EVERYONE HAS AN ANGLE: EXPLORING THE COMPLEXITY OF SUPPORTING CHARACTERS USING THE STORYWORLD OF JUDGES 10:6—12:7

by

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A dissertation submitted to
the Faculty of McMaster Divinity College
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Christian Theology)

McMaster Divinity College
Hamilton, Ontario
2021

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
(Christian Theology)

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TITLE: Everyone Has an Angle: Exploring the Complexity of Supporting Characters Using the Storyworld of Judges 10:6—12:7

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NUMBER OF PAGES: viii + 359

ABSTRACT

Everyone Has an Angle: Exploring the Complexity of Supporting Characters Using the Storyworld of Judges 10:6—12:7

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Literary theory widely attests to the powerful role of characters as vehicles in producing meaning. Yet current narrative models focus almost exclusively on *primary* characters, neglecting supporting characters, who are capable of reshaping narrative emphases or revealing layers of story within the story. This project demonstrates the significance of supporting characters in biblical narratives by applying a narrative methodology drawn from cognitive narratology to the Jephthah story (Judg 10:6—12:7) in order to illuminate the distinct perspectives of each secondary character within its storyworld.

The first chapter outlines a cognitive narrative methodology, which asserts that the purpose of narrative is not merely to convey a meaning, but for readers to experience and engage the story. Therefore, it focuses not on determining *the* meaning of the text, but embracing the power of stories to become transformative and meaningful experiences for the reader with multiple points of engagement (characters).

Chapter two introduces the timecourse (causally related sequence of events) of the Jephthah cycle and then analyzes the initiating event from Yhwh's perspective. This chapter establishes the situations and expectations between Yhwh and his people that echo in unique ways into the scenes that follow.

Each chapter that follows re-reads the story of Jephthah (Judg 10:17—12:7) through the lens of a supporting character—Jephthah's brothers/elders of Gilead, Ammonites/Ammonite king, the daughter of Jephthah, and the Ephraimites—developing the character's person and perspective through their *social role* (social and historical expectations built into social models), *mode of conduct* (character assessment based on biblical and social norms), and *disposition* (the personality of that character determined through speech, action, or direct narration). Each chapter also assesses the *tellability* of the supporting character's story (establishing their viable perspective within the text) and concludes by summarizing the significance of the character's perspective and engaging with it from my own subjective awareness.

Using the Jephthah account, I demonstrate the complexity and depth of the many unnamed characters who engage with this morally ambiguous judge, suggesting that they are part of a pattern of outside, or *other*, voices in biblical narrative that have the power to transform readers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Mark J. Boda for his invaluable support and guidance. On many occasions, he challenged me more than I thought I could handle, but he also believed I could rise to the occasion and gradually I came to believe that I could do it too. Thank you for pushing me and for trusting me with this unique project. I also want to thank my second reader, Dr. Paul S. Evans, for his meticulous eye for detail and his insight that has challenged me to be similarly mindful. I am deeply grateful for the perspective and enthusiasm of my outside reader, Dr. Tammi Schneider, who heard my voice and continues to encourage me to speak my observations of the biblical story boldly. My gratitude extends also to the faculty, administration, and my cohorts at McMaster Divinity College who have challenged my own assumptions and formed me into a more thoughtful reader of Scripture and tradition.

I have also been blessed to have a broad community of support from many inspiring people that I am lucky to call my friends. Firstly, thank you to my friend and mentor, Dr. J. Richard Middleton, who first set my heart on fire with his reading of Scripture and first believed that I could step into the life of biblical scholarship. His work and our many conversations continue to inspire me. I would also like to thank my good friend and dialogue partner, Dr. Brittany Kim, whose advice, wisdom, and editing hand have helped my ideas take shape and grow. Furthermore, I would like to express a special thanks to my friends and colleagues at Azusa Pacific University who have shared their research, their passion, and their enthusiasm for our field. Specifically, I would like to thank the community of "doctor sisters" in the School of Theology, who included me in their family even before my credentials were complete. I am grateful for the many large and small ways that their work and their lives have shown me a path that continues to inform my own.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to my family for the tremendous amount of encouragement and understanding that made it possible to complete this degree. For my parents, Ronnie and Marsha Coy, who first told me that I could be anything I put my mind to—your faith in me made it easier to have faith in myself. To my sisters, Dena DePiazza and Christy Deleo, who listened to all of my musings as if they were publishable material. They forced me not to recede into an academic tower, but to think about what all these methods, theories, and philosophies meant in everyday life. I am also deeply grateful to my daughters, Kylie and Lydia, who are (and may always be) my inspiration. Reading bedtime stories and sharing the stories of our biblical ancestors has challenged me to hear the Bible afresh. Thank you, sweet girls, for reminding me that the simplest truths are often the most foundational.

Finally, I want to thank my husband, Jeff Birge. You have been the solid ground beneath my feet and the structural beams holding me up when life became difficult. I wrote this dissertation, but you steadied my hand. With all my heart, thank you.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Edited by James B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969
Ant.	*Jewish Antiquities*
BDB	Brown, Francis, et al. *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1907.
CDCH	Clines, David J. A., ed. *Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009.
Eccl. Rab.	*Ecclesiastes Rabbah*
Gen. Rab.	*Genesis Rabbah*
GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910.
HALOT	Koehler, Ludwig, et al. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated and edited by M. E. J. Richardson et al. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999.
IBHS	B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. Winona Lake, IN, 1990.
Iph. aul.	*Iphigenia aulidensis*
Iph. taur.	*Iphigenia taurica*
L.A.B.	*Liber antiquitatum biblicarum*
Lev. Rab.	*Leviticus Rabbah*

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: ASSESSING SUPPORTING CHARACTERS USING COGNITIVE LITERARY CHARACTERIZATION

> *"I wonder," he said to himself, "what's in a book while it's closed? Oh, I know it's full of letters printed on paper, but all the same, something must be happening, because as soon as I open it, there's a whole story with people I don't know yet and all kinds of adventures, deeds and battles. And sometimes there are storms at sea, or it takes you to strange cities and countries. All those things are somehow shut in a book. Of course you have to read it to find out. But it's already there, that's the funny thing. I just wish I knew how it could be."*
>
> Michael Ende, *The Neverending Story*

Literary theory widely attests to the powerful role of characters as vehicles in producing meaning,[1] yet current narrative models focus almost exclusively on "primary" characters.[2] "Secondary" characters are often dismissed as mere props or rhetorical devices, whose value is minimal and derivative.[3] Is that necessarily true? Or can a supporting character offer significant meaning, value, and perspective to the text and its reader? In ignoring their role and their value,

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[1] Nearly all narratological approaches dedicate one (or several) chapters of their monograph to characters and characterization (e.g., Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 143–62; Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 23–42; Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 321–364; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 47–92; Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 69–92; Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 55–96; Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative*, 22–41; Dearman, *Reading Hebrew Bible Narratives*, 59–76).

[2] Of the narrative models listed above, only Walsh (*Old Testament Narrative*, 24–25) and Dearman (*Reading Hebrew Bible Narratives*, 57–70) contain a specific discussion on the role of supporting characters, and even here they are often used primarily to buttress and explore the role/characterization of the primary characters. To this point, Walsh comments on the purpose of supporting characters, saying that they "are equally essential to a good story. They act as foils to contrast with, or to highlight, the more important figures in the scene" (*Old Testament Narrative*, 24). This phenomenon will be further addressed in the "Treatments of Supporting Characters" section later in the chapter.

[3] An excellent example of this can be seen in the approach to characterization by Bar-Efat (*Narrative Art*, 86), who argues that "minor characters serve as a backdrop against which the personalities of the main ones stand out." This project will argue that while character interactions certainly highlight elements of the person they interact with—including the primary actor—this does not imply that the supporting character has no other function.

are we controlling the story to produce *a* reading rather than recognizing its multi-dimensional power? In his commentary on 1 and 2 Kings, Brueggemann describes the importance of the 'supporting cast' in the Kings narrative, who often sustain the action of the 'headliner' characters. He notes that the supporting characters may only occupy the periphery of the narrative, but they are often placed at crucial points in the story to provide quiet assistance to the primary characters. He concludes that, "we may well reread the Bible with attention to 'minor' figures who live at the edge of the narrative in dangerous, faithful ways."[4] Perhaps Brueggemann's intuition on these marginal characters is correct, and the call to reread the biblical narratives to recover their story is long overdue. This project will demonstrate the significance of supporting characters in biblical narratives by applying a narrative methodology which draws insights from cognitive narratology to the Jephthah story (Judg 10:6–12:7) in order to illuminate the distinct perspectives of each supporting character within its storyworld.

Description of the Topic and Its Importance

This study will apply post-classical narrative theory to studies in Hebrew narrative,[5] focusing on the role of the supporting characters within a living, three-dimensional storyworld,[6] using the supporting cast in the story of Jephthah (Judg 10:6—12:7) as an exemplar. Post-classical

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[4] Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 221.

[5] The term "post-classical narratology" was originally used by David Herman ("Scripts, Sequences, and Stories," 1046–59), who connects language theory to cognitive science to demonstrate that written texts do not simply create structures but cue responses from readers. Alber and Fludernik ("Introduction," 1–3) summarize the field as combining classical narrative analysis with several new methodologies, including psychoanalytic approaches; speech-act theory; and deconstructionist, feminist, queer, ethnic, or post-colonial approaches, among others.

[6] The phrase "living, three-dimensional storyworld" will be fully explained later in this chapter, but in short: "living" because it is in flux as its human interpreters learn more about the narrative world and human experience and "three-dimensional" because readers assume that the narrative world extends beyond the narrative gaps, assuming a full geography, history, and social and political environment.

narrative theory asserts that the purpose of narrative is not merely to convey a meaning, but for readers[7] to experience and engage the story. Take, for example, the paradox of fiction:[8] even when readers encounter a world that they know is artificial, they feel real emotion for its characters: joy, sorrow, and even anger. How can a reader, who knows that such a character construct is artificial, cry upon their death or swell with pride at their triumph? Perhaps it is due to the nature of storytelling itself. To readers, the world inside the story *feels* real (or else they would cease to read). Cognitive narratologist, David Herman, argues that they feel real because readers create storyworlds within their mind through combinations of textual cues and literary structures, which project a larger world that resonates with human experience.[9] Readers do not simply collect data to determine meaning abstractly, but use those textual cues to create a storyworld in which they run simulations of reality, actively participating in the account as if they themselves were the characters.[10] Yet modern readers, displaced in time and culture, often fail to fully understand and appreciate how the biblical storyteller's cues create similar vivid mental worlds.

Furthermore, the biblical stories are not meant to be read once or twice, but repeatedly over the course of a person's lifetime.[11] As Ehud Ben Zvi famously proclaims, the text was never

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[7] In this dissertation, the term "readers" will refer to those who engage the story, whether modern readers or ancient listeners in an oral format. If and when the audiences need to be distinguished, the text will specify.

[8] This term was famously coined by literary scholar, Colin Radford, who unpacked the implications of such an irrational belief over the course of a few decades. See Radford and Weston, "How Can We Be Moved," 67–93.

[9] For information on storyworld, see Herman, "Cognitive Narratology"; Herman, *Storytelling and the Sciences of the Mind*.

[10] The reference to "simulations of reality" here draws on the work of Oatley, "On Truth and Fiction," 259–78.

[11] The character of the literature as a communal document, with an emphasis on repetitive engagement, can be seen in the Shema (Deut 6:6–9), the requirement that the rules for Israel's king be read repeatedly (Deut 17:18–19), and later readings of or meditation on the law (Josh 1:8; Neh 8–9; Dan 9:10–13).

meant to be read, but to be re-read over and over.[12] Well-told stories create a world as multi-dimensional as the one in which we live, and stories re-read over the course of a lifetime continually expand the social world, intertextual echoes, and ideological frameworks that enliven that storyworld. As readers turn the story over and over in their mind, the flat details of the text become three-dimensional reproductions, like a movie in their mind—characters in the account move from stereotyped silhouettes on a page to unique and embodied persons with whom we (as readers) interact. They become *our* enemies and allies, *our* friends and rivals. According to Herman, that is because stories prompt readers to occupy the storyworlds, the mental worlds evoked by the narrative, and actively engage its inhabitants.[13] In a three-dimensional storyworld, readers experience the story afresh as they resonate with the situations of many characters, not just the protagonist, and it draws their attention to otherwise unnoticed details of the text. For example, shared experience with marginal characters often warrants shifts in perspective—like reading the story of Huldah (2 Kgs 22) as a woman who has faced the dual realities of affirmed calling and social derision, or reading the conquest from the perspective of those who have been brutally conquered.[14] Characters connect with our experience, but readers need not limit their interaction to characters who share their own perspective. Instead, stories that are *re*-read can create spaces to imagine and live the same account from a variety of perspectives within the narrative, if we are willing to intentionally shift to the vantage points of the supporting characters.

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[12] Ehud Ben Zvi is well known for this assertion, which features prominently in many of his books and articles. For example, in *Signs of Jonah* (1–13) Ben Zvi highlights the "charm" and appeal of the book of Jonah for "folkloristic motifs," which play into the audience's willingness and ability to interact with the communal narrative.

[13] In his chapter on storyworlds, Herman (*Basic Elements of Narrative*, 105–36) explains that narratives themselves are essentially blueprints for a specific world-creation. He explains how stories map these worlds, which eventually results in the reader "taking up residence" in the storyworld to be impacted by the unfolding events.

[14] Birge, "Biblical Precedent," 36–47; Tamez, "Bible and the Five Hundred Years," 13–26.

Each chapter of this dissertation will re-read the story of Jephthah (Judg 10:6—12:7) through the lens of a supporting character within the narrative. These readings seek to understand the motivations and perspectives of these characters *from within* their social world and *using the confines* of the story's textual cues to shape the scaffolding for the storyworld. Therefore, each chapter will utilize the cues within the pericope, the intertextual framework and echoes, as well as the socio-historical referents in order to rebuild the storyworld and bring these supporting characters to life. These are not arbitrary re-creations fashioned from an uncritically sympathetic position, but a re-creation of character that attempts to see the story from their perspective as fashioned *by* the storyteller—with all their strengths and failings. In seeing the story through the eyes of the supporting characters, the reader may see more of themselves—both the qualities worthy of admiration and admonition.[15] The purpose of this project is not to find a new or hidden meaning to override previous readings, but to demonstrate the inherent multiplicity of meaning and perceptivity in the biblical narratives when we expend as much energy to understand the characters on the margin as we do the protagonist. I will argue that the supporting characters can have a significant impact on readers of the account of Jephthah, capable of reshaping the basic narrative emphases or illuminating layers of story within the story.

Treatments of Supporting Characters

Critical work in literary studies has long recognized the importance of characterization in shaping meaning in narrative. In 1927, English novelist and literary critic E. M. Forster

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[15] As with primary actors, supporting characters are rebuked or praised for specific traits or motivations, which are often aberrations of attributes that were originally intended for positive use. In order to understand the text's praise or critique, it is important to take the time to understand what should have been (from a literary, theological, or even sociological standpoint) before understanding how they exemplify or fail that standard.

introduced a distinction between 'round' and 'flat' characters. Forster proposed that the 'round' characters are well-developed and complex, often seeming life-like, while flat characters are less developed and simple because they are functional rather than realistic.[16] For Forster, these character types act as points on a continuum and all characters fall somewhere on the spectrum. These terms designate the primary categories of thought when it comes to characterization and have been accepted and nuanced by several prominent narrative critics in literary and biblical studies alike.[17]

Characterization and the Treatment of Supporting Characters in Biblical Narrative Methodology

According to literary scholar, Erich Auerbach, Hebrew narrative is a primitive form of storytelling, yet the fundamental elements of story exist within the biblical text.[18] While the biblical text is far more modest than modern storytelling in its use of descriptive language, he urges that it is also "fraught with background,"[19] producing surprisingly complex characters. The thoughts and feelings of the characters are not typically expressed, yet readers are struck by their life-like quality.[20] Scholars like Alter, Sternberg, and Bar-Efrat (and others) have aptly demonstrated the subtle techniques implemented by these narratives to shape meaning, relying on the interplay of narration, action, and speech to artfully construct the character's presence in

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[16] Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 103–18.

[17] This can be seen in the work of several prominent biblical narrative models (see, e.g., Dearman, *Reading Hebrew Bible Narratives*, 17–18, 61). Berlin (*Poetics and Interpretation*, 23–24) utilizes a nearly identical model, but modifies the "flat" characters, designating some as a "type" and some as an "agent." Amit (*Reading Biblical Narratives*, 71–74) accepts a similar three-category structure as Berlin but wrestles with the implications of that structure on the character of the divine. Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art*, 86–87) uses the terms "secondary" and "primary" but refers to a similar continuum as Foster.

[18] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 143–73.

[19] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 12.

[20] Alter, *Pleasures of Reading*, 55.

the story.[21] Linguist, Matthew Anstey suggests that, "it is as if the paucity of descriptions shadows a surplus of meaning."[22] Yet, despite the acknowledged minimalistic nature of Hebrew narrative, the accepted techniques of character assessment are applied almost entirely to primary actors.[23]

Most of the analysis regarding supporting characters in biblical narrative is found in a small sub-section of narrative methodology monographs, each containing no more than a few pages (or paragraphs) on the specific attributes and function of supporting characters.[24] For example, Alter offers little more than a paragraph to summarize the role of secondary characters in shaping meaning, noting that they follow similar rules of characterization to that of primary characters, except with fewer details.[25] In most models, the 'roundness' of a character is often determined by the "sum of the literary means"[26] applied to a character by the storyteller.[27] As a result, the minimal literary footprint of supporting characters has relegated them to the sidelines of interpretation with scholarly attention focused almost solely on the primary actors.[28]

Therefore the study of supporting characters has usually been addressed only in their relationship to the primary character.[29] In many models, 'minor' characters are not independent

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[21] See n1 for a list of the chapters regarding characterization in the various Hebrew narrative monographs.
[22] Anstey, "Narratological Necessity," 13.
[23] See n2.
[24] A full development and evaluation of these different methods will be addressed later in this chapter.
[25] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 109–10.
[26] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 48.
[27] For instance, Fokkelman (*Reading Biblical Narrative*, 73–96) focuses on the characters who qualify as the "hero" of the text, necessarily minimizing anyone who does not rise to that role.
[28] These approaches mirror the direction of the structuralist movement found in literary studies, seeking to understand the literary components that undergird narrative as elements that create meaning. This impetus can be seen in all of the biblical narrative methods from the 1980s–1990s, such as those by Alter, Berlin, and Bar-Efrat. Alter, however, has shifted in his ideological framework of reading, reflecting a sense of post-classical approach.
[29] For example, Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art*, 74) offers an example of his method using the story of David and Abigail (1 Sam 25), concluding that Abigail's request and David's acceptance (vv. 32–34) reveal *David's* nobility and willingness to accept his mistakes.

actors at all, but indirect means by which the narrator develops the personalities and actions of the primary characters. Bar-Efrat limits their role to "a background against which the personalities of the main ones stand out."[30] More recently (1999), narrative structuralist J. P. Fokkelman pressed the conversation of 'round' and 'flat' characters even further to reduce all characters, primary and supporting, to an invention of the invisible hand of the narrator primarily purposed to develop the plot.[31] While Fokkelman's model allows for lesser-known characters to sometimes become central figures (or heroes) in individual accounts,[32] this model only celebrates lesser-known characters who shift to the center of a particular narrative while all other characters, as with Bar-Efrat, are functional props rather than independent figures. Further, even the 'hero' does not retain personhood, as a seemingly living actor in the mind of the reader, but instead is merely a construct utilized by the narrator to create meaning.[33]

In his monograph on narrative study, Jerome Walsh acknowledges the far more complicated and diverse range in character types and the polyvalent nature of texts. He offers the

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[30] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 86. While he acknowledges that some "subsidiary characters" serve important functions, they are still only a tool of the narrator to affect the characterization of the primary actor. Sternberg (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 330) refers to secondary characters as "embodied plot development." Berlin (*Poetics and Interpretation*, 23–27) uses a similar function-oriented view of 'flat' characters, but breaks them into two categories: 'flat' characters who are stereotypical representations and 'agents' who perform a necessary action to the plot.

[31] Fokkelman (*Reading Biblical Narrative*, 53–72) rejects the terms 'round' and 'flat,' analyzing the story in terms of the 'hero' (primary character) and 'helpers' and 'opponents' (flat characters), who are each scripted into a 'quest' (plot). He emphasizes the connection between narrator and character: when the reader sees a character act, or hears a character speak, what they really see is the hand of the narrator who shapes the action to create meaning.

[32] The hero is not always 'round' or well developed but is the primary actor in any given story or pericope, who establishes the quest and sees it through to completion. Fokkelman (*Reading Biblical Narrative*, 94–95) gives the example of the mother who keeps a room for Elisha and then presses him to bring her son back from the dead (2 Kgs 4:8–37). While the reader may anticipate that Elisha is, or should be, the hero because he raises the boy from the dead, the woman is the real hero of the story. She is the one who initiates the quest, she is present throughout the text, and it is her character and strength that bring healing. Fokkelman urges that the story, rightly understood with the woman as the hero, offers a subtle critique of the prophet and praise of the woman's character.

[33] This framework for understanding both characterization and plot seems to resonate most closely with Ferdinand de Saussure (*Course in General Linguistics*, 65–70), where the meaning of the text does not reflect reality but is defined by the literary components that surround it.

most nuanced attempt to distinguish between different types of supporting characters, outlining five character groupings: 'round' and 'flat' characters, stock (or stereotyped) characters, group characters, and *anomalies*.[34] He defines *anomalies* as characters that "violate our expectations," such as an underdeveloped main character or an overdeveloped supporting character—meaning that he sees some significant character development in supporting characters, but that this itself is an anomaly, not the norm.[35] Walsh's distinctions demonstrate an increasing awareness of the diverse ways in which characters develop meaning and significance in narrative, yet the term "anomaly" seems to suggest an infrequent manifestation in the text.

Individual Studies in Minor Characters

The history of research on the function of supporting characters in biblical narrative is sparse, and a focus on these characters in the Hebrew Bible is nearly non-existent. Within the last 150 years, a mere seven books have been published dedicated to the use and role of supporting characters in the Bible with varying degrees of academic rigor. Conversely, analysis of individual supporting characters can be seen periodically throughout the history of research, yet with little coordinated attempt to understand their function in Hebrew narrative has followed.

The first book written on supporting figures in the biblical text appeared in 1885 as Fredric Hastings endeavored to produce a portrait of "obscure characters" within Scripture for the purpose of edifying the faith of readers who may resonate with these "lost" stories.[36] Hastings offered a literary summary and theological reflection on several lesser-known characters, but offered little depth or fresh insight into their overall significance. Furthermore,

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[34] Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative*, 24–31.
[35] Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative*, 27.
[36] Hastings, *Obscure Characters*.

the characters selected for his study were chosen at random given his personal church experience, rather than using any specific literary criteria. Some characters, for example, were primary actors in their own account,[37] yet considered "obscure" from Hastings perspective. In 1928, A. T. Robertson took another look at supporting characters, focusing his analysis on the New Testament.[38] His study offered a more systematic approach to secondary characterization, focusing primarily on the role of secondary characters in the Gospel accounts, yet it was primarily concerned with theological issues and offered little insight on their literary function.

Although not a monograph, in 1973, Uriel Simon delivered a public address offering a brief examination of the use of secondary characters in biblical narrative. This address came from his earlier article, "Secondary Characters in the Biblical Narrative," in which he expounded upon the many different forms secondary characters may take yet did so while greatly restricting the function of these characters. For Simon, the narrative voice is focused on *one* primary message so narrative tools (like characterization) become formulaic elements used to develop that *one* thought, rather than serving to create a multi-dimensional and interactive storyworld. Therefore, the roles of the supporting characters are intentionally limited by the narrator so as not to distract from the main characters and main message.[39]

Some time later, Joel Williams wrote the most comprehensive exploration of secondary characters to date. In his 1994 monograph, *Other Followers of Jesus: Minor Characters as Major Figures in Mark's Gospel*, Williams addressed the important role of the supporting cast in

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[37] An example of a secondary character in the broad narrative who shifts to a primary character in their own text, read Abigail in 1 Sam 25.

[38] Robertson, *Some Minor Characters*.

[39] Simon, "Secondary Characters," 31–36. In a subsequent essay in 1990 ("Minor Characters in Biblical Narrative," 18), he emphasizes the significance of the supporting cast yet insists, "it is precisely the possibility of saying little about them which makes them such an effective means for pointing out the main issue."

Mark's Gospel.[40] He utilized a narrative-critical model with elements of reader-response criticism to evaluate the minor characters within this Gospel and understand how the writer of Mark used this collective group, dispersed throughout the narrative. Williams argues that these 'minor characters' may seem insignificant in their individual circumstances, yet taken within the context of Mark's entire Gospel, they serve a more significant function, namely to impact readers, empowering them as they see their own role mirrored in the faceless crowd.[41] While he made a significant contribution to a narrative-critical reading of Mark and to subsequent studies on the role of supporting characters in the Gospel narratives, his study did not continue past the bounds of Mark's Gospel.[42]

In 2005, Frank Spina wrote the first monograph to focus on minor characters in the Old Testament, *The Faith of the Outsider*.[43] While Spina does utilize some narrative and rhetorical-critical tools, he applies these tools to a theological and ethical problem he perceives in faith communities: a theology of exclusivity that is often taken as a central tenet of Old Testament faith.[44] Spina's selection of characters, therefore, is based on his theological question rather than specific literary or narrative criteria. Using portraits of these *outsider* characters,[45] he argues that the status of *insider* is not limited by ethnicity, but rather includes those who respond to Yhwh in faith.[46] Spina's work offers a theological discussion on the theme of ethnic inclusion that is

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[40] Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus.*

[41] Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 11–12, 203–206.

[42] Subsequent work has added to William's analysis of Mark or adapted his research questions and method to different Gospels, but each attempt (like Williams) has only attempted to explain the supporting characters in a single biblical book. New Testament scholars who have addressed this issue in the Gospels include: Malbon, "Major Importance," 58–86; Conway, "Speaking through Ambiguity," 324–41; Gardner, "Reading Between the Texts," 45–66; Shore, "People Like Us," 76–83; Howard, "Significance of Minor Characters," 63–78.

[43] Spina, *Faith of the Outsider*.

[44] Spina, *Faith of the Outsider*, 1–13.

[45] Esau, Tamar, Rahab, Naaman, Ruth, and the Samaritan Woman.

[46] Spina, *Faith of the Outsider*, 6–7, 135–36.

present throughout the biblical text, yet the goal of his monograph is not to offer guidelines for understanding supporting characters. Instead of speaking to the academy about the implications of a narrative phenomenon, he speaks to the church regarding its own need to reevaluate its boundaries of exclusivity.

For the purposes of this project, there have been two noteworthy monographs: *Jeroboam's Wife: The Enduring Contributions of the Old Testament's Least-Known Women* by Robin Gallaher Branch and *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* by Kristin Moen Saxegaard.[47] Branch utilizes narrative criticism to read and cultivate an appreciation for seven "least-known" women in the Old Testament, developing detailed characterizations, evaluating their significance in the narrative strategy of the text, and developing practical insights from this study.[48] Using a variety of literary-critical tools, she masterfully brings to life previously under-studied female characters, expressly focusing on demonstrating the significance and value of these marginal figures within the text and in the praxis of faith.[49] While some may quibble over certain details of her characterizations, her explications of these lesser-known figures offer profound insight into the value of the supporting cast and make a firm case for further studies. Among her findings, she concludes "[t]he passages about each woman and girl . . . reveal characteristics about them and allow them to emerge with discernable personalities."[50] Therefore, it stands to reason that other supporting characters may have a story to tell as well.

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[47] Branch, *Jeroboam's Wife*; Saxegaard, *Character Complexity*.

[48] Branch (*Jeroboam's Wife*, 9–12) offers a fairly standard narrative methodology that is simplified, perhaps as a result of her intended audience, which seems to be educated laypeople or undergraduate students.

[49] In her concluding chapter, Branch (*Jeroboam's Wife*, 171–84) walks through the different ways that each woman she addresses offers a significant contribution to the story as well as to the reader.

[50] Branch, *Jeroboam's Wife*, 171.

Saxegaard's monograph also addresses the role of supporting characters, though indirectly. Saxegaard offers an academically rigorous approach to developing and understanding the importance of complex characters, opining that one-dimensional readings (of primary or supporting characters) "make characters more ideal and less human, and thus difficult to identify with."[51] Her study focuses primarily upon the primary characters (Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz) yet it does not completely neglect the supporting cast, spending an entire chapter discussing the role of minor characters in developing the plot and shaping the complexity of the primary actors.[52] Unfortunately, she fails to shift the perspective in order to understand the supporting cast and is therefore unable to identify with the one-dimensional reading of those characters.

Finally, *Seitenblicke*, an edited monograph focused on the literary and historical studies of the book of 2 Samuel in 2007, contains twenty four chapters which study the contribution of individual supporting characters in these texts.[53] The third section of the monograph is especially relevant for this study as each contributor focuses on a different character who is often only marginalized as part of the David story, though to varying extents: Michal, Nathan, Bathsheba, Amnon and Tamar, Shimei, the sons of Zeruiah, Absalom, Ahitophel, Kimham and Barzillai, Sheba, the wise woman from the city wall of Abel-Beth-Maachah, and the prophet Gad.[54] The contributors come from a variety of perspectives and hermeneutical approaches highlighting the presence and importance of marginal figures in the book of 2 Samuel, inviting scholarship to look beyond the primary protagonist. I hope to build on this basic sentiment by demonstrating

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[51] Saxegaard, *Character Complexity*, 3.

[52] Saxegaard (*Character Complexity*, 57–74) concludes that, "for a character study the minor characters are of less importance. For the development of the plot, and most of all, for the understanding of the main characters, they are significant."

[53] Deitrich, ed., *Seitenblicke*.

[54] Deitrich, ed., *Seitenblicke*, 194–423.

that the various perspectives identified by the contributor allude to a much broader truth of biblical literary studies: every character has a story to tell.

In contrast to the weak monograph history, there have been several articles published that address individual supporting characters who play a significant role in biblical narratives.[55] Most individual essays seem surprised at the unexpected significance of these periphery characters. For example, a couple of the individual characters identified by this study (the daughter of Jephthah and the Ephraimites), have had some (or significant) scholarly attention in the past.[56] Yet few academic works have sought to fully appreciate the impact of supporting characters as a significant literary means of shaping meaning and experience from within the story.

The brief history of research on supporting characters in biblical literature demonstrates two things: (1) a gaping hole in modern research and (2) an implicit acknowledgment that supporting characters can be complex. Cognitive narratology may help to bridge the gap between the critical tools that have deprioritized supporting characters and the intuitive acknowledgement that something important is happening on the margins of the text, by helping to recreate a mental storyworld in which all the inhabitants come to life.

In this project, a supporting character is a person who is not the protagonist (perhaps less developed than the primary actor), but whose character is developed by the narrator through speech, action, and/or narrative description, even if those traits are considered "flat" in other

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[55] For example, in Old Testament studies many have noted the use of secondary characters in significant ways for Exodus and Samuel (e.g., Exum, "Second Thoughts," 75–87; Hildebrandt, "Servants of Saul," 179–200; Jacobs, "Role of the Secondary Characters," 495–509), and on secondary characters in the Apocrypha, see Branch and Jordan, "Significance of Secondary Characters," 389–416. Many more are available, and the daughter of Jephthah has herself been given significant attention in scholarly work, which will be fully explored in chapter 5.

[56] These scholarly debates will be discussed in chapters 5 and 6. For example, Beavis ("Daughter in Israel," 11–25) offers a survey of feminist and non-feminist speculation on the festival following the daughter's sacrifice and the shibboleth incident has garnered significant scholarly attention as Marcus ("Ridiculing the Ephraimites," 95–105) explores.

narrative models. This study will focus in particular on the supporting characters in the story of Jephthah in Judg 10:6—12:7: Yhwh (who plays a minimal role in the literary footprint of the text), the brothers/elders, Ammon, the daughter of Jephthah, and the Ephraimites. These characters act as test cases to assess the complexity of marginal figures in a single story. Each character selected meets the following criteria to be considered for this study. First, while this character may feature prominently in a particular scene, they are not a primary actor in the Jephthah account. These are unquestionably *supporting* (flat) characters, not merely under-researched *primary* actors.[57] Second, the text uses universally accepted characterization techniques to develop these characters. Minimally, this means that characters must be involved in both speech and action, as these are the primary tools of characterization in Hebrew narrative, though other factors may also contribute to their character development. Third, each character's active participation in their account will be limited to 6–15 verses in length, so as not to overwhelm the assessment. The limited pericope size allows for a detailed analysis of individual stories and characters. Using these characters, this dissertation will demonstrate that supporting characters can also offer complex and valuable insights in Hebrew narrative. Capable of shaping or reshaping the primary storyline and offering their own perspectives, they present stories within the story as they interact with Jephthah.

Studies in the Story of Jephthah (Judg 10:6—12:7)

The story of Jephthah and his fateful vow has captivated readers for thousands of years, typically provoking ire directed toward Jephthah. In the first century, Jephthah's actions were thoroughly

[57] This means that the story is not "about" them; rather, they are engaged in the storyline of some other character's experience.

rebuked by both Josephus and Pseudo-Philo, who critique the premise of the vow as well as his feigned obligation to keep it.[58] Early rabbinic discussions continued to castigate Jephthah and his sacrifice, detailing the laws he had broken and the missed opportunities to escape the horrible outcome of his misguided vow.[59] With one voice, early Jewish writers, from Josephus to Rashi, rejected the vow and the killing of Jephthah's daughter, emphasizing Jephthah's violation of God's law and the ignorance of his response.[60] Yet early Christian interpretation offers some more sympathetic readings, likely as a result of Jephthah's positive appraisal in Heb 11:32. Augustine softens Jephthah's violation, drawing a parallel between Gideon testing the fleece and Jephthah's act of child sacrifice and rationalizing that God uses flawed individuals to do great things.[61] Eleventh-century Jewish exegete Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra first introduced the argument that the daughter had not been killed, but simply separated from her community and devoted to God as a virgin for the rest of her life.[62] While some early writers focused their attention on the daughter's actions (interpreted either as noble or sinful), the primary emphasis of these ancient and medieval thinkers was on the role and responsibility of Jephthah.[63]

While studies on the story of Jephthah have primarily focused on the scandal of his vow, modern scholarship has extended its focus to include assessments of its significance in historical re-creation and ethical and ideological evaluations of this complicated judge. Jephthah's account

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[58] Josephus, *Ant.*, 7.10. Pseudo-Philo, *L.A.B.*, 39:10–11.

[59] For example, *Gen. Rab.*, 60:3; and *Lev. Rab.*, 37:4.

[60] See Rashi's Commentary, 11:39.

[61] Further, Augustine suggests that the death of the daughter was a means of shocking the audience into seeking the true nature of sacrifice, as demonstrated by the daughter. *Patristic Commentary*, Judg 11:39.

[62] Baumgarten ("'Remember That Glorious Girl'," 203) notes this interpretive stance in her presentation of the history of medieval interpretation regarding the daughter of Jephthah in Jewish communities.

[63] For a full review of ancient and medieval interpretation, see Gunn (*Judges Through the Centuries*, 147–83) which explores the reception history of the book of Judges from ancient thought through modernity, with a detailed chapter on the story of Jephthah.

has been particularly important for scholars interested in source criticism and the origin of the office of 'judging' in Israel's history.[64] While these studies have produced valuable insights in re-creating the historical situation and development of the text, they offer little aid in understanding the narrative's use of characterization. In his 1987 monograph, Barry Webb recognizes the importance of the Jephthah account in understanding the unique literary features of the book of Judges, placing his analysis of Jephthah at the beginning to demonstrate the reoccurring (though modified) features of the story of the Judges.[65] While there have been several commentaries produced within the last two decades which illuminate the theological, socio-historical, literary, and ideological aspects of the book of Judges,[66] this particular account is singled out in only a handful of literary studies. For example, Moberly devotes a chapter to

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[64] For an analysis of early historical-critical work, see Rösel, "Richter Israels," 180–203. Wellhausen (*Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, 232–36) prioritizes the Jephthah account as the "stem of the tradition" that constructed the history of Israel as seen in the book of the Judges. For more recent redaction-critical work, see Gross, *Richter* (2009).

[65] Webb, *Integrated Reading*, 41–78.

[66] These recent commentaries reflect a variety of methodological and hermeneutical perspectives, many of which intersect with this project in a variety of ways. Several commentaries have focused on the literary features of the text, offering insights in the literary landscape of the text as well as helpful notes on the characters and character developments, e.g., Conway, *Judging the Judges* (2019); Schneider, *Judges* (2000); Webb, *Book of Judges* (2012); Ryan, *Judges* (2007); Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth* (2013); Boda and Conway, *Judges* (forthcoming). Other literary commentaries have been published with helpful literary insights, but considerably smaller contributions to character analysis, including Wijk-Bos, *End of the Beginning* (2019); Biddle, *Reading Judges* (2012). Another helpful publication is the monograph by Gorospe and Ringma (*Judges*, 2016), which explores the literary features of the text and parallels found in the authors' own Asian cultural context. Butler (*Judges*, 2009) provides a helpful and near-exhaustive summary of previous work, with his own insights intermixed. Others have offered in-depth analyses of the social and cultural background, which help to explore and expand the storyworld of the Judges accounts, e.g., Sasson, *Judges 1–12* (2014); Matthews, *Judges and Ruth* (2004); and to a lesser extent Walton, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel* (2009). Furthermore, some commentaries have been focused on theological insights from the book of Judges and sometimes the contemporary application of the text, e.g., Younger, *Judges/Ruth* (2002); McCann, *Judges* (2011); Evans, *Judges and Ruth* (2017). Perhaps most the most significant contribution in this category is Block's (*Judges, Ruth*, 1999) detailed exegetical and theological reading with several helpful literary insights. Furthermore, Niditch (*Judges*, 2008) traces the three different voices in the redaction history of the text: the "epic-bardic" voice that represents the oldest source of the story, the theological voice, and the humanist (cf. Brettler, *Book of Judges*, 2002). Frolov (*Judges*, 2013) focuses on an updated assessment of form-critical issues for the book of Judges that have helpful, though limited, insights for this project. While not in the most recent history, other major works that have contributed significant insights on the literary, historical, and social world of Judges and are worth noting include Boling, *Judges* (1975); Soggin, *Judges* (1981); Amit, *Book of Judges* (1992); Klein, *Triumph of Irony* (1988).

Jephthah in his assessment of the "empty men" in ancient heroic tales, focusing primarily on literary and theological techniques.[67] Elie Assis combines a literary approach with historical studies to assess the ideology of leadership in the later period of the judges, emphasizing Jephthah's failure to lead for the sake of communal interest.[68]

Yet scholarship remains fixated on the horror of Jephthah's vow: both in making it and in keeping it. Some of the early and more optimistic readings have revived and rearticulated the view that Jephthah's daughter never died.[69] Yet this interpretation has been widely disregarded as unjustified by the text,[70] and the focus has often shifted to the moral, ethical, and theological implications of the passage. Written works dedicated entirely to the seemingly condoned violence of the text have proliferated.[71] Sjöberg, for example, contends with the violence as both an ethical and gender issue, analyzing the different interpretive strategies utilized throughout the text's reception history as reflections of the reader's own assessment of power.[72] The only supporting character in Jephthah's story who receives significant attention is the daughter he sacrifices.[73] Yet the primary focus has been on attempts to recover the earliest dialectical

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[67] Mobley, *Empty Men* (2005).

[68] Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 2–3, 234–37.

[69] The primary example of this approach was developed by David Marcus (*Jephthah and His Vow*) in 1986. Yet some scholars continue to utilize this argument. For example, Reis ("Spoiled Child," 281–85) reads the daughter's actions as a ploy to attain freedom from the burden of marriage at her father's expense.

[70] For example, Schneider (*Judges*, 174–79) offers a critique of the major tenets of the "dedication" theory, including its context within Judges, as well as the timing, purpose, and language of the vow that sealed her fate and its intertextual connections to the story of Isaac (Gen 22; cf. Conway, *Judging the Judges*, 495–96; Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 211). For a helpful analysis of the many different elements scholars have considered in relationship to this question, see Butler (*Judges*, 287–90), who concludes that a human sacrifice is the most likely reading.

[71] This is most clearly seen among feminist interpreters, like Exum ("Centre Cannot Hold," 422–23), who argues that the text not only condones the violence, but locates it within the divine will as a result of the presence of the Spirit of God at the time of the vow.

[72] Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 3–8.

[73] Feminist critics have been especially interested in reading and retelling this story from the perspective of the daughter. Some important examples include: Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, 41–68; Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 93–115. Yet that work has been picked up by a variety of feminist writers; for example: Lockwood, "Jephthah's

difference suggested by that that text, not on the characterization of the Ephraimites.[74] With the exception of the daughter, few academic works attempt to fully understand the remaining supporting characters in the Jephthah account.[75]

Reading Stories Using Post-Classical, Cognitive Narrative Theory and Methodology

This project will utilize a post-classical narrative approach, drawing specifically from the field of cognitive narratology to determine and develop the multi-layered storyworld of Judg 10:6–12:7. Post-classical narrative analysis is a blanket term which includes a plurality of literary approaches, sharing an emphasis on classical literary studies when combined with research in other areas of study (e.g. psychology, feminism, post-colonial research, and various media/non-literary forms).[76] Cognitive narratology is an area of post-classical research in which insights from the fields of psychology and neuroscience are combined with more traditional narratology methods. In praxis, this shifts the focus of the study: from a more structuralist approach, which seeks to uncover what a particular story *means*; to a reader-psychology approach, which seeks to understand what is happening in the *mind of the reader* as they engage story and its implication on meaning making.

Daughter," 210–218; Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing," 116–30; Claaseens, "Female Resistance," 607.

[74] See Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 384 n.157) for an extensive footnote regarding the history of scholarly interaction with the Shibboleth incident.

[75] While no academic work has a stated intention of studying the supporting characters in the Jephthah account, a few notable commentaries have given more attention to them than standard exegetical studies. For example, Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 418–35) offers a helpful analysis of Jephthah's negotiation with the Ammonites that includes consideration of the Ammonite perspective.

[76] For a helpful assessment of the developing field of post-classical narrative approaches, see Alber and Flundernik's edited volume (*Postclassical Narratology*, 1–34) which offers a brief introduction to the field followed by several individual entries regarding differing approaches to the field.

The use of cognitive narratology has had a significant impact on the broader world of literary studies, but is only beginning to be applied to the biblical text. Cognitive narratology demonstrates that stories build mental worlds for the readers to inhabit and engage its situations, creating meaning through a simulated experience. Similarly, it stands to reason that the biblical text is also capable of building mental worlds in which readers might engage the characters and their situations, if readers are able to better recreate the storyworld by connecting the textual cues to the broader socio-historical worlds to which they allude.[77]

Cognitive narratology shows us that as readers engage stories, they genuinely respond to the scenarios of the characters in the storyworld, leading them to become more empathetic and responsive to other perspectives.[78] If stories are an engagement of the mind, it stands to reason that over time, the details of a well-known story will allow readers to engage with and reenact the account from multiple perspectives within the narrative through various character vantage points. Essentially, while readers respond to the textual cues of the narrative, perhaps shaping their understanding of the storyworld through their own experience and knowledge, they are also shaped by their interaction with the storyworld. They enter into the storyworld and engage its characters, envisioning themselves in a variety of circumstances that would have otherwise been distant, detached, or hypothetical.[79] In this way readers' response to stories can shape an organic

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[77] See n5.

[78] Jacobs and Willems, "Fictive Brain," 1–14. Furthermore, Carroll ("Minds and Meaning," 7–9) argues that narratives are capable of producing "adaptive psychological functions" in response to the characters within the text.

[79] Pirlet and Wirag ("Towards a 'Natural' Bond," 38) note that we understand characters and the situations they are in "not merely rationally but also emotionally." Accordingly, Hsu et al. ("Fiction Feelings," 1356–61), compare the neural correlates before and after reading fear-inducing passages from the Harry Potter books, finding that the mid-cingulate cortex (which regulates emotion) shows significantly strong reactions to the reading. This neurological observation suggests a connection between the process of reading characters and the affective response of the reader.

and living framework for understanding the role of self, others, and the divine.[80] Perhaps it should be no surprise that the biblical text, a document written to shape the identity and ethos of its people, was written in a primarily narrative format. The formative power of narrative also demonstrates the implicit value in reading the text in a way that engages with multiple characters as it offers a fuller sense of the story by providing multiple reflection points and perspectives.

Studies in Biblical Narrative, Past and Present

The earliest studies of narrative, such as Aristotle's *Poetics*, assumed that stories mimicked life in artful ways and that art can never be truly measured.[81] Within the last century, structuralist literary criticism challenged this assumption, arguing instead that meaning in literature can be measured and the structures of narrative mapped out. In the 1980s, French structural narratology dominated the field of literary criticism.[82] Contrary to the dominant framework of Erich Auerbach—which famously argued that story mimics life (1946)—structuralists argued that there is no one-to-one correspondence between literature and reality, but that each text creates its own internal reality, which does not exist in the real world.[83] Readers approach the text knowing

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[80] Another interesting example of the power of story can be found in Adeney, "Response to the Articles." 93–101. Adeney writes about her experience at a West African Seminary in which two groups of students were taught: one using the traditional Western model (biblical studies, theology, etc.), and the other using a 'Story Model,' in which they learned 135 Bible stories. At the end of the year, all of the students were tested using traditional theological tests, and the students in the Story Model were able to come to the same theological conclusions as those educated in a traditional model, using frequent references to stories within the biblical text.

[81] Aristotle, *Poetics*, part 1.

[82] This is exemplified in the work of Berlin (*Poetics and the Interpretation* [1983]) and Culpepper (*Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* [1983]).

[83] Contra Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 548.

that they are not reading reality, but a construct of the writer; therefore, meaning is discerned from the structural relationship of its literary elements, as established by its author.[84]

In the wake of disillusionment over the limitations of historical-critical methodology in biblical scholarship, the emphasis of research shifted to the final form of the text. Meir Sternberg was the first to write extensively on biblical narrative, offering a detailed and philosophical examination of its inherent structures, and his work began a conversation that led to a flurry of scholarship.[85] Soon after, Robert Alter, an established scholar in comparative literature, applied his craft to the field of biblical studies, writing the watershed monograph, *The Art of Biblical Narrative.* In it, Alter utilized elements of the structuralist hermeneutic but with a focus on reading biblical literature as an art form, rather than mechanical process. While many narrative handbooks were subsequently published, they seemed essentially to reiterate or nuance the categories of Sternberg and Alter.[86] Structuralist approaches attempted to understand the mechanisms of the narrative, but often did so by minimizing (or attempting to quantify) the role of the reader/hearer in engaging textual meaning in order to produce a singular meaning.

While the structuralist model has remained the primary narrative research method in biblical studies for decades, it has seen some nuancing and reimagining. More recently, scholars have begun to incorporate the insights of the Russian structuralists into their literary frameworks. Beginning in the 1920s, Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, wrote

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[84] Notable literary structuralist, Tzvetan Todorov was an active voice in this movement, coining the term "narratology" in his 1970 work *Introduction à la Littérature Fantastique* to describe his narrative process.

[85] Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative.*

[86] This body of work is sometimes referred to as the Tel Aviv school. Many of these early works highlighting the poetics of the Hebrew text were originally written in Hebrew and only secondarily translated into English (e.g., Weiss, *Bible from Within*; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*; Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*. Berlin (*Poetics and Interpretation*), whose work was first published in English, offers a similar framework of narratological interpretation.

extensively on a variety of topics, including dialogic and polyphonic voicing in the text.[87] His work inspired research in many different disciplines but was not utilized by biblical scholarship until the last few decades. Robert Polzin was the first to incorporate Bakhtin's insights into his narrative-critical readings of the Deuteronomic history,[88] yet Bakhtin's influence can also be seen in the work of several other narrative critics, such as Keith Bodner, Barbara Green, and Roland Boer.[89] Biblical scholarship continues to examine how biblical texts produce polyphonic meaning and how stories evoke, echo, or even rebuke each other within the biblical canon.[90] Rather than utilizing the narrative-critical model to determine a single message of a story, scholarship is beginning to explore the rich complexity of the text and the interaction between divergent voices within it.[91]

Cognitive narratology, which address the intersection between narrative and psychology, have been highly influential in literary studies and are just beginning to attract interest within biblical scholarship.[92] These methods are diverse, yet share similar research goals and questions:

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[87] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (first published in Russian in 1929); Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* (first published in 1975).

[88] Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*; Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*; Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist.* Jobling (*Sense of Biblical Narrative* [1978]) utilizes a similar structuralist perspective.

[89] While their critical work on biblical texts reflects Bakhtin's influence, each of these authors has also written methodological studies on the integration of Bakhtin's methods into biblical interpretation. See Bodner, *Artistic Dimension* (2007); Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship* (2000); Boer, ed., *Bakhtin and Genre Theory* (2007).

[90] These phenomena have crossed into many disciplines, having a profound effect on feminist studies (e.g., Klitsner, *Subversive Sequels*) but also gaining attention from mainline literary practitioners (e.g., Niditch [*Judges*], who examines the three different voices that intertwine in the text).

[91] This can be seen in the rise of contextual interpretations of the text. See, e.g., Kuan ("Reading with New Eyes," 1–7), who explores the role of context in shaping reader expectation and response to texts, as well as De la Torre (*Reading the Bible from the Margins*) and Pardes (*Countertraditions in the Bible*). As pertains to this project, Bal (*Death and Dissymmetry*, 2) analyzes the book of Judges and critiques the preoccupation with textual coherence as a reader's ideological choice regarding what to focus on. Therefore, she shifts the ideological focus, bringing the marginalized characters, typically women, to the center of her study.

[92] To date, this field has been largely operating in the world of literary studies and/or psychology, but has not interacted significantly with biblical scholars. Primary voices in this movement, which have been utilized in this project, include scholars like Herman, *Storytelling and the Sciences of the Mind*; Oatley and Djikic, "Psychology of Narrative Art"; Oatley, "On Truth and Fiction"; and Flundernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*. To see a

What is happening in the mind as an audience experiences story? How is meaning made and determined? How are stories affected by readers, and conversely, how do stories affect readers? They take issue with the overuse of structuralist categories,[93] which minimize the interplay of reader and text, pointing out that stories are not fundamentally descriptions of a created world, but mentally engaging simulations.[94]

These cognitive narrative approaches in some ways resemble reader-response criticism, but they differ in their emphasis regarding the directionality of meaning-making.[95] Both cognitive narratology and reader-response methods critique the notion that textual meaning exists objectively and independent of the reader.[96] Therefore, both emphasize the role of the reader in forming the meaning of the text, and both assume that the text gives cues that presume

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sampling of the different fields of methodological approaches within postclassical literary studies, visit Hühn et al., eds., *Living Handbook of Narratology* (http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/). This is a large and diverse discipline that includes an emphasis on both narrative literary studies as well as psychological studies. It expands to include scholars like Mar et al. ("Emotion and Narrative Fiction," 818–33), studying the role of experience and personality in social processes; Carroll ("The Truth about Fiction," 129–60), examining the nexus between reality and fiction in the human brain; Ryan (*Avatars of Story*), looking at story as a form of meaning making that transcends culture as well as the various ways in which it is communicated; and Pirlet and Wirag ("Towards a 'Natural' Bond," 35–53), addressing cognition and affect in narratology.

[93] Herman ("Cognitive Narratology," para. 5–10) offers a brief history of postclassical narratology, identifying it as a literary branch that reacted against a perceived overconfidence in structuralist arguments. While some academics, like Flundernik, dismiss structuralist claims altogether, others reject structuralist arguments to varying degrees. Herman (*Basic Elements of Narrative*, 112–18) himself believes that it is necessary to have some structure as long as the structure itself is not the dominant meaning-maker in the story.

[94] Alter (*Pleasures of Reading*, 51) also notes this incongruity and identifies the problem well, contending that the "inadequacy of Structuralist thinking about narrative is compounded by a fondness for seeing literary works in reductively linguistic terms . . . [yet] in all this, there are scarcely grounds for helping us understand why the great fictional characters engage us so powerfully and even provide illumination for our lives."

[95] While the broader field of literary studies has shifted towards postclassical narrative approaches, its engagement with the world of biblical studies has been minimal. Hongisto (*Experiencing the Apocalypse*, 23) offers the first full-fledged argument from a postclassical biblical approach, emphasizing the messiness of "real reading." Elliott (*Reconfiguring Mark's Jesus*, 2011) provides another scholarly attempt at postclassical narratology.

[96] Reader-response critics Gunn and Fewell (*Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 7–12) offer a narrative methodology that critiques the formalist narrative criticism of the past, arguing that textual meaning is so heavily dependent on the reader's role that a "correct" interpretation is never truly possible.

the active participation of the reader in constructing meaning.[97] Yet reader-response criticism is focused on how the reader creates meaning with the text, whereas cognitive narratology studies focus on the way that story shapes the reader in its wake. For cognitive narratology, stories become the experiences of the world, of persons, and of situations that become a rehearsal for real life, not unlike a simulation.[98] Reader-response remains a dominantly literary criticism, measuring the way in which meaning is created through the interaction of the reader with the text.[99] Cognitive narratology originates from the world of the mind, examining how it is reshaped as readers respond to the text.[100]

This project combines a distinctly post-classical framework of cognitive narratology insights with new literary-critical approaches. Typical biblical narrative methods use the literary structures of a story to create a (or a few) meaning(s). This project will utilize the narrative insights of previous scholarship,[101] but re-purpose them as cues in creating a rich and engaging storyworld in which readers mentally engage with and enact the biblical actors. Using this cognitive narrative approach, I hope to employ a narrative method that broadens the storyworld, enabling readers to indwell, shape, and be shaped by the narrative situations and the characters' actions within them. It is time for studies in biblical narrative to move from what post-classical literary scholar Marie-Laure Ryan refers to as *textualization* (a single-minded focus on what is

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[97] This can be seen in a variety of places. An example from the reader-response narrative method of Gunn and Fewell (*Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 27–33). See footnote 90 for the previous discussion regarding reader interaction and meaning making in cognitive narrative methods.

[98] Oatley, "On Truth and Fiction," 261–65.

[99] Keesey, "Reader-Response Criticism," 129–37.

[100] For example, Oatley and Djikic ("Psychology of Narrative Art," 2–3) explain the connection between storytelling and human interaction, explaining experiments in which certain behavioral outcomes (e.g., empathy) have been measured and connected to an increase in reading/engaging stories.

[101] This study will focus on the literary methods of the Israeli scholars like Alter, Berlin, Sternberg, etc., rather than the Russian formalists.

present in the text) to *narrativization* (entering the storyworld). Ryan explains, "textualization becomes narrativization when space is not described for its own sake, as would a tourist guide, but becomes the setting of an action that develops in time."[102] The objective, therefore, is to recreate the persons within the text in order for the reader to fully engage them and their perspectives within the story.

Proposing a Post-Classical, Cognitive Narrative Hermeneutic and Method for Biblical Studies

Narrative Levels in Scholarship and in this Project

The first step in addressing a biblical story is to decipher the voice of the storyteller and the nature of his/her medium. Historical-critical methods (diachronic studies) have focused on the level of the narrative's telling; this includes the search for the original author (the initial writer), and the original reader (the first audience of the text) as they exist(ed) in the real world, or the *history of the text*. All of these factors are external to the story, seeking to understand the history of the text as it came into being and the circumstances of its writing. While these studies have produced volumes of helpful literature (some of which will be utilized in this project), their attempts to understand the world behind the text have often shifted the focus away from the claims of the text itself. Modern literary readings have typically focused on the text itself (synchronic studies), utilizing the final form of the text and applying literary-critical tools to discern its meaning.

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[102] Ryan, "Space," para 11.

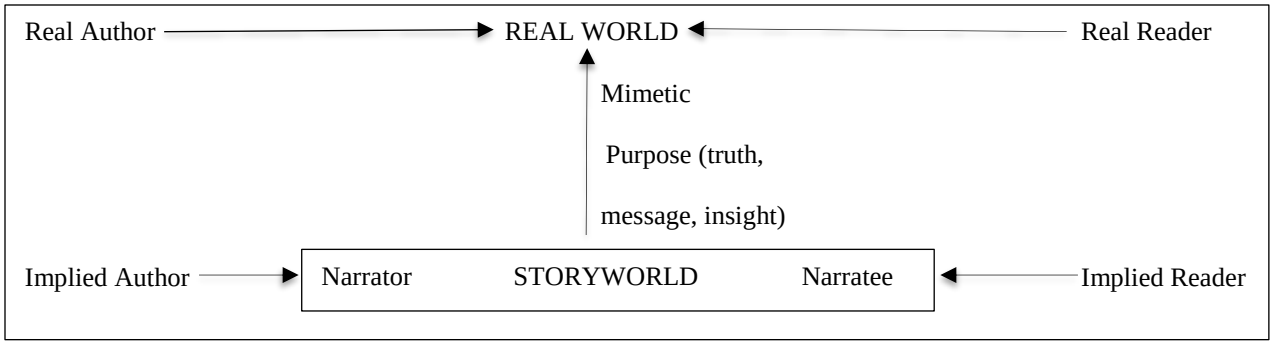

Figure 1: Levels of Narrative[103]

Synchronic studies emphasize the text itself. As Bar-Efrat urges, "the *being* of biblical narrative is equally as interesting as its *becoming*."[104] These literary models are text centered, seeking to understand what the story presents as the implied author ("the implied authorial view"),[105] narrative (final form of the text), and implied reader (the audience presupposed by the implied author). The *narrative level* deals with the reconstructed implied author and the implied reader, which are discerned using textual cues embedded into the final form of the text.[106] Therefore, the narrative level does not seek to discover the initial audience per se, but the audience seemingly implied by the text itself.[107] This is the most common level of narrative evaluation, yet this study will utilize a level embedded deeper within the story.

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[103] Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 103.

[104] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 10, emphasis original.

[105] Abbott, *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 85. He explains that the implied author is essentially a construct created and shaped by the real author, yet distinct from the narrator, as narrators are sometimes intentionally unreliable, or discordant.

[106] Notably, these approaches typically read the text in its final form, yet they examine the stories within their original language(s) and seek to understand the ancient context rather than imposing a modern understanding on the ancient text. The *emphasis* is on the elements of the ancient world (and text) that the story seems to be presenting, rather than reconstructing the history of the text's life before the final form.

[107] Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 19. Notably, the implied author and implied reader of the biblical accounts are in and of themselves historical characters; therefore, understanding the text implies some digging into ancient contexts as well.

This study will engage the deepest layer of narrative analysis, the *story level* in which the narrator, events, and character perspectives are contained within the storyworld itself.[108] This level of story assumes an immersive reader experience. Here, the voice behind the text assumes the highest level of authority throughout the narrative, and it is through the narrator that the reader learns of characters, actions, and events that shape the story (or stories).[109] Likewise, the characters themselves provide the perspective within the story, as they respond to the events presented by the narrative. While stories themselves may be familiar, the story level takes on a life of its own when a cognitive narrative approach is applied. For example, the assumed expansive world of story encourages readers (early and present) to deepen their own knowledge and experience with places, scenes, and situations in order to move past understanding and consider projecting oneself into those places. Furthermore, the character's perspective becomes an immersive experience because the audience of the story is essentially re-enacting the events from the vantage point of characters within the story. This study will look primarily at the story level, yet the narrative world may be expanded and clarified through some use of the previously mentioned narrative levels when necessary. Rather than focus on the authorial intention (actual or implied) that has often been the object of traditional literary models, this study will focus on using the textual cues in combination with the social world that the story constructs in order to engage the account on the story level, creating a simulation of the time, place, and cultural constructs that the story assumes. It is within this period-sensitive mental recreation of the story

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[108] I have utilized Tate's model in figure 1, but repurposed the inner-storyworld to incorporate the insights from Abbott (*Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 167), who contends that the story itself creates its own world where the voice of the narrator is eclipsed by the perspective of particularly engaging characters. For modern literature, this can mean an authorial hand that shifts between the perspectives of major characters without a narrator's voice. Yet this model involves learning from the characterizations as "self-projections" (Jacobs and Willems, "Fictive Brian," 4) to understand the behavior of characters within certain situations.

[109] Margolin, "Narrator," para 1.

that readers engage and respond to the characters and events as if they were experiencing them.[110]

Criteria for Calling Something a Story: Tellability

This study will examine the vantage point of supporting characters within the broader narrative, establishing their viable perspective within the text by demonstrating the tellability of their stories. Literary scholars maintain that in order for a story to be worth telling, certain features of narrative must be present. Herman argues that despite the occasion, location, or time of a given story, storytellers necessarily utilize at least three characteristics to tell a story:[111] (1) a "*structured timecourse*," which means that events develop over the course of a causally related sequence of events;[112] (2) a *disruption* in the mental world evoked of the character (something goes wrong, challenging their expectations or mental framework for how things are or should be), developed by the narrator; (3) and a *subjective awareness* of what it is like to experience the disruption in the mind of the audience.[113] Herman's three features are clearly identifiable across

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[110] Ricoeur notes this continuing struggle to determine meaning in story, describing the horizon of meaning as a point located at the nexus of reader and text (see, e.g., "Life," 126). This study will emphasize the importance of the reader not merely in shaping meaning, but how the reader themselves being shaped by the meaning of text

[111] Herman (*Basic Narrative Elements*, 37) also includes a fourth element of tellability, which is "situatedness" which deals with the context through which stories are told. He states, "[n]arrative is a mode of representation that is situated in—must be interpreted in light of—a specific discourse context or occasion for telling." The narrative occasion for the biblical texts, by Herman's definition, does not change therefore it is not a helpful criteria in determining the tellability of certain stories within biblical narratives.

[112] While some stories are not told in a chronological sequence, often because the storyteller is trying to produce some effect, there is still a sequence through which the story develops. Without a sequential telling, the story loses tellability, much like child who details their adventure with the proverbial "*and then* . . .," but does not seem to be developing any particular idea or moving in any specific direction.

[113] Herman (*Basic Elements of Narrative*, 9–22) outlines several examples of what this might look like but emphasizes the way stories capture feelings of a broken or disrupted mental framework in order for readers to connect with and share that emotional experience. Although Herman's criteria are not universally accepted (e.g., Norrick, *Conversational Narrative*; Goldstein and Shuman, "Introduction," 1–13), many cognitive narrative scholars either utilize his framework or nuance it. For example, Fludernik ("Natural Narratology," 245) emphasizes the experiential component of tellability, arguing that it is the level of emotional connectivity that makes a story tellable. Sternberg ("How Narrativity Makes a Difference," 117) emphasizes the experience of disruption, stating that

a wide span of literary genres, including biblical narrative, and offer a helpful connective point for addressing the perspectives of the supporting characters in this study. Each chapter will demonstrate a unique *disruption* (or a disturbance in their expectations) from the perspective of the character and the audience's *subjective awareness* of this type of experience. The presence of these factors will demonstrate that each supporting character has a story to tell.

Stories provide an opportunity to learn through experience, even if that experience is not (technically) your own.[114] Supporting characters in the biblical text are often experiencing their own disruptions, which resonate in different ways with the reader. In experiencing the unique disruptions of the supporting characters, the reader is able to learn from the positive and negative responses of each character, thereby demonstrating the value of those perspectives in offering formative experiences.[115] In shifting between perspectives within the story, readers have an opportunity to understand how a disruption affects characters in many different ways: some may experience the disruption as a victim of a heinous act, finding solidarity and hope in their response—or consolation in their despair; or they may read the perceived disruption of the aggressor, finding a critique of their own self-interested expectations and fears, which have led to cruelty. Yet narratives do not simply present victims and oppressors, but a wide array of actors, whose parts interact in small or significant ways and depict countless other perspectives on the

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suspense, curiosity, and surprise are the cornerstones for tellable stories. For the purposes of this study, Herman's argument that "subjective awareness" is required in order for a story to retain tellability helps us to understand the inherent complexity in ancient stories, even when they are not as detail-rich as their modern counterparts.

[114] The positive impact of stories on the human psyche has been extensively studied. For a few helpful examples, see Herman, "How Stories Make us Smarter," 133–53; Oatley and Djiikic, "Psychology of Narrative Art," 1–8; Pino and Mazza, "The Use of 'Literary Fiction' to Promote Mentalizing Ability," 1–14; Burke, et al., "Empathy at the Confluence," 6–41.

[115] Oatley, "In the Minds of Others," 62. Further, Oatley and Djikic ("Psychology and Narrative Art," 1–2) point out that it is not simply understanding their disruptions, but also how difficult situations arise through a combination of several complex factors—in understanding those factors we better understand the motivations, reactions, and emotions that lead to various decisions, as well as seeing the outcome of where the character's decisions take them.

same events. If, indeed, the stories of the supporting cast prove themselves to be tellable accounts, readers gain multiple points of accessibility and experience through each individual perspective in the narrative.

Immersive Stories: Using Textual Cues to Create Living Worlds through Narrative Space and Storyworld

Good literature does not create a scaffolding of meaning to be puzzled out, but a world for stories to become real in the mind of the reader. Readers utilize basic literary cues from the text to shape a larger reality to frame the setting (both spatially and temporally) and within which the plot may unfold and the characters interact. The storyworld is the world created in the mind of the reader, allowing them to experience the story. Attempts to determine the parameters of the storyworld based only on the literary scaffolding are inherently reductionistic because readers perceive the storyworld to be as large and expansive as the world they inhabit. As a reader's knowledge and experience with the story expands, so too does the narrative space. For this study, it is important to understand how to develop a storyworld that is responding directly to textual cues in the narrative, yet also multi-dimensional and complex, in order to appreciate the activity of supporting characters within the narrative.

The narrative space is a dynamic world that exists within the mind of the reader, essentially creating the "stage" within the mind for the story to unfold.[116] Contrary to structuralist theory,[117] storyworld is not limited to the minimal space detailed by the text because

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[116] Ryan, "Space," para. 3.

[117] Varying forms of structuralist theories argue that the only elements that exist in the storyworld are those mentioned on the page and discernable through method. Notably, Alter (*Art of Biblical Narrative*, 17) critiques Auerbach, saying that his work "reflected a profound art" but "his insight is the result of penetrating critical intuition unsupported by any real method for dealing with the specific characteristics of biblical literature." Anything in

readers naturally fill in gaps as the literary cues and reader knowledge/experience interact. Ryan identifies five aspects of narrative space readers intuitively (and intentionally) take to construct the narrative space, four are useful for this project: *spatial frames*, *setting*, *storyworld*, and *narrative universe*.[118] These spaces are often addressed in literary-critical manuals, which study the larger geographic locations, smaller immediate surroundings, period-specific information, unfolding of events (or plot), and intertextual references within a narrative.[119] Other critical models utilize these elements to determine a specific meaning or interpretation for a story, yet a biblical cognitive narrative method utilizes these observations to shape the storyworld, much like entering the data parameters into a computer simulation.[120] Rather than readers in themselves creating meaning, the meaning occurs as the reader engages the storyworld; the more accurate the narrative-space data, the more helpful the simulation. The Bible is, after all, a period piece—to read its story outside of its physical location and socio-historical reality will necessarily misconstrue its meaning.

The *spatial frames, setting,* and *narrative universe* are the primary elements of narrative setting, yet these elements emphasize the way in which these aspects of narrative create the three-dimensional storyworld.[121] The *spatial frame* refers to the locations discussed in the events

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addition to these descriptions will distract from the reading. However, most biblical narrative structuralists are softer in their application of this point.

[118] Ryan, "Space," para. 6–10.

[119] These items are often addressed in the "setting" chapter of a narrative manual. For example, Bar-Efrat has an entire chapter labeled "Time and Space" in his narrative manual (*Narrative Art,* 141–96), and Fokkelman includes a chapter on the topic, "Time and space, entrances and exits: the power of a correct structuration" (*Reading Biblical Narrative,* 112–22). Other narrative specialists also include this information, but for many, like Robert Alter, it is dispersed throughout the chapters.

[120] The "computer simulation" metaphor is the primary example in the work of cognitive narrative psychologist, Keith Oatley ("On Truth and Fiction," 261–78). More information regarding his perspective will be developed later in this chapter.

[121] These correspond to the category of spatial and temporal location utilized by Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 56–57; and Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 87–88.

that take place and their immediate surroundings, as well as the implicit movement between spaces.[122] It therefore involves textual referents (cues) that refer to something existing outside the text. For the Jephthah account, this would include large spaces in which the stories take place (i.e., Gilead, Tov, Ephraim, Mizpah, or the Jordan) and small spaces (i.e., Jephthah's father's house or his own house).[123] Especially in a historically situated story, these textual cues represent real places, through which the storyteller anticipates readers should be capable of recognizing and reconstructing in their mind's eye. For a modern audience, these locations, and the meaning ascribed to them, may be less intuitive and therefore require a more detailed analysis in order to re-create a more representative storyworld.

Ryan distinguishes the *setting* from the *spatial frame* as an exploration of the "socio-historico-geographical environment in which the action" of the narrative occurs.[124] For example, "Gilead" is not merely a location, but a specific geographic and socio-political entity present during the time of the judges. Most of the social and political realities of early Israel are not explained in the book, but are elements of the setting that the reader is expected to understand as they imagine themselves in the role of the various characters (for example, tribal identities, alliances, and boundaries).[125] Each of these narrative spaces is created with brief literary cues,

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[122] Ryan, "Space," para. 6.

[123] For example, see Alter's chapter on "Biblical Type-Scenes and the Uses of Convention" (*Art of Biblical Narrative*, 55–78), which discusses how details about location and time are often charged with meaning.

[124] Ryan, "Space," para. 7.

[125] To elaborate, the setting includes the socio-historical setting because each story is essentially a "period piece," which claims to be situated within a specific context. Re-creating the "period" of this story is difficult to navigate as scholars will necessarily disagree on the degree to which a story is historically located in Iron I Israel in contrast to the social ideology of later redactors who influenced the final form of the book. This project seeks to reconstruct Iron I Israel as it is reflected in the story of the judges, prioritizing Deuteronomic ideals as they pervade the book, yet using later literature and ideology sparingly. Therefore, this study will prioritize socio-historical and archeological research that is consistent with the presentation of the story in the book of Judges and/or the Deuteronomic ideological framework. Yet, given the assumed redaction of the piece, it is by nature an inexact science that requires constant renegotiation. By way of illustration: To read a Shakespearean play, a modern reader would need to research period details (locations, praxis, speech patterns, etc.) in order to best understand and

but the storyteller assumes that the narratee[126] is able to understand and re-create the broader context of those cues. Readers, especially those stepping into the role of narratee, assume that the world of the text is broader than what is introduced by the text, like the world in reality, and they naturally fill in the spaces with what they know to be true in any given situation or place.[127]

The *narrative universe* is the world presented through the action and speech of the characters, and it takes into account the interaction between the voice of the narrator (or absence of the narrative voice) and the voice and actions of characters in the story.[128] This world can be harmonious among the characters and the narrator, or contradiction and ambiguity can create tension. Sometimes, the characters create a hypothetical world that contrasts with the description of the world presented by the narrator. For example, Jephthah claims that he called on the Ephraimites for aid in battle, yet in the lead up to his battle he travels to at least three locations (rallying troops?) and the narrator does not include Ephraim in those travels.[129] Many questions in biblical interpretation lie in the narrative universe, which contrasts the perspective of God, the narrator, and/or a protagonist.

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immerse themselves in the story. By contrast, a modern play written about Henry VIII would likely utilize socio-historical research to create an immersive experience, yet the details would not quite reflect the same degree of historical dependency. When reading the Judges accounts, the stories are a blend of a period piece with adaptations to its modern audience (which remains debated and indeterminate). Therefore, the task of recreating the setting of each story should prioritize the social-historical setting that is directly discussed in the text with approximations of what these text cues may be referring to based on the socio-historical research.

[126] As per the narrative levels, the narratee is the participant within the storyworld who becomes the lens of the reader. "Narratee" is the preferred term in this context because of its broad use to refer to the perspective of any character within the narrative that is being focalized for a particular study. For further reference, see figure 1 on p. 26.

[127] This is not unlike what historical critics have done, yet for a different methodological purpose. Here, those cues to social and historical realities become the scaffolding of the storyworld in the mental image of the reader.

[128] Ryan, "Space," para. 10.

[129] Judg 11:29, 32; 12:2–3.

Finally, the term *storyworld* refers to the way the elements (above) go beyond the explicit details of the text to create the world of the story in the mind of the reader using all of the textual cues and context above.[130] The *story space* (above) clarifies the scenes, selected details, and textual nuances in the story, and proposes means through which some of those gaps might be filled, yet the storyworld is that fuller picture of all of those elements combining to create a three-dimensional world for the characters to inhabit. The *storyworld* refers to a phenomenon in which the reader utilizes the textual cues to signal broader aspects of the full and vibrant world. As readers hear references to specific locations or events, they draw from their knowledge (history or experience) to imagine and give meaning to the story.[131]

Herman argues that the narrator offers cues, or tropes, that connect to scenes or experience for filling in gaps. While the *storyworld* may easily fill in the gaps of the *spatial frame* through interaction with experience in the geographic setting, this also means that readers may expand the *storyworld* through increased knowledge (e.g., cultural and historical studies, intertextual readings) and experience (e.g., varied relationships like marriage, parenting, siblings, etc.).[132] Similarly, the culture and setting of the storyworld will also shape the storyworld.

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[130] Ryan, "Space," para. 9. This notion is also a major feature in Herman (*Storytelling*, 101–224) who dedicates an entire section of his book to the development of the storyworld through narrative cues.

[131] This can also be seen in a recent article by Claire Fuller ("In the Gap"), which demonstrates the unique ability of the reader's imagination. In Fuller's novel *Our Endless Numbered Days*, she describes a house using minimal detail. After reading the book, she asked a group to draw a picture of how they imagined the house. While they all drew from the same textual cues, the readers filled in the gaps in ways that did not necessarily contradict but were not specifically outlined in the book either. She concludes that "each reader brings her own imagination, history, and knowledge to the cabin she draws, just as each reader brings a different version of the novel to life as she reads it" ("In the Gap," para. 1.).

[132] The concept of experience detached from knowledge can lead to erroneous thinking, imposing the social mores of the reader (regardless of place and time) on the text, yet social-historical knowledge tempers the experience of the reader to more accurately reflect upon both the similarities and distinctions of the experiences themselves. If the reader is capable of connecting to the story through a shared sense of experience, then even if they are modifying their own experience to account for what is present in the cultural world of the story, the connection enables an affective reading.

Readers fill in gaps intuitively, yet those who are aware of their own subjectivity may be able to apply that perspective in ways that will illumine the text, rather than distract from it.[133] This is not a "hermeneutic of creative imagination"[134] that allows for a re-writing of the text to suit the ideological leanings of the reader, rather it is the intuitive act of careful readers as they fill in the textual gaps based on cultural knowledge and experience. For example, Delores Williams' reading of Hagar, using the historical and social perspective of antebellum slave women, offers insight into the strength of character involved in Hagar's return to Sarah after she first met God in the wilderness.[135] Conversely, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's creative retelling of Mary's interaction with Jesus, where he not only teaches Mary who sits by his feet, but accepts admonishment from her, admits he was wrong, and defers to her judgment, directly contradicts the narrative cues that shape the storyworld.[136] Filling in the textual gaps is constrained by the text, yet illuminated when human experience resonates with the story. Readers fill in the gaps to the best of their ability, present those findings, and change or adjust their conclusions based on new information.

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[133] Responsible interpretation is too often confused with consensus. Again, combining knowledge of the social and cultural norms of the text with experience offers depth of engagement, yet for every reader certain experiences lie outside their lived reality. Therefore, it becomes imperative for readers to engage the experience of others. Many post-modern disciplines, particularly those from majority-world or feminist perspectives, have noted that the perception of objectivity was only possible when the dominant interpretive voices came from similar socio-economic and cultural perspectives (see Smith, Lalitha, and Hawk, eds, *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations*). The multiplicity of voices in interpretive perspective is a reminder that our reading of the text does not have to form a consensus for the stories to unite these separate groups in their task. Perhaps the multi-cultural background will offer us more insight, rather than merely divergent opinions, if each group remains faithful to the textual frame and willing to listen to its connection with others.

[134] This hermeneutic was famously used by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (*But She Said*, 53–55, 73–76) to creatively re-write the biblical account of Mary and Martha to include Jesus deferring to the wisdom and judgment of the women in the room.

[135] See Williams' chapter, "Hagar's Story," in *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 15–31.

[136] See Fiorenza's chapter, "Mary of Magdala," in *But She Said*, 79–101.

While the biblical narratives are admittedly detail-thin compared to modern storytelling, this does not limit their ability to produce profoundly detailed and immersive storyworlds. Using the *spatial frame*, *setting*, *story-space,* and *narrative universe*, the narratee is able to move beyond the two-dimensional world of the text alone and enter into a *storyworld* that is conceived of "as a cohesive, unified, ontologically full and materially existing entity."[137] The biblical stories are carefully crafted to elicit a reader's imagination in response to its literary cues and create a vibrant and complex storyworld. These interpretations should not merely be fashioned to suit the whims of the reader, but should engage in a detailed reading of the text, in which readers seek to fill in the gaps to create a storyworld using the *principle of minimal departure*. The principle of minimal departure asserts that when we interpret stories about an alternate world, we recreate that world using the closest possible reality to the one described and the one we know.[138] For Herman, mapping the *storyworld* is a prerequisite for thoughtful interaction with the story.[139]

Reading Characters as Persons

It is within the context of the three-dimensional storyworld that characters come to life. Readers often engage the story through the lens of its character (primary and supporting), gauging the actions and reactions of the characters in the simulated reality of the storyworld. The term

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[137] Ryan, "Space," para. 9.

[138] In her monograph, *Possible Worlds*, Ryan includes a chapter ("Reconstructing the Textual Universe," 49–60) in which she explains that the point of reconstructing worlds "is not to create alternate possible worlds for their own sake," but to demonstrate the multiple words that already exist within the textual footprint itself. While she uses this principle in a variety of ways best suited to reading modern literature, the same basic principle may be applied to creating storyworlds in biblical interpretation. Furthermore, she goes beyond textualization (specific textual references) to add that any detail that departs from the *physical, social, or cultural norms* of the story would also violate the "ordinary" storyworld assumed by the text. This principle not only allows but requires storytellers of the ancient stories to utilize the implications of many social, historical, and physical elements presumed by early readers. Therefore, modern readers must work to understand the implications of the early context.

[139] Herman, "Cognitive Narratology," 32–36.

"character" implies neither real nor fictitious representation, but instead refers more generally to the actors who participate in the storyworld, often offering the clearest connection point between reader and text. Readers see themselves either *as* the characters or as interacting *with* the characters—they get to know them—offering a means to achieve what Ricoeur refers to as "self-understanding by means of understanding others."[140] Yet, as Saxegaard laments, one-dimensional characters (the hero, the villain, the sinner, the saint) lack significance to readers precisely because they are flat; "such descriptions make characters more ideal and less human, and thus difficult to identify with."[141] Therefore, much like the textual cues that allow readers to re-create a three-dimensional storyworld, readers must also encounter characters through the textual cues that create complex people rather than flat representations of persons.[142] Therefore, character analysis is not concerned primarily with description that decodes an external personhood, but with the literary cues that lead readers to personally identify with characters, character types, or character situations.

Perhaps seeing oneself in characters is the reason that, for most readers, characters have become the litmus test through which they judge the believability of a story. Alter asserts that "very few people will take the trouble to read a novel or story unless they can somehow 'identify' with the characters."[143] Yet most structuralist approaches are inadequate to handle the complexity of the persons presented in the text, minimizing their personhood to the textual

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[140] See Ricoeur's work on the hermeneutic of phenomenology where he discusses the dialectical engagement between self and text, specifically focusing on the link between an understanding of one's self as it engages symbol ("Existence and Hermeneutics," 3–24).

[141] Saxegaard, *Character Complexity*, 3.

[142] Oatley ("On Truth and Fiction," 261) argues that story is "about thinking and feeling beyond the immediate, into worlds of the possible." He notes that stories may have been the first kind of simulations run in the mind in order to shape consciousness and culture.

[143] Alter (*Pleasures of Reading*, 49) reflects on his own experience in reading, noting that characters are engaging and powerful, continuing to impact readers long after the initial 'meaning' has been deciphered.

description, actions, or speech. In contrast, a cognitive narrative method assumes that characters, like setting, move beyond the simple textual directives, combining to make the actors in the text become embodied persons with whom readers resonate. In short, when characters are written and read well, they *feel* real.

Textual Cues: Basics of Hebrew Characterization

Characterization in Hebrew narrative begins with textual cues, both direct and indirect. Direct shaping takes place through the descriptive cues and evaluations given by the narrator or other characters in the story.[144] Occasionally, these descriptions offer details of their physical appearance that serve as important elements of plot development.[145] Yet the physical appearance of a character is not important unless it is necessary to understand the situation or actions of the individual and those around them. At other times the narrator offers a direct evaluation of the person's character: for example, Josiah was righteous (2 Kgs 22:1–2; 23:25) and Ahab was evil (1 Kgs 16:29–30). The narrator also offers several important cues that require discernment to determine their significance: tribal affiliation (e.g., Gilead, Ephraim), birth order, age, etc. These details are not deduced by the reader; they are explicitly stated by the narrator and therefore carry special weight as important starting points for character development. Yet the storyteller rarely

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[144] The characterization in the mouth of the narrator has a much different implication than when it is in the mouth of a character. Characters may be uninformed, deceptive, or misled, and therefore their evaluations may become elements of the narrative universe (above) that are placed in tension with other perspectives. The evaluation of the narrator, on the other hand, is typically accepted as authoritative and trustworthy (e.g., Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 116–21; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 13–46; Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 57–59).

[145] For example, Sarah's beauty is described so that the reader may understand why foreign kings would want to marry her (Gen 12:11–12); Esau's hairiness so that the beguiling of Isaac would, well, be funnier and the ruse of Jacob clearly premeditated (Gen 25:25; 27:11, 16, 21–23).

speaks as directly as one would like, and, instead, the reader bears the burden of piecing together the indirect cues.

Rather than a description of appearance, character appraisal, or a dictated inner-monologue, characterization in the Hebrew Bible is most often shaped indirectly through speech and action.[146] Readers hear the words of the actors in combination (or tension) with their actions and attempt to discern the motives and morality of the characters involved. Not all speech or actions are as direct as they may initially seem, and a change in inflection may change the perception of the speech.[147] Readers essentially imagine themselves as actors in the story, asking themselves questions like: How might one respond to such a situation? What might motivate such an action or speech? How might one respond to such actions/speech in others given a specific scenario? Imagining changes in inflection, using the same textual footprint, often leads to polyvalent characterization.

Even attentive biblical scholars come to different conclusions, as can be seen in the characterization of David in Samuel. Some consider David's eloquent speeches as evidence of his incredible faith and leadership skill, whereas others highlight the tension between speech and action as evidence of a power-hungry and manipulative king.[148] The narrator recounts what

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[146] These insights are most often connected to the methodology of Alter (*Art of Biblical Narrative*, 143–62), but each characterization manual includes some reference to these categories. Schneider (*Mothers of Promise*, 11) proposes a method of "verbing the character," that is, listing all the verbs of which the character is subject and object as a means of determining. This model has been helpful in quantifying my own conclusions regarding character "action."

[147] In a sitcom, one character quipped to another that she had read the text with the wrong inflection. Where the primary character read a positive appraisal, she missed the sarcastic inflection (read it like Chandler Bing from *Friends*), which changed the entire meaning of the text. Words and actions often do the same thing in biblical narrative. Readers continually replay the stories in their mind, looking to understand the inflection of the characters that makes the most complete sense of the words and actions within the storyworld and situation. Even direct descriptions do not always disambiguate a character's speech and actions because no person is wholly good or bad: a righteous character can be sarcastic and a character who demonstrates moral failing may offer a sincere apology.

[148] For example, note the various scholarly responses to the character of Jephthah. Some interpreters take Jephthah's use of the name of Yhwh as sincere and believe him to be a genuine Yhwhist, who made a magnificent

persons in the narrative say and do, while often withholding an evaluation of their character and significance. So the reader is left to wrestle with the implications of their speech and actions within the story. Biblical scholar Yairah Amit, states that, "by using an indirect approach, the narrator achieves a level of ambiguity" that creates greater depth of consciousness in their characters.[149] For Alter, it is the inscrutability of character that makes their presence in the story so compelling.[150] It is important to note the speech and action cues that help to shape the personhood of characters as readers connect the disparate pieces to make sense of the storied person as a cohesive and unified whole.

Shaping Personhood: Trait Codes and Intersecting Identities

Yet determining character traits from text does not necessarily create embodied persons in the mind of readers, which limits their ability to share in the experience of disruption and resolution within the narrative. According to Herman, to understand characterization, readers engage in at least two different activities. First, they decode the textual map of character traits, which creates a constellation of categories and personal characteristics. This is accomplished through a combination of gathering textual cues (concerning role, conduct, tendencies, dispositions, etc.) and then using socio-historical and cultural research to understand the significance of these trait codes.[151] After assessing the textual map, characters become persons and readers strive to place

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mistake in the vow that killed his daughter (e.g., Klein, *Triumph of Irony*, 83–99), while others argue that his use of Yhwhist language was always self-interested and used for the aim of power broking (e.g., Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 175–237).

[149] Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 82.

[150] Alter, *Pleasures of Reading.*

[151] While *all* readers of biblical texts cannot possibly do extensive research on each character in each story they read, this could be an appropriate next step in biblical narrative research. If scholarship is able to focus on these constellations of character qualities and create vivid pictures of the ancient stories, the communities in which we share the stories might also benefit from the accumulation of this wisdom.

those traits within their own experience.[152] Herman summarizes that characters are "textually grounded models of individuals-in-a-world . . . [or] model persons."[153] These model persons become points of engagement for readers as their understanding of the overlapping trait codes associated with certain individuals helps shape the response of the reader, demonstrating the uniqueness of the individual within a broader thought-world.

This is accomplished by understanding the way these trait codes work together to shape embodied persons. According to Herman, persons are initially introduced with their *social role* (doctor, sister, father, etc.), which offers the broadest connection to experience. It is particularly important in biblical stories not only to identify the social role of the characters, but also to explore the social and historical expectations built in to that model.[154] Textual honesty does not assume that *all* definitions of role are equally helpful, but the more information the reader has to construct that category of person, the more realistic and accurate is the person in the storyworld. While many of these social relationships have analogues in the experience of modern readers, the trait codes for these roles often assume a different ideological archetype that must be recovered using literary and social-historical research. To understand a nuanced reading of the "seer," one must first understand the archetypical understanding of the seer at the period depicted within the text before addressing the nuances of this particular instance.[155]

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[152] Herman, *Storytelling*, 193–215.

[153] Herman, *Storytelling*, 193.

[154] As noted previously, it is important that the "simulation of reality" corresponds to the textual cues to enhance the reader's experience of the storyworld, which will have a more lasting effect on shaping person.

[155] Again, significant care must be taken to try to balance the social and archeological information about the period with the reality of later editing hands reshaping the texts. This project will utilize the socio-historical research inasmuch as it can be demonstrated as normative in the book of Judges and also, to a lesser extent, the expectation in the early Deuteronomic history (Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and sometimes 1–2 Samuel).

From there, these models of character modify the social role through *modes of conduct*: with an emphasis on "mode," as this is an *evaluation* or *assessment* of the character. Although the narrator only rarely offers direct commentary on the evaluation of the characters, this does not imply that their mode of conduct is unknowable. Often, the assessment of a character is demonstrated through the varying degrees to which their behavior aligns with or contradicts biblical norms or social expectations.[156] Furthermore, the storyteller in the book of Judges often utilizes intertextual echoes to nuance the character and the reader's perception of their response—comparing or contrasting their behavior to positive or negative moments in the stories of others.[157]

Finally, *dispositional tendencies* describe the personality of the character—how they tend to behave, whether they are easily angered or joyful, etc.[158] The disposition is often the easiest to render from the text, primarily through recognizing how their personality is shaped by their speech and actions. This process is quite intuitive and plays a significant role in character development to this day as readers are given the "script" of their mental movie and must determine their character's motivation and personality in order to deliver convincing lines. The speech and actions do not typically give a clear motivation, but their behavioral footprint is delivered by the narrator, often through subtle modifications to the expectations implied by their social role. An example of a modern expression of this characterization model might look like

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[156] In biblical narratives, adherence to law supersedes adherence to social expectations (as can be seen in the instruction to honor God above all else, Deut 6:4–5), yet many of the disruptions (conflict) seem to present themselves when the character perceives that some element of social expectation has been violated.

[157] This can include intertextual echoes to other stories in the Bible (e.g., the sacrifice of Isaac and the daughter of Jephthah) or echoes within the book of Judges itself (e.g., the many intertextual connections between Abimelech and Jephthah, which will be developed later). It is not enough to merely note the connections, but is necessary to understand the relationship between them. The connection should lead to a comparison/contrast of the characters situations to determine the significance of their connection.

[158] Herman, *Storytelling*, 194.

this: a 1950s gangster (*social role*), who is trying to be good or has a heart of gold (*mode of conduct*) but still exhibits a hot temper (*disposition*). This constellation of characteristics creates an intuitive sense of personhood with which the reader can engage.

Additionally, Herman's models of character may be helpfully augmented by the work of social theorist Kimberle Crenshaw and the concept of intersectionality.[159] Herman suggests that the *social role* of a character is modified by their *conduct* and *disposition*, but Crenshaw points out that human beings are shaped by and respond to the norms and expectations of multiple social roles simultaneously.[160] Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" to describe the multidimensional elements of identity, particularly for those who have experienced marginalization in more than one way.[161] Crenshaw's work has been particularly influential in contextual approaches to biblical studies,[162] but it also offers a helpful framework for understanding the multiple ways in which characters are presented and how these multi-faceted presentations shape complex character portraits and the shift into personhood.

As Alter suggests, to be human is to be complex and "inscrutable,"[163] yet that inscrutability can often be traced to the many unique intersecting realities, experiences, and social locations of each individual. These many categories of personhood and role create co-existing realities that are held together in tension within any one person. In order to identify the

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[159] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection," 139–67.

[160] Crenshaw ("Demarginalizing the Intersection," 152–67) illustrates this principle by demonstrating the innate discrimination against black women whose intersectional experiences have not been accounted for and therefore have been denied justice in several different discrimination court cases. The flat treatment of identity led to the failure within the system to account for unique experience.

[161] While Crenshaw was not the first person to discuss the notion of intersectional identities, her article ("Demarginalizing the Intersection," 139–67) coined this important term and sparked a flurry of research on the many ways that "intersectionality" shapes experience and personhood.

[162] E.g., Gallagher Elkins, "Feminist Studies," 19–34; Yee, "Thinking Intersectionally," 7–26; McCall, "Double Consciousness," 328–43; Yang, "Feminist Critical Theory," 139–67.

[163] Alter, *Pleasures of Reading*.

personhood of the supporting characters and their movement in the storyworld, it is important to understand the categories and models used in the textual description and then move from categories to person by means of the unique constellation of qualities. The more textured and nuanced the person becomes, the more relatable their character and their experience of disruption that readers identify with.

Simulations of Reality

Narrative psychologist Keith Oatley argues that readers are not simply decoding characters but running simulations of reality through the lens of these characters.[164] Oatley explains that story is "a kind of simulation: one that runs not on computers but on minds."[165] They allow readers to put together individual scenarios that we understand (like sibling rivalry) to form more complex scenarios (like the birth and blessings of Jacob and Esau) in order to explore the complexity of moral and ethical issues (like why God might select one brother, who seems morally questionable). Readers can engage their own experiences and relate to the characters within the storyworld, exploring the complexities of human life within a God-centered universe.[166]

The texts produce mental models, which require that I, as the author of this project, address my own questions and wrestling in text, story, and experience. This act of inhabiting storyworlds is not an objective measurement of textual cues, but comes as a result of my own personal response to such stimuli—*my own* subjective awareness of the characters' experience of disruption and conflict. After creating a vivid storyworld using the cues in the text, readers

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[164] Oatley, "On Truth and Fiction," 261.
[165] Oatley, "On Truth and Fiction," 262.
[166] While this model of immersive reading seems modern, Allan et al. ("From *Enargeia* to Immersion," 34–51) demonstrate that the notion of a reader being absorbed into the world of the story can be traced back as early as ancient Greek literary critics.

(which I intend to model) engage with a responsive storyworld, thoughtfully interacting with the character cues and placing self within the narrative. This methodological "step" is the moment when the data for the simulation is inputted, the program begins to run, and the reader genuinely responds to the situation described in the text (trying not to crash the program).

Traditionally, primary actors are given significant attention because there is more literary space allotted to them with which we may explore their perspective, yet a well-developed storyworld typically includes far more detailed renderings of those who stand on the periphery of the narrative than is traditionally recognized. A standard literary reading, focusing on "authorial intent," may ignore peripheral characters because they are given less attention by the "author." But a cognitive reading invites deeper engagement with all aspects of the story. As literary scholars engage in the interplay between the perspectives of the primary and supporting characters, these supporting points of view should be in constant dialogue with those of the primary actors and readers, revising each other in pursuit of a fuller understanding of the text and its claims.

There is a limitation in traditional literary models that attempt to ascertain *the* meaning of the text. I contend that the stories of the Bible are *not* primarily interested in conveying a single, quantifiable theology or an isolated moral, but in becoming a place for readers to wrestle with the nature of God and with the complicated endeavor of being human in God's world. Readers do not merely discern systems, but experience simulations of reality that help them make sense of their own. These stories are not only concerned with preserving Israel's memory of the past but also with allowing generation upon generation (Deut 6:7) to be shaped by the same formative experiences—to relive the faith it took for Abraham to make his blind leap (Gen 12:1–5); the gut-wrenching trust it took for Hagar to return to her abuser in order to preserve her life (Gen

16); and the grief of being unloved like Leah, who was rejected by her husband, though cared for by the divine (Gen 29–49). While in that storyworld, readers wrestle with the emotions, the paradoxes, and the actions of others as if they were personally experiencing them. Approaching narrative as simulations of reality means wisdom may be gained through the experience of others.

Re-reading

The effects of the storyworld are compounded given the nature of biblical stories—they were not experienced once, but listened to over and over, often performed by a storyteller or storytellers during festivals.[167] Re-readers know that a good story is far more complex than an initial (or main point) reading may suggest. Like a favorite movie played year after year, it is not the basic meaning of the story that continues to draw the audience in, but the muted moments and figures that resonate deeply and reshape the basic meaning of the story. As this project will demonstrate, the figures who once were viewed only as a prop for understanding the central figures may speak profoundly to the experience and attention of readers who are willing to embrace the subjective experience that makes stories tellable. Within the created construct of the narrative world, the perspective of the reader naturally shifts and creates new readings, versions, and insights that are permitted within the parameters of the storyworld. I may never have the power and authority to bring reform, like Josiah (2 Kgs 22:1—23:30)—but I may be able to offer my outsider perspective, like Huldah (22:3–20).

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[167] There is evidence within the biblical text itself that the document was read communally (see n11). Furthermore, Matthews and Benjamin (*Social World of Ancient Israel*, 237–52) argue that storytelling and storytellers themselves were celebrated and even given roles by monarchs.

As readers wrestle with the stories of scripture, they do so within a world that allows them insight into the God who shapes both the storyworld and their own.[168] Re-reading the story from the perspective of the marginal character mirrors the complexity and intricacy of life itself and allows readers to run "simulations of reality" through more than the primary characters, thereby maximizing the narrative's influence on readers. This reading is accomplished by engaging the textual cues that shape personhood—social roles (remembering how intersecting realities create unique conditions), mode of conduct (discerning the assessment of the character, based on biblical and social norms), and disposition (determining the personality of that character through speech, action, or direct narration). Using the Jephthah account, I hope to demonstrate the complexity and depth of the many unnamed characters who engage this morally ambiguous judge and through that task to enable self and others to learn from their stories. Through these close re-readings from different character perspectives and arguments for the tellability of their stories, I will demonstrate that complex supporting characters are not anomalies at all, but part of a pattern of outside, or *other*, voices that speak and are remembered throughout the biblical narrative.

Layout of the Following Chapters

This dissertation will address the perspective of four supporting characters within Judg 10:6—12:7: Jephthah's brothers/elders of Gilead, Ammonites/Ammonite king, the daughter of

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[168] Significantly, most of the biblical text is written as a narrative. If cognitive theorists are correct, and immersion in a story world makes discernable changes to a reader's personality (inculcating empathy, compassion, etc.), then the lack of a vibrant storyworld will significantly lessen the impact of the text on the reader (Oatley and Djikic, "Psychology of Narrative Art," 161–68).

Jephthah, and the Ephraimites. Notably, Jephthah will not be directly addressed but will be presented in each scene as he interacts with the supporting character who is held up for study.

Chapter two, "The Premise of Judges 10:6—12:7: Situations of Dissonance and the Intention of Silence from God," will introduce the timecourse of the story of Jephthah and lay out the primary issues that pervade the story. The *timecourse* (or series of events) and *disruption* (or conflict) are essential elements to any story and are important in establishing the baseline issues of the account. These will be presented as two main sections within the chapter.[169] First, an analysis of the timecourse will address the major events of the narrative, noting the movement between space, time, and action, and will explore the patterns of familial *disruption* that echo through the many narrative storylines. The second portion of this chapter will address the role of Yhwh and the disruption between Israel and their God as an initiating event that echoes into every level of the Jephthah narrative with cascading effects. Through a modified character analysis of Yhwh, I will demonstrate that the bond of familial connectivity is first broken between Israel and Yhwh and that that brokenness then reverberates through the familial relationships in the later accounts. Furthermore, the frustration of Yhwh leads to his chosen absence within the narrative itself, essentially removing the normative voice from most of the account, requiring the reader to wrestle with the many cases of moral ambiguity presented in the text. Therefore, the initiating disruption of divine frustration and a seeming refusal to engage in Israel's deliverance shift the focus of the story to the human actors.

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[169] This is essentially the plot, but the plot in this sense will address more than simply the trajectory of the narrative, but also ways in which the narrator shapes the initial storyline of the account. The initial storyline is the guiding storyline that pervades the narrative. The shift in perspective gained from analyzing a supporting character can shape the primary narrative, but should not fundamentally change it. Therefore, though the characterization of Huldah may nuance Josiah, if it directly contradicts the narrator's announcement that he was a righteous king, then there must be some other textual support to back those claims. In this sense, this project will utilize the principle of minimal departure.

The remaining chapters will focus on a single supporting character as the object of study, using the characterization method discussed above—spending significant time developing each character's storyworld through their implied *social role,* teasing out the *mode of conduct*, and exploring their perspective in the narrative through their *disposition*—in order to demonstrate the personhood and perspective of these supporting characters in each section of the narrative. Each chapter will also assess the *tellability* of the story from the vantage point of the supporting character: Did the narrator evoke a *disruption* to their mental world, and did that experience of disruption resonate with the reader's own *subjective awareness*? Once it has been demonstrated that the character meets this criteria, the chapter will conclude with a summary of the significance of the character's perspective and an honest reflection on my own subjective awareness and experiential learning as I interact with their perspective. The conclusion will specifically focus on how the supporting character demonstrates a unique lesson/shaping consistent with the narrative as well as how their account shapes and interacts with Jephthah as the protagonist.

Chapter three, "The Rivals of Jephthah: Opportunism and Callousness Runs in the Family," studies the dual roles of the Jephthah's brothers and the elders of Gilead. This chapter will address the two distinct constellations of trait codes of the acting parties, as well as the connections between them. After presenting two distinct persons, the chapter will also address two distinct disruptions from their perspectives—why might the brothers and elders perceive that their reality has been disrupted, how does that resonate, and what does the narrative say about such motives?

The fourth chapter, "The Enemy of Jephthah: Ammon as Complex Villain, Unexpected Victim, or Both," will address the problem of oversimplification when reading the villains of

Scripture. First, the chapter will explore the complex character portrait of Ammon, which is often ignored, paying close attention to their complicated social code and their less-than-gracious response to diplomacy. After reconstructing their perception of the disruption between Israel and Ammon, this chapter will demonstrate how a subjective awareness of the disruption of Ammon is both present and engaging.

The fifth chapter, "The Daughter of Jephthah: Tragic Heroism Through Resistance and Solidarity," will develop the constellation of trait codes that shape the vibrant, benevolent, and assertive person who stands out in the Jephthah account as the only character who is not rebuked by the narrator. After developing the personhood of Jephthah's daughter, the tellability of her story is demonstrated through the character's disruption of victimhood, which continues to resonate with reader experience. Her fate may have been unavoidable, but she demonstrates an example of noble resistance for those who refuse to be victims, yet are unable to effect final change.

The sixth chapter, "The Adversaries of Jephthah: The Ephraimites, Intertribal Warfare, and the Slaughter of Kinship," will address the tragic violation of tribal alliances when two bullish personalities collide. The chapter will explore the character archetype of Ephraim and its expression in this particular episode in order to give context for their boorish behavior. After understanding the situation from the perspective of the Ephraimites, the chapter will address the Gileadites' disproportionate response to the aggressive posturing of Ephraim as a caution for those who would feign brute strength to pressure others to follow their rules.

The project will conclude with a brief epilogue that explores the relationships between these supporting characters, their reflection on the character of Jephthah, and their overall impact

on the narrative. Finally, it will reflect on the significance of the supporting cast in shaping a meaningful story and its profound power in shaping the ethos of the reader.

CHAPTER 2: THE PREMISE OF JUDGES 10:6—12:7: SITUATIONS OF DISSONANCE AND THE INTENTION OF SILENCE FROM GOD

> *I've begun to realize that you can listen to silence and learn from it. It has a quality and a dimension all its own. It talks to me sometimes. I feel myself alive in it. It talks. And I can hear it . . . . You have to want to listen to it, and then you can hear it. It has a strange, beautiful texture. It doesn't always talk. Sometimes—sometimes it cries, and you hear the pain of the world in it. It hurts to listen to it then. But you have to.*
>
> Chaim Potok, *The Chosen*

The aim of this study is two-fold, first to demonstrate that Hebrew narratives create boundless storyworlds that readers enter to participate, and second that each storyworld itself contains multiple stories from the recorded accounts of the supporting cast that are just waiting to be recovered. The former focuses on extending the boundaries of traditional narrative analysis to paint a picture of a storyworld that is expansive, three-dimensional, and experiential within the mind of readers. The latter utilizes that storyworld for the purpose of engaging in the multi-perspectivity inherent in every story, and it requires that each supporting character must have a story that passes the test of tellability. This chapter will examine the first criterion for tellability—that each story must include a structured timecourse (sequence of events) [1]—and then will explore the reader-expectations that are established in the initiating event (Judg 10:6–

[1] For a fuller examination of these criteria, see p. 28. For further analysis, see Herman (*Basic Elements of Narrative*, 14–19), who discusses the importance of narrative tellability, particularly its representation of situations for mental simulation (cf. Herman, "Scripts, Sequences, and Stories," 1046–59; Grabes, "The Processualities of Literature," 1–8).

16), particularly concerning the role of Yhwh. Analyzing the timecourse of the whole Jephthah account will provide a foundation for understanding the unique disruptions experienced by the characters in each individual story and will highlight the episodic patterns of disillusionment and response that repeatedly fail to restore a sense of character equilibrium. The account of Jephthah's judgeship offers an illuminating test-subject for character study as God (in the first scene) chooses *not* to explain the divine perspective, but recedes into the background, which focalizes the characters' reactions and responses to situations.

The timecourse of Judg 10:6—12:7 may be divided into five situations (or scenes). Aside from the opening, each situation centers on Jephthah as the protagonist but also highlights a key supporting character who interacts with Jephthah and reveals distinct experiences of disruption from within the storyworld: the brothers of Jephthah/elders of Gilead, the Ammonites, the daughter of Jephthah, and the Ephraimites. While the actions of the supporting characters rarely overlap into subsequent scenes, the sequence of events in each episode follows a pattern of relational dissonance, prompting the character's response to their experience of disruption, which then fails to achieve reconciliation. The opening episode (10:6–16) does not include Jephthah or the events in Gilead, but it does introduce the theme of relational dissonance. Therefore it acts as a prologue to the story, establishing the tone of the narrative by describing the unraveling relationship between Israel and their God. Yhwh grows weary of the people's disingenuous cries for help and expectation of deliverance, prompting him to respond in an unexpected way by refusing to maintain this dysfunctional cycle that forms the backbone of the book of kings (v. 13).

As a result, the stories of the supporting characters examined in this study exist within the larger and deeply disturbing storyworld created by the disruption of the introduction—in which

the work and the normative voice of the divine is shielded from view.[2] After the discordant relationship between Yhwh and his people is established, the following scenes show the ripple effect of that break throughout the many layers of early Israelite society. Susan Niditch identifies the relational emphasis of the text, summarizing the themes that unite the Jephthah cycle as "kinship, gender, leadership, and group unity/disunity . . . [which] points to foundational and defining issues in Israelite worldview."[3] After the initial scene, the normative voice of Yhwh no longer speaks to assess the stories (and characters) as they unfold. With many characters cloaked in moral ambiguity and no voice of the divine to issue a definitive assessment of their role, each person in the account claims to be the *real* victim of circumstance and any movements toward reconciliation seem driven by a desire for personal benefit rather than true restoration.[4] Readers (and listeners) for thousands of years have studied this story and felt both betrayed and baffled: what exactly is the point of such a horrific tale with such disgraceful people?[5]

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[2] Klein (*Triumph of Irony*, 13) points out the significance of point of view in this account, noting the marked difference that occurs when Yhwh shifts from the central role, where he is moving the action along, to a silent viewer. When that happens, the stories of the human actors takes center stage, and it is not always clear how God is engaging with them.

[3] Niditch, *Judges*, 130.

[4] Notably, the narrative identifies at least one objection (or conflict) from the perspective of nearly every supporting character, in which that character seems to see themselves of victims of injustice or circumstance: the brothers reject Jephthah because they believe their inheritance is threatened (11:2); the elders approach Jephthah because they cannot find a leader among them to fight Ammon (10:17, 11:6); the Ammonites feel that the Israelites unjustly seized their land (11:13); and the Ephraimites complain that they were denied participation in the war against Ammon (12:1). The one exception to this rule is the daughter, who does not object directly to her victimhood but chooses to accept that fate and face it directly (11:36–37). Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 1–14) identifies the role of self-interest over communal interest as a primary theme in the latter stories in the judges cycle—namely, those of Gideon, Abimelech, and Jephthah—yet his research does not fully explore ways in which the secondary characters fit into the same thematic frame.

[5] I remember taking a course on existential literature, and after reading Albert Camus' *The Stranger*, I sat angry, trying to figure out the purpose for telling such a story. The main character was detestable, the secondary characters were inscrutable, and the situation seemed pointlessly violent. It is a story that has clung to me, even when I wanted to rid myself of its dark claims about the nature of humanity. Yet, the purpose of the story continues to unfold in my own life, guarding against meaningless existence so that my story does not become as incomprehensible as that of the stranger. Camus' work is hailed as a prime example of the "philosophy of the absurd," a story type that points out the inherent contradiction in humanity's pursuit of meaning and its inability to find it. Perhaps Jephthah's story is toying with the reader in a similar way.

Timecourse: The Unfolding Sequence of Events and Overlapping Experiences

Establishing the timecourse in a biblical narrative is similar to a structural analysis, but focuses on describing how the story establishes situations for the characters to engage, not primarily on identifying thematic or verbal patterns.[6] Herman explains that "sequencing" involves the narrative representations of events and focuses on identifying particular situations that unfold in a specific order to determine the motivation for the characters' actions, as well as the consequences for their responses.[7] He notes, "narrative traces paths taken by particularized individuals faced with decision points at one or more temporal junctures in a storyworld; those paths lead to consequences that take shape against a larger backdrop in which other possible paths might have been pursued, but were not."[8] To enter the storyworld, readers must see the structural elements as a means of imagining an unfolding set of circumstances, as if they themselves are participating in the situations and appraising the character's response. In doing so, readers see the *characters* as *people* and organically wrestle with the text in order to understand the nuances, intricacies, and unspoken motivations as they respond to the situations

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[6] Structural analysis typically addresses the shape and design of the narrative by noting the movement in the story, often through linguistic or thematic markers, to discern shifts in focus, pacing, emphasis, and other story contours. See, e.g. Chisholm (*From Exegesis to Exposition*, 119–42), who notes several linguistic markers that indicate movement and the type of movement they may imply. Fokkelman (*Narrative Art*, 12) argues that structural analysis will allow a reader to "gain insight into the structure which governs the words, a structure which will be seen as the motor of the narration and the narrator's view." His method also leans on linguistic, phonological, and focal shifts to map the story. Establishing the timecourse does not conflict with structural analysis, yet places the emphasis on the means through which the stories create mental simulations and unique situations, as will be further developed below.

[7] Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative*, 17–19. This is similar to Bal (*Narratology*, 182–87), who defines an 'event' as "the transition from one state to another state." Furthermore, the movement within each event will be broken down following three additional criteria noted by Sjöberg (*Wrestling with Divine Violence*, 24): change (transition), choice (character actions that functionally shift the direction of the narrative or warrant a response), and confrontation (two actors come into conflict).

[8] Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative*, 19.

in which they occur. This creates what Matthew Schlimm describes as a "laboratory for ethics" in the mind of readers.[9] Essentially, understanding *persons* and their reactions to relatable *situations* simulates reality and initiates a process of meaning making. While later chapters will address the personhood of the characters, an overview of the situations in which the characters are found is needed before a subjective awareness is possible.

Repeated Features in Each Episode of the Structured Timecourse

The Jephthah cycle is introduced with an elaborate macro-pattern-breaking introduction that stands out in the book of Judges—the well-established pattern of the sin cycle has gone haywire.[10] The extreme dissonance between Israel and their God sets the stage for the events that unfold, reverberating in similar situations of relational brokenness and self-interested attempts at restoration at every level of Israelite society and preventing the peace that Israel has come to expect after calling upon Yhwh. In the story of Jephthah's leadership in Gilead, the characters are trapped in a series of broken relationships that mirror the disingenuous calls for restoration (or restitution) from the introduction and reflect the unrelieved tension of God's limited response.

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[9] Schlimm, *This Strange and Sacred Scripture*, 62–80.
[10]For a full discussion of the sin cycle, see n.81.

The Structured Timecourse: A Detailed Account of the Sequence of Events that Shape the Characters' Experience

The timecourse is a means of understanding the data of structural analysis,[11] focusing on assisting readers in re-creating the situations of the text in order for the reader to project themselves into the situation of its characters.[12] In order to understand the behavior of characters within a story (and their reasoning), these characters are situated within a series of unfolding of events,[13] in which they experience disequilibrium and react to their changing situation, allowing the reader to create mental models of their reactions and the resulting consequences (both intended and unintended).[14] Essentially, characters are embedded in an *occasion* and their response to that occasion is shaped by a series of complex transactions signified by the narrator.[15]

Given the emphasis on characters and reader projection into those situations, this project will break down the timecourse according to shifts in time, space, and character relationships. At times, the shifts may be determined by a change in physical or temporal location—most notably the changing situations of Gilead in relation to their battle with Ammon (10:17, 11:4, 11:12, 11:29, 12:1). Yet the most distinguishable shifts can be seen in the character relationships—

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[11] In biblical narrative analysis, this is similarly gives to practitioners' attention to setting and, particularly in its attention to spatial and temporal arrangement, as an essential container through which to understand what happens in the narrative. For some examples, see Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 79–110; Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 103–14; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 141–96.

[12] Jacobs and Willems, "Fictive Brain," 4.

[13] Herman (*Basic Elements of Narrative*, 14) connects the structured timecourse with the representational quality of storytelling. The story must represent some element of human existence, and that representation requires situational cues through which interpreters might draw inferences about the characters' disruptions and responses in order to fully "experience" and learn from that story through the lens of its characters.

[14] Grabes, "Sequentiality," para. 1. Herman ("Scripts, Sequences, and Stories," 1047) notes that in creating mental storyworlds, the sequence of events is especially important in not simply telling you *how* the event unfolded, but *how to make* it unfold in your storyworld simulation.

[15] Herman (*Basic Elements of Narrative*, 17–18, 128–38).

which provide the framework for the major situations,[16] while also the movement within each situation, often delineated through shifts in speech or action in response to another character.

The supporting characters in the Jephthah narrative do not interact with other supporting characters, only with Jephthah himself, and therefore each interaction with these characters constitutes its own unique situation (or scene). These scenes include narrative references to the *disruption* in the supporting character's mental world (an internal or external conflict or wrestling) and their *responses* to that situation (often multiple responses, denoted through shifts in speech or action), concluding with a narrative indication of the *outcome* of their action.[17] Therefore, each scene includes at least these three elements—disruption, response, and outcome—with the exception of the first scene in which Yhwh's disruption and response are recorded, but the outcome is delayed and obscure (10:16). Using this model, readers may break down the situation of each character, tracing their steps during particular decision points in the story and determining the consequences of those decisions within the situational context of the other possible paths that the character might have chosen.[18] In doing so, interpreters are able to recreate a mental representation of the situation within which each character exists, enabling them to evaluate the character's responses.

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[16] Israel with Yhwh (10:6–16), Jephthah with Gilead (10:17—11:11), Jephthah with Ammon (11:12–28), Jephthah with his daughter (11:29–40), and Jephthah with Ephraim (12:1–7). Webb (*Integrated Reading*, 74) essentially follows the same delineation of episodes, noting that each episode focuses on a conflict between (at least) two parties and emphasizing the relational element within each scene. Furthermore, Webb identifies the dialogue as the "real dramatic interest of each episode," contending that the remaining information is primarily used to establish the background for that conversation. Cf. Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 176–81; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 342.

[17] In particular, Jacobs and Willems ("Fictive Brain," 3) argue that while comprehending words and sentences is an important aspect of meaning making, the process of reconstructing the situations as they play out in the text is also crucial.

[18] Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative*, 19.

Situation 1 (Judg 10:6–16): <u>The Initiating Circumstances</u>: A Broken Sin Cycle, in which Israel Sins, Yhwh Punishes, Israel Cries for Help, and Yhwh Says No.[19]

(10:6) *Israel's abandonment and <u>Yhwh's subsequent disruption</u>*—Israel abandons God to worship the gods of their enemies—fidelity of worship has been violated
(10:7–9) *<u>Yhwh's response</u>*—Yhwh hands Israel over to the Ammonites and the Philistines
(10:7a) God's anger is kindled against Israel
(10:7b) God gives the Israelites to the power of the Philistines (in the West) and the Ammonites (in the East)
(10:8) The Israelites are "crushed and oppressed" for eighteen years
(10:9) The Ammonites (in the East) expand their reach, crossing the Jordan and invading the lands of Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim in the Cisjordan
(10:10) *<u>Israel seeks reconciliation</u>*—the Israelites cry out to Yhwh, admitting that they abandoned Yhwh and worshiped Baal
(10:11–14) *<u>Yhwh's response</u>*—Yhwh rejects their call for restoration as disingenuous
(10:11a) Yhwh responds to the Israelites
(10:11b–13a) Yhwh speaks using leading questions to condemn them
(10:11b–12) Do you remember Yhwh's deliverances?
Gapped answer, rhetorically implies that they do remember
(10:13a) Do you remember your response?
Stated answer: you abandoned me and worshiped others
(10:13b) Therefore (as a result of the previous question/response), God will no longer deliver
(10:14) Yhwh sends them away to ask for help from the gods they have chosen for themselves
(10:15–16b) *<u>Israel's mixed response to God's rejection</u>*—changed behavior alongside egocentric request
(10:15) The Israelites' spoken response to Yhwh: accepting guilt, but distancing themselves from the consequences
(10:15a–b) Admittance of their sin and its consequences
(10:15c) Accepting God's response but asking for God to save them one more time
(10:16) The Israelites' active response to Yhwh: turn from idolatry and worship Yhwh

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[19] Notably, some scholarship includes vv. 17–18 in this episode, seeing the Ammonite's advancing threat against Gilead as a component of Yhwh's response to Israel (e.g., Frolov, *Judges*, 203–4; Boda and Conway, 2; Van Wijk-Bos, *End of the Beginning*, 253). O'Connell (*Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 172–73) splits vv. 17 and 18, seeing v. 17 as a development of the opening plot line and v. 18 as a new plot line that focuses specifically on the Gileadites. Although Biddle (*Reading Judges*, 118–19) does not offer a detailed structural analysis, his own headings separate vv. 17–18 from both the preceding and following units, acknowledging a movement from the more general introduction of Israel's failed covenant obligations and their implications, yet making the relationship of these verses to the broader story unclear (cf. Boling, *Judges*, 194).The timecourse I have indicated above aligns with the work of Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 341) and Webb (*Integrated Reading*, 74), who also focus on the shifts in relationships, connecting vv. 17 and 18 with the subsequent story by noting the transition from Israel's general response to Yhwh and their oppression (vv. 6–16) to the rise of the deliverer (10:17—11:11).

(10:16a) They put away foreign gods
(10:16b) They worship Yhwh
(10:16c) <u>*Outcome:* *Yhwh's unclear response*</u>—an occasion for hope that Yhwh will intervene, or a statement of Yhwh's continued exasperation with his people, or both[20]

Each situation showcases a character and how they respond to their disruption. Yet the first scene stands apart because it does not include Jephthah or any specific human actors; rather it speaks of the relationship between God and Israel in general terms, with Yhwh as the only distinct "person" in the text. As a result, this section may be better understood as a prologue, or the initiating set of circumstances that frames the narrative.[21] The first situation introduces a set of socio-historical and relational conditions that explain the principal *disruption* in the Jephthah cycle: the people have (once again) rejected Yhwh. If reader perspective intentionally shifts to experience the disruption of Yhwh, then the sequence of events in this account seems far more immersive and emotionally charged.[22] Yhwh is (and has been) the faithful covenant partner, who is maintaining kinship with an unfaithful people.[23] Furthermore, his disillusionment is compounded by the narrative's placement in the overall structure of Judges— near the end of the sin cycle, where the hope that the Israelites would turn from their evil has been repeatedly dashed.[24] Israel's repeated acts of disloyalty to Yhwh in the judges cycle and this narrative's emphasis on the extent of their infidelity (a seven-fold description of their idolatry, 10:6) disrupt

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[20] For a discussion of the difficult translation of this phrase, see p. 97.

[21] Biddle (*Reading Judges*, 116–18) refers to this as the "framework statement," owing to its connection to the sin cycle (historical framework). He further points out that the uniquely detailed rendering of this episode signifies that Israel's cycle of sin and deliverance has reached a climactic point.

[22] This practice of shifting to the perspective of the divine is introduced by Fretheim (*Suffering of God*, 13–34) as he explores the nature and presentation of the divine in the text, which is similar to studying the tellability of the story of the divine "character" throughout the Hebrew Bible.

[23] The nature of covenant theology as a relational creed will be discussed later in this chapter.

[24] Boda (*Severe Mercy*, 139) notes that the sin cycle does not merely indicate God's redemptive activity, but is a narrative signal of the "repetitive and inevitable behavior of the people" who consistently do what is evil in God's sight. As a result of this repeated rejection of God and the resultant suffering of his people, the text indicates that God is in misery (cf. Fretheim, *Suffering of God*, 10–11).

the bond between Yhwh and his people and elicit sympathy for the divine.[25] How should God respond when his care for their cries and his gracious intervention have merely led to "conversions of convenience" in time of need?[26]

The timecourse then records the unfolding events as God and Israel respond to one another, tracing the path of their interaction as the sin cycle breaks down. The sequence of events is as follows: Yhwh is rejected, again, experiencing a *disruption* in the relationship between him and his people (v. 6); *Yhwh responds*, giving the Israelites over to be oppressed by Ammon and Philistia (vv. 7–9); the *Israelites respond*, they cry out to God and confess that they abandoned him, seeking restoration (v. 10); *Yhwh responds* to their request, rejecting their confession as disingenuous and utilitarian (vv. 11–14); *Israel responds*, admitting guilt, asking for deliverance anyway, and then putting away other gods (vv. 15–16a); and Yhwh's "soul was exasperated by the trouble of Israel" (v. 16b). The first situation ends without resolution—Yhwh's frustration is justifiable, but will he intervene? The *outcome* is unclear, which uniquely highlights the importance of the character actions that follow.

Situation 2 (Judg 10:17—11:11): <u>Gilead and Jephthah</u>: The Gileadites Are Threatened by Ammon, but Find Themselves Without a Leader, so They Pursue the Brother They Exiled

(10:17–18) **Primary Storyline**: The <u>*Gileadites experience disruption*</u> as the troops of Ammon are summoned to Gilead

(10:17) Comparison of the preparedness of troops in Ammon and Gilead[27]

(10:17a) The Ammonites are summoned to battle

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[25] Through "self-projection" (Jacobs and Willems, "Fictive Brain," 4), readers may imagine the pain of rejection and disloyalty as they try to understand Yhwh's experience and role in this narrative.

[26] Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 199. Gorospe and Ringma (*Judges*, 141) refer to this situation as a "utilitarian confession."

[27] Notably, O'Connell (*Rhetoric of the Book of Judges,* 172) includes v. 17 in the previous section as a development of Israel's complicated relationship to Yhwh. Admittedly, this verse does develop the intensity of the previous situation, communicating the increasing intensity of Israel's failed relationship with Yhwh through increased conflict with Ammon. Yet the shift in specificity of battle—in Gilead—combined with the following interaction with the Gileadite officials suggests that this verse is both spatially and relationally connected to what follows.

(10:17b) The Gileadites simply gather together

(10:18) The *Gileadite response*: Gileadite officials seek to resolve their lack of preparedness by finding a leader

(10:18a) The officials speak to one another

(10:18b) They ask each other: who will lead the battle against Ammon?

(10:18c) Agreed-upon reward: whomever leads the battle will also lead all of Gilead

(11:1–3) **Flashback**: *Second Disruption in the life of 'Gilead's' family* explains the absence of a leader in Gilead

(11:1) Jephthah's *paradoxical introduction*: son of a זונה, son of Gilead, and a mighty warrior

(11:2) Inheritance conflict—explanation for the brother's disruption

(11:2a) Gilead's wife has legitimate sons who reach maturity

(11:2b) *Gilead's sons respond* by disinheriting Jephthah

(11:2c) They explain their response as a result of the *disruption in Gilead's family, which they perceive as a threat to their inheritance* (and perhaps honor) based on Jephthah's maternal lineage, though not questioning his paternity

(11:3) Jephthah flees and his new situation and *his new identity continue to be paradoxical*

(11:3a) Jephthah is forced out of the household by his brothers

(11:3b) Jephthah settles in the land of Tob (literally, "Good")

(11:3c) Nefarious men are *drawn* to Jephthah

(11:3c) Jephthah and these men become a band of raiders

(11:4–11) **Primary Storyline Resumes**: *Gileadite elders respond to the unresolved leadership crisis*

(11:4) The war with Ammon restarts the narrative, with Ammon going on the offensive against Israel

(11:5–10) The elders of Gilead set out to bring Jephthah from Tob to lead them in battle against Ammon, a *second attempt to resolve their disruption*

(11:5) Having not found anyone to lead them in battle, the elders seek out Jephthah

(11:6) *The elders' first response*: Invite Jephthah to return and command their armies

(11:7) *Jephthah responds* with incredulity

(11:7a) Jephthah responds to the elders

(11:7b) Accusation: You are the ones who forced me out of my father's house

(11:7c) Pointing out their audacity: Therefore, why do you come to ask me for help when you are in trouble?

(11:8) *The elders' second response*: Attempt to diffuse his frustration and renegotiate their offer

(11:8a) The elders reply to Jephthah's rebuke

(11:8b) Change of direction: Rather than respond to his accusations, they redirect—we are here now

(11:8c) Offer restoration and promotion: Invitation to fight with them and as a result be made head over the elders and all of Gilead
(11:9) *Jephthah responds*: adding conditions to ensure their word
(11:9a) Jephthah responds
(11:9b) Jephthah creates the conditions of his return:
IF they bring him home to fight
AND Yhwh gives him victory
THEN he will lead them
(11:10) *The elders' third response*: Agree to the terms, assuming the experience of victory in battle is the work of Yhwh, therefore binding themselves to Yhwh as witness
(11:11) *Outcome: Jephthah is restored to Gilead* (and presumably his household), made head of Gilead and commander of its armies—speaking all his words before Yhwh

The second situation offers a complex storyline, including a primary sequence of events that is interrupted by a flashback.[28] The primary storyline focuses on the Ammonites' direct threat against Gilead and Gilead's lack of leadership—this is the *primary disruption* of this scene, as they struggle to face a threatening force while lacking the leadership necessary to fight—they *respond* by seeking a volunteer for Gileadite leadership (10:18). The primary storyline is then interrupted with a flashback, giving the backstory for the exile of Jephthah, the Gileadite warrior. From the perspective of Jephthah's brothers, his presence in the household of Gilead presents the *secondary disruption*, as they believe Jephthah is a threat to their household, not only to their inheritance but also to their family honor (11:2). They respond to their situation by severing Jephthah's relationship with the family by exiling him from Gilead into Tob, where he leads successful raiding parties for survival (v. 3). The *outcome* of the brothers disruption is seemingly resolved, yet it has created a *disruption* for Jephthah that remains unresolved. When the primary narrative resumes (v. 4), Gilead remains leaderless (the primary disruption

[28] Many interpreted elements of this story are referenced in this section, yet the interpretive work itself is explained in detail in chapter 3. I have chosen to refrain from fully discussing each interpretive point here in order to focalize the sequence of events and the cause and effect of the characters' behavior.

continues), so *the elders respond* to those circumstances by journeying to Tob to bring Jephthah back to command their army, yet not to restore him to Gilead (vv. 5–6).

Jephthah's response is aimed at both the elders and the brothers who had sent him away in the first place—he retorts with an incredulous *no* (11:7). As the situation becomes increasingly dire, the *elders respond* by improving their offer and upgrading Jephthah's role: from military commander to head of all of Gilead (v. 8). Cunningly, *Jephthah responds* with an addendum, uniting his victory in battle with the work of Yhwh to ground their agreement in Yhwhistic fidelity (v. 9). The Gileadites *accept* (v. 10), and the *outcome* is a resolution to their leadership problem and the restoration of Jephthah to the people (household?) of Gilead (v. 11). While he outcome of the restoration may resolve Jephthah's disruption of exile, the initial reason for the brothers disruption remains unresolved in the background of the remaining text. Yet the nature of the elder's disruption revolves around pragmatic concerns, not relational priorities—filling a leadership void, rather than the desire to restore Jephthah as a rightful heir of Gilead—depicting a utilitarian motivation reminiscent of the previous scene. The outcome does not seem to imply a restored relationship, but rather an agreement that offers mutual benefit to both parties. The kinship system of Israel has been patched up, but the interaction seems less than ideal.

Situation 3 (Judg 11:12–28): Ammon and Jephthah: The King of Ammon is Confronted by the New Leader of Gilead, Who Demands an Explanation for His Hostilities[29]

> (11:12) *Jephthah's response* to Ammonite aggression—sends a messenger the King of Ammon about his aggression against Gilead

[29] Scholars are divided regarding which scene vv. 29–33 (which recount the coming of the Spirit of Yhwh, the vow, and the defeat of Ammon) should belong to. Butler (*Judges*, 256) connects the Ammonite discourse (11:17–28) to the war report (vv. 29–33), with the caveat that the vow narrative (vv. 34–40) should also include v. 30. O'Connell (*Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 175–75) includes the coming of the Spirit (v. 29) with the scene regarding Jephthah's engagement of the Ammonite king. (cf. Schneider, *Judges*, 169). This is particularly interesting

(11:12a) Jephthah sends a messenger to the king of Ammon
(11:12b) Jephthah personalizes the conflict—why are you attacking me?
(11:13) *The king of Ammon responds*, asserting that the *disruption (conflict) was caused by the Israelites'* unjust seizure of the land; therefore, they should return it for resolution
(11:13a) The Ammonite king responds to Jephthah via the messenger
(11:13b) The king of Ammon refuses to personalize the conflict—the Israelites took Ammonite land when they came from Egypt (similar to the Numbers account)
(11:13c) *Resolution proposed*: he demands that the Israelites return "their" lands to avoid war
(11:14–27) *Jephthah's response*: offers a rebuttal of the King of Ammon's accusation through a messenger, demonstrating both an awareness of and a unique version of Israelite history and theology and refusing the king of Ammon's proposal
(11:14–15a) Jephthah sends messengers to the king of Ammon, re-personalizing the conflict: "thus says Jephthah"
(11:15b–22) Jephthah begins with an argument based on Israel's history according to Deuteronomy—they did not take the land from Ammon but the Amorites, and even then peace was extended first
(11:23–26) Jephthah turns the ethical debate against Ammon with a series of rhetorical questions regarding the place of deities in determining land boundaries
(11:27) Jephthah claims ideological innocence in this war, invoking Yhwh as judge
(11:27a) He accuses the king of Ammon of wrongdoing
(11:27b) He closes by invoking Yhwh as judge between the Israelites and Ammonites
(11:28) *The Ammonite king responds*: Jephthah's speech does not persuade the king of Ammon to cease his war efforts; *Outcome: reconciliation is denied*

The third situation occurs between the Ammonite king and Jephthah, depicting a seemingly diplomatic bargain in which the warring kingdoms present incompatible peace terms. This incident begins when Jephthah, as the new leader of Gilead, assumes the *principal*

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because of its focus on the relationship between the coming of the Spirit and the invocation of Yhwh's name at the end of his speech, yet in drawing this connection, it softens the relationship between the Spirit and the action of the vow. Again, Biddle (*Reading Judges*, 125–27) separates these verses as an independent unit, showing their distinction but failing to indicate their relationship to the whole of the passage (cf. Frolov, *Judges*, 205–6; Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Violence*, 25; Boda and Conway, *Judges*, 2). Yet the vast majority of Judges scholarship places vv. 29–40 together as one unit, emphasizing different aspects of the connection between vv. 29–33 and 34–40. For example, Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 341) includes vv. 29–33 with the following scene, referring to it as "Jephthah's Tarnished Victory," rather than highlighting the relationship aspect as has been done in this project. Chisholm (*Judges and Ruth*, 350) and Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 435) also link vv. 29–33 with vv. 34–40 yet emphasize the connection between the vow and its implications for the daughter (cf. Boling, *Judges*, 206; Evans, *Judges and Ruth*, 131; Soggins, *Judges*, 213).

disruption of Israel (foreign oppression, 10:6–16) as his own and extends a challenge to Ammon (11:12)—forcing the foreign oppressor to speak for the first time. The *Ammonite disruption* is revealed *in their response* to Jephthah's messenger: they did not start this conflict; rather, it was Israel who took their land from them when they entered the Transjordan (v. 13a). Furthermore, the Ammonites *propose a resolution*, which is that Israel should return the southern Transjordanian lands to Ammon to restore peace (v. 13b).[30] *Jephthah's response* attempts to discredit the Ammonite claim historically (vv. 15–22),[31] which (if accepted by the reader) leads further to rhetorical (v. 23), theological (v. 24), and ethical accusations of wrongdoing on Ammon's behalf (vv. 25–27). Notably, Jephthah does not agree to the king's resolution, nor does he propose a counter-argument (except, perhaps, that Ammon should relinquish their claim). Therefore, the *king of Ammon's final response rejects* the message of Jephthah, and the *outcome* of this transaction is an impending war.

As the timecourse unfolds, the reader is given an unusual glimpse into the stated motivations of Ammon, allowing readers to construct a mental representation of their perspective and response to Jephthah's claims. From this mental representation, Jephthah's speech does not seem directed towards the concerns of the Ammonite king. Furthermore, the sequence of events and the structure of Jephthah's argument seem increasingly Gileadite-focused, prompting readers to reflect on other possible paths that could have been pursued but were not. Jephthah's

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[30] Undoubtedly, this would not have been accepted by any Israelite judge, yet negotiation does not typically involve a yes-or-no answer, but a back-and-forth haggle over terms. The king of Ammon offers an opening bid, yet Jephthah's long-winded answer essentially replies, "no." For a thoughtful analysis on the social process of bargaining in the ancient world, see MacDonald, "Listening to Abraham," 30–31.

[31] The debate regarding who should possess the land is discussed in full detail in chapter 4, but both the Ammonite claims and Jephthah's claims have roots in two different traditions represented in the book of Numbers and Deuteronomy.

disproportionate speech length, with a response that is inadequate to achieve peace, casts a shadow on the negotiation process, signaling yet another failed attempt at reconciliation.

Situation 4 (Judg 11:29–40): <u>The Daughter and Jephthah</u>: The Daughter of Jephthah Greets Her Father with Honor and Loyalty, but Is Met with Condemnation and Death

(11:29–33) **Preface**: The defeat of the Ammonites, itself a *<u>resolution to the Israelites' Ammonite disruption</u>*, yet under questionable circumstances

(11:29a) ***A****:* The Spirit of Yhwh comes upon Jephthah

(11:29b) ***B****:* Jephthah crosses from Gilead to Manasseh, and back to Mizpah in Gilead, then crosses to Ammon (rallying troops?)

(11:30–31) ***C****:* Jephthah pauses action to make a vow to Yhwh: *<u>new and uncertain disruption introduced</u>*. Whatever comes out of his house to meet him after his victorious return from battle will be given as a burnt offering—whom (or what) will be the object of his vow?

(11:32a) ***B'****:* Jephthah resumes his journey, crossing over to the Ammonites for battle

(11:32b–33) ***A'****:* Yhwh gives them into his hand and inflicts a decisive victory over Ammon

(11:34–38) His daughter greets him as a hero and Jephthah blames her for his miscalculation, *<u>compounding her disruption</u>* as both sacrificial victim and agent of disruption for Jephthah

(11:34) Jephthah returns to his home and is greeted by his daughter—the *<u>resolution of the uncertain disruption</u>* (11:30–31): the daughter will be sacrificed

(11:34a) Jephthah returns to his home (presumably his father's house to which he has been restored)

(11:34b) Jephthah's daughter comes out to meet him as a conquering hero

(11:34c) The narrator shares that she is his only child

(11:35) *<u>Jephthah's response</u> leads to <u>the daughter's first disruption</u>*: Jephthah blames his daughter for this misfortune. He also confirms his intent to sacrifice her, the *<u>second disruption</u>*.

(11:35a) Jephthah tears his clothes in mourning

(11:35b) He accuses his daughter of bringing trouble upon him

(11:35c) He concludes that what he has vowed with his mouth cannot be taken back

(11:36–37) *<u>The daughter's response to these disruptions</u>*: she resists his blame and courageously accepts her fate, but negotiates for time to lament

(11:36) *Response 1*: The daughter places the blame back in the mouth of Jephthah for intertwining his victory, Yhwh, and this vow—she will comply, but not retain the blame

[no response from Jephthah]

(11:37) *Response 2*: She continues with a request—two months in which to mourn with her companions

(11:38a) *Jephthah's final response*—"go"—indicates that this man of words has been rendered nearly speechless.
(11:38b) *Daughter's response*: She leaves with her companions to bewail her unrealized life
(11:39–40) *Daughter's final response*: She returns, she is sacrificed, and her story is remembered by the daughters of Israel
(11:39a) The daughter returns to her father after two months, as promised
(11:39b) Jephthah "did to her according to the vow he made"
(11:40) A custom arises in Israel that remembers and laments the daughter of Jephthah

The sequence of events that shapes this occasion is deeply impactful in creating a meaningful mental model of the daughter and her sacrifice. The scene opens with a prologue (11:29–33) in which the suspense of this scene is introduced. Notably, it begins with a clear sense of hope as the Spirit of Yhwh descends (v. 29a), reducing the tension from the unresolved outcome of the first scene—God has chosen to act (even if minimally) on behalf of his people. The coming of the Spirit marks the beginning of the campaign towards Ammon (v. 29b), which is interrupted when Jephthah pauses to make a vow to Yhwh (vv. 30–31). The timing of the vow is suspect, after God has initiated the advance and before the victory, creating tension and a narrative *disruption in the mind of the reader*: whom (or what) will Jephthah need to sacrifice?

After the campaign resumes (v. 32), Jephthah is given a decisive, and concisely recorded, victory in battle (v. 33), shifting reader attention back to the object of the vow. The daughter is doomed before she begins to speak to Jephthah, yet her actions and responses are not futile. The daughter *responds* to her father's presence by greeting her father as a conquering hero (v. 34), and *her father responds* by ascribing to her the blame for the circumstances and by indicating his resolute decision to follow through with his vow (v. 35). Jephthah's response contains *two experiences of disruption* for the daughter of Jephthah—she is labeled by her father as "one of those who brings me trouble," and then she is sentenced to death. First, the *daughter responds* by reminding the father of his vow, thereby rejecting his blame, and then accepting her tragic fate

(v. 36). Her response leaves *Jephthah speechless*, perhaps not expecting her reply or not knowing what to say in return. The *daughter responds again*, negotiating for time to lament with her companions (v. 37). *Jephthah responds* minimally, "go" (v. 38), trusting his daughter to leave and return in two months for him to fulfill his vow. The *outcome* of her speech includes a negotiated two months of additional time and mourning. Yet the *outcome* of Jephthah's vow involves tragedy, silence, and remembrance—the daughter returns to be executed (keeping her word to her father), Jephthah no longer speaks, and her story is commemorated among the daughters of Israel in an annual festival (vv. 39–40). The daughter's story represents a fate she could not avoid, yet constructs a mental representation of those circumstances in which, despite the outcome, she does not have to die forgotten.

Situation 5 (Judg 12:1–7): <u>The Ephraimites and Jephthah</u>: The Ephraimites Challenge Jephthah for Ignoring Them During the Battle with Ammon

(12:1) The men of Ephraim cross the Jordan to confront Jephthah on <u>*their own perceived disruption*</u>, being left out of the battle against Ammon
- (12:1a) <u>*The men of Ephraim respond*</u> to this disruption by assembling for battle and crossing into the territory of Gilead
- (12:1b) <u>*The Ephraimites' second response*</u>*:* An aggressively spoken message rebukes Jephthah for not calling them into battle
- (12:1c) The Ephraimites threaten to burn down Jephthah's house

(12:2–3) <u>*Jephthah responds with words*</u>, offering a similarly aggressive and self-focused rebuttal
- (12:2) Jephthah claims that he was oppressed and that he did call on Ephraim for help but they did not come
- (12:3) Jephthah insults the premise of their rebuke and their worthiness in battle, congratulating himself on the victory
  - (12:3a) He realized they were not deliverers
  - (12:3b) So *he* rose to the occasion and fought the Ammonites, in response to which the Lord gave him victory
  - (12:3c) He concludes by turning the question on them—so why do you want to fight me?

(12:4) <u>*Jephthah responds in action*</u>, decisively defeating the Ephraimites in battle
- (12:4a) Jephthah gathers his men for battle, and they defeat Ephraim
- (12:4b) An insertion of motive: the Gileadites were insulted by the Ephraimites

(12:5–6) After the battle, the Ephraimites flee, and the Gileadites execute the survivors

(12:5a) The Gileadites seize the fords of the Jordan
(12:5b) *The Ephraimites' respond to their loss*: they flee, trying to cross the Jordan
(12:5c–6a) *The Gileadites' respond to their retreat*: they develop a test to identify Ephraimites based on their pronunciation of the word *Shibboleth*
(12:6b) *The Gileadites' continued response*: they seize and kill Ephraimite survivors, and forty-two thousand Ephraimites die as a result
(12:7) Summary of Jephthah's career[32]
(12:7a) Jephthah judged for six years
(12:7b) He died and was buried among the towns of Gilead

The final situation depicts an intertribal war, which occurs in the absence of the divine voice or action with devastating consequences. The Ephraimites respond to Jephthah's victory over Ammon by confronting him for not calling them into battle (12:1b). For the Ephraimites, the *disruption in their mental world* is their very absence from battle, and they blame Jephthah specifically for that omission (v. 1c). While their reaction seems severe, the background of their discontent seems rooted in the expectation of intertribal cooperation. This disruption leads the *Ephraimites to react* (or overreact) decisively as they advance their troops into Gilead and threaten Gilead's leader (v. 1). *Jephthah responds initially* with a defense of his actions and an assessment of the Ephraimites behavior (vv. 2–3) and then *responds again* with action in a quick and decisive war (v. 4a), only later revealing the motivation for his advance as the Ephraimites' insult against the people of Gilead (v. 4b). The *Ephraimites respond* to their defeat by retreating across the Jordan (v. 5a), but the *Gileadites respond* with a dialectic test and the slaughter of anyone who fails (vv. 5b–6a). This scene closes with *a gruesome outcome*: 42,000 Ephraimites are slaughtered (v. 6b). Moreover, Jephthah judges only six years, and there is *no peace* during his judgeship.

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[32] Some scholars separate the epilogue to the Jephthah narrative from the Ephraimite conflict. O'Connell (*Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 178) sees the final verse as the plot resolution for the character of Jephthah, as distinct from the resolution of the Gileadite-Ephraimite Ephraim conflict (cf. Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Divine Violence*, 25; Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 455).

Analysis of the Full-Timecourse

The sequence of events articulated in the timecourse of the Jephthah story emphasizes the endless cycle of disruption in the many levels of kinship and family, as well as the inadequate responses of nearly all the characters in these situations. The stories trace the choices of each person as they interact in flawed relation to one another, often for utilitarian (rather than restorative) purposes, much like Israel's relationship with Yhwh in the narrative framework (10:6–16). If biblical accounts are a laboratory for ethics, this simulation is primarily constructed with behavioral warnings and illustrations of the consequences of decaying relationships.

The initial situation in Judg 10:6–16 introduces the relational discord between Israel and Yhwh, which has, once again, descended into disillusionment and even absurdity. Yet the relational rupture introduced in the first scene is not a self-contained "spiritual" problem but flows with the cascading effects of egocentric motivation out onto the lives of the human actors in the story.[33] The sequence of events reveals many shared elements between the different scenes, suggesting that understanding these scenes from the perspective of the supporting cast is consistent with the ideas presented in the opening situation and through Jephthah (the protagonist).[34] For example, each situation begins with an early disruption (Yhwh, 10:6; elders,

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[33] Gorospe and Ringma (*Judges*, 167–68) refer to this as the utilitarian use of people and God. They argue that "Jephthah recognizes that he is being used (11:7), and the elders admit that they only want Jephthah for what he can do (11:8) . . . the heart of utilitarianism is a sheer pragmatism that values productivity, achievement, and outcome without considering the people who produce them." They conclude that this story is an example of the destruction and damage that such pragmatism wreaks on a community.

[34] While the theme of self-interest is often discussed, most scholarship remains focused solely on Jephthah and fails to see the extent to which it permeates the entire narrative. For example, Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 235–36) notes the selfish leadership of Jephthah, who "exploited a national situation in order to further personal interest," but he fails to recognize the ways that other characters in the narrative demonstrate similar behavioral patterns. Furthermore, Klein (*Triumph of Irony*, 98) emphasizes the narrative focus on Jephthah alone as the "sole source of error" in the text, citing the unnamed status of the remaining characters. By contrast, Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 386) begins to address the role of the supporting characters in his assessment, emphasizing the selfishness of Jephthah but concluding that "this people has received the leader they deserve."

10:17–18; brothers, 11:2; Ammon, 11:13; daughter, 11:35; Ephraim, 12:1), but character responses often create further disruption rather than immediate restoration. The multiple layers of disruption and response offer increasingly negative evaluations of the characters (with the exception of the daughter), who use their authority and power to dominate or negotiate. This suggests that just as the Israelites cry out to Yhwh seemingly out of self-preservation rather than loyalty, so too do the many persons involved in Jephthah's story act out of self-interest. Notably, each situation also includes a vague reference to a possible hope, yet this sentiment is guarded and filled with ambiguity and doubt due to the untrustworthiness of the characters.[35] The outcome of these dubious resolutions varies from situation to situation, but the situations progressively devolve into horrifying scenes of violence and disrepair. Relationship is breaking down at every level of Israelite society: divine-human relationship, inter-tribal allegiance, and kinship and family bonds.[36]

Each situation introduced by the storyteller offers a variation on the same basic theme: relational dissonance. Broken relationships abound, from the national level to the intimacy of the family, and too often the characters' attempts to respond to the disruptions in their lives are guided by self-interest and manipulation, rather than humility, repentance, or an actual desire for reconciliation. It is no wonder that when the human participants seek the divine to restore their fortunes, Yhwh rejects their repentance as disingenuous and temporary. This manipulative posturing is not a human response to Yhwh alone; rather it is further reflected in the way the

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[35] These allusions to hope are often overstated and used to create ambiguity regarding the outcome. For example, rather than maintaining the ambiguity in 10:16, Biddle (*Reading Judges*, 118) reads God's expression of impatience as an indication that he could no longer refrain from intervening on Israel's behalf (cf. Moore, *Judges*, 281; Kaufmann, *Sefer Shofitim*, 216).

[36] Boda and Conway (*Judges*, 45) summarize relational tension as one of the primary interests of the account, noting also that the text has a built in warning "to not allow bitterness to take root within us or our communities of faith."

human characters interact with each other. The supporting characters, therefore, do not simply present different readings of the same story, but articulate different aspects of this experience of an egocentric social system. Their timecourse invites readers to walk with characters through various decision points, step-by-step, to understand the motivations for, as well as the consequences of, such actions. In these texts, the repetitive pattern of the sin cycle, which assumes God's restoration of the people if they cry out to him, has unintentionally shaped a utilitarian view of God and others, and instead of restoring God's people to covenant relationship, it is being coopted to nourish the selfish tendencies of humanity.

The Initiating Event (10:6–16): Exploring Reader Expectations When God Chooses Silence

Jephthah and the supporting characters act and react to events in situations two through five, yet the initial situation is set apart because of its focus on the broader events of Israel rather than the specific events in Gilead. This introduction to the Jephthah cycle (10:6–16) acts as an extended historical prologue,[37] both initiating the events and contextualizing the reader expectations for the situations that follow. This means that the secondary characters for this study exist within the broader situation established by the extended prologue to the Jephthah cycle, which lays out the primary conflict of the narrative—Israel's disrupted relationship with Yhwh and subsequent punishment.

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[37] In most accounts, this prologue (*apostasy* followed by *oppression*, and then the Israelites *crying out* and God *sending* a deliverer) takes up very little narrative space—typically 2–3 verses: Othniel, 3:7–9a; Ehud, 3:12–15a; Deborah/Barak, 4:1–3; Samson, 13:1–2 (yet Israel does not cry out). Both the Gideon and Jephthah narratives stand out with an extended prologue that warrants significant attention. To this point, Webb (*Integrated Reading*, 41) states that the "situation which forms the background to the [Jephthah] story" is introduced in 10:6–16, establishing both the literary structure and themes which are then integrated into the story as a whole.

While the timecourse (above) utilizes a narrative-guided, temporal structure to engage readers with the character situations in the storyworld, the use of contextual background is crucial to shaping the atmosphere and experience of the mental simulations.[38] In this initial scene, Israel's behavior mimics the expectations of the sin cycle (Israel sins, v. 6; Yhwh punishes them, vv. 7–9; Israel cries out, vv. 10), yet the final elements of the sin cycle are missing—Yhwh refuses to raise up a deliverer and bring peace to Israel.[39] This divine refusal and reticence to act permeates the remainder of the story. The narrative begins with a chilling sentiment—Yhwh acts in an *unexpected* way, breaking the pattern of redemption established in the book of Judges; therefore, the reader is unable to predict God's involvement in the events that follow and directed to observe the depth of the fracture in Israelite society.

Interestingly, in the initial situation Yhwh is presented as a character engaged with other characters in the storyworld (Israel, Ammon, the Philistines), yet he recedes into the background almost immediately thereafter.[40] The biblical stories seem to presume divine presence even (and

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[38] Jacobs and Willems ("The Fictive Brain," 3) emphasize the importance of the reader's knowledge of the storyworld for mental simulations, noting that readers must integrate their knowledge of the world with the one in the text. Therefore, the background knowledge, whether literary or socio-historical, becomes necessary to creating an affective bond between reader and story (cf. Zwaan, "Situation Models," 1028–34).

[39] This contrasts with the accounts of previous judges, in which the narrator specifically cites God's act of raising/calling a deliverer: Othniel, 3:9; Ehud, 3:15; Deborah/Barak, 4:4, 6; Gideon, 6:11–12; Samson, 13:3. This point will be fully developed later in the chapter, yet the significance of this moment cannot be understated. Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 234) describes God as choosing to change the "habitual framework" of divine intervention and thereby rejecting the judge leadership that has continually failed to bring complete restoration for his people. Notably, in 1 Sam 12:11, Samuel chastises the Israelites for requesting a king and cites the many times God has sent them a deliverer, indicating that God also sent Jephthah. While this does offer an interesting intertextual use of the Jephthah account, it seems more likely that the Samuel text is referencing God's delivering act (Judg 11:29, 33) than that it indicates God's calling of Jephthah. Yet admittedly, this does not fully explain Samuel's use of the phrase "he sent" in regards to Jephthah.

[40] The presentation of God as a character in a story has broad implications in a cognitive narratology reading. God's "character" invites readers to engage with and understand the situation from the divine perspective. Yet unlike most characters, the divine perspective is not evaluated upon the merits determined by the reader in traditional biblical interpretation, but is assumed to be normative. For example, Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art*, 54) refers to the voice and actions of God as having "absolute validity." More ideological readings, however, allow the reader to question the perspective of God, as illustrated by the work of womanist scholar Weems (*Battered Love*, 6–7), who critiques the biblical text itself, particularly when it depicts the abuse female bodies in relationship to God. While

especially) when God acts indirectly,[41] yet does God ever recede? This raises the question, what is the God of Israel doing when he is silent in the narrative?[42] In this introduction, God acts (his "anger burned," 10:7; "he sold," v. 7; "his soul was exasperated," v. 16), and he is verbose and decisive in response to Israel with no intermediary (vv. 11–14). However, his presence becomes nearly imperceptible after he pronounces his intended absence (with a few terse exceptions: Yhwh sends his Spirit upon Jephthah in 11:29 and gives him victory in battle in v. 33).[43] This leaves the reader to wrestle with the implications of divine engagement: does God ever recede so far into the background that he is no longer acting at all, or does the de-emphasis on his actions merely serve to focalize the human actors? What is the God of Israel doing when the story places him off-screen—is he raising up leaders in secret, or are leaders who invoke his name doing so as a manipulation tactic rather than in concert with the divine? Sjöberg asserts that this question is "the central ambiguity of the narrative, namely, whether Yhwh uses Jephthah or whether

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this offers a thoughtful criticism of the ways in which texts have been used in several communities to unfairly demonize female bodies, these readings are not intuitive to the storyworld itself. The storyworld of the biblical narrative seems to understand the divine voice as normative.

Yet is it right to refer to God as a "character" in the story? In her recent monograph, Freedman (*God as an Absent Character*, 1–3) points out that while the "character" of God is used less frequently than most assume, the presence (and personhood) of God is depicted in other ways—for example, through stand-ins (e.g. angelic beings or other appointed leaders). While Freedman's work offers helpful insight into the many different representations of the divine within the text and their implications on character, I would love to see the same close readings applied to the actions of Yhwh described by the narrator—where Yhwh himself acts as an agent (through no intermediary), as is often the case in the book of Judges. This is particularly true in the stories of the earlier judges (Othniel, 3:8–10; Ehud, 3:15; Deborah, 4:2, 23; and Gideon, 6:1, 14, 16, 23, 34, 40; 7:2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 22).

[41] To this point, Freedman (*God as an Absent Character*, 3) aptly observes that "there can be no question that the HB as a whole is centered on God and God's relations with Israel, [yet] God appears in most biblical stories only indirectly," noting that God rarely acts as an independent agent beyond the books of Genesis and Exodus.

[42] Notably, Yhwh does not speak through a mediator—prophet or angelic host—as he does in other judge accounts: Deborah (who was a prophet), 4:4; Gideon (through a prophet), 6:8; and Samson (through an angel of Yhwh), 13:3. Instead, the divine engages directly. Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 346) sees this shift as an indication of God's increased displeasure with Israel (cf. Wijk-Bos, *End of the Beginning*, 254).

[43] Here I make a distinction between the narrative description of divine action and the characters' invocation of Yhwh's name. Using that criteria, Yhwh exits the narrative after chastising the Israelites, and the characters act independently of him (except in 11:29, 33).

Jephthah uses Yhwh to win the victory."[44] Given the importance of the prologue in initiating all of the events that follow, it seems important to address the nuances of this first situation and what expectations it may establish for the characters who follow.

Translation of Situation 1 (Judg 10:6–16): Yhwh Says No More

> [6] But the sons of Israel again did the evil thing in the eyes of Yhwh, and they served the Baals, and the Ashtaroth, and the gods of Aram, and the gods of Sidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines. So they abandoned Yhwh and did not serve him.
>
> [7] So the anger of Yhwh burned against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the sons of Ammon. [8] Then they crushed and they oppressed the sons of Israel in that year; this lasted[45] eighteen years, for all the sons of Israel who were beyond the Jordan, in the land of the Amorites that was in Gilead. [9] And the sons of Ammon crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah, against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim. Then there was great distress for Israel.
>
> [10] Then the sons of Israel cried out to Yhwh, saying, "we have sinned against you, for indeed,[46] we have abandoned our God and served the Baals." [11] Then Yhwh said to the sons of Israel, "Did I not [deliver you][47] from Egypt and from the Amorites and from the sons of Ammon and from the Philistines? [12] And the Sidonians and Amalek and Maon oppressed you. And you cried out to me, and I delivered you from their hand. [13] But *you* abandoned me![48] And you served other gods; therefore, I will not continue to deliver you. [14] Go and cry out to the gods that you have chosen! Let *them*[49] save you in the time of your trouble."
>
> [15] And the sons of Israel said to Yhwh, "We have sinned. Do, yourself, to us according to what is good in your eyes; only please save us this day." [16] Then they put away from the

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[44] Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 51.

[45] Following Butler (*Judges*, 254), who adds "this lasted" for clarity, connecting the second clause with the first due to the lack of verb.

[46] The Hebrew כי in this text can be used logically or for emphasis, but it seems to reflect emphatically in this case (see further the translation footnote in Boda and Conway, *Judges)*.

[47] The verb is missing in the MT, likely due to textual corruption or an ellipsis. Burney (*Judges*, 296–97) and Boling (*Judges*, 192) argue for the corruption of the text, believing that the phrase הוצאתי אתכם ("I saved you") has dropped out. *BHS* also suggests a textual corruption, proposing that הוצאתי אתכם was part of a larger clause that dropped from the verse as a scribe jumped from a *mem* to a *mem*.

[48] This phrase utilizes the emphatic you (אתה) before the verb, creating the emphasis through the redundant pronoun (*IBHS* 16.3.1b; cf. Muruoka, *Emphatic Words*, 47).

[49] Again, the redundant pronoun creates emphasis (*IBHS* 16.3.1b).

> foreign gods from among them and served Yhwh, but his soul was exasperated by the trouble of Israel.[50]

Israel's Fractured Relationship with Yhwh and its Implications for the Jephthah Cycle

The story of Jephthah begins with a depiction of the paradigmatic sin cycle, which has dominated the book of Judges,[51] failing to bring the restoration desired. This initiating sequence of events takes place between two parties, Israel and Yhwh, as Israel seemingly fails to obtain the services of the divine warrior and Yhwh recognizes that "Israel has debased repentance into negotiation."[52] Though the Israelites are certainly acting and reacting to circumstances in the first situation (worshiping other deities, v. 6; crying out to God, v. 10; and "repenting," vv. 15–17), this scene offers a detailed portrait of Yhwh as the primary actor. The presentation of God as a character in the story invites elements of God's perspective to be *experienced*, not merely itemized. Therefore, as a result of Yhwh's direct interaction, readers may experience the disorientation of the Yhwh/Israelite disruption from the perspective of God, producing empathy

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[50] This phrase has traditionally been rendered, "he could bear Israel's misery no longer." This can be seen most in early research (e.g., Boling, *Judges*, 190; Soggins, *Judges*, 202; Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 379), but it also dominates modern translations (NLT, NAS, NRSV, REB, NAB, NJB, JPSV). Yet several scholars have challenged this interpretation (e.g., Webb, *Judges*, 42–46).

The challenge of the translation is a result of the awkward syntax and idiomatic phrases. The axiom "his soul was short" (תקצר נפשו), occurs four other times in biblical literature (Num 21:4; Judg 16:16; Job 21:4; Zech 11:8) and typically implies impatience. Notably, Samson becomes exasperated (impatient) regarding Delilah's repeated attempts to manipulate him—a situation strikingly similar to the present text. Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 349) refers to it as "anger in the face of an intolerable situation." Yet what is intolerable? The phrase is completed with another polyvalent expression, "for the trouble/effort of Israel" (בעמל ישראל). According to *CDCH* (332, def. 1, 2), the noun עמל may take on three relevant possible meanings: 1. trouble, hardship, misfortune 2. harm, mischief, wrong 3a. toil, labour. In light of these definitions, it is possible that Yhwh is either growing impatient with Israel's misfortune—namely, their oppression, or growing impatient with the work/trouble that Israel is causing him in their repeated requests. Given the context of Yhwh's previous statements of rejection and distrust, the latter seems the most appropriate translation, though the former cannot be eliminated as a possibility. Further discussion of this text and the implications of this translation are developed on pp. 96–98.

[51] Webb (*Integrated Reading*, 41) finds this story so significant in the overall scheme of the book of Judges, that he places his discussion of the Jephthah story at the beginning. For Webb, the Jephthah narrative "will serve as a point of departure and a point of reference for the wider analysis that follows."

[52] Webb, *Integrated Reading*, 74.

for the divine experience and shaping a narrative atmosphere of relational dissonance that will be further echoed into the lives of the character who follow.[53]

Therefore, in order to understand the social disintegration that results from Israel's rejection of Yhwh, it is helpful to utilize a modified character analysis to understand the story through the lens of Yhwh and then address the implications on the rest of the story. The first situation emphasizes Yhwh's experience of anger and exasperation as he is abandoned once again, and he derisively observes that Israel is only interested in their God when they need his compassion and deliverance.[54] In this iteration of the sin cycle, the mechanistic expectations of Israel's relationship are challenged and proven to be problematic. For Yhwh, there is an internal struggle since his compassion and deliverance seem to be complicit in enabling Israel's disregard of justice.[55] Rather than restoring the people to wholeness and community with God, Yhwh's care for his people is co-opted into a pattern of disruption because of their disregard for the purpose of the covenant, formalizing the relationship with Yhwh. Certainly, the relational patterns between Yhwh and his people can be repaired, yet this story reveals that the compassion of God has been abused for personal gain, rather than restoration.

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[53] Biddle (*Reading Judges*, 117) argues that Yhwh's refusal to deliver Israel offers profound insight into the relational nature of the divine. Yhwh's reaction (rejecting their cry) is not as a result of the mechanisms of the sin cycle, but as a result of God's authentic response to their rejection of him. He concludes, "the God of Israel adapts in response to altered behavior" (cf. Fretheim, *God and World*, 13–20).

[54] Gorospe and Ringma (*Judges*, 139, 167–68) summarize the relational pattern of utilitarian interest, introduced during the first episode, as the primary issue of the Jephthah narrative. Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 415) understands the "big story" as one in which commitment and rejection continually overtake both God and Israel, leading to exasperation and suffering. Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 343) refers to this pattern as Yhwh's "marginalization by the Israelites" that is then mirrored "in his decreasing involvement in the narrative." Further, he points to the role of Yhwh in the first episode, which acts as a "theological rationale" for his absence in the texts that follow. Wijk Bos (*End of the Beginning*, 255) treats the introductory episode as a theological and ethical question that is explored as the story of Jephthah unfolds: does God always respond to human contrition with grace and forgiveness?

[55] Martin, "Yahweh Conflicted," 357.

Social Code: The Anticipated Role of Israel's God

The social code seeks to re-create the framework of thought applied to certain individuals or social groups that would have constituted the basic matrix of expectation for typical behavior patterns.[56] Yet trying to discern the social code and expectations of God during the time of the judges is a complicated endeavor. Some have focused on Israel's perception of their deity as it developed during different periods in Israel's history, while others have sought to curate the full attestation of Yhwh's nature in the overall canon of Scripture.[57] These emphases, while worthwhile, present complex answers to questions that are only minimally (and sometimes indirectly) related to the specific "character archetype" in this account. Therefore, this study will focus on God's role and response to Israel's national life as presented in the book of Judges,[58] specifically utilizing the patterns developed in the book's theological framework, also known as the sin cycle.[59]

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[56] The social code refers to the archetypical social frameworks that are implicit in common roles, as seen in relationships (father, daughter, kinship, husband, etc.), vocations (prophet, judge, chief, elder, etc.), or identities (Gilead, Ammon, Ephraim, etc.). For a discussion of social codes in relationship to character building, see p. 40.

[57] Examples of the former include: Paton, "Origin of Yahweh-Worship," 6–22; Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People*, 27–76; Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel*, 44–46, 70–72; Provan et. al., *Biblical History of Israel*, 27–31, 161–66; and more recently Dijkstra, "El, the God of Israel." Examples of the latter include works like Fretheim, *Suffering of God*; Boda, *Severe Mercy*. Notably, Boda's extensive study concerning God's response to sin offers helpful assessments of God's role in each book of the Hebrew Bible and is more helpful than other broad theological constructions.

[58] This project prioritizes the depiction of Yhwh in the book of Judges as most informative, yet includes material from elsewhere in the biblical witness when necessary. The degree to which I have leaned on various biblical sources can be imagined as a series of concentric circles, with Judges in the center, the Torah surrounding Judges, the Deuteronomic History outside that, the remaining Hebrew Bible texts outside that. When the information is contradictory, the evidence is weighed as more or less useful based on its proximity to the concentric center: Judges.

[59] The sin cycle goes by several names: it is also referred to as the "major apostasy paradigm" (Klein, *Triumph of Irony*, 84), "conventional pattern of apostasy" (Niditch, *Judges*, 121), "historical framework" (Biddle, *Reading Judges*, 116), "Deuteronomic introduction" (Soggin, *Judges*, 201), "paradigmatic Deuteronomistic theme" (Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Divine Violence*, 27), "theological introduction" (Boling, *Judges*, 193), "cycle proper" (Frolov, *Judges*, 203), or simply "the cycle" (Boda and Conway, *Judges*, 5). The differing terminology seems to reflect the different roles that this pattern plays within each scholar's methodological framework.

In the book of Judges, the interactions of Yhwh within the affairs of Israel play out in iterations of a basic framework, introduced in Judg 2:11–19, which becomes paradigmatic for the stories of the heroes in chapters 3–16. While the presence of a cyclical paradigm for the judge stories is widely accepted,[60] the process of development and the meaning of the frame are often debated. In 1943, Noth introduced the notion that *a* Deuteronomic writer collected original accounts of the judge heroes and retold their stories using the theological framework of the sin cycle (Judg 3–16) to shape a distinctly Deuteronomic account.[61] Many scholars have picked up on the notion of a Deuteronomic writer, though offering different perspectives on the number of writers, the timing of the work, and what constitutes Deuteronomic language and presence.[62] Notably, their claims concerning the Deuteronomic influence in Judges focus on the same basic texts that Noth understood to be created by the Deuteronomic hand (chs. 3–16).

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[60] As noted in n10. Scholarship may use different language to describe what they are seeing, but the pattern itself has become ubiquitous within Judges studies. Most major commentaries offer a detailed exposition of 2:11–19 as the pattern for the core of the book of Judges. For example, Chisholm (*Judges and Ruth*, 149—59) refers to this pattern as the "monotonous downward cycle," outlining the literary/structural cues and their implications for later narratives (cf. Schneider, *Judges*, 30–32; Block, *Judges Ruth*, 131–32; Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 189–93; Boling, *Judges*, 73–76).

[61] Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*, 3–4. Notably, Noth did not believe that the book of Judges was simply shaped by a later redacting hand, but that the Deuteronomist collected the early stories and wove them together using a framework that utilized Deuteronomic thought and language to pull it together. While Noth's perspective on structure has been widely accepted, his view that the DHR was a single individual has largely been rejected. For a helpful summary of Noth's work, see McKenzie, *Trouble with Kings*, 1–3.

[62] Soon after Noth, von Rad ("deuteronomistische Geschichtstheologie," 189–204) traced the themes of prophecy and fulfillment—both in the destruction of Judah and Israel and in the promises to David. Richter (*Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*) further developed Noth's theory with particular attention to Judges, exploring the various layers in the book. Other early lists of Deuteronomistic idioms and themes can be seen in Weinfeld (*Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, 320–65) and Cross (*Canaanite Myth and Hebraic Epic*, 252–54). More recently, some scholars have reassessed the notion of Deuteronomic influence, often suggesting a smaller role in its overall structure. For a more recent discussion regarding the presence or influence of the DTR see the multiple perspectives represented in the following edited volumes: Römer, ed., *Future of Deuteronomistic History*; and Schearing and McKenzie, eds., *Those Elusive Deuteronomists*. While it would not be helpful to offer an extensive list of this research, for further discussion, see McKenzie, "Deuteronomistic History," 2:160–68; Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 13–44.

The discussion regarding the literary and theological overtones of the DH in the book of Judges continue, particularly in reference to the cycle of the judges (chs. 3–16), though many of these conclusions are increasingly challenged. For example, Greenspahn critiques the claim of Deuteronomistic influence, suggesting instead that the theology of the judges cycle is informed by a punishment-and-grace theology reminiscent of the language and acts of delivery with the exodus account.[63] Brueggemann identifies a dual-thematic focus for the judges cycle. The first, "deed-consequence," shapes the Israelite understanding of covenant fidelity connected to a stable social reality, and the second, "cry out/save," presents the Israelites as "stand[ing] outside the managed world of 'deed-consequence,'" implicitly critiquing the failures of the former and asking for something new.[64] Niditch also drops the language of "Deuteronomic" writer and instead incorporates the Deuteronomic perspective into one of the three redaction "voices" that shape the text.[65] She attributes the formulaic structure that shapes the cycle of the judges to the "voice of the theologian," contending that it emphasizes the role of the covenant in shaping the heroic tales.[66] For Niditch, the DH is present in the "voice of the theologian" but is less intrusive than often assumed, shaping the stories retained by the "epic-bardic voice" (the epic stories from Iron 1 Israel), maintaining their colorful accounts despite the rough edges. Niditch's approach

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[63] Greenspahn, "Theology of the Framework of Judges," 385–96. This claim is further developed by Martin ("Where Are All His Wonders?" 87–109), who highlights the pervasive Exodus imagery throughout the entire book of Judges.

[64] Brueggemann, "Social Criticism," 73–90. Brueggemann builds his argument from Beyerlin ("Gattung und Herkunft," 3–5), who understands the four-fold formula in the book of Judges (i.e., the sin cycle) as two distinct ideological movements. Yet Brueggemann critiques Beyerlin's conclusion that the formulaic introductions qualify as lawsuits.

[65] Niditch (*Judges*, 9–13) identifies the three voices as the "epic-bardic voice," which represents the oldest traditions and maintains a "classic epic" telling in both quest and character; the "voice of the theologian," often associated with the DHR, which is covenantal, understanding Israel's history as dependent upon its relationship with Yhwh; and finally, the "voice of the humanist," which features more prominently in the introduction and concluding stories and does not offer overt criticism of its protagonists.

[66] Niditch, *Judges*, 10.

fits well with the Jephthah account, which allows the narrative to unfold without frequent commentary, despite the fact that the stories present claims to which the Deuteronomist would seemingly object.[67]

A central theme for Niditch's "voice of the theologian" is the importance of covenantal orientation, which she then uses to connect faithfulness with military, economic, and political success. The book of Judges begins by reminding the Israelites of God's covenant promises and fidelity, as well as their own disobedience. The covenant is invoked three times, twice in the theophany that prefaces sin cycle (2:1, 2) and once when Yhwh invokes the Israelites' covenant violation as an explanation for his anger (v. 20).[68] Yet Niditch fails to take into account the relational dynamics implied between Yhwh and Israel as a result of that covenant.[69]

Covenants are not merely international treaties or royal grants,[70] but a means of formalizing and regulating a familial relationship where there once was none.[71] The relational nature of the covenant is articulated in the language used to identify the covenant parties—using terms associated with marriage (joining households), adoption (father/son), and kinship ("my people/your God").[72] Rendtorff highlights that last type of relationship: "[t]hat Yhwh is Israel's

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[67] Niditch, *Judges*, 11.

[68] As noted in n.60, Judg 2 is widely accepted to establish the patterns and expectations for the judges cycle that begins in ch. 3.

[69] The relational aspect of Yhwh's covenant with Israel has been considered an important feature of the OT theology for quite some time. Boda (*Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology*, 53–76) argues that the relational creed between Yhwh and his people is one of the three core principles in Old Testament theology. For a classical treatment of covenant theology, see Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 1; also McComiskey, *Covenants of Promise*; Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*; and Martens, *God's Design*, 62–79.

[70] For example Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant*; Weinfeld, "Covenant of Grant," 184–203; McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*; Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant*.

[71] In a key study, Cross ("Kinship and Covenant," 3–21) argued convincingly that covenant was a means by which kinship relations were established between non-kin.

[72] Establishing links between non-kin individuals or groups through a covenant is not unique to Yhwh's relationship with Israel—note also marriage covenants connecting two families or clans (Mal 2:14; Prov 2:17), adoption (or father/son language) used in the context of a kingship covenant (2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chron 22:10; Ps 2:7; Ps 89:26–27), and foreign nations establishing kinship-like alliances (Abram and the Amorites, Gen 14:13; Israel and

God, and Israel Yhwh's people is one of the central statements in the OT. It is expressed in a variety of linguistic forms . . . [one of which] stands out clearly: 'I will be God for you and you shall be a people for me.'"[73] This language of kinship constitutes Yhwh's primary relational identity, essentially welcoming Israel into his family.[74] While God initiates the relationship, the people must respond to the covenant and meet its obligations in order to maintain their relational status.[75] Therefore, the familial bond between Yhwh and Israel carries expectations that move past dispassionate and mechanistic interaction, instead connoting personal and emotive response.

When Israel violates their obligations, they have not merely broken a rule, but have violated an intimate relationship. Therefore, the story depicts God responding *affectively* to that relational disruption.[76] Yhwh's emotive response to Israel's rejection is clearly evident throughout the first scene in the Jephthah cycle, which describes God's anger (10:7) and exasperation (10:16).[77] As Webb observes, the text has "something to say about the nature of

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the Gibeonites, Josh 9; Ahaz and Tiglath-Pileser, 2 Kgs 16:7). Hugenberger (*Marriage as a Covenant*, 177–78) argues that kinship language dominated covenantal texts in both the ANE and the HB, leaning on adoption marriage, and kinship social constructs to define expectations for a new relationship. As a result, Hugenburger (11) identifies only four essential elements in creating covenants: (1) a relationship, (2) with a non-relative, (3) involving obligations for each party, (4) established through an oath.

[73] Rendtorff, *Covenant Formula*, 11. Boda (*Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology*, 54–55) offers an extensive list of examples that echo a similar sentiment. He includes several examples within the Torah alone: Lev 26:12; Exod 6:7; Deut 4:20; 7:6; 12:2; 26:16–19; 27:9; 29:13.

[74] Covenant language is a means through which God formalizes his identity-in-relationship to the people of Israel. Gottwald (*Tribes of Yahweh*, 240) concludes that the term "people" (עם) is a kinship term. Furthermore, Weinfeld (*Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, 81) identified these terms as "legal terminology . . . [for] marriage and adoption."

[75] Boda (*Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology*, 62–69) aptly demonstrates that the relational agreements with Yhwh require reciprocity from both parties.

[76] Butler (*Judges*, 262) notes that though the Bible pictures God as a reactive and emotional character, his anger does not reflect fickleness, but "is a faithful response to Israel's rejection." Essentially, the anger demonstrates God's emotional attachment that has now been violated by their lack of faithfulness.

[77] The tone of Yhwh's speech also portrays an exasperated deity. Gorospe and Ringma (*Judges*, 143) hear a sense of betrayal in God's accusation (v. 13a), as well as an annoyed sarcasm in his response (v. 14), concluding that his frustration is born from continual disappointment and the pain of a deep love that has been repeatedly betrayed. Wijk-Bos (*End of the Beginning*, 255) describes Yhwh's anger as "dejection" over the failure of his repeated attempts to restore his people.

Yahweh's involvement with Israel [in general] . . . as deeply personal and emotional rather than as merely formal and legal; as not, in the final analysis, governed by abstract principles of reward and punishment, justice and retribution."[78] The God of Israel does not merely take note of the wrongs perpetrated by his people, but experiences the pain and disillusionment of relational infidelity and betrayal. Over and over, Yhwh's people have abandoned him, despite his great salvific acts.[79]

While few debate *that* the sin cycle provides the framework for Judg 3–16, the composition of that framework is a contested subject.[80] The cycle may be reconstructed using the most repeated textual cues that mark significant moments in each account. Frolov enumerates the following:

- "*the sons of Israel did (again) evil in the eyes of Yhwh*" (2:11; 3:7; 3:12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 31:1)
- "*the anger of Yhwh burned against Israel*" and he sold them into the hand of X (2:14; 3:8; 3:12; 4:2; 6:1; 10:7; 31:1)
- "*the sons of Israel cried out to Yhwh*" (3:9; 3:15; 4:3; 6:6; 10:10)
- "*X was subdued before/by/into the hand of Israel*" (3:30; 4:23; 8:28; 11:33)
- "*the land had peace for X years*" (3:11; 3:30; 5:31; 8:32)[81]

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[78] Webb, *Integrated Reading*, 75.

[79] Evinced by the repetition, "again Israel did what was evil in the eyes of Yhwh" (2:11; 3:7; 3:12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 31:1).

[80] Scholarship has noted that the central core of the book of Judges is driven by a structural cycle that shapes this retelling of history (see O'Connell, *Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 26 n18). Yet scholars disagree regarding the number of elements in the cycle. Some scholars argue for a five-part cycle: Israel did evil, God sold them into the hands of their enemies, Israel cried out, their enemies were humbled, and there was peace (e.g., Amit, *Book of Judges*, 36–37); Greenspahn, "Theology of the Framework," 388). Trompf ("Notions of Historical Recurrence," 219–20) omits the separate movement of peace after deliverance, therefore describing a four-part cycle. Still others, including Boda (*Severe Mercy*, 138), Mayes (*Story of Israel*," 61–62) and Gunn ("Joshua and Judges," 104–5) maintain a six-part cycle, typically adding a reference to the death of the deliverer, while Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 146–49) argues for a seven-part formula, separating the divine provision of a leader from the defeat of Israel's enemy.

[81] Frolov, "Rethinking Judges," 28–29.

This pattern is introduced in Judg 2:11–19 but does not fully establish itself until the third chapter of the book.[82] While this pattern is significant in the overall structure of Judges, it is the unique elements in the various iterations of this pattern that set each account apart.[83] This cycle does not simply repeat the same tropes, but as the narrative progresses, the cycles form a "downward spiral" of disintegration.[84] Regardless of which particular elements are included in this framework, the cycle can be summarized as two distinct movements, each "rooted in the covenantal relationship between Israel and Yahweh."[85] These two primary movements are the trajectory from sin to punishment and then from Israel's misery to deliverance—which identify the dominant expectations for Yhwh's character and course of action as perceived by the Israelites through covenant and experience.[86]

The first movement, from sin to punishment, is a familiar trope in Israel's history, which depicts the *just* nature of God in requiring the Israelites to uphold their covenant commitments. This movement is easily identifiable within the framework and one of the most consistently rendered elements in cycle of the hero stories. Israel's sin is typically introduced with a formula ("Israel [again] did evil in the eyes of Yhwh"), and then their sin is illustrated with reference to the specific form of idolatrous worship and abandonment of Yhwh in which they are currently

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[82] Frolov, "Rethinking Judges," 28–29. See n10 for other possible configurations.

[83] O'Connell (*Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 20–26) charts the different iterations of this cycle and finds at least twenty additional elements, twelve of which he deems "essential." While his observations are helpful in understanding several links between the stories and their connections to Deuteronomic motifs, several "repetitions" occur infrequently and therefore do not seem to warrant the title of "essential" element.

[84] Boda, "Recycling Heaven's Words," 45. Notably, Boda also ascribes structural nuance to the ending cycle of the pattern, establishing distinct categories for "rest" in the land and the "death" of the judge.

[85] Martin, "Yahweh Conflicted," 358.

[86] In many ways, this resonates with Brueggemann's categories of movement in the judges cycle (see n64), yet here I am connecting the movements directly to Israel's covenantal relationship with Yhwh.

engaged.[87] Israel's act of sin, particularly the sin of idolatry, angers God and leads to their punishment in the form of invading armies. This language, which connects sin to idolatry and idolatry to the anger of God, is well attested in the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy refers to idolatry as "evil" on a number of occasions (4:23–26; 9:18–21; 17:2–3; 31:29), often noting that it provokes the anger of Yhwh (4:25; 9:18; 31:20, 29).[88] Causality is important in this sequence, as punishment is not simply a direct result of sin, but a direct result of God's anger, and the anger a direct result of Israel's abandonment and idolatry—essentially, relational dissonance. Therefore, the punishment of God is not depicted as the verdict of a detached judge, but as a fundamental violation of the relationship. God is *moved* by their infidelity.[89]

The second movement echoes another common trope—Israel cries out to God, which moves God's to deliver them—depicting the *compassion* of God upon seeing the misery of his people. Scholars have often conflated the cries of Israel with the concept of repentance,[90] yet the

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[87] Greenspahn ("Theology of the Framework of Judges," 385–96) argues against an immediate connection between sin and idolatry, contending that the sin remains unidentified. Frolov ("Framework of the Judges," 394–95) further develops the distinction between sin and idolatry, suggesting that the "sin" is ambiguous and the idolatry is a late addition of the Deuteronomic writer. Yet since the only sin consistently presented within the narratives is the sin of idolatry, it is more likely that the formulaic introduction, they do not identify any sin other than the sin of idolatry that is consistently presented within the narratives. In contrast, the formulaic introduction "Israel sinned" is followed with a more specific description of the particular way in which they have sinned against God. Furthermore, when God appoints Gideon as the deliverer of Israel, he is first assigned the task of breaking down the altars of Baal before he is commissioned for battle (Judg 6:25–27). This suggests that the sin that Gideon must rectify before heading into battle is the sin of Baal worship.

[88] Martin, "Yahweh Conflicted," 359–60.

[89] Latvus (*God, Anger and Ideology*, 40) argues that Yhwh's reaction to Israel's abandonment here is reminiscent of the language of the prophets during the time of the exile (who describe it as marital adultery) in that both use "strongly relational" language, depicting a "deeply affective and anthropomorphic" theological core. The influence on the text is both apparent and profound, yet Latvus's assertion and recreation of the different Deuteronomic voices in connection with specific historical events in Israel's history demonstrate intertextuality, but perhaps not dependence. His insights into the theological frame are helpful, even if the specific "writers" of these frames remain tentative.

[90] This assumption can be seen in explicitly in early works like: Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, 240–41; Burney, *Book of Judges*, 131; yet more recent commentaries are not immune to this assumption: Frolov, *Turn of the Cycle*, 47–48; O'Connell, *Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 40–42; Matthews, *Judges and Ruth*, 53.

only time in the iterations of the judges' cycles when repentance is clearly articulated is in Judg 10:15–16.[91] And importantly, this happens after God has said "no" to their cry. Instead of an implied cry of repentance, the language of Israel's call to God is reminiscent of the Israelites' cry of distress when enslaved by the Egyptians (Exod 2:23).[92] It was the desperate cry of his people that moved God to raise up a deliverer (Moses) to bring his people out of Egypt (2:24–25; 3:7–10). This act was not a cry of confession, but a call for deliverance, which was accompanied by God "seeing" the misery of his people.[93] Martin notes that "Israel's suffering under the Egyptian regime is paradigmatic for its later suffering at the hands of the tyrannical Canaanite rulers."[94] Throughout the book of Judges, as in the exodus event, the cries of Israel elicit God's compassionate response, and he moves to save Israel over and over again in a series of mini-exoduses. The exodus was a paradigmatic event, which shaped Israel's expectation for their experience with Yhwh, a deity who cannot bear to see his people suffering. Yhwh is a God who is *moved* to action because of his compassionate response to the misery of his people.

Therefore, the cycle of the judges demonstrates two important aspects of the Israelites' archetypical expectations of Yhwh. First, the God of the book of Judges is relational and just—loyalty and fidelity matter deeply to him, and Israel demonstrates these qualities through covenant faithfulness. Infidelity initiates a mechanism of punishment (by means of foreign oppressors), which is prefaced by Yhwh's affective experience: Yhwh is angry at their betrayal.

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[91] Notably, the different judges' accounts do not explicitly state whether or not the cry was penitential, with the exception of 10:10, 15, leaving the content of the cry ambiguous. While it may be fair to assume that certain judges were able to lead their tribes into penitence, God certainly does not believe that their cries reflect true repentance.

[92] Boda (*Return to Me*, 51) notes that in the introduction to Judges (2:18), the cry is described as "groaning" (נאקה) a term associated with Israel's "groaning" under the oppression in Egypt (Exod 2:24; 6:5), yet most of the judges' accounts rely on a more generic verb for "distress" (זעק , Judg 3:9, 15; 4:3; 6:6–7; 10:10).

[93] See also Wong, *Compositional Strategy*, 181; Martin, "Yahweh Conflicted," 362.

[94] Martin, "Yahweh Conflicted," 362.

Furthermore, the God of Judges is a God of strength and compassion in response to his people's pain—the Israelites are his "treasured possession" (Exod 19:5), and he cannot bear to see them suffer. The people depend upon (and exploit) God's compassion and his election of Israel to find stability in the land over and over again. As a relational deity who is not slavishly following a set of guidelines, God wrestles with the tension that is necessarily created between these two qualities: when to act in justice and when to act in compassion.[95]

Mode of Conduct: Above Reproach, but Defying Expectations

The mode of conduct offers a character appraisal and evaluation based on the perspective of the storyteller—is the character trustworthy and good? While Yhwh's mode of conduct is never explicitly stated by the storyteller in *this* judge cycle,[96] the story level of biblical narrative presumes the moral authority of the divine.[97] Yet even while God is always assumed to be just, righteous, and good, that does not mean those attributes are conceived of simply. This account in particular presses the goodness of God and the expected experience of divine compassion: does the goodness of God require that he always save his people when they cry out to him?[98]

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[95] After developing his argument for the unrelieved tensions in the passions of Yhwh, Martin ("Yahweh Conflicted," 370) concludes, "[h]e does not enjoy the tension, but he endures it," arguing that this tension should not be mitigated in our theology but embraced as a testament to God's truly relational disposition.

[96] However, it may be inferred based on the divine lawsuit in Judg 2:1–5, which offers a defense of Yhwh as a consistently faithful covenant partner and friend to Israel, contrasted with Israel's repeated disobedience and rejection of Yhwh (see Butler, *Judges*, 39–42). Furthermore, 2:20—3:6 tells us that Yahweh left these nations and their gods in place to test his people for faithfulness.

[97] It is important to acknowledge that many postmodern, ideological criticisms, and reader-response perspectives do not maintain a similar conviction. While the reliability of the narrator and the trustworthiness of the divine may be an issue of personal debate, they are never in question on the story level of the biblical narrative. When characters within the story struggle with theodicy (for example, Job), God's response does not explain divine justice, but only calls for the requisite trust in the divine. See Amit (*Reading Biblical Narratives*, 93–102) for a helpful assessment of the reliability of Yhwh's character in biblical narratives.

[98] An even more disturbing to the sense of divine goodness, why does Yhwh not intervene in the same way during the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter as he does for the sacrifice of Abraham's son (Gen 22)? This question will be discussed in chapter five, which discusses the perspective of the daughter.

From the perspective of the Israelites within the narrative of Judges, Yhwh has always saved them when foreign nations oppressed them.[99] Thus, when Yhwh rebukes their cry for help and verbally refuses to intervene during the period of the Ammonite and Philistine invasion, this must be a disorienting experience. Their new experience of rejection, even if it is only a temporary rebuke, defies their mechanistic categories for understanding God's response to their misery, leading to the question: is the goodness of God always demonstrated in his deliverance of the people?[100] Yet reading the story from the perspective of Yhwh reverses the direction of the question—Is delivering his people always an appropriate expression of God's goodness? God seems to be reckoning with the fundamental tension in his repeated acts of compassionate deliverance. If the salvific acts of Yhwh become an automatic response to Israel's pain, over time these mechanistic responses become self-serving tools for manipulating divine favor. Then, his special relationship with Israel (as his "treasured possession") devolves into a toxic assumption of exceptionalism that no longer requires repentance, only expressed need.

Even so, after Yhwh says "no" to the Israelites' cry, they respond with acts of contrition in both word and deed. They acknowledge their sin with their mouth ("we have sinned," Judg 10:15) and then with their actions (they "put aside" other gods and "served Yhwh," v. 16), thereby returning to their covenant obligations.[101] This demonstrates some level of awareness on behalf of Israel—when their attempt to solicit a repetition of the exodus event does not work,

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[99] This claim is predicated on the sequence of events narrated in the judges cycle, not on a historical reconstruction of the chronological events.

[100] While this breaks the paradigmatic pattern of the judges, the broader witness of Deuteronomic history demonstrates that deliverance is not always the best approach (e.g., 2 Kgs 25).

[101] Boda (*Return to Me*, 51) notes that Judg 10:10, 15 is the only place in which the confession, including the admission of sin, is followed by a description of penitence—representing a clear act of repentance.

they seek to restore their place as covenant partners through repentance.[102] But Yhwh is unmoved.[103] How might the goodness of God be understood when Israel repents and God still says no? Does this throw shade on the compassionate portrait of God?

Yet even in their act of penitence, the Israelites reveal the self-interested motivation of their actions, begging God to do as he sees fit, but "deliver us this day" (v. 15b). Block aptly points out that, "[t]he people's verbal response to Yahweh's rejection betrays a blindness not only to the fundamental contradiction in their demand, but also to the manner in which Yahweh has consistently worked heretofore in the book," handing them over to their enemies as a result of their betrayal.[104] While the repentance may be authentic, their retort conveys that they know that Ammon's oppression is punishment for their idolatry and even defer piously to the will of God, but then quickly add—except not *this* time.[105] Perhaps this is why Yhwh remains unspeaking and does not raise up a deliverer.[106]

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[102] Notably, they only make movements towards true repentance after the cry for help failed to secure deliverance (see Gorospe and Ringma, *Judges*, 141–43). Notably, Webb (*Integrated Reading*, 45) argues that Yhwh is not merely responding, but interjecting in the midst of their repentance. Therefore, their actions are not necessarily a response to Yhwh's rejection, but a completion of the act, regardless of the outcome. Yet Webb also reads their act as utilitarian, which implies that it is manipulative from the start.

[103] Yhwh's lack of response could indicate one of two assessments of Israel's repentance: firstly, that Israel's repentance is purely utilitarian and therefore does not warrant divine mercy, or secondly, that it is authentic but that the opportunity for repentance has passed (see Jer 14:1—15:4).

[104] Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 348) further notes that what is right in God's eyes has been to hand Israel over to their enemies in judgment, yet "what is right had been suspended in favor of what is gracious." Boda and Conway (*Judges*, 9) further question the implications of their request for rescue, noting that it could present a brazen Israel who assumes that Yhwh will always get them out of trouble or a humbled Israel crying out in genuine desperation. The reader essentially holds both readings in tension.

[105] Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 182–83) notes the seemingly genuine repentance of the Israelites, drawing a parallel between this account and the introductory formula in Gideon (Judg 6:7–9) and the introduction (Judg 2:2–5) to contrast the different manifestations of repentance appears. Further, he notes their stated connection between their idolatry and the Ammonites—the Israelites know that they have sinned and that the Ammonite incursion is a result of that sin. Yet he fails to acknowledge how this moment fits within the premise of his overall work, as the final line, "only please deliver us this day," articulates the story's first instance of self-interested action.

[106] Notably, Yhwh does send the Spirit of Yhwh upon Jephthah just before battle (11:29), but the text explicitly states that it is the Gileadites, not Yhwh, who raise up the deliverer (vv. 5–6). And Yhwh does not speak again throughout the remainder of the story. While 1 Sam 12:11 does indicate that God "sent" Jephthah, the lack of direct indication by the narrator of Judges remains suspicious and casts doubt. It may be that God's sending of the spirit (11:29) and Jephthah's subsequent divine victory (11:29, 33) prompted the brief description by Samuel.

The Israelites experience a disruption in their perception of their God's nature: if the God of the covenant and the exodus event is true to his word, why has no help arrived even after their repentance? The covenant with Yhwh explains their experience of sin and punishment and even the anger of God itself. Yet their awareness of the exodus event would lead them to expect a deity who acts on their behalf. Were they no longer his 'treasured possession,' or did Yhwh no longer act in compassion? If the sin cycle established mechanistic norms that the Israelites depend upon, they may perceive that Yhwh has violated the rules he had established and that they have been wronged.

Disposition and Perspective within the Narrative: The Exasperated Divine

The disposition, or personality, of Yhwh in this opening scene is vividly anthropomorphic, strikingly emotive, and offers insight into the perspective of Yhwh as the story begins. Yhwh is not passively enacting his duties as arbiter of covenant law, but deeply grieved at the repeated rejections of the Israelites. Reading the story through the lens of Yhwh, therefore, requires engaging with his personalized and specific responses to the situations within the account. While the movements within the sin cycle have revealed the basic characteristics that constitute anticipated archetypes of Yhwh's character, Yhwh does not fit neatly into archetypical boxes, forcing readers to reevaluate their own assumptions of divine personhood. This account features a unique response from God that is prefaced by a self-declared *disruption* in the "mind" of Yhwh himself—he is "angry" (10:7) and "exasperated" (10:16) with Israel.[107] This disruption in

[107] This project does not argue for the fundamental nature of the divine (e.g., whether he is immutable), but rather takes seriously textual cues that reflect causality. A reader may assume that this language is merely figurative (to teach an abstract concept in a tangible way) or that it reveals the nature of God (concerning divine affect), yet both approaches must deal with the language presented. Therefore, this project will not argue for one presumptive framework or the other, only for the presentation of the divine on the story level itself.

Yhwh's mental world fundamentally reshapes the pattern in the second movement. The anticipated deliverance does not come because God's anger has led him to reject their claims—he neither abandons them nor raises up a deliverer. God chooses to be silent.

It is difficult to understand God's response to Israel without first understanding the weight of Israel's sin. This particular iteration of the sin cycle is striking because of its emphatic list of covenantal failings.[108] And when readers shift their perspective to the experience of God, the contrast between the infidelity of Israel and the faithfulness of God is striking. Yhwh has not simply been ignored, but the Israelites have turned to serve almost every god in the Levant *except* for Yhwh.[109] The verb "to serve" (עבד) brackets the opening and closing remarks in the introductory verse (10:6), highlighting the negative correlation between their acts of worship. Initially, the text states "and they served" (ויעבדו) other gods, and then it concludes that "they did not serve him" (ולא עבדוהו). Sandwiched between these two verbs is a list of all the gods Israel has chosen to serve instead of Yhwh, highlighting their wholesale rejection of their God.[110]

Again, reading the story from Yhwh's perspective emphasizes the depth of their betrayal. The Israelites' attitude towards Yhwh is not characterized as a passive and incidental forgetting; instead, they fundamentally reject him and actively עזב ("abandon") him (v. 6).[111] Yhwh's *own* people (his treasured possession) have forsaken him. Adding insult to injury, not only have they

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[108] Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 344) points out that this is the most elaborate description of apostasy in the book of Judges itself, signaling that Israel has reached its climax of degradation. Furthermore, Butler (*Judges*, 261) describes this occurrence of the sin cycle as "revealing the depraved status of Israel."

[109] Notably, Schneider (*Judges*, 101, 124) notes that the lack of named deities obscures what the text means by the "bad thing" that they did, suggesting that it was likely more than just false worship, but intermarriage that led to apostasy.

[110] This notion that Israel "serves" other gods can clearly be seen in the prelude to the judges cycle (2:11) as well as in the account of Othniel, but in most accounts it seems to be simply assumed. The story of Gideon suggests that the idolatry is widespread and normalized and, significantly, every judge after this seems to dwell in a world that presupposes Israel's worship of other gods.

[111] Conway, *Judging the Judges*, 462.

abandoned him, but they have chosen nearly every *other* deity to worship. The text lists seven deities which symbolically represents wholeness or completion,[112] and, compared to the accounts of other judges, this list of deities seems oddly specific and uniquely described. Only the first two deities are mentioned by name, albeit via a generic and likely representative title: Baals and Ashtoreths. The remaining deities are instead identified by the nations who worship them:[113] the gods of Aram,[114] Sidon,[115] Moab,[116] Ammon,[117] and Philistia.[118] Ironically, these nations also appear at various points throughout the book of Judges as the nations who oppress Israel, highlighting the audacity of the disloyalty. Repeatedly, Israel has cried out to Yhwh on account of the oppression from *these* nations, and now Israel has abandoned Yhwh to serve the gods of their oppressors.

The "punishment" portion of the sin cycle is similarly amplified, conveying God's own feelings of betrayal through his response. The *action* of God's punishment is introduced with the *emotion* of God's response to idolatry, the "the anger of Yhwh burned against Israel" (v. 7). This

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[112] Several scholars explore the significance of the seven-nation list. For example, Hamlin (*At Risk in the Promised Land,* 110–11) points out that Israel is charged with seven cases of apostasy, despite the fact that Yhwh has saved them from oppression seven times. Meanwhile, Biddle (*Reading Judges*, 117) concludes that the heptad apostasy may signal that the sin/deliverance cycle has reached its climactic point; therefore, something is about to change.

[113] Scholarship has often noted the emphatic introduction to this iteration of the sin cycle for differing reasons. For example, Niditch (*Judges*, 123) believes that these are examples of the Israelites' assimilation to cultures in Canaan. Butler (*Judges*, 262) contrasts Israel's acquiesce to the gods of Canaan with Joshua's annihilation of other deities. Conway (*Judging the Judges*, 462) contrasts the expansive list to others in the cycle of judges, concluding that "sin reaches its climax in the cycle of Jephthah." All of these observations, and more, point to various ways in which the emphasis of the storyteller creates a distinctively broken and chaotic introduction to the story of Jephthah as the Israelites become indistinguishable from their Canaanite neighbors.

[114] Subdued by Othniel (3:10).

[115] Mentioned in the opening account (1:31), as well as in Micah's story (18:28), yet the Israelites are never explicitly oppressed by Sidon.

[116] Subdued by Ehud (3:10-30).

[117] Mentioned in the account of Ehud (3:13), but more significantly, this is the nation that Jephthah has been called to fight despite the fact that Israel has chosen to "serve" their gods (10:7–18).

[118] The Philistines are, perhaps, one of the most frequent enemies of Israel. They are a threatening force during the time of Othniel (3:3) and Ehud (3:21), as well as Jephthah himself (10:7). They also continue to be a major force during and after the life of Samson (13:1-5).

particular phrase has not been used since the first act of unfaithfulness in the hero stories, during the time of Othniel (3:8), and it does not appear again in the book of Judges.[119] This means that the sins of Israel during the time of Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, or even Samson do not elicit the same emotional response (burning anger) from Yhwh as *these* acts of idolatry.[120] Yhwh's anger and discontent with his people is not easily abated, as it was during the career of earlier judges, rather this particular situation which is characterized by *multiple* violations of their covenant relationship, triggers a more intense emotional response.

God's corresponding actions seem to indicate the intensity of his outrage, he "sold them into the hand" (וימכרם ביד)[121] of the Philistines and Ammonites: "and they were shattered" (וירעצו), "and they were crushed" (וירצצו).[122] Israel's relational dissonance with Yhwh leads to rejection and God leaves them to fight for themselves. As a result, foreign powers decimate the Israelite forces, who are defenseless without their God to fight for them. The result is wholesale destruction. For the first time in the text, enemies encroach against Israel from both sides of the Jordan at once: the Ammonites from the east and the Philistines from the West.[123] God's

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[119] The narrative parallels between Jephthah and Othniel are intriguing. Both feature a daughter trapped by their father due to a war-time vow. This connection will be developed further in chapter five. Yet it is worth noting that even here the connections between the stories of the two men are beginning to connect.

[120] Typically, this section is introduced with the phrase "and again, the sons of Israel did evil in the eyes of Yhwh . . . and he have them into the hand of . . . for . . . years." This pattern can be seen in each of the judges' accounts: Othniel (3:7–8), Deborah (4:1–2), Gideon (6:1), and Samson (13:1), with a variation of this formula occurring in the story of Ehud (3:12-13). (There is no introductory formula in the story of Abimelech [9:1]). Notably, only in the introduction to the sin cycle (2:11), the story of Othniel, and the account of Jephthah does the formula include an emotion attached to Yhwh's action of delivering them into the hands of their oppressor. .

[121] Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 191) explores the expression that God "gives them over" noting that in military contexts it "always implies that people are left to the mercy of others." Furthermore, Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 344) points out that this is the first time that the "anger of God" is mentioned as the emotion behind selling them into their enemies' hand.

[122] This is the only place that this verb occurs in the *polel* form, which makes it difficult to translate. Butler (*Judges*, 263) goes as far as to suggest "exterminate" as a translation. Yet the Israelites clearly survive this incursion, so that seems a bit too drastic. Either way, the intensity is palpable.

[123] Schneider, *Judges*, 160.

rejection leads the Israelites to also experience a familiar sense of disillusionment in an intensified form, "there was great distress for Israel" (10:9).[124] Conway notes, "this is an indication of the reciprocal suffering that Israel has caused their God."[125] The amplified adjectives ("*burning* anger" and "*great* distress") draw the reader into the experience of extreme suffering, connecting that suffering to the relational brokenness initiated by Israel.

As expected per the sin cycle, the Israelites cry out to Yhwh for help (v. 10), likely expecting their deliverance, and the story shifts back to Yhwh's perspective as readers await his response. Their cry includes an admission of sin, but little else.[126] Past precedent would suggest that when the people cry out to Yhwh in "great distress," it would move him to compassion. Yet doubt lingers. The introduction has already emphatically demonstrated that the Israelites are untrustworthy, which opens up the possibility that their cry and admittance of guilt may be motivated by something other than reconciliation. Given the context of oppression and the repeated attempts to repent only to return to sin, the pattern suggests that their motivation for restoration may be have been reduced to self-serving utilitarianism, only calling on God when all other plans fail. God remains disturbed by their infidelity and either his patience has run out or he remains unconvinced by their confession, finally speaking his mind in return.[127]

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[124] Interestingly, the verb here, צרר, means "distressed" (*BDB*, def. 1.), but it also has the sense of being "bound" or "constricted." In the present context, that slight inflection may be intentional. For Israel, they were hemmed in by their enemies on the east and west and the attack was constricting them further and further (cf. *CDCH*, def. 2).

[125] Conway, *Judging the Judges*, 467.

[126] Additionally, Boda and Conway (*Judges*) highlight the distinctive nature of the confession at this point in the story. Importantly, this is the only confession attached to the "cry" in the cycle of judges, and the initial confession is incomplete. It stands alone, without any corresponding change in behavior, and therefore is an inadequate expression of repentance, which is immediately rebuffed by God.

[127] To this end, Polzin (*Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 177–78) notes, "What comes through quite forcefully in this dialogue are both Israel's rather self-serving conversion as an apparent attempt once more to use Yahweh to insure their peace and tranquility, and Yahweh's argument that a slighted and rejected God will be used no longer."

God's spoken response is direct and stinging, revealing the intensity of his own disruptive experience with Israel. Yhwh's message is no longer delivered through a messenger (2:1–3) or a prophet (6:8–10), but spoken directly to the people of Israel ("and Yhwh said to the sons of Israel," 10:11). In a speech dripping with furious irony, Yhwh declares:

> Did I not [deliver you] from Egypt and from the Amorites and from the sons of Ammon and from the Philistines? And the Sidonians and Amalek and Maon oppressed you. And you cried out to me, and I delivered you from their hand. But *you* abandoned me! And you served other gods; therefore, I will not continue to deliver you. Go and cry out to the gods that you have chosen! Let *them* save you in the time of your distress. (vv. 11–14)

The cadence and content of God's speech are telling. The syntax of the text is awkward, with missing verbs and problematic word order—skipping important connecting verbs in the opening clauses to seemingly spit out an account of earlier acts of deliverance—conveying an emotive Yhwh.[128] He begins with a rebuke, framing their shared history as a rhetorical question on God's dependability. Ironically, the long list of enemies from whom he has saved them corresponds with the long list of gods for whom Israel has abandoned Yhwh.[129] They request deliverance, but God has already delivered them over and over again. And Israel has been consistent only in their abandonment of him in favor of those very nations, whose deities they now serve. After recalling these prior situations of distress and his faithful deliverance, Yhwh exclaims, "*you* abandoned me!" Yhwh is hurt by this betrayal of trust and sardonically replies that they should return to the gods they have chosen in his place. After all, they must believe that these deities can save them if

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[128] Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 412–13) contrasts both the mode of delivery (a messenger) and the smooth complaint and grievance in 2:1–4 and 6:8–9. Instead, this text reads like an outburst that is directly attributed to God. Furthermore, he points to the fractured syntax, or anacoluthon, that "approximates bursts of anger." He points to the difficult syntax resulting from the preposition מִן attached to the first three powers (Egypt, Amorites, and Philistines, v.11), which seemingly connect them to the delivering act from Egypt, but not attached to the remaining peoples from whom Yhwh delivered his people (v.12).

[129] Gorospe and Ringma, *Judges*, 142.

they were willing to risk their relationship with Yhwh to serve these other gods. Yhwh's furious speech suggests that he is moved by more than "anger," but also by a deeper sense of dejection and a growing sense of futility in his efforts.[130] Yhwh refuses to be their utilitarian God.[131]

Israel responds to God's rebuke with a second confession and a change of behavior, but there is no verbal response from God, only a narrative conclusion that Yhwh is in misery. Notably, the storyteller continues to reshape the sin cycle by clearly not stating Israel's fate. Instead, the focus is on the way in which God continues to experience the unfolding events—God is exasperated—but the cause of that misery is less clear. The confusion comes as a result of the ambiguous closing phrase, (ותקצר נפשו בעמל ישראל, v. 16b). If Yhwh has accepted their confession and repentance as genuine, then the reference to the suffering of the Israelites may be an indication of God's movement towards compassion.[132] After all, compassion is often a precursor for Yhwh's acts of deliverance, and the scene that follows introduces the deliverer of Israel. Therefore, many interpreters render this phrase in a way that reflects Yhwh's misery in seeing Israel suffer, which elicits sympathy and initiates his acts of deliverance.[133] Yet others

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[130] Wijk-Bos, *End of the Beginning*, 255. In contrast, Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 189) shifts the emphasis to God's response to Israel's failed leadership, stating that this is not a rejection of Israel's repentance, but their lack of solid leadership. While this offers an interesting texture to the reading, he does not adequately account for the lack of leadership language in God's rejection speech.

[131] Gorospe and Ringma, *Judges*, 141–47.

[132] Several scholars share this conclusion. For example, Niditch (*Judges*, 124) translates this phrase as "his soul was cut to the quick" as a result of their repentance, contending that God therefore decided to intervene. McCann (*Judges*, 78–79) assumes that this text indicates God's decision to act and states that he "proceeds to deliver them by way of Jephthah." Boling (*Judges*, 193) suggests that God is moved by their willingness to act and genuinely remove the foreign gods from among them (cf. Moore, *Judges*, 281; Kaufmann, *Sefer Shoftim*, 216; Schneider, *Judges*, 160).

[133] For example, Polzin (*Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 177) argues that God's patience has run out due to their repeated attempts to repent and change God's mind (cf. Webb, *Integrated Reading*, 42–46; O'Connell, *Rhetoric of the Judges*, 187–88; Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 415). See Butler (*Judges*, 266–67) for a full breakdown of the different scholarly positions.

suggest that Yhwh sees through their acts of repentance as disingenuous and utilitarian and remains exasperated by their repeated offence.[134]

As seen in the timecourse, each situation in the Jephthah narrative is defined by an act of negotiation, with the participants acting out of self-interest and manipulation, casting doubt on the Israelites' sincerity in repentance.[135] Furthermore, the phrase (ותקצר נפשו) is also utilized in the Samson account (16:16) to describe Samson's response to Delilah's repeated questioning, typically translated "he became exasperated to the point of death." Notably, Samson's exasperation was provoked by his frustration at her persistence.[136] Likewise, it is Yhwh's frustration with Israel (a frustration he has already laid out in detail), rather than his compassion, that dominates his final text; "but his soul was exasperated by the trouble of Israel." Yet, much like Samson, the frustration comes as a result of divine love, not from an absence of it. If Yhwh still cares enough to grow weary, the relationship *still* exists. Therefore, the hope of restoration *may* also still exist.

The Tellability of Yhwh's Story: What the Reader Learns in Reading the Story from Yhwh's Perspective

Early in the Jephthah cycle, Yhwh *chooses* to step into the background of the narrative, but before he leaves, he makes an illuminating speech. Through God's response to Israel's repeated betrayals, his silence in the following scenes is given reason and purpose. Israel's utilitarian use of the sin cycle has ruined its ability to effectively obtain Yhwh's salvation. If they only turn to

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[134] For example, see Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 346–47; O'Connell, *Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 187; Webb, *Book of Judges* (NICOT), 305–7; Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 177.

[135] Boda and Conway, *Judges*, 11. Interestingly, the same can be said for Yhwh: his initial response is not the final response, it is an opening salvo to emphasize the increased problem of Israel's sin and is followed by a less explicit reference to Yhwh empowering the deliverer they had chosen for themselves.

[136] Boda and Conway, *Judges*, 10.

God in order to get them out of the mess that they brought upon themselves, God's chosen silence will allow them to see where their path of self-interest leads. Stepping into Yhwh's perspective awakens an empathetic rendering of the divine and an awareness of the way in which reliance on God's repeatedly compassionate responses may cause suffering and anguish in God. Coupling the storyteller's description of the people's all-encompassing acts of infidelity and rejection with Yhwh's emotive language of anger and exasperation, the story of God in this account compels readers to reflect deeply upon their use and misuse of divine compassion. Although Yhwh's explicit interaction with the people is contained almost exclusively in the opening scene of the Jephthah narrative (Judg 10:6–16), his story certainly passes the test of tellability.[137] Firstly, the structured timecourse demonstrates a clear and distinct sequence of events in which Yhwh both interacts and responds: the infidelity of the Israelites leads to the reaction of Yhwh (Judg 10:6–9), Yhwh's punishment leads to their confession (Judg 10:10), their confession leads to Yhwh's scathing rebuke (Judg 10:11–14), and their seeming repentance torments God (Judg 10:15–16). There is a clear order to the events that develops the situation and also shapes the responses of Yhwh and Israel. Secondly, the storyteller clearly articulates Yhwh's experience of disruption. His disruption is twofold—the repeated acts of infidelity that cause feelings of anger and betrayal and his exasperation with the dysfunctional nature of the sin cycle, evident in both his speech (Judg 10:11–14) and narrative description (Judg 10:16b). Finally, the reader can empathize with similar experiences of disruption caused by disloyalty and manipulated compassion, which lead to feelings of anger, betrayal, and exasperation.[138] I read this passage through the lens of some failed friendships and strained relationships with church

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[137] The criteria for tellability are outlined in the methodology section of the first chapter.

[138] Notably, subjective experience does not require that I have experienced the same situations, only similar feelings of disruption in which to weigh my own experiences and actions.

and family members, which have acquainted me with the disruption caused by others' self-interest and the abuse of my own instincts for compassion. In those experiences of subjective awareness, the "character" of Yhwh becomes a friend with shared experience, offering insight into these human relationships as well as my own relationship with the divine.

This cognitive narratology characterization model emphasizes the personhood implicit in each character in the storyworld, therefore inviting a reflection on the personhood of God in this account. Throughout the book of Judges, Yhwh has continually held Israel to the expectations of their covenant relationship, revoking the covenant blessing when they have violated the stipulations. Yhwh has also been presented as the compassionate deliverer, caring so deeply for his people that he is unable to hear their cries of pain without acting to deliver them. Over and over again, Yhwh re-enacts the exodus deliverance, asking for faithfulness in return. Yet over and over again, his acts of compassion are met with forgetfulness, disloyalty, and a callous disregard for the relationship that he so cherishes. As a result, this account suggests that compassion has limits, particularly when they lead to destructive ends, but the depth of his relational connection with his people—Yhwh is in pain.

Yet Yhwh's response to these disruptions is important precisely because he is God and models the highest ideals: how should one respond to similar experiences of disruption? On the story level, Yhwh's mode of conduct is never in doubt—the God of the judges is just and good—yet how does one define those qualities when standard measurements of God's activities are challenged or absent. When they cry out, they are rebuked. When they repent, they receive only silence. Does the compassion of God require that he move to action each time his people call upon him? Or if the consequences of betrayal are immediately transcended when the betrayer seeks restoration, is the relational pattern itself becoming destructive? Yhwh's actions

demonstrate that showing compassion may have consequences, and patterns of divine behavior should not become expected norms because they create an illusion of a detached and unfeeling divine patron who can be manipulated when necessary. Gorospe and Ringma contend that Yhwh's refusal to submit to the expectations of the sin cycle speaks volumes:

> Yahweh's silence in the face of Israel's outward confession and repentance breaks the cycle of sin-oppression-deliverance-rest. This challenges the contemporary community of faith to break perpetual cycles of co-dependence/dysfunction and patterns of abuse/forgiveness or confession/restoration when no real changes take place.[139]

In this way, the depiction of Yhwh in this text is both jarring to our structuralist sensibilities and profound in its revelation of the divine. Yhwh is not a detached arbiter of covenant law, nor is he required to extend mercy—particularly when that mercy leads to further destruction. Israel promises to amend their ways, putting aside false gods and worshiping only Yhwh (10:15–16), yet Yhwh remains unconvinced. The scene ends with the possibility of hope (Yhwh *is* moved, even if it is in exasperation), but with many lingering doubts. Are the Israelites simply trying to curry his favor or is this change sincere? In subsequent scenes, God's involvement with Gilead's deliverer is small—appearing explicitly only in the statement, "the Spirit of Yhwh came upon Jephthah" (11:29). The reason for his reticence is explained in the ten-verse prologue—God himself will break the pattern of abuse. The question of God's participation in the events that are unfolding darkens the conclusion to the prelude as well as the four scenes that follow: can restoration truly happen if the person who hopes for restoration has duplicitous intentions? For the first time in the book of Judges, Israel's deliverance is not secure and God's involvement is indeterminate.

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[139] Gorospe and Ringma, *Judges*, 147.

CHAPTER 3: THE RIVALS OF JEPHTHAH: OPPORTUNISM AND CALLOUSNESS RUN IN THE FAMILY

> *If the soul is left in darkness, sins will be committed. The guilty one is not he who commits the sin, but the one who causes the darkness.*
> Monseigneur Bienvenu in Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

The story of Israel in Judg 10:6—12:7 is filled with suffering as the brokenness of Israel's relationship with Yhwh is on display at every level of society, from household controversy to national crisis. The previous episode depicts the Israelites crying out to God to save them, as they have done many times before, yet God does not respond as they expect (10:6–16). An exasperated God says no, or at least he refuses to respond a second time after their repentance (vv. 11–14). While God's speech reflects the maddened response of a deity who has had enough of his people, the Israelites seeming repentance (v. 15) and their ostensible turn from false worship (v. 16a) offer a glimmer of hope for the future of Israel. Perhaps God will be moved by *seeming* repentance. The final clause of the previous episode may suggest a further reason for hope (v. 16c). Yet this hope is uncertain as the text allows for two conflicting readings: is God moved to compassion due to their pain, or is he fed up with their troublesome fickleness?[1] This ambiguous ending creates tension as the battle continues in Gilead. Will God raise up a deliverer, or will they have to rise to the occasion themselves?

[1] See the previous chapter for the different interpretive issues with this verse. In this project, I have rendered the translation, "but his soul was exasperated by the trouble of Israel."

Soon after the conflict between Ammon and Gilead is introduced, the rise of a deliverer is thwarted twice: first, when God refuses to produce a deliverer for Israel (v. 14) and again when the Gileadites attempt to raise up *their own* deliverer and that call goes unanswered (vv. 17–18). An echoed silence in each story leaves the reader in suspense: will the calls for help ever be answered? Yet that is not the only resonance between these two scenes. As the story continues to unfold, the household relationships between the brothers mirror Israel's broken relationship with their patron God. Both the Israelites and the Gileadite brothers refuse to act for restoration until self-preservation demands it. A close evaluation of the brothers and elders demonstrates that the conflation of ambition and retribution is not unique to Jephthah, rather it is an echo of the household values of Gilead.

The character appraisal of the brothers and elders examines the impact of broken kinship ties, pride, and betrayal as they impact the governance of Israel, emphasizing the damaging effects of self-interested action. The brothers and elders create and sustain a situation in which justice and honor are diminished in favor of an "every man for himself" mentality. Yet, rather than contrast their poor outlook with the noble character of Jephthah, the storyteller instead creates parallels between them. Both the brothers and Jephthah share a common goal: on the surface, they believe that they have been wronged and seek to correct that perceived injustice with the power given to them. But upon closer inspection their quest is self-focused, and they perpetuate even worse injustices in their attempt at retribution. The story of Jephthah among his brothers demonstrates over and over again that self-seeking interest under the guise of restoration leads to tragedy.

Translation of Situation 2: Jephthah among the Sons of Gilead

17 Now the sons of Ammon were summoned and encamped in Gilead, and the sons of Israel gathered and encamped in Mizpah. 18 And the people, the leaders of Gilead,[2] said to one another, "Who is the man who will begin to fight against the sons of Ammon? He will become as a head to all the inhabitants of Gilead."

11 1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior. And he was the son of a prostitute,[3] yet Gilead fathered Jephthah. 2 Now the wife of Gilead bore him sons, and the sons of his wife grew up and expelled Jephthah and said to him, "You will not inherit in the house of our father because you are the son of another woman." 3 So Jephthah fled from before his brothers and lived in the land of Tob. Then empty[4] men gathered to Jephthah and went out with him.

4 And it came to pass in time that the sons of Ammon fought against Israel.[5] 5 And it happened, that when the sons of Ammon made war with Israel, the elders of Gilead went to bring Jephthah from the land of Tob. 6 Then they said to Jephthah, "Come with us and be our captain, and we may fight against the sons of Ammon." 7 But Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did *you*[6] not hate me and expel me from my father's house? So why have you come to me now that distress is upon you?" 8 And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "Assuredly,[7] now we have returned to you, that you may go with us and may fight against the sons of Ammon. Then you will become to us as a head for all the inhabitants of Gilead." 9 Then Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you take me back[8] to fight against the sons of Ammon, and Yhwh gives them over to me, then I will certainly become your head." 10 And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "Yhwh will hear between us, surely we will do according to your word." 11 So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead and the people appointed him as head and as commander over them. Then Jephthah spoke all his words before Yhwh at Mizpah.

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[2] Certain manuscripts disagree: LXX: twelve 𝔊* καὶ Μαδιαμ, which reflects ומדין.

[3] The term (זנה) will be discussed in full later in the chapter.

[4] The translation of this term is much debated. This is the second time it is used to describe persons in the book of Judges, referring also to the people whom Abimelech hires to murder his brothers in 9:4, where it is paired with פחזים and seems to indicate the unscrupulous nature of these men. Elsewhere, when this term is applied to people, it is similarly used to describe unsavory actions (see 2 Sam 6:20; 2 Chr 13:7). In reference to actions themselves, Proverbs uses it to describe "senseless" or "empty" pursuits (see 12:11; 28:19). Mobley (*Empty Men*, 1–2) observes specific commonalities between the three occurrences of the phrase "empty men" (Judg 9:4; 11:3; 2 Chr 13:7), noting that they all designate men who "fell through the cracks" of kinship relations that organized life and family; therefore, they gathered together making pseudo-families who survived using "martial harvests and brigandage."

[5] This verse is missing in some LXX manuscripts.

[6] Here, I have italicized "you" to reflect an emphatic use, due to a redundant pronoun (*IBHS* §16.3.1b).

[7] Here I follow the translation of Mary Conway (*Judging the Judges*), who explains the expression as a response to an objection rather than the typical "therefore" used in judgment announcements. This is also reflected in the LXX, οὐχ οὕτως, which suggests the Vorlage (כן לא).

[8] This syntax is awkward, but reflects the sense of the *hiphil* on the verb (שוב), therefore "return me" (i.e., cause me to return, assuming that (אתם) is the direct object marker.

The Brothers and Elders in the Text

Both the brothers and the elders qualify for a character study given the presence of basic textual elements of Hebrew characterization, speech and action, but their perspectives in the story rely heavily on socially recognized roles,[9] which are uniquely nuanced to tell *this* story. Rather than named individuals or even unnamed individuals with a distinct role (such as the daughter of Jephthah and the king of Ammon), the brothers and elders are always referenced as a collective and therefore treated as a unit.[10] Yet that unit does not merely impose the expectations of their social role onto the story, but utilizes them as a starting point to offer a succinct, yet impactful and personalized response to their situation of disruption. Therefore, this nuanced rendering of a character archetype (brothers/elders) as they respond to familiar situations (inheritance/war) resonates with the story's audience and forces them to reflect on the contentious realities of family life, kinship, hardship, and the consequences of selfish choices. The story acts as a warning about the inherent weaknesses within their social system, which require participants to be *impartial* and *just* in order for the system to function properly.

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[9] Admittedly, understanding the social and historical cues of the biblical text is not an exact science. The ancient storyteller selected elements of the social world that, in some way, reflect elements of their audience's accepted reality, regardless of whether that reality is the setting of the story, the world of the storyteller themselves, or a complete fabrication by the storyteller. Yet "[c]haracters in a story are positioned to fulfill particular and socially recognizable roles" (Matthews, "Determination of Social Identity," 17), evinced by the fact that they utilize, but typically do not explain, their existence (by contrast, note the explanation of the role of the seer in 1 Sam 9:9 as the storyteller assumes that this title is unfamiliar to the audience). If those story roles lose the inner consistency of reality, then the audience will disengage and the story will no longer be relevant. To achieve this level of "acceptable reality," characters must act in a way that the audience can intuit or anticipate, even if in the long run the story aims to surprise. Therefore, this project will seek to rebuild the elements of the social world that are in some way referenced in the story as important storytelling elements, at times leaving open the possibility of different social situations if the text is unclear.

[10] They expel Jephthah as one (11:2), and as a group they journey to Tov in order to take Jephthah back to Gilead (11:5). Furthermore, each time the elders speak, the verb (אמר) is plural (11:2, 6, 8, 10). Therefore, the characterization of the brothers and the elders does not rest on individual members, but nuances the role of these particular archetypes in early Israel as kinship expectations break down.

Yet why connect the character analysis of the brothers with that of the elders? The brothers' perspective is presented only in a brief flashback (11:1–3), distinct from the battle (10:17–18) and the negotiation scenes in Tob (11:4–11), yet their identities and roles are tied together by Jephthah himself, who exclaims to the elders: "Did *you* not hate me and expel me from my father's house?" (v. 7a). Perhaps the connection between the identities of these two characters is imbedded into the social world of early Israel.

Social Code: The Roles of the Household, Brothers, Mother, and Eldership

If a story is a simulation of reality and characters are the lens through which we experience that story, then it is important that we begin the simulation by first putting on the "costume" of the characters by noting the social codes inherent in the presentation of characters and social constructs. It is important to establish the nuances of their situated worldview in order that we may "step into" their space within the storyworld, in this case in an early Israelite household and battlefield. The reader's task is like that of a person who participates in historical reenactments (e.g., of the War of 1812) and must put on the persona of the past, as accurately as possible, in order to better dramatize the experience of the battle.[11]

[11] Entire conventions are dedicated to those who love particular stories, creating a simulation of their favorite narrative worlds so that they may experience it in real time, often imaging themselves as characters from within the story. This same basic theory applies both to enthusiasts recreating the Star Wars universe at Comic-Con and Potter fans imagining themselves attending Hogwarts at Universal Studios. For all serious cosplay participants, the details matter.

Socio-Historical Aspects of the Brotherhood

The flashback with Jephthah and his brothers requires the reader to first understand the implied social world of family and household in ancient Israel.[12] This memory is compact, only three verses (11:1–3), yet it assumes a shared expectation of how this primary social unit should function. These familial roles, relationships, and responsibilities form the basis for the characters' "understanding of self" and others as a starting point to understand the gravity of their actions.[13] The story of Gilead's sons addresses at least two notable social realities: the significance, function, and membership of the "house of the father" as well as the complicated relationships among sons within that household, specifically when they had mothers of unequal status. The story of Jephthah and his brothers was not an unfamiliar situation; rather, the transition of paternal inheritance was a well-known trope of family conflict and disorder in an otherwise stable system of household governance.

When the brothers initiate their confrontation with Jephthah, they do not merely exile him from the land, they reject him from "the house of our father (בית־אבינו)" (11:2), an alarming act within this storyworld. The house of the father, or "household," included both a group of people, and the resources that they utilized to manage their land: buildings, tools, equipment, and

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[12] The term "ancient Israel" in this chapter refers to the social world of pre-monarchical Israel. Archeological, anthropological, and ethnographic studies refer to this period as Iron I. Therefore, while I will at times reach into the late Bronze period or Iron II research if they seem to provide helpful parallels, my research will focus primarily on Iron I Israel, utilizing these studies to develop an Iron I representation of the social and thought world of the text. Aspects of that research that directly contradict what is presented in the text are not utilized, as they were clearly not an intended aspect of the storyworld.

[13] Meyers ("Family in Early Israel," 2–3) underscores the idea that one of the purposes of social and historical research is to better identify the biblical persons' "understanding of self" as they navigate their world. This offers a helpful framework for viewing characters as persons, as insights into their social world allow for greater participation in their story.

livestock.[14] The household in early Israel functioned with "economic autonomy," capable of producing everything they needed, yet only producing at a subsistence level due to the lack of water and resource-rich land.[15] Producing enough resources for the household required the full participation of each member, and at times even that was not enough.[16] As a result, the household was more than a simple assembly of related individuals, but an agrarian group with interlocking goals and responsibilities, ultimately securing their ability to survive in the land together.[17] The unlucky few who found themselves outside of a household unit had little access to the basic elements needed to live, making the household not only essential for social life, but also for survival.[18]

Therefore, for early Israel the household was not merely the family one is born into, but a means of survival in a harsh and unforgiving terrain.[19] Israel's soil was certainly farmable, but

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[14] Many of these tools have been recovered and itemized, helping to recreate elements of the Israelite household (see, e.g., Brody, "Archeology of the Extended Family," 237–54).

[15] Meyers, "Family in Early Israel," 14–15.

[16] For a description of the roles of each individual group within the household, see Meyers, "Family in Early Israel," 1–47. These insights are also reflected in the summary of Israelite households in Holliday, "'Home Economics 1407,'" 64; and on differing family sizes and roles among those with wealth and status, see Routledge, "Average Families?," 53–57.

[17] Given the difficult farmland of the Levant (see Meyers, "Family in Early Israel," 8–11), it would be almost impossible for an individual to be capable of completing the requisite work needed to survive on their own. Individuals within walled cities may have had an opportunity to work and live outside the household social structure, but this type of living seems rare in Iron I Israel. Cities allowed for those who possessed trades or were skilled in arts to survive outside the normal agricultural setting (Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 155). Without the resources of the city, being part of a household was the only means of survival.

[18] Mobley (*Empty Men*) notes the dire straits of men who had been disconnected from their kinship roots. For example, 1 Sam 22:2 describes those who gathered around David as those who were in in distress, in debt, or discontent—essentially they had nowhere to go, so they chose to rally to David and created a raiding party that enabled their survival.

[19] Meyers ("Family in Early Israel," 8–11) refers to the early Israelite settlers as pioneers who faced significant issues in producing from and maintaining the land. The land itself lacked many valuable nutrients that make farming productive, and water sources were low and unpredictable. As a result, early Israelites devised tools and practices of seasonal rotation that required a significant degree of work. This work could not be done by one person, or even a few people, which means that the burden of maintaining a household required finding and training a work force through birth, adoption, or payment.

the soil was often rocky and lacking in nutrients, and the dry weather made drought a constant threat.[20] The difficult terrain did not support high-yield crops; therefore, trade was not a reliable option, and sustenance farming remained normative throughout the pre-monarchic state. Furthermore, each region had its own unique opportunities and challenges; therefore, the land was often best managed by the families who had long farmed it, sharing their hard-earned strategies from generation to generation.[21] Inheritance did not simply entail land, it also included knowledge, which was unique to the particular land holdings of the family. Meyers describes it this way, "the identity of any family unit was thus inseparable from its land, which was the material basis of its survival."[22] Therefore, for both Jephthah and his brothers, the land of their father was of paramount importance. They were deeply connected to it for survival and deeply dependent upon each other to maintain it.

The members of the household were profoundly interdependent and assumed a communal, rather than an individual, identity, with each member of the family working for at least fourteen hours a day to stave off threats to their survival. The most basic human composition of the household unit included the paternal head and his wife, along with their descendants—including their adult sons with their wives, the children of their adult sons, and

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[20] Meyers ("Family in Early Israel," 10) explores the difficult terrain of Israel's highlands, noting challenges with resources, topography, climate, and geology. She estimates that drought occurred three to four times every ten years, making the care and maintenance of the land a constant battle. This required significant work on behalf of the farming families as they sowed their crops, maintained the land, and stored any excess in case of a drought or for consumption between seasons. What's more Holliday ("Home Economics 1407," 63–64) describes the laborious processes of animal husbandry and agriculture in detail. In early Israel, agricultural production typically involved "plow-assisted dry farming," horticulture, and pastoralism. These three time-intensive tasks were practiced continuously and tailored specifically to the constraints of their lands. This sustenance farming came with inherent risks given the reality of drought and failed crops—a problem that persists in that region to this day (see also Meyers, "Family in Early Israel," 10–11).

[21] Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 9.

[22] Meyers, "Family in Early Israel," 21.

their unmarried daughters—as well as slaves, debt servants, and any sacred personnel such as a priest or Levite.[23] Yet this household composition was constantly in flux as a result of births, marriages, and deaths. Scholars disagree about the average size of the household, estimates ranging from approximately ten to fifteen members or as many as twenty to twenty-five members in the average Israelite household complex.[24] Jephthah's status within the household of Gilead proves complex and disruptive for the family. Though he was an inheriting son, Jephthah was not born to the proper wife of Gilead (11:2).

The missing explanation of the circumstances of Jephthah's birth creates a gap in the narrative, which makes Jephthah's role within the family difficult to determine.[25] *It is possible* that Jephthah was the result of a promiscuous liaison, in which Gilead attempted to do right by the son who was birthed as an outcome, despite the status of his mother.[26] *It is possible* that Gilead simply approached a prostitute, like Judah (Gen 38), and produced an heir as a result. *It is possible* that Gilead had an unconventional, and unrecognized, relationship with this woman—

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[23] This is clearly seen in passage such as Gen 24 and Judg 17.

[24] Block ("Marriage and Family," 38) approximates an average of twenty to twenty-five members, assuming monogamous marriages, average lifespans and fertility rates, and an estimation of two to three generations. Meyers (*Rediscovering Eve*, 110–11) assumes a lower count with the average nuclear family including only one wife and approximately two children born per married couple. Bendor (*Social Structure of Ancient Israel*, 52–53) estimates a slightly larger household number, approximately fifteen sons and twenty slaves, using biblical examples to estimate a norm. Most recently, Routledge ("Average Families?"42–60) has urged for caution, contending that household sizes varied more widely than is often realized, particularly along socio-economic lines, and therefore suggesting that focusing on an average household size is itself misleading. While I appreciate Routledge's note of caution, the biblical text seems to use larger household sizes in purposeful ways in order to demonstrate an increase in status or blessing; therefore, the average household is important to determine.

[25] This remains a deeply divided issue among biblical scholars. Sjöberg (*Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 53) explains that the meaning is obscure because of "the lack of proper sociological knowledge of the institutions of marriage and prostitution."

[26] Schneider (*Judges*, 163–64) argues as such, utilizing a broader usage of the term "promiscuous woman" (אשה זונה) and pointing to the brothers' acceptance of Jephthah's inheritance and their reference to his mother as "another woman" (אשה אחרת). Schneider also points out the missing parentage of Jephthah's mother, suggesting that Jephthah may have been of mixed heritage.

adultery or otherwise.[27] *It is also possible* that she slept with so many men that the name "Gilead" was simply a representative title because no one knew which man of Gilead fathered Jephthah.[28] *It is also entirely possible, if not probable*, that Gilead's wife had *seemed* barren; therefore, they sought an alternative means to produce an heir.[29] Jephthah is introduced as the son of a *prostitute* (אשה זונה), who is never called a wife of Gilead (or even a concubine), yet Jephthah's place in the household was not in question.[30] Further, the prostitute is never given the title of *mother* (אם), nor does she play an active role at any other stage in the story, suggesting that Jephthah's birth may have been intended to produce an heir for someone else, perhaps the

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[27] Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 353) articulates many possible versions of this option that the text allows: violation of one's marriage, her indeterminate ethnic identity, her father's violation of covenant law in selling her into prostitution (Lev 19:29), or even that she was a Canaanite cult center prostitute. There are many ways that this scene casts doubt on the integrity of Gilead himself.

[28] Klein (*Triumph of Irony*, 86) and many others include this as a possibly reading if one assumes that the "land of his birth is personified as his father." These arguments are adaptations of Burney (*Book of Judges*, 304) in connection with references to cities listed as individuals. While that may be possible in other circumstances, the issues of inheritance in this passage as well as the specific family structure that is utilized would make for a strained metaphor indeed.

[29] Young women began having children in their early teen years, so the wife of Gilead could either have struggled to get pregnant or struggled with miscarriages for years before finally being able to produce a child on her own. Given the high infant mortality rate combined with the importance of having sons to inherit, it seems likely that after a certain number of years the household might seek an alternative method for producing a child.

[30] The Hebrew word (זנה) is a complicated term, whose meaning is highly debated. The basic meaning of the term (זנה) refers to extramarital sexual relations and is usually used to designate either a paid sex worker or one engaged in sexual activity outside the bounds of marriage. The term is most often translated as "prostitute." For example, in Gen 38:15 Judah believes Tamar to be a sex worker before engaging in relations with her. Leviticus 19:29 prohibits making your daughter a "prostitute," condemning the one who places her in that role, rather than presenting her in an illicit relationship. Deuteronomy 23:18 speaks of the abomination of "hiring a prostitute" for wages. In Josh 6:17 Rahab is a "prostitute," who can welcome strange men into her house without suspicion. Bird ("Prostitution in the Social World," 41–44) explains that sex-work is the primary usage and other forms of sexual and cultic misuse of sex are secondary in nature. This passage offers little context to understand the use of this term as applied to Jephthah's mother, yet the implication of the lowest social status is best conveyed through the use of the term "prostitute." But less often it seems to reference those engaged in adulterous acts. For example, Deut 22:21 calls Israel not to "play the whore," while in Judg 2:17 Israel "played the whore" and was unfaithful to Yhwh. Perhaps Schneider (*Judges*, 162) summarizes it best: "[t]he term *zônāh* is understood to mean a professional prostitute who accepts payments for her services, but it could also apply to a woman who had sex before or outside the confines of marriage." While this passage does not offer significant context to determine the nature of the relationship between Jephthah's mother and Gilead, the lower status of his mother in the eyes of his brothers is beyond question.

wife of Gilead.[31] In the event of a barren wife, the husband could produce an heir through adoption or through a surrogate womb. Options for a surrogate womb included a second wife, a slave-wife (concubine), or a prostitute, who could be hired and compensated for this service.[32] The children of these surrogate births were to be treated as full sons and daughters of the household, though if the primary wife were to produce heirs, the status of the other sons could be diminished.[33]

Regardless of the situation of Jephthah's birth, two things remain true: Jephthah grew into adulthood as an inheriting son of Gilead, and his mother's low social status followed him. It stands to reason that if the low status of Jephthah's mother followed *him*, it would also attach itself to the household of Gilead and his brothers—particularly if Jephthah were to inherit an equal or substantive share of his father's household. From the brother's perspective, they had a lot to lose if their brother were to inherit (particularly if he inherited as a firstborn), both in material goods and in family honor/status.

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[31] This insight was introduced by Lovelace ("We Don't Give Birth to Thugs," 243–50), who challenges implicit criticism of Jephthah on account of his mother's lowered status. Lovelace brilliantly demonstrates the negative associations that are often connected with Jephthah's maternal link, arguing that the identification of his mother as a prostitute implies his own moral failure, yet when reading it from the vantage point of the brothers it may serve to critique the cultural view of social status that drives their actions, rather than inviting the reader to assume the same. Others, including Klein (*Judges*, 98) ascribe to a negative view of Jephthah because of his mother.

[32] Frymer-Kensky (*Reading the Women*, 103) assumes this social reality to be so unequivocally normative that she does not feel the need to argue for it. She leans on the earlier work of Mendelsohn ("Disinheritance of Jephthah," 116–18), who assesses Jephthah's disinheritance in the context of the Lipit-Ishtar code, which outlines the proper way for a man without a child to acquire one from a prostitute: by bringing the son into his house and taking care of the prostitute's needs, but excluding her from the house itself for as long as the first wife is alive (§27). He also notes that only one biblical law (Lev 7:13–14) discusses relationships with prostitutes, prohibiting priests from marrying a prostitute, yet the law is notably silent on the marriage codes for those who want to marry a prostitute but are not priests. If the social norms described in the Lipit-Ishtar code reflect a similar world to the non-priestly members of Israel, then the story of Jephthah may reflect a similar cultural practice in which a prostitute is hired (yet not brought into the household as a wife), and her child has inheritance rights. Mendelsohn's view is fairly normative in some circles, but others have challenged that the term "prostitute" may refer to a wide array of other relationships and/or that the practice of prostitution in Israel is a deeply contentious issue (e.g., Lev 19:29).

[33] Chapman (*House of the Mother*, 196–98) demonstrates this point through the stories of many biblical accounts of contentious inheritance transfers—for example, Abimelech (Judg 9), Abraham (Gen 15:2–3; 21:10), and Jacob's sons (Gen 37:2).

It is of primary importance, then, to determine Jephthah's place within the household at the time when his father's inheritance is transferred. Notably, Jephthah's identity as a son of Gilead is never questioned, not by the storyteller and not even by the brothers who attempt to disinherit him. He is first introduced by the storyteller in connection to his mother's low status as an, (אשה זונה, 11:1a), a term that implies sexual impropriety and *could* throw the paternity of her child into question. Yet the storyteller removes any doubt of his paternity, quickly affirming that "Gilead fathered Jephthah" (v. 1c). Furthermore, the brothers' words of rejection do not cast doubt on the paternity of Jephthah, an easy argument for disinheritance if his mother was remembered for sexual impropriety (as a profession or otherwise). Instead, the brothers say they reject Jephthah because of his outsider status—he was the (בן־אשה אחרת, "son of another woman," v. 2). The inheritance dispute between Jephthah and his brothers pits the custom of equal distribution of their father's house against social norms that elevate the mandates of family honor and reputation.

Should Jephthah inherit? Jephthah's status as an inheriting son seems to be implied by the timing of the brothers' words of rejection. After "they grew up (ויגדלו)" (v. 2), they initiate the scene of rejection, which is presented as a *new* event that disrupts the inheritance expectations of Jephthah. Presumably, before this Jephthah was a member of the household of Gilead and an assumed heir. While the gaps in the narrative do not give a full account of the household relationships, it seems likely that Gilead himself counted Jephthah among his sons and heirs. As head of household, Gilead alone was authorized to designate heirs, particularly those acquired

through surrogate wombs or adoption.[34] Once designated as a legitimate heir, "all sons belonging to the 'house of the father' inherit together."[35]

Therefore, if Jephthah was part of the household, why was his place as co-inheritor so readily rejected? Several scholars have assumed that the brothers were motivated by greed.[36] While this reading is possible, it does not take into account other motivating factors introduced by the text, namely that Jephthah may have been competing for the birthright. Jephthah's birth is described in v. 1, and his brothers' births to Gilead's wife in v. 2a. The order of these actions matters. The clause that introduces Gilead's sons born to his wife connects with the previous clause with a *waw*-relative. This *waw*-relative is typically read as a *successive action*, indicating that the birth order of the sons of Gilead is in a temporal and logical sequence.[37] This would mean that the sons of Gilead's wife were born after Jephthah, making him the firstborn son.

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[34] Notably, when Sarah wants Ishmael to be disinherited, she goes through Abraham to do so (Gen 21:9–14). Furthermore, despite Esau giving his birthright to Jacob, it is still within the purview of Isaac to bless his sons as he sees fit (25:29–34; 27).

[35] While specific biblical social codes do not expressly address the divisions of the land, Westbrook and Wells (*Everyday Law in Biblical Israel*, 96) draw this conclusion by connecting the procedures of division of inheritance outlined in cuneiform law codes and legal documents with narrative depictions of land allocation after the conquest via casting lots depicted in Josh 13:6–7; 14:1–2; 17:3–6; 18:1–11. The overlap between the cuneiform codes and the depicted distribution suggest that widely accepted practices of distribution informed the practice.

[36] Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 353) states plainly that "their expulsion of their half-brother was motivated by greed," concluding that the status of his mother merely offered an excuse to do so. Both Wijk-Bos (*Joshua & Judges*, 257) and Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 421) simply state that the brothers feared sharing the inheritance, implying a greedy motivation without directly stating it. Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 192) recognizes the status of his birth as the reason for his expulsion but does not linger to consider why that may have mattered to them. In the end, he contends, the reason did not matter because "they were many and he was alone."

[37] *IBHS* §33.2.1. Interpreters who treat the relationship between Gilead and Jephthah's mother as casual sex seem to either underestimate the significance of this timing or argue instead for an implicitly pluperfect inflection (ie. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 352–53). If it is pluperfect, then the timing is not sequential but indicates completed action, which makes the birth order unclear. If Jephthah's brothers were born first, then this would solidify the notion that Jephthah's adoption was to correct an inappropriate sexual relationship of Gilead. According to Waltke and O'Connor (*IBHS* §33.2.3–4), the use of this verbal form remains contested because it is not clearly indicated by the text. Specifically, there is no clear circumstantial phrase or clause that comes before this construct.

The meaning of Jephthah's name may also hint at this idea.[38] Jephthah's name means "he opens," suggesting that he was a womb opener for his mother and that his birth had significance for the household. Chapman notes that "womb-opening" sons often offer a sense of security for the mother, giving the firstborn son a stronger claim to headship, which may help to establish the lineage and promise of succession for the father.[39] She also notes that when succession occurs within a household, it is typically the "womb openers" from different mothers who compete to succeed their father.[40] It is unclear who named Jephthah, mother or father; therefore, the significance may have been for the mother more than for the household, yet the name in combination with the sequence of births suggests that Jephthah's birth signaled a womb opening experience for the household.[41] The birth of the brothers of Jephthah then produced tension because Jephthah's status as a womb opening son, tapping into a familiar sense of rivalry.[42]

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[38] Though this is, admittedly, tenuous, the connection between Jephthah's name and his open mouth is an oft cited literary mechanism for meaning making, typically in reference to his rhetorical prowess (ie., Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 351–52; Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 419), this is an attempt to possibly flesh out another layer of meaning that his name may allude.

[39] Chapman, *House of the Mother*, 151. While this certainly did not help the mother of Jephthah, perhaps her status would have been elevated if the wife of Gilead had remained childless.

[40] For evidence, Chapman (*House of the Mother*, 166–67) cites many biblical examples of womb-opening sons competing for an inheritance: Ishmael and Isaac are primary examples (Gen 21:10), but Joseph and his brothers from different mothers, while he is clearly the womb opening son of Jacob's favored wife he is not in direct competition with any specific son of Leah (Gen 37); Abimelech and Gideon's seventy sons, yet here the womb-opening is unclear and the mother status is centered (Judg 8:30–31), etc. Further, she discusses the way in which genealogical lists favor the womb-opening sons, citing the lineage of David in 2 Sam 3:2–5, which include the names of his six womb opening sons.

[41] This leans further into the notion of an extra-marital relationship rather than the idea that Jephthah's mother was a prostitute. If she produced a child outside of marriage, she may have even hoped that her son would secure her a place within the household. Zakovitch ("Women's Rights," 39–40) suggests that the term (זונה) may refer to a divorced woman, yet that does not explain her absence from the remaining text.

[42] A full discussion on inheritance customs will be discussed in the "Mode of Conduct" section of this chapter.

Literary and Theological Tropes that Shape the Brothers' Perspective

Biblical narratives often depict scenes of sibling rivalry, connecting to reader experiences of combative and complicated family relationships. Famous stories of sibling rivalries, particularly those that focus on the rights of inheritance and blessing, abound throughout the book of Genesis. Cain murders his brother Abel in a jealous rage for not earning the favor of God (Gen 4:1–16), creating the Bible's first example of brotherhood, rivalry, and fratricide all at once. This tradition of troublesome brotherhood is continued with the sons of Abraham, who are driven apart by Sarah in order to secure Isaac's inheritance (21:8–11).[43] Jacob and Esau begin their rivalry in the womb, and years later Jacob tricks Esau out of his birthright and then steals Esau's blessing (ch. 27).[44] In yet another ancestral family, the sons of Jacob detest Joseph's arrogance coupled with Jacob's obvious favoritism for the firstborn of his favored wife, so much so that they stage his death and sell him into slavery (37:12–28). The stories of Israel's contentious families continue throughout the historical books: Moses/Aaron (Num 12), David/Eliab (1 Sam 17:28–29), Amnon/Absalom (2 Sam 13:24–29), and Solomon/Adonijah (1 Kgs 2:13–25).[45]

Yet sibling rivalry does not have the last say in biblical literature. While biblical narrative often depicts contentious relationships between brothers, brotherhood in a figurative sense offers a much more optimistic picture of what *could* and *should* be. When the language of a text utilizes

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[43] It is noteworthy that Isaac does not seem to have a problem with the presence of Ishmael; instead, the division between the brothers is initiated by Sarah. Because of this division, Isaac receives the entire inheritance of their father, without having to share it with Ishmael or with any of the sons of Keturah, Abraham's wife after Sarah died.

[44] Though the brothers are eventually reunited, the fracture of the family is so severe that Jacob leaves with a blessing, but without inheriting property. Indeed, during the reunification of Jacob and Esau, Jacob gives Esau part of his earned fortune, rather than taking an inheritance from Isaac (33:11).

[45] Ryken et al. eds., "Sibling Rivalry," 789.

the language of brotherhood to refer to someone who is not related by blood, it often refers to a sense of community, friendship, and even equal status. Sameness is emphasized between "brother" kings (1 Kgs 9:13), "brother" prophets (13:30), "brother" Levites and priests (2 Chron 39:34), etc. David calls Jonathan his "brother" when he weeps for his death, connoting a deep and heartfelt friendship (2 Sam 1:26). David also calls the soldiers who have been outlawed alongside him his "brothers" to emphasize their equality and friendship (1 Sam 30:23).[46] While the experience of brothers in narrative was often antagonistic, the notion of brotherhood also carried an ideal of connection, mutual care, and solidarity—an ideal that was violated when the brothers sent Jephthah away.

The stories of sibling rivalry first seen in the Pentateuch continue into the book of Judges, and increasingly they deal with issues of national leadership, rather than merely property distribution. The subject of brotherly relationship intersects with issues of inheritance, military leadership, and governance. The first mention of a brotherhood, Caleb and Othniel, shows the harmony between Caleb, who offers his daughter in marriage in exchange for leading Israel into battle, and his younger "brother" Othniel, who accepts the offer (1:12–13).[47] Here the younger brother is a gifted leader, though his leadership is seemingly limited to the battlefield, and Caleb

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[46] Ryken et al. eds., "Brother, Brotherhood," 126.

[47] There is considerable debate concerning the relationship between Othniel and Caleb. The text (Judg 1:13 and 3:9) says "Othniel son of Kenaz, the younger brother of Caleb." Yet it is unclear if the phrase "younger brother of Caleb" refers to Othniel or Kenaz. Yet even if it is referring to Kenaz, the notion of brotherhood likely transcends the generation gap, as is often the case with genealogies. The kinship identification clearly demonstrates a connection between the two that is depicted in some sense as brotherhood; therefore, it seems worthwhile to point out how this notion of brotherhood shifts between the earliest rendering in the book of Judges and the final renderings in the stories of Abimelech and Jephthah.

passes on authority without reservation.[48] The next discussion of siblings in the book of Judges is presented in the story of Abimelech, who kills all of his brothers in order to be *made king* (ch. 9). Jephthah's story follows soon after, but rather than murdering his brothers, he settles for their subjugation as he is *made chief* of all of Gilead (11:11). While Othniel's role in the narrative does not include an inheritance dispute between brothers,[49] both Jephthah and Abimelech present the problematic nature of *household inheritance* when it is overlaid with the often bloody scenes of *leadership succession*.

In the latter half of the judges cycle (from Gideon on), there is an increasing relationship between the emphasis on family and its role in shaping governance in Israel.[50] Tsevat notes the emphasis on family lineage from Gideon to Abdon, using the numerical references within the stories to identify a pattern.[51] Smith arranges this pattern into a chiasm as follows:

70—The number of Gideon's children (8:30)

30/30/30—The sons/donkeys/cities under Jair (10:4)

1—The single daughter of Jephthah (11:34)

30/30/30—The sons/daughters/daughters-in-law of Ibzan (12:9)

70—The donkeys for Abdon's 40 sons and 30 grandsons (12:14)[52]

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[48] Notably, if there is any rivalry at all in this passage, it is not between Othniel and Caleb, but between Caleb and his daughter, Achsah, who petitions for the dowry she had been inadvertently denied. The situation is quickly rectified as Caleb provides her with land (1:14–15).

[49] Only Achsah's dispute about her dowry, which is promptly rectified (1:14–15).

[50] Gooding, "Composition of the Book of Judges," 79.

[51] Tsevat, "Two Old Testament Stories," 324–26.

[52] Smith, "Failure of the Family," 289.

This pattern demonstrates that after Gideon the judges are increasingly depicted as engaging in dynastic behavior: taking multiple wives, having multiple sons, governing multiple cities, and riding on multiple donkeys.[53]

The inclination towards permanent and centralized governance begins with Gideon, with important echoes in the brief description of Jair (10:3–5). For Gideon, the movement towards kingship (though not called that) is reflected in his seventy sons through multiple wives and naming his son Abimelech, meaning "my father is king," which contrasts with the irony of his rejection of kingship (8:23).[54] Jair is also remembered for creating a pseudo-dynasty: having thirty sons on thirty donkeys, who lived in thirty cities.[55] For both Gideon and Jair the number of sons is unusually large for a typical family in early Israel, yet it is often used to designate the status of a king.[56] Both Gideon and Jair are also depicted as assigning their sons to maintain their

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[53] The story of Samson breaks this pattern, but perhaps this is a result of his own disregard for norms and structures. He is also the only judge who does not fight a national battle, acting only to rectify personal vendettas.

[54] The meaning of Abimelech's name is debated by some scholars. Bluedorn (*Yahweh Versus Baalism*, 191–93) best articulates the ambiguous nature of the name, presenting eight possible renderings of the name, some of which point to a far less controversial outcome ("father [i.e., Yhwh] is king," "the king [i.e., Yhwh] is [Abimelech's] father"), others to a more deeply idolatrous outcome ("father [i.e., Baal] is king," "the king [i.e., Baal] is [Abimelech's] father") or to a call for his own claim to kingship ("Abimelech is divine (or first) king," "father [i.e., Gideon] is king," the king [i.e., Gideon] is [Abimelech's] father," and "[Abimelech is] father of a king [i.e., Abimelech's son]"). While these possibilities present a variety of reasons why Abimelech might have been given such a charged name, the ambiguity of it also reflects the ambiguous behavior of Gideon himself, who rejects the notion of kingship while establishing a dynasty—which is his true intention?

[55] Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 415. During Iron I, Israel's governance was decentralized, with a few households that came together to form a village, which was essentially a self-contained unit. In times of famine or war, these villages could combine with other villages based on clan or tribal affiliation, but cities do not become prominent until the development of more centralized structures, seen primarily in the rise of the monarchy (Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 1–5). This notion will be further developed later in the chapter. Throughout the later period of the judges, the chiefs (discussed later) become more and more centralized and gain in strength, taking steps towards monarchy.

[56] Meyers (*Rediscovering Eve*, 110) postulates that the average family in early Israel was likely monogamous (except in rare occasions of wealthy men or state leaders), averaging 2–3 sons per mother. She points out that the patriarchs are established as well-to-do families, but even in these accounts it takes Jacob four wives to produce twelve heirs. If Jair were to produce thirty heirs, that would suggest a minimum of ten to fifteen wives. This number would be more at home in a royal harem than in a typical household in Israel.

governing offices after them.[57] The assumed leadership roles of Gideon's sons prompted a hearing in Shechem, which was held to convince Abimelech's relatives that he, rather than other sons of Gideon, should rule over them (9:1–2). In Jair's tenure, the text states that "they" (the thirty sons of Jair) had thirty towns, rather than the singular "he" to refer to Jair. Jair's brief account even describes his sons as "riding a donkey," imagery that further alludes to the presence of a dynasty.[58] Jair seems to set up his sons in these cities to continue his work, and he is notably followed by another Gileadite (Jephthah) who becomes chief. Each leader seems to develop an early form of dynastic rule, followed immediately by an account of brothers competing for inheritance, presenting parallel storylines that diverge at significant points.

The stories of Jair and Jephthah, in many ways, resonate with the stories of Gideon and Abimelech. Consider the parallels between these accounts. Both represent a succession of power within the same tribal region—Gideon and Abimelech[59] are from Manasseh, and Jair and Jephthah from Gilead (6:11; 9:1; 10:3; 11:1).[60] While the storyteller specifically states that Gideon fathered Abimelech (8:31), the Jair and Jephthah accounts do not directly connect their paternity.[61] The literary placement of Jephthah after the introduction of Jair the Gileadite, who

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[57] A tradition that continues into the book of 1 Samuel when both Eli and Samuel, judges according to the text (4:18; 7:15), assign their sons to continue this role after them (2:22; 8:1).

[58] Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 410) discusses the significance of the donkeys as marks of status. Combining the thirty sons, riding thirty donkeys, and controlling thirty cities gave the impression that, "Jair is set to be in control deep into the generations following."

[59] It is worth noting that Abimelech is the son of Gideon, therefore from the tribe of Manasseh, but he goes to live with his mother's family in Shechem (9:2), which is part of the tribe of Ephraim. Interestingly, Ephraim and Manasseh are both tribes of Joseph that are often used interchangeably.

[60] Yet another connection between the two is the correlation between Gilead and Manasseh. Gilead as a territory, not a person, is located in eastern Manasseh (also Reuben and Gad). Therefore, these two pairings seem to include two Manassehite traditions: one in the Cis-Jordan and the other in the Transjordan.

[61] Notably, part of the genealogy of 1 Chr 2:21–23 describes Machir, father of Gilead to be the grandfather of Segub. Segub is then described as the father of Jair, who had twenty-three towns in Gilead, likely a reference to the judge remembered as Jair. If Jair was the ancestor to Jephthah, it seems entirely likely that Jair may have either

was establishing a pseudo-dynasty, and the unusual reference to Jephthah's father being named "Gilead" may suggest that Gilead is a family name and attribution.[62] If this is true, Jephthah was not merely the son of any man but a descendant of Jair, the unnamed *head* of Gilead from an earlier time.[63] Perhaps Jephthah's story, like all others that follow Gideon, is an account of the false start of a dynasty and the family quarrels that dominate them.

If "Gilead" is an heir of Jair and their family has maintained leadership in the region of Gilead, then the debate concerning the transfer of inheritance involves far more than just the family land, animals, and equipment—it also includes governing authority. Jephthah and Jair are both Gileadites, but "Gilead" is not a tribe in Israel, rather it is the entire region east of the Jordan.[64] According to Øystein LaBianca, early tribal communities in the Levant understood national boundaries and affiliations differently than Canaanite nation-state monarchies. They were adaptive in utilizing the land's resources and ancestral connections to combine people groups or to make claims on specific lands.[65] These ancestral claims could justify a sub-division (into smaller groups) or unification depending on external realities and needs. Tribal kingdoms began to adapt monarchical rule as individual tribes merged into what LaBianca refers to as

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named a son after his grandfather, Gilead, or his descendants bore both the leadership and the name of the ancestor that brought them to the land.

[62] Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 354) notes that the reference to Jephthah's father as "Gilead" was a term of nobility—either descending from eponymous ancestors, or utilizing it as a representative title.

[63] The connections between Jephthah and Jair are intriguing. Webb (*Book of Judges* [NICOT], 299) says only that "Jair's pampered sons will be of little use when the Ammonites invade!" However, his characterization of the sons of Jair bears striking resemblance to that of the brothers and elders who jockey for power but have little will and ability in battle. Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 421) notes that the story seems to have a vested interest in linking these two accounts, perhaps linking Jephthah's father with Jair.

[64] While Gilead is treated as Manassehite, the land boundaries discussed in Num 32:3, 26; Deut 3:12; and Josh 13:25 identify cities that are attributed to Reuben and Gad, but are connected with Gilead at this time. For a more detailed discussion of the land boundaries of Gilead, see the chapter regarding the Ephraimites.

[65] LaBianca, "Excursus," 19–20.

supra-tribes.[66] Under the leadership of Jair, the Transjordanian tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh become their own supra-tribe. The text suggests the pre-monarchical status of Gilead in its introduction to the crisis. Rather than the normative elder-led governance of early Israel,[67] the introduction in 10:17–18 states that the leaders of Gilead gather together for battle seeking to find someone to lead the fight with the offer "to be head over all of Gilead (לראש לכל ישבי גלעד)" as a permanent result.[68] This changed title, in combination with the hierarchical overtones of Jair's leadership (v. 4), seems to contrast with the preference for a governing eldership in early Israel.[69] Rather than the typical village eldership indicative of early Israel governance, Gilead was moving towards monarchy before Jephthah was made "head" of his people. Interestingly, the sons of Gilead are struggling with a common situation in antiquity, the struggle for succession and inheritance, yet this struggle has been overlaid with the hint of royal intrigue.

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[66] LaBianca, "Excursus," 19–20.

[67] This claim can be verified in several sources on early Israelite social structure, yet a few key texts include: Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 121–24; Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 113–17; and Reviv, *Elders in Ancient Israel*, 29–30.

[68] This is also evident in Israelite governance where Israelite leaders often gather, with the elders representing the individual tribes and helping to determine a battle plan (seen in Judg 4:2, 7; 5:15; 7:25; 8:3, 6, 14; 9:30).

[69] According to Reviv (*Elders in Ancient Israel*, 15–21, 41), an expert on Israelite eldership, the Israelites preferred the term "elder" but would sometimes use the word "head" to describe leaders within the eldership that obtain more authority. The term "head" was not the equivalent to "elder," but referred to a single leader within the collective. Early Israel relied heavily upon eldership rule, both in village arbitration and tribal politics, until the kingship gradually eclipsed that role well after the monarchy of David. The social organization under Jair does not refer Jair as "head" of Gilead, but the placement of his sons in thirty cities seems to reflect a movement towards a more hierarchical headship that is not fully realized until the time of Jephthah.

Socio-Historical Aspects of the Eldership

These dual social realities (local and state) are again overlaid in the presentation of the elders of Gilead who approach Jephthah for help (11:4–11).[70] Jephthah speaks to them as if they are local elders from his village, yet in offering headship over all of Gilead they wield significantly more authority. The role of the elders in this text seems to mingle aspects of both local eldership and state eldership, intentionally conflating the roles and therefore their responsibility for Jephthah's current state of exile as well as their power to restore him. To what extent did the elders of Jephthah's village contribute to his unjust situation, and is this the same group who approached him for help in Tob?

Life in local villages would have been a normative experience for an early audience and set a very specific scene for the story. Hebrew villages were not small families of disconnected landowners, but communities of extended kin with some shared space between households. These villages could measure anywhere from half an acre to two and a half acre plots, with roughly 50–250 inhabitants.[71] The village layouts were seemingly haphazard, with individual household compounds extending outwards of each other and formed around a free space in the middle and those units joined together with other clustered units through varying means. These villages typically had a shared space, which likely held livestock pens as well as shared community resources, such as a threshing floor. These small and clustered settlements consisted of several households, growing organically to reflect a "map of kinship groups" coalescing

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[70] Willis (*Elders of the City*, 80–81) explains the distinctions between and overlapping functions of the two primary forms of eldership, local tribal eldership as well as national eldership, noting the principles of "familial corporateness" and the "family-oriented collective responsibility" that pervades the office locally and in statehood.

[71] Meyers, "Family in Early Israel," 12–13.

around expanding families as households outgrew their land or the inherited land was divided among the legitimate heirs.[72] Therefore, though the head of household had the ability to make decisions for his family, the village itself was often an extended family (kin), who took an interest in the way its members were treated. The village elders had the responsibility of feeding the vulnerable, administering justice, and uniting the village in religious practice.[73]

These villages diffused the power via the council, and that village council was charged with adjudicating the law and protecting those on the margins of the community.[74] The primary job of the assembly was not to seek out and punish those who had violated the law, but to secure land and property rights, as well as settle disputes through arbitration. They did so by following the precedents outlined by the law. However, as Willis urges, "members of kinship-based societies are never rigid in their implementation of legal prescriptions (written or oral)" because those laws only represent a good ruling in certain situations, not the only possible response.[75] Therefore, the assembly acted as arbitrators of the village's shared understanding of tradition,

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[72] Utilizing details drawn from ANE sources and biblical depictions, King and Stager (*Life in Biblical Israel*, 13–15) offer kinship explanations for the strangely clustered settlements (e.g., the layout of the Tell of en-Naṣbeh [ancient Mizpah], and Tell Beit Mirsim). The maps clearly indicate that spatial order was not the driving factor, yet the clustered homes seem to grow outward from each other, bearing a close resemblance to the biblical description of inheritance among sons.

[73] Block ("Marriage and Family," 37) describes the role of the clan as an extended family unit responsible for "maintaining the integrity of the patrimonial holding" (as seen in the prophecy calling Jeremiah to buy a family field [Jer 32:6–15] or the process through which the kinsman redeemer must be found to keep the land within the family of Naomi [Ruth 4:1–10]), administering justice (as in the situation described by the widow of Tekoa [2 Sam 14:7]), and engaging in religious affairs (as seen in the expectations that David will return to his family during religious festivals [1 Sam 20:6, 29]). A similar point is made by Matthews and Benjamin (*Social World of Ancient Israel*, 126), who cite Deut 22:13–22, which outlines laws pertaining to sexual propriety, and note that the elders are charged with holding the perpetrator accountable for his unlawful actions (vv. 18–19). With this and other examples, Matthews and Benjamin conclude that one of the primary roles of the elder in early Israel was to maintain community traditions and enforce the law.

[74] Again, Ruth 4 demonstrates this clearly. Hoppe ("Elders and Deuteronomy," 265) examines the age and importance of the elders in each era of Israelite social development, noting that, "elders have always functioned as part of the internal self-government of the tribes."

[75] Willis, *Elders of the City*, 306.

covenant, and law as they applied to the lived situations and reality of the communities' ever-changing needs.[76]

When the elders of Gilead seek out Jephthah, he seems to hold them responsible for his situation (11:7), suggesting either that the elders heard his case or that he is accusing them because of their inaction. In the case between Jephthah and his brothers, a host of issues would be weighed in order to arbitrate their dispute. Clearly, the first issue was the determination of proper inheritance and whether Jephthah's maternal heritage disqualified him from inheriting, especially in view of the fact that until this point both Jephthah and the brothers assumed he would inherit among the sons of Gilead. Beyond legal case studies in inheritance, the Deuteronomic charges to the communities to protect the rights of their marginalized members would also be relevant to this situation.[77] If a member of the village felt wronged and their issue could not (or would not) be righted within their own household, then they could stand on the village threshing floor awaiting the justice of the assembly. The village elders, who were themselves the heads of households in the village, would then administer the justice of the community.[78]

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[76] Willis (*Elders of the City*, 307–8) concludes his study of the five laws of Deuteronomy prescribed for the elders by demonstrating the necessary flexibility of elder laws because fundamentally the laws were guiding principles rather than rigid edicts.

[77] Hoppe, "Elders and Deuteronomy," 266.

[78] This is evident in certain passages that depict the elders of Israel as the fathers of different household, notably Ruth 4:2 and Prov 31:23 (Block, "Marriage and Family," 37).

Literary and Theological Tropes that Shape the Elders' Perspective

The flashback in 11:1–3 never depicts a scene in which Jephthah presents his case before the village assembly, yet an ancient listener would understand that the assembly was *still* responsible for not intervening on his behalf— whether the brothers themselves were among the elders or the broader village had failed to step in. The elders were charged with "protecting the rights of those dwelling there without a household,"[79] yet they had violated this social contract and Jephthah's life was at risk as a result. Furthermore, once a son of Gilead had become the head of household, he would also be incorporated into the village elders with the ability to directly thwart Jephthah's attempt for justice from within their system of justice itself. Using the brushstrokes of the narrator, who subtly connects the simple village household of Gilead with the pseudo-dynasty of Jair, Jephthah may have had significantly more than one brother as a member of the assembly, influencing the distribution of justice.

This episode seems to conflate the actions of the brothers with the elders of Gilead, conferring the identity of the brothers on those who request Jephthah's aid. Jephthah's sense of the audacity of the elders' request for help in vv. 4–11 confirms the circumstances that led to his exile. Addressing the elders directly, he emphatically replies, "Did *you* not hate me and expel me from my father's house?" (11:7). The use of the second person emphatic pronoun (אתם) combined with the equally intense verb (שנאתם) "you hated" suggests an intense and emotional response.[80] Jephthah's over-the-top response suggests that the men who approached him were not a distant group of diplomats, or even a village governing body who ignored his cause, but the

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[79] Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 122.

[80] As Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 424) notes, the verb שנא is linked to "such an intense desire to hurt that biblical law forbade its manifestation among Hebrews (Lev 19:17)."

very people who forced him to flee his home in the first place. The elders of Gilead do not contradict this accusation, despite that being their easiest defense, nor do they deflect responsibility onto those who *did* drive him from his father's house, which quietly confirms their shared paternity.[81]

Yet this picture of intimate betrayal is overlaid with the language of a traveling delegation to represent the leaders of Gilead as a whole. The group that approaches Jephthah in Tob is more than just a group of local elders implicated in Jephthah's expulsion, but the elders of the whole region of Gilead, who are collectively responding to the threat of Ammonite battle after their call for leadership meets with no response (10:18). Yet how would they be responsible for Jephthah's situation if they are not the same local elders who denied him justice within his village? Reviv explains that local elders may have been responsible for their individual communities, but the larger group of tribal elders was not a simple democratic collection of village tribal representatives.[82] Instead, tribal elders with stronger economic and social capital became more influential in making decisions for the tribe as a whole.[83] Jephthah addresses the

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[81] Many commentaries assume some connection between the brothers' actions and the elders' culpability based off of this comment, but most ignore the possibility that they directly culpable because they are indeed Jephthah's brothers. For example, Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 197) explains that they do not try to justify their expulsion of Jephthah, only rather they compensate him for his loss by giving him a job. Yet she never deals with the reality that the elders are not part of the flashback scene, therefore only implicitly indicted because they should have been involved. Butler (*Judges*, 282) goes further to connect this text with the elders' culpability, suggesting that they are charged because they did not interfere or that the text implies a legal proceeding at the city gate in which they approved the charges against Jephthah. Yet he does not account for the emotionally charged language of Jephthah in that moment. Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 355) concludes that in Jephthah's response, he is generalizing his poor treatment at the hands of his brothers to that of all of Gilead. Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 424) notes the intensity of Jephthah's response but stops short of connecting the elders directly with the brothers, instead contrasting the hyperbolic language of Jephthah with the "curt" response of the elders.

[82] The word "tribe" here is used as a short form of "supra-tribe," described on p. 121. Gilead seems to function much like a tribe in Israel (e.g., in 5:14–18, the song of Deborah treats Gilead with equal status as the other mentioned tribes), but it is never actually referred to as a tribe and is only tangentially related to the eponymous ancestors of Israel's tribal system.

[83] Reviv, *Elders in Ancient Israel*, 42.

elders of Gilead as if they are the elders of his own hometown, indicating that his town's elders are now taking a primary role in leading Gilead. The leadership of Jair indicated a more centralized form of governance, and the brothers of Jephthah apparently have continued and adapted their role in that endeavor.

The last character archetype to address is the elders' call for a ראש ("chief") to lead them to fight against Ammon. When a region was under attack, elders of the village would issue a call for help from other villages, selecting a chief from the warriors to lead them into battle.[84] In order to achieve victory, the chief exercised significant authority over the elders (and thereby the people), occupying a leadership role that, at least in this case, extends past the scope of battle.[85] Early in the book of Judges, when a deliverer is raised up by God, their role is as a temporary military leader who retires from active duty after the battle is won, as is evident in the role of judges like Othniel, Ehud, and Deborah. When the elders of Gilead approach Jephthah, they first ask him to become the (קצין) "captain" in their fight against the Ammonites, a military command post that would presumably end once the battle has concluded (v. 6).[86] This would utilize his skills as a warrior without relinquishing their ultimate role as leaders of Gilead. However, Jephthah rejects the temporary job post, refusing to accept the first offer and forcing the elders to

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[84] There were no standing armies in early Israel; instead, they consisted of villagers who assembled with their tribe during times of military crisis. As a result of their decentralized governance, before battle the troops needed to gather and select a leader. Often, the biblical text indicates some form of calling by Yhwh, as with Joshua (Josh 1:2–9), Ehud (Judg 3:15), Barak (4:6), Gideon (6:14), and Saul (1 Sam 10:1; 11:6–11). These roles become more and more permanent as time passes, being retained long past the military threat (Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 97–98).

[85] There are many other uses of the word ראש, but notably here it is qualified with the statement "over all of Gilead" and contrasts with the earlier role offered to Jephthah as "commander" (קצין). For a full treatment of the use of these words in vv. 4–11, see Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 354.

[86] The word (קצין) has a range of meaning from "military general" (Josh 10:24) to "ruler" (Isa 1:10; Mic 3:1); therefore, context is important. However, this account occurs within the context of war and is used specifically to select a person who would lead them in battle.

renegotiate: restoring him to his people, his land, and his household.[87] Jephthah does not want a job as a hired mercenary, but a role as the permanent head of Gilead.

While the textual footprint of the brothers and the elders seems sparse, the characters are created assuming an audience who already understands certain social realities briefly mentioned in the text. These archetypes are formed through the literary and experiential world that early Israel would have understood on a deep and visceral level. The earliest audiences of this story would have experienced the same complications of household, brotherhood, maternal identity, and eldership. The purpose of character social codes is to utilize these assumed ideas and stereotypical "persons" and then adjust them using mode of conduct and disposition to see how they fit into that idea world. The operations of the household, the weight of association with a low-status mother, and the authority of the elders all become the staging ground in the imagination for the events that unfold.

Mode of Conduct: Self-Focused and Untrustworthy

The mode of conduct determines the filter through which the actions of the brothers and the elders should be read: are they good or evil? While even modern readers can easily identify the negative portrait of the brothers and the audacious request of the elders, it is important to understand the context and weight of these actions given their social world. Their choices are based on rational, though one-sided, modes of conduct—no one is the villain in their own story. Therefore, just how bad are they, and in what ways might they have attempted to justify their

[87] Marcus ("Bargaining Between Jephthah and the Elders," 95–100) argues that it is indeed Jephthah, in his final retort—"if you bring me back . . . I will be your head"—that uses legal language to reinstate his inheritance, as is reflected in Akkadian adoption contracts. Therefore Jephthah is forcing them to bring about full restoration.

actions? Would their actions have been rejected in the eyes of the social world in which this story is embedded? The answer to this question, as with nearly every character in the story of Jephthah, is both yes and no.

The Mode of Conduct for the Brothers of Jephthah

The brothers' mode of conduct is never explicitly stated by the narrator, leaving the value of their actions to be weighed by biblical and ancient Near Eastern (ANE) social standards. The injustice of Jephthah's treatment is undoubtedly cast in a negative light, made especially clear in the dramatic irony of the Gileadites new request for help. Yet even with the obviously poor mode of conduct, the narrator may also hint that the brothers had their reasons to reject Jephthah before the transfer of inheritance was complete. The brothers' logic, which is itself critiqued by the narrative, was able to convince their household, their village/kin, and the broader eldership of Gilead of the justifiable and advantageous nature of their claim to disinherit Jephthah—yet on what grounds?

Passing on inheritance was an important process of property and leadership transfer from generation to generation, yet the process was not mechanistic but was weighed and measured based on community standards and expectations. The biblical narratives depict an inheritance system that is assumed, only regulating special cases in which conflict might occur.[88] Therefore, Israel's procedure seems to have followed the basic system of inheritance seen throughout the ancient Near East. Upon the death of the head of household, the legitimate heirs automatically

[88] These texts, which include Num 25:11–25; 36:5–9; Deut 21:15–17, will be discussed later in this section.

assume headship and begin the process of distributing their father's estate.[89] The material estate, which included everything the father had controlled—the land, equipment, and animals—was jointly divided into parcels of equal value to be distributed among the legal heirs by casting lots. This process was similar to the distribution of land between the tribes in the book of Joshua (Josh 18–19); the land was also divided into equal parcels, and then assigned through lots.[90]

While inheritance rights in ancient Israel seem straightforward on the surface, the actual transition of property from father to son was notoriously contentious.[91] A reasonable distribution of land and property was a difficult task to complete, especially when multiple sons competed for limited resources. The major question becomes: who should inherit? Num 27:5–11 responds to a situation in which a father dies without a son to inherit. This inheritance dilemma is resolved as follows: first, the son(s) of the head of household inherit; but if there is no son, the daughter(s)

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[89] Immediate distribution is standard, yet there are cases in which this does not happen. The sons of Ahitub in 1 Sam 22:9–16 depict an entire community, under the leadership of Ahimelech, who leads "his father's house" (Westbrook and Wells, *Everyday Law in Biblical Israel*, 93). While this is an interesting case, it is also rare. Typically, the sons are depicted dividing the father's lands and goods and starting to build their own households, as with sons of Jacob in Gen 49:1–33.

[90] Parallels between Mesopotamian law codes are present in many texts, including the Old Babylonian inheritance texts that date to the seventeenth century, which state that property is held in common by the co-heirs until divided by lot. This correlates with the division of the lands in Josh 18–19 and Akkadian inheritance texts as well, leading Anne Kitz ("Undivided Inheritance," 603–5) to conclude that biblical inheritance praxis shared many similarities with their ANE counterparts. Westbrook and Wells (*Everyday Law in Biblical Israel*, 94–97) back this claim of land allotment using Canaanite law codes and legal documents as well as references to a similar process in the book of Joshua 14–21. Furthermore, Anne Kitz ("Undivided Inheritance," 602–6) argues that the act of casting lots itself is considered a revelation of divine will, thus providing an important way to include the divine on matters of land distribution (demonstrated in the priestly work through the use of Urim and Thummim [e.g., Deut 33:8]). According to Deuteronomy, the land was owned by Yhwh and therefore the only one with true legal authority in bestowing rights was Yhwh himself. According to Kitz, Jacob was the first "father" of the house of Israel, and therefore after he dies, his heirs would divide the land. Because the Israelites were held in bondage as the descendants of Jacob grew into a nation, the same inheritance practice (casting lots) was used to sub-divide the land among the different tribes, who were representatives of the twelve sons of Jacob. Kitz contends that this practice continues to subdivide inheritance in individual households as they grow within their own lands.

[91] Note the many complicated relationships between brothers in the book of Genesis, as noted on p. 116. Furthermore, in the book of Judges the only other story about inheritance transfer is the bloody business in the house of Gideon (ch. 9).

inherit; and if there is no daughter, his brothers inherit; and if he has no brother, his father's brothers inherit; if the father does not have any living brothers, the inheritance will go to the nearest living relative in the clan. The emphasis of this law is on keeping the land within the house of the father or as close to that as could be found. Notably, there are no cases in biblical precedent that indicate an implied difference in inheritance for sons from low-status mothers. Whether a son was born from a first wife, second wife, concubine, or even a prostitute (like Jephthah's mother), there is no evidence of a legal distinction.[92]

As previously stated, the decision as to who was a legal heir rested with the head of household, and Gilead, it seems, had included Jephthah in his household. Yet this story does not include the voice of Gilead (or Jair?) himself, suggesting that the head of house has already died before this story begins and that the brothers overrule his will. By timing their rejection of Jephthah to the death of the father, they deny him an important ally in the inheritance debate.[93] Furthermore, if their father was dead, he could no longer correct his deathbed will or even leave behind a gift for his rejected son, further denying him access to resources outside of the normal

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[92] Hiers ("Transfer of Property," 94) draws this conclusion primarily from the case laws presented in the Torah (Num 27:5–11; 36:5–9; and Deut 21:15–17), but also from the stories of contested inheritance throughout biblical narrative. For example, while Ishmael is disinherited, the reason Sarah forces Abraham to disinherit Ishmael before his death is because otherwise, after he died, Ishmael would have a legal right to a share of his father's house, despite the text never referring to Hagar as a secondary wife—though arguably she functioned as such (Gen 21:10). Again, Matt 1:5 identifies Boaz as the son of (former) prostitute Rahab. Notably, the story in Judg 11:2 is the only account in which the son of a prostitute-womb is presented in Scripture, and the son is rejected in this case. Yet this one act of rejection cannot prove a pattern, especially when the storyteller seems to be critiquing the brothers for their action.

[93] The internal strife between brothers upon the death of their father is reminiscent of the similar circumstances of Joseph's brothers groveling to him after the death of their father, Jacob, despite Jacob's deathbed blessings that should have guaranteed their continued coexistence (Gen 50:14–21). Yet in this case, the brother with power (Joseph) shows mercy and compassion, in contrast to the brothers with power in Jephthah's story, who instead exile their half-brother away from the household.

transfer of inheritance.[94] Even if tradition dictates that the father determines inheritance, custom does not guarantee that the father's will be carried out. Yet why might the brothers have disregarded their father's will?

Jephthah's status as firstborn may have given him a claim to a larger inheritance, as well as possible leadership within the family. As noted above, "womb-opening" sons held significance for the entire household, perhaps a significance that the other sons of Gilead resented and feared.[95] The only distinction among heirs prescribed in Scripture was the privilege of the firstborn.[96] The custom of the "birthright," a double portion given to the oldest son, is indirectly discussed in Deut 21:15–17.[97] This Deuteronomic ordinance states that a husband who hates his wife cannot deny her son, the eldest of the household, his double portion of the inheritance. This act of spitefulness, to "hate" a wife and treat her son unjustly, is unlawful. This Deuteronomic exemplar addresses the *misuse* of an unwritten custom, demonstrating that the birthright of the firstborn was culturally normative and that contempt for a spouse was also a common enough reason for this custom to be disregarded. This adds another layer of negative appraisal upon the brothers—was Jephthah unjustly denied not only his inheritance but also his birthright? Jephthah's own language of disgust when he confronts the elders (11:6) seems to echo the sentiment that prompted unjust treatment of an eldest son, according to the

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[94] At times, the pater-father seems to designate property distribution before his death (in a "behest" property transfer). For example, Isaac was the sole inheritor of Abraham's property, yet before he died he bestowed gifts on Ishmael and the six sons of Keturah (Gen 25:1–6; Hiers, "Transfer of Property," 122–23, 148–50).

[95] See p. 115. Webb (*Integrated Reading*, 51) postulates that the brothers seem motivated by a "fear of domination" that would only be possible if his firstborn status offered him a possibility of family headship. .

[96] This can be seen in other ANE literature, as, e.g., in the Hittite story of Appu and his twin sons, when the older son argues that he should receive the better cow because he was entitled to it as the eldest son (Gaster, *Oldest Stories in the World*, 159–71). Yet notably, some ANE laws seem to present the opposite case—e.g., Hammurabi's Code states that each of the brothers receives an equal share of the inheritance (§170).

[97] Heirs, "Transfer of Property," 143.

Deuteronomic law. The father of the household, who clearly had not disinherited Jephthah, may have favored his firstborn son and planned to give him the birthright, as Sarah feared would happen with Ishmael. [98] Perhaps Jephthah, like Esau before him (Gen 25:28), was preferred by his father for his strength and what that brought the family.[99] Clearly, Jephthah's brothers were not mighty warriors capable of leading their people into battle, as the call for headship went unheeded.

On what grounds then, might the brothers have objected to Jephthah's claim? The biblical narratives often depict lower-status sons losing their birthright to their high-status brothers. Ishmael, for example, is not only denied the birthright of the eldest, but is excluded from inheriting altogether (Gen 21:10). The experiences of Ishmael and Jephthah offer interesting parallels. Both Ishmael and Jephthah are (seemingly) firstborn sons as well as sons of low-status mothers. Both are exiled and disinherited from their father's household and become strong in exile. Yet the story of Ishmael suggests that in some circumstances the children of low-status mothers might not always have been seen as legitimate heirs.

The distinctions between Jephthah and Ishmael should bear notice as well. First, when Sarah proposes to disinherit Ishmael, Abraham resists. It is God who intervenes and gives permission for Ishmael's exile (Gen 21:11–12). No one acts hesitant or concerned for the

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[98] A similar motif of disinheritance by sons of the first wife can be seen in many biblical stories: Sarah tries to prevent Ishmael from inheriting (Gen 21:9–12); the brothers of Joseph try to prevent him from remaining an heir (37:19–20); and Laban's sons try to block Jacob from becoming an inheriting heir (31:1–2; Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World in Ancient Israel*, 19). For Jephthah, his father's absence during the distribution of shares made him particularly vulnerable because there was no one, not even God, to speak for him.

[99] This insight is echoed by Boda and Conway (*Judges*, 14), "[t]he sons may have been motivated by their father's preference for his older son and the suspicion that he would receive some specific legacy regardless of his dubious status, or perhaps Jephthah's reputation as a great warrior caused them to fear that he might take his inheritance by force."

wellbeing of Jephthah. The father's voice is missing, and the brothers determine *amongst themselves* to drive him away (Judg 11:2). Second, though both Jephthah and Ishmael are *expelled* (גרש) from their household, Hagar and Ishmael experience an exodus-type event, being expelled by their oppressors (cf. גרש in Exod 11:1) and moving towards freedom and kingdom-building.[100] By contrast, rather than being moved towards freedom at the behest and in the care of the divine, the brothers drive Jephthah out of the household, as if he were the Canaanites driven out from the promised land (cf. גרש in Exod 34:11)—Jephthah must flee from their presence. To "expel" was a harsh decision as survival outside of the household was incredibly difficult. Finally, once Hagar and Ishmael are expelled, God calls to them in the wilderness, offering protection and promise in their exile and growing their household through marriage and childbearing (Gen 21:17–20). Jephthah's story offers no such encounter with the divine. Instead of the presence of God approaching him in Tob, "worthless men" are drawn to him (Judg 11:3). And as we discover later, only one child is born to him (v. 34).

Therefore, while the story of Ishmael may offer some precedent for rejecting the son of a low-status mother, the action of Jephthah's brothers appears to be much less justified than that of Abraham and Sarah. Yet how would such an egregious betrayal have been permitted in an Israelite community? Early audiences knew that sometimes succession lines did not follow a linear path, but a pragmatic one. While the number of Gilead's sons is uncertain, too many heirs could easily overtax the land and resources, diminishing the chances of survival. Meyers unpacks this uncomfortable reality: "[w]hen village populations expanded and land resources

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[100] Observations regarding Hagar's place in biblical history and the reverse exodus have been presented by a number of Womanist scholars, most notably Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 15–59.

proportionally diminished, conflict among heirs was hardly unusual."[101] Overtaxed resources could force some members of the household to leave home and village, searching for work in cities or as soldiers.[102] Perhaps Gilead had too many heirs, and sharing the land would become a danger to their survival.

Jephthah is first introduced as a (גבור חיל) "mighty warrior," a title given to him *before* his exile from his household (11:1).[103] While most interpreters assume that he earns this title during his years in exile or demonstrates that skill against Ammon, yet that is not necessarily true.[104] Household and village life were primarily agricultural, but the book of Judges depicts a nation constantly at war. The use of tribal language in this text indicates a shift from the imagery of farmlands and pastures to centralized military endeavors and battle.[105] The introduction to the Jephthah cycle indicates that the battle with the Ammonites (and the Philistines) had been ongoing for eighteen years (10:8). Jephthah may have proven himself a warrior for Gilead as Ammon and Philistia continually oppressed the Gileadite lands. Just prior to Jephthah's expulsion, his younger brothers have "grown up," suggesting that they had reached the age of adulthood. Therefore, Jephthah would have been an adult long before his expulsion takes place,

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[101] Meyers, "Family in Early Israel," 35.

[102] See further n18.

[103] Notably, David is described as a "mighty warrior" in 1 Sam 16:15–19, before he ever fought in a battle. Similarly, the narrative invites readers to wonder how the servant would know these things about David and if/how David had already demonstrated them at this point.

[104] For example, Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 419–420) describes this title as a role he has not yet earned. Others, like Butler (*Judges*, 280), prefer to leave the timing of this title vague and instead focus on the meaning of the term as a person with ability, but not necessarily God's blessing.

[105] Villages operated independently of one another, except during times of political or economic crisis, in which they would unite to face a common threat. When facing a threat that brought into question the survival of the village on its own, the members of the village would become "indefinitely absorbed into a larger and more totalitarian social system called a 'tribe.'" The use of tribalism during times of war can be seen in several texts, including Judg 19:1 and 1 Sam 11. In each case, the villages were unified by a shared perception of a military threat and rallied under a leader to fight back (Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 96–97).

and as an adult male would have had plenty of opportunity to fight during those eighteen years of conflict. Certainly, his military acumen could have explained why the men of Tob were drawn to him and were willing to go out raiding with him as their leader (11:3).

The introduction to Jephthah's character, as a warrior and the son of an untraditional union, indicates two very different honor symbols that affect the inheritance process: aptitude and maternal identity. The son of a lesser-accepted union may not have retained the firstborn status after sons were born to the first wife. However, sons who had proven themselves in battle were often favored in leadership and inheritance.[106] Furthermore, the brothers may have perceived that their eldest brother was more competent or even that he may physically overpower them, sparking a sense of jealousy and indignation.

Primarily, the justification for Jephthah's expulsion relied on the negative association of his maternal heritage: better to drive out the son of a prostitute than the son of the legitimate wife, right? Being the son of a prostitute indicated a lower level of ascribed honor within the biblical community. Jephthah had earned some honor with his reputation as a mighty warrior, yet his inherited dishonor diminished his standing.[107] The low standing of Jephthah's birth could not be redeemed in battle, it could only be overcome with admittance back into the household in a public acknowledgement.[108] Yet the dishonor that was attached to Jephthah's birth would not

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[106] Israel's warrior culture exalted the strong combatants, particularly in leadership roles (Chapman, *House of the Mother*, 166–172). Indeed, the rise of Israel's leaders is often marked with battles in which they demonstrate their military skill and defeat an enemy of Israel (Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 424).

[107] DeMaris and Leeb ("Judges," 180) evaluate the significance of Jephthah's honor status throughout the narrative. Jephthah's honor rating is inconsistent because of his low birth combined with his military victories, and they contend that "[a]n ambiguous or inconsistent honor rating cannot stand in a world defined by honor and shame." Although DeMaris and Leeb consider Jephthah's honor status and how regaining his honor drives the narrative, they fail to recognize the use of the honor code in motivating the brothers to expel their low-birth co-inheritor.

[108] DeMaris and Leeb, "Judges," 181.

only be attributed to Jephthah, but may have followed the household of Gilead as a whole, especially if Jephthah rivaled his brothers for the birthright. Therefore, it is up to the brothers to redeem the family honor by removing him from the household. If this conviction was felt deeply enough, the brothers could perceive their response to be a necessary action in restoring the family honor as they move further into leadership in Gilead.

The implied social denigration of sons from low-status mothers is encoded in expressions of humility throughout the biblical text. Chapman explores expressions of debasement and their connection to maternal roles, particularly with mothers of lower status (slave girl, concubine, and prostitute). She demonstrates that in many expressions of debasement, particularly before God, penitents usually refer to themselves in humble terms, like "your servant." Yet when the penitent wants to show the *lowest* imaginable status, they up their rhetorical game and refer to themselves as the "son of your maidservant,"[109] suggesting that being born of a low-status mother reflected the lowest status possible. To be the son of a prostitute would have involved even further debasement because of its associations with sexual impropriety, not simply lower class. Imagine the horror of the brothers as such a low-status brother was about to inherit the property and name of their high-status father. In their rejection of Jephthah, the brothers identify his maternity as the reason for his rejection but cannot seem to bring themselves to wholly discuss the status of his mother, preferring instead to refer to her simply as "another woman" (11:2). The overlaying of social imagery in the house of Gilead suggests a local family with dynastic aspirations and alludes to a more ambitious, state-like household. As the brothers age and begin to take leadership roles in the village, perhaps even spreading their influence throughout Gilead, the

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[109] See, e.g., Pss 86:16; 116:16 (Chapman, *House of the Mother*, 196–97).

presence of their ignoble sibling may have challenged their sense of propriety and right rule. They have been raised with the son of an unconventional union, yet they do not want to inherit alongside of him nor submit to his headship as firstborn.

Yet their rejection of Jephthah may have also reflected their own keen observations of their brother: perhaps he was not an upright man as his immediate acceptance by professional thieves may attest. The storyteller may subtly reshape the brothers' mode of conduct by way of resonance and contrast between Jephthah and Abimelech. There are many points of connection between their stories: Abimelech and Jephthah are both sons from non-traditional births (8:31; 11:1), each man becomes professionally affiliated with *empty* (ריקים) men to do nefarious deeds for/with them (9:4; 11:3),[110] and the stories of Jephthah and Abimelech both begin with a debate surrounding inheritance (9:2; 11:2). The brothers of Jephthah are savvy enough to preemptively strike before Jephthah can use his military might against them, sending him away to another land. Yet unlike Abimelech, Jephthah does not simply *hire* unscrupulous men to do his bidding, the unscrupulous men are *drawn* (לקט) to him and follow him as their leader.[111] Perhaps the brothers see something dangerous and unruly in Jephthah. Jephthah's character does not change in exile; rather his reception reveals that he is at home among these shady men and they too with him. Perhaps the brothers know something about their older brother that leads them to not only disinherit, but also expel him from the household before he could bring more shame upon them. In the end, regardless of their motivation—whether it be a concern for survival, a sense of

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[110] See the translation notes for a full assessment of the term ריקים. Notably, it is only used twice in the book of Judges, in the stories of these two low-status sons.

[111] This verb is most often used in reference to food (or sometimes stones) being gathered by people or animals, but in the *hithpael*, may reflect collecting oneself to something (*CDCH*, 197; cf. *BDB*, 544–45). This is the only place it appears in the *hithpael* where it seems to have a reflexive meaning: the unscrupulous men gathered themselves to Jephthah of their own volition and free will. This suggests they chose to be collected.

propriety in the family status, a fear of Jephthah's strength and character, or some combination of these—the brothers prove themselves to be entirely focused on their own self-need.

The Mode of Conduct for the Elders of Gilead

The elders of Gilead are presented as duplicitous and untrustworthy—cautioning the reader to be wary of their actions and offerings. Traditionally, the elders were entrusted with maintaining law and justice in the land, but they fail to defend Jephthah's place within the household. Jephthah's loss is compounded as his response to their disinheritance indicates his own sense of danger and lack of confidence in the justice system of Gilead. The text reads that Jephthah had to *flee* (ברח), not *to* a land, but *from before* (מפני אחיו) his brothers, emphasizing his implied fear of their reaction. Sasson points out the significance of this phrase, noting that "they were not simply dispossessing their brother but were intent to harm him."[112] The inaction of the elders in Jephthah's disinheritance is just as significant as the action of the brothers. It paints an ominous picture of the governance of Gilead at the time of Jephthah, as the leaders bend the laws and traditions towards the powerful rather than protecting the rights of the weak.

Their lack of justice taints the perception of their conduct during their negotiation and subsequent offer, of which Jephthah himself seems aware. The elders cannot be trusted. In each element of the discourse, the elders attempt to disguise their plight in order to maximize their control and minimize their offering. When they first approach Jephthah in Tob, they request that Jephthah return and be *to us* (לנו) as a *captain* (קצין) to fight the Ammonites among them (v. 6).

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[112] Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 421) demonstrates that this phrase is an idiom, using illustrations from the story of Hagar, Jacob, David, Jeroboam, and Jotham.

Their initial offer is strained in the mind of the reader, who knows that these same elders have already issued an offer to *all of Gilead* and that offer came with the rank of *head* (ראש) of all Gilead (10:18). In this change of semantics from the offer at Mizpah, along with the inclusion of themselves in the battle, they offer Jephthah only a temporary reprieve from his exile. If accepted, Jephthah would lead the troops but would have no permanent place; he is being hired for his services as a mighty warrior (perhaps demonstrating those skills while a mercenary in Tob?) and little else. In other words, the elders offer him an opportunity to earn more *acquired* honor, rather than restore his *ascribed* honor and therefore his place within the household.[113]

Yet Jephthah proves himself an apt negotiator and forces the elders to address their own role in the injustice perpetuated against him (11:7). The elders cannot merely hire a mercenary. If they want Jephthah's help, then they must first address his exiled state because *they* are culpable. Jephthah's language here echoes the language of Yhwh when he rejects the Israelites' previous request for help (10:13–14), no longer trusting that repentance is a genuine attempt at restoration, but rather a distress call when all other avenues have failed.[114] The elders' request is itself further an affront to their previous acts of repentance, indicating that they no longer trust in God to deliver them.[115] Further, the Gileadites' response to Jephthah, "Assuredly, now we have returned (שבנו) to you" (11:8), also echoes the Israelites' attempt at repentant acts after Yhwh rejects their

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[113] DeMaris and Leeb, "Judges," 183.

[114] Jephthah's emphatic use of pronouns echoes the speech of Yhwh in the prologue. Jephthah echoes the audacity of God, drawing the two up for comparison, yet these parallels do not indicate harmony between the characters, but discord. Yhwh is frustrated and flatly refuses to be manipulated, whereas Jephthah recognizes that they are trying to manipulate him and therefore attempts to out-maneuver their duplicity.

[115] Exum ("Center Cannot Hold," 422) goes as far as to say that the Gileadite elders seeking a deliverer is itself a censure to Yhwh's inaction. Younger, (*Judges/Ruth*, 248) argues that it portrays them as "irreligious opportunists," who have broken the trust in God's deliverance by seeking a deliverer for themselves. Schneider (*Judges*, 166) remarks that "[t]he wrong people asked the wrong questions and offered wrong rewards."

cry for help (10:15–16).[116] The Gileadite elders' mode of conduct reflects the same self-serving behavioral code that has already been rejected by Yhwh. However, this also demonstrates that the people are even further from repentance than at the beginning of their story because they now cast Jephthah in the role of deliverer rather than waiting on Yhwh.[117]

The elders' response to Jephthah seems to avoid replying directly to his criticism because, in truth, there is no defense. They *were* responsible for his expulsion, as the brothers could not have expelled him without their permission or, at least, apathy towards his plight. The elders passively wave off Jephthah's rebuke and move forward into their counter offer: asking him to go with them and fight, not as commander but as *head* (ראש) of all Gilead (11:8)—restored as a Gileadite and elevated even above the elders themselves. Though again, the stingy nature of the elders taints their offer. They offer him headship, yet will they really uphold their end of the deal once the battle has ended? The elders of Gilead have proven themselves duplicitous; therefore, Jephthah seeks to solidify his permanent headship by invoking Yhwh (v. 9). In doing so, Jephthah places himself on the level of the judges of Israel, rather than one among the elders. To defy Jephthah after his victory would be to defy Yhwh—Jephthah's invocation of the name of Yhwh therefore reshapes his role as Yhwh's chosen deliverer, not merely the champion of Gilead.

Jephthah's final response reflects distrust for the brothers and a need for a binding contract between them, and who better than Yhwh to anchor his claim? Jephthah has outwitted the duplicitous elders, connecting his victory in battle to Yhwh's authority (11:9), which the lead

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[116] For a more detailed assessment of these narrative echoes, see Boda and Conway, *Judges*, 17.

[117] While the echo between these texts was first noted by Polzin (*Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 178–79), the significance of that connection is best articulated in the more recent work by Boda and Conway, *Judges*, 17.

the elders then to establish a binding them in a contract that would have dire consequences if broken.[118] The tension and distrust between Jephthah and the elders has not disappeared, rather they have been placed under an obligation—will the elders respect the law and the rule of Yhwh this time? The text never relieves that tension. Therefore, the Gileadite elders' mode of conduct is negative precisely because of their duplicitous actions. They have demonstrated that their acts of repentance in the previous scene were an opportunistic ploy to win the favor of Yhwh. They have demonstrated that their complicity in Jephthah's exile was pragmatic rather than principled, and that same pragmatism has now led them to his door. The story seems to caution its audience—do not trust the elders, they do whatever is best for them in the moment.

Disposition and Perspective within the Story: Dealing with the Issues that Were Right in Front of Them

Disposition refers to the personality ascribed by the storyteller that works both for and against the expectations of the readers—therefore, the characters' response demonstrates their perspective within the story. In the case of both the brothers and the elders, the disposition is subtly developed but seems to reflect on dangerous qualities that might lead some to misuse each social group. The relationships between brothers during times of distributing inheritance were contentious and often self-serving, survivalist with determination regarding how their inheritance should be divided. Yet the legality of their actions are not as clear cut as legal precedent may imply, leading many to justify unjust actions in an attempt to avoid harsh economic outcomes. Furthermore, they are proud and their behavior seems guided by the honor and shame codes, a

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[118] Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 424) discusses the language of contract issued by Jephthah as well as its acceptance by the elders. He urges that the final pledge before the shrine in Mizpah further secures the contract and solidifies Jephthah's permanent rule.

significant driving force in the ancient world. Similarly, a group of local leaders who are charged to maintain tradition and protect the weakest members of society become pragmatic and unreliable arbiters of justice—focusing their communal decisions on temporary utility rather than principled decisions. How should readers engage the brothers who are mistreating their half-brother or the duplicitous schemes of the elders who violate their fundamental purpose in order protect the powerful?

Brothers: Perceptive, Scheming, and Influential

The disposition of the brothers varies according to the reader's perception of their nuanced mode of conduct—is it possible that the brothers recognized something about Jephthah that readers take much longer to discern? If the brothers are read as greedy violators of law and tradition, then they are easily cast as self-involved, scheming, and cruel. But if the brothers are read as those concerned with propriety and honor, who are acting against a strong and untenable competitor, they may be cast as perceptive, scheming, and paranoid. Either way, the brothers' self-interested behavior goes too far in excommunicating Jephthah. Clearly, they prove themselves to be influential in both family and village, and perhaps in Gilead as a whole, and they use that influence for personal gain.

The text describes the actions of the brothers in two short verbs: *and they grew up* (ויגדלו) and *they expelled* (ויגרשו) in 11:2. The brothers do not confront Jephthah until they are grown and their father Gilead is (presumably) gone. They timed their coup properly. Furthermore, their rejection speech also reflects their self-focused mindset, presenting their actions in direct statements and leaving no room for negotiation. They do not invoke legal precedent, mutual struggle, or any action of Jephthah that may have warranted a spoken response from Jephthah.

This is the only time in the narrative when Jephthah is not afforded an opportunity to speak; he is simply informed of their decision. As a skilled negotiator (manipulator?), he is denied one of his most powerful tools, his words. The brothers offer no gifts for survival (not even the meager gifts Abraham gave Hagar in Gen 21:14); rather they simply recast Jephthah as an outsider, the son of another woman, who is therefore not a member of their father's household.

As a result of their self-involved scheming, the brothers' actions, even when put into their social context, depict a truly calloused and cruel disposition that preempts any wrongs Jephthah may commit (if they believe him to demonstrate dangerous posturing, as seen with Abimelech). When the sons of Gilead force Jephthah to leave, they deny him more than an invitation to the next family reunion, but also his link to his ancestral lands and the connective bonds of kinship. They also replace any ascribed honor he may have had with shame.[119] Unlike Abimelech, he has nowhere to run—evinced by the fact that he does not attempt to reconnect with his maternal household. His rejection from the household of Gilead does not simply cost him relationships, but also throws his own existence into peril. He has to escape to a city that is known to harbor mercenaries, one of the few ways to survive for a man without a household.[120]

Yet if the narrator is truly establishing Jephthah as a threat to his brother's inheritance, as a mighty (and manipulative) warrior in a family of politicians, then perhaps the brothers' personalities are more perceptive of Jephthah's violent potential, leading to paranoia rather than

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[119] The act of being "detached" from the house of the father removed any ambiguity that may have been present in his paradoxical introduction: ultimately, being the son of a prostitute overrules his status as a son of Gilead. While he may be able to earn acquired honor through achievements (economically or in battle), he could never by his own actions restore his ascribed honor (DeMaris and Leeb, "Judges," 182).

[120] Tob is rarely mentioned in biblical literature, but in 2 Sam 10:8 it is referenced as the place in which David acquired twelve thousand men to fight alongside him and defeat the Ammonites.

self-protection. The early description of Jephthah's birth and status as a warrior warn readers not to count Jephthah out in the battle for an inheritance. In response to the paradoxical nature of his description, a mighty warrior and the son of a prostitute, Webb postulates that the brothers' response "hints that fear of domination may have been the unexpressed motive behind his expulsion."[121] The term גבור חיל ("mighty warrior") can be used to describe skill and strength in battle, but may even designate someone who has a personal army at their disposal.[122] Jephthah certainly has his own para-military organization while in Tob. His career as a successful leader of raiding parties seems to cast a shadow on his life outside of Gilead. Why were the unscrupulous men drawn to him? What would happen if an unscrupulous man became the head of Gilead? Would he kill his brothers as Abimelech had killed his own brotherly rivals? Perhaps these issues lead the brothers to act in haste and paranoia, rather than greed. This paranoia undoubtedly leads to cruel ends that ironically rebound upon them later in their war with Ammon.

Elders: Cowardly, Detached, and Pragmatic

While this chapter has focused primarily on the flashback concerning Jephthah's heritage and his negotiations for return with the elders of Gilead, in truth this story begins after God refuses to respond to the people and the Ammonites assemble for war in Gilead (10:17–18).[123] Here the

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[121] Webb, *Integrated Reading*, 51.

[122] For more information on the eight men ascribed this title in the biblical text, see Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 51–52.

[123] This text does not use the term זקן ("elders") of Gilead, but instead refers to the leaders of Gilead as the שר ("leaders") of Gilead. This could mean one of two things. First, the elders who were familiar (or related) to Jephthah may have been sent to fetch him on behalf of the leaders. The second, and more likely, option is that the

elders are introduced as the representative leaders of Gilead and as cowardly. Judges 10:17 describes the Ammonites action as being *summoned* (צעק) to battle, while the sons of Israel merely *gather* (אסף) at Mizpah. The act of summoning connotes "a more disciplined assembly," compared to the less purposeful gathering of Israelites, who were just beginning to organize in response to the threat.[124] In an attempt to mount a response, the leaders of Gilead offer an enticing reward—a leadership role "as head to all the inhabitants of Gilead (לראשׁ לכל ישׁבי גלעד)" to whomever will direct the attack. Notably, while the elders have promoted themselves as leaders over the people, they themselves do not respond to the offer to lead Gilead into battle. Leadership roles in Israel often require, if not imply, military acumen. Judges and kings in Israel are often initiated into their role through military accomplishment. In the book of Judges, each major judge cycle includes an account of an external threat to which the judge then leads a military campaign to free Israel.[125] Similarly, King Saul is not accepted as Israel's first king until after he defeats the Ammonites in Jabesh-Gilead (1 Sam 10). In contrast, the leadership in Gilead declines the role of war hero and instead seeks out another military commander.

Another interesting dispositional attribute applied to the elders by Jephthah is his accusation of hatefulness in their adjudication of his dispute with the brothers, demonstrating their ethically *detached* administration of the law. The prohibition against hatred in Lev 19:17 is embedded into a section that seeks to establish the personal ethical standards of Israel. If the

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elders and the leaders are the same group. Notice that the elders eventually issue the same offer to Jephthah as the leaders do for all of Gilead, and they do so without needing permission from a larger governing body.

[124] Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 418.

[125] Again, the only notable exception to this is in the story of Deborah, who acts as a prophet rather than a warrior, and Samson who kills Philistines in fits of anger rather than as a war hero. There's tension in the account as to whether the "judge" is Deborah or Barak (see, e.g., 1 Sam 12:11). Deborah "judged" Israel (4:4), but she wasn't supposed to function as the military deliverer—her role was to prophetically call out Barak to do that, but he wouldn't go without her.

elders, as representatives of their people, treat Jephthah with such low regard, what might Jephthah's accusation reveal? It certainly reflects Jephthah's own feelings about his expulsion, but his experience with injustice is unlikely unique to him. More likely, it represents a system that has betrayed its core convictions without any remorse—note that they do not approach Jephthah until they need him, not in order to rectify the wrong they have perpetuated against him. They placed the desires of the influential above the needs of the marginalized and therefore abused their authority. What they may have perceived as apathy towards his cause was received as trauma fueled by hateful silence. Therefore, hatred in this context is not a deep and personal desire for injury, but a corrupt and manipulative system that works against the weak. While likely hyperbolic in order to prove a point, Jephthah's assessment of the elders' ethical failures and his experience at the receiving end of their dishonesty exposes a corrupt system of governance that only the resourceful and cunning can endure. In the end, Jephthah grows into that character.

Finally, the leaders are *pragmatic* and *ambitious*. The elders know that they cannot win a battle without a military chief to lead the legions of Gilead into battle, yet that does not mean they are willing to promote an "outsider" into headship if they do not have to. The governors of Gilead initially offer headship to any of the inhabitants willing to lead them into battle, but the elders carefully craft their overtures to Jephthah, only giving away what power they must in order to retain his service. Initially, they attempt to woo Jephthah as a restored member of Gilead, or at least restored in battle; "Come with us and be our captain, and we may fight against the sons of Ammon" (Judg 11:5). They seem to believe that Jephthah would be flattered by their offer of a quick promotion despite his low status, yet they underestimate his contempt. They are the ones responsible for his low status, and he has not forgotten. Jephthah knows they must be

desperate if they have approached him, so he presses for more. In response, they offer him headship over all of Gilead, as they had previously offered all of the Gileadite assembly. Yet the elders are untrustworthy and have already demonstrated a calloused disregard for law and tradition—they have offered headship, but the parameters are not clear and could lead to a second disinheritance if Jephthah is not careful.[126] Finally, Jephthah invokes the name of Yhwh, positioning himself as a judge of Israel and a permanent head of their people. At each step, the disingenuous elders offer only a portion of what is available to them, yet they recognize their own need and are eventually outmaneuvered by Jephthah.[127] In episode two, it remains to be seen whether or not they will honor these promises, or will they find a loophole as they did earlier, allowing for Jephthah's excommunication?

The Tellability of the Brothers' and the Elders' Stories: What the Reader Learns in Reading the Story from the Perspective of Jephthah's Rivals

Throughout this episode, the family of Gilead demonstrates a misuse of kinship connections with lasting national implications. While codes of social honor, pragmatic land decisions, and even a tenor of fear may have motivated their reactions, the story seems to call the brothers to account

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[126] The back and forth between Jephthah and the elders has produced several insights in regards to both parties. Schneider (*Judges*, 167) questions the legitimacy of the elders' offer in light of their promises to Yhwh in the previous scene, noting that the manner in which the offer was made recalls Jotham's fable, warning of disingenuous leadership offers. Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 355) argues that Jephthah's invocation of Yhwh here demonstrates his opportunism—knowing that the elders are desperate and also that they are not trustworthy, he utilizes Yhwh as witness to a more formal contract. Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 197) points out that while the refusal to accept office is fairly common in the OT (e.g., Moses, Gideon, Jeremiah), there is a deep contrast between their refusals because of perceived unworthiness and Jephthah's refusal because of the unworthiness and untrustworthiness of those asking for help. Boda and Conway (*Judges*, 16) describe the elders' actions as cunning, only upping the ante when Jephthah pushes back, finally invoking Yhwh to make doubly sure that the agreement will be upheld.

[127] Yet Boda and Conway (*Judges*, 35) note that since the offer agreed to is nothing more than what was originally offered to all Gileadites in (Judg 10:18), Jephthah was unable to secure for himself anything beyond what the elders were already prepared to give him.

for their dubious claims and the elders for their decision to aid the powerful rather than the powerless. The heirs of Gilead have exiled their brother, violating the collective identity of household, village, and community. Similarly, the elders—whether they are the brothers or representatives from the community—do nothing to stop the injustice against Jephthah and are therefore equally accountable. Corrupt leadership has lasting implications for the tribe of Gilead as they face the crisis of Ammon without the warrior raised in their house. The irony of their request expresses their desperate need, but also the insincerity of their appeal. Recovering Jephthah from Tob was never a move towards reconciliation, but self-preservation. This truth recalls the opening scene and God's rejection of Israel's repentance: is Israel's cry for help ever anything more than self-serving?

Importantly, the stories of the brothers and the elders offer tellable accounts of the Jephthah cycle, containing a structured timecourse, an identifiable disruption in their mental world, as well as a subjective awareness of what that disruption feels like. The timecourse for the elders begins with the advance of the Ammonites, which prompts a call for leadership (10:17–18). This action is interrupted with the story of the brothers—Jephthah is born to Gilead by a woman of disrepute (11:1), the wife of Gilead bears sons, and at the time of inheritance transfer they believe their portion of the inheritance to be in jeopardy, so they respond by disinheriting him (v. 2). As a result of their disinheritance, Jephthah flees to Tob and makes a life as a raider (v. 3). The story then resumes as the Ammonites again fight Israel, so the elders of Gilead seek out the exiled Gileadite warrior to bring him back and command their armies (vv. 4–6). Jephthah angrily rejects their offer on account of their betrayal, so the elders offer him full restoration to Gilead as both commander and chief (vv. 7–8). Not trusting the elders, Jephthah binds them by the word of Yhwh, and they agree to his terms (vv. 9–11). The sequence of events offers a clear

journey through the perspective of the brothers and elders as they navigate their complex family (and extended family) situation with a tenuous outcome of restoration.

The disruptions of both the brothers and the elders are also clearly introduced by the narrator. The brothers perceive the presence of Jephthah as a disruption to their own self-interest. There may have been cause to fear Jephthah's place within the household of Gilead based on his own questionable disposition (he did *immediately* find empty men who drawn to him in Tob) or the difficulty in fairly dividing Gilead's property between his sons (could the land sustain all the families of Gilead's sons simultaneously?). Yet their response to the disruption is cruel and unjust. In focusing on their own self-preservation, they perpetuate a deeper injustice against their own brother. They disown him from the shared household identity and force him to flee from the protection of his kin and country. The brothers perceive a threat and elect to use their privilege within the family to their own advantage. This is a subjective reality that far too few people are aware of—those who hold positions of privilege (in household, community, and beyond) are responsible for the way their actions affect others. There is a critique of self-focus that fails to recognize the way our actions and choices effect change. I do not want to admit my own complicity in elevating self above others, particularly when I have felt wronged, yet the disruption of the brothers' mental world rings painfully true. Often the deepest wrongs perpetrated against another are those seemingly justified acts of self-preservation that fail to consider the lasting implications of our choices on others. If I *can* effect change, that means that I should be *cautious and aware* of how those changes affect others. We make ourselves the victim (or the righteous) in order to justify our actions. We make "them" the villain that would cause cascading effects of danger or dishonor that must be guarded against. No one wants to

believe that they are the villain in their own story. The brothers believe that Jephthah has no right to their inheritance and, in their minds, this justifies their expulsion of Jephthah.

The elders experience the disruption of the impending war and the reality that God has not raised up a deliverer for them (nor has anyone responded to their call for a leader [10:18]). With the Ammonites pressing in, the Gileadites respond in desperation, finally determining that the answer is to recall the only mighty warrior that they know, Jephthah. Much like the Israelites who cry out to God to save them from Ammon and Philistia in the opening scene, the Gileadites now seek Jephthah for utilitarian purposes only. Their subjective experience of desperation and the fatefulness of their response echo deeply into human experiences of failed leadership and the inevitable inadequacy of corrupt leaders. Corrupt leadership sides with those in power rather than protecting the disempowered in society, and eventually becomes the source of its own downfall. If your guiding principle is to side with those in power, then the life that follows will necessarily be disordered and chaotic—marked by irony, distrust, and disloyalty. The elders allowed for Jephthah to be driven away, forsaking their role as impartial protectors of Israelite tradition and ethos, yet that same prioritizing of power is what leads them to seek that same man for help against Ammon. The brothers/elders only consider what is best for them, giving Jephthah real restoration only when forced.

So what do the brothers and elders reveal about human nature—particularly our reactions to similar situations and disruptions? The story of the brothers and elders demonstrates the cruelty and injustice of self-focused actions, particularly the ease with which they may *feel* justifiable in a moment. Through the persons of the brothers, it is easy to simulate the real experience of family turmoil, particularly for an early audience who had experienced disruptions around the transfer of inheritance. Similarly, when leaders in Israel emphasize their own self-

interest instead of prioritizing the health of the community, they all fail. Yet perhaps the most striking lesson comes as the elders restore Jephthah to his household if he agrees to fight against Ammon—this is not an example of reconciliation, but of effective bargaining. Continuing the pattern of disingenuous acts of reconciliation begun in the first episode, they do not confront the conflicts that created the broken relationship. Instead, they move forward with what can be gained—thereby perpetuating a cycle of inadequate reconciliation and further disruption. The brothers and elders are united in their goal of self-preservation at minimal cost to them, making dubious claims to justify their actions and ignoring their track record of wrongdoing in order to gain the only prize they truly desire—not restoration, but a military victory.

Through his interaction with his brothers and the elders, Jephthah's character and personhood are also revealed. Jephthah is a survivor and leans on the only skill that would allow him to survive without land or household: he uses his strength to become a raider, stealing from towns and travelers what he could not supply on his own. Jephthah, on his account, speaks directly to the audacity and irony of the elders' request, but then uses this request to not only reclaim his place within the family, but to make assurances that they will no longer have the authority to remove his place within the household when their self-interest has shifted once again. Jephthah, rightfully, does not trust them. Jephthah, wrongfully, thinks he has outwitted them at last. The brothers and elders have already demonstrated that they are guided by their own selfish opportunism and shifting loyalties based on personal need. Yet this episode of irony shifts Jephthah back into the role of inheritor; only this time he is not only the head of household but has become the head over all of Gilead. His participation in battle is focused on how it feeds into his personal gain, not on the good of his people.

At first glance, Jephthah's actions seem justified, the just outcome of an unjust situation. Yet his character is not so different from that of his brothers. Jephthah reclaims what was lost, but he may make one final attempt at revenge upon his father's household. Having been restored to his family land and leadership over his family, perhaps his rash vow, coming in episode four (11:30–31) is not meant for his daughter but for the family who lives in the household of Gilead—that is, one of his brothers.[128] Regardless of its intended target, Jephthah's vow ultimately undercuts his restoration to his father's land. If Jephthah goes back on his vow, his contract with the elders, who have proven untrustworthy and driven by self-interest, may also be cast aside. If he sacrifices his daughter, he no longer has a child to inherit after him, and his lineage effectively dies. No matter his action, Jephthah has lost. Matthews and Benjamin conclude, "despite the fact that Jephthah regains his position within the household of Gilead, he is ultimately unable to pass on his inheritance and the household passes back to his brothers."[129] He is restored for a brief moment, only to sacrifice his headship and inheritance on the altar alongside his daughter. In fulfilling his vow, his position in Gilead and in his household remains intact, but his victory is self-focused and temporary. In the end, Jephthah is not only a victim of his brothers' injustices, but a perpetuator, who takes part in his family's selfish and opportunistic ethos, leading to his own demise. The brothers win at last.

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[128] Note that the vow reads that the offering would be someone/thing that comes out from his house (v. 31). If Jephthah has been restored to the household of Gilead, then he would be restored to his family land and would now live and dwell with his brothers and their families once again. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter five, which analyzes the role of Jephthah's daughter in this story.

[129] Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 20.

CHAPTER 4: THE ENEMY OF JEPHTHAH: AMMON AS COMPLEX VILLAIN WITH AN UNEXPECTED CLAIM

> *In the moment when I truly understand my enemy, understand him well enough to defeat him, then in that very moment I also love him. I think it's impossible to really understand somebody, what they want, what they believe, and not love them the way they love themselves.*
>
> Orson Scott Card, *Ender's Game*

Well-written villains are often much more complex than simple categories of "evil" and "good" may assume. The literary bad guy of a children's story may have *only* nefarious intent, but as readers age they anticipate a more realistic villain. Grown-up enemies have complex and conflicting motivations. And, though they may cross the line, these characters are often as multifaceted as the narrative hero.[1] Yet when stories demonstrate the inherent complexity of motivation in villains, this can blur the line between heroes and villains (to varying degrees), forcing readers to wrestle with the over-simplification of their assumed categories of right and wrong.[2] While biblical literature has many distinct features, perhaps readers have under-read the complexity of the biblical "bad guy" and therefore missed the multifaceted nature of the perceived enemies of Israel as well as the reasons for their divine rebuke.

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[1] There are many examples of complex villains in literature, but perhaps none more infamous than Shakespeare's Iago in his play *Othello*. The audience is immediately confronted with the duplicity and contradictions of his character, marveling at his ability to convince the protagonist of his fidelity while secretly plotting his demise.

[2] This theory of blurred lines between good and evil has existed for quite some time but was fully explored in the period of existential literature in the 19th century. Albert Camus's *The Stranger* features a protagonist so dark that it is impossible for readers to root for him and antagonists so sympathetic that it is difficult to see and understand why they would stand by him.

Centuries of biblical research have nuanced our reading and characterization of Israel (and Jephthah), yet this same sensitive reading has not typically been extended to Israel's neighbors. With few exceptions, most view the Ammonites in the book of Judges as playing the role of another stereotypical evil nation opposing the purposes of God (and Jephthah) in the Promised Land, and therefore as ultimately doomed for destruction. While it is tempting to read Jephthah as an underdog who overpowers his many challengers with the help of God,[3] this simplified reading of the narrative also underestimates the text's ability to create a realistic storyworld through the many perspectives held in tension within the story. Perhaps the objections of Ammon can offer insight into our own failed attempts at "diplomacy" that may be perceived as a "war declaration."[4]

Translation of Situation 3 (Judg 11:12–28): The Debate with Ammon

> 11 [12] Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the sons of Ammon, saying, "What is between you and me,[5] that you have come to me to fight against my land?" [13] And the king of the sons of Ammon said to the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel took my land, when it went up from Egypt, from the Arnon[6] to the Jabbok, and over to the Jordan. So now, return it peaceably."
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> [14] Then once again Jephthah sent messengers[7] to the king of the sons of Ammon, [15] and they said to him, "Thus says Jephthah, Israel did not take the land of Moab, nor the land

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[3] This is the stated intention of Ryan (*Judges*, 80), who acknowledges the many negative evaluations of Jephthah but intends to find a more positive evaluation of the judge—casually describing the Ammonite king as unconvinced by the "reference of the rival deity." In summarizing the king's actions as a rejection of the divine, the Ammonite response is reduced to one point within a much broader section.

[4] This point was first introduced by Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 433–34) and will be fully developed later in this chapter.

[5] Lit. "what to me and to you."

[6] While the MT includes the ו prefix, it is missing in many Heb. MSS, as well as OG, and Vg. It seems that it is unnecessary for the proper understanding of this clause.

[7] The OG includes the phrase, "and the messengers turned back to Jephthah, and he sent." The OL also includes, "and the messengers returned to Jephthah." Here it is omitted because of the MT reading and because it seems to be implied by the narrative.

of the sons of Ammon. [16] For in coming up from Egypt, Israel went into the wilderness as far as the Reed Sea,[8] and came to Kadesh. [17] Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, "Please let us pass through your land," but the king of Edom did not listen. Then also to the king of Moab they sent [messengers], but he would not consent. So Israel remained in Kadesh. [18] Then they went into the wilderness and went around the land of Edom and the land of Moab, and they went up to the eastern side[9] of the land of Moab, and they encamped on the other side of the Arnon—but they did not go into the territory of Moab, because the Arnon was the border of Moab. [19] Then the Israelites sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, king of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, "Please, let us pass through your land to our[10] place." [20] But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through[11] his territory, so Sihon gathered all his people and encamped in Jahaz and fought with Israel. [21] Then Yhwh, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and he struck them down. Then Israel took possession of all the land of the Amorites, those dwelling in that land. [22] So they took possession of all the territory of the Amorites,[12] from the Arnon and as far as the Jabbok, and from the wilderness and as far as the Jordan. [23] But now, Yhwh, the God of Israel, dispossessed the Amorites from before his people, Israel; but will you dispossess him? [24] Will you not take possession of what Chemosh, your god, gives you to possess? So then all that Yhwh, our God, had dispossessed from before us, we will possess. [25] So now, are you really better than Balak, son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive with Israel, or did he ever fight against them? When Israel lived in Heshbon and in its villages, and in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities that were upon the banks of the Arnon, for three hundred years, why did you not recover them at that time? [26] Therefore *I*[13] have not sinned against you, but *you*[14] are doing wrong to me by making war against me. May Yhwh, the judge, judge today between the sons of Israel and the sons of Ammon."

[28] But the king of the sons of Ammon would not listen to the words that Jephthah had sent to him.

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[8] Or "Red Sea."

[9] Lit. "eastern sun."

[10] The MT has a singular pronoun, but it has been translated as "our" to match the usage in v. 17.

[11] The OG reads, "Sihon did not want Israel to pass through" (on which, see Butler, *Judges*, 275). Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 261) argues for the OG, reading the MT as awkward. He also notes that the OG reading better fits the context with v. 17 and Num 20:21. Yet the lack of trust fits into the broader context of this disagreement in which the Ammonite king does not seem to trust Jephthah either.

[12] The OG does not have "they possessed all the Amorite territory," likely eliminating the repetition of ideas.

[13] Emphatic use, due to a redundant pronoun (*IBHS* §16.3.1b).

[14] Emphatic use, due to a redundant pronoun (*IBHS* §16.3.1b).

The Ammonites in the Text

The Ammonites are supporting characters, yet they are either active or passive participants in each scene of this story. They are directly speaking and/or acting in the first and third scenes: introduced at the onset of the crisis as part of Yhwh's response to the sin of Israel (10:6–18) and here, in the person of the king, negotiating with Jephthah, which ends in their military defeat (11:12–33). The Ammonites are indirect participants in each other scene as characters discuss how they are affected by the circumstances of the Ammonite threat. The second scene offers summative statements of their movement against Gilead and calls them to mind in the elders' bid to convince Jephthah to fight for Gilead (Judg 11:4–10). In the fourth scene, the daughter invokes the defeat of Jephthah's enemy as a reason to keep his bargain with God (vv. 34–40). In the final scene, the Ammonites are mentioned by the Ephraimites as cause of their discontent (12:1–7). Despite their pervasive presence in the narrative, most scholarship has only briefly introduced the Transjordan people as the latest in a long line of Israel's enemies in the book of Judges.[15] Who are the Ammonites, and what perspective do they offer on the events as they unfold?

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[15] Most scholars are focused on the words and actions of Jephthah and offer little insight into the claims of Ammon. Commentaries, even detailed historical commentaries, typically offer very few details on the actual people of Ammon. For example, Boling (*Judges*, 191) provides only a brief summary of their diplomatic interaction, defending Jephthah's historical re-telling of conquest and even justifying the harmonizing of Ammonite and Moabite culture, suggesting that Ammon was merely a new nation who had absorbed Moab (see also Ryan, *Judges*, 78–80, 83–85). Niditch (*Judges*, 131) glosses over the actual history of Ammon and defers to the notion that Ammon came to control the land only after Israel took the lands from the Amorites. Many scholars seem deal with the Ammonites as flat literary foils for Jephthah, focusing on Jephthah's argumentation rather than analyzing the validity of the Ammonite claim (e.g., Wijk-Bos, *End of the Beginning*, 256–58; Biddle, *Reading Judges*, 123–25; Evans, *Judges and Ruth*, 128–31). Other scholars emphasize that this text must be a later insertion and was directed towards its Hebrew readers of a different social location and crisis point. For example, Soggin (*Judges*, 211–13) sees this entire interaction as a later insertion intended to justify Israel's control over the disputed land, and Schnieder (*Judges*, 172–73) interprets the diplomacy as a written invention to depict Jephthah's character as being transformed into an Israelite insider. Notably, a few scholars have explored the motivation behind Ammon's actions (in addition to Jephthah) and the less-than-diplomatic exchange from each perspective. Webb (*Integrated Reading*, 54–56)

Social Code: The Role of the Ammonites in the Transjordan

Judg 10:6—12:7 introduces Israel's interaction with Ammon as a people (army) as well as the king of Ammon personally, suggesting two distinct social entities. In the first scene, Yhwh describes the actions of the Ammonites, and their acts against Israel are grouped together with the oppression of the Philistines (10:6–16).[16] Each subsequent mention of Ammon in the speeches of the elders, the daughter, and Ephraim addresses their actions as a collective, not the person of the king. Jephthah's interaction with Ammon takes place in the third scene (11:12–33), where he engages their *unnamed* king, whom this project will refer to as King Getal, through messengers.[17] In order to understand the original archetype of "Ammon," as well as the storyteller's nuancing of this particular character, it is important to understand both the biblical and historical realities of these social roles.[18] The Ammonites were a *specific* cultural group, who

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explores the economic motivation for Ammon's expansion and possession of the land, also noting Ammon's justifiable claim to territory in the region and suggesting an implied expansion into Moab. Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 424–35) offers the most extensive insight into the Ammon/Gileadite conflict and history and is able to demonstrate the many gaps in Jephthah's argument as well as the questionable intent of the negotiations, yet he never fully engages with the perspective of the Ammonites as a plausible ethical claim. Notably, not a single commentary has explored Ammon's claim to the land and the possibility that it may be a lawful assertion.

[16] Here it is impossible to differentiate between the actions of the Philistines and the actions of the Ammonites. It is unclear what kind of control each nation exercised over the land; therefore, it is important to see this as a summative experience of Israel, rather than a specific atrocity committed by Ammon.

[17] While the name of the king of Ammon has been lost to history, Pseudo-Philo gives him the name "Getal," arguing for the piety of Jephthah as a reason that God granted him victory over King Getal (*L.A.B.* 39:8). While Pseudo-Philo's treatments of both the king of Ammon and Jephthah are devotional rather than historical, this is the first name attached to the king in antiquity, and therefore this chapter will refer to the unknown king of Ammon as King Getal to offer clarity when switching between the people Ammon and their king, as well as to highlight the depth of character despite the lack of name.

[18] I do not presuppose that each and every early Israelite would be aware of all the biblical and historical nuances of Ammon. Surely, this could not be assumed of any audience at any given point in history. Archetypes are often shaped by culture, but certainly each reader has reshaped that archetype based off of their own education and experience. Yet a historical and literary re-creation of this "villain" will help to develop a more realistic character simulation. I also do not assume that the existing research on the Ammonites is in any sense exhaustive. As more information becomes available about this lesser-known tribal kingdom, the storyworld may continue to grow and the character simulation become more accurate and nuanced. This present study is working with the information that is

had regular interaction with Israel, or at least the western tribes, throughout the Iron Age. In this storyworld, utilizing an Ammonite meant invoking the reader's experience of "Ammon." Therefore, referring to the characters as the "people of Ammon" or the "king of Ammon" would connote a constellation of character expectations based the biblical record as well as on the historical realities of Ammonite polity, social structures, and religious practices.

Literary and Theological Tropes that Shape the Perception of Ammon in the Biblical Text

Biblical analysis of the Ammonites tends to be anachronistic, drawing together the few known elements of their cultural existence from brief references spread throughout the biblical text without regard for the way in which Ammonite culture, like Israel's, developed and changed over time. To be sure, the identity of the Ammonites is addressed in Scripture, yet with sparing detail and spanning almost a thousand years of biblical history. Therefore, not surprisingly, most studies have failed to fully address the dynamic nature of this culture as it developed and transformed throughout the history of the Levant.[19] The biblical texts that discuss or mention Ammon fall into three primary categories: ideological framing texts, which discuss origins and outline Israel's intended engagement with Ammon (Gen 19:36–38; Num 21:21–35; Deut 2:19, 37); historical records of Israel's interaction with Ammon, typically in a military context (Judg 3:13; 10:6—11:33; 1 Sam 11:1–11; 2 Sam 10–12; 17:27; 1 Kgs 11:1, 5, 7; 2 Kgs 23:13; 24:2; 2 Chr 20:1, 10, 22–23; 26:8; 27:5; Neh 4:3, 7–10); and poetic texts, which are most often focused on the Ammonites' false worship (Isa 11:14; Jer 9:25–26; 25:21; 27:3; 41:10, 15; 49:1–6; Ezek

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currently available, but is hermeneutically predisposed to continually seek more information in order to clarify the persons in the storyworld.

[19] For examples of this anachronistic reading, see Biddle, *Reading Judges*, 123–25; Evans, *Judges and Ruth*, 130.

21:28–32; 25:1–5; Dan 11:41; Amos 1:13–15; and Zeph 2:8–9). Each category offers insight into Israel's long history with Ammon, and together they reveal Ammon's dynamic relationship with Israel: as both ally and adversary.

Early biblical references to the people of Ammon in the Torah present a complex, yet foundational, archetype. According to Gen 19:36–38, Ammon was the second-born son of Lot and the product of an incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughter. That also makes him the younger brother to Moab, both of whom become the eponymous ancestors of the Transjordanian nations that later interact with Israel. While the text clearly derides the ignoble and incestuous birth of Ammon (and Moab), it is also important to note that Ammon is tied directly into the lineage of Abraham. Therefore the tribal nation has ancestral connections with the Hebrew people: they are a *cousin* nation. This relationship is distant and perhaps strained, though not altogether negative.

Furthermore, Deuteronomy offers specific instructions for dealing with the Ammonites and their land, directed primarily at the generation of Israelites who are preparing for the conquest of the Promised Land. Deuteronomic law warns the Israelites not to provoke the Ammonites or seize their land, because God has given it to the descendants of Lot (2:19), constituting a land grant that recognizes and honors the kinship of this cousin nation and its protection by God. Notably, the lands of Ammon are safeguarded, but there is no clear indication of which lands qualify as the legitimate "lands of Ammon." Deuteronomy also establishes regulations that exclude the Ammonites from joining the assembly of Israel (23:3–6, specifically addressing leadership roles), introducing a divinely placed ideological barrier between the two

peoples.[20] Therefore, the Deuteronomic law protects Ammonite lands from the invasive force of the Israelite army, yet also safeguards Israel's governance from the intrusion of Ammonite influence. This dual focus offers both an optimistic and cautious archetype. The nation of Ammon *is* protected by God, yet its people are potentially disruptive to Israel.

Both Jephthah and the king of Ammon invoke the memory of the conquest, even though Ammon is not directly referenced in the Bible's conquest narratives. Israel approached the Promised Land via the Transjordan, roughly following the trade route known as the King's Highway.[21] Upon entering Edom (Num 20:14–22), they requested permission to travel through their land and were denied passage. So they went around the nation on the east. Again, when they came to Moab (21:12–13), they requested safe passage. And again they were denied and therefore went around the land of Moab. Finally, Israel requested permission from King Sihon of the Amorites to travel through their land and were once again refused. But this time Sihon did not simply deny permission but attacked the Israelites (21:21–35). Sihon's decision compelled Israel into battle, which resulted in Israel's "possession of his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, as far as to the Ammonites; for the boundary of the Ammonites was strong" (21:24). The lands acquired from the Amorites became the tribal lands of Gad, Reuben, and Eastern Manasseh, which during the time of the Judges has united into the supra-tribe of Gilead. There are two key takeaways from this narrative. First, Israel's possession of the Transjordanian land was a result of their battle against the Amorites, not the Ammonites (who are not mentioned). Second, Israel respected the Deuteronomic prohibitions against taking land from the Ammonites at that time.

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[20] It is notable that the limitation is geared toward leadership roles, not resident rights; therefore, it safeguards leadership without denying the basic rights and protections of those who live within Israelite borders.

[21] The King's Highway was a trade route that extended from Egypt through the Transjordan, ending at the Euphrates River in northern Mesopotamia.

To Jephthah's point, the Israelites followed the rules outlined in Deuteronomy when they took the land.

The record of Israel's later interactions with Ammon focuses on the disputes and subsequent battles between them. The relationship between the bordering tribes of Israel and Ammon begins to sour in the book of Judges, and battles begin. Ammon is first mentioned in the story of Ehud, where the narrator states that the Ammonites ally with King Eglon the Moabite and help him defeat Israel (3:13).[22] Yet Ammon is only *introduced* in the story of Ehud's judgeship, disappearing from the narrative soon after the introduction and not mentioned in the major battle scene. Ehud is able to overthrow the oppressive rule of Moab by killing King Eglon and defeating the Moabite armies, apparently without any intervention from their Ammonite allies. Yet this is only the first connection between Ammon and Moab in the book of Judges. These nations, both descending from Lot, have worked together before and their connection continues to entwine in the stories that follow.[23] Importantly, the story of Jephthah marks a major turning point in the narrative relationship between Israel and Ammon, as Ammon's aggression is most clearly directed *toward* their cousin nation (10:6—11:33), not merely in assisting their ally, Moab.

Later in the historical accounts of the Former Prophets, Israel's tumultuous relationship with Ammon involves a seemingly continuous series of strained border tensions with only the

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[22] The book of Judges is not arranged according to chronology; therefore, it is unclear which judge incursion (during the time of Ehud or Jephthah) came first. Yet chronology and historical development may not be the primary significance in the story. For the narrator, the sense of erosion (of the people of Israel, their leaders, and their relationship to their neighbors) carries primary significance; therefore, the narrative of Judges should be read as a whole, rather than as a chronological map.

[23] Here I am noting Jephthah's reference to the god Chemosh, the Moabite deity, and King Balak of Moab in his diplomatic attempt with King Getal (11:24–25). These will be discussed in greater detail later.

most contentious moments recorded. In 1 Sam 11:1–11, Nahash the Ammonite King brutally oppresses Israel, threatens Jabesh-Gilead and is subsequently defeated by Saul, demonstrating God's favor toward Israel. In 2 Sam 10–12, David's confrontation with the new king of Ammon leads to a decisive war in which David's men conquer Rabbath-Ammon, Ammon's capital city. Yet David restores a diplomatic relationship between the two warring nations (2 Sam 17:27) after enthroning Shobi the Ammonite, the brother of King Hanun of Ammon.[24] While the biblical witness does record a number of violent encounters between the two nations, it is important to note that the biblical text is interested in formative and significant moments in their history, rather than everyday life.

To some extent, the presence of Ammonites as residents in Israel was an accepted reality. In 1 Kgs 11, Solomon has an Ammonite wife, Naamah, suggesting a peace agreement between the lands, likely solidified through marriage.[25] Yet vv. 4–8 also state that Solomon's heart is led astray by his foreign wives (including his Ammonite wife), as he builds altars to their gods within Israel and leads the people into apostasy. Notably, Naamah is the mother of Rehoboam, the uncontested heir to Solomon's throne; therefore, the heir has a mixed Israelite and Ammonite heritage. Yet Rehoboam's early governing choices prompt the people to rebel against his kingship (1 Kgs 12:1–15),[26] with Yhwh backing Jeroboam's rebellion. This turn of events leads

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[24] Tarragon, "Ammon, Ammonite," 195.

[25] Matthews and Benjamin (*Social World of Ancient Israel*, 165) discuss the use of diplomatic marriages in the ancient Near East, as the relationships offered "a physical symbol of the unification which the covenant brought about between their two states." This arrangement is clearly described in 1 Kgs 9:16, where the text explicitly states that Pharaoh had "given it [Gezer] as a dowry to his daughter, Solomon's wife." 1 Kgs 11:13 states that Solomon had 700 princess-wives and additionally 300 concubines.

[26] Notably, the sequence of events seemingly faults Rehoboam for not listening to the elders and instead following the advice of the young men who serve him (vv. 6–14), but the text reveals that these events came about because of the prophecy Yhwh had spoken through Ahijah the Shilonite (1 Kgs 11:29–39, 12:15). Similar to the

to the permanent division of Judah and Israel (12:1–24). Yet it is noteworthy that Rehoboam is chastised by the people for his oppressive policies, which echo his father's rule, not for the false worship that one might assume from having an Ammonite mother.[27] Therefore, the accepted presence of Ammonites within the royal line of Israel is a quiet testament to their ability to live peacefully in Israel.

Ammonite religion is difficult to reconstruct because there are so few references within the biblical text, most of them coming from late in Israelite history. The biblical text usually attributes the worship of Milcom to the Ammonites, as seen in 1 Kgs 11:5, 7,[28] and 33, and again in 2 Kgs 23:13. Yet aside from identifying Milcom as the Ammonite national deity, the biblical text offers no stories of Ammonite worship or religious praxis. The only description of Ammonite religious praxis, giving only summary evaluations: Milcom is the "abomination of the Ammonites" (1 Kgs 11:5, 7; 2 Kgs 23:13). While some scholarship has tried to link Milcom with Molech, [29] and therefore the practice of child sacrifice,[30] these connections are tenuous.[31]

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story of Jephthah, the sequence of events seems to highlight the human actions that led to the fallout, while also indicating that the events were in some way shaped by the divine.

[27] He is primarily faulted for expanding his father's cruel taxation and service policies (12:1–15).

[28] In the MT, v. 7 states that the Ammonites worship Molech, yet the OG translation (as well as Syr. and Lat.) reads Milcom. The distinction, it seems, lies in the vocalization of *mlk*. Notably, the MT offers inconsistent indications of the state deity of Ammon, portraying them as worshiping Chemosh in Judg 11:24, Molech in 1 Kgs 11:7, and Milcom in v. 33. Perhaps the biblical writers were not entirely sure *which* god the Ammonites worshiped, or perhaps the Ammonites did not have one single deity that they worshiped consistently throughout the years. For a brief summary, see Tarragon, "Ammon," 194–96 (cf. Tyson, "The Religion of the Ammonites," 1–34; Cornell, "A Moratorium on God Mergers?," 49–99).

[29] Aufrecht ("Religion of the Ammonites," 152). Some scholarship has equated Molech with Milcom, citing the Drehem Tablets from Nineveh or the Elba and Mari Tablets, but this thesis depends heavily on the conflation of two names that seem to have two distinct usages. See also Tyson, "Religion of the Ammonites," 1–35; Burnett, "Iron Age Deities in Word, Image, and Name," 153–64; Hübner, "Mondtempel," 145–53; Petit and Kafafi, "Beyond the River Jordan," 18–26.

[30] Leviticus 18:21 and 20:2–5 prohibit practices associated with the worship of Molech, particularly child sacrifice.

[31] According to Puech ("Milcom," 575), the LXX, Syr., and Lat. versions of the Hebrew Bible show multiple occasions where Molech in the MT is read as Milcom. While this observation reveals the inherent

Interestingly, in Jephthah's response to King Getal, he does not reference Milcom (or Molech) as the Ammonite deity, but Chemosh.[32] Chemosh is the well-known, and well-attested, national deity of Moab. He is mentioned seven times in the Hebrew Bible in addition to the Jephthah account, and in each he is described as the god of Moab (Num 21:29; 1 Kgs 11:7, 33; 2 Kgs 23:13; Jer 48:7, 13, 46). While the statements regarding Chemosh are typically summative, as with Milcom, worship of Chemosh features prominently in one key text that factors into this account: a Moabite king sacrifices his son to secure victory over Israel in 2 Kgs 3:27. This dark parallel with Jephthah's later sacrifice of his daughter forms a sense of dramatic irony at Jephthah's own conflation of the Moabite and Ammonite deities.[33] Yet it is unclear why Jephthah would invoke the worship of the wrong deity in his attempt to create a diplomatic relationship with Ammon, unless the gloss itself is the point that Jephthah intends to make. Jephthah's conflation of the nations of Moab and Ammon in his diplomatic attempt express another layer of social code that is embedded into this text: the close relationship between Ammon and Moab.[34] Genesis identifies both of these nations as the incestuous offspring of Lot—as *brother* nations, not unlike the fraternal affiliation of Israel's twelve tribes (Gen 19:36–

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complexity in studying such an unknown deity, Puech does not successfully demonstrate that these anomalies resulted from an intentional reshaping of older stories.

[32] While most scholars address this issue in some way, others ignore or undermine the significance of this designation. For example, Ryan (*Judges*, 85) supposes that Chemosh was likely a major deity for Moab, but not limited to Moab simply because of this one attestation in Judges. Rather than considering Jephthah's possible rhetorical switch, he uncritically accepts the premise of Jephthah's argument and offers explanation to support his response. The flippant comments of Ryan disregard the likelihood that the gloss was intentional and what that intentionality may mean for the inflection of Jephthah's interaction with King Getal.

[33] Chemosh and Milcom are often discussed side-by-side as unique gods; three of the seven times that Chemosh of Moab is mentioned, Milcom of Ammon is also listed. These texts group the two nations and their errant deities together, yet maintain their distinction. For example, in 1 Kgs 11:7, Solomon is condemned for building high places for Chemosh of the Moabites and Molech of the Ammonites (cf. v. 33). Second Kgs 23:13 describes Josiah's reform, noting that he tore down the high places for Chemosh of Moab and Milcom of Ammon.

[34] Jephthah's speech is cloaked in Moabite references. He discusses Moab's rejection of peaceful passage and the great lengths to which Israel went to appease them (Judg 11:17–18); the Moabite deity, Chemosh (v. 24); and the memory of King Balak of Moab (v. 25).

38). As already noted, these nations appear together in Num 21 and the book of Judges, and the connection between them continues throughout the period of the monarchy. Similarly, the prophetic literature typically refers to these nations in tandem, typically indicting their idolatry or unethical behavior as cause for the judgment of God (Isa 11:14; Jer 9:25–26; 25:21; 27:3; Dan 11:41; Amos 1:13–15, 2:1–3; Zeph 2:8–9). It seems that the biblical text is alluding to a kinship lasting over the course of hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Only Ammon plays a role in Jephthah's story, though the history and territory of the two regions is conflated, which begs the question: where is Moab? Did the Ammonites defeat and absorb the territory of Moab, or did the tribes combine to fight foreign powers and extend their territory? The history between the two nations is unclear, but Jephthah seems to combine them in his own "diplomatic" response to Ammon.

As an archetype in the Deuteronomic history, Ammon is enigmatic in its interactions with Israel.[35] The early tribal nations of Israel and Ammon shared some sense of kinship and therefore extended loose kinship boundaries in their interactions, yet their boundaries were not always respected. This ancestral connection heightens the sense of treachery between Israel and Ammon when either nation acts aggressively against the other. Apparently, it leaves an indelible mark on their historical memories that eventually comes to a head.

[35] While it is easy to reject Ammon based on their later acts of betrayal against Israel, it is notable that Israel shares a similar character arc as the nation of Ammon. Though the Israelites know God early in the biblical story, the people are often in moral and ethical decline. Even if Ammon is not fully aware of Yhwh, they seem to oscillate between familial protection and border rivalry.

Socio-Historical Aspects of the Formation and Settlement of Ammon

The biblical interaction with Ammon leaves many gaps in the narrative that were likely filled in by the assumed experiential knowledge of early audiences.[36] To understand the social codes implied by this text, it is important to also consult the historical record of Ammon, which includes archaeological and inscriptional evidence, allowing the historical presence of Ammon to shape character archetype. While the Ammonites left a relatively small footprint in the archaeological and inscriptional landscape of the early Iron Age Levant,[37] what is available may help to fill in the gaps and create a fuller sense of the Ammonite community that is engaged in this story.

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[36] Growing up in Western New York, near the Canadian border, I was vaguely aware of the history of Canada and its relationship to the United States but gathered most of my archetypical information from frequent interactions *with* Canadians. I did not learn about Canada through books or articles as much as through interactions with real people as our lives "crossed." Similarly, the Israelites and the Ammonites had many opportunities to cross paths in organic ways. For example, the King's Highway trade route ran northward between the nations of Israel and Ammon; utilized by each nation, it provided an opportunity for interaction between the two people groups. Further, the eastern tribes of Israel were likely trade partners with the Ammonites, who needed many of the goods produced in the fertile Jordan River Valley. This has led me to believe that the character archetype for early readers would come from more than a simple literary footprint, but from the casual interactions that must have occurred between these groups of people. I don't presume that early hearers of the story would have been aware of the entire history of the Ammonites, but that Ammon's past would have shaped their ethos and social responses. This same mindset is also demonstrated in Israel's own formative laws, which constantly remind the people of their life as slaves in order to guide or motivate their social and ethical choices. It is always prudent to acknowledge how the history of a people becomes embedded into their cultural norms and expectations.

[37] Notably, the story is set in the Iron I landscape, but may have been written or influenced by Iron II redactors. Therefore, Iron I insights will dominate (unless they are in tension with the text), supplemented with information from Iron II that is either consistent with or directly referenced by the text. There are various studies that address the material and inscriptional material. Cornell ("Moratorium on God Mergers?" 49–99) offers fairly exhaustive classifications of different onomastica, integrating inscriptional and glyptic data with theology in the Levant. Younker ("Emergence of the Ammonites," 153–76) evaluates the various Ammonite sites and recovered materials, as well as their implications for understanding Ammonite development. For further studies that shape the following conclusions, see Burnett, "Iron Age Deities," 153–64; Daviau, *Anomalies in the Archaeological Record*, 103–27; MacDonald, "Ammonite Territory and Sites," 30–65; Tyson, *Ammonites*, 15–26; Clark, "Objects and Artifacts," 365–432; Aufrecht, *Corpus of Ammonite Inscriptions*.

The Ammonites were a Transjordanian people whose entrance into the land predated the Israelite conquest and settlement.[38] While little is known of their early history, archaeological evidence places them in Rabbath-Ammon, their capital city, as early as the Early Bronze (EB) era, with a continuous (though intermittent) occupation of the city and surrounding lands.[39] Yet there is no mention of Ammon in inscriptional or written, historical documentation until 733 BCE when Tiglath-pileser III claims that the king of Bit-Ammon bowed down and paid tribute to the Neo-Assyrian Empire.[40] This suggests that the Ammonites began as a relatively small tribal kingdom,[41] with few meaningful interactions with larger empires until they encounter the expansive reach of Assyrians. Yet avoiding the attention of the major empires did not mean that they remained passive and small. During the late Iron Age, they experienced significant

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[38] This contrasts with much of the scholarship on the book of Judges, which assumes that Ammon is a late addition to the region (after the conquest), rather than a nation whose claim to the land pre-dates the Israelite entrance. The late entry of Ammon is held by prominent scholars like Soggin, *Judges*, 212; and Boling, *Judges*, 197. Younker ("Emergence of the Ammonites," 189–218) estimates that the people who became the Ammonites likely date back to the late Bronze Age. There is little inscriptional evidence of Ammonite cities during this period, suggesting a sparse sedentary occupation. Yet the continuous development of material culture from the Late Bronze to the early Iron age (particularly that discovered from Tell el-Umeiri, an Ammonite site) suggests that *a* certain cultural group did occupy the land and grew, only in a primarily non-sedentary, nomadic capacity. Younker further theorizes that these early peoples adopted a primarily nomadic lifestyle in response to the Egyptian invasion and occupation of Palestine. As the power of Egypt waned, the Transjordanian people settled into a more sedentary lifestyle, developing villages, towns, and cities. Archaeologists have uncovered at least sixty-eight settlements from the early Iron Age that have been identified with Ammon. These tribal cities grew and, in response to the growing threat of Israel in the west, established coalitions between the tribes, eventually becoming kingdoms.

[39] Tarragon ("Ammon, Ammonite," 1:194) offers this observation based on the occupation of an early Rabbath-Ammon and the material findings which connect to the cultural development seen in the Late Bronze Ammonite findings. Cf. LaBianca and Younker ("Kingdoms of Ammon, Moab, and Edom," 406–411) concludes that the origin of Ammon is not an external people who emigrated to the region, but an indigenous people who developed from within (the earliest of the Transjordan tribal nations), similarly noting the continuous material and cultural development spanning the Late Bronze and Iron Age. They note key excavations projects (e.g. Tell el-Umeiri from the Madaba Plains Project led by Larry Herr in 1992) which demonstrate consistent occupation of key Ammonite territory, though their research is focused on the LB period.

[40] Tarragon, "Ammon, Ammonite," 1:195.

[41] The tribal nature of this kingdom is evident in many ways, including the lack of three-tiered settlement patterns typically associated with "state" politics. Instead, they were heavily pastoral and nomadic, which has led scholarship on Ammon to move more towards the term "tribal kingdom" or "chiefdom" to differentiate it from other higher state entities (Tebes, "Mesha Inscription," 287; see also Bienkowski, ed., *Studies in Iron Age Moab*; Tebes ed., *Unearthing the Wilderness*).

development from their nomadic past to a settled kingdom, able and willing to defend itself against other perceived acts of aggression from neighboring nations, and even to expand its territory.

Archaeological evidence demonstrates that Ammonites' early sedentary life was often uprooted by the Egyptian campaigns into Palestine.[42] These campaigns directed their efforts at key cities that served an administrative role for the hinterlands surrounding them, in an attempt to control the produce, resources, and major trade routes of the Levant. Ammon was not powerful enough to resist Egypt, so the group again took up a nomadic lifestyle,[43] adopting an anti-urban policy in order to maintain their freedom from the Egyptian occupation, while remaining loosely united through kinship rather than land.[44] In the second half of the twelfth century, Egypt lost its grip on Palestine, and the nomadic tribes began to resettle the region again.[45]

The settlement growth from the Late Bronze (LB) period to Iron I was exponential. Archaeologists have unearthed fourteen settlements and farmlands from the LB era concentrated

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[42] Joffe (*Settlement and Society*, 90–91) refers to this as a cycle of "resolution," in which the people migrate and go through a process of social re-identification in response to threats posed by the Egyptian authorities and strong urban centers. Burnett ("Transjordan," 311–12) argues that the Ammonite settlements in the Middle Bronze (MB) and Late Bronze (LB) period demonstrate this pattern. Settlements are present in MB, but disappear in the LB period, when Egypt resumed their political and economic strength in the Mediterranean Egyptian based, and nation-state settlements boomed. This gives rise to the assumption that the Ammonites did not cease to exist between these major periods, but uprooted their people in response to foreign powers. See also LaBianca and Younker, "Kingdoms of Ammon, Moab, and Edom," 402–5.

[43] Bloch-Smith ("Stratified Account," 299) argues that the lack of destruction of major settlements in the region points to abandonment rather than war.

[44] Younker, "Emergence of the Ammonites," 170.

[45] Burnet ("Transjordan," 314) points to regional exploitation, based on the well-fortified systems of Ammon that were subsequently destroyed at the end of the LB and buried with a cache of luxury goods of the elite and human remains. A shift in the economy, which relied on plow agriculture and promoted land ownership and kinship bonds, fundamentally changed the nation moving into Iron I.

in the eastern end of the Jabbok River,[46] but in the Iron I Transjordan, the Ammonites had expanded their territory to include sixty-nine settlements and farmsteads.[47] As the Ammonites grew in the land, new nations pressed in, challenging their independence and control. Their primary rivals included the Philistines as well as the Israelites who continually asserted themselves into nearby regions. Notably, all three nations were either new to the region or re-asserting land claims concurrently. Defining borders was contentious because the concept of "border" does not adequately reflect the ever-evolving growth and expansion of these people groups.[48] In response to these new threats, the Ammonites did not uproot their community as they had done in response to Egypt, but chose to resist and go to war. They were no longer the small and insignificant settlement that was easily bullied by the Egyptians, but a collaboration of many city-states, who had "developed coalitions that now made them a potent force in their own right."[49] Whereas earlier the Ammonites had been easily pressured into compliance or had disbanded for survival, now they had gained the ability to fight back against the powers that threatened them, becoming themselves a major pressure point for Israel, with continued sedentary growth into regions Israel claimed as their own.

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[46] Younker ("Emergence of the Ammonites," 155–56, 168–69) itemizes the number of sites found during the different archaeological periods, noting a few early farmsteads during the MB period, with growing settlements in the LB (both farmsteads and larger settlements, identified through a "unique rectangular, almost square, structure" as well as three burial plots) and an increasing number of settlements and farmsteads in the Iron I and II periods.

[47] For a summary and distribution maps, see Younker, "Emergence of the Ammonites," 155–56. For more information on the LB Transjordanian settlements, see Finkelstein, "Emergence of Israel," 162; Gonen, "Urban Canaan," 61–73. For more information regarding Iron I settlements, including Amman citadels, see Burdajewicz, "Rabbath-Ammon," 1247; and for information regarding the fortified cities of Ammon see Najjar, "Rescue Excavations at Khilda/Amman," 420–29.

[48] Dearman ("'Border' Area," 210) rejects the notion of "national borders" because of the fluidity of the space as well as the plurality and overlap of the communities that they include. While he does not adequately demonstrate the plurality of cultures within individual communities, he argues convincingly that the notion of national boundary lines is implicitly flawed because it reflects a modern polity that does not best reflect the social and political world of antiquity.

[49] Younker, "Emergence of the Ammonites," 169.

The primary reason Ammon could so easily adapt was due to its kin-based tribal structure, which created flexibility through adaptable familial connections in order to adjust to the realities of land and resources.[50] Early tribal communities (including, but not limited to Ammon) were adaptive in utilizing the land's resources, drawing on ancestral connections to combine people groups or to make claims on specific lands.[51] These ancestral claims could justify either a sub-division (into smaller groups) or unity depending on external realities and needs. These divisions or mergers were typically done for pragmatic reasons: dispersing for economic purposes (food-finding) or uniting to face a common threat (war or invasion). As tribal nations resettled the land, they began to adapt into chiefdoms as individual tribes merged into what LaBianca refers to as *supra-tribes*.[52]

In Jephthah's diplomatic speech, he addresses the king of Ammon while fusing the history and identity of the people of Moab with the people of Ammon. This has led many scholars to question why Jephthah conflates their national identities: had Ammon defeated Moab shortly after King Eglon's defeat at the hand of Ehud?[53] Yet the relationship between the two nations may not have been an issue of conquest (Ammon defeating Moab), but of combining forces to create a supra-tribe. Essentially, the two nations may have used the ideological connections of kinship to forge alliances—not unlike the structural organization of Israel itself.

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[50] For current research regarding the flexibility of the land due to the tribal organization, see Tyson, *Ammonites*, 206; Bienkowski, ed., *Studies in Iron Age Moab*.

[51] LaBianca, "Excursus," 19–20.

[52] LaBianca, "Excursus," 19–20. See also Tyson, *Ammonites*, 206; Bienkowski, ed., *Studies in Iron Age Moab*; Steen and Smelik, "King Mesha," 152–53; LaBianca and Younker, "Kingdoms of Ammon, Moab, and Edom," 405.

[53] Webb (*Integrated Reading*, 56) suggests that the Ammonites expanded their territory to control Moab at some point before attacking Israel. Brensinger (*Judges*, 131) argues that the Moabites were weakened after the defeat of Ehud, and therefore the Ammonites took it upon themselves to include the region in question. Younger (*Judges/Ruth*, 256) simply rejects the claim that Jephthah connected the two intentionally and instead urges that this gloss is a demonstration of Jephthah's ignorance.

While it is possible that Ammon defeated Moab after they were weakened by Ehud, it seems reasonable to suggest that they may have united their tribes to strengthen and develop their control of the land and its resources as Israel pushed further into the Transjordan, expanding its own influence over the land.

Early Transjordanian communities like Ammon remained primarily kin-based societies, despite the presence of a high-state "king." These kinship connections also help to explain the flexible national boundaries of Ammon. Furthermore, the fluidity of the kinship model heavily qualifies the notion of a "king" of Ammon, who functions like a supra-tribal chief rather than the head of a nation-state.[54] While the chief/king had authority, the tribes also maintained kinship leaders (like the elders of Israel), which acted as a layer of bureaucracy imbedded into the governing structure.[55] Kings did not act alone, and the fidelity of their people was granted through kin-based acquiescence.

The religion of the Ammonites also features prominently in this pericope, though in many ways it contradicts the expectations of readers, ancient and modern. Jephthah rhetorically opines, "Will you not take possession of what Chemosh, your god, gives you to possess?" (11:24), though Chemosh is primarily regarded as the god of the Moabites.[56] While Ammon produced no

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[54] Tyson (*Ammonites*, 211) argues that the term "king" in this text is a later gloss by the editor as the supra-tribal structure and policies of Iron I Ammon is unlikely to have been organized around a state system. This seems an apt response, given that the book of Judges has clearly been edited to focus on kingship and offer a warning for its abuse of power. Regardless, even if the king of Ammon referred to himself as a king, this does not mean that there was no monarchy. The monarchy itself is embedded into a tribal structure, unlike the state hierarchies found in the major empires that surrounded Ammon. For more information, see LaBianca, "Excursus," 19.

[55] LaBianca, "Excursus," 21.

[56] Notably, Worschech ("Gott Kemosch," 393–401) finds that the west-Semitic root word *kmš* can be etymologically traced to several deities throughout antiquity, with different characteristics and functions, yet designates a god with distinct authority among the Moabites. This means that it is possible that the Ammonites included Chemosh in their worship praxis as well, even if he was not their primary deity.

distinctly Ammonite religious texts, which would communicate their belief system (like the Hebrew Bible), elements of their religion may be pieced together through various methods. Ancient Near Eastern belief systems are typically understood in terms of *national religion*—in which a kingdom or nation administered offerings in exchange for protection from the chief deity—and *household/family religion*—which sought similar protections and blessings, but on a household basis.[57] Unearthed Ammonite materials show significant interest and diversity in household or family religious practices,[58] but only two deities are highly attested enough to rise to the level of chief god: *'El* and *Milcom*.[59] The earliest direct attestation of an Ammonite chief deity dates to a mid-ninth or early eighth-century inscription commemorating a building project in the Amman Citadel in the name of Milcom.[60] Yet even during that time, most other epigraphic and onomastic evidence suggests that 'El was the more common and influential deity.[61] This early evidence has led many Ammonite scholars to conclude that 'El was the earliest chief deity of the Ammonites, yet by the Iron II period their worship shifted focus to Milcom.[62] Both deities played a significant role in Ammonite history, with 'El being more prominent during the early period of their kingdom and Milcom eclipsing him in importance by the end of the Iron II period

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[57] For more on family religion, see Albertz et al., eds., *Family and Household Religion* (2014); Daviau, "Family Religion" (2001); Porter and Boutin eds., *Remembering the Dead* (2014).

[58] Tyson ("Religion of the Ammonites," 7–24) offers a helpful exploration of the many different religious practices of the Ammonites, citing material and epigraphic evidence to demonstrate the presence of specific worship practices as well as the regularity of their occurrence.

[59] Tyson ("Religion of the Ammonites," 3) echoes this claim, noting that religious attestations include statues, figurines, and iconography in seals. For a full list, see Aufrecht, *Corpus of Ammonite Inscriptions*.

[60] Aufrecht, *Corpus of Ammonite Inscriptions*, no. 59.

[61] Ammonite names bear meaningful theophoric inflections, based on names like *'El*, *'Astarte*, *Ba'al*, *Dagon*, *Inurta*, and even *Yahweh*. The most commonly repeated deity name is *'El*, which Aufrecht ("Religion of the Ammonites," 152) suggests may imply a state worship of *this* deity. Furthermore, Tyson ("Religion of the Ammonites," 6) points out that several known Ammonite kings include *'El* names. See also Grayson and Novotny, *Royal Inscriptions of Sennarcherib*, 175; Leichty, *Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon*, 23

[62] For a helpful summary on key archaeological finds in reference to Milcom, see Burnett, "Ammon, Moab and Edom," 26–31.

(undoubtedly, when much of the biblical literature experienced significant shaping).[63] Regardless of which deity was the primary god of the Ammonites in this storyworld, neither of these gods is, or should be conflated with, Chemosh.

When Jephthah rebukes the Ammonite theology of battle, he invokes "your god, Chemosh." Yet Chemosh is *not* the god of the Ammonites. Chemosh is noticeably absent from Ammon's archaeological record yet plays a significant role in Moabite culture, with some inscriptional attestation in other small surrounding kingdoms.[64] In many ways, Moab shared common theological assumptions and practices with other religious communities in the Levant (Israel, Ammon, and Edom): a call for loyalty and a protective deity with wide-ranging control, who becomes angry with his people and permits neighboring kings to oppress them but who also delivers them in battle.[65] Yet while the Moabites left behind some traces of Chemosh's influence on their culture, the evidence fails to offer a clear portrait of what worship of Chemosh entails—therefore the child sacrifice depicted in the Bible (e.g., 2 Kgs 2:37) is possible but cannot be proven or disproven by the archaeological citation.

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[63] Ammonite scholars are deeply divided on this point: did the Ammonites shift loyalties from 'El to Milcom (Cornell, "Moratorium on God Mergers?" 69–81), or did the worship of 'El merely represent an early form of worship that merged with other ANE religious practices into what is now known as Milcom worship (Tyson, *Ammonites*, 228–29). In this debate, Cornell contends that if these two gods merged, one would expect crossover between the representations of these two divine entities, yet they remain unique.

[64] The most notable archaeological attestation of a connection between Moab and Chemosh is in the Mesha Stele, ca. 840 BCE (see Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age*, 133–53). See also Mattingly, "Chemosh," 895.

[65] Cornell ("What Happened to Kemosh?" 286–89) offers an itemized list of each of these occurrences in the Moabite writings. Though his conclusions in the end overstate the similarities by ignoring the distinctions between the two national deities.

Mode of Conduct: An Aggressively One-Sided Interpretation of the Past

Mode of conduct determines the character evaluation of the archetype (social code) and personality (disposition) as presented by the narrative. While most readers tend to automatically assume a negative mode of conduct for Israel's enemies, the archetype of the Ammonites, as well as the increasingly negative portraits of the judge-heroes, suggest that this assessment may require considerably more nuancing.[66] Moreover, it is not enough to simply identify *that* a character has a negative mode of conduct, but to determine *in what way* they are failing and *to what degree*.[67] Typically, mode of conduct is most reliable when spoken by the narrator or, in biblical literature, the voice of God.[68] Yet here neither of these voices explicitly condemns the

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[66] In his article on tribal boundaries, Klein ("Between the Rivers Arnon and Jabbok," 132) concludes that dispute between Jephthah and the Ammonites rests on legitimate claims from Israelite history as well as the validity of the Ammonite claim that they had once controlled the land. Yet I have not found a single Judges commentator who reads the Ammonites' claim as anything but disingenuous or trite. At most, some scholars have justified the Ammonites' rejection of Jephthah's diplomatic effort (e.g., Biddle, *Reading Judges*, 123–25; Boling, *Judges*, 201–5; Evans, *Judges and Ruth*, 128–31; McCann, *Judges*, 80–81; Ryan, *Judges*, 83–85; Soggins, *Judges*, 211–12). A few scholars point out the insincerity of Jephthah's "diplomatic" effort, which was not truly attempting peace but developing his political profile and winning an ideological battle before the war (Gorospe and Ringma, *Judges*, 152–54; Niditch, *Judges*, 131; Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 422–35; Schneider, *Reading Judges*, 172; Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 39; Wijk-Bos, *End of the Beginning*, 256–58; Frolov [*Judges*, 213–14] notes that this was likely inserted by an editorial hand to justify Jephthah's war). These voices are helpful, but they fail to discuss the implications for the characterization of Ammon on the interaction between the leaders. Even Webb (*Book of Judges* [NICOT], 325), a watershed scholar on the book of Judges who is critical of Jephthah from the onset of the narrative, doubts the likelihood that this diplomatic exchange would be successful, yet emphasizes that Jephthah "takes his leadership responsibilities seriously, and discharges them with maturity and impressive skill." The most sympathetic reading of Ammon comes from Butler (*Judges*, 284, 290), who identifies two distinct perspectives on history presented by the narrator (Israel and Ammon), withholding judgment on which version is correct, though he does end with a note of praise for Jephthah's oratory skill.

[67] I do not intend to say that the Ammonites are not wrong in their oppression, or that it is acceptable or even justifiable for them to "crush" (10:8) their adversaries, yet there is a difference in the description of Midian's oppression (6:1–6) and the summative remarks concerning the Ammonite oppression. Furthermore, the Ammonites are given an actual characterization that attempts to explain their perspective, however errant; therefore, the storyteller is not treating them superficially, but pausing to reflect on the nature of the conflict. The rest of this chapter will discuss that perspective, yet the nature of my methodology (i.e., focusing on the subjective awareness of the disruption) may lead readers to different conclusions regarding the depth of their injustices.

[68] It is worth noting that in the book of Judges, God's voice does not offer an evaluation for any of the nations that threaten Israel, yet that does not mean that the narrative does not offer any indication of a character assessment. God's silence in regard to Ammonite behavior is not unusual (as can be seen in God raising threats to Israel, then later bringing a deliverer: the Mesopotamian kings in 3:8, 9; the Moabite king in 3:12, 15; Jabin of

Ammonites. One clear indicator of judgment comes in the next scene when God intervenes in the battle and gives Jephthah victory (Judg 11:32–33), but there is more to the Ammonites than the summative description of the battle suggests. Therefore, what exactly did they do wrong and how might they have justified it in their own eyes?

The Ammonite Army: Diffused Brutality

The Ammonite army holds a different space in the narrative than the Ammonite king and should therefore be evaluated separately—though it also offers context to weigh the actions of King Getal. It is important to first pause reader assumptions based on the primary storyline of the narrative. The Ammonites' rise to power and oppression of Israel was not solely a result of their aggression, but also of divine ordination. In 10:7, the narrator states that Yhwh had "sold them [Israel] into the hand"[69] of Ammon and the Philistines as a result of Israel's apostasy. The narrator is not focused on the actions of Ammon, but on the correlation between the Ammonite invasion and the sins of Israel. Yet the Ammonites do not simply take control; the text states that they "shattered" (רעץ) and "crushed" (רצץ)[70] the Israelites, which reveals an intense experience of suffering that seems to rhetorically match the hyperbolic list of Israel's acts of disloyalty to Yhwh (10:6, which describes seven accounts of apostasy).[71]

Canaan in 4:2, 3–6; and Midian in 6:1, 11), but that does mean that all assessments of foreign threats should be treated as if they are the same.

[69] This phrase is commonly used throughout the book of Judges to describe Yhwh giving victory in battle to the nations around Israel, or to Israel once they cry for help. Yhwh sells the Israelites into the hands of their enemies (2:14), Cushan-rishathaim (3:8), and Jabin king of Canaan (4:2). Interestingly, Deborah uses this phrase to foreshadow the end of her own account in 4:9, saying that Yhwh will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman.

[70] This phrase combines alliteration of similar sounding words for oppression with the *Polel* of רצץ to further intensify the phrase.

[71] Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 344) notes that the punishment of Yhwh confirms that in "the narrator's mind the nation's Canaanization is coming to a climax." The punishment, therefore, is primarily a reflection of their sin.

Is the story emphasizing the brutality of the Ammonites, or does the severity of the suffering represent the deep consequences of Israel's unfaithful acts? The textual footprint implies both. The text deflects the emphasis from Ammon in a few ways. The Israelites are "shattered" and "crushed" by both the Philistines and the Ammonites; therefore, it is not clear if each nation "crushe[s]" Israel, if their combined effort "crushe[s]" Israel, or if one nation takes the lead in their oppressive efforts.[72] In previous judge-hero stories, some nations work together to fight against Israel, but there is typically a primary nation leading the advance. For example, Moab gathers Ammon and Amalek (3:12–13) and the Midianites come up with the Amalekites (6:3). In the introduction to this judge cycle, both the Ammonites and the Philistines are actively oppressing Israel, putting pressure on the nation from the east and west. Yet the story of Jephthah only deals with the Ammonites, and the story of Samson addresses the Philistines. Unlike in previous stories, the Ammonites and the Philistines do not appear to be in league together. This disseminated condemnation does not eliminate the description of brutal violence, but it spreads its potency between the two nations, suggesting the crushing experience of being oppressed by two different people groups simultaneously.

Furthermore, Ammon's occupation of the land is predicated on the hand of Yhwh being against Israel, which suggests that Ammon is given victory by Yhwh (10:7). This begs an important interpretive question: are the nations whom God uses to punish Israel necessarily evil, or are they being empowered to do the work of God? For example, later in Israel's history, Babylon is raised up by God to control most of Mesopotamia and punish Israel for their

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[72] Some scholars, like Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 412) argue that it is the Ammonites alone who "shattered" and "oppressed" Israel, but the subject of the verb is plural, suggesting the inclusion of both nations.

disobedience. Their act of expansion is not condemned by Yhwh, but directed by him. Later, Babylon *is* rebuked, but it is because they show "no mercy" and place a burden on Israel that is "exceedingly heavy" (Isa 47:6)—basically, they go too far. Again, God raises up Cyrus of Persia, an outsider who is never called a God-fearer, as a savior of the Israelites (45:1), demonstrating God's control over the geo-political interactions of nations and empires to shape Israel's future. In the end, Jephthah calls on Yhwh to act as judge between Israel and Ammon (Judg 11:27), and Yhwh backs Israel's claim as the more innocent party. Ammon is rebuked for their aggression, certainly, but what specifically does the story suggest is their wrongdoing? Like Babylon, have they gone too far, or are they acting in bad faith by taking the land that already belonged to Israel: their motivation is best developed through the voice of their king.

King Getal: One-Sided Memory, which Creates Dangerous Half-Truths

King Getal is a fascinating character because his words and deeds are seemingly principled and yet also contradictory. While Jephthah is often credited for his attempt at "diplomacy," an act that is unprecedented in the book of Judges,[73] many of these assessments pay little attention to

[73] Many scholars have noted the unjustified claim of Ammon beside the oddity of Jephthah's more positive characterization in an otherwise unflattering account. Ryan (*Judges*, 84–85) describes Ammon as "invaders" and contends that Jephthah should be commended for "attempts to avoid the slaughter of open battle by negotiating," as it is the Ammonites who do not respond appropriately. Boling (*Judges*, 205) designates Jephthah as "diplomatically irreproachable" and then faults Ammon for not accepting his "crowning argument for peace." Biddle (*Reading Judges*, 123–25) compares this exchange to that of the brothers, noting a similar spirit of distrust between them, yet he also highlights Jephthah's willingness to negotiate with an enemy of Israel and his legal aptitude. Wijk-Bos (*End of the Beginning*, 256) describes the scene this way: "Jefta attempts in vain to come to a peaceful agreement with the Ammonites through diplomatic efforts." Even Soggin (*Judges*, 213), whose diachronic analysis focuses on the redactor rather than the character, portrays Jephthah as a "cultured person," who would back his position with theology and international law. See also McCann (*Judges*, 81), who states that "the Ammonite king rebuffs Jephthah's peace initiatives. While on the surface, an attempt at peace would certainly stand out among the judges, it is not clear that that is Jephthah's intention. And King Getal certainly does not seem to believe that he could respond diplomatically.

the reception and response of the Ammonite king, whose reply is equally unusual. Most foreign kings in the book of Judges never directly engage a leader in Israel (e.g., King Cushan-Rishathaim [3:8–11], King Jabin of Hazor [4:2], and the Midianite kings who do not directly engage Gideon until they are captured [8:10, 18–21]). King Eglon of Moab has a conversation with Ehud, but they do not discuss the Moabite occupation or potential for Israel's freedom (3:19–21). Therefore, King Getal is the only foreign king in the book of Judges to truly engage an Israelite, and he responds to Jephthah with an ethical justification for war—Israel had unjustly taken their lands when they entered the Levant (11:13). It is true that Jephthah's choice to send an envoy to King Getal complies with Deuteronomic law, offering terms of peace before engaging in battle (Deut 20:10), yet the king of Ammon's response also resonates with the Deuteronomic law that prohibits Israel from taking Ammonite lands (2:19). Which begs the question: do the Ammonites have a claim to the contested land?

It seems significant when stories parallel the actions of their characters with the character of the divine—and the Ammonite king bears that comparison here. Within each episode of the narrative, there is a repeating process of "dialogic confrontation," in which a character is wronged, a request is made, and the request is (at least initially) rejected.[74] This pattern is established in the initial episode, in which the people reject Yhwh, only to request divine intervention when their enemies close in on them, but Yhwh declines their request. In the next episode, Jephthah is sent away, the elders make the audacious request for his return, and Jephthah initially rejects their offer, only to accept it after they offer him full restoration and

[74] Polzin (*Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 178–80) was the first to identify the resonance between these episodes.

leadership—breaking the pattern. In this third episode, it is King Getal who rejects the request of Jephthah and resonates with the pattern established by the divine in the initiating event. Polzin explores the similarities between the initial offer and argumentation in each episode, noting that in both the first and third episodes, Israel and Jephthah appeal to a long history between the two parties, asking an absurd "favor" despite the clear lack of justification for their demand.[75] Both Israel and Jephthah are "transparently self-serving," and therefore Yhwh and King Getal reject their obviously one-sided requests.[76] In each case, the offended party offers a justice-centered counter-claim: Yhwh points to covenant loyalty and King Getal to land rights that predate the current fight. Both Israel and Jephthah are unsuccessful in convincing the offended party to act on behalf of the offender.[77] Therefore, King Getal's reaction to Jephthah's attempt at "diplomacy" should echo the audacity of Yhwh's previous rejection of Israel. If the request made of King Getal resonates with that made of Yhwh in the introduction, how should Jephthah's diplomatic effort be evaluated? The content of the speech delivered to King Getal suggests that peace was never truly Jephthah's intention.

Rather than reading King Getal as a liar, who embellishes the truth to justify his own aggression, perhaps both he and Jephthah are discussing two different perspectives on a shared

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[75] For Israel, this "favor" includes an admittance of sin and its consequences, along with the plea, "only deliver us this day" (10:15). For Jephthah, it involves asking the Ammonite King to relinquish the land and end the war (11:12–27), despite the fact that Ammon has proved itself to have the stronger military for eighteen years.

[76] Polzin (*Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 179) highlights the "preposterous" nature of each of these claims as Israel "appeals to the donor to return the land . . . Jephthah appeals to the original inhabitants to return it." .

[77] Polzin (*Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 179) also identifies another uncanny connection after the bargainer has had their claim rejected. For the Israelites, rather than accept Yhwh's non-answer, they make an offer to find their own leader, directing them to Jephthah. Similarly, as Jephthah's bid is rejected by the Ammonite king, he vows a burnt offering from his own household to solidify his victory. Both take hasty steps that end in destruction.

history.[78] Scholars have noted that the settlement accounts in Numbers (chs. 32, 34) and Deuteronomy (chs. 2–3, 34) provide different understandings of the Israel's acquisition of the Transjordanian tribal lands.[79] According to the Deuteronomy 2–3, the settlement of the Transjordan happened as a result of a divine plan that enabled Israel to seize the territories of Sihon and Og, yet the book of Numbers describes their settlement as justified, though unplanned.[80] Interestingly, both accounts of Israel's settlement history have been maintained and therefore King Getal's claim may not be an outright lie, but the invocation of a different historical memory of Israel's conquest. The term "historical memory" does not refer to a dispassionate and objective account of the events as they transpired, but the cultural memory of major events told through the lens of their importance to *that* particular people.[81] They do not simply remember what happened, but also why it matters. Therefore, for King Getal, the defeat of Sihon which led to the Israelite settlement were incidental and *not-necessarily*[82] permanent (as per the Numbers tradition). For Jephthah, the events were divinely ordained in order for the Israelites to possess the land (as per the Deuteronomic tradition). Perhaps both Jephthah and King Getal are making honest claims based on the historical memories of their own people.[83]

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[78] Block (*Judges*, 284) states that the narrator "provides two perspectives on history, that of the Ammonites and that of the Israelites." Each, for their part, believes that they have the right to the land.

[79] Key works in this discussion include Weinfeld, "Extent of the Promised Land"; Kallai, *Historical Geography*, 241–59; Jobling, "Jordan a Boundary," 93–119; Bekkum, *From Conquest to Coexistence*, 202–3; Petter, *Land Between the Two Rivers*.

[80] Bekkum, (*From Conquest to Coexistence*, 202–3) describes the nature of the conquest of Sihon and Og as "accidental," stressing that this earlier tradition does not specifically identify these Transjordanian lands as part of the Israelite Promised Land.

[81] Analogously, when a person recites formative memories in their past, they do not stick to an objective re-creation of the events, but infuse their long-term significance into the telling.

[82] They are not-necessarily permanent because the southern Transjordanian lands were not included as part of the Promised Land in Num 34:11–12.

[83] Some scholars suggest that the Ammonites may have controlled the land before the Amorites; therefore, their claim is accurate to their own historical memory even if the Israelites never actually took the land directly from them (see Brensinger, *Judges*, 131; Conway, *Judging the Judges*, 486; Klein, "Between the Rivers Arnon and Jabbok," 125–33).

The claims of each leader are worth addressing in further detail. Jephthah's recitation of Israel's entrance in the land demonstrates knowledge of Israel's conquest of the Transjordanian lands recorded in the book of Numbers, even if he conflates the Ammonites with the Moabites. Jephthah utilizes formative memories from Israel's past to justify their actions as they moved into the land. Yet in his retelling, Jephthah also ignores other aspects of Israelite law that do not adequately support his claim of innocence. The disputed territories—the lands between the Jabbok and Arnon—are located in the tribal lands of Reuben and Gad, yet these lands were treated as an outlier from the other tribes. According to land boundaries in Num 34:3–12, the Israelites were given control of the lands west of the Jordan (see Figure 1[84]), but the language for their acquisition of the Transjordanian territories between the Arnon and Jabbok Rivers (34:13–14) is discussed separately, highlighting their unique path to possession.[85] Num 34:3–12 specifically identifies the land of inheritance, "this is the land that will fall to you as an inheritance, the land of Canaan with her boundaries" (Num 34:2), this includes the southern, western, northern, and eastern boundaries of God's initiative. Notably, the eastern boundary is located "down along the Jordan, and it will end at the Dead Sea" (Num 34:12)—the Transjordan lands are not included in this boundary. Num 34:13 goes on to explain that these are only the tribal territories of nine and

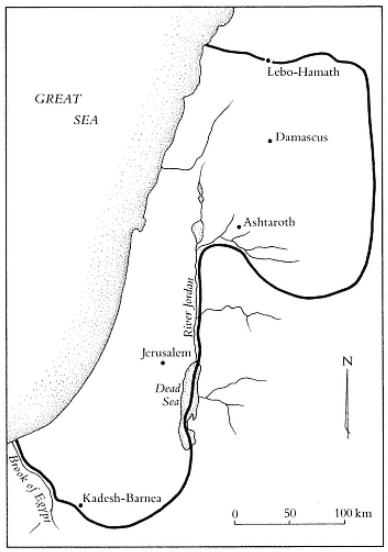

Figure 1: The land boundaries expressed in Num 34

[84] This map is from Weinfeld's work on the Promised Land boundaries (Weinfeld, *Promised Land*, 56).

[85] The possession of the Transjordan territories is a sensitive issue throughout many of the Promised Land/Conquest texts. After the conquest, in Josh 22, Joshua sends the Transjordan tribes back to their region, but soon after their arrival in their land these tribes built altars (v. 10) which led the Israelites to gather against them (v. 12). The Transjordan tribes seem to be inherently problematic and push against Israelite norms.

a half tribes, referring to the Transjordan lands as the inheritance of Gad, Reuben, and the half-tribe of Manasseh (v. 14), separating the language of the ideal boundaries of Israel from the previously negotiated Transjordan lands. This later attribution reminds the reader that the Gadites/Reubenites request that led the Transjordan tribes to acquire the lands before God gave specific instructions. Rather than the divine initiative, their inheritance was both initiated by these tribes (Num 32:1–5) who agree that in return for the land they will participate in Israel's coming conquest (Num 32:6–32). Israel's Transjordan presence was contingent on their participation in battle, not (at least initially) an implied inheritance. Furthermore, the text identifies Moses as the negotiation partner—he seems to speak for God but does not invoke God in prayer, see a vision, or use the messenger formula (thus says the LORD), therefore depicting a very *human* process.

The unique nature of the Gadites and Reubenites acquisition of the land in Num 32 may offer room to ponder a larger question: who had possession of the contested lands before the Amorites and might they also have a claim to the land? If the Ammonites had occupied the land, and their lands are protected by Yhwh, it stands to reason that even if the land was lost for a season (to Sihon or Israel), it might not be lost in perpetuity. The biblical texts themselves demonstrate that God has a special relationship with the Ammonites (Gen 19:37–38 and Deut 2:19). Furthermore, the socio-historical background attests to the early presence of the Ammonites in the land, primarily clustered around the Jabbok, but research has also painted a picture of an early tribal group that chose to uproot their communities and live a nomadic life

before settling back near the Jabbok.[86] If Abraham's claim to the Promised Land was traced though his nomadic existence in Canaan, might the same be true for the Ammonites? Likewise, if the Ammonites had been displaced by Sihon before the Israelites entered the land, would an Israelite defeat of the Amorites mean that the Ammonites could never reclaim those lands?

Yet there are issues with the Ammonite claim. King Getal claims that the Ammonite lands should extend all the way to the Arnon—land associated with Moab, not Ammon.[87] Yet, much like Ammon, the Moabite communities began to settle (more accurately *re*settle) the region surrounding the Arnon around the eleventh-century.[88] They also, like Ammon, adapted a kin-based social organization, which prioritized familial structures of household, village/clan, and then tribal identity.[89] These societies formed around tribal territories, both in their functional autonomy and in their allegiances to one another in order to grow their influence or respond to an external threat. The brother tribes of Ammon and Moab are not depicted in conflict within the biblical text or in any other archaeological or inscriptional finds. Furthermore, the Ehud account testifies to the unity between them (Judg 3:13), an alliance likely formed based on their tribal

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[86] Notably, the Mesha Stele itself suggests the contested nature of the lands. King Mesha laments his loss of land when his faith in Chemosh failed and the nation who had fought against him was Israel (*ANET*, 207–8).

[87] Scholars have responded to this and the various overlaying concepts of Ammonite and Moabite history and religion in different ways. Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 206) concludes that the story does not make sense as an address to the king of Ammon and instead was a later literary insertion to present Jephthah's theological claims as the turning point in the narrative. Conway (*Judging the Judges*, 487) sees the conflation of the two nations as a negotiating technique. Schneider (*Judges*, 173) concludes that the only one who would benefit from and respond to Jephthah's speech were Israelites. Younger (*Judges/Ruth*, 256) concludes that Jephthah's conflation demonstrates his factual ignorance of these distinct cultures. Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 360) comically retorts that "he mixes up the facts and conflates Israel's encounters with Moabites, Ammonites, and Amorites," but concludes that removing the Ammonites from the story is an intentional rhetorical technique to counter their claim to the land.

[88] For more information on Moabite distinctives and settlement patterns, see Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age*, 87–113; Miller, *Archaeological Survey of the Kerak Plateau*; Bloch-Smith, "Stratified Account," 298–302; Burnett, "Ammon, Moab and Edom," 32–37; LaBianca and Younker, "Kingdoms of Ammon, Moab, and Edom," 399–411.

[89] LaBianca and Younker ("Kingdoms of Ammon, Moab, and Edom," 403–9) offer a helpful analysis of the unique structures of these Transjordanian tribes and how they established a unique society that was both adaptable and lasting (see also Younker, "Emergence of the Ammonites," 160–63).

kinship. Once Moab is weakened, the Ammonites need not "defeat" the Moabites; rather, they simply combined to form a supra-tribe, taking the name of the dominant tribe—Ammon. Therefore, King Getal may actually be the chieftain over the supra-tribe of Ammon-Moab; therefore, *he felt justified* to claim the lands that had at some point been controlled by the ancestors of both tribal nations.

King Getal's response should also be held in tension with Gilead's growing presence in the Transjordanian region. Supra-tribal kingdoms were a means of expanding power and reach, while maintaining kinship social structures and loyalties, which may also explain the presence of Gilead among the tribes of Israel. Gilead is not a traditional Israelite tribe, descending from the sons of Jacob, but a supra-tribe of the early Iron Age Levant. As previously stated, individual tribes often join for two reasons: to grow economically (food production) or to unite against shared opposition. According to Judg 10:3–5, Gilead already exists as a supra-tribe during the time of Jair. Jair is a Gileadite judge, who is renowned for his peacetime administration of 30 towns, by his 30 sons, who rode on 30 donkeys. Each description of Jair's success celebrates the stability and prosperity of Gilead's food production and animal husbandry capabilities. Yet as Jair's control of these regions increased, the 'boundaries' with neighboring kingdoms and the control over contested hinterland spaces would necessarily be affected.[90]

According to Israel's own law, Israel could not seize the land of the Ammonites, yet how should one define the boundaries of Ammon?[91] Are the lands of Ammon limited to the battle

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[90] LaBianca, ("Excursus," 20–22) discusses the importance of controlling the hinterlands, particularly in bringing wealth to a kingdom or nation-state. The wealth and prosperity of the Gilead supra-tribe can be seen in the summation of strength at the end of the judgeship of Jair (v. 4).

[91] To this point, Block (*Judges, Ruth,* 359) remarks that control of the land is difficult because it is an "amorphous region" without clear boundary markers. Dearman ("'Border' Area," 210) discusses the cultural

territories invoked by Jephthah's rebuttal, or should they include the land that predates the battle against Sihon?[92] Furthermore, even if the early Ammonite settlements remained unharmed by the Israelite settlers, the control of the resources in the hinterlands and the goods they provide remains less clear. The fluid nature of these boundaries creates real tension that should not be too quickly swept aside. In the eyes of the Ammonite king, Israel has taken *his land*, and he has a justifiable demand to reclaim it. If Jephthah is sincere in his desire for peace, then perhaps he could have reached further back in history to respond to and/or compromise concerning the difficult reality of their disputed borders.

Does King Getal offer a diplomatic solution or an ultimatum? It depends on how one interprets the silence. In the first scene, the storyteller depicts an emboldened Ammon who has ramped up its offensive against Israel and crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim (10:9). King Getal demands the return of the disputed lands in return for peace, yet he says nothing about the territories in the heartland of Israel. It is possible that he does not mention those territories because he has already subdued them and is not currently engaged in battle. Therefore, his control over the Cisjordanian territories would continue. But it is also possible that the king is offering a compromise in which he will leave the Cisjordanian lands in return for the Transjordanian territories, as those are the only contested lands he addresses. Either way, the rhetoric of his response leaves open the opportunity for Jephthah to respond with a

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diversity and overlap in this region, concluding that any attempt to define borders would be inevitably historically inaccurate.

[92] This dispute bears resemblance to modern land disputes in the Middle East. While the modern state of Israel is certainly new to the region and has displaced hundreds of thousands, Israel's connection to the land also reaches into antiquity. Which land claims are correct? Any answer that fails to recognize the complicated nature of these conflicting claims is inadequate.

counter-offer.[93] While it is untenable to believe that Jephthah would simply accept the king's terms, it is notable that he makes no true counter-offer that might continue negotiations, only a defense.[94] King Getal essentially offers peace in exchange for specific lands; Jephthah offers peace only after the king of Ammon gives up on his claim altogether.[95] It is worth noting that Ammon has no reason to retreat, given Gilead's long losing record against them in battle for the last eighteen years (10:8). Even so, King Getal seems to offer to relinquish control of the Israelite heartland to a people who are militarily weak if they stop fighting for lands that, he believes, are rightfully his.

Yet the silence regarding the Cisjordanian tribes is also a testament against Ammon's king. His response to Jephthah's messenger omits one important truth that disqualifies his claim for ethical restoration—King Getal has not simply fought for "his" lands, but has crossed the Jordan to take new lands. Even in the most favorable reading, the king's demand for justice, as he is perpetuating the same injustice, rings deeply ironic. Perhaps this deeply flawed logic—seeking to restore what has been lost while simultaneously committing the exact same infraction—is the reason for Yhwh's decisive defeat of the Ammonite peoples.

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[93] Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 206) notes that it is Jephthah's stubbornness, not a lack of opportunity that prevents diplomacy. He states, "Jephthah could have achieved something for Israel by diplomatic means if he had been prepared to compromise his theological arguments, but he does not do so, preferring to wage war on the Ammonites."

[94] Numerous commentators have noted that Jephthah's response does not truly address or engage with the Ammonite king. O'Connell (*Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 195) argues that his speech is structured to defend the innocence of his people.

[95] Jephthah's inflexible response to the Ammonite perspective leads Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 433) to describe Jephthah's response as a declaration of war rather than an attempt at diplomacy.

King Getal and the Ammonites: A Final Evaluation in the Next Episode (11:29–40)

The end of the Ammonite narrative offers the most condemning implicit evaluation of Ammon in the story, though even in their defeat a negative mode of conduct is suggested, not stated (11:32–33). The final element of Jephthah's message to King Getal calls on Yhwh to act as a divine arbiter between himself and the king (11:27), which results in the Spirit of Yhwh coming on Jephthah to enable his victory against Ammon. Yhwh chooses a side in the battle, yet he does *not* call Jephthah a deliverer (11:32–33). The language of the battle indicates that the Ammonites experience a resounding defeat ("and he struck them with a very great blow . . . twenty cities . . . the sons of Ammon were humbled before the sons of Israel" [11:33]), yet this defeat seems rhetorically aimed at Jephthah's vow as much as at the Ammonites. Tammi Schneider observes that this narrative stands out in the book of Judges because "the brevity of the battle's description is emphasized by the extensive negotiations which led up to it."[96] For Schneider, this indicates the narrator's focus on the words and deeds of Jephthah, yet in turning the focus to Jephthah and away from the battle, the story may also lessens the weight of God's condemnation of Ammon. There is no pursuit of unscrupulous enemy leaders,[97] nor is there delight in the fallen enemy that leads to freedom in Israel.[98] Instead, the battle text also seems deeply connected to Jephthah's vow, creating narrative tension for his character in connection with the vow's unassailable fulfillment.[99] Furthermore, God's silence in this victory may demonstrate his own reluctance to

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[96] Schneider, *Judges*, 176.

[97] As with Ehud (3:15–25), Deborah (4:17–22), and Gideon (8:10–12, 18–21).

[98] As with Ehud (3:27–30) and Deborah (5:1–31).

[99] Webb (*Integrated Reading*, 63) astutely points out the overlapping causation in vv. 30–39, in which the victory acts as a pivot point. Gilead's army *with* the Spirit of God *leads to* victory over Ammon, but the vow *with* the victory *leads to* the death of the daughter.

offer judgment between Jephthah and King Getal. Perhaps deciding between this warring pair is not as obvious as it should be.

In this scene, Jephthah's pre-battle vow includes two conditions in order for the defeat of Ammon to meet the expectations of his bargain with Yhwh: "if you give the Ammonites *into my hand* . . . [and] I *return victorious* from the Ammonites" (11:30–31). The description of the battle that follows, therefore, echoes the initial conditions laid out in the vow, declaring, "Yhwh gave them *into his hand*" (v. 32), and then listing the cities and territory Jephthah defeated. The storyteller leaves no room for doubt—Jephthah has no unfinished business before claiming victory. The victory over the Ammonites is absolute and directly tied to the tragic end of the daughter. Webb teases out the implications of the vow/victory: "Jephthah got what he wanted. But now he must pay for it; his victory over the Ammonites brings him, predictably, to the door of his house."[100] Their defeat, much like their rise, seems predicated on the actions and choices of Israel (or in this case, Jephthah) and is not directly connected Ammon's own actions outside of their rejection of Jephthah's message.

While many scholars have noted the increasing chaos and moral failings of the judges in the second half of the book, few have noted the increasingly sympathetic presentation of the antagonist in the story. The darkness that imbues the early oppressors[101] seems to contrast with the more positive portraits of villains in the latter judge narratives. For example, in the Gideon account (Judg 6–8), the severity of Israel's oppression in the beginning of the story (6:1–6) is

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[100] Webb, *Book of Judges* (NICOT), 330.

[101] This includes the stories of Othniel with King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram, a name that means "double portion of wickedness" (3:7–11); Ehud with King Eglon of Moab, who has fattened himself from the tributes collected from the oppressed nation of Israel (3:12–30); Deborah with King Jabin of Canaan who oppresses the Israelites "cruelly" (4:1–24); and Gideon, who acts as a turning point, who is raised up to respond to the severe impoverishment due to the oppression of the Midianites (6:1–6).

then contrasted with the vengeful pursuit of the Midianite leaders after their retreat and Gideon's willingness to kill his own people to get his personal revenge (8:4–21). Sliding further into decline, Abimelech's story (Judg 9) presents no foreign threat, only the civil war that he initiates (9:1–41). Finally, in the story of Samson, the Philistine characters are written in greater detail, often eliciting a milder or even sympathetic response from readers (e.g., the death of Samson's wife in Timnah, along with her father, 15:6). Each of these "enemies" of Israel offers an increasingly complex characterization, as the "hero" of Israel fails to meet the basic religious and ethical standards expected in the Deuteronomic Law. The simple categories of protagonist and antagonist fall apart and force the reader to hold in tension the more complex modes of conduct. It is not simply *that* they are the "bad guy," but *why* and *to what extent*.

Disposition and Perspective in the Story: National Half-Memory Fuels International Conflict

Much like the social roles and mode of conduct, the disposition of Ammon should be analyzed in two parts: Ammon as a nation/army and King Getal of Ammon. The nation offers a generalized understanding of the occupying force and their relationship with Israel, while the interactions with King Getal allow for a more nuanced approach to the same archetype within the story. Ammon's actions as a nation are described in situations 1–4, but never include speech. King Getal, on the other hand, appears only in the third scene and is known primarily through his brief interaction with the messenger of Jephthah.

Ammon as a Nation: Aggressive, Organized, and Decisive

Throughout the text, Ammon is presented as a fairly flat and one-dimensional "character," yet this characterization demonstrates their disposition of power and authority into the geo-political

world of the Transjordan. Their aggressive expansion policies, which extend across the Jordan and into the heartland of Israel, act as a backdrop against which to read the later interaction between Jephthah and King Getal, as the latter inexplicably offers (or at least implies) a peaceful retreat from across the Jordan. Yet this strength and aggression contrasts with the early history of Ammon as a nation of nomads, who would relocate rather than pick a fight. Clearly, now that they have power, they are willing to use it. Ammon's actions are both frequent and consistent: they go to battle and dominate, until they eventually lose. The first scene describes Yhwh handing the people of Israel over to the Ammonites (and the Philistines), who "shattered" (רעץ) and "crushed" (רצץ) Israel (10:8).[102] This account is interesting for a couple reasons. First, as stated earlier, this description of their actions seems to match the hyperbolic description of Israel's rejection of God. Second, it is used as a summative remark to describe the Israelite experience of oppression from the east and west, both Ammon and Philistia. The narrator does not recount specific expansion policies or oppressive acts, but rather emphasizes the experience of oppression from every angle, including from Ammon. Even so, this does not absolve Ammon of their aggressive posturing.

The initial scene moves past summative remarks, to describe the specific situation between Gilead and Ammon, depicting a coordinated military effort. The story narrows in on Ammon as they cross (עבר) the Jordan River in order to fight (לחם) in Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim (v. 9). Ammon is now marching aggressively into the heartland of Israel with the explicit intention to fight. The Ammonites are "called to arms" (צעק) in Gilead to prepare for

[102] Butler (*Judges*, 263) notes that this is an incredibly rare combination, indicating a "determinative attack" that happened immediately upon God handing Israel over to the Ammonites.

war; the Gileadites merely "c[o]me together" (אסף) in Mizpah (v. 17). The verb used of the Ammonites' inflects a sense of being summoned, implying both leadership and purpose,[103] which contrasts with the verb applied to the Gileadites, inflecting an informal gathering (almost like an ancient family reunion rather than a call to war).[104] The contrast demonstrates the unity, organization, and will of the Ammonites, juxtaposed to the scattered and tentative Israelites. Ammon is a force to be reckoned with and they are ready for war. The action intensifies with Ammon's show of force, demonstrated in the repetition of the verb "to fight" (לחם), which demonstrates the urgency of the moment (11:4, 5).[105]

The story also uses secondary forms of characterization, namely, descriptions of Ammon through the speech and actions of other characters. Many characters in the story speak of Ammon and offer caricaturized portraits of their oppressors (with varying degrees of reliability, depending on the source). For example, the elders emphasize the urgency of their need by invoking the impending fight with the Ammonites (11:5, 8), yet they assume that Jephthah is aware of the threat and that it requires little explanation. The daughter of Jephthah describes the defeat of this worthy enemy of Jephthah, accepting its deep cost to herself (11:36). Ephraim also invokes the memory of the mighty battle with Ammon in order to goad Jephthah into war (12:1). At this point in time, Ammon seems to have risen to a point of infamy, and the defeat of Ammon is a point of great interest to multiple parties. Jephthah's evaluation of Ammon is revealed through his perspective on their king.

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[103] "צעק," *CDCH*, Ni 1.

[104] "אסף," *CDCH*, Qal1a. See also Webb, *Book of Judges* (NICOT), 308–9.

[105] Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 195) points to the continuing action as a sign of the dire situation of the Gileadites as battle resumes while God still has not raised up a deliverer.

King Getal: Rebuking, Remembering, and Ignoring a Counter-Truth

Much like in the story of the elders/brothers, the anonymity of the king is contrasted with his distinctive characterization. Though his speech and actions are fairly limited, they are charged with meaning, offering a direct response to Jephthah's messengers, a willingness to begin negotiations, and a subtle rebuke of Jephthah.[106] At this point in the narrative, Ammon has proven to be the stronger nation in battle and has little reason to seek peace with Israel. The region has been engaged in battle for eighteen years, culminating in Gilead's crushing defeat in that last year (10:8).[107] Ammon, a Transjordanian tribal-nation, continues to extend their reach beyond the Jordan and into the lands of Ephraim, Judah, and Benjamin (10:9). By the time Jephthah reaches out to King Getal through a messenger, he is not speaking at the onset of war, but after many battles have been fought and Ammon has consistently outperformed Israel. From the perspective of the Ammonite king, the gods *have* favored Ammon. Within this context, it is striking that King Getal would even entertain a response to Gilead's new leader.

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[106] Reinhartz ("Anonymity and Character," 117–41) argues that withholding a name for some secondary characters contributes positively to the named major and minor characters. Further, she describes the significance of anonymity in mimetic readings as a means of reshaping the stereotypical view of that character group. While Reinhartz begins her work by looking at three women in the books of Samuel, her theory has been expanded in this project and applied to the characters in Jephthah's story..

[107] The syntax of this phrase in v. 8, שְׁמֹנֶה עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה, is odd. When a cardinal number, like eighteen, is presented within a prepositional phrase (e.g., "in year # of"), it is read as an ordinal number. Here the cardinal number stands alone. Whenever these cardinal number constructions occur in Judges, they seem to represent a period of time, yet they all include a preposition; why not here? The debate on the translation, then, is an attempt to understand whether this text describes eighteen years of oppression (cardinal), or if something significant happened in the eighteenth year (ordinal). Only on one occurrence does a standalone cardinal number (without a preposition) inflect as an ordinal (Gen 14:4–5), yet the context makes that meaning clear. Given the use of patterned language in the book of judges, this difference is suggestive, though not conclusive. Perhaps the eighteen years of oppression came to fullness in the eighteenth and final year. For clarification on standard ordinal usage, see *IBHS* §15.3.1.

King Getal's response to Jephthah offers a subtle rebuke to the new chieftain of Gilead. Jephthah first reaches out to King Getal with the charged phrase, "what is there between me and you that you have come to fight me against my land" (11:12). Jephthah has spoken like a king, personalizing the conflict (between *you* and *me*; in *my* land) and speaking boldly to the king of Ammon as a newly minted chieftain of the Gileadite supra-tribe.[108] Jephthah's message is ripe with irony and self-aggrandizement when read through the lens of King Getal. Jephthah has made a living raiding towns throughout the Transjordan, likely invading the lands of Ammon and Moab as well. If Jephthah was good at this practice, which the elders' pilgrimage to retrieve him for battle suggests, then King Getal would likely have known of this *empty* man. How striking for the king of Ammon to be confronted about the ethics of his battle practices by the mercenary from Tob—now speaking as the head of Gilead? The region of Tob, located somewhere northeast of Gilead, was well-known for marauding and for the fierce mercenaries it produced.[109] Within a few generations, the Ammonites themselves hire mercenaries from Tob to help them fight against David's army (2 Sam 10:6, 8).

Yet, unlike Jephthah, the king does not fully personalize the conflict between them, subtly rebuking the would-be king. Instead, he personalizes his claim, describing the land that

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[108] See Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 424–25), who explains Jephthah's use of language to express his equality with King Getal and imply that the king of Ammon had breached etiquette. Yet Sasson does not believe that this particular "diplomatic" attempt aims to change the mind of King Getal; rather, it is rhetoric that is used to provoke the deity into action. Gorospe and Ringma (*Judges*, 152) point to parallels in the interaction between Pharaoh Neco and King Josiah (2 Chr 35:20–21). See also Boling, *Judges*, 202.

[109] The exact location of Tob is unknown, yet it carries significant implications. First, there is the irony that Jephthah is exiled to the land of "good," and yet he surrounds himself with worthless men. Yet there is more here than irony. Some, like Butler (*Judges*, 281), have connected this land to the city-state referenced in the Amarna letters and also by Thutmose III of Egypt. Others, like Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 421), argue that the ruler of Tubu, during the Amarna period in which the leader offered to assist Pharaoh, shows enough semantic similarity for there to be a correlation, yet the aural similarity does not necessarily mean that these two are connected. While the reference remains unclear, the existence of a region where someone could find a hired fighter seems at least mythically connected to Jephthah, who, before becoming judge, was already well known for his military prowess.

was taken as "*my* land," but indicates that it is "Israel" (not Jephthah) who is responsible for the offense (Judg 11:13). Importantly, there is no point during the king's response in which he addresses Jephthah directly; therefore, he personalizes his own part in the conflict and denies that right to Jephthah. The language of his response to Jephthah offers a critique of the mercenary turned national leader; they are *not* men of equal standing. Jephthah may have convinced Gilead that he could lead, but he has not convinced the king of Ammon.

In addition to this rebuke, King Getal directly addresses Jephthah's question by accusing Israel of illegitimately taking his land. His response is succinct, taking up only one verse, but he insists that Israel, not Ammon, is the unethical nation: "because Israel took my land, when it went up from Egypt, from the Arnon to the Jabbok, and over to the Jordan. So now, return it peaceably" (v. 13b), emphasizing that this is about an ancestral land that he believes was taken by Israel though it belonged to Ammon. Therefore, King Getal claims that the cause of the war is the restoration of what was lost, not a policy of expansion and economic gain. Given the Ammonites' long history in the land, it is entirely possible, if not likely, that they had occupied that region in the past, even if they had not done so in their "more recent" (to Jephthah) history. To that point, the historical record presents early Ammon (of the Bronze Age) as a small nation that could not fight back, yet three hundred years later[110] they are finally strong enough to assert their will. It is not a matter of ignoring the problem until it is too late, but being too weak to make a stand. Ammon has now grown enough to exert their own power on the surrounding

[110] It is unclear whether this number is literal or figurative, but the rhetorical emphasis that Jephthah seems to evoke is that they have not made a claim on the land in a very long time.

regions. In short, King Getal claims that the ancestors of Israel have wronged the ancestors of Ammon, and therefore Ammon's action is justified.

Jephthah offers the most substantive speech in the passage (vv. 15–27), generating significant material to examine his characterization. But a thorough analysis of the characterization of Jephthah, the protagonist, would distract attention from the supporting characters, who are the primary focus in this project. Therefore, I will consider only a few important items with particular relevance to understanding his character appraisal of Ammon's king(dom). First, Jephthah's response to King Getal does not seem focused on persuading the foreign king to accept terms of peace, but on defending Israel *to Israel*, weaving together historical events with theological principles that would resonate with the Gileadites in order to validate his selection as head and rally them to war.[111] Jephthah's speech is rhetorically charged in order to speak to the beliefs of Israel and/or to insult the Ammonite king, leading to battle. After all, from the perspective of the Ammonite king, Jephthah accuses him of having a false understanding of history and being unjust, as well as theologically confused.

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[111] Scholars agree that the use of Israelite history and theology was unlikely to bring peace with Ammon, but they disagree on what Jephthah was intending to do with these speeches. For example, both Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 361–63) and Gorospe and Ringma (*Judges*, 153) treat Jephthah's speech as politically motivated—not to compromise with the king of Ammon, but to inspire the Gileadites to fight against Ammon. Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 432) argues that his target audience is Yhwh, not the Ammonite king, with the aim of persuading Yhwh to support them in battle. Webb (*Book of Judges* [NICOT], 316) concludes that the dialogue is about maneuvering for an advantage rather than building a bridge between the nations. Similarly, Wijk-Bos (*End of the Beginning*, 258) argues that the king of Ammon is the intended audience, but that the intention was never peace but to create an opening to engage in battle. Then again, O'Connell (*Rhetoric of the Judges*, 195) and Butler ("Announcements of Judgment," 163–65) argue that the speech follows a "lawsuit" format, in which Jephthah acts as the defendant, demonstrating the rightness of Israel's actions, Yet it is unlikely that Ammon would act as an impartial judge.

Jephthah's speech can be broken down into two key arguments: one historical and the other theological.[112] The historical argument (vv. 15–22) offers a detailed re-telling of the Israelites' entrance into the land, emphasizing Israel's deferential posture toward the Transjordanian people groups until met with hostility by Sihon the Amorite. Yet Jephthah's account does not address the pre-history of the events leading up to Israel's encounters with these nations. If Ammon's lands had been seized by Sihon, should they be returned to them by the Israelites, whose God has declared their land out of bounds? This question is never discussed because Jephthah dismisses the king's claims as historically inaccurate—he has no right to the land, and his aggression commits the very wrong that he accuses Israel of perpetrating. Instead, during Jephthah's long-winded account of Israel's settlement in the land, he discusses Edom, Moab, and the Amorites, but never Ammon. His omission implies a slight against the Ammonites—not only did Israel not take their lands, but they were never there to begin with.

Yet Jephthah's theological reasoning, which is intended to persuade or counter the claims of the Ammonite king, shapes the backbone of his argument. Jephthah's retelling of history recognizes Yhwh as the reason for Israel's victory and then appeals to King Getal's similar sensibilities: "Will you not take possession of what Chemosh, your god, gives you to possess? So then all that Yhwh, our God, has driven from before us, we will possess" (v. 24).[113] Jephthah

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[112] While the argument is broken down into at least four major sections (a historical argument [vv. 15–22], a theological argument [vv. 23–24], a story meant to threaten [v. 25], and an ethical argument [vv. 26–27]), these four structural elements have two main themes that are nuanced in the closing portion of his speech. According to Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 204–6), Jephthah places heavy importance on his theological argument, despite this being the least convincing aspect, due to his own theological blunders.

[113] Significant research has been done to determine why Jephthah references Chemosh as the god of Ammon, which does not match the historical or biblical record. Some have resolved that this must have been an editorial issue from competing traditions (e.g., Moore, *Judges*, 283; Burney, *Book of Judges*, 299–300; Soggins, *Judges*, 211). Others argue that Ammon defeated Moab, and therefore their histories are united (e.g., Boling, *Judges*, 203; Brensinger, *Judges*, 131; Wood, *Distressing Days of the Judges*, 287). Klein (*Triumph of Irony*, 89) contends

turns this into a battle of the gods, one that Jephthah contends has already been determined for the people of Yhwh. Ironically, after Jephthah demonstrates that Israel came into the land in years prior, his own theological argument undercuts his claims. If the Gileadites have a right to the land because God gave it to them in battle against Sihon, how might Jephthah interpret the perspective of the gods in regard to Ammon's eighteen-year occupation of Israel?[114] For an Israelite audience, Jephthah demonstrates his aptitude in his recitation of God's history and his assurance of God's unfailing presence in Israel,[115] yet for King Getal this point demonstrates the reverse. The gods have given him victory for eighteen years, so clearly they have sided with Ammon.

While King Getal asserts an ethical claim to the disputed lands based on Ammonite history in the region, he rejects or completely ignores Jephthah's similar claim. The episode ends with a clear and fateful concluding remark, "but the king of the sons of Ammon would not listen to the words of Jephthah that he had sent to him" (v. 24). Despite the reality that Jephthah's speech was not likely geared toward a diplomatic end, his demand for justice for his people is not matched with an equal sense of justice for Ammon. Similarly, Ammon is concerned only with what they perceive to be just for them, with their own retribution, and King Getal will *not listen* (לא שמע) to words that contradict his own narrative.

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that Jephthah makes a mistake, and therefore that the narrator is casting him as foolish or unknowing (see also O'Connell, *Rhetoric of Judges*, 196–97; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 360–62; Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, 256). And finally, I share the reading of Webb (*Integrated Reading*, 56) that this is not a mistake but that Jephthah intentionally references them together to rhetorically undermine the Ammonites' claim of unjust land appropriation.

[114] See Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 205–6.

[115] Conway (*Judging the Judges*, 485) notes that the recitation of history by Israelite characters "constitutes a proclamation of the character and power of YHWH who acts within history." Yet it is less clear if Jephthah is co-opting this trope in order to appear as a pious leader, or acting as a genuine Yhwh-worshiper (who also acknowledges the power of Chemosh in the same speech).

The Tellability of the Ammonites' Perspective: What the Reader Learns in Reading the Story from the Perspective of Jephthah's Enemies

Ammon had been a weak and insignificant nation in the broader history of the Levant, building a life on the edge of the desert, yet pushing themselves closer and closer to the resources in the Jordan River Valley. When they became strong and fortified, they advanced deep into the heartland of Israel, holding on to their grievances that justified aggression against Israel—they took *our* lands. It is impossible to determine conclusively whether there is any truth to King Getal's claim that they had once controlled the disputed territories—yet national memories are nearly always one-sided and incomplete. Even Jephthah's retelling of Israelite history demonstrates the elasticity of national storytelling for political purposes. Yet King Getal does not truly learn the moral of the stories in his own national memory. He decries the injustice of Israel's advance, yet continues his advance across the Jordan and extend his control over Israel, blind to the irony of his own request for recompense.

The tellability of the Ammonites' perspective is both a yes and a no. By themselves, the "sons of Ammon," who are passive participants in much of the narrative, lack a discernable disruption without the speech of King Getal. Yet when King Getal is introduced and interacts with Jephthah, the perspective of the Ammonites in the battle with Gilead springs to life. Jephthah initiates this episode by questioning the motives of the king of Ammon (11:12), who then responds with a terse, yet enlightening explanation for their aggression (v. 13). After Jephthah returns a long treatise through his messenger (vv. 14–27), the Ammonite king and his people disregard his message and continue their campaign (v. 28). This basic format produces a sequence of events that indicates the perceived disruption of both the Ammonites and their king and presents the king's response to Jephthah's indignant message and the outcome of war based

on stubborn and one-sided "diplomacy." For the Ammonites, the disruption is simple—they believe that the land in Gilead is rightfully theirs; therefore, their king is seizing it with violent force if it is not relinquished peaceably.

The disruption and response of King Getal prompt a subjective awareness of a similar issue that is at the heart of many conflicts in early Israel and even today—competing views of history and claims to land. King Getal asserts his version of history to be true and rejects Jephthah's counter truth. A negotiation *may* have been possible, if they could both have *heard* one another. While it may seem disingenuous for the Ammonites to press for "their" land to be returned to them after three hundred years, but this may be their first opportunity to obtain the land of their ancestors. Consider similar conflicts about land claims connected with different historical memories around the world. The modern Israeli/Palestinian debate continues to rage, with each side rooting their claim to the land (among other things) with a historical connection.[116] This debate is not grounded purely in the historical facts themselves, but in the interpretation of these historical moments and of which events should be normative. Furthermore, the United States continues to wrestle with its complicated and brutal national history with regard to the Native American population. Two narratives co-exist, as native populations continue to struggle against American profiteers who seek their land.[117] Whose story is the American story, and who is entitled to the land? Competing histories can have a profound impact on our understanding of domestic and international conflicts, but those who have the power to enact their perspective must do so cautiously.

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[116] For a thoughtful analysis of the issues that continue to dominate these regions, see Tolan, *Lemon Tree* (2006).

[117] For a haunting account of the continued struggle of Native communities in the West to retain their land, see Redniss, *Oak Flat* (2020).

To debate the claims of the land or to contradict historical memory is not uncommon, yet Ammon is condemned for more than just "reclaiming" the land between the Jabbok, Arnon, and the Jordan. Even if King Getal and the Ammonites were initially interested in restoring their lost territories, they have far exceeded the boundaries of their storied past by extending their reach into the heartland of Israel. In crossing the Jordan, the Ammonites reveal that they are concerned with more than an ethical recompense for what was taken, but are seeking vengeance upon their perceived enemies or are motivated by greed to engage in expansionist policies. If King Getal is being sincere, they began their campaign with an aim to reclaim something lost in the distant past, only to become the purveyors of injustice themselves—brutally expanding across the Jordan and crushing those not strong enough to fight back. The Ammonites reveal how easy it is to become the very thing you once rejected. As they grew in power and authority, they chose to assert their authority over others—taking Cisjordanian land from the Israelites and violating their own stated ethical conciousness.

Yet King Getal is not the only one in the wrong, as Jephthah is more interested in posturing as an Israelite leader than in a genuine attempt at diplomacy. The location of the disputed land is precisely defined—the territory between the Jabbok and Arnon rivers, up to the Jordan—though ownership is not. If the audience reads the narrative with the aim of understanding the Ammonites, then the text becomes more complicated and truth claims more entangled. The Ammonite king may offer an untenable argument in the eyes of Jephthah, but his initial offer signals something Jephthah's speech does not—a willingness to bargain. In a dispute, compromise is reached when parties go back and forth, negotiating over terms, and King Getal *does* offer a partial truce. By contrast, Jephthah does not extend terms of peace to King Getal, only a defense of Israel, followed by a demand for Ammon's retreat with nothing in

return. As Sasson aptly argues, Jephthah's response is a declaration of war, not a peace negotiation.[118] King Getal may only offer an ultimatum, but in it he implies that he will relinquish the Cisjordanian lands and therefore creates space to begin negotiations. To the careful observer, it is the king of Ammon, rather than the judge of Israel who initiates the "diplomatic" effort with an ethical complaint and an opening for further dialogue. The Ammonites have become the abusers they condemn, but Jephthah is not the hero he wants his people to believe. If Jephthah truly engaged the king of Ammon, then perhaps a compromise could be reached. While it is impossible to enter into the mind of the Ammonite King and determine how he might have responded to a counter-proposal or why he went silent after Jephthah's retort; perhaps this story is a case study in how *not* to negotiate for peace.

[118] Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 433–44) compares the language of Jephthah's response with the language of other ancient war declarations, particularly the discoveries in the Mari archive. The structure of the documents are almost identical: an appeal to the king and the gods, a statement of the justifiable grievance, a description of the case history, an example of that history, and then a conclusion with an oath and war declaration. Therefore, Sasson concludes that Jephthah never intended a diplomatic end at all: "Unlike an ultimatum, it makes no demands for change but uses the lesson of history as a backdrop for announcing hostility."

CHAPTER 5: THE CASUALTY OF JEPHTHAH: THE DAUGHTER'S TRAGIC HEROISM THROUGH RESISTANCE AND SOLIDARITY

> "I wish it need not have happened in my time," said Frodo. "So do I," said Gandalf, "and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."
> J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*

As the story of Jephthah continues to unfold, the violence and dissonance in the text is most profoundly felt in the fatal presentation of the daughter of Jephthah (or *Seila*, detailed in 11:29–40). Many feminist scholars combat the minimized personhood of the daughter of Jephthah by giving her a name, yet these names are often merely versions of the word "daughter," therefore minimizing the impact of their revision.[1] The earliest attribution of a name given to *this* daughter is found in the writings of Pseudo-Philo, who calls her *Seila*.[2] In order to emphasize the daughter's importance and individuality in the text, I will follow the tradition of Pseudo-Philo and henceforth refer to her as *Seila*. Throughout this project, a close reading of the supporting characters has primarily addressed those who held positions of power and the implications of

[1] Importantly, some feminists both name and refuse to name her at the same time. For example, Gerstein ("Ritual Processed," 176) refers to her as 'Bat' or 'Batya.' This follows the tradition initiated by Bal ("Dealing/with/Women," 317), who uses a variant transliteration of the term daughter, *Bath*, as a proper name throughout her writing. Gerstein and Bal are correct in their impulse to give the daughter a name in order to emphasize her importance and individuality in the text, but although they draw a name directly from the Hebrew text, it is not truly a *name*.

[2] *L.A.B.* 40. Pseudo-Philo's portrait of the daughter of Jephthah is imaginative and engaging, yet often contradicts the textual cues themselves and leaves the tradition suspect. Pseudo-Philo never indicates why he chose this particular moniker, but the name is highly unlikely to be her actual name in history. Feldman ("On the Cusp of Christianity," 379–416) argues that the name Seila resonates with the naming of Samuel, postulating that Pseudo-Philo intended to connect the vow of Jephthah with the vow of Hannah. While the parallel between two individuals issuing a vow in desperation offers an interesting comparison, those connections seem dependent on Pseudo-Philo and therefore will not be addressed in this study.

their choices on other characters within the story, yet Seila's perspective offers a different experience altogether. Rather than wielding power, she is at the mercy of those who hold power over her—in this case, her father. Seila's place within the story is fraught with painfully conflicting experiences. She is compassionate, though she receives little empathy. She is innocent, but she is counted among those who cause her father trouble. She is well-spoken, yet she receives little reply. And she remains unnamed, though she is perpetually memorialized. Perhaps most notably, her story raises the question, why did God allow Jephthah to kill his daughter in such a horrific manner?[3] Much like Gandalf's advice to Frodo in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, her actions demonstrate her ability to do the best "with the time that is given." In her response to this tragedy, she is not simply a dutiful daughter modeling the values of a patriarchal system,[4] but rather a heroine, who resists blame, rebukes the powerful, and creates space for

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[3] This particular situation in the Jephthah narrative has been the subject of multiple studies for thousands of years with varying degrees of agreement. For reviews of some threads in the history of interpretation (particularly emphasizing the intention and completion of the vow), consult Knapp, "Jephthah's Daughter," 279–97; Brock, "*Soghitha* on the Daughter of Jephtha," 3–25; Økland, "Facilitating Speech and Discourse," 209–35. In addition to this sweeping history of interpretation, it is worth noting other sources of interpretation that draw from different perspectives for varying purposes. A recent edited volume (Taylor and DeGroot, eds., *Women of War*) describes the work of nineteenth-century female interpreters in the books of Joshua and Judges, offering fascinating insight into earlier perspectives on the role of the daughter through the eyes of women. Additionally, Miller (*Tell it on the Mountain*) presents an entire monograph devoted to the daughter of Jephthah, combining literary, feminist, and rabbinic Midrash to weave together a vivid and engaging account. Yet another fascinating area of interest in the daughter's story can be seen in the history of artistic representation of this scene (see Caroselli, "Dissemination of Jephthah's Daughter," 86–101). While not directly relevant for this study, this fascinating aspect of interpretive history further demonstrates the considerable difficulties interpreters have faced in attempting to understand the significance of this story.

[4] This is a common feminist critique against the claims of the story, which suggests that the daughter represents the highest ideals of female submission to male authority in a patriarchal system. For example, Fuchs ("Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing") argues for a sympathetic portrayal of Jephthah, which in turn minimizes the daughter and her personhood in order to emphasize his pained response rather than her reality. As such, she remarks that Jephthah's daughter becomes a hopelessly flat character who is "the perfect filial role model" of a dutiful daughter—a reading that should be resisted (p. 42). Bal (*Death and Dissymmetry*, 43) notes that the daughter is disempowered by the narrator, who does not give her a name, and therefore contends that readers should resist the ideology of the text. Further, Exum ("Murder They Wrote," 23) argues that there is no true "daughter's story" in the text because it has been submerged by Jephthah's (and the narrator's) voice.

herself and others who have suffered at the hands of those in power. Therefore, in this chapter, the story of *Seila* will be retold again, as was once the custom in Israel.[5]

Translation of Situation 4: The Vow and the Daughter (Judg 11:29–40)

> [29] Then the Spirit of Yhwh came upon Jephthah, so he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, then he passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed over to the sons of Ammon. [30] Then Jephthah made[6] a vow to Yhwh, saying, "If you will surely give the sons of Ammon into my hand, [31] then it will be that the one that comes out[7] from the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it will be for Yhwh, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering." [32] Then Jephthah passed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them, and Yhwh gave them into his hand. [33] And he struck them from Aroer and up to Minnith, twenty towns, as far as Abel-keramim, with a very great slaughter. So the sons of Ammon were humbled before the sons of Israel.
>
> [34] Then Jephthah entered Mizpah, to his house, and behold! His daughter was coming out to meet him, with tambourines and with dancing. Now, she was the only one, he did not have anyone beside her, son or daughter. [35] Then it happened when he saw her, that he tore his clothes and said, "Ah! My daughter! You have brought me *very low*![8] *You*[9] are like one of those who cause me trouble! For *I*[10] have opened my mouth to Yhwh, and I cannot take it back." [36] Then she said to him, "My father, you have opened your mouth to Yhwh; do to me as came out of your mouth, because Yhwh avenged you on your enemies, the sons of Ammon." [37] And she said to her father, "Let this thing be done to me, grant me two months and let me go, that I may wander[11] upon the mountains and weep because of my maidenhood,[12] I and my companions." [38] Then he said to her, "Go." So he sent her away for two months, and she went, she and her companions, and she wept for her maidenhood upon the mountains.

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[5] This is a reference to the final line in this situation (10:39b–40).

[6] Lit. "Jephthah vowed a vow."

[7] The interpretation of this phrase will be discussed later in the chapter (see pp. 226–31).

[8] Hiphil infinitive absolute with a hiphil second person singular, suffix conjugation, creates an intensifying effect (*IBHS*, 35.3.1g).

[9] Emphatic use, due to a redundant pronoun (*IBHS* §16.3.1b).

[10] Emphatic use, due to a redundant pronoun (*IBHS* §16.3.1b).

[11] Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 373 n122) suggests that the MT's וירדתי, which is an inflected form of *to go down* (ירד), is actually a corruption from *to wander* (רוד). Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 219n) argues in support of this, pointing to the Aramaic version, which reads, "I will wander upon the hills." For another perspective, Rashi takes ירד to mean "lament," as in Isa 15:3; Ps 55:3.

[12] This word (בתוליה) has much broader implications and will be discussed later in the chapter (see pp. 216–18).

> [39] And it came to pass at the end of two months that she returned to her father, and he did to her his vow that he had vowed (and she did not know a man). Then she became*[13]* a custom in Israel, [40] from year to year the daughters of Israel went out to recount on behalf*[14]* of the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite, four days in the year.

The Daughter in the Text

Interpreters have struggled with *this* portion of the Jephthah story for thousands of years. Seila's brutal death raises many questions and does not allow for a dispassionate response. As painful as it may seem, this story requires the reader to step into the experience of the daughter of Jephthah, to understand the social world in which her response to her father is embedded, and to listen to her voice speak profoundly into her social reality. Seila's perspective in the story is both tellable and captivating, eliciting sympathy and admiration for the slain daughter whose actions offer an early example of the "weapons of the weak"[15] utilized by those whose resistance to power only allow subtle, yet defiant gestures. She is not a flat prop modeling female submission, instead she cleverly rebukes the morally corrupt power that seals her fate. In noting the nuanced telling of Seila's story, her impact on the storyworld becomes more and more profound.

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[13] The verb form ותהי has a female subject and will be discussed in detail later in the chapter (see pp. 239–42).

[14] The ל preposition in לבת־יפתח is typically treated as an introductory particle for the object—"to lament/bewail/commemorate the daughter of Jephthah." While the preposition has a variety of possible meanings, one of the common secondary meanings is "for" or "on behalf of." By including this preposition in the translation, it further emphasizes the task of the daughters of Israel—they are not merely retelling the story of Jephthah, which includes Seila, rather they are remembering this story on behalf of the daughter (cf. Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, 67).

[15] Scott (*Weapons of the Weak*), a social anthropologist, suggests that those outside powerful positions rebel with small acts of everyday resistance, pushing against their domination by creating space in otherwise strict structures.

Social Code: Daughters in (and outside of) the **בית אב** and the Significance of Maidenhood

Relatively few social codes are directly ascribed to *Seila* in the text, but several are attached to her through indirect means. These social codes are particularly important because, rather than naming the daughter, the story emphasizes her place within the family. She is directly identified as a *daughter* (בת), locating her relationally to her father, and as a girl in her stage of *maidenhood* (בתולה), indicating her stage of development. Her maidenhood is discussed twice, each time as Seila's own self-description (vv. 37–38), and the storyteller describes her as a "daughter" on three separate occasions (vv. 34–35, 40), which make these terms the primary foci of her social identity. Yet her back-story is far more complex than the average daughter in Israel. Her role should not be understood merely within the traditional framework of the Israelite household since Seila was raised away from kinship and her father's ancestral land. She was brought up only by her father (and maybe her mother, but she is never mentioned), in the company of 'empty' men, with her father's heritage and exile hanging over her experience and identity. In 11:4–11 it is not only Jephthah who is being restored to the family, but the daughter as well. Yet, what does it mean to be a daughter outside of the traditional Israelite household?

Socio-Historical Aspects of a Daughter in a Traditional Household and of בתולים

Being a daughter in ancient Israel is a concept embedded within the social world and expectations of the *house of the father* (בית אב),[16] a structure already discussed in reference to

[16] As a result, much of the research regarding the early Israelite household from chapter 3 shapes the background for understanding the role of the female participants as well. Yet the study of women within the household has often been under appreciated. Russaw (*Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 2) points out that most feminist scholars agree that women have bifurcated identities, wives and mothers, but she demonstrates that this assumption has erroneously focused on two elements of the same life stage, and ignored the life of women before

communal identity, brotherhood, and inheritance in chapter three.[17] As noted earlier, the household is the bedrock social organization in early Levantine communities, and notably in early Israel.[18] The birth of a child signaled blessing to the household (particularly the parents),[19] with the expectation that children[20] would eventually continue the *paterfamilia*, care for (and eventually inherit) the family property, and contribute towards the family's economic production.[21] Therefore, children were an integral part of the Israelite household, assigned household tasks as early as age five and gradually increasing their share of the household labor until age thirteen in which they reached nearly a full adult-level contribution.[22]

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marriage (see, e.g., Meyers, ed., *Women in Scripture*; Deen, *All of the Women*; and Mastro, *All the Women*). Russaw notes that these roles are simultaneous and only include the life experiences of adult woman, ignoring the significance the premarital aspect of women's' lives.

[17] See p. 106. For a broad understanding of the role the household in ancient Israel, see Bendor (*Social Structure of Ancient Israel*, 45–53) who discusses the importance and composition of the בית אב, particularly in reference to the smallest unit, which is the household. While Bendor offers a helpful overview of the basic composition of the family, his work is primarily focused on the male participants, particularly the role of sons in inheritance and extending into the broader forms of leadership in ancient Israel.

[18] For a review of the literature regarding several aspects of Israelite households, see Yasur-Landau, Ebeling, and Mazow, "Introduction," 1–8; Hardin, "Understanding Houses," 9–25.

[19] For example, Yhwh promises children as a sign of blessing on multiple occasions in the ancestral narratives: Gen 12:2–3; 14:5; 16:10; 17:4–8; 22:17–18; 24:60; 26:3–4; 28:13–14. Women are also very vocal about wanting children, particularly in stories of barrenness: Gen 25:21; 30:22–43; 1 Sam 1.

[20] It is important to recognize that the term "children" is woefully flat and inadequate as childhood in antiquity is construed in multiple ways depending on legal status and birth. For example, the experience of children can be quite diverse: those born to both a head of household and his wife versus those born to one or more parents with lower status, half-siblings, orphans, adopted children, foundlings, slaves or debt-slaves, and sons versus daughters. For more see the following monographs which often dedicate entire chapters to the different situations expressed in the changing demographics: Garroway, *Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household*; Bunge et al., eds., *Child in the Bible*; Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*; Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children*; Steinberg, *World of the Child*; Baxter, *Archaeology of Childhood*. In this project I will use the term "children" to indicate a child legally connected to a member (or head) of the household, whether male or female, and including any birth scenario that maintains that legal status as a full child of that household.

[21] Garroway, *Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household*, 159.

[22] For more on daily household tasks, see Meyers ("Family in Early Israel," 27), who categorizes the daily tasks based on gender and age.

Within the household, children were designated as having a lower status than grown men and women, with little autonomy.[23] Therefore, children in the בית אב were expected to follow the rules of that social system, which consistently emphasized obedience and submission. While the biblical law offers little geared *specifically* towards children or *how* to parent (beyond teaching children Yhwh's commandments),[24] early traditions include one key stipulation warranting discipline in children: lack of obedience.[25] Deuteronomy 21:18–21 states that if a disobedient son (while it does not directly address daughters, it reveals expectations about filial obedience that undoubtedly applied to daughters as well) continues their behavior despite parental chastisement, they can be brought to the elders and stoned to death.[26] In all likelihood this was a rare occasion, attested by the absence of such any narrative depictions in the biblical account, yet it articulates the importance of obedience as a fundamental expectation of childhood behavior. Disrespect and disobedience were considered a threat not only to the household, but also to the community as a whole, and could therefore warrant extreme measures.[27] Stiebert summarizes, "the ideal being

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[23] Garroway (*Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household*, 245) explains that children are not automatically members of the household, nor are they non-members, rather she describes them as members "*in Potentia*" who grow towards full membership as they age towards adulthood. For a full assessment of her argument, see pp. 198–244.

[24] The primary mandate is to teach the commandments and stories of Yhwh to their children, Deut 6:7.

[25] Stiebert (*Fathers and Daughters*, 35) points out that obedience is depicted through corporal punishment, citing Proverbs and even 2 Sam 7:14. While there is no mention of corporal discipline of daughters, this was likely because of the androcentric focus of the text. She notes Num 12:14, which describes spitting at a daughter and Lev 21:9, which describes burning a priestly daughter who prostitutes herself as evidence that daughters also received harsh punishments for disobedience.

[26] Notably, this does not offer specific age parameters; therefore, it likely applies to adult sons, (note that the text uses the masc. sg. בן, not בן ובת or the gender-inclusive plural בנים). It is likely that it could be applied more broadly to include children of both genders as well, yet doubtful that parents could still punish their married daughters.The object of the text is disputed. Brenner ("Regulating 'Sons' and 'Daughters,'" 6) seems to see it as gender specific and likely referring to adult sons. Yet a similar sentiment is also expressed in the commandment to "honor your father and mother" in Exod 20:12 and Deut 5:16—which does not specify age, but the gender seems to extend beyond simply the son.

[27] Fleishman, "Age of Legal Maturity," 35–48.

promoted is one where parents guide and hold authority and children respect and honor parents,"[28] even while noting the many cases within the biblical text in which this standard is not upheld.

While children certainly faced socioeconomic duties as well as expectations of honor and obedience, this does not imply that parents were necessarily detached from their children's well-being. On the contrary, biblical narratives reveal a range of parental responses, reflecting ideal demonstrations of care and compassion, while also not shying away from the harsh realities of cruel parenting. Parents' love for their children is consistently exalted in Scripture (e.g., Isa 49:15; Jer 47:3; Ps 103:13) and is frequently depicted in story: the anguish of a mother who weeps for her suffering child (Hagar in Gen 21:16); a mother risking her life to preserve the life of her child (Jochebed in Exod 2:3, 6–9); a father grieving over the death of an infant (David in 2 Sam 12:15, 18–22; see also 1 Kgs 14:13, when all of Israel mourns Jeroboam's child); and even a mother begging for intervention to protect her children from debt slavery (the widow in 2 Kgs 4:1–7).[29] Yet on the darker side, biblical stories also depict different parents in desperate circumstances could produce markedly different experiences. For example: biblical traditions allow for parents to sell their children into debt-slavery (Exod 21:7–11);[30] narratives depicting calloused parents (Gen 21:14);[31] ignoring the rape of their own daughters (Gen 34:5; 2 Sam

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[28] Stiebert (*Fathers and Daughters*, 37) ties together many examples of parenting from Scripture in her conclusion, making the distinction between texts that are prescriptive (wisdom and law codes, e.g., Deut 21:17–23; Lev 20:9; Prov 1:8; 4:1, 3–4; 19:6) and those that are descriptive (stories, e.g., 2 Sam 7:14; 2 Chr 11:23; 1 Kgs 1:6; 2 Kgs 6:28–29), and paying special attention to narrative condemnation of breaches in ideals.

[29] For more regarding motherly affection for their children, see Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers*, 1–58. The relationship between fathers and daughters will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

[30] Notably, this stipulation acknowledges the practice yet seems to attempt to soften its application.

[31] Admittedly, Yhwh told Abraham to send Ishmael away, but the story clearly depicts that Ishmael and Hagar were not given significant resources for their journey, nor any form of inheritance/gifts that would support the child in his life away from Abraham's protection.

13:21); and infamously *eating* them during times of extreme food shortage (2 Kgs 6:28–30; Lam 2:20). Adults were able to exercise authority over the children in their household; therefore, childhood was often shaped by circumstance and parental modes of conduct. Caring parents will go to great lengths to protect their children, yet selfish (or desperate) parents may lean heavily on the utilitarian dependency of childhood.[32]

Stories of daughters in the Hebrew Bible occur less frequently than (and often as minor subplots to) the stories of sons,[33] yet their minimal portrayal does not necessarily imply a negative one.[34] While in their father's household, daughters would be expected to contribute like any other member of the home—through tasks like drawing water, cooking, weaving, shepherding, and farming.[35] Furthermore, biblical stories also depict paternal care and appreciation for daughters, in which they are (or at least could be) a source of honor, joy, and affection.[36] Yet daughters occupied a liminal space—they labored for their family for a period of time, but once married, they would no longer support their household of origin. By contrast, a son would remain within his father's household his entire life, continuing to contribute

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[32] Steinberg (*World of the Child*) adds that the constructs of childhood in the biblical accounts emphasize what the child can do for the parent, not the other way around (cf. Koepf, *Give me Children*, 45–47).

[33] Notably, the Hebrew word for *son* (בן) occurs ten times more often than the word *daughter* (בת) demonstrating a preference for the stories of sons over the stories of daughters (Russaw, *Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 50).

[34] Contra many feminist scholars who recognize the androcentric nature of the text, yet fail to fully grasp the nuanced nature of the feminine portrait. For example, Wöller (*Vom Vater verwundet*, 12, 16) argues that patriarchy is an illness that ruins women, imprisoning daughters at birth.

[35] Russaw (*Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 3) offers several examples of daughters in differing roles, including the daughters of the priest of Midian drawing water from a well for their father's flock (Exod 2:16), David's daughter Tamar cooking for her ill brother (2 Sam 13:7–9; see also Gen 18:6; 1 Sam 28:24), Rachel and Zipporah shepherding (Gen 29:9; Exod 2:16–21), the Shulamite woman farming (Song 1:5–8), and women as a whole weaving (Exod 35:25; 2 Kgs 23:7b; Prov 31:19).

[36] For an example, see the care and provision of Job for his daughters (Job 1:4–5; 42:13–15) or Caleb granting his daughter's request to award her land as an inheritance (Judg 1:12–15).

economically and socially to that household.[37] As a result, "daughters were welcome in ancient families, sons were preferred."[38] If the family was poor, supplying a daughter's needs and producing a dowry could strain the family,[39] but she could also add value through her future marriage—strengthening or establishing alliances between groups.[40] While in the household, daughters were under the supervision of many others within the family: their father (who decided membership in the household and arranged marriage for daughters), their mother and older women (who dictated the workload of children and servants within the household), and at times also their brothers (in particular, those who took charge in the event that their father died).[41]

The vulnerability of women in antiquity is well attested, and daughters in particular are often depicted as physically vulnerable before becoming wives.[42] The biblical text is spotted with stories of daughters being violently seized and forced into marriage: Jacob's daughter Dinah, who is kidnapped and raped, only to be made the bride of her rapist, though her brothers kill the men of the city before she could be handed over to Shechem (Gen 34); the virgin daughters of the Ephraimite, who are offered to an abusive crowd in order to protect a Levite (Judg 19); and a group of young women who are kidnapped for the purpose of rebuilding the line of Benjamin (Judg 21). In particular, scholars continue to debate the significance of spatiality for unmarried

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[37] It is noteworthy that there is some discussion regarding the possibility that daughters maintained a permanent role in their father's household. This notion is reconstructed from a practice described in a Nuzi text, yet some argue that this experience lies beneath many biblical stories, most notably the account of Laban, Jacob, Leah, and Rachel in Gen 31 (see Paradise, "Daughter and her Father's Property," 189–207; Burrows, "Complaint of Laban's Daughters," 264n26; Morrison, "Jacob and Laban Narrative," 160).

[38] Russaw, *Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 50.

[39] This may explain the detailed stipulations for selling a daughter into slavery in Exod 21—she essentially becomes a wife without a dowry, relieving the financial burden on her father's house and guaranteeing her a future within the house of her new husband.

[40] Stiebert, *Fathers and Daughters*, 38–50, 70.

[41] Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 127–35.

[42] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women*, 166.

women—where were women safe in antiquity? Trible argues that daughters were safe only when they remained within the private spaces of their homes, citing the story of the concubine who died as a result of being thrown outside by the Levite (Judg 19).[43] Bal, on the other hand, argues that houses were often unsafe spaces for daughters, citing the near-rape of the daughters of Lot (Gen 19), the violent death of Samson's first wife (Judg 15:6), and the violation of Bathsheba (2 Sam 11).[44] The stories of violated women in the biblical text suggest that there perhaps there were no *intrinsically* safe spaces for the daughters of Israel.[45] Yet more significant than spatiality is relationality —there was no safe space for daughters in Israel unless there were safe men interacting with them. The issue of spatiality becomes even more pertinent for the daughter of Jephthah, who finds security in seemingly unsafe spaces (wandering in the mountains) rather than returning to the spaces governed by her father.

The father/daughter relationship is one of the most frequently referenced relationships for a young *daughter* (בת) in Israel.[46] Fathers had the final authority to shape the ultimate outcome of their daughters' lives, exerting control particularly in marriage arrangements.[47] Caring fathers within the biblical accounts are sometimes depicted as responding directly to their daughters'

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[43] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 72–73.

[44] Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, 172.

[45] Bohmbach, "Hands on the Threshhold," 72–73.

[46] This can also be seen in the common tendency to introduce daughters' names in connection with their fathers, as is also true of sons (Stiebert, *Fathers and Daughters*, 25). At times specific daughters are attributed to specific fathers—Milcah daughter of Haran (Gen 11:29), Rebekah daughter of Bethuel (Gen 25:20), and Bathsheba daughter of Eliab (2 Sam 11:3)—while at other times a broader term is used to identify a role—like a princess who is called the "daughter of a king" (2 Chr 22:11; 2 Kgs 9:34; Dan 11:6; Exod 2:5, 7, 10). A similar patter can be seen in the identification of sons as well.

[47] This is especially notable in contrast to sons who are sometimes depicted as taking wives for themselves (e.g. Esau in Gen 26:34; 28:8–9).

wishes,[48] yet most daughters' responses were not recorded.[49] It is likely that a good number of fathers in antiquity cared enough to protect their daughters and consult them (to varying degrees), yet virginity offered an undeniable economic value to the household, which complicates how many have read paternal motivation in the biblical text.[50] For example, Frymer-Kensky points to the rape of Dinah to demonstrate that if virginity were merely an issue of protection and family honor, Jacob's response seems remarkably passive. He seems indifferent about the violation of his daughter once he has been properly compensated with a military victory, thereby securing the Kiriath-sepher for Israel.[51] Some biblical laws seem aimed to protect daughters from fathers with ill intent (e.g. Exod 21:7–11 and Lev 19:29.),[52] but this only further highlights the vulnerability of their social position: the life of the daughter depended upon the care and concern of the father.

The vulnerability of daughters is most often seen as they reach maturity, or *maidenhood* (בתולים), in preparation for their transition into adulthood. Childhood in the ancient Near East is

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[48] For example, Caleb responds to his daughter Aschah's request for land with fresh water (Judg 1:13–15). Also while Saul uses his daughter as bait for David, it is Michal, not Merab, who chooses to marry David (1 Sam 18:19–21). Stiebert (*Fathers and Daughters*, 40) rightly qualifies this observation, noting that it is unclear whether these stories of interaction are exceptional or normative. In contrast, Zlotnick (*Dinah's Daughters*, 46) argues that women are consulted as a "perfunctory gesture," in which consent is merely a formality rather than a true expression of consent. Yet, while some parents certainly pressure their kids into matches, in antiquity as much as modernity, it seems unwarranted to assume motivations not stated in the text without additional evidence.

[49] For example, Zipporah is given to Moses (Exod 2:21), but is never pictured as speaking directly to her father about it.

[50] There are many reasons for financial value to be considered in regards to father/daughter relationships, including inheritance laws and preservation of family lines, but it is important to note that a man seeking to be husband did not need the consent of the woman, but need only pay the price of the father. It was up to the father whether or not to care for the concerns of the daughter. For a breakdown of the economic value of virginity, see Russaw, *Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 11–13.

[51] Frymer-Kensky, "Virginity in the Bible," 80–87.

[52] For a full assessment of these particular laws and how they protect a daughter's status and freedom, see Fleishman's recent work (*Father-Daughter Relations*, 2011), which offers a chapter-length analysis of each mandate.

not measured by age, but by stages of development, with each implying varying statuses and household expectations.[53] Seila's secondary identifier, בתולים (Judg 11:37–38), is often translated as "virginity" and as a result her lament is often mischaracterized as a lament over a lack of sexual activity or a denial of motherhood.[54] These translations/interpretations often miss the emphasis of her self-designation. According to Walton, the related noun בתולה identifies "a girl under the guardianship of her father" who is nearing marriageable age.[55] Essentially, she has reached the final stage of development for a young woman—she is nearing a sort of graduation into womanhood. Moreover, when *maidenhood* (בתולים) is qualified with the phrase, "who had not known a man," it reinforces what kind of bride she would make.[56] Thus word *maidenhood* does not solely indicate that a girl has not experienced sex, marriage, or motherhood, but signifies a phase of life when a young girl is transitioning out of childhood.[57] She mourns her

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[53] Garroway (*Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household*, 10, 16) argues that the term "child" in antiquity includes anyone in the household between birth and marriage, categorized by age categories or life stages, from infant to child to young person. Bal (*Death and Dissymmetry*, 48) breaks down these life stages using nouns describing the life cycle of a daughter: "there is the noun, *na'arah*, young girl . . . On the other side, there is the *'almah*, the nubile, mostly already married woman, before her first pregnancy . . . Between the one, still possessed and protected by her father, and the other, already possessed by the husband, the *bethulah* is confronted with the passage from one to the other."

[54] The popular translation "virginity" can be seen in translations like the NRSV, NASB, JPS, ESV, and NET. Interestingly, the NIV elects to translate this idiomatically as "I will never marry," better reflecting her status as an unmarried maiden, but putting too much emphasis on the act of marriage itself. Many scholars struggle with the significance of her lament, yet they fall into three primary categories: (1) she weeps over her inexperience with men (noting the use of the phrase "she had not known a man" in v. 39; e.g., Exum, "Murder They Wrote," 32–33; Schneider, *Judges*, 181; Boose, "Father's House," 40), (2) she laments her childless state (e.g. Boling, *Judges*, 209; Klein, *Triumph of Irony*, 95; Boda and Conway, *Judges*, 33; Webb, *Integrated Reading*, 69; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 374123n123), or (3) she engages in ritual practices for young women in ancient cultures (e.g., Gerstein, "A Ritual Processed," 1924n4; Day, "From the Child," 59–60; Steinberg, "Problem of Human Sacrifice," 127; Kramer, "Jephthah's Daughter," 68. For other arguments, which combine or introduce unique readings, see: Ostriker, "Fathers and Daughters," 152; cf. the discussion of John Gower in Caroselli, "Dissemination of Jephthah's Daughter," 98). .

[55] Walton, "בְּתוּלָה," 1:783.

[56] Russaw, *Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 53–54.

[57] This notion was first introduced by Keukens ("Richter 11.37f," 41–42) and has been variously applied by scholars who continue to see the term as merely a reference to sexual purity (cf. Wenham, "B^{e}tûlāh," 326–48; Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, 46–48; Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 104; Exum, "On Judges 11," 131–44; Assis, *Self-Interest or*

maidenhood because of the loss of potential and the failure to realize the full status of life in the community. Garroway describes childhood as household membership in *potentia*—as children grow, they are *becoming* full members in the household and society, like a coloring-book page that is being filled in over time.[58] Therefore, Seila is not just a *virgin*, she is a *maiden* is on the verge of achieving full status within her community—with all of the potential for life that this might imply.

Socio-Historical Aspects of a Daughter in a Non-Traditional Household and of Human Sacrifice

While household structures seem fairly normative among many Iron I cultures, the story of Seila nuances her background—in many ways, she grew up *outside* of the traditional household. Family honor, or dishonor, likely follows multiple generations.[59] Since Jephthah was the son of "another woman," which suggests a scandalous maternal line, that same stigma would have been applied to the daughter whose grandmother bore that crude title who was then born into a household of little ascribed honor. She may be the granddaughter of Gilead, but she is raised outside of the בית אב, among the empty men in Tob (Judg 11:3).[60] Seila's young life did not develop on her family land with her grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins—as would be the traditional household structure—nor does she have the security of kinship found in the village,

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Communal Interest, 219; Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 65; Niditch, *Judges*, 134; Chisholm, "Ethical Challenge," 409).

[58] Garroway, *Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household*, 245–46.

[59] Note that early biblical literature attaches the "sins of the father" to the "third and fourth generation." For examples Ex 34:7; Num 14:18; Deut 5:9.

[60] Park ("Crossings, Transgressions, and Movement," 249–50) argues that the emphasis on household in the early portion of the narrative draws attention to Jephthah's physical and metaphorical presence outside of the normal "houses" of Israel. However, interpreters fail to reflect on how Jephthah's exclusion from his household bears on Seila's story.

clan, or tribe.[61] She, along with her father, lived a more dangerous existence on the edges of civilization. She is the only child of an exiled Israelite. She too has been rejected by her people and banished from her homeland. The homecoming of Jephthah would have been an opportunity for restoration for the daughter, not just the father. Furthermore, while the text frequently references the father/daughter dynamic, the story is silent on the action of or interaction with the mother—Seila is described only in connection with the dangerous and dishonorable men who surround her, her father and the empty men who are drawn to him.[62]

If daughters in the ancient world occupied vulnerable spaces, the spaces of *Seila*'s childhood would have been far more precarious. As noted above, women were safe only when interacting with safe men—the men drawn to Jephthah were *not* that. While Jephthah's character retains some sense of moral ambiguity in the beginning of the narrative (the storyteller refuses to explicitly state whether Jephthah is righteous or wicked), the company he keeps does not. Jephthah's father was a leader in Gilead, but Seila's father is the leader of a band of mercenaries, or *empty men* (אנשים ריקים), who raid neighboring cities and territories to build their wealth. Furthermore, households were places where members learned culture and religion, therefore the

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[61] It is unclear if she was born before Jephthah's exile or during, but her father seems to have lived in Tob for long enough to gain a reputation as a mercenary before his brothers seek to hire his services, which suggests that during many formative years of her life she was raised in a shadowy existence as an outsider to Israel.

[62] Meyers' (*Rediscovering Eve*, 109–13) observation of the early Israelite household are correct the family structure included a senior couple in which, while the senior father held an elevated position within the family that was second only to the senior mother. In this model, the senior pair oversaw different elements of the household function, generally divided along gender. If this is true, the omission of the mother in Seila's narrative indicates yet another point of vulnerability without a mother figure to teach and direct her. Yet this conclusion must be held tentatively as little research has been done in regards to the relationship between mothers and daughters in the Hebrew Bible due to the relative obscurity of reference material. Even in the few monographs dedicated to the study of daughters in the Hebrew Bible, their interaction with their mother is only briefly discussed. For example, in her monograph covering the role of daughters in the Hebrew Bible, Russaw (*Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 182) offers only minor insights and concludes with a suggestion for further research to be conducted.

daughter's knowledge of Yhwh and the people of Israel would be limited by her only partial engagement with the בית אב. If daughters were only as safe as the people around them, Seila's untold history warns of a dark past. She has survived among the murderous men of Tob, yet ironically, it is in returning home to her own people that her fate is finally sealed.

Finally, unrelated to the household expectations of father and daughter, or the nubile stage of her development, is the narrative's central concern with human sacrifice.[63] The broader category of sacrifice in the ANE, as distinguished from an offering, typically involves a ritual killing.[64] These ritual killings can be used for a variety of purposes: to ward off pestilence,[65] as a ritual substitution for the king,[66] and to seek divine favor and blessing.[67] Human sacrifice experienced much more limited use, offering a more costly sacrifice in extreme situations.[68]

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[63] I will touch briefly on key ideologies and praxis of human sacrifice in antiquity, but for more information consult the following sources: Finsterbusch et al., eds., *Human Sacrifice*, particularly the essays by Bauks ("Theological Implications of Child Sacrifice," 65–86) and Ilan ("Gender Difference and the Rabbis," 175–90); Pongratz-Leisten, "Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East," 291–304; Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*; Levenson, *Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*; Heider, *Cult of Molek*, 100, 113–14, 144–48, 164–67, 181, 183–222; Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice*, 141–317; cf. de Vaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice*; Green, *Role of Human Sacrifice*, 161–86.

[64] For a more robust definition of the notions of "sacrifice" and "ritual killing," see Garroway, *Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household*, 178.

[65] Also known as the "scapegoat" ritual. A version of this substitution ritual exists in the biblical text, which uses a ram rather than a human being, but Hittite and Neo-Assyrian texts include a woman as sacrifice, usually the substitute for the king. Though Pongratz-Leisten ("Ritual Killing and Sacrifice," 22–25) points out that "the integration of the so-called 'scapegoat' ritual into the survey needs justification since killing of the substitute is not a part of these rituals." Thus it is important to note both the similar substitutionary category as well as the lack of actual death as part of the ceremony.

[66] This ritual intended to establish a positive relationship between the king and the gods and take away anything that may threaten the king. This rite was practiced in a Hittite context, in which the king would temporarily abdicate the throne for a brief period of time while a surrogate took his place. Eventually, the surrogate would be put to death and all remaining items of their reign would be burned, signifying their loss to the underworld as well (Pongratz-Leisten, "Ritual Killing and Sacrifice," 21; see further Kümmel, *Ersatzrituale für den hethitischen König*).

[67] Pongratz-Leisten ("Ritual Killing and Sacrifice," 13–14) demonstrates the importance of the cosmogonic literature in connecting violence to order. The created order was often depicted as a violent and antagonistic reality, as seen in epics like *Enuma Elish*; therefore, it was constantly re-established through war and killing in an attempt to maintain order.

[68] For example, war contexts as seen in 2 Kgs 3:27.

Paradoxically, the violence of the act is intended to preserve the social order; therefore, the victim must be "similar enough to the other members of society to serve as an appropriate target, but must be marginal enough that the killing does not engender actions of revenge."[69] As a result, those who had did not have (or had not yet achieved) social status within the community were most often chosen as victims: for example, prisoners of war, slaves, women, and children.[70]

While human sacrifice was a known phenomenon in ANE civilizations, particularly among followers of Molech and Baal, it is wholly rejected by the biblical witness. Yet there is no explicit reference to adult human sacrifice, still the biblical tradition condemns the practice of child sacrifice (Lev 18:12; 20:2–5; Deut 12:31; 18:10). There are a few biblical stories that demonstrate that child sacrifice remained a tempting practice within early Israel, but the practice is depicted, at best, as a misunderstanding of the divine.[71] There are two kinds of child sacrifice depicted in Scripture: as a result of a vow or test (Gen 22 and Judg 11) or as part of a regular

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[69] Schwartz, "Archeology and Sacrifice," 5.

[70] Garroway, *Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household*, 1797n7.

[71] Some scholars contend that child sacrifice was an accepted element of early Israelite religion. For example, Stavrakopoulou (*King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice*, 141–38, 207–300) argues that if neighboring communities practiced child sacrifice in a manner that is consistent with the biblical witness, then the biblical text is likely describing (or editing) the real and normative practice that existed in Israel. Furthermore, Soggin (*Judges*, 218) believes that the Jephthah account demonstrates that early Israelite religion was similar to other ANE religious practices, enacting and even venerating child sacrifice. De Vaux (*Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice*, 65–66) agrees, contending that the storyteller does not censure Jephthah's act, therefore presenting his act as righteous. Yet while Jephthah's actions are never directly condemned, the narrator remains quiet on a number of issues, matching the silence of God initiated in the beginning of the story. Furthermore, if the sacrifice is merely a remnant of past Israelite religious practice, then it seems surprising that no redactor would attempt to change the story to better suit the attitude towards sacrifice that had later been adopted by Israel. Instead, it seems that the storyteller is intent on demonstrating God's silence in connection with Jephthah's clear lack of understanding. Further, many prophetic texts seem to discuss child sacrifice, forcefully condemning its practices as one of the many reasons for God's judgement of Israel: Ezek 20:25–32; Mic 6:7; Isa 30:33; Jer 7:31, 19:5, 32:35. While Yhwh does in fact request a child sacrifice of Abraham (Gen 22), Yhwh seemingly did not intend to allow Isaac to die—regardless of if Abraham passed or failed the test, Isaac would live. The difference is that Abraham did not previously know whether this God required sacrifice because all he had to draw on was his personal experience. He demonstrates that he is willing, despite the fact that God does not require its completion.

worship practice (e.g., Jer 7:30–31).[72] In sacrifices aimed to prove fidelity at a great cost, the "best" victim is one who is both personally close to the offerer and has a lower social status; therefore, the offerer's own child represented the choicest offering: presumably, this would require the only, favored, or firstborn child.[73] Yet each of these accounts nuances or critiques the practice—in Gen 22 the sacrifice is requested but not ultimately required; in Judg 11 Jephthah is depicted as a blundering pagan, whose religious posturing is met with Yhwh's silence; and in Jer 7:30–31 the practice of child sacrifice demonstrates the fallen state of Israel. While the broader ANE context may presume that human sacrifice is noble, or even praiseworthy, Israel's God unequivocally rejects such sacrifices, and their presence within Israel's stories.[74] Instead, God provides a substitute for the fulfilment of this sentiment in Exod 13:1, assuming that firstborns (including humans) belong to God.[75] Therefore, Jephthah's initiation and completion of his sacrificial vow can only be read in a negative light regardless of *who* came out of his house to greet him.[76]

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[72] Garroway (*Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household*, 180) also includes a third category, sacrifice during community-wide distress, yet her examples primarily include instances of starvation in which parents resort to eating their children (2 Kgs 6:24–30; Deut 28:52–57; Jer 19:9). While this is certainly an appalling death for a child, the killing itself is not directed to Yhwh and is therefore not technically a sacrifice.

[73] Garroway, *Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household*, 252.

[74] Contra Tapp, "Ideology of Expendability," 157–74. While some early Israelites seemed to interpret the consecration of the firstborns—including animals—to Yhwh, Israel's God also provides a substitution for the fulfillment of that requirement.

[75] Albertz and Schmitt (*Family and Household Religion*, 402–3) connect Yhwh's claim on the firstborn to the harvest offering of the firstfruit, substituting the ancient Near Eastern forms of human sacrifice for an offering of thanksgiving to Yhwh instead.

[76] The intended object of Jephthah's vow will be discussed later in this chapter.

The Language of the Vow, Literary-Theological Echoes of Sacrifice, and the Contrast with Isaac, Achsah, and Mesha's Son

The primary disruption driving this story is Jephthah's vow—the intention, object, and fulfillment of the vow, as well as its moral and ethical implications. The vow has been studied extensively and from a variety of perspectives, yet it remains as elusive as it is gripping.[77] Yet one avenue remains fairly under-researched—how intertextual echoes influence the reading of this text.[78] Many have noted how this text echoes features of the stories of Isaac (Gen 22), Achsah (Judg 1:12–15), and Mesha's son (2 Kgs 3:26–27), yet none have held each of these echoing texts together to understand the distinctive nature of Jephthah's vow and sacrifice of his daughter.

It is first important to understand the basic circumstances of Jephthah's vow.[79] This particular situation in the Jephthah narrative (Judg 11:29–40) begins with the first truly positive moment in the account: the Spirit of Yhwh *empowers* Jephthah for his battle with Ammon (v.

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[77] Jephthah's intended object of his vow has been studied for thousands of years: did he expect an animal, his daughter, or simply leave it open ended and hope for someone else? The argument for an animal sacrifice dates back to the *Midrash Genesis Rabba* 60, 3 (vol. II, p. 527), but has been picked up by more modern readings like Kaufmann, *Sefer Shoftim*, 226–27; Boling, *Judges*, 208; and Ryan, *Judges*, 86. The most common reading preserves the notion of at least a possible human sacrifice, yet maintains that Jephthah's shock at seeing his daughter was genuine and he must have expected (or hoped for) someone (or something) else. Variations of this argument have been put forward by Moore, *Judges*, 299; Burney, *Book of Judges*, 319–20; Green, *Role of Human Sacrifice*, 162; Soggin, *Judges*, 215; Webb, *Book of Judges*, 328–30; Butler, *Judges*, 287; Martin, *Book of Judges*, 145; Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 211; and Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 438–39. Finally, some scholars assert that Jephthah knowingly offered (or at least endangered) his daughter: Klein, *Triumph of Irony*, 91–93; Schneider, *Judges*, 175; Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 61–62; and Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 368; and Conway, *Judging the Judges*, 506.

[78] Notably, Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 371–72) has done considerable comparative analysis with the sacrifice of Jephthah with the sacrifices of Abraham and this project seeks to build on his work.

[79] Albertz and Schmitt (*Family and Household Religion*, 403–5) note that vows were typically used in cases of extreme crisis in both private (Num 30) and public contexts (1 Sam 1:9–11), but the fulfillment was performed for the community. Notably, they also outline both legislative and biblical texts that recommend restraint in issuing a vow—something that Jephthah would have done well to learn.

29a).[80] For the first time since the prologue, Yhwh's movement is clear and is directed toward the defense of Israel—removing the ambiguity of God's response to Israel's misery for a brief moment. Empowered by the Spirit of Yhwh, Jephthah begins a curiously long journey towards Ammon (v. 29) that is then interrupted by the infamous vow (vv. 30–31),[81] but ends with his decisive victory over Ammon (vv. 32–33). To emphasize this interruption in action, the storyteller expresses Jephthah's journey to the battlefield in three stages using the verb עבר:[82] ויעבר to Gilead and Manasseh (v. 29a); עבר to Ammon (v. 29b); he made the vow (vv. 30–31); and then again ויעבר to Ammon (v. 32).[83] Therefore the timing of the vow is suspect—it is not at a moment of dire need,[84] which is typical of petitioners, but after receiving the Spirit and likely accumulating troops in his travel.[85] Jephthah's journey towards the battle is both simple and

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[80] There is some question regarding whether or not the Spirit of Yhwh prompts Jephthah to make the vow, given the timing of the vow just after the Spirit descends on him. Exum (*Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, 49–50) contends that the timing of the vow makes it impossible to determine if it the Spirit, the vow, or both that lead to victory over Ammon. Conversely, Webb (*An Integrated Reading*, 62–63) points out that the vow is a clear interruption from the previous verses, marked off by the repetition of the verb "he passed" in vv. 29 and 32 and the disjunctive clause at the end of v. 29. After assessing the disposition and mode of conduct of Gideon and Samson, who also possess the Spirit, Chisholm ("Ethical Challenge," 412) concludes that God provides a capacity for humanity to act, but humanity remains free to thwart the Spirit's influence. Martin ("Power to Save!?," 39–40) notes that the Spirit is there to "initiate and complete Yahweh's salvific mission," instilling a confidence in the judge, yet the judge can misuse this confidence to suit their own desires. McCann (*Judges*, 82) argues further that, while the Spirit of Yhwh can be effective, it does not automatically bring deliverance, as is clear with Samson.

[81] The repetition is noteworthy—immediately upon receiving the Spirit, Jephthah *passed through* (עבר) Gilead and Manasseh, and then he *passed through* (עבר) to Mizpah of Gilead (v. 29). He finally resumes his travels after his vow, when it states that he *passed through* (עבר) to Ammon (v. 32). Some have understood this to be a journey to recruit troops (e.g., Butler, *Judges*, 287), yet there is little indication in the text what was happening while he travelled, other than that he made his vow. Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 436–37) argues that the repetition of these verbs indicates the aggressive nature of Jephthah's fight, who did not simply defend the territory of Gilead, but fought directly in Ammon, forcing them to retreat to protect their own territory.

[82] Park ("Crossings, Transgressions, and Movement," 248) observes that the root word עבר occurs fifteen times within the Jephthah account: Judg 10:8 [2 times], 9; 11:17–20, 29 [3 times], 32; 12:1, 3, 5 [2 times], 6). Römer ("Why Would the Deuteronomists," 29) also notes that the verb עבר runs throughout the Jephthah narrative, asserting that the absence of this verb in the vow is evidence that it is a later insertion.

[83] This structure is based on the structure first identified by Webb (*Integrated Reading*, 62–63).

[84] For a fuller study in the norms of vow making, see Cartledge, *Vows in the Hebrew Bible*, 178.

[85] Gorospe and Ringma (*Judges*, 156–60) point out several anomalies in the Jephthah vow, concluding that the distinct features of this vow illustrate the nature of Jephthah's desire—rather than fighting for Israel or to defend the name of Yhwh, he wants Yhwh to fight for him in order to make a name for himself, regardless of the cost.

changed with meaning, slowing the reader down to contemplate the significance of each stop: the land of Manasseh (reminding readers of the vengeance of Abimelech in 9:1–5) and Mizpah (likely the location of his father's household, 11:11), before pausing to make one final addendum to the "words" spoken before Yhwh in the presence of the elders, thus "sealing the deal" of the arrangement between he and his brothers.[86] Jephthah now promises that if God gives him victory over Ammon and brings peace to the land, he will offer *as a burnt offering* that which comes out of his house to greet him (vv. 30–31). Contrasting the lengthy travel-log to Ammon is the concise description of the battle itself, which offers the shortest battle description in the book of Judges.[87]

Making a vow in ancient Israel was a fairly common practice,[88] yet each case involves different nuances due the unique interests of the petitioner.[89] In form, Jephthah's vow utilizes a

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[86] Further, Butler (*Judges 1–12*, 287) observes that this is the first and only time that Jephthah speaks directly to God, rather than about him.

[87] The brevity of the war has received some attention, typically among historical-critical researchers. For example, Wellhausen (*Composition des Hexateuchs*, 228–29) points to the quick battle report as an indication that there is no historical reality behind Jephthah's war. Moore (*Judges*, 284) simply notes that, though it is unusual, it could simply mean that the details of the battle had faded from memory. However, the juxtaposition of the concise battle report with the lengthy negotiations that precede it is better understood from a literary approach, indicating the deprioritizing of the battle itself in order to highlight the vow and its implications as central. Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 210) urges that the "extreme brevity" of the war description emphasizes the content of the vow as well as its fulfillment.

[88] Vows were made by Israelites for a variety of reasons, yet the object of the vow often references the person and request rather than the God it is made to: for example, Hannah promises to dedicate her son to the service of the Tabernacle if Yhwh would open her womb—therefore the son is connected to the open womb (1 Sam 1:11–21). Again, after Jacob's dream of a ladder reaching into the heavens, he vowed that if God cared for his needs, then he would claim Yhwh as his God, tethering the promise of blessing to the acknowledgment of its source (Gen 28:10–22). For examples of other vows in the biblical texts, see Lev 7:16, 22:18–23, 23:38, 27:2–8; Num 6:2–21; 15:3–8, 21:2, 29:39, 30:3–15; Deut 12:6–26, 23:19–24; 2 Sam 15:7–8; Job 22:27; Pss 22:25, 50:14, 56:12, 61:5–8, 76:11, 116:14–18, 132:2; Prov 7:14, 31:2; Eccl 5:4–5; Isa 19:21; Jonah 2:9; Nah 1:15; Mal 1:14. As a result, Butler (*Judges 1–12*, 288) jokes that "Jephthah had not learned the lesson of Prov 20:25: 'It is a snare for one to say rashly, 'It is holy,' and begin to reflect only after making a vow.'"

[89] Cartledge, *Vows in the Hebrew Bible*, 12; also Ziegler, *Promises to Keep*, 58–59, 151–262.

standard structure,[90] beginning with a conditional statement ("*if* you will surely give the sons of Ammon into my hand . . . when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon" vv. 30b–31), followed by the petitioner's promise if the condition is met ("*then* it will be that the one that comes out from the doors of my house to meet me . . . it will be for Yhwh, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering," v. 31).[91] Yet while the structure is fairly normative, the content certainly deviates from the norm. Jephthah issues two conditions: first, that he will achieve victory over Ammon (v. 30); and second, that he will return in peace against the Ammonites (v. 31), making a more specific and more difficult bar to reach. They are written entirely in the first person, revealing the personal nature of Jephthah's motives. Furthermore, these conditions set up a very specific context for Jephthah's completion of the vow.[92] Assis argues that Jephthah's emphasis on his return in victory indicates that "he is going to fight a national war, but it is only a means to achieve a desired personal status."[93] He will only commit to the sacrifice once his prize has been achieved. Furthermore, Assis adds that Jephthah's reference to "the one coming out of my house" (v. 31) also indicates his anticipation of a celebratory meeting.[94] He expected the

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[90] This format can be seen specifically in four other vows in the Old Testament: Jacob's vow in Gen 28:20–22; Israel's vow in Num 21:2; Hannah's vow in 1 Sam 1:11; and Absalom's vow in 2 Sam 15:7–8. For further discussion, see Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 366 nn. 85 and 86; Marcus, *Jephthah and His Vow*, 18–19. For a comparison of Israelite and Ugaritic vows, see Parker, "Vow in Ugaritic," 693–700.

[91] Cartledge, *Vows in the Hebrew Bible*, 16–17.

[92] Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 437–38) points out that this second condition mirrors the language of Gideon's vow to punish the men of Penuel (Judg 8:9) as well as Jacob's language at Bethel (Gen 28:20–21). This language indicates that the price of the vow will only be paid upon the return home from battle, not simply the completion of a single battle.

[93] For Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 212–13) the first person wording of the vow exceeds standards of personal vow performance, indicating the self-oriented nature of his triumph (cf. DeMaris and Leeb, "Judges," 180; Boda and Conway, *Judges*, 26).

[94] Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 212–12. Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 368) points out the peculiar nature of this promise noting that the vow seems both unnecessary (the Spirit of Yhwh is already upon him) and awkwardly worded to include either an animal or human object (contrasting the specific offering that comes at a significant cost to the offerer). The condition and consequence are typically closely connected—for example, Jacob vowed to be devoted to God if God would be with him (Gen 28:20–22), the Israelites promised to return the

triumphant entrance of a hero for all of Gilead, perhaps a parade of Gilead's women or the leaders of the city, but was instead greeted by the solitary procession of his only child.

Once the condition was met, Jephthah was responsible for fulfilling his promise—but what exactly *did* Jephthah promise? There are two debated elements of his promise: the object of the vow (person or animal) and the outcome (death or permanent virginity). Instead of clarity, the storyteller leaves the burden of unraveling Jephthah's ambiguous expectation on the reader with only a few literary brushstrokes as clues. The object of the vow is confusing because of the awkward cadence of the sentence, *the one coming out, who comes out of my house to greet me* (היוצא אשר יצא מדלתי ביתי לקראתי).[95] First, he stacks the verbal forms of (יצא) awkwardly beside each other, one a participle (היוצא) and the other prefix-conjugation (יצא). This could suggest that he was anticipating a male object of his vow or that he was using the masculine form in the absence of a neutral participial form to maintain a broad spectrum of possibility—either way, if his rhetoric is genuine and not an intentional misdirect, it suggests that he was not intentionally targeting his daughter, but his language does not protect her either.

According to the stipulations of the vow, the "one who comes" must greet him from his own house: if Jephthah had only one child, who else would he have expected to be in his home? Block rightly points out that this criterion must be interpreted broadly because *house* (בית) can

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Canaanite cities to Yhwh if he delivered them (Num 21:2), Hannah vowed to have her child consecrated to Yhwh if God provided her with a child (1 Sam 1:11), and Absalom vowed to worship Yhwh if Yhwh brought him back from exile (2 Sam 15:7–8). See also Marcus, *Jephthah and His Vow*, 19.

[95] Boda and Conway (*Judges*, 27) offer a thoughtful breakdown of the ambiguity of the vow, suggesting that the ambiguity itself indicates that Jephthah was hoping for the optics of a high value human sacrifice, with the loopholes for a less costly animal—a gamble he grossly miscalculated.

refer to the physical dwelling as well as all of the people and possessions associated with it.[96] Seila grew up among the outsiders in Tob, but both she and Jephthah were restored to Gilead with his promotion and, as argued in the brothers chapter, likely were restored to the household of Gilead. Now, Jephthah and Seila would be trying to fit into Gilead's house, likely living in the same family compound living as both insiders and outsiders simultaneously.[97] As part of the household of Gilead, they would also be living with the household members—his brothers and their families—as well.[98] This means that a variety of occupants might come from his house—servants, his brothers, his brother's wives, or his brother's children. Jephthah's vow threatens far more than simply his daughter, but also his brothers and extended family, who have rejected him. Perhaps his restoration to the (בית אב) of Gilead was not enough—instead, Jephthah makes room for a dark vengeance in the name of victory against Ammon and glory to Yhwh. This may explain Jephthah's seeming surprise when she comes out to greet him, perhaps he was hoping for a different outcome, yet an alternative person/thing is never introduced.

Yet the identity of the sacrifice need not (necessarily) be a human being, even if the non-human offering seems less likely.[99] Jephthah describes the object of his sacrifice using the

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[96] Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 367. The notion of a household and all that it entails is fully developed in chapter three (see p. 106). See further, Bender, *Social Structure*, 48–53.

[97] Stager ("Archaeology of the Family," 17–23) notes several excavation sites that contain multiple nuclear family homes within a family compound, postulating that as the sons of the patriarch grow, marry, and produce. children, they do not spread out throughout the village, but cluster in familial compounds. After the pater father dies, married brothers may continue to live on the single compound or spread out.

[98] In their archeological study of family and household in ancient Israel, King and Stager (*Life in Biblical Israel*, 12–19, 39–43) explain that Israelite lands would contain not simply single houses, but clustered housing units that developed organically around each other to fit the growing and expanding families. These housing units shared basic resources and farmed land together, while having individual structures for their nuclear families (cf. Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 104–113).

[99] For example, Ryan (*Judges*, 88–91) insists that Jephthah intended an animal sacrifice all along and even goes as far as to assert that the vow was not only justified, but it was necessary for the restoration of Israel. For Ryan, it is the daughter who subverts the will of her father and forces him to change course and sacrifice her instead.

relative pronoun (אשר), which can be translated either *whoever* or *whatever*. Furthermore, the verb (קרא) which is translated "to greet" here, can also inflect a broader meaning of "to meet," an action that seems plausible with animal interactions. Boling has suggested such a reading, noting the construction of early Israelite homes which housed animals on the first floor and could plausibly explain how an animal would be the first to leave the house and meet Jephthah on the road.[100] While the possibility of an animal sacrifice may seem better than an outright intention to sacrifice a human being, it does not take into consideration whether the animal that greets him will be a worthy sacrifice. If an animal were the intent of the vow, it would be equally important for the offerer to specify *which* animal should be sacrificed in order to avoid other complications with Israelite law. Just as human sacrifice is an inappropriate offering in Israel, so too would be the family donkey.

While the intention of an animal is possible, it is not probable for a variety of reasons. First, the greeting from an animal would be atypical in biblical stories. In the modern era, a dog may happily meet/greet his master upon returning home, but dogs were not typical pets in ancient Israel.[101] Therefore, it seems equally unlikely that Jephthah would be accustomed to a sheep or donkey coming out to meet him on his journey home, much less for Jephthah to expect one upon his arrival at such an important juncture.[102] Notably, the final clause of his promise, *to*

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[100] While this argument has its roots in early Midrash, it was famously reintroduced by Marcus (*Jephthah and His Vow*, 50–55) and Boling (*Judges*, 208).

[101] While dogs were certainly present in ancient Israel (e.g., Ps 59:6, 14), they were regarded with contempt and certainly not acceptable animals for offerings (Firmage, "Zoology [Fauna]," 6:1143). Furthermore, in the ancient world animals did not go out to meet conquering heroes, even if they may have wandered away from the shelter and met him on the path. See Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, 45 and Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 367.

[102] This is precisely the argument made by those who believe Jephthah expected an animal sacrifice, e.g., Boling, *Judges*, 208.

greet me (לקראתי) suggests a far more intentional and human action as there are no occurrences in the Hebrew Bible in which an animal subject modifies the verb (קרא). *Greeting* is a distinctly human (or occasionally divine) action in biblical Hebrew.[103] Therefore, Jephthah's language seems suggestive of a human offering, yet leaves the details open enough to include the possibility of an animal substitute. Yet this hopeful ambiguity does not relinquish the guilt of his intention to offer a human being, because even *if* he hoped for an animal, he was willing to sacrifice a human being.

Perhaps the most perplexing element of his promise is that he intends to give the object of his vow to Yhwh as *a burnt offering* (עולה). While the daughter's death by fire is fairly well accepted within the academy, there are still some who believe that she was merely confined to a life of celibacy. For example, while Marcus argues that the text is purposefully ambiguous in order to focus on the warning of a vow made in haste, he is compelled to defend Jephthah because of the seeming lack of condemnation by the narrator and therefore reduces the severity of the offering and argues for a symbolic sacrifice.[104] Landers has argued that the daughter's "sacrifice" must be a dedication, rather than a death, specifically because the daughter was female, which would have made her an unacceptable sacrifice.[105] Fundamentally, those who argue for the daughter's perpetual virginity must argue (or at least accept) that the word (עולה) in

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[103] See Moore, *Judges*, 299–300; Zapletal, *Richter*, 182, 186.

[104] Marcus, *Jephthah and his Vow*, 50–52.

[105] Landers, "Did Jephthah Kill his Daughter?," 27–31. This argument is dependent upon the assumption that Israel practiced human sacrifice in the same manner as other early Levantine cultures in its early years, therefore the "acceptable" nature of the human male is based on the written accounts of other ANE cultures, not biblical law.

this text is being used figuratively—often doing so in response to the narrators refrain from a direct condemnation of his actions.[106]

While there is no past precedent for a burnt offering referring to a symbolic loss, yet the narrator is often coy with their judgment, imbuing the narrative with subtle hints rather than direct statements of judgment. Conway points out that the phrase in 11:31, (והעליתהו עולה), is the exact same language used to describe Mesha's sacrifice in 2 Kgs 3:27—both are Hiphil *wayyiqtols* followed by the noun (עלה), and no one would argue that Mesha dedicated his son to perpetual virginity.[107] A burnt offering is a burnt offering, an object burnt fully on the altar and dedicated to Yhwh alone. The lack of a response from the narrator is an oft used tactic of biblical storytellers. This narrative ambiguity can be used in several different ways, but in this case seems to help nuance the characterization of Jephthah himself. Jephthah, the judge regarded for his verbose presence and shrewd deal making abilities, utilizes language that was intentionally vague. For those in Gilead who heard his petition to God, he is seemingly offering a costly sacrifice, while he cunningly leaves open up the possibility for a less costly option.[108] It seems that Jephthah is trying to manipulate God and the people with an appearance of sacrifice rather than an intention of one.

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[106] Reis (*Reading the Lines*, 105–30) goes as far as to suggest that Jephthah intended to redeem one of his slaves from servitude, but his daughter coopts this opportunity for a righteous redemption in order to trick him into a life of independence and celibacy. Cf. Keil and Delitzsch, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 388–95.

[107] Conway, *Judging the Judges*, 500. Furthermore, O'Connell (*Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 182) suggests that Jephthah's use of this vow in an attempt to manipulate Yhwh through the foreign rite of human sacrifice casts Jephthah as a foreigner himself.

[108] Several scholars make similar arguments: Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 367–39; Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 212–13; and Conway, *Judging the Judges*, 499.

Now that we have examined Jephthah's vow in more detail, we can compare the narrative of Jephthah and Seilah to the accounts of Caleb and Achsah (Judg 1:12–15), Abraham and Isaac (Gen 22), and King Mesha and his son (2 Kgs 3:26–27).[109] Firstly, Achsah (the nubile daughter of Caleb) matches Seila in both her acceptance of her father's promise, as well as her act of protest within the confines of that oath.[110] In Judg 1:12, Caleb offers his daughter, Achsah, to whomever is willing to lead the attack and defeat Kiriath-sepher. In response, Othniel accepts Caleb's terms, achieves victory, and is awarded Achsah as a result (1:13).[111] Therefore, both fathers (Caleb and Jephthah) issue a similar set of conditions (military victory) and offer their daughters to the victor. For Achsah, this means marriage to Othniel; but for Seila, the victor is Yhwh, and she is "given" to him in death. The connection between these two texts is part of the subtle literary artistry of Judges, alluding to an aborted engagement/marriage scene for Seila.[112] Yet, while both young women accept their father's promise, they do not simply acquiesce. Instead, they protest to create more optimal circumstances from within the confines of the oath.

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[109] Sjöberg (*Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 61–62) argues that the Seila account is "part of a pattern of performative speech, the severity of which escalates throughout the cycle." This pattern is introduced with the story of Caleb and Achsah (1:12), continued in the story of Seila and Jephthah (11:30–31), and darkly repeated in the story of the Israelites who swear not to give their daughters in marriage to the Benjaminites (21:15). The variations in successive iterations of the theme increasingly demonstrate the depth of darkness in Israel.

[110] This parallel is noteworthy because of the positive evaluation the text affords to Achsah. Some have noted that the treatment of Achsah is especially pertinent as a backdrop for the abuse of other women later in the book of Judges: e.g., Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 96; Klein, *Triumph of Irony*, 172–74. Klein ("Spectrum of Female Characters," 25) argues that she is the archetype for female propriety in a male-dominated society (cf. Klein, "Book of Judges," 55–60; Schneider, *Judges*, 17). While Achsah has enjoyed a fairly positive reception in the academy, a few offer mild critiques of her request to Caleb. For example, Niditch (*Judges*, 41) reads the story of Achsah as a biblical parallel of the story of Anat, therefore casting her request to Caleb as more petulant than earnest.

[111] Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 144–52) amusingly interjects that the bridal procession is interrupted by Achsah dismounting the donkey and voicing a request that depicts not only her will, but "also her chutzpah" as she makes demands even before she has fully entered into her married life. He further argues that the text even suggests that Othniel is going to receive only Achsah as his prize, with an inadequate dowry, which leads Achsah to speak up and ask for more.

[112] Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, 43–44.

Achsah, upon recognizing that the land Caleb has already given her holds few resources, approaches her father to request springs of water. She seeks resources that would be essential to maintain their property and her father graciously concedes (1:14).[113] In contrast, Seila's fate leads to an altogether different request—rather than planning for a future, she asks only for time to lament and space away from the household of her father (11:37). While both submit to the confines of their father's oath, they each protest to make room within their father's wishes. The disparity between the fated promises should not be lost: Achsah claims a better land and inheritance—marks of a continuing life. Seila asks for the only thing she really can—time.

The storyteller offers the most direct connection with the Akedah (Gen 22), connecting back to that narrative on both linguistic and thematic levels.[114] For example, both Isaac and Seila are described as the *only/unique one* (יחיד // יחידה)—either the only child or at least the unique and favored one of their father (Gen 22:2; Judg 11:34)—heightening the costliness of the sacrifice.[115] Both Isaac and Seila are originally expected to be offered as a *burnt offering* (עלה, in Gen 22:2; Judg 11:31), indicating the same sacrificial rite. Furthermore, both son and daughter echo language of paternal affection in their conversation with the oath keeper, *my father* (אבי)

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[113] Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 95–96.

[114] While this comparison has been extensively researched from the perspective of Jephthah, I am going to focus in particular on the comparison between Isaac and Seila, extending to Abraham and Jephthah when their actions are important to understand the children themselves. For a helpful analysis of the two fathers, see Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 371–72), who presents Abraham as a "saintly patriarch" and Jephthah as a model pagan, noting the many ways these texts develop those characterizations. Davis ("Condemnation of Jephthah," 10–15) lists far more similarities—linguistic, thematic, and stylistic—to demonstrate how the symmetry between the accounts serves to heighten the condemnation of Jephthah, as the Jephthah narrative forms an inverted mirror image of the faithful story of Abraham.

[115] Stiebert (*Fathers and Daughters*, 92) points to Isaac, Seila, and even Mesha's son to demonstrate that sacrificed children are meant to represent significance and value to the offerer. Offering anything less than the most valuable and cherished object is an unfit vow. Yet what Steibert does not account for is that Jephthah's vow does not necessarily imply that his daughter would be the offering; therefore, Jephthah attempts to manipulate his vow to procure a lesser-value offering and instead is presented with his daughter—a delightful, though dark, irony.

(Gen 22:7; Judg 11:36), keeping the intimacy of the moment ever present. Even more so, the thematic continuity is striking—a father sacrificing a child to Yhwh as a burnt offering, that child willingly submitting to their father's deadly intent, and chillingly intimate dialogue between child and parent.

The similarities between Isaac and Seila render the distinctions between their circumstances that much more noteworthy. Some small, but significant, differences shape the atmosphere of the text. For example, when each child is introduced as the only/unique child of their father, Gen 22:2 declares that Abraham *loved* (אהב) Isaac; by contrast, Jephthah never expresses אהב for Seila.[116] The callousness of Seila's father is further emphasized in comparison with Abraham's seeming affection for Isaac. Abraham's declaration to Isaac, "here I am, my son, . . . God himself will provide the lamb" (Gen 22:7–8), sharply contrasts with Jephthah's accusation against Seila, "*you* have brought me very low! *You* are like one of those who cause me trouble!" (Judg 11:35). Note also the slow and painful pace of Gen 22:1–19 in contrast to Jephthah's quick act of vow fulfillment (only five words in v. 39).[117] It is impossible to know how Jephthah felt about his daughter, but his actions ring cold and detached in comparison to the paternal anguish of Abraham.

Importantly, the sacrifice sequence is also initiated in entirely different ways—for Abraham, God calls him to this test of faith and instructs him to stop before he actually follows through (Gen 22:2, 11–14). The intention was never for Isaac to die. Abraham has little

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[116] This missing element is especially significant given the linguistic echo between the verses introducing the children. Bal (*Death and Dissymmetry*, 60) describes the significance of the missing אהב, this "twist is even more questionable because in Gen 22:2 the phrase 'the one you love' is added to the modifier *yaḥid*." (cf. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 372).

[117] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 102.

knowledge of this deity, certainly he does not have access to the law, so Abraham did not know that Yhwh was not a God who required child sacrifice. By contrast, the sacrifice of Seila is not initiated by God, but by Jephthah who is either gambling with the life of others and/or attempting to manipulate God altogether (Judg 11:30–31).[118] Furthermore, his grasp of the Deuteronomic conquest of the land suggests some familiarity with law, yet his use of Yhwh's law extends only to his utilitarian purposes of gaining the upper hand over Ammon.[119] Interestingly, the children themselves also offer different responses: while both submit to their father's actions at some point in the narrative,[120] only Seila speaks up for herself, seeking time and space. Most notably, Yhwh does not intervene on behalf of Seila. Perhaps this is the result of the sinful nature of the vow or the pervasive silence of Yhwh throughout the narrative, but silence continues as Jephthah carries out his most egregious act against his daughter—unlike Isaac, Seila is not spared.[121]

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[118] Klein (*Triumph of Irony*, 95) argues that Jephthah's human sacrifice simply misses the point of the Abraham account. While Jephthah is attempting to demonstrate dedication and devotion like Abraham, he actually displays a pious ignorance, seeking to emulate Abraham's faith without Abraham's knowledge. Yet I wonder how Jephthah could have been aware of Abraham's account and yet have so grossly miscalculated the Torah's perspective on child sacrifice as a whole.

[119] The Deuteronomic influence in Jephthah's speech against Ammon is discussed in full detail in the previous chapter.

[120] Admittedly, Isaac does not seem aware of his father's intentions on the journey to the sacrifice, but at some point he is bound by his elderly father and placed on an alter, where his father's intent must have become glaringly obvious. There is no account of Isaac struggling to break free.

[121] The silence of Yhwh in the face of this vow is a difficult, and therefore much discussed, topic with no clear resolution. Many argue that, unlike with Abraham, this vow is entirely the product of Jephthah and Yhwh has nothing to do with it—therefore, Jephthah must face the consequences of his actions, even if his concern is more with his family line being cut off rather than for his daughter. (see Brensinger, *Judges*, 135). Yet it is the daughter, not Jephthah, who truly feels the consequences. Others demonstrate Yhwh's aversion for child sacrifice and his continued silence throughout the narrative to argue that the fault for the vow falls squarely on Jephthah (see McCann, *Judges*, 85–87; Bowman, "Narrative Criticism," 37). Still a few others insist that Yhwh not only accepts, but requires the fulfillment of the vow because God has already fulfilled his obligations (see Römer, "Why Would the Deuteronomists," 37–38; Janzen, "Why the Deuteronomist," 344–46; Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 33; Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 106).

Finally, the story of King Mesha of Moab, who offers his son as a sacrifice to defeat Israel in battle presents disturbing parallels with Jephthah's act (2 Kgs 3:26–27) as another example of a firstborn sacrificed in order to win a battle.[122] The story begins when King Mesha rebels against Israel, prompting the Israelite army to attack his city. As Mesha's troops fail, he seizes his oldest son and offers him as *a burnt offering* (עלה)—the exact same word that Jephthah uses to describe his promised offering (Judg 11:31).[123] Seemingly in response to this sacrifice, "a great wrath came upon Israel" and the Israelites were forced to abandon their war efforts (2 Kgs 3:27). The parallels between these accounts are clear: both leaders end up sacrificing their eldest child as *a burnt offering* (עלה)[124] and both victims remain nameless, emphasizing their value as an offering rather than their personhood an autonomous self. Yet there are important distinctions—firstly, unlike Mesha, Jephthah's sacrifice is conditional on a few factors, including victory from battle, returning home in peace, and (seemingly) someone coming out to greet him upon his arrival. Jephthah is not willing to pay the price of victory if he cannot enjoy it. Secondly, Jephthah's vow is open-ended and does not necessarily require his daughter to be the object of the vow.[125] While this demonstrates that he may not be intentionally targeting his

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[122] Soggins (*Judges*, 216) points to this text as the most obvious parallel with Jephthah's vow and sacrifice. He concludes that the similarities between the accounts demonstrate Jephthah's perceived risk level and his "calculated risk," knowing that his daughter was one of only a few who could come out of his house, but feeling the vow requisite for victory.

[123] Frymer-Kensky (*Reading the Women*, 111) argues that the presence of this story, along with specific prohibitions against child sacrifice and the Molech offering, demonstrates that Israelites were well aware of these practices and had experience with this custom, even if it was used only in extreme contexts. For Frymer-Kensky, this does not imply that the Israelites accepted the practice, but that it would be a well-known trope. She also points to other accounts of child sacrifice in the biblical texts, like King Ahaz, who "passed his son through the fire" (2 Kgs 16:3;,21:6; 2 Chr 33:6), and Jeremiah, who complains of the same Israelite practice in the valley of Hinnom (Jer 7:31).

[124] Dewrell (*Child Sacrifice in Ancient Israel*, 111) further notes the emphasis on Seila's status as only child, which would also make her the eldest child. Regardless of whether or not a daughter is properly considered a "firstborn," she is functionally so in this account, strengthening the parallel between them. He further notes that the term עלה is used in each account suggesting identical rites.

[125] Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice in Ancient Israel*, 111–12.

daughter, the language of the vow indicates that he is still willing to offer a human sacrifice, though perhaps hoping for someone else. Therefore, the vow itself is both pagan in nature and diminished in conviction when compared to Mesha's. As a result, Jephthah fails as an Israelite leader in his acceptance of human sacrifice, but he fails as a pagan king because he tries to offer someone (or something) of lesser value.

Comparing the narrative of Seila with these other accounts emphasizes both the tragedy of her story and the horror of Jephthah's actions. Like Achsah, she is promised as a reward to the victor in battle—but here the victor is Yhwh, and she is given over to death rather than marriage. Like Isaac, Seila is the object of her father's sacrifice, a demonstration of *his* faith and obedience, yet unlike Isaac she is not spared and her father is not obedient. She is also steadfast, like Isaac, despite the disingenuous nature of her father's offering and his calloused treatment of her. Finally, she is offered as a child sacrifice following the practice of pagan kings—yet this offering fails on both pagan and Yhwhist grounds. This is not primarily a story of Jephthah's tragedy, but of the heartbreaking abuse of one of Israel's vulnerable daughters.

Mode of Conduct: Exemplary Daughter, Fully Restored, and Perpetually Remembered

Seila is one of the few characters in this story (other than Yhwh) of whom the storyteller offers a positive evaluation, with only a few ambiguous issues clouding her reception.[126] Her poise and

[126] This conclusion is shared by the vast majority of scholars, even if they disagree on *which* aspects of her behavior are being praised. Famously, Stanton (*Woman's Bible,* 24–26) criticizes the views and values of the patriarchal storyteller who celebrates her submission to male authority, then re-writes the account so that the daughter does not acquiesce, but fights for her own life. Similarly, Exum ("Murder They Wrote," 31–32), lament that the male-dominated text glorifies the female submission that continues even unto death. Liptzin ("Jephthah and His Daughter," 392–94) praises both Jephthah and his daughter for their extreme acts of faith and obedience, holding them up as paragons of righteousness. Brensinger (*Judges*, 135) describes her as the most admirable and

courage in the face of death are awe-inspiring, regardless of how interpreters understand her personality and response. She does not simply walk towards danger (as one might go into battle, hoping to live but prepared to die), but turns resolutely towards a certain death. What's more, it is the daughter of Jephthah, not the judge who delivers Gilead from the Ammonites, who becomes an annual commemorative event in all of Israel. Yet the strength of her actions and the recollection of her story are curiously matched by her anonymity. Why would the storyteller introduce a character, emphasize her value, and then resign her to obscurity? The daughter, more than any other supporting actors in this story, speaks decisively, acts in integrity, and is the only one to render Jephthah silent.[127] I have called her Seila, but the storyteller has removed her name from the story—does this absence of her name diminish her evaluation?[128]

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godly character in the story, and contends that while she is certainly the victim, she is also a "devout encourager." Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 373) notes that she demonstrates "sensitivity and submissiveness." McCann (*Judges*, 88) goes as far as to liken her to a "type of Jesus" in the story. Butler (*Judges*, 293) adds that she is portrayed as "loyal, obedient, brave, courageous, a bit independent, and loved by her friends . . . by far the most sympathetic character in the Jephthah narratives and possibly in the last half of the book of Judges." There are only a few wholly negative reviews of the daughter's role in this story and each offers this evaluation in order to defend the character of Jephthah. For example, Janzen ("Why the Deuteronomist," 348) argues that the daughter is equally as guilty as Jephthah because she perpetuates pagan worship practices without protesting her father, yet she may have been unaware of true Yhwhism. First, Reis ("Spoiled Child," 270, 284–88) describes the daughter as a spoiled and impetus child, who thwarts the attempts of her pious father to free a slave in honor of Yhwh to selfishly exert her own agenda of perpetual virginity. This argument is only made tenable because of Reis's unconvincing claim that the daughter is not sacrificed as a burnt offering, but is dedicated to a life of perpetual virginity (by her own design). Finally, Ryan (*Judges*, 91) argues that the daughter manipulates Jephthah and is "intent upon her own self-sacrifice for reasons which are not disclosed," therefore framing her response to Jephthah as a demand for him to kill her, rather than a submission to his pre-determined will to sacrifice her. Unfortunately, Ryan draws most of these conclusions without support from the text, which undermines his insights.

[127] While Jephthah initiates dialogue with his daughter (11:35), she speaks twice after that (11:36, 37). In her speech she redirects his accusation and outlines the sequence of events that will follow and Jephthah agrees to her plan in one word, *go* (לכי) (11:38). Upon her return, he is again speechless—no direct speech is indicated nor any other indication of his response in contrast to the description of Jephthah's return to Mizpah (11:11). She has closed the mouth of Jephthah.

[128] Notably, all of the supporting characters in this study have been nameless, but there has been little or no scholarship that references their anonymity as an issue within the text. They are deemed negative characters, so the anonymity of their presentation is not viewed as problematic. Yet the daughter of Jephthah has a positive evaluation despite her anonymity; therefore, she is the only character in which the namelessness is consequential for her character evaluation. While some elements of this argument may be applied to other supporting characters, they are most significant for the daughter.

Seila remains nameless throughout the story, despite her meaningful interactions with Jephthah and the daughters of Israel. She is paradoxically known (in story and ceremony) and unknown (unnamed). Her lack of a name has drawn criticism among many feminist scholars, who perceive this missing attribution as a sign of her diminished place in the story.[129] While many narrative critics have rightly connected naming with personal significance in the biblical narratives, the lack of a name does not necessarily indicate a lack of importance.[130] On the contrary, in her study on anonymous characters in the book of Samuel, Reinhartz unpacks the use of anonymity as a literary tool in shaping believable stories.[131] She argues that unidentified characters have a mimetic quality that represents a broader experience—more specifically, readers have a "tendency to perceive that person . . . performing a typified role."[132] These characters, therefore, have the potential to become more than simply an individual within their social world; rather, they may serve as new exemplars to redefine and reshape the social construct they embody.[133] By refusing to name the daughter then, the narrator depicts a new

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[129] Fuchs (*Sexual Politics*, 60–62) argues that this instance is one among many in which remarkable women (particularly mothers) remain anonymous as the Hebrew Bible tries to "cut them down to size" by removing their name. Seidenberg ("Sacrificing the First You See," 55–56) argues that the anonymity reflects the narrator's criticism of the daughter, who should never have submitted to her father's unacceptable vow. Exum ("Murder They Wrote," 32) critiques the toxic culture in which the story was written, which trivializes the role of women as expendable and inconsequential. This is also echoed by Stiebert (*Fathers and Daughters*, 83), who notes that namelessness is a strategy to limit the praise that might be attributed to her, instead depicting her as a worthy sacrifice to fulfill her father's vow.

[130] According to Searle ("Proper Names," 172), names in a narrative act as "pegs" on which to hang all other attributes of character. These sentiments have been echoed throughout most literary-critical work on the biblical text.

[131] Reinhartz, "Anonymity and Character," 117–41.

[132] Reinhartz, "Anonymity and Character," 120.

[133] This is not unlike an advertising campaign for a new medication that narrates all of the life activities in which the patient may now participate, following the patient through their everyday life, yet never including the face of the participant on camera. The commercial urges viewers to see themselves as that newly revived person. The person is both particular (interacting with particular family members and friends, participating in specific activities, etc.) and an archetype for those hoping to regain their lives after a certain illness.

archetypical model for daughters in Israel.[134] In the following section, I will demonstrate that this archetype is not simply one of dutiful obedience and female submission, but of courage and strength, cleverness in speech, resistance to power structures, and finally finding solidarity with others in safe spaces. As such, Jephthah's daughter is both a person and an occasion—a person and a gathering point for all young women in similar situations.

Seila's positive evaluation is most clearly demonstrated in the narrative conclusion, in which the storyteller describes the annual commemoration of her story by the women in Israel.[135] The story reads that "she became a custom in Israel" (Judg 11:39b). The translation of this phrase is complicated because the verb *became* (ותהי) is expressed in the feminine form even though the noun *custom* (הק) is masculine, leading many to translate the feminine form as a neuter: "*it became* a custom in Israel."[136] Trible resolves this peculiarity by refocusing the

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[134] This project has chosen to name the daughter Seila as a deliberate strategy for the modern reader, who themselves associate anonymity with a lack of importance. By contrast, Reinhartz point develops the function of anonymity in the narrative structure. The two techniques are not contradictory, but complimentary to speak to different audiences, one modern and one ancient.

[135] Several scholars have studied this text to determine the nature of the festival. Day ("From the Child," 66) argues that this is an etiological account for a ritual of lament performed by young women who begin to meet maturity by recognizing that their own well-being needs to be held in tension with that of others. More recently, Olyan ("What Do We Really Know," 56–67) focuses instead on offering a review of the different rituals in antiquity and women's participation, suggesting that this story is Israel's own version of this common ancient trope. On the other hand, Janzen ("Why the Deuteronomist," 348) argues that this rite demonstrates the paganization of the Israelites. Gerstein ("Ritual Processed," 68) notes that this festival would be perceived differently by men and women: a symbolic act for a stage in women's life, or a connection to military patriotism for men. For a review of feminist perspectives addressing the patriotic and military nature of the festival, see Beavis, "Daughter in Israel," 11–25. There is no record of this particular festival being practiced in Israel within either the biblical text or external sources, but this neither confirms nor denies the frequency or long-term continuation of this practice, particularly given that this story is specifically identified as a women's festival and would likely be outside the interest of many biblical writers.

[136] See Soggin (*Judges*, 214, italics mine), who is following GKC §122*q*, in which a feminine form can be used in order to express the neuter, as seen in Ps 69:11. While "it" need not refer to the custom, rather the "thing the narrator is describing," this reading decenters the daughter from the ceremony. Moore (*Judges*, 303) connects this phrase with the previous clause, which is introduced with "and she" (והיא), therefore justifying the feminine verb. Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 435) translates this text in the neuter, but in nnote b offers a counter-reading, "she set an example in Israel."

subject of the verb on the daughter herself, instead translating, "*she* became a tradition in Israel."[137] While both "she" and "it" are linguistically possible, Trible's translation rightfully focuses on the subject of the rite—the story of the daughter—which is particularly meaningful in a culture that did not typically center the female experience. The young women of Israel are to recite her story annually so that *she* is remembered, despite dying without children.[138] It also seems significant that although Seila spent the most recent portion of her childhood in exile, she is now remembered by the daughters of Israel. This commemoration of her story, enfolded into the annual cycle of life for Israel's young women, demonstrates some degree of restoration.[139] She is one of *them*—both in her darkest hour and after her life is cut short.

The act of recounting this event is linguistically connected to the story of Deborah, who calls on the people of Israel to recount the story of Yhwh, "there they will *recount* (תנה) the righteous deeds of Yhwh" (Judg 5:11). Deborah has a notable legacy in the book of Judges as a prophet of Yhwh and a successful judge.[140] The statement that "from year to year the daughters

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[137] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 106–7; also Gorospe and Ringma, *Judges*, 164.

[138] Two interesting asides in regards to this mourning ritual. First, that Jephthah himself does not seem to emotionally respond to the death itself. Lockwood ("Jephthah's Daughter," 215) notes that even though Jephthah does tear his clothes as a sign of mourning, he does not cover himself in sackcloth and ashes, nor is he depicted entering into an extended period of mourning (cf. Gen 37:34–35; 44:27–31). It is also unclear if the narrator simply removes his grief upon completing her as a burnt offering or if the absence of grief is meant to shape the perception of Jephthah. Conversely, Conway (*Judging the Judges*, 511) notes that the mourning rites are picked up by the women in the community who mourn her loss perpetually, as well as the perpetual reminder of "what might have been if Jephthah had been less manipulating and selfish."

[139] Schneider (*Judges*, 182) suggests that this event may have been indirectly referenced in 21:21. While the event mentioned there is described as an annual feast of the deity (v. 19), the men approach the festival to find virgin wives for the Benjaminites and are able to find a number of young unmarried women celebrating together. Schneider postulates that these young women may have been celebrating the festival that began in honor of Jephthah's daughter.

[140] In her dissertation, Knight ("Like the Sun in Its Might," 116–22) argues for the overtly positive evaluation of the prophetess and judge, Deborah, who is one of the few judges in the judges cycle with *no* negative statements or allusions casting shade on her characterization. Knight demonstrates that the narrator makes a discernable effort to retain this positive evaluation that Deborah's prophetic nature and minimizing any hint of adversarial tones in her response to Barak. Wong (*Compositional Strategy*, 243) argues further that Deborah acts so

of Israel went out to *recount* (תנה) on behalf of the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite" (Judg 11:39b–40) is linguistically connected to Deborah's declaration that the people "will recount (תנה) the righteous deeds of Yhwh" (5:11b). Notably, these are the only two occurrences of this verb *to recount* (תנה) in the book of Judges. While the specific practices of this festival are unknown, the echoing between the two accounts reflects the acts of story recitation and remembrance at a similar level of remembering the deeds of Yhwh.[141] Each narrative echoes the importance of oral history, yet the correlation also highlights a contrast. In Deborah's song, she reminds her audience of the faithful and righteous deeds of Yhwh during the Canaanite conflict, yet the daughters of Israel withdraw from prying ears in order to remember the story of the daughter who is not saved by Yhwh (like Isaac) nor fights a great battle (like Jephthah) but is remembered for the manner of her death. Bal writes, "if the sons of Israel make history by fighting wars and going astray, the daughters of Israel recount the price that such a history requires."[142] The daughter is held up so that the Israelites would remember the cost—the only faithful member of the (בית אב) of Gilead dies by the hand of its new head of household.

The resonance between these two stories may suggest that Seila (like Yhwh) is recounted for her righteousness and therefore has a *positive* mode of conduct. Like Deborah, her valiant mode of conduct would be remembered by Israel's women, despite the increasingly dangerous world of men surrounding them. She is obedient, trustworthy, and good, yet her evaluation as "good" should not flatten the particularities of her disposition and the uniqueness of her

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much like an agent of Yhwh that it flattens her character; therefore, the multi-dimensional characterization typical of the judges cycle, which invariably includes the deeply flawed nature of the judges themselves, is missing in the account of Deborah.

[141] Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, 67.

[142] Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, 67.

response. In her anonymity, the story of Jephthah's daughter becomes more than an instance of passive obedience; rather, her reliability in the face of extreme personal loss becomes a new paradigm for young women in the Israelite household. As her disposition will show, this positive paradigm represents so much more than submission to male dominance, but also a voice of knowledge and measured defiance.

Disposition and Perspective within the Story: The Death of the Courageous, though Audacious, Daughter

The personality and perspective of Seila adds depth and complexity to the social archetypes of the dutiful daughter, which have been introduced in the account. Her disposition is primarily developed through her speech (which challenges expectations) and is further portrayed through the integrity of her words and actions, which are consistent with her speech. The daughter seems well aware of her father's scheming ways and unsurprised that they have rebounded upon him, making her collateral damage on his path to victory and perhaps to vengeance. While she complies with his vow, she is not tame and subservient, but bold and cunning—revealing the disingenuous intentions of her father and refusing to carry his blame. She, like many women before her, utilizes his expectations of her gender in order to soften her situation temporarily and gain the very thing his vow denies her: time.

Seila as the Sole Demonstration of Loyalty, Honoring the Hero of Gilead

Upon Jephthah's triumphant return to Mizpah, he is greeted with disappointment that then compounds into tragedy. In the previous situation with his brothers and the elders (Judg 10:17—11:11), Jephthah had bargained for his restoration to Gilead (and his father's house), relishing his

return and promotion as head of the household. After the battle, the text reads that "Jephthah entered Mizpah, to his house" (v. 34a), demonstrating the shift in Jephthah's "home" from the land of Tob (v. 5) to Mizpah (vv. 11 and 34a)—likely restoring him to the land and house of his father and bringing his daughter from a non-traditional household into a more traditional setting. Yet the utilitarian nature of the brother's agreement clouds the text, and it remains to be seen how the brothers/elders would relate to Jephthah (and Seila) after the battle is won. Would they celebrate their victorious half-brother as one of their own, or is their reinstatement of Jephthah as selfish as it seems?

The wording of Jephthah's vow (vv. 30–31) links his sacrificial offering to *both* his victory in battle *and* the anticipated celebration of his triumphant return.[143] Although Jephthah's vow refers to only one person coming out of his house, he is likely anticipating that his return will be greeted by a welcoming party, as was the custom for the people of the city to greet their victor. Biddle notes that the "most likely scenario for greeting a hero returning from victory on the battlefield would be a human welcoming party,"[144] not least of these would be the women who celebrate the military exploits of Israel's heroes.[145] This expectation can be seen in the language of the vow itself, which states that "the one coming out . . . when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon" (v. 31)—which describes the people of Gilead (and in particular his own

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[143] See p. 220 for a full evaluation of the vow itself.

[144] Biddle, *Reading Judges*, 127.

[145] Boda ("Daughter's Joy," 338) in particular connects the role of female participants, particularly daughters, in these "calls to joy" by connecting the victories to the metaphor of Daughter of Zion. Cf. Meyers, "Of Drums and Damsels," 16–27; Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer*, 110.

house) exiting their homes to greet their victor, marking the occasion with a procession of timbrel, dancing, and song (see Exod 15:20; Judg 5; 1 Sam 19:6).[146]

Unfortunately for Jephthah, his reception party goes from underwhelming to tragic as his only child is also his only celebrant. The one who "come[s] out from the doors of my house to meet me" could have been his daughter, but it could also be any number of family members from the households of the brothers who had exiled him.[147] When the storyteller introduces the daughter, and *only* the daughter, the striking element is not simply that she is the first to leave his house, but that she may also be the *only one* to greet him.[148] For Jephthah, this lonely procession would have been a tragedy in itself, but it is compounded by the fact that the only act of loyalty he receives comes from the daughter whom he must now sacrifice—thereby destroying his only hope for the future of his household.

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[146] Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 212.

[147] Only a few have noted this shift in occupancy. Burney (*Book of Judges*, 300) suggests that this problem is the result of conflicting sources that shaped the final form of the book, yet he under-appreciates the significance of Jephthah's negotiation and restoration to the house of Gilead as an important element in the narrative. Klein (*Triumph of Irony,* 88) understands "Mizpah" to be a literary, rather than a historical, tool to create irony—he goes to the "watch tower" (the meaning of the name Mizpah) but does not see the implications until it is too late. More recently, Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 213) recognizes this shift from Tob to Mizpah as an important element of the narrative, demonstrating a shift in his home as a representation of his transition in status granted by the elders. Yet even Assis fails to see the implications on this shift in regards to the victim of his vow. More recently, some scholars have argued that Jephthah intended for his daughter to be the sacrifice because only such a sacrifice would represent a sacrifice that was truly costly (Lockwood, "Jephthah's Daughter," 213–14; cf. Olson, "Judges," 2:832).

[148] Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 214–15) points out that the phrase literally rendered, "she is the *only* one" (ורק היא יהידה) can be understood a reference to her status as only child (which is then repeated for emphasis) or read with the previous clause: "there was his daughter coming out to meet him, with timbrel and dance! She is the only one." The doubling not only adds emphasis—but acts as an indication of her solitary procession and/or as Jephthah's only child. Frymer-Kensky (*Reading the Women*, 108) suggests that she was not supposed to be there to begin with because the custom would typically involve women (נשׁים), not pubescent girls. Yet it is unclear if age restrictions were part of the custom or if younger girls were simply not mentioned. Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 439) assumes that there were many present in this processional, but that Jephthah's gaze was fixed on his daughter. He bases this argument on tradition—the custom assumes a group of women, not one, yet there is no indication within the text that other women were present.

Seila is depicted in wholly loyal and trustworthy terms. Her action in the story is framed with two verbs: she *came out* (יצא) to greet Jephthah (v. 34) and she *returned* (שוב) to meet her death (v. 39). The text introduces her as someone who faithfully observes custom, celebrating the returning war hero of Gilead and the victory of Yhwh, and it concludes with her keeping her word to return, even though it costs her her life. This act of faithful celebration is even more profound when remembering her own context as a newly restored outcast—this *new* daughter of Mizpah does not follow the lead of the silent villagers.[149] Even though Jephthah and his daughter have been brought back from exile and restored to their position in Mizpah they are still treated as outsiders.[150] As discussed in the social code, daughters are dependent on their guardians, therefore Jephthah must have left her in the care of her mother (though she is never mentioned, neither as care giver or as celebrant in the procession) or is with other relatives. Yet here, Seila does not follow the lead of her guardians. Instead, the story highlights her independent action through the use of a disjunctive (והנה בתו—"and behold! His daughter"), which interrupts the flow of waw-consecutive forms in vv. 33–34a and draws attention to Seila's actions. This is followed by the verbal phrase: "*was coming out* (יצאת) *to meet him* (לקראתו)" (v. 34). Echoing the language of Jephthah's vow, "the one that comes out (יצא) from the doors of my house to meet me (לקראתי)" (v. 31), the narrator removes any doubt that she will indeed be the object of the vow.[151]

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[149] A similar situation can be seen in the story of the Levite and his concubine, who upon entering Gibeah, are not greeted properly until someone from their own territory—the hill country of Ephraim—approaches them to offer them lodging (19:15–20). In both scenarios, there seems to be a hint that something is not quite right in the city long before the tragic deaths occur.

[150] Note the elders' initial reluctance to offer the same prize of "headship" that they had already offered to all the inhabitants of Gilead (see p. 140).

[151] Trible (*Texts of Terror*, 100) notes the importance of the word choice in the daughter's introduction as the ambiguous vow now becomes abundantly clear: she is his sacrifice.

She goes out alone and she alone becomes the fulfillment of the vow—unique in celebrating her father who has saved their people from Ammon and unique in facing her death. This solitary act casts a shadow on the inhabitants of Mitzpah, who seem to have only half-heartedly restored Jephthah, and emphasizes the bravery, loyalty, and nobility of Seila's actions. This moment also emphasizes her boldness—she will celebrate like the daughter of a warrior rather than hide as the child of an outcast.

Jephthah's Accusation, Shifting Blame to Seila

Reading the story from Jephthah's perspective highlights his seeming shock at his daughter's sudden appearance, which designates her as the sacrifice.[152] However, when read from Seila's vantage point, the story expresses a different kind of shock—that her act of loyalty is regarded as an act of treachery. Jephthah's physical response at his daughter's appearance suggests that he is in distress. The text states that "he tore his clothes" (v. 35) when he sees her approach, a traditional sign of distress (eg. Gen 37:29; 44:13; Num 14:6; 2 Kgs 2:12), which typically elicits sympathy for Jephthah who is perceived as a grieving father, realizing the depth of his foolish vow.[153] Yet conspicuously, this is the only sign of physical distress attributed to the "grieving"

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[152] Some scholars have attempted to explain his shock and her calm be suggesting a pre-arrangement by father-daughter before his arrival. For example, Fewell and Gunn (*Gender, Power, and Promise*, 127) argue that she is aware of her father's vow because of the public nature of his promise and chooses to comes out to greet him in order to protect others from the cruel fate. They conclude, "her voluntary action passes judgement on her father's willingness to bargain for glory with the life of another." This is indeed a plausible interpretation, which is consistent with the disposition presented in this chapter, but perhaps not the most obvious reading.

[153] Numerous scholars have recognized Jephthah's act of tearing his robes in grief as an act of genuine emotion, even if they disagree with the object of that grief. Sjöberg (*Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 43) argues that the perspective of Jephthah is the focalized intent of the narrator, demonstrating that his grief is the center point of this scene, and thereby that the narrator reserves condemnation. McCann (*Judges*, 83–84) empathizes with the grief of Jephthah and his personal loss as a father. Webb (*Integrated Reading*, 67), who has an altogether negative reading of Jephthah, points to this act of grief as a genuine attestation of his renewed understanding of his daughter's value.

father. He does not put on sackcloth or ashes, nor does he lament, fast, weep, or cover himself in ashes after his daughter accepts the consequences of his vow (v. 37).[154] Similarly, when he completes his vow in the end, there is no emotion expressed at all—no gratitude at the reunion from her wilderness wanderings nor sorrow upon her death. His reaction is presented in stark contrast to her companions, who *weep* (בכה) with her (twice, vv. 37–38), as well as to the annual custom that commemorates her (vv. 39b–40). Jephthah is surprisingly impassive.

While all Jephthah's initial physical response reflects the emotionally charged situation of her arrival, his words of accusation that follow stand in contrast to the seeming grief of the father. When Jephthah opens his mouth to speak to his daughter, his speech reveals that he recognizes the disaster of this moment *for him*, but that he disregards the implications of the moment for his daughter.[155] The few words Jephthah musters towards his daughter ring with self-absorbed bitterness: "Ah! My daughter! You have brought me *very low*! *You* are like one of those who cause me trouble! For *I* have opened my mouth to Yhwh, and I cannot take it back" (v. 35). The initial accusation includes two clauses that utilize a play on the letters כ, ר, and ע —הכרַע הכרַעתני ואת היית בעכרי—the oral resonance dramatizing and compounding the harshness of

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Butler (*Judges*, 290) argues that seeing her causes Jephthah great sorrow and anxiety, demonstrated through his act of tearing his clothes. Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 372) addresses Jephthah's grief but contends that it was not directed towards the death of his daughter but towards his own personal loss. Boda and Conway (*Judges*, 31) note that the combination of torn clothes and his immediate cry (הנה) expresses his fear and despair, citing similar incidents in Josh 7:7; Judg 6:22; 2 Kgs 3:10, 6:5, 15.

[154] Compare this with other acts of distress and mourning—e.g., Reuben tears his robes upon seeing the empty pit in which his brothers had been holding Joseph in Gen 37:29, while Jacob tears his clothes, puts on sackcloth, and mourns Joseph's apparent death in v. 34. When the act of tearing robes stands alone, it seems to indicate significant emotion or distress (see Gen 44:13; Num 14:6; 2 Kgs 2:12; 5:7–8; 11:14; 22:11; 2 Chr 23:13; 34:19). However, when it is depicted in conjunction with other acts of mourning, it suggests a more intense experience of mourning or grief (see Josh 7:6; 2 Sam 1:2, 11–12; 3:31; 15:32; 1 Kgs 21:27; 2 Kgs 6:30; 18:37–19:2; 22:19; 2 Chr 34:27).

[155] Brensinger (*Judges*, 135) observes, "[h]e offers no comfort or reassurance. The child, without siblings, therefore finds herself with no noticeable parental compassion either."

his response.[156] Jephthah utilizes the *hiphil* of the verb (כרע), typically rendered "to cause to bow down" or "bring someone down," but he combines a finite verbal form with the infinitive absolute to give it intensity and force—she has *forced* him down.[157] The second clause again makes the daughter the active agent in bringing Jephthah pain. The term *trouble* (עכר) in narrative texts most often references significant sins, which incur divine wrath: for example, those of Simeon and Levi (Gen 34:30), Achan (Josh 7:25; 1 Chr 2:7), Saul (1 Sam 14:29), and Ahab (1 Kgs 18:17, 18).[158] Here Jephthah is accusing his daughter of causing the kind of trouble that brings about the wrath of God, which is harsh rhetoric directed towards a young girl who is trying to honor her father.[159] Furthermore, designating the girl as "one of those who causes me trouble" recalls *all* of Jephthah's troublesome earlier interactions—with his brothers, the elders, and the Ammonites. A dark irony pervades his response because, although he speaks to each "enemy" in the narrative, the loyal daughter is the *only one* he identifies as the cause of his

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[156] Wijk-Bos (*End of the Beginning*, 261) notes the wrenching effect of the tearing of robes combined with the play on words in Jephthah's speech, in which the *k-r* sound repeats three times, imitating the sound of his tearing robes. Other treatments of this play on words can be found in Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 440; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 373; cf. GKC §133*c* and §136*f*.

[157] The use of this particular verb suggests several biblical connections. Webb (*Book of Judges* [NICOT], 332) notes that this same phrase is used to describe Sisera being laid low by Jael in 5:27 and is also employed in 2 Sam 22:40 to denote enemies being laid low in battle. Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 440) highlights the sense of forced submission, which combines with the second phrase utilizing the verb (עכר), which is about generating harm or torment for others. Lockwood ("Jephthah's Daughter," 215) notes that this verb is also used in Job 31:10 to describe male-on-female sexual violence, suggesting that Jephthah equates her actions with sexual coercion. Trible (*Texts of Terror*, 102, 112) observes, the intensification of the infinitive absolute, which emphasizes the daughter as the cause of calamity, also echoing a similar grammatical construction with the infinitive absolute in the vow (Judg 11:30).

[158] Lockwood, "Jephthah's Daughter," 215–16.

[159] Ironically, Amit (*Book of Judges*, 88) suggests that God allows the girl to come out to meet Jephthah in order to punish him for promising a human sacrifice. Therefore, the *trouble* in this narrative is brought on by Jephthah, and she is merely the recipient of the divine wrath.

trouble.[160] This verbal response amounts to a betrayal, shifting the burden of responsibility to Seila and re-characterizing her act of loyalty as an act of treachery.[161]

Jephthah concludes that, because the vow has been spoken (v. 35), it cannot be taken back.[162] This strange reference to the vow, "I have opened my mouth,"[163] echoes and repurposes the meaning of Jephthah's name.[164] *Jephthah,* from the verb *to open* (פתח), which likely once referenced his status as a "womb opening" son and inheritor of Gilead,[165] now shifts to describe the foolish nature of his open mouth. While it is certainly important to fulfill vows in biblical literature, faithfulness to Yhwh does not necessarily imply blind obedience to a vow that violates the covenant.[166] The biblical narratives themselves demonstrate that vows could be nullified in

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[160] Furthermore, Klein (*Triumph of Irony*, 21, 95–96) argues that the judges are representations of Israel, and as such: "Jephthah's unwillingness to accept responsibility for his errors and displacing them on the victim are subtle comments on the condition of Israel."

[161] Whether Jephthah is indeed blame-shifting is debated among scholars, but most at least wrestle with the accusatory tone of his response. For example, Lockwood ("Jephthah's Daughter," 214–15) describes Jephthah's speech as "blaming the victim" and even "gas-lighting" to provoke a response from his daughter. Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 440) argues that in Jephthah's eyes the blame lies with God as much as the daughter, noting that the use of "alas" (אהה) in narratives is almost always followed by "LORD God," but concluding that Jephthah also admits to his own mistake in the end. A few others persist in defending Jephthah, often at the expense of the daughter by softening the rhetoric of Jephthah's remarks and minimizing his intention: Niditch, *Judges*, 134; Logan, "Rehabilitating Jephthah," 679; Reis, "Spoiled Child," 284; Ryan, *Judges*, 89. In response to those who seek to defend Jephthah's language, Boda and Conway (*Judges*, 31n) offer a secondary evaluation of his rhetoric, analyzing the text in Codex Vaticanus to demonstrate an early underlying Hebrew rendering that articulates a clearly accusatory phrase, "you have brought disaster on me." While this reading does not supersede the MT, this suggests that in the earliest readings of the story, Jephthah made his daughter culpable for his trouble. Cf. Butler, *Judges*, 291; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 373; Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 216; Trible, "Meditation in Mourning," 63; Klein, Triumph of *Irony*, 95–96).

[162] For more on the significance of making a vow and the power of words through Jephthah's mouth in this account, see Cartledge, *Vows in the Hebrew Bible*, 179–80; Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, 60–65; Ziegler, *Promises to Keep*, 25–52; Parker, "Vow in Ugaritic," 493–500.

[163] Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 373f) notes that the word *vow* (נדר) never actually appears in this conversation, rather the text speaks of "what has proceeded from his mouth."

[164] Garsiel (*Biblical Names*, 105–6) argues that the meaning of names in the biblical text corresponds to a central point in the action of the protagonist; therefore, Jephthah's name is an etymological legend about how he opened his mouth in a vow to God (cf. Klein, *Triumph of Irony*, 94; Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, 48; Marais, *Representation in Old Testament Narrative Texts*, 119–20).

[165] See p. 115.

[166] The necessity of the vow's completion is highly debated because of conflicting biblical evidence. For example, Niditch (*War in the Hebrew Bible*, 665–85) argues that Jephthah's vow was made in the midst of war

cases where they were made foolishly, unfaithfully, or in violation of broader Israelite tradition. For example, in 1 Sam 14:24–46, Saul makes a rash vow cursing anyone who ate before he had avenged himself of the Philistines, but Jonathan ate because he had not heard his father's oath, yet Saul's men convince him not to put Jonathan to death. Although the text points out the foolishness of Saul's vow, there is no condemnation on Saul for not *fulfilling* his vow and murdering his son. As in that account, the object of Jephthah's vow is a human being, a sacrifice that God unequivocally condemns.[167] Even before knowing that the vow would implicate his daughter, Jephthah is still apparently *willing* to offer an unacceptable sacrifice: a human person (child or adult) or even an unclean animal if it should wander out.[168] The final clause of Jephthah's speech does not indicate the intractable nature of the vow; rather, his unwillingness to turn aside from its grotesque implications—Seila will die.

Throughout this story, Jephthah invokes the name of Yhwh more than any other character, yet he wields the name of his God like a pagan king.[169] Yhwh is a bargaining chip in

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using language similar to *ḥerem* in Num 21:2–3; therefore, the vow was binding and absolute. Hamilton (*Handbook on the Historical Books*, 145) argues that there are no provisions for annulling a vow made to God within the biblical text; rather, those were created during the postbiblical rabbinic traditions—though this does not adequately deal with the prohibitions in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. On the other hand, Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 377) argues that Jephthah could have redeemed his daughter through a priest, a notion found in the Targum (cf. Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, 265). Chisholm ("Ethical Challenge," 413–15) offers a helpful assessment on the different ways scholars have handled the necessity of the vow before concluding that Jephthah did have other options. Sjöberk (*Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 31) notes the needlessness of carrying out the vow as a means to affect change in the story—rather it is an agent of maintaining what Jephthah had previously haggled: "there is no evidence that the fulfilment of the vow changes the outcome of the story. In fact, it changes neither the relationship between Jephthah and God, nor that between Jephthah and the people of Gilead. Thus, the absolute ending of the relationship between Jephthah and his daughter through the sacrifice preserves the status quo of the other relationships." In this case, the status quo implies a distant deity (his vow completion does not improve this because it sacrifices a human being) and the people of Gilead remain temporarily under his leadership.

[167] Cf. Lev 18:21, 20:1–5; Deut 12:31, 18:10.

[168] See p. 226.

[169] Many scholars have struggled with the juxtaposition of Jephthah's keen knowledge of Israelite history, as demonstrated in his discourse with the Ammonite king, yet his misunderstanding of Israelite religion. Klein (*Triumph of Irony*, 96) argues that because Jephthah was sent away from his family, he did not have a full

his negotiations with the elders (Judg 11:9) and a rallying cry for the people of Gilead (Judg 11:11, 27, 30–31). By intentionally connecting his restoration to his people and the victory over Ammon to the work of Yhwh, he has branded himself "Yhwh's leader," conflating his leadership with the rule of Yhwh. Therefore, acknowledging the inappropriateness of his vow made in Yhwh's name would weaken his mantle as Yhwh's chosen one. How committed is Jephthah to his own deceptive rhetoric? Will he preserve his *only* child and lineage, admitting his fallacious use of the divine and perhaps the vindictive intentions of his vow? Or will he protect his newly given role as head in Gilead by continuing the ruse? The storyteller answers this question before it has time to fully develop in the mind of the readers: Jephthah has opened his mouth, and he will not take it back.

Seila's First Response: Acceptance of Her Fate, but Rejection of Her Guilt

Most scholars have noted the faithfulness and obedience of Seila to her father's foolish will, yet they disagree on the significance and manner of her obedience.[170] Here the social code that underlies the role of the daughter significantly shapes the characterization of Seila's response. In many ways, she is trapped in a system that requires a loving father in order for her well-being to be preserved, yet her father is demonstrably self-involved and manipulative. Seila cannot prevent her death, but she can work within the confines of her social status to effect *some* change. According to Russaw, daughters in antiquity could navigate their place within systems of power

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understanding of Yhwh-ism and therefore filled in the gaps of his knowledge with other polytheistic beliefs. Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 367) points to his scheming nature that extends to his attempt to manipulate the divine, which demonstrates that he is an "outrightly pagan" judge.

[170] See p. 234 n.126.

in a two ways: they could accommodate, or they could resist.[171] Importantly, Seila's response to Jephthah's despair and condemnation indicates *both* accommodation and subtle resistance. Her place within her family (nubile daughter) and society (returning outcast) does not allow her much self-determination; therefore, she accommodates to her father's demand on her life. However, she reshapes his claims into a slightly more manageable form by resisting the burden of blame and offering her own subtle rebuke.

Seila's response includes a substantial concession—"do to me as came out of your mouth" (v. 36)—expressing her calm acceptance of the binding nature of her father's words spoken to Yhwh. Her acquiesce to her father's vow is not an endorsement of its virtues, but a recognition of its inevitability.[172] Jephthah's speech to his daughter (v. 35) is *not* a negotiation—a first for the precocious judge—instead, upon seeing her, he accuses the daughter of wrongdoing and then affirms his commitment to his vow.[173] His address offers no invitation for response (as with King Getal), and she holds no bargaining chip to entice him to change his mind (as with the elders of Gilead). Therefore, there is (seemingly) no room for her to negotiate the outcome. Jephthah has opened his mouth, and she understands the implications. As the daughter

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[171] Russaw (*Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 163) articulates this point through the use of several different stories. For example, Miriam accommodates to the system of power when she sings for Moses (Exod 15:21), therefore finding her voice within it, yet still deferring to Moses' authority. Yet Miriam also resists systems of power by defying Pharaoh's decree to throw Hebrew baby boys into the Nile (2:4–8) and by rejecting Moses' exclusive claim to leadership (Num 12:1–2). Their responses to these systems of power are based on the degree of antagonism within the system as well as their ability to enact change.

[172] Contra Sjöberg (*Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 67), who argues that in agreeing to meet her death she "theologically legitimizes the sacrifice." Sjöberg fails to consider the daughter's social location and her inability to effect change with regard to her father's vow. In speaking up, she will never be able to subvert the will of her father, but through this acquiesce she is able to negotiate for time (see also Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 103).

[173] DeMaris and Leeb ("Judges," 177–90) argue that his restoration to Gilead would have required that he complete the sacrifice, regardless of the fact that it was his only child. If Jephthah were to spare her life, his future in Gilead would be in jeopardy.

of the restored exile, she is subject to the will of her father and has few, if any, voices willing to speak on her behalf.[174] Therefore, she accommodates to her father's will by agreeing to his vow. To accommodate a power structure does not imply an endorsement of that structure or situation; rather, it is a testament to the disparity between those with power and those without. As the book of Judges unfolds, the power disparity between male and female characters becomes more and more profound, with women moving from heroic roles to tragic ones. Seila's story begins to show the downward slope of Israel's rigid and abusive patriarchy.[175]

Seila responds to her father's disturbing blame with composure, narrowing the focus from the ambiguous object of an unattributed vow (vv. 30–31) to the personal nature of its fulfillment in herself. She does not distance herself from Jephthah or allow herself to be counted among his enemies; rather, she addresses him as "my father" (v. 36).[176] Notably, for the remainder of their interaction, neither the storyteller nor the characters refer to him by his name, Jephthah, rather he is designated in relationship to his daughter—after Seila refers to him as "my father," the narrator describes his interaction as "her father" twice (vv. 37, 39).[177] Thus the storyteller consistently reminds the reader of the identity of her executioner.

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[174] Arguably, the daughters of Israel who go to the mountains to mourn with her may speak up, but they too have little ability to effect change. This presents a contrast to the vow of Saul, which is nullified when the men in his army intervene on Jonathan's behalf (1 Sam 14). Furthermore, Wijk-Bos (*End of the Beginning*, 261) notes that there do not seem to be any cultic personnel around to intervene or offer a substitute.

[175] For an analysis of the power disparity, particularly among female characters, see Chisholm, "Role of Women," 34–49; cf. Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, 21–24.

[176] Outside of the connections with Gen 22 (see p. 230), many scholars have noted the sensitivity and affection implied in this address (e.g., Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 373; Schneider, *Judges*, 179). Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 440) goes so far as to say that the vocative, *my father*, "must certainly have torn a hole in Jephthah's heart."

[177] Stiebert, *Fathers and Daughters*, 76.

Seila's response to her father is not merely capitulation to the patriarch, but includes a subtle rebuke regarding both his passing of the blame and his motivation for its fulfillment.[178] Her initial response (v. 36) includes both an identification of the origin of Jephthah's vow—"you opened *your mouth* to Yhwh; do to me as came out of *your mouth*"—and an articulation of Jephthah's motivation—"because Yhwh *avenged* you of *your enemies*, the sons of Ammon." Seila's language echoes Jephthah's initial response to her, making two succinct references to the open mouth of Jephthah, and no direct statement of the content of the vow. How does Seila know what the vow entails?[179] This presents a few divergent portraits of Jephthah, all of them dubious—he is a shrewd negotiator, who intends for his daughter to die in order to offer the most costly sacrifice to Yhwh (and only feigns grief),[180] a foolish man who makes a rash vow because of uncertainty and a lack of trust in Yhwh,[181] or a high-risk gambler who is hoping for the best (perhaps an act of vengeance).[182] The storyteller presents Jephthah as a man of words, who is

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[178] Claassens ("Female Resistance," 613) refers to this as "counter-language": resistance language of those on the margins. She notes that this language maintains the marginalized character's version of the events, creating (or reframing) a new reality.

[179] While most assume that the daughter understood that the vow would lead to her sacrificial death, some have questioned whether or not Seila is fully aware of the content of the vow that she agrees to, or at which point she becomes aware. Russaw (*Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 87) maintains that she is unaware of the exact content of the vow, though agrees to it anyway. Schneider (*Judges*, 179) points out the Jephthah never describes the content of the vow, but that the daughter seems to understand enough to make a final request in v. 37. Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 441) similarly points out that it is unclear whether or not the daughter is fully aware of what her father had vowed until it is too late.

[180] See Martin, *Book of Judges*, 145; Olson, "Judges," 2:832; Lockwood, "Jephthah's Daughter," 213–15.

[181] See Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 97, 100, 104; McCann, *Judges*, 82; Boling, *Judges*, 207; Schneider, *Judges*, 174–75. Frymer-Kensky (*Reading the Women*, 106) argues that the wording of the vow is foolish, even if the practice of wartime vow-making was normally an honorable act.

[182] For example, Cartledge (*Vows in the Hebrew Bible*, 179–80) argues that Jephthah is gambling with the outcome—allowing for the possibility that his daughter would come out first but hoping for an animal instead. Similarly, Exum (*Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, 1648n8) argues that he would have expected a woman to come out to meet him, regardless of whether it was his daughter, though perhaps hoping for someone else. Webb (*Integrated Reading*, 64–65) urges that Jephthah's vow is not rash or foolish but another manipulative ploy to move God to act on his behalf—he risks his daughter, but hopes for a different outcome. Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 212) notes that if Jephthah wanted to offer an animal, there is specific language that would designate a "choice offering" for Yhwh; instead, "Jephthah's words introduced the subject of the homage that he hoped to

constantly using speech to manipulate his position in the community. The "mouth" of Jephthah is a weapon, and Seila is well aware of its destructive power. Yet this simple phrase also demonstrates that Seila credits Yhwh, not Jephthah, for the military victory, even though she was not present to know that the Spirit of Yhwh had come upon her father. She echoes Israelite tradition in giving credit to Yhwh for the victory in battle, and by separating the clauses about vow and victory, she may be implying that the vow was superfluous.[183]

Jephthah admits that he first "opened his mouth" (v. 35) to Yhwh, and the daughter repeats this language twice for emphasis. Sasson points out that most attestations of the mouth (or lips) in the biblical text offer a less-than-flattering depiction: the earth opens its mouth to accept innocent blood (Gen 4:10) and people open their mouths vapidly (Job 35:16), sometimes to threaten the innocent (Ps 22:14; Lam 2:16, 3:36).[184] As a result, the "mouth" can be used as an idiom to suggest false or foolhardy speech.[185] Seila wryly reiterates the foolishness of his words spoken "to Yhwh" that are to be applied "to me." The daughter has undoubtedly known her father's penchant for calculating negotiations, as well as his self-serving determination. She knows that when her father opens his mouth, both cunning and foolishness flow out. Lockwood contends that, because of the consistent portrayal in the narrative of Jephthah's manipulative predisposition, his only child would likely be familiar with this dangerous predilection. He

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receive among those greeting him on his return home as victor." I find Assis's argument most intriguing. For the argument that Jephthah may have been seeking vengeance against his brothers, see p. 224.

[183] Greves, "Daughter of Courage," 164.

[184] Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 440.

[185] See also Biddle (*Reading Judges*, 133). The idiom often references foolhardy speech (Job 35:16; Ps 66:14; Isa 10:14; Lam 2:16; 3:46), though it can also indicate ravenous consumption (Gen 4:11; Num 16:30; Deut 11:6; Ps 22:14; Ezek 2:8).

suspects that "she has long known . . . that everything that comes out of his mouth is inherently destructive."[186]

Seila continues her clever rebuttal by identifying Jephthah's self-serving intentions for the battle and its vow. On one end, she demonstrates Yhwhist wisdom, attributing the victory in battle to Yhwh alone,[187] yet her right war theology conceals a right rebuke. Notably, the daughter's speech uses second-person pronouns ("because Yhwh *avenged you* of *your enemies*, the people of Ammon") attached to both *avenged* and *enemies*, rather than the traditional third-person markers associated with the enemies of Israel.[188] Assis observes that the daughter's language characterizes Jephthah's fight against Ammon as a private war for vengeance, not a battle for the public good of Gilead.[189] The word *avenge* (נקמה) occurs twenty-nine times in the Hebrew Bible and is primarily used to describe (or call for) God's justice against the enemies of Israel.[190] Interestingly, the word is used in the context of personal vengeance only on a handful of occasions and mostly with a negative inflection: twice in the Psalms[191] and four times elsewhere, where it is found in the mouth of those accused of inappropriate vengeance or is used to justify ill intent.[192] Seila strokes her father's ego by reminding him of his victory over

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[186] Lockwood, "Jephthah's Daughter," 87. Though Lockwood does not explain this sentiment, it is presumably connected to the intimate knowledge of familial relationship.

[187] Many scholars marvel at the theological interpretation of the battle from such a young girl, yet their analysis of her speech does not move beyond this initial insight (cf. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 373).

[188] Cf. Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing," 42.

[189] Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 218; contra Burney (*Book of Judges*, 300), who reads the personal pronouns to mean that Jephthah had a personal quarrel with the Ammonites outside of their conflict with Gilead.

[190] E.g., Num 31:2–3; Pss 94:1 (twice); 149:7; Jer 11:20; 20:2; 46:10; 50:15, 28 (twice); 51:6, 11(twice), 36 (twice); Ezek 25:14 (twice), 17.

[191] Pss 18:47; 79:10.

[192] In Jer 20:10, the enemies of Jeremiah look for a weakness so that they may wreak "vengeance" on him. Lamentations 3:60 offers a cry for God's justice because he has seen their "vengeance" and the schemes against them. In Ezek 25:15, God states that the Philistines are punished because they acted in "vengeance" against Israel.

Ammon, while simultaneously critiquing his motivation—Jephthah fought for himself, not Israel.

Furthermore, the daughter responds to Jephthah's accusation that she is among "those who cause [him] trouble" (v. 35) by recalling Jephthah's enemies.[193] Again, the daughter personalizes the enemies—Yhwh enabled him to defeat *his* enemies. It seems worth asking, who are the enemies of Jephthah in this text? *So far*, his brothers have exiled and humiliated him (vv. 1–3). The elders (his brothers) have tried to negotiate his military assistance without his full restoration to Gilead (vv. 6–8), and King Getal has not addressed him as a proper chief of Gilead (v. 13). The reference to Yhwh delivering Jephthah "from his enemies" (מאיביך) is followed by "from the sons of Ammon" (מבני עמון). Yet those are not the only enemies he faces. His daughter, however, is not one of them. Seila's words, clothed in the self-controlled cadence of one without power, casts doubt on Jephthah's version of his story.

While many are confused and distraught that Seila does not fight for her life, she understands the inevitability of her fate.[194] Rather than waiting for her father to force his authority over her, she chooses to offer herself willingly. In agreeing to the vow, she takes Jephthah's power of decision away from him—he cannot force her to die if she goes willingly. If she must die, she will do so on her own terms. In her essay on female resistance in the story of Jephthah, Claassens asserts that "to be human means to resist those forces that seek to assault,

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The last occasion is unique in that it describes the "vengeance" of God on behalf of David—yet it comes from Rechab and Bannah, who are justifying their assassination of Ish-Bosheth to David and die soon after (2 Sam 4:8).

[193] Greves, "Daughter of Courage," 164; cf. Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing," 42.

[194] Russaw (*Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 151) points out that the social structures, both tradition and legal mechanisms, legitimize the father's power and authority over their daughter. It would have been nearly impossible for Seila to outright reject the authority of Jephthah to determine her next steps.

violate, or obscure one's human dignity."[195] Seila uses her response in order to reclaim her integrity after her father's cruel accusation and take away some of Jephthah's power by turning it into a personal choice.

Seila's Second Response: Negotiating for Space and Solidarity

Seila's immediate acceptance of her fate and her successful deflection of its blame result in Jephthah's stunned silence, evidenced by the repetition of a second speech phrase, *she said* (ותאמר, v. 37a), without an intervening response from Jephthah.[196] The daughter speaks a second time, negotiating what fulfillment of that vow might look like: "Let this word *be done to me*, but grant me two months and let me go, that I may wander upon the mountains and weep because of my maidenhood, I and my companions" (v. 37b). Seila begins her second speech by repeating, almost exactly, the words that she used to indicate her intention to fulfill the sacrifice, yet with a subtle nuance. Previously, *Seila* had assured Jephthah that he should *do to me* (עשה לי, v. 36) what he had vowed to God. Now she qualifies the word that "has come out of [Jephthah's] mouth" with her own word. She reshapes her own language of unconditional acceptance in the previous line, to make a compelling appeal in the second—now inflected with a jussive, *let it be done to me* (יעשה לי, v. 37)—to make an urgent request tied to the fulfillment of the vow.[197] This

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[195] Claassens, "Female Resistance," 608.

[196] This well-known nuance in narrative sequence dates back to 1964, see Shiloah, "ויאמר . . . ויאמר," 251–76. For Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 218), this pause between speeches is an indication that the daughter expects Jephthah to respond to her self-sacrificing acceptance, perhaps with a loophole or at least consolation. Therefore, his silence compounds the egocentricity of Jephthah's initial response (cf. Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 441).

[197] According to Waltke and O'Connor (*IBHS* §34.3b), the inflection of jussives in simple discourse depend on the "status relations of the speaker and addressee." When the speaker is inferior and speaking to a superior (as is the case with the daughter) it indicates an urgent request, prayer, or a request for permission.

small change in the verbal inflection moves Seila from wholesale acceptance to cunning negotiation—although she cannot avoid her fate, perhaps she can shape how it manifests.

Seila completes her speech with a request: she would like two months in the mountains to lament her maidenhood with her companions.[198] This request breaks down into three distinct components: the timing, the location, and the company she chooses. The two-month timeframe lacks the usually charged symbolism of biblical numbers. It is not a theologically freighted number, in which one may discern another subtle sentiment—for example, twelve, as a reference to the tribes of Israel, or seven, as the number of completion reflected in creation, the cycle of the week, and various festival calendars.[199] Further, the two-month timeframe is not connected to any known Israelite practices or festivals in the Hebrew Bible.[200] Therefore, if the two-month period is not symbolically charged or connecting the event to important festivals in Israel, why would the storyteller specify this detail?

While the exact length of time may not be significant, by adding a substantial delay, Seila forces her father to violate the vow that he has deemed unavoidable. Jephthah's detailed recitation and nuanced telling of Israel's history in the Transjordan in his dialogue with King

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[198] Many scholars have found interesting correspondence between this account and other Canaanite myths, particularly in the daughter's final act of lament. Beavis ("Daughter in Israel," 22) likens this account to other heroine cults of antiquity, especially the account regarding the daughters of Erechtheus who offered themselves as sacrifices for their father's military victory. Russaw (*Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 101n74) points to the daughter's request to weep for her virginity as an echo of an Ugaritic/Canaanite myth of the virgin goddess Anat, who roams the hills mourning her lost fertility. While outside the scope of this project, they offer interesting analyses of the similarities and distinctives of the daughter's account within its ancient context. For more information on comparative Ugaritic myths, see Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*; Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature*; Gray, *Legacy of Canaan*. For more comparative Greek myths, see West, *Epic Cycle*; Euripides, *Iph. aul*.; Euripides, *Iph. taur*.; Homer, *Homeric Hymns*.

[199] While this is a widely attested phenomenon, for a more recent assessment of the significance of numbers in the Bible and the ANE, see Reinhold, ed., *Zahl Sieben im Alten Orient*.

[200] Those who compare the Jephthah account to other Canaanite myths (see n198) often find some tangential connections with festival itself, but the two-month period is uncommon.

Getal (vv. 15–27) signals to the reader that he is (or at least he wants to be known as) knowledgeable of Israel's traditions and history, which includes its stipulations. Jephthah had invoked the Deuteronomic history of conquest to justify the conquest of the Transjordan, but oaths are also covered in the Deuteronomic Law and require that one "should not delay in fulfilling a vow" as a delay is akin to a sin against God (Deut 23:21). It is unclear if Jephthah is unaware of such a stipulation or simply ignoring it, but there is a deep inconsistency in his character as a Yhwh worshiper and a noticeable deviation from the Deuteronomic regulation.[201]

On the one hand, he presents himself as a man of Yhwh utilizing the name of God to "seal the deal" in many different situations (Judg 11:9, 11, 21, 23, 24, 27, 31).[202] He offers a military vow in the name of Yhwh before battle (vv. 30–31) but then *does not understand* the basic mechanics of oath keeping. In not fulfilling the vow immediately, Seila exposes his utilitarian use of his Yhwh-ism. If Jephthah truly desired to fulfill his vow, only immediate action would suffice. Yet Jephthah's compliance with the vow seems predicated on self-preservation, not piety[203]—to deny this vow might imperil his public image as "Yhwh's leader"

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[201] In this project, I am not prepared to argue for a specific composition history, only to note that Jephthah's speech to King Getal (11:15–27) clearly bears Deuteronomic influence. Therefore, whether this hand was original or a later edition does not really matter because the final form of this text assumes Deuteronomic influence.

[202] Notably, Jephthah states the name of God most often in his address to the king of Ammon, yet that message is delivered through a messenger, which implies that Jephthah speaks to two audiences at once: the King of Ammon as well as *his* people in Gilead. As developed in the previous chapter, he is building a reputation for himself as a paragon of Yhwhistic faith in a way that the Gileadites could see and hear.

[203] Janzen ("Why the Deuteronomist," 345) points to a clear theme in the Deuteronomic history—"obeying is better than sacrificing"—and observes that human sacrifice is clearly forbidden. Therefore, Jephthah's obedience to an "illegal bribe" (he characterizes the vow as a bribe of Yhwh which violates law) only compounds his error. Likewise, Chisholm ("Ethical Challenge," 415) points out the correlation between the principle of obedience and the similar situation in the story of Saul's near-sacrifice of Jonathan (1 Sam 14), noting that those who understand God's priorities would not make, let alone keep, a vow that contradict Yhwh's will. Even early interpretations of the text rebuff Jephthah's notion of unavoidability. For example, the Targum of Judges (11:39; Smelik, *Targum of Judges*, 555–56) condemns him for not asking Phinehas the Priest to redeem her through a "monetary consecration." This leads God to condemn him to a gruesome death as he falls apart limb-by-limb and the pieces are buried throughout the cities of Gilead (cf. *Eccl. Rab.* 12:7).

and undermine the restoration he worked so hard to earn. As Assis points out, Jephthah now discusses his vow to Yhwh while standing in the very place, where he had initially spoken his words before Yhwh when the elders made him chief and head of Gilead (v. 11).[204] Jephthah guards his image as deliverer so that his "God speech" is not counted as equally disingenuous.

Seila also chooses to find her solace in the mountains surrounding Gilead during her two months of refuge. She declares "let me go, that I may wander upon the mountains." The Hebrew (ואלצה לירדתי על־ההרים) more woodenly translates as "let me go, to go down upon the mountains." This phrase is complicated on account of its almost whimsical repetition of "going," using two different words and, what Soggins refers to as, "the impossible 'descend on the mountains'" rendering of (ירד).[205] How does one descend upon a mountain if they do not abide in the heavens? Most scholars assume a manuscript discrepancy or idiom of lament,[206] with a few arguing that it is a veiled reference to religious practices concerning pagan goddesses.[207] Yet the location of the mountain, away from the security of the household, itself holds significance. Seila chooses to face wild animals, lack of resources, and the strain of natural elements as a thirteen-ish year old girl surrounded only by young women like herself. Her desire to spend her remaining time away from the strongholds of family and village and live in a harsh and threatening terrain highlights the instability of this broken family. The בית אב has become more

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[204] Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest,* 213. Assis argues that he believed that he would receive a hero's welcome, but instead he was only greeted by his daughter and therefore the spectacle of his military vow will test the reliability of Jephthah's words.

[205] Soggins, *Judges*, 214.

[206] See n11.

[207] While this is an element of research for those who compare the festival for the daughter with other pagan myths, the most notable argument is from Reis ("Spoiled Child," 287), who argues that the phrase should be understood as a "spiritual descent" to participate in a pagan rite, thereby rejecting the faith of her father. Yet Reis's argument seems heavily dependent on circumstances not discussed in the text and translations that rely heavily on ancient Greek parallels rather than biblical evidence, literary or linguistic.

dangerous than the untamed mountains, and the wilderness safer than the security of the household.

In the final months of her life, Seila also chooses whom she wishes her companions to be—not her father, but her friends. This shift can be noted in her speech, as she begins speaking to and about *my father* (אבי, v. 36), but in the end shifts her focus to *my companions* (רעיני, v. 37; cf. v. 38).[208] Russaw points out that often, the only spaces in which women found safety were in the presence of other women.[209] This would be even more true for Seila on the mountain, where there was no (or little) social stratification because her companions were all nubile, seemingly unmarried women. There she finds solidarity outside the grasp of those in power.[210] These young women accompany her to lament, where her father is impassive, to remember, where the storyteller has hidden her name. These companions offer her little protection from the elements, yet their presence implies a different kind of safety. Cooper vividly articulates the paradox of this despair and comfort, "despite the horror and the lack of real alternatives in her situation, Jephthah's daughter manages to find dignity and solace in her tears and in her comrades' tears."[211] Through the young women who accompany her, she finds her strength in solidarity with those who understand the weight of gender injustice—the social powerlessness of a daughter in Israel under the authority of egocentric men.[212]

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[208] Hunt, "Who is Culpable?," 97.

[209] Russaw, *Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 155.

[210] While it is likely that these women are her attendants, perhaps women who had lived with her in Tob, because of Jephthah's leadership role in Israel, that does not imply a lack of affection (p. 237). They may also be young women of the area who were so struck by the injustice of her story that they grieve with and for her. Either way, these young women lament her plight, though they are not compelled to by tradition or law. Cf. Hunt, "Who is Culpable?," 99

[211] Cooper, "Someplace to Cry," 189–90.

[212] Claassens ("Female Resistance," 607) sees Seila's movements toward solidarity as important elements of both healing and rebuking power systems. Within smaller groups with shared experiences, telling stories and

In the end, Seila is able to find space, but she also finds what her father has denied her—a future. The daughters' lament affords the opportunity to remember the story as she told it, rather than allowing the world of men to re-write her part. With no children and no one left to remember her, her death would have a deeper sting and more permanent effect as she would be forgotten from community and her own family-line erased. Ironically for Jephthah, while Seila finds a future, his own future is strikingly temporary. Through her death, his entire family line is extinguished. The ritual act of annually retelling her story gives her an enduring legacy, whereas Jephthah's hard-fought restoration to the house of Gilead will not endure. Furthermore, Bal reflects that through this ritual *Seila* has finally achieved freedom from her father—*her* story, not the narrative of Israel's judge, is remembered every year.[213] Seila has created a space for herself, but also a space for all young women to lament the *insecurity* of their maidenhood, which may be surrounded by danger, yet also to find solidarity and strength in each other for four days a year. Lockwood summarizes the significance of what she created: "she has ensured that the memory of what she suffered will never be forgotten, in the fervent hope that others may learn and be spared."[214] Those who do not learn, become like the men of Israel at the end of the book of Judges. With this festival intention in mind that the book of Judges ends in bitter irony (Judg 21:19–22), where the customary remembrance is invaded to capture the virgins of Shiloh and repopulate the devastated Benjaminites—thereby violating the last safe space of these young women.

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hearing others creates a bond and allows space for the marginalized narratives to be held and remembered. Seila creates that space in the last two months of her life, yet it continues long after she has passed.

[213] Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, 68.

[214] Lockwood, "Jephthah's Daughter," 90.

The Tellability of Seila's Story: What the Reader Learns in Reading the Story from the Perspective of Jephthah's Daughter

The story of Seila is perhaps the most tellable supporting character account within the Jephthah cycle. This sequence of events not only illustrates the character's response, but creates a tension with little relief as well as a visceral awareness of the daughter and the emotional turmoil that it implies. Attending to the subjective awareness of Seila is a painful experience for the reader, who may resonate with her experience of disempowerment, despair, and resignation—but also hope for her sense of calm and intentionality. Though disempowered, she is not powerless. Her presence responds to a painfully common experience: what should people of faith do when their power to truly act has been taken from them?

This situation begins with a note of hope as the Spirit of Yhwh finally, and unambiguously, moves to save Israel (v. 29), and the reader dares to hope for a positive outcome. Yet that hope is quickly shrouded by a suspiciously worded, and terrifying, vow (vv. 30–31)—triumph is tied to death. Before the reader knows who will be the object of the vow, we know its inevitability as Jephthah quickly seizes victory (vv. 32–33). Upon his homecoming, the dramatic reveal of the vow's object shatters that earlier sense of hope. Seila, Jephthah's only child, enters the scene with an ironic demonstration of song and dance—her celebration leading to her tragedy (v. 34). Jephthah responds to this revelation with despair, accusations, and a confirmation of his intention to fulfill the vow (v. 35), but she in turn, responds with calm and grace, accepting the vow but not his blame (v. 36). Jephthah does not respond. After a pause of unspecified length, she speaks again, seeking to negotiate for time and space before the vow is enacted (v. 37), and he responds with only one word, "go" (v. 38). As a result of her successful bargaining, Seila is given a brief period of time to lament in the safety of her companions. The story concludes with

a summary, the deed is done, and this event is commemorated—she is remembered (vv. 39–40). As the story unfolds, Seila's response to each situation is as startling as it is admirable.

On a surface level, Seila's disruption is explicitly stated by the storyteller and obvious to anyone who has read the text—she has been promised to death and she cannot avoid it. While readers may empathize with this disruption, few have subjectively faced the impending doom of Seila. Yet this experience speaks to a much more profound and familiar experience of vulnerability and disempowerment (more common, perhaps, for women and minorities). We are not always in control even of our own lives and, significantly, those who are in control sometimes make choices that do significant harm to those under their power. What do we do in the face of oppressive systems or cruel authoritarians, particularly when those forces wield the power of life and death—and sometimes in the name of Yhwh? Sometimes our faith will not save us. God does *not always* directly intervene; sometimes we may die. Seila is one of the few people in this narrative to use the name of Yhwh without a hint of self-serving or disingenuous manipulation; therefore, she becomes a model of at least one form of godly resistance. To that end, she demonstrates that despite the choices of those who wield power over us, we can still act with honor and integrity. Through Seila, the storyteller reminds us that sometimes it is not *that* we die, but *how* we die, that matters.

Daughters in Israel (like many today) were born into a world controlled by men—some compassionate and kind, others violent and self-focused—and frequently offered little recompense for the wrongs perpetuated against them. Compounding her experience of having little control over her life as a daughter, Seila is also raised as an outsider of the (בית אב). She is in a position of vulnerability with little recourse, yet she prevails by tempering her dissent in order to make room for her request. Submission to authority was expected from a daughter of

Israel; therefore, her acceptance of the sacrifice does not imply that she endorses the act. Rather, she uses the pretext of submission in order to resist the narrative that her father has re-written over her life. Too often, when confronted with the implications of their faulty maneuvering, those in power re-write the story to cast the blame on someone else, often blaming the victim for the circumstances that lead to the tragedy.[215] Jephthah attempts to do just that, to displace his own guilt for the illicit vow, he rewrites the story to include Seila as one of his enemies. Seila refuses this blame.

Furthermore, in accepting her fate, Seila disarms her wordsmithing father, which leaves an opening for her to reclaim some of what he plans to take away: space and time. She makes two simple requests, a two-month reprieve to mourn her failed transition into adulthood and the maidens to keep her company—seeking a safe space, which is, ironically, away from the protection of father and household. In her trip to the mountains, she solidifies the truth of her story outside of the prying ears and the booming voices of men and finds solidarity with those who understand her vulnerable state. She is given two months to mourn, two months to remember, and two months to feel the safety and solidarity that comes from shared experience.

In the end, Jephthah's legacy is one of manipulation and violence, yet the daughter's story is remembered by those who, like her, occupy dangerous spaces on the margins of society. Like Seila, they have little power to assert their will if those in authority will not make room for them, yet every year they commit to remembering her story. Exum emphasizes the importance of

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[215] For a thoughtful analysis, see Day's ("Rhetoric and Domestic Violence in Ezekiel 16," 220–21) article which talks about (among other things) the phenomena of blame and derogatory statements against women within abuse cycles. While I disagree with her basic assessment of Yhwh as the abuser, her poignant observations are fitting in this context. Cf. Ptacek, "How Men Who Batter," 250.

"recounting" the stories of the past: "to recount the story of Jephthah's daughter is to make her live again through words."[216] The refusal to name the daughter in this text also speaks to the ritual established among the women of Israel to re-tell her story each year. The daughter's story is not hers alone, but an occasion for solidarity among all women who suffer the consequences of the words of uncaring men. Claassens summarizes the long-term effect of such a story:

> Thus by noticing instances of female resistance in spite of injustice in the tragic story of the daughter of Jephthah, we could imagine the possibility of resistance in contemporary situations of injustice that may inspire us in an act of solidarity, not only among women but among all who care about the plight of those finding themselves in situations of injustice, to keep on working for a world in which dehumanization and indignity is no more.[217]

What does a person of God do when there is no way out and oppression is inescapable? For those who may never be in the position of Jephthah, perhaps the daughter's response to injustice may act as a spark of courage and resistance.

Reading in solidarity with the daughter of Jephthah means acknowledging that we may not have the opportunity to change the world, we may even be killed by those in authority, but we are never truly powerless. There is always a faithful response and that faithful response is not *just* death. In the end, Seila's anonymity only disguises the significance of her character as one who challenges the social archetypes in our imagination. Being placed in a position of vulnerability does not simply mean quietly accepting our fate—like Seila we are challenged to use what limited space we are given, *to decide what to do with the time that is given us*.

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[216] Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, 61.
[217] Claassens, "Female Resistance," 620.

CHAPTER 6: THE ADVERSARIES OF JEPHTHAH: THE EPHRAIMITES, INTERTRIBAL WARFARE, AND THE SLAUGHTER OF KINSHIP

> Where now are the horse and rider? Where is the horn that was blowing? Where is the helm and the hauberk, and the bright hair flowing . . . They have passed like rain on the mountain, like a wind in the meadow; the days have gone down in the West behind the hills into shadow.
>
> Théodred, King of Rohan, in J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers*

The story of Jephthah does not end with his victory over Ammon or his obedience to the vow, but with a tragic episode of intertribal warfare.[1] The final supporting character study will focus on the perspective of the Ephraimites in their horrifying defeat at the hands of Jephthah and the men of Gilead. The Gileadite crisis and response detailed in Judg 10:6—12:7 unfolds as a series of broken relationships that exemplify the disintegration of Yhwh's people at every level of society.[2] The story begins with the breakdown of Israel's relationship to God (10:6–16), then continues with an account of a broken בית אב (10:18—11:11), followed by ruptured international relations from the cousin nation of Ammon (11:12–28), and the account becomes deeply troubling with the death of basic paternal instinct as the daughter greets Jephthah and loses her

[1] It is noteworthy that the stories of the initial judges—Othniel (3:10–11), Ehud (3:30–31), and Deborah (4:23–24, 5:31b)—come to a close soon after they have accomplished victory over their enemy. In contrast, Gideon's story continues by explaining the significance of his life after battle (8:4–35), including the story of his power-seeking son, Abimelech (9:1–57). Similarly, Jephthah's story does not end in the triumph of battle but in a appalling account of civil war.

[2] It is worth noting that Moore (*Judges*, 306) and Burney (*Book of Judges*, 302) have suggested that the confrontation of the Ephraimites is a late edition to the text that is disconnected from the previous stories. Soggin (*Judges*, 221) argues that this account likely preserves a memory of conflict between the neighboring tribes, yet they likely had nothing to do with the Jephthah cycle. Yet Soggins, Moore, and Burney fail to recognize the thematic continuity in Jephthah's story and the spiraling disintegration at each level of Israelite society, culminating here in the tribal disintegration. Biddle (*Reading Judges*, 134) rightly accepts that some forms of literary growth produced the Jephthah cycle, and this final section may be seen as part of that process, yet the end result is not a disjointed narrative, but an intentionally "jolting conclusion to a jolting career."

life (11:29–40). As the action falls in the final scene, the focus turns to the brokenness of one last social structure in Israel: Israel's tribal bonds (12:1–7). While it is easy to see the faults of Ephraim—they are depicted as haughty, aggressive, and overconfident—it is important to note the significance of their role in the story and the validity of their complaint regarding the degradation of tribal loyalty. Perhaps they were overly aggressive, but that does not mean they had no claim against Jephthah or that Jephthah's response was justified.

This account is both similar and distinct from the conflict in the previous chapters. Like Ammon, the Ephraimites rally to fight against Jephthah and they are thoroughly defeated, yet this Gileadite victory is not attributed to Yhwh nor is their rival merely a *cousin* nation. The defeated armies of Ephraim are their fellow Israelites. Furthermore, the Ephraimites claim a betrayal of their kinship ties, recalling the treachery of the brothers who rejected Jephthah to enlarge their own inheritance and family dominance, yet this time the party at fault remains obscured from view—did Ephraim betray Jephthah in his time of need (as Jephthah claims in 12:3) or did Jephthah refuse to reach out to his tribal ally when the fight with Ammon was imminent (as Ephraim claims in 12:1). Therefore, the story of Ephraim combines the themes of kinship violation and the defeat of Israel's oppressors to portray a bitter conflict with a costly defeat. Both the Ephraimites and Jephthah have violated the traditions of tribal Israel, and both will experience the destructive power of that loss.

Translation of Situation 5 (Judg 12:1–7): Jephthah against the Ephraimites

[1] Then the men of Ephraim were summoned[3] and they crossed over northward, and they said to Jephthah, "Why did you cross over to fight against the sons of Ammon, but you did not call on us to go with you? We will burn down your house upon you[4] with fire!"

[2] So Jephthah said to them, "*I* was a man of contention, and my people,[5] with the sons of Ammon! Exceedingly! And I cried out to you and you did not deliver me from their hand. [3] When I saw that you were not a deliverer, then I placed my life in my hand and crossed over to the sons of Ammon and Yhwh gave them into my hand. So why have you come up against me this day, to fight against me?"

[4] Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and they fought the Ephraimites and the men of Gilead struck down the Ephraimites, for they had said, "you[6] are escapees of Ephraim, Gilead, in the midst of Ephraim, in the midst of Manasseh." [5] And Gilead seized the fords of the Jordan controlled by Ephraim.

And it came to pass, when the escapees of Ephraim would say, "let me cross over." Then the men of Gilead would say to him, "are you an Ephraimite?" And he would say, "no." [6] Then they would say to him, "Just[7] say 'Shibboleth.'" Then he would say, "Sibboleth." For he was not able to speak this way. So they would seize him and they would slaughter him at the fords of the Jordan. Then 42,000 from Ephraim fell at that time.

[7] Jephthah judged Israel six years, and Jephthah the Gileadite died and he was buried among[8] the towns of Gilead.

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[3] The MT employs the *niphal* of the verb צעק, translated "summoned," which is used elsewhere for troops being called out for battle (e.g., Judg 7:23–24; 10:17). Following the verb, "they crossed over" (עבר), has already been used in this story to describe the military procession of Jephthah leading to Ammon in 11:29–30. Furthermore, the aggressive nature of their speech suggests a militaristic response.

[4] The LXX does not include the phrase "upon you" (עליך).

[5] Jephthah uses an odd phrase here, focusing on his own personal strife by using a 1cs form of the verb (היה), including an unnecessary pronoun, and then tacking on the people at the end (לעמי), seemingly as an afterthought of his argument. The LXX adds the clarification that the Ammonites "humiliated" or "oppressed" (ἐταπείνουν) Jephthah. Similarly, Niditch (*Judges*, 137) translates the OL as "I was an opponent, and my people also, and the sons of Ammon humiliated me exceedingly."

[6] Joüon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, §146.a.2.

[7] נא is used here as an interjection (see *IBHS* §4.2.2c). While this particular particle is often used to make a polite request, the situation of the text does not seem to reflect a sense of deference and respect to the hearer.

[8] The MT offers the more difficult reading ("among the towns," בערי), which the LXX smoothed out with "in his city, in Gilead" (ἐν τῇ πόλει αὐτοῦ ἐν Γαλααδ, similarly the OL).

The Ephraimites in the Text

Nearly all interpretations of the Ephraimites' behavior have assumed an exclusively negative appraisal of their character in Judg 12:1–6. For example, Butler concludes that Jephthah should not take all the blame for the battle because, in truth, the intertribal war was precipitated by the Ephraimites' taunt.[9] Matthews concludes that the narrator's characterization of the Ephraimites depicts them as both negative and incompetent.[10] Block offers the most stinging rebuke, describing their "jealousy and wounded sense of self-importance . . . [they have] no pride in greater Israel, let alone any respect for the Transjordan."[11] Commonly, Ephraim's posturing is read as flatly aggressive and arrogant, yet these dispositional traits may minimize ways in which the storyteller contextualizes their response. Notably, the storyteller allows for a complicated mode of conduct, refusing to clarify which leader—Jephthah of Gilead or the commander of the Ephraimites—is telling the truth regarding the war with Ammon.[12] Furthermore, the Ephraimites argue that Jephthah has violated covenant bonds of loyalty, Yhwh does not show up for this battle, and in the end the Gileadites continue to slaughter the Ephraimites even after the threat has subsided.

The Ephraimites are certainly not above blame for this destructive battle, yet they are not flat foils who show up in order to initiate Jephthah's last stand, rather they represent an important ethos in Israel connected to the Deuteronomic demand for tribal unity in war. That unity, which

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[9] Butler, *Judges 1–12*, 295.
[10] Matthews, *Judges and Ruth*, 129.
[11] Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 381.
[12] Wong (*Compositional Strategy*, 180) points out that the narrator has *intentionally* left the text ambiguous, presenting the conflicting claims of both the Ephraimites and Jephthah without resolving which one is correct.

had won them the Promised Land, had been diminishing throughout the cycles of the Judges.[13] Although the Ephraimites may have poorly represented their perspective, their aggression is an attempt to rebuke the man who has abandoned them. Ephraim is certainly *over*confident in the strength of their taunt as well as their military might, as is evident in their resounding loss, yet that does not preclude them from presenting what, in their view, may have been a justifiable claim against Jephthah for his breach in tribal loyalty headed into battle against Ammon.

Character Archetypes: The Social-Historical Shaping of Tribes, Clans, and the Descendants of Joseph

Who is Ephraim and how might this tribal group have been regarded in the minds of early readers? The archetype of Ephraim is shaped by a variety of converging factors, particularly the social understanding of the tribal system in ancient Israel and the role and character archetypes of the tribes of Joseph in their many different iterations. Ephraim is not a son of Jacob, but his grandson, one of Joseph's two sons whom Jacob chose to bless (Gen 48:5). Yet the Josephite tribes are *not* limited to Ephraim and Manasseh in the book of Judges, instead reflecting the later

[13] The role of tribalism in the structure of the book of Judges is highly debated, but typically centers on the prominence and participation of the tribes of Judah and the Josephite tribes. Recently, O'Connell (*Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 277) argues that one of the primary rhetorical concerns within the book of Judges is the "disintegration of intertribal loyalty." For O'Connell, this structure of the judges cycle evinces a growing fragmentation of the covenant people, which takes a startling turn in the brutal civil war in Jephthah's account. Wong (*Compositional Strategy*, 176–78) echoes a similar sentiment, highlighting the decline in tribal loyalty as one of five key areas of deterioration that are central to the compositional strategy. For further research, see Malamat ("Charismatic Leadership in the Book of Judges," 30–35), who notes how the heritage and habitation of the primary characters create a tribal schema for the structure of the book overall. See also Beldman (*Completion of Judges*, 41), who discusses the progressive deterioration in the book of Judges as a whole (cf. Globe, "'Enemies Round About': Disintegrative Structure in the Book of Judges," in *Mappings of the Biblical Terrain* 236–45). Throughout each of these assessments, the primary questions are the way in which the tribal system goes from bad to worse and which tribes take the brunt of the blame and therefore how the book was shaped ideologically for or against particular powers in leadership in Israel.

genealogies that include Machir and Gilead. Therefore, when Ephraim interacts with Jephthah the Gileadite, the storyteller is working from a framework of tribal expectations, specifically concerning the tribes of Joseph, and their assumed kinship ties and loyalties in battle.

The Tribal System in the Book of Judges

What would the notion of tribe and tribal loyalty mean in the storyworld of this text? The term "tribe" is a well-researched yet notoriously difficult historical phenomenon to describe.[14] The biblical texts utilize the term "tribe" for a variety of functions, in different contexts, and to designate diverse groups, yet they never clearly define its use for any given period of time. The difficulty in discerning the function of Israel's tribal system is also reflected in the complicated nature of identifying the tribes: more specifically, *which* tribes constitute the famous twelve tribes of Israel? Deborah's song (Judg 5) is generally agreed to be the oldest text within the book of Judges, and in it she extolls the tribes who fought together in their battle against Sisera's army. This song acts as an important witness to the early existence of the tribal system, yet it

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[14] There are several noteworthy contributions over the last century. Martin Noth's important work *The History of Israel* in 1960 argued that Israel's tribal system resembled the Greek amphictyony, an association of neighboring tribes who were united with a shared religious core, which Noth understood as covenant commitment. Noth's theory dominated the field for some time, but eventually, support eroded as elements of his theory became increasingly untenable. In 1976, C. H. J. de Geus challenged his work, arguing against a religious starting point for the tribes in favor of a geographic orientation in *The Tribes of Israel*. Then in 1979, Gottwald published his watershed monograph, *Tribes of Yahweh*, arguing that Israelite tribes were far more segmented than previously assumed. He argued for autonomous and egalitarian entities that were centered on family and village groupings and joined together for protective associations we call tribes, yet these tribes had little subsequent structure and were connected regionally by default. Scholars have increasingly emphasized the decentralized nature of Israel's early governance and the responsive nature of the tribal system to suit the needs of the people, connecting through common patrilineal descent (real or imagined) and the needs of the community (see McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, 82–83; Stager, "Archaeology of the Family," 24–28). More recently, some scholars have noted the presence of tribalism in early Israel but argued that this early form is difficult, if not impossible, to fully reconstruct because of the editorial hand of the late redactor. Therefore, they focus their work on tribes as an interface between kingdom and monarch (see Bendor, *Social Structure of Ancient Israel*, 87–93; Coote, "Tribalism," 35–49).

offers very little specific information on the structures of this social reality.[15] The identity of the tribes (including Gilead and Machir) and their function in war, rather than governance, depicts an early iteration of the tribal system, but not a definitive one. Tribalism by nature seems to be a fluid notion that is often resized to fit different situations throughout the life of Israel.[16]

This project does not attempt to narrowly define the specific stage of social development in Israel's tribal system reflected in the period of the judges, rather it accepts the movement in sociological scholarship that sees the tribal system as a dynamic and responsive entity, which utilized shared geography and segmented values,[17] as well as a perception of shared lineage to understand their relationship to other tribal members as seen and developed in the story.[18] For the

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[15] While this much-researched passage has been approached from a variety of angles, many scholars originally argued for a pre-monarchic dating of the text based on both linguistic features and content (which, importantly, includes a reference to ten of the twelve tribes of Israel; see Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence*, 153–55; Cross and Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry*, 5; Boling, *Judges*, 98–112; Halpern, "Resourceful Israelite Historian," 379–401; Schloen, "Caravans, Kenites, and Casus Belli," 18–38; Stager, "Song of Deborah," 50–64; Akroyd, "Composition of the Song of Deborah" 160–62; Soggin, *Judges*, 80–81). More recently, scholars have resisted such an early dating but still press for an earlier composition than the rest of the book, dating the text in the 9th century BCE (see Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity*, 109–21; Sparks, "Genesis 49," 328). Brettler (*Book of Judges*, 79) resists dating the poem, agreeing that it is "among the earliest biblical literature" but contending that it has still undergone enough changes over time to cast doubt on any claim to be representative of an early Israel (cf. Fokkelmann, "Song of Deborah and Barak," 596; Smith, "Warfare Song," 165–86). Tobolowsky (*Sons of Jacob*, 53) affirms Judg 5 as the earliest tribal list in the biblical text, yet wrestles with an exact dating as well as the level to which later redactors reshaped its content.

[16] In his assessment of Israelite tribalism, Coote ("Tribalism," 35–41) wrestles with the difficulty in determining any socially normative praxis of tribalism, questioning the very existence of tribalism before the monarchy as the testimony to that early tribal form was a product of state literature. Yet in the end, he finds the fluid nature of the eldership to be one of the most fundamental "generalizations" about kinship communities and tribes. This fluidity has been widely attested for nearly a half century (cf. Wilson, *Genealogy and History* [1977]; Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh* [1979]; Meyers, "Of Seasons and Soldiers," 47–48 [1983]).

[17] In Israel's case, these social units arranged themselves through an adherence to biblical traditions, agrarian ideals, and common descent groups through an eponymous ancestor (real or imagined). Gottwald (*Politics of Ancient Israel*, 164–65) offers a theory of segmentation, which refers to the phenomena that Israelite society was held together by a set of shared values, often aligning through kinship groups—though he cautions that the archaeology can neither prove nor deny such circumstances.

[18] In her study of the tribe of Manasseh, Lerner ("Manasseh," 33–35 and 42–46) elucidates each significant movement in tribal studies, articulating the difficult distinctions between "tribe" and "state" as well as the many distinct forms and societal structures that they may take (cf. Meyers, "*Tribes* and Tribulations," 38–45; Szuchman, "Integrating Approaches," 1–9; Schloen, *House of the Father*, 63–73).

purpose of this study, reconstructing the historical reality is not as important as the ideological framework that the language of tribal affiliation in the Judges account signifies. Therefore, this study will focus on what the book of Judges and other relevant biblical texts in their final form imply about that ideological framework.[19]

Tribes in early Israel seemed to be united under certain principles and priorities regarding the ideals and expectations of how life should look and what is valued among these communities. This segmentation of values,[20] as well as a notion of descent from a shared ancestor, tied the groups together, while also allowing the flexibility to respond to the social circumstances of the time. More specifically, the individual *tribe* was unified under the mantle of the eponymous ancestor, while also indicating commonality in several formational features of land and society (shared heritage and traditions, common linguistic patterns, territorial affinity, shared economic interests, etc.).[21] While these tribes maintained their distinctive identities, they were also part of the collective tribal unity, referred to as the *tribes of Israel*. Therefore, Israelite tribal alliances and loyalty connected both horizontally (with the kinsman within the individual tribes of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, etc.) and vertically (kinship under the ancestral connection to Abraham or

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[19] In 1903, Burney (*Book of Judges*) first suggested a late Ephrathite redactor of the book of Judges. More recently, Finkelstein ("Major Saviors," 431–49) argues for an early northern tradition (dominated by the Ephraimite voice) that shaped an early version of the book of Judges. Yet these are still relatively uncommon perspectives, especially since 1943, when Noth (*Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*) not only introduced the notion of the Deuteronomistic history, but included Judges in its list. Since then, most scholars have utilized Noth's model in some form (cf. Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*; Fretheim et al., eds., *Deuteronomic History*; Dietrich, "History and Law," 315–42; Ausloos "Angel of YHWH," 1–12; Amit, "Book of Judges," 297–332; Gillmayr-Bucher, "Framework and Discourse," 687–702; Noll, "Deuteronomistic History," 311–45).

[20] This is a term coined by Gottwald (*Politics of Ancient Israel*, 164–65). For a fuller articulation, see footnote 17. See also Meyers, "The Family in Early Israel," 37.

[21] These different categories are often used to describe unique elements of the social systems within the tribes. For an analysis of the different distinctions maintained within tribal systems, see Tapper, "Anthropologists, Historians, and Tribespeople," 49–57; Szuchman, "Integrating Approaches," 4; Lerner, "Manasseh," 45–47.

Jacob/Israel). Through these tribal bonds, the book of Judges implies that Israelites should anticipate a shared agreement regarding cooperation, particularly in the event of war, even if these bonds lie in the distant past.

The tribal structure was ideologically linked to the notion of household and kinship—essentially, early Israel conceived of themselves as small social units (families) that replicate into increasingly larger social units.[22] As Meyers points out, the average Israelite was unlikely to have any significant interaction outside of their village, unless a deep need arose—e.g., battle or famine.[23] Nevertheless, these ideological bonds of far extended family connected the individual to their own tribe, as well as to the tribal system of Israel, through a shared sense of familial loyalty. Most local matters were handled within the clan or tribe, which each had its own distinct identity, but during times of distress, they drew on the more distant bonds of tribal kinship for greater support and security. As such, Israel's tribal names (Ephraim, Judah, Benjamin, etc.) are not mere geographic markers, but socio-cultural indicators of localized culture that were independent and particularized.[24]

It is important to begin with the relationship of the tribes as a whole since one of the more unique features of Israel is the *unity* among the tribes of Israel that is expected as a result of their

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[22] Lerner ("Manasseh," 45–46) concludes that "segmented groups are characterized by a great degree of flexibility and fluidity and can accommodate the fusion or fission of various social units that inevitably occur due to changing social, economic, and /or political realities" (cf. Lemche, *Early Israel*, 223–37; McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, 78–81).

[23] Meyers, "Family in Early Israel," 41.

[24] This is not unlike the socio-cultural distinctions between the different states of the USA. While New York certainly maintains its connection with the federal union, it retains its own unique cultural footprint. The same can be said for the different provinces that make up the nation of Canada. While unity is prized, especially during times of national distress, Québec's differences are maintained and honored rather than homogenized in relationship to the whole. Like the individual tribes of Israel, each state, or province, has its own particular identity. Yet in both the United States and Canada, the distinctions are primarily tied to geographic land boundaries, whereas in early Israel, kinship was centralized and geographic regions were secondary.

shared covenant with Yhwh.[25] In the book of Judges, the unity of the tribes is a central concern which is introduced at the onset of the story (Judg 1–2), albeit to demonstrate their failures which continue to erode throughout the story.[26] Admittedly, Israel is rarely unified in the accounts of the judges, yet the people of Israel are often referred to in the collective.[27] For example, when Ehud calls the Israelites to battle, the storyteller refers to the warriors who went down with him as "the sons of Israel" (3:27), yet his call to arms and subsequent battle seems to have been fought primarily by the Ephraimites. The Ephraimites are depicted as not operating as an independent tribal nation, but as part of the nation of Israel. The broader witness of Scripture expresses more obvious references to that unity. Israel's story is dominated by the notion that the nation of Israel (before and after the emergence of kingship) is essentially one big tribe (a supra-tribe), descended from the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is apparent in the Deuteronomic history,[28] which utilizes the ancestral and eponymous expectations for the

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[25] It is important to note that the unity among the tribes, especially during the early stages of Israel's history as depicted in the book of Judges, is highly debated and in many cases rejected outright, particularly by those who followed Noth (*History of Israel*, 99–103) in viewing Israel as an amphictyony. The question remains, are the tribal connections described in the text an invention of the later writers (e.g., Coote, "Tribalism," 37; Brettler, *Book of the Judges*, 8; Lemche, *Early Israel*) or do they attest to the existence of tribalism in early Israel, despite the inevitable shaping of later redactors (e.g., Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 26–44; Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, 1:67–103; Lasine, "Fiction, Falsehood, and Fact," 24–40). In my view, the earliest texts (e.g., the song of Deborah in Judg 5) clearly attest to the presence and unity of tribalism; therefore, to disregard tribalism as merely an invention of later writers is an unnecessary overreaction to the presence of a redactor at some stage in writing.

[26] Wong (*Compositional Strategy*, 143–90) breaks down the paradigms presented in the prologue that influence the ideology and structural strategy for the book as a whole. Importantly, he notes the progressive deterioration of Israel's society as one introduced by the introductory accounts and progressively displayed in the central section. Cf. O'Connell, 266; Gunn, *Judges*, 104.

[27] In particular, Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 30–31) demonstrates that the frequent use of the term "Israel" in the book of Judges (more than in any other book of the Hebrew Bible)—as well as expressions like "all Israel" (8:27), "all the sons of Israel" (2:4; 20:1), "the men of Israel" (7:8, 23; 8:22), "the hand of Israel (3:30; 11:21), "the camp of Israel" (7:15), and the frequent references to the "tribes of Israel" in the last two chapters (20:2, 10, 12; 21:5, 8, 15; see also 18:1), etc.—emphasizes that Israel is (or should be) recognized as a collective whole. Furthermore, he argues that the presentation of Israel in the Song of Deborah (Judg 5) matches the description of Israel in the Merneptah Stele, demonstrating that at a very early stage, Israel viewed itself as one nation, as did the nations surrounding it.

[28] This is also evident in the stories of the ancestors in Genesis and is re-introduced in Exod 6:14–30.

interaction of tribes in the historical accounts of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. For example, when Joshua crosses the Jordan to fight for the promised land, it is important that all the tribes, even those that have already taken possession of their land, continue to fight until the whole land is claimed for Israel (Josh 1:12–15). While the organization or functional structure of this tribal system is not explicitly expressed, the people's experience as a coalition of tribes and the importance of tribal unity pervade Israel's written accounts. Whereas Canaanite city-state citizens unite *through* their relationship and loyalty to a king, Israel's early tribal society was "united through their relationship to *each other*."[29] Therefore, Lambert argues that the very *idea* of tribal unity becomes an important theme in the history of Israel,[30] interpreting the emphasis on "tribe" as demonstrating the difference between Israel and the Canaanite city-states.[31]

It is also important to recognize the distinction between tribal Israel and the clans within those tribes, especially as presented in the book of Judges. The clan (often rendered by מִשְׁפָּחָה) designates a group that is more complex than a family (בית אב) but is a smaller sub-unit of the tribe.[32] Like the tribes, the extended kinship of the clan requires familial loyalty and care, yet at

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[29] Lambert ("Tribal Influences," 46) contrasts Israel's early tribal system with Ugaritic texts that invite a nation to join in unity based on their fidelity to the king, building on the earlier work of Buccellati (*Cities and Nations*, 56–62).

[30] Lambert ("Tribe/State Paradox," 20–44) argues that both tribal and city-state life were present in early Israelite history, yet only the history of the tribal form was recorded. In his view, as the political and structural power of the tribe weakened, the ideology of the tribe (its religious and political values) strengthened. Furthermore, he argues that the real tribes did indeed exist in the national memory preserved their religious and political values.

[31] As noted in the Ammonite chapter, there are other nations (like Ammon) who seem to utilize a similar tribal/chiefdom structure in their government. Perhaps Israel was unique not merely in having individual tribes, but in maintaining a confederacy of tribes together.

[32] For more on the practical function of the clan, see Block ("Marriage and Family," 37), who argues that the clan played an extremely important role in day-to-day life, often maintaining the integrity of "patrimonial holdings" (typically through endogamous marriages), protecting the community from outside influence, and even participating in religious affairs. For further discussion on the clan system in Israel, see Wright, *God's People*, 48–53; Bendor, *Social Structure*, 67–86. Notably, Gottwald (*Tribes of Yahweh*, 257–58; 318) famously refused to translate (מִשְׁפָּחָה) as clan, and instead chose "protective association," which broadens the term to make members kinsmen without truly having common descent (kinship).

times this is depicted as at odds with a broader tribal affiliation.[33] Some biblical texts emphasize the importance of clan loyalty, highlighting the need to back a fellow clan member *above all else*. Therefore, in adjudicating a dispute between individuals from different clans, regardless of the principles of the situation, the disputant typically favored his fellow clan member. This is most clearly evident in the story of Abimelech (Judg 9:1–6), who requests the loyalty and support of the Shechemites based on his clan membership, leading them to pay for the mercenaries who brutally slaughter the other sons of Gideon in order to make Abimelech king. Abimelech specifically speaks to "the whole clan (משפחה) of the household of his mother's father" (v. 1), who then choose to honor clan ties above all else (v. 3), despite the clear violation of tribal kinship bonds as well as the prohibition of murder.

The story of Abimelech contrasts the vertical kinship ties of his father's household with the horizontal kinship ties with that of his mother, in which alliances and loyalty between tribes create agreed-upon protections for their interactions. Similarly, the *botched* attempt at inter-tribal adjudication for the death of the Levite's concubine in Judg 20 demonstrates some degree of cooperation and impartiality between the tribes. The Levite's case appeals to an unstated set of standards that have been horribly violated and then the sons of Israel to, "Behold, all you sons of Israel, give here your advice and counsel" (20:7).[34] While this story is complicated by the

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[33] This may demonstrate the degrees of loyalty that exist within Israelite society: first family, then village, then clan, then tribe, and finally the tribes of Israel. At some point, these layers of loyalty come into conflict and then the ideal of kinship fidelity leads to a violation of the outer layers of kinship bonds among tribes.

[34] Furthermore, Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 549) points out the unanimity of the scope of this summit—they all come out to find out what has happened (20:1; "all of the sons of Israel" has only otherwise occurred in 2:4). The story highlights the collective participation of the tribal groups (without Benjamin) in order to fully condemn them all as one. The only other times Israel is this united is in their rejection of Yhwh. Butler (*Judges*, 439–40) describes the primary possibilities for communal gatherings—reflecting worship or judgment, or war with the latter prevailing. In gathering they may come together to bring judgement for the crime against the Levite, but it turns into a plotting session to displace their own kinsman.

duplicitous witness of the Levite, inattentiveness to the divine law, and a violent overreach for "justice"—the story clearly demonstrates a shared sense of inter-tribal governance through which they attempt to arbitrate the conflict ("the Israelites said, 'tell us, how did this wickedness come about?'" v. 3b). This suggests that there were some agreed-upon standards of interaction between the allied tribes of Israel, which the Benjamites have violated.[35]

Archaeologists and anthropologists wrestle with the structure of early Israelite tribalism, attempting to reconstruct the social framework through an evaluation of the material world the Israelites left behind. In Gottwald's watershed work, he described the Israelite tribe as a primitive social construct without hierarchical organization, using the term *egalitarian*.[36] As archaeological investigation continued, particularly in Israel's highlands, the sites revealed an altogether different picture than assumed in Gottwald's work. Rather than a system that emphasizes the autonomous production and benefit of the individual (or, Gottwald's egalitarian construct), the materials suggested distinct zones of occupation as well as different-sized dwelling units, and some artifacts that were imported rather than individually made.[37] This distinction between the ideological egalitarian and the lived reality of occupying forces offers an important social reality that is often depicted in the cycles of the judges.

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[35] Yet, as is often the case in the book of Judges, the Israelite response to the injustice is similarly cruel and egregious.

[36] By egalitarian, Gottwald (*Tribes of Yahweh*, 696–97, 798n635) was referring to a social structure in which persons of the tribe have equal access to basic resources. He later modified this term, instead describing Israel as resulting from a *communitarian* social revolution ("Social Class," 81)—basically, removing the modern political associations with "egalitarian" and simply indicating a less hierarchical structure rather than a fully equal social world.

[37] For helpful surveys in regards to these early projects, see Finkelstein, *Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement*; Broshi and Finkelstein, "Population of Palestine," 47–60; Zertal, "Fortified Enclosures," 113–25; and Finkelstein and Mazar, *Quest for the Historical Israel*.

This evidence suggests that a socio-economic hierarchy existed in these early tribal social structures, yet hierarchies are not homogenous. Meyers, for example, suggests that the strong presence of imported goods between villages, as well as the differing house sizes, demonstrate a social arrangement that extends beyond the boundary of the immediate village or tribe and requires some form of social organization in order to facilitate the activities. The differing property sizes are also evidence of a socio-economic divide that Gottwald's original egalitarian model does not account for. She therefore embraces the notion of a loose "chiefdom," which is born out of a kin-based society and includes higher-ranking individuals or families that are ascribed this role at birth.[38] The early tribal chiefdoms of the Levant certainly maintained the kinship values and were, perhaps, less hierarchical in nature, yet they were a movement in the direction towards monarchy, which the cycle of the judges seems to both depict and ideologically reject.[39] Lenski assesses the characteristics of hunter/gatherer as well as agrarian societies and the social stratification systems that guided those cultures, observing that *sometimes* these groups might successfully throw off the systems of a stratified society in favor of a more autonomous one.[40] Yet he laments, that these were always temporary in nature. His observations track well for the period of Israel's settlement as depicted in the book of Judges. Israel began as a de-centralized governing structure, rejecting the hierarchies and chiefdoms of

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[38] Meyers, "*Tribes* and Tribulations," 38

[39] Cf. Bloch-Smith, "Israelite Ethnicity," 401–25.

[40] Lenski, *Ecological-Evolutionary Theory*, 159–63. Pitkänen, ("Settlement Period," 201–207) uses Lenski's work to draw together her own insights, advocating for a "settler colonialism" of early Israel in which the stories of Egypt and the more revolutionary law codes were a result of this formative period. Further, she proposes that the social stratification, with a tiny elite in control, occurred notably late in Israel's story, increasing as they adopted and developed their monarchy. This is reflected in the material world uncovered through archaeological remains—particularly in dwellings of varying sizes as well as imports through trade.

nations around them, but eventually move in the direction of monarchy that is not fully achieved until the books of Samuel.[41]

Whether Israel's literature attests to a primitive form of tribalism before chiefdom or simply reflects a retelling of Israel's story to fit particular ideological ends, the book of the Judges portrays the presence of "chiefs" (ראש) in Israel's leadership as an erosion of their identity as Yhwh's chosen nation.[42] The Israelites' early rejection of state hierarchy stands in sharp contrast to their neighbors. In the cycles of the early judges, the Israelite leader is always depicted as a temporary military (or prophetic) head who would lead them and then recede into the background (Othniel: 3:9–10; Ehud: 3:29–30; Deborah/Barak: 4:23–24). In contrast, each nation that Israel opposes is led by a king—and typically that king is a tyrant (King Cushan-Rishathaim: 3:8; King Elon of Moab: 3:15; King Jabin of Canaan: 4:2). It is no accident that as the Israelites fall further and further down the plunging spiral of sin and corruption, they become indistinguishable from the Canaanites—specifically in their adaptation of chieftains and the disintegration of kinship ties.[43] This is first seen with Gideon, who rejects the notion of kingship

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[41] The final section of the book of Judges emphasizes the need for a king because of Israel's fallen state ("in those days there was no king in Israel . . . "; 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). The call for a king comes after the long decline of Israel's tribal system, as the judges become more and more driven by monarchical goals. Monarchy is not inevitable but appears as a response to Israel's dismantled tribal system, established upon the people's request rather than the divine mandate (see Klein, *Triumph of Irony*, 141).

[42] Coote ("Tribalism," 37–38) argues that the biblical text in front of us may claim to have its basis in Israel's history, but in reality it is tribalism reshaped by court and state ideology. Coote's caution in denying a one-to-one correspondence with the historical reality of Israel is apt. Yet while the story we have has clearly been through a long process of oral tradition, writing, and editing, his notion of a hopelessly propagandized document does not fit the reality of the text, which often critiques those in power and diminishes the importance of the kingship/chiefdom in comparison to a well-functioning Yhwhistic tribalism.

[43] See further p. 173, especially n54. While the storyteller eventually suggests that a move towards kingship may be a positive thing ("in those days Israel had no king . . ."), this adaptation to a kingship in Israel is not introduced until the final section of the Judges narrative (chs. 17–21) when the tribal systems have completely broken down. Notably, none of the early accounts of the judges depict a positive "kingship" role, whether that king is presented as the leader of a foreign oppressor or someone who attempts to create a dynasty in Israel (with the possible exception of Gideon, though Abimelech's account is quite condemning). O'Connell (*Rhetoric of the Book*

in speech (8:23) only to establish a pseudo-kingship through fathering seventy sons (the result of many wives or a harem), the seemingly dynastic control of his sons after his death (9:2), and the rise of his son Abimelech into kingship after first killing his brothers and rivals (9:5). In different ways, Abimelech and Jephthah mirror a similar pattern. The movement to lifetime appointments and establishing chiefdoms in their region demonstrates a change in Israel's governing structure, while the localized emphasis in each account indicates the unraveling of the intertribal loyalties. Regardless of whether the social reality of an early tribalism (without chiefdom or monarchy) occurred, the book of Judges stands in judgment of the hierarchical systems that were normative in that environment, while similarly recognizing the ways in which human weaknesses inhibit the ability of a Yhwh-led tribalism to properly function.

The Tribe of Ephraim and its Relationship to the Sons of Joseph

As previously mentioned, while Israel's ideology as a tribal unit is important, each individual tribe maintains a distinct identity. There are three tribes mentioned in this text: Ephraim, Gilead, and (briefly) Manasseh. This scene utilizes the term *Ephraim* (אפרים) eight times, with seven of those occurrences found in only three verses (12:4–6). Yet since this narrative recounts a battle between tribes, not nations, they are not the only tribe introduced in this passage. Ephraim is set against *Gilead* (גלעד),[44] which is introduced five times in vv. 4–5, though the tribe acts at the

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of Judges, 276–79) concedes that while the rhetorical strategy of the book of Judges moves towards a kingship in Israel, this only happens as a result of the repeated failures of Israel after they have demonstrably failed in their relationship to Yhwh, covenant, and tribal loyalty. Kingship (done Yhwh's way) becomes the only option when all other stabilizing elements of tribal Israel's structure have failed.

[44] It is unclear whether or not Gilead functions as a tribe or a clan, but here is presented in contrast to Ephraim. The text does not directly refer to them a clan or a tribe and, while Ephraim is nearly always associated with the tribe in the hill country of the Cisjordan, the classification of Gilead most frequently refers to a geographic

behest of Jephthah (their chief/head), who determines their course of action in contrast to the collective presentation of the angry tribe of Ephraim.[45] Finally, the name *Manasseh* (מנשה, v. 4) is only mentioned once, invoked by the Ephraimites to taunt the Gileadites. Therefore, this scene highlights the distinctive tribal identities in contrast to the unified tribal ideology of Israel, stressing the strained bonds of loyalty that are finally breaking.

The three tribes mentioned in this text (Ephraim, Gilead, and Manasseh) share a unique relationship among the tribes: they are all associated with the eponymous ancestor Joseph.[46] While the tribes of Israel are all portrayed as descending from the sons of Jacob, the tribe of Joseph is distinct because it is often further divided into two separate tribes, from Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh. Even when the "tribe of Joseph" is blessed in Deut 33:13–17, this blessing is explicitly extended to Ephraim and Manasseh (v. 17b). Miller notes that the tribal blessings in Deut 33 reflect the life of the tribe *after* they enter the promised land;[47] therefore,

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region (Ottosson, "Gilead," 2:1020). For the purposes of this paper, Gilead is understood as a tribe because: (1) a clan is typically a smaller subset of a tribe and yet Gilead includes a much broader territory, enveloping the territory of at least two and a half tribes. (2) It is presented in contrast to Ephraim, and war alliances (most often indicative of kinship ideology) are the pivotal issue that motivates the battle. Yet it is also important to hold their treatment as a tribal entity in tension with their willingness to kill many from the opposing kinship tribe (not just in battle, but as they escape from battle) and their unusual geographic boundaries (including expanding to include part of three tribal territories). For more information on the possibility of Gilead being a supratribe, see the previous discussion on (p. 121).

[45] The Ephraimites as a people (rather than the leader of the Ephraimites) are presented in conversation with Jephthah (v. 1), whereas the people of Gilead do not have a voice outside the speech of Jephthah himself (vv. 2–3)— which, according to Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 227), is self-focused, emphasizing Jephthah's own deeds and victory. This will be discussed more fully later this chapter. In vv. 4–5 the people of Gilead are unified in their battle against the Ephraimites and act as a collective with decisive force and aggression, once again following the instructions of Jephthah himself.

[46] The historicity of the genealogical record is highly debated—which came first, the ancestor or the tribe? Yet few doubt the significance of the eponymous ancestors in establishing some type of normative expression of tribal identity. For example, drawing on Greek genealogies, Tobolowsky (*Sons of Jacob*, 2–10, 63–67) argues that genealogies are mythic in nature, giving storied accounts to explain lived realities. Yet these mythic accounts intend to explain the systems that existed around the earliest audiences. Regardless of whether these genealogies are considered historically plausible or invented mythos, the function of these genealogies and blessings remain.

[47] Miller (*Deuteronomy*, 239) concludes that the blessings of the tribes highlight common themes that are illustrated in Israel's later tribal life: protection, abundance, and strength.

they reflect tribal paradigms that follow the individual tribes through their stories in the promised land.[48] Through it, Joseph receives a blessing of assets (land and resources, vv. 13–16a), a place of distinction among his brothers (v. 16b), and the promise of military strength (v. 17a).[49] Interestingly, this blessing states that "he will push the peoples together to the ends of the earth" (v. 17b), suggesting a combination of strength and a drive for the unity of their people.[50] Therefore, the Josephite tribes are depicted as blessed in similar ways as the other tribes, yet also portrayed as *distinctly* strong among the tribes of Israel, with a strength that serves to protect a sense of unity among the tribes.

Yet the sons of Joseph also maintain a distinct bond that stands apart from the other tribes in Israel: they are *full* brothers to each other (with the same mother and father); therefore, they are connected to each other through horizontal kinship, yet they do not share a similar horizontal kinship with the remaining tribes, being instead the grandsons of Jacob.[51] Furthermore, among

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[48] The Deuteronomic blessing includes a variety of benefits: a blessing of land/territory and resources (Naphtali, v. 23; Zebulun and Issachar, vv. 18–19), long life (Reuben, v. 6), leadership (Judah, v. 7; Gad, vv. 20–21; Levi, vv. 8–11), protection and strength (Benjamin, v. 12; Asher, v. 24; Dan, v. 22). There is also a notable emphasis on the topological and arable features that those among the Josephite tribes would experience (sun, good soil for produce, mountains, etc., vv. 13–17), as well as the blessings of the maritime and trade route activities for Zebulun and Issachar (vv. 18–19; Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 239).

[49] Neef (*Ephraim*, 267–68) describes these blessings in great detail, and his discussion of the third and final promise, that Joseph would be a bull that gores—indicating not only his strength but also his capability to exert power over the people—is most helpful in demonstrating the unique function of the Josephite tribes in Israel's tribal structure. Notably, the number of cola and syllables in the Joseph blessing is significantly higher than in most of the blessings, with the exception of Levi. For a helpful chart, see Kelly, "Quantitative Analysis," 59–60.

[50] While the term "people" has a broad meaning that also includes the peoples of the land, within the context of the blessing the emphasis is on how each tribe will affect the people of Israel. For example, Deut 33:7 states that Yhwh will bring Judah to "his people." Furthermore, while the presence of the "wild ox" metaphor leads many interpreters to translate the verb נגח as "gore," this translation does not take into account the phrase "them together" (יחדו), which immediately follows. To "push them together," with the intensity of a wild bull demonstrates a fierce strength used for noble purposes, better aligning with the more positive blessing that comes before it.

[51] Levin ("Understanding Biblical Genealogies," 21–22) further suggests that their geographic proximity itself is significant in their presentation as full brothers who have a different father and mother than the remaining tribal ancestors. For Levin, it is not a coincidence that the two prominent tribes in the fertile lands of the central hill country just happened to be full brothers. However, other tribes with strong ties come from sons with different mothers (e.g., Judah and Benjamin).

the full brother pairings in the tribes of Israel, Ephraim and Manasseh are the only full brothers whose land also directly borders the other, further strengthening their alliance through shared territorial interest.[52] As the Deuteronomic storyline progresses, Josh 17:14–18 depicts the separation of the sons of Joseph into their eponymous two tribes when they request additional territory. [53] The Joshua text portrays three elements of tribalism as they relate to this account: the connection between the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh under the umbrella of Joseph, the separation of the Josephite tribe into two units, and an explanation for their shared border—they once shared the land that is now divided. Their full-sibling identity serves an important etiological function, namely it explains the close relationship experienced by these neighboring brother tribes—regardless of whether it is real or contrived.

Yet the story of Ephraim and Manasseh does not begin with the blessing in Deut 33, but can be traced back ideologically to the deathbed proclamation of Jacob, who adopts both of the sons of Joseph as his own (Gen 48:1–5).[54] Jacob specifically states that "Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as are Reuben and Simeon" (v. 5)—thereby adopting them as full members of Jacob's household.[55] As a result, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh are considered among the

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[52] Lerner, "Manasseh," 177–183; Levin, "Understanding Biblical Genealogies," 21–22.

[53] The Ephraimites were located in the central Palestinian mountains in a land that was particularly resource-rich. Archaeology of the Iron I period demonstrates an abundance of settlements in the region. Neef (*Ephraim*, 319) offers a fairly extensive review of the archaeological data on Ephraim during Iron I. For more recent work, Grabbe ("From Merneptah to Shoshenq," 74–75) enumerates further evidence of Ephraim and Manasseh in the region as early as Iron I. While I disagree with his rejection of the biblical texts as a historical witness, the helpful list of recovered sites illuminates the development of the region, leaving room for scholars to come to their own conclusions with the evidence.

[54] Not all scholars recognize an early historical connection between the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. For example, Lerner ("Manasseh," 177) cites the Song of Deborah, an early text that predates the final redacted text, which mentions Ephraim, but not Manasseh or even Joseph. Yet given the special connection between these brother tribes outlined throughout the broader biblical witness (see later in this section), this lack of reference in one witness does not seem to assume the absence of an early connection.

[55] Westermann (*Genesis 37–50*, 185) notes that in this act Jacob legitimizes both the sons of Joseph and their role as tribal heads.

founding eponymous ancestors in the house of Israel, while still maintaining their distinctive genealogy and unique relational space,[56] which sometimes highlights their unity and on other occasions their discord (e.g., Num 26:28; Deut 34:2; Isa 9:21; Pss 60:8; 108:9).[57] Just as degrees of loyalty toward village, clan, tribe, and Israel vary according to closest kinship, the kinship between these two tribes seems to maintain importance within the broader intertribal relationships. This unity is reflected in their frequent references together and would imply a greater feeling of betrayal if that kinship tie were violated (as can be seen in the Ephraimite frustration with Gideon and Manasseh in Judg 8:1–3).[58]

In the story of Jephthah, the Ephraimites accuse him of the same kinship betrayal that had been lobbied at his predecessor, Gideon of Manasseh. It is notable that the only two times Ephraim directly confronts one of the tribes of Israel in the book of Judges, and those tribes are associated with the house of Joseph. Perhaps the violation of their closer horizontal kinship bond was a more egregious affront to their sensibilities. While the text portrays a clear violation of the tribal alliance between Ephraim and Gilead, it is unclear who violated the bonds of brotherhood. Olson points out that both parties accuse the other of "intra-tribal disloyalty," yet one of them

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[56] Bendor (*Social Structures of Ancient Israel*, 173–75) presses this issue further, suggesting that Manasseh and Ephraim would be seen as independent ancestors from the line of Jacob rather than inheritors of Joseph, translating Jacob's blessing to read, "they shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance" (v. 6). Bendor further points out that this distinguishes them from even their own brothers within the house of Joseph, they alone have been set apart as members of Jacob's blessing.

[57] Lerner, "Manasseh," 180–81.

[58] A strained history between the Transjordanian and Cisjordanian tribes can also be detected in Num 32. The dispute recounted in that text is settled once the Transjordanian tribes agree to fight alongside the remaining tribes, promising "we will not return to our homes until every one of the sons of Israel has gained possession of his inheritance" (v. 18). Importantly, Joshua (an Ephraimite) reminds these Transjordanian tribes of this promise before they begin the conquest of Canaan, and they again agree to the terms (Josh 1:12–18).

must be lying.[59] The Ephraimites claim that Jephthah ignored their known desire to participate in battle (12:1); Jephthah claims that the Ephraimites did not reply to his request for aid (v. 2). Ephraim's perception of Gilead's betrayal is likely emphasized due to Gilead's association with Manasseh. In fact, genealogical lists present Gilead as a descendant of Manasseh.[60]

The expansion of the Ephraimite and Manassite lineage is developed in later genealogical lists in the book of Numbers, with the tribe of Manasseh consisting of eight additional sub-groups.[61] According to the second wilderness census in Num 26, two names emerge that relate to the Transjordanian regional groups: Machir and Gilead.[62] This census maintains that Manasseh fathered Machir and Machir fathered Gilead—therefore, both of the Transjordanian toponymous ancestors descend from Manasseh, who is himself a descendant of Joseph, and therefore a member of the tribes of Israel. Yet there is no recorded legitimization of *this* son (Gilead,

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[59] Olson ("Dialogues of Life," 52) believes that it is clearly Jephthah, with his trail of deception, who is lying. Yet the text seems purposefully vague, suggesting that both tribes were perhaps being disingenuous.

[60] See further p. 121. Notably, Deborah's song (Judg 5:17) does include Gilead as a tribe of Israel, yet the Song of Deborah, the story of Jair (10:3–5) and the Jephthah account are the only places in the historical texts that Gilead is used in reference to a tribal entity (Lerner, "Manasseh," 111). Gilead is usually used in reference to a geographic region (e.g., Gen 31:25; Deut 34:1; Josh 17:5, 6; 22:9, 13, 15, 32; Judg 10:4; Hos 6:8; Amos 1:3; Pss 60:9; 108:9). Yet that boundary is nebulous, and often described in different ways. Ottosson (*Gilead*, 9) notes at least four different territorial markers: (1) the region that is cut in half by the Jabbok River in Deut 3:12–13 and Josh 12:2–5; (2) the region north of the Jabbok River in Deut 3:13 and Josh 12:5; (3) the region south of the Jabbok in Num 21; Deut 3:12 and Josh 12:2; (4) the territory both north and south of the Jabbok river, extending between the Yarmuk in the north and the Arnon in the south, as seen in Gen 37:35; Deut 3:10, 34:1; Josh 22:9. Ottosson then concludes (116–19) that the Deuteronomist viewed the Jordan as a topological line, east of which represents the district of Gilead. MacDonald (*East of the Jordan*, 195–99) observes the same mixed attribution, but maintains that Gilead was initially designated as the area south of the Jabbok based on excavated sites east of the Jordan.

[61] According to Lerner ("Manasseh," 54–59), Num 26 enumerates the tribal subgroups of Manasseh during the wilderness settings. The primary eight groups include: Machir, Gilead, Abiezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Shemida, and Hepher (vv. 29–33). This list includes both vertical (Machir begat Gilead and Gilead begat the remaining ancestors) and horizontal (the brothers included are Abiezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Shemida, and Hepher) relationships, yet most of these figures are not presented as eponymous ancestors to specific social groups. Instead, these names are toponyms, connecting the descent groups with regions.

[62] It is worth noting that while the genealogy places them as later descendants of Manasseh, some scholars dispute the order. For example, Guillaume ("Deborah and the Seven Tribes," 20–21) describes Machir as an earlier form of the tribe of Manasseh and Gilead as a precursor to the Transjordanian community.

grandson) of Manasseh in the early blessing texts that would elevate his status as eponymous ancestor of an Israelite tribe (as Jacob did for Ephraim and Manasseh, Gen 48:1–5). The genealogy describes Gilead as a grandson of Manasseh, and therefore part of the ancestral kinship that connected the sons of Joseph, yet obscures Gilead's role in the broader tribal framework of Israel.

What is Gilead—a region, tribe, or even a supra-tribe?[63] Outside of the book of Judges, Gilead most often denotes a region rather than a tribe.[64] Even the etymology of the name *Gilead* (גלעד) likely derives from the term *difficult* (גיד), which may be a reference to the land Gilead inhabits—a pre-cultivated, mountainous, and *difficult* terrain—again shifting the focus of Gileadite traditions to regional categories.[65] Yet the song of Deborah seems to imply that Gilead is a tribe of Israel located in the Transjordan, as she extolls and critiques the tribes based on their participation in battle ("Gilead remained across the Jordan," 5:17). However, "Gilead" in the book of Judges seems to behave unusually for an Israelite tribe, absorbing the tribal territories (perhaps the tribes themselves) of Gad, Reuben, and eastern Manasseh. The combination of tribal identity with geographical region seems fitting if Gilead is acting as a supra-tribe.[66] The model of a supra-tribe offers a helpful paradigm for understanding how Gilead both functioned as an

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[63] Again, a supra-tribe occurs when independent tribal units unite, either for economic purposes or to face an external threat, see LaBianca, "Excursus," 19–20. In the story of Jair, Gilead may have united for the former, yet that association likely continued during the life of Jephthah in response to the Ammonite threat.

[64] Gen 31:21, 23, 25; Num 32:1; 32:29, 39, 40; Deut 2:36; 3:10, 12; 3:13, 15, 16; 4:43; 34:1; Josh 12:2, 5; 13:11, 25, 31; 17:1, 5, 6; 20:8; 21:38; 22:9, 13, 15, 32; 2 Sam 2:9; 17:26; 24:6; 1 Kgs 4:13, 19; 17:1; 2 Kgs 10:33; 15:29; 1 Chr 2:22; 5:9, 10, 16; 6:80; 27:21; Jer 8:22; 22:6; 46:11; 50:19; Ezek 47:18; Amos 1:3; Obad 1:19; Zech 10:10.

[65] Ottosson, (*Gilead*, 3–15, 29), who has written the most extensive work on Gilead, notes that the meaning of the name is difficult to determine, adding that it could mean "curly" (as in the hair of a baby), but concluding that it most likely references a location. He states that it was likely "an adopted name for the East Jordan countryside, and particularly for the afforested hill country running from north to south," utilizing numerous biblical texts to demonstrate this point.

[66] See further p. 121.

Israelite tribe and deviated from the normative path. Perhaps the inclusion of Gilead as a key figure at this point in the narrative is yet another indication of the fallen state of Israel—this dominating "tribe" resembles, but does not fully represent, the ideology of Israel's tribal system (e.g., Gen 49; Num 26; Deut 33). Thus the archetypical understanding of Ephraim is directly tied to Manasseh, which is vertically connected to Gilead, and their social and political realities are both entwined and distinct.

Ephraim stands apart as he is placed above his older brother, Manasseh, in the extensive blessings offered to the tribes of Joseph (e.g., Gen 49:22–26; Deut 33:13–17). When Jacob extends the blessing of the firstborn onto Ephraim, Joseph tries to correct him. But Jacob responds, "I know, my son, I know; he will also become a people and he also will be great. But indeed, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a multitude of nations" (Gen 48:19). Jacob's blessing echoes his own story of receiving the blessing over his older brother, Esau (25:21–26; 27:26–29), as well as Isaac over Ishmael (17:16–19). Both sons will inherit, but the younger from a position of strength. Furthermore, when Moses blesses the tribe of Joseph he reiterates the priority and military strength of Ephraim over Manasseh—"and they, the ten thousands of Ephraim // and they, the thousands of Manasseh" (Deut 33:17c). Each blessing illustrates the (biblically normative but) socially unusual power structure of the elder (Manasseh) serving the younger (Ephraim), which is further reflected in the more prominent role of Ephraim in the book of Judges.[67] This tenfold increase in military strength suggests that

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[67] Notably, in Deborah's song (5:14) Ephraim is extolled for their participation in the battle against Sisera's army, but is also described as having "roots in Amalek." This odd configuration has led to varying interpretations, from "root" implying a contentious relationship between Amalek and Ephraim (Smelik, *Targum of Judges*, 453) to co-settling among the Amalekites (Barthélemy, *Josue, Juges*, 85). Knight ("Like the Sun in Its Might," 47) concludes that the Ephraimites likely lived in an area controlled by the Amalekites, given the narrator's emphasis on

Ephraim is not only powerful but also capable of exerting that power over other peoples, even those in Israel.[68]

For example, Ps 60 rejoices over God's saving history, remembering the role of only four tribes of Israel: Gilead, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Judah. Significantly, three of these "tribes" belong to the house of Joseph. God declares that Gilead and Manasseh are "mine," and Judah is to rule as the "scepter," but Ephraim's primary role is the defense of the land—Ephraim is "protection of my head" i.e., helmet (v. 9 [7]). Notably, the most successful warrior-leader in Israel's history, Joshua, is from the tribe of Ephraim. Furthermore, that strength of leadership is also reflected in Israel's later history as the name "Ephraim" becomes synonymous with the northern kingdom.[69] This warrior leadership is so deeply intrinsic to the expectations of Ephraim that when the prophet Zechariah describes the salvation and restoration of Ephraim, he declares that they will be "like a warrior" (Zech 10:7), therefore restoring them to their proper place in Israel. This reflection of Ephraim's prominence and defensive role in Israel reflects a similar sentiment as Deut 33:17, while Gilead and Manasseh are simply objects of Yhwh's attention and care.

So, what is the character archetype for Ephraim? Ephraim is blessed exponentially by Yhwh, is militarily strong, and is charged to "push the people together" (Deut 33:17). Finally,

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their failure to remove the previous inhabitants from the land in 1:29. Furthermore, this prominence of Ephraim is attested to in the broader biblical story—as a primary defender of Israel during the time of Joshua's leadership and later in Israel's history, "Ephraim" becomes synonymous with the northern kingdom.

[68] The typical dating of this text suggests that it reflects on the experience of the strength of Ephraim rather than foretelling it. Neef (*Ephraim*, 269) compares the blessing of Deut 33 with the blessing in Gen 49, noting that the Genesis text requires the tribes to remain connected, whereas the Deuteronomy text focuses on pronouncing blessings over and extolling the prowess of the separated tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh in past victories.

[69] 2 Kgs 14:13; 2 Chr 17:2; 25:7, 10, 23; 28:12; Neh 8:16; 12:39; Isa 7:5, 8, 9, 17; 9:9; 11:13; 17:3; 28:1, 3; Jer 7:15; 31:9, 18, 20; Ezek 37:16, 19; Hos 4:17: 5:3; 5:5; 5:9, 11, 12, 13, 14; 6:4, 10; 7:1, 8, 11; 8:9, 11; 9:3, 8, 11, 13, 16; 10:6, 11; 11:3, 8, 9, 12; 12:1, 8, 14; 13:1, 12; 14:8; Zech 9:10, 13; 10:7.

due to their strength and their drive to unity, Ephraim is the "helmet" of God in defense of the nation. However, the manner in which they carry out these traits does not always fit their worthy ideal.

Mode of Conduct: Flawed Protectors of Israel's Unity

Ephraim's mode of conduct, like most characters in the story of Jephthah, is not directly stated by the storyteller and is instead deduced through subtle textual cues, intertextual echoes, and Ephraim's relationship to elements of Israel's covenant code. While nearly every academic review of this text recognizes that the Ephraimites do not possess a particularly positive depiction,[70] their mode of conduct is much more complicated than many assume. While there are clear indicators of misconduct, there are also textual clues that suggest elements of a positive, or at least more sympathetic, reading to help understand this hotheaded tribe.

Ephraim's faults are difficult to ignore. It is the Ephraimites who initiate the conflict with Jephthah and Gilead, marching to battle against their kin *after* the enemies of Israel have been defeated. The text indicates that they were "summoned" (צעק) and "crossed over (עבר) [the Jordan] to Zaphon" (Judg 12:1) to confront Jephthah directly, rather than attempting a diplomatic solution through messengers or an envoy of elders. These actions echo the aggressive behavior of Ammon in the introduction to the Jephthah cycle—Ammon "crossed over the Jordan to fight" (ויעברו בני־עמון את־הירדן להלחם) in 10:9 and they "summoned" (צעק) their troops in v. 17.

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[70] It would be impractical to give an exhaustive list of those who negatively characterize Ephraim as that would include most of the literature. For a few examples of negative evaluations with no positive or sympathetic readings of Ephraim, see nn9–11. This negative appraisal is perhaps best surmised by Guillaume (*Waiting for Josiah*, 154), who concludes that "nothing but trouble comes from Ephraim!"

Therefore, the confrontational behavior of the Ephraimites, as well as the decisive act to cross the Jordan into territory that is clearly beyond their borders,[71] matches the behavior of the Ammonites who have already been rebuked by the deity.[72]

Furthermore, Ephraim's complaint (being left out of the battle with Ammon) is immediately followed with a threat of imminent harm to the leader of Gilead, "we will burn down your house upon you with fire!" (12:1). The reference to "fire" as an instrument of vengeance is an often used intimidation tactic in the book of Judges—for example, it is mentioned in the introduction as Judah's means of destroying Jerusalem *after* the battle was won (1:8), cited in Jotham's fable as judgment for the cedars' malicious intent (9:15, 20), applied by Abimelech against the people of Shechem for their disloyalty (9:49), and issued by the Philistines to threaten and then destroy the wife of Samson for making fools of them (14:15;

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[71] The exact location of the Ephraimites after they cross the Jordan is debated, yet clearly lies beyond Ephraimite territory: is Zaphon a location (and if so, where), or does it just mean "north"? In Josh 13:25–27, Zaphon is referenced as one of the "towns of Gilead," located north of the Jabbok and about 2.5 miles east of the Jordan (see Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 380; Webb, *Book of Judges*, 337). Yet the location of the confrontation is difficult to discern given the LXX reading "northward" and the correlation of the name Zaphon to the Amarna correspondence, which suggests a variety of other possible sites. Butler (*Judges*, 293) identifies Zaphon as a town seventeen miles southeast of Beth-shan, but notes that there are five possible sites. Rainey and Notley (*Sacred Bridge*, 141) have suggested that the location of Zaphon in the north, listing the probable sites as Sa'idiyeh and Mazar. Biddle (*Reading Judges*, 134) argues that the term "Zaphon" designates the direction "north" and references a "mythic location" rather than a specific place. Yet Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 452) is correct in concluding that regardless of the location of Zaphon, the "essential point is that it lay across the Jordan, so taking Ephraim out of its space and into areas now controlled by Jephthah" (cf. Franklin, "Zaphon," 6:1040).

[72] Ammon and Ephraim show interesting parallels in their behavior, as first noted by Webb (*Book of Judges*, 338). Although few other scholars have observed this connection, Janzen ("Why the Deuteronomist," 352–54) concludes that this echo functions to cast Ephraim's actions as those of foreign invaders. While Janzen's observations are helpful, they miss the distinct actions of the Ammonites and perhaps overgeneralize the failings of Ammon. Jobling ("Structuralist Criticism," 107–11) notes the repeating incidents at the "fords of the Jordan," which occurs three times (3:27–29; 7:24—8:3; 12:1–6), highlighting two major oppositions—summoning versus not summoning the Ephraimites to battle and Ephraim allying versus not allying with the judge. He argues that while the similarities require closer examination, the distinctive elements are more compelling. He concludes that 12:1–6 is unique in that it focalizes the Ephraimites, rather than Jephthah, and holds their behavior as normative. As a result, the comparison of these accounts serves as a critique of Jephthah who continues to act as an outsider. O'Connell (*Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 202) further notes that the similar circumstances of Gilead's battle with Ephraim and Ammon further highlight Jephthah's lack of engagement with Ephraim.

15:6).[73] In these examples, each person invokes fire out of a desire for personal vengeance against an individual or community. Yet the impetus for, as well as the implications of, this threatening fire takes on many different dimensions.

The "fire" of vengeance is depicted in a range of contexts and with varying motivations, for example, as the act of the proud and vindictive Philistines (14:15; 15:6) and in Jotham's call for divine reprisal for a truly egregious act of violence (9:20). Ephraim's threat against Jephthah may in many ways reflect the pride of the Philistines, but there are some indications that the motivation may not have been purely vindictive—they are personally affronted by the lack of tribal loyalty demonstrated by the Gileadite chief and are calling him to account. While some scholars, like Assis and Block, have argued that this threat against Jephthah demonstrates an increasingly hostile attitude towards the Gileadite leader compared to the Gideon account, in which the Ephraimites merely "argued passionately with him" (8:1), the focus on intensity alone misses the point.[74] Instead of focusing on a shift in intensity, the second account demonstrates a marked shift in the subject of their disapproval—Jephthah *himself*.[75] The men of Ephraim do not directly threaten to burn the cities of Gilead (in the way that Abimelech killed the people of

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[73] On this pattern of burning people's houses—physical or familial—and its relationship to the Ephraimites' taunt, see Schneider, *Judges*, 184; Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 452. O'Connell (*Rhetoric of the Judges*, 201n291) argues that they had an offended sense of self-importance, noting that "the clause-initial position" of ולנו in 12:1 as well as the language of the threat is remarkably similar to the threat of the Philistines in 14:15 (cf. Webb, *Integrated Reading*, 71). Yet both O'Connell and Webb fail to recognize the dramatically different impetus in which each threat is uttered. While that does not make the Ephraimites' response a noble retort, it should be seen as a soften the negative characterizations in Israel, not as synonymous with the Philistine behavior.

[74] See, e.g., Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 226) and Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 380), who primarily contrast the situations as increasingly intense.

[75] Conway (*Judging the Judges*, 518) notes the shift to direct discourse in both the threat and Jephthah's response as compared to the Gideon account.

Shechem), but threaten to attack Jephthah himself (as an independent agent who has wronged them, as with Samson). Their discontent is aimed directly at the leader of Gilead.

Furthermore, the intensity of their threat depends upon what the Ephraimites know about the death of Jephthah's daughter. Were the Ephraimites sardonically pointing to his misguided vow (and its completion), or were they threatening a core Israelite structure? The narrative abruptly moves on from the death of Jephthah's daughter (11:39), the only heir of his household, to the confrontation with the Ephraimites, with little discussion concerning the mourning of Jephthah or the people in Gilead.[76] It is the Ephraimites who first remind us of this painful death by bringing to mind the "house" of Jephthah and the "fire" that they intend to consume it. Scholars disagree regarding the referent for the word "house" (בית) in the Ephraimites' threat. Gorospe and Ringma argue that the term "house" denotes the household of Jephthah, as the Ephraimites may have been unaware of his daughter's death or were threatening the broader household of Gilead.[77] Others assume the death of the household (as Jephthah's daughter has, of course, already been killed) but shift their focus to the physical building as a sign of the complete destruction of his physical house (likely with Jephthah inside).[78]

Yet since the text itself maintains the ambiguity, the crucial point is that the fire is intent upon destroying Jephthah, evoking the memory of his sacrifice, regardless of whether or not the

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[76] Notably, while Jephthah should be called to account for his unlawful vow and the murder of his daughter, there is no record of anyone in Gilead raising an objection or intervening to prevent the fulfillment of the vow, only the commemoration of the sacrifice by the young women (11:40). The men of Gilead seem to have coalesced around Jephthah after his victory, vow, and sacrifice. Unlike the advocacy on behalf of Jonathan in 1 Sam 14, the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter is permitted by the people through their silence (Gorospe and Ringma, *Judges*, 166). It is unclear whether the story of her death had extended beyond the bounds of Gilead.

[77] Gorospe and Ringma, *Judges*, 165. Biddle (*Reading Judges*, 134) also assumes that Ephraim is unaware of Jephthah's vow and the death of his daughter but does not directly address the implications of the term "house."

[78] For variations of this argument, see Webb, *Book of Judges*, 338; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 380; Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 452.

Ephraimites were aware of it.[79] The rhetorical impact of the remark rings painfully ironic: the fire *has already* consumed his household, and the "household" matters little by comparison. The text is unclear regarding what Ephraim knows, raising the question of whether they are depicted as spiteful, deliberately pouring salt into a wound, or ignorant, threatening Jephthah's house(hold) yet unaware that there is little left to threaten?[80] The storyteller seems reticent to clarify their foreknowledge or intent, therefore allowing two versions of Ephraim to co-exist. Yet either way, the Ephraimites issue a blistering threat against a fellow Israelite, using language that will only exacerbate the conflict—this dominant tribe of Israel has failed to bring the tribes together.

Still, the Ephraimites' actions and threat cannot be detached from their value system, which prompts their summons to cross the border and their threat against Jephthah. Certainly, to attack the leader of Gilead would incite the Gileadites to war, yet the Ephraimites' complaint seems to suggest that they are not merely challenging the Gileadites, but Jephthah's role as a leader (or even a member) in Israel—not unlike the brothers' and elders' initial response to this crafty judge. Younger concludes, "[j]ust as his half-brothers rejected him, so now his tribal 'brothers' seem to have rejected him."[81] Therefore the reference to the "house" of Jephthah

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[79] Butler, *Judges*, 293–94; see also McCann, *Judges*, 90. For a different perspective, see Schneider (*Judges*, 183), who believes that the threat was not an individual assault against Jephthah, but extended to all the houses of Gilead. While she offers an interesting perspective on what becomes an inter-tribal threat, Schneider does not provide a clear articulation of the evidence for concluding that the direct threat against Jephthah is assumed to also apply more broadly.

[80] While relatively few scholars have considered this question carefully, those who wrestle with this textual gap come to different conclusions. Some assume that the Ephraimites must be aware of Jephthah's sacrifice and therefore that the threat is selfish and inconsiderate (e.g., Gorospe and Ringma, *Judges*, 165.). Others conclude that they must be unaware in order for the threat to intimidate him (Webb, *Judges*, 338). Notably, Boda ("Judges," 2:1197) argues that the confrontation with the Ephraimites happens before he reaches home and the sacrifice of his daughter, which further heightens the irony of the threat. Yet I maintain the ambiguity of the narrator and believe that both possibilities are important in maintaining the opacity of the Ephraimites' actions.

[81] Younger, *Judges, Ruth*, 273.

likely signifies the institution that they believe was violated when Gilead marched to battle without them—loyalty within the house of Israel.

The substance of the Ephraimites' claim, "you crossed over to fight against the sons of Ammon, but you did not call on us to go with you" (12:1), is connected to the failing ideology of tribal loyalty and kinship ties that should be assumed in Israel, especially during times of war. The Ephraimites are reacting (however inappropriately) to the deterioration of the social bonds between Israel's tribes. Throughout the book of Judges, Ephraim frequently comes to the aid of their tribal brothers.[82] Therefore, despite their faults, Ephraim has been a reliable ally in times of war and has proved faithful to the principle of inter-tribal loyalty. O'Connell and Wong both point to the disintegration of tribal unity as a structural theme in the book of Judges, noting the continuing dissolution of those ties as an indicator of the brokenness of Israel.[83] Klein further connects this fragmentation of the tribal system to the rise in high state offices, like kingship (Abimelech) and chiefdom.[84] Therefore, as Jephthah ascends to the role of chief over Gilead, the Ephraimites misguidedly fight for the tribal system of a forgotten age. Sometimes characters do the wrong thing for the right reason.

Furthermore, this fidelity in battle speaks particularly to the expectations implicit in the tribal archetype of Ephraim as Israel's strongest defense (as outlined in the blessings found in Gen 48, 49; Deut 33). It may have come as a surprise (or at least a shock to their ego) when both

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[82] Judg 3:27; 4:5; 5:14; 7:24; 8:1–3; 10:1; 12:1–6; 12:15; 20:1–2, 11.

[83] O'Connell, *Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 277–78. Oeste ("Butchered Brothers," 297–306) emphasizes the disintegration of kinship ties and their implications on inter-tribal unity as a central theme in the book of Judges. Wong (*Compositional Strategy*, 176–78) specifically identifies the decreasing participation of the tribes in military campaigns as a sign of the deterioration of Israel.

[84] Klein, *Triumph of Irony*, 17–20.

Gideon and Jephthah ignored them as they rallied to war. From the Ephraimites' perspective, this failure to acknowledge their defensive role within Israel's tribal system, which translates into a slight against their honor, and needs to be addressed.[85]

Yet any assessment the Ephraimites' motivation depends upon whom the reader trusts in the dispute regarding the call to arms, Jephthah (Judg 12:2) or the Ephraimites (v. 1).[86] The story offers no record of Jephthah's preparation for battle and his gathering of allies beyond the description of his journey to Ammon (11:29). Here the narrative details Jephthah's journey to Manasseh and then Mizpah before facing off with Ammon, yet the intention of this journey remains unclear. Some speculate that Jephthah traveled to gather troops for war—notably this would include Manasseh and perhaps the southern Transjordanian tribes of Gad and Reuben.[87] Yet a reference to Ephraim is conspicuously absent. The storyteller presents the claims of both Ephraim and Jephthah, but does not mitigate their dispute—it is unclear who is telling the truth.

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[85] In his study of ancient Israel, Pederson (*Israel*, 1:216–26) argued that military exploits are a central area in which one can earn (or lose) honor, thus explaining the perceived severity of Jephthah's offense. Furthermore, Kirkpatrick ("Questions of Honor," 25–27) describes the incident as a "contest for honor," in which the Ephraimites perceive Jephthah's actions as a slight to their honor and therefore issue a challenge in order to defend it. In contrast to Gideon, Jephthah does not remove the need for the challenge but instead accepts the challenge and thoroughly "despoils" his opponents.

[86] Scholars are divided on this question. For example, Ryan (*Judges*, 93–4) consistently gives Jephthah the benefit of the doubt and therefore continues to trust his testimony of events as his conflict with the Ephraimites unfolds, presuming that the Ephraimites are lying. Wong (*Compositional Strategy*, 171–73) has a more negative reading of Jephthah, pointing to the lack of evidence for his claim in the previous description of his journey to battle and his lack of trustworthiness. Olson ("Judges," 294) has such a negative view of Jephthah that he declares that "the reader is led to conclude that this is a bald-faced lie." Still many maintain the ambiguity of the account. Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 229) notes that the text does not validate either account and, given that this dispute is the reason for war, the suppressed information is a deliberate move by the storyteller so that "we will pay attention only to the present situation . . . which points an accusing finger at Jephthah's egocentric conduct."

[87] Schneider (*Judges*, 184) notes that Jephthah's account is impossible to corroborate because though we have a record of Jephthah marching through Gilead and Manasseh, the purpose of that march is never recorded. Webb (*Book of Judges*, 327–28) argues that while the purpose of this trip is not stated, it must be connected to his preparation for battle in some way. Butler (*Judges*, 287) takes this a step further, arguing that he was not merely preparing for battle, but recruiting troops (cf. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 365).

Jephthah has not proven himself trustworthy in the narrative, yet this self-serving lie would constitute a bold deception.

Yet if the social code of the tribe of Ephraim produces character expectations that they will fight for the protection of the other tribes of Israel, why has Ephraim only confronted Gideon and Jephthah, despite the fact that they have not been directly included in other battles? For example, while they are likely a primary force fighting alongside Ehud against Moab (3:27), Deborah (an Ephraimite) does not summon the Ephraimites to battle, but Naphtali and Zebulun (4:4–6). While Deborah's song indicates their participation (5:14), they are not a central element of the Israelite defense strategy in the narrative, yet they do not rebuke Deborah and Barak at any point in the battle or after.

The conflict between Ephraim and Jephthah bears a striking resemblance to that tribe's conflict with Gideon in 8:1–3. The foundational similarity lies in the horizontal kinship between the descendants of Joseph—suggesting a closer bond between these specific people groups. Furthermore, the accounts also exhibit textual connections: the Ephraimites are "summoned" (צעק, 7:24; 12:1), speak as "the men of Ephraim" (8:1; 12:1), complain that they were not "called" to battle (קרא, 8:1; 12:1), and argue fervidly (8:1; 12:1).[88] While these common features demonstrate an intertextual connection, the unique features of Jephthah's encounter reflect the further deterioration of tribal relations between Jephthah and Ephraim as the kinship bonds of the sons of Joseph are strained to the breaking point.

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[88] For a full assessment of the textual links and their implications, see Conway, *Judging the Judges*, 515–19.

Notably, the occasion that leads the Ephraimites to complain differs between the Gideon and Jephthah accounts. While Gideon may have delayed in calling the Ephraimites to battle, he clearly summons them and they play an essential (though small) role in the Israelites' victory (7:24). This contrasts with the situation with Jephthah, in which it is unclear if he ever summons them at all, and both parties agree that the Ephraimites play no role in the victory over Ammon.[89] Whether Jephthah broke covenant by choice or unintentionally, the Ephraimites argue that Jephthah has violated their tribal alliance and violently attempt to make it right.[90]

The most significant distinctions between Ephraim's confrontations with Gideon and Jephthah are the response of the judge and the outcome of the confrontation. Gideon replies with self-effacing humility ("what have I done in comparison with you?" 8:2), praising the value and strength of the Ephraimites ("the gleaning of grapes in Ephraim is better than the vintage of Abiezer. Into *your* hands God has given the leaders of Midian," 8:2–3). Through humility, Gideon assuages the Ephraimites' anger and restores their honor; therefore, the crisis is averted.[91] That story thus offers proof that the Ephraimites *can* be persuaded to disengage and go

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[89] Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 382) concludes that, "[k]nowing Jephthah this probably was a fabrication for the sake of the moment."

[90] Some scholars have suggested other motivations for Ephraim's threat, besides tribal alliance. For example, Webb (*Book of Judges*, 337–38) argues that the Ephraimites are primarily interested in the leadership of Jephthah, proposing that they may have been upset that they were left out of the leadership discussion altogether. This supposition accounts for the personalized language used in the complaint and the threat, yet the Ephraimites do not contend with his position as chief, but with Jephthah himself. Further, the later invocation of Manasseh (v. 4) in their insult against Gilead suggests that this is a broader tribal issue than Webb contends. Using common ANE war praxis to contextualize the scene, Niditch (*Judges*, 137) suggests that the Ephraimites are likely motivated by the spoils of war that they believe have been unjustly denied to them. While this is an interesting theory, it does not account for the fact that spoils of war are never mentioned in the text and that the Israelites had been losing to the Ammonites for eighteen years and therefore had little reason to believe their campaign could be successful.

[91] Kirkpatrick ("Questions of Honor," 29–31) notes that Gideon's response to Ephraim's challenge emphasizes the social superiority of Ephraim, thereby affirming their ascribed honor while maintaining his own acquired honor from battle. By deferring to their ascribed honor, he does not absolutely reject their challenge as invalid, but refuses to respond with a secondary challenge. In so doing, both Ephraim and Gideon retain their honor and are able to depart in peace.

home—war is not inevitable. Furthermore, they are disarmed by Gideon's speech. By contrast, Jephthah chooses a different form of speech,[92] and instead of disarming the conflict, he intensifies the animosity between them.[93] Amit poignantly summarizes the irony of this response, "Jephthah did not exploit his diplomatic talents . . . Instead, he preferred to irritate the Ephraimites and to set out against them in a cruel war."[94]

The end of the story tells of a stunning defeat of the Ephraimites by the hand of the Gileadites: should it evoke feelings of justified rebuke or an uncomfortable sympathy? I believe the latter. The Ephraimites' violent posturing leads to its inevitable end—a war they could not win. Yet subtle textual cues suggest a critique of Jephthah and the Gileadites. Importantly, the Spirit of Yhwh that falls upon Jephthah to help him defeat the Ammonites is no longer present. Instead, Jephthah and his men are credited with the dialogue, battle plan, and defeat (12:4–6). The absence of divine markers characterizes times of extreme distress: God remains silent when the Gileadites seek a deliverer (10:17—11:11), when the daughter is chosen for the sacrifice (11:34–40), and in the resounding defeat of the Ephraimites (12:1–6). The absence of God in the battle against Ephraim is particularly noticeable because it is Yhwh who enables the defeat over Ammon (11:29). By contrast, Yhwh does not give Ephraim into Jephthah's hand; rather the battle and its decisive result are the product of each army's poor choices.

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[92] While most scholars deem Jephthah "verbally gifted" (see Logan, "Rehabilitating Jephthah," 677), in reality his skills at negotiating have been less and less successful as the story continues. While he is able to make a deal for headship in Gilead, his negotiation with Ammon is fruitless, and his bargain with God (the vow) backfires painfully. Jephthah's words become increasingly ineffective, and in this text, he moves quickly to resolving the situation with violence rather than attempting further negotiations (see Boda and Conway, *Judges*, 35).

[93] Or, in the framework of Kirkpatrick ("Questions of Honor," 25–27), Jephthah chooses to accept their honor challenge and exacerbates rather than assuages the Ephraimites' perceived slight.

[94] Amit, *Book of Judges*, 89.

Further, the Gileadites slaughter 42,000 Ephraimites by the end of the conflict. The book of Numbers recounts two censuses, which list the number of military-aged men in Ephraim as 40,500 (1:33) and 32,500 (26:37). While this story takes place at least a few (if not several) generations later and may account for a small population growth, this means that the death toll for Israel's first civil war on a tribal level could have been nearly comprehensive—mirroring the near-total destruction of the Benjamites in 20:35, 46.[95] Jephthah, not Yhwh, decides to so severely rout his enemy that even as they—his own countrymen—escape for home, he captures and slaughters them.

The defeat may have reflected the error of the Ephraimites in challenging Jephthah, but the שִׁבֹּלֶת test reflects the ruthlessness of Gilead's chief mercenary. This account has accumulated significant research that tries to reconstruct or explain the dialectical distinctions between Ephraim and Gilead,[96] but regardless of whether they can be reconstructed, the primary point is

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[95] Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 384f) contends that the word אלף here, typically translated as "thousand," could be translated as "contingent," drawing on a broader interpretive movement that addresses the "unrealistically high" estimation of the numbers in biblical census lists and death tolls by taking אלף as a reference to some kind of subgroup (e.g., "family," "clan," "military unit") or to a "chief." This view was initially suggested by Petrie (*Egypt and Israel*, 42–45) in 1911 and further argued by Mendenhall, ("Census Lists," 66), Payne ("Validity of the Numbers," 215–18), Wenham ("Large Numbers," 19–53), and more recently Humphreys ("Number of People," 323–28) and Rendsburg ("Additional Note," 392–96). Yet while that does address the strangely high death statistic, it may not fit this particular situation. Yet elsewhere in the book of Judges, אלף is best translated as "thousand," and this story has a similar context, relating the number of dead in battle. Therefore, the strangely high number of casualties may be better understood as a rhetorical device to demonstrate the degree to which the Ephraimites were defeated—a near ethnic cleansing.

[96] Studies of the Shibboleth incident have often focused primarily on the difference in pronunciation between the two words. There has been significant debate as to whether the שׁ should be pronounced as /š/, in contrast to /s/, or if the שׁ was really pronounced as a /t̲/, reflecting a proto-Semitic cognate. For examples of this work, see Emerton, "Some Comments," 250–57; Lemaire, "L'incident du šibbolet," 275–81; and Speiser, "The Shibboleth Incident," 10–13. Interestingly, Rendsburg presents evidence for the /t̲/ based on an Ammonite royal name, thus suggesting different dialects on either side of the Jordan ("Ammonite Phoneme," 73–79; also Rendsburg, "More on Hebrew Šibbōlet, 255–258; cf. Faber, "Second Harvest," 1–10). While these studies seek to clarify the language and application of the Hebrew word in the story, they offer little insight into the significance of the scene outside of the fact that it demonstrates some form of a dialectical difference between the two tribes. At most, these works may suggest that this scene in 12:6 was a folk tale that was inserted late in the text's history, yet that does not help to explain the significance of this scene in the received text.

that such distinctions existed.[97] Furthermore, the pettiness of the criterion also serves to ridicule and insult the Ephraimites, who have now become the "escapees" that they accused the Gileadites of being and have been denied an honorable death in battle, instead dying because of their inability to pronounce a word meaning "ear of grain" without an Ephraimite accent.[98] It is precisely the banal nature of this word and this test, contrasted with a portrait of the fractured kinship ties of tribal loyalty and further compounded by the horrifying death toll, that casts a long shadow on Jephthah and the Gileadites.[99] The punishment far exceeds the crime, eliciting sympathy for the initial aggressors.

The Ephraimites act foolishly—goading on a brutally strong chieftain because of an offended sense of honor and loyalty and their own pride. While their values have some root in Israel's tribalism and their distinctive tribal identities, their presentation of these values leaves much to be desired. They attempt to right the wrong through brute force, a bit *too* "on brand" for the Ephraimites as they use what was intended for blessing to force the Gileadites to recognize their place in war. As a result, the Ephraimites suffer more than any of Israel's enemies in the

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[97] In order to reflect the reality of the phonological difference, the storyteller changed the spelling of a familiar word (Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 454).

[98] Webb (*Book of Judges,* 339–40) points to the Ephraimite insult (his translation reads: "you Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim") that is now flipped on its head as the Ephraimites have become the fugitives. Similarly, Marcus ("Ridiculing the Ephraimites," 103–104) reads the entire passage as a ridicule of the tribe of Ephraim—depicting the Ephraimites as opportunistic, incompetent, and stupid—which he views as a biblical satire against the northern kingdom. Yet both Webb and Marcus fail to take into account the value system of the book of Judges itself and the importance of tribal affiliation. While the Ephraimites are certainly overconfident, and even self-righteous, the Shibboleth incident seems to be more a reflection on the cruelty of the Gileadites than a rebounding insult on Ephraim.

[99] Baker ("Double Trouble," 29–50) evaluates the role of Jephthah in the book of Judges, comparing his account in particular with both Ehud and Abimelech. He notes that both Jephthah and Abimelech bring about a civil war (though Jephthah's is deadlier) and that Jephthah leads for exactly double the time of Abimelech (3 and 6). He concludes that just as Ehud is the double portion of Othniel, a positive assessment, Jephthah is the negative doubling of Abimelech. For Baker, it is the Ephraimite passage that renders the doubling of evil on Jephthah. I would argue that this darker portrait of Jephthah also serves to soften the portrait of Ephraim by comparison.

book of Judges—they may have a less-than-positive appraisal, but it is clear that the response of Jephthah and the Gileadites far exceeds the wrong perpetuated against them.

Disposition: Impudent, Confrontational, and Self-Righteous

The Ephraimites' disposition (or personality) is presented primarily through their actions and brief speeches, which hurl stinging words of rebuke at the already bruised ego of Jephthah. The Ephraimites posture themselves as aggressive defenders of battle alliances, but in their deadly complaint about their snub in the war against Ammon, they push their grievance toward antagonism rather than vindication. Nevertheless, difficult family is *still* family and the Ephraimites are presented as the bold, yet unwise, confrontational, easily offended, and proud cousins from a contentious family barbeque in which one unit of the extended family threatens to eliminate the "house" of another. A caricatured reflection of their wounded honor combines with their warrior-like social code.

Bold and Impudent

The sequence of events emphasizes the boldness of the Ephraimites' actions in confronting Jephthah. Given the timecourse of the overall narrative (10:6–12:7), the reader already has a great deal of knowledge regarding the situation the characters have found themselves in: that the Ephraimites have been oppressed (10:9), that the Ammonites have been defeated (11:33), and that the daughter of Jephthah has been sacrificed (11:39).[100] Yet the story is not over. After all of

[100] The timing of this scene in relation to the battle is difficult to determine. Boda and Conway (*Judges*, 35) suggest that the temporal flow of the narrative has intentionally placed events out of order to highlight certain aspects of a scene. Accordingly, they come to the conclusion that the battle with Ephraim happens just after the

this death and destruction, the Ephraimites are just *now* marching out to battle to confront Gilead—peace has not yet been achieved for the Israelites. The manner of their arrival speaks volumes: they do not send messengers, but instead march out together against Jephthah. When the complaint and threat are delivered, they are on Jephthah's doorstep, demanding justice for the wrongs *they* believe were perpetrated against them. Though the Ephraimites were not able to throw off their Ammonite oppressor, they march against Jephthah and his victorious army without reserve.

Furthermore, the boldness of the Ephraimites is juxtaposed to the implied fragility of the daughter's death that immediately precedes this scene. The situation turns abruptly from the anguish of her death to the Ephraimites being summoned to battle and issuing a contemptuous threat against Jephthah. The literary arrangement draws a stark contrast between the two situations—the daughter who returns to her father in order to be murdered (11:39) and the Ephraimites who travel to Gilead to confront Jephthah with a threat of murder (12:1). Whereas the daughter is unable to speak against the ill-will of her father, Ephraim speaks scornfully regarding a real, yet exaggerated, offence. This confrontational style highlights the impudent

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defeat of Ammon, but before the sacrifice of the daughter, pointing to the linguistic similarity of the verb "summons" (צעק), which initiates the conflict in both the Gideon and Abimelech scenes, and therefore arguing that Jephthah is the one who summons the Ephraimites here. Yet it is difficult to determine whether or not such a subtle cue to a temporal shift would be clearly identifiable to early readers. Notably, Niditch (*Judges*, 137) also directly links this story with the battle against Ammon yet does not clarify its relationship to the sacrifice nor explain her position by linking the temporal markers from the Gideon story. Furthermore, given the fairly elaborate travel plans and presumable summons to battle in 11:29, it seems that Jephthah did explicitly connect with Manasseh, but not Ephraim. It is therefore important to the narrative that Jephthah is claiming to have summoned Ephraim, when the detailed narrative of his war preparation is intentionally silent. It seems most likely that Jephthah does not summon Ephraim to Zaphon; Ephraim summons themselves because Jephthah did not make the first attempt. Some scholars have suggested that two months have elapsed between the battle against Ammon and the Ephraimite confrontation, seeing the narrative ordering as temporal and believing, therefore, that this takes place after the daughter has had her two-month respite and has subsequently been sacrificed (see Webb, *Book of Judges*, 338). See also Sjöberg (*Wrestling with Divine Violence*, 37), who argues for the important role of analepsis in the Jephthah narrative, noting that the episode of the Ephraimite dispute is only loosely connected to the events of the Ammonite war; therefore, the timing in connection to the previous stories is dictated by function and effect.

posturing of Ephraim, especially in comparison to the daughter. Both have a reason to protest against Jephthah's treatment, and both act boldly, but in very different ways. Jephthah, who has already been in conflict with his father's household, his own tribe, and his only child, is now the central figure of an inter-tribal conflict. Ephraim's audacious advance towards Gilead signals the disintegration of the tribal system.

Furthermore, the decisive march on Gilead highlights the bold tactical actions of Ephraim as compared to Gilead. Unlike Jephthah's conflict with Ammon, this encounter does not begin with a war of words, culminating in battle, but begins with a physical confrontation that is followed by a verbal altercation. After being made head of Gilead (11:11), Jephthah sends a messenger to the king of Ammon (v. 12) *before* gathering forces and crossing into Ammonite territory for battle (v. 29). The text creates a narrative space between Jephthah and the king of Ammon during their discourse, which contrasts with the lack of space between Jephthah and Ephraim. Instead, the Ephraimites cross the Jordan into Zaphon (12:1), in Gileadite territory, with an aggressive threat. Ephraim either feels that they could easily match the strength of Jephthah's warriors in battle or that their act of strength alone will force Jephthah and the Gileadites to fully recognize their wrongdoing. The men of Ephraim are brazenly posturing for battle to force their "errant" allies to acknowledge their slight.

Collective Identity

After assembling in Gilead, the Ephraimites (as a group) speak directly to Jephthah. In contrast to the Ammonite discourse, Jephthah does not interact with *an* Ephraimite, but *the*

Ephraimites—suggesting that unlike Gilead, there is no *head* (ראֹש) in Ephraim.[101] Furthermore, in contrast to King Getal's reluctance to "personalize the conflict" between himself and Jephthah, the leaderless Ephraimites speak directly to the head of Gilead. This acknowledgement carries with it conflicting implications. In comparison with the Ammonite king, they acknowledge his leadership and treat him as the leader and decision-maker in Gilead.[102] On the other hand, they target Jephthah and his household specifically, seemingly attacking his leadership. Notably, the personalization of their criticism directed toward Jephthah stands in contrast with the communal voice of an offended Ephraim. This contrast is made clearer in Jephthah's response, as his defense is intently focused on his own self-interest ("*I* . . . and *my* people," "*I* cried out to you," "*I* saw you that were not a deliverer," "*I* placed *my* life in *my* hand," "Yhwh gave them into *my hand*," "why have you come up against *me* . . . to fight against *me*" 12:2–3),[103] in opposition to the Ephraimites' sense of communal identity ("we" and "us," 12:1).

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[101] Lack of a leader is not unusual for the Ephraimites in the book of Judges. Boda and Conway (*Judges*, 35–36) offer a helpful table describing the role of Ephraim throughout the book of Judges and observe the leaderless state of the Ephraimites after the death of Joshua (with the exception of Deborah, the prophetess [4:5], who does not lead in battle but leads through wisdom and word). Throughout the book, they seem to fight solely under the leadership of other judges, generals, or tribes. It is important to note that leadership is a difficult subject in the book of judges, with several examples of failure and abuse. Therefore, a lack of individual leaders is not an implicit criticism, and leaderless unity may have been an ideal depicted in the earliest cycles of the judges (notably, little is said about the role or leadership of the early judges—Othniel, Ehud, and Deborah/Barak—after they deliver their people). To that end, Jobling (*Sense of Biblical Narrative,* 109–17, 125–28) argues that Ephraim, and possibly the entire Cisjordan, is therefore uncomfortable with Jephthah's control of the Transjordan and the power imbalance it represents.

[102] Sasson (*Judges 1–12*, 317) discusses the personal slight of the Ammonite king who refuses to address Jephthah by name.

[103] Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 229) argues that Jephthah goes to war because of an offense against his personal honor and status—it is due to his egocentricity, not his moral fortitude (cf. Conway, *Judging the Judges*, 518). Contra Webb (*Book of Judges*, 339), who understands Jephthah's declaration "I . . . and my people" as an act of tribal solidarity rather than, as I suggested in the translation notes, an awkward afterthought (cf. Moore, *Judges*, 307).

Exaggerated Sense of Offense

The Ephraimites collectively confront Jephthah because they believe they were excluded from a battle, invoking the covenant ideology of inter-tribal loyalty in warfare. While the military accounts of the judges rarely include many (let alone all) of the tribes of Israel, this story stands out for the number of tribes it seems to affect.[104] Gilead as a "supra-tribe" seems to include all of the tribes east of the Jordan: east Manasseh, Gad, and Reuben. Furthermore, according to the storyteller in the first situation (10:8), the Ammonites had oppressed Israel for eighteen years and had already crossed over the Jordan to invade the lands of Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim. Yet none of these Cisjordanian tribes or territories are listed in Jephthah's travels before his battle with Ammon despite the fact that this battle mattered significantly for much of Israel, not just Gilead. If the Ephraimites are being honest in their accusation, then their claim has credibility, but their aggressive response seems excessive.

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[104] Aside from non-specific references to "Israel," Ehud's account mentions Benjamin and Ephraim (3:8–30); Gideon's story includes Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, Naphtali, Ephraim (6:1–7:25); and Samson is identified as a Danite but never goes to battle. Deborah is the grand exception to this localizing tendency. Her deliverance story names only Ephraim, Naphtali, and Zebulun, but her song includes a reference to many more tribes not mentioned in the story: Benjamin, Machir, and Issachar (who fought with them) and Reuben, Gilead, Dan, and Asher (who did not come to battle, chs. 4–5). Furthermore, Klein (*Triumph of Irony*, 101–4) states that "the narratives suggest a correspondence between the association of clan-names with mundane, non-Yahwist values." She develops this notion by first evaluating the tribal affiliation of the first judges: Othniel, a member of the tribe of Judah (1:13—by inference since the Calebites descended from the Kenites and Jethro was a Kenite who is said to have lived with the sons of Judah in the wilderness, v. 16); Ehud, a Benjaminite (3:15); Deborah, an Ephraimite (4:4–5); Barak, from Naphtali (4:6); Gideon, from the tribe of Manasseh (by inference from his Abiezrite heritage, which is traced through Josh 17:2). She then deduces their motivations in battle, gauging whether they seem to be working for the benefit of all of Israel or for personal gain. For example, for Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar (probably non-Israelite), there is no mention of personal reward. Deborah and Barak sing of rewards for the Israelite people, juxtaposed to the expectation of plunder from the mother of Sisera. And finally, Gideon seems like a timid leader in the beginning but collects personal glory and plunder, culminating in a dynastic succession battle upon his death.

The initial speech of the Ephraimites is marked with incredulity, "Why did you cross over to fight against the sons of Ammon, but you did not call on us to go with you?" (12:1). This complaint stands out because it evokes Jephthah's odd travel itinerary before engaging Ammon and the Ephraimites' perspective on that journey (11:32–33). Both the storyteller (11:32) and the Ephraimites (12:1) offer the same description of Jephthah's preparation, he "crossed over" (עבר) to engage Ammon (11:32; 12:1). Does this merely refer to "crossing over" boundaries, or was he crossing over the Jordan as well? Webb argues that the Ephraimites seem to imply that Jephthah had not confined his travel to only eastern Manasseh, but had travelled to western Manasseh as well.[105] This act, crossing the Jordan to visit western Manasseh without also visiting Ephraim, would have been especially insulting. Furthermore, while the lands of Ephraim did not necessarily border the Jordan during this time period,[106] in early texts within the book of Judges these waterways are often held and utilized by the Ephraimites in battle. For example, in the story of Ehud, the Ephraimites control the fords of the Jordan and capture the escaping Moabites as they attempt to "cross" (עבר) back into Moab using the Jordan (3:27–28). In Gideon's account, Ephraim takes control of the "waters as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan" and uses that tactical advantage to capture Oreb and Zeeb, decisively ending the battle with the Midianites (7:24–25).

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[105] Webb, *Book of Judges*, 337–38. It is possible that Jephthah had been in the territory of western Manasseh before this and therefore that Jephthah crossing the Jordan was simply to get back into the Transjordan to fight. Yet the sequence of Jephthah's pre-battle travel is rather detailed: he passes through Gilead and Manasseh, then Mizpah of Gilead; from there he goes to Ammon—pause for the vow—and crosses over to the sons of Ammon. The text never identifies where the Ammonites are when the story begins, only that by the conclusion of the battle Ammon has been defeated from Aroer to Minnith to Abel-keramim, including twenty cities total (11:29, 32–33). With such an extensive defeat, it seems implausible that the Cisjordanian tribes still struggle against Ammon. Either they are defeated in the Transjordan and it affects the Cisjordanian occupation, or Jephthah begins with the Cisjordanian occupation and decisively sweeps through the Transjordan.

[106] While the exact boundaries are debated, western Manasseh seems to have bordered most of the western bank of the Jordan while Gad controlled most of the eastern bank (Hoffman and Mullins, *Atlas of the Biblical World*, 49).

Clearly, the waters of the Jordan are a strategic advantage in battle that the Ephraimites are accustomed to dominating. From the perspective of the Ephraimites, Jephthah was not acting as a tribal member coordinating an attack (like Ehud or Deborah), but as an unrestrained Transjordanian chieftain, who insulted the autonomy, cooperation, and mutual respect of the tribes.

However, while the Ephraimites may have had grounds for offense, they seem to exaggerate its significance and make matters worse through heated rhetoric.[107] While inter-tribal loyalty in battle between the Transjordanian and Cisjordanian tribes has been encouraged since the time of the conquest (Deut 3:12–20; Josh 1:12–15), there is no stated penalty for those who fail to call them to battle. The implication seems to be that God would determine the people's faithfulness in battle and that their possession of the land would be contingent on their faithfulness (Deut 1:15). Furthermore, if there is an occasion for inter-tribal conflict, the conflict is typically addressed with a gathering of elders who attempt to settle the dispute, as seen in the conflict between the east and west tribes in Josh 22:12–30.[108] Therefore, summoning their troops against the Transjordanian tribe who has successfully freed them from Ammonite oppression in

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[107] Westbrook and Wells (*Everyday Law in Biblical Israel*, 73) point out that ancient Israelite law allowed the right of revenge for the victim or their family, but excessive revenge was considered "uncivilized." Therefore, even if the Ephraimites are trying to appeal to a sense of vengeance based on a perceived wrong, the punishment for Jephthah and Gilead should match the crime. Unfortunately, there is no precedent for punishment in litigating this type of offence within the law itself.

[108] Schneider (*Judges*, 184n36) notes the parallel between these two conflicts, which both include an east/west debate regarding disloyalty. She further notes that "ironically, it was the tribes on the western side of the Jordan who interpreted actions of the eastern Jordan tribes as treasonous and gathered at Shiloh to fight them." In the Joshua conflict, the dispute was settled without war by the priest Phinehas—unfortunately, there were no peace makers in this crowd.

Israel's heartland,[109] and threatening the fire of vengeance against their leader seems to endanger the very tribal loyalties they claim to defend.

Heated, with an Ill-Mannered Response

As the confrontation between Jephthah and the Ephraimites continues to escalate, both parties become increasingly angry and spiteful. To this end, Webb remarks that "[t]his battle is not represented as holy war, but with wry humor as a rather squalid tit-for-tat tribal feud."[110] For his part, Jephthah responds to their threat with an adamant defense of his own actions, aiming stinging rebuttals at the Ephraimites and refusing to concede that he has failed to meet his obligations. Unlike Gideon, whose conciliatory remarks de-escalate the situation by reminding the Ephraimites of their superior ascribed honor and humbly offering them the ultimate credit for God's victory over the Midianites (Judg 8:2–3),[111] Jephthah's speech shifts the blame of the confrontation back onto the Ephraimites—it was they who failed to respond to his call.[112] Jephthah characterizes himself as the reluctant hero who was nearly overpowered because he called for help and no one came:

> "*I* was a man of contention, and my people, with the sons of Ammon! Exceedingly! And I cried out to you and you did not deliver me from their hand. When I saw that you were not a deliverer, then I placed my life in my hand and crossed over to the sons of Ammon and Yhwh gave them into my hand. (12:2–3)

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[109] Block (*Judges, Ruth*, 380) finds this point particularly odious—that instead of thanking Jephthah for delivering them from the Ammonites, they threaten him based on a "wounded sense of self-importance."

[110] Webb, *Book of Judges*, 339.

[111] Kirkpatrick, "Questions of Honor," 25–26.

[112] Several scholars have contrasted the de-escalation tactics of Gideon with the self-congratulatory response of Jephthah. For some helpful examples, see the comparative analysis of Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest*, 227–30; Conway, *Judging the Judges*, 516–18; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 381–83. This scholarly majority contrasts with the minority of voices who adamantly defend Jephthah, specifically Boling (*Judges*, 212) and Ryan (*Judges*, 93–94).

He pours on the rhetoric, casting shame and dishonor on the Ephraimites.[113] Rather than engaging Ephraim in a conversation to adjudicate if there was indeed tribal disloyalty (e.g., Josh 22:16–29) or offering evidence to counter their claim, Jephthah dramatically dismisses their accusation, charging them with ignoring his cries for help and characterizing the Ephraimites as disloyal and dishonorable. More specifically, in a book filled with deliverers and during a time when Israel needed heroes, Jephthah glibly remarks that Ephraim is not one of them: "I saw that you were not a deliverer" (v. 2). While this observation may be correct,[114] it could only serve to infuriate the already insulted tribal brothers. For Jephthah, who is characterized largely through his words, he demonstrates his preference for berating and demeaning in this text. His priority is in winning, not peace.

Ephraim returns insult for insult, retorting: "you are escapees of Ephraim, Gilead, in the midst of Ephraim, in the midst of Manasseh" (v. 4).[115] The Ephraimites mock the Gileadites—how can the Ephraimites contest for tribal loyalty when Gilead is *not* a tribe of Israel but merely those who escaped the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh? This insult traces back to the unity, as

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[113] Kirkpatrick ("Questions of Honor," 26) notes that the contest for honor/shame usually includes threats, shaming, and derogatory remarks in order to achieve honor for oneself. Here, Jephthah's rhetoric seeks the same ends—rather than diplomatically subverting war, he is goading on his challengers.

[114] While Deborah is from Ephraim, Boda and Conway (*Judges*, 37) observe that she uses the army from Naphtali to initiate the fight. They conclude that Ephraim seems content to let other tribes lead.

[115] The word פליט is typically translated as "survivor," "fugitive," or "escaped one," deriving from the verb "to escape" (פלט). According to BDB, when the noun is the genitive subject, it is best translated "fugitive" (*BDB*, 812). This reading has been adopted by key scholars like Webb, *Book of Judges*, 229; Butler, *Judges*, 273; Niditch, *Judges*, 135. Yet other notable commentators offer differing approaches. Chisholm (*Commentary on Judges and Ruth*, 336) prefers the translation "refugees," yet does not explain this aspect of his translation. Conway (*Judging the Judges*, 517) translates it as "survivors," following the DCH (*DCH*, 358). To some extent, each of these meanings seem to fit the text, and perhaps the insult can be discerned through any of these choices. If they are "survivors," it aims to minimize their military prowess and earned honor—they are not victorious warriors, but merely those who got away. The word "escapees" is best suited for the context of this story given Jephthah's own search for redemption, from a man who ran to escape his brothers to head of Gilead. The impact of this word on Jephthah, let alone the implications for the men of Gilead who chose an "escapee" to lead them and are thereby implicated in this dishonor, seems better suited to the issues at hand in this story.

well as the division, among the tribes of Joseph.[116] Yet it is Ephraim and Manasseh who are included in the blessings of Jacob and Moses, not Gilead. Gilead has no tribal blessing according to Jacob, no tribal calling given by Moses. Therefore, the Ephraimites poke fun—the Gileadites are not a tribe of Israel.

While Ephraim and Manasseh are recognized as central figures in the stories of Israel's patriarchs—the sons of Joseph—Gilead and Machir are introduced through genealogy rather than story. Therefore, the connections of Machir and Gilead to Joseph are further removed.[117] They represent small remnants from the splintered tribe of Joseph—nothing but the escaped members of the covenantal tribes.[118] They are the scraps, the leftovers, the stowaways of the Josephite tradition.[119]

Perhaps Jephthah takes the insult so personally because, after all, he had once run away from his own household, fearing for his life (11:3). Then he was treated like an outsider by his own brothers when they offered him a temporary job instead of the headship offered to Gileadites (v. 6). Jephthah's response to their accusation produces a profound sense of irony—in order to restore his wounded honor and prove that Gilead is *not* an outsider of Israel, he utterly destroys the tribe of Ephraim—tearing down the house of Israel from within.

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[116] In the book of Judges, the Josephite tribes are discussed both in a collective introduction (1:22–23, 35), and in individual references to the tribes/territories: Ephraim (1:29; 2:9; 3:27; 4:5; 5:14; 7:24; 8:1–3; 10:1, 9; 12:1–6, 15; 17:1, 8; 18:2, 13; 19:1, 16, 18), Manasseh (1:27; 6:15–17; 11:29; 12:4; 18:30), Machir (5:14), and Gilead (5:17; 7:3; 10:4; 10:8—12:7; 20:1; 21:8–10).

[117] Notably, Machir was born before Joseph died and therefore met the important patriarch (Gen 50:23). The same cannot be said of Gilead.

[118] Lerner, "Manasseh," 54–58.

[119] Jobling ("Jordan a Boundary," 88–134) describes the connection between the physical and ideological boundary that the Jordan River presented. The Transjordanian region is often treated in a derogatory way, as if something was fundamentally off about the Transjordanian neighbors—the leftovers of the "proper" tribes.

The Tellability of the Ephraimites' Story: What the Reader Learns in Reading the Story from the Perspective of Ephraim

Reading the Ephraimites in Judg 12:1–6 requires a more concerted look at their character social codes and how they influence the perception of mode of conduct and dispositional traits. The Ephraimites were known for their unparalleled strength in Israel, which they *should* use to unify and defend the tribes. At the best of times, that is precisely what they did—joining their countrymen in battle to fight alongside them during the early period of the judges. Yet their view of the Israelite tribal system, and in particular, their place within that tribal family became corrupt and untenable as they twisted their position to become a requisite defense in all Israelite causes. In this passage, the Ephraimites' blessing of strength has turned to aggression. Their duty as the protectors of Israel has become fodder for their wounded honor and pride. Their perception of Ephraimite priority leads to an assumption of Ephraimite superiority, or at least a requirement of Ephraimite appeasement. This deluded sense of self-importance leads them to underestimate their worthy opponent, who is far less interested in soothing their ego. Their designations have been taken for granted and warped by their perception of the intent of tribal loyalty—not to elevate one tribe above the others, but to intervene when their brothers in arms need help. They demonstrate that great weakness often grows in the wake of great strength if left unattended.

Yet despite all of their bluster, the Ephraimites' frustration and aggression is born from a seed of truth: the tribal alliances of Israel were fading and that *was* a tragedy. The tribal disintegration presented in the Ephraimites' clumsy complaint is real, and these fading alliances have given way to new forms of governance. The Ephraimites complain to both Gideon and Jephthah, those who should be their closest allies and tribal brothers. They angrily protest their

minimized (or absent) role in battle, which is emblematic of the diminished connection between the tribes. This complaint signifies a more personal betrayal due to the close relationship between the cultural offshoots of the tribe of Joseph. In Gideon's account, the kinship ties are breaking down, but with Jephthah they have already snapped. Gideon called them too late, but Jephthah did not call them at all. The closest bonds of tribal brotherhood have been cut. Are the Ephraimites petulant in regards to their loss of stature, or is their discontent amplified as a result of the shifting alliances and tribal restructuring? The text is unclear. The old values of Israel have been tarnished, no matter who is seen as the offender.

The aggression of the Ephraimites has been wholly rejected by most readers, yet the price of their hubris is annihilation, not chastisement. Does the punishment really fit the crime? Sure, everyone loves to see the bullies on the playground put in their place, but audiences would collectively gasp if the hero then followed them as they tried to go home and slaughtered them where they stood. The 42,000 casualties (real or rhetorical) far exceeds the language of punishment against any nation in the book of Judges—including nations that have been described in various ways as brutal oppressors. This excessive death toll reflects negatively on Jephthah's military efforts. It is Jephthah, not Yhwh, who fights the battle against Ephraim. It is Jephthah, not Yhwh, who decides to treat the Ephraimites worse than a foreign oppressor, pursuing them as they try to escape and nearly decimating their population. The Shibboleth test demonstrates the arbitrary nature of their deaths—the Ephraimites have already run away and no longer pose a threat. The only way to catch them is through linguistic markers, which means that they are so similar to the Gileadites that they otherwise may have crossed the Jordan undetected. The necessity for such a technique also reveals the closeness of their kinship—they are otherwise indistinguishable. In the end, Jephthah judges for six years—a double portion of Abimelech's

deadly monarchy—and then dies with no record of peace and is buried in an untraceable part of Gilead. The final story with Ephraim seals his fate as a judge of contention, except this contention he has brought upon himself and upon all of Israel.

This story is a tellable account precisely because the Ephraimites bear witness to a disruption deeply rooted in human experience. If we listen to Ephraim, they speak to our own sense of disruption when our presence and place within the people of God is questioned, denied, or disrespected. The question is not *whether* one is accepted in faith communities, but *how* should we respond in such situations? Unfortunately, the story of the Ephraimites is not an account of success, but a warning regarding the destructive nature of aggressive confrontation. It presents a cautionary tale of communal discontent: hostility breeds greater hostility.

As a woman in the evangelical world, which does not always recognize the callings of women, I understand the temptation to demand that "Gilead" acknowledge my rightful place among them. Within faith communities throughout the world, there are many whose presence and purpose are denied or minimized, but it is not always clear how to respond. We may want to force others to acknowledge our role, but that will merely breed division and animosity. The Ephraimites were made the "helmet" of Israel to defend it from injustice and oppression, yet they focused instead upon their gift of strength instead of on its protective function. Often, like the Ephraimites, we miss the point of our giftings, which should be aimed at the betterment and development of the community as a whole, not used to promote and protect our place within it.

This final scene of the story of Jephthah should not push readers into silence and acceptance of the status quo but warn against overreacting towards perceived threats. The Ephraimites threaten to burn down the house of Jephthah, and Jephthah responds by utterly slaughtering them—vicious rebellion leads to a messy end. Both Jephthah and the Ephraimites

demonstrate the problematic cycle of redemption. The Ephraimites, like the brothers and Ammonites before them, feel that they have been wronged. An injustice (or sin) has been perpetrated, and it is their job to correct it. So the Ephraimites prepare to punish Jephthah and his household for their infraction. Much like the Israelites in the opening scene, their desire for restoration is twisted by their own self-interest. Instead of repentance, Jephthah returns blame for blame, insult for insult. Instead of restoration, Jephthah becomes the agent of personal retribution, slaughtering the Ephraimites and waging the most deadly conflict in the book of Judges. The story of Jephthah ends with a painful question: is restoration ever truly possible?

CONCLUSION: READING IN A WORLD OF TELLABLE STORIES

> *A story can tell the truth, she knew, but a story can also lie. Stories can bend and twist and obfuscate. Controlling stories is power indeed.*
> Kelly Barnhill, *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*

All stories create an interactive storyworld, and the biblical accounts are no different. In the storyworld, characters move through *that* space and respond to *those* situations, and the audience is invited to follow along and learn through someone else's experience, and therefore, through the lens of its characters. Cognitive narratology's literary theory suggests that finding meaning in a story does not require one to determine *the* meaning of the text or merely accept the subjectivity of *a* meaning in the text, but to embrace the power of stories to become transformative and meaningful experiences for the reader. Arguably, biblical narratives have always done this well. Traditionally, readers of the biblical narratives have primarily focused on the protagonist—imagining themselves as the biblical prophet, judge, or king. Others have focused on one supporting character within the story, who resonates with their experience—highlighting the loyalty of Jonathan, the strength of Deborah, the resilience of Hagar, etc. But if reading biblical narrative and engaging with the characters can be a truly transformative experience, what happens when we treat all of the perspectives developed by the storyteller as if they matter?

This project has endeavored to do just that—to demonstrate the robust storyworld of *all* the characters who inhabit and engage in the story of Jephthah. The stories of the supporting characters have passed the test of tellability (with the exception of the Ammonite army, who

proves a stock figure to develop the Ammonite king): each responds to a disruption through a traceable sequence of events leading to an outcome, each has a clear disruption to which they must respond, and each of those disruptions resonates in some way with human experience. Yet these stories are not merely tellable, but also offer teachable insights when readers are willing to see themselves in these villains and victims. In endeavoring to understand the social codes imbedded in the narrative, the textual cues offer enough detail to recreate the situations of each textual person and allow their disruption to reveal new insight into their motivations and responses. The biblical stories become dangerous when we only see ourselves through the prism of the hero and fail to see that often of the responses of different characters within the narrative resonate our own experience—even supporting characters prove inscrutable and complex.

Hebrew storytelling offers more than flat "heroes" and "villains," including textured and complicated characters that reflect the dynamic complexity of human life. Readers often default to drawing hard lines between good and evil in biblical interpretation, unintentionally assuming the simplicity of a perceived villain and therefore missing the depth of character conveyed by the storyteller. It is not enough to know *that* someone is rebuked by God, it is equally important to know *why* and to *what extent*. This phenomenon of simplifying biblical characters is similar to the notion of binary identity formation discussed in postcolonial scholarship. Kay Higuera Smith explores the phenomenon of binary identity formation in society and the church,[1] offering a helpful paradigm that may be applied to readers who justify the actions of the corrupt hero and under-engage literary enemies. Smith states that by drawing sharp lines between *us* and *them*,

[1] Smith, "Embracing the Other," 197–210.

binary identities lead to callousness for those deemed *other* and reduce the reality of human complexity.[2] In truth, reading to understand the perspective of the *other,* in life and in text, pushes against our binary paradigms, allowing us to recognize what is right and wrong in each person we encounter and encouraging us to measure ourselves by those same standards of truth.

This important truth would have dramatically changed the circumstances of all of the characters in the Jephthah cycle. The sin-cycle is a demonstration of Yhwh's desire for justice and his great capacity for compassion and reconciliation, yet his refusal to continue the process demonstrates the flaw in the system—Israel's self-absorbed survival instinct and blindness to their own unrighteousness. If divine compassion becomes a mechanistic contract for military deliverance, then it is easy to abuse that system—likewise, if we adhere to a mechanistic redemption (say this prayer, study these texts, affirm these truths, etc.) rather than the restoration of relationship implied by redemption we have missed the point. In Jephthah's story, Israel only wants to turn to Yhwh when they have no other choice; they return for self-preservation rather than a desire for restoration.

When Israel's relationship with Yhwh becomes abusive, their relationships in all other areas of their life soon follow. This same thread of selfishness drives the action of the Jephthah story. The brothers seek to preserve (or grow) their inheritance by driving Jephthah away, resonating with our own fear of self-preservation. The elders allow the injustice against Jephthah to occur and only restore him when they have no other option, resonating with the human tendency to prioritize self-interest over justice. The Ammonites may have brooded over their

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[2] Smith ("Embracing the Other," 197) focuses on the danger of binary identities in church life, yet her understanding is easily applied to reader reactions to characters in the biblical story. .

"unjust" loss of land, now becoming the same tyrants they accuse Israel of being. And the Ephraimites decry the broken allegiances of Israel's tribal kingdom while assembling for war, demonstrating the human experiences of humiliation from a bruised sense of pride. In this story, each character (except the daughter) experiences a disruption and responds to it with self-absorbed determination and apathy towards the other. Self-interest is compelling, but short-cited and has long-term consequences. Interestingly enough, the remedy for their egotism is to listen to the story and seek the interest of others—further demonstrating the continuing need to attend to the perspectives of supporting characters.

Seila stands apart. She is not the perpetrator of injustice, nor does she limit her scope to her own circumstances. The daughter of Jephthah represents those who die at the hands of people who have power over them. She does not fight a battle with her father that she cannot win; rather she faces her father's failed manipulation with strength and courage. She speaks truth to her oppressor, creates her own space outside of his control, and her memory unites those who live in similarly dangerous spaces. She is not simply a victim; she is model of tempered resistance.

As selfishness pervades the story, character upon character makes short-term, self-focused decisions that have lasting implications, both nationally and at home. The different situations of the Jephthah narrative require more from us than an evaluation of the protagonist or even of God. They require us to identify with as much of the narrative as we can—who are we in *this* narrative and how does it translate in *our* time? Are we the brothers, who act in self-preservation and overlook the pain it causes others, or the elders, who favor the powerful and turn a blind eye toward those in need? Are we the Ammonites, who seek to rectify old injuries only to perpetuate the same injustices, or the Ephraimites, who seek unity only to cause division? Or perhaps, like Seila, we are the victims of someone's selfishness, not simply acquiescing to our

fate but using what little voice is afforded us to rebuke the system that sealed our fate. We are all stories, in the end, and if we are not honest in our reading of others, perhaps we are not being honest in our reading of self—quieting the voice of God so that we hear only the truths that are *right in our own eyes*.

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