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LEGITIMACY, ILLEGITIMACY,  
AND THE RIGHT TO RULE

Windows on Abimelech's Rise and Demise  
in Judges 9

Gordon K. Oeste



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## Chapter 1

### LOOKING AT JUDGES 9 THROUGH MULTIPLE SIGHT LINES

The story of the rise and demise of Abimelech son of Jerubbaal in Judg 9 is rather odd, even for the book of Judges. The story describes the three-year reign of Abimelech as king in Shechem (9:22). Indeed, Abimelech is the only Israelite explicitly described as king in the book of Judges. The description of his kingship, however, is very negative, emphasizing Abimelech's shady rise to power, the elimination of all of his subjects, and his humiliating demise at Thebez. Moreover, the anomalous reign of Abimelech stands in direct contrast to Gideon's rejection of dynastic rule (Judg 8:22–23). This negative portrait has led some to argue that the story of Abimelech's cut-throat style of monarchy, in whole or in part, is strongly anti-monarchic.<sup>1</sup>

However, the story itself is set in the period of the judges, a time when Israel was led by a series of regional, charismatic judges or deliverers. The final chapters of Judges repeatedly point out that there was no king in the land (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25), and when combined with the accompanying chaos described in Judg 17–21, the end of the book makes a powerful argument legitimating the role of a king. Thus, some have even argued that the book of Judges serves as an apology for the monarchy.<sup>2</sup>

1. Martin Buber, *The Kingship of God* (3d ed.; trans. R. Scheimann; London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1967), 75; A. D. H. Mayes, *Judges* (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 26; Frank Crüsemann, *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum. Die antiköniglichen Texte des Alten Testaments und der Kampf um den frühen israelitischen Staat* (WMANT 49; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978), 29; Timo Veijola, *Das Königtum in der Beurteilung der deuteronomistischen Historiographie. Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, Series B, Tom. 198; Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1977), 115–20; J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary* (trans. J. Bowden; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 174–77.

2. Arthur E. Cundall, "Judges—An Apology for the Monarchy," *Expository Times* 81 (1969–70): 178–81; Marc Zvi Brettler, "The Book of Judges: Literature as

The strongly negative depiction of Abimelech as king therefore seems at odds with the pro-monarchic stance of the end of the book. However, I propose that a multi-disciplinary approach using the tools of narrative, rhetorical, and social-scientific analysis will provide data that support theories holding to a monarchic context for Judg 9. In addition, this approach will show how, while negative, the description of the reign of Abimelech in Judg 9 served as part of a legitimation strategy for the monarchy. This strategy attempted to delegitimize local bases of power, exemplified by Abimelech's regional rule in Shechem, by showing how such localized centres of power failed to benefit the people and instead resulted in disaster. This negative analogy was then utilized to legitimize the role, function, and authority of a centralized monarchy.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. *The Value of Multiple Sight Lines*

The value of a multidisciplinary approach can be compared with ways of viewing Michelangelo's *Pietà*. In order to appreciate fully a sculpture such as the *Pietà*, it must be viewed from multiple sight lines or viewpoints. A frontal view will yield an appreciation that is similar to, and yet different from, a view in profile. Each sight line gives a different perspective of Michelangelo's work with a unique appreciation of its artistic design, lines, and emotional power. However, to appreciate this work best, one must combine the different sight lines into an appreciation of the whole.

Just as the *Pietà* can best be appreciated by viewing it through multiple sight lines, I believe that Judg 9 can be appreciated best when it is viewed through multiple methodological lenses. Each method can add a new and different perspective on Judg 9: a narrative analysis can show how plot structure and characterization further the message of Judg 9; a rhetorical analysis can highlight the arguments intended to persuade the audience of Judg 9; and a social-scientific analysis can aid in understanding the social context(s) embedded in the Abimelech narrative. These analyses are not exhaustive and will not provide a comprehensive view of Judg 9, but when combined, they can bring a fuller appreciation of the message communicated in this biblical chapter.

Politics," *JBL* 108 (1989): 395–418; Robert H. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* (VTSup 63; Leiden: Brill, 1996); Marvin A. Sweeney, "Davidic Polemics in the Book of Judges," *VT* 47 (1997): 517–29.

3. The passage may also function to show the negative results of a king who reigns without Yahweh's approval. However, this too could serve to delegitimize local power bases by implying that even such localizations of power as found in Judg 9 operate without Yahweh's sanction and ultimately lead to destructive ends.

2. *Reading the Narrative Interests of Judges 9*a. *The Goal of a Narrative Analysis*

Our study of Judg 9 will begin with a narrative analysis because the account of Abimelech in Judg 9 is related in the form of a story, a narrative. Stories can entertain through the use of humour or suspense. Biblical stories, however, seek to move beyond entertainment or the mere conveyance of information, and seek to instruct and to elicit a response from their audience. They have been crafted to relay a message as effectively as possible, and if we are to attempt to discern those interests, we must begin by carefully analyzing the way in which the story is told.

Our analysis of the story of Abimelech and the Shechemites, therefore, begins with a narrative analysis, an examination of the various tools utilized by the storyteller of Judg 9 to convey his message. Such an approach seeks to examine the “building blocks” of the story by utilizing a close reading strategy. Adele Berlin points to the value of such an endeavour: “If we know *how* texts mean, we are in a better position to discover *what* a particular text means.”<sup>4</sup> Jan Fokkelman similarly emphasizes the relationship between a story’s form and its content, “When we learn more and more about how a story has been constructed and by what means, and learn to understand what the purpose is behind all those techniques and structures, we will have penetrated deeply into the meaning and values of the text.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, we will examine the key tools and techniques utilized by biblical storytellers that enable them to work their craft effectively, and thereby shape the perceptions of readers with regard to the characters and message of Judg 9. The works of Robert Alter, Adele Berlin, Shimon Bar-Efrat, Yairah Amit, Jan Fokkelman, and Meir Sternberg<sup>6</sup> have been instrumental in laying out the “tools” and techniques of biblical narrative and have greatly informed my reading of biblical narrative. These tools and techniques may include: characterization, point of view, plot development and structure, time sequencing,

4. Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 17.

5. Jan P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 28.

6. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Berlin, *Poetics and Biblical Interpretation*; Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (London: T&T Clark/Continuum, 1989, 2004); Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001); Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*; Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

or the use of repetitive elements, such as the use of *Leitwörter* and *Leitmotifs*. A careful reading of Judg 9 will illustrate how the storyteller of Judg 9 has combined these various tools and techniques in order to craft his story, and thereby help readers to discern the interests and values inherent in Judg 9.

b. *Assumptions*

(1) *Coherence*. The narrative analysis presumes that the story of Abimelech found in Judg 9 of the MT is a unity. This does not discount reference to the LXX or other ancient versions in order to elucidate those places where the MT is less than clear due to eccentricities in the transmission of the text. However, our reading of the Abimelech story is fundamentally a reading of the MT version of Judg 9.

It may be helpful to point out that both synchronic and diachronic readings of a given passage begin with the current form of the text as found in the MT;<sup>7</sup> they diverge in their explanation of the various tensions, ambiguities, and gaps that appear in biblical narratives. Diachronic approaches see the “bumpiness” in a text as evidence of another source or the hand of another author/editor.<sup>8</sup> Synchronic interpreters, however, come to a different interpretation of the “bumpiness” of a text. They assume that gaps and tensions can be intentional and part of the overall story design. Thus, sometimes the narrator may withhold information or create gaps for rhetorical, aesthetic, or structural purposes. Meir Sternberg points out that literature frequently contains gaps, discontinuities, and missing bits of information which serve the interests of the story by creating suspense, curiosity, or ambiguity, and thereby drawing the reader into the story.<sup>9</sup> At other times, the structure of a narrative may lead an

7. James Barr, “The Synchronic, the Diachronic and the Historical: A Triangular Relationship?,” in *Synchronic or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis* (ed. Johannes C. de Moor; OtSt 34; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 1–14.

8. Thus, changes in perspective or viewpoint within a story are often linked to different writers from different time periods. By adding a new viewpoint, sometimes merely in the form of an explanatory sentence or just a word here and there, the meaning of the text was shaped anew. These differing perspectives were then enfolded into the current text, which a careful diachronic reading can elucidate by sifting through the various strata in the text, linking them with different meanings for the story. Diachronic analysts also presume that one can recover, at least in part, the intentions of the author(s) who added various layers to a text in order to shape further its meaning.

9. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 183–88. Sternberg suggests that such gaps are intentional, for we presume that the author could have done otherwise, but chose not to (p. 184).

author to leave out some pieces of information and add others, sacrificing detail in order to achieve structural goals, thereby leaving the reader to fill these gaps imaginatively.<sup>10</sup> In light of the above, tensions or shifts in point of view will be considered as parts of the communicative design of the story.

(2) *The Recoverability of Authorial Intention.* This study of Judg 9 also assumes the recoverability of authorial intention. Under the influence of New Criticism, some scholars have challenged the recoverability or applicability of authorial intent.<sup>11</sup> However, most biblical interpreters hold to the potential of recovering some form of authorial intention.<sup>12</sup> In many cases, the author of a given piece of biblical literature remains anonymous, as is the case with the book of Judges, or a work may be the product of multiple authors. As a result, it is helpful to speak of the role of an *implied author*. As interpreters read a narrative, they inevitably form some sort of mental picture of the author. The reader constructs this picture from the narrative's portrayal of the characters, the narrator's comments, and the overall plot and design of the story.<sup>13</sup> The mental image of this "personality" behind the text is the implied author. Similarly, the implied reader is the audience presupposed by the text.<sup>14</sup> It is the implied author's message, discerned from the overall narrative of Judg 9, that we will attempt to uncover.

10. Alter (*The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 114–30) describes this phenomenon as the "art of reticence."

11. For an overview of the rise of New Criticism and its impact upon biblical studies, see Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (FCI 3; Grand Rapids: Academie, 1987), 25–27; Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (GBS; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 4–5.

12. Diachronic analysts assume not only the recoverability of the intent of the whole, but also presume to be able to describe how the various accretions over time modified the original intent of the story. For a response to the irrelevance of the author, see E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1967), 1–23; Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning In This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Leicester: Apollon, 1998), 43–97, 201–78.

13. A reader's image of the implied author's values may not always coincide with the true views of the real author. However, this disjunction is largely a modern literary innovation.

14. See the discussion in D. F. Tolmie, *Narratology and Biblical Narratives: A Practical Guide* (Bethesda, Md.: International Scholars Publications, 1999), 6–8; Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 84–85.

The narrator is the author's representative within the story itself.<sup>15</sup> Though there are various manifestations of narratorial presence in a text,<sup>16</sup> the narrator usually carries out three functions in biblical narrative: (1) a directing function, where the narrator makes meta-narrative remarks about the internal organization of the narrative in order to bring out certain relationships or disjunctions; (2) an ideological function, where the narrator voices theological or ideological opinions that summarize or characterize events, people, or places in biblical narrative; (3) a testimonial function, where the narrator indicates his relationship to the narrative by signalling sources or emotional responses to the events in a narrative.<sup>17</sup> An implied author will use the omniscient narrator of a biblical narrative<sup>18</sup> to shape the reader's responses to various events or characters in the narrative through the narrator's evaluation and ordering of the events. Thus, the narrator is a tool of the implied author, echoing the implied author's thoughts, and in this sense is identified with and related to the implied author. Moreover, in biblical literature, the distinction between implied author and narrator is not very great. The narrator is responsible for shaping and sometimes interpreting the story for readers, and in this way often functions in the same manner as the implied author.

Corresponding to the role of the narrator is the narratee. The narratee is the person or group addressed by the narrator. At times, the narratee may be a character within the story, as in the case of Theophilus in Luke 1:3. However, in most narratives, the presence of the narratee is implicit, and only discerned through the narrator's use of deictic particles like "now," "then," "there," or other brackets of frame in order to address his audience.<sup>19</sup> There is no explicit narratee in the Abimelech narrative.

The relationship between the various aspects of a narrative work can be illustrated as follows:<sup>20</sup>

15. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 14.

16. *Ibid.*, 23–43. For example, Bar-Efrat distinguishes between an overt and a covert narrator.

17. Tolmie, *Narratology and Biblical Narratives*, 21–24.

18. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 17, 22.

19. On the role of the narratee, see Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 86–87; Tolmie, *Narratology and Biblical Narratives*, 13–24, *passim*.

20. Adapted from Tolmie (*Narratology and Biblical Narratives*, 6), who adapted this illustration from Seymour Chatman (*Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978], 147).

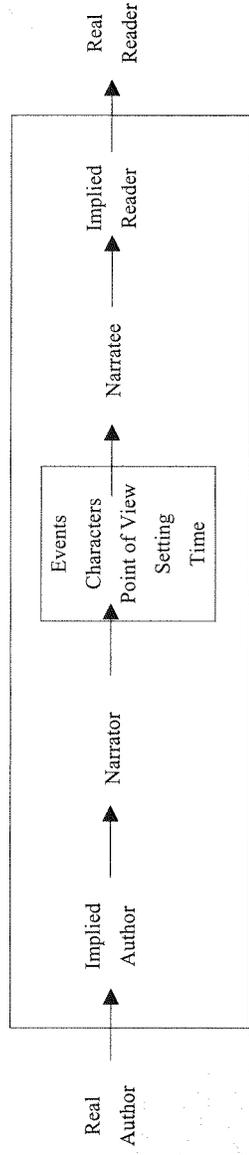


Figure 1.1

The real author and the real reader stand outside the text itself. Both the implied author and implied reader are inferred from the text, while the narrator and narratee (if present) can be easily observed in the text. However, while both narrator and narratee are part of the story world, they are not usually part of the events of the story itself, but external to it, observing or commenting upon it.

This distinction between real author and implied author is a useful concept. Mark Powell points out that the concept of an implied author “provides all that is needed in order to comprehend the literary meaning and impact of the narrative; thus it is possible to understand works that are anonymous.”<sup>21</sup> In this sense, good stories are accessible to all readers—at one level readers can grasp the overarching idea or thematic emphasis of a story without recourse to knowledge about the author.

However, the notion of an implied audience suggests that Powell’s observation is not completely accurate. For a reader to grasp the meaning of a passage beyond a simplistic comprehension of its theme or message, the reader must enter the world of the implied author and audience. The implied author and the implied audience share certain assumptions and knowledge, to which we, as modern readers, are not always privy. For example, the meaning of certain words, phrases, cultural traits, or euphemisms may be shrouded by the mists of time, and can only be illuminated by the use of geographical, lexicographical, or comparative studies. Such information can help the modern reader “join” the implied audience, so that they too “hear” the words of the text as intended for the implied audience. Therefore, this analysis of the Abimelech narrative, while grounded in the text, will also make judicious use of extra-textual resources in order to help elucidate the story world of Judg 9.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, good stories will challenge readers not only to ask about the worlds of the implied author and audience, but also the purpose and intention behind a literary work. Not only that, but good stories also reveal clues as to the values, purposes, and goals of the implied author. Thus, this analysis will not only examine the plot, characters, and events of the Abimelech narrative, but will also ask about its goal and intention. What was the implied author of Judg 9 trying to say? What clues in the

21. Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 5–6.

22. The remarks in this paragraph do not contradict the above-stated intention to read Judg 9 synchronically. Both James Barr (“The Synchronic, the Diachronic and the Historical,” 6–14) and David J. A. Clines (“Beyond Synchronic/Diachronic,” in de Moor, ed., *Synchronic or Diachronic?*, 52–71) conclude that synchronic and diachronic approaches are inextricably linked. Thus, diachronic data from archaeological studies, lexicographical research, or comparative studies can add to our understanding of the story world of Judg 9.

text suggest his goals and intentions? How do the overall literary structure and the artistry of the narrative combine to convey meaning for both the implied audience and modern readers?

### 3. *Reading the Rhetoric of Judges 9*

The second sight line into Judg 9 will be the use of a rhetorical analysis. A rhetorical analysis builds upon a narrative analysis by going beyond an appreciation of how the literary artistry contributes to the message of the story to delve into the various means by which the story persuades its audience of its message.

Historically, the rise of the formal study of rhetorical art began with the Greeks. Consequently, the question rightly arises as to the value and even the legitimacy of examining forms of persuasion that pre-date Greek categories and interests. Moreover, ancient Hebrew does not utilize the word *rhetoric*, nor does it describe its stories in this manner. However, as Carol Lipson and Roberta Binkley rightly point out, absence of the term does not necessarily indicate an absence of the concept.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, though the term “rhetoric” is anachronistic when applied to Hebrew narrative, these narratives clearly aim to persuade their audience, and it is their persuasive means that is our interest here.<sup>24</sup>

The Aristotelian view of rhetoric, which has dominated modern understandings of rhetorical form and method, was based upon a view of reality where relationships between premises were considered valid if they met the requirements of a formal, enthymematic, logic-based system. However, a growing trend over the past half-century has been the recognition of the role of narratives in structuring reality.<sup>25</sup> Narratives help people give meaning to the events in which they take part by placing these events within a “plot” or a series of interconnected stories. Plots display the significance of events by placing these events in relation

23. Carol S. Lipson and Roberta A. Binkley, “Introduction,” in *Rhetoric Before and Beyond the Greeks* (ed. Carol S. Lipson and Roberta A. Binkley; Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 9–10.

24. Dale Patrick and Allen Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation* (JSOTSup 82; Sheffield: Almond, 1990), 31–32, list four cues that suggest the rhetorical character of the Hebrew Scriptures: (1) the narrator construed God’s actions in the world as rhetorical; (2) the authors possibly chose prose because of its amenability to rhetorical forms; (3) direct prescriptions in the text itself about ritual use strongly suggest a rhetorical perspective; (4) rabbinic interpreters read the text in a manner similar to what we call rhetoric.

25. Gerard Hauser, *Introduction to Rhetorical Theory* (2d ed.; Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland, 2002), 185–217.

to one another. Consequently, narratives play a key role in shaping our perceptions and convictions—they carry persuasive force.<sup>26</sup> Gerard Hauser writes,

For stories to exert persuasive force, they must partake of the emplotted accounts that community members actively share. They are an important source of identity and how it is manifested through words and deeds. By developing rhetorical appeals in ways that are sensitive to these elements, we influence how our audience's interests are engaged, emotions aroused, and thoughts channelled. The audience's use of narrative reasoning to make sense of novel situations is the primary way in which this is accomplished.<sup>27</sup>

Consequently, among rhetoricians and literary analysts, there is a growing appreciation of the close relationship between narrative form and rhetorical function.<sup>28</sup>

There is also a recognition in biblical studies that biblical narratives do not merely recount stories from Israel's past in order to record what happened.<sup>29</sup> At times, they specifically call for a response (Josh 24:15), set out wise council from past leaders (Deut 5:1–5), or point out past mistakes that should not be repeated (Judg 6:7–10).

The popularization of a rhetorical approach to biblical literature had its genesis in James Muilenburg's SBL presidential address.<sup>30</sup> Muilenburg himself saw a rhetorical approach to the Bible as an outgrowth or expansion of form criticism. Phyllis Tribble, Muilenburg's student, outlines two distinct, but not incompatible understandings of rhetoric that have grown out of Muilenburg's program: (1) an investigation of the art of composition, which focuses upon the use of artful speech, particularly its structure and style (often connected with the type of close reading of texts described above as a narrative analysis); and (2) the art of persuasion, which focuses on the means and methods used by a writer to persuade his or her audience.<sup>31</sup> The second understanding generally corresponds

26. *Ibid.*, 191. Hauser points out that while Aristotle defined humans as rational animals, contemporary rhetoric has begun to appreciate how humans are more fundamentally story-telling animals.

27. *Ibid.*, 192.

28. See, for example, the work by Michael Kearns, *Rhetorical Narratology* (Lincoln; University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

29. For a brief historical survey of the development of rhetorical methods in biblical studies, see Patricia K. Tull, "Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality," in *To Each Its Own Meaning* (ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes; rev. ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 156–64.

30. James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *JBL* 88 (1969): 1–18.

31. Phyllis Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 32–47, *passim*.

with the approach we will use in the examination of Judg 9, though the two are closely related to each other.<sup>32</sup>

An attempt to define rhetoric or rhetorical criticism is a slippery thing. While different authors define the term differently,<sup>33</sup> the description by Dale Patrick and Allen Scult serves as a good summary of the rhetorical approach to Judg 9 utilized in this study:

The idea that the form or shape of a discourse is the key to how it functions for an audience is basic to rhetorical perspective. But in the rhetorical perspective, function is seen more broadly: It refers to how a discourse is meant to act upon, or affect an audience. Through the shape into which speakers cast their message they tell the audience how they mean it to be engaged and therefore to be understood. Of course, the auditors are free to interpret the language of a discourse in any way they wish, but the speaker or author attempts to constrain that freedom and direct interpretation by giving the audience cues and indicators as to how he or she means the discourse to function for them.<sup>34</sup>

A rhetorical study requires interpreters to enter into the world of the text and to join its implied audience in order to discern how the author persuades his audience to accept his message.<sup>35</sup> It is this emphasis upon the implied audience presupposed by the text that differentiates rhetorical criticism from a reader-response approach.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, such an approach recognizes that the subject under discussion “is intimately related to the *situation* in which persuasion takes place.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Chaim Perelman notes,

32. Hauser (*Introduction to Rhetorical Theory*, 189) intimates the inter-connect-edness of literary artistry and rhetorical function when he says, “Examining a narra-tive’s basic structural features will help us better understand its rhetorical function.”

33. James Comas, “The Question of Defining ‘Rhetoric,’” n.p. (cited December 30, 2010). Online: <http://frank.mtsu.edu/~jcomas/rhetoric/defining.html>.

34. Patrick and Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation*, 15.

35. Throughout this work I will make use of the conventional masculine pro-nouns when referring to the author or implied author. That the author was a female remains, of course, an unlikely possibility.

36. Yehoshua Gitay (“Rhetorical Criticism,” in *To Each Its Own Meaning* [ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1993], 136–37) notes the difference in this way: “Receptionists [*reader response theorists*] focus on the act of reading and the significance of the audience’s imagination and self-interpretation. Rhetoric, however, attempts to bring the audi-ence into agreement with the thinking of the author. Thus the analysis of rhetoric focuses on the text itself, regarding the audience as an element in the deliberate communicative endeavor and not as a subjective commentator.”

37. Robert Cockcroft and Susan M. Cockcroft, *Persuading People: An Intro-duction to Rhetoric* (London: MacMillan, 1992), 5.

The part played by the audience in rhetoric is crucially important, because all argumentation, in aiming to persuade, must be adapted to the audience and, hence based on beliefs accepted by the audience with such conviction that the rest of the discourse can be securely based upon it.<sup>38</sup>

Due to the argumentative focus of rhetorical analysis, rhetorical study also involves a reconstruction of the argumentative situation or the conditions to which a given piece of literature addresses itself.<sup>39</sup> An examination of the various means used by the implied author of Judg 9 to persuade the implied audience of the illegitimacy of Abimelech's rise will then lead us to consider possible argumentative situations that could give rise to such a narrative.

The foundation of the rhetorical methodology to be applied to Judg 9 stems from the "New Rhetoric" developed by Chaim Perelman and others.<sup>40</sup> The New Rhetoric focuses upon informal means of persuading audiences, ones which are not bound to formal rules of induction and deduction, though these types of rules may still apply informally.<sup>41</sup> Perelman explains,

Nonformal argument consists, not of a chain of ideas of which some are derived from others according to accepted rules of inference, but rather of a web formed from all the arguments and all the reasons that combine to achieve the desired result. The purpose of the discourse in general is to bring the audience to the conclusion offered by the orator, starting from premises that they already accept... The argumentative process consists in establishing a link by which acceptance, or adherence, is passed from one element to another, and this end can be reached either by leaving the various elements of the discourse unchanged and associated as they are or by making a dissociation of ideas.<sup>42</sup>

This form of analysis lends itself well to the mode of argumentation used in Hebrew narrative, which persuades not by logical syllogisms but through plot, characterization, and narratorial point of view.

38. Chaim Perelman, *The New Rhetoric and the Humanities: Essays on Rhetoric and Its Applications* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1979), 14.

39. Gitay, "Rhetorical Criticism," 136. It is thus helpful in placing a text within a possible *Sitz im Leben*.

40. See Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (trans. J. Wilkinson and P. Weaver; Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969); Chaim Perelman, *The Realm of Rhetoric* (trans. W. Kluback; Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982); cf. Hauser, *Introduction to Rhetorical Theory*; Cockcroft and Cockcroft, *Persuading People*.

41. See Ronald C. Katz, *The Structure of Ancient Arguments: Rhetoric and Its Near Eastern Origin* (New York: Shapolsky/Steimatzky, 1986), 7.

42. Perelman, *The New Rhetoric and the Humanities*, 18–19.

The informal mode of rhetorical argumentation described by Perelman utilizes persuasive techniques that fall into two broad categories. One method influences the audience's perceptions via the use of associative techniques, such as narrative example and analogy or the recurrence of key words or ideas from other contexts. A second method utilizes an array of dissociative techniques, such as the displacement of conventional patterns, key omissions, drastic negative actions, or a play on perspectives that casts doubt on a character's actions, words, or thoughts.<sup>43</sup>

Perelman's associative technique of argumentation, particularly through analogy in the context of biblical interpretation, requires further discussion here. Many biblical interpreters have noted that biblical narratives often bring to mind other biblical texts for their audience. These associations may be based upon similar topics, themes, or characters, or they may stem from similar vocabulary, style, or characterization. These connections form a web of connotations and associations in which biblical texts are then "heard" by their audience. Patricia Tull explains,

We all approach books (or any text, whether written or oral) filled with presuppositions and associations based upon previous experience, without which a new book would be as indecipherable as the rows of wedged-shaped indentations on an ancient Sumerian table... This property of texts, that is, their inseparability from associations with other texts, is known as "intertextuality." In a general sense, intertextuality simply refers to the interconnections among texts. These connections can be as general and indirect as shared language, or as specific and direct as the footnoted quotation of one text in another.<sup>44</sup>

Intertextuality within the book of Judges evidences itself in various ways, particularly through the use of the introductory paradigm (2:11–19) and the various framework elements surrounding the deliverer cycles. These paradigmatic elements invite the audience to compare and contrast the judges with each other, so that each is evaluated in light of the previous and following judges.<sup>45</sup> Thus, intertextuality is an important part of understanding the book of Judges, and will play a vital role in discerning the message of Judg 9.

As the quote from Tull above suggests, there are multiple approaches to intertextuality. One approach examines the web of interconnections reaching out from a text under consideration from the perspective of the

43. Cf. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 441–81.

44. Tull, "Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality," 164.

45. This approach is particularly evident in J. Cheryl Exum, "The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 410–31.

modern reader.<sup>46</sup> However, our interests lie in examining how the implied audience of Judg 9 may have received the arguments of the Abimelech narrative. The determination of how the implied audience may have “heard” the Abimelech narrative, however, is not an easy task. Despite this, I believe that the implied author does give some clues for his implied audience as to how to understand this story via explicit comments by the narrator, the characterization of individuals and groups, and so on. Thus, the rhetorical analysis will build upon the results of the narrative analysis discussed above.

One particular form of intertextuality is the use of analogy. Analogies are intertextual connections that invite the audience to compare and contrast elements found in two (or more) stories, and then by positive or negative association influence the audience’s view of characters or events in a story. This process is admittedly subjective and can be based on factors such as similar plot, characterization, or semantic choice. Therefore, in order to avoid what Samuel Sandmel has called “parallelomania,”<sup>47</sup> we need to set out some reasonable criteria by which we can judge the intentionality of an analogy. Yairah Amit makes several recommendations that seem helpful: first, interpreters must determine the extent to which analogies are anchored in the text through multiple points of equivalency, especially linguistic parallels and parallels of genre:

The more points of equivalents on the level of the story world, strengthened by linguistic or generic elements, the more reasonable it is to assume that the analogy was intended by the composer and does not represent the creative interpretation of the reader. Conversely, when the analogical elements are limited, and the linguistic and generic supports are absent, it is reasonable to assume that the analogy is accidental or that it expresses the abstract and associative thinking of the interpreter.<sup>48</sup>

Second, interpreters must ask whether the analogical element is integral to the text or whether it is incidental to the narrative. The more vital the

46. Cf. George Aichele and Gary A. Phillips, “Introduction: Exegesis, Eisegesis, Intergesis,” *Semeia* 69–70 (1995): 7–18.

47. Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *JBL* 81 (1962): 1–13. Sandmel defines “parallelomania” as “that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying connection flowing in an inevitable and predetermined direction” (p. 1).

48. Yairah Amit, “The Use of Analogy in the Study of the Book of Judges,” in *Wünschet Jerusalem Frieden: Collected Communications of the XIIth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Jerusalem, 1986* (ed. Matthias Augustin and Klaus-Dietrich Schunck; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988), 388.

analogous element is to the structure of the plot, the greater the likelihood it was intended by the implied author as a persuasive element.<sup>49</sup> To this, we might add a third guideline: the stronger the *pattern* of resemblances that run throughout a given set of texts (not only at isolated spots), the greater the likelihood of its intentionality.<sup>50</sup> When these three recommendations are taken together in relation to the analogies of Judg 9:1–57, they form a viable basis upon which we can evaluate the analogies in Judg 9.

Finally, for the purposes of this study we will restrict the analogical field to the Deuteronomistic History (DH), in part due to the accepted convention of reading the books of the DH in light of each other,<sup>51</sup> and also because it is the primary biblical narrative corpus that deals with the establishment of the monarchy, a key issue in Judg 9. It should also be noted that analogies from within the book of Judges are more likely to be intentional due to macro plot developments or the juxtaposition and/or strategic placement of key ideas within the book. In light of these criteria, the strength of each analogy will need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis in order to judge if it may serve as a viable comparison to Judg 9.

Thus, this study will examine the overt and implicit rhetorical techniques used in Judg 9:1–57 and discuss what type of audience they may presuppose. It will also examine plausible settings for the argumentative situation and audience implied by the concerns discerned in the rhetorical analysis.

#### 4. *Monarchic Context*

The argumentative context presupposed by Judg 9 also reflects a social context in which such a discussion took place. The view advanced here is that the argumentative situation reflected in Judg 9 best fits a monarchic context. The following discussion will explore this view in greater detail, but it is helpful to build a general case for such a situation at the outset to show why such a case could be plausible.

49. Ibid., 389.

50. Cf. Paul R. Noble, “Esau, Tamar, and Joseph: Criteria for Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions,” *VT* 52 (2002): 244–52.

51. While this convention has increasingly been challenged on a number of fronts (e.g. Graeme Auld, “The Deuteronomists and the Former Prophets, or What Makes the Former Prophets Deuteronomistic?,” in *Those Elusive Deuteronomists: The Phenomenon of Pan-Deuteronomism* [ed. Linda S. Shearing and Steven L. McKenzie; JSOTSup 268; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999], 116–26) most scholars still hold to some sense in which Deuteronomy–2 Kings forms a distinct corpus.

While the date of the composition of Judg 9 and the book of Judges remains a matter of continuing debate, some scholars hold that much of Judg 9 stems from the exilic/post-exilic period,<sup>52</sup> or that the whole book was composed in this period.<sup>53</sup> This determination, in part, is influenced by how one views the composition of the DH. However, scholars continue to place the composition of the book (or at least Judg 9) within the period of the monarchy.<sup>54</sup> In addition, Marc Zvi Brettler, Robert

52. Volkmar Fritz, "Abimelech und Sichem in Jdg. 9," *VT* 32 (1982): 144; Veijola, *Das Königtum in der Beurteilung der deuteronomistischen Historiographie*, 111; U. Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Studien zum Richterbuch* (BZAW 192; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), 300–305; Edgar Jans, *Abimelech und sein Königtum: Diachrone und Synchronische Untersuchungen zu Ri 9* (ATSAT 66; St. Ottilien: EOS, 2001), 414–21; Karin Schöpflin, "Jotham's Speech and Fable as Prophetic Commentary on Abimelech's Story: The Genesis of Judges 9," *SJOT* 18 (2004): 3–22.

53. Graeme Auld, "The Deuteronomists Between History and Theology," in *Congress Volume: Oslo, 1998* (ed. A. LeMaire and M. Sæbø; VTSup 80; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 353–67; Janet E. Tollington, "The Book of Judges: The Result of Post-Exilic Exegesis?," in *Intertextuality in Ugarit and Israel* (ed. Johannes C. de Moor; OtSt 40; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 186–96.

54. Frank Moore Cross (*Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973], 274–89) places the bulk of the composition of the DH during the time of Josiah, with a second, lightly edited version arising in the exilic period. Cf. Richard Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup 18; Sheffield: JSOT, 1981), 43; idem, "The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History: The Case is Still Compelling," *JSOT* 29 (2005): 319–37; Marvin A. Sweeney, *King Josiah of Judah: The Lost Messiah of Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 121–22. Yairah Amit (*The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing* [trans. Jonathan Chipman; Biblical Interpretation Series 38; Leiden: Brill, 1999], 368–69) suggests that the composition of the book may fit into the period of the early monarchy, but prefers a Hezekianic date for at least Judg 1–18; cf. also older studies that are still relevant, like those of Robert Boling, *Judges* (AB 6A; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), 165–85, passim; Wolfgang Richter, *Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Richterbuch* (BBB 18; Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1963), 316–17. Cf. also Isabelle de Castelbajac, "Histoire de la redaction de Juges ix: une solution," *VT* 51 (2001): 166–85. Daniel Block (*Judges, Ruth* [NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999], 66–67) similarly proposes a date during the reign of Manasseh, while Trent Butler (*Judges* [WBC 8; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009], lxxii–lxxiv) proposes a date in the early Divided Monarchy; cf. Eli Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest: An Ideology of Leadership in the Gideon, Abimelech and Jephthah Narratives [Judg. 6–12]* [VTSup 106; Leiden: Brill, 2005], 239–48), who dates the ideology of Judg 6–12 to the pre-monarchic period. Others, however, date the book largely to the exilic or post-exilic period; cf. R. Smend ("Das Gesetz und die Völker: Ein Beitrag zur deuteronomistischen Redaktionsgeschichte," in *Probleme biblischer Theologie: Festschrift Gerhard von*

O'Connell, and Marvin Sweeney have presented arguments for a pro-Judahite ideological orientation for the book of Judges, suggesting that the book denigrates northern leaders in the pre-state period in order to develop a positive picture of southern Judahite leaders.<sup>55</sup> As a result, they place the probable composition of the book during the period of the monarchy, though they assign it different dates.<sup>56</sup> This position must however be tempered by the observation that, while Judges does portray Judah in a relatively positive light, it too is not portrayed without its faults.<sup>57</sup> Yet, when considered in light of the implied positive view of the monarchy presented in Judg 17–21, this outlook suggests that, overall, Judges could have served the interests of the monarchy in legitimating its role.

Additionally, F. Greenspahn's observations regarding the phrase "everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (Judg 17:6; 21:25) are suggestive. He points out that "to do right in the eyes of..." is a common positive Deuteronomic (Dtn) evaluation, while its negative use here to describe the anarchy of the pre-monarchic period makes a strong argument for the value of a king.<sup>58</sup> Greenspahn notes how this phrase has several similarities with an expression from the reign of Setnakhte (ca. 1184–1182 B.C.E.) describing the chaos before his accession, as found in Harris Papyrus No. 1, "The land of Egypt had been overthrown with every man being his own standard of right...since they had no leader (*rhrv*) for many years in the times of others."<sup>59</sup> While this exact wording is unique, comparison between current rulers and the "chaos" of their predecessors was a common monarchic legitimation technique in Egypt.<sup>60</sup>

*Rad* [ed. H. W. Wolff; Munich: Kaiser, 1971], 494–509) and W. Dietrich (*Prophetie und Geschichte: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk* [FRLANT 108; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972]).

55. Brettler, "Literature as Politics," 395–418; O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*; Sweeney, "Davidic Polemics in the Book of Judges," 519–25.

56. Sweeney links the book with Josiah (*King Josiah of Judah*, 121–22). Brettler ("Literature as Politics," 417) places its composition any time between the period after Solomon to the period of the Chronicler. O'Connell (*The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 305–42) proposes a date during the United Monarchy.

57. Three thousand men of Judah betray Samson into the hands of the Philistines in Judg 15:11–13. A Levite from Bethlehem in Judah services Micah's illicit cultic installation (Judg 17:7), and Judah fails to conquer some of its allotted territory (Judg 1:19).

58. F. E. Greenspahn, "An Egyptian Parallel to Judg 17:6 and 21:25," *JBL* 101 (1982): 129–30.

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Ibid.*

Thus, though not exactly parallel, the phrase is consistent with monarchic efforts to contrast the advantages of the current ruler over the disadvantages of the previous period.

We may add to this observation another line of argumentation. C. F. Burney was among the first to note the scant evidence for direct Deuteronomistic (Dtr) shaping of the book beyond Judg 2.<sup>61</sup> Walter Beyerlin, in comparing the framework elements of Judges to characteristic Dtr phraseology concluded that only 2:11–19 could rightly be attributed to Dtr.<sup>62</sup> Greenspahn further expanded the circle of Dtr influence to the framing elements in Judg 2, 3, and 10, but again noted that none of the other deliverer stories indicate direct ties to Deuteronomy, and so are older than the portions exhibiting Dtr influence. Greenspahn opines, “Outside chapters ii, iii, and x, there is no firm basis for describing the framework as Deuteronomistic... If so, however, one cannot simply assume that the ideology of these passages conforms to Deuteronomistic teaching.”<sup>63</sup> When Yairah Amit examined the linguistic links between Judges and Deuteronomy using Weinfeld’s invaluable summary of Dtr phraseology,<sup>64</sup> she too found that most of the ideological world of Deuteronomy and its school was concentrated in the opening framework of Judges, and that even this phraseology was not unique to Dtn: “We thus find that, not only are there a limited number of shared subjects with a common denominator in the stylistic realm, but that these are not unique to Deuteronomy or to the literature developed under its influence.”<sup>65</sup> Based upon these factors, Amit dates the editing of the book of Judges (or at least Judg 1–18) to the late eighth century B.C.E. and suggests that the ideology of Judges affected the Dtr stream of literature, rather than being affected by it.<sup>66</sup> Given these considerations, it is

61. C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges* (2d ed.; London: Rivingtons, 1920), xli–xlii.

62. Walter Beyerlin, “Gattung und Herkunft des Rahmens im Richterbuch,” in *Tradition und Situation: Studien zur alttestamentlichen Prophetie, Festschrift A. Weiser* (ed. E. Würthwein and O. Kaiser; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), 1–29.

63. Frederick Greenspahn, “The Theology of the Framework of Judges,” *VT* 36 (1996): 391, 395–96; similarly Robert D. Miller, “Deuteronomistic Theology in the Book of Judges?,” *OTE* 15/2 (2002): 411–16.

64. Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972; repr., Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 320–65.

65. Amit, *The Art of Editing*, 366.

66. *Ibid.*, 367–82. Cf. Boling (*Judges*, 30–31; *idem*, “In Those Days There Was No King in Israel,” in *A Light Unto My Path* [ed. Howard N. Bream, Ralph D. Heim, and Carey A. Moore; Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974], 33–48), who offers a similar timeframe for Judg 3–16, though using a very different methodology.

probable that the deliverer narratives are older than the passages that exhibit Dtr-like language. Furthermore, Judg 9:1–57 does not exhibit any characteristic Dtr language, and so may well stem from an earlier period during the monarchy.

These factors are by no means conclusive. However, they do point towards the viability of exploring a monarchic context for Judg 9.<sup>67</sup>

## 5. The Social Context of Judges 9

### a. Social-Scientific Models

A third sight line by which to view Judg 9 is through the use of a social-scientific analysis. An examination of the argumentative situation presupposed by the rhetoric of Judg 9 points us towards a social context in which such a “discussion” might take place. A social-scientific examination of Judg 9 can aid us in understanding not only the social world described in the text, but also help us to understand better the social world of the implied author.

The application of social-scientific methods to the Bible can take a wide variety of forms. In general, the social-scientific exploration of biblical texts borrows insights and models from social, political-, ethno-anthropology, and macro-sociology, augmented by evidence from archaeology and even other ancient Near Eastern parallels, in order to explain social relationships and structures described in the Bible. Our goal in applying these methods to Judg 9 is to understand better the social world described and implied in the text, and to see more clearly the social connections between the narrative world and the world of the implied

67. We might also supplement these conclusions with some archaeological observations from excavations at ancient Shechem (Tell Balâtah), which suggests that elements of Judg 9 are indeed reflected in the archaeological context of Tell Balâtah. G. E. Wright, followed (more tentatively) by E. F. Campbell, associates the Iron I destruction of Shechem with Abimelech: see G. Ernest Wright, *Shechem: The Biography of a Biblical City* (London: Duckworth, 1965), 78; Edward F. Campbell, *Shechem III: The Stratigraphy and Architecture of Shechem/Tell Balâtah*. Vol. 1, *Text* (Boston: ASOR, 2002), 232, 251. While reinterpreting elements of Wright’s view, L. Stager goes on to suggest that the level of correspondence between Judg 9 and the archaeological context is such that the descriptions of Judg 9 must have been compiled not long after the events described: see Lawrence E. Stager, “The Fortress-Temple at Shechem and the ‘House of El, Lord of the Covenant,’” in *Realia Dei: Essays in Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Edward F. Campbell, Jr. at His Retirement* (ed. P. H. Williams Jr. and T. Hiebert; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 240, 245–46, and “The Shechem Temple Where Abimelech Massacred a Thousand,” *BAR* 29, no. 4 (2003): 68.

audience. Such models can also assist us in examining the social context in which the implied author may have formulated the arguments found in Judg 9.

The social phenomena embedded in Judg 9 may at times be explicitly described in the narrative, but at other times may be part of the social matrix shared by the implied author and the implied audience, and so hidden or blurred for modern interpreters by social, cultural, and temporal distance. By applying models based upon cross-cultural comparisons, social-scientific analysis can open up new lines of inquiry and point towards aspects of the biblical text that have been overlooked due to the interpreter's cultural or temporal distance, or possibly social location.

Social-scientific analysis employs the use of models in order to facilitate comparisons between diverse cultures. In reality, we all use models to aid us in the interpretation of social phenomena, whether consciously or unconsciously.<sup>68</sup> The value of a model is that it can specify interpretive assumptions that may otherwise remain hidden. Moreover, conscious use of a model can simplify diverse variables and cultural data into manageable points of comparison, though this also brings with it a corresponding disadvantage. The selection of some data by definition excludes other points of information, which makes it more difficult to consider other viewpoints or phenomena. Another drawback<sup>69</sup> to using a consciously chosen model is that a model may obscure the role of individuals whose actions contravene expectations and general social patterns.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, the applicability of some models to certain

68. Thomas F. Carney, *The Shape of the Past: Models and Antiquity* (Lawrence, Kans.: Coronado, 1975), 5: "The hard fact is that we do not have the choice of whether we will use models or not. Our choice, rather, lies in deciding whether to use them consciously or unconsciously. If we use them unconsciously they control us, we do not control them."

69. Cf. Niels Peter Lemche, "On the Use of 'System Theory,' 'Macro Theories,' and 'Evolutionistic Thinking' in Modern Old Testament Research and Biblical Archaeology," in *Community, Identity, and Ideology: Social Science Approaches to the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Charles E. Carter and Carol L. Meyers; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 273–86; Gary A. Herion, "The Impact of Modern and Social Science Assumptions on the Reconstruction of Israelite History," in Carter and Meyers, eds., *Community, Identity, and Ideology*, 230–57; Charles E. Carter, "A Discipline in Transition," in Carter and Meyer, eds., *Community, Identity, and Ideology*, 3–36; Paula M. McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel* (LAI; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 25–31.

70. Lemche, "On the Use of 'System Theory,'" 280–81; Herion, "The Impact of Modern and Social Science Assumptions," 236.

aspects of ancient Israelite culture depends upon the level of abstraction used—the greater the level of abstraction in order to obtain comparable data, the greater the danger of misreading social phenomena described in the Bible.<sup>71</sup> Paula McNutt's summary is helpful here,

It is important to keep in mind at every level of the interpretive process that a "type" or "model" is not "real"—they are hypothetical entities. They should be used to analyze the existing data, not as substitutes for evidence in the absence of data. Neither should data that do not mesh with the model be shoved aside or forced to fit the model. In such cases the interpreter should investigate why it is that the data and the model diverge. Models do *not* provide definitive answers.<sup>72</sup>

Thus, the judicious use of social-scientific models and insights justifies their careful application as heuristic tools, which may point us towards new insights and perspectives on the biblical materials related in Judg 9.

b. *Max Weber's Patrimonialism*

In light of the diverse approaches utilized by practitioners of biblical social-scientific analysis and the importance of models in the study of the society of ancient Israel, it is important to spell out the particular approach used in this study. Sociologist Max Weber developed the general model that will be applied to the analysis of the story world of Judg 9. Weber described societies based upon the type of authority governing their social structure and the type of legitimation used to bring order to social relationships. Weber's analysis uses "ideal-types," an attempt to describe the essential features of a social phenomenon by setting it within the analytical framework of an idealized case. A pure ideal-type does not exist because in actuality there are a wide variety of other factors also influencing the phenomenon described. Thus, an ideal-type is an analytical tool accentuating certain aspects of social behaviours.<sup>73</sup>

Weber's use of ideal-types has been questioned by positivists, suggesting that they are not based upon testable generalizations (they are unfalsifiable) and that the decision as to what fits within the parameters of the type is completely subjective. As a result, they are unable to

71. Cyril S. Rodd, "On Applying a Sociological Theory to Biblical Studies," in *Social-Scientific Old Testament Criticism* (ed. David Chalcraft; The Biblical Seminar 47; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 32; cf. McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, 26.

72. McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, 30.

73. Sven Eliaeson, "Max Weber's Methodology: An Ideal-Type," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 36, no. 3 (2000): 250.

produce helpful predictions or explanations,<sup>74</sup> or serve as impartial abstractions.<sup>75</sup> However, the charge of subjectivity may be mitigated in Weber's case by his original historical orientation and his attempt to draw out native understandings of society, combining them with observations drawn from other similar contexts to form an ideal-type.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, the objectivity claimed by empirical methods has increasingly come into question by pointing out that all models reflect to a degree the values of the interpreter and require selectivity in choosing to isolate certain phenomena and in attempting to explain the possible causes of an action.<sup>77</sup> Weber's ideal-types still have currency and applicability because of their utility in explaining social action—the selectivity inherent within an ideal-type allows greater explanatory power for some social phenomena.<sup>78</sup> Thus, Ola Agevall, after surveying the continued currency of Weber's ideal-types, suggests that their relevance lies in their combinatorial nature, in the fact that they can serve as a bridge between inductive and deductive studies.<sup>79</sup>

Weber's approach is based upon observations of human behaviour with relation to others or "social action," which can be described as "a type of behaviour that is oriented to the behaviour of another actor, and to which the actor attaches a meaning."<sup>80</sup> One specific type of social action is domination, "The probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a given group of persons," which implies at least some form of voluntary compliance.<sup>81</sup> However, Weber's

74. See, for example, the critique in David Papineau, "Ideal Types and Empirical Theories," *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 27, no. 2 (1976): 137–46.

75. Peter Breiner, "Ideal-Types as 'Utopias' and Impartial Political Clarification: Weber and Mannheim on Sociological Prudence," in *Max Weber's "Objectivity" Reconsidered* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 89–116.

76. Eliaeson, "Max Weber's Methodology," 250.

77. *Ibid.*, 255; Catherine Brennan, *Max Weber on Power and Social Stratification: An Interpretation and Critique* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), 22–23.

78. Stephen Turner, "The Continued Relevance of Weber's Philosophy of Social Science," *Etica & Politica/Ethics & Politics* 7, no. 2 (2005): 7–8 (cited December 31, 2010). Online [http://www2.units.it/etica/2005\\_2/TURNER.htm](http://www2.units.it/etica/2005_2/TURNER.htm).

79. Ola Agevall, "Thinking About Configurations: Max Weber and Modern Social Science," *Etica & Politica/Ethics & Politics* 7, no. 2 (2005): 9 (cited December 31, 2010). Online: [http://www2.units.it/etica/2005\\_2/AGEVALL.htm](http://www2.units.it/etica/2005_2/AGEVALL.htm).

80. Richard Swedberg, "Social Action," in *The Max Weber Dictionary: Key Words and Central Concepts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 246.

81. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich; trans. Ephraim Fischoff et al.; 2 vols.; Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1978), 212.

definition also implies the capacity for resistance.<sup>82</sup> Consequently, social relationships of domination (or power) require a belief in the legitimacy of that power relationship.<sup>83</sup> However, different types of legitimacy will result in different types of obedience, different types of administrative staffs required to guarantee such power, and different modes by which that power is exercised.<sup>84</sup>

Weber classifies diverse societies based upon the types of legitimation used to under-gird domination or authority.

1. *Legal Authority*—a rationalized belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those who have been elevated to authority based upon those rules to issue commands.
2. *Traditional Authority*—domination based upon an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them.
3. *Charismatic Authority*—where authority rests upon devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns of order revealed or ordained by him.<sup>85</sup>

Weber's three-fold classification of legitimate authority has come under scrutiny as authorities question whether Weber's analytical categories are comprehensive enough,<sup>86</sup> while Craig Matheson has suggested that Weber's bases for legitimacy also needs to be expanded, though

82. J. M. Barbalet, "Power and Resistance," *The British Journal of Sociology* 36 (1985): 531–48.

83. Dennis Wrong (*Power: Its Forms, Bases and Uses* [New York: Harper & Row, 1979], 24–34) differentiates between four different types of power: force, manipulation, persuasion, and authority. Wrong further notes that not all authority is legitimate, differentiating between five types of authority: coercive authority, authority by inducement, legitimate authority, competent authority, and personal authority (pp. 35–62). It is the concept of legitimate authority as a form of power that is our interest here.

84. Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1:212–13.

85. *Ibid.*, 1:215.

86. Martin E. Spencer, "Weber on Legitimate Norms and Authority," *The British Journal of Sociology* 21, no. 2 (1970): 123–34 (129–31). Monica Ciobanu has noted a fourth category which utilizes "negative legitimacy," a situation where authority is upheld despite the absence of consent (though these are very few); see Monica Ciobanu, "Theoretical and Historical Dimensions of the Concept of Political Legitimacy: Lessons from Socialist and Post-Socialist Societies" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Philadelphia, 2005), 6–7 (cited June 18, 2007). Online: [www.allacademic.com/meta/p18984\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p18984_index.html).

his expansions merely specify items largely already subsumed under Weber's three types.<sup>87</sup>

Charismatic authority rests in some personal quality exhibited by a leader, as a result of which others willingly submit to their authority. It exists as long as the ruler endowed with specific quality(ies) continues to exhibit those qualities. Whenever the expression of those qualities (rather than questioning the office or position of power) comes into question for more than a brief period of time, authority is lost. Consequently, charismatic domination is inherently unstable, and its routinization usually involves a shift towards traditional types of legitimation.<sup>88</sup>

Weber's legal authority describes many modern bureaucratic states. Most ancient social power relationships, however, exhibit the characteristics of Weber's traditional mode of authority and legitimation. In this form of authority, power-holders claim legitimacy on the basis of age-old beliefs and traditions where power-holders are obeyed because their authority is rooted in traditions from the past.

One particular type of traditional authority that is helpful for examining Judg 9 is Weber's patrimonial domination. Patrimonial domination is a form of patriarchal domination that has been decentralized and is based upon personal relationships structured along the lines of a patriarchal household, which are sanctioned by tradition.<sup>89</sup>

One form of this type of domination is the patrimonial state, where, just as in the patriarchal household, the fundamental obligation of the subject is to provide for the wishes and needs of the ruler. Tradition legitimates the ruler's position, but at the same time constrains it. Both the administrative apparatus of the state and the military are the personal instruments of the ruler, for personal loyalty, and not abstract fidelity to duty, determines the relationship between the ruler and the ruled.<sup>90</sup> Retainers have no clearly demarcated sphere of competence defined by abstract rules of government, no rationally established hierarchy, no regular system of appointments, nor fixed salaries or technical training

87. Craig Matheson, "Weber and the Classification of Forms of Legitimacy," *The British Journal of Sociology* 38, no. 2 (1987): 206–7. Matheson takes the three aspects of Weber's "traditional authority" and separates them into three distinct bases of legitimacy: the sanctity of tradition, convention, and personal relationship with the power-holder.

88. Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1:247.

89. Weber (*ibid.*, 2:1007) describes this form of authority as "based upon personal relations that are perceived as natural. This belief is rooted in filial piety, in the close and permanent living together of all dependents of the household which results in an external and spiritual 'community of fate.'"

90. *Ibid.*, 2:1006–10.

requirements.<sup>91</sup> The ruler's demands may be legitimized partly in terms of past traditions, which determine the boundaries of his authority, and partly through the ruler's discretion in areas not directly addressed by tradition, which provides a degree of latitude in the exercise of power. A further characteristic is the central ruler's continuous struggle with various local power-holders. These local power-holders compete with the ruler for power by things like attempting to gain immunity from various forms of taxes or demanding that the ruler not interfere with the exercise of patrimonial power. The ruler in turn attempts to curb the local leaders' power by limiting the terms of grants and benefices.<sup>92</sup>

Though Weber first proposed this model many decades ago, it continues to serve as a valuable tool for sociologists. Weber's model of patrimonial authority has also been fruitfully applied to ancient Israel by a number of scholars.<sup>93</sup> The value of Weber's model for our study evidences itself in a number of ways. First, the polity reflected in Judg 9

91. Ibid., 1:226–31.

92. Ibid., 2:1055–59.

93. Lawrence Stager was among the first to apply Weber's patrimonial model to ancient Israel. Stager illustrated the importance of the patriarchal household in ancient Israelite society, showing how each level of society functioned as a series of nested households, culminating with the king as the earthly master over the children of Israel, and Yahweh as their ultimate heavenly master; see Lawrence E. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family," *BASOR* 260 (1985): 1–35; Philip King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (LAI; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 36–38, and "Of Fathers, Kings and the Deity: The Nested Households of Ancient Israel," *BAR* 28, no. 2 (2002): 42–45, 62; Lawrence E. Stager, "The Patrimonial Kingdom of Solomon," in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina* (ed. William Dever and Seymour Gitin; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 63–74; cf. Daniel M. Master, "State Formation Theory and the Kingdom of Ancient Israel," *JNES* 60 (2001): 117–31. Christa Schäfer-Lichtenberger ("Sociological and Biblical Views of the Early State," in *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite State* [ed. Volkmar Fritz and Philip R. Davies; JSOTSup 228; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996], 78–105) combines Weber's patrimonial model with the processual model of early states proposed by Henri Claessen and Peter Skalnik. David Schloen has made the most detailed investigation of the evidence for patrimonialism in the ancient Near East, and suggests that the social structure of ancient Israel from the pre-state period until the period of Assyrian invasion and influence reflects the essential characteristics of Weber's patrimonial model. Thus, even an entire national body can be conceived of as a household, a group of individuals whose social structure reflects the typical Israelite household; see J. David Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* (SAHT 2; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 49–76, 255–357.

differs in size and form from a patrimonial state, but the type of authority and its structure is similar to that found in a patrimonial state<sup>94</sup> (a patrimonial state extends a leader's patriarchal authority by adding a layer of retainers and staff loyal to the king). This then allows for a fundamental continuity in terms of the conception of social relationships, particularly power relationships, between the story world and the world of the implied author and his implied audience, for power in both pre-state and state contexts was legitimated through traditional means, though its specific expression differed in these two contexts. Second, the legitimation of power in Weber's model has a common basis at all levels of society. Social relationships at various levels of society can then be fruitfully compared with each other, not on the basis of extrinsic factors such as social or economic differentiation, but on the basis of shared views of legitimate and illegitimate authority. Thus, the legitimation of Abimelech's authority can be fruitfully compared to that of other kings, though the scope and scale of his "kingdom" may be decidedly different. Third, Weber's model attempts to describe social relationships using concepts that are at home in the biblical milieu,<sup>95</sup> thereby minimizing the level of abstraction for cross-cultural comparisons. Weber's concept of patriarchal domination, with its emphasis upon personal, kin-based relationships is particularly useful as a model in examining Judg 9, for as the narrative analysis will show, the story of Abimelech and the Shechemites places a great deal of emphasis upon the use (and abuse) of kinship relationships in depicting the characters of Judg 9.

However, we must also be cognizant of the drawbacks of Weber's model. First, as it is an ideal-type, we may expect that not every detail in Judg 9 will comport with Weber's model. For example, while the story world relegates the sphere of Abimelech's reign to the area around Shechem, the model cannot easily explain why the narrator refers to the scope of his reign as extending to "Israel" (9:22, 55). Second, Weber's model suggests that the legitimation of authority at various levels of society operates in fundamentally the same fashion. While this is generally true, it does not take full recognition of the fact that there are also some significant differences between the legitimation of patriarchal authority and patrimonial authority. In particular, when applying this

94. Schloen (*The House of the Father*, 64) notes that the use of the house of the father as a fundamental metaphor to describe Israelite society at all its levels undergoes a fundamental shift in the seventh century B.C.E.

95. *Ibid.*, 65: "The patrimonial model takes account of the native understanding of social reality in a way that an alien model derived from medieval European feudalism cannot."

model to ancient Near Eastern kingship, kings require a much greater and more visibly evident degree of sacral legitimation than the head of a household.<sup>96</sup> As a result, sacral legitimation plays a large part in understanding the legitimation (and delegitimation) of Abimelech's reign, though it does not play a large role in Weber's model.<sup>97</sup>

c. *The Dimensions of Legitimacy*

One other key aspect of Weber's model requires further examination and expansion. For Weber, power is legitimate because people *believe* it to be so (on legal, traditional, or charismatic grounds).<sup>98</sup> David Beetham, however, points out that this definition is inadequate. Power is legitimate not only because people believe it to be so, but also because power-holders are successful in convincing their subordinates of the legitimacy of their power. What is more, power is legitimate because it can be justified in terms of people's (pre-existing) beliefs—because it comports with their understanding of reality. Furthermore, Weber's view does not adequately take account of the fact that there are some aspects to legitimacy that are not tied to belief, but to action; legitimacy is conferred not by mental ascent alone, but by ritual and action as well.<sup>99</sup> Thus, Beetham points out that that legitimacy is multi-dimensional.<sup>100</sup>

Beetham builds upon Weber's basic definition, positing that when power is considered legitimate, it reflects the following three component elements:<sup>101</sup> (1) it conforms to established rules (or is acquired and exercised in accordance with established rules); (2) the rules can be justified by reference to beliefs shared by both the dominant and the subordinate; (3) there is evidence of consent by (qualified) subordinates

96. This may be evidenced in the importance of the anointing of kings (1 Sam 9:16; 10:1; 15:1; 16:13; 2 Sam 5:3; 1 Kgs 1:39; 2 Kgs 9:12; 11:12), the prominence of temple building (2 Sam 7; 1 Kgs 6–9), and spirit possession (1 Sam 10:10; 16:13–14), and so on.

97. Weber (*Economy and Society*, 2:1022–25) makes limited reference to the sacral aspects of legitimation through reference to the role of liturgical elements in the maintenance of patrimonial authority.

98. *Ibid.*, 1:213.

99. David Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 9–12.

100. *Ibid.*, 6–10. Beetham adds (p. 21), “In analysing legitimacy into its component elements, I am claiming that these constitute basic criteria for legitimacy in all historical societies, past and present.” However, he also emphasizes that this is only a general framework, and that the specific forms that legitimation takes will also need to be examined in individual societies.

101. *Ibid.*, 16–19.

to the particular power relation.<sup>102</sup> Using this model for assessing elements of legitimate power can then guide our examination of the portrayal of Abimelech's power in Judg 9. The absence of some (or all) of these characteristics points towards a desire on the part of the implied author of Judg 9 to delegitimize Abimelech's reign as "king."

d. *Abimelech as Localized Power-Holder*

Weber's model is helpful for examining the social context described in the story world of Judg 9. However, when we examine the world of the implied author of Judg 9, another social-scientific model can also prove helpful.

The story of Abimelech's rise and fall from power in Shechem is the story of a localized king. The sphere of Abimelech's rule described in Judg 9 does not extend beyond Thebez and Arumah (Judg 9:41, 50), and so the story can be localized around Shechem. This facet of the story allows it to serve as a negative example of what local power-holders can do. Thus, Judg 9 can also be fruitfully viewed through anthropological models on the dynamics of legitimation in early and developing pre-colonial states,<sup>103</sup> with their emphasis upon the prevention of fissioning.<sup>104</sup>

102. *Ibid.*, 71–76.

103. The impetus for the model of the early state as passing through three phases—(1) inchoate state; (2) typical state; and (3) transitional state—comes from the work of Henri Claessen and Peter Skalník: see Henri J. M. Claessen and Peter Skalník, "The Early State: Models and Reality," in *The Early State* (ed. Henri J. M. Claessen and Peter Skalník; *Studies in the Social Sciences* 32; New York: Mouton, 1978), 637–50; *idem*, "Ubi sumus? The Study of the State Conference in Retrospect," in *The Study of the State* (ed. Henri J. M. Claessen and Peter Skalník; *Studies in the Social Sciences* 35; New York: Mouton, 1981), 469–510. Subsequent evaluation of their model, while largely accepting the general classificatory descriptions, has wrestled with the model's Eurocentric views of statehood, the determinism assumed by the model, and a difficulty in taking into account the actions of free individuals, which can greatly influence the process of state formation. Cf. Philip L. Kohl, "State Formation: Useful Concept or Idée Fixe?," in *Power Relations and State Formation* (ed. Thomas C. Patterson and Christine W. Gailey; Salem, Wisc.: Sheffield, 1987), 27–34; Norman Yoffee, "Too Many Chiefs? (or, Safe Texts for the 90s)," in *Archaeological Theory: Who Sets the Agenda?* (ed. Norman Yoffee and Andrew Sherratt; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 60–78; Paul B. Roscoe, "Practice and Political Centralisation: A New Approach to Political Evolution," *Current Anthropologist* 34 (1993): 111–40 (113–15); Peter Skalník, "Ideological and Symbolic Authority: Political Culture in Nanun, Northern Ghana," in *Ideology and the Formation of Early States* (ed. Henri J. M. Claessen and Jarich G. Oosten; *Studies in Human Society* 11; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 84–98. However, the general typology has remained a useful concept for anthropologists. Our focus is

Fissioning is the tendency within political systems to break up and form other similar units in response to conflicts over such resources as land, and disputes over issues such as succession, and so on. It is my contention that Judg 9 represents an argument that could have been used to minimize the fissioning tendencies of local power-holders in an early state context.

Therefore, the frameworks provided by Weber and Beetham, augmented with other applicable social-scientific insights can then help readers view the social realities recorded in Judges within an appropriate context and aid in the interpretation of Judg 9. In addition, a social-scientific analysis can also aid in giving some possible or even plausible answers to such questions as: Whose interests are reflected in Judg 9? And in what sorts of social contexts would those interests arise?

### 6. *Combining the Sight Lines*

Each of the following chapters presents important and inter-related “views” of Judg 9 that need to be read in relation to each other and as building upon each other. A narrative analysis examining the ways the message of the chapter has been structured and communicated then sets the foundation for an examination of its persuasive means. A study of the various ways in which Judg 9 attempts to persuade its implied audience implies a social context in which persuasion takes place. Combining

specifically upon the role of legitimation, where the concern with fissioning seems to resonate well with the realia of modern tribal states in the Middle East. Thus, Khoury and Kostiner, in their study of modern Middle Eastern tribes, have noted that a key aspect of the survival of Middle Eastern states is the ability to legitimize themselves through the formation and management of coalitions. This is very similar to the interests of early states in preventing fissioning, described below. Cf. Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, “Introduction: Tribes and the Complexities of State Formation in the Middle East,” in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (ed. Philip Khoury and Joseph Kostiner; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 19.

104. Ronald Cohen, “State Origins: A Reappraisal,” in Claessen and Skalník, eds., *The Early State*, 35–36, and “Evolution, Fission, and the Early State,” in Claessen and Skalník, eds., *The Study of the State*, 87; Donald V. Kurtz, “The Legitimation of the Aztec State,” in Claessen and Skalník, eds., *The Early State*, 170, 186; idem, “Strategies of Legitimation and the Aztec State,” in *Anthropological Approaches to Political Behavior* (ed. Frank McGlynn and Arthur Tuden; Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 148–49; idem, *Political Anthropology: Paradigms and Power* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 2001), 61; Donald V. Kurtz with Margaret Showman, “The Legitimation of Early Inchoate States,” in Claessen and Skalník, eds., *The Study of the State*, 179.

these different “sight lines” enables us to see how Judg 9 could fit well into a monarchic context. Moreover, the story of Abimelech need not be viewed as anti-monarchic. While Judg 9 is certainly negative, it may yet have served the interests of a centralized monarchy and is thus compatible with the pro-monarchic stance of Judg 17–21. These diverse approaches to Judg 9 allow us to gain a multi-dimensional and vivid picture of the rise and demise of Abimelech son of Jerubbaal from multiple sight lines, as well as a deeper appreciation for its role within the book of Judges in legitimating the interests of a centralized monarchy.