

## Tongues of Angels, Words of Prophets: Means of Divine Communication in the Book of Judges

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### A. Introduction

The mention of the book of Judges calls forth images of battle between Israel and the Canaanites, tales of murder and intrigue, and stories of extraordinary characters. The topic of divine speech, however, rarely surfaces in discussions of Judges. Although the voice of God is a topic that should resonate with Pentecostals, whose distinctive theology includes the charismatic revelatory gifts, when approaching Judges, they give most of their attention to the Spirit passages. Pentecostals take note of the empowering activity of the Spirit of Yahweh,<sup>1</sup> and they observe the questionable moral character of the judges upon whom the Spirit descends.<sup>2</sup> Like everyone else, however, Pentecostals hardly reflect on the voice of God in Judges.

Notwithstanding its apparent obscurity, the speech of Yahweh figures prominently in nine episodes of Judges, episodes that are crucial to

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<sup>1</sup> Pentecostal-Charismatic studies of the Spirit of Yahweh in Judges include: Stanley M. Horton, *What the Bible Says about the Holy Spirit* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1976), pp. 33-42; George T. Montague, *The Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition* (An Exploration Book; New York: Paulist, 1976), pp. 17-18; 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; Wilf Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), pp. 112-18; Lee Roy Martin, 'Power to Save!?: The Role of the Spirit of The Lord in the Book of Judges', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 16.2 (2008), pp. 21-50.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Horton, *Holy Spirit*, p. 35, reveals an awareness of the tension between purity and power when he acknowledges that sometimes God worked 'in spite of' the judges. I have addressed this concern in 'Judging the Judges: Finding Value in these Problematic Characters', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 29.1 (2008), pp. 110-29.

the development of the narrative.<sup>3</sup> In these episodes, Yahweh speaks in response to the priestly inquiry; he speaks through the angel of Yahweh; he speaks through prophets; he speaks through a dream; and he speaks directly, with the means of communication unstated.<sup>4</sup> It is the purpose of this paper to survey the divine communication in Judges by briefly examining each of the nine episodes in which God's speech is reported. I will conclude with a summary of the significance and implications of those divine interventions.

## B. The Voice of Yahweh

### 1. 'Judah shall go up' (1.2)

Divine communication is a significant element in the opening episode of the book of Judges, for as soon as the narrative gets underway, God is invited to speak. After the death of Joshua, the Israelites seek Yahweh's direction for leadership by means of the first recorded priestly inquiry. They ask, 'Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?' (Judg. 1.1).<sup>5</sup> In the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy, there is no need for such an inquiry, because Yahweh speaks face to face with Moses. After the death of Moses, Yahweh again takes the initiative to speak to Joshua quite directly.<sup>6</sup> After Joshua's death, however, the Israelites begin to inquire of Yahweh by means of the High Priest.<sup>7</sup>

In response to Israel's inquiry, Yahweh names Judah as the tribe of leadership,<sup>8</sup> saying, 'Judah shall go up. I hereby give the land into his hand' (Judg. 1.2), thus introducing a new structure of leadership for

<sup>3</sup> Sections of this paper are dependent upon Lee Roy Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God: A Pentecostal Hearing of the Book of Judges* (JPTS; Blandford Forum, UK: Deo, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew roots אָמַר (to say) and דָּבַר (to speak) are used 49 times in Judges with God (or one of his agents) as the subject. Also, in reference to the speech of God, the root צִוָּה (to command) is used 4 times and the word קוֹל (voice) is used 3 times. Taken together, in Judges we find 56 references to the speech of God.

<sup>5</sup> Biblical quotations are translations of the author.

<sup>6</sup> It is recorded 14 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)

<sup>7</sup> Nosson Scherman, *The Prophe*

*ts: Joshua/Judges. The Early Prophets with a Commentary Anthologized from the Rabbinic Writings* (Artscroll; Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah, 2000), p. 118.

<sup>8</sup> Although ch. 1 does not mention the tabernacle or the priests, the verb שָׁאַל (to ask) followed by the preposition ב (in, with, by), signifies the cultic ritual of 'inquiring, consulting'; 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. 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; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), p. 20. This may have been the first use of the *Urim* and the *Thummim* (Exod. 28.30; Num. 27.21); cf. Scherman, *Joshua/Judges*, p. 118.

Israel. For the first time in the canonical story, the narrative lacks a central character. After the death of Joshua, Yahweh does not choose a single person as national leader. When the Israelites ask Yahweh, 'Who shall go up for us first?', Yahweh names the tribe of Judah as preeminent. The absence of a replacement for Joshua might suggest a 'sense of uncertainty'<sup>9</sup> about Israel's future paradigm of leadership, but the personal guidance of Yahweh appears to be continuing.<sup>10</sup>

This first episode of Judges supplies important narrative indicators, including the temporal setting and the main characters of the story. According to these first two verses: (1) the story of Judges occurs just after the death of Joshua; (2) the main characters are the Israelites and Yahweh; and (3) the story involves the Israelites' continuing struggle to gain control of the land from the Canaanites. Furthermore, the opening verses of Judges suggest that the Israelites were operating purposefully in a unified fashion and were acting faithfully toward God. It is clear, however, that the conquest of the land is not complete, a fact that foreshadows the conflict that escalates throughout the book.

## 2. 'You have not heard my voice' (2.2)

After Yahweh names Judah as the tribe of leadership (Judg. 1.2), the succeeding verses are devoted to Judah's battles, in which he defeats numerous enemies and claims new cities. Verse 19 records Judah's first defeat, which is followed by a long register of failures that lists the tribes and their lack of success.

Yahweh responds to the failure of the Israelites in Judg. 1 by sending the angel of Yahweh, who brings a passionate message of rebuke from Yahweh (2.1-5). He begins with a reference to the exodus tradition, declaring, 'I brought you up from Egypt and I brought you into the land that I swore to your ancestors' (2.1). The reference to the exodus characterizes Yahweh as their savior and suggests that their future prospects in Canaan are based not upon their commitment to Yahweh but on his commitment to them. The mention of the ancestors affirms God's continuing faithfulness in his relationship with the people of Israel. This is not a new God who speaks; he is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

Yahweh continues his speech with a reaffirmation of his faithfulness: 'I will not break my covenant with you forever' (2.1). Yahweh insists that he is a God who can be trusted, a God of covenant faithfulness –

<sup>9</sup> Carolyn Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), p. 130.

<sup>10</sup> The lack of a national leader does not imply an absence of leadership on the tribal level. The hearer of Judges would be aware of earlier texts (such as Josh. 23.2) that indicate the existence of leadership categories that include 'elders' (זקנים), 'heads' (ראשים), 'judges' (שפטים), and 'officers' (שרים).

forever. The hearer of Judges 2 would understand that Yahweh is the Israelites' 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.

After insisting upon his own fidelity, Yahweh addresses the Israelites with this accusation: '[I said] you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall throw down their altars: but ye have not heard (שמע) my voice. What is this you have done?' (2.2). Yahweh's indictment of the Israelites suggests the following implications: (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. Israel had vowed eagerly to listen to Yahweh (Josh. 24.24), but now their vows are broken. The crucial point of Judg. 2.1-5 is that while Yahweh has been faithful to his covenant with the Israelites, they have been unfaithful to him.<sup>11</sup> (4) 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.

Although Yahweh promises that he will never break his covenant, a covenant that includes his giving of the land, he concludes his speech by declaring that he will discipline Israel by allowing the Canaanites to remain as thorns and snares. Yahweh, however, will not entirely abandon Israel. Yahweh's response to the infidelity of the Israelites is not legalistic or mechanistic; moreover, his response is not altogether predictable; for although the Israelites show signs of repentance by weeping and offering sacrifices, he does not relent in his decision to allow the Canaanites to remain.

Yahweh's speech serves as a dramatic conclusion to the first half of the prologue (Judg. 1.1-2.5). In terms of dramatic structure, Judg. 1.1-31 can be understood as the introduction to the drama and Yahweh's speech (Judg. 2.1-5) is the causal moment (*das erregende Moment*), which signals the beginning of rising action in the drama.<sup>12</sup> 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 mo-

<sup>11</sup> 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).

<sup>12</sup> Gustav Freytag, *Die Technik des Dramas* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1897), p. 107.

tion of the rest of the book. Thus, Yahweh's speech sets the agenda for the narrative that follows.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. 'They transgressed my covenant' (2.20)

A second introduction (Judg. 2.6-3.6) retells the death of Joshua and then describes the subsequent apostasy of the Israelites. Like the first introduction, the second introduction concludes with a divine speech. Yahweh's speech (Judg. 2.20-22) restates elements of his earlier speech; but, rather than speaking directly to the Israelites as in Judg. 2.1-5, Yahweh speaks about Israel in the third person. The two speeches may refer to the same event, with the second speech coming in the form of a report that is directed to the hearers of Judges.

In this second rebuke Yahweh comes right to the point by stating the cause of his dissatisfaction with the Israelites. He says, 'Because this nation has transgressed my covenant that I commanded their ancestors, and they have not heard my voice...' (2.20). Earlier in the chapter, the narrator describes the sin of Israel as idolatry, that is, the forsaking of Yahweh and the worshiping of the Baals (Judg. 2.11-13). In his speech, however, Yahweh characterizes the sin of the Israelites in terms of his covenant relationship with them. The hearer of Yahweh's speech may be reminded of Yahweh's earlier word to Moses:

Behold, you will sleep with your ancestors; and this people will rise up and play the harlot after the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake me, and violate my covenant that I have made with them (Deut. 31.16).

The reference to the Israelites as 'this people' in Deut. 31.16, parallels 'this nation' in Judg. 2.20; and the charges that the Israelites will 'play the harlot' (זנה) after foreign gods and will 'forsake' (עזב) Yahweh find their counterparts in Judg. 2.17 and 13 respectively. Furthermore, the breaking of the 'covenant' is the focus of both Deut. 31.16 and Judg. 2.20.

God's covenant with the Israelites demands their absolute allegiance, and their disloyalty offends God, moving him to act in judgment. In response to Israel's unfaithfulness, Yahweh declares, 'I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left before he died' (2.21). In spite of the apparent severity of his judgment, Yahweh names a salvific or disciplinary purpose for allowing the Canaanites to remain in the land. The Canaanites will be allowed to remain in the land in order to provide the new generation with the opportuni-

<sup>13</sup> For a more extensive discussion of this passage, see Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God*, ch. 5.

ty to prove themselves faithful in the face of severe temptation (2.22) and in the conduct of war (3.1-6).

The dual introduction to Judges (1.1-2.5; 2.6-3.6) 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. According to the introduction, therefore, the Israelites' root problem is their refusal to hear and obey God's word: 'You have not heard (שמע) 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).

#### 4. 'Go ... I have given Sisera into your hand' (4.6-7)

The first and paradigmatic<sup>14</sup> judge is Othniel who is hailed earlier as a heroic warrior (Judg. 1.13), and the second judge is left-handed Ehud (3.12-30), who defeats King Eglon of Moab.<sup>15</sup> Then, after the brief mention of Shamgar, who saves the Israelites from the Philistines (3.31), Deborah is introduced as a prophet who is 'judging Israel' (4.4-5) in Ephraim. As a judge, the people come to her for justice, and as a prophet, she speaks for Yahweh.<sup>16</sup> It is not insignificant that a woman fills these roles that are traditionally assigned to men. 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'.<sup>17</sup> Mieke Bal, 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

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 149; and Lawson Grant Stone, 'From Tribal Confederation to Monarchic State: The Editorial Perspective of the Book of Judges' (Ph.D., Yale University, 1988), pp. 260-89, where Stone provides an extended discussion of Othniel's paradigmatic role in Judges.

<sup>15</sup> Ehud, as he approaches King Eglon, declares that he brings to the king 'the word of God' (דבר-אלהים). Ehud's statement suggests a claim of divine endorsement and guidance. Perhaps we could infer that God had spoken to him and provided the strategy for his victory.

<sup>16</sup> I use the term 'prophet' rather than 'prophetess' because the gendered terminology is a manifestation of Hebrew grammatical categories and is not an expression of different roles. In the contemporary Church we would not refer to a woman priest as 'priestess', and neither should we refer to a woman prophet as a 'prophetess'.

<sup>17</sup> Her prophetic role is downplayed by John Gray, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth* (New Century Bible; Greenwood, SC: Attic, rev. edn, 1977), who names the prophet of Judg. 6.7 as the 'first emergence of the prophet in Israel' (p. 171).

in Israel”<sup>18</sup>. Bal and other interpreters such as Elie Assis are correct to point out the uniqueness of Deborah’s judgeship, but in so doing they fail to recognize that each of the judges is unique.<sup>19</sup> Deborah is clearly a judge (4.4-5) who rises up to bring deliverance (5.7-8), and who embodies the programmatic statement in the prologue, which says that Yahweh ‘raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them’ (2.16).

As a judge, Deborah stands within the tradition of Moses and the leadership structure attributed to Moses (Exod. 18.13-26). The biblical narrative prior to the book of Judges establishes a system of tribal leadership that includes judges, but the exact structure of leadership is not fully discernable. Like the texts that describe the office of prophet, these texts about judges assume that men will fill the position, but women are not explicitly forbidden from doing so.

As a prophet, Deborah speaks three prophetic words and she utters a song of praise. Her first act is to summon 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. Her words are not lacking in detail, as she specifies the location where Barak is to encamp, the number of soldiers that he is to recruit, the names of the tribes who

<sup>18</sup> 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), pp. 209-210.

<sup>19</sup> Elie Assis, ‘Man, Woman, and God in Judges 4’, *Sjot* 20/1 (2006), pp. 110-124 (p. 111). Block, *Judges, Ruth*, pp. 193-97, has expended considerable effort to classify Deborah as different from the other judges. Cf. Daniel I. Block, ‘Deborah among the Judges: The Perspective of the Hebrew Historian’, in A. Millard, J. Hoffmeier, and D. Baker (eds.), *Faith, Tradition, and History* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), pp. 229-53; and Daniel I. Block, ‘Why Deborah’s Different’, *BR* 17/3 (2001), pp. 34-40, 49-52. Devotion to a male leadership model is expressed as well by Herbert Wolf, ‘Judges’, in F.E. Gaebelien (ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), III, pp. 375-508, who, incredibly and without any biblical warrant, insists that Deborah’s ‘prominence implies a lack of qualified and willing men’ (p. 404). If God prefers male leaders, then why does he not dispense with Deborah entirely and call Barak directly, as he calls Gideon later? Or why does he not raise up a leader from birth, as he raises up Samson and Samuel? It is not from necessity that God uses Deborah but from his divine choice. It has been argued as well that the ministry of women is an exception that God allows only in times of extreme spiritual chaos. If that were true, we would expect Deborah to be one of the final judges, since the Israelites grow more unfaithful as the book progresses. I would argue that male domination is the aberration, caused by human sinfulness, and that in God’s redeemed kingdom there is no domination or subjugation (cf. Gal 3.28). For a recent Pentecostal presentation regarding the leadership role of women, see Kimberly Ervin Alexander & R. Hollis Gause, *Women in Leadership: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Cleveland, TN: Center for Pentecostal Leadership & Care, 2006). I contend that women should be welcomed at all levels of leadership, both civil and ecclesiastical.

will be involved, the name of the enemy general, and the exact location of the battle (4.6-7).

Speaking as the messenger of Yahweh,<sup>20</sup> she assures Barak of victory, declaring, 'I will give him into your hand' (4.7). There is no indication in the text that Barak questions Deborah's credentials or that he is disturbed by her gender; nevertheless, his response is less than enthusiastic. He requires that Deborah accompany him to the battle, and because of his demand that she be physically present, he is deprived of the glory.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, Deborah proclaims that the glory of victory will go to a woman,<sup>22</sup> and at this point in the narrative that woman appears to be Deborah herself.

Deborah escorts Barak to the place of battle, and when the armies have assembled she commands Barak, 'Rise up; for this is the day in which Yahweh has given Sisera into your hand; has not Yahweh gone out before you?' (4.14).<sup>23</sup> In addition to Deborah's first prophetic word that served as the initial command to Barak, she now delivers a second word that specifies the exact timing for Barak's attack on the enemy. Deborah's words sound much like those of Moses, who promises the Israelites, 'It is Yahweh who goes before you; he will be with you; he will not fail you' (Deut. 31.8).<sup>24</sup> Like before, she speaks with no hint of uncertainty, providing Barak with the assurance that he needs to initiate the battle.

Why Deborah does not lead the army is left unstated, but I would suggest that it has something to do with her role as prophet.<sup>25</sup> Deborah's activity seems to parallel that of Moses when the Amalekites attacked Israel in the wilderness (Exod. 17.8-13). Just as Deborah directs Barak to engage in battle, Moses directs Joshua, who serves as com-

<sup>20</sup> The phrase 'Has not Yahweh, the God of Israel, commanded' is used to introduce the words of Yahweh, and takes the place of the messenger formula 'Thus says Yahweh'.

<sup>21</sup> It might be inferred that Barak's response arises out of doubt and disobedience, but cf. the words of Moses to God in Exod. 33.15. See Assis, 'Man, Woman, and God in Judges 4', pp. 120-23, who sorts out the implications of Barak's demand that Deborah accompany him.

<sup>22</sup> Some scholars conclude that 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.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the words of Yahweh to Gideon (Judg. 7.9) and David (1 Sam. 23.4).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Exod. 23.23; 32.34.

<sup>25</sup> Often it is assumed that it is Deborah's gender that prevents her participation in the battle; cf. Assis, 'Man, Woman, and God in Judges 4', p. 119. The relationship between prophecy and warfare is explored, along with its attendant scholarship by Rick Dale Moore, *God Saves: Lessons from the Elisha Stories* (JSOTS 95; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), pp. 128-47, who observes that it is 'Israel's prophet, not its conventional military resources, that represents the true strength and salvation of the nation in its confrontation with foreign military aggression' (pp. 128-29).

mander of the army in the wilderness. Similarly to Deborah, Moses issues the initial command (Exod. 17.9), and he accompanies Joshua to the battle zone, but he does not participate in the battle nor issue orders regarding the conduct of battle. Finally, Moses' recording of the battle story in a scroll (Exod. 17.14) may be compared to Deborah's recounting of her story in song. Assis writes that Deborah's 'act' of deliverance is 'in the act of delivering prophecy'.<sup>26</sup>

The prophecies of Deborah are fulfilled when the Israelites win the battle, and the glory of killing Sisera goes to Jael, a woman who drives a tent peg through the head of the unsuspecting general. The war is followed by a victory song that glorifies Yahweh, Deborah, Barak and Jael, and makes a mockery of Sisera and his defeat.

In light of the connections between prophecy and song (Exod. 15.20, 1 Sam. 10.5; 18.10, 1 Chron. 25), we might classify Deborah's song as prophetic praise; however, the song includes no messenger formula and no direct speech from Yahweh. Nevertheless, the song includes at least one word of divine communication: 'Curse Meroz, says the angel of Yahweh, curse severely its inhabitants, because they did not come to the help of Yahweh, to the help of Yahweh against the mighty ones' (Judg. 5.23).<sup>27</sup> In Judges, the angel of Yahweh brings a word of rebuke to the Israelites (2.1-5), a word of commission to Gideon (6.11-24) and a word of annunciation to Samson's mother (13.2-23). Here, in Deborah's song, the angel appears, as if singing along with Deborah and Barak, and then he breaks in with a solo part. The angel's pronouncement is the concluding word to the section of the song that praises those who fought for Yahweh and condemns those who did not fight (5.9-23). The town of Meroz is singled out for special judgment because it lies within the vicinity of the battlefield<sup>28</sup> and its inhabitants<sup>29</sup> would have heard and ignored Barak's call to arms. 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 all your enemies will perish, O Lord; but those who love you are like the rising of the sun in its strength' (5.31).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Assis, 'Man, Woman, and God in Judges 4', p. 119.

<sup>27</sup> The phrase 'against the mighty ones' (בגבורים) might be translated instead, 'with the mighty ones', thus signifying the army of Barak.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Wolf, 'Judges', p. 414.

<sup>29</sup> It has been argued that in this context the Hebrew ישיבים (inhabitants) means 'rulers'. See Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979), pp. 512-34.

<sup>30</sup> This mention of Yahweh worshipers as 'those who love' him is a rare early acknowledgement of the emotional aspect of Israelite religion according to Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), I, p. 251.

### 5. 'Do not fear the gods of the Amorites' (6.10)

The mood of hope and optimism created by the song of Deborah is replaced immediately by a mood of extreme desperation<sup>31</sup> when the Israelites rebel yet again (6.1), and Yahweh gives them into the hand of the Midianites and Amalekites,<sup>32</sup> who for seven years rob the Israelites of their crops and livestock, leaving the land impoverished and the people helpless. 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'.<sup>33</sup> 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 from the land that Yahweh had given them.<sup>34</sup>

As before, the Israelites cry out to Yahweh for help, but the usual cyclical pattern is interrupted when, before he raises up a deliverer, Yahweh sends to them an unnamed prophet.<sup>35</sup> 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 functioned in the previous cycle.<sup>36</sup> This prophet, however, 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;<sup>37</sup> and

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Scherman, *Joshua/Judges*, p. 151; Barry G. Webb, *The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading* (JSOTS 46; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), p. 144.

<sup>32</sup> Midianites and Amalekites are 'echoes from the past' according to Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Judges: Grace Abounding* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 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; Deut. 25.17-19.

<sup>33</sup> J. Clinton McCann, *Judges* (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Louisville, KY: John Knox, 2002), p. 63.

<sup>34</sup> 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, p. 116. This is contra Berman Lee, 'Fragmentation of Reader Focus in the Preamble to Battle in Judges 6:1-7:14', *JSOT* 25 (2002), pp. 65-86 (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, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, p. 432.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. L. Juliana M. Claassens, 'The Character of God in Judges 6-8: the Gideon Narrative as Theological and Moral Resource', *HBT* 23/1 (2001), pp. 51-71 (p. 56). Cf. Dennis Olson, 'Judges', *The New Interpreter's Bible: Numbers-Samuel* (12 vols.; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), II, pp. 721-888 (p. 792).

<sup>36</sup> See Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* (Bible and Literature, 14; Sheffield: Almond, 1988), p. 50, who suggests that the reader may expect this prophet to be even more effective than Deborah, but he is not effective at all.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, p. 169.

(3) the prophet of ch. 6 interrupts the cyclical pattern while Deborah functions within the pattern, fulfilling the role of judge.<sup>38</sup>

The verb forms in the prophet's message indicate that Yahweh is the primary character within the speech itself. The first six verbs have Yahweh as their subject: (1) 'I myself brought you up (אָנֹכִי הֵעִלִּיתִי) from Egypt'; (2) 'I brought you out (וּמִצִּיּוֹן) from the house of bondage'; (3) 'I delivered you (וּמִצֶּל) from the hand of Egypt'; (4) 'I dispossessed them (וּמִאֶרֶץ) from before you'; (5) I gave to you (וּמִתְּנוּחָה) their land'; and (6) 'I said to you, "You shall not fear (לֹא תִירָאוּ) the gods of the Amorites"'. By this unbroken series of assertions, Yahweh claims to be Israel's God, Israel's savior, Israel's victor, and Israel's provider. The emphasis upon the person of Yahweh is strengthened further by the emphatic pronoun that precedes the first verb. This combination of pronoun and verb produces a phrase that occurs here for the first time in the Old Testament: 'I myself brought you up (אָנֹכִי הֵעִלִּיתִי) from Egypt'.<sup>39</sup> Yahweh alone is Israel's savior.

Yahweh 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).<sup>40</sup> Yahweh's exclusive claim for the loyalty of Israel stands at the core of the Torah, and when Yahweh says 'you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites' (6.10), his use of the verb 'to fear' is meant to prohibit the 'worship', 'reverence' and 'service' of other gods.<sup>41</sup> On several occasions Yahweh forbids the worship of other gods (Deut. 11.16), the service of other gods (Deut. 13.6) or the pursuit of 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).<sup>42</sup>

When compared to Yahweh's earlier rebuke of the Israelites (2.1-5), this speech suggests that the Israelites have regressed in their covenant relationship to Yahweh although they have not abandoned him alto-

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Olson, 'Judges', pp. 795-96.

<sup>39</sup> This combination of pronoun and verb, אָנֹכִי הֵעִלִּיתִי ('I, even I brought up'), is found only in two other OT texts: 1 Sam. 10.18 and Amos 2.10.

<sup>40</sup> The Amorites are well-known in the biblical narrative, being mentioned sixty times in Exodus through Joshua, 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).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Clines, *DCH*, IV, p. 278, who includes the definition 'revere, be in awe of'. See also Köhler, *HALOT*, I, p. 433.

<sup>42</sup> The use of the word 'fear' in Judg. 6.10 foreshadows the Gideon narrative. 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'.

gether. In the earlier speech, Yahweh scolds 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.<sup>43</sup> As in his earlier speech (2.1-5), Yahweh here summarizes Israel's entire rebellion in one concise judgment: 'But you did not hear my voice' (6.10). 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. Unlike Yahweh's earlier speech (Judg. 2.1-5), 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. 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.<sup>44</sup>

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 the speech are continued later in the Gideon narrative. I conclude that Yahweh's speech foreshadows the Gideon narrative in at least four ways: (1) it highlights the Egypt/exodus tradition;<sup>45</sup> (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 the voice of Yahweh.

Olson argues that this speech marks a transitional point in the narrative of Judges and begins the second major section of the book.<sup>46</sup> In light of the Israelites' repeated idolatry and in light of their unwillingness to hear the voice of Yahweh, Olson suggests further that the prophet's speech may cause the reader to question whether God has reached the limits of his patience.<sup>47</sup> Surprisingly, Yahweh once again demonstrates his mercy; and, in spite of the Israelites' obstinacy, he does not abandon them.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> 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, 2002), pp. 274-81; Goldingay, *OT Theology: Israel's Faith*, pp. 38-40; David Penchansky, *Twilight of the Gods: Polytheism in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), p. 33.

<sup>44</sup> 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?

<sup>45</sup> Egypt is mentioned in nine verses of Judges: 2.1, 12; 6.8, 9, 13; 10.11; 11.13, 16; 19.30; and the exodus seems to be in the background of Judg. 5.5 and 21. Cf. the language of Ps. 77.14-20, which is similar to Judg. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Olson, 'Judges', pp. 795-96. The third major section of Judges commences with Yahweh's speech in Judg. 10.11-16.

<sup>47</sup> Olson, 'Judges', pp. 795-96.

<sup>48</sup> For a more extensive discussion of this passage, see Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God*, ch. 6.

## 6. 'Yahweh is with you, mighty warrior' (6.12)

After the prophet's stinging rebuke, the scene shifts suddenly 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, and before the story comes to an end, Gideon has received thirteen distinct communications from God in four different episodes.

God's first communication with Gideon comes in the form of a call narrative in which the angel of Yahweh confronts Gideon with a surprising declaration – 'Yahweh is with you, mighty warrior' (6.12). The angel's statement is surprising to the reader, since Gideon has been revealed in the previous verse not as a mighty warrior but as a farmer who is hiding from the Midianites. The angel's statement is surprising to Gideon as well, given his context of constant oppression, which indicates to him that Yahweh is *not* with the Israelites. Gideon, unaware that the messenger is Yahweh, gives voice to his frustration, by recounting Israel's deliverance from Egypt and then lamenting, 'but now Yahweh has forsaken us and given us into the hands of the Midianites' (6.13).<sup>49</sup> Apparently, Gideon's theology does not allow for the possibility that Yahweh might be *with him* even in the midst of suffering.

The angel of Yahweh does not answer Gideon's complaint that Yahweh has not saved them; instead, he points to Gideon himself as Yahweh's instrument of salvation. The angel says, 'Go in this your might, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites; have I not sent you?' (6.14). Thus Gideon, who charges God with failing to save Israel, is himself charged with the task of salvation. Notwithstanding Gideon's objections, Yahweh promises to 'be with' Gideon, enabling him to defeat the enemy (Judg. 6.16; cf. Exod. 3.12).

This first dialogue between God and Gideon concludes with Gideon's request for a sign and God's gracious performance of that sign. When Gideon brings an offering of meat and bread and places it upon a rock, the angel touches the offering with his staff, and flames burst forth from the rock and consume the sacrifice. The angel vanishes, causing Gideon to fear for his life, because he realizes that he has 'seen the angel of Yahweh face to face' (6.22). Yahweh then speaks a final word of assurance to Gideon: 'Peace be to you; fear not; you will not die' (6.23).

<sup>49</sup> Gideon had heard of the exodus and Yahweh's faithfulness in the past but not experienced Yahweh's 'wonders' (נִפְלְאוֹת); cf. the use of the same term in Exod. 3.20; 15.11 and Josh. 3.5. The failure to appreciate Yahweh's former saving acts is reflected as well in 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'.

Gideon's first encounter with God exhibits numerous similarities to the call narrative of Moses<sup>50</sup> and casts Gideon as a new Moses,<sup>51</sup> invested with divine authority, who will deliver the Israelites from oppression. Gideon's call narrative also provides a setting for his own consecration through his presentation of a sacrifice.

That same night, Yahweh speaks the second time to Gideon, commanding him to destroy his father's altar to Baal and the Asherah beside the altar (cf. Judg. 2.2). Gideon is to build an altar to Yahweh on the site of the razed altar and offer up a whole burnt offering to Yahweh (6.25-26). Gideon obeys, but he works surreptitiously by night because he is 'afraid' (6.27). This is the first and only time in Judges when a judge acts in direct opposition to the Canaanite gods, and the angry response of Gideon's neighbors highlights their thoroughgoing idolatry.

After the Spirit of Yahweh empowers Gideon to muster an army who will resist the Midianites, God graciously answers Gideon's repeated requests for a sign (using the fleece). Yahweh then speaks to Gideon a third time, informing him that the Israelite army is so large that they might be tempted to attribute the victory to their own strength rather than to God's help. In order to reduce the size of the army, Yahweh allows all those who are fearful to return to their homes (7.3). With ten thousand soldiers remaining, Yahweh sifts Gideon's army the second time and chooses only the three hundred who lap water like a dog.<sup>52</sup> The fact that the testing occurs at the Fearful Spring (7.1) leads Lindars to conclude that the test ensures that only the bravest men will be retained in the army.<sup>53</sup>

Before Gideon engages the Midianites in battle, Yahweh speaks to him the fourth and final time, telling Gideon to go down to the Midianite camp where he will 'hear what they say' (7.11). At the camp Gideon overhears a Midianite soldier recounting a dream in which a loaf of bread rolled into the camp and flattened a tent. The soldier

<sup>50</sup> Mark S. Smith, 'Remembering God: Collective Memory in Israelite Religion', *CBQ* 64/4 (2002), pp. 634-38. For a list of these similarities, see Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God*, ch. 6.

<sup>51</sup> 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.

<sup>52</sup> The use of the word 'dog' (כלב) suggests to me an allusion to Caleb (also כלב), 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; 3.9). Earlier allusions to Caleb include Othniel, the first judge, who is the nephew of Caleb; the husband of Jael, hero of Judg. 4-5, who is a relative of Caleb (1 Chron. 2.55); and the name of the site where Jael kills Sisera (שדר, 'Qadesh', cf. Num. 13.26, the location where Caleb speaks to Israelites and enjoins them not to fear the inhabitants of the land).

<sup>53</sup> Lindars, 'Gideon and Kingship', p. 319.

interprets the dream as a prediction of Gideon's victory by the power of Yahweh. As soon as Gideon hears the dream, 'he worshiped' (7.15), and he returned full of confidence to his awaiting army.

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 to Gideon, '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 has difficulty hearing the word of the angel of Yahweh and the word of Yahweh himself, he finally hears the voice of Yahweh speaking through an enemy soldier (Judg. 7.9-11).

### 7. 'I will not save you again' (10.13)

Upon Gideon's death, his son Abimelech<sup>54</sup> claims the kingship of Shechem and rules until he falls to the retribution of Yahweh. Abimelech is followed by two minor judges: Tola and Jair. 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 says to them,

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 (Judg. 10.11-13).

Yahweh reminds the Israelites of the numerous times that he has saved them,<sup>55</sup> yet they continue to forsake him and serve foreign gods. He furiously rebukes them and announces that he will save them no more. The tone of Yahweh's rebuff is quite sarcastic,<sup>56</sup> 'Go and call upon the gods you have chosen', perhaps alluding ironically to Joshua's covenant renewal ceremony where the Israelites 'chose' to serve Yah-

<sup>54</sup> 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.

<sup>55</sup> 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)

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, p. 45.

weh (Josh. 24.22). In response to Yahweh's reprimand, the Israelites, for the first time in Judges, confess their sin, put away the foreign gods, and renew their worship of Yahweh.

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 changing his mind (cf. Judg. 2.18) and by raising up a judge who would bring salvation to the Israelites (cf. 3.9; 3.15; 4.4; 6.11). God, however, does not respond as expected. Yahweh's refusal to rescue his people is all the more unexpected given his earlier declaration: 'I will never break my covenant' (2.1). The cycle of sin and salvation that is repeated four times earlier in the book of Judges (3.7-11; 12-30; 4.1-5.31; 6.1-8.28) will not be repeated quite the same again.

Yahweh's speech in ch. 10 discloses several striking features: (1) Verses 6-16 offer details of the longest dialogue between God and Israel within the book of Judges.<sup>57</sup> (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.<sup>58</sup>

This speech suggests 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. The voice of Yahweh in Judg. 10.6-16 is angry, injured, frustrated and weary; but it is a voice that must be heard.

### 8. 'He will begin to save Israel' (13.5)

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,

<sup>57</sup> Cf. J. Gordon Harris, Cheryl Anne Brown, and Michael S. Moore, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (New International Biblical Commentary; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), p. 221.

<sup>58</sup> For a more extensive discussion of this passage, see Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God*, ch. 7; Martin, 'God at Risk', pp. 722-40. I address the tension between Yahweh's anger and his compassion in 'Yahweh Conflicted: Unresolved Theological Tension in the Cycle of Judges 10:6-16', *Old Testament Essays* 22.2 (2009), pp. 356-72.

when they cry out to him, he raises up a judge who delivers them. Following Yahweh's withdrawal in Judg. 10.13, however, the role of God is ambiguous, as the tension surrounding the God's anger and his compassion intensifies.<sup>59</sup>

As a result of Yahweh's refusal to offer further aid to the Israelites, the elders of Gilead, by their own initiative, seek out Jephthah to be their leader; and the narrative continues to display the tension between Yahweh's faithfulness and his frustration. The tension is evident in that, although the Spirit of Yahweh comes upon Jephthah, Yahweh does not prevent the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter, and he does not prevent the intertribal battles that follow Jephthah's victory. Throughout the Jephthah story, Yahweh remains silent.

The tension between Yahweh's anger and his compassion persists and even grows stronger in the Samson cycle. In contrast to earlier cycles, the Israelites do not cry out for God's help, but still he reveals his compassion by appointing Samson from before birth. The angel of Yahweh appears to Samson's mother with a word of promise:

Although you are barren, having borne no children, you shall conceive and bear a son. Now be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, or to eat anything unclean, for you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor is to come on his head, for the boy shall be a nazirite to God from birth. And he will begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines (Judg. 13.3-5).

The angel's revelation to Samson's mother is noteworthy for several reasons. First, Yahweh's breaking of his silence indicates that he may be returning to full engagement with his people. Second, in light of his mother's barrenness, Samson's birth can be understood as a miracle, a fact that might anticipate divine blessings upon Samson's life. Third, the calling of Samson to be a nazirite adds to the sense of purpose and devotion attached to his life. Fourth, the annunciation narrative includes elements that bring to mind the call of Gideon, who was successful in delivering the Israelites from their oppressor; therefore, the angel's visitation to Samson's mother might suggest that he also is destined for victory. Fifth, the ambiguous declaration that Samson will 'begin' to save Israel, might be the single possible portent of Samson's lack of effectiveness.

Although Yahweh speaks to Samson's mother, he never speaks to Samson himself. Throughout the Samson narrative, Yahweh repeatedly gives his Spirit to Samson; and the narrative states that Yahweh is working behind the scenes, directing Samson's actions (14.4) and ans-

<sup>59</sup> For an excellent survey of the increasingly ambiguous role of Yahweh in the narrative, see Exum, 'The Centre Cannot Hold', pp. 410-31. While I have focused my attention on the speech of Yahweh, Exum devotes the bulk of her study to his actions.

wering his prayers (15.18-19; 16.28).<sup>60</sup> 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.

### **9. 'Judah is first' (20.18)**

In the epilogue to Judges, Yahweh disappears almost entirely. The characters invoke the name of Yahweh (17.2, 3, 13), but Yahweh himself is silent. The final chapters of Judges recount unspeakable atrocities that are enacted while Yahweh remains intentionally uninvolved, allowing the Israelites to 'do what is right' in their own eyes (17.6; 21.25).

When the Israelites decide to go to battle against the Benjaminites, 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'<sup>61</sup> (20.18). The Israelites proceed to battle, but are defeated, and after weeping before Yahweh they inquire of him again, this time asking, 'Shall we go up again to fight the Benjaminites?', and Yahweh replies in the affirmative (20.22). They fight for a second day, and again they 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.

Yahweh's role in the battle 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 that he experiences as he is forced repeatedly to choose his response to the chronic infidelity of the Israelites.

### **C. Conclusions**

The foregoing discussion of divine communication suggests that the voice of Yahweh functions as an important narrative element within the book of Judges. Both the frequency of divine speech and its stra-

<sup>60</sup> 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).

<sup>61</sup> The Hebrew text (יהודה בחולה) says only 'Judah is the first'; it does not repeat Judg. 1.2, 'Judah shall go up' (יהודה יעלה). Thus, at this point, Yahweh refrains from authorizing the battle.

tegic location within the narrative point to its importance as a crucial piece of the interpretive puzzle of Judges.

The placement and the content of the divine word in Judges are consistent with other thematic indicators in the book that manifest the spiraling decline of Israel's devotion to Yahweh, the gradual disintegration of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel, and the escalating tension within the passions of Yahweh himself. The first episode of the book of Judges begins with an assuring, guiding word from Yahweh, but that episode concludes with a judging, disciplining word in which Yahweh declares his displeasure with the Israelites. That word of discipline is repeated at the end of the introduction, and Yahweh does not speak again until the beginning of the third cycle of evil, oppression, and salvation, when Deborah arises as a prophet. Deborah's ministry is the culmination, or high point among the stories of the effective judges. Her story is followed immediately by a nameless prophet who introduces the beginning of the transitional period of Gideon and Abimelech. Yahweh's frequent communications with Gideon lend divine authority and expectation to his leadership, and we are quite disappointed when, after his miraculous victory, his foolhardy actions plunge the Israelites anew into the abyss of idolatry. In Yahweh's final speech to the Israelites, his words pour forth a surge of frustration, and he refuses to save them again. He is mostly silent for the second half of the book of Judges, venturing forth only to announce the birth of Samson and to answer the Israelites' final inquiry concerning their intertribal conflict.

Taken together, Yahweh's speeches show that, although the actions of the Israelites are essential to the story, it is Yahweh who decides the course of the narrative. Repeatedly, Yahweh speaks of himself as the God who brought the Israelites out of Egypt. His numerous allusions to the exodus, along with the fact that he saves the Israelites even when they show no sign of repentance, suggest that all of Yahweh's acts of salvation in Judges flow from the paradigm of the exodus.

In my hearing of the voice of Yahweh in Judges, I did not always hear what I expected to hear, and I did not always hear what I wanted to hear. I heard of Yahweh's oath, his covenant, his mighty acts and his faithfulness. However, I did not hear a solution to every conflict or 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).

**Abstract**

In this survey of divine communication in the book of Judges, I observe that Yahweh speaks through a variety of agents and with a broad array of objectives. Yahweh responds to Israel's inquiries; he speaks through prophets; he speaks through an angel; he speaks directly; and he speaks through a dream that is given to an enemy soldier. Although the voice of Yahweh in Judges is virtually unnoticed by biblical scholars, I argue that divine communication is a prominent feature of the book, and that the speeches of Yahweh register crucial movements in the narrative.