

“WHERE ARE ALL HIS WONDERS?”: THE EXODUS MOTIF IN THE BOOK OF JUDGES

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Introduction

The exodus is the theological crux of the Hebrew Bible. It is fundamental to Israel’s self-understanding, and it is the cornerstone of the biblical perceptions of YHWH, the God of Israel.¹ Traditions regarding the exodus persist as paradigmatic throughout the Former and Latter Prophets, and references to the exodus permeate the Psalms as a principal constituent in Israel’s praise and worship of YHWH.² Remembrance of the exodus provokes Israel’s deepest longings toward God and his kingdom.

In this examination of the exodus motif in Judges, I am continuing my attempts to hear the text of Judges from within my interpretive location as a Pentecostal.³ In this article, I propose to bring the Pentecostal testimony (and my personal testimony) into conversation with the book of Judges and its theological witness regarding Israel’s exodus tradition,⁴ which is one of biblical Israel’s most powerful and sustaining memories. I argue here that the exodus tradition serves the narrative of Judges as a witness to YHWH’s power and faithfulness that calls Israel to obedience and encourages their hope in YHWH’s present and future attentiveness.

I. Testimony of the Exodus

The memory of the exodus pervades the Hebrew Bible, and the book of Judges is no exception to the rule, referring explicitly to the exodus nine times within seven different

¹ Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 288-89, writes, “Israel’s deliverance from Egypt is the real beginning and essential content of the First Testament Gospel.” Cf. Ernest W. Nicholson, *Exodus and Sinai in History and Tradition* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox, 1973), 56-57; Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 177-81.

² See Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (2 vols.; New York: Harper, 1962), I: 175-79, and Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Blandford Forum, UK: Deo Publishing, 2005), 71-75.

³ In part, I am responding to Rickie Moore’s challenge that I explicate my ‘hearing’ of the text with more openness to the critical claims of the Holy Spirit. See Rickie D. Moore, “Welcoming an Unheard Voice: A Response to Lee Roy Martin’s *The Unheard Voice of God*,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 18.2 (2008): 7-14. My previous works on Judges include Lee Roy Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God: A Pentecostal Hearing of the Book of Judges* (JPTSup 32; Blandford Forum, UK: Deo Publishing, 2008); *idem*, “Judging the Judges: Searching for Value in these Problematic Characters,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 29.1 (2008): 110-29; *idem*, “Power to Save!?” *idem*, “Yahweh Conflicted: Unresolved Theological Tension in the Cycle of Judges 10:6-16,” *Old Testament Essays* 22.2 (2009): 356-72; and *idem*, “Tongues of Angels, Words of Prophets: Means of Divine Communication in the Book of Judges,” in Steven J. Land, John Christopher Thomas and Rickie D. Moore (eds.), *Passover, Pentecost and Parousia: Studies in Honor of the Life and Ministry of R. Hollis Gause* (Blandford Forum, UK: Deo Publishers, 2010), 38-42.

⁴ The exodus motif in Judges is a topic that I began to explore in my earlier monograph, Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God*, chs. 5, 6, and 7.

passages.⁵ Although biblical scholarship has devoted significant attention to the exodus tradition, little work has been done to explicate the significance of the exodus within the narrative of Judges. However, two established points of connection between Judges and the exodus deserve mention here. First, Frederick Greenspahn has shown that YHWH's acts of deliverance in Judges are based upon the theology of the exodus and the covenant rather than on a theology of repentance.⁶ Interpreters have often assumed incorrectly that the cries of Israel are cries of repentance. Julius Wellhausen, for example, characterized Israel's cry as evidence of "*Bekehrung*" ("conversion"),⁷ and C. F. Burney declared that one of the lessons of Judges is that "true repentance is followed by a renewal of the Divine favour,"⁸ and writers continue to use the terminology of repentance.⁹ Michael Welker goes so far as to claim that in Judges the Israelites experience "the forgiveness of sins,"¹⁰ apparently overlooking the fact that forgiveness language is entirely absent from Judges.

Rather than being a cry of repentance, Israel's cry in Judges (בַּעֲקָ/זַעֲקָ) is reminiscent of the exodus (Exod 2:23), where the cry is "a plea to be delivered from oppression."¹¹ Just as in the case of the exodus, the cry in Judges is sometimes no more than a groan (נִאֲקָרָה, Judg 2:18; Exod 2:24).¹² Israel's suffering under the Egyptian regime is paradigmatic for its later suffering at the hands of the tyrannical Canaanite rulers. The framework of Judges "thus perceives the period of the judges as continuing the process initiated by the exodus in which Israel's suffering is dealt with by divine salvation."¹³

The second point of connection between Judges and the exodus is the similarity between Gideon and Moses,¹⁴ a similarity which invests Gideon with divine authority and casts him as

⁵ Judg 2:1, 12; 6:8, 9, 13; 10:11; 11:13, 16; and 19:30.

⁶ Frederick E. Greenspahn, "The Theology of the Framework of Judges," *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (1986): 385-96. Building upon Greenspahn's argument, I have insisted that YHWH's responsive acts in Judges are generated out of his inner passions (anger/compassion). See Martin, "Yahweh Conflicted." On the one occasion when Israel seems to repent (10:10-15), YHWH is not responsive.

⁷ Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1883), 240. For Wellhausen, the four stages of the cycle were "*Abfall Drangsal Bekehrung Ruhe*" (240-41).

⁸ C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges, with Introduction and Notes* (London: Rivingtons, 1918), cxxi.

⁹ E.g., Serge Frolov, *The Turn of the Cycle: 1 Samuel 1-8 in Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 47-48; Robert H. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* (VTSup 63; Leiden: Brill, 1996): 40-42; Robert B. Hughes, J. Carl Laney, and Robert B. Hughes, *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary* (The Tyndale Reference Library. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 99; Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1981), 136; Richard L. Pratt, *He Gave us Stories: The Bible Student's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives* (Brentwood, Tenn.: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1990), 135; Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 120; and Victor H. Matthews, *Judges and Ruth* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 53.

¹⁰ Michael Welker, *God the Spirit* (trans. John F. Hoffmeyer. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1994), 65.

¹¹ Walter Brueggemann, "Social Criticism and Social Vision in the Deuteronomical Formula of the Judges," in Patrick D. Miller (ed.), *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1994), 83.

¹² Philippe Guillaume contends that the Israelite's "groaning" in the prologue reflects an activity different from their "crying" in the framework (*Waiting for Josiah: The Judges* [JSOTSup 385; New York: T & T Clark, 2004], 21). To my mind, the parallels in Exod 2:23-24 and the semantic similarity of the two Hebrew terms suggest that "groan" and "cry" describe the same activity spoken of in two different ways. Cf. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 40; and Gregory Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges: An Inductive, Rhetorical Study* (VTSup 111; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 181, n. 13.

¹³ Greenspahn, "Framework of Judges," 395.

¹⁴ Mark S. Smith, "Remembering God: Collective Memory in Israelite Religion," *CBQ* 64, no. 4 (2002): 634-38. Cf. Charles D. Isbell, *The Function of Exodus Motifs in Biblical Narratives: Theological Didactic Drama* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity, 52; Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 111-15.

a new Moses.¹⁵ A comparison of the stories of Moses and Gideon reveals numerous points of contact, most of which involve the call narratives.¹⁶

The aforementioned associations between Judges and the exodus demonstrate the importance of the exodus tradition for understanding the theology of the book as a whole. We will now turn our attention to the passages in Judges where the exodus is mentioned explicitly.

A. YHWH's Self-testimony through His Angel (Judg 2:1-5)¹⁷

The book of Judges first mentions the exodus at the beginning of chapter 2:

Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, "I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you into the land that I had promised to your ancestors. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you. For your part, do not make a covenant with the inhabitants of this land; tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my command. See what you have done!" (Judg 2:1-2, NRSV)

In light of Israel's failure to complete the conquest (as related in Judges 1), the angel of YHWH appears in order to deliver a stern rebuke.¹⁸ He begins with a testimony of the exodus tradition, which serves as a powerful reference and poses a certain characterization of YHWH. The description of YHWH as the one who brought Israel up from Egypt is "probably the earliest and at the same time the most widely used"¹⁹ of Israel's confessions.

The testimony that is highlighted by his statement, "I brought you up out of Egypt,"²⁰ affirms that YHWH is a benevolent God who delivered them from slavery. In addition, he is a powerful God, who overthrew the mighty armies of Egypt. His appearance, therefore, would inspire awe. Furthermore, he is the God of the Sinai covenant, which begins: "I am YHWH your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exod 20:2). Israel's covenant with YHWH is founded upon his act of salvation. Because of his gracious salvation, he is Israel's covenant God and deserves their allegiance. Therefore, his appearance should awaken Israel's sense of gratitude and obligation.

YHWH's declaration, "I brought you up out of Egypt," assumes his claim to an essential disposition of grace toward Israel. Thus, the Israelites are reminded that YHWH saved them from the slavery of Egypt not because they deserved salvation, but because he chose them to be his people. Just as their salvation was based not upon their commitment to YHWH but on his commitment to them, his present posture toward them continues to rest upon the same foundation—his grace and love.

¹⁵ Barnabas Lindars, "Gideon and Kingship," *Theological Studies* 16 (1965): 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): 1-25.

¹⁶ For a listing of these similarities, see Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God*, 188-89. In addition to the Moses/Gideon comparison, I have offered a Moses/Deborah comparison (Martin, "Tongues of Angels," 38-42).

¹⁷ I discuss this passage in detail in Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God*, 105-160.

¹⁸ Heinz-Dieter Neef argues that the even the mention of the angel of YHWH harks back to the exodus (Exod 14:19 and 23:20). See Heinz-Dieter Neef, "Ich Selber bin in ihm' (Ex 23,21): Exegetische Beobachtungen zur Rede Vom 'Engel des Herrn' in Ex 23,20-22; 32,34; 33,2; Jdc 2,1-5; 5,23," *BZ* 39 (1995), 69. Daniel Block agrees, linking the angel to the events of Exod 23:20-33; 32:34; 33:2; and 34:11-15. See Block, *Judges, Ruth* (New American Commentary, 6; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 110. Cf. George F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), 57, who associates Judg 2:1 with Exod 32:20.

¹⁹ Rad, *OT Theology*, I: 121, 179. Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 173-75.

²⁰ On the anomalous yiqtol verb here (אָנְכִי), see Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God*, 120-22, 238-39. Citations of Scripture are my own translation unless noted otherwise.

The testimony of the exodus recalls YHWH's election of Israel, his mighty acts of judgment in the land of Egypt and his overthrowing of Pharaoh in the Red Sea. Israel's salvation from Egypt was a manifestation of God's power, and the God of the exodus even now has the might to overthrow the Canaanites and to negate every power that would shackle Israel. The exodus tradition, as Brueggemann writes, “enunciates Yahweh's resolved capacity to intervene decisively against every oppressive, alienating circumstance and force that precludes a life of well-being.”²¹ Judges chapter one ended with a recital of Israel's weakness, but the Israelites may have hope that he will prevail in spite of their failures.

In addition to YHWH's grace and his power, another important theme is conveyed by the exodus story—the theme of YHWH's purpose. Brueggemann's testimony to “Yahweh's resolved capacity” illuminates the integration of YHWH's purposes and his power, because purpose is prerequisite to resolve.²² YHWH's overall purpose in the exodus is to liberate Israel for himself, to free them from the land of Egypt in order that they may live in the land of promise and to bring them out of the household of bondage that they might be the household of God. The mention of the exodus, therefore, might suggest their plight “as continuing the process initiated by the exodus in which Israel's suffering is dealt with by divine salvation.”²³ YHWH aspires to liberate Israel from Egypt, from Canaan, and from every other power, in order that they may be his special possession (Exod 19:5).

From a narrative perspective, it seems significant that the angel first draws attention to the faithfulness of YHWH before he addresses Israel's failure. YHWH said that he would bring them out from the land of Egypt, and he did so. He swore to the patriarchs that he would bring them into the land of Canaan, and he fulfilled his oath. He promised that he would never break his covenant, and he was patient enough not to break it. After testifying to his own fidelity, YHWH, in three brief statements, sharply rebukes the Israelites for their infidelity: 1. He had told them, “You shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land;” and 2. “You shall tear down their altars;” 3. Thus he concludes, “But you have not obeyed My voice” (Judg 2:2). The Israelites are disloyal on all counts. Consequently, a crucial theme for Judg 2:1-5 is the contrast between the covenant loyalty of YHWH and the disloyalty of Israel.²⁴ Brevard Childs observes, “In stark contrast to Israel's faithlessness is God's faithfulness.”²⁵

B. The Narrator's Testimony (Judg 2:11-12)

Since an initial theme of chapter two is YHWH's faithfulness as opposed to Israel's faithlessness, the hearer of Judges might be inclined to anticipate further development of this theme as the narrative progresses. As expected, the theme is continued later in chapter 2 when the narrator explains that after the death of Joshua and his faithful generation a new generation arose (2:10) who were unfaithful:

Then the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and worshiped the Baals; and they abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; they followed other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who

²¹ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 174.

²² *Ibid.*, 174.

²³ Greenspahn, “Framework of Judges,” 395. As we read further into the book of Judges, we will observe the continued prominence of the salvation theme. The Hebrew root שׁוּׁ (to save) is used 21 times in Judges, and the word שָׁׁ (deliver) is found 6 times.

²⁴ Cf. Carlos R. Sosa, “Análisis exegético y literario de Jueces 2:1-5,” *Kairós (Guatemala)* 43 (July-Dec., 2008): 9-38.

²⁵ Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1st Fortress Press edn, 1993), 420.

were all around them, and bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. (Judg 2:11-12, NRSV)

The idolatry of the Israelites is punished by the LORD when he hands them over to their enemies. After a time of oppression, the Israelites cry out to YHWH for his help, and he raises up a judge who delivers them. Soon, however, the Israelites return to their idolatry, and thus begins the long recognized cyclical pattern of the book of Judges.

This testimony of the exodus calls attention to Israel's lack of gratitude and lack of loyalty. Israel abandoned the God who had saved them from bondage in Egypt. YHWH is deserving of gratitude, loyalty, and devotion, but Israel is unwilling to remain faithful. YHWH's aforementioned speech (2:1-5) had rebuked the Israelites for their failure to tear down the altars of Canaan, but here the disobedience goes a step further—they are actively engaged in worship at those altars. Instead of steadfastly worshipping YHWH who had saved them, they turn to the gods of Canaan, the very gods whose altars the Israelites were tasked to destroy.

C. YHWH's Self-testimony through His Prophet (Judg 6:7-10)²⁶

The next testimony of the exodus comes from YHWH through the mouth of his prophet. Once again, YHWH begins his address with a reminder of the exodus:

The Israelites cried to the LORD on account of the Midianites, and the LORD sent a prophet to the Israelites; and he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt, and brought you out of the house of slavery; and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians, and from the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you, and gave you their land; and I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell.' But you have not obeyed my voice." (Judg 6:7-10)

Some four generations have passed since Yhwh's first testimony (2:1-5), and the exodus is now an even more distant event than it had been when the angel of the Lord spoke of it. During that interim God has saved the Israelites from three enemies, demonstrating that "the God of the exodus continues to effect a series of new exoduses throughout the book of Judges."²⁷ Nevertheless, the situation of the Israelites has deteriorated significantly, and this testimony of the exodus serves as reassurance that YHWH "acts powerfully on behalf of Israel when Israel is helpless and has no power of her own,"²⁸ and that the power of YHWH "is more than a match for the powers of oppression,"²⁹ powers which are embodied in the Midianite encampments.

The Israelites who are "brought very low (דלל) because of Midian" (6:6, NASB),³⁰ are now reminded of the time when Yhwh brought them up (עלה) out of Egypt (6:8). By the oppressive acts of the Midianites, the Israelites are brought 'low', but they can be brought 'up' by the power of YHWH, who brought them up from Egypt.

The exodus theme is expanded further by YHWH's second affirmation: "I brought you out (צאת) from the house of bondage" (6:8). The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt; they

²⁶ I discuss this passage in detail in Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God*, 161-97.

²⁷ J. Clinton McCann, *Judges* (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Louisville, K.Y.: John Knox Press, 2002), 63.

²⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible Makes Sense* (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1977), 64.

²⁹ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 174.

³⁰ Cf. Brown et al., *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (trans. Edward Robinson; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1979), 195.

had belonged to the household of bondage; but YHWH had brought them out. The reference to slavery may cause the Israelites to compare their current extreme situation to the earlier Egyptian bondage. Is it possible that they had been brought so low by the Midianites that their condition was as woeful to them as slavery? Even so, YHWH, who had brought them out from the house of bondage, is able to bring them out from their enslavement to the Midianites.

YHWH continues his speech with a third reference to the exodus: “I delivered you (וַאֲצִל) from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors (לְחַצְיֹכֶם)” (6:9).³¹ YHWH not only reiterates his act of delivering the Israelites from Egypt, but he expands that deliverance to include his rescue from their enemies subsequent to the exodus. Because the two objects are predicated upon only one verb, the reader might infer that the exodus serves as the paradigm for YHWH's subsequent saving acts.

It is from the “hand” (יָד) of Egypt and subsequent enemies that YHWH has delivered Israel. Forty-nine times in the book of Judges the word ‘hand’ serves as a metaphor for ‘power’.³² On one occasion the enemy is subdued under (תַּחַת) the hand of the Israelites (3:30), and ten times a reversal of power is signified by either Israel or the Canaanites being sold (מָכַר) or given (נָתַן) into the hand of the other. Furthermore, the metaphorical use of the hand to signify power (6:9) combines with the term “oppressors” (לְחַצְיֹכֶם) to form a graphic depiction of Israel's plight. Since ‘oppressors’ is a participle of the Hebrew לָחַץ, which means literally ‘squeeze’,³³ the image is that of Israel being squeezed in the hand of the Midianites, causing both “physical and psychological oppression.”³⁴ God, however, affirms that he has delivered the Israelites from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all other oppressors,³⁵ with the implication that he is now able to deliver them from the hand of the Midianites.

The interval between the exodus and Judges 6 includes numerous episodes of divine intervention in which YHWH saves the Israelites by the agency of Joshua, Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, and Deborah; but this is the first use in Judges of the word ‘deliver’ (נָצַל).³⁶ The term is used fourteen times in the book of Exodus, for example: “I have come down to deliver them from the hand of the Egyptians” (Exod 3:8). The verb נָצַל is quite forceful, as Brueggemann explains, “This verb references an abrupt physical act of grasping or seizing—often, as here, grasping or seizing in order to pull out of danger . . . Israel is ‘snatched’ out of the danger of Egyptian slavery in a forceful, physical gesture by Yahweh.”³⁷ The Israelites are now languishing in the “hand of the Midianites” (6:1), but the same God who had

³¹ The phrase “from the hand of the Egyptians” (מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם) precedes Judg 6:9 only in Exod 3:8; 14:30; 18:9; and 18:10.

³² Judg 1:2, 4, 35; 2:14, 15, 16, 18, 23; 3:8, 10, 28, 30; 4:2, 7, 9, 14, 24; 6:1, 2, 9, 36, 37; 7:2, 7, 9, 11, 14, 15; 8:3, 7, 22, 34; 9:17, 29; 10:7, 12; 11:21, 30, 32; 12:2; 13:1, 5; 15:12, 13, 18; 16:23, 24; 18:10; 20:28. Also, the word ‘palm’ (כַּף) means ‘power’ in Judg 6:13, 14; 8:6, 15; and 12:3. Cf. Brown et al., *BDB*, 389; William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, corrected 10th edn, 1988), 128; and Ludwig Köhler, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (2 vols.; Leiden: E. J. Brill, Study edn, 2001), I: 888.

³³ Brown et al., *BDB*, 537. Cf. David J. A. Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (7 vols.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), IV, 539.

³⁴ I. Swart, “לָחַץ”, in Willem Van Gemeren (ed.), *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (5 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1997), II: 792.

³⁵ The most recent enemy who is called an ‘oppressor’ of Israel is Jabin, king of Canaan (Judg 4:3).

³⁶ In chs. 1-5, the idea of YHWH's rescue is indicated by the phrases “YHWH saved (שָׁעַ) Israel” (2:16, 18; 3:9, 15, 31) and “YHWH subdued (כָּבַעַ) the enemy” (3:30; 4:23).

³⁷ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 174. Cf. Köhler, *HALOT*, I: 717, who offers the translation “to tear from.”

snatched them from the “hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all” their oppressors (6:9) can now snatch them away from the power of the Midianites.

YHWH completes his self-testimony with one more word. He declares, “I am YHWH your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites” (6:10). The first appearance of the phrase “I am YHWH your God (Mkyhlס יהוה י אני)”³⁸ is connected to the exodus: “Then I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am YHWH your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” (Exod 6:7). YHWH claims the Israelites as his people, and he gives himself to them to be their God. In light of the covenantal connections of YHWH's claim to be Israel's God, his renewal of that claim through the word of the prophet in Judges 6 serves as a condemnation of the Israelites' idolatry that is implied in their doing of “the evil” (Judg 6:1), and it serves as a fitting prerequisite to the prohibition “You shall not fear the gods of the Amorites” (6:10), in which YHWH and the Amorite gods are set in juxtaposition.

The prophet's appeal to the exodus affirms both YHWH's might and his mercy. It is not enough that YHWH defeats the gods of Egypt and shows himself superior in strength; his acts go beyond a simple demonstration of power. YHWH's power is exercised toward salvific purpose in bringing the Israelites out of slavery, and the covenant is founded not upon the abstract notion of divine power but upon the concrete expressions of divine care. Therefore, YHWH insists that his awesome acts of grace toward the Israelites are deserving of the joint responses of fear and love. Thus, when YHWH says, “I am YHWH your God, you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites,” he is insisting that his acts of salvation and his giving of the covenant establish him as the only deity who is deserving of the worship of the Israelites. His manifest love for the Israelites calls for their reciprocation, and his gracious acts of salvation require the Israelites' exclusive reverence.

D. The Testimony Disputed (Judg 6:13)³⁹

Immediately following the prophet's speech (6:7-10), we are introduced to Gideon, who is threshing wheat in the wine press in order to hide his grain from the marauding Midianites. He is greeted by the angel of YHWH who declares, “YHWH is with you” (6:12). Gideon replies dubiously (sarcastically?) with a question that makes reference to the exodus testimony:

[I]f YHWH is with us, then why has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonders that our ancestors recounted to us saying, “Did not YHWH bring us up from Egypt?” But now YHWH has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites. (Judg 6:13)

Until now, the hearer of Judges has not been informed of the Israelites' inner attitudes and feelings toward YHWH and toward their situation in Canaan. Gideon's dialogue with the angel is the first disclosure of these inner thoughts. The perspective of Gideon may represent that of the Israelites throughout Judges, a perspective that stands in conflict with the perspective of YHWH. YHWH speaks of the deliverance from Egypt as a point of assurance, but Gideon sees the same tradition as a point of suspicion. Gideon has heard testimonies of the exodus and YHWH's faithfulness in the past, but he has not experienced

³⁸ Previous to Judg 6.10, the Hebrew phrase **ס יהוה י אני** is used 22 times in Leviticus and it is found in Exod 6.7; 16.12; Num. 10.10; 15.41; and Deut 29.5.

³⁹ I discuss other aspects of the Gideon cycle in Martin, “Tongues of Angels,” 105-160 and in Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God*, 185-92.

YHWH's wonders (נִפְלְאוֹת). He is one of the “new generation ... who did not know YHWH nor the works that he had done for Israel” (Judg 2:10).

The angelic proclamation affirmed YHWH's presence—“YHWH is with you”—but Gideon has experienced only YHWH's absence. Gideon asks, “If YHWH is with us, then why have all these things happened to us?” The question reveals Gideon's unfulfilled expectations, his disappointment with the theology handed down to him. Gideon is not satisfied with a divine word of mere affirmation or a vague promise of comfort in the time of affliction. Specifically, Gideon asks, “Where are all his wonders that our elders told us about?” He demands that the God of the exodus show himself to be God in the midst of the present crisis. In effect, Gideon is asking, “I have heard the testimonies of what the LORD has done in the past, but where is he now, in this desperate time?”

Gideon's question, therefore, may indicate that he is skeptical of the testimony that he has heard from his ancestors (his elders). When we come to the Gideon cycle, the exodus testimony has been recited three times already (2:1; 2:11; 6:8), but Gideon questions that testimony. He admits that he has heard the testimony of the exodus but he does not profess to believe it. Gideon does not say, “YHWH brought us up out of Egypt”; instead he remarks, “*they said*, ‘YHWH brought us up.’” Gideon knows the testimony and cites it, but he falls short of confessing agreement with his elders. Perhaps he doubts that the testimony of the exodus is reliable and relevant and that the testimony of the elders can be trusted.

Gideon remembers the testimony of the exodus, but his remembrance of YHWH's presence in the past serves only to bring attention to YHWH's absence in the present. Gideon believes that theological reflection on past memories should carry relevance for the present. He wants to believe in a God who is reliable across generations, but he has his doubts. For Gideon, YHWH is no longer the God who saves.

Bernon Lee observes that Gideon's response is the beginning of “an ongoing conflict” between Gideon and YHWH.⁴⁰ Lee maintains that the narrative “provides ample opportunity for reader participation in the suspension of belief in divine fidelity;”⁴¹ it allows the reader to have “a measure of sympathy for Gideon”⁴² in his complaint. According to Lee, the reader and Gideon are united in the question of 6:13b, “where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about?”⁴³ The hearer of the narrative might wonder if Gideon's protest is his way of motivating YHWH to action⁴⁴ or if it is a foreshadowing of Gideon's pessimistic outlook that continues throughout the story.⁴⁵

It is appropriate that Gideon should inquire about the ‘wonders’ of YHWH because the word ‘wonders’ (נִפְלְאוֹת), often translated ‘miracles’, is used several times in the Hebrew Bible to describe the mighty acts of YHWH that accompanied the exodus. In the call narrative of Moses, YHWH promised, “I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all my *wonders* that I will do in it; then he will let you go” (Exod 3:20). After the deliverance at the Red Sea, Moses sang, “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, doing *wonders*?” (Exod 15:11). When Moses is upon Mt. Sinai, YHWH points forward to the conquest of Canaan with this promise: “Before

⁴⁰ Bernon Lee, “Fragmentation of Reader Focus in the Preamble to Battle in Judges 6:1-7:14,” *JSOT* 25 (2002): 70.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴⁴ Barry G. Webb, *The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading* (JSOTSup 46; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 147-48.

⁴⁵ O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 149.

all your people I will perform *wonders*, such as have not been performed in all the earth or in any nation; and all the people among whom you live shall see the work of the LORD; for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you” (Exod 34:11).⁴⁶ Upon the eve of their crossing into Canaan, Joshua charges Israel, “Sanctify yourselves; for tomorrow the LORD will do *wonders* among you” (Josh 3:5). Other texts in the Hebrew Bible use the word ‘wonder’ with reference to the exodus: “I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD; I will remember your *wonders* of old” (Ps 77:11); “He sent signs and *wonders* into your midst, O Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants” (Ps 135:9); and “You showed signs and *wonders* in the land of Egypt ...” (Jer 32:20). Salvation from Egypt is accomplished through the wonders of YHWH; entering the promised land is accompanied by the wonders of YHWH, and deliverance from oppression is a wonder for which Gideon now yearns.

The narrative offers at least two reasons for Gideon’s reticence to accept the testimony of his elders. First, the objective data seem to contradict the testimony. To Gideon, the Midianite oppression is a sign that YHWH has abandoned Israel. If the testimony about the exodus is true, Gideon reasons, YHWH would act and bring deliverance. Gideon’s question implies either that the testimony of the elders may be less than truthful or that God has changed in his relationship to the Israelites. The testimonies of the distant past do not seem to be sufficient in the face of Gideon’s present reality of daily suffering and crushing oppression. YHWH’s failure to save is to Gideon a violation of the settled and stable theology that he has been taught.⁴⁷ Israel’s covenant with YHWH should grant to them a position of privilege and entitlement in regard to YHWH’s protection, but that protection has not been forthcoming. The Midianites continue to plunder the Israelites, devastate their crops and terrorize their villages. Human reason suggests to Gideon that, for whatever reason, YHWH is inactive.

In our current context, modern biblical scholarship often presents a challenge to the testimony of our Pentecostal elders. Young women and men enroll in seminary or university graduate programs in religion, and they find immediately that the academy does not appreciate the testimony of the elders. Like the Midianites, the academy is an irresistible force that leaves the children impoverished (Judg 6:6). Critical scholarship points to the ‘objective’ data and dismisses the wonders of YHWH as ancient mythology that must be abandoned.⁴⁸ Julius Wellhausen (the Moses of historical criticism) acknowledged as much when he resigned his theology post at Greifswald. Making reference to his “scientific

⁴⁶ Exodus 34:10-16 contains a number of verbal connections to Judges 2–3, including the reference to the making of the covenant (v. 10), the warning that the Canaanites will be a snare (v. 12), the injunction to tear down the altars of Canaan (v. 13), the prohibition against entering into covenant with the Canaanites (v. 15), and the prohibition against intermarriage with the Canaanites (v. 16).

⁴⁷ Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary* (Old Testament Library; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 90, observes the similarity between Gideon’s complaint and Israel’s national laments in Pss 74 and 77. Unlike the usual lament form, however, and in contrast to Ps 74:12-17 and 77:11-20, Gideon does not give voice to a prayer, nor does he confess confidence in YHWH.

⁴⁸ It is a fundamental assumption of historical criticism that the accuracy of Scripture’s testimony of events can be judged according to the analogy of present, empirically verifiable experience. For the flaws in this assumption and for an extensive Pentecostal critique of the historical critical method, see Kenneth Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture and Community* (Cleveland, Tenn.: CPT Press, 2009), 200-208. In spite of my objections to historical criticism, however, I am not arguing for a return to pre-critical exegesis (see Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God*, 19-59). Among historical criticism’s many helpful gains, we might include its exposing of the human dimension in the Bible’s creation and transmission.

treatment of the Bible,” as he called it, he confessed, “[D]espite all caution on my own part I make my hearers unfit for their office” as ministers in the Protestant church.⁴⁹

Well-known biblical scholar, Daniel Patte, has acknowledged that his training in the biblical studies academy taught him to disregard the testimony of his elders. Speaking of his entrance into the Protestant Institute (Montpellier, France), he writes:

We were entering a programme supposed to prepare us for a ministry of the Word and sacraments. But, ironically, it demanded that we ignore and reject as sentimental, emotional, naïve and childish the very *pro me* and *pro nobis* interpretations of the Bible that had convinced us to pursue theological studies, with, of course, a major focus on biblical studies. In my case, critical biblical studies demanded that I disregard the transforming religious power of the biblical text upon me, upon others and upon society! ... As an evangelical descendant of Huguenots, these powerful biblical teachings defined my identity as a member of my family and of my small Protestant community.⁵⁰

A similar story comes from Rickie D. Moore, whose experience at Vanderbilt University included a challenge to the testimony of his elders:

There I was directed once again to the first words of the book of Deuteronomy, but now a mountain of scholarship stood before these words and yielded a very different reading, namely, “these are *not* the words of Moses” ... This towering fortress of scholarship, with its formidable conclusions about the text and methods used to read them, was a far cry from the ethos and impulses of my Pentecostal confession ... In a way that went against my deepest and mostly unconscious longings, I was being relentlessly conditioned to experience criticism and confession as mutually exclusive opposites.⁵¹

Like Gideon, Patte and Moore were overwhelmed by the power of those who opposed the testimony of their elders; but as in the case of Gideon, they found their way back to a place of confidence in God’s power to save and transform.

Gideon, however, has a second and even more compelling reason for his skepticism regarding the testimony of his elders, and that is the disloyalty of the elders themselves. They testify of YHWH’s wondrous works, but all the while their idolatrous practices contradict their testimony. Gideon’s father may have believed that YHWH brought up Israel from Egypt, but his construction of an altar for the worship of Baal (Judg 6:25) reveals his lack of devotion to YHWH. Most likely, the entire community was committed to the worship of numerous gods (Judg 6:28-32) in violation of their covenant with YHWH. The vacillation of the elders contradicts their own testimony. Can the children believe the testimony of elders who have come to depend upon idols?

As the Pentecostal church in the West gives birth to the third, fourth, and even fifth generations of Pentecostal adherents, we are faced with the same contradiction. We hear the testimony that encourages trust and faithfulness, but we see numerous idols that are set up in the Church. Many of our children are cynical and distrustful of leaders who seem to major in ecclesiastical politics and manipulation. Will our children believe the testimony of elders

⁴⁹ Alfred Jepsen, “Wellhausen in Greifswald,” in *Festschrift zur 500-Jahrfeier der Universität Greifswald* (Greifswald: Ernst Moritz-Arndt-Universität, 1956), 47-56; cited in Rudolf Smend, “Julius Wellhausen and his Prolegomena to the history of Israel,” *Semeia* 25 (1982): 6.

⁵⁰ Daniel Patte, “The Guarded Personal Voice of a Male European-American Biblical Scholar,” in *Personal Voice in Biblical Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 1999), 13-14.

⁵¹ Rickie D. Moore, “Deuteronomy and the Fire of God: A Critical Charismatic Interpretation,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 7 (1995): 13-14.

who have come to depend upon the gods of status, materialism, human ingenuity and ambition? I expect that God will soon raise up a new Gideon, who will obey God's call to tear down our altars to Baal.⁵²

The irony in Gideon's story is that while he is skeptically questioning the truth of what he has heard, YHWH is already preparing to intervene in a way that is consistent with the elders' testimony. He has heard the cries of Israel (6:6), and he sends his angel to commission Gideon, proving that he is indeed the God of the exodus testimony, the God who never ceases to act on behalf of those who suffer. Thus, even as Gideon is yearning for salvation, YHWH is moving to revisit Israel with "all his wonders", and he has chosen Gideon as the new Moses, who will bring his people out of bondage.

E. YHWH's Third Self-testimony (Judg 10:11-13)⁵³

The sixth cycle of rebellion begins when the Israelites again "did what was evil in the sight of YHWH" (10:6).⁵⁴ In this cycle, the idolatry of the Israelites seems to have increased: "they served the Baals and the Ashtartes, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook YHWH and did not serve him" (10:6). When compared to the earlier cycles, the appearance of such an array of foreign gods in Judg 10:6 raises the intensity level of the Israelites' idolatry and heightens their guilt.⁵⁵ It appears that the Israelites have strengthened their ties to the foreign gods, while at the same time they have drifted farther away from YHWH. The Israelites' allowing of Canaanite worship to continue is despicable to YHWH (2:2), and their adoption of other gods alongside YHWH is forbidden by the Decalogue (Exod 20:3). Moreover, their complete abandonment of YHWH cannot be tolerated.

YHWH's response to rejection is vehement: "The anger of YHWH was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the Ammonites . . ." (10:7-8). These enemies crushed and oppressed Israel for eighteen years, and "Israel was greatly distressed" (10:9).⁵⁶ The shattering and crushing oppression causes the Israelites to cry out to YHWH once again (10:10).⁵⁷ On this occasion, they not only beg for deliverance, but they also confess, "We have sinned against you, in that we have forsaken our God and we have served the Baals" (10:10). Never before in Judges is the content of their cry supplied to the hearer, and never before do the Israelites confess any sin.⁵⁸ It would appear that, in this case, they are expressing genuine repentance toward God.

⁵² A colleague, Kevin Spawn, suggested still another factor that could have fueled Gideon's distrust of his elders, namely, their selectivity in appropriating their traditions. While the elders affirm the exodus tradition, they violate other traditions by later inviting Gideon to rule over them. The move toward monarchy is itself questionable, but doubly so in light of the fact that Gideon is from the tribe of Manasseh. Tradition appears to specify that Israel's eventual king should come from Judah. Furthermore, in reflecting upon their victory, the elders prefer to glorify Gideon rather than Yahweh. They say to Gideon, "you delivered us" (8:22). Cf. Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher's brief comment on Gideon in her "Framework and Discourse in the Book of Judges," *JBL* 128 (2009): 687-702 (695-96).

⁵³ I discuss this passage in detail in Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God*, 198-228.

⁵⁴ This refrain appears once in the introduction (2:11), then it serves as the beginning of every major judge cycle (3:7; 3:12; 4:1; 6:1).

⁵⁵ Cf. Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, 44; and Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 344.

⁵⁶ The phrase, "the anger of YHWH," has not been used since Judg 3:8.

⁵⁷ The same Hebrew word (צָוַי) is used for 'cry' in 3:9, 15; 6:6, 7; 10:10 and 10:14. In 4:3 the word is צָוַיָּ, which is a variant spelling of the same root. Cf. Brown et al., *BDB*, 858.

⁵⁸ That the previous 'cries' of Israel do not include genuine repentance is the view of most interpreters, including J. Cheryl Exum, "The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 411-12; and Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 155.

In light of the apparent repentance of the Israelites and the previous mercies of YHWH, the hearer of Judges would likely expect YHWH to respond by raising up a judge who would bring salvation to the Israelites (cf. 3:9; 3:15; 4:4; and 6:11). God, however, does not respond as expected. Surprisingly, YHWH says to the Israelites:

Was it not from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and from the Ammonites and from the Philistines—and when the Sidonians and Amalek and Maon oppressed you, you cried unto me, and I saved you from their power? But you have forsaken me and served other gods; therefore, I will not save you again. Go and call upon the gods that you have chosen. They will save you in the time of your distress. (Judges 10:11-13)

YHWH once again reminds the Israelites of his faithfulness, mercy, and salvation in the past. Once again he points back all the way to the exodus from Egypt and then lists six more enemies from which he had saved them.⁵⁹ It seems significant that only here in Judges does YHWH himself respond verbally to the Israelites' cries. In previous rebukes of the Israelites, YHWH employs an angel (2:1) and a prophet (6:8). The immediacy of the dialog is accentuated by the lack of a mediating angel or prophet. The tone of the rebuff is quite sarcastic, "Go cry to the gods you have chosen,"⁶⁰ perhaps alluding ironically to Joshua's covenant renewal ceremony where the Israelites "chose" to serve YHWH (Josh 24:22). The Lord seems to be completely unresponsive to the Israelites' cries and unconcerned about their suffering. Pressler reads this rebuff as "the passionate, pained response of a lover whose love is betrayed one too many times."⁶¹ God's response here is not only unprecedented but also completely unexpected.⁶² In YHWH's earlier speeches (2:1-5 and 6:7-10), it is Israel who will not hear; but now, YHWH will not hear. Consequently, he advises the Israelites to cry out to the gods they have chosen; perhaps those gods will hear and save.

As before (2:2; 2:11; and 6:8), Yhwh's self-testimony affirms his covenant faithfulness in saving the Israelites from their enemies. The exodus is presented as the first in a series of YHWH's mighty acts of deliverance. Also as before, the faithfulness of YHWH is contrasted to the unfaithfulness of Israel, who, in violation of the covenant with YHWH, has chosen to pursue other gods. There can be little doubt that YHWH is justified in his decision to punish Israel's idolatry.

F. The Testimony Appropriated (Judg 11:15-24)

Jephthah is a "mighty warrior and the son of a prostitute" (11:1), and he is a man displaced and marginalized, having been disinherited by his family and expelled from his community (11:2-3). When the elders of Gilead decide to seek Jephthah as military leader against the invading Ammonites, he is not even living in Gilead, so they go "to fetch him from the land of Tob" (11:5). Having been received back into the community, he subsequently lays claim to the land in his diplomatic letter to the king of Ammon in which Jephthah writes, "Why have you come against me to fight in *my land*?" (11:12). The Ammonite king responds to Jephthah with his own claim to the land, saying, "Because Israel, on *coming from Egypt*, took away my land from the Arnon to the Jabbok and to the Jordan; now therefore restore it peaceably"

⁵⁹ 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 Judges 6).

⁶⁰ Cf. Webb, *Judges: An Integrated Reading*, 45.

⁶¹ Carolyn Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 198.

⁶² The cyclical pattern disintegrates because YHWH becomes frustrated with Israel's unfaithful behavior (Martin, "Yahweh Conflicted").

(11:13).⁶³ The Ammonite ruler knows of the exodus, but he does not credit YHWH with deliverance. Jephthah responds with a lengthy, detailed accounting of Israel's journey through the wilderness. He writes,

Israel did not take away the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites, but when they *came up from Egypt*, Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh. Israel then sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, "Let us pass through your land"; but the king of Edom would not listen. They also sent to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh. Then they journeyed through the wilderness, went around the land of Edom and the land of Moab, arrived on the east side of the land of Moab, and camped on the other side of the Arnon. They did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was the boundary of Moab. Israel then sent messengers to King Sihon of the Amorites, king of Heshbon; and Israel said to him, "Let us pass through your land to our country." But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory; so Sihon gathered all his people together, and encamped at Jahaz, and fought with Israel. Then YHWH, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them; so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited that country. They possessed all the territory of the Amorites from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. So now YHWH, the God of Israel, has dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel. Do you intend to take their place? Should you not possess what your god Chemosh gives you to possess? So whatever the LORD our God takes possession of before us, we will possess. (Judg 11:15-24)

Jephthah argues that all lands east of the Jordan were taken by the Israelites in self-defense when they were on their journey from Egypt to Canaan and the inhabitants refused to allow them to pass through peaceably (11:20-21); therefore, the Israelites "possessed all the land of the Amorites" (11:21). Furthermore, Jephthah credits YHWH as the one who dispossessed the Amorites and gave the land to the Israelites (11:23), and YHWH is the one to whom Jephthah looks for victory (11:9, 24, 27). Consequently, Jephthah will not surrender the land in which he now enjoys a new position of status and a reborn sense of belonging. Having suffered previously the loss of land and the pain of exile, he is not willing to relinquish that which has been restored to him.

The extent of Jephthah's knowledge of the exodus/wilderness tradition is surprising to the hearer of the narrative, given the fact that Jephthah has lived outside the community for most of his life. The hearer is also surprised to learn that immediately after Jephthah's fervent defense of Israel's claim and his submission of the case to YHWH as judge (11:27); YHWH, who had threatened not to help Israel any more (10:12), shows himself once again to be the God of surprising grace and sends his empowering Spirit upon Jephthah (11:29). Could it be that Jephthah's recitation of the tradition awakens YHWH to action and moves him to put his Spirit upon Jephthah?⁶⁴

G. The Testimony and Israel's Origin (Judg 19:30)

The final chapters of Judges recount the unspeakable atrocities that are inflicted upon a Levite's secondary wife (19:25-30), who is raped, murdered and dismembered, and upon the

⁶³ This testimony from a foreigner functions in the narrative to add credibility to the exodus tradition. Cf. the testimony of Rahab in Josh 2:8-11.

⁶⁴ This possibility is entertained as well by Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000), 173.

women of Jabesh-gilead and Shiloh, who are kidnapped and forced to become wives to the Benjamite remnant (21:12, 20-23). It is in the midst of these cruelties that we hear Judges' final testimony to the exodus. A certain Levite and his *pilegesh* (פִּילֵגֶשׁ),⁶⁵ or secondary wife, find lodging in the home of a Gibeonite man. When night falls certain worthless men of the city surround the house and demand that the Levite be given to them for their pleasure. Instead, the Levite pushes his concubine outside, and the men rape and murder her. The next morning, the Levite puts her dead body upon his donkey and carries her home. Then he divides her corpse into twelve pieces and sends them out to the tribes of Israel as a way of demanding justice, asking that the men of Gibeah be punished for their crimes. When the Israelites receive the gruesome message, everyone says, "Nothing like this has been done or seen from the day that the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt until this day. Consider it, take counsel, and speak up" (Judg 19:30).

The reference to the exodus harks back to Israel's founding moment, a moment marked by YHWH's grace that delivered his people from oppression and bondage. It is a moment that brings to mind hopeful expectations of a future free of abuse and fear, expectations that apparently remain unfulfilled given the crimes against this helpless and unprotected woman. Thrown to the mob to be raped and murdered, she is victimized twice, the second time by her husband when he dismembers her dead body and sends it throughout the land.⁶⁶ Israel's exodus, the high point in its history, stands in stark contrast to this low point in Judges, when freedom is turned into anarchy and the oppressed become the oppressor.

To hear this testimony is to admit that we have fallen far short of the promise of saving grace. The testimony points to the exodus as a founding moment when YHWH's saving power created a new people, called and united under the covenant. The God of the exodus is the God who stands on the side of the weak, the slave, the abused. It is only when we choose the same stance that we become the holy people that we were meant to be.

H. The Exodus Motif and the Original Audience of Judges

I have shown that the exodus tradition serves the narrative of Judges as a witness to YHWH's saving power and faithfulness that calls Israel to obedience and encourages their hope in YHWH's present and future attentiveness. This means that because of his gracious salvation, he is Israel's covenant God and deserves their allegiance, their worship, and their loyalty. The exodus testimony also means that even now he has the might to overthrow the Canaanites and to negate every power that would shackle Israel. YHWH's overall purpose in the exodus is to liberate Israel for himself, to bring them out of the household of bondage that they might be the household of God.

The original audience, along with every audience until now, would observe the contrast between the covenant loyalty of YHWH and the disloyalty of Israel. In light of Israel's continual unfaithfulness, there can be little doubt that YHWH is justified in his decision to punish Israel, eventually sending them into the Babylonian exile. Like Gideon, the hearers of Judges would experience times when the testimony of God's attentiveness would be challenged. The exile is one of those times. During and after the exile, however, the testimony of the exodus would serve as a point of hope that God is able to deliver his people.

⁶⁵ Often translated 'concubine', a פִּילֵגֶשׁ is a second wife who is of lower status than the primary wife. Victor P. Hamilton, "פִּילֵגֶשׁ," in R. Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke (eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (2 vols.; Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), II: 724. Cf. Brown et al., *BDB*, 811; and Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 292.

⁶⁶ Cf. Niditch, *Judges*, 194.

II. The Pentecostal Testimony

The indispensable Pentecostal testimony is that God never ceases to be intensely active; that is, he continues to speak and work through and among his people for the sake of his kingdom in the world.⁶⁷ From Azusa Street until now, Pentecostals everywhere have insisted upon the present reality of God's presence to save, sanctify, fill with the Holy Spirit, heal, and reign as coming king.⁶⁸ The emphasis is not that God saved (past tense) but that God saves (present tense). Pentecostals long to see and hear what God is doing now, both among the elders and among the younger generations.

While past efforts to connect Gideon and Pentecostalism have centered on Gideon's reception of the Spirit,⁶⁹ I see also an association between Pentecostalism and Gideon's use of the exodus tradition. I hear in Gideon's question, 'where are all his wonders?', an analogy to the aforementioned Pentecostal theme, namely, the urgent longing for a new manifestation of God's saving presence. The exodus testimony discloses a God who intervenes for those who suffer,⁷⁰ and Gideon yearns for divine intervention on behalf of his people who are suffering acutely at the hands of the merciless Midianites.

III. A Personal Testimony

It was during a recent personal crisis that I began to hear the yearning and the anguish in Gideon's voice. On May 17, 2007, I awoke suddenly because of a sharp, crushing pain in the center of my chest. I should have called an ambulance, but instead I took two aspirin and sat in a recliner until the pain subsided to a dull ache. I struggled through the morning and early afternoon, praying and believing God for healing. I recited to God all of the healing testimonies from Scripture, and I reminded him of the healings that I had witnessed and experienced. When faced with death, the doctrine of healing is not a point for theoretical debate, and the belief in God's present willingness to intervene on our behalf is not a dusty tradition. During that time of wrestling with God, I became convinced that God had kept me alive through the day and that I would "not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord" (Ps 118:17). Nevertheless, with the pain continuing, I went to the hospital emergency room and underwent tests that showed a 99 per cent blockage in the left descending cardiac artery (but no heart damage). After four arterial grafts (bypasses) and five days of recovery, I returned home with a good prognosis.

In the wake of my near-death experience, I came back to the study of Judges with a new perspective; and when I read the question of Gideon, I heard in his plaintive voice my own

⁶⁷ Cf. Steven Jack Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (JPTSUP 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 60-61. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (JPTSUP 10; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 22-43. Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 174-77.

⁶⁸ *The Apostolic Faith* 1.1 (Sept. 1906): 1 and *passim*. Writing in the first issue of *Pneuma*, William MacDonald, "Temple Theology," *Pneuma* 1.1 (Spring 1979), insists, "Unless we dare claim that Christianity was fossilized in the first century, we must contend that the Spirit is still speaking to the churches" (48). On the five-fold Gospel, see Faupel, *Everlasting Gospel*, 39; Land, *A Passion for the Kingdom*, 55-56; and Donald W. Dayton, *The Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Studies in Evangelicalism, 5; Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1987). Dayton recognizes the five-fold pattern (20); however, he points out that the four-fold Gospel characterizes all Pentecostals while the five-fold pattern is adopted only by the holiness Pentecostals.

⁶⁹ E.g., 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), 21-50.

⁷⁰ Cf. John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 313-17. Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 180-81.

yearning, my own craving for the authentic reality of God's saving presence. I experienced a rekindling of my passion for the manifestation of "all his wonders" as reflected in the cry of Gideon and in the testimonies of my elders in the Pentecostal family.

IV. Final Reflections

From my interpretive location as a Pentecostal, I hear in YHWH's stern warning (Judg 10:11-13) that his patience has its breaking point. At what point does our continued rebellion call for radical judgment on the part of God? The message of Jesus to the seven churches of Asia Minor suggests that the Church is not excused from the requirements of faithfulness. He warns the church at Ephesus, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent" (Rev 2:5). Judges' call for faithfulness on the part of Israel resonates with Pentecostals and their demand for holiness of heart and life. Obedience issues from the gratitude of a saved and transformed life.

Furthermore, I hear in Jephthah's testimony (Judg 11:15-24) the longing of one who had been marginalized, excluded, outcast, now laying claim to his place in the community based upon his testimony of the exodus. The exodus demonstrates that YHWH embraces the outsider and the ostracized. Similarly, to hear the testimony of Judg 19:30 is to believe that the God of the exodus is the God who stands on the side of the weak, the slave, the abused. It is only when we choose the same stance that we become the holy people that we were meant to be.

For Pentecostals, who often testify of God's saving power, the exodus is paradigmatic for salvation.⁷¹ This soteriology declares that God's power is available and sufficient to deliver us from any power that binds or oppresses. In some contexts salvation might mean liberation from political and social oppression.⁷² In others, salvation might be a spiritual work, for just as YHWH delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage, he delivers us from the bondage of sin. Still another possibility is that salvation can mean deliverance from the power of drugs, alcohol, and other life-controlling substances and addictions.

To hear the question of Gideon is to hunger for a fresh display of YHWH's 'wonders'. The question of Gideon mirrors our own yearning that the God of the exodus will manifest himself in the work of saving, sanctifying, filling with his Spirit, healing the sick, and reigning as coming king. If we hear Gideon's question, we will turn to the Lord, forsake all of our idols, and destroy our altars to Baal so that our children and grandchildren will receive our testimony with joy.

⁷¹ I preached one of my first sermons, at the age of 19, on the text that reads, "Fear not, but stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will show to you this day" (Exod 14:13).

⁷² On the contribution of Pentecostalism to a broader concept of salvation, see Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (trans. R. A. Wilson; Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Pub. House, 1st U.S. edn, 1972), pp. 204-17, 246-57; and Richard Schaul, "La Iglesia, Crisis y Nuevas Perspectivas," *Vida y Pensamiento* 15 (1995), pp. 8-48.