

Judges Chapter 6 Part 7

Last week, I used an article from a journal to show that some scholars understand Gideon as a “new” Moses. There are several references to the exodus from Egypt that takes us back to that context. But there are other links.

Moses → Gideon

Links from Moses to Gideon (based on Gregory Wong’s Article, “Gideon: A New Moses” in the book “Reflection and Refraction”)

1. Similar “call” narratives
2. Similar vocabulary
3. Visit by the Angel of the Lord
4. Talking face-to-face to God and surviving

Jacob → Gideon

Link from Jacob to Gideon (personal observation)

1. Visit by the Angel of the Lord
2. Saw God face-to-face and surviving

Tonight we will use another article from a journal that describes rabbinical thought linking Abraham to Gideon. I would then like to take that illustration and link it to Moses and even Jesus.

Abraham→Gideon→Jesus

But first, let us read the pertinent passages that will be referenced by the Jewish rabbi who will make the link from Gideon to Abraham.

Judges 6:25 Now on the same night the Lord said to him, “Take your father’s bull and a

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second bull seven years old, and tear down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it;

Judges 6:26 and build an altar to the Lord your God on the top of this stronghold in an orderly way, and take a second bull and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you shall cut down.”

Judges 6:27 Then Gideon took ten men from his servants and did as the Lord had spoken to him; and because he was too afraid of his father’s household and the men of the city to do it by day, he did it by night.

Judges 6:28 When the people of the city got up early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal had been torn down, and the Asherah which had been beside it had been cut down, and the second bull had been offered on the altar which had been built.

Judges 6:29 So they said to one another, “Who did this thing?” And when they searched and inquired, they said, “Gideon the son of Joash did this thing.”

Judges 6:30 Then the men of the city said to Joash, “Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has torn down the altar of Baal, and

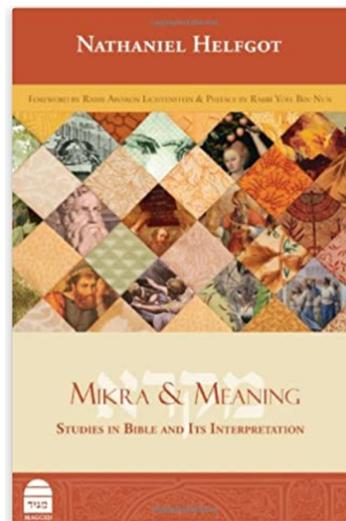
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indeed, he has cut down the Asherah which was beside it.”

Judges 6:31 But Joash said to all who stood against him, “Will you contend for Baal, or will you save him? Whoever will contend for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, since someone has torn down his altar!”

Judges 6:32 Therefore on that day he named Gideon Jerubbaal, that is to say, “Let Baal contend against him,” because he had torn down his altar.

Read the article “Unlocking the Riddle of Abraham the Iconoclast: A Study in the Intertextuality of Peshat and Derash, by Nathaniel Helfgot.



There are some words used which you may not be familiar with:

aggadot = “In general, Aggadah is a compendium of rabbinic texts that incorporates folklore, historical anecdotes, moral exhortations,

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and practical advice in various spheres, from business to medicine.” (Wikipedia)

midrash = biblical exegesis documented by rabbis in the past. It means study or textual interpretation (from Wikipedia).

Tanach = word made from Hebrew letters TNK which is an abbreviation meaning Torah (Pentateuch), Nabim (Prophets) and Kethuvim (Writings). In other words, Tanach is what we call the Old Testament Scriptures.

Here are some summary points on the parallels between Abraham and Gideon from Rabbi Helfgot’s article:

1. “There is a father and son, with the father an adherent in practice (if not in total internal commitment) to the idolatrous worship, and the son acting as the opposition to this worship.
2. “The son destroys the idols/idolatrous altars of his father.
3. “There is a short scene of an attempt to find out who exactly committed the vandalism with the result being that the son is identified.
4. “The son is in harm’s way because of his actions, threatened with imminent death from which he emerges unharmed.
5. “The story contains a mocking comment directed at the idols and their power in light of the destruction that has been visited upon them.”

Rabbi Helfgot asks, “The parallel to Gideon seems clear, yet it still leaves our basic question unanswered Why, of all stories in the Bible, did the rabbis choose to turn to the Gideon narrative in order to extract a scene and re-envision it in the life of Abraham?”

Helfgot already told us, “Earlier we indicated that there is no hint of the smashing of the idols narrative in the entire Abraham cycle in the Torah.”

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And he provides additional points showing parallels between the lives of Abraham and Gideon.

Here is the point I want to pull out of the journal article. Rabbi Helfgot says, “Given the deep and rich connections between the Gideon and Abraham narratives, we are now able to resolve the original dilemma described at the outset of the essay. It would appear that the rabbis of the midrash, in their close reading of the text, recognized the fact that the text of *Judges* clearly presents Gideon in the image of Abraham.”

Abraham→Gideon

Others before me have seen a fabric of Scripture, often referred to in technical journals as intertextuality, among the Old Testament heroes. For the writer of the book of Hebrews, the most important link among these heroes is the demonstration of faith as outlined in Hebrews chapter 11.

For me, an important point is that a “righteous” Israelite destroys idols that were made and worshipped by Israelites who had abandoned God. This theme carries through the “good” or “righteous” kings. Moses was the first leader to destroy an Israelite-made idol, the golden calf.

Moses→Gideon

Now, when there was a kingdom and the kings either allowed worship of idols or worse, promoted the worship of idols, there arose a few good and righteous kings who destroyed the idols. They were in a sense following in the footsteps of Gideon. There is an ironic sense in which Gideon may have considered himself as “king” or ruler.

Judges 8:22 Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, “Rule over us, both you and your son, your son’s son as well, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian!”

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Judges 8:23 But Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you.”

Here Gideon refuses to rule over them. Yet, he had a son, one of many, which he named Abimelech which means, my father is king. We will get to that when we get to chapter 8.

Let me quote just a couple.

1 Kings 15:11 Now Asa did what was right in the sight of the Lord, like his father David.

1 Kings 15:2 He also removed the male cult prostitutes from the land and removed all the idols which his fathers had made.

1 Kings 15:13 And even his mother Maacah, he also removed her from the position of queen mother, because she had made an abominable image as an Asherah; and Asa cut down her abominable image and burned it at the brook Kidron.

2 Kings 18:4a He (Hezekiah) removed the high places and smashed the memorial stones to pieces, and cut down the Asherah.

Moses→Gideon→(good) Kings

Jesus' cleansing of the Temple is reminiscent of Gideon's cleansing by destruction of altar of Baal and replacing it with an altar to Yahweh. Let's read three of the four Temple cleansing accounts. Keep in mind that the Synoptic accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke) recount the cleansing at the

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end of Jesus' ministry. John recounts a temple cleansing at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. There is no destruction of idols. Idolatry in the usual sense was not a problem in Israel at the time of Jesus. Legalism was the problem, and dedication to making money like the rich young ruler.

Mark:

Mark 11:15 Then they *came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple area and began to drive out those who were selling and buying on the temple grounds, and He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves;

Mark 11:16 and He would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple grounds.

Mark 11:17 And He began to teach and say to them, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."

Mark 11:18 And the chief priests and the scribes heard this, and they began seeking how to put Him to death; for they were afraid of Him, because all the crowd was astonished at His teaching.

Luke:

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Luke 19:45 And Jesus entered the temple grounds and began to drive out those who were selling,

Luke 19:46 saying to them, “It is written: ‘And My house will be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers.”

Luke 19:47 And He was teaching daily in the temple; but the chief priests and the scribes and the leading men among the people were trying to put Him to death,

Luke 19:48 and yet they could not find anything that they might do, for all the people were hanging on to every word He said.

John:

John 2:13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

John 2:14 And within the temple grounds He found those who were selling oxen, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables.

John 2:15 And He made a whip of cords, and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables;

John 2:16 and to those who were selling the doves He said, “Take these things away from here; stop making My Father’s house a place of business!”

Let us look at the five points previously listed. But now let us generalize or reword them slightly.

1. “There is a father and son. The idolatry happens in the father’s house or property. Note, in the New Testament, Jesus quotes Jeremiah calling the temple “My house” (Mark 11:17/Luke 19:46) and also His “Father’s House” (John 2:16).
2. “The son destroys the objects of idolatry in his father’s property. Jesus overturns tables and scatters money. This is not exactly the same as Gideon, but then we are not dealing with typical idolatry but with money.
3. “There is a short scene of an attempt to find out who exactly committed the vandalism with the result being that the son is identified. In the New Testament Jesus did not cleanse the temple at night but during daytime in the sight of everyone, so there was no need to find out who did it. They watched Him do it.
4. “The son is in harm’s way because of his actions, threatened with imminent death from which he emerges unharmed. In the New Testament, Mark 11:18/Luke 19:47, the chief priests and scribes began to seek how to put Jesus to death.
5. “The story contains a mocking comment directed at the idols and their power in light of the destruction that has been visited upon them.” In the New Testament, the scene is followed by comments about teaching and bringing people into faith. Jesus subsequent teaching caused many to believe.

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During the time of the kings, idols were brought into the Temple. Now, the focus of attention is money, and animals that had “invaded” the Temple. The Temple was a house of worship. Jesus “cleansed” the Temple. But, he also got people’s attention and taught them and for some, they believed and eventually followed Him. Gideon apparently got people’s attention and got them to follow him into battle.

Abraham→Gideon→(good kings)→Jesus