CHAPTER ONE

RHETORICAL CONCERNS OF JUDGES’ TRIBAL–POLITICAL AND DEUTERONOMIC SCHEMATICA

The aim of this and the following chapters is to discern the primary rhetorical purpose of Judges from its formal structure and poetics. It is my main thesis that Judges was designed to enjoin its readers to endorse a divinely appointed Judahite king who, in contrast to foreign kings and previous non-Judahite deliverers, exemplified loyalty to the deuteronomic ideals of expelling foreigners from the land and maintaining intertribal loyalty to YHWH’s covenant, cult and social order. Both the tribal–political agenda (with its concern for the endorsement of Judahite leadership/kingship) and the deuteronomic agenda (with its concern for occupation of the land, intertribal covenant loyalty, cultic order and social justice) feature in almost all the major sections of the book of Judges and reflect the concerns and ideals of its compiler/redactor with respect to his/her purposes for compiling/editing the book. Since my overall aim is to explain the rhetorical purpose of Judges from its formal structure and poetics, it should be emphasized that the present chapter contributes to that aim by attempting to discover and explain the controlling rhetorical concerns and ideals of Judges.

The deuteronomic concerns and ideals are most apparent in the second part of Judges’ double prologue (2:6–3:6), in the double dénouement, where the issues of idolatry (17–18) and social injustice (19–21) loom large, and in the recurring cycle-motif that comprises the framework for the hero stories. However, to varying degrees, these concerns are evident also in the traditional hero stories, which suggests that the stories themselves may have been selected and/or remodelled to accord with Judges’ deuteronomic ideals.

The tribal–political concerns and ideals of Judges are most apparent in the first part of Judges’ double prologue (1:1–2:5), where Judah is portrayed as preeminent among the tribes and the tribe that YHWH favours (1:2), and in the double dénouement (17–18; 19–21), where YHWH again prefers Judah (20:18) and where kingship is implicitly endorsed as the means of attaining the covenant ideals of land occupation, intertribal covenant loyalty, social justice and adherence to the cult (17:6a; 18:1a; 19:1a; 21:25a). These tribal–political concerns and
ideals frame and characterize those of the deliverer stories and double dénouement where Judges portrays the negative effects of the tribes’ covenant compromises, which compromises include their general indolence in expelling foreigners from their land, their lapses into idolatry, their disregard for maintaining the Levites and the national cult, their intertribal fragmentation, and their failure to uphold covenant justice. The combination of the tribal–political portrayals in the framework and deliverer accounts seems to suggest that the ills of tribal Israel could be overcome only by a united endorsement of a divinely appointed Judahite king who, in contrast to foreign kings or previous non-Judahite leaders, modelled loyalty to the ideals of land occupation, intertribal covenant unity, cultic order and social justice as prescribed in YHWH’s covenant.

As to Judges’ idealization of a model of kingship distinct from that of foreigners, it may be averred that the deliverer accounts portray foreign kings in such a way as to make them objects of satire. Much of the satire seems already to have been evident or latent in the traditional stories, but the recontextualization of these stories into Judges’ dual framework heightens their ridicule of foreign kings by their contrast with the framework’s glorification of YHWH. As to Judges’ idealization of a type of leader distinct from that modelled by non-Judahite deliverers of Israel, it may be inferred that the portrayal of premonarchical leadership among the deliverer accounts in Judges serves as a foil to the ideal of kingship to which it is implicitly contrasted in Judges’ double dénouement (17:6a; 18:1a; 19:1a; 21:25a). Indeed, most of the deliverer accounts, but especially the two stories of the double dénouement, show how the foibles of flawed tribal leaders could escalate to tribal or even national levels.

The tribal–political and deuteronomistic concerns and ideals just described are also reflected in two distinct patterns of arrangement, the schemata of which provide a dual framework for the book: one schema presents Israel’s tribes (Judg. 1:1–2:5) and their heroic representatives (3:7–16:31) in the same general order; the other schema presents Judges’ religious–historical cycle-motif (2:11–3:6) as a recurring feature in each of the deliverer accounts (3:7a–16:31). The two schemata, which are introduced separately in the two phases of Judges’ double prologue, are superimposed on the body of Judges. Since it is my purpose to discern the rhetorical motive of the compiler/redactor for superimposing these schemata, I will analyse each separately in order to discern what role it plays in determining Judges’ overall rhetorical strategy. Thus, the following analysis of Judges’ superimposed