

“A Dream Carries Much Implication”:* The Midianite’s Dream (Judges VII), Its Role and Meanings

Abstract: Commentators have long been divided in appraising Gideon. Some consider him an outstanding champion of Yahweh’s cause. Others judge him as, at best, flawed, at worst a vainglorious manipulator who corrupted Israel’s relationship with Yahweh and weakened her hold on the Promised Land. Despite abundant commentary on Gideon, the Midianite’s dream has attracted little specific exegetical attention beyond recognition that, on hearing its interpretation, Gideon was transformed. Yet it must surely rank as one of the most remarkable episodes in Judges. This study considers the dream’s hermeneutical function in illuminating Gideon’s character and changing relationship with Yahweh. It examines the dream’s place in the Gideon narrative and explores the meaning of its symbolism for the writer’s time and readership. It demonstrates that the narrative’s structure, and the dream’s place within it, were carefully planned and crucial to its interpretation. Finally, it analyses heuristic literary devices used in the narrative.

Key words: Gideon-Jerubbaal; kingship; King Manasseh; ring-structure; 3+1 literary figures; divination; esoteric writing

1. Something New

Scholars have long been divided in appraising Gideon.¹ The view that he was an outstanding champion of Yahweh’s cause has enjoyed considerable currency in biblical exegesis, ancient

* Midrash Haggadol, quoted in Jeffrey H. Tigay, “An Early Technique of Aggadic Exegesis”, in H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld (eds), *History, Historiography and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures* (Jerusalem, 1983), pp. 169-89 (171).

¹ David M. Gunn, *Judges* (Malden MA/Oxford, 2005), pp. 93-120.

and modern.² Other commentators consider him, at best, flawed,³ at worst a self-serving opportunist whose leadership set a direction for Israel that would blight her relationship with Yahweh and weaken her hold on the Promised Land.⁴ Whatever one's view, one can scarcely disagree with Shammai Feldman's observation that "something new begins with Gideon". As Feldman explains, the principal thematic innovation that Gideon's story

² Note, for example, the evaluation of Gideon in the New Testament (Heb 11:32), where he is listed first among the figures from the Judges era commended as heroes of faith; Josephus, *Antiquities* V 6:6-7; J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary*, trans. John Bowden (London, 1981), p. 194; John Gray, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth (The Century Bible - New Edn)* (London, 1967), p. 228; John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd edn (London, 1981), p. 180; Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary (OTL)* (Louisville, 2008), pp. 105-6; Andreas Scherer, "Gideon: ein Anti-Held? Ein Beitrag zur Auseinandersetzung mit dem sog. 'Flawed Hero Approach' am Beispiel von Jdc. VI 36-40", *VT* 55 (2005), pp. 269-73; Shammai Feldman, "Biblical Motives and Sources", *JNES* 22 (1963), pp. 73-103 (103).

³ J. Cheryl Exum, "The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges", *CBQ* 52 (1990), pp. 410-31 (418); Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading* (Sheffield, 1987), p. 157; idem, *The Book of Judges (NICOT)* (Grand Rapids, 2012), p. 267.

⁴ Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* (Sheffield, 1988), p. 68; Arthur E. Cundall and Leon Morris, *Judges, Ruth: Introduction and Commentary* (London, 1968), pp. 121-2; Jan P. Fokkeman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Ineke Smit (Leiderdorp, 1999), p. 147; Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth (NIC 6)* (Nashville, 1999), p. 301; Wolfgang Bluedorn, *Yahweh versus Baalism: A Theological Reading of the Gideon-Abimelech Narrative* (London, 2001); Trent C. Butler, *Judges (WBC 8)* (Nashville, 2009), p. 200.

introduces is kingship over Israel, and any discussion of his legacy for Israel is inevitably drawn to this topic.⁵ Actually, Gideon's explicit association with the subject of kingship – in this case royal bearing – is introduced only late in the cycle, when he seizes the Midianite kings (8:18).⁶ Nevertheless, Gideon went *after* kings with the consuming zeal that his compatriots whored *after* his ephod and later the baals (8:5, 12; 8:27, 33). The trappings of royalty attracted him: on slaying Zebah and Zalmunna he plundered the ornaments on their camels' necks, pendants, crescent-moon amulets, and the royal garments (8:21, 26).⁷ He named his son Abimelech "my father is king" (8:31).⁸ The size of his harem, the number of his sons (seventy), and the wealth implicit in their support betray a regal *modus vivendi* (cf. Deut 17:16-17).⁹

⁵ "Motives", pp. 95-96. One commentator - Naftali Kraus (*Bírák és próféták: a zsidó nép őstörténete* [Budapest, 2006], p. 50) - entitles his chapter on the hero "Gideon ben-Joash: The Man Who Would Not Be King".

⁶ Webb, *Judges*, p. 258; Block, *Judges*, p. 294.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 300. G. Henton Davies, "Judges VIII 22-23", *VT* 13 (1963), pp. 151-7 (157); Fokkelman, *Reading*, p. 147.

⁸ *Idem*, "Structural Remarks on Judges 9 and 19", in Michael Fishbane and Emanuel Tov (eds), *"Sha'arei Talmon": Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon* (Winona Lake, 1992), pp. 33-45 (34). Compare Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York, 2001), pp. 510-1.

⁹ K. Lawson Younger, Jr., *Judges and Ruth* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids, 2002), p. 209; Bluedorn, *Yahwism*, pp. 124-5.

From the outset, Gideon's portrayal reveals three character traits inimical to his calling as Yahweh's "hero of strength" (*gibbôr heḥāyîl*), viz., cowardice, an attachment to his patriarchal "house",¹⁰ and talent for making (self-interested) logical calculations - in Barry Webb's terms, his "personal resourcefulness" cum "tactical skill".¹¹ In furtherance of His plan to create in Gideon a spiritual leader for His people, Yahweh attacks these traits systematically, and, seemingly, successfully. From the moment that Yahweh commissions Gideon, the only hero-figure in Judges called from a domestic setting,¹² He seeks to deal with his fear and attenuate his connection with his patriarchal house (cf. Gen 12:1). Thus, as the opening salvo in Yahweh's challenge to Baal, He instructs Gideon to slaughter a bull belonging to his father as a sacrifice to Yahweh,¹³ and to destroy his father's Baal altar and Asherah pole.¹⁴ Three times in one verse, the construction אשר לאביר/עליו "which is *your father's*" is repeated in the context of the targets Gideon had to eliminate (6:25-28).

¹⁰ The Midrash commends Gideon's care for his father (Kraus, *Bírák*, p. 53).

¹¹ *Integrated*, p. 151. Compare Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven and London, 1993), p. 85.

¹² Susan Niditch, "Samson as Culture Hero, Trickster, and Bandit: The Empowerment of the Weak", *CBQ* 54 (1990), pp. 608-24 (623).

¹³ On the crux concerning the Judg 6:25-28 reference to two bulls (Webb, *Judges*, p. 233 n. 40), note that two bulls were a feature of the iconography of Aššur, chief deity of the Assyrians (Alasdair Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea* [SAA 3; Helsinki, 1989], p. 42).

¹⁴ Younger, *Judges*, p. 38.

Second, he makes him abandon all rational calculation in the battle preparation (7:2-8).

Although as a result of his relationship with Yahweh, Gideon does become the courageous hero envisioned in his calling,¹⁵ by the story's end we find that the suppression of the other traits was temporary; they re-emerge more assured than ever. Arguably, the most dramatic example of their retention is Gideon's production, using gold plundered from the Midianite dead, of the ephod which proved so popular an alternative to strict, aniconic Yahwism that "all Israel" passionately venerated it. Gideon's motive in creating the ephod is unstated. I suggest that it reflected a calculation that, if denied cult images, the Israelites would soon revert to worshipping the autochthonous gods, which would be detrimental to the interests of a leader such as Gideon closely identified with Yahweh and so famously associated with destroying a Baal altar and Asherah pole that he bore the cognomen Jerubbaal (cf. 9:28). Surely better, then, that they have an ephod celebrating Yahweh/Gideon's victory than an idol to an alien god.¹⁶ Moreover, by establishing it in his home town, Ophrah, he elevated Ophrah's importance nationally, doubtlessly benefiting its economy, while further gilding the status of his "house" by placing himself at the centre of the cult. *Prima facie*, Gideon's

¹⁵ Exum, "Centre", p. 417. Compare Ken Stone, "Gender Criticism: The Un-Manning of Abimelech", in Gale A. Yee (ed.), *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd edn (Minneapolis, 2007), pp. 183-201 (188).

¹⁶ H.W. Hertzberg, *Die Bücher Josua, Richter, Ruth*, 4th edn (ATD 9; Göttingen, 1969), p. 199. Barhebraeus understands the ephod as a memorial, not an idol (Martin Sprengling and William Creighton Graham [eds], *Barhebraeus's Scholia on the Old Testament, Part I Genesis-II Samuel* [Chicago, 1931], p. 285). One may infer that the two altars to Yahweh that Gideon erected in Ophrah failed to excite concupiscent enthusiasm.

calculation was vindicated: the Midianites did not “raise their heads” again, the land had rest for forty years, and Gideon himself spent those four decades enjoying himself in the best traditions of Near Eastern potentates. He went to his grave “in good old age” and was buried with fitting honour (8:28-32). Indeed, even the next event in the narrative could be read as vindication of Gideon’s religious strategy: “as soon as Gideon was dead, the Israelites returned to whoring after the baals and made Baal of the Covenant [*ba’al b’rît*] their god” (v 33). Israel’s proclivity for cultic “whoring” was unaffected by his death, but her favours switched in the direction he had anticipated forty years earlier. Thus, we learn in 9:4 that as a consequence of this national cultic reorientation, Ophrah’s ephod was superseded as national shrine by the temple of Baal of the Covenant located in the ancient Canaanite cult-centre of Shechem.¹⁷ In the revival of Canaanite cult among the Israelites, not only was Yahweh forgotten by His people, who now understood “covenant” in terms of Baal, but they ceased to show *hesed* towards “Jerubbaal-Gideon’s house” (8:35). The reappearance, at this point in the narrative, of his appellation Jerubbaal “Let Baal contest/Baal will contest”¹⁸ reminds us that for Baalists, whether Israelite or Canaanite in the mixed population that was Israel,¹⁹ Gideon’s contributions in the cultic sphere were not positive.²⁰

¹⁷ Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, P.W. van der Horst (eds), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible [DDD]*, 2nd rev. edn (Leiden; Grand Rapids, 1999), pp. 141-4.

¹⁸ Block, *Judges*, p. 302.

¹⁹ Martin Noth, *A History of Israel*, 2nd edn (London, 1960), p. 145.

²⁰ J. Alberto Soggin, *A History of Israel: From the Beginnings to the Bar Kochba Revolt*, trans. John Bowden (London, 1984), p. 178; compare Julian Morgenstern, “Amos Studies I”, *HUCA* 11 (1936), pp. 19-140 (79).

This “now-you-see-it, now-you-don’t” aspect of Gideon’s character creates the essential ambiguity in his portrayal identified by Robert Polzin,²¹ an ambiguity highlighted by his two names, Gideon “hacker”, and Jerubbaal. The fact that the latter can have two meanings, both of which able to be interpreted positively or negatively in light of Gideon’s story, underlines the ambiguity. Polzin’s point is corroborated by the divide between exegetes concerning Gideon’s contribution to Israelite society, and whether he really rejected the offer of hereditary rule in favour of Yahweh (8:23), or was dissembling.²²

Given that the narrative’s surface meaning abounds in ambiguity, the reader must look elsewhere for clues to decipher its message. As generally in Judges, the structure assists. The pericope’s rhetorical architecture (6:11-8:35, with its prologue 6:1-10) casts light on meanings concealed in the opacity of the surface text.²³ 3+1 formations have an allied

²¹ *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History, Part 1* (New York, 1980), p. 169: “The [Gideon] story revolves around repeated efforts to resolve ambiguity”. Graeme Auld (*Joshua Retold: Synoptic Perspectives* [Edinburgh, 1998], 122) dubs its hero Jekyll and Hyde.

²² Davies, “Judges”, pp. 151-7; Feldman, “Motives”, p. 95; Dennis T. Olson, “Buber, Kingship, and the Book of Judges: A Study of Judges 6-9 and 17-21”, in Bernard F. Batto and Kathryn Roberts (eds), *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J.J.M. Roberts* (Winona Lake, 2004), pp. 199-218 (210).

²³ Detailed consideration of the Abimelech section (chapter 9) lies beyond this article’s scope. It is undoubtedly the Gideon section’s sequel, and together they constitute a bipartite series, as many scholars assert (Robert H. O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* [Leiden, 1996], pp. 139-40 passim; Klein, *Triumph*, p. 50; Younger, *Judges*, pp. 38-39,

heuristic role, highlighting negatively portentous incidents and words.²⁴ This may reflect a polemic against Baalism. Nicolas Wyatt notes just such a 3+1 configuration in Baal's identity:

Though [the three weather goddesses] form a natural triad, they really belong with Baal as hypostases, or manifestations of him, forming a tetrad. This is expressed in terms of their familial relationship to him: they are both his "daughters" and his "perfect brides" (KTU 1.3 i 23 [bnt], 1.3 i 26, 1.4 iv 54 etc. [klt] [...]), which makes them dependent on him, and inseparable from him.²⁵

In the Gideon cycle, four pivotal words display such an arrangement. The fact that the words are parasonant suggests that the grouping determined by 3+1 marking is not fortuitous; it functions to illuminate the text's esoteric meaning. That one of its members, *vmšl*, is

167, 203; Elie Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest: An Ideology of Leadership in the Gideon, Abimelech and Jephthah Narrative (Judg. 6-12)* [Leiden, 2005], p. 132; Webb, *Integrated*, p. 154). Trent Butler (*Judges*, p. 195) considers the Abimelech pericope "a narrative appendix".

²⁴ On the generally fateful nature of the 3+1 figure in Judges, see Robin Baker, *Hollow Men, Strange Women: Riddles, Codes and Otherness in the Book of Judges* (Leiden and Boston, 2016), pp. 38, 60, 86-93 passim.

²⁵ "The Rumpelstiltskin Factor: Explorations in the Arithmetic of Pantheons", in H.B. Huffmon and A.J. Ferrara (eds), *Wine and Honey for Simon B. Parker* (Winona Lake, in press). Such a three/four pattern may parallel Egyptian theological notions (op. cit.).

connected by homophony to the word meaning “simile, allegory” conceivably supplies a further clue that this story contains an esoteric dimension.²⁶

Consonant with the structure of Judges,²⁷ and resembling that of other biblical and ancient Near Eastern texts,²⁸ the Gideon section is a ring-composition. Episodes and phrasing in the first half are recast either as synonymous parallels or antithetically in the second.²⁹ Thus, the story begins and ends in Ophrah.³⁰ It is set in the context of Israel’s oppression by peoples of conspicuous concubine ancestry – the Midianites and Amalekites

²⁶ Stephen J. Lieberman, “A Mesopotamian Background for the So-Called *Aggadic* ‘Measures’ of Biblical Hermeneutics”, *HUCA* 58 (1987), pp. 157-225 (160-63). Compare Ezek 21:5 (E. 20:49); Daniel Boyarin, “The Bartered Word: Midrash and Symbolic Economy”, in Glenn W. Most (ed.), *Commentaries = Kommentare*, (Göttingen, 1999), pp. 19-65 (48).

²⁷ Baker, *Hollow Men*, pp. 121-56; J. Cheryl Exum, “Promise and Fulfilment: Narrative Art in Judges 13”, *JBL* 99 (1980), pp. 43-59; David M. Gunn, “Joshua and Judges”, in Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (eds), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (London, 1987), pp. 102-21 (117).

²⁸ Mary Douglas, *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers* (Oxford, 2001), pp. xxiv; 116-50; eadem, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford and New York, 1999), pp. 50-52, 175, 219, 244; F. Al-Rawi and J.A. Black, “The Second Tablet of ‘Išum and Erra’”, *Iraq* 51 (1989), pp. 111-22 (111).

²⁹ D.W. Gooding (“The Composition of the Book of Judges”, *Eretz Israel* 16 [*H.M. Orlinsky Vol.*; 1982], pp. 70-79), David Dorsey (*The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* [Grand Rapids, 1999], pp. 110-11) and Lawson Younger (*Judges*, pp. 167-8) contend that the Gideon pericope has a chiasmic structure.

³⁰ Webb, *Integrated*, p. 153; Block, *Judges*, p. 250.

(6:1-6).³¹ Gideon's final recorded act is naming Abimelech whom his concubine bore him (8:31). References to the Midianites form an *inclusio* around the account of Gideon's career (6:13; 8:28). The first scene opens in a stone structure belonging to Joash, his father – a winepress; the final scene has Gideon being interred in a stone structure belonging to Joash – his tomb. Both were traditionally hewn in solid rock.³² The parallelism is not merely conceptual; it is also conveyed by the words deployed here, arranged in a roughly chiasmic figure:

[...] in Ophrah which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, and Gideon his son was threshing wheat in the winepress (6:11).

Gideon the son of Joash died [...] and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father in Abiezrite Ophrah (8:32).

The closing section describes the dissonance in Gideon's conduct from what one would expect. It is the conduct of a Near Eastern ruler, not that befitting a champion of Yahweh's covenant (8:29-32).³³ Equally incongruous is his behaviour when we first encounter him: he is threshing wheat in the "wrong" facility. This episode serves a further symbolic purpose. Since the winepress was a sheltered structure in a sheltered location, and, consequently, protected from the breeze, Gideon's ability to separate the wheat from the chaff would have been partial, at best.³⁴ The vignette emblemizes a man who, the reader will learn, cannot shake out the chaff in his nature. Gideon's first words, his "sarcastic rebuttal" of the

³¹ Webb, *Judges*, pp. 222, 263.

³² C.F. Burney, *The Book of Judges*, 2nd edn (London, 1920), p. 187.

³³ Cundall, *Judges*, pp. 123-4; Block, *Judges*, p. 299.

³⁴ Compare *ibid.*, p. 259.

angelic proclamation,³⁵ betray a 3+1 structure (three questions followed by a statement concerning Midianite control): “If Yahweh is with us, why has all this befallen us? Where are all his miracles? The ones our fathers recounted to us saying ‘Did not Yahweh bring us up from Egypt?’ But now Yahweh has abandoned us and put us under the Midianites’ control” (6:13).³⁶ This 3+1 construction, which treats the questions lying at the root of the theological concerns of the Gideon narrative, namely, who rules Israel, who merits her loyalty and who is her saviour, is matched in the closing scene of Gideon’s campaign by the 3+1 pattern of the exultant Israelites’ offer of dynastic rule to Gideon (three imperative subjects followed by a statement concerning Midianite control): “Rule over us, both you, your son, and your grandson also, since you have saved us from Midian’s control” (8:22).³⁷

³⁵ Moshe Garsiel, “Homiletic Name-Derivations as a Literary Device in the Gideon Narrative: Judges VI-VIII”, *VT* 43 (1993), pp. 302-17 (304). Compare Walter Beyerlin, “Geschichte und heilgeschichtliche Traditionsbildung im Alten Testament: Ein Beitrag zur Traditionsgeschichte von Richter VI-VIII”, *VT* 13 (1963), pp. 1-25 (6); Mark Roncace, “Josephus’ (Real) Portraits of Deborah and Gideon: A Reading of ‘Antiquities’ 5.198-232”, *JSJPHRP* 31 (2000), pp. 247-74 (261-2).

³⁶ Curiously, Gideon’s frame of reference for Yahweh’s saving acts does not include His interventions recorded in Judges, viz., the defeat of the three kings, Cushan-rishathaim, Eglon and Jabin/Sisera.

³⁷ 3+1 operates in this episode at both a syntactic and a lexical level. The Israelites use *vmšl* “rule” once (as an imperative); Gideon’s reply (8:23) repeats it three times in indicative forms. In the Gideon cycle, the lexeme occurs only here. Scholars agree that it has a key role in the politico-theological discourse conveyed by the Gideon story. Equally important in this

On receiving his commission, Gideon's first assignment is to destroy a cult installation in Ophrah, his father's Baal altar and Asherah pole, and use the materials to build another (an altar to Yahweh). He marks his return to Ophrah at the end of his campaign by setting up a cult installation (the ephod) using materials taken from a pagan source (6:25-28; 8:21-27).³⁸ Gideon's replacement of Baal's altar with Yahweh's provoked a

context is *melek* "king", a word to which *mšl* is related semantically and by loose parasonance. References to kings in the cycle likewise display a 3+1 arrangement: three references to the kings of Midian, one to Gideon (8:18; 8:5, 12, 26). In the final citation, Gideon is literally assuming their dress. The deployment in Judges of 3+1 to signal portents possesses broad thematic applications, too. The fact that the decades of peace Gideon secured for the land did not outlive him, in contrast to his three predecessor-deliverers Othniel, Ehud and Deborah, insinuates Gideon's deleterious effect on Israel and her ancestral faith.

³⁸ Burney, *Judges*, p. 235. Indeed, just as the ephod syncretized Yahwism with the iconographic practices of the surrounding peoples (Younger, *Judges*, p. 207), so Gideon became an amalgam of Yahwistic *gibbôr hehāyîl* and louche Canaanite potentate. Robert O'Connell (*Rhetoric*, p. 155) draws a parallel between Gideon making the ephod and his sexual congress with a Canaanite. The number of Gideon's sons equals the number of sons engendered by El upon Athirat-Asherah (*DDD*, pp. 99, 603). The ephod was a symbol, then, not of Gideon's triumph as he believed, but of his adulterated conception of Yahweh, as well as his failure to anchor Israel's faith in her God despite the immensity of the divine victory over Midian.

dramatic public reaction: the Ophrahites call for his death. As dramatic is the public response to the ephod.

These examples might suggest that the ring-structure links only the pericope's beginning and end. In fact, the Gideon narrative is arranged in concentric rings. Thus, in 6:34, Gideon is "clothed" by Yahweh's Spirit; in 8:26, he has appropriated the purple garments of his foes. In chapter 7, he singles out from his troops a small group whom he, instructed by Yahweh, chooses for action. The process takes place in two stages (7:2-7). In chapter 8, he singles out men from a larger group – for violent punishment. This, too, occurs in two stages (8:14-17). The man who covertly threshed wheat is now openly threshing his compatriots.³⁹ In chapter 7, Gideon asks Yahweh for confirmation of His promise of victory by setting Him "interminable tests",⁴⁰ specifically with a fleece; in chapter 8, he puts the Israelites to a test by requesting their spoils of gold.⁴¹ The lemma חָרַד "shake with fear" is used of the emotional state of some of Gideon's forces in 7:3, deliciously anticipated by the

³⁹ Webb, *Judges*, p. 256. Note Burney, *Judges*, pp. 229-30.

⁴⁰ David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford, 1993), p. 66. Compare Alan Lenzi, *Akkadian Prayers and Hymns: A Reader*, rev. edn (*ANE Monographs* 3; Atlanta, 2015), p. 471.

⁴¹ It appears that, in antiquity, the fleece and the gold were associated, since Clement of Alexandria contended that the Greek myth of the Golden Fleece was based on the Gideon tale (James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* [New Haven and London, 1981], p. 144).

name of the spring where they are encamped (טַרְחַן - 7:1),⁴² and it characterizes Gideon's terrifying effect on the Midianite troops (8:12).

The ring arrangement connects the pericope's prologue and epilogue, too. The prophecy proclaimed in 6:8-10 matches the curse issued in 9:16-20. Both rehearse the past. The ring-structure's most striking element is, however, *bayit* "house". We encounter it at the beginning and end of the Gideon section, and, if the one reference in the prologue is included, its distribution is perfectly balanced between them (6:8, 15, 27; 8:27, 29, 35).⁴³ Furthermore, disregarding two toponyms found in 8:22-24, the word is absent from the body of the account. Like Ophrah, then, *bayit* provides an inclusio encompassing Gideon's story. The pattern indicates the word's significance for the Gideon narrative. Even more consequential is the structure's centre-point. In this pericope, the writer not only carefully defines the outer ring of the design and, more loosely, its concentric rings,⁴⁴ he gives primacy to the nexus, the fulcrum where the plot tips, consistent with contemporary literary practice.⁴⁵

⁴² Burney, *Judges*, pp. 205-9; Klein, *Triumph*, p. 56.

⁴³ The portion 6:7-10 is lacking in 4QJUDG^a (Martin Abegg, Jr., Peter Flint and Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible Translated for the First Time into English* [New York, 1999], pp. 208-11). It is extant, however, in all other Hebrew and LXX manuscripts.

⁴⁴ Daniel Block (*Judges*, pp. 262, 288) demonstrates that ring-composition also occurs at the level of verse-clusters.

⁴⁵ On the importance of the midpoint of biblical compositions for their interpretation, see Yehuda T. Radday, "Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative," in John W. Welch (ed.), *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analysis, Exegesis* (Hildesheim, 1981), pp. 50-117 (51, 57);

2. Dreams and Oracles

In the Gideon cycle, the midpoint resembles the crown of a hill between two valleys. The first part of the narrative describes how Gideon, aided, humoured, and tolerated by Yahweh, makes his way stepwise to the top. The second recounts how, having achieved the summit, he descends, his connection with the deity who impelled him there progressively slackening as he gathers pace. The centre-point marks Gideon's transformation into, ostensibly, the individual whom God envisaged in him.⁴⁶ It rapidly becomes clear, though, as his descent begins, that the change, while undoubtedly dramatic and authentic, does not conform to the paragon of godly strength and virtue that Yahweh had in mind. Stated baldly, God made him brave but could not make him good. It is unsurprising, then, that the midpoint is actually set in the context of a hill and valley, as the text emphasizes.⁴⁷

The thesis I am advancing regarding the turning point in this narrative differs from the position generally held by those scholars who, as I do, understand Gideon to be an essentially negative figure. Webb makes a seductive case that the plot turns with Gideon's foray across the Jordan,⁴⁸ a position reflected in some commentaries.⁴⁹ Others find the

Douglas, *Leviticus*, p. 50; eadem, *Wilderness*, p. 117. Compare Richard C. Steiner, "The Two Sons of Neriah and the Two Editions of Jeremiah in the Light of Two *Atbash* Code-Words for Babylon", *VT* 46 (1996), pp. 74-84 (80-81, 84), who, although taking a contrary view, corroborates this point.

⁴⁶ Block, *Judges*, p. 281.

⁴⁷ Compare Webb, *Judges*, p. 241.

⁴⁸ *Integrated*, pp. 151-3; *Judges*, pp. 220-1.

⁴⁹ Younger, *Judges*, pp. 197-8; Butler, *Judges*, p. 218.

tipping point in 7:24, with Gideon's summons to the tribes to join him in eradicating the Midianite forces, rather than continuing to rely on Yahweh for miraculous victory.⁵⁰ All these scholars maintain that the deleterious change in the hero happens after his first battle against the Midianites and before he annihilates this enemy. This analysis overlooks the role of the most extraordinary feature of the entire cycle: the dream that the Midianite soldier relates to his fellow in the camp of Midian, and his interlocutor's interpretation of it in Gideon and his servant Pura's hearing.⁵¹ It is a divine oracle which the Midianite hearer and Gideon, *mutatis mutandis*, immediately recognize as such (7:14-15). Moreover, as well as receiving the dream-oracle and its interpretation, Gideon, according to ancient Near Eastern belief, also experienced in this episode an "ominous encounter", i.e., God had arranged for him to overhear them.⁵² Not only does the event transform Gideon from the capricious, fearful individual who fills the first half of his story (Yahweh and Gideon acknowledge the latter's fearfulness in the episode's introduction [7:10-11]), it is also the last occasion when he responds to Yahweh spontaneously in a manner that befits his calling: "he worshipped".

⁵⁰ Yairah Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing*, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Leiden, 1999), p. 232; Klein, *Triumph*, pp. 57-58; Bluedorn, *Yahweh*, pp. 144-8.

⁵¹ Butler (*Judges*, pp. 195, 511) and Block (*Judges*, p. 247), for example, do not include the dream in their summaries of the Gideon cycle. Indeed, Block (*ibid.*, p. 278) judges the passage a "detour".

⁵² Niditch, *Judges*, p. 98; A. Leo Oppenheim, "The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East", *Transactions of the American Philological Society* 46 (1956), pp. 179-373 (210-1, 238-9); W.W. Hallo, "Akkadian Apocalypses", *IEJ* 16 (1966), pp. 231-42 (232); S.A.L. Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams and Dream Rituals* (AOAT 258; Münster, 1998), p. 4.

What the visitation by the angel with its attendant miracle, the rescue from Ophrah's baying mob, the fleece tests, and the direct communication from Yahweh, in its scale and detail unprecedented in Judges,⁵³ could not effect, the dream and its interpretation, set within an ominous encounter, achieve.⁵⁴ Ironically, it is not the direct communication from Yahweh that produces Gideon's transformation but an oracle delivered and interpreted by Midianites,⁵⁵ just as it is Midianite gold that inspires the creation of the ephod that becomes the "snare to Gideon and his house" (8:27). Yahweh's instruction to Gideon that, if he is afraid to attack the Midianites, he should go down from the Israelite camp on the mountain to their camp in the valley to "hear what *they* are saying" (7:3, 9-15) is the final occasion on which Gideon hears Yahweh. The narrative at this point ironically reverses Yahweh's dictum to Moses, Aaron and Miriam in Num 12:5-8. Hitherto, Gideon was a man with whom Yahweh spoke not through dreams or visions, but "mouth to mouth", in this respect

⁵³ Klein, *Triumph*, p. 66.

⁵⁴ Younger, *Judges*, p. 190; Amit, *Judges*, p. 227.

⁵⁵ Butler, *Judges*, p. 214.

resembling Moses.⁵⁶ But it is when He communicates through a dream,⁵⁷ not even a dream experienced by Gideon, but one received and interpreted by a polytheist,⁵⁸ presented in a context rich in allusion to polytheistic ominous belief, that Gideon finally changes. The effects of the dream event are, first, Gideon is transformed into the *gibbôr hehâyîl* that God envisioned in him and, second, their relationship is transformed from one characterized by frequent direct oral communication to one in which no communication occurs.⁵⁹ Through the discussion of the Exodus that introduces the Gideon narrative (6:8-10) and is then reprised in the nascent hero's first words (6:13), the writer has already served notice that this man's story must be assessed in light of the Exodus account. The parallel between the production of the golden ephod, which supplies the closing scene of Gideon's martial adventures, and the golden calf, both fabricated from rings offered by the Israelites,

⁵⁶ Martin Buber, *Kingship of God*, 3rd edn, trans. Richard Scheimann (New Jersey, London, 1967), p. 72; Webb, *Judges*, p. 228. Compare Judg 6:22; Morgenstern, "Amos", p. 51 n. 52. On the parallels between Yahweh's commissioning of Moses and Gideon, see Beyerlin, "Geschichte", pp. 9-10; Gregory Wong, "Gideon: A New Moses?", in R. Rezetko et al. (eds), *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld* (VTSup 113; Leiden, 2006), pp. 529-46; Block, *Judges*, pp. 257-65, who describes Gideon as "a sort of second Moses".

⁵⁷ Compare Jer 23:28. "Said Rabbi Hanina ben Isaac: 'an incomplete form of prophecy is the dream'" (*Genesis Rabbah* 44:17); Heschel, *Prophets*, pp. 519, 548, 590-1.

⁵⁸ A. Graeme Auld, "Gideon: Hacking at the Heart of the Old Testament", *VT* 39 (1989), pp. 257-67 (261).

⁵⁹ Compare Exum, "Centre", p. 417; Klein, *Triumph*, pp. 57-58; Younger, *Judges*, p. 176.

buttresses the connection.⁶⁰ Gideon's metamorphosis recalls, but cannot reconcile, both Moses' theophanic experience on Mount Sinai and the events surrounding Aaron (and Miriam) that took place simultaneously on the plain below (Exod 31:18-32:29).⁶¹ As Gideon moves further and further out of earshot from Yahweh, so his resemblance to Moses fades.

It is not only the fact that the Midianite's dream effects the transformation of Gideon into a hero of strength and concomitantly ends the communication between him and Yahweh, which has hitherto driven the narrative, that suggests this episode is the theological centre of the cycle.⁶² It is literally its centre, according to the verse count. Judg 6:11-8:35 comprises ninety verses. The forty-fifth verse begins: "When Gideon heard the dream account" (7:15a). The text intimates that the dream episode is to be understood as the cycle's midpoint in more abstract ways too. Gideon's attack on the Midianites, which immediately follows it, happens "at the beginning of the *middle* watch" (7:19).

Commentators have observed that the two halves of the cycle each feature a winepress and their role in the story is significant.⁶³ They respectively provide the setting for Gideon's divine encounter and commission, and the fulfilment of that commission with the eradication of the Midianite threat (6:11; 7:25).⁶⁴ In the name Pura (*pūrāh* - 7:10, 11), the

⁶⁰ Feldman ("Motives", p. 76 n. 2) considers these episodes "doublets".

⁶¹ Compare Gregory Mobley, *The Empty Men: The Heroic Tradition of Ancient Israel* (ABRL; New York, 2005), p. 118; Wong, "Gideon", pp. 543-4.

⁶² Dorsey (*Structure*, pp. 110-1) construes 7:9-22 as "the central unit" but ascribes no significance to the dream. Compare Younger, *Judges*, pp. 167-8.

⁶³ Auld, "Hacking", p. 266; Younger, *Judges*, p. 173.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 197 n. 50.

writer puns on *pûrāh* “winepress” (Isa 63:3),⁶⁵ and thereby artfully draws attention to the dream episode as the nexus between the two halves.

What underlines the exceptional nature of the dream incident for the narrative is not simply its effect on the hero and the plot development, but that in the Hebrew Bible, outside Genesis and Daniel, narrated dreams are very rare, notwithstanding the assertion in Numbers 12 that they provide the main channel through which Yahweh communicates with His prophets. The Midianite’s dream has the distinction of being the only symbolic oracular dream recounted in the Hebrew Bible which is not only received by a non-Israelite, but interpreted by one.⁶⁶ In Sally Butler’s classification of dream omens based on the Akkadian divinatory corpus, this dream falls in the category of “prognostic symbolic-message dream”. Its origin is divine but decoding is necessary. This dream-type, she maintains, demonstrates a more distant relationship with the sending deity than “message dreams containing a clear statement, requiring no interpretation”. In the latter, the dream’s divine creator often appears.⁶⁷ The account of the Judges dream stresses its cryptic nature: it requires deciphering. The word translated “its interpretation”, *šibrô*, literally means “its breaking, cracking” (v 15). While in English, “breaking, cracking” a code is accepted parlance, *všbr* “break”, which occurs relatively frequently in biblical Hebrew, is not found elsewhere in this

⁶⁵ Compare LXX rendering of the name as φαρα.

⁶⁶ Compare André Caquot, “Les songes et leur interprétation selon Canaan et Israel”, in Anne-Marie Esnoul et al. (eds), *Les songes et leur interprétation* (Paris, 1959), pp. 99-124 (111); Heschel, *Prophets*, p. 434 n.

⁶⁷ *Conceptions*, pp. 15-18. In the Hebrew Bible, only Gentiles receive symbolic-message dreams (Oppenheim, *Interpretation*, p. 207).

metaphorical meaning.⁶⁸ Cognate forms in Akkadian, which are encountered widely and possess an extensive range of applications, likewise nowhere attest the root in this meaning.⁶⁹ C.F. Burney considers the word etymologically unrelated to *všbr*, but, rather, a *Šaph'ēl* form of the biliteral *vbr* “see”, with *š* functioning as a performative prefix, thus signifying “its elucidation”.⁷⁰ The difficulty in proving this postulation is plain. In submitting it, Burney cites the Akkadian *šabrû* as an example of a cognate lexeme which, he claims, underwent similar morphophonological development.⁷¹ In fact, *šabrû*'s precise relationship to *barû* “to see”, including “to see in a dream”, is uncertain.⁷² What is incontestable, however, is that *šabrû* was the term for “dream interpreter” in Standard Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian Akkadian, and that, in unpointed script, שברו could (conceivably, in this context, would) be read as *šabrû*. It seems, therefore, that the writer introduces here a

⁶⁸ *BDB*, pp. 990-1, contra Block, *Judges*, p. 280 n. 613. *všbr* is employed for Moses shattering the tablets he received on Mount Sinai on reaching the foot of the mountain (Exod 32:19, 34:1; Deut 9:17, 10:2).

⁶⁹ *CAD Š/2*, pp. 246-51; Jeremy Black et al., *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian [CDA]*, 2nd edn (Wiesbaden, 2000), pp. 364-5. Compare the use of *šbr* in the Neo-Assyrian divination record K 1360 (Ivan Starr, *Queries to the Sun-god: Divination and Politics in Sargonid Assyria [SAA 4]*; Helsinki, 1990], 281 l.6). Ugaritic cognate forms (*ṭ-b-r*), too, lack this meaning (Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, 2 vols, trans. Wilfred Watson [Leiden, 2003], pp. 897-8).

⁷⁰ *Judges*, p. xvi; compare *GKC* §§55 i; 30 p.

⁷¹ *Judges*, p. 214.

⁷² *CDA*, p. 39; *CAD Š/1*, p. 15.

borrowing from Akkadian since its divinatory vocabulary included a specific term for “dream interpreter”,⁷³ and that he did this either as bilingual paronomasia,⁷⁴ should Burney’s analysis of the lexeme’s morphophonological composition obtain, or because the word could be employed in contemporary Hebrew as a technical term.⁷⁵ If the latter is so, Judg 7:15 reads “and when he heard the dream narration and the *šabrû*, he worshipped”.⁷⁶

Whatever the precise provenance/meaning of את-שברו in the verse, we may assume that it struck contemporary readers as remarkable, first because it unexpectedly evokes the Mesopotamian cultic sphere,⁷⁷ and, second, because this loaded term’s appearance here goes against the grain of the narrative. After all, 7:15 marks Gideon finally, unequivocally, accepting his vocation from Yahweh, not from Baal. Yet, as the reader will soon learn, this is

⁷³ Ibid.; CDA, p. 344; Martti Nissinen, *References to Prophecy in Neo-Assyrian Sources (SAAS 7; Helsinki, 1998)*, pp. 53-55.

⁷⁴ Scott B. Noegel, “Paronomasia”, in Geoffrey Khan (ed.), *EHL vol. 3*, pp. 24-29 (26).

⁷⁵ Compare Baker, *Hollow Men*, p. 37.

⁷⁶ For the use of *šm’* with *’et* + person, see Dan 12:7. Compare A.B. Davidson, *Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd edn (Edinburgh, 1901), §78. This is not to ignore the more usual designation *ḥōlēm haḥlôm* “dreamer of the dream” for oneiromancers (Deut 13:4, 6; compare Jer 27:9). The proposal by some scholars (e.g., Oppenheim, *Interpretation*, p. 238) that *ḥartôm* denotes a cultic specialist in dreams is unproven (Kasia Szpakowska, *Behind Closed Eyes: Dreams and Nightmares in Ancient Egypt* [Swansea, 2003], pp. 63-65).

⁷⁷ Beate Pongratz-Leisten, “Mesopotamia”, in Barbetta Stanley Spaeth (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions* (Cambridge and New York, 2013), pp. 33-54 (44).

the moment when his slide begins, when Baal does indeed contest. The appearance of שברו (not to mention the episode itself) is one of the elements in 7:1-16 that indicate the text's esoteric character. This section possesses yet stranger features that reinforce the impression that the writer invites the reader to understand it as an esoteric text.

Leaving until later Judges best-known crux, the enigmatic non sequitur in the lapping scene (7:4-7),⁷⁸ we encounter "Mount Gilead" as the site of Gideon's camp (7:3). As Burney remarks, "'the Gil'ead' is elsewhere confined to the well-known district east of Jordan; and though it is perhaps too bold to say that the same name *could* not have been applied to a mountain on the western side of the river, yet such a coincidence in nomenclature is [...] highly improbable".⁷⁹ Geographically, it is improbable, but the Gilead citation highlights the allusion the author makes. It is not only with Moses that he draws parallels in this cycle, it is also with Jacob,⁸⁰ and specifically the episodes in his story that are enacted in Gilead. From 7:8b, the beginning of the dream account, the allusions to them are numerous. Their analysis lies outside the scope of this study. Pertinent for it, however, is that Laban meets Jacob on Mount Gilead immediately following a dream in which "God" speaks to "Laban the Syrian" concerning Jacob (Gen 31:23-25). The enigmatic appearance of Gilead in Judges 7 is, therefore, not a scribal blunder, but a mystical reference that places

⁷⁸ Gunn, *Judges*, pp. 105-6, 117.

⁷⁹ *Judges*, pp. 207-8. Many scholars consider "Gilead" here a scribal error for "Gilboa" (*BDB*, p. 167; *DCH* 2, p. 356; Gray, *Judges*, p. 291), but see Garsiel, "Homiletic", pp. 313-4.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 314-6; Buber, *Kingship*, pp. 71-72; Auld, "Hacking", pp. 257-8.

the dream concerning Gideon-Jerubbaal in the epistemological context of the Jacob-Israel narrative.⁸¹

Gilead is not the only enigmatic toponym used in the verses leading to the dream. The Midianites' conversation takes place beneath "the hill of the Oracle/Oracle-giver" (7:1).⁸² The site's connection with divination is reinforced by its proximity to En-dor, infamous for its necromantic oracle (1 Sam 28).⁸³ We have noted the ominous context in which the dream is relayed. Omen references pervade the cycle. Gregory Mobley observes that divination is a principal motif "that runs through the entire [Gideon] narrative".⁸⁴

⁸¹ Compare *ibid.*, p. 267. The paronomasia referring to Gideon's lineage found in the Midianite's interpretation – יואש איש ישראל - intimates in the dream episode itself a connection between Gideon-Jerubbaal and Jacob-Israel (7:14).

⁸² Burney; *Judges*, p. 206 n.; Gray, *Judges*, 290; Mobley, *Empty Men*, p. 138.

⁸³ Hartmut Rösel, "Studien zur Topographie der Kriege in den Büchern Josua und Richter", *ZDPV* 92 (1976), pp. 10-46 (14); O'Connell, *Rhetoric*, p. 290.

⁸⁴ *Empty Men*, p. 138. He lists (note 42) 6:17-23, 36-40; 7:4-8, 9-15; 8:27 as references to divination. On the resemblance of scriptural exegesis to divination and dream-interpretation, see Tigay, "Technique"; Lieberman, "Background", p. 160; compare Eckart Frahm, "Reading the Tablet, the Body and the Ext: The Hermeneutics of Cuneiform Signs in Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries and Divinatory Texts", in Amar Annus (ed.), *Divination and Interpretation of Signs in the Ancient World (OIS 6; Chicago, 2010)*, pp. 93-141 (98-99).

Gideon's fleece tests are *omina impetrativa*.⁸⁵ The angel's combustion of the sacrifice was also such an omen, effected in response to Gideon's challenge, itself framed in the form of Mesopotamian *omina*: "If I have found favour in your sight, give me a sign that it is you speaking with me" (6:17). His initial response to the angel also comprises such a "linked pair, consisting of a protasis (if-clause) and an apodosis (forecast)",⁸⁶ but on this occasion it is subverted, its subversion presaging Gideon's subversion of Yahwism: "If Yahweh is with us, why has all this befallen us?" (6:13).⁸⁷ The names of the Midianite commanders, Oreb and Zeeb, furnish a further ominous allusion.⁸⁸ The Midianite's dream represents the only *omen oblativum* in the cycle,⁸⁹ and its explication is framed as an omen apodosis.⁹⁰

These traits – enigmatic words, unexpected intertextual allusions, "lexical gymnastics" and plays on numbers, ominous references, curious personal and place names – are typical of ancient Near-Eastern esoteric literature of the period in which Judges was

⁸⁵ Younger, *Judges*, p. 188; Jack M. Sasson, "Oracle Inquiries in Judges", in Chaim Cohen et al. (eds), *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Post-Biblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul* (Winona Lake, 2008), pp. 149-69 (158).

⁸⁶ Erica Reiner, "Astral Magic in Babylonia", *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 85 (1995), p. 61.

⁸⁷ This is a subverted instance of the omen category that Oppenheim (*Interpretation*, p. 257) defines as "apodoses which do not prognosticate but purport to explain the reason why a specific ominous event occurred".

⁸⁸ Baker, *Hollow Men*, p. 59 n. 92.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62; Soggin, *Judges*, p. 141.

⁹⁰ Compare Tigay, "Technique", p. 181.

composed.⁹¹ Also characteristic are patent non sequiturs in plot development, with Tablet XII of *Gilgamesh* supplying the parade example.⁹² Omen texts in particular were intended

⁹¹ Simo Parpola, "Mount Nišir and the Foundations of the Assyrian Church", in Salvatore Gaspa et al. (eds), *From Source to History: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Worlds and Beyond Dedicated to G.B. Lanfranchi* (AOAT 412; Münster, 2014), pp. 469–84 (especially 470–71); idem, "The Esoteric Meaning of the Name of Gilgamesh", in Jiří Prosecký (ed.), *Intellectual Life of the Ancient Near East. Papers Presented at the 43rd RAI, Prague, July 1-5, 1996* (Prague, 1998), pp. 315-329 (318-29); Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, 3rd edn (Bethesda, 2005), pp. 14-26; Alasdair Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 44-52; Niek Veldhuis, "The Theory of Knowledge and the Practice of Celestial Divination", in Annus (ed.), *Divination*, pp. 77-91 (84-87); Lieberman, "Background", pp. 167, 181-3; Eckart Frahm, "Royal Hermeneutics: Observations on the Commentaries from Ashurbanipal's Libraries at Nineveh", *Iraq* 66 (2004), pp. 45-50 (50); Andrea Seri, "The Fifty Names of Marduk in Enūma eliš", *JAOS* 126 (2006), pp. 507-19 (515-7). Amos 8:1-2 furnishes an approximately contemporary biblical example of paronomasia for mantic purposes (Tigay, "Technique", p. 178).

⁹² See Bendt Alster, "The Paradigmatic Character of Mesopotamian Heroes", *RA* 68 (1974), pp. 49-60 (55-59); Simo Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy", *JNES* 52 (1993), pp. 161-208 (193-5). Tablet XII of the epic constitutes the only belletristic text discovered in the library of the Sargonid master of esoteric literature and occult lore, Nabû-zuqup-kēnu (Lieberman, "Background", p. 208).

only for the initiated, who were enjoined to “unveil the face of the secret”.⁹³ As Francesca Rochberg states, “the diviner represented the one specially privileged by education to participate in the contact between divine and human. The diviner-scholar is sometimes referred to, especially in omen colophons, as *mūdû* ‘the one who knows’, or ‘the initiated’, as in *mūdû mūdâ likallim* ‘the initiated may show (the tablet) only to the initiated’”.⁹⁴

The Gideon cycle boasts another feature that betrays its esoteric character: the prominence of seven. The mystical performative properties attributed to seven, enabling humans to enter or materialize the divine realm, are well known.⁹⁵ In Mesopotamian

⁹³ Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, 32 l.40. Compare R. Borger, “Geheimwissen”, *RIA* 3, p. 190. Scott Noegel (“‘Sign, Sign, Everywhere a Sign’: Script, Power, and Interpretation in the Ancient Near East”, in Annus [ed.], *Divination*, pp. 143-62 [149]) comments that the Akkadian term *ittu* signifies both “omen” and “password”.

⁹⁴ *In the Path of the Moon: Babylonian Celestial Divination and Its Legacy* (Leiden, 2010), p. 219. Some omen texts prepared in the Neo-Assyrian period are written in a form that entirely obscures their meaning. Only with glosses can they be deciphered (E. Weidner, “Geheimschrift”, *RIA* 3, p. 186).

⁹⁵ Arguably most famously witnessed in Enoch (Gen 5:24), the seventh in the line of Adam (Jude 1:14). Burney, *Judges*, p. 251; Bob Becking, *From David to Gedaliah: The Book of Kings as Story and History* (Fribourg, 2007), pp. 80-81; Zvi Giora, “The Magical Number Seven”, in Robert Dán (ed.), *Occident and Orient: A Tribute to the Memory of Alexander Scheiber* (Budapest and Leiden, 1988), pp. 171-8 (171-2); *The Encyclopaedia Judaica* (2008) sub loc. [accessed 03/11/2014]; Livingstone, *Mystical*, pp. 159, 178-9.

theology and divination, seven may also have been associated with kingship.⁹⁶ Thus, Esarhaddon ascribes to seven gods his appointment to kingship.⁹⁷ Certainly, seven was associated with divine sovereignty⁹⁸ and esoteric knowledge.⁹⁹ It is a seven-year-old bull

⁹⁶ “If the gall bladders number seven – the king of the universe” (Albrecht Goetze, *Old Babylonian Omen Texts* [YOS 10; New Haven, 1947], 31 xiii 19-21).

⁹⁷ Erle Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680-669 BC)* (RINAP 4, Winona Lake, 2001), 1.ii.12-17; 5.i.1-5.

⁹⁸ Seven is identified with both Enlil, the king of the gods (the “seven Enlils”), Ninurta his son who was raised to kingship (the “seven Ninurtas”) (KAR 142 i, ii), the seven destiny-determining deities, and the Igigi gods, sometimes written logographically as 5+1+1 (A.R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts* [Leuven, 1992], pp. 288-9, 445; Stefan M. Maul, “Wenn der Held (zum Kampfe) auszieht...” Ein Ninurta Eršemma’, *OrNS* 60 [1991], pp. 312-34 [320]; Simo Parpola, “The Assyrian Cabinet”, in M. Dietrich and O. Loretz (eds), *Vom Alten Orient zum Alten Testament. Festschrift für Wolfgang Freiherrn von Soden zum 85 Geburtstag* [Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1995], pp. 379-401 [n. 34]; Livingstone, *Mystical*, p. 194). According to STT 400, “Enlil = the seventh day” (ibid., pp. 77-78; Greta van Buylaere, “The Secret Lore of Scholars”, in Giovanni Lanfranchi et al. [eds], *Leggo! Studies Presented to Frederick Mario Fales* [Wiesbaden, 2012], pp. 853-63 [857, 859]).

⁹⁹ The seventh antediluvian king, Enmeduranki, whom many scholars consider a prototype of Enoch, introduced divination to humans (Amar Annus, “On the Beginnings and Continuities of Omen Sciences in the Ancient World”, in idem [ed.], *Divination*, pp. 1-18 [9]). See Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary* (Austin, 2014), pp. 144, 162-4; Erica Reiner, “The Etiological Myth

that Yahweh chooses as the offering to Himself.¹⁰⁰ The prologue begins with mention of the seven years of oppression that Yahweh has visited on Israel (6:1), and in the prophet's message, Yahweh uses the first-person singular form seven times, on the seventh occasion in the I AM form (6:8-10).¹⁰¹ The character who introduces Gideon, and who morphs into

of the 'Seven Sages'", *OrNS* 30 (1961), pp. 1-11 (7); Wyatt, "Rumpelstiltskin", n. 67. Compare Abot 5:7: "There are seven traits [...] to a sage" (Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* [New Haven and London, 1988], p. 686).

¹⁰⁰ Note Gunn, *Judges*, p. 95.

¹⁰¹ Younger, *Judges*, p. 169 n. 5. On the artful deployment of heptads in Genesis, see Fokkelman, *Reading*, pp. 173, 180. *ba'al* exhibits a defective heptadic (i.e., 6+1) pattern in the cycle, occurring six times in the singular (6:25, 28, 30, 31, 32; 8:33), once in the plural (8:33), six times with the definite article, once without (8:33), six times unqualified, once with the qualifier *b³rît* (compare A.S. Kapelrud, *The Ras Shamra Discoveries and the Old Testament* [Oxford, 1965], p. 31). If the four references to Jerubbaal are included, the sum of *ba'al* references totals eleven, the number of monsters defeated by Marduk in *Enūma eliš* (Black and Green, *Gods*, pp. 177-8; F.A.M. Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts* [Groningen, 1992], pp. 163-4). While the correspondence may be adventitious, we cannot be certain: *Enūma eliš* was manifestly influential in first-millennium Near Eastern culture. Moreover, Simo Parpola avers: "the whole [Gideon] story - the calling of Gideon, the defeat of the Midianites and Gideon's elevation to kingship afterward - is unmistakably patterned after *Enūma eliš* II-V" (personal communication). If so, the Judges author has, typically, subverted its meaning to present the hero-figure, Marduk/Aššur, as the overweening but ultimately futile challenger of Yahweh's cosmic sovereignty

Yahweh,¹⁰² is *mal'ak YHWH/'elohîm*, “the angel of Yahweh/God”. This locution is employed seven times (6:11, 12, 20, 21x2, 22x2),¹⁰³ as is the form *yš'* “save”, which comes to epitomize the struggle between Yahweh and Gideon for Israel’s allegiance.¹⁰⁴ The first six occur before the dream episode (6:14, 15, 36, 37; 7:2, 7), the seventh is used by the grateful Israelites as the rationale for offering Gideon hereditary rule: “you have saved us” (8:22).¹⁰⁵ Gideon eschews asserting that it was Yahweh who saved them.¹⁰⁶

3. Turned Upside Down

These clues in the narrative’s structure and vocabulary suggest, then, that the ambiguous surface text may point to an underlying layer of esoteric meaning. Certainly they indicate that the narrative’s literal central event – the dream itself - is pivotal, and they may intimate it to be no less, and perhaps more, esoteric than the ring of text in which it is set. We have

(Morgenstern, “Amos”, pp. 252-3; Baker, *Hollow Men*, pp. 257, 287). On the Neo-Assyrian replacement of Marduk by Aššur in the myth, see W.G. Lambert, “The Great Battle of the Mesopotamian Religious Year: The Conflict in the Akītu House”, *Iraq* 25 [1963], pp. 189–90).

¹⁰² Wong, “Gideon”, pp. 531-2; Levenson, *Death*, pp. 45-46.

¹⁰³ The parasonant dyad *mal'ak* and *melek* form a chiasmus in the cycle’s ring-structure, the former encountered only at its beginning, the latter only in the final chapter (8:5, 12, 18, 26, plus 8:31, if the reference to Abimelech is included).

¹⁰⁴ Butler (*Judges*, pp. 200, 210-11) holds that the Gideon story revolves around his ambition to claim the glory that properly belongs to Yahweh. See also Bluedorn, *Yahweh*, pp. 55, 124; Younger, *Judges*, p. 207.

¹⁰⁵ Webb, *Judges*, pp. 262-3; Block, *Judges*, p. 298.

¹⁰⁶ Gunn, “Joshua”, p. 114.

noted the writer's emphasis that Gideon descends from the mountain. Consistent with the dream's interpretation, this corresponds with the downward movement of the loaf rolling towards the Midianite camp.¹⁰⁷ Nothing abstruse there, it seems - except why does a loaf of barley bread symbolize Gideon, or rather the "sword of Gideon"? And what is the significance of the tent? Josephus claims that such a loaf prepared from barley-seed was vile and scarcely edible. He understands the tent to be the king's tent.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Rösel, "Studien", p. 14.

¹⁰⁸ *Antiquities* V 6:4. Compare Robert G. Boling, *Judges: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 6A; Garden City NY, 1975), p. 146. A. Jeffers ("Divination by Dreams in Ugaritic Literature and the Old Testament", *IBS* 12 [1990], pp. 167-83 [174]) interprets the barley loaf as "the peasants, the tent [as] the nomads". Andreas Resch (*Der Traum im Heilsplan Gottes: Deutung und Bedeutung des Traums im Alten Testament* [Freiburg: Herder, 1964], p. 109) understands it as "Israel" embodied in Gideon, her leader (compare Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, *Der Traum im Alten Testament. Inaugural-Dissertation* [Berlin, 1953] p. 87). Wolfgang Bluedorn (*Yahweh*, pp. 99, 135), on the other hand, recognizes no correspondence between the dream imagery and the interpretation. In fact, the bread motif suffuses the cycle like leaven. The Midianite predation deprives the Israelites of bread; consequently, they are "emaciated" (Moblely, *Empty Men*, p. 130). We first encounter Gideon threshing wheat for bread, and he prepares and offers unleavened bread to the angel. The fleece tests are performed on the threshing floor. Despite Gideon's identification with bread in the dream, his men are starved of bread. This circumstance leads to him threshing his compatriots.

If the dream is the centre of the cycle, the tent is the focal point of the dream. The text gives threefold and anastrophic emphasis to the tent's up-ending and total collapse: "And [the bread] struck [the tent] and it fell, and it turned it upside down, and fell the tent" (7:13). The episode that precedes the dream section, the lapping test, presages this turning upside down since it boasts a story-line turned upside down, a feature that has perennially exercised commentators. David Gunn explains:

God tells Gideon to separate out "every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth" from "every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink". A reader might expect those lapping like a dog would put their mouths down to the water and do just that, lap up the water, whereas the kneelers would presumably scoop up the water to drink [...] from their cupped hands. But the next verse tells us that the 300 chosen were those "that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth".¹⁰⁹

Not only does this episode conceivably prepare the reader for the dream event, the phrase "turned upside down" in that event may reciprocally offer a clue for unravelling the arcane meaning of this non sequitur. "Turning upside down" was an exegetical practice that Akkadian scribes used for esoteric purpose. The Sumerian locution signifying it, AN-TA KI-TA KI-TA AN-TA, can be read as making the celestial terrestrial (or the divine profane) and *vice versa*. It entails the transposition of cuneiform signs to achieve an apposite meaning.¹¹⁰ The most prominent lemma in the lapping account, *lqq* "lap", readily admits such a "turning

¹⁰⁹ *Judges*, p. 105.

¹¹⁰ Lieberman, "Background", pp. 220-1; Livingstone, *Mystical*, 41; Leichty, *Esarhaddon*, 104.ii.2-8; CAD E, pp. 96-97; J. Nougayrol, "Notes brèves (12)", *RA* 66 (1972), p. 96.

upside down". In so doing it becomes *qll*, a root found in Judges only in the report of the consequences of Gideon's deeds (9:27, 57). Indeed, it provides the grammatical subject of the concluding statement of the Gideon-Abimelech epic: "upon them came the curse (*q^lālāh*) of Jotham ben-Jerubbaal" (note the derivative *q^lālôn* [Hab 2:16]). The narrative reveals how the *q^lālāh* enunciated against his half-brother by Jotham, whose name *yôtām* ("Yah is perfect") becomes, with analogous vocalic "turning upside down", *yātôm* ("fatherless"), has its roots in the *lqq* incident. That incident led to the snaring of the House of Gideon, in turn producing the mass fratricide that provokes the imprecation. The *q^lālāh* not only concludes the Gideon-Abimelech epic, it precipitates the final stage of the fall of the House of Gideon. This outcome can be traced back to the 300 who lapped. Following Yahweh's victory, they, emulating their leader, degenerated. They were complicit in Gideon's blood-letting in Transjordan, and, almost certainly, among the first of those who urged him to accept dynastic rule and who contributed plunder for the ephod. Thus, they were accomplices in Gideon's delinquency and, without them, Gideon, his house, and Israel would not have been snared. If this hypothesis is valid, the lapping episode is one of the devices used to foretoken this narrative's denouement to readers conversant in its metaphysical quality.¹¹¹

The Midianite interprets the tent as "Midian and all the camp" (7:14). But is this the meaning that the writer wants his intended audience to receive? By assuming that a pagan possesses a comprehensive understanding of Yahweh's oracle, would they not imitate

¹¹¹ As Stephen Lieberman ("Background", p. 218) observes, "The means were available, and if the desire was present, it was certainly possible for hidden messages to be put into the Bible".

Gideon's syncretism? The Midianite identifies the bread with "the sword of Gideon", yet it is actually "the sword of Yahweh" that triumphs, since the battle is won by Yahweh setting the enemies' "sword against one another" (7:22).¹¹² The *šabrû* effects a greater change in Gideon than merely emboldening him. Although his words appear to repeat those Yahweh uttered to Gideon in 7:9,¹¹³ the pragmatics are manifestly different. 7:9 topicalizes Yahweh; 7:14 topicalizes Gideon, with "the god" simply the enabler. The words immediately engender a desire in him for the acclaim, and this desire corrodes his relationship with Yahweh.¹¹⁴ Moreover, since the interpretation is supplied, it is difficult to see what

¹¹² Gerhard von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, trans. Marva Dawn (Grand Rapids, 1991), pp. 48-49; Ehrlich, *Traum*, p. 88; Barnabas Lindars, "Gideon and Kingship", *JTS* 16 (1965), pp. 315-26 (317).

¹¹³ Younger (*Judges*, p. 190) considers them "the exact same words".

¹¹⁴ Bluedorn, *Yahwism*, p. 99; Olson, "Buber", p. 109. Note Block's remark (*Judges*, p. 287): "Does [the narrator] see in Gideon's addition of his own name to the battle cry '[The sword] belonging to the LORD and to Gideon' a premonition of a future problem?" This addition occurs immediately after Gideon encounters the *šabrû* (7:18). It was not a future problem, but one new-born. It will dominate his story. The fact that only hours before, Yahweh told Gideon that the victory must be Yahweh's alone - "lest Israel vaunt herself at My expense saying 'my own hand saved me'" (7:2b) - makes Gideon's action all the more telling (Roncace, "Portraits", p. 254). Notwithstanding, Yahweh's attitude to Gideon also appears to have changed since their first exchange. Then Yahweh exhorted him: "Go in this your strength and save Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?" (6:14). Presumably, Gideon's hawing and obstructiveness led to the divine reassessment (compare Scherer,

rhetorical purpose is served by locating it within a series of esoteric cum divinatory references. There is, *prima facie*, nothing esoteric about it. A disjunction exists, therefore, between the cryptic setting of the interpretation and its (apparent) plain meaning. The section's mystical quality insinuates that the words of the שברו, while effective in "strengthening Gideon's hand" and terrifying the Midianites, do not *ipso facto* convey the meaning the author vouchsafes to his readers. In fact, they are inimical to it. In His final words to the hero, Yahweh declares that he will hear in the valley "what they are saying", not what He is saying. In such a conception, the שברו serves to veil the dream's true meaning from the diffident Gideon, a meaning with far-reaching implications for his house and people, while the oracle speaks past him to the ones intended, the ones "who know".¹¹⁵ A 3+1 configuration intimates that, really, the dream is ill-omened: three times the root *hlm* "dream" occurs as a noun, once as a verb (in a *figura etymologica*), all in the space of three

"Gideon", p. 271). Note that there is support from some manuscripts and versions that the battle-cry Gideon gives his troops is "*The sword* belonging to Yahweh and to Gideon" (*BHS* sub loc.). It is natural that Gideon would draw on the Midianite's words for it (Ehrlich, *Traum*, 89).

¹¹⁵ Compare Lieberman, "Background", p. 184. The discourse in the Midianite camp raises a more complex question than is generally appreciated, viz., who is the actual "addressee" - the Midianite interlocutor, Gideon, or the intended readers? (See Geoffrey Leech, *Principles of Pragmatics* [London and New York, 1983], p. 13). Each of these "receivers" believes him/herself to be the addressee. Jack Sasson ("Oracle", pp. 152, 165) considers that Yahweh "forces signs on Midian" for Gideon's benefit. I submit that the intended readership is the addressee.

verses (7:13-15). The corrupting influence of the Midianite sentries' words on Gideon is compounded by the effect that the Midianite kings' words regarding his regal aura have on the 300 and other Israelite onlookers. Taking the cue, they exhort him to accept hereditary rule (8:18-22).¹¹⁶

William Schniedewind, in his perceptive discussion of Ps 78, states:

The concluding section [...] begins with the rejection of the northern shrine and leadership in verse 67: "He rejected the tent [or shrine (אהל)] of Joseph, he did not choose the tribe [or rod (שבט)] of Ephraim." Translations of this verse hide the double meaning of the Hebrew terms *'ōhel*, which might be taken as either "tent" or "shrine," and *šebet*, which might be either "tribe" or "rod."¹¹⁷

There is a tent in Judges possessed of sacred and numinous properties: the tent of meeting, the "House of God", pitched in Shiloh (18:31; cf. 1 Sam 2:22). It is juxtaposed in the narrative with the cultic installation in the city of Dan that began with the production of an ephod and idols on Mount Ephraim (17:5; 18:14-31), the location that provides the backdrop to the beginning and end of Gideon's story. Gideon's ephod subverted and displaced the canonical worship of Yahweh by Israel at His dwelling, constructed by Moses in the Exodus account, precisely as Micah's ephod and idols did in a domestic and, subsequently, tribal environment. Given that many commentators consider that the events recounted in Judges

¹¹⁶ Compare Buber, *Kingship*, p. 72; Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature*, Phoenix edn (Chicago and London, 1978), p. 339.

¹¹⁷ *Society and the Promise to David: The Reception History of 2 Samuel 7:1-17* (Oxford and New York, 1999), pp. 68-69.

17-18 took place early in the Judges era,¹¹⁸ Micah's ephod was probably the precursor, and perhaps the prototype, of Gideon's.

Thus, using his characteristic intra-textual referencing technique,¹¹⁹ the writer lets us understand that, at one level, the rolling bread symbolizes Gideon breaking loose from a relationship in which he is constrained by Yahweh. This, in turn, leads to his disruption and overturning of the authentic worship of Israel's God emblemized by, and conducted at, Yahweh's shrine in Shiloh. The threefold repetition of *'ōhel*,¹²⁰ clustered around the dream event (7:8, 7:13, 7:13),¹²¹ adds support for this reading.

¹¹⁸ Burney, *Judges*, pp. 142-43, 339-41, 417; Soggin, *Judges*, pp. 226-7; Gray, *Judges*, p. 342; Cundall, *Judges*, p. 183; Abraham Malamat, "Charismatic Leadership in the Book of Judges", in Frank Moore Cross et al. (eds), *Magnalia Dei, The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright* (New York, 1976), pp. 152-68 (154); Block, *Judges*, p. 233. Compare Roland de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel*, 2 vols (London, 1978), p. 815.

¹¹⁹ Gunn, "Joshua", pp. 105-7; Baker, *Hollow Men*, pp. 81, 114.

¹²⁰ Note "Three times in the year will all your males appear before the lord Yahweh the god of Israel" [at Yahweh's tent] (Exod 35:23-24).

¹²¹ Compare Schniedewind, *Society*, p. 43; Scott B. Noegel, "Atbash in Jeremiah and Its Literary Significance: Part II", *JBQ* 24 (1996), pp. 160-66 (160). The pattern recalls the role of triads in Mesopotamian incantations (Reiner, *Astral*, p. 103; Irving L. Finkel, "Necromancy in Ancient Mesopotamia", *AfO* 29 [1983], pp. 1-17 [5, 10]) and the *Geheimwissen* colophons to esoteric works (*RIA* 3, pp. 188-9). On the mystical correspondence of three and seven, see Wyatt, "Rumpelstiltskin"; Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Winona

But this interpretation prompts the question why the author would conceal the deeper meaning of the dream if it concerns the Judges era alone, and why he stresses its divinatory context. Indulging in such a conceit merely to display his skill and cognizance of contemporary esoteric writing would be uncharacteristic. More plausibly, the dream's profoundest meaning refers to circumstances that obtained when he wrote the work. Indeed, the "House of God" at Shiloh is mentioned in the context of the only datable near-contemporary reference found in Judges: "the captivity of the land", the late eighth-century BC destruction of the Northern Kingdom and the deportation of its inhabitants (18:30). Furthermore, Ps 78, persuasively dated by scholars to the late eighth century, evinces a near-contemporary discourse in which the Settlement-era *'ōhel*, "where [Yahweh] dwelt among men", at Shiloh (v 60) is paralleled with Jerusalem.¹²²

Thus, if the tent symbolizes more than Midian and the camp, by the same token does the bread represent more than "the sword of Gideon"? Might it symbolize an agency or person engaged in subverting and overturning the true worship of Yahweh, centred on Jerusalem, at the time of the book's composition, and whose ambition and methods resembled Gideon's?¹²³

Lake, 1998), p. 208; Black and Green, *Gods*, p. 144, and compare 1 Kgs 17:19-24 with 2 Kgs 4:32-35 (John Gray, *I and II Kings*, 3rd rev. edn [OTL; London, 1977], p. 382).

¹²² Schniedewind, *Society*, pp. 66-69.

¹²³ In a mystical Neo-Assyrian ritual portraying a struggle for cosmic dominion, the king, who assumes the role of Bel-Marduk, bounces a bread-loaf symbolizing Anu, a previous king of the pantheon, whose position Marduk took: "Marduk bound Anu and broke him [...] the loaf

Gideon is the only individual in Judges associated with the name “Manasseh” (6:15),¹²⁴ although Num 32:41, Deut 3:14, and 1 Kgs 4:13 suggest that Jair, the “minor judge”, was almost certainly a Manassite. For him, however, the writer employs the geographical descriptor “Gileadite” (10:3).¹²⁵ Many parallels exist between the biblical representations of Gideon and King Manasseh.¹²⁶ The accounts devoted to them reflect on rebellion against Yahweh and its consequences for the perpetrators’ dynasties. The ephod that became a snare for Gideon’s house finds an echo in the cult objects Manasseh installed in Yahweh’s temple (2 Kgs 21:4-8), by which he made the divine profane, and which became a snare for the House of David. As Gideon provided an image that Israel whored after, so Manasseh led Israel “astray to perform more evil than the people whom Yahweh destroyed

baked in ashes that they bounce is the heart of Anu and he pulled it out with his own hands” (Mark E. Cohen, *The Cultic Calendars of the Ancient Near East* [Bethesda, 1993], p. 325).

¹²⁴ Compare Schniedewind, *Society*, p. 70; Lawrence E. Stager, “The Song of Deborah: Why Some Tribes Answered the Call and Others Did Not”, *BAR* 15 (1989), pp. 50-64 (62).

¹²⁵ Hertzberg, *Bücher*, p. 210; S.R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 3rd edn (ICC; Edinburgh, 1895), pp. 55-56.

¹²⁶ Block (*Judges*, pp. 66-67) and Alice Logan (“Rehabilitating Jephthah”, *JBL* 124 [2009], pp. 665-85 [668, 684-5]) date the composition of Judges to Manasseh’s reign. The victory over Midian was celebrated in Hezekiah’s day; we may assume that Gideon’s notorious acts were also known. Of all the mighty deeds involving God’s heroes in Judges, it is the crushing of Midian and destruction of Sisera and Jabin that are celebrated elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Isa. 9:3 [E. 4]; 10:26; Ps 83:10 [E. 9]) (Noth, *History*, p. 162; E.W. Heaton, *The Hebrew Kingdoms* [Oxford, 1968], p. 337).

from before them” [i.e., in the Judges period] (21:9). If any king of Judah deserves the cognomen “Baal will contend”, it is Manasseh who, figuratively, restored the Baal altar and Asherah that Gideon destroyed (21:3, 7).¹²⁷ Both men are portrayed as oppressors.¹²⁸ The unjust shedding of Israelite blood by a compatriot, which first occurs in Israel with Gideon, reaches its nadir with Manasseh who, according to 2 Kgs 21:16, “shed prodigious quantities of innocent blood until it filled Jerusalem”.

Although both appeared to bring prosperity and peace to his people (2 Chr 33:14),¹²⁹ in reality their rule sowed the seeds of national catastrophe (2 Kgs 21:10-15; 23:26-27; Jer 15:1-14).¹³⁰ Both “slept with his fathers” in good old age, Manasseh having ruled, apparently untroubled, for fifty-five years, Gideon for forty. Neither man accepted the fathers’ teachings on Yahweh (Judg 6:13; 2 Kgs 21:3; cf. Ps 78:3-8), or instilled them in their sons (2

¹²⁷ John Day, “Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature”, *JBL* 105 (1986), pp. 385-408 (406); Baker, *Hollow Men*, pp. 254-5.

¹²⁸ Lindars, “Gideon”, p. 321.

¹²⁹ Archaeological evidence reveals that, during Manasseh’s reign, Judah enjoyed peace and increasing prosperity; see Israel Finkelstein, “The Archaeology of the Days of Manasseh”, in Michael D. Coogan et al. (eds), *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays in Honor of Philip J. King* (Louisville, 1994), pp. 169-87 (171, 180-1); Avraham Faust, “Settlement, Economy, and Demography under Assyrian Rule in the West: The Territories of the Former Kingdom of Israel as a Test Case”, *JAOS* 135 (2015), pp. 765-89 (782).

¹³⁰ Compare Butler, *Judges*, p. 225.

Kgs 21:19-22).¹³¹ Both witnessed Yahweh's miraculous intervention against a mighty, predatory and destructive enemy – in Manasseh's case, Sennacherib¹³² – but, regardless, abandoned canonical Yahwism. The tent overturned (*hāpak*) in the dream has an analogue in the dish overturned (*hāpak*) as a metaphor for the destruction of Jerusalem including its temple, Yahweh's "inheritance", in judgment on Manasseh's deeds (2 Kgs 21:13-14).¹³³ Seen thus, it is Manasseh who is the bread – *leḥem* – careering downwards to destroy finally the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and His people. *Leḥem*'s ominous meaning is indicated by its 3+1 coding. It appears once metaphorically in the dream and three times in the account of Gideon's first shedding of compatriot blood (8:5, 6, 15).¹³⁴ Just as "something

¹³¹ Gideon's failure to inculcate devotion to Yahweh and respect for His Law even in his own "house" is indicated by the fratricide committed by Abimelech, and, more subtly, in the oration of his one surviving legitimate son, Jotham. In every divine reference he makes, he uses *'elohîm* "god/s," not "Yahweh" (9:7-13) (*BDB*, p. 43; Eugene Maly, "The Jotham Fable – Anti-Monarchical?", *CBQ* 22 [1960], pp. 299-305 [301]; Barnabas Lindars, "Jotham's Fable – A New Form-Critical Analysis", *JTS* 24 [1973], pp. 355-66 [366]).

¹³² Sennacherib was "the king who from east and west made all the lands be looked upon as booty" (Livingstone, *Poetry*, 32r l.23). On the destruction Sennacherib's forces inflicted on Judean Shephelah, see Hayah Katz and Avraham Faust, "The Assyrian Destruction Layer at Tel 'Eton", *IEJ* 62 (2012), pp. 22-53 (48-49). Jerusalem's deliverance from the Assyrians generated a belief in its supernatural inviolability (Bright, *History*, pp. 294, 332; Schniedewind, *Society*, p. 104).

¹³³ Compare Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings (AB)*; New York, 1988), p. 269.

¹³⁴ Although the bread motif is pervasive, *leḥem* is limited to these citations.

new” begins with Gideon (kingship), something new began with Manasseh, viz., Yahweh’s rejection of Judah (2 Kgs 21:14) and her kings.

4. Behind the Ephod

There is a further esoteric feature connected with the dream that points to the king/kings of Judah. I noted that *bayit*’s peculiar distribution in the narrative flags its significance.

Excepting the prologue’s reference to Yahweh saving Israel from the “house of slaves”, i.e., Egypt, all the references concern Gideon. In 8:29, *bayit* conveys its literal meaning of a physical dwelling; elsewhere it signifies patriarchal structure/dynasty.¹³⁵ It occurs first in this meaning in conjunction with “Manasseh” (6:15). I also noted that Gideon’s attachment to his patriarchal house is central to his portrayal. Despite Yahweh’s challenge, Gideon’s identification with his father’s/his *bayit* remained robust.¹³⁶ The degree of identification is evident in the pericope’s final statement: “[Israel] did not extend *hesed* to Jerubbaal-Gideon’s house according to all the good he had done Israel” (8:35).¹³⁷

We may infer, then, that in the Gideon narrative Yahweh is symbolized by *’ohel*, its hero identified with *bayit/bêt*. The cycle’s rhetorical architecture, in which *’ohel* is juxtaposed with *bayit*, supports this conclusion. Whereas *bayit* occurs only in the opening and closing scenes, *’ohel* is conspicuous in the central scenes. They – the immediate preparation for the battle and the battle itself, with the dream in the centre (7:1-22) -

¹³⁵ Douglas, *Leviticus*, p. 191; Schniedewind, *Society*, p. 146.

¹³⁶ Mobley, *Empty Men*, p. 143.

¹³⁷ The association of the two key terms in the Judg 8:33-35 denouement - *b^arît* and *hesed* - with the “Promise to David” and the Davidides’ claim to monarchy dates from early monarchic times (Schniedewind, *Society*, p. 115).

belong to Yahweh whose immaculate victory it was. The sections that surround it, pervaded by syncretism and deviance, belong to Gideon (and Baal).¹³⁸ This *'ōhel-bayit* dichotomy is precisely the one evinced in 2 Sam 7:1-16, a passage axiomatic to the royal ideology of the Davidic House in the seventh century BC.¹³⁹ “The king said to Nathan, ‘I dwell in a *bêt 'arāzîm* (house of cedar), but the ark of God dwells inside curtains” (7:2b). Yahweh replies: “I have not dwelt in a *bayit* since the day I brought the sons of Israel up from Egypt until this very day, but I AM [i.e., have been] walking in a *'ōhel*, a *miškān* (tabernacle)” (v 6).¹⁴⁰

This passage is salient for us: Yahweh makes an explicit reference to the Judges era (v 11) (cf. 1 Chr 17:5-6); He counters the king’s suggestion that he should create a physical *bayit* for Yahweh by Yahweh stating that He will create a dynastic *bayit* for David;¹⁴¹ both pericopes begin with God’s spokesman declaring “YHWH *'imm^akā*/is with you” (Judg 6:12; 2

¹³⁸ J. Alberto Soggin, “Der offiziell geförderte Synkretismus in Israel während das 10.

Jahrhunderts”, *ZAW* 78 (1965), pp. 179-204 (180-81); Michael Grant, *The History of Ancient Israel* (London, 1984), p. 54; Butler, *Judges*, pp. 218-9. The disposition of direct speech in the cycle corroborates this taxonomy. Only in the section 7:1-11 is Yahweh alone quoted.

Thereafter, Yahweh is quoted no more, his speech is superseded by the Midianites’, and theirs, in turn, by Gideon’s and the Israelites’.

¹³⁹ Schniedewind, *Society*, pp. 3-4, 15, 18-50, 85-86; Frankfort, *Kingship*, p. 340.

¹⁴⁰ S.R. Driver (*Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel*, 2nd edn [Oxford, 1913], p. 274) remarks that *וַאֲהִיָּה מִתְהַלֵּךְ* “expresses forcibly the idea of continuance”.

¹⁴¹ On the use of puns to emphasise the association of David and his dynasty with *bayit*, see Schniedewind, *Promise*, pp. 35, 48-50.

Sam 7:3); 2 Sam 7:1 contains phrases resembling those found at the end of the Gideon cycle: “[Jerubbaal] dwelt in his house. [...] Yahweh their god who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies round about” (Judg 8:29b, 34b); “the king dwelt in his house; Yahweh had given him rest from all his enemies round about”.

This is not the occasion to treat 2 Sam 7 in detail. Evidently, though, this seminal text substantiates the association of Yahweh with *’ōhel* and the Davidic king with *bayit* implicit in Gideon’s story, recalling Auld’s remark that Gideon’s story is nothing if not “well-connected” to other biblical narratives.¹⁴² Notwithstanding, in the dream *per se*, Gideon is not identified with *bayit/bêt*, but explicitly, as we noted, with *leḥem* “bread”.¹⁴³ Employing “extended” paronomasia, which sometimes serves as an esoteric device,¹⁴⁴ the writer highlights *leḥem*’s relationship with the other crucial roots presented in 3+1 formation, viz., its anagram *ḥlm* “dream”, *mlk* “king”, with which *ḥlm* is parasonant, and *mšl*, itself in parasonant relationship with *mlk*. These interconnections further underscore *leḥem*’s significance for interpreting

¹⁴² “Hacking”, p. 257.

¹⁴³ Perhaps “the sword of Gideon” in the dream interpretation and battle cry alludes to the incident at Nob when the terrified David sought bread and weapons. He departed with the trophy sword of Goliath located “behind the ephod” and bread from Yahweh’s *’ōhel* (1 Sam 21:2-11 [E. 1-10]).

¹⁴⁴ J.M. Sasson, “Wordplay in the Old Testament”, *IDB Supplementary Vol.* (Nashville, 1976), pp. 968-70; Noegel, “Sign”, pp. 152-3. In Mesopotamian incantation, it could possess magic properties (Niek Veldhuis, “The Poetry of Magic”, in Tzvi Abusch and Karel van der Toorn [eds], *Mesopotamian Magic: Textual, Historical, and Interpretative Perspectives* [Groningen, 1999], pp. 35-48 [41-46]).

the account.¹⁴⁵ Extending his debt to the contemporary literary use of cryptography,¹⁴⁶ he thus equates the words *bêt* and *lehem*, and thereby that location's most famous "house",

¹⁴⁵ See Sasson, "Wordplay"; Noegel, "Paronomasia", p. 26; Werner Diem, "'Paronomasie'. Eine Begriffsverwirrung", *ZDMG* 157 (2007), pp. 299-352 (336-43). Following André Caquot ("Les songes", p. 112), Jeffers ("Divination", p. 174) maintains that the Midianite's dream constitutes "a unique example of popular interpretation based on wordplay", rightly identifying wordplay in the polysemy of *lhm*: "bread" and "combat".

¹⁴⁶ In the Sargonid period, cryptography and gematria were *à la mode* (*RIA* 3, p. 186; Lieberman, "Background", pp. 174-6, 207; Frahm, "Hermeneutics", p. 46). The extraordinary polyvalent flexibility of cuneiform rendered it exceptionally suited for cryptography (Frahm, "Reading"; Stephanie Dalley, "Babylon as a Name for Other Cities Including Nineveh", in Robert D. Biggs et al. (eds), *Proceedings of the 51st RAI* [Chicago, 2008], pp. 25-33 (31); Erle Leichty, "The Colophon", in *Studies Presented to A. Leo Oppenheim* [Chicago, 1964], pp. 147-54 [152-3]; Parpola, "Esoteric", pp. 322-3). Ernst Weidner (*RIA* 3, p. 185) comments that the motivation for Mesopotamian *Geheimschrift* "appears to be, on the one hand, the protection of certain special knowledge, rendering it inaccessible to the 'uninitiated', and, on the other, a fondness for word-games". Both motives animated the Judges author. While cuneiform was the richer medium (Frahm, "Reading", p. 98), I do not understate the role of cryptographic devices, e.g., *atbash*, *notariqon*, in the Hebrew Bible, or the mystical properties ascribed to the Hebrew script and its esoteric applications in later periods (see Albert van der Heide, "*Mem and Samekh* Stood by a Miracle: The Suga on the Hebrew Script (Shabbat 103a-104a)", *Studia Rosenthalia* 38/39 [2005/2006], pp. 137-43; Wilfred G.E. Watson, "Reversed Root Play in Ps 145", *Biblica* 62 (1981), pp. 101-2; Steiner, "Sons", pp.

with the man whose life and conduct introduced kingship to Israel. When we take into account the heptadic constructions in the Gideon narrative, the narrative's esoteric meaning becomes even clearer. Ranged against the 3+1 formations symbolizing arrogations of Yahweh's sovereignty, whether by apostate leaders or a contending Baal, stand the 7-formations: Yahweh is saviour, Yahweh is the supreme agency - the One Who Is - and, anagrammatically with מלאך יהוה (*mal'ak Yahweh*), Yahweh is אמלך: "I reign as king".¹⁴⁷ And, if Wyatt's postulation is entertained, the name Yahweh itself is revealed in the Moses call-scene in a context (Exod 3:14-15) that "perhaps point[s] to a heptad of gods".¹⁴⁸

82-84; Noegel, "Atbash in Jeremiah and Its Literary Significance: Part 1", *JBQ* 24 (1996), pp. 82-89 (84-85); idem, "Atbash: Part 3", op. cit., pp. 247-50 (249-50); A. Marx, "De Shîshaq à Shéshaq. A propos de 1 Rois XIV 25-26", *VT* 49 (1999), pp. 186-90 (189-90).

¹⁴⁷ Compare Kapelrud, *Discoveries*, p. 51; Gunn, "Joshua", p. 114; Heschel, *Prophets*, pp. 609, 621.

¹⁴⁸ "Rumpelstiltskin".