

Was Gideon a Canaanite Who Worshiped Baal and the Sacred Pole (Asherah)? A Redactional and Archaeological Evaluation of Judges 6:25–32

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<Abstract>

The book of Judges often preserves more historically grounded accounts of early Israelite identity formation than the conquest narratives of Joshua, yet it also presents significant historiographic and archaeological challenges. One such challenge appears in the Gideon cycle (Judg 6:25–32), where Gideon—also known as Jerubbaal—is introduced as the son of Joash, who maintains an altar to Baal and a sacred pole. This raises two central questions: Why does Joash possess these cultic objects, and why is Gideon renamed in relation to Baal rather than YHWH? This article examines the redactional and tradition-historical development of this pericope and proposes two complementary interpretations: (1) that Jerubbaal was the original figure, later distinguished from Gideon through

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Deuteronomistic redaction, and (2) that the narrative reflects a transitional phase in which Canaanite religious practices were challenged and gradually integrated into Yahwism. Together, these perspectives suggest that Gideon/Jerubbaal may have originally been a Canaanite figure whose memory was reinterpreted to reflect emerging Yahwistic ideals. The passage thus preserves a trace of indigenous Canaanite religious transformation within Israelite tradition. This reading contributes to broader theories of Israel's origins, supporting the view that Israel emerged from within Canaanite society through internal social and religious reconfiguration rather than external conquest.

***Keywords**

Judges; Gideon; Jerubbaal; Baal; Asherah; Israelites; Canaanites.

1. Was Gideon a Canaanite Who Worshiped Baal and the Sacred Pole (Asherah)? A Redactional and Archaeological Evaluation of Judges 6:25–32

The book of Judges is often considered to preserve a more accurate portrayal of the territorial and religious struggle of the early Israelites in the Levant during the Late Bronze Age than Joshua.¹ Nevertheless, this does

¹ The Hebrew Bible contains two distinct accounts of how the Israelites came to possess the land of Canaan, found in the books of Joshua and Judges. The major difference between these accounts lies in the nature of Israel's conquest. The book of Joshua portrays a swift military campaign conducted over a relatively short period. During this campaign, many indigenous peoples of Canaan were defeated, and both sides of the Jordan River were occupied. By contrast, the book of Judges describes no large-scale military campaign, implying that Israel gradually took possession of the land over an extended period and in the reverse order of the Joshua account—the allotment of land preceding actual possession. Importantly, Judges indicates that Israel did not conquer the entire land of Canaan.

Current scholarship argues that the Judges account more accurately reflects a historical tradition of Israel's possession of the land than the Joshua account. For further discussion, see Abraham Malamat, "Israelite Conduct of War in the Conquest of Canaan," in *Symposia Celebrating the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the American Schools of Oriental Research (1900–1975)*, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Cambridge: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1979), 36; Hershel Shanks, "Defining the Problems: Where We Are in the Debate," in *The Rise of Ancient Israel* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1992), 3–4.

Source criticism may explain this discrepancy. The accounts in Joshua 1–12 are attributed to the Deuteronomistic historians, who drew on much older sources. By contrast, the accounts in Judges derive from various sources, including an older and arguably more reliable epic tradition (J) than the Deuteronomistic History, which its

not mean that Judges is free from historical and archaeological difficulties. While Judges may preserve intact memories of early Israelites' emergence in the southern Levant, it is problematic to assume that all characters portrayed as Israelites were, in fact, culturally Israelites. Joash's household in the Gideon narrative is particularly notable for its ambiguous ethnic and religious identity.² Though this ambiguity complicates traditional readings, it may provide a more nuanced perspective on Israelite origins—one that stands in contrast to the military conquest narratives found elsewhere in Judges and Joshua.

A close reading of the narrative raises two critical questions: (1) Why does Joash, Gideon's father, have an altar to Baal and the sacred pole (asherah)? (2) Why is Gideon given the name Jerubbaal, which directly references Baal? Together, these two questions raise a central issue: Was Gideon a Yahwistic Israelite from the beginning, or was he originally a

authors likely used in their compositions. J. Alberto Soggin argues that Judges 6 consists of independent episodes—vv. 11–24, 24–32, 33–35, and 36–40—which differ significantly from the Deuteronomistic introduction in vv. 1–10. However, he does not mean that other independent episodes are entirely free of the Deuteronomistic additions. For this discussion, see Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1986), 118–22; Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 42, 45–6; Wolfgang Richter, *Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Richterbuch* (Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1963), 112–46; Lawrence E. Stager, “Forging an Identity: The Emergence of Ancient Israel,” in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 127; J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 104, 108–9.

² Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges*, Berit olam (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 108.

Canaanite figure whose identity was later redefined? This article explores whether the Gideon/Jerubbaal narrative in Judges 6:25–32 preserves an early memory of Israel’s indigenous origins. Through redactional and archaeological analysis, I examine the symbolic and social significance of Baal worship, the naming of Jerubbaal, and the religious practices in Joash’s household. Situating the narrative within its likely *Sitz im Leben*, this study investigates whether the Gideon tradition reveals a more complex picture of early Israelite identity formation.

2. Six Theories on Gideon/Jerubbaal’s Identity

Although interpretive implications vary, most scholars since the late nineteenth century have regarded Judges 6:25–32 as an independent unit or at least recognized that the Gideon cycle contains different composition layers.³ A major turning point in this debate came with Julius Wellhausen,

³ For early Protestant or confessional interpretations, see Paulus Cassel, *The Book of Judges* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1899), 115–16; Edward Lewis Curtis, *The Book of Judges* (New York: Macmillan, 1913), 74; John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament* (Bristol: William Pine, 1765), 815, 819. For a literary-critical approach, see Charles Fox Burney, *The Book of Judges with Introduction and Notes* (London: Rivingtons, 1918), xxxvii, 194–201; T. K. Cheyne, “Gideon,” in *Encyclopædia Biblica: A Critical Dictionary of the Literary, Political and Religious History, the Archaeology, Geography, and Natural History of the Bible*, vol. 2 (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1899), 1719–21; Samuel Rolles Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Meridian Books, 1897), 171; George Foot Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895), xxiv–xxv, 190–91.

who in *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis* (1871) questioned the name Jerubbaal's originality due to its Yahwistic connotation, suggesting that it is equivalent to Jeruel (ירואל) or Jeremiah (ירמיהו).⁴ In the early twentieth century, biblical scholars distinguished Gideon from Jerubbaal as belonging to two different narratives, using source, redactional, and tradition-historical criticisms.⁵ Nevertheless, the distinction between Gideon and Jerubbaal in these analyses does not necessarily imply that they represent two distinct ethnic groups.

The century-long scholarly debate concerning the identification of Gideon and Jerubbaal can be summarized in six theories [Tab. 1].⁶

The first theory holds that Jerubbaal was given the name Gideon, גדעון ("hewer"), after he destroyed the altar of the Baal and the sacred pole.⁷

⁴ Julius Wellhausen, *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis* (Göttingen: Vendenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1871), 31. Also see fn. 25.

⁵ Burney, *The Book of Judges*, 177–78, 201; G. A. Cooke, *The Book of Judges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), 68–69, 81; Emil G. Hirsch, "Gideon," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 5 (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1903), 660–62.

⁶ The crucial study on this topic was conducted by J. A. Emerton, who in 1976 summarized four theories, which I have expanded to six by incorporating additional scholarly proposals. For further discussion, see J. A. Emerton, "Gideon and Jerubbaal," *Vetus Testamentum* 26, no. 4 (1976): 385–403

⁷ A. Graeme Auld, "Gideon: Hacking at the Heart of the Old Testament," *Vetus Testamentum* 39, no. 3 (1989): 263–67; William Foxwell Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (London: Athlone Press, 1968), 173; Daniel I. Block, "Will the Real Gideon Please Stand Up? Narrative Style and Intention in Judges 6–9," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no. 3 (1997): 354; Yehezkel Kaufmann, *Sefer Shoftim* (Jerusalem: Hotsa' at Kiryat-Sefer,

Table 1: Typology of Six Naming Theories

	Naming Theory	Direction of Name Change	Key Concept
1	Post-event Naming	Jerubbaal > Gideon	“Gideon” given after destroying Baal’s altar
2	Post-event Naming	Gideon > Jerubbaal	“Jerubbaal” given after defeating the Midianites
3	Dual Names for a Single Figure	Possible Coexisting	Gideon at Ophrah Jerubbaal at Shechem
4	Post-event Naming	Jerubbaal > Gideon	“Jerubbaal” was original; name altered during Yahwistic reform
5	Dual Names for a Single Figure	Possible Coexisting	One of them was a regnal name
6	Dual Names for Distinct Figures	Possible Coexisting	Gideon at Ophrah Jerubbaal at Shechem

The second theory is the opposite: Gideon acquired the name Jerubbaal because of his victory over the Midianites in the name of Baal.⁸ The third theory states that Jerubbaal was the name Gideon used in Shechem and that Jerubbaal is also related to *Ba ʿāl-bērît*.⁹ The fourth theory suggests the two names belong to one person, but due to opposition to the Baal cult, the

1962), 168; Abraham Kuenen, *De Godsdienst van Israël tot den Ondergang van den Joodschen Staat*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: A. C. Kruseman, 1869), 302, 403–4.

⁸ Hugo Gressmann, *Die Anfänge Israels (von 2. Mosis bis Richter und Ruth): Übersetzt, Erklärt und mit Einleitungen versehen von Hugo Gressmann* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1914), 204; Isabelle de Castelbajac, “Histoire de la rédaction de Juges IX: Une solution,” *Vetus Testamentum* 51, no. 2 (2001): 170; Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel: With a Reprint of the Article ‘Israel’ from the Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885), 238.

⁹ Eugen Täubler, *Biblische Studien: Die Epoche der Richter* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1958), 266; Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, 94.

person acquired the name Gideon, implying that Jerubbaal was the original name.¹⁰ The fifth theory proposes that one of the names functioned as a regnal title.¹¹ This theory explains that the two different names do not necessarily stem from separate sources but could reflect a double royal name, a common feature in the ancient Near East and the later Israelite monarchy. Lastly, the sixth theory posits that Gideon and Jerubbaal are entirely distinct characters: Gideon, the Manassite judge associated with Ophrah, delivered Israel from the Midianite oppression; Jerubbaal, associated with Shechem, is the father of Abimelek.¹²

¹⁰ A. M. Honeyman, "The Evidence for Regnal Names among the Hebrews," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 67, no. 1 (1948): 13–25; Emerton, "Gideon and Jerubbaal," 308–9.

¹¹ Abraham Malamat, "The Period of the Judges," in *The World History of the Jewish People*, vol. 3, *Judges*, ed. Benjamine Mazar (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1971), 148; Eduard Nielsen, *Shechem: A Traditio-Historical Investigation* (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad, 1959), 143.

¹² One of the earliest articulations of this theory is found in T. K. Cheyne's work. He reconstructs the Gideon narrative in connection with nomadic invaders, highlighting three key elements: YHWH's call of Gideon at Ophrah, the recruitment of warriors from Manasseh and Ephraim, and a surprise night assault on the Midianite camp. Regarding Jerubbaal, Cheyne proposes that he belonged to a Gadite family originally named Uribaal—a name later altered to Jerubbaal—and associates him with a separate nocturnal mission involving ten servants. Contrary to the biblical account, Cheyne links this episode to a sudden Midianite counterattack at Tabor and Karkor, which culminates in Jerubbaal's pursuit, the capture of Zebah and Zalmunna, and the making of the ephod. Cheyne, "Gideon," 1719–21. Also see Uwe Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Studien zum Richterbuch* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), 152; Herbert Haag, "Gideon-Jerubbaal-Abimelek," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 79 (1967): 314; Barnabas Lindars, "Gideon and Kingship," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 16, no. 2 (1965): 324–26; Richter, *Traditionsgeschichtliche*

While the preceding discussion reflects a century of scholarship, a contrasting school of thought—championed by the minimalists or the Copenhagen School—also exists. This view holds that Judges was composed much later, often in the post-exilic period, and that its narratives function as ideological and theological functions rather than preserving earlier historical tradition.¹³ Pauline Guest, for example, argues that the judge stories reflect concerns of the author's own time, not ancient tribal folklore.¹⁴ She applies the minimalist perspective to argue that the Book of Judges is largely fictional in nature and was composed during the post-exilic period, serving as instruction and warning against dangerous liaisons with surrounding nations and their cultures.

Untersuchungen zum Richterbuch, 112–318; Roland de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978), 770–71; Timo Veijola, *Das Königtum in der Beurteilung der deuteronomistischen Historiographie: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1977), 110–15.

¹³ Pauline Deryn Guest, “Dangerous Liaisons in the Book of Judges,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 11, no. 2 (1997): 241–69; Niels Peter Lemche, *Early Israel: Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite Society before the Monarchy* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 383; *The Israelites in History and Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 24–30; Thomas L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 353–72.

¹⁴ Guest, “Dangerous Liaisons in the Book of Judges,” 243. Similarly, Philip R. Davies contends that the dating and content of Judges are retrospective constructions, shaped by post-monarchic theological agendas, and unsupported by archaeological evidence. *In Search of ‘Ancient Israel’: A Study in Biblical Origins* (London: Continuum, 2006), 26, 149–55.

All of these theories have their own strengths and weaknesses, but the minimalist view—that the Book of Judges lacks historical value—fails to clearly explain why Joash’s son is given two names in Judges 6:25–32. However, with the exception of the third theory—which holds that Jerubbaal was the name Gideon used in Shechem—none of the others address possible indications of Gideon/Jerubbaal’s ethnicity. Furthermore, these theories have not been evaluated through alternative methodological approaches that consider how the characters are portrayed within their historical context. Before examining the ethnicity of Gideon/Jerubbaal from an archaeological perspective, however, it is prudent to first propose a viable theory grounded in redactional and tradition-historical approaches.

3. Redactional and Tradition-historical Implications for the Two Names of Joash’s Son

The Gideon cycle has been a subject of scholarly debate due to its internal contradictions, narrative tensions, and the presence of literary doublets with differing features. These discrepancies may reflect the extended compositional development of Judges 6–9.¹⁵ The Gideon cycle reveals two distinct narrative blocks. Yaira Amit identifies these blocks as

¹⁵ Auld, “Gideon,” 257–67; Block, “Will the Real Gideon Please Stand Up,” 353–54; Robert G. Boling, *Judges*, The Anchor Bible 6A (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), 130; J. A. Emerton, “Gideon and Jerubbaal,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 27, no. 2 (1976): 289–99; Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988), 50–68; Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, 238.

having differing central subjects, character portrayals, temporal frameworks, and spatial settings.¹⁶ She identifies the first block (6:11–7:23) as centered on divine signs, portraying Gideon as a hesitant and fearful hero. Set in Ophrah and the Jezreel valley, these episodes unfold west of the Jordan River. The second block, 7:24–8:27a, mostly deals with Gideon’s leadership, portraying him as a capable military commander and is set entirely east of the Jordan River. The marked differences between these blocks have been cited as evidence of redactional activity within the Gideon cycle.

Uwe Becker proposes a complex evolution of the text. He identified two relatively disparate sets of (preliterary) traditions, namely, local traditions of Gideon and his role in the battle against Midian (6:11–24; 7:11–15, 16–22; 8:5–21) and an account of the rise and fall of Abimelek, the son of Jerubbaal (9:1–6, 21, 24–41, 46–54).¹⁷ The sixth theory (which argues for the original distinctness of Gideon and Jerubbaal) aligns with the geographical and literary differences observed in the two blocks—an explanation that other theories struggle to adequately address.

To clarify the implications of these divergent views, this section evaluates the six theories introduced earlier. Each theory offers a different explanation for the name relationship between Gideon and Jerubbaal—some proposing a name change after a key event, others asserting editorial substitution or even character conflation. The discussion below will

¹⁶ Yaira Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 233–46.

¹⁷ Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum*, 206.

consider each theory in relation to the narrative sequence, theological context, and possible historical background of Judges 6–9.

- (1) *Jerubbaal received the name Gideon after destroying Baal's altar;*
- (2) *Jerubbaal gained his name because of a victory over the Midianites;*
- (3) *Jerubbaal was at Shechem and Gideon was at Ophrah;*
- (4) *Jerubbaal was original but changed due to Yawhistic reform;*
- (5) *One of the names was a regnal name;*
- (6) *Gideon and Jerubbaal were originally two distinct individuals later merged into one figure.*

As you will see, further evidence of redactional activity emerges in the naming of Joash's son. Thus, reading the Gideon narrative raises an intriguing question: why does the narrator give Gideon the theophoric nickname Jerubbaal, which appears to associate him with the Canaanite deity Baal? There has been a suggestion to explain the meaning of the names of Gideon/Jerubbaal. Soggin argues that the name Jerubbaal would mean "let Baal prove himself to be great," and that the theophoric name contains a positive connotation: either "Baal is great" or "Baal makes (you) great."¹⁸ This interpretation may concur with the second theory: Gideon acquired the name Jerubbaal because of his victory over the Midianites in the name of Baal. However, the name Jerubbaal also appears outside Judges (in 1 Sam 12:11 and 2 Sam 11:21 as "Jerubbeshet"), whereas Gideon is attested only within the book of Judges. This may suggest that the name of Jerubbaal, which appears more widely and persistently, may be more significant and authentic than the name of Gideon.

¹⁸ Soggin, *Judges*, 125.

Given these interpretations—which challenge the traditional view that Gideon was associated with destroying the Canaanites’ altar and religious objects—the first theory, namely that Jerubbaal was given the name Gideon after destroying them, suggests that Jerubbaal is not a nickname but something like a birth name given by his father, Joash. This would accord well with the root of the name, גרע, meaning to hew and to cut down.¹⁹ This interpretation may also align with the third, fourth, and sixth theories, which suggest that Jerubbaal, a resident of Shechem, destroyed a local altar to Baal and its associated sacred pole, subsequently acquiring the name Gideon.²⁰ A major challenge to this interpretation is that the Judges 6:25–32 does not use the verb גרע, and the narrative presents the sequence in reverse: Gideon is said to have acquired the name Jerubbaal, not the other way around.

Naphtali Herz Tur-Sinai attempts to explain this issue through the substitution theory. He proposes that the verb גרע was originally used for cutting down the sacred pole in Judges 6:25, 26, and 28, just as it was used in Deuteronomy 7:5.²¹ He argues that this original usage of גרע was

¹⁹ Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 173; Auld, “Gideon,” 263–67; Block, “Will the Real Gideon Please Stand Up?” 353–54; Josiah Derby, “Gideon or Jerubbaal,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (2003): 182–83; Kaufmann, *Sefer Shoftim*, 168; Kuenen, *De Godsdienst van Israël*, 302, 403–4.

²⁰ If Jerubbaal’s departure from Shechem for Ophrah was motivated by religious concerns, it would lend support to Brendon Benz’s theory, which largely aligns with the ruralization, the “emergence from within,” and mixed multitude theories. For more on this possibility, see the discussion below.

²¹ Naphtali Herz Tur-Sinai, *Peshuto shel Mikra: Perush le-Setumot she-Bekitvei ha-kodesh lefi Seder Ha-Ketuvim ba-Masoret*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1962), 74.

replaced later by another verb, כרת. Tur-Sinai suggests that this substitution reflects a Midrashic interpretation of the name “Gideon,” assigned to Jerubbaal. The name may have been derived from the verb גדע (to cut down), and the change in the verb in the biblical text masks this association. His theory is further supported by the observation that גדע, used alongside נתן, שבר, and שרף באש in Deuteronomy 7:5 and 12:3, does not appear again in cultic reform contexts within the so-called Deuteronomistic History (DeutH). Instead, it appears only in 2 Chronicles 14:2 and 34:4, 7. This suggests that the Deuteronomistic Historian (DtrH) preferred the verb כרת over גדע when describing cultic reforms.²² This lexical pattern may support Deuteronomistic influence, though its precise editorial origin remains debated.²³

²² For the relationship between Exodus 34:13, Deuteronomy 7:5, and 12:3, see Joshua A. Berman, *Inconsistency in the Torah: Ancient Literary Convention and the Limits of Source Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 157; Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 100; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, The Anchor Bible 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 366.

²³ Hans-Detlef Hoffmann, *Reform und Reformen: Untersuchungen zu einem Grundthema der deuteronomistischen Geschichtsschreibung* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1980), 275–78. According to Becker, a DtrH created a coherent Gideon-Abimelek narrative by linking two different traditions and renaming Gideon as Jerubbaal (Judg. 6:25–32). Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum*, 206–7. However, Smend and Veijola—who have a different perspective on the composition of the Deuteronomistic History—assigned Judges 6–8 to DtrN (the nomistic redactor). Rudolf Smend, *Die Entstehung des Alten Testaments* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1978), 116; Veijola, *Das Königtum*, 43–45.

While these redaction-critical views refine our understanding within the Deuteronomistic framework, recent scholarship has cast doubt on the coherence or even existence of a unified Deuteronomistic redactor.²⁴ Scholars increasingly argue that the Deuteronomistic History reflects multiple layers or schools of redaction, making it difficult to ascribe particular lexical or theological choices—such as the shift from גרע to כרת—to a single redactional intention. Judges, in particular, poses challenges to the traditional DeutH model due to its irregular structure and theology, suggesting that it might have circulated independently before

²⁴ In addition to Claus Westermann's questioning of the complex redactional history of the DeutH in his *Die Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments: gab es ein deuteronomistisches Geschichtswerk?* Theologische Bücherei 87 (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 1994), also see Thomas Römer, who offers a layered, redactional model of DeutH, challenging Noth's single-redactor theory. He argues in *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2007) that what we call the Deuteronomistic History was compiled in multiple stages—Josianic, exilic, and Persian—by different scribal groups or “schools,” rather than a single unified author. See also references to the multiple Deuteronomistic layers theory in fn. 4 of Gary N. Knoppers, *Prophets, Priests, and Promises: Essays on the Deuteronomistic History, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 186 (Brill, 2021), 29, and in fn. 3 of Brain Neil Peterson, *The Authors of the Deuteronomistic History: Locating a Tradition in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 166. The book of Judges also shows multiple redactional hands, countering the assumption of a single Deuteronomist behind its composition. E. Theodore Mullen Jr., “Judges 1:1–36: The Deuteronomistic Reintroduction of the Book of Judges,” *Harvard Theological Review* 77, no. 1 (1984): 33–54; Peterson, *The Authors of the Deuteronomistic History*, 165–98.

being incorporated into the DeutH at a later stage.²⁵ Therefore, while the lexical pattern supports a possible Deuteronomistic influence, this observation should be held with caution given the redactional complexity of the book.

Not only Gideon's new name in the narrative, Jerubbaal, but also Joash's name becomes instrumental in this study. Joash's Yahwistic theophoric name raises the question of why his son received a Baalistic theophoric name. The first possibility is that the names of Joash and Gideon could have been both given to them after Jerubbaal tore down the altar for Baal. But the problem is why was Gideon not given a theophoric name after YHWH like his father Joash? This question can be solved in the third point below. The second possible explanation is that since Joash had an altar for Baal, Joash may have required a more decisive shift toward YHWH, whereas Jerubbaal had already taken decisive action by tearing down the altar and building one for YHWH and was given a new name based on his action. Jerubbaal's subversive action could have been enough to warrant that he had a strong affiliation with YHWH. The third explanation is that the name of Jerubbaal originally included YHWH.²⁶ The fourth option is that Baal was indiscriminately used or legitimately used as an interpolation for YHWH in Shechem and/or Ophrah.²⁷

²⁵ Peterson, *The Authors of the Deuteronomistic History*, 165–98.

²⁶ As noted at the beginning of Section 2, Wellhausen proposed that the original name of Jerubbaal—distinct from Zerubbaal—was likely Jeruel or Jeremiah. Wellhausen, *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis*, 31.

²⁷ Wellhausen associated Jerubbaal with Shechem, arguing that Judges 9:27—an ancient and instructive narrative—reflects a Canaanite vintage festival in autumn. He questioned

The preceding discussion converges on the idea that Jerubbaal—arguably the original figure—was likely of Canaanite origin. Jerubbaal’s acquisition of the name Gideon suggests that the use of two different names was a deliberate attempt by later redactors and editors—who viewed Gideon as YHWH’s chosen deliverer and the conqueror of the Midianites—to avoid associating the hero with Baal.²⁸ That is to say, the name Gideon was deliberately tied to the destruction of the altar of Baal and the sacred pole, whether he was associated with Ophrah or Shechem. This observation suggests that the Gideon narrative may have been redacted with a specific theological agenda in mind. Furthermore, this analysis attests to Jerubbaal’s Canaanite ethnic affiliation. According to these theories, it is also possible that the names of Gideon and Jerubbaal represent two different persons but were merged by later redactors and editors for whom the issue of kingship had become a central concern.²⁹ That is, Jerubbaal, the father of Abimelech, was originally a Canaanite, and the identification with Gideon of Ophrah was a late redactional

the addition of a second narrative. He concluded that the first altar episode involved Baal, and that the second story was inserted to highlight Gideon’s piety for YHWH. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, 94, 238–39. Similarly, Moore argued that for several centuries after the Israelite occupation of Canaan, the term *ba’al* (“proprietor”) was used by the Israelites as innocently as *el* and *adon* for YHWH. He therefore insisted that the name Jerubbaal contains a Yahwistic element. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges*, 195.

²⁸ Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 173; Auld, “Gideon,” 263–67; Block, “Will the Real Gideon Please Stand Up?” 354; Derby, “Gideon or Jerubbaal,” 184; Kaufmann, *Sefer Shoftim*, 168; Kuenen, *De Godsdienst van Israël*, 302, 403–4.

²⁹ Block, “Will the Real Gideon Please Stand Up?” 355, 360, 365.

development.³⁰ Yet, the abovementioned hypotheses are purely speculative and thus must be tested against more tangible criteria than literary analysis alone.

4. Testing Judges 6:25–32 with Settlement Hypotheses

4.1. The Conquest Hypothesis

Among the three classic scholarly hypotheses of Israel's emergence in the Levant, the "conquest" hypothesis is the oldest, developed primarily in North America by the Albrightian School.³¹ Interpreting archaeological evidence unearthed during the formative years of biblical archaeology, this

³⁰ Auld, "Gideon," 257–67; Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum*, 140–208; Block, "Will the Real Gideon Please Stand Up?" 360; Ernst Würthwein, *Studien zum Deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 227 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1994), 12–28; Haag, "Gideon-Jerubbaal-Abimelek," 305–14; Hartmut Rösel, "Studien zur Topographie der Kriege in den Büchern Josua und Richter. Schluss," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 92 (1976): 10–46; Richter, *Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Richterbuch*, 112–318; Veijola, *Das Königtum*.

³¹ For discussions of the conquest hypothesis, see W. F. Albright, "The Israelite Conquest of Canaan in the Light of Archaeology," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 74 (1939): 1–12; *The Archaeology of Palestine* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1954), 112–28; and Yigael Yadin, "The Transition from a Semi-Nomadic to a Sedentary Society," in *Symposia Celebrating the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the American Schools of Oriental Research (1900–1975)*, ed. F. M. Cross (Cambridge: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1979), 57–68.

hypothesis explains Israel's conquest—directly derived from the book of Joshua—and suggests pan-military activity in the Late Bronze Age III (1,550–1,200 B.C.E.) and Iron Age IA (1,200–1,150 B.C.E.). If the conquest hypothesis is historical and the Gideon narrative is based on this history, then a critical question regarding the interpretation of Judges 6:25–32 arises. A total or partial conquest would imply that the people mentioned in Judges 6:25–32 were all Israelites. Although the early Israelites did not conquer all of Canaan, this fact does not imply that they coexisted with the indigenous Canaanites whom they had defeated—whether in shared settlements, as social equals, or both. Unless the indigenous Canaanites became slaves or forced laborers, hostility resulting from military conflict between Israelites and Canaanites likely led them to live in separate towns and villages.

This assumption implies a homogeneous group—either Israelites or Canaanites. Yet a close reading reveals that the people's anger is caused only by the destruction of the altar (vv. 28, 30). If the townspeople were all Israelites, then it is hard to see the reason why the people are angry with the cutting down of the altar of Baal along with the sacred pole and the building of an altar for YHWH. Indeed, in v. 30, the people demand the death penalty for Gideon solely because he has torn down the altar of Baal and cut down the sacred pole. There is no charge for building a new altar for YHWH—this may suggest a degree of religious tolerance. Thus, Jack

Sasson notes that although the townsmen were Hebrew, they appear to have held cosmopolitan religious views.³²

The absence of religious hostility toward a newly built altar for YHWH from the townspeople could be interpreted in two ways. (1) If all the people were the Israelites, they had long been practicing veneration of Baal and the sacred pole. That is, they had become nominal polytheists. (2) Alternatively, the people may have been religiously tolerant from the beginning, practicing polytheism and thus unconcerned about building a new altar in addition to those for their own deities.

The first option—that all the people were Israelites—could reflect how the biblical narrative presents the situation, and that is why the Deuteronomist charges apostasy against Israel through an unnamed prophet in Judges 6:7–10. This interpretation, however, raises problems: it is unclear why the Deuteronomistic redactors and editors would assign Gideon a theophoric name containing Baal, the very deity with whom the Deuteronomist accuses Israel of committing apostasy, unless Jerubbaal was originally a Yahwistic name—such as Jeruel or Jeremiah, as Wellhausen proposed. The second option seems to be more plausible but does not accord with the Deuteronomistic theology. Therefore, this model fails to account for the Gideon/Jerubbaal narrative.

³² Jack M. Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, The Anchor Bible 6D (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 344.

4.2. The Peaceful Infiltration Hypothesis

The peaceful infiltration hypothesis (also known as the sedentarization hypothesis) is an alternative to the conquest model.³³ This theory was initially developed by German scholars, who argued that the Albrightian school misunderstand the account in the Book of Joshua as a historical narrative and misread destruction evidence as direct proof of an Israelite military conquest. Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth claimed that semi-nomadic peoples gradually took up farming and eventually became sedentary. However, applying this theory to the Gideon narrative also raises a significant question regarding the ethnic identification of Gideon-Jerubbaal, Joash's household, and the townspeople.

This hypothesis allows for possible cohabitation between Israelites and Canaanites. Applied to the Gideon/Jerubbaal narrative, it implies that all the townspeople are Canaanites, with the exception of Joash's household. This speculation has both advantages and drawbacks for interpreting Judges 6:25–32. First, if the hypothesis holds, it becomes clear who cut down the altar for Baal and the sacred pole. The biblical passage supports this view, as the people immediately identify Gideon as the one who committed a religious crime, presumably after a very quick investigation.

Second, this hypothesis may explain the subtle hostility between the townspeople and Gideon. It could stem from ethnic differences. The

³³ For the peaceful infiltration, see Albrecht Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966); Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (New York: Harper, 1958), 68–84.

Canaanite townspeople may have viewed themselves as culturally superior³⁴—possessing more established forms of worship and a relatively stable economy—compared to Joash’s formerly nomadic household.

Alternatively, the hostility may not reflect interethnic tension but rather internal conflict sparked by the introduction of a radically different religious system—namely, monotheism. As noted in the examination of the conquest hypothesis, the townspeople’s anger is not directed at the building of the altar to YHWH but at the destruction of the altar of Baal and the sacred pole. This suggests that monotheism disrupted the religious tolerance typical of Canaanite polytheism.

Furthermore, if Joash’s household were Israelites, Gideon’s destruction of the altar becomes problematic, since the altar belongs to Joash, his father. According to the narrative, Joash appears to be a leader of the city (העיר שר) and a patron of Baal and the sacred pole. It seems unlikely that a recent nomadic outsider could attain such social and religious prominence in an agrarian, city-based society.³⁵ In fact, the narrative portrays Joash as a man of means: he owns the terebinth at Ophrah (Judg 6:11), possesses bulls,

³⁴ Stager, “Forging an Identity,” 138.

³⁵ Lot’s case may serve as a useful exception for interpreting Joash’s situation. Though from a different period, Lot—like Joash—may have gained influence in Sodom through his wealth, which earlier led to his separation from Abraham (Gen 13). This may have afforded him special status in the city. His position at the city gate and his welcome of the two angels at sundown (Gen 19:1–3) suggest he held the role of a town elder. However, as the situation escalates, the narrative reveals the townspeople’s hostility: “This fellow came here as an alien, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them” (Gen 19:9). This illustrates that, despite any apparent status, Lot remained an outsider in their eyes.

kids (young female goats), and servants (Judg 6:19, 25, 27), and maintains a personal altar (Judg 6:25). Moreover, he is shown to wield considerable influence among the townspeople (Judg 6:31–32). Since nomadic (desert) culture was generally regarded as inferior to urban civilization, it is difficult to imagine a nomadic outsider rising to leadership in a city.

Thus, applying this hypothesis to the ethnic identity of Gideon/Jerubbaal and the ownership of the altar yields two possibilities: 1) all the people were ethnically homogenous or 2) Joash's household, along with possibly a few others in the town, had long lived among the Canaanites and had gradually lost their nomadic and ancestral heritage. However, this hypothesis faces a challenge: the time span since the Israelites' settlement may have been too short for full assimilation into urban Canaanite society.³⁶ How many years had passed? Was that enough time to abandon their nomadic culture and adopt an urban way of life? However, this hypothesis holds significant potential for explaining the narrative. Unlike the conquest model, the peaceful infiltration hypothesis may offer a more convincing—if not complete—explanation for the etymology of the name Jerubbaal as assigned to Gideon, though it requires further examination and consideration of other factors.

³⁶ Although no universally accepted theory exists on how long it takes an ethnic group to fully assimilate into a new culture, Milton Gordon's seven-stage model of assimilation suggests the process may take at least two generations. However, the timeline may accelerate under certain conditions. Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 69–71.

4.3. The Peasant Revolution Hypothesis

In the 1950s, George E. Mendenhall proposed a new theory: that an internal revolt occurred, driven by religious motivation.³⁷ This theory later influenced Norman K. Gottwald, who expanded it from a Marxist perspective.³⁸ He claimed that during the Late Bronze Age, many cities in the Levant were ruled by feudal overlords. He proposed that the oppressed classes later aligned with the so-called ‘*Apîrû*’ after hearing a miraculous redemptive story.³⁹ Gottwald argued that the oppressed classes and the ‘*Apîrû*’ were the same people, who worshiped the same God and spoke the same language.⁴⁰ When applied to Judges 6:25–32, however, this hypothesis reveals a critical flaw. The hypothesis presents two possible ethnic configurations for the characters in the narrative: 1) all the townspeople are proto-Israelites, as they are depicted in the narrative; or 2) the townspeople are Canaanites, while Joash’s household represents the proto-Israelite group (‘*Apîrû*’), or vice versa.

Unfortunately, just like the previous hypothesis, neither case fits Joash’s social status. If Joash were socially marginalized, he would not have had farmland, a number of servants, and a personally patronized altar. It is unlikely that a peasant would have had substantial possessions. Again,

³⁷ For the peasant revolution theory, see George E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

³⁸ Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979).

³⁹ Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, 210–19.

⁴⁰ Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, 401–09.

despite their nomadic lifestyle, Abraham and Lot were portrayed as wealthy, and Abraham even owned a personal army that rescued Lot once (Gen 14:1–16). Joash may have been wealthy, which would preclude his identification with an oppressed class. On the contrary, Joash appears to have held influence in both social and religious capacities.⁴¹ The fact that Joash does not appear marginalized, impoverished, or oppressed suggests that Joash's status was likely between that of a feudal lord and the oppressed class at the least—comparable to a petty noble or minor official.

Nevertheless, the text does not indicate clear oppression by a feudal lord over a lower class. If there is any oppressor in the narrative, it might be Joash himself, possibly misusing his influence over the people (Judg 6:31). Furthermore, the Masoretic text does not describe the people as peasant (פרזון), but as townspeople (העיר אנשי), who would have lived inside of either a fortified or an unfortified city (*hammā'ôz*). According to this hypothesis, the revolting peasants escaped from cities in the lowlands and valleys, seeking freedom in areas where the urban elite had little or no authority.⁴² This portrayal does not correspond to the townspeople in the Gideon story.

A similar expression used to describe peasants in the theory appears in Judges 6:2. However, the oppressive situation arose not because of urban elites, but due to the Midianites. Moreover, the situation in the Gideon narrative does not align with this theory, as the people are organized under Gideon's leadership and later fight effectively against the Midianites.

⁴¹ Schneider, *Judges*, 107.

⁴² Stager, "Forging an Identity," 140.

Hypothetically, if this were a pre-revolt stage, then the targets of the uprising would have been Joash's household or Gideon/Jerubbaal. Therefore, Joash's household and Gideon/Jerubbaal could not have been peasants or part of a socially oppressed and marginalized class. Joash's household was originally rooted in a group such as the 'Apîrû, as an extra-biblical document suggests their integration into the region's political fabric. EA 289, a letter sent by 'Abdi-Heba of Jerusalem, reports that Lab'ayu, the ruler of Shechem, gave land to the 'Apîrû.⁴³ If this were the case, it would indicate that they had lived among the Canaanites for a prolonged period and eventually became fully assimilated. Therefore, this model fails to explain Gideon/Jerubbaal's ethnicity through its core argument and instead relies on the secondary peaceful infiltration or sedentarization hypothesis.

4.4. The Ruralization, the "Emergence from within," and Mixed Multitude Theories

Scholars have increasingly questioned whether the characters in the Gideon/Jerubbaal narrative (Judg 6:25–32)—Joash's household or the broader group—should be identified as Israelites, arguing that such a classification lacks sufficient support. One alternative, less frequently discussed, is that Gideon/Jerubbaal, Joash's household, and the townspeople were Canaanites—part of a diverse population that later

⁴³ Brendon C. Benz, *The Land Before the Kingdom of Israel: A History of the Southern Levant and the People Who Populated It* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 180–81.

contributed to the formation of early Israel. This alternative points to a fourth hypothesis: the ruralization, the “emergence from within,” and mixed multitude theories.

Recent scholarship on the origins of the Israelites now place greater emphasis on archaeological data from the Late Bronze Age to Iron Age I, which demonstrate both cultural continuity and discontinuity.⁴⁴ These cultural shifts suggest that, with the collapse of city-state systems in the final phase of the Late Bronze Age, a population expansion occurred in marginal “frontier” zones—settings in which early Israel began to emerge.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ William Dever argues for continuities in pottery styles and art, as well as in ideology, religion, and language, all of which are of local Canaanite origin. For example, Saul Olyan maintains that the religion of the Late Bronze Age persisted into the Iron Age I period. Contrary to the biblical portrayal of the sacred pole as idolatrous, he argues that it was a legitimate symbol in Yahwistic cults. Simultaneously, cultural discontinuities appear in settlement types, demography, house forms, social structures, and political organization—reflecting rural dispersion and a population boom in the hill country. William G. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites, and Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 191–94; Saul M. Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel* (Atlanta: Scholar Press, 1988), 73.

⁴⁵ Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites*, 174; Beth Alpert Nakhai, *Archaeology and the Religions of Canaan and Israel* (Boston: ASOR, 2001), 154; Stager, “Forging an Identity,” 141–42.

Ann E. Killebrew argues that one of the most significant features of the Late Bronze Age was the emergence of centralized administration. However, this world system underwent rapid changes between the late thirteenth and early twelfth centuries B.C.E. Major forces behind this shift included the destruction of the Hittite Empire, the disintegration of the Mycenaean palace system, and the decline of Egypt’s New Kingdom. She outlines

Examining archaeological evidence in the central hill country during the Iron Age I, Israel Finkelstein suggests that the emergence of the early Israelites was rooted predominantly in Canaanite culture, which caused the collapse of Canaanite culture, not the other way around (like the conquest theory), and therefore they emerged from within it.⁴⁶ It was an internal

several potential triggers for these collapses, including natural disasters, climatic changes, technological innovations, systemic failures, and the cyclical rise and fall of urban cultures. Although identifying the exact cause is challenging, she emphasizes that the collapse of the international system and empires during the Late Bronze Age unfolded gradually, involving steady decline, episodes of destruction, site abandonment, and, in some cases, continued occupation. Consequently, she argues that during the twelfth century B.C.E., former Bronze Age centers fragmented into smaller units, and in the resulting political and economic vacuum, new ideologies and ethnic identities emerged. Ann E. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity: An Archaeological Study of Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, and Early Israel, 1300–1100 B.C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 37.

For the socio-political conditions of the Late Bronze Age that contributed to the emergence of new political entities, see the theory of *chaosmos*, which explains the end of the Late Bronze Age as a breaking point in which the system's non-equilibrium condition persists, reaches a critical threshold, diverges, and gives rise to a new order. See Seung Ho Bang, "Tyre That Brought Chaos: An Oracle Against Systematic Economic Injustice," in *Tension in Resistance, Paradox in Freedom: Slavery Texts in the Bible and Their Readers*, eds. Soo Kim Sweeney and Stacy Davis (Atlanta: SBL Press, forthcoming). For the concept of *chaosmos*, see Soyoung Lee, "A Study on the Chaosmos Space Materializing a Multiple Potential World: Focusing on the Works of a Researcher" (D.F.A. diss., Kookmin University, 2014), 43, <https://data.riss.kr/resource/Thesis/000013529404>.

⁴⁶ Israel Finkelstein, "The Emergence of Early Israel: Anthropology, Environment and Archaeology," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 110, no. 4 (1990): 677–86;

process. His earlier model seemed to closely align with the peaceful infiltration theory, as he insisted that pastoral groups resedentarized in the central hill country at the end of the thirteenth century B.C.E.⁴⁷ However, unlike Alt and Noth, he proposed that these groups of pastoral nomads were local.⁴⁸

Ann E. Killebrew's study of the Canaanites and early Israelites supports the ruralization theory and offers critical insight into the ethnic identity of Gideon/Jerubbaal.⁴⁹ She distinguishes between "Canaan" as a geographical designation and "Canaanites" as a label for a multiethnic population. As a result, the biblical portrayal of the Canaanites should not be interpreted as a reference to a single, cohesive ethnic group. The settlement patterns in the Canaanite sites reveal the gradual development of large urban centers during the Middle Bronze Age, reaching its peak in the thirteenth century in the coastal plain and fertile valleys.

"When and How Did the Israelites Emerge?" in *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel*, ed. Brian B. Schmidt (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2007), 73–83; Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 113–18.

⁴⁷ Israel Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1988), 336–51.

⁴⁸ Israel Finkelstein, "The Emergence of Israel: A Phase in the Cyclic History of Canaan in the Third and Second Millennia BCE" in *From Nomadism to Monarchy: Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel*, ed. Israel Finkelstein and Nadav Na'aman (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 150–78.

⁴⁹ Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity*, 93–196.

At the end of the Late Bronze Age and into the early Iron Age, settlement patterns changed dramatically: including a notable increase in small villages in previously marginal areas, such as the hill-country region; continued occupation of several Late Bronze Age urban centers in the lowlands; and the emergence of urban centers along the southern coastal plain associated with the Philistines and other Sea Peoples.⁵⁰ These new settlement patterns delineated new social boundaries. In tandem with these shifts, cultic practices also reflect the cultural continuity and diversity of the region. Bronze Age Canaanite temples exhibit a wide range of cultic structures.⁵¹ These attest to the rich and diverse cultic heritage of Canaan and its polytheistic ideology.⁵²

Drawing on these findings, Killebrew proposes a theory similar to Finkelstein that the emergence of ancient Israel was a process of ethnogenesis, or the gradual formation of a group identity from a “mixed multitude” of people who largely originated as indigenous Canaanites.⁵³ She asserts that the worship of YHWH was the core of early Israelite ethnogenesis and distinguished them from their Canaanite origins. She characterizes the archaeological evidence of newly established Iron Age

⁵⁰ Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity*, 97.

⁵¹ The impressive size of this Canaanite sanctuary—demonstrated by both archaeological evidence and biblical accounts—is remarkable, especially when contrasted with the typically modest worship sites of the Iron I period. Nakhai, *Archaeology and the Religions of Canaan and Israel*, 175.

⁵² Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity*, 105.

⁵³ Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity*, 149–50. Also see Avi Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis: Settlement, Interaction, Expansion and Resistance* (London: Equinox, 2006).

highland sites during the twelfth and eleventh centuries B.C.E. as follows: (1) the three- or four-room pillared houses, (2) a proliferation of silos, (3) the appearance of cisterns, (4) agricultural terraces, (5) absence of pig bones, (6) paucity of burials, and (7) a very limited repertoire of utilitarian ceramic containers.⁵⁴ These material culture traits spread across the central hill country, particularly in two regions: Samaria (Manasseh and Ephraim) and Judea (Benjamin and Judah). The setting of the Gideon narrative—Shechem and Ophrah—is located within the broader region of Samaria.

5. Gideon as a Canaanite

The ruralization and mixed multitude theories may satisfactorily explain the two questions that were initially posed in the beginning: (1) Why does Joash, Gideon's father, have the altar for Baal and the sacred pole? (2) Why is Gideon given a new name associated with Baal? If Gideon's family was Canaanite, it would not be surprising that Joash—despite his Yahwistic name—maintained an altar for Baal and the sacred pole. Furthermore, their Canaanite identity can also explain Joash's leadership in the town and Gideon's authority over people. If the Gideon/Jerubaal cycle reflects the emergence of the early Israelites—a loosely organized group of largely indigenous Canaanites living on the frontier who struggled to mobilize or defend effectively against invasions—then the shift from polytheism to monolatry, including the replacement of their patron deity, may represent as a key moment in their ethnogenesis. Mark Smith and Elizabeth Bloch-

⁵⁴ Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity*, 157.

Smith argue that the narrative reflects tension between two competing groups operating in distinct religio-social spheres, each aligned with either YHWH or Baal worship.⁵⁵ This framework helps explain how what originally was a single, homogenous population evolved into two distinct groups.

The two names of the son of Joash, Gideon and Jerubbaal, also shed light on the ethnogenesis of the early Israelites. The Baal-related name Jerubbaal aligns with a Canaanite cultural background. According to the first theory, Joash's son—originally named Jerubbaal (though the name does not necessarily confirm Canaanite ethnicity⁵⁶)—was renamed Gideon after demolishing the altar of Baal and the sacred pole at Ophrah. This explanation more naturally accounts for the two names of a single character without requiring, as Wellhausen proposed, that Jerubbaal was originally a Yahwistic name in order to force his identity to conform to that of an Israelite. Or it may even explain how the two distinct figures were later merged with the one associated with YHWH by the Deuteronomistic redactor. Although Gideon is non-Yahwistic, it still connotes religious reform. Gideon's actions align with the Deuteronomistic prescriptions (Deut 7:5; 12:3).⁵⁷ In particular, the root of Gideon's name, גִּדְוֹן,

⁵⁵ Mark S. Smith and Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judges 1: A Commentary on Judges*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021), 456.

⁵⁶ Smith and Bloch-Smith, *Judges 1*, 457. For a contrasting interpretation, see Isabelle de Castelbajac, "Le cycle de Gédéon ou la condamnation du refus de la royauté," *Vetus Testamentum* 57, no. 2 (2007): 153–54.

⁵⁷ The author of the Gideon narrative appears familiar with Deuteronomy 12, as reflected in literary patterns identified by Joshua Berman and others. For further

corresponds to the word to cut down the sacred poles (ואשריהם תגדעון) in Deuteronomy 7:5.

Archaeological evidence most likely supports identifying Joash's family as Canaanite. Shechem (Tell Balâṭah) was predominantly Canaanite until the Late Bronze Age, as evidenced by the Amarna letters, which associate Shechem with Lab'ayu. In the following period, however, it became part of the northern Kingdom of Israel.⁵⁸ Brendon Benz argues that during the Late Bronze Age, Shechem functioned more like a decentralized region composed of multiple local powers, with at most a tenuous or informal connection to Lab'ayu.⁵⁹ This political flux may have created space for a new group of people—namely the Israelites—to emerge on the horizon. Later, Shechem—along with Shiloh and Dothan—lay in ruins, leaving the region without an urban center and signaling the collapse of previous social and political hierarchies. This vacuum likely enabled the eventual rise of a new ruling entity during the tenth century B.C.E.⁶⁰

As previously noted, the search for the ethnicity of Gideon/Jerubbaal in Judges 6 seems to align well with the peaceful infiltration (or

discussion, see Berman, *Inconsistency in the Torah*, 156–60; Saul M. Olyan, *Violent Rituals of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 52–53; Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 344; Smith and Bloch-Smith, *Judges 1*, 456–57.

⁵⁸ Edward F. Campbell Jr., “The Amarna Letters and the Amarna Period,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 23, no. 1 (1960): 19–20; E. Sellin, “Die Ausgrabung von Sichem: Kurze vorläufige Mitteilung über die Arbeit im Sommer 1926,” *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 49, no. 4 (1926): 304–20.

⁵⁹ Benz, *The Land before the Kingdom of Israel*, 183, 242–43, 251.

⁶⁰ Omer Sergi, *The Two Houses of Israel: State Formation and the Origins of Pan-Israelite Identity* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2023), 74, 76.

sedentarization) hypothesis. This may explain why archaeologists such as Israel Finkelstein initially supported models resembling this hypothesis. In his earlier formulation, he argued that pastoralist groups became sedentary in the central hill country at the end of the thirteenth century B.C.E. However, in contrast to classic peaceful infiltration models, Finkelstein later argued that these pastoral nomads were local Canaanite groups who gradually transitioned to agrarian life—indicating that early Israel emerged from within Canaanite culture, not from outside it. Along with Nadav Na'aman, Finkelstein advocates for a low chronology, which pushes the emergence of the Northern Kingdom and its material culture to a later period than traditionally thought. This chronological revision reinforces the “emergence from within” model, as it allows more time for a gradual, endogenous development of Israelite identity and settlement patterns. In this framework, their analysis of Shechem’s role under Lab’ayu during the Amarna period highlights the region’s political instability and the later shift from Canaanite to northern Israelite culture between the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age I—a change they attribute to the expansion of the Northern Kingdom.⁶¹

Examining the transitional phases of Tell Balâṭah from Canaanite to Israelite culture, Brendon Benz suggests the population consisted of both sedentary and nomadic groups—specifically, pastoralists and settled communities—who were tribally related and shared “a common social,

⁶¹ Israel Finkelstein and Nadav Na'aman, “Shechem of the Amarna Period and the Rise of the Northern Kingdom of Israel,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 55, no. 2 (2005): 172–93.

political, and even religious heritage.”⁶² He believes that not only the influx but also the departure of non-sedentary settlers contributed to the fluctuation. This interpretation makes sense if Ophrah was a rural frontier town in contrast to Shechem—suggesting that Canaanites based in Shechem may have moved back and forth between the two settlements.⁶³ While his proposition may support the peaceful infiltration or sedentarization theory, based on archaeological evidence from Tell Balâṭah,⁶⁴ it aligns more closely with the ruralization theory and the broader “emergence from within” model. Although Benz emphasizes political reasons for the abandonment of the region and the decline of Tell Balâṭah,

⁶² Benz, *The Land before the Kingdom of Israel*, 227–28, 234, 236.

⁶³ F. M. Abel and Albrecht Alt propose that Ophrah corresponds to ʿṭ-Ṭaiyibeh, situated between Mount Tabor and Beth-Shean, whereas Yohanan Aharoni identifies it with modern ‘Afula in the heart of the Jezreel Valley. However, because the territory of Manasseh lay south of the Jezreel Valley, Herbert Donner—aligning with Abel and Alt—places Ophrah at modern Tell Šōfar, approximately 4 km northwest of Tell Balâṭah. F. M. Abel, *Géographie de la Palestine*, vol. 2 (Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie, 1938), 402; Albrecht Alt, *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israels*, vol. 1 (München: C. H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1959), 160; Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography* (London: Burns & Oates, 1979), 263; Herbert Donner, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel und seiner Nachbarn in Grundzügen*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 171. Regardless of its precise location, Ophrah likely had a small rural setting, as it has not been securely identified with any major sites in the region. Judges 6:26 describes the location where God instructed Gideon to build an altar as ‘*al hammā’ôz*. If this term refers to Ophrah—where Joash maintained an altar to Baal and an accompanying sacred pole—and if Ophrah functioned as a mountain stronghold or place of refuge, then its characteristics align with this interpretation.

⁶⁴ Benz, *The Land before the Kingdom of Israel*, 232.

it is plausible that political and religious affiliations were closely intertwined in influencing these social transformations—or that religious factors may even have shaped the political ones.

This transition occurred between Strata XII (ca. 1,325–1,200 B.C.E.) and XI (ca. 1,200–1150/25) at Shechem.⁶⁵ The *bêt El-běřît* (or *Ba'āl-běřît*) mentioned in Judges 9:4, 27, 46–49—destroyed by Abimelech and his supporters—has been identified with the Canaanite fortress temple (Temple 2b) of Temenos 9/Stratum XI.⁶⁶ The archaeologist interprets the change in material culture as evidence for the emergence of a new people.⁶⁷ Lawrence Toombs argues that Shechem's transition during this period took place without the evidence of violent military attack. Thus, he seems to favor the infiltration theory—a gradual change over time.⁶⁸ In his discussion on violent rites, Olyan does not categorize the Gideon narrative with the transfer of a group's political affiliation as in 2 Samuel 20:1–22 and 2 Kings 10:6–10.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, from a broader perspective on early Israelite formation, the Gideon narrative may likewise reflect a shift in

⁶⁵ Edward F. Campbell, *Shechem III: The Stratigraphy and Architecture of Shechem/Tell Balāṭah*, vol. 1, *Text* (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2002), 8; Lawrence E. Toombs, “Shechem: Problems of the Early Israelite Era,” in *Symposia Celebrating the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the American Schools of Oriental Research (1900–1975)*, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Winona Lake: ASOR, 1979), 69.

⁶⁶ Lawrence E. Toombs et al., “The Fourth Campaign at Balāṭah (Shechem),” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 169 (1963): 29.

⁶⁷ Toombs, “Shechem,” 70.

⁶⁸ Toombs, “Shechem,” 74.

⁶⁹ Olyan, *Violent Rituals of the Hebrew Bible*, 53–55.

political-religious affiliation, with the destruction of Canaanite cultic sites symbolizing religious reform—a key component of Israelite ethnogenesis.

6. Conclusion

In light of redactional and tradition-historical criticism of Judges 6:25–32, its broader literary context, the inadequacy of the three traditional settlement models for this pericope, and the development of alternative hypotheses, such as ruralization, the “emergence from within,” and the mixed multitude theories informed by archaeological evidence, two interpretations of the ethnic identity of Gideon/Jerubbaal—and possibly Joash’s household and the townspeople—can be proposed.

First, redaction and tradition-historical criticism suggest that Jerubbaal was the original character in the narrative, and that later Deuteronomistic redactors introduced a monotheistic dimension by distinguishing Gideon (associated with YHWH) from Jerubbaal (associated with Baal and the sacred pole). Second, the ruralization, the “emergence from within,” and mixed multitude theories suggest that the narrative may reflect a phase of rural dispersion and demographic expansion in the hill country during the twelfth century B.C.E. Although minimalists argue that Judges 6:25–32 is entirely fictional, the narrative may preserve historical kernels related to the emergence of early Israel. Sociologically, the narrative may portray the final phase of a city-based feudal society, prior to population dispersal into marginal areas such as the hill country, amid a period of social and political upheaval. Religiously, the narrative may illustrate a time when Canaanite

polytheism was challenged by emerging monotheism, leading to the development of Yahwistic belief.

Who is Gideon? Based on these two interpretations, it is plausible that Gideon/Jerubbaal in Judges 6:25–32 was originally a Canaanite. The passage may also reflect a transitional stage in which those who once worshipped Baal and the sacred pole were confronted by Yahwism and eventually assimilated into it.

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<한글초록>

기드온은 바알과 아세라를 섬긴 가나안인이었는가?: 사사기 6 장

25-32 절에 대한 편집비평적 및 고고학적 평가

방승호 *

사사기는 여호수아서의 정복 서사보다 이스라엘 초기 정체성 형성과 관련된 보다 역사적으로 신빙성 있는 전승을 담고 있는 경우가 많지만, 동시에 역사 서술과 고고학 해석에 있어 중요한 과제를 안고 있다. 이러한 과제는 특히 기드온 사이클(사사기 6:25-32)에서 두드러지는데, 이 본문에서 기드온(여룹바알로도 불림)은 바알 제단과 아세라 목상을 보유한 요아스의 아들로 등장한다. 이 장면은 두 가지 핵심 질문을 제기한다. 요아스는 왜 그러한 제의적 기물을 소유하고 있었는가? 그리고 기드온은 왜 야훼가 아닌 바알과 관련된 이름으로 개명되었는가? 본 논문은 해당 본문의 편집사적 및 전승사적 발전 과정을 분석하며, 다음의 두 상보적인 해석을 제안한다. 첫째, 여룹바알이 본래의 인물이었으며 이후 신명기계 편집 과정을 통해 기드온이라는 인물로 구분되었다는 점, 둘째, 이 본문이 가나안 종교 관행이 도전을 받으며 점진적으로 야훼 신앙 속으로 통합되어 가는 과도기를 반영하고 있다는 점이다.

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이러한 두 해석은 기드온/여룹바알이 원래 가나안 출신 인물로서, 그의 기억이 신앙의 변화와 함께 야훼 중심의 이상에 따라 재구성되었을 가능성을 시사한다. 결국 이 본문은 이스라엘 전통 안에 내재된 가나안 종교의 내적 변화 과정을 반영하는 흔적을 담고 있으며, 이스라엘의 기원을 외부 정복이 아닌 가나안 사회 내부의 사회적·종교적 재편 과정을 통해 이해하려는 최근의 해석적 흐름—소위 ‘내재적 기원’ 이론—에 힘을 실어준다.

***주제어**

사사들; 기드온; 여룹바알; 바알; 아세라; 이스라엘 사람들; 가나안 사람들.