CHAPTER THREE

THE RHETORICAL STRATEGY OF JUDGES

There are many aspects of Judges’ double dénouement that lead to unexpected implications for the reader. By the close of Judges’ series of deliverer accounts, the reader has already tacitly made decisions about ideals of leadership in Israel. Then, in the final five chapters, the monarchical and cultic perspectives of its compiler/redactor appear for the first time. Indeed, it makes sense that, if Judges were a work designed to inculcate new political and religious ideals, it would employ subtle strategies of idealization, refraining from making direct references to the cause that it endorses until a new consciousness of the situation had been established. Once one has encountered the explicit monarchicalism of the dénouement sections of Judges, one can see in retrospect both explicit and implicit strategies of monarchical idealization throughout the book. It is chiefly by means of a strategy of entrapment that Judges achieves its implicit rhetorical purpose of idealizing the monarchy of Judah at the expense of that of Benjamin.1

Perhaps the only resolution to the problem of Israel’s covenant disloyalty, repeatedly expressed in the cyclical deuteronomistic schema of Judges, is that implied by the compiler/redactor’s explicit monarchicalism in Judg. 17:6 and 21:25. The monarchical idealization of Judges is a reflex of the compiler/redactor’s implicit negative evaluation of the premonarchical period, which is contrasted to the period of the monarchy.2

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1 This carries with it the implication that the ostensible situation of composition for the book of Judges is that of the rivalry between the houses of David and of Saul at a time when the legitimacy of David’s rule over all Israel was still open to dispute (e.g., the situation portrayed in 2 Sam. 1–4). See the discussion in chapter 4.

A. EXPLICIT MONARCHICALISM IN JUDGES' DOUBLE DÉNOUEMENT

From the references to a premonarchical period in 17:6a; 18:1a; 19:1a; 21:25a, it is evident that Judges was finally compiled/redacted subsequent to the establishment of the monarchy in Israel.3 The fact that


3 The proposal of Talmon (following Qimḥi on Judg. 18:1), that in Judges the titles שלוש and כלאה are essentially synonymous (“Those Days” [1971], vol. 1, pp. 242-43 [Hebrew; English summary]), has been endorsed by L. R. Klein (The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges [JSOTS 68, BLS 14, Sheffield, 1988], pp. 141, 229 n. 2). This leads to the view that Judg. 17:6a; 18:1a; 19:1a and 21:25a do not connote the absence of a ‘king’ but merely of a ‘ruler, leader’. Thus, the concern expressed in this motif would be with apostasy during the leaderless interims of the period of the judges rather than with the absence of the monarchical period to come.

Against Talmon’s equation of שלוש and כלאה in Judges one may list the following observations. First, Gideon refuses to establish hereditary ‘rule’ (לַמֵּשְׁך, 8:22-23). Second, Abimelech is denounced for usurping such ‘rule’ (לַמֵּשְׁך, 9:2) as ‘king’ (לָמוּר, כלאה, 9:6; 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18—not ‘judge’ שלוש), and the Judges compiler/redactor avoids referring to the period of his ‘rule’ using the standard (F1) motif שלוש אָבְּרִימֶשְׁךָ (9:22). Third, a distinction is made in 2 Kgs 23:22 between שלוש and כלאה although outside Judges, reflects a concern to differentiate the periods of the ‘judges’ from those of the ‘kings’ by employing distinct technical terms for their differing roles as rulers (so M. S. Rozenberg, “The סופים in the Bible”, in Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies, vol. 12, Nelson Glueck Memorial Volume [Jerusalem, 1975], p. 82*; cf. Greenspahn, “Egyptian Parallel” [1982], p. 129 n. 5). Rozenberg concluded that, because the titular use of שלוש never appears outside Judges’ framework, it was not original to the traditions that the Judges compiler/redactor used but reflects his/her concern to distinguish the type of leadership inherent in the premonarchical period from that of the monarchy (pp. 82*, 85*; so T. Ishida, “The Leaders of the Tribal Leagues: ‘Israel’ in the Pre-Monarchic Period”, RB 80 [1973], pp. 521, 529-30). Thus, Klein’s citation of Ishida’s and Rozenberg’s studies as though in agreement with Talmon’s equation of שלוש and כלאה may be misleading (Triumph of Irony [1988], p. 229 n. 2). Fourth, most examples of parallelism between שלוש and כלאה (or some other synonym for ‘king’) occur outside the former prophets (i.e., the so-called Deuteronomistic History): (1) שלוש || כלאה: Hos. 7:7; Pss. 2:10; 148:11 (cf. Isa. 33:22); (2) שלוש || המלך: Exod. 2:14; Amos 2:3; Mic. 7:3; Zeph. 3:3; Prov. 8:16; 2 Chron. 1:2; (3) שלוש || המלך and המלך: Hos. 13:10 (cf. Ps. 148:11); (4) שלוש || המלך: Isa. 40:23 (cf. המלך || המלך: Judg. 5:3) (see Ishida, “Leaders” [1973], p. 520). Nor does the Ugaritic parallelism between pt (sometimes synonymous with dyn) and melk or zbl offer any regulation on how שלוש should be understood in Judges and the former prophets (Ishida, “Leaders” [1973], p. 518; cf. J. Blenkinsopp, “Structure and Style in Judges 13-16”, JBL 82 [1963], p. 69 n. 16). Uses of שלוש that are generally taken to mean ‘ruler’ from context alone also occur outside the former prophets (Mic. 4:14; Dan. 9:12). Thus, nowhere in the former prophets can a