis and the painful crisis in turn causes the Israelites to seek the help of other gods. Apparently, the Israelites are calling on as many gods as possible, hoping that one of them may offer assistance. Yahweh rejects this syncretistic approach and declares it a breach of his commandment, saying to the Israelites, 'I am Yahweh your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites' (6.10).

6.5.3.2. *The Patience of Yahweh Persists*

In light of the Israelites' repeated idolatry and in light of their unwillingness to hear the voice of Yahweh, Olsen suggests that the prophet's speech may cause the reader to question whether God has reached the limits of his patience.¹¹¹ Surprisingly, Yahweh once again demonstrates his mercy; and, in spite of the Israelites' obstinacy, he does not abandon them.

¹¹¹ Olson, 'Judges', pp. 795-96.

Barry Webb argues that the prophet's speech implies the Israelites' forfeiture of the right for deliverance,¹¹² but this is nothing new in Judges, for they have not been deserving of any previous deliverance. Three specific elements of the story demonstrate the persistence of Yahweh's patience. First, the repetition of Exodus imagery in the prophet's speech and in the Gideon story reinforces the idea that all of Yahweh's acts of salvation in Judges flow from the paradigm of the Exodus. Thus, when Yahweh saves the Israelites from their oppressors, his actions are based not upon Israel's repentance but upon his own compassion and upon his determination to maintain his covenant relationship to his people. Second, the fact that Yahweh does not impose further penalties upon the Israelites but raises up Gideon as deliverer is a sign of Yahweh's patience and mercy. Third, Gideon does not respond to God's word as enthusiastically as might be expected, but God does not show any signs of agitation toward his timorous recruit. Instead, Yahweh continues to speak repeatedly to Gideon and to communicate through a variety of means until Gideon finally perceives the word of Yahweh. Therefore, Judges 6-8 is a witness to the persistent patience of Yahweh.

¹¹² Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 145.

CHAPTER 7

'I WILL NOT SAVE YOU': YAHWEH'S RISK AND ISRAEL'S RECALCITRANCE

7.1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of this chapter is to hear the voice of God in his third speech to the Israelites (Judg.10.14), in which God declares that he can no longer tolerate the unfaithfulness of the Israelites. My examination of this third speech of Yahweh shows that it fills a strategic role within the overall structure of Judges, signaling a significant turning point in the narrative. I suggest furthermore that this speech reveals an inner conflict within the passions of God, a conflict between his anger at the Israelites for their unfaithfulness and his compassion for them in their suffering. I conclude as well that the underlying theology of chapter ten (and all of Judges) is that God chooses to enter into a genuine relationship with his people,¹ and that this relationship, which is formalized in the covenant, causes God himself to be vulnerable to abuse, neglect, and personal injury. As soon as Yahweh chooses to enter into the covenant, he submits himself to a position of personal risk.

7.2. ISRAEL STRAINS YAHWEH'S PATIENCE

The stories of four judges, Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar and Deborah, unfold between the first speech of Yahweh (Judg. 2.1-5) and his second speech (Judg. 6.7-10). Between the second and third speeches (Judg. 10.6-16), four additional characters, Gideon, Abimelech, Tola and Jair, have their stories told. Both Gideon and Abimelech introduce complications to the plot of Judges that suggest a widening fracture in the relationship between Yahweh and the Israelites.

¹ Fretheim, *Suffering of God*, p. 35.

In addition to the strain on Yahweh's patience that results from Israel's repeated idolatry, a more severe testing of his patience begins with the Gideon story. As my foregoing discussion in Chapter 5 demonstrates, Gideon is the first judge who shows evidence of serious character flaws and who, after his victory, performs questionable acts. The slight hesitancy that surfaces in Barak's response to Deborah (4.8)² develops into full-blown fear in the story of Gideon (6.23, 27; 7.3, 10). Also, Gideon's resistance to the angel of Yahweh, his requests for multiple signs, and his pessimistic response to the direct overtures of Yahweh demonstrate that Gideon is less than receptive to the voice of Yahweh. In another paradoxical move, Gideon refuses the role of monarch, but he apparently adopts the lifestyle of a monarch (8.30-31; 9.2). Furthermore, at the command of Yahweh, Gideon destroys his father's idolatrous altar, but later he constructs a golden ephod that becomes the object of idolatrous worship in his community (8.24-27). Although Yahweh bears with Gideon and manifests no sign of impatience, the ambivalence of Gideon and Israel's quick return to idolatry (8.33) might cause the hearer of Judges to wonder how long Yahweh's patience can persevere.

After Gideon's death, Abimelech, the son of Gideon by his concubine, murders his brothers and proclaims himself king (Judg. 9.1-6). Yahweh participates little in the Abimelech story, except that he intervenes to bring retribution to the evildoers. Abimelech reigns for three years, and then Yahweh sends an 'evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem' in order that both Abimelech and the men of Shechem might be judged for their evil deeds (9.22-24). A battle ensues and Abimelech is killed by a nameless woman who drops a millstone³ on his head as he

² When Deborah sends Barak to battle Sisera, Barak responds, 'If you will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go' (4.8). Because of his hesitation, the glory of victory is taken from him and given to a woman, Jael (4.9, 18).

³ Recent archaeological discoveries show that individual households used small millstones weighing eight to ten pounds. See Denise Dick Herr and Mary Petrina Boyd, 'A Watermelon Named Abimelech', *BAR* 28, no. 1 (2002), pp. 34-37, 62.

and his army are attacking the tower of Thebez. The narrator adds a summary statement to the end of the story: 'So God repaid the evil of Abimelech . . . and God returned all the evil of the Shechemites upon their own heads' (9.56-57). Although Yahweh's role in the Abimelech story is a small one, it is a vital role. Yahweh is not patient with Abimelech, and his actions show him to be a God who is capable of inflicting swift punishment.

After Yahweh's second speech (6.7-10), further cycles of rebellion and deliverance weary Yahweh and bring him closer to losing his patience with the Israelites. First, Yahweh delivers the Israelites by the hand of Gideon, then he must deal with Abimelech the usurper. Following the death of Abimelech, two of the minor judges are mentioned very briefly. Tola judges Israel twenty-three years, but no details of his exploits are recorded. Of Tola the text says, 'After Abimelech, there arose to save (ישע) Israel, Tola, son of Puah' (10.1). The story of Tola is very short and does not include all of the elements of the characteristic cycle of rebellion and deliverance. Nevertheless, the fact that he 'saves' (ישע) Israel assumes the existence of an enemy and a period of oppression from which Israel is saved. Another judge follows Tola: 'There arose after him, Jair the Gileadite, and he judged Israel twenty-two years' (10.3). The activities of Jair receive little space in the narrative, but the statement that he 'arose' (קום) may be shorthand for the phrase 'arose to save' (10.1) and may hark back to the earlier texts of Judges in which Yahweh 'raised up' (קום) a judge (2.16, 18; 3.9, 15). The word is used of Deborah as well: 'The peasantry ceased in Israel, they ceased until I, Deborah, arose; I arose as a mother in Israel' (5.7).

After accounts of the two minor judges, a familiar refrain appears for the sixth time within the Book of Judges: The Israelites 'did what was evil in the sight of

Yahweh' (10.6).⁴ In light of the previous cycles that begin with this indictment, the hearer would likely expect that another standard cycle has commenced. In this cycle, however, the idolatry of the Israelites seems to have increased: 'they served the Baals and the Ashtartes, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook Yahweh and did not serve him' (10.6). Among the four previous cycles, only the first indictment specifically names the Israelites' idols—the Baals and Asherahs (3.7).⁵ Within the Gideon story, however, it is revealed that the Israelites are worshiping Baal (6.25), and after Gideon's death it is said, 'And so it was, as soon as Gideon died, the Israelites returned and played the harlot after the Baals, and appointed Baalberith as their god' (Judg. 8.33).

When compared to the earlier cycles, the appearance of such an array of foreign gods in Judg. 10.6 raises the intensity level of the Israelites' idolatry and heightens their guilt.⁶ The intensity is heightened further by the addition of a summarizing accusation: 'Thus they forsook Yahweh and did not serve him' (10.6). It appears that the Israelites have strengthened their ties to the foreign gods, while at the same time they have drifted farther away from Yahweh. This progression is suggested as well by the description of the Israelites' sin as found in Yahweh's three speeches. In his first speech, Yahweh accuses them of failing to 'tear down' the Canaanite altars (2.2), but he does not charge them with active idolatry. In his second speech, he accuses them of 'fearing' the gods of the Amorites, but they are not described as having 'forsaken' Yahweh. The subsequent Gideon narrative suggests that the Israelites were engaged in syncretistic worship, actively participating in Canaanite worship alongside Yahweh worship. In this third speech,

⁴ This refrain appears once in the introduction (2.11), then it serves as the beginning of every major judge cycle (3.7; 3.12; 4.1; 6.1).

⁵ Cf. Schneider, *Judges*, p. 160.

⁶ Cf. Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 44; and Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 344.

however, Yahweh denounces the Israelites for forsaking him and failing to worship him (10.6), apparently abandoning the worship of Yahweh in favor of the foreign gods. The Israelites' allowing of Canaanite worship to continue is despicable to Yahweh (2.2), and their adoption of other gods alongside Yahweh is forbidden by the Decalogue (Exod. 20.3), but their complete abandonment of Yahweh cannot be tolerated. Joshua had warned the Israelites, 'If you forsake Yahweh and serve foreign gods, he will turn and do harm to you, and consume you, after having done good to you' (Josh. 24.20).

Yahweh's response to rejection is vehement: 'The anger of Yahweh was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the Ammonites . . .' (10.7-8). These enemies crushed and oppressed Israel for eighteen years, and 'Israel was greatly distressed' (10.9).⁷ The unusual thing about this aspect of the cycle consists in its use of two quite intensive words for oppression, 'shatter' (רעץ) and 'crush' (רצץ), words that are not used elsewhere in Judges to describe the Israelites' oppression.⁸ In earlier cycles, the Israelites 'serve' the enemy (3.8, 14); they are 'squeezed' (לחץ) by the enemy (4.3); the hand of the enemy is 'strong' (עז) against them (6.2); and they are 'brought low' (דלל) because of the enemy (6.6). None of the previous terms, as forceful as they may be, can approach the severity of 'shatter' (רעץ) and 'crush' (רצץ), words that signify near total destruction.

However, it is not only the severity of these words that gives pause to the hearer of this narrative, but it is their usage and associations. The first word, רעץ, is

⁷ The phrase, 'the anger of Yahweh', has not been used since Judg. 3.8.

⁸ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 345. It should be admitted, however, that previous cycles demonstrate considerable variety of expression and some intensity when disclosing the nature of the enemies' oppressions. For example, Jabin had 'squeezed' (לחץ) the Israelites with force (בהזקה) for twenty years' (4.3). As I pointed out in Chapter 6, the most detailed account of oppression is found in the Gideon cycle, where five verses at the beginning of the story are devoted to the Midianites' actions, and other aspects of their activities are mentioned throughout the narrative.

used elsewhere in the Old Testament only to describe Yahweh's destruction of the Egyptian armies: 'Your right hand, O Yahweh, is majestic in power, your right hand, O Yahweh, shatters (רעץ) the enemy' (Exod. 15.6). At one time the Israelites witnessed as Yahweh shattered their enemies, but now, since they have exchanged gods, the Israelites themselves are being shattered. The gravity of the second word 'crush' (רציץ), which is used only four times in Gen.-Judg.,⁹ may be illustrated by its use in the previous chapter of Judges, when the unnamed woman 'crushed' (רציץ) the skull of Abimelech with a millstone (9.53). In Deuteronomy, רציץ is included among the curses that Yahweh threatens to bring upon the Israelites if they disobey his commandments: '. . . you will be only oppressed and crushed all the time' (Deut. 28.33). Therefore, Yahweh, in Judg. 10.8, is bringing upon the Israelites the retribution that they deserve and that he had threatened, just as he brought retribution to Abimelech.

The shattering and crushing oppression causes the Israelites to cry out to Yahweh once again (10.10).¹⁰ Their cry, however, for the first time in the book of Judges, includes the content of their prayer, which goes beyond a cry for help. On this occasion, they not only beg for deliverance, but they confess: 'We have sinned against you, in that we have forsaken our God and we have served the Baals' (10.10). Never before in Judges is the content of their cry supplied to the reader, and never before do the Israelites confess any sin.¹¹ It would appear that, in this case, they are expressing genuine repentance toward God.

⁹ Gen. 25.22; Deut. 28.33; Judg. 9.53; 10.8.

¹⁰ The same Hebrew word (זעק) is used for 'cry' in 3.9; 3.15; 6.6,7; 10.10 and 10.14. In 4.3 the word is צעק, which is a variant spelling of the same root. Cf. Brown *et al.*, *BDB*, p. 858.

¹¹ That the previous 'cries' of Israel do not include genuine repentance is the view of most interpreters, including Exum, 'The Centre Cannot Hold', pp. 411-12; and Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, p. 155.

7.3. YAHWEH REFUSES TO SAVE ISRAEL

In light of the apparent repentance of the Israelites and the previous mercies of Yahweh, the hearer of Judges would likely expect Yahweh to respond by raising up a judge who would bring salvation to the Israelites (cf. 3.9; 3.15; 4.4; and 6.11). God, however, does not respond as expected. Surprisingly, Yahweh says to the Israelites:

Was it not from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and from the Ammonites and from the Philistines—and when the Sidonians and Amalek and Maon oppressed you, you cried unto me, and I saved you from their power? But you have forsaken me and served other gods; therefore, I will not save you again. Go and call upon the gods that you have chosen. They will save you in the time of your distress (Judges 10.11-13).

Yahweh's refusal to rescue his people is all the more unexpected given his earlier declaration: 'I will never break my covenant' (2.1). Judges 10.6-16, therefore, is quite a shocking dialogue between God and the Israelites. In spite of their confession and their repentance, God does not respond favorably. He has saved them time after time, but he will not save them again. The cycle of sin and salvation is repeated four times earlier in the book of Judges (3.7-11; 12-30; 4.1-5.31; 6.1-8.28), but it will not be repeated quite the same again. One would have expected that the unique perplexity of this passage, in which the previously patient Yahweh refuses to save Israel, would cause it to be the object of much scrutiny, however it has not received significant attention by biblical interpreters.¹²

In this third speech, Yahweh reminds the Israelites of his faithfulness, mercy, and salvation in the past. Once again he points back all the way to Egypt and then

¹² Scholars have given little attention to Judg. 10.6-16. Shiveka's journal article is a detailed study that offers a new translation of one word (עֲמִיל) in Judg. 10.16; Avi Shiveka, 'Watiqzar Nafsho Ba'amal Yisrael: A New Understanding', *BM* 172 (2002), pp. 77-86 (in Hebrew). Furthermore, the commentaries scarcely treat ch. 10. Schneider, for example, devotes less than one page to ch. 10, and she does no more than summarize the text. She provides no commentary and no discussion of the significance of ch. 10 or its place in the flow of the narrative; Schneider, *Judges*, p. 160. Soggin devotes about one and one-half pages to ch. 10, but most of his comments are simply paraphrases of the text. His primary concern is source criticism; thus, he entitles this section of his commentary 'Prologue: Deuteronomistic Introduction'; Soggin, *Judges*, pp. 201-203. Moore includes only a few lines of comment outside of his discussion of source criticism; Moore, *Judges*, p. 281. Only one page is given to 10.6-16 in Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, p. 198. To be fair, I should mention Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, pp. 44-48; and Block, *Judges, Ruth*, pp. 344-349, who offer more substantial comments (5 pp.).

lists six more enemies from which he had saved them.¹³ It seems significant that only here in Judges does Yahweh himself respond verbally to the Israelites' cries. In previous rebukes of the Israelites, Yahweh employs an angel (2.1) and a prophet (6.8). The immediacy of the dialog is accentuated by the lack of a mediating angel or prophet. The tone of the rebuff is quite sarcastic, 'Go cry to the gods you have chosen',¹⁴ perhaps alluding ironically to Joshua's covenant renewal ceremony where the Israelites 'chose' to serve Yahweh (Josh. 24.22). The Lord seems to be completely unresponsive to the Israelites' cries and unconcerned about their suffering. Pressler reads this rebuff as 'the passionate, pained response of a lover whose love is betrayed one too many times'.¹⁵ God's response here is not only unprecedented but also completely unexpected. Although the basic plan of the book is established in chapter three, the divine intransigence here is not included there as part of the standard cycle. In Yahweh's first two speeches, it is Israel who will not hear; but now, Yahweh will not hear. Consequently, he advises the Israelites to cry out to the gods they have chosen; perhaps those gods will hear and save.

7.3.1. Yahweh's Frustrated Speech

As in previous cycles, the narrator informs the reader that God is very angry at the Israelites, but in chapter ten, the anger of God is given further expression in his speech. He refuses to aid the Israelites again, and he sarcastically recommends they seek the help of the foreign gods. Additional evidence for the passionate tone of God's speech may be found in the Hebrew grammar of verses eleven and twelve. Verse eleven is an incomplete sentence that contains no verb. The Hebrew text reads:

¹³ The list of nations in Judg. 10.11-12 corresponds to previous deliverances: Amorites (Num. 21; Josh. 24.8); Ammonites (Judg. 3.13); Philistines (Judg. 3.31); Sidonians (Josh. 13.6; Judg. 3.3); Amalekites (Judg. 6.3, 33; 7.12); Maon (Josh. 15.55). The LXX has Midian in the place of Maon, which would point to Judg. 6)

¹⁴ Cf. Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 45.

¹⁵ Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, p. 198.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֲלֹא מִמִּצְרַיִם וּמִן־הָאֱמֹרִי וּמִן־בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן וּמִן־פְּלִשְׁתִּים

The verse might be translated literally, 'And Yahweh said unto the sons of Israel, "Was it not from Egypt and from the Ammonite and from the sons of Ammon and from the Philistines . . . ?"' Verse twelve follows with, "'And the Sidonians and Amalek and Maon oppressed you, and you cried unto me, and I saved you from their hand"'. Verse twelve, therefore, is a complete sentence and makes sense as it stands, but verse eleven is incomplete, and cannot be attached grammatically to verse twelve. The critical apparatus of the BHS suggests that verse eleven is corrupt and recommends the addition of the verb הוֹשַׁעְתִּי as an emendation, even though there is no manuscript support for such a move.¹⁶ Translations have smoothed out the verse by supplying the missing verb; for example, the King James Version reads: 'And the LORD said unto the children of Israel, *Did not I deliver you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines?*'¹⁷ Commentators insist on emending verse eleven, either by adding a verb, by removing the preposition מִן, or by doing both. Boling declares that 'the verses have clearly suffered in transmission'.¹⁸ Gesenius allows for the legitimate existence of rhetorical anacoluthon, but he sees no reason for its use in Judges ten; therefore, he also calls for emendation.¹⁹

¹⁶ Rudolf Kittel *et al.*, *BHS* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 3rd emended edn, 1987), p. 421.

¹⁷ The following translations offer similar solutions: JPS, NASB, RSV, NIV, NRSV, NAB, NJB, NKJV, and TNK. I was unable to find any translation that allows verse eleven to stand without a verb. Some translations (including the Vulgate and Luther) join verses eleven and twelve into one sentence, choosing to remove the preposition מִן from verse eleven. Both A and B versions of the LXX remove the anacoluthon, but they do so in different ways.

¹⁸ Boling, *Judges*, p. 192; Moore, *Judges*, pp. 281-82; Soggin, *Judges*, p. 202; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 346; O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, pp. 467-68. Other commentators do not mention the anacoluthon, but in their translations they emend verse eleven; e.g., Martin, *Judges*, p. 135; Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, p. 197; Schneider, *Judges*, p. 160; Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 43; Wilcock, *Message of Judges*, p. 108

¹⁹ Gesenius, Kautzsch, and Cowley, *Grammar*, pp. 505-506. Gesenius' examples of anacoluthon are Gen. 23.13; 31.52; Ezek. 34.10; Num. 14.21 ff.; 32.20 ff.; Deut. 17.2 ff.; 24.1 ff.; and 29.21 ff. Other grammars do not mention anacoluthon; nor do they discuss Judg. 10.11-12. Cf. Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*; Van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*; Waltke and O'Connor, *Hebrew Syntax*.

Soggin argues that the corruption of verse eleven is made obvious by the abnormal attaching of the preposition מִן directly to the names of the nations ('from Egypt', etc.), when the usual terminology for salvation in Judges is 'saved from the hand of' (2.16, 18; 6.9, 14; 8.22; 9.17; 10.12; 13.5).²⁰ In regard to Judges, Soggin is correct, but מִן can be used with יִשַׁע, as it is in 2 Sam. 22.4 (וַיִּמְאַיְבֵי אֹיְשָׁע), 'I will be saved from my enemies'). Furthermore, when Judges speaks of Egypt, the preposition מִן is often attached to מִצְרַיִם (2.1; 6.8; 6.13; 11.13; and 11.16). It seems, therefore, that the use of the preposition מִן may be conditioned by the placing of Egypt first in the list.

In spite of the universal calls for emendation, there is good reason to accept the text as it stands. In fact, any clarifying emendation would detract significantly from the mood of the text, which is expressed in the explosive tone of the anacoluthon. The extraordinary form of expression matches the extraordinary content of the expression. God is frustrated with the Israelites, and his frustration is evident in his strained response. The broken grammar could be registering the passionate outburst of an offended God. Verse eleven is the fractional speech of a furious God. To remove the tension from Judg. 10.11-12 would be equivalent to removing the Song of Deborah from chapter five because we have the prose account of the same events in chapter four. Just as poetry communicates mood, so does direct speech; and the speech of chapter ten evokes a dense mood of complex emotion, which must not be easily dismissed.

7.3.2. Israel's Plea for Mercy

After Yahweh threatens to abandon the Israelites to their own devices, they repeat their confession and supplement it with the reiteration of their plea for help, saying 'We have sinned; do, yourself, to us whatever is good in your sight, only please deliver us this day' (10.15). The redundant use of the pronoun 'yourself' (אָתָּה) shows

²⁰ Soggin, *Judges*, p. 202.

that the Israelites want to be delivered from the enemy and placed under the discipline of God himself. Apparently, they prefer a punishment that proceeds directly from God (disease, crop failure, natural disasters, etc.) rather than one that comes through the mediation of an enemy people.²¹ Although the Lord does not respond to their plea for deliverance, 'They put aside their foreign gods from among them and they served Yahweh' (10.16). They proceed to discard their idols and to serve (עבד) the Lord, actions which function in the narrative as an *inclusio* to the beginning of the episode in verse six, which states, 'they forsook the Lord and did not serve (עבד) him'. In verse six they *do not* serve Yahweh, but in verse sixteen they *do* serve Yahweh.

The putting away of their idols and their serving of Yahweh would appear to constitute genuine repentance. It would be natural for the reader to expect God's mercy and forgiveness to accompany the Israelites' repentance, especially since Yahweh has delivered them on many occasions when they did not clearly repent. Yahweh, however, does not answer, showing that 'deliverance does not mechanically follow confession'.²² Furthermore, he does not speak again until chapter thirteen when the angel of Yahweh announces the coming birth of Samson. The abrupt silence of Yahweh that follows Israel's plea is reminiscent of the silence of Israel after Yahweh's previous speech (6.10). Although Yahweh does not speak, the narrator furnishes a glimpse into the heart of God with these concluding words: 'And his soul was grieved by the misery of Israel' (10.16b). Yahweh does not answer, and he does not save the Israelites, but he is moved to grief by their misery. 'Israel's suffering is God's grief'.²³

²¹ Cf. David, who also chose discipline from the hand of God rather than from the hand of the enemy (2 Sam. 24.14).

²² Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, p. 197.

²³ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (2 vols.; New York: Harper & Row, 1962), II, p. 151.

The Hebrew text of Judg. 10.16b, וַתִּקְצַר נַפְשׁוֹ בְּעַמְלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, is rendered by the New Revised Standard Version, 'and he could no longer bear to see Israel suffer', which represents the traditional consensus interpretation.²⁴ Although the exact wording of the translations and commentaries may differ, they agree that Judg. 10.16b is an expression of Yahweh's compassion toward the Israelites in their suffering. Soggin, for example, translates, 'and his heart felt sorry for the sufferings of Israel'.²⁵

Robert Polzin, however, challenges the consensus, and argues that verse sixteen does not include any movement toward compassion on God's part. He insists that the 'misery of Israel' refers to Israel's laborious response to Yahweh, and that the phrase as a whole (וַתִּקְצַר נַפְשׁוֹ בְּעַמְלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) means that Yahweh is annoyed with Israel's laborious attempts to feign repentance. Polzin translates 10.16b, 'and he grew annoyed [or impatient] with the troubled efforts of Israel'.²⁶ Barry Webb has effectively refuted Polzin's position,²⁷ but since other writers continue to depend upon Polzin's argument and to build upon his interpretation,²⁸ a brief discussion of the translation of 10.16b may prove helpful.

If Judg. 10.16b, וַתִּקְצַר נַפְשׁוֹ בְּעַמְלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, were translated quite literally, the clause would read, 'and his soul was cut short by the misery of Israel'. It is agreed

²⁴ Cf. other major versions, both ancient and modern; e.g., 'and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel' (KJV); και ὀλιγόθη ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ ἐν κόπῳ Ἰσραὴλ (LXX); *qui doluit super miseriis eorum* (VUL); *Und es jammerte ihn, daß Israel so geplaget ward* (LUT); 'and He could not bear the miseries of Israel' (TNK); 'And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel' (NKJV); 'so that he grieved over the misery of Israel' (NAB); 'and He could bear the misery of Israel no longer' (NAU); 'and he could no longer bear to see Israel suffer' (NRSV); 'but He became weary of Israel's misery' (CSB); *toen kon Hij Israëls ellende niet langer aanzien* (Dutch, NBG); *ne put pas supporter plus longtemps leur accablement* (French, BFC); *che si addolorò per l'afflizione d'Israele* (Italian, NRV); *y Él no pudo soportar más la angustia de Israel* (Spanish, LBA). The exception to the consensus is the RSV, which reads, 'and he became indignant over the misery of Israel'.

²⁵ Soggin, *Judges*, p. 202. Cf. 'and the plight of Israel became intolerable to him', by Boling, *Judges*, p. 190; and Yahweh 'could no longer bear the miseries of Israel', by Schneider, *Judges*, p. 160.

²⁶ Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, p. 177 (parenthesis Polzin's).

²⁷ Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, pp. 46-47

²⁸ E.g., Block, *Judges, Ruth*, pp. 348-49; and Shiveka, 'Ba'amal Yisrael', pp. 77-86.

that the verb קָצַר means literally 'to cut short',²⁹ and it is used most often to describe the reaping of grain (Lev. 19.9). The general meaning of נֶפֶשׁ, 'soul', is beyond dispute as well, but lexicons vary on the precise definition of the term. Apparently, the נֶפֶשׁ is the 'vital force'³⁰ or 'vital energy'³¹ of all living beings, and when used in relation to God, refers to 'the utmost depths of God's living being'.³² The cutting short of the life force, therefore, would suggest a weakening or debilitating effect, which is why Moore writes, 'the phrase is used for complete discouragement, when endurance itself is exhausted'.³³ Clines allows that the combination of קָצַר and נֶפֶשׁ can mean 'vex',³⁴ which itself means 'to afflict with mental agitation or trouble; to make anxious or depressed; to distress deeply or seriously'.³⁵

Two other biblical texts, Num. 21.4 and Judg. 16.16, illustrate the usage of the phrase קָצַר נֶפֶשׁ. The book of Numbers recounts the journey of the Israelites through the wilderness, and Num. 21.4 reads, 'And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged (וַתִּקְצַר נֶפֶשׁ הָעָם) because of the way' (KJV). The difficulties of the journey cause distress and emotional exhaustion, and the Israelites choose to respond by complaining against God and Moses (Num. 21.5). The basis of their discouragement, according to verse five, is the lack of food and water. Haak

²⁹ Brown *et al.*, *BDB*, p. 894. Cf. Holladay, *Lexicon*, p. 322.

³⁰ Albert Dihle, 'ψυχή', in Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (eds.), *TDNT* (trans. G. Bromiley; 10 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), IX, p. 632.

³¹ H. Seebass, 'נֶפֶשׁ', in G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (eds.), *TDOT* (trans. John T. Willis; 14 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), IX, p. 510.

³² Seebass, 'נֶפֶשׁ', p. 516.

³³ Moore, *Judges*, p. 282.

³⁴ Clines, *DCH*, V, p. 726. The words are so translated in Judg. 16.16 by the KJV, NKJV, JPS and RSV.

³⁵ J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner (eds.), *The Oxford English Dictionary: Electronic Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd edn, 1989), s.v. 'vex'.

suggests that they are 'weakened on the road, i.e., they were in a condition of powerlessness'.³⁶

The second parallel to Judg. 10.16b is found later in the same book, near the climax of the dialogue between Samson and Delilah: 'And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death' (16.16, KJV). The Hebrew text reads,

וַיְהִי כִּי־הִצִּיקָהּ לוֹ בַדְבָרֶיהָ כָּל־הַיָּמִים וַתִּאֲלָצֶהוּ וַתִּקְצַר נַפְשׁוֹ לְמוֹת:

In Samson's case, the phrase וַתִּקְצַר נַפְשׁוֹ seems to signify that he is 'weakening',³⁷ 'tired' (NRSV), 'weary' (NAB) or 'sick' (NJB), under the pressure of Delilah's emotional pleas; in fact, he is weakening 'to the point of death' (לְמוֹת), which is an obvious hyperbole. Consequent upon his distress, Samson relents and tells Delilah everything that she seeks to know. It is important to recognize, however, that the phrase וַתִּקְצַר נַפְשׁוֹ does not include the act of relenting. Samson's choice to give in and reveal his secret is precipitated by his emotional weariness, but he could have chosen to endure the suffering and remain silent.

The wording of the RSV, 'and he became indignant over the misery of Israel' requires that וַתִּקְצַר נַפְשׁוֹ be interpreted against its common usage, since nowhere else does the phrase mean 'indignant'. The word 'indignant' is a category of 'anger', more specifically 'anger at injustice';³⁸ and although Yahweh is angry in Judges ch. 10, he is not angered by Israel's misery; he is angered by Israel's idolatry. The RSV is corrected in the NRSV, which reads, 'and he could no longer bear to see Israel suffer'. Given the meaning of the individual words, קָצַר and נֶפֶשׁ, and in light of the usage of the phrase, וַתִּקְצַר נַפְשׁוֹ, I would recommend the translation 'wearied' or

³⁶ Robert D. Haak, 'A Study and New Interpretation of QSR NPŠ', *JBL* 101 (1982), p. 166.

³⁷ Haak, 'QSR NPŠ', p. 166.

³⁸ The word 'indignant' means 'provoked to wrath by something regarded as unworthy, unjust, or ungrateful; moved by an emotion of anger mingled with scorn or contempt'; Simpson and Weiner (eds.), *OED*, s.v. 'indignant'.

'vexed'. Samson is 'wearied' by Delilah's persistence, and he cannot bear her tearful entreaties. Israel is 'wearied' by the difficulties in the wilderness, unable to bear the lack of food and water. God is 'wearied' by the labor of Israel. Hence Yahweh's identification with Israel is manifested—Israel labors, and it is Yahweh who grows weary.

Avi Shiveka agrees with Polzin and takes up his argument by focusing on the translation of עמל, 'misery'. Shiveka asserts that the word עמל does not mean 'misery' as it has been translated; but that it means 'deceit'. If עמל means 'deceit', then the latter part of the verse would read, 'and he was grieved by the deceit of Israel'. Therefore, Shiveka argues that the deceit of the Israelites is their attempt to persuade God that they are repentant when in fact they are not. Their deceit is their feigned repentance, their pretense, their hypocrisy.³⁹

Shiveka's argument rests upon two grounds. First, he suggests that the translation 'he was grieved by the deceit of Israel' is more consistent with the context of chapter ten. With this translation, Yahweh's persistent refusal to aid Israel continues to the very end of the passage. Second, he points to texts where עמל is paired with words that mean 'deceit', and he argues that since the words are paired together, they must be synonyms.⁴⁰

Shiveka's linguistic argument is unconvincing, however, because the pairing of words by no means requires that the paired words be synonyms.⁴¹ The usage of עמל does not vary in the Hebrew Bible, and the lexicons consistently define עמל as a noun meaning 'toil', 'trouble', 'misery', 'labor', and they never define it as 'deceit'.⁴²

³⁹ Shiveka, 'Ba'amal Yisrael', pp. 77-86

⁴⁰ For a similar but much briefer argument, cf. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 349.

⁴¹ Karl Bernhardt, 'עמל', in G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (eds.), *TDOT* (trans. John T. Willis; 13 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), I, p. 142.

⁴² Brown *et al.*, *BDB*, p. 765; Köhler, *HALOT*, p. 845; Ludwig Köhler and Walter Baumgartner, *KB* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1958), p. 715; David Thompson, 'עמל', in Willem Van Gemeren (ed.), *NIDOTE* (5

Although the meaning of עִמָּל is consistent, there are two distinct ways that it can be used. It can signify either the 'toil' or 'misery' that one suffers, or it may signify the 'toil' or 'misery' that one causes others to suffer. Many nouns that express a verbal quality are capable of similar dual usage,⁴³ but the basic meaning of those terms remains the same. Whenever עִמָּל is paired with 'deceit', the causative force of the noun comes into play. In those cases, the words 'misery' and 'deceit' are complementary, but they are not synonymous. Both words fit into the same semantic field and designate coexistent forms of oppression.⁴⁴ For example in Job 15.35, 'They conceive misery (עִמָּל), and give birth to trouble (אֵיזֶן),⁴⁵ and their womb prepares deceit (מִרְמוּה)'.⁴⁶ In addition, עִמָּל can be followed by a functional genitive; and, as is the case with other verbal nouns, that genitive may be an objective genitive or it may be a subjective genitive. That is, the phrase 'the misery of Israel' can denote the misery or oppression suffered by Israel or it can mean the misery or oppression that Israel causes. In Judges chapter ten, the Israelites are the object of oppression, and the Philistines and Ammonites are the cause of the oppression.⁴⁷

In addition to the texts and the lexica, the translations are consistent in rendering עִמָּל as 'misery', 'suffering', 'trouble'. Among the ancient versions, the

vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), III, p. 435; Siegfried Schwertner, 'עִמָּל', in Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (eds.), *TLOT* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; 3 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), II, p. 924; Holladay, *Lexicon*, p. 276; Even-Shoshan, *Concordance*, p. 897. A few representative verses are Job 3.20, 'Why is light given to him that is in misery (עִמָּל), and life to the bitter in soul;' Job 11.16, 'Because you shall forget your trouble (עִמָּל), and remember it as waters that pass away;' and Pro. 31.7, 'Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery (עִמָּל) no more'.

⁴³ In the case of verbal nouns, the genitive form may indicate either the subject or the object of the action. See Waltke and O'Connor, *Hebrew Syntax*, pp. 142-46.

⁴⁴ Schwertner, 'עִמָּל', p. 926; Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *TWOT*, II, p. 100.

⁴⁵ R. Knierim, 'אֵיזֶן', in Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (eds.), *TLOT* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; 3 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), I, p. 60; Clines, *DCH*, I, p. 141.

⁴⁶ Another example is Psalm 10.7, 'His mouth is full of cursing (אֵלֵה), deceit (מִרְמוּה), and fraud (תִּדְ): under his tongue is misery (עִמָּל) and trouble (אֵיזֶן)'.

⁴⁷ Cf. Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, pp. 46-48.

Septuagint translates עמל with κόπος, ('a striking, beating . . . toil, trouble').⁴⁸ Targum Jonathan uses עמל and expands the verse by adding צער (pain, sorrow); the Vulgate uses *miseria* (misery). The following translations use some form of the word 'misery': Geneva Bible, Authorized King James Version, New King James Version, New International Version, New American Standard Version, New American Bible, Revised Standard Version, New Living Translation, the Jewish Publication Society TANAKH. The New Revised Standard Version reads 'suffer'; the New Jerusalem Bible says 'suffering', and the New English Bible employs 'plight'. The following non-English versions all utilize terms that are synonymous with 'misery' and 'suffering': Luther Bibel, *geplagt*; Elberfelder Bibel, *Elend*; Reina-Valera, *aflicción*; Bible in Français Courant, *accablement*; La Sacra Bibbia Nuova Riveduta, *afflizione*; Leidse Vertaling, *lijden*; Netherlands Bible Society Version, *ellende*; and the Ou Vertaling in Afrikaans, *moeite*. Thus, it seems clear that Bible translators have consistently understood עמל as a form of suffering.

Shiveka's other argument, which is based upon contextual considerations, on the surface seems reasonable; it makes sense that God's frustration with Israel might continue until the end of the passage. The weight of linguistic evidence against Shiveka, however, requires another view of the context. Shiveka's attention to verse sixteen is to be commended, when so many scholars have ignored the implications of God's passions. Furthermore, he appreciates the significance of Judg. 10 for the interpretation of the second half of Judges. Shiveka is correct when he argues that chapter ten presents a God who is angry with his people, frustrated by their continual backsliding, and disappointed in all their previous claims to repentance. He is also correct in his proposal that God's reticence to comfort and aid Israel will have repercussions in the Jephthah story. He is not correct, however, in his

⁴⁸ Henry George Liddell *et al.*, *LSJ* (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1940), p. 978.

translation of עמל as 'deceit'. A consideration of wider contextual factors reveals that the pattern for the judge cycle in 2.11-19 shows evidence of a parallel to Judg. 10.16.⁴⁹ God's anger is revealed in 2.14, and his compassion is expressed in 2.18. God becomes angry because of the Israelites' idolatry and he saves them because he is moved with compassion. The Lord 'saved them from the hand of their enemies . . . because the Lord was sorry (נחם) on account of those who tyrannized and oppressed them' (2.18b). The verb נחם is used frequently in the Hebrew Bible to signify God's change of mind or actions. It can be translated 'repent', 'regret', or 'be sorry'.⁵⁰ Regardless of the precise meaning that is assigned to נחם, one thing is clear; God's sympathy for the suffering of the Israelites is a major factor in his decision to save them. A similar compassion is expressed in the words of 10.16, 'his soul was grieved by the misery of Israel', except that 'grief' does not extend so far as to include the change of mind that is expressed by נחם in 2.18b. The continuation of Yahweh's anger is demonstrated further by the fact that he offers no further response to the Israelites; it is not Yahweh but the narrator who discloses Yahweh's struggle in Judg. 10.16.

Polzin's approach to Judg. 10.16 uncovers the two basic questions that interpreters have attempted to answer when commenting on the verse. First, does the phrase refer to God's compassionate concern for Israel? Second, does the phrase counteract Yahweh's earlier refusal to save Israel (10.13)? The two questions should be kept separate, but they are often combined, as if Yahweh's compassion automatically leads to and requires his change of mind. Polzin binds the questions together, reacting to any attempt to see 10.16 as a reversal of 10.13. Brown, for example, sees such a reversal when she writes that 10.16 'expresses God's heart for

⁴⁹ Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, p. 198.

⁵⁰ Köhler, *HALOT*, p. 688; Köhler and Baumgartner, *KB*, p. 608; H. J. Stoebe, 'נחם', in Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (eds.), *TLOT* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; 3 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), II, p. 738; Clines, *DCH*, V, p. 663.

his people and his readiness to act on their behalf; action would be immediately forthcoming'.⁵¹ Pressler follows the same course, asserting that 10.16 means that 'mercy finally prevails'.⁵²

Unfortunately, Polzin, Brown and Pressler fail to recognize the possibility that Yahweh may be wearied and vexed by the suffering of the Israelites and still maintain his course of noninvolvement. Polzin is correct in his argument that in spite of their repentance, the Israelites cannot be assured of Yahweh's positive response.⁵³ Nevertheless, his point can be made without resorting to a questionable translation, since the text states only that Yahweh is distressed; it does not state that he has changed his course of action. Webb explains, 'We may perhaps infer from the cause of the exasperation (Israel's misery) that Yahweh, like Samson, will relent. But that is an inference for which we must seek confirmation in the ensuing narrative'.⁵⁴ Notwithstanding his incorrect translation of Judg. 10.16b, Polzin is unerring in his overall assessment of Judg. 10.6-16:

What comes through quite forcefully in this dialogue are both Israel's rather self-serving conversion as an apparent attempt once more to use Yahweh to insure their peace and tranquility, and Yahweh's argument that a slighted and rejected God will be used no longer.⁵⁵

7.4. YAHWEH'S SPEECH AS THE TURNING POINT OF JUDGES

It has been argued that the story of either Gideon or Abimelech is the turning point in the book of Judges.⁵⁶ Without a doubt, as the discussion in Chapter 6 has shown,

⁵¹ Brown, 'Judges', p. 220.

⁵² Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, p. 198. Another commentator who fails to separate the two questions is Block, *Judges, Ruth*, pp. 348-49. See also, Anthony Tomasino and Robin Wakely, 'קָצַר', in Willem Van Gemeren (ed.), *NIDOTE* (5 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), III, p. 968, who write, 'God became impatient because of their suffering and delivered them from their oppressors'.

⁵³ Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, p. 177.

⁵⁴ Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 48.

⁵⁵ Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, p. 178.

⁵⁶ J. Gordon Harris, Cheryl Anne Brown, and Michael S. Moore, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (New International Biblical Commentary; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), p. 218; Gooding, 'Composition of the Book of Judges', pp. 70-79; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 335; Klein, *Triumph of Irony*, p. 83; and Exum, 'The Centre Cannot Hold', p. 412.

Gideon functions as a transitional character whose ambiguous behavior indicates a definite increase in the narrative tension. Abimelech is a central character in the narrative as well, and his role is both vital and complex.⁵⁷ The movement from Gideon (who refuses to be king) to Abimelech (who makes himself king) is a powerful introduction to the theme of monarchy, a theme that is revisited later in the book.

The argument for Gideon or Abimelech as the turning point in the book, however, appears to be based upon questionable assumptions. First, the argument assumes that speech of God (as found in chapter ten) is less significant than the actions of other characters.⁵⁸ Cheryl Brown, however, insists on the importance of Yahweh's speech: 'The length and detail of this divine speech is significant; for in Hebrew narrative convention, important points are often communicated in the form of direct speech, and how much more in the form of divine speech'.⁵⁹ Second, it assumes that the various source materials in Judges can be ranked in levels of importance based upon their relative age. According to this view, chapter ten, being a Deuteronomic source, occupies the third and latest strata, and is, therefore, virtually disposable, while 'the story of Abimelech is one of the oldest in the book of Judges, and in various ways one of the most instructive'.⁶⁰ Third, the argument for Abimelech's priority is based partially upon historical criticism's penchant for pursuing the perceived political agenda of the documents. That is, since the Abimelech story relates to the monarchical theme (a political agenda), it must carry

⁵⁷ Since this paper does not focus on Abimelech, his role in the overall narrative of Judges will not be detailed here. For more on Abimelech, see Thomas A. Boogaart, 'Stone for Stone: Retribution in the Story of Abimelech and Shechem', *JSOT* 32 (1985), pp. 45-56; J. P. Fokkelman, 'Structural Remarks on Judges 9 and 19', in M. Fishbane, E. Tov, and W. Fields (eds.), *Sha'arei Talmon* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), pp. 33-45; and J. Gerald Janzen, 'A Certain Woman in the Rhetoric of Judges 9', *JSOT*, no. 38 (1987), pp. 33-37. Most other articles on Abimelech are historical critical studies.

⁵⁸ E.g., the speeches of God are not considered by Exum, 'The Centre Cannot Hold', p. 411, who argues that as the behavior and fortunes of Israel decline throughout the book of Judges, the role of God becomes more uncertain.

⁵⁹ Harris, Brown, and Moore, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, p. 221.

⁶⁰ Moore, *Judges*, p. 238.

more weight than chapter ten, which pursues a religious agenda.⁶¹ Fourth, the argument for either Gideon or Abimelech as the turning point underestimates the narrative value of the minor judges who are chronicled in Judg. 10.1-5. The accounts of Tola and Jair function in the narrative as a temporal buffer between the story of Abimelech in chapter nine and the speech of God that begins in 10.6. More than an entire generation (forty-five years) passes from the time of Abimelech's illegitimate rule to the time when God refuses to save Israel.

It is only after Yahweh's speech in chapter ten, that the whole texture of the narrative changes. The land never again has rest. Never again is deliverance (נציל) or salvation (ישע) attributed to God.⁶² For the most part, in the remainder of the book, God is silent, speaking only in two episodes (Judg. 13 and 20).⁶³ Furthermore, God's relative silence is accompanied by his seeming inactivity. For the reasons stated above, it is probably right to suggest, as I do here, that the dialogue between God and the Israelites in 10.6-16 is the major turning point in the book.⁶⁴

The cyclical pattern that forms the framework for the central section of Judges begins to break down in Judg. 10.6-16. The cycle continues intact with the Othniel and Ehud narratives, but in the Deborah narrative the completion of the cycle is threatened because of the hesitancy of Barak (4.6-8). A more serious threat to the cyclical pattern comes in the Gideon cycle when Gideon requires repeated signs and assurances from Yahweh; but, in the end, the cycle runs its course with the

⁶¹ Historical criticism tends to read the biblical documents as political propaganda packaged in the guise of religion, while I would view them the opposite way—they are religious documents with political implications. It should be noted that the theme of kingship is not accepted unanimously as the major theme of Abimelech's story. See Webb, 'Jephthah', pp. 34-43. Webb argues that retribution is the controlling theme.

⁶² Although neither the word 'save' (ישע) nor 'deliver' (נציל) is used, Yahweh is credited with the victory when he 'gives' (נתן) the enemy into the hand of Jephthah (11.33).

⁶³ Yahweh's declaration of noninvolvement helps to explain his allowing of subsequent atrocities, such as Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter, and his silence regarding those atrocities.

⁶⁴ See Boling, *Judges*, p. 193, who argues that ch. 10 serves as a 'theological introduction' to chs. 11-21. It may not be coincidental that, according to the final masorah of Judges, the center of the book is Judg. 10.8; Kittel *et al.*, *BHS*, p. 442.

components intact. The Jephthah cycle, however, lacks two important components that are found in all the other cycles. First, Yahweh's threat to withdraw from helping the Israelites is manifested in his refusal to participate in the choosing of a deliverer. Jephthah is chosen not by Yahweh but by the elders of Gilead. Second, at the end of the Jephthah narrative it is not said that the land had rest. The pattern seems to collapse completely in the Samson cycle, the only cycle in which the Israelites do not cry out to Yahweh for his help.⁶⁵ In fact they seem to be content to live under the domination of the Philistines rather than to join Samson in his fight against Philistine oppression (Judg. 15.11.). In addition to the missing cry for help, the Samson cycle fails to include both salvation from the enemy and rest for the land. Samson's failure to effect salvation is important enough to the story that it is mentioned in his birth narrative when the angel of Yahweh says not that Samson will deliver Israel but that he will 'begin' to deliver Israel (13.5). The cyclical pattern, therefore, is complete in the Othniel and Ehud narratives, is threatened in the Deborah and Gideon narratives, and finally collapses in the Jephthah and Samson cycles. The human participants in the narratives, as important as their roles are, are not responsible ultimately for the collapse of the cyclical framework. I suggest, in contrast to the emphasis of Exum⁶⁶ and other interpreters of Judges, that the collapse of the pattern is caused by Yahweh's refusal to continue to save a people who have repeatedly offended him and have taken advantage of his mercy.

⁶⁵ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 337. The final judge, Samson, is different from all other judges in at least three ways. First, he is chosen from before his birth and is destined to be a judge and a nazirite all the days of his life. Second, he never raises an army to engage the enemy, the Philistines. Third, he fails to save Israel.

⁶⁶ Although Exum, 'The Centre Cannot Hold', attributes to Yahweh partial responsibility for the collapse of the cyclical pattern, she does not give sufficient weight to Yahweh's speech in Judg. 6-16, and she does not recognize, as I suggest here, that Yahweh's inner struggle is the source of his ambiguous actions in Judges 17-21. Exum concludes, 'Yhwh's rule is ineffectual, either because Yhwh does not intervene in events or because Yhwh intervenes in ways that result in destruction rather than benefit. Yhwh thus shares with Israel responsibility for the disorder with which Judges ends' (p. 414).

7.5. THE PASSIONS OF GOD

When the reader of Judges reaches 10.6 and hears the words, 'The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh', and 'the anger of Yahweh grew hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand' of the enemy, and 'the Israelites cried out to Yahweh', he or she would expect to see the repetition of the whole judge cycle for the fifth time. The expectations of the hearer are shattered, however, by the unfolding of a unique scenario: Yahweh refuses to help Israel. 'I saved you time and again,' the Lord says, 'but I will save you no more'. The hearer naturally expects the next event to be Yahweh's raising up of a savior, but no such action ensues. Instead of naming a judge/savior, the Lord responds to the cries of the Israelites' with a stinging rebuke, reminding them of all the times he has saved them in the past. Yahweh declares that this time he will not save them. His mercy has been used up. All hope is not lost, however, for the narrator reports that Yahweh '*could not bear to see Israel suffer*' (10.16).

7.5.1. The Anger of Yahweh

This episode highlights the two poles that represent God's passions. At one end is the anger of God, and at the other end is the compassion of God. The judge cycle of chapter ten begins with the statement of God's anger, 'The anger of Yahweh was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the Ammonites' (10.7). His anger is justified, given the depths of idolatry into which the Israelites had fallen. By this time, the hearer of Judges would be familiar with the cycle that includes the Israelites' idolatry and Yahweh's angry response. The theme of God's anger is introduced in Judg. 2, and the cause of that anger is attributed to the actions of the Israelites who worship other gods and in doing so 'provoked Yahweh' (2.12). The idolatry of the Israelites is further described as a breach of the

covenant and as disobedience.⁶⁷ The Lord said, 'This people have transgressed my covenant . . . and have not heard / obeyed my voice' (2.20). God is faithful to the covenant (2.1), but Israel is unfaithful and disobedient.

Apparently, the Lord's anger intensifies as the list of foreign gods grows longer and as Israel persists in apostasy. In chapter ten, Yahweh reminds Israel of his repeated salvation from enemy after enemy, while Israel continues to relapse into idolatry. It seems that Israel's chronic unfaithfulness and ingratitude provoke God to the point that he is forced to employ drastic measures in his dealings with his people.⁶⁸ If he does not vigorously confront Israel, the covenant will be in danger of irreparable mutilation. Since the Lord declares earlier that he will never break his covenant (2.1), his refusal to save the Israelites must be interpreted as an emergency measure, calculated to discipline them severely. 'A personal relationship binds Him to Israel . . . The divine commandments are not mere recommendations for man, but express divine concern, which, when realized or repudiated, is of personal importance to him'.⁶⁹

7.5.2. The Compassion of Yahweh

Compassion stands at the other end of the spectrum of God's passions; and although chapter ten shows little evidence of that compassion, the hearer of chapter ten would be aware of the compassionate saving acts of Yahweh in the earlier cycles of Judges. Yahweh reminds the Israelites that he had saved them from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, the Sidonians, Amalek and Maon (10.11). The other hint of Yahweh's compassion is the second part of verse sixteen, which offers a small ray of hope, a glimmer of light, an indication that God's compassion has not failed. The narrator declares that the Lord 'was grieved by the misery of

⁶⁷ Cf. Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, p. 197.

⁶⁸ Cf. Moore, *Judges*, p. 278.

⁶⁹ Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p. 24.

Israel' (10.16b). What is often missed in the discussions of Yahweh's attitude in Judg. 10.16b is Olson's point that it is 'Israel's suffering, not Israel's deep repentance' that affects Yahweh and causes his emotional distress.⁷⁰ Apparently, the Israelites' suffering affects God in such a way that his compassion is aroused. Their misery causes him sorrow. This closing verse in the exchange between the Lord and Israel reveals a small opening in the door of hope that God had previously shut. At the beginning of this narrative, he is angry at the Israelites because of their unfaithfulness. Now, although still angry, he is suffering along with them. The reader is left with quite an ambiguous situation. God has not answered; he has not saved; but he is sympathetic to Israel's plight.

The equivocal nature of God's response to Israel in 10.6-16 perhaps produces mixed expectations in the reader. Will Yahweh again come to the Israelites' aid and deliver them as he did in the past? Or, will he resolutely refuse to respond to what may be once again a temporary and shallow rededication of a rebellious and recalcitrant people. The tension within Yahweh between his anger and his compassion is not resolved in Judges ch. 10.

7.6. THE VULNERABILITY OF GOD

Chapter ten of Judges brings into focus the apparent conflict between Yahweh's anger and his compassion, a conflict that derives from the covenant relationship between God and his people. The angel of the Lord says in chapter two:

'I brought you up from Egypt, and I brought you to the land that I had sworn to your ancestors. And I said, "I will not break my covenant with you forever. And you, do not make a covenant with the inhabitants of this land; tear down their altars". But you have not heard/obeyed my voice . . .' (2.1-2).

In light of the Lord's initial rebuke of Israel, one could suggest that the underlying theology of Judges is based upon the covenant relationship between God and

⁷⁰ Olson, 'Judges', p. 825.

Israel.⁷¹ God has chosen to enter into a genuine relationship with his people, and that relationship causes God himself to be vulnerable to abuse, neglect, and personal injury. As soon as the Lord chooses to enter into the covenant, he submits himself to a position of personal risk.⁷² The covenant relationship 'reveals a divine vulnerability, as God takes on all the risks that authentic relatedness entails. Because of what happens to that relationship with those whom God loves, God suffers'.⁷³

7.6.1. Departure from the Norm

Yahweh's negative response to Israel's cries in chapter ten marks a clear departure from the expected cycle and begs for an explanation. Apparently, God's change of response shows that he is not mechanical in his response to sin and/or repentance; rather, his response is truly relational.⁷⁴ In chapter ten, the cry of the Israelites is more sincere than ever; they repent, confessing twice, 'we have sinned'. They demonstrate their authentic repentance by casting aside their idols and serving Yahweh. Yet in spite of their apparent change of heart and action, the Lord refuses to come to their aid.

7.6.2. Covenant Relationship and Risk

The interaction between Yahweh and Israel in chapter ten of Judges suggests that by entering into a covenant relationship with Israel, the God of Judges has put himself at risk or made himself vulnerable in at least three ways. First, the God of Judges is vulnerable to repeated rejection—God is faithful, but Israel is not faithful. God keeps his covenant obligations, but Israel breaks the covenant over and over. God rescues the Israelites repeatedly, but their gratitude is short-lived. The Israelites' relationship

⁷¹ Cf. Harris, Brown, and Moore, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, p. 132.

⁷² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 271-75.

⁷³ Fretheim, *Suffering of God*, p. 78; see also pp. 36-37 and 76-77; and Boling, *Judges*, p. 193.

⁷⁴ On the unpredictability of Yahweh's response to Israel, see Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 227-28. For a theological argument for the relationality of God, cf. Clark H. Pinnock, 'Divine Relationality: A Pentecostal Contribution to the Doctrine of God', *JPT* 5 (2000), pp. 3-26.

to God is one of freedom, based upon intergenerational covenant renewal. That freedom may be illustrated in the challenge of Joshua, who says to Israel, 'Choose today whom you will serve' (Josh. 24.15). In the Book of Judges, the Israelites choose over and over again to serve the gods of the Canaanites; and when they serve the gods of the Canaanites, they are forced to serve the Canaanites as well. Freedom does have its limits.

Second, the God of Judges is vulnerable to attempted manipulation. The Israelites' recurring cycle of rebellion and their repentance in chapter ten may epitomize their attempts to use God, to abuse their relationship with God. Over and over they commit what is evil in the sight of God, but God forgives them each time. It is only natural that they would anticipate forgiveness once again, especially if they would repent. Their repeated rebellion may indicate to the reader that the Israelites are attempting to manipulate God to their own ends, presuming upon his mercy, and taking advantage of his compassion.⁷⁵ Further, the reader may sense that their efforts to manipulate and exploit God are successful for a time. But in chapter ten it becomes clear that the Lord is refusing to allow that manipulation to continue.

Third, the God of Judges is vulnerable to internal conflict. In chapter ten of Judges, God is angry; he is so angry that he refuses to save his covenant people from oppression. An angry God is a terrible presence, but even more terrible would be an absent God. As Moltmann stated, 'The opposite of love is not wrath, but indifference. Indifference towards justice and injustice would be a retreat on the part of God from the covenant. But his wrath is an expression of his abiding interest'.⁷⁶ Yes, God is angry; he is so angry that he speaks with broken grammar (10.11). He is so angry that he becomes sarcastic: 'Go and cry out to the gods that you have

⁷⁵ Cf. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 347.

⁷⁶ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p. 272.

chosen. They will save you' (10.14).⁷⁷ Eichrodt argues that the anger of Yahweh, though genuine and intense, is not enduring:

God's anger is conceived as operating in individual acts of punishment. It is something transient; it is his lovingkindness and righteousness which are truly permanent . . . anger is a sudden change in God's attitude, to which he is driven by man's behaviour.⁷⁸

On the one hand, he is so angry that when the Israelites repent for the second time, he remains silent. On the other hand, he is moved with intense compassion; he is grieved by their suffering; he suffers with them. The words of verse sixteen indicate a draining, depleting, diminishing, exhausting compassion.⁷⁹ Nosson Scherman explains, 'The verse likens God to a sensitive human being, who cannot bear to see the suffering of a beloved friend. Even though the friend has wronged him and does not deserve mercy, the person feels compelled to try and relieve the friend's agony'.⁸⁰ Abraham Heschel asks, 'What hidden bond exists between the word of wrath and the word of compassion, between "consuming fire" and "everlasting love"?'⁸¹ The Lord appears to be torn in two directions.⁸² According to Fiddes, this inner conflict is 'the torment of God's desire for his people, a longing which is suffused by a sense of failure and disappointment. "Struggle" within God' is an expression of his pain.⁸³ He will not be manipulated and exploited, but he suffers when his people suffer. It is a tension that remains unresolved in the book of Judges.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ God's words here express an 'angry tone'; Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 45.

⁷⁸ Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 266.

⁷⁹ Similar words, we saw earlier, are used to describe Samson's exhaustion from Delilah's constant inquiries.

⁸⁰ Scherman, *Joshua/Judges*, p. 182.

⁸¹ Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p. 23.

⁸² Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, p. 198.

⁸³ Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 23-24.

⁸⁴ Yahweh's inner conflict as it emerges from Exod. 34.6-7 is explored by Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 227-28, who writes 'There is no one like Yahweh, who while endlessly faithful, hosts in Yahweh's own life a profound contradiction that leaves open a harshness toward the beloved partner community' (p. 228).

7.7. GOD FORSAKEN AND THE GOD-FORSAKEN

Yahweh declares in his passionate third speech that, after having saved the Israelites seven times, he will not save them again. Their ingratitude and continued forsaking of Yahweh have exhausted his patience so that he no longer responds to their cry for help. As the narrative moves beyond Yahweh's speech, the hearer of Judges must hold together two apparently incompatible words from Yahweh: (1) 'I will never break my covenant' (2.1); and (2) 'I will not save you again' (10.13). Yahweh's refusal to save Israel stands in tension with his earlier declarations of faithfulness and his earlier acts of salvation. The entire story of Israel, from the Exodus to the conquest and to the Judges, is a witness to Yahweh's mercy and faithfulness; but now it seems that Yahweh's mercy has been depleted and the continuation of his covenant with Israel is in doubt. Most likely, the hearer of Judges is hoping that the aforementioned tension will be resolved in the ensuing narrative and that Yahweh will respond with renewed compassion to the cries of Israel. Tensions in the narrative, especially when those tensions surround the character of God, make us uncomfortable; and we hope for a hurried resolution.

In the first half of the book of Judges, the role of God is clear—when the Israelites sin, he hands them over to an enemy for discipline; and, when they cry out to him, he raises up a judge who delivers them. The second half of Judges, however, forces us to linger in the midst of ambiguity, as the tension surrounding the role of God continues unabated and as the narrative refuses to bend to our wishes for an easy resolution.⁸⁵

After Yahweh's third speech, it appears that he has abandoned the Israelites, since he does not raise up for them a judge who will deliver them. Without any direction from Yahweh, the elders of Gilead seek out Jephthah to be their leader; and

⁸⁵ For an excellent survey of the increasingly ambiguous role of Yahweh in the narrative, see Exum, 'The Centre Cannot Hold', pp. 410-31, which I discussed in Ch. 1.

Jephthah responds to their invitation with the words, 'Did you not hate me, and drive me out of my father's house? So why have you come to me now when you are in distress?'—words that allude to the statement of Yahweh in Judg. 10.11-14. Yahweh continues to be uninvolved in the story until Judg. 11.26, when, quite unexpectedly, the 'Spirit of Yahweh' comes upon Jephthah, implying perhaps that Yahweh is returning to the role that he occupied in the earlier cycles of Judges. Such a return is not forthcoming, however, as Yahweh proceeds to display the tension between his faithfulness and his frustration. The tension is evident in that, although the Spirit of Yahweh comes upon Jephthah, Yahweh does not prevent Jephthah from making a rash vow. Although Yahweh had declared that he would not 'save' the Israelites again, he delivers the Ammonites into the hand of Jephthah. Although Yahweh gives victory to Jephthah, neither the word 'save' or 'deliver' are used of God's action; and the land is not granted a time of rest, such as would have conformed to the earlier cyclical pattern. Furthermore, Yahweh does not prevent nor even comment on the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter, and he does not prevent the intertribal battles that follow Jephthah's victory.

The tension between Yahweh's anger and his compassion persists and even grows stronger in the Samson cycle. Even though in this cycle the Israelites do not cry out for his help, Yahweh still initiates the process of deliverance by appointing Samson from before his miraculous birth. Throughout the story of Samson, Yahweh repeatedly gives his Spirit to Samson; but, unlike other judges, Samson does not gather an army. Samson desires to marry a forbidden foreign woman, but the narrative states that Yahweh is working behind the scenes and directing Samson's action (14.4). Yahweh does not speak to Samson, but he answers his prayers (15.18-

19; 16.28).⁸⁶ Although he does not warn Samson of his precarious position when he begins breaking his nazirite vows, Yahweh takes away Samson's strength after his hair is cut, thereby allowing Samson to be the only judge who is defeated by the enemy. Yahweh's abandonment of Samson seems to parallel and illustrate his abandonment of Israel as a whole⁸⁷ and stands in tension with the narrator's declaration from the prologue, 'Yahweh was with the judge' (2.18). Although Samson never admits his errors and never utters words of repentance, Yahweh restores his strength for his last act of vengeance upon the Philistines. The role of God in the affairs of Israel continues to be unclear to the hearer of the Samson story.

In the epilogue to Judges, Yahweh disappears almost entirely. The themes of idolatry and conflict in the two-part epilogue recall the same themes in the two parts of the prologue. Micah's mother creates a silver idol, places it in Micah's shrine, and Micah hires a Levite to be his priest. Throughout the story, the characters invoke the name of Yahweh (17.2, 3, 13), but Yahweh himself is silent. Micah's illicit activities prompt the first occurrence of the refrain, 'In those days there was no king in Israel' (17.6; 18.1; 19.1; 21.25). Since the covenant assumes that Yahweh is Israel's great king, and since Gideon, in his refusal of the monarchy, declares Yahweh to be Israel's only ruler (8.22-23),⁸⁸ the refrain that there is no king in Israel may have a double meaning. Not only does it mean that Israel has no human king, but it may also reflect the withdrawal of God from manifesting his sovereign authority.

⁸⁶ The silence of Yahweh is continued from Judges into 1 Samuel, where we are told 'the word of Yahweh was rare in those days' (1 Sam. 3.1).

⁸⁷ Edward L. Greenstein, 'The Riddle of Samson', *Prf* 1/3 (1981), pp. 237-60.

⁸⁸ Neither Gideon nor the Israelites who approach him use the Hebrew term for 'king' (מֶלֶךְ). Instead, they use the word 'rule' (נָשַׁל): 'The men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule (נָשַׁל) over us . . ." and Gideon said to them, "I will not rule (נָשַׁל) over you, and my son will not rule (נָשַׁל) over you; Yahweh will rule (נָשַׁל) over you "' (Judg. 8.22-23). Could it be that the term 'king' is being deliberately avoided here? If so, then the actions of naming Abimelech (which means, 'my father is king') and of enthroning Abimelech as 'king' (מֶלֶךְ, Judg. 9.6) take on an even greater significance as they stand in contrast this earlier avoidance of the use of the term 'king'.

The story of Micah and his idol merges into the story of the Danites and their search for a land to inhabit. The Danites had been driven back by the Amorites (Judg. 1.34) and now must seek out a new location. They settle in Laish⁸⁹ and establish there an illegitimate cultic center (18.27-30). The Danites give credit to God for their victory; but, as before, Yahweh himself neither speaks nor acts in the narrative.

The final chapters of Judges recount the unspeakable atrocities that are inflicted upon a Levite's secondary wife (19.25-30), who is raped, murdered and dismembered, and upon the women of Jabesh-gilead and Shiloh, who are kidnapped and forced to become wives to the Benjaminite remnant (21.12, 20-23). It is quite disturbing to the hearer of Judges that Yahweh does nothing to prevent the savagery of the Levite, the men of Gibeah, or the Benjaminites. Apparently, Yahweh is intentionally uninvolved, allowing the Israelites to 'do what is right' in their own eyes (17.6; 21.25). However, when the Israelites decide to punish the Gibeonite offenders by engaging in battle with Benjamin, who is one of their own tribes, they turn to Yahweh for his direction. In an episode that recalls Judg. 1.1-2, the Israelites inquire of Yahweh, 'Who shall go up first to fight the Benjaminites?', and Yahweh replies, 'Judah is first' (20.18). Unlike his response in Judg. 1.2, Yahweh's answer here is incomplete, since he does not include in his response the words 'go up' (יַעֲלֶה), and he does not promise victory. By answering the inquiry, but not answering completely, Yahweh allows the Israelites to go into battle without his complete authorization. The Israelites are defeated, and after weeping before Yahweh they inquire of him again, this time asking, 'Shall we go up again to fight

⁸⁹ Laish, on the northern edge of Israel, is described as 'at rest (שָׁקֵט) and trusting, lacking nothing that is in the earth, and possessing (יָרֵשׁ) wealth' (Judg. 18.7); 'and there was no deliverer' (Judg. 18.28). The use of three words that are central to the theology of Judges suggests an ironic comment on the tribe of Dan who, because they lack a deliverer (נִצֵּל), is unable to possess (יָרֵשׁ) their own inheritance (Judg. 1.31) in the land of Israel, which no longer enjoys rest (שָׁקֵט).

the Benjaminites?', and Yahweh replies in the affirmative (20.22), but again he does not promise victory. They fight for a second day, and again the Israelites are defeated. They weep, fast, offer sacrifices and inquire again. This time, Yahweh not only instructs them to continue the battle, but he insures the Israelites of victory (20.28). The Israelites who once fought together against the Canaanites are now warring against one of their own tribes. The Benjaminites are decimated, and the other tribes mourn the aftermath of the civil war (21.1-7). In the final episode of Judges, in order to prevent the complete extermination of the tribe of Benjamin, the remaining Benjaminite men are encouraged to abduct young girls who are then forced to become their wives.

Yahweh's role in the narrative is ambiguous, in that, even though he responds to the inquiries of the Israelites, he causes the war to be prolonged. Perhaps Yahweh's drawing out of the Israelite conflict is a reflection of his own prolonged inner conflict. It is said that Yahweh is 'grieved by the misery of Israel' (10.16), but could it be possible that Yahweh is turning the tables on Israel and forcing them to experience the same kind of conflicted situation which he is suffering? Like Yahweh, the Israelites are forced to choose between justice and mercy. They must decide just how severely to punish the Benjaminites and how to prevent the complete extermination of the tribe of Benjamin. Israel's choices are not easy ones, but they mirror the vexing choices that present themselves to Yahweh—justice or mercy.

7.8. CONCLUSION

7.8.1. Features of Judges 10.6-16

The above hearing of Judges chapter ten discloses several striking features: (1) Verses six through sixteen offer details of the longest dialogue between God and

Israel within the book of Judges;⁹⁰ (2) The dialogue is unmediated. That is, the text does not report the presence of an angel, prophet, or any other messenger; (3) It records the longest list of idols in Judges; (4) It is the only time in Judges that the Israelites are said to have repented and laid aside their idols; (5) It is the only time in Judges that Yahweh refuses to come to the aid of his people when they call upon him; (6) The passage brings into focus the tension between Yahweh's anger and his compassion, a tension that is occasioned by the rebellion of his covenant people. In light of the covenant, he is well within his rights to abandon Israel (Cf. Deut. 31.17);⁹¹ and it remains to be seen whether or not Yahweh will turn back and come to Israel's rescue.

7.8.2. The Suitability of Narrative for the Display of Tension

My survey of Judges 10-21 confirms that narrative discourse is especially suited to the presentation of subtle theological tensions, such as the tensions that are registered in the characterization of God in Judges. I have shown that the tension between Yahweh's anger and his compassion is displayed throughout the entire second half of the book of Judges.

Although the divine speeches in Judges have been my primary focus, I recognize that it is the whole narrative that must claim ultimate priority. Consequently, I have demonstrated the function of the divine speeches within the larger context of the narrative. Direct speech often interprets and makes explicit the tensions that are more implicit and subtle in the narrative. These tensions are worked out through the particularity and concreteness of narrative. Thus, the

⁹⁰ Cf. Harris, Brown, and Moore, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, p. 221.

⁹¹ Cf. Wilcock, *Message of Judges*, p. 105.

narrative is able to draw out, prolong and elaborate the tensions, while direct speech emerges at key junctures and guides the reader to take seriously the narrative.

Interpreters of Judges have sought to eliminate (either consciously or unconsciously) the tension that surfaces when Yahweh says to Israel, 'I will not save you' (Judg. 10.13). Commentators either see Yahweh's anger continuing unabated or they see Yahweh's compassion taking over again. I have shown that Yahweh's inner tension remains throughout the rest of the book, with neither his anger or his compassion co-opting the other. It is that persistent tension that creates the sense of hopelessness and chaos that dominates the latter part of the book. The narrative, therefore, instead of depicting Yahweh as continually angry and unresponsive or as always gracious and compassionate, sustains the tension in various ways throughout the entire second half of Judges. The tension is never resolved.

Modern interpreters, in pursuit of verifiable truth, usually seek to eliminate the ambiguities and tensions in the biblical text. This is true of the confessional interpreter who feels constrained to force the text to fit a dogmatic consensus; and it is true of the historical critic who feels a need to disassemble the text into different sources to fashion a historical construct.⁹² In either case, the voice of text itself remains unheard, having been replaced by doctrinal or historical claims. While I understand that every reading of the text is an interpretation and that disinterested readings are not possible, I am arguing simply that the tensions in the text should not be eliminated in favor of a smooth and coherent theological or historical construct.

Narrative, therefore, serves quite well as a mode of theological discourse in which delicate tensions may be posed and kept alive without collapsing one side of the tension into the other. The tension that surfaces and remains unsettled in Judg.

⁹² For a discriminating and thorough exposition of this point, see Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 103-107, who critiques both the historical critical and the confessional approaches.

10.6-16 is manifested subtly in the ensuing narrative. The lengthy and artful portrayal of Yahweh's inner struggle (Judg. 11-21) demonstrates that, as a mode of theological discourse, narrative is most effective in carrying forward a dramatic echo of the richly textured voice of God.

7.8.3. The Passibility of Yahweh

God is often portrayed by theologians as impassible, unemotional. Biblical statements of his emotions have been identified as anthropopathisms, figures of speech that do not represent the true nature of God.⁹³ In the same way that anthropomorphisms represent God's character and actions in a symbolic way (e.g., his eyes represent his omniscience), anthropopathisms represent his will and his decrees. Thus, the impassible God does not really become angry because anger is a mere human emotion. The anger of God is no more than an ancient metaphor for God's dispassionate sense of justice.⁹⁴ Eichrodt insists that God's passions are genuine and they are personal, but they are not impaired with the unholy characteristics that may be found in human passions.

In case of God there can never be any question of despotic caprice striking out in blind rage. It would certainly be a quite illicit impairing of the original meaning to suggest that the statements about God's anger were nothing but a naïve use of imagery to express the way in which God steadfastly safeguards his universal laws. The transformation of God's reaction to sin into the action of an impersonal order of things, an objectively necessary universal foreign law such as implied by philosophical thought, is an idea quite foreign to the Israelite outlook. The latter speaks not of some unmoved divine being, but of a mighty dynamic of divine self-determination, which sets man in the presence of a personal will directed at himself laying immediate hold on his life.⁹⁵

Clearly, the God of Judges is not dispassionate. Biblical references to God's emotions are not mere figures of speech, but it is true as well that the affections of

⁹³ Fretheim, *Suffering of God*, p. 6.

⁹⁴ A detailed introduction to the doctrine of impassibility may be found in Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*. From a biblical perspective, cf. Fretheim, *Suffering of God*; and Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, pp. 27-47, 79-86. For a theological reflection on God's suffering in the cross, cf. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*.

⁹⁵ Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 265.

God are not equivalent to the affections of humans.⁹⁶ Human affections, although not sinful, are influenced by sin. Unlike humans, God's emotions and actions are always appropriate to the situation. Unlike humans, God does not internalize his anger. God is healthy and whole while humans are often unhealthy and dysfunctional.⁹⁷ Furthermore, it is true that a tension exists between the immutability of God and the passibility of God; but surely it is a tension that can be accommodated within the Christian theological tradition that affirms the tension-filled mysteries of the trinity and the incarnation.

Finally, my hearing of Yahweh's third and final speech to Israel in Judges concludes that the relationship between Yahweh and Israel is fractured and is in danger of irreparable breakage. Since we are familiar with the subsequent biblical narratives of Samuel and Kings, we know that the fracture will be repaired; consequently, it is difficult for us to recognize the significance of Yahweh's impassioned speech and to take seriously his dejection. On the one hand, the biblical testimony includes many occasions when the voice of Yahweh is comforting, consoling, redeeming, promising, encouraging and easy to hear. On the other hand, the voice of Yahweh in Judges 10.6-16 is angry, injured, frustrated and weary; but it is a voice that must be heard.

⁹⁶ Cf. Fretheim, *Suffering of God*, p. 8; Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p. 55.

⁹⁷ Cf. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p. 271.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS: THE RESULTS OF A PENTECOSTAL APPROACH TO JUDGES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

In the preceding chapters I have presented my Pentecostal hearing of the book of Judges. In this brief final chapter, I will summarize my findings, highlight significant contributions and reflect on directions for future study.

8.1. SUMMARIZING THE THESIS

My survey of previous scholarship has shown both the need and opportunity for a fresh approach to Judges, a book that has puzzled both critical scholars and confessional interpreters alike. I argued that Wesleyan-Pentecostals, with their dual concerns for both purity and power, have been attracted to the charismatic experiences of the judges, but they have been perplexed and repelled by the questionable actions of those same judges. I indicated that critical and postcritical scholars have produced numbers of helpful works on discrete sections of Judges and on individual characters, but no one has been able to advance a satisfying approach to the book as a whole. While several scholars have identified important lines of continuity that point to the literary unity of Judges, others have pointed to the tensions and discontinuities. My work has shown that both the continuities and the discontinuities within the book can be traced to the narrative role of God, who determines the course of the story by his giving and removing of power to both the Israelites and their enemies. I demonstrated that the theological motivation for God's role in the book is expressed in his three speeches to the Israelites, speeches that disclose Yahweh's anger, which moves him to punish the Israelites for their unfaithfulness, his compassion, which moves him to deliver them from oppression,

and the tension between the two passions, which accounts for Yahweh's apparent vacillation, particularly in the latter portion of Judges.

In describing my approach to Judges, I asserted that the terminology of 'hearing' is more appropriate for Pentecostals than the now popular hermeneutical term 'reading'. If God is intent to engage his people in genuine relationship, according to the claim that my hearing of Judges has shown to be at the heart of the book's message, then the term 'reading' proves to be a rather impersonal and inappropriate description of the encounter with the biblical text of the book of Judges in relation to its own terms as a prophetic word of a personal God. With this in mind, I argued that biblical interpreters, although skilled and observant, have failed to give sufficient attention to the most prominent voice in the book of Judges—the voice of God. As my study has claimed and demonstrated, fresh theological perspectives and striking tensions emerge from the narrative when one pauses and turns attentively to hear the voice of God.

I have demonstrated that these three speeches of Yahweh, addressed not to individuals but to the entire community of Israel, serve as narrative markers that alert the hearer to crucial movements in the story. My study indicates that, although the actions of the Israelites are essential to the story, it is Yahweh who decides the course of the narrative. We saw that Yahweh's first speech to the Israelites (Judg. 2.1-5) sets the stage for the entire book of Judges, setting in motion the narrative conflict that intensifies throughout the book. On account of Israel's failure to 'hear' the voice of Yahweh, he allows the Canaanites to remain in the land. Yahweh intends to discipline Israel by using the Canaanites as 'thorns and snares'; but, at the same time, he declares that he will 'never break' his covenant. Given Yahweh's commitment to the covenant and his repeated mention of the Exodus, I argued that Yahweh's saving acts in Judges flow from the paradigm of the Exodus.

Consequently, we observed that, when Yahweh saves the Israelites from their oppressors, his actions are based not upon Israel's repentance but upon his own compassion and upon his determination to maintain his covenant relationship to his people.

I demonstrated that Yahweh's second speech (6.7-10) signals an intensification of the conflict between Israel and the Canaanites and between Yahweh and Israel, a conflict that is manifested as well through the questionable characteristics of Gideon in the ensuing narrative. I observed that, in spite of Israel's continued failure to 'hear' the voice of Yahweh, their deepening idolatry and the instability of Gideon, Yahweh's patience persists, as expressed in his saving of Israel and his granting of rest to the land.

We heard in Yahweh's third speech (10.6-16), however, that his patience is finally exhausted, and he refuses to save the Israelites again. I demonstrated that this third speech is the turning point in the book of Judges, the point at which the cyclical framework begins to break down. My argument suggested that Yahweh's speech signals the breaking point of the cycle because it is the breaking point of Yahweh himself, the point at which Yahweh no longer responds according to the pattern that is evident in the earlier cycles. As before, the sin and punishment aspects of the cycle were found to continue unchanged; that is, the sin of the Israelites angers Yahweh and he hands them over to an oppressor. However, the second half of the cycle was seen to be disrupted when Yahweh no longer responds by raising up a deliverer and the land no longer is granted periods of rest. The continual rebellion and repeated idolatry of the Israelites, I argued, appears to have frustrated Yahweh to the point of his feeling manipulated.

I showed how this third speech displays a divine inner tension between Yahweh's anger and his compassion, which is a result of his genuine relationship to

Israel as expressed in the covenant oath that was acknowledged to be underwriting his dealings with Israel from the outset (Jud. 2.1). Yahweh's gift of covenant, I argued, exposes him to personal risk and makes him vulnerable to rejection, offense and personal injury. The depiction of Yahweh as a God who relates personally and intimately with humans, I pointed out, is a theological perspective that differs from the common view that the actions of God in Judges are based upon the mechanical retributive principle of reward and punishment. Yahweh's refusal to save Israel, even after they have exhibited signs of repentance, reveals that Yahweh is not mechanical in his relationship with Israel and that he is unwilling to submit to continued manipulation by a people who vacillate repeatedly.

Although the passions of God are in the background of the two earlier speeches, I pointed out that this third speech brings them to the foreground. At the conclusion of the third speech, I noted that Yahweh's relationship to Israel is clearly at risk, and the remaining chapters of Judges show evidence of Yahweh's continued inner conflict. On several occasions he acts on behalf of Israel and the judges, giving his Spirit and bringing about a measure of deliverance. However, I noted how on other occasions when his intervention is sorely needed, he fails to act at all, leaving the Israelites and their judges to their own devices. Thus this inner tension between Yahweh's anger and his compassion was found to be skillfully reflected in the narrative of Judg. 11-21. This served to highlight the way narrative discourse proves itself to be especially suited for posing and preserving those tensions that we find difficult to accept and that we seek to resolve all too quickly. The book of Judges ends, I observed, without resolving the important tension between Yahweh's oath to preserve the covenant (Judg. 2.1) and his refusal to save Israel again (Judg. 10.13), an

inner tension that has deep roots in the Exodus tradition.¹ This served to highlight the point that the voice of a frustrated and injured God is not easy to hear, but it will nevertheless have its say in the end.

I have heard the voice of God, and I have witnessed to what I heard. Nevertheless, my hearing is not perfect, nor is it absolute, nor is it unchallengeable. My hearing is subject to testing and may prove to be in need of modification. Furthermore, in my Pentecostal hearing of the book of Judges, I did not always hear what I expected to hear, and I did not always hear what I wanted to hear. In hearing the voice of God, I heard of Yahweh's oath, his covenant, his mighty acts and his faithfulness. However, I did not hear a solution to every conflict nor the erasing of every troubling tension. I did not hear the comforting words of closure, for in Judges, the anger of Yahweh seems to be longer than a 'moment' (Ps. 30.5). In the voice of Yahweh, I heard disappointment—'What is this you have done?' (Judg. 2.2). I heard threat—'I will not save you again' (10.13). I heard chiding frustration—'Call on the gods you have chosen; they will save you' (10.14). Finally, I heard nothing but deathly, alienating, disturbing silence—enough to make one ache for another word 'just once more' (16.28).

8.2. HIGHLIGHTING CONTRIBUTIONS

What, then, have I discovered in this effort that demands a hearing? I believe my thesis offers several specific contributions to the body of scholarship on the book of Judges in regard to individual themes and texts and in regard to the book as a whole. My work is the most detailed study of the role of God as a character within the narrative of Judges and the first to focus on the speeches of Yahweh within the book.

¹ Cf. Exod. 34.6-7, a text which brings to the surface the conflicted passions of Yahweh. See Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 215-28.

I have contributed to the study of Judges by offering a fresh approach to the book as whole. My study is the first to recognize the thematic importance in Judges of the terminology 'hearing the voice of Yahweh' as the essential crux of the Israelites' unfaithfulness to their covenant with Yahweh (Judg. 2.2). I observe that the crucial difference between the Israelites in the book of Joshua and the Israelites in the book of Judges is that Joshua's generation hears the voice of Yahweh (Judg. 2.17), but the next generation does not hear the voice of Yahweh (Judg. 2.2, 17, 20; 3.4; 6.10). Also, I demonstrate that the theological perspective of Judges, as highlighted by the divine speeches, is neither one of sin-and-punishment nor one of cry-and-deliverance, but it is the holding in tension of the two paradigms. My analysis shows that in the first half of Judges, Yahweh acts consistently from both perspectives: when the Israelites commit evil, he hands them over to an oppressor for discipline; and when they cry out to him, he saves them. In the second half of the book, however, the second half of the cycle collapses. Yahweh continues to punish the Israelites for their sin, but his acts of salvation are partial and reluctant.

Furthermore, I offer a fresh approach to the narrative structure of the book of Judges. My research shows that Yahweh's first speech registers the source of the conflict between Yahweh and the Israelites, which grounds and generates the well-known cyclical pattern of sin and deliverance. The second speech introduces an increase of the tension, and the third speech marks the turning point of the narrative and the collapse of the cyclical pattern. I show how the tension between Yahweh's anger and his compassion continues unresolved from the third speech through the ensuing narrative segment to the end of the book. I conclude that the inner tension between Yahweh's anger and his compassion is the cause of the ambiguity regarding Yahweh's role in the second half of Judges. While this ambiguity has been acknowledged in recent scholarship, mine is the first study to recognize and account

for its source in the tension expressed in God's conflicted passions. In fact, my study offers the first detailed exposition of the passions of Yahweh in the book of Judges.

My thesis is the only academic study of the book of Judges to be undertaken from a Pentecostal perspective. Before now, Pentecostals have written only short summaries for popular-level introductions and studies of the empowering work of the Spirit in Judges. In utilizing a Pentecostal approach, I have offered an integrative method that is openly confessional but is also sensitive to and appreciative of critical voices. I have demonstrated the ways in which the charismatic prophetic experience of Pentecostals can bring to the surface important features of the biblical text that have formerly remained overlooked. Thus, my work represents a fresh methodology for Pentecostal biblical study in the postmodern environment and a fresh developing of that methodology in terms of the biblically grounded concept and dynamic of 'hearing' the voice of the text.

Finally, my work contributes to literary/rhetorical criticism by demonstrating the importance of direct speech for the development of God as a character in biblical narrative.

8.3. FUTURE EXPLORATIONS?

In light of the foregoing conclusions, several directions for future exploration come into view.

In light of Yahweh's ambiguous role in the final chapters of Judges, it would seem only reasonable to examine God's role in the book of 1 Samuel in order to determine how the biblical narrative moves forward from this unresolved tension in its depiction of God. Furthermore, I would suggest additional studies concerning the role of God as a character in other biblical texts.

In line with my study of Judges, investigation of the divine speeches in other biblical texts may uncover new insights into those materials. Also, since I focused

only on Yahweh's speeches to the Israelites as a whole; further examination of his speeches in Judges to individuals may prove enlightening as well.

As an outgrowth of my Pentecostal interpretation of Judges, I would hope to make more explicit the relevance of the book of Judges for the life and mission of the church. Also, I would hope that studies of every Old Testament book would be undertaken utilizing Pentecostal methodologies and goals.

In summation, I have made a number of observations concerning the role of God in Judges, and I have focused particularly upon the speech of God in Judges. My observations emerge from a literary study of the text itself, but my Pentecostal context provides the worldview that has made those observations possible. To a Pentecostal, the voice of God is a charismatic reality, and when Yahweh says, 'You have not heard my voice', a personal challenge to self-examination is posed. I am therefore compelled to close with the words of Jesus from the Apocalypse, 'Those who have ears to hear, let them hear' (Rev. 2.7).

APPENDIX A: SAMSON AND SAMUEL

A comparison of the narrative of Samson and Samuel reveals a number of striking features. Although Samson has been compared to Saul, I would offer the list below as evidence that Samuel may be understood as the judge who fulfilled all of the expectations that went unfulfilled by Samson.

TOPIC	QUOTATIONS FROM JUDGES	QUOTATIONS FROM 1 SAMUEL
INTRODUCTION	There was a certain man (13.1)	There was a certain man (1.1)
BARRENNESS	his wife was barren (13.2)	Hannah had no children (1.2) the Lord had closed her womb (1.5)
PROPHECY	you shall conceive and bear a son (13.3) a man of God came (13.6)	the God of Israel will grant your petition (1.17) there came a man of God (2.27)
NAZARITE	and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb (13.5)	a razor shall never come upon his head (1.11)
MOTHER NOT TO DRINK	drink not wine nor strong drink (13.4)	put away your wine (1.15)
PRAYER	Manoah entreated the Lord (13.8)	Hannah prayed unto the Lord (1.10)
PHILISTINES	he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines (13.5)	the Philistines were subdued . . . the hand of Yahweh was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel (7.13)
SACRIFICE	Manoah took the kid with the grain offering and offered it (13.19)	Elkanah sacrificed (1.4)
REMEMBER	remember me (16.28)	remember me (1.12)
GROWTH	the child grew and the Lord blessed him (13.24)	Samuel grew and the Lord was with him (3.19)
LORD KILLS	if it pleased the Lord to kill us (13.23)	it pleased the Lord to kill them (2.25)
SIGHT	gouged out his eyes (16.21)	Eli could not see (3.2; 4.15) no open vision (3.1) Samuel is called a seer Samuel was afraid to tell the vision (3.15)
PILLARS	pillars on which the house stood (16.25-29)	pillars of the earth (2.8)
STRENGTH	Entice him, and see where his great strength lies (16.5)	by strength shall no man prevail (2.9)

OTHER COMPARISONS

CALL NARRATIVE	Samson's birth and dedication to God is foretold, but he is not encountered by God in a call narrative	Samuel's birth and dedication to God is foretold and he is encountered by God in a call narrative (1 Sam. 3.1-21).
HOLY SPIRIT	The Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson	no mention of the Spirit in Samuel's ministry
COMMUNITY	Samson never assembled the people Judahites even arrested him and handed him over to the Philistines.	Samuel was well-respected and followed by the people. (Although his sons were rejected)
SERVICE	Samson served his own desires	Samuel ministered to the Lord (2.11, 18; 3.1)
WIFE WISER THAN HUSBAND	First, Manoah wants to meet the 'man', then when Manoah realizes that the man is an angel, he fears for his life. His wife comforts him by saying that God does not want to kill them.	Elkanah tries to comfort Hannah with the somewhat foolish statement 'am I not better to you than 10 sons?'
WOMEN	Most of the Samson narrative concerns women	Women not mentioned in Samuel's life, even though we know that he had children.
WORSHIP	Samson lived in Dan where false worship was practiced. He did nothing to stop it.	Samuel lived in Shiloh, where the tabernacle was located. He worshiped in contrast to Hophni and Phineas, who were immoral priests.

APPENDIX B: ANOMALOUS YIQTOL IN JUDG. 2.1

Several attempts have been made to account for the *yiqtol* form of the verb (אֶעֱלֶה) in Judg. 2.1. Gesenius explains the form by observing that the *yiqtol* can signify the past tense of actions that are continued over a period of time.¹ Joüon agrees that Judg. 2.1 is a durative (or imperfective) *yiqtol* in the past tense, and he translates the phrase: ‘I was making you to go up’. He cites other examples such as Gen. 37.7 (‘your sheaves were surrounding my sheaf’) and Exod. 13.22 (‘the pillar of cloud was not leaving its place by day’).² This past tense durative *yiqtol*, however, is not attested elsewhere in the initial position of direct speech.

Another possible explanation of אֶעֱלֶה is that it may be an example of an indicative preterite form of the *yiqtol*, which would be translated ‘I brought up’.³ The study of Ugaritic has confirmed the theory that pre-biblical Hebrew included the *yiqtol* preterite.⁴ Although the existence of *yiqtol* preterites in the Hebrew Bible is disputed, their existence would explain this case and a few other difficult cases of the *yiqtol*.⁵ According to Niccacci, however, the preterite is used in poetry and in fixed combinations following the words אָז and כִּי; therefore, it would not be

¹ Gesenius, Kautzsch, and Cowley, *Grammar*, §107ba. This use of the *yiqtol* is termed ‘durative’ by Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, II, p. 368, and ‘non-perfective’ by Waltke and O’Connor, *Hebrew Syntax*, pp. 502-504.

² Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, p. 368. Other examples are Num. 9.16, 17; Isa. 1.21; 6.4; and Jer. 36.18. Also, see the discussion and examples in Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2d edn, 1976), pp. 30-31.

³ E.g. Péter Kustár, *Aspekt im Hebräischen* (Basel: Reinhardt, 1972), p. 7. This translation has been adopted, probably for lack of better options, by KJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, NET, NIV, NJB, and every other version that I consulted.

⁴ Niccacci, *Syntax*, p. 194. Cf. C. L. Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), p. 158.

⁵ In his discussion of possible preterites, Williams, *Syntax*, pp. 32-33, lists Exod. 15.1, 12; Num. 21.17; Deut. 4.41; 32.10; Josh. 8.30; 10.12; Isa. 5.12; 9.17; Job 3.3; 1 Kgs 8.1; and Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, II, pp. 368-70, list Gen. 48.10, 17; Exod. 15.5, 14; Judg. 5.26; 1 Sam. 13.19; 2 Sam. 15.37; 17.17; Pss. 8.6; 18.14, 40; 116.3; Job 15.7; Job 3.11; Isa. 41.5. In addition, S. R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew and Some Other Syntactical Questions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 3d edn, 1892), pp. 32-33, adds 1 Kgs 7.8; 21.6; 2 Kgs 8.29; and Niccacci, *Syntax*, p. 194, adds Gen. 49; Num. 23-24; Ps. 29 and Ps. 78.

⁶ Niccacci, *Syntax*, p. 194. Cf. Williams, *Syntax*, p. 32.

appropriate in the context of Judg. 2.1. Furthermore, most, if not all, of the purported preterites that are found in narrative can be explained as durative, iterative, or modal in meaning. Moore is not convinced that Judg. 2.1 is a preterite, saying that ‘Attempts to explain אַעֲלָה grammatically are forced, . . . and do not account for the following וְאָבִיא,⁷ which is not a *yiqtol* but is a *wayyiqtol*. If the tense of אַעֲלָה is meant to be parallel to וְאָבִיא, then why isn't וְאָבִיא written in the parallel *yiqtol* form (אָבִיא) as in Deut. 32.10, which contains four parallel *yiqtol*s. One of the examples of preterite cited by Driver, however, has a *yiqtol* used in parallel with *wayyiqtol*. ‘He said to her, “When I spoke (אָדַבַּר) to Naboth the Jezreelite, and I said (וְאָמַרְתִּי) to him . . .’” (1 Kgs 21.6). Like other examples in narrative, however, the *yiqtol* of 1 Kgs 21.6 could be interpreted not as preterite but as imperfective/durative: ‘When I was speaking (אָדַבַּר) to Naboth the Jezreelite, I said (וְאָמַרְתִּי) to him’. Therefore, the Hebrew Bible contains no clear case of a *yiqtol* preterite followed by a *wayyiqtol*. In summary, the reading of אַעֲלָה as a preterite seems to be a possibility but not a certainty.

⁷ Moore, *Judges*, p. 61.

APPENDIX C: THE BIBLICAL IDEA OF COVENANT

A covenant is needed whenever people choose to extend a commitment beyond the natural groupings of kinship.¹ Parents do not make a covenant to care for their children because normal expectations of relationship within the family are assumed in society. However, when bonds are formed outside the family, a covenant is required. Examples of covenants (ברית) from the Hexateuch² include the following participants: God and Noah (Gen. 6.18; 9.9-17); Abram and the Amorite (Gen. 14.13); God and Abram (Gen. 15.18); God and Abram's family, sealed with circumcision (17.2-21); Abraham and Abimelech (Gen. 21.22-32); Abimelech and Isaac (Gen. 26.28); Laban and Jacob (Gen. 31.44-54); God and Israel (Exod. 19.5; 24.7-8; 31.16; 34.10, etc.); God and Phinehas (Num. 25.12-13); and Joshua and the Gibeonites (Josh. 9.6-16).

Covenants are sometimes mutual agreements made between equal parties and at other times they are agreements between a weaker party and a stronger party.³ Covenants may be secular or sacred, political or social, communal or individual, relational or legal.⁴ John Goldingay offers the following definition:

A covenant is a solemnly sealed commitment that comes into being in a historical context. As a relationship, it involves a commitment as opposed to a mere acquaintance without obligation. As solemnly sealed, it makes that commitment something the parties think about and affirm with some formal procedure; there will be no getting out of it. And it comes into being historically, as opposed to being a natural commitment or relationship.⁵

¹ Goldingay, *OT Theology: Israel's Faith*, p. 183.

² I use the term 'Hexateuch' only as a matter of descriptive convenience.

³ Goldingay, *OT Theology: Israel's Faith*, pp. 183, 185.

⁴ However, cf. Mendenhall, 'Covenant', p. 716, who observes that the Greek word for 'contract' is never used as a translation of ברית in the LXX.

⁵ Goldingay, *OT Theology: Israel's Faith*, p. 182.

Elmer A. Martens identifies what he sees as important characteristics of the biblical covenant by contrasting the features of the covenant with the features of a modern contract:⁶

1. The occasion of a contract is the expectation of mutual benefits, but the biblical covenant is occasioned on the desire for a relationship;
2. The initiative for a contract may come from either partner, but the initiative for the biblical covenant proceeds from God alone;⁷
3. A contract is oriented toward the exchange of goods and services, thus it is 'thing-oriented'; but the biblical covenant is 'person-oriented', resulting from a 'desire for a measure of intimacy';⁸
4. The terms of a contract are reached by 'negotiation', but the biblical covenant is a 'gift';⁹
5. The obligations of a contract are aimed at 'performance', but the obligations of the biblical covenant are fundamentally concerned with 'loyalty';¹⁰
6. A contract usually covers a specified time period, but the biblical covenant is 'forever'.

The Hebrew word בְּרִית ('covenant') occurs 283 times in the Old Testament,¹¹ but it is attested with the meaning 'covenant' nowhere else in the ancient Near East.¹² The concept of covenant, however, was well known in the ancient Near East, as were the correlative ideas of the oath and the curse; but the specific range of

⁶ Martens, *God's Design*, pp. 65-79.

⁷ Cf. Goldingay, *OT Theology: Israel's Faith*, p. 187.

⁸ Martens, *God's Design*, p. 73.

⁹ Cf. Goldingay, *OT Theology: Israel's Faith*, p. 187.

¹⁰ Cf. Goldingay, *OT Theology: Israel's Faith*, p. 186, who writes: 'The fundamental covenant commitment requires love of God with one's entire being and energy, a loyalty to Yhwh that excludes reliance on other peoples, and thus may exclude other covenants (2 Chron 16:1-12), of course including covenants with other deities'.

¹¹ Even-Shoshan, *Concordance*, pp. 205-206.

¹² McConville, 'ברית', p. 747. Cf. Kutsch, 'ברית', p. 256. Although several proposals have been advanced regarding the etymology of ברית, they are all doubtful, and no consensus has been reached. The semantic range of ברית, however, is quite clear from its usage in the biblical text.

meaning expressed by the use of בְּרִית is a 'distinctively biblical' theological idea.¹³

Weinfeld explains:

The idea of a covenant between a deity and a people is unknown to us from other religions and cultures . . . the covenant idea was a special feature of the religion of Israel, the only one to demand exclusive loyalty and to preclude the possibility of dual or multiple loyalties such as were permitted in other religions.¹⁴

The uniqueness of the Hebrew use of בְּרִית may arise from its comprehensive range of application. The biblical use of בְּרִית corresponds to at least three types of ancient Near Eastern forms of contract: (1) The suzerain-vassal treaty of the Hittites; (2) The royal grant of the Assyrians and the Hittites; and (3) the marriage contract.¹⁵

In 1954 George Mendenhall compared the structure of the Old Testament covenant to the Hittite suzerain-vassal treaty forms of the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BCE, and he discovered that their overall structures were basically the

¹³ McConville, 'ברית', p. 753.

¹⁴ Weinfeld, 'ברית', p. 278. Arguing for an exception, P. A. Riemann, 'Covenant, Mosaic', in Keith R. Crim (ed.), *IDBSup* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), p. 192, insists that the incantation text from Arslan Tash includes a covenant with the gods. According to James Bennett Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 3d edn, 1969), p. 658, the text is written on a double-sided amulet and is directed against demons called 'stranglers' to prevent their entrance into the house, probably during childbirth. See also, S. David Sperling, 'An Arslan Tash Incantation: Interpretations and Implications', *HUCA* 53 (1982), pp. 1-3, who states that the language of the text is uncertain, but is probably Phoenician. The text includes the word אֱלִיָּה (probably 'oath'), which is used five times in the short spell. It is translated 'incantation' and 'bond' by Pritchard, *ANET*, p. 658; 'incantations', 'covenant', and 'oath' by McCarter in William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, *The Context of Scripture* (3 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1996), II, II, p. 223; 'conjunction' and 'covenants' by Sperling, 'Arslan Tash', pp. 4-5; and 'incantation', 'curse', 'treaty', and 'oath' by Blane W. Conklin, 'Arslan Tash I and Other Vestiges of a Particular Syrian Incantatory Thread', *Bib* 84, no. 1 (2003), p. 90. Several factors prevent our acceptance of the text as the proof that other religions of the ANE made covenants with their gods. First, the authenticity of the amulet is in doubt according to J. Teixidor, 'Les Tablettes d'Arslan Tash au Musée d'Alep', *AuOr* 1 (1983), pp. 105-108 and P. Amiet, 'Observations sur les "Tablettes Magiques" d'Arslan Tash', *AuOr* 1 (1983), p. 109. Second, the meaning of אֱלִיָּה in this context is not clear. The Hebrew counterpart, אֱלִיָּה, is used by the KJV 14 times as 'oath', 18 times as 'curse', twice as 'execration' and twice as 'swearing'. Although an oath can be part of a covenant, functioning as the assurance of fulfillment or as self-imprecation (Gen. 26.28), and as a part of the covenant, it can be a synecdoche figuratively standing for the whole covenant (Deut. 29.11; 29.13), an oath is not a covenant and אֱלִיָּה is not a synonym for בְּרִית. Third, while it is clear that the text indicates some sort of magical spell that is backed by the power of the gods, to call it a covenant is something of a stretch. The אֱלִיָּה is a conjuration based on the gods' agreement with an individual, not with a people. It is a protective spell and does not include terms of relationship, promises, cultic obligations, or other stipulations. Furthermore, it invokes numerous gods. In short, except for its use of the word 'oath', it does not parallel any of the covenants found in the OT. A drawing of the amulet is included in Conklin, 'Arslan Tash I', pp. 100-101.

¹⁵ Weinfeld, 'ברית', pp. 253-79.

same.¹⁶ The treaty usually consisted of five parts, which by now are well known to every Old Testament scholar: (1) A preamble that names the suzerain, (2) An historical prologue that details previous relations between the parties, (3) Stipulations (demands) of the suzerain, (4) A listing of blessings attendant upon obedience and curses that follow disobedience, (5) Naming of witnesses and directions for carrying out the treaty. Also, there may be a clause providing for the deposit and periodic reading of the covenant.¹⁷

The suzerainty treaty is an agreement where a stronger king imposes his will upon a weaker king and offers protection to the weaker in exchange for tribute. This type of covenant, insists Weinfeld, ‘implies first and foremost the notion of “imposition”, “liability”, or “obligation”, not ‘mutual agreement’, thus the ‘covenant at Sinai in Ex. 24 is in its essence an imposition of laws and obligations upon the people’.¹⁸ The one-sidedness of the suzerain-vassal treaty may be further discerned by the fact that the suzerain is free to revoke the treaty at any time; ‘only the vassal is bound by oath’.¹⁹

Another type of agreement found in ancient Near Eastern texts is the ‘royal grant’ of the Assyrians and the Hittites,²⁰ also called the ‘divine charter’.²¹ The terminology of Yahweh’s covenants with Noah, Abraham and David follows the pattern of this royal promissory grant in which an ancient near eastern king bestowed gifts ‘upon individuals who distinguished themselves in loyally serving

¹⁶ George E. Mendenhall, ‘Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition’, *BA* 17 (1954), pp. 50-76. The suzerain-vassal treaty form was compared to the structure of Deut. by Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy, Studies and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963).

¹⁷ Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, pp. 14, 28.

¹⁸ Weinfeld, ‘ברית’, p. 255.

¹⁹ Mendenhall, ‘Covenant’, p. 715.

²⁰ Weinfeld, ‘ברית’, pp. 270-72. Goldingay, *OT Theology: Israel’s Gospel*, p. 515; M. Weinfeld, *The Promise of the Land: The Inheritance of the Land of Canaan by the Israelites* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 222-64; and M. Weinfeld, ‘The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East’, *JAOS* 90, no. 2 (1970), pp. 184-203.

²¹ Mendenhall and Herion, ‘Covenant’, p. 1188.

their masters'.²² These grants were unconditional promises of property and other gifts.

A third class of pact that parallels the biblical covenant is the marriage contract. Julius Wellhausen argues that the biblical use of covenant as a symbol for the Israelites' relationship to Yahweh actually derived from the marriage metaphor;²³ and Riemann writes that the biblical covenant is 'closely related' to the metaphor of marriage.²⁴ Although the idea of marriage between God and Israel is not explicitly mentioned in the Pentateuch, there is language that seems to imply such a relationship. Yahweh warns against Israel's infidelity with the words: 'For I the Lord your God am a jealous God' (Exod. 20.5; 34.14; Deut. 5.9; Josh. 24.19). The Hebrew קנה, 'to be jealous', is used to describe a husband who is jealous over his wife (Num. 5.14). In addition, one of the terms used in the Pentateuch as a metaphor for idolatry is זנה, 'to act as harlot'.²⁵ Israel is forbidden to 'go whoring after' the Canaanite gods (Exod. 34.16; cf. Lev. 17.7; 20.5-6; Num. 15.39; Deut. 31.16). Furthermore, the covenant formula 'I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God' (Exod. 6.7; Lev. 26.12; Deut. 29.12) is marital language that is known from legal documents of the ancient Near East²⁶ (cf. also Hos. 2.4). 'The relationship of the vassal to his suzerain', writes Weinfeld, 'and that of the wife to her husband, leave no place for double loyalty, and therefore are perfect metaphors for loyalty in a monotheistic religion'.²⁷

²² Weinfeld, 'בריה', p. 270-72. Cf. Weinfeld, 'Covenant, Davidic', p. 189.

²³ Cited in S. David Sperling, *The Original Torah: The Political Intent of the Bible's Writers* (Reappraisals in Jewish Social and Intellectual History; New York: New York University Press, 1998), p. 64.

²⁴ Riemann, 'Covenant, Mosaic', p. 192.

²⁵ Brown *et al.*, *BDB*, p. 276. The terminology of harlotry is applied symbolically to Israel's unfaithfulness in Judg. 2.17; 8.27, 33; and literally in relation to Samson (16.1) and the Levite's concubine (19.2).

²⁶ Weinfeld, 'בריה', p. 278.

²⁷ Weinfeld, 'בריה', p. 278.

It should be remembered that the biblical understanding of covenant includes both similarities to and differences from the ancient Near Eastern concepts. While the form of the biblical covenant between Yahweh and Israel is similar to the suzerainty treaty, the theological content and social implications of Yahweh's covenant departs from the ancient Near Eastern treaties in various ways. The comparison of the biblical treaty with other treaties can illuminate our understanding of Israel's relationship to Yahweh; but, as Goldingay warns, 'we should be wary of exaggerating the importance of this factor in the development of covenant thinking'.²⁸

²⁸ Goldingay, *OT Theology: Israel's Faith*, p. 186.

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