

The Story of Gideon's Destruction of the Altar of Baal (Judges 6:25–32): An Intertextual Reading in Light of Two Biblical Passages

Hava Shalom-Guy

David Yellin College of Education, Jerusalem

Introduction

An intertextual reading of the story of Gideon's destruction of the altar of Baal (Judg. 6:25–32) shows that two other biblical pericopes resonate in this story: the destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19) and the Deuteronomic laws proscribing idolatry and incitement of others to idolatry (Deut. 13:13–19; 17:2–7). As used broadly in the study of literature, the term "intertextuality" refers to various manifestations of the relationship between a specific text and earlier or contemporary texts. These intertextual relations are not only produced by, but also construct, a communicative polysystem between texts.¹ In the biblical context, this communicative polysystem, essential to the interpretation of any text, is denoted "inner-biblical interpretation." As defined by Yair Zakovitch, "inner-biblical interpretation is the light that one biblical text casts onto another—whether to solve a problem within the interpreted text or to adapt the interpreted text to the beliefs and ideas of the interpreter. The interpreting text may stand far from the interpreted text, or

This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the International SBL Conference, Edinburgh, July 2006. All translations of biblical verses are cited from the *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999). All emphases are mine. I thank the editors of *JANES* for their insightful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

¹ See Z. Ben-Porat, "Intertextuality, Rhetorical Intertextuality, Allusion and Parody," *Hasifrut* 2/34 (1985), 170–78 [Hebrew]. The term *intertextualité* was coined by Julia Kristeva in order to describe the translinguistic productivity of the literary text; "Bakhtine: le mot, le dialogue et le roman," *Critique* 239 (April 1967), 438–65; "Problèmes de la structuration du text," *Théorie d'ensemble* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968), 297–316. The underlying assumption is that the text is not an independent entity; nor does it function as a closed system. For a discussion of central approaches to intertextuality, see M. Worton and J. Still, (eds.), *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990). For a brief summary, see also A. Jardine, "Intertextuality," in T. A. Sebeok et al. (eds.), *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986), 1:387–89.

be next to it, or may even be incorporated within it. Not always does a text function solely as the interpreting or as the interpreted one: sometimes the two will mutually interpret one another."² In other words, intertextuality relates to the manner in which two or more texts are read in terms of one another, and the discernment of similarities and differences between literary texts, traditions, and works is largely dependent on the reader's familiarity with his society's literary heritage.³ In the process of reading, readers, like authors, consciously and unconsciously approach the literary work with reference to a variety of earlier or contemporary texts with which they are familiar.⁴

The two biblical pericopes noted above that resonate in the story of Gideon's destruction of the altar of Baal—the story of Sodom and the Deuteronomic laws against inciting others to idol worship—primarily serve to shed light on the characterization of Gideon in this story. Here it is not just

² Y. Zakovitch, "Inner-Biblical Interpretation," in R. Hendel (ed.), *Reading Genesis: Ten Methods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 92. For discussions of intertextuality in the biblical context, see S. Draisma (ed.), *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings* (Kampen: Kok, 1989); D. N. Fewell (ed.), *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992); G. Aichele and G. A. Phillips (eds.), *Intertextuality and the Bible* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995). For treatments of inner-biblical interpretation, its genres, manifestations, and methods, see M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985); Y. Zakovitch, *An Introduction to Inner-Biblical Interpretation* (Even Yehuda: Reches, 1992) [Hebrew]; G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1961); J. L. Kugel and R. A. Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986); B. D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 1–31; D. M. Sharon, "Echoes of Gideon's Ephod: An Intertextual Reading," *JANES* 30 (2006), 89–102, esp. 90–91 and n. 3.

³ M. Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies and Parallels* (Ramat-Gan: Revivim, 1985), 30; Y. Zakovitch, *Through the Looking Glass: Reflection Stories in the Bible* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1995), 12 [Hebrew].

⁴ Underpinning this assumption is the formalistic theory regarding the status of literature as a system as formulated by J. Tynjanov in the 1920s; "On Literary Evolution," in L. Matejka and K. Pomorska (eds.), *Readings in Russian Poetics* (Ann Arbor: Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, 1971), 66–78. This thesis was renewed and developed by I. Even-Zohar, "The Relations between Primary and Secondary Systems in the Literary Polysystem," *Hasifrut* 5 (1974), 45–49 [Hebrew]; and "The Polysystem Hypothesis Revisited," in *Papers in Historical Poetics* (Tel Aviv: Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, Tel Aviv University, 1978), 28–35. He proposes that literature be viewed as a polysystem with two main parts: canonized and non-canonized literature (each with subsystems), which share mutual intra-system relationships and interrelationships with other, extra-literary systems. See also G. Toury, "Literature as a Polysystem," *Hasifrut* 5 (1974), 1–19 [Hebrew].

the similarities to which I direct attention, but also the differences that emerge from consideration of the intertexts.⁵ I suggest that this comparison shows that these analogies were intended to serve as a foil for the behavior of the protagonists and to promote a characterization of Gideon as a worthy savior of the Israelites from the Midianite oppression.

The Text

The base text for my discussion is Judg. 6:25–32:

- 6:25 וַיְהִי בַלַּיְלָהָה הַהוּא וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ יְהוָה קח אֶת-פֶּר-הַשּׁוֹר אֲשֶׁר לְאַבְדִּי וּפֶר הַשְּׂנִי שְׁבַע שָׁנִים וְהִרְסֹתָ אֶת-מִזְבַּח הַבַּעַל אֲשֶׁר לְאַבְדִּי וְאֶת-הָאִשָּׁרָה אֲשֶׁר-עָלְיוֹ תִכְרֹת
- 6:26 וּבִנְיַת מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל רֹאשׁ הַמַּעֲוִז הַזֶּה בַּמַּעֲרָכָה וְלִקְחֹתָ אֶת-הַפֶּר הַשְּׂנִי וְהַעֲלִיתָ עֹלָה בַּעֲצֵי הָאִשָּׁרָה אֲשֶׁר תִּכְרֹת
- 6:27 וַיִּקַּח גִּדְעוֹן עֶשְׂרֵה אַנְשִׁים מֵעַבְדָּיו וַיַּעַשׂ כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלָיו יְהוָה וַיְהִי כְּאֲשֶׁר יָרָא אֶת-בֵּית אָבִיו וְאֶת-אֲנָשָׁי הָעִיר מַעֲשֹׂת יוֹמָם וַיַּעַשׂ לַיְלָה
- 6:28 וַיִּשְׁכְּמוּ אֲנָשֵׁי הָעִיר בַּבֹּקֶר וְהִנֵּה גִמְזָן מִזְבַּח הַבַּעַל וְהָאִשָּׁרָה אֲשֶׁר-עָלָיו כָּרְתָה וְאֶת הַפֶּר הַשְּׂנִי הִעֲלָה עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ הַכִּנּוּי
- 6:29 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל-רֵעֵהוּ מִי עָשָׂה הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וַיִּדְרָשׁוּ וַיִּבְקָשׁוּ וַיֹּאמְרוּ גִדְעוֹן בֶּן-יֹאָשׁ עָשָׂה הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה
- 6:30 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲנָשֵׁי הָעִיר אֶל-יֹאָשׁ הוֹצֵא אֶת-בְּנֶךָ וְנִמְתָּ כִּי נָתַן אֶת-מִזְבַּח הַבַּעַל וְכִי כָרַת הָאִשָּׁרָה אֲשֶׁר-עָלָיו
- 6:31 וַיֹּאמֶר יֹאָשׁ לְכָל אֲשֶׁר-עָמְדוּ עָלָיו הֵאֱתַם תְּרִיבוֹן לַבַּעַל אִם-אַתֶּם תוֹשִׁיעוֹן אוֹתוֹ אֲשֶׁר יָרִיב לוֹ יוֹמַת עַד-הַבֹּקֶר אִם-אֱלֹהִים הוּא יֵרָב לוֹ כִּי נָתַן אֶת-מִזְבְּחוֹ
- 6:32 וַיִּקְרָא-לוֹ בַּיּוֹם-הַהוּא יִרְבֵּעַל לֵאמֹר יֵרָב בּוֹ הַבַּעַל כִּי נָתַן אֶת-מִזְבְּחוֹ

⁵ On the phenomenon of literary parallels as an expression of literary analogy and the ramifications of their systematic examination in the biblical context, see H. Shalom-Guy, *The Gideon Cycle through the Mirror of Its Literary Parallels* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2013) [Hebrew].

The Gideon Unit and the Sodom Story

Any comparison between the Gideon unit and the story of Sodom must take into account the fact that the Sodom tradition is reflected in additional pericopes, particularly the story of the outrage at Gibeah (Judges 19). That Genesis 19 and Judges 19 have shared elements, including plot, structural features, motifs, and language, is widely accepted in scholarship.⁶ Briefly, the main points of similarity in plot between these stories include: (1) a similar sequence of events; (2) similar temporal starting and ending points; and (3) the stay in a hostile environment is preceded by gracious hospitality: the visit of the angels to Abraham in Hebron (Gen. 18:1–15) and the visit of the Levite to his father-in-law's home in Bethlehem (Judg. 19:3–9). There are also broad linguistic correspondences: Gen. 19:2–3 // Judg. 19:7–9, 20–21; Gen. 19:4–5 // Judg. 19:22; Gen. 19:6–8 // Judg. 19:23–24; Gen. 19:28 // Judg. 20:40.

In all three stories, we find massive involvement by the townspeople, called אנשי העיר, that is, all the residents of that place,⁷ who gather near the house of a local resident (see Judg. 6:27, 28, 30; Gen. 19:4; and Judg. 19:22). As used in Gen. 19:4, and even more so in the eight-verse pericope of Judg. 6:25–32, where it is repeated *three* times, אנשי העיר conveys this sense of mass involvement. In the Sodom story, this is further accentuated by the appearance of the additional phrases: מנער עד זקן ("young and old") and כל

⁶ See, e.g., M. Gudemann, "Tendenz und Abfassungszeit der letzten Kapitel des Buches der Richter," *MGWJ* 18 (1869), 357–68; C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges: with Introduction and Notes* (2nd ed.; London: Rivingtons, 1920), 444–45; R. C. Culley, *Studies in the Structure of Hebrew Narrative* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 54–59; T. Rudin-O'Brasky, *The Patriarchs in Hebron and Sodom (Genesis 18–19): A Study of the Structure and Composition of a Biblical Story* (Jerusalem: Simor, 1982), 102–5 [Hebrew]; S. Niditch, "The 'Sodomite' Theme in Judges 19–20: Family, Community, and Social Disintegration," *CBQ* 44 (1982), 375; E. L. Greenstein, "The Formation of the Biblical Narrative Corpus," *AJS Review* 15 (1990), 151–78; Y. Amit, *Judges: Introduction and Commentary* (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1999), 287–89 [Hebrew]; W. W. Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah: History and Motif in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 62–64, 108–12. On the nature of the affinity between these two stories, see the body of the article and n. 16 below.

⁷ Cf. Gen. 24:13; Judg. 8:14, 14:17; 1 Sam. 5:9; 2 Kgs. 2:19, 23:17. This term usually appears in reference to a joint civilian enterprise: going to war (Josh. 8:14; 2 Sam. 11:17), and executing a death verdict (Deut. 21:21; 22:21), among others.

העם מקצה ("to the last man"; v. 4).⁸ Also shared by the stories is the use of the phrase להוציא את for the townspeople's demand that the person or persons inside the resident's home be turned over to them ("bring out"; Judg. 6:30, Gen. 19:5, Judg. 19:22). All three stories share the refusal of the householder to fulfill their request, and the events in all three begin at night and conclude in the morning, as seen from the time expressions used in each (see Judg. 6:25, 27, 28; Gen. 19:4, 5, 15, 27; and Judg. 19:14, 25–26).

However, the reader's attention is drawn not only to these topical-linguistic similarities, but also to the differences between these three stories. One significant distinction inheres in the nature of the sin of Gideon's townspeople as opposed to that of the people of Sodom and of Gibeah. In their refusal to shelter travelers,⁹ coupled by their attempt to sodomize them,¹⁰ the people of Sodom and Gibeah demonstrate their contempt for the norms of hospitality. Nonetheless, the iniquity of Sodom and Gibeah cannot be considered of equal severity: in Sodom, where angelic intervention prevents sexual abuse, the sin is of a lesser degree than in Gibeah, where the group rape concludes with the victim's cruel death.¹¹ But the offense attributed to Gideon's townspeople in Judges 6 lies not in their disregard for hospitality but rather in their zealous Baal worship. They seek Gideon's death because of his actions: the destruction of the Baal cult in Ophrah and its replacement with an altar to the Lord.

⁸ Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 77 n. 49; Y. Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 344. Amit maintains that, in the Sodom story, this emphasis highlights the link between Sodom and the doctrine of reward reflected in Gen. 18:23–33 (ibid., 344 n. 31).

⁹ Hospitality for strangers is a widespread folklore motif. See A. Aarne and S. Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1961), 750A–H. This motif's broad distribution reflects a socioeconomic reality in which food and lodging had to be provided for wayfarers. As Fields shows, the treatment of wayfarers serves as an evaluative criterion in many biblical traditions (*Sodom and Gomorrah*, 45–67). See, e.g., Gen. 18:1–15; 24:10–59; 1 Kgs. 17:8–16); and especially Job 31:32: "No sojourner spent the night in the open; I opened my doors to the road."

¹⁰ Sodomy is viewed as abominable and as undermining the social order (Lev. 18:22, 20:13); see Niditch, "'Sodomite' Theme," 368–69; Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 116–17.

¹¹ Amit, *Book of Judges*, 343–45; Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 125–26.

A second divergence relates to the characters' social status. Lot in Sodom and the elderly man from the hill country of Ephraim in Gibeah are outsiders, as seen from the use of the root ג"ר to denote their socio-legal status (Gen. 19:9, Judg. 19:16).¹² In contrast, Gideon obviously has the status of a local resident.

Another feature shared by the Sodom and the Gibeah stories is the householders' proposal to substitute two women for their guests. Lot offers his two daughters (Gen. 19:8), and the elderly man from Ephraim—his daughter and the Levite's concubine (Judg. 19:24). In contrast, Joash does not suggest a substitute for Gideon; indeed, he comes strongly to his son's defense.

An additional aspect distinguishing Genesis 19/Judges 19 from the Gideon story regards punishment. Whereas both Sodom and Gibeah are totally destroyed by fire (Gen. 19:24–25; Judg. 20:40),¹³ no punishment takes place in the Gideon story.

The role of nighttime also differs. If in the Sodom and Gibeah stories nighttime is a period of danger, prone to violence,¹⁴ Judges 6 reflects a different attitude toward night: there it serves to mask Gideon's deeds, providing an opportunity for him to act undetected: "but as he was afraid to do it by day... he did it by night" (v. 27).¹⁵

The elements shared by the stories of Gideon's destruction of the altar of Baal, Sodom, and the concubine at Gibeah are not grounded in their

¹² The biblical root ג"ר denotes persons living outside their homelands (e.g., Ruth 1:1; 2 Kgs. 8:1–2). For a discussion of the connotations of the root and the socio-legal status of the ג"ר, see I. L. Seeligmann, "גר," *Encyclopaedia Biblica* 2:546 [Hebrew]; D. Kellerman, "גור," *TDOT* 2:439–49; Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 27–53.

¹³ Rudin-O'Brasky, *Patriarchs*, 119–20. On the motif of "a city destroyed by fire," see Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 137–41.

¹⁴ Cf. Gen. 32:23–33. This shaping rests in a socio-cultural reality in which communal life virtually ceased at sunset because of the lack of artificial lighting in the public sphere, as Fields notes (*Sodom and Gomorrah*, 103–4, 108–12).

¹⁵ This aspect of Gideon's behavior appears elsewhere in the cycle: he is afraid of the Midianites and therefore threshes wheat in the winepress (Judg. 6:11); he is afraid to go to the Midianite camp alone (7:10–11). See J. C. Exum, "The Center Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges," *CBQ* 52 (1990), 417; and more recently E. Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest: The Stories of Three Leaders in the Book of Judges* (Tel Aviv: Miskal, 2006), 40–42, 60–61 [Hebrew].

recounting of the same or similar events; rather, these are stories that treat different subjects but still display some topical or linguistic similarities. A comparison of these stories sparks associations between Gideon (and his father Joash) and between Lot and the old man from Ephraim, as well as between the townspeople of Gideon's city and the townspeople of Sodom and Gibeah. These associations underscore the contrast between Gideon, who opposes the cult of Baal, and his townspeople, zealous Baal worshipers; the strong stand against them taken by Gideon (and by his father), and also the magnitude of the sin of Gideon's fellow townspeople, even though it differs from that of the Sodomites and the residents of Gibeah. More significantly, the portrayal of Joash's behavior as a father who comes to his son's defense and refuses to turn him over to the townspeople who seek his death is antithetical to Lot's behavior in the parallel situation: a father who offers his daughters to the townspeople, notwithstanding his knowledge of their fate. Indeed, Joash's behavior appears to be deliberately constructed as the rectification of Lot's proposed behavior.¹⁶

Both the shared features outlined above, coupled with these contrasts that highlight the distinctive elements of the Gideon unit, invite the reader to further consider the specifics of the Gideon story against a broader biblical perspective. The echoes of the tradition of Sodom's sinfulness and destruction in the Gideon pericope suggest familiarity with this tradition as it developed over time. I refer to the transformation of the city of Sodom itself, or Sodom as part of a cluster of cities—Sodom and Gomorrah (Deut. 29:22,

¹⁶ Many scholars assume that Judges 19 uses building blocks from Genesis 19. See, e.g., Y. Kaufmann, *The Book of Judges: Introduction and Commentary* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1961), 281 [Hebrew]; R. G. Boling, *Judges* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 277–79; Rudin-O'Brasky, *Patriarchs*, 105; S. Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19: Lot's Hospitality in an Inverted World," *JSOT* 29 (1984), 38–39; Amit, *Judges: Introduction and Commentary*, 283, 287–89; and M. Z. Brettler, *The Book of Judges* (London: Routledge, 2002), 86–87, among others. Others argue that Judges 19 served as the basis for the story of Sodom; Niditch, "The 'Sodomite' Theme," 376–78; Greenstein, "Formation of the Biblical Narrative," 170 and n. 80. Culley notes that it is impossible to arrive at a definitive answer to this question; *Hebrew Narrative*, 54–55. For a detailed discussion of this issue, see H. Shalom-Guy, "'My friends, do not commit such a wrong': The Pericope of the Concubine at Gibeah and the Sodom Narrative," *Bamikhla* 16–17 (2005): 185–93 [Hebrew].

Isa. 13:19, Jer. 49:18, among others), and Admah and Zeboiim (Deut. 29:22, Hos. 11:8)—into a symbol of ultimate sin, moral turpitude, and individual-social corruption, as well as of the ultimate punishment. This development is reflected in a number of inner-biblical contexts (see Deut. 29:22, 32:32; Isa. 1:10–17, 13:19; Jer. 23:14, 49:18, 50:40; Ezek. 16:46ff; and Zeph. 2:9, among others) and also in postbiblical sources: in the Apocrypha, midrashic literature, and the New Testament.¹⁷ Perhaps this development was fueled by the general statement in Gen. 18:20–21: "The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave. I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me; if not, I will take note"; and the portrayal of the Sodomites in Gen. 13:13: "Now the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked sinners against the Lord."¹⁸

An intertextual reading of the Gideon cycle, in which the story of the destruction of the altar appears, shows that it contains additional elements from the broader context of Genesis 18–19. These include, first of all, the description and implementation of the signs in the story of Gideon's appointment (Judg. 6:17–21), which reflect the story of the announcement of Isaac's birth (Gen. 18:1–15): the hospitality scene in particular (vv. 1–8). Although the stories differ topically, both share the theme of hosting superhuman figures. In both stories: (a) the host asks the guests to wait and they agree to his request; (b) the host enters his house in order to prepare the meal; (c) the meal includes meat and a baked dough; and (d) only at the conclusion do the hosts discover the superhuman identity of their guests. The use of this plot element, often shaped in a causal relationship with an ensuing miraculous birth,¹⁹ differs in the Gideon story, which is patterned on

¹⁷ See Rudin-O'Brasky, *Patriarchs*, 111–15, 128–29; Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 155–84.

¹⁸ Rudin-O'Brasky, *Patriarchs*, 113. See also M. Z. Brettler, "The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics," *JBL* 108 (1989), 411–12 and n. 94.

¹⁹ This structure appears in the story of the birth of the Shunammite's son (2 Kgs. 4:8–37) and in extra-biblical traditions on the birth of Orion (Ovid, *Fasti*, 5.493–540) and of Aqhat (2 *Aqhat*, 5.4–31). Isaac's birth story contains both elements: the hosting of superhuman figures and a miraculous birth, even if the causal relationship between them has been obscured. See Rudin-O'Brasky, *Patriarchs*, 55–56 nn. 25–26, 72–73; Y. Avishur, "The Narrative of Abraham the Host (Genesis 18:1–16a): The Literary Structure and Ugaritic Parallel (CTA17 [2 Aqht] V:

stories of appointment. I suggest that its incorporation reflects the story of the announcement of Isaac's birth, now shaped to a different context: the meal offered to the angel does not belong to the norms of hospitality, but rather serves as a means whereby Gideon tests his guest's identity and verifies his supernatural essence. In addition, in contrast to Gen. 18:1–15—where the angels appear to Abraham in human guise, partake of a meal, wash their feet, and sit in the shade of a tree while eating—as portrayed in Judg. 6:11–24, the attributes of the angel appear to have undergone refinement, reflected by his refusal to partake of the meal Gideon offers.²⁰

Another similarity between the broader contexts comes from the fashion in which both Abraham and Gideon address God (Judg. 6:39 and Gen. 18:30, 32).²¹ Abraham says: ויאמר אל נא יחר לאדני ואדברה; ויאמר אל נא יחר לאדני ("Let not my Lord be angry if I go on" [v. 30]; "And he said, Let not my Lord be angry if I speak but this last time" [v. 32]); Gideon says: ויאמר ("Then Gideon said to God, 'Do not be angry with me if I speak but this last time. Let me make just one more test with the fleece'" [v. 39]). Both Abraham and Gideon seek to downplay the audacity of speaking out in the presence of God.

An examination of the Gideon story in light of Genesis 19 magnifies the impression of the severity of the sin of Gideon's townspeople. By drawing a comparison between the sin of Gideon's townspeople and that of the Sodomites, now conceived of in general terms as the ultimate sin, and not

4–31," *Studies in Biblical Narrative: Style, Structure, and the Ancient Near Eastern Background* (Tel-Aviv-Jaffa: Archaeological Center Publication, 1999), 57–74.

²⁰ The story of Samson's birth (Judges 13) reflects even greater refinement: the angel announces in advance that he will not eat and suggests that Manoah sacrifice a burnt-offering to God (v. 16). The notion that angels are forbidden to eat appears in post-biblical literature as well (Tob 12:19; and various sources interpreting the angelic visit to Abraham, e.g., Josephus, *Ant.* 1.11.2; BT *B. Meṣi'a* 86b; *Gen. Rab.* 45). See A. Rofé, *The Prophetic Stories: The Narratives about the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, Their Literary Types and History* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 175–77; Rudin-O'Brasky, *Patriarchs*, 55 n. 24.

²¹ G. F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895), 199; Kaufmann, *Judges: Introduction and Commentary*, 171; Y. Zakovitch, *The Concept of the Miracle in the Bible* (Tel-Aviv: Ministry of Defence, 1987), 115–16 [Hebrew]; Amit, *Judges*, 133; among others.

specifically restricted to disregard for the rules of hospitality or attempted sodomy, this frames and heightens the sin of Gideon's Baal-worshipping fellow townspeople. Another theme that emerges is the contrast between Gideon's strong stand (and that of his father) against his townspeople to Lot's weaker stand against the people of Sodom, both portrayed as a confrontation between an individual and the masses.

The Gideon Unit and the Deuteronomic Proscription against Inciting to Idolatry

Another biblical unit that resonates in the contrasting portrayal of Gideon and of his townspeople is the Deuteronomic pericope treating the laws forbidding idolatry. The Gideon unit fashions the townspeople's behavior as the converse of the conduct required by the Deuteronomic laws against inciting others to idolatry: in particular, the elements governing the treatment of an individual who turns to idolatry (17:2–7),²² and of an entire city that turns to apostasy (13:13–19). These laws call for the court to engage in a thorough inquiry to establish the truth of the allegations before executing the idolater by stoning, or totally destroying the inhabitants of the idolatrous town and their belongings.²³ In Judges, the process is inverted: Gideon's townspeople are themselves idol worshipers who seek, after thorough investigation, to kill the person who has turned against the cult of Baal.

²² The laws in Deut. 13:12–19 treat three cases: a prophet (vv. 2–6); a relative (vv. 7–12), and an entire city (vv. 13–19). The contextual-literary affinity between 17:2–7, which treats the law of an individual who turns to idol worship, and 13:2–19 shows that it was originally a unit of this law code, as A. Rofé (*Introduction to Deuteronomy* [Jerusalem: Akademon, 1988], 60–65 [Hebrew]) and Y. Zakovitch (*The Pattern of the Numerical Sequence Three-Four in the Bible* [Ph. D. diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1977], 458–64 [Hebrew]) suggest. They disagree, however, as to its original placement: Rofé places it at the beginning and Zakovitch at the end, as the fourth element in the literary pattern.

²³ For a discussion of the testimony and the procedure, see C. Carmichael, *The Laws of Deuteronomy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 78, 100–1, 115.

Judges 6

"ויאמרו איש אל רעהו מי עשה
הדבר הזה וידרשו ויבקשו
ויאמרו גדעון בן יואש עשה
הדבר הזה. ויאמרו אנשי העיר
אל יואש הוצא את בנך וימת כי
נתץ את מזבח הבעל וכי כרת את
האשרה אשר עליו" (פס' 29–
30).

They said to one another,
"*Who did this thing?*"
Upon *inquiry* and
investigation, they were
told, "Gideon son of Joash
did this thing!" The
townspeople said to
Joash, "*Bring out* your
son, for he must die: he
has torn down the altar
of Baal and cut down the
sacred post beside it!"

Deut 13:13–19, 17:2–7

"והגד לך ושמעת ודרשת היטב
והנה אמת נכון הדבר נעשתה
התועבה הזאת בישראל" (יז 4);
"ודרשת וחקרת ושאלת היטב
והנה אמת נכון הדבר נעשתה
התועבה הזאת בקרבך" (יג 15).
"והוצאת את האיש ההוא או את
האשה ההוא אשר עשו את
הדבר הרע הזה... וסקלתם
באבנים ומתו" (יז 5), "הכה תכה
את ישבי העיר ההוא לפי חרב
החרם אתה ואת כל אשר בה" (יג
16–17).

and you have been
informed or have
learned of it, then you
shall make a *thorough*
inquiry. If it is true, the
fact is established, that
abhorrent thing was
perpetrated in Israel
(17:4); you shall *inquire*
and investigate and
interrogate thoroughly. If
it is true, the fact is
established—that
abhorrent thing was
perpetrated in your
midst— (13:15; trans.

slightly revised); *you shall take* the man or the woman who did *that wicked thing out* ... and you shall stone them (17:5); put the inhabitants of that town to the sword ... doom it and all that is in it to destruction (13:16–17)

Note the repeated appearance of the verbs *דרש*, *עשה*, and *הוציא* in both pericopes and their use as key words in both passages.

Like the Gideon-townspeople/Lot-townspeople analogy, the antithetical shaping of the townspeople's behavior to the requirements of the Deuteronomic laws proscribing incitement to idolatry reinforces the contrast between Gideon and his townspeople, fanatical Baal worshipers who seek to execute Gideon for his deed. This contrast is further heightened by the midrash of names found in the text. Joash's taunting remarks serve as an initial name-midrash for Jerubaal: "'Do you have to contend for Baal? Do you have to vindicate him? Whoever fights his battles shall be dead by morning! If he is a god, let him fight his own battles, since it is his altar that has been torn down!' That day they named him Jerubaal, meaning 'Let Baal contend with him, since he tore down his altar'" (Judg. 6:31–32a). This ironic taunt conveys an inherent threat: whoever fights for Baal will be dead by morning, a measure-for-measure punishment against the townspeople who ask Joash to bring out his son, so that they can put him to death (v. 30). The absence of a response on Baal's part, who moreover apparently requires the protection of his believers, makes Baal and his followers figures worthy of ridicule.²⁴

²⁴ A sharper ridicule of Baal appears in 1 Kgs. 18:17–40.

This midrash undermines the positive meaning of this theophoric name in praise of Baal and relates it to Gideon's struggle against Baal worship instead.²⁵ Essentially, this name midrash for Jerubaal illustrates the absence of a link between the name and idolatry.²⁶ To the contrary: it voices Gideon's campaign against Baal worship.²⁷ The name-midrash also functions to create identity between the names Gideon and Jerubaal. This also occurs elsewhere in the Gideon cycle, where efforts are made to highlight this identity, notwithstanding the alternation in the names.²⁸

²⁵ The second name-midrash (v. 32b) repeats the ending of the previous one, nearly word for word, though it substitutes לִי for לוֹ: "meaning 'Let Baal contend with him, since he tore down his altar.'" This change heightens the phonetic link to the name Jerubaal, but also misunderstands the first name-midrash, as Y. Zakovitch ("Doubled Name Midrashim" [M.A. thesis, Hebrew University, 1972], 13–14 [Hebrew]) notes. If the first midrash speaks of Baal's war and expresses the inability to contend for him, the second speaks of Baal's war against Gideon without any ironic overtones. See Y. Zakovitch, "The Synonymous Word and Synonymous Name in Name-Midrashim," *Shnaton* 2 (1977), 109 [Hebrew]; M. Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns* (trans. P. Hackett; Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 106.

²⁶ Jerubaal is a theophoric name that glorifies Baal, one of the chief deities in the Canaanite pantheon. On this deity, see J. C. de Moor, "בעל," *TDOT* 2:182–85. Various proposals have been put forth for the etymology of this name. One is that the connotation of the initial element יר is "to found"; thus the meaning of this name is "Baal founds," similar to the name Jeruel; see J. Wellhausen, *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1871), 31; Moore, *Judges*, 196; Amit, *Judges*, 131. Another identifies the root of this name as רבב: May Baal show himself to be great; see M. Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen* (BWANT III, 10; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1928), 206–7; W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (3rd ed.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), 111, 206 (but he suggests another meaning—"May Baal give increase"). For a survey of the varied proposals, see J. A. Emerton, "Gideon and Jerubbaal," *JTS* 27 (1976), 290; J. M. Sasson, *Judges 1-12* (AB 6D; New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2014), 340.

²⁷ A similar trend is reflected in places, mainly in the books of Samuel, where the derogatory בַּשֵּׁת replaces the theophoric element Baal in personal names, including Jerubaal. The name Jerubaal, which appears twelve times in Judges 6–8 and in 1 Sam. 12:11, was changed in 2 Sam. 11:21 to Jerubbesheth (but is Jerubaal in the LXX). The same is true for Eshbaal (1 Chr. 8:33, 9:39), Saul's fourth son, which was changed to Ish-bosheth in 2 Sam. 2:8ff., 3:8ff., 4:5ff. among others; see M. J. Mulder, "Baal in the Old Testament," *TDOT* 2:192–93; E. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (2nd rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 267–68; Amit, *Judges*, 158. At a later stage in Israelite history, when monotheism prevailed, there was less sensitivity to theophoric names, as Amit notes (*ibid.*). Thus, the author of Chronicles does not hesitate to use the name Eshbaal, even though his sources prefer Ish-bosheth. For a comprehensive discussion of the Baal-Bosheth exchange in names, see M. Avioz, "The Names Mephibosheth and Ishbosheth Reconsidered," *JANES* 32 (2011), 11–20.

²⁸ The attempt to link the name Gideon that appears 35 times in Judg. 6:11–8:28, but which is not mentioned in Judges 9 at all, and the name Jerubaal, which appears eight times in Judges 9 and only twice in 6:11–8:28 (6:32, 7:1), is found in different places in the cycle. It appears explicitly in Judg. 7:1: "Early next day, Jerubaal—that is, Gideon...." In two connecting links that serve to integrate the story of Abimelech into the Gideon cycle (8:29–32, 33–35) this is

The change in Gideon's name to Jerubaal in the wake of this episode of the destruction of the altar of Baal is indicative of a substantive change, for in the biblical context, a name is not simply an identifying feature but one that gives expression to the essence and being of its carrier²⁹ and contributes, alongside the first midrash of this name (vv. 31–32a), to the underscoring of Gideon's anti-Baal campaign. This is further heightened by the tacit name-midrash for Gideon also found in the passage: the use of the root כר"ת, which appears four times with reference to the destruction of the sacred post (vv. 25, 26, 28, 30), as many scholars have noted.³⁰ Synonymous with גד"ע, "to cut down,"³¹ כר"ת expresses a similar message. Both כר"ת and גד"ע appear in the context of removal of the Asherah, Asherim, and Asherot.³² Thus, this tacit name-midrash draws the reader's attention to the link between Gideon's name and the act of cutting down the sacred post.³³ These two roots, along with נח"ץ, found four times in the story of Gideon's destruction of the altar of Baal (vv. 28, 30, 31, 32), all occur in biblical contexts that entail the elimination of idolatry.³⁴ Thus the name-midrashim, both explicit and tacit,

implied by the alternation of the names Gideon (8:30, 32, 33) and Jerubaal (8:29), and explicitly stated in 8:35: "the house of Jerubaal-Gideon." For a discussion of the alternation between these names and their implications for the formation of the Gideon cycle, see B. Lindars, "Gideon and Kingship," *JTS* 16 (1965), 324–25; H. Haag, "Gideon – Jerubaal – Abimelek," *ZAW* 79 (1967), 305–14; Emerton, "Gideon and Jerubaal"; J. A. Soggin, *Judges* (trans. J. S. Bowden; London: SCM, 1981), 103–4; Amit, *Book of Judges*, 95; idem, *Judges*, 158; Sasson, *Judges 1-12*, 344–46.

²⁹ A definitive expression of this notion appears in 1 Sam. 25:25: "For he is just what his name says: His name means 'boor' and he is a boor." See Zakovitch, "Doubled Name Midrashim," 3–5; B. Porten, "מתן שמות בישראל," *Encyclopaedia Biblica* 8:34–35.

³⁰ See F. Zimmermann, "Folk Etymology of Biblical Names," *VTSupp.* 15 (1966), 315–16; Zakovitch, "Doubled Name Midrashim," 29–30; idem, "Synonymous Word and Synonymous Name," 105–6; Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 106 and n. 17 there.

³¹ As emerges from phrases repeated in two different biblical books, where one uses כר"ת and the other גד"ע. See Exod. 34:13 // Deut. 7:5; 2 Kgs. 18:4 // 2 Chron. 31:1, and the parallelism in Isa. 22:25. See Zimmermann, "Folk Etymology of Biblical Names," 315; Zakovitch, "Doubled Name Midrashim," 29–30; idem, "Synonymous Word and Synonymous Name," 106; Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 106; Amit, *Judges*, 129–30.

³² See Exod. 31:13 // Deut. 7:5; 2 Kgs. 18:4 // 2 Chron. 31:1, as well as 1 Kgs. 15:13 // 2 Chron. 15:16 (כר"ת), 2 Chron. 14:2 (גד"ע), and 2 Kgs. 23:14 (כר"ת).

³³ Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 106.

³⁴ Examples include: גד"ע—Deut. 12:3; Ezek. 6:6; 2 Chron. 34:4, 7; כר"ת—Lev. 26:30, Zech. 13:2; נח"ץ—Exod. 34:13; Deut. 7:5; 12:3; Judg. 2:2; 2 Kgs. 11:18; 23:8, 12, 15; 2 Chron. 31:1.

highlight the motif of the passage: Gideon's strong campaign against the Baal cult practiced by his townspeople.

This shaping of Gideon and his deeds portrays him as worthy of rescuing the Israelites from the hands of the Midianites because of his fight against Baal and his strong stand against his townspeople, who engage in Baal worship. Its placement between the story of commissioning and the beginning of Gideon's campaign against Midian contributes to this impression. Indeed, the heightened contrast between Gideon and his townspeople is not confined to the anti-Baal polemic. Gideon's behavior is also antithetical to its portrayal in the previous unit of the cycle, which recounts his appointment as a savior (Judg. 6:11–24). In the appointment story Gideon objects to his election, expresses doubts that the divine presence is found among his people, and echoes the general opinion that the Midianite oppression proves that God has abandoned his people: "If the Lord is with us, why has all this befallen us? Where are all His wondrous deeds about which our fathers told us...? Now the Lord has abandoned us and delivered us into the hands of Midian!" (6:13).³⁵ The use of the plural: עמנו, ויתנונו, מצאתנו, לנו, אבותינו, העלנו, נטשנו, ויתנונו contributes to the impression that Gideon represents the prevailing public viewpoint.³⁶ This dissimilar characterization of Gideon in the adjacent stories once again directs the reader's attention to a more favorable view of Gideon. The placement of this unit—between the story of Gideon's appointment and the initiation of his struggle against the Midianites—underscores this message. The story of the destruction of the altar of Baal is not the natural continuation of the story of Gideon's appointment as savior (6:11–24), which we would expect to be immediately followed by a description of how Gideon saved the people from the Midianites.³⁷ This, however, begins only in v 37

³⁵ Y. Zakovitch, *"And You Shall Tell Your Son...": The Concept of the Exodus in the Bible* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), 48–49, 67.

³⁶ Amit, *Judges*, 124.

³⁷ Amit, *Book of Judges*, 226.

In conclusion, I suggest that sensitivity to these intertextual allusions enriches our understanding of the Gideon story—and its intertexts. The resonance of the Sodom pericope with the Deuteronomic laws that prohibit inciting others to idolatry in this narrative ultimately guides us to the conclusion that, because of his strong stand against the sinful townspeople, fanatical Baal worshipers, Gideon was worthy of saving the Israelites from the Midianites. The placement of this unit—between the story of Gideon's appointment and the initiation of his struggle against the Midianites—underscores this message. At the same time, this inner-biblical reading of this pericope against the context of the Sodom narrative heightens the perception of the gravity of the sin of Gideon's townspeople; and its reading against the context of the Deuteronomic proscription of incitement to idolatry holds up a mirror image to the behavior of Gideon's idol-worshipping townspeople.