

UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN EARLY ISRAEL BEFORE SAMUEL

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The period of the judges needs to be opened for a thorough re-examination of its form and structure. This applies not only to the so-called "office" of the judge¹ and to the theory of a tribal confederation, two ideas that have been in the forefront during recent discussions of this period; it applies even more basically to the presupposition that the period must of necessity have had some organizational focus giving coherence and unity to Israel as a whole made up of numerous constituent elements. This latter idea is of crucial import for the study of this period since, if the need for a structured religious and/or political relationship is taken for granted, it predisposes scholars to search and interpret the literature along certain lines—namely, those that lead to "organizational" theories. Martin Noth's proposed amphictyony,² and the theory of George Mendenhall and Nor-

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¹See my article, "The Minor Judges—A Re-evaluation," *JBL* 94 (1975) 190-200.

²See *Das System der zwölf Stämme Israels* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1930); *The History of Israel* (New York: Harper, 1960) 85-109. In recent years Noth's amphictyonic theory, along with his reconstruction of the office of the judge of Israel (based on the lists in Judg 10:1-5; 12:7-15) as the main office of leadership for all of Israel, has come to dominate scholarly interpretation of Israel's early years in Palestine, with scholars assuming that Israel, while politically fragmented, was nevertheless religiously united during this era due to the role all twelve tribes played in the institution of the judge-led amphictyony. Scholars adopting Noth's basic position are legion. In the Albright school it has become axiomatic. Gerhard von Rad built his holy-war theory on the foundation of a presumed amphictyony. Mowinckel, Weiser and Muilenburg have presumed this organization, and Robert G. Boling has presumed its existence in his recent commentary, *Judges* (AB; Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1975). Murray Newman has written an historical interpretation of Israel from Moses to David that revolves entirely around the idea of an amphictyony (*The People of the Covenant: A Study of Israel from Moses to the Monarchy* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1962]). For a more extensive discussion of the influence of Noth's theory and for a substantial bibliography of examples see J. H. Hayes, "The Twelve-Tribe Israelite Amphictyony: An Appraisal," *Trinity University Studies in Religion* 10 (1975) 27-28.

Since the purpose of this paper is not to critique Noth's theory but rather to outline a viable alternative to an "organizational" perspective on early Israelite history, only limited attention will be given to points that directly refute Noth's theory. For a detailed refutation of Noth see H. M. Orlinsky, "The Tribal System of Israel and Related Groups in the Period of the Judges," *Studies and Essays in Honor of Abraham A. Neuman* (eds. M. Ben-Horin, B. D. Weinryb and S. Zeitlin; Leiden: Brill, 1962) 375-387; G. W. Anderson, "Israel: Amphictyony: 'Am; Kāhāl; 'Edāh," *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament: Essays in Honor of Herbert Gordon May* (eds. H. T. Frank and W. L. Reed; Nashville: Abingdon, 1970) 135-151; Hayes, "Amphictyony," 22-36; R. de Vaux, "La thèse de l'amphictyonie Israélite," *HTR* 64 (1971) 415-436; A. D. H. Mayes, *Israel in the Period of the Judges* (SBT 2/29; Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1974); and my "Minor Judges," 191-192.

It should be noted that, once one abandons the idea of a massive invasion and conquest of Palestine by all Israel under Joshua, the question of the source of eventual Israelite unity in Palestine becomes a problem. While Noth's theory of an amphictyony gives the appearance of explaining the origin of such unity, it actually does not. The proposed amphictyony can not be seen as the power driving the tribes to unite as Israel: Rather, in any form of the theory it can only be the vehicle of implementation whereby an already-existing drive for pan-Israelite collectivity would be given concrete form. Similarly, the organizational forms delineated in the Articles of Confederation and the subsequent Federal Constitution did not cause the thirteen American colonies to unite: Rather, they gave form and expression to the essential unity that already existed. Hence when one asks how various groups came to view themselves collectively as Israel, simply pointing to an organization does not answer the question.

man Gottwald that claims Israel came into existence as an alliance against the oppressive political dynasties of the Canaanite city-states,³ are examples of such "organizational" theories. Such thinking, however, precludes examination of the possibility that "Israelite society" during this era may have been radically decentralized, constituting little more than a multifaceted category of peoples all of whom had some form of allegiance to the God Yahweh. When I turn to an analysis of specific traditions in the book of Judges, I will argue in favor of this latter theory by demonstrating that these traditions point to a diversified group of leaders, none of whom fit into the mold of an established office or give evidence that they operated by means of any kind of established relationship that encompassed all Israelite tribes.⁴

First, however, I want to examine the factors that have led OT scholars to seek an organizational focus for Israel during this era. The most obvious factor, yet ironically the one most easily overlooked, is the rampant proclivity on the part of

³See G. E. Mendenhall, "The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine," *BA* 25 (1962) 66-87, and *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1973); and N. K. Gottwald, "Were the Early Israelites Pastoral Nomads?," *Rhetorical Criticism. Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (eds. J. Jackson and M. Kessler; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974) 223-255; "Domain Assumptions and Societal Models in the Study of Pre-monarchic Israel," *VTSup Edinburgh Congress Volume* (1975) 89-100; and "Early Israel and 'The Asiatic Mode of Production' in Canaan," *SBLASP* (ed. G. MacRae; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976) 145-154. Gottwald's upcoming work, *A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1000 B. C.* (Orbis), is not yet available.

While the positions of Mendenhall and Gottwald are not carbon copies of one another, they both view the origin of Israelite society in terms of the conflict between the highly-structured political hierarchy in control of the Canaanite city-states and the bulk of the rurally-oriented peasant population who unite and revolt under the banner of Yahweh. As Gottwald notes: "The Israelite tribes may be conceived of as . . . a very broad alliance of such units [extended families and tribes] that managed to throw off the central authority and take over its entrepreneurial socio-economic, military and religious functions at the village and tribal levels. On this model, everything depended on the Israelite revolutionary movement attaining a sufficient scale and sophistication of coordination to be able to provide the basic services that central authority had claimed as its prerogative" ("Asiatic Mode," 149; italics his).

After the revolution, Gottwald sees Israel to be unique in that Israel "sustained its non-authoritarian organizational thrust for some two centuries" (*ibid.*). In comparing this period and the subsequent monarchy, Gottwald claims that "the difference was that the Israelite state faced extraordinary infra-structural restraints and blockages to its enlargement based precisely in the fact that its villages [*sic*] communities were not insular units but had developed networks of self-rule and self-service. The village-tribal ethos and religion had been so well cultivated during Israel's first two centuries that it was this 'lower' level of social organization that tended to shape the national culture and to stamp the religion as a persistent latent revolutionary force" (*ibid.*). Mendenhall stresses the idea of the kingdom of God as the focal point of the revolutionary community of Israel, and he sees Israel's submission to the authority of Yahweh as king as the central thrust of the movement against the oppressive political power of the Canaanite monarchies (*Tenth Generation*, 19-31, 224; "Hebrew Conquest," 73-76, 84-87). Mendenhall sees the tribal federation as the means whereby Israel gives expression to her community as the people of the kingdom of Yahweh.

This is not the place for an extensive critique of the proposals of Mendenhall and Gottwald, which I have earlier provided in issues 7 and 8 of the *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (May and July 1978), where there are also responses by Gottwald, Mendenhall, and T. L. Thompson. My purpose in presenting their position here is mainly to show that even in a theory that focuses on an anti-institutional revolt (that is, one opposed to the political structure of the Canaanite city-states) as the bond for early Israel, there is yet the view that Israel constituted an organization or affiliation of various groups.

⁴It should be noted that I am not attempting to solve in this paper the thorny question of the origin of ancient Israel. While my conclusions about the lack of organizational structure in early Israel have some bearing on that question, they constitute no more than a first step in the direction of a solution.

twentieth-century man to form an office or bureau for almost anything that needs to be done. One only needs to look at the sprawling bureaucracy of the United States government, or the extent to which professors get dragged onto an endless number of committees, in order to observe this trend. Organizational forms are woven into the very fabric of our lifestyle. Therefore in any re-examination of the period of the judges we must constantly be on guard lest we use the text as a mirror that will reflect back to us our own hyperorganizational mode of thinking. We must be open to the possibility that life in early Israel may have proceeded quite satisfactorily in a context we might term "chaotic."

This possibility is reasonable. Communication, which through the printed and electronic media has standardized and interwoven our lifestyle in a very thorough fashion, was difficult and infrequent for villagers separated by more than a few miles. This was especially true since the geography of the central hill country tended to isolate people into small cultural pockets.⁵ Also, life was not so complicated and intertwined with distant geographical regions as regards the need for exchange of material goods. Most of life's needs could be produced, processed and consumed locally.⁶ These factors tend toward a spirit of local independence and autonomy that leads away from, rather than toward, the development of organizational forms that unite people living substantial distances from one another.⁷ While these factors do not preclude the development of such forms—as for example with the rise of the Israelite monarchy—neither do they make their development likely without the addition of external organizing elements.

A second factor leading scholars to search for a unifying organization during the period of the judges is the presupposition that if numerous people have the same religious beliefs and commitment they must of necessity express their religious oneness through some structured form. But this second factor also derives from our modern, hyperorganizational mode of thinking, especially as this is to be observed in the contemporary phenomenon of denominationalism.⁸ In the United States there is an insatiable tendency for likeminded individuals to express their religious unity by either splintering off from (or joining together to attack) a group with which they mutually disagree, or by forming a melting pot of expatri-

⁵One must note that even in the plains areas, where communication was considerably less difficult, the Canaanite city-states remained fragmented into many small political kinglets; see Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) 138-173. One of the most valuable aspects of Gottwald's work is his analysis of the way in which the "cohesive village community," with its independence and essential ability to sustain itself, had for many years formed the basic pattern of life in rural Palestine ("Asiatic Mode," 148-152).

⁶This is highlighted in Gottwald's discussion of the production by the village communities of goods for their "use value" rather than for their "exchange value" (*ibid.*, 147, 151).

⁷For a discussion of the way in which modern means of communication have led to an explosion of social interaction, standardizing lifestyles and making possible organizational unity on even a global scale, and for a discussion of the way in which cheap means for the bulk transportation of goods have led to the extensive interrelatedness of distant regions regarding the forms and materials of life, see G. and J. Lenski, *Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974) 322-328.

⁸See S. E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment* (New York: Harper, 1963), for an excellent discussion of the phenomenon of denominationalism (103-133) and for his definition of "denomination" as "a voluntary association of like-hearted and like-minded individuals, who are united on the basis of common beliefs for the purpose of accomplishing tangible and defined objectives" (104).

ated devotees from various other denominations. In either case, however, getting organized and structured is a matter that is treated with the utmost urgency. When one is bombarded with such experiences in everyday contemporary life, it becomes difficult to envision a situation in which followers of Yahweh did not express their religious oneness in some organizational form.

But several features of this period make it unlikely that (1) there was a need for such an organizational form and (2) that there was a religious oneness at all. Regarding the first point, one must note that there were literally dozens of independent Canaanite city-states in Palestine, all of whom worshipped the god Baal without there being any specific religious office coordinating and connecting these various local shrines. Presumably, Canaanite religion originated, was spread and was modified in the matrix of early Canaanite culture without any such encompassing organization being required. While it is true that the worship of Yahweh was likely brought into Palestine by one or more groups of conquering and/or settling peoples, there is no need to suppose that the growth and modification of the worship of Yahweh would have been any different than that of Baalism. That is, groups already settled in Palestine, as well as additional groups entering by whatever means, would come to adopt the worship of Yahweh as they learned of him from groups already worshipping him. Thus, through a variety of means and over a considerable period of years large numbers of people in Palestine would become affiliated with the God Yahweh, not through incorporation into an organization but through the simple procedure of beginning to worship this new God.⁹ We must be careful at this point not to confuse the concept of Israel as a political-religious entity, such as she existed in institutionalized form during the time of the monarchy, with the idea of Israel as a religious entity—that is, as the sum total of those who worshipped Yahweh. In short, the worship of Yahweh need not have encompassed organizational unity any more than the worship of Baal encompassed organizational unity. It is only our modern, hyperorganizational mode of thinking that makes it seem necessary to presume a structure every time worshippers of Yahweh are discussed.

Regarding the lack of a religious oneness during this era, it should be noted that even as late as King Josiah, religious practices in Israel were still substantially divergent and independent in many of the local shrines. (2 Kgs 23:4-25). Might this not reflect the heritage of an earlier age in which Yahweh was worshipped, independent of any organizing and unifying structure, in a multitude of local, autonomous shrines with divergent beliefs and practices? An organizational theory like Noth's maintains¹⁰ that the office of judge of Israel bore the responsibility for interpreting and maintaining the law of Yahweh, which is traced back to apodictic law and presumed to be applicable to all Israel. But one need not presume that a law code (or codes), however ancient, must of necessity have been unquestioningly and uniformly followed by all who worshipped Yahweh during

⁹The process of individuals and groups of people beginning to worship Yahweh is clearly still in progress during the time of David, as exemplified in Uriah the Hittite, the city of Jerusalem, and the Canaanite cities incorporated into David's kingdom, although by this time a political organization, the newly-founded monarchy, has become one of the means by which people are brought to the worship of Yahweh.

¹⁰Noth, *History*, 102-103.

these early years.¹¹ It would be at least as reasonable to presume that at this time the codes had local or at best regional authority, with different regions having different forms and interpretations of the laws involved and probably different agendas of laws they felt obliged to obey (as is suggested by the religious diversity that endures even in Josiah's time). Furthermore, when one presumes that there was one corpus of apodictic law applicable to all worshippers of Yahweh, it becomes difficult to understand how some of the actions in the book of Judges could have gone uncensured. Gideon's father, for example, maintained an altar to Baal (Judg 6:25) in direct violation of Exod 20:3-6, and Gideon himself erected an ephod that Israel worshipped (Judg 8:27). Jephthah sacrificed his own daughter to Yahweh, a practice strongly denounced in Deut 12:30-31. Micah constructed a graven image and dedicated it to the worship of Yahweh (Judg 17:3), again in defiance of Exod 20:3-6. Would not an organizational structure have to insist on at least a minimal compliance on the part of all members (and especially such prominent members as Gideon and Jephthah) with such basic apodictic laws as not making graven images and not worshipping gods other than Yahweh? Due to the several cases in which basic laws such as these were violated, it would seem better to take seriously the statement that "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg 17:6; 21:25) and understand it to apply in the broadest sense to the total religious life of the worshippers of Yahweh during this era.¹²

It is further worth noting that in the one case (Judges 19-21) where unified action is taken against an offender (Gibeah and the Benjaminites) those who would punish the offender are not called out through a council, through the office of the judge (in fact, no judge is ever mentioned in this account) or through an institutional office of any sort, but rather through the *ad hoc* technique of sending pieces of the concubine to the various tribes. When we add to this the likelihood that various worshippers of Yahweh had varying degrees of commitment to this deity¹³ the following pattern emerges: During the period of the judges there were various independent, autonomous groups that had different degrees of commitment to Yahweh, such commitment often being blended with one or more other religions, which had various interpretations of the religion of Yahweh and which had different understandings of the laws associated with the worship of Yahweh. This is precisely what one would expect if many different groups, scattered throughout Palestine and possessing divergent backgrounds, came individually to adopt the worship of Yahweh, adapting it to their own particular situation before passing it on to still other groups. In such a context of local autonomy and divergent understandings of what constituted Yahwism, highly varied practices and rituals (some of which would later be considered heterodox and scandalous by a more

¹¹Mendenhall's theory presupposes one uniform legal corpus focusing on interpersonal relationships and demanding absolute loyalty to the deity ("Hebrew Conquest," 73-74).

¹²This diversity is further substantiated by the possibility that the sanctuaries of Jeroboam at Bethel and Dan reflect one early form of the worship of Yahweh that Jeroboam adopted and continued rather than created; see J. A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951) 254-260; N. H. Snaith, "Introduction and Exegesis: The First and Second Books of Kings," *IB* (New York: Abingdon, 1944) 117-120; W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (2d ed.; Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1957) 299-301. See also the reference in 2 Kgs 18:4 to divergent practices still in evidence in the time of Hezekiah.

¹³For example, Gideon's father, who split his religious allegiance between Yahweh and Baal.

standardized Yahwism) were likely to proliferate due to the vacuum left by the lack of any central authority.¹⁴

There is a third factor that has led modern scholars to posit an organizational focus. The conquest of Palestine has been viewed by many as a fairly well-organized takeover of substantial portions of Palestine by a large amalgam of Israelite groups. For example, Bright and Mendenhall¹⁵ argue that the process of the conquest created the broader structure of Israel as it existed in subsequent years, with the constituent members of later Israel being incorporated from many different points of origin as the conquest progressed. Furthermore, the rise of the monarchy under Saul and David has been seen to involve almost immediately an organizational structure uniting within it all segments of Israel. In light of these two factors it has seemed reasonable to suppose that there must have been an organization of some sort that bridged the gap between the former period and the latter.

Such reasoning must, however, be questioned. The form of the conquest is a matter that is itself open to considerable debate.¹⁶ To the extent that Noth is correct about settlement playing an important role in Israel's arrival in Palestine¹⁷ we must see the conquest as, in part at least, a rather unorganized affair. Furthermore, the various conquest traditions in Judges 1, with their emphasis on individual tribal groups fighting for and seizing some but not all of the land in their territory, also point toward disorganization and fragmentation. And even when one maintains that a number of groups that formed part of later Israel invaded central Palestine and seized significant portions of it under the leadership of

¹⁴It should be noted that I am *not* denying that there was some degree of mutuality among the various worshippers of Yahweh—that is, that there was a feeling of affinity, loyalty and, to a certain degree, military interdependence between various groups of worshippers of Yahweh. Judges 5 can serve as an example of the centripetal thrust of this mutuality: The repeated invoking of the name of Yahweh in the Song of Deborah points to the worship of Yahweh as the important glue holding the coalition together. But to view the worship of Yahweh as the only or the most important concept of mutuality in the lives of these people would be misleading. Tribal and clan loyalties would clearly have been decisive foci of mutuality, as in Judg 12:1-6, where the Ephraimites take offense at what they feel is the affront to their group by Jephthah, or in 20:12-14, where the Benjaminites refuse to abandon Gibeah to the attack of other tribes. Also, various of these people would no doubt have felt a pull of mutuality toward other worshippers of Baal, as in the case of Gideon's father and the men of his city (6:25-32). And as numerous stories in the book of Judges make obvious, local and regional contact along with the crisscrossing of parochial factors of common self-interest, seen most obviously in the threat of an invading foe (e. g., 9:17), made for a geographical sense of mutuality.

Concerning the affiliation of and sense of mutuality among groups of worshippers of Yahweh, H. H. Rowley, "Israel, History of," in *IDB* 2, 754, says: "One may doubt whether there was any twelve-tribe amphictyony at this date, for one finds little evidence of it in the period of the judges. At the same time, the prominence of shrines in the narrative must be recognized, and it seems more likely that at various times there were alliances of groups of tribes, these alliances being sealed at sanctuaries. The variety of shrines mentioned seems to tell against an amphictyony of all the tribes with a central amphictyonic shrine."

¹⁵J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 126-139; Mendenhall, "Hebrew Conquest," 66-87; *Tenth Generation*, 19-31, 224-226.

¹⁶See M. Weippert, *The Settlement of the Israelite Tribes in Palestine* (SBT 2/21; London: SCM, 1971).

¹⁷Noth, *History*, 68-84. See also A. Alt, "The Settlement of the Israelites in Palestine," *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1968) 175-221.

Joshua,¹⁸ this need not lead one to claim that the process required anything more than the dynamic leadership of one man. Nor is there any need to suppose that his death caused any real need for a continuing office (whether essentially religious or political) to be set up. Neither Joshua 23-24 nor Judges 1-2 gives any hint of such a continuing office. Further, the most immediate need of the followers of Joshua would have been to acclimate themselves to their new land, to build their homes, and to learn how to make a living in their new environment. This would inevitably focus the people's energies locally, away from any national or quasi-national structures. Therefore when one combines (1) the likelihood that some tribes and clans entered Palestine by settlement, (2) the picture of Judges 1, which suggests considerable local conquest by individual tribes, (3) the fact that any groups allied in a conquest effort would have to have turned their energies to the locally-oriented process of making themselves at home in their territory, and (4) the diversity of religious practices in evidence in the book of Judges, one of two patterns appears likely. Either there was no political or religious structure involved in Israel's takeover of Palestine, or whatever limited organizing and structuring there may have been under a figure like Joshua disappeared with his death.

We now turn to an analysis of the traditions that treat the various leaders mentioned in the book of Judges.¹⁹ While the argumentation presented above is

¹⁸For quite some time it has been felt by many that Joshua's role in the conquest of Palestine may actually relate to a relatively limited territory. See Weippert, *Settlement*, 37-41, for a proposal concerning the original place of Joshua in the traditions and for a discussion of the well-known views of Alt and Noth regarding the Joshua traditions. In the book of Joshua there is only brief reference to campaigns in Judah and there is no reference to the central hill country immediately south of the valley of Jezreel; see further Moore, *Judges*, 107-109. This suggests that Joshua's military leadership focused on the territory north of Jerusalem in the central hill country, the territory to whose conquest the book of Joshua devotes the most space. Consequently it is best to avoid conceiving of the conquest as a massive, unified effort by a majority of the groups constituting later Israel, despite the efforts of some scholars to use archaeological data to support this concept, as in the case of G. E. Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) 69-85, and P. W. Lapp, "The Conquest of Palestine in the Light of Archaeology," *CTM* 38 (1967) 283-300. [For a helpful discussion of the skepticism which must be employed vis-à-vis the use of late-second-millennium Palestinian archaeological finds as evidence for a massive and extensive conquest of Palestine by Israel see Noth, *History*, 42-49, 81-83; Weippert, *Settlement*, 127-136; and R. de Vaux, "On Right and Wrong Uses of Archaeology," *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Nelson Glueck* (ed. J. A. Sanders; Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1970) 64-80.] While Joshua could have been a figure of considerable regional importance as a conqueror, there is no need to suppose that he either brought into Palestine a pan-Israelite unifying organization or to suppose that the results of his conquest were so far-reaching that they brought into being a broadly-based organizational structure. The book of Judges presents material that is much more pertinent for analyzing the practices and affiliations of those who worshipped Yahweh during the early years in Palestine.

¹⁹I have chosen to use the term "leader" rather than "judge" for the following reasons: *špt*, "to judge," is never applied as a *noun* to any of the figures in the book of Judges; it is not applied at all to some of the figures mentioned, as in the cases of Ehud, Barak and Gideon; the use of the term "judge" has for many scholars come to imply a uniformity and consistency of office among the various figures placed in this category that simply cannot be supported when the leadership roles of these figures are carefully examined; and a more neutral and open-ended category like "leader" must of necessity be defined in each case by the specifics contained in the pertinent traditions. Furthermore, due to the substantial ambiguities bound up in the meaning of the root *špt*, and due to its failure to be uniformly self-defining in the book of Judges, it would seem best not to place emphasis on the term itself but rather to study the

important in analyzing the question of whether or not there was a unifying organization during this period, the most decisive evidence will be produced by a close analysis of the way in which the leadership role of each of these figures is portrayed. Several important questions must be asked regarding these leaders: What was the scope of their power and influence? What kinds of activities are ascribed to them? Into what type of political and/or religious framework do these activities fit? How do the individuals come to power, and for how long do they exercise their power?

All the figures discussed in Judges 3-16, with the exception of Samson,²⁰ have one thing in common: They are portrayed as leaders. But the nature of their leadership varies. Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar,²¹ Deborah and Barak, Gideon, Tola, Jair and Jephthah are portrayed as military figures while Ibzan, Elon and Abdon are not. Not all of the military figures are said to have continued to lead after their military role was completed,²² for following the accounts concerning Ehud and Deborah and Barak we are told only that the land had rest for a certain number of years. There is substantial evidence, however, that both Gideon and Jephthah continued some form of rulership after their initial role as deliverers was completed. Tola also appears to have continued his leadership after his act of deliverance, and the military figure Jair apparently was a leader for more than twenty years. As may be seen from this brief overview of the various individuals, it is not the case that we have two basic groups of figures, as Noth proposes: one composed of military deliverers, the other of nonmilitary, legally-oriented religious judges.²³ Rather, we have one category—leadership—which could be developed

complexities and nuances in the traditions revolving around each figure. A detailed analysis of the root as it is applied to Israel's premonarchical figures is available in M. Rozenberg, *The Stem špt: An Investigation of Biblical and Extra-Biblical Sources* (doctoral dissertation, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1963), esp. 74-89.

²⁰I do not deal with Samson in my subsequent treatment of the traditions in Judges because he never is described as leading any worshippers of Yahweh, in battle or in any other way. Since he always acts as a lone individual, his traditions are not directly relevant to the question of unity and diversity in early Israel. The enigmatic phrase "he judged Israel" (Judg 15:20; 16:31) gives us no precise information, as noted above in n. 19, and may have been applied to Samson at a late date (see Moore, *Judges*, 313-314). It is noteworthy that the general context into which the Samson traditions fit is one of relative chaos and disunity and that Samson acts, if not on behalf of just himself, certainly on behalf of no more than the tribes of Dan and Judah.

²¹The tradition treating Shamgar is exceptionally brief (Judg 3:31), with barely enough words to tell us that he delivered Israel by slaying six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. For a discussion of the context into which Shamgar fits see Boling, *Judges*, 89-90.

²²Whether Judg 3:11, which describes forty years of rest for Israel before Othniel's death, should be taken to indicate an extended period of leadership for Othniel is an open question (see also 3:30; 5:31; 8:28; see Moore, *Judges*, 88). Othniel may, however, have been made a leader in his clan as a result of his role in the conquest of Debir (Josh 15:16-17; Judg 1:12-13; cf. Jair, discussed below), with this perhaps leading to his call to be a military deliverer (3:7-11). But whether or not Othniel experienced an extended period of leadership, he clearly is portrayed as a military figure of substantial consequence.

²³Noth has argued that the individuals treated in Judg 10:1-5; 12:7-15 were legal figures who served as judges in the context of Israel's amphictyony, while the other persons in Judges 3-16 were military figures who may not properly be termed judges (*History*, 101-103; "Das Amt des 'Richters Israel,'" *Festschrift Alfred Bertholet* [ed. W. Baumgartner; Tübingen: Mohr, 1950] 404-417; *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* [Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1967] 47-50). It should be noted, however,

in several different forms, forms that cross and interweave with one another. We will now examine these forms in detail.

Concerning Ehud, and Deborah and Barak, the traditions do not indicate a continued period of leadership after these individuals guide their people to victory over the oppressors. They arise as leaders in a chaotic situation with their people being oppressed by an enemy, succeed in throwing off that enemy, and then apparently abandon the reins of power and return to their former station in life. Although Deborah and Barak lead quite a substantial coalition of tribes into battle (Judg 5:14-18) the alliance is far from pan-Israelite and essentially involves those groups that had an interest in the territory in Jezreel that was dominated by Jabin of Hazor. Ehud's efforts focus on the deliverance of Ephraim and Benjamin, which were dominated by Eglon, king of Moab, locally headquartered in Jericho.

These figures fit in well with the pattern proposed earlier for the book of Judges—namely, that there was no religious or political office giving organizational cohesiveness during this period. The way in which these leaders rise to power in direct response to a crisis, and their apparent abandonment of power once the crisis has passed, point to the general lack of organization. The essentially local orientation of these battles for deliverance also leads to the same conclusion, since the tribes that fight do so because their own self-interest is at stake and not because of any organizational commitments. Finally, although in the case of Deborah we have a prophetess who is said to have been “judging Israel,” there is no indication here of a role played by Deborah in an organized, pan-Israelite religious institution.²⁴

The second category of leadership involves those who brought deliverance and then stayed on as leaders until their deaths. No particulars are given concerning the deliverance wrought by Tola. The enemy is not mentioned, and the geographical region delivered is not specified. This, however, is understandable in a literary composition (Judg 10:1-5; 12:7-15) that is laconic and interested mainly in items such as ancestry, duration of leadership and place of burial.²⁵ He is specifically said to have come from Issachar and to have made his home at Shamir in Ephraim. This would suggest the eastern area of the valley of Jezreel and the portion of the central hill country below it as the territory of his deliverance and twenty-three-year leadership.

It is with Jephthah and Gideon, however, that we get the most detailed picture of those who brought deliverance and then stayed on to rule. Turning first to the Jephthah traditions, we notice immediately that Jephthah followed a rather

that of the six figures mentioned in 10:1-5; 12:7-15, three (Tola, Jair and Jephthah) are portrayed as military figures, while of the other three at least two (Ibzan and Abdon) can best be described as local clan leaders (see my arguments below). I have critiqued Noth's position concerning these figures in “Minor Judges,” 190-200.

²⁴See the discussion of the phrase “judged Israel” in “Minor Judges,” 195, where I argue that reference to “Israel” in this phrase need not be taken to mean literally “all Israel.”

²⁵A comparison to the Jair tradition is instructive. Nothing in Judg 10:3-5 points decisively to a military role for Jair. We learn of that from military traditions underlying Jair that are external to Judges (Num 32:41; Deut 3:14). Judges 10:1 does, however, apply the verbal form “to deliver” (*lhwy'*) to Tola (see my discussion of the military significance of *yš'* in the book of Judges in “Minor Judges,” 199). Unfortunately there are no narratives about Tola elsewhere in the OT.

tortuous path to power. Born the illegitimate son of a harlot,²⁶ he was hounded out of Gilead. After fleeing to the land of Tob he gathered around himself a band of "worthless fellows" and became their leader (Judg 11:3). He and his men were in effect bandits, very much after the fashion of David and his men when they were being pursued by Saul (1 Samuel 25, for example). But the crucial thing to note is that Jephthah, despite the fact that he was a bandit, had the one thing the men of Gilead desperately needed when they were attacked by Ammon: military power, the ability to act quickly and decisively using a trained and organized military unit. Gilead clearly did not have such a unit, and the dialogue (Judg 11:4-11) between Jephthah and the leaders of Gilead when they come seeking his help pointedly highlights their dire need for assistance. They are willing to come to the very man whom they had earlier driven out, and they are willing to allow him to become their head and leader in exchange for his help. Being desperate, they were forced to accept as their ruler one who had every reason to hate and despise them (v 7) and whose plundering ways might be directed on Gilead, albeit in a somewhat more legitimized fashion, after he became Gilead's leader. The thrust of Jephthah's comments during the negotiations makes it clear that he is helping Gilead only for what he can get out of the arrangement—namely, command over a sizable group of people. He realizes that he can exploit the chaotic situation to his own advantage.

Thus the Jephthah traditions reveal, for at least the clan of Gilead, a very unsettled, chaotic, disorganized political-military context. Other than Jephthah, and the rather tardy and irascible Ephraimites (12:1-6), there is no one within or outside of Gilead who can be counted on for effective help. The help and organization that is provided through Jephthah arises spontaneously in response to the sociological situation in which disorganization and lack of unity have created a desperate need.

The Jephthah tradition also provides evidence against any broadly-based religious organization. Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter²⁷ makes it difficult to maintain that there was a central and unifying religious organization in Israel, led by a judge who interpreted and enforced the law of Yahweh that was accepted by all member clans and tribes. Jephthah, it must be noted, is one of the six figures mentioned in the list (10:1-5; 12:7-15) that Noth claims names some of those who served the amphictyony as judge. The crucial question, therefore, is: How are we to explain Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter if he either was or was about

²⁶See Boling's discussion of Jephthah's parentage and of the phrase "Gilead was the father of Jephthah," which he interprets as meaning that Jephthah's prostitute mother did not know which of her numerous Gileadite lovers was Jephthah's father (*Judges*, 197).

²⁷One need not assume that this account has an etiological origin, as claimed by T. H. Gaster: "Modern scholars see in this a story based on the ancient and primitive custom of annually bewailing the dead or ousted spirit of fertility during the dry or winter season" (*Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament* [New York: Harper, 1975] 431). The carelessness demonstrated by Jephthah in making the vow, the sad consequence that follows, and Jephthah's persistence in fulfilling the vow form the foci of the narrative. The element of fertility (virginity) only enters to heighten the pathos by showing that Jephthah's daughter died without having had a chance to fulfill the main function of womanhood, that of bearing children. Any possible connection with the practice of wailing for the fertility goddess could only be, at best, very remote; see Boling, *Judges*, 209-210. It should further be noted that it is not his having to offer a human sacrifice that upsets Jephthah, but rather the fact that his *daughter* is the one chosen for the sacrifice.

to become "judge of Israel" and, as such, would have had a knowledge of the law known and accepted by all Israelites? Further, could Israel accept as its judge one who had so flagrantly violated the law of Yahweh? It would seem better to argue as proposed earlier that (1) there was no standardized, universally-accepted concept of the law of Yahweh, (2) there was no pan-Israelite religious institution to enforce such law, and (3) locally-oriented individuals and clans obeyed and interpreted the laws of Yahweh with which they were familiar basically along the lines of their own desires and inclinations.

Gideon also serves as a ruler after his act of deliverance, despite the enigmatic statement in 8:23 that Gideon would not rule. His success against Midian led to considerable power and authority for the duration of his life. His rescue of Shechem from the Midianites led to a treaty with Shechem whereby he became its ruler, the treaty being sealed by Gideon's marriage to a Shechemite concubine (8:31; 9:17).²⁸ Furthermore, Abimelech's rise to kingship can only be explained on the presupposition that his father Gideon had been a ruler (9:1-6).

The exact scope of Gideon's authority cannot be established. But the fact that Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, Naphtali (6:35) and Ephraim (7:24-8:3) are called upon to help in the battle against Midian, when coupled with Gideon's rulership over Shechem, suggests that Gideon ruled over a substantial portion of the central hill country to the north and south of the valley of Jezreel. Abimelech certainly had control of the central hill country below the valley of Jezreel, presumably because he inherited this control from his father.

Unlike Jephthah, a military man who vigorously sought to become a ruler, Gideon is portrayed as one who was reluctant both to be a leader in the war against Midian (6:15-21, 36-40; 7:9-14) and to be a ruler in Israel (8:22-23). How then does he come to rule? The answer may lie, at least in part, in the difficult situation in which the several tribes found themselves due to the Midianite plundering. While it is true that Gideon drove off the Midianites and dealt them a considerable defeat, the devastation they had wrought would surely have been prominent in the memory of those whom Gideon had delivered.²⁹ This could easily have led them to make Gideon's leadership permanent, thereby avoiding the lack of unity that had laid them bare to Midian and preserving the one means that had proven successful against Midian. And Gideon may have demonstrated his leadership abilities to his constituency even further by the way in which he defused the anger of the Ephraimites (7:24-8:3), who blustered because they had not been included in the initial call to arms (compare Jephthah's association with the Ephraimites, 12:1-6).

Gideon's years as a ruler solidified his office sufficiently that it was assumed he would be succeeded (9:2), and the succession was successfully carried out by Abimelech despite the bloodbath he found necessary to employ. Abimelech's power and authority were substantial since he was able, within three years of his becoming king, to destroy rebellious Shechem—the base for his rise to power—and was about to complete his conquest of Thebez when his own carelessness led

²⁸Cf. 2 Sam 3:3; 1 Kgs 3:1; 7:8; 11:1-3, where treaties are sealed by marriage.

²⁹The Midianites were no normal foe. Their swift camels, which gave them the ability to suddenly swoop down upon the people, gather booty, and vanish as quickly as they had come, would have struck terror in the hearts of those who were attacked.

to his untimely death. Despite the moralizing statements that Abimelech was punished for the slaughter of his brothers (9:20, 23-24, 56-57), the account indicates that he was about to stamp out the rebellion against him when he strayed too close to the wall and was struck by the millstone. Thus in two generations a substantial monarchy had been created in central Palestine, and it is reasonable to speculate that, had Abimelech ruled for twenty or more years and had he placed a competent son on the throne,³⁰ Gideon and Abimelech might today be remembered as the founders of the first Israelite dynasty.

But the line of succession ceased with Abimelech, and apparently no attempt was made to find a successor. Why? First, the dynasty had been interrupted a bit too early, after only three years (9:22) of the second generation, and the other sons of Gideon had been systematically eliminated. Second, and potentially more important, is the fact that some time had passed since the trouble with the Midianites, and the need for a unifying and protecting ruler would not have been felt so keenly as it was during Gideon's rise to power.³¹ The tendencies toward localization and separation mentioned earlier would have been stronger than the people's perception of their need for a unifying monarchy, and with Abimelech, the embodiment of the monarchy, gone there would have been no force pushing for its continuance.³²

In closing the discussion of Gideon we must note the aberrant religious practices associated with him. Joash's maintenance of an altar to Baal has already been noted. While Gideon does tear down this altar, after his victory over the Midianites he collects a large quantity of gold, out of which he constructs an ephod that he places in his city. Israel is said to have played the harlot after the ephod (8:24-27). This is another instance during the period of the judges when Exod 20:3-6 would have been violated, and it is difficult to understand how an action like this by so prominent a leader as Gideon could have gone uncensured by a centralizing organization.

Jair, according to the traditions underlying him in Num 32:41 and Deut 3:14, was instrumental in the takeover of the Havvoth-Jair in Gilead. While he is thus described as a military figure he clearly differs from Tola, Jephthah and Gideon in that his military activity consists in conquering, rather than in delivering, the specific territory with which he is associated. Judges 10:3-5 indicates, however, that he continued his role as leader for the duration of his life. It stands to reason that his important role in the conquest of the region would have led the new inhabitants to look upon him as their leader as long as he lived. This, along with the

³⁰This would probably have given the office sufficient inertia to institutionalize it.

³¹Midian is not mentioned again as a threat in Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel or 1 and 2 Kings.

³²Given the strong antimonarchial position that Mendenhall and Gottwald presuppose ("Hebrew Conquest," 71-84; *Tenth Generation*, 21-22, 28-31; "Pastoral Nomads," 252-254; and "Asiatic Mode," 149-152), the Gideon-Abimelech narrative complex is problematic. Could a group of former peasants, only a generation or two removed from Canaanite monarchial oppression which would have to have been severe in order to set the stage for the peasants' revolt, submit again to monarchial rule under Gideon and Abimelech (they ask Gideon to rule over them [Judg 8:22] and remain loyal to Abimelech despite his bloody rise to kingship [9:55])? Nowhere in the account are the people chastised for being subjects of a king but rather for the manner in which they helped Abimelech become king. Judges 9, including Jotham's fable, is not antimonarchial (as one might expect were Mendenhall correct) but rather anti-Abimelech, due to the bloodbath he causes; see E. H. Maly, "The Jotham Fable—Anti-Monarchial?," *CBQ* 22 (1960) 299-305.

tradition of his thirty sons riding on thirty asses and possessing thirty cities, is best understood to fit the picture of one who for many years was a regional chieftain and/or clan leader. The picture of the many sons riding on their asses to the various cities suggests that Jair delegated authority to his sons in order that they could help govern the territory over which he had control.³³ There is no need or justification in the text for going beyond the function of a clan leader and proposing that Jair exerted a pan-Israelite influence during his term as leader. The picture of local independence and autonomy proposed above for the period of the judges fits well with the local and regional flavor reflected in the traditions concerning Jair.

The final category of leaders contains those whose traditions give no indication of military activity of any kind: Ibzan, Abdon and Elon. Ibzan of Bethlehem (12:8-10) is said to have had thirty sons and thirty daughters. Even if the numbers "thirty" are rounded figures Ibzan was a man with numerous wives, a man whose importance and prestige would entitle him to a large harem.³⁴ In the context of the period under discussion, the role of a clan ruler or chieftain comes immediately to mind.³⁵ This is further supported by Ibzan's extensive interest in marrying his sons and daughters to those "outside his clan" (12:9). Ibzan would have entered into such marital exchanges as a means of enhancing his role as leader in the region surrounding Bethlehem. Thus Ibzan is best understood as a local clan leader with ambitions stretching into the surrounding territory.

Abdon of Pirathon (12:13-15) also fits the image of a local clan ruler. While the numbers "forty" and "thirty," applied respectively to his sons and grandsons, may be rounded figures, he (like Ibzan) would have been an important man with a large harem, again calling to mind the image of a local ruler. The picture of the seventy sons and grandsons riding on seventy asses also fits with such an image.³⁶

For Elon (12:11-12) we have only the enigmatic phrase "judged Israel," along with the commonly-given information regarding his origin and place of burial. The fact that his memory is preserved suggests his importance as a leader, but the nature of his leadership remains ambiguous. The scant information given does not, however, require the picture of a nationally-significant political or religious leader.

In summarizing the evidence presented above we will first of all amalgamate the knowledge gained concerning the six so-called "minor judges." Three of these individuals—Tola, Jair and Jephthah—are military figures, and all three appear to achieve positions as important leaders in their regions by virtue of their military exploits. While we may entertain the possibility that they served as national figures, there is nothing in the traditions that leads toward or requires such an in-

³³*lhm*, "to them," is used in conjunction with *'rym*, "cities," suggesting that the sons were directly in charge of the cities.

³⁴This calls to mind Gideon who, as a man of importance and power, possessed a large harem (Judg 8:30).

³⁵See my discussion of the phrase "judged Israel" as it is applied to Ibzan, Abdon, Elon and others ("Minor Judges," 195). The phrase need not imply a pan-Israelite scope for these leaders.

³⁶Cf. Jair (Judg 10:4).

terpretation. The Jair tradition presents the very different picture of a local clan leader, and the extensive Jephthah tradition depicts one who strives for and achieves a position of local rulership. The other three individuals mentioned in 12:8-15 are not portrayed as military figures. But Ibzan and Abdon give the strong appearance of being local clan leaders rather than figures of national significance. Consequently, although the traditions in 10:1-5; 12:7-15 present variations in the roles filled by the six individuals listed, the overwhelming weight of the evidence points toward local clan leaders or rulers. If this evidence is taken seriously,³⁷ any attempt to make these men into figures of national significance is doomed to failure.

A composite picture drawn from the rest of the traditions in the book of Judges also points away from any national office or organization. Local and regional threats to various groups are met by the spontaneous appearance of deliverers, who call out and unite the warriors from the affected clans and tribes and drive off the foe. Some of these leaders, like Ehud and Barak, apparently abandon their role as leaders once the danger is removed, allowing the situation to revert to its earlier status of local independence and autonomy. Gideon, however, continues in power and, along with his son Abimelech, almost establishes a dynasty in central Palestine. But the dynasty ends abruptly due to Abimelech's untimely death, and local independence and autonomy return (9:55). Jephthah, who bargains his way into being named ruler of Gilead, succeeds in controlling only a relatively small number of people, and there is no indication that his office continued after his death, especially since his only child was sacrificed to Yahweh (11:34-40). The pattern clearly is one of local separateness and autonomy,³⁸ which is occasionally interrupted by regional alliances that arise in order to counter the threat of foes but which returns once the threat has been removed and/or the delivering leader passes from the scene. Also, the various forms of leadership in evidence among the figures mentioned above point strongly to the fact that, due to the rather chaotic and ambiguous sociological situation, leadership would arise in whatever form was most suited to a combination of the specific circumstances and the desires and abilities of the particular leader who came forward.

Finally, the varied, unusual and, from the standpoint of later generations, aberrant religious practices in evidence during this era indicate that this was a time of freedom, independence and diversity in religious matters. There was no one unified conception of the nature of Yahwism; there was no universal, total commitment to the worship of Yahweh alone; and there was no central religious office with the authority to enforce a standardized religious practice on those who worshipped Yahweh. Joash's altar to Baal serves as an example of the less-than-total commitment to Yahweh in evidence among some, a semi-commitment that was easily accommodated to the worship of other gods. Gideon's erection of an ephod, along with Micah's bizarre sanctuary to Yahweh (Judges 17), reveal the variegated forms through which different people felt they could satisfy the re-

³⁷Noth, for example, fails to take this evidence seriously, dismissing it as "brief anecdotal remarks" (*History*, 101; "Amt," 407, 412-413; 47-48).

³⁸The scene of the confrontation between Micah and the Danites (Judg 18:21-26) must also be considered here, as Micah is unable to call on more than a few neighbors to help him against the Danites. No substantial group or organization is available for a strike against the Danite thieves.

quirements for the worship of Yahweh. When combined with Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter to Yahweh these examples are sufficient to indicate the absence of a standardizing, centripetal, pan-Israelite religious institution during this era. It therefore seems best to picture "Israel" during this period as a multifarious category of groups and clans, all of whom were loosely affiliated with one another by virtue of their worship of Yahweh (which some groups had learned from others, and which took different forms in different groups), and none of whom were permanently and exclusively bound to the other worshippers of Yahweh through a political or religious institution.