

# Echoes of Gideon's Ephod: An Intertextual Reading

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## *I. Introduction*

A surface reading of the story of Gideon seems to reveal an episode that participates in the overall pattern of the book of Judges. Israel is oppressed by enemies and cries out for divine help; a judge who is to be an instrument of divine salvation is chosen, perhaps from the ranks of the unlikely;<sup>1</sup> this judge mediates salvation through divine providence; Israel has peace for the rest of the judge's life; Israel backslides following the leader's demise, and is punished by oppression—the cycle begins again.

The trajectory from success during his career to chaos following his death seems to follow for Gideon as it does for the other leaders in the book. The events at the end of his life thus arouse no particular negative judgment in the mind of readers familiar with the expected pattern. Perhaps Gideon is even more to be praised than other leaders—after all, he rejects the rulership offered to him by the people following his triumph over Midian (Judg. 8:23), noting correctly that only God is the legitimate ruler over Israel. Even Gideon's construction of an ephod out of the spoils of war immediately following this rejection of rulership raises no immediate red flag; some other leaders who are not Levitical priests and who do not serve in Jerusalem perform cultic functions with impunity if not approbation.<sup>2</sup> Gideon's ephod, even though it is traditionally an instrument of the high priest to divine God's will, seems to serve Gideon and his house in maintaining their proper relationship to God, not to pervert it.

However, several striking elements are embedded in this final act of Gideon's that invite a closer look at this benign initial reading. These are words and phrases that call up other biblical instances where these same linguistic elements occur, but in these other intertexts the context is far from benign. Such expressions as מִרְקָשׁ, "snare," נִזְמֵי זָהָב "golden rings," and the verb זָנָה "to whore," evoke, in their appearances elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, powerful contexts of idolatry and condemnation. In addition to these expressions, a second cluster of language and narrative structure

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1. E.g., from among left handed warriors (Ehud, Judges 3), women (Deborah and Jael, Judges 4–5) or craven (Gideon in Judges 3 is winnowing in a cave to evade Midianite raiders).

2. E.g., Samuel serves in the sanctuary at Shiloh (1 Samuel 1–3) even though he is not a Levite, and David brings the ark to Jerusalem, personally offering sacrifices every few feet (2 Sam. 6:12–14) even though he is not a Levitical priest.

associated with Gideon's act in making the ephod, וַיַּעַשׂ אֹתוֹ גִדְעוֹן לְאֵפוֹד (8:27), call up intertexts in which dire consequences follow cultic violations.

### A. Methodology

In this study, I will explore the rich intertextual associations that relate to the construction of the ephod and its consequences, implications, and forebodings. These intertextual readings will show that echoes of Gideon's ephod resonate ominously throughout the Hebrew Bible, suggesting that compressed into these few verses at the end of Gideon's career is a condemnation and warning for Gideon, his own house, and the house of Israel.

In its broadest sense, the term intertextuality refers to the way in which two or more texts are read in terms of one another.<sup>3</sup> Scholars use a variety of markers of intertextuality, relying on diction—vocabulary and syntax—and literary devices, as well as upon relationships of genre and structure between and among texts. New meanings arise from the familiar texts, and subtleties and nuances are thrown into high relief, when the text is read with close attention to the borrowing and reshaping of language, motif, and theme, both within the Book of Judges and also throughout the wider biblical context. In this article, I will focus primarily on parallels between the language of our pericope and its resonances elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. On occasion, a root that occurs with frequency in biblical texts will only occur a few

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3. Much has been written on the theory of intertextuality in general, and on its application to biblical studies in particular. In this introduction I note the most accessible of these. For further discussion, see the following: R. G. Bowman and R. W. Swanson, "Samson and the Sons of God, or Dead Heroes and Dead Goats: Ethical Readings of Narrative Violence in Judges and Matthew," *Semeia* 77 (1997), 59–73; A. Brenner and C. Fontaine, eds., *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies* (Sheffield, 1997); M. Z. Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London, 1995); H. Cazelles, "Connexions et Structure de Gen XV," *RB* 69 (1962), 321–49; D. Crownfield, ed., *Body Text in Julia Kristeva: Religion, Women, and Psychoanalysis* (Albany, 1992); P. Eisenbaum, *The Jewish Heroes of Christian History*, *SBLMS* (Atlanta, 1997); H. G. Enelow, ed., *The Mishnah of Rabbi Eliezer, or the Midrash of Thirty-Two Hermeneutic Rules* (New York, 1933; Hebrew); J. C. Exum and D. J. A. Clines, eds., *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, *JSOTSup* 143 (Sheffield, 1993); D. N. Fewell, ed., *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, 1992); M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford, 1985); H. L. Ginsberg, "A Strand in the Cord of Hebrew Hymnody," in *EI* 9, *Albright Volume* (Jerusalem, 1969), 45–50; J. J. Granowski, "Jehoiachin at the King's Table: A Reading of the Ending of the Second Book of Kings," in Fewell, ed., *Reading Between Texts*, 173–88; E. L. Greenstein, "'An Eye for an Eye, a Tooth for a Tooth': Peshat, Derash and the Question of Context," *Resling* 5 (Summer 1998), 31–34 (Hebrew); idem, "Recovering 'The Women Who Served at the Entrance,'" in G. Galil and M. Weinfeld, eds., *Studies in Historical Geography and Biblical Historiography, Presented to Zecharia Kallai*, (Leiden, 2000); G. H. Hartman and S. Budick, eds., *Midrash and Literature* (New Haven, 1986); M. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus*, *NTSMS* 8 (Cambridge, 1969); G. L. Kessler, "Intertextuality and the Reading of Talmudic Culture," *Arachnē* 1 (1994), 238–52; P. O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse: Reading Narrative Theory* (Toronto, 1996); G. Rendsburg, "David and His Circle in Genesis 38," *VT* 36 (1986), 438–46; G. Savran, "Beastly Speech: Intertextuality, Balaam's Ass and the Garden of Eden," *JSOT* 64 (1994), 33–55; idem, *Telling and Retelling: Quotation in Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington-Indianapolis, 1988); W. M. Swartley, *Israel's Scripture Traditions and the Synoptic Gospels: Story, Shaping Story* (Peabody, Mass., 1994); Y. Zakovitch, *"And You Shall Tell Your Son . . .": The Concept of the Exodus in the Bible* (Jerusalem, 1991) and idem, *Through the Looking Glass: Reflection Stories in the Bible* (Tel Aviv, 1995; Hebrew).

times in a particular grammatical form. When these identities occur in intertexts that demonstrate structural or other connections to each other, I give the morphological identity of the root, especially considering its rarity, additional weight in relating the two intertexts to one another.<sup>4</sup>

### *B. Theological context*

The theological turning point in this pericope is when Gideon rejects dynastic rulership of the people for himself and his descendants and, in his next breath, initiates the creation of an ephod, the symbol of priestly hegemony. In a theocracy such as that depicted for the nation of Israel in the Hebrew Bible, God is the ultimate sovereign and the people of Israel are subject to divine law. Here in Judg. 8:22–27, both the cultic and civic realms are invoked, and Gideon makes choices about his relationship to each: he rejects civic rulership but then takes on one of the accoutrements of cultic leadership. However, the distinction between civil and cultic domains that is so clearly delineated, for example, in the American bedrock principle of the separation between church and state, is a distinction without a difference for a nation governed as Israel is by God: God is the ultimate authority in both realms. The leaders of both civil and cultic institutions are chosen by God and serve at the divine pleasure. Thus, any rebellion against the divinely appointed leader in either realm is a rebellion against God, and any arrogation of power in either realm is a challenge to divine authority. In Judg. 8:22–27, these two spheres are offered as a kind of hendiadys, perhaps, for the totality of divine leadership in a theocracy. Gideon's decision to reject dynastic leadership with the politically correct observation that God is the only ruler over Israel is subverted by Gideon's arrogation of priestly leadership.

Gideon's creation of a divinatory ephod out of enemy spoils is in itself a symbol of this subversion. Not only does this recall Aaron's creation of a molten calf out of the spoils of Egypt, as I discuss below, but it also recalls Korah's rebellion against Aaron in Numbers 16, which entwines traditions about civic and cultic challenges in such a way as to make clear that challenge to either is challenge to God.<sup>5</sup> As a ritual

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4. It makes sense that in an aural/oral culture, the rare repetition of particular forms of roots that occur in other forms with more frequency would have particular resonance. For example, the root  $\text{?HB}$ , "to love," occurs in the Hebrew Bible 248 times, referring to love and loyalty of all kinds, human and divine. However, the specific morphology of  $\text{ואהבת}$  "and you shall love/be loyal to," which has particular resonance in its centrality to the liturgy proclaiming the unity of God, occurs only six times (Lev. 19:18, Lev. 19:34, Deut. 6:5, Deut. 11:1, Jer. 31:3, Mic. 6:8), in every case implying loyalty within a context evoking the covenant between God and Israel; cf. W. L. Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," *CBQ* 25 (1963), 77–87. Thus, in this example, the occurrence of the specific morphology of  $\text{ואהבת}$  may be expected to carry a burden of discourse that is distinct from intertexts with other forms of the same root. I believe the same is true in other cases where there are few morphologically identical forms in intertexts, even though the root of those forms may occur frequently. At the same time, I am certainly not excluding from intertextual consideration different forms of the same root that occur elsewhere, when they are relevant. My approach simply reads words with identical morphologies as having particular intertextual emphasis and resonance, without excluding other intertexts.

5. As God makes clear in Num. 16:29–30, any rebellion against Moses, the civil leader, is a rebellion against God, who chose him. Scholars have routinely pointed out the intertwining of sources in Numbers 16 and have noted that traditions involving rebellion against Moses and against Aaron have been woven

garment reserved for the use of the high priest, the metal divinary ephod is a symbol of cultic authority, commanded by God and bestowed upon the high priest in an unbroken line from Aaron. Within this cultural context, Gideon's manufacture and appropriation of such a richly resonant cultic object for his own use represents a shocking violation. As it is for Korah's followers and for the followers of Dathan and Abiram, the outcome of such arrogation for Gideon, for his house, and for the people, is disastrous.

## II. Intertextual exposition

The base text for my discussion is Judg. 8:22–27:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵל־גִּדְעוֹן מִשְׁלֵ־בָנוּ גַם־אֶתֶּה גַם־בְּנֶךְ גַם בְּךָ־בְּנֶךְ כִּי הוֹשַׁעְתָּנוּ מִיַּד מִדְיָן׃	8:22
וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם גִּדְעוֹן לֹא־אֲמַשְׁלֵ אֲנִי בָכֶם וְלֹא־יִמְשַׁל בְּכֶם׃	8:23
וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם גִּדְעוֹן אֲשַׁאֲלֶה מִכֶּם שְׂאֵלָה וְתַנּוּ־לִי אִישׁ נָזֶם שְׁלָלוּ כִי־נִזְמִי זָהָב לָהֶם כִּי־שִׁמְעֵאֵלִים הֵם׃	8:24
וַיֹּאמְרוּ נָתַן נָתַן וַיִּפְרְשׂוּ אֶת־הַשְּׂמֹלֶה וַיִּשְׁלִיכוּ שָׂמָה אִישׁ נָזֶם שְׁלָלוּ׃	8:25
וַיְהִי מִשְׁקַל נִזְמֵי הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר שָׁאֵל אֶלְפָּה וְשִׁבְע־מֵאוֹת זָהָב לְבַד מִן־הַשְּׁהָרָנִים וְהַנְּטָפוֹת וּבִגְדֵי־הָאֲרָגָמָן שֶׁעַל מַלְכֵי מִדְיָן וַיִּלְבַּד מִן־הַעֲנֻקוֹת אֲשֶׁר בְּצִוְאַרְיֵי גְמְלֵיהֶם׃	8:26
וַיַּעַשׂ אוֹתוֹ גִּדְעוֹן לְאֵפוֹד וַיַּצַּג אוֹתוֹ בְּעִירוֹ בְּעַפְרָה וַיִּזְנוּ כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל אַחֲרָיו שֶׁם נִיְהִי לְגִדְעוֹן וּלְבֵיתוֹ לְמוֹקֵשׁ׃	8:27

In these verses, the people offer Gideon rulership over them after his decisive defeat of Midian. Gideon articulates the Deuteronomistic position on leadership for Israel in his initial answer to the call of the Israelites,<sup>6</sup> but follows his rejection of their offer with a request for contributions of recently captured Midianite spoil with which he builds an ephod. The narrative observes that all Israel whores after this ephod, which becomes a snare to Gideon and to his house. The disaster to come is foreshadowed in the language of these verses. Embedded in the Israelite offer of rulership to Gideon and his descendants, and also in Gideon's response and in his subsequent actions, is language that resonates throughout the Bible in intertexts that signal warnings of danger that are apparent for readers or listeners familiar with the Hebrew Bible as a whole.

### A. Group I: Idolatry

The judgment of the narrator upon Gideon's action in creating the ephod is apparent in 8:27: "Gideon made it into an ephod, and he displayed it in his city, in Ophrah,

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together there. See, most recently, D. T. Olson, *Numbers*, Interpretation (Louisville, 1996), 102–8; and J. Milgrom, *Numbers: The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia, 1990), 414–23. Further, as Robert Alter has noted in *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, 1981), 135–36, the intertwining of Korah within those verses uses literary and rhetorical means in order to make the theological point that cultic authority as well as civic authority both originate with God, and that rebellion against either one is punishable as rebellion against God.

6. On the issues in contemporary scholarship regarding the role and extent of the Deuteronomistic voice in the Deuteronomistic History, see G. N. Knoppers and J. G. McConville, eds., *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History* (Winona Lake, 2000).

and all Israel whored after it there. And it was, for Gideon and his house, a snare.” Close examination of this passage and its intertexts reveals the depth of condemnation suggested by its language.

### 1. The noun אֶפֶד, “ephod”

Immediately following his rejection of dynastic rulership, Gideon initiates the production of an ephod, symbol of priestly hegemony. The ephod is an item of the high priest's garb that is made of metal and has precious stones set into it.<sup>7</sup> In general, the term אֶפֶד, *ephod*, stands as a symbol of cultic leadership. The only unambiguously positive allusions to the ephod occur in the commands and performance in Exodus for setting up the ritual objects for the sanctuary and for garbing all the priests in linen ephods.

All other references, however, including the one here in Judges 8, are in contexts that suggest a deviation in some way from the will of God. In 1 Sam. 2:28, a man of God condemns Eli, the priest of Shiloh, and in doing so enumerates the cultic tasks that God had appointed for Eli, including the wearing of an ephod. In Hos. 3:4, God predicts that Israel will spend many days without lay or cultic leaders. In Hosea's prophecy, cultic leadership is symbolized by “sacrifice, pillar, ephod.” Hosea's condemnation is connected intertextually with Gideon by this use of the word “ephod” as a symbol of cultic leadership, and, more broadly, also because of the role of the verb זָנָה, “to whore,” in Hosea,<sup>8</sup> a verb that occurs in Judg. 8:27 in connection with Gideon's establishing the ephod in Ophrah. This language emphasizes perversion of the Israelite cult in contrast to its divinely-approved performance.

### 2. The noun טָבַח, “ring”

The phrase טָבַחַי זָהָב, “rings of gold,”<sup>9</sup> only occurs four times in the Hebrew Bible, twice here in Judg. 8:24 and 26, and twice in Exod. 32:2 and 3, in the context of the molten calf. Since these four instances occur only in these two contexts, a strong analogy can be drawn intertextually that equates Gideon's action here with Aaron's in the molten calf episode. At a minimum, the molten calf incident in Exodus is an account of a leader acting inappropriately, and has further traditionally been interpreted as an act of idolatry.<sup>10</sup> The comparison, by means of this phrase, of the calf episode in

7. See Exod. 28:4, 6, 12, 25, 27, 28, 31; 29:5; 39:2, 20–22; and Lev. 8:7 for its various fastenings and adornments. It is worn over the priestly garment, most likely upon the chest, suspended by rings and shoulder pieces. It consists of an elaborate assembly called as a whole מַעֲשֵׂה אֶפֶד in Exod. 28:15 and 39:8.

8. The root underlying this word is זָנָה. The final consonant of the root is weak, expressed in conjugation as a *yod*, *heh*, or *waw*. HALOT cites it as זָנָה, which is how it is most often recognized, and how I refer to this root in the rest of this article. This word occurs nine times in Hosea 1–2 alone, and appears in the following citations throughout the prophetic book: Hos. 1:2 (3x), 2:4, 6, 7, 4:11, 12, 15, 5:4, 6:10, 9:1.

9. The Hebrew noun can refer either to an earring or to a nose-ring, usually for a woman. HALOT, s.v.

10. Traditional Jewish exegesis sees the transgression of idolatry in the making of the molten calf. See, in Hebrew, A. Shinan, ed., *Midrash Rabbah, Exodus* (Jerusalem, 1984), ad loc. See also Nehama Leibowitz, *New Studies in Shemot (Exodus) Part II*, trans. A. Newman (Jerusalem, 1995), 549–57. Modern scholarship compares Moses' treatment of the image to Anat's destruction of Mot in her rescue of Baal,

Exodus 32 to Gideon's action here, suggests that Gideon, like Aaron, is a leader acting inappropriately, and, perhaps, idolatrously.<sup>11</sup>

*a. Other language of spoil*

The phrases describing the donation and gathering of the spoils, the fashioning of the ephod, and its display reinforce the intertextual messages shown thus far. The other items besides earrings gathered from the spoil and donated to Gideon also resonate with significant intertexts. The finery specified, besides the 1,700 shekel-weight of

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showing that the verbs in Exod. 32:20 are identical in root and sequence to the comparable actions in Ugaritic myth. The treatment of the calf in an identical way to the treatment of Mot suggests that this is the way a divinity is destroyed in the culture of the ancient Near East. This reading reinforces the reading of the calf as a god, and the sin as idolatry. See S. E. Loewenstamm, "The Making and Destruction of the Golden Calf," *Biblica* 48 (1967), 481–90. A different, though very persuasive, reading takes into account iconography of the ancient Near East in which a variety of divinities is shown riding on the backs of various creatures. The calf, this reading suggests, is thus the vehicle for transporting the Israelites' invisible God, and not a divinity in itself. The Israelites' sin is thus not idolatry but rather impatience in creating on their own initiative a god-bearing vehicle for transversing the wilderness once the people leave the holy site of Sinai, instead of waiting for God to deliver the template for the Tabernacle through Moses. This reading explains why Aaron is invested as high priest in spite of his role in the episode of the molten calf; had he committed an act of idolatry, he would have merited death, not investiture. See J. M. Sasson, "The Worship of the Golden Calf," in H. A. Hoffner, ed., *Orient and Occident: Essays Presented to Cyrus H. Gordon*, AOAT 22 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1973), 151–59.

11. The language of the "rings" taken as spoil evokes the enemies that surround Israel on all sides, coming from all ethnic origins. The rings that are made into the molten calf are spoils taken from the non-Semitic Egyptians south of the land of promise when Israel leaves Egypt after the plague of the firstborn (Exod. 12:35–36). In the beginning of Gideon's story, in Judg. 6:3, a coalition of Semitic tribes from the Transjordan is named as participating in raids against Israel, including Midian, Amalek, and the Kedemites (literally, "Tribes of the East"). In the pericope under consideration here, the enemy is identified as Midian in 8:22, 26, and 28, and as Ishmaelites in 8:24. Boling says this parenthetical demonstrates that Midianites were a confederation of tribal groups in the time of Gideon, and for support cites Buber; R. G. Boling, *Judges, AB* (Garden City, N.Y., 1975), 160. Ishmaelites were a Semitic people that are viewed in the Hebrew Bible as being ethnically related to the Israelites; see Genesis 16–25. It is possible that Ishmaelites are included in this federation, though not named at first, or else it is possible that "Ishmaelite" is an ethnic designation comprising several of these tribes characterized by, presumably among other things, the wearing of these body ornaments.

This is not the only place in the Bible where the designations Ishmaelite and Midianite appear interchangeable. In the Joseph Saga, in Gen. 37:28, both Ishmaelites and Midianites are named in the same verse with some ambiguity. Greenstein has suggested that a theological reading of this ambiguity blurs the human details and leaves divine will crystal clear; see E. L. Greenstein, "An Equivocal Reading of the Sale of Joseph," in K. R. R. Gros Louis, ed., *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives, Volume II* (Nashville, 1982), 114–25. Later, Alter discusses the Midianite/Ishmaelite vacillation and connects it to the Joseph story in R. Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature* (New York, 1992), 125–26. Perhaps the blurring of the identity of Israel's enemies here serves the same purpose, underlining Gideon's duty to obey God, and highlighting his failure to do so.

It is interesting that this noun as ornament shows up as an Israelite practice for Rebecca in Genesis, and also in Ezekiel and Hosea, and is attributed to foreigners in Job, Exodus, and Judges, where its usage apparently has to be explained to the Israelite audience. At least one scholar has suggested that the clarification here relates to the idea of men wearing the ornament, compared with the rings as female adornment in other citations. Soggin cites Pliny as an "early" report that Eastern men were accustomed to wearing nose-rings; J. A. Soggin, *Judges, OTL* (Philadelphia, 1981), 159.

rings, includes *הַשְּׁהָרִימִים וְהַנְּטָפוֹת וּבִגְדֵי הָאֲרָגָמָן*, the crescents and the pendants and the purple robes worn by the Midianites. These items of adornment appear to be associated, even in later prophetic literature, with divine punishment. An ominous intertext reinforcing the suggestion that Gideon's choice will have negative consequences occurs in Isa. 3:18, 19, where both *שְׁהָרִימִים* and *נְטָפוֹת*, crescents and pendants, are specified in the list of finery that God will strip away from Israel in her punishment on the Day of the Lord. In Judges 8, Gideon is asking the people to voluntarily strip themselves of this finery. The consequences of their actions are not yet known: the creation of the Ephod is to become a snare. In the intertext in Isaiah 3, however, God is the agent of stripping Israel's finery, and the dreadful consequences are made explicit. The rare occurrence in the Hebrew Bible of this language of adornment highlights the relationship between these two intertexts: the not-yet-known consequences of the people's action in Judges 8 is made known in the language of Isaiah 3.

The phrase "garments of purple," *בִּגְדֵי הָאֲרָגָמָן*, occurs most often in the Hebrew Bible in intertexts within cultic contexts, reinforcing the cultic challenge implicit in Gideon's unorthodox act in creating an ephod for his own use. The full phrase *בִּגְדֵי הָאֲרָגָמָן*, "garments of purple," occurs nineteen times in passages detailing the command and execution of creating the priestly garments in Exodus 25–38. Further, the Hebrew word for this purple, *הָאֲרָגָמָן*, appears in descriptions of sanctuary furnishings in Num. 4:13 and 2 Chr. 3:14.<sup>12</sup>

Two other occurrences of this word are notable in the context of the Gideon narrative. In Jer. 10:9, purple colors the garments of idols. The context suggests that fools dress wood and stone thus and worship them instead of the true God of Israel. This intertext reinforces the allusions to idolatry that I mentioned earlier, and also highlights the fork in the road, whether to follow false gods, or the God of Israel. The second occurrence represents an intertextual warning that cloth of purple is no protection against divine punishment. In Ezekiel's lament over the destruction of Tyre (Ezek. 27:7), he notes that the awning of her boats was purple, and that the purple fabric was also part of Tyre's expensive merchant cargo, all sunk in the sea and lost, according to the prophecy of God (v. 16). Taken all together, the intertexts associated with the finery of the spoils gathered by Gideon for the making of his ephod—rings of gold, crescents, pendants, and garments of purple—bode ill for Gideon's enterprise in constructing an ephod.

In addition, this language reinforces the link between cultic leadership and monarchy with intertexts that shimmer with royal imagery. The noun *אֲרָגָמָן*, "purple," occurs twice in the Book of Esther, first in 1:6 to describe the royal hangings of Ahasuerus's party pavilion, and then in 8:15, to describe Mordecai's dress after subverting Haman's initial decree of destruction and insuring salvation for the Jews. The Book of Esther emphasizes reversals as a major theme, and within the reversals that permeate the book, it is fitting in this context among other reversals, to have, for example, Mordecai raised up even as Haman is brought low. However, the specific language of *אֲרָגָמָן*, "purple," so particularly associated with royalty, occurs only

12. Citations in cultic contexts include priestly garments: Exod. 25:4; 26:1, 31; 27:16; 28:5, 6, 8, 15, 33; 35:6, 23, 25; 38:18; 39:2, 3, 5, 8, 24, 29; 2 Chr. 3:14; and Temple furnishings: Num. 4:13 (command to spread cloth of purple over altar).

twice in the Book of Esther and is applied to only two characters in the text: to the King and to Mordecai. By means of the scarcity of this language, the King's pavilion early in the book, and Mordecai's garments near the close of the book, are thus equated: purple drapery is appropriate for royal personages.

Mordecai's "purple," equated to the Persian King's "purple," suggests a further equation to the "purple" spoil gathered by Gideon, thereby draping Gideon's actions in regal allusion. Perhaps these "purple" intertexts also raise an ironic eyebrow at Gideon's action in calling for such royal spoil, since the Persian king, Ahasuerus, ensconced in his purple pavilion, lacks sound judgment, and it is Mordecai, the Jewish citizen, who literally wears the purple here. The intertexts for "purple" may be read as a warning for Gideon to take heed, to embrace the role of citizen and eschew royal aspirations.

### 3. The word *לְמוֹקֵשׁ*, "as a snare"

The ephod becomes *לְמוֹקֵשׁ*, "as a snare" to Gideon and his house.<sup>13</sup> Most often in the Hebrew Bible this word is used to describe the effect that the indigenous peoples of Canaan will have on Israel if they are not extirpated—they will be "as a snare" to the Israelites, luring them into idolatry and harrying them, giving them no peace.<sup>14</sup> These intertexts equate Gideon's ephod with the idols of the Canaanites, and thus equate the "whoring" of the Israelites after the ephod with their straying into idolatry.

The word *לְמוֹקֵשׁ* is not only applied to non-Israelites in the Hebrew Bible. Egyptians refer to Moses "as a snare" in Exod. 10:7. Pharaoh's servants, fearing the ruin of Egypt after they hear Moses predict the devastation of the eighth plague, locusts, beg Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go, asking rhetorically how long Moses would be "as a snare" to them. Their petition fails, and their fear of the plague is justified. A similar outcome awaits Saul, who gleefully regards his daughter Michal as a snare for David in 1 Sam. 18:21, promising her to him if David can bring back 100 Philistine foreskins. His plan fails, and his fears are justified: Saul is ensnared in his own trap as his hope that the Philistines will rid him of his rival are dashed (1 Sam. 18:27–29), and as his daughter soon proves more of a helpmeet to David than a snare (1 Sam. 19:11–12). These two intertexts subtly suggest that Gideon and his house will somehow be "hoist with his own petard," that the plans he makes to have access to a divinatory ephod for his personal use will eventually entrap both his family and Israel.

The negative reflection of the intertexts upon Gideon's folly are enhanced by the evidence in Proverbs, where this noun occurs in six verses.<sup>15</sup> In three of these cases,

13. The morphology of the Hebrew noun as it is here occurs eight other times in the Hebrew Bible. The form consists of the preposition "as" + the noun *מוֹקֵשׁ* in the common masculine singular absolute. Its occurrences exactly as it appears here include: Exod. 10:7; 23:33; 34:12; Judg. 2:3; 8:27; 1 Sam. 18:21; Ps. 69:23; 106:36. It also occurs in construct and plural forms, with and without conjunctive *waw*, etc. In my discussion here I address occurrences of the nominal root in whatever form it takes.

14. These intertexts include Exod. 23:33; 34:12; Deut. 7:16; Josh. 23:13; Judg. 2:3; Ps. 106:36. This episode of Gideon's story has several intertexts with Psalm 106, a historical psalm that rehearses many of Israel's doctrinal transgressions. These recurring intertexts suggest a link between this transgression of Gideon's and every transgression by Israel throughout its history, reinforcing the paradigmatic nature of Gideon noted earlier.

15. The citations are: Prov. 12:13; 18:7; 20:25; 22:25; 29:6; 29:25.



the fool is ensnared by the words of his mouth,<sup>16</sup> as Gideon certainly is after his request for the spoil in Judg. 8:24. The remaining three instances offer apt warnings to Gideon's house, to Israel, and to the followers of Gideon's son and successor, Abimelekh. Prov. 29:6 cautions against becoming ensnared by the transgressions of the wicked, which both Gideon's house and Israel would do well to heed. Prov. 29:25 asserts that fear is a snare, but that faith in God is security. By means of this intertext, Gideon is warned against his own lack of faith: the proverb can be read as addressing the possibility that Gideon and his household will become ensnared in the divinatory ephod, perhaps out of doubt that divine providence will make itself known without it. The intertext of Prov. 22:24–25 serves, perhaps, as a warning that Abimelekh's followers would do well to heed: this proverb warns not to become ensnared by someone who cannot control his temper. The cumulative effect of all of these intertexts with the noun לְמוֹקֵשׁ is to portend a dire outcome for Gideon and his followers, but even more, each proverb offers a choice: to follow either the wicked or the righteous way, to be either wise or foolish, to be either full of doubt or full of faith in God. Gideon, too, has similar choices at this point in his life. Either he can control his desires and remain wholly within divine parameters, or he can give in to his impulses and unleash the consequences.

#### 4. The root זָנָה, “to whore”

Israel's “whoring” is associated with idolatry and straying from the cultic norm prescribed by God. I have already observed that an ephod made of precious metal is a ritual object associated with the high priest of the Jerusalem temple.<sup>17</sup> The multiple cultic intertexts evoked by the language in Judg. 8:24–27 serve the function of emphasizing the contrast between Gideon's unorthodox actions and the “orthodox” prescriptions of the Jerusalem cult. The language of “whoring” seems to be chosen for its resonance to intertexts of duplicity and betrayal. The root זָנָה, “to whore,” is an expression of idolatry, a metaphoric characterization of Israel's betrayal of God.<sup>18</sup> Although the root ZNH occurs often in the Hebrew Bible, the specific form of the verb in 8:27, זָנְנוּ,<sup>19</sup> “then they whored,” occurs twice in this context in Judg. 8:27 and 33, and only three other times elsewhere. This double occurrence in a single episode of this relatively rare morphology of a common root serves to emphasize its significance. It should be noted that in spite of the sexual overtones of the verbal root “to whore,” here and in the other intertexts I cite, the harlotry imagery is only metaphoric. There are no literally sexual uses of this morphology, זָנְנוּ, anywhere in the Hebrew Bible. Instead, the occurrence of this form of the verb in all six of the intertexts is exclusively

16. Prov. 12:13; 18:7; and 20:25.

17. Texts containing the command/performance accounts of making the metal ephod for use by the high priest in the tabernacle include Exod. 28:4, 27, 28, 31 and 35:9, 27. The intertextual resonance of the ephod is discussed under the appropriate sub-heading above.

18. A secondary meaning, clearly related to this metaphorical use, is “to stray.” See *HALOT*, s.v., under the first meaning for the root. For an extensive discussion of this meaning of the root, especially as it applies to Judah's daughter-in-law Tamar and to the unnamed concubine in Judges 19, see my forthcoming article, “Some Results of a Structural Semiotic Analysis of the Story of Judah & Tamar,” *JSOT* 29 (2005), 289–318, esp. nn. 28 and 29.

19. *Qal waw* consecutive imperfect third person masculine plural.

within contexts of cultic violations and disloyalty to God. Israel “whores” after idolatrous objects, first, in 8:27, after the ephod that Gideon makes and displays in his city, and second, in 8:33, after Baalim, especially in making Baal Berith their divinity—an important link to the ensuing chapter and Abimelekh’s story.<sup>20</sup>

One possible implication suggested by 8:27 is that Israel’s disloyalty to God starts small during Gideon’s lifetime, and grows bigger and more explicitly idolatrous later, after his death. Thus, even if Gideon’s intentions are not to mislead Israel, he has started Israel down the “slippery slope” of idolatry, and is unable to restrain Israel from sliding further and faster, especially after his death.

The three other occurrences of this specific verb form are also suggestive. In 1 Chr. 5:25, their “whoring” after the divinities of the land is blamed for the exile of the Transjordanian tribes at the hand of Assyria, implying that Israel’s “whoring” in Judges might have a similarly tragic outcome. In Psalm 106 the word occurs in the context of recounting the long history of Israel’s betrayal of the divine covenant. This segment of Psalm 106 refers to the period of the judges, when Israel is accused of sacrificing her children to the gods of Canaan, and committing the sin of incomplete extirpation of the indigenous inhabitants of the land; their unclean acts and “whoring” practices have provoked God to deliver them into the hands of their enemies (vv. 40–41). This language evokes the beginning of Gideon’s story, when Israel is given into the hands of Midian and her allies on account of her transgressions (Judg. 6:1), and the end of Gideon’s career, when the Israelites offer him dynastic kingship because he delivered them out of the hand of Midian (Judg. 8:22).

A final and most telling example of this form, וַיִּזְנוּ, occurs in Hos. 4:12, and is exactly analogous to the situation in Gideon: עַמִּי בָעֵצוֹ יִשְׁאַל וּמְקִלוֹ יִגִּיד לוֹ כִּי רוּחַ זְנוּנִים הִתְעָה וַיִּזְנוּ מִתַּחַת אֲלֵהֶם, “My people inquires of his tree, his branch gives answers, a spirit of whoring has misled them and they have whored away from God.” This intertext resonates with Judg. 8:24–27, in which Gideon’s divinatory ephod is connected to Israel’s “whoring” after idolatry and straying away from God’s covenant.

Another impressive echo of these verses in Judges is the only other occurrence in a single verse of the Hebrew Bible of the three elements “Israel” + the root זנה, “to whore” + the locative adverb שם, “there.” These come together in Jer. 3:6. There, God speaks to Jeremiah in the days of King Josiah, and asks rhetorically whether the prophet has seen what faithless Israel has done, playing the harlot on every high hill and under every green tree. These condemnations of idolatrous practices in these locations are metaphorically seen as infidelity to the God of Israel whose proper

20. The name “Baal-berith” may be literally translated as “master of the covenant,” and thus might be another name for the God of Israel (perhaps in use in early traditions) and so not idolatry at all, except as seen through a later lens. See J. H. Tigay, “Israelite Religion: The Onomastic and Epigraphic Evidence,” in P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride, eds., *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (Philadelphia, 1987), 157–94, esp. 163. Personal names incorporating the divine name Baal in names of Israelites appear to be acceptable during the reign of Saul, for example—note that Saul’s son Ishbosheth and Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth probably both originally had Baal as the second part of their name, only replaced with the Hebrew word for “shame” later, when the theophoric Baal is no longer acceptable. Ishbosheth means “man of Baal.” See *HALOT* under “Mephibosheth,” thought to be probably a “deformation” of “Meribaal.” The name incorporates an Egyptian element as the first part of the name that may be translated as “beloved of Baal.”

locus is in the centralized cult center of Jerusalem. Intertextually, the common language in these verses also condemns as idolatrous Gideon's sin of displaying a ritual object in the wrong place.

I have shown that intertexts for the language in Judg. 8:22–27 such as the term אֶפֹד, “ephod,” the expression גִּזְמֵי זָהָב, “golden rings,” and other language of spoil, the noun מִוִּקֶשׁ, “snare,” the verb זָנָה, “to whore,” evoke powerful contexts of idolatry and condemnation. All of these parallels suggest that Gideon's action in creating the ephod from enemy spoil is far from benign. Rather it is viewed, in light of the intertexts, as deeply transgressive.

### *B. Group II: Dire consequences*

After Gideon makes his choice to refuse dynastic rulership but to create an ephod, after the spoils are described, gathered, fashioned and displayed, then the inevitable consequences follow. This second group of intertexts, evoked by the language of these consequences, links Gideon's choices and the negative outcomes to the fate of the people themselves, suggesting that Gideon's misstep, and the people's willing cooperation, are paradigms for the transgressions of Israel's kings and of the nation of Israel as a whole. The language used to describe the impact of the ephod upon Israel and upon Gideon resounds with intertexts that reinforce the condemnatory tone.

#### *1. Micah*

This combination of the word וַיַּעַשׂ, “then he made,” with the direct object of an ephod occurs only one other time in the Hebrew Bible, in Judg. 17:5. There, Micah has a shrine for which he makes an ephod and teraphim, and installs one of his sons as his priest. The story of Micah and his shrine comes near the end of the Book of Judges, and is part of the social disintegration that marks chapters 17–21.<sup>21</sup>

Further, Micah's installation of these elements into his shrine is followed in the next verse, 17:6, by the thematic expression of Judges that in those days there was no king in Israel and each person did what was right in one's own eyes. Micah's cultic transgression is followed in the next verse by a note that there is no king. Gideon's repudiation of kingship is followed in the next verse by his cultic transgression. The chiasmic relationship between these intertexts links the Gideon episodes at the book's center with its disastrous coda, and binds the twin cords of cultic and monarchic leadership even more closely together.

#### *2. The sons of Micah and of Gideon*

In addition, there are parallels of motif between Micah's relationship with his son and Gideon's interaction with his sons that frame this ephod incident. For example,

21. The idea that the final episodes of the Book of Judges reflect the shredded social fabric of the tribal period and make the case for a change to rulership by monarchy has been noted by several scholars: e.g., see T. J. Schneider, *Judges*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, Minn., 2000), 244; S. Niditch, “The ‘Sodomite’ Theme in Judges 19–20: Family, Community, and Social Disintegration,” *CBQ* (1982), 365–78.

Micah's installation of his son in an inappropriate role as priest in his shrine in Judges 17 is doubly foreshadowed in the Gideon episodes. In 8:20, just before our pericope, Gideon calls upon his eldest son, Jether, to slay the Midianite princes Zebah and Zalmunna, an action which Jether is unable to perform; in Judges 9, immediately after our story closes, Abimelekh, Gideon's only son by his concubine, inappropriately persuades his mother's clan to support his leadership against his father's house and eventually brings both to ruin. Both of these sons of Gideon, like Micah's son the priest, are in positions that place them in inappropriate roles that they are not equipped to handle, and the consequences are humiliating and destructive: Micah's son is soon supplanted by the itinerant Levite in 17:10–11, who becomes both priest and like a son to Micah; this Levite later betrays Micah by accompanying the marauding Danites to their new home in 18:14–20. Jether is supplanted by his father, Gideon, who slays the Midianite princes when he cannot. He is never heard from again, and is presumably among the seventy sons of Gideon slain upon a single stone (Judg. 9:5). Abimelekh betrays his father Gideon by slaying his 70 half-brothers in 9:5, and he is himself slain in ignominy as divine retribution for his fratricide (9:56–57), to be succeeded in 10:1 by Tola the son of Puah, son of Dodo, a man of Issachar. Gideon's house, once offered generations of royal dynasty by his followers, fades into obscurity. These intertexts resonate within the Gideon narrative, linked by motif and marked by the language of “ephod.”

*a. The verb גִּיפְרְשׁוּ, “They spread (out)”*

These intertextual resonances of tragic consequences are reinforced indirectly in the language associated with Gideon's collection of the spoil to be made into the ephod. Like the root זנה, “to whore,” and the ephod, the language of ‘spreading out’ has a cultic intertext as well. The verb גִּיפְרְשׁוּ, “they spread (out),” in the morphology found here in Judg. 8:25 only occurs two other times in the Hebrew Bible, in 1 Kgs. 6:27 and in Ezek. 19:8.<sup>22</sup> In 1 Kgs. 6:27, this form of the verb is used to describe the innermost Holy of Holies where the *kerubim* spread out their wings above the ark of the covenant. What may appear at first to be a fortuitous resemblance may upon further reflection prove significant: the association between the two texts through this verb form contrasts the idea of Solomon's building what God commands with Gideon's crafting of the ephod according to his own desires, and evokes the formulaic phrase that recurs several times in Judges, suggesting that social chaos ensues when everyone does what is right in one's own eyes instead of what is right in God's eyes.<sup>23</sup>

The second allusion to the verb גִּיפְרְשׁוּ, “they spread (out),” in the morphology found in Judg. 8:25, although not directly connected to cult, is nonetheless relevant to Gideon's narrative, since it foreshadows metaphorically both the exile of Judah and the relationships among Gideon's sons. In Ezek. 19:8, Jerusalem/Judah is described as a mother lion, whose first whelp is captured and sent to Egypt, but whose second whelp, a young lion, ravages people who eventually manage to bring him captive to

22. As noted above, in perfect *waw* consecutive third person plural.

23. This expression occurs in Judg. 17:6 and 21:25 as a negative judgment upon the behavior of the leadership and the people of Israel.

Babylon. Metaphorically, Ezekiel is referring to the fates of two groups caught in the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of Judah, one of which (including the unwilling Jeremiah) goes down to Egypt, and the second of which is taken in chains to Babylon. Given the weight of evidence of all intertexts considered thus far, it is not a great stretch to identify in this image of the lion's offspring an apt intertext for Gideon's children. Just as Ezekiel does with the lion's offspring, the text in Judges divides Gideon's sons into two groups: his seventy sons by many wives (8:30), and his son by his concubine in Shechem (8:31). The first "whelp," represented by the youngest son, Jotham, survives Abimelekh's slaughter of his seventy brothers upon one stone (9:5). Jotham is effectively exiled from Gideon's family holdings as he flees and hides from Abimelekh and is never heard from again (9:21). The ravaging "whelp," Abimelekh, destroys all those who deal with him, whether in support or opposition. Eventually, he is himself overpowered and destroyed (9:53–54).<sup>24</sup>

*b. The expression כָּאֲשֶׁר מָת, "when he died"*

Judg. 8:33 reports the circumstances after Gideon's death with the Hebrew expression כָּאֲשֶׁר מָת, literally, "when he died," language that only occurs one other time in the Hebrew Bible, in Deut. 32:50, when God tells Moses that he will die as his brother Aaron has died (כָּאֲשֶׁר מָת), at the top of a mountain. In Num. 27:14 God tells Moses he is to be punished for his single error of striking the rock instead of speaking to

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24. The intertextual allusions continue with the description of the donation of the rings of spoil and their collection in a spread garment. The people do not ask why Gideon is requesting their donation of the spoil to him. Nevertheless, the people respond with such enthusiasm that the astounding weight and variety of their donations is specified in 8:26. Gideon's purpose is not revealed until 8:27, where the reader—and presumably the Israelites—discover that Gideon uses the spoil gathered in the spread garment of 8:24 to craft an ephod, which is associated, in biblical literature, with divinatory purpose. Carol Meyers writes of the Ephod's divinatory role (*ABD* 2.550): "Because the breastpiece containing the Urim and Thummim are attached to it, the ephod is an essential part of divinatory apparatus of the Israelite cult. That function is clear in many of the passages associating David with an ephod, in which he uses it to 'inquire of the Lord' (1 Sam 30:7–8; cf. Judg 18:5)." I discuss the intertextual associations to the ephod more fully in my discussion of Judg. 8:27 above.

The morphology of the Hebrew phrase וַיִּפְרְשׂוּ אֶת־הַשְּׂמֹלֶה, "they spread the garment," in the perfect *waw*-consecutive third person plural and incorporating the direct object marker *'et*, does not occur exactly this way anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible. However, in Deut. 22:17 the phrase וַיִּפְרְשׂוּ הַשְּׂמֹלֶה, "they shall spread the garment," does occur with the same verbal root, פָּרַשׂ, "to spread," although the verb is in the imperfect *vav* consecutive third person plural and the phrase omits the direct object marker *'et*. There the context concerns what is to be done to counter a false claim by a husband who repudiates his bride by trying to claim after the wedding night that she had not been a virgin; the text directs that in such a case the father is to bring the evidence of his daughter's virginity, and "they shall spread out the garment before the elders of the city," וַיִּפְרְשׂוּ הַשְּׂמֹלֶה לְפָנֵי זִקְנֵי הָעִיר. The function of the spread garment in Deut. 22:17 as an appropriate instrument with which to overturn false witness stands in ironic contrast to Gideon's use of the spoil gathered in the spread garment to craft an inappropriate instrument with which to seek divine witness. Further, the marital/sexual associations of Deut. 22:17 also echo in Judges 8, for when the ephod is completed and set up as cult object, all Israel 'whores' after it, in v. 27: וַיַּעַשׂ אֹתוֹ גְדֵעוֹן לְאַפְוֹד וַיִּצַּג אֹתוֹ. The ironic contrast between the two texts is sustained by this evocative language: the spread garment in Deut. 22:17 literally restores a sanctioned sexual relationship within the marriage contract between husband and wife, while the spread garment in Judg. 8:24 metaphorically initiates an inappropriate sexual relationship outside the covenant between God and Israel.

it at Meribah by forfeiting his right to enter the promised land. Gideon, too, makes just one mistake at the end of a career otherwise filled with service to divine will. Perhaps this intertext suggests a comparison between Moses, the archetypal leader of Israel, and Gideon. The outcome of just one bad choice on the part of God's appointed leader results for each in the final failure of lifelong dreams: Moses will not be privileged to enter the land of promise, but will only view it from the mountain top; Gideon's efforts on behalf of his father's house in Abiezer, the locus of Gideon's final years and the place of honor for the ephod, will, after Gideon's death, disintegrate at the hand of his disinherited son, Abimelekh.

Once Israel has been pushed by Gideon's creation of the ephod down the slippery slope of idolatry, Israel ends, after the death of Gideon, by whoring after "Baalim," most notably "Baal Berith" (8:33), whose sanctuary in Shechem funds Abimelekh's murderous campaign against Gideon's sons in Judg. 9:4. Thus, the language of the final verses of Gideon's story in Judg. 8:22–35 weaves together the transgression and its inevitable consequences, the intersection of the private sphere and the public arena, the human desire in tension with the divine requirement, all in the person of an ambitious leader whose human fallibility sets into motion disastrous consequences.

The irony of Israel's following the idolatrous "Baal Berith," or "Baal of the Covenant," recalls dialogue with the divine messenger that opens Gideon's career in Judg. 6:13. There, Gideon remembers the divine covenant, and faults God for forgetting the divine salvific role.<sup>25</sup> Here, Israel forgets her part of that very same covenant.<sup>26</sup> Israel's lack of loyalty to Gideon is ironic in a context in which the Deuteronomist is deeply concerned with loyalty to God and with divine leadership. This is an instance of measure for measure:<sup>27</sup> Israel is disloyal to the house of Jerubbaal/Gideon, as he has been disloyal to God. Even further, Israel is not loyal to anyone at all, neither to Gideon, nor to God.

Perhaps this is a subtle critique of Israel's desire for a king: if Israel cannot be loyal to an invisible God, even though divine deeds are salvific and miraculous, and they cannot be loyal to a charismatic and popular military leader to whom they offered dynastic loyalty, then Israel certainly will not be loyal to a human king. Indeed, the history of Israel united, as well as the histories of the Northern and Southern kingdoms, are studded with betrayal, dissension, and rebellion. Israel's disloyalty to Gideon's house and to God's covenant is emblematic of Israel's inability to be loyal to anyone at all. Abimelekh's story is a cautionary tale of the bloody consequences of such disloyalty.

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25. The Hebrew root for "saved" is here נצל, just as it is in Judg. 6:9 when prophecy prefigures Gideon's being chosen as the divine agent to rescue Israel from oppression. Here the morphology, "the one who saves" is unique in the Hebrew Bible, המציל.

26. The expression "they did not remember" וְלֹא זָכְרוּ is most often applied to Israel forgetting her relationship with God (Judg. 8:34; Ps. 78:42; 106:7; Neh. 9:17), but in one case it is Israel's kin and enemy not recalling the covenant of brotherhood (Amos 1:9). These intertexts reinforce the divine demand for loyalty to God, and the idea that punishment for violation is inevitable. Even Israel's enemies receive divine vengeance for their actions (as Midian does at the hands of Gideon).

27. On the phenomenon of "measure for measure," see D. M. Sharon, *Patterns of Destiny: Narrative Structures of Foundation and Doom in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake, 2002), 89 and n. 80. Cf. D. Marcus, "David the Deceiver and David the Dupe," *Prooftexts* 6 (1986), 163–71; and M. H. Lichtenstein, "The Poetry of Poetic Justice: A Comparative Study in Biblical Imagery," *JANES* 5 (1973), 255–65.