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*REIMAGING GIDEON'S LEADERSHIP IN LIGHT OF
MAX WEBER'S SOCIOLOGY OF AUTHORITY*

Isaias D'Oleo-Ochoa

Abstract: Despite the methodological usefulness of some recent scholarship, Max Weber's sociology of authority may still prove fruitful for biblical and leadership studies. This paper explores Gideon's judgeship from such a perspective in order to broaden our understanding of the Gideon narrative as depicted in Judges 6-8 and reclaim Gideon's portrayal as a competent and strong leader in spite of his initial state of hesitation and faith struggle.

Keywords: Charisma, Charismatic Leadership, Faith Struggle, Sociology of Religion, Suspension of the Ethical

Introduction

Even though there have been studies that have analyzed the charismatic leadership in the Old Testament specifically during the 50's and 60's of the twentieth century,¹ except for biblical surveys and recent scholarly publications,² the topic has not received much further study and reflection. This is reflected, for example, in leadership studies focusing on the Book of Judges, both in a particular sense—analyzing the leadership development of a major or minor judge—or in a general sense—studying the era of pre-monarchy era in Israel from a leadership perspective.³ The

¹ See, e.g., Zeev Weisman, "Charismatic Leaders in the Era of the Judges," *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 89, no. 3 (1977): 399-411; Abraham Malamat, "Type of Leadership in the Biblical Period," in Charles E. Carter and Carol L. Meyers, eds., *Community, Identity, and Ideology: Social Science Approaches to the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake, In: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 293-310. Please see footnote (4) for other scholars.

² See, e.g., Tamás Czövek, *Three Seasons of Charismatic Leadership: A Literary-Critical and Theological Interpretation of the Narrative of Saul, David and Solomon* (Milton Keynes Waynesboro, GA: Regnum in association with Paternoster, 2006); Arthur J. Bellinzoni, *The Old Testament: An Introduction to Biblical Scholarship* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2009).

³ See, e.g., Elie Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest: An Ideology of Leadership in the Gideon*,

rise of new methodologies in biblical studies, the challenges to Max Weber's sociology of religion, and the focus on kingship in Ancient Israel seem to have contributed to this situation. Zeev Weisman, for instance, analyzed Weber's contributions of charismatic authority in biblical studies and challenged some of the misunderstandings around the type of leadership during the era of the judges. Between 1932 and 1966 there were biblical scholars⁴ who, after studying the Weberian notion of charisma, supported the hypothesis that "the judges in Israel's pre-monarchy era represented this kind of leadership"⁵ The problem arose, among other aspects, regarding "a tendency...developed among some scholars to identify the charismatic leaders with the political system of the era [of the judges]."⁶ Weisman disagreed with that tendency and correctly asserted that "there is no real justification for the application of this term [charismatic leadership] to a political regime or to any consecutive historical system of leadership; it may properly be applied only to individual leaders as such."⁷

More recently there have been scholars, including Daniel I. Block and Susan E. Haddox, who despite not focusing on charismatic authority have indeed contributed to the leadership discussion in biblical studies. Both Block and Haddox have studied the figure of Gideon and his judgeship from different perspectives. Block studies the narrative of Judges 6-9 and offers a brief discussion on how the classical-critical, the contemporary-critical, the traditional pious, and the holistic literary approach have interpreted Gideon's narrative in light of their own methodology. While the first three theories portray Gideon relatively in positive way, the holistic literary approach, however, has been more suspicious of such portrayal. "[I]t is difficult to accept the popular view of Gideon as a man

Abimelech, and Jephthah Narratives (Judges 6-12) (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

⁴ Weisman mentions Albrecth Alt (1966), Martin Noth (1960), W.F. Albright (1942), Martin Buber (1932), and Yehetzel Kaufmann (1962) in "Charismatic Leaders in the Era of the Judges," 399.

⁵ Weisman, "Charismatic Leaders in the Era of the Judges," 399.

⁶ Weisman, "Charismatic Leaders in the Era of the Judges," 399.

⁷ Weisman, "Charismatic Leaders in the Era of the Judges," 401.

of strong and pious devotion,” Block states.⁸ The importance of this essay is that it provides us different frameworks in which the Gideon narrative may be viewed and interpreted. Haddox instead analyzes Gideon’s character development through the lens of modern masculinity studies.⁹ According to her view, “Even after military success, the epithet ‘mighty warrior’ never rests comfortably with the reader’s experience of Gideon. Gideon frankly comes across as a wimp.”¹⁰ While this is a problematic conclusion, Maddox’s analysis, nonetheless, adds significant insight to the leadership discussion of the era of the judges.

Taking into account that far from being homogenous the judgeship of Gideon was under continuous development and social-cultural validation, and that the portrayal of Gideon as a heroic figure is disputed among modern scholars, I will be analyzing in the present paper Gideon’s leadership development inasmuch as he is a complex and “round character”¹¹ in the biblical narrative. By using German sociologist Max Weber’s theory of charismatic authority,¹² this article aims to explore the leadership of Gideon as depicted in Judges 6-8 in order to reclaim Gideon’s portrayal as a competent and strong leader in spite of his initial state of hesitation and faith struggle.

⁸ Daniel I. Block, “Will the Real Gideon Please Stand Up? Narrative Style and Intention in Judges 6-9,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 no. 3 (1997): 362.

⁹ Susan E. Haddox, “The Lord is with You, You Mighty Warrior: The Question of Gideon’s Masculinity,” *Proceedings EGLBS & MWSBL* 30 (2010): 70.

¹⁰ Haddox, “The Lord is With You, You Mighty Warrior,” 71.

¹¹ English novelist and literary critic Edward M. Foster coined the terms “flat” and “round” character. See E.M. Foster, *Aspects of the Novel*, (E. Arnold & Co.: London, 1927). In contrast to round characters, flat characters do not change much through a story because their psychological development is simple and easy to figure out. For example, in the Book of Exodus, Moses is portrayed as a round character in the narrative, while the Pharaoh is portrayed as a flat character.

¹² Max Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth, and C. W. Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 245-252.

I. Max Weber's Concept of Charisma

Weber borrows the concept of charisma from German theologian Rudolf Sohm: "It is to his credit that Rudolf Sohm out the sociological peculiarity of this category of domination-structure for a historically important special case, namely, the historical development of the authority of the early Christian church."¹³ Weber then develops further Sohm's notion of charisma and affirms that "[t]he natural leaders in distress have been holders of specific gifts of the body and spirit; and these gifts have been believed to be supernatural, not accessible to everybody."¹⁴ That specific gift of the body and the spirit is what Weber calls "charisma." Nevertheless, one needs to mention the following: First, the concept of charisma is used in a neutral sense since Weber does not consider there to be a difference between charisma for doing wrong and charisma for doing evil.¹⁵ Second, "charisma" in the Weberian sense should not be confused with the Pauline understanding of it in the New Testament. Rob Muthiah warns us about this possible confusion, and states:

Weber was conscious of the religious connection as he developed his idea of charisma. He knew he was drawing on Pauline language and he appropriated religious phrases to describe charisma. For example, he claimed that charisma "'constitutes a call' in the most emphatic sense of the word, a 'mission' or a 'spiritual duty.'" Yet what Weber meant by charisma has almost no overlap with scriptural uses of charisma, just as the word mouse when applied to a little rodent has almost no overlap of meaning with the word mouse when applied to a piece of computer hardware.¹⁶

Thus, the Weberian concept of charisma is related to authority vouchsafed to the leader, where such authority is validated and legitimized by the leader's disciples and followers. Besides, Weber claims that charisma is

¹³ Weber, "The Sociology of Charismatic Authority," 246.

¹⁴ Weber, "The Sociology of Charismatic Authority," 245.

¹⁵ Weber, "The Sociology of Charismatic Authority," 246.

¹⁶ Robert Muthiah, "Charismatic Leadership in the Church: What the Apostle Paul Has to Say to Max Weber," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 9, no. 2 (2010): 21.

based on “the authority of the extraordinary and personal gift of grace.”¹⁷ Otherwise, charisma is not based on the leader’s personal traits, but on the faith of the people in the leader and the dialectical relationship between him and his followers. It must be emphasized that when one speaks of the Weberian charisma, there is a close relation with distress and routine: the charismatic leader usually emerges in times of distress, and his charismatic structure is out of the daily routine.

II. How to Identify the Charismatic Leader?

Weber speaks of three types of dominion-structures: rational-legal, charismatic, and traditional. Charismatic leadership is the one that is more relevant in biblical studies because it is mainly associated with personal leadership and patriarchal structures in the Ancient Near Eastern societies. In his essay “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” Weber proposes a series of components that describes the charisma-holder. The first one has to do with charismatic qualification. Weber remarks, “[T]he ‘natural leaders’—in times of psychic, physical, economic, ethical, religious, political distress—have been neither officeholders nor incumbents of an ‘occupation’ The natural leaders in distress have been holders of specific gifts of the body and spirit.”¹⁸ The disciples and followers of the charismatic leader must have faith in the unique divine calling of their leader, inasmuch as “the idea of God has already been clearly conceived, by virtue of the divine mission lying therein.”¹⁹ As a result, his disciples and followers, by virtue of his mission (and not because of his personal traits), validate the charismatic leader.

The second feature of the charisma-holder has to do with the lack of accountability or any agency of control. That is, the charismatic leader is not accountable to any regulating office or institution, except his “only inner determination and inner restraint.”²⁰ This is so, for “[t]he holder of charisma seizes the task that is adequate for him and demands obedience

¹⁷ Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, 79.

¹⁸ Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 245.

¹⁹ Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 246.

²⁰ Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 246.

and a following by virtue of his mission. His success determines whether he finds them.”²¹ Because of the calling of the charismatic leader is believed to be divine in the eyes of his followers, the charisma-holder does not need the people to grant him a ruling right. On the contrary, that right is derived, not from the people’s will, but from a divine source. In that respect, Weber explains, “[I]t is the duty of those to whom he addresses his mission to recognize him as their charismatically qualified leader.”²²

The third characteristic of the charisma-holder is his particularized dominion and leadership. This means that the mission of the charismatic leader is not universal, but delimited in several aspects, as Weber declares, “in meaning and in content the mission [of the charismatic leader] may be addressed to a group of men who are delimited locally, ethnically, socially, politically, occupationally, or in some other way.”²³

The fourth component that characterizes the charismatic leader is his rejection of economic motives. The charisma-holder rejects any undignified source of income from which he may benefit himself. Weber notes, “But charisma, and this is decisive, always rejects as undignified any pecuniary gain that is methodical and rational. In general, charisma rejects all rational economic conduit.”²⁴ There are exceptions to this, however, such as the gain of a mission by warrior leaders.²⁵

The last but not least element of the charismatic leader is that he remains outside of the institutionalized routine. Weber states, “‘Pure’ charisma is contrary to all patriarchal domination...by its very nature it is not an ‘institutional’ and permanent structure, but rather, where its ‘pure’ type is at work, it is the very opposite of the institutionally permanent.”²⁶

²¹ Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 246.

²² Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 247.

²³ Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 247.

²⁴ Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 247.

²⁵ Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 247.

²⁶ Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 248.

The charisma-holder knows that his dominion is in virtue of his mission, and that his charisma is “specifically unstable.”²⁷ That is, charisma authority, by being mainly dynamic, is not a permanent dominion-structure inasmuch as “charisma does not know any ‘legitimacy’ other than that flowing from personal strength, that is, one which is constantly being proved.”²⁸ For that reason it is that Weber also writes, “Charismatic dominion means a rejection of all ties to any external order in favor of the exclusive glorification of the genuine mentality of the prophet or hero.”²⁹

III. The Context and Content of Judges 6-8

The Book of Judges narrates the story of the judges—individuals who God chose to deliver Israel from their enemies in the pre-monarchy era. The people of Israel are portrayed as a community that is in the process of consolidation, where there is no king established. They are also portrayed as rebellious and idolatrous, doing always what was evil. The people of Israel experience the divine punishment, repent from their sins, and God saves them. In short, it is a common cycle with which every judge had to deal. Hence God rises up, calls, and prepares the judges in order that they could serve his purposes. This is also the case with Gideon son of Joash the Abiezrite, usually recognized as the fifth judge. Throughout chapters 6-8 of the Book of Judges, one comes to see the challenges that Gideon has and how he responds to them. The Gideon narrative begins with a brief context that is narrated in 6:1-10. The people of Israel have done evil again and have been under a frantic oppression of the Midianites for seven years. During this oppression, the people of Israel cry to the Lord and he sends a prophet who tells them the reasons of why they are suffering severely.

Regarding the content of Judges 6-8, the passage may be divided in the following sections: a) Judges 6:1-10, Brief context, b) Judges 6:11-24, Gideon’s calling and commissioning, c) Judges 6:25-32, Gideon is commanded to destroy his father’s altar, d) Judges 6:33-35, The Spirit comes over Gideon and he calls people to arms, e) Judges 6:36-40, Gideon

²⁷ Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 248.

²⁸ Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 248.

²⁹ Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 250.

asks for two signs: The fleece and dew, f) Judges 7:1-25, Gideon defeats the Midianite camp, g) Judges 8:1-3, Gideon's contempt, h) Judges 8:4-21, Zebah and Zalmuna, i) Judges 8:22-27, Gideon asks for gold to make an ephod, and j) Judges 8:28-33, Death of Gideon.

IV. Reimagining Gideon's Leadership and Authority

Before discussing Gideon's leadership development, it should be noted that one of the main issues that arises when one analyses the leadership of the judges is that this is a complicated area in biblical studies. First, the judges are not kings, officials, representatives of any local authority, or elected by the people. On the contrary, they are common people whom God rises up out of their communities to carry out particular tasks, most of them to battle against ferocious enemies. Second, the corpus available from the biblical text is limited. And as if these limitations were not enough, one may add a third one: "the complicated literary criticism of these sources."³⁰

The account of Gideon's commissioning is narrated in 6:11-40. While Gideon is threshing wheat in a winepress because of the fear of the Midianites, the angel of the Lord appears to Gideon, and greets him saying: "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior!" (6:12).³¹ We essentially may interpret this greeting at least in two different ways: one that is *descriptive*, where the angel of the Lord describes Gideon's past and current social status; and the second one that is *annunciative*, where the angel of the Lord gives a brief statement of Gideon's calling to let him know that he has been chosen. This second option seems to fit better in Gideon's story.

4.1 Gideon: A Flawed Hero?

One of the aspects we observe from the Gideon narrative is that God does not choose an established leader to carry out his purposes for delivering the people of Israel from the Midianites, but an anxious and fearful farmer. This opens the door, however, to find a diversity of

³⁰ Abraham Malamat, "The War of Gideon and Midian: A Military Approach," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 85 (1953): 61.

³¹ All Scripture citations are taken from the New International Version.

interpretations when one, for instance, studies Gideon's leadership development. Because of those interpretations, there is little agreement between scholars regarding the portrayal of Gideon as a leader. While, for some, Gideon is a courageous and strong biblical figure; for others, he is just a flawed hero, someone who has weakness in character. For example, J. Paul Tanner states, "Certainly Gideon was good news for Israel in that he effected the needed deliverance from Midian (and did act valiantly and nobly at several points in the story), but he struggled to believe God and was flawed in character."³² In reply to that argument, I argue that Gideon is not a flawed leader despite his initial lack of self-assurance and faith struggle because, by virtue of his divine vocation, he progressively moves away from his state of hesitation and fear. In contrast to the flawed hero, Gideon's reputation as a leader and warlord increases. Furthermore, leadership in Gideon's cultural context is not measured by possessing a particular series of skills, such as assertiveness, for instance, but measured by the fulfillment of the leader's mission, usually perceived as a divine task. And while developing his mission, the leader's character nurtures and grows. This is confirmed by the fact that the people of Israel continuously offer their devotion to Gideon by recognizing not only his charisma but also his personal strength. Such devotion, Weber claims, means, "that the leader is personally recognized as the innerly 'called' leader of men. Men do not obey him by virtue of tradition or statue, but because they believe in him."³³

4.2 Gideon's Collective Fear

Now the psychological state of Gideon may be also disputed. The question that arises is whether the biblical text offers any sign of an eventual incident that has caused Gideon experience a great distress and has made him struggle internally so hard. If not, what is the source of Gideon's struggle then? It is not easy trying to answer these questions, yet the simplest answers would be a 'no' for the first one, and a 'lack of faith' for the second one. I argue that the response to both questions needs more elaboration beyond this. Due to the severe oppression of the Midianites,

³² J. Paul Tanner, "The Gideon Narrative as the Focal Point of Judges," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 49 no. 594 (1992): 154.

³³ Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 79.

Gideon seems to experience a great fear that has led him to a state of hopelessness and abandonment. God seems, for Gideon, to have forgotten his people by letting the Midianite oppression happen. This information is significant when analyzing Gideon's life story because his fear seems to be a reflection of a state of despair and distress. It must be emphasized that Gideon is not the only one who seems to experience this fear; verse 7:3 shows that twenty-two thousand men leave Gideon as they tremble with panic after being recruited for war. This lets us claim that the distress experienced by the people of Israel for seven years because of the oppression of the Midianite has become part of the "collective consciousness."³⁴ Thus in this section, Gideon's fear is not the result of a flawed character, but he experiences this collective fear along with the rest of the oppressed people.³⁵ Gideon's response to the angel's annunciation supports this line of reasoning: "Pardon me, my lord...But if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about...? But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian" (6:13).³⁶ Having the divine calling on one side and the distress of the Midianite oppression on the other side, Gideon questions and rationalizes his divine calling and commissioning. He says, "But how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh and I am the least in my family?"³⁷ God assures Gideon that he "will strike down all Midianites, leaving none alive" (6:16). Regardless of God's assurance, Gideon, out of his fear of the Midianites, hesitates and asks for a sign of confirmation. God grants it and consumes the meat and bread with fire on a rock.

³⁴ The term was coined by Emile Durkheim in 1893. See Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*. ed. Steven Lukes (New York: Free Press, 2014), 39. Collective consciousness refers to the entire shared set of beliefs and values in a society.

³⁵ It might also show that Gideon, by that time, lacks some life experience.

³⁶ Considering the socio-cultural context where he is living, Gideon perhaps did not even know about the prophet's message given in 6:7-10, as he was the youngest in his family, and probably was ignored. See I Samuel 16:1-13 when David, as the youngest son of Jesse of Bethlehem, is ignored and was not invited to Samuel's convocation. Only David's father and his older brothers attended.

³⁷ Haddox suggests that Gideon here "minimizes his status and his power" before God. See Haddox, "The Lord is With You, You Mighty Warrior," 79.

4.3 Gideon and the Suspension of the Ethical

The next section is found in 6:25-32 where it is narrated the episode of God addressing Gideon in dreams. God commands him to take two bulls, the second bull from his father's herd and the seven-year-old one, tear down his father's Baal altar, cut down the Asherah pole, and offer a burnt offering.³⁸ This task resembles in part the instructions given to the people of Israel: "Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains, on the hills and under every spreading tree, where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places."³⁹ Because Gideon does not escape from his obligation of not violating the Law as a participant of the covenant, Gideon obeys the Lord and does as he is commanded, but he does it by night because he was afraid of his father and the townspeople.⁴⁰ He seems to fear that he probably would be violating the ethical norms of his society. The complexity of such task leaves no other option than rethinking this episode in Gideon's life story as a divine test. Gideon is afraid and there is a good reason for that: May Gideon go against his own household taking the bulls, sacrificing them, and destroying his father's idols without any consequences? On one hand, if Gideon obeys, he shows that he is courageous and has faith, but breaks his society's ethical norms by dishonoring his household and stealing the bulls. On the other hand, if he does not act according to the divine command, he also sins for not being obedient to the voice of the Lord, and shows that he does not have faith at all. The problem does not have a solution in the ethical. Consequently, one should conclude that Gideon's faith is being tested. He must act out of faith instead of fear to complete the task successfully. Once the test is finished and completed, Gideon's faith grows. This also shows that according to the nature of the test given to Gideon, his performance of the task by night is in some way

³⁸ By offering this, Gideon proves his faith.

³⁹ Deut. 12:2-3.

⁴⁰ I differentiate between Gideon's moral fear in this context where he avoids offending his father and the townspeople based on the societal norms of his time from the collective fear he experiences at the beginning of the narrative where the fear has led him to a state of despair.

insignificant: What God wants is that Gideon may enter into another state—that he moves away from fear towards faith, and not simply that he shows he is capable or not of doing a task in a particular moment. Notwithstanding his previous fear and anxiety, Gideon passes the divine test by taking courage in faith that God is with him. In fact, this narrative in 6:25-32 resembles Abraham's test of sacrificing his son Isaac in Gen. 22. In both cases, Kierkegaard's notion of the teleological suspension of the ethical is present. Both Abraham and Gideon's actions are ethically wrong, but religiously right.⁴¹ In Abraham's case, the decision of sacrificing Isaac is not a result of human thinking, but a divine command. Abraham obeys despite the serious implications of the action given—committing murder. He proves his faith. In Gideon's case, he suspends the ethical when he obeys the Lord. In doing so, Gideon goes against his own family by dishonoring them publically and damaging the property of his father. The act is itself a very risky one considering the society in which Gideon was living. The consequence of such doing is death. This is what the narrator shows in 6:30 when tells us that the townspeople demanded Gideon's death. Gideon here proves his faith. This episode is important because the Spirit has not covered Gideon yet. Aside from the consequences, Gideon obeys the Lord, and as an outcome, the Lord delivers him from dying in the hands of the people by encouraging Gideon's father to defend him vigorously: "But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, 'Are you going to plead Baal's cause? Are you trying to save him?...If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar'" (6:31). As one may observe, this episode demonstrates that not only Gideon passes the divine test, but also that he has started his spiritual journey by moving away from fear towards faith. It should be noted that it is not coincidence that the narrator starts with the covering of Gideon by the Spirit in the next section.

⁴¹ The Danish theologian and philosopher Søren Kierkegaard developed the concept of the "teleological suspension of the ethical" in 1843. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, tr. Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 83-95. In this work, Kierkegaard claims that Abraham acts in the realm of the religious and not in the ethical, and for that reason, Abraham's decision of sacrificing his son is religiously right while ethically wrong.

4.4 Gideon's Emergence as Charismatic Leader

In 6:33-35 the narrator recounts the episode where the Spirit of the Lord comes over Gideon, and he calls his people to arms to fight against the Midianite army. The covering on Gideon by the Spirit marks the start of Gideon's charismatic leadership. In verse 6:35 one also sees Weber's first characteristic of charisma—the divine qualification of the leader. Gideon, by calling to arms, demonstrates that he has strengthened his faith and is willing to continue his journey of faith: "...and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him" (6:33).

The section 6:36-40 about Gideon asking for two more signs (the dew and the wool fleece) after the covering of the Spirit may be narratively misplaced as Haddox, following J. A. Soggin, highlights: "[It] makes little sense to have the request for a sign immediately following Gideon's possession of the Spirit ... There are a number of textual difficulties in this passage."⁴² The implications of this would be relocating the section 6:36-40 in a better narrative context, probably between verse 6:24 and 6:25. Thus, one may have three signs asked by Gideon to confirm his commissioning before the covering of the Spirit. As Gideon asks for a third sign from God, Gideon's faith is tested as he has been asked to destroy his father's idols. With that test, God brings the dialectical process to a closure: Gideon must have faith and stop his ambivalence. There is no sense locating the sign of the fleece and dew after the covering of the Spirit where the Lord vouchsafes Gideon with charismatic authority, or even after the destruction of his father's idols where Gideon proves his faith by obeying the Lord despite of the consequences.⁴³ Furthermore, the second element of charismatic leadership is also seen here when the Spirit covers Gideon and he emerges as a charismatic leader without establishing any accountability. Yet the role of the people is validating Gideon's leadership, this role is not about choosing him as in a democracy or making

⁴² Haddox, "The Lord is With You, You Mighty Warrior," 80.

⁴³ It is important to mention that the calling (commissioning) of Gideon and his emergence (establishment) as a charismatic leader are two different events, but related and inseparable. We should not confuse both, however. Before the covering of the Spirit, although Gideon has a calling, there is no sense discussing about Gideon's leadership, since what was required of him was to have courage and accept his calling in faith, and not exercise any kind of dominion.

him accountable to the people, however. Gideon, as a charismatic leader, does not know of any human agency of control, except his own restraint.

4.5 Gideon's Struggle with Faith

The narrator in 7:1-25 describes about how Gideon defeats the Midianite army. The context of this story is found in 6:33-35 when Gideon calls the Abiezrites to arms. One notes that Gideon summons the people to follow him in virtue of his charismatic authority, and sends messengers via Manasseh to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. Here one also sees that the mission of Gideon is delimited at least ethnically and socially, as Weber speaks of the particularized leadership and dominion of the charisma-holder. For example, Gideon sends his message not to all the people of Israel, but to specific tribes, probably those that were more affected by the Midianite oppression. Once Gideon achieves his goal of gathering an army of thirty-two thousand men for the confrontation, the Lord talks to Gideon and tells him he would not deliver the victory against the Midianite camp with such an amount of people due to the fact that the people of Israel would think that their own strength had saved them (7:2). For that reason, Gideon announces that anyone who fears may be back home. The surprising fact is that twenty-two thousand men leave Gideon. The Lord talks to Gideon again and tells him that there were still many men. In this context, Gideon is commanded to separate men in two groups and take them to drink water: those who lap the water with their tongues would stay. The result was that nine thousand seven hundred men went home back. Thus, Gideon stays only with three hundred men, probably the weakest ones.

Tanner, commenting this particular episode, writes: "The reduction of Gideon's army is familiar story often told from the perspective of emphasizing God's ability to deliver whether by many or by few. While this is true, such an explanation falls short of doing justice in this context. The context is dealing with a struggle within Gideon himself."⁴⁴ In this case, I agree with Tanner's interpretation of the episode. Without Gideon asking, the Lord summons Gideon that if he is afraid to attack, he should go with his servant Purah and listen to what the Midianite guards were saying (7:10). Notwithstanding the other times where Gideon was afraid, this time he has been covered by the Spirit, so that Gideon is expected to

⁴⁴ Tanner, "The Gideon Narrative as the Focal Point of Judges," 157.

obey without any hesitation. Since he does not ask for another sign, one observes that in spite of his courage, Gideon struggles with his faith. In the end, Gideon goes to the Midianite camp with his servant, and after hearing a Midianite guard recounting the dream he had about a loaf of bread coming to the camp and his interpretation, Gideon is encouraged and worships the Lord due to the fact that the guards identify the loaf of bread with him. This particular episode shows us that Gideon's main issue was his struggling with faith. During all this process, Gideon's faith not only has been challenged and tested, but has also grown and been strengthened. As Weber notes, "[t]he charismatic leader gains and maintains authority solely by proving his strength in life...if he wants to be a war lord, he must perform heroic deeds."⁴⁵ And it is this what one notices here: Gideon, as a charisma-holder, takes courage and in faith calls out his men to attack. This is narrated in 7:15-21. The narrator recounts in 7:22 that after Gideon's men blew their trumpets, the Lord causes the Midianite to attack each other. This should not be interpreted, nonetheless, in the sense that the whole Midianite army died because of their confusion. In fact, fifteen thousand men do not die but stay with their kings. Thus, the text suggests that Gideon and his men must have courage and fight against them in order to capture their enemies. This is, therefore, the beginning of the combat and not the end. Because many of the Midianites were running away, the people of Israel have to run after them to capture them. Though the narrator does not tell us directly that Gideon was fighting, it would be a mistake to assume he was not. One observes that without a courageous Gideon leading the fight, the victory that the Lord granted had not been possible at all. His faith also makes the Israelites hold the victory. Again, Gideon proves his strength and courage by virtue of his charismatic authority.

In 8:1-3, Gideon's leadership is challenged by the Ephraimites. The Ephraimites ask Gideon why they were not invited to fight Midian. The narrator informs us that the Ephraimites challenge Gideon vigorously and resent him. What one sees here is not simply a discussion between Gideon and the Ephraimites, but a power struggle. By minimizing his power and his tribe's achievements, Gideon proves himself worthy by making the resentment subside. This episode is significant because the weaker Gideon's character is, the less probability he is willing to minimize his power.

⁴⁵ Weber, "The Sociology of Charismatic Authority," 249.

4.6 Gideon's Vengeance

In 8:4-21 the narrator tells us about the pursuing of Zebah and Zalmuna, kings of Midian. Gideon was pursuing them, and after crossing the Jordan, he and his men got exhausted. Gideon, for that reason, asks for bread from the elders of Sukkoth. However, they refuse to give it to him. The group also goes to another city, Peniel, and asks the same request, and the elders there also refuse to give him bread. Gideon replies them that after he returns in triumph he will tear down their tower. Weisman, pointing out the unusual response by the elders, claims:

There is no certain knowledge as to the ethnic and political identity of these two groups. However, provided that they did belong to the Israelite population, two observations may be made: firstly, that the elders formed the governing body as far as decision-making was concerned, and secondly, that they represented (at least in the historical account) the extreme local, separatist approach which ran counter to the spirit of inter-tribal solidarity put forward by the judge-saviours.⁴⁶

It is worth noting that the lack of recognition of Gideon's judgeship from the elders does not detract from his charisma. In view of Weber's theory, one may claim that by virtue of the divine authority vouchsafed to Gideon, it is the people's duty to recognize him as being called by God. It is in this aspect that the elders of Sukkoth and Peniel fail, since their decision of not supporting Gideon's mission by refusing his request is religiously evil. In that respect, the destruction of the towers and the punishment of the elders of Sukkoth and Peniel, though ethically wrong, may be religiously right.

A similar situation happens with the killing of Zebah and Zalmuna regarding Gideon's vengeance of the blood of his own brothers. Gideon's courageous character is seen once again. The fact that in the end Gideon indeed kills the kings of Midian and takes the ornaments of their camels' necks is a proof that his previous command—that his firstborn Jether may kill the kings—is not based on a lack of courage and prowess. On the contrary, by Gideon killing the kings, he not only proves his character strength as a warlord and leader, but he also fulfills his religious obligation. As John Marshall Lang correctly states, Gideon's action of killing the

⁴⁶ Weisman, "Charismatic Leaders in the Era of the Judges," 404.

murderers of his brothers is “according to the notions of the period, a duty demanded of him.”⁴⁷ Though controversial, it seems that Gideon has a double right to kill the kings: as a warlord where he kills his enemies in virtue of his mission, and as a family-blood avenger.⁴⁸

4.7 Resolution of the Gideon Narrative

The resolution of the Gideon narrative is found in 8:22-27 where the people of Israel ask Gideon to rule over them, and where also Gideon requests gold from the people to make an ephod. In this section one comes to see the last two elements that characterize the charisma-holder: his remaining outside of the institutionalized routine and his rejection of any undignified pecuniary gain. In 8:22-23 Gideon is asked to rule over the people of Israel as a king because he had saved them from the Midianites. But Gideon rejects the offer by replying that only the Lord will rule over them. Although Weber considers kingship as part of the development and evolution of political charisma inasmuch as “the king is everywhere mainly a warlord,”⁴⁹ the charismatic authority that holds the warlord can be stable or not, depending of the state of affairs: whether there is peace (unstable) or a chronic state (permanent).⁵⁰ In Gideon’s case, his charisma is active while the fight against the Midianites lasts. As soon as the war ends and the victory is granted, Gideon’s charismatic authority becomes unstable. In fact, it remains that way throughout the biblical text. Thus, when Gideon rejects the kingship, on one hand, he is basically rejecting a patriarchal domination based on his leadership and achievements; as a charisma-holder, he knows that the source of his dominion is God. On the other hand, by rejecting the kingship, Gideon may be trying to glorify his heroic figure.

Concerning the economic motives, despite Gideon surprisingly requesting a gold earring from each person, Weber’s theory of charismatic

⁴⁷ John Marshall Lang, *Gideon and the Judges: A Study Historical and Practical* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1890), 165.

⁴⁸ Cf. Gen. 9:6; Jos. 8:24-28.

⁴⁹ Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 251.

⁵⁰ Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 252.

leadership still holds. The charisma-holder rejects not all gain, but that one which is undignified, methodical, and rational “in the sense of economic exploitation by the making of a deal.”⁵¹ The purpose of Gideon asking for the gold earring is not based on an ulterior motive to earn pecuniary gain as a source of income.⁵² This is reflected in the biblical narrative when Gideon does not make a deal with his followers, but asks for donations of gold. The response of the people of offering gladly their gold earrings supports this interpretation of the facts. Even in the presence of an eventual tension, Weber’s theory still holds in this narrative, as Weber argues, “[i]n the case of charismatic warrior heroes, booty represents one of the ends as well as the material means of the mission.”⁵³

As an additional comment, the last section found in 8:28-33 presents a series of textual and narrative issues. Except for the new information added in 8:30-32 regarding Gideon’s wives and children and Gideon’s death, the section seems to be an expansion, probably done by another narrator, of the previous section in 8:22-27, e.g., verse 8:28 expands what is said in verse 22, while 8:29 and 8:33-35 expand what has been narrated in verse 27.

Concluding Remarks

Notwithstanding the methodological usefulness of some of the more recent scholarship, Weber’s sociology of authority may still prove fruitful for biblical studies or leadership studies. By engaging Gideon’s narrative using Weber’s sociology of authority, one comes to see that despite the fact that there might be components that cannot be explained under such a paradigm, the Weberian theory offers us a model that helps us gain a

⁵¹ Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 247.

⁵² Regarding the reasons of why Gideon desires to make an ephod, a good explanation is that Gideon wants to use it as a memorial of the victory. Another interpretation, however, is that he pretends to use it for oracle purposes, as Sa-Moon Kang affirms in Sa-Moon Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East* (Berlin: Gruyter, 1989), 210. In any case, since Weber discusses charisma in a neutral sense, despite Gideon’s mistake of making a golden ephod causing the people of Israel stray, his charisma is not lost.

⁵³ Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 248.

better understanding of the notion of dominion and authority in biblical leadership studies. That is, Weber's exposition of authority lets us broaden our understanding of the biblical text.

In the particular case of Gideon, Weber's theory extends our understanding of Gideon's portrayal as a leader and warlord by paying attention to the fact that his judgeship is strongly shaped by his cultural-historical and socio-political context. One observes how the narrator does not try to hide Gideon's initial fear or his struggle with faith. Instead, he clearly shows his readers Gideon's real humanity. It would be really difficult if one tried to understand Gideon's judgeship without exploring the social-political context where he develops such a dominion. Even more difficult is trying to grasp Gideon's thought without paying attention to his understanding of the world and the different facets of his own life—social, psychological, and religious for instance. One sees not only that Gideon indeed struggles with his faith and that by virtue of his divine calling he progressively moves away from his state of hesitation, but also how Gideon develops further his character as a leader during his journey of faith.

Finally, I acknowledge that although one might question Gideon's depiction as a strong figure in the biblical text in light of modern paradigms; yet for the people of Israel of his time, he emerged as a courageous and competent leader, as he continuously proved his faith and strength in life during his forty-year guidance. Gideon's failures and shortcomings were expected from him inasmuch as he was not free from having struggles and hesitation. What was not expected from him, however, was being a failure regarding the fulfillment of his divine vocation, as Weber speaks of charismatic leaders. Whether Gideon fights against the Midianites using only his natural strength, or whether he does it on the Lord's, or even a combination of both, the use of one or the other does not detract from Gideon's achievements in light of the fact that the religious and the cultural were so ingrained in the social stratification of the Ancient Near Eastern societies—Israel was no exception.