

THE LITERARY INFLUENCE OF  
“THE BINDING OF ISAAC” (GENESIS 22)  
ON “THE OUTRAGE AT GIBEAH” (JUDGES 19)<sup>1</sup>

By

JEREMIAH UNTERMAN

*Wichita State University*

MORE THAN A hundred years ago, Güdemann (1869, pp. 357–368) recognized that the author of “The Outrage at Gibeah” story in Judges 19 utilized the story of Lot in Sodom in Genesis 19 in order to discredit Saul and his house.<sup>2</sup> It is the purpose of this paper to show that the author of Judges 19 also intentionally borrowed from the story of “The Binding of Isaac” in Genesis 22 for the same reason. A linguistic, thematic, and ideological comparison of Judges 19 with Genesis 22 will provide the evidence for this contention.

**Genesis 22 and Judges 19: A Comparison**

1. Gen 22:6—“and he took in his hand the fire and *hamma'ākelet* ‘the knife’ ”

Gen 22:10—“and he took *hamma'ākelet*”

Judg 19:29—“and he took *hamma'ākelet*”

These are the only two chapters in biblical narrative in which the word *ma'ākelet* appears. The word occurs only once more in the Bible, in the plural

1. This paper had its own genesis in a conversation with Yair Zakovitch, and I am indebted to him for his suggestions.

2. Compare Judg 19:29 and 20:1 with 1 Sam 11:7. Compare, also, Judg 19:20-24 with Gen 19:2-8. Additionally, see Luria (1966, pp. 463–494), with whose arguments I agree, for a detailed study of the anti-Saul polemic at the end of Judges which appears in the context of the diminution of the tribe of Benjamin.

in Prov 30:14, a verse which illuminates its connotative meaning: “There is a generation whose teeth are as swords, whose jawteeth are as *ma’ākālōt* to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.” *ma’ākālōt* is herein paralleled to *hārābōt* ‘swords’, both of which are said to devour *le’ēkōl* the poor and the needy. The author presupposes the derivation of *ma’ākālōt* from the root *’kl*, as is evidenced by the proximity of *ma’ākālōt* and *le’ēkōl*, the common biblical metaphor of the devouring sword,<sup>3</sup> and the explicit comparison of “teeth” with “swords” and “knives.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, *ma’ākālōt*, although denoting ‘knives,’ connotes ‘things that devour.’ Furthermore, it should be noted that the victims of the *ma’ākālōt* are helpless and innocent persons—the poor and the needy.

So, too, in Genesis 22. It is well known that the author of “The Binding of Isaac” story chose his words carefully in order to evoke the empathy of the reader (compare Rashi’s sensitive commentary to vs. 2, and Auerbach, 1953, pp. 8–11). The term *ma’ākelet*, which not only starkly describes the instrument, but also conveys the horrid effect of the instrument’s action, is chosen for its shock value to impress upon the reader the cruelty of the intended child-sacrifice. The word *hereb* would not have been as effective, since its conveyed meaning of ‘destruction’ would have been ignored due to its daily usage. Additionally, in Gen 22:6 the proximity of *ma’ākelet* to ‘fire’ hints at the specter of the devouring, consuming fire—a very common biblical metaphor.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, the intended victim here is also a helpless innocent—Isaac.

Although the strongest literary proof of the relationship between “The Outrage at Gibeah” and Saul rests upon the nearly identical language used in Judg 19:29 and 1 Sam 11:7, the verse in Judges differs from that in 1 Samuel in its inclusion of a phrase duplicated only in Gen 22:10: “and he took the *ma’ākelet*.” The appearance of this phrase in Judg 19:29 leads one to the possibility that the connection between Genesis 22 and Judges 19 is not coincidental.

2. Gen 22:3 — “and he saddled his ass (*hāmōrō*) and took his two servants (*nə’ārāyw*) with him”

Judg 19:3 — “*vəna’ārō* with him and a pair of *hāmōrīm*” (compare Judg 19:10).

The two phrases appear in similar contexts — at the start of a journey. Nowhere else is there any mention of a *hāmōr* and a *na’ar* in any numerical

3. Deut 32:42; 2 Sam 2:26; 11:25; 18:8; Isa 1:20; 5:17; 31:8; Jer 2:29 (30); 12:12; 46:10,14; Nah 2:14. See further Isa 9:11 as a description of war atrocities. Additionally, the sharp edge of the sword is known as the “mouth of the sword,” e.g.: Judg 3:16; Ps 149:6; Prov 5:4.

4. Similarly, the prongs of the fleshhook were known as “teeth” — 1 Sam 2:13.

5. See, for example, Lev 6:3; Isa 9:4,18; Ezek 15:4; Amos 1:4,7,10,11,14; 2:2,5.

combination accompanying a man on a journey. The chiasmic relationship of the phrase in Judg 19:3 to that in Gen 22:3 would appear to indicate a conscious borrowing.<sup>6</sup>

3. Gen 22:6,8—“and they went the two of them together (*šənêhem yaḥdāw*)”

Gen 22:19 — “and they went together”

Judg 19:6 — “and they ate *šənêhem yaḥdāw*”

Judg 19:8 — “and the two of them ate”

*šənêhem yaḥdāw* appears elsewhere only in Isa 1:31 in a completely different context. A similar expression is found in Amos 3:3. There seems to be an intentional wordplay by the author of Judges 19: *wayyō’kālū* ‘and they ate’ — *wayyēlākū* ‘and they went.’

4. Gen 22:2 — “on one of the mountains” (elsewhere in the chapter the reference is to a “place” — vss. 3,4,9,14)

Judg 19:13 — “to one of the places”

5. Gen 22:3 — “and Abraham arose early in the morning . . . and rose up and went”

Judg 19:5 — “and they arose early in the morning and he rose up to go”

Judg 19:8 — “and he arose early in the morning . . . to go”

(compare also, vss. 7,9,10)

The context is similar — at the beginning of the venture.

6. Gen 22:19 — “and they rose up and went together to Beersheba”

Judg 19:28 — “and the man rose up and went to his place”

The context is similar — the main characters are returning home.

7. Gen 22:4 — “and Abraham raised his eyes and saw”

Judg 19:17 — “and he raised his eyes and saw”

This expression appears only here in Judges.

8. Gen 22:12 — “don’t do to him” (compare Gen 19:8)

Judg 19:23 — “don’t do”

The context of the verses is similar — statements are made to prevent the killing of innocents.

9. Gen 22:14—*YHWH yir’e ’āšer yē’āmēr* ‘God will see as it is said’

Judg 19:30—*wəḥāyā kol hārō’e wə’amar* ‘and it was that all who saw [it] said’

Perhaps this is another word-play. Both word groups come in anti-climactic places in the stories.

10. In each story there is a reference to Jerusalem: indirectly in Gen 22:14 (cf. also vs. 2, “the land of Moriah” with 2 Chr 3:1, “Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem in Mount Moriah”), and directly in Judg

6. On chiasm as a literary device in the Bible, see Zeidel (1956) and R. Weiss (1962).

19:10. It should be noted that in each of the verses the reference to Jerusalem comes only as a clarification: Gen 22:14 — ‘as it is said today, in the mountain of the Lord’; Judg 19:10 — ‘and he came over against Jebus, the same is Jerusalem.’

11. Both the cast of characters and the scene are similar. The main character in each story travels South to North (from Beersheba in Genesis 22 and from Bethlehem in Judges 19) in the central hills near Jerusalem accompanied by one or two asses, one or two servants, and a person of close familial relationship. In each case, the main character raises the knife against the relative.

### Conclusions

The fact that these two stories have so many parallels and points of contact provides one with enough proof to assume that Judges 19 and Genesis 22 are related. Furthermore, if the author of Judges 19 borrowed from Genesis 19, it is now obvious that he also borrowed from Genesis 22. One question remains to be answered: Why did the author of Judges 19 borrow from Genesis 22? In order to answer this question we must first understand better why he borrowed from Genesis 19.

As indicated above,<sup>7</sup> the author of Judges 19 wished to discredit Saul and his house. He does so by depicting the men of Saul’s hometown, Gibeah of Benjamin, as of the same character as the men of Sodom. In both cases the inhabitants of the town want to assault the visitors sexually, and in both cases the visiting men are saved by a resident in the town (Lot, and the Ephraimite). However, whereas God intervenes, through the angels, to save Lot and his family, God does not intervene to save the Levite’s concubine. The net effect is to show that Saul comes from evil, barbaric origins, from a town unfit for man or God.

Similarly, but from a different perspective, the author of Judges 19 uses Genesis 22. If, by using Genesis 19 he emphasizes the inhuman element, then by using Genesis 22 he emphasizes the lack of divine intervention. The place where Abraham is to sacrifice Isaac is, in Judges 19, a non-Israelite city, the home of the pagan Jebusites. Yet, in Genesis 22, God saves the innocent Isaac at that very place. However, in Judges 19, even God won’t step in to save the innocent. It, Gibeah, is a town abandoned by God. Such a view mitigates against the fitness of Saul to be king over Israel. Thus, the author of Judges 19 uses two stories from the Abraham cycle, that of Lot in Sodom and that of ‘The Binding of Isaac,’ in his polemic against Saul. By using Genesis 19 this author

7. See note 2 above.

depicts the men of Gibeah as equal in their evil to the men of Sodom, and by using Genesis 22 he depicts Gibeah as less worthy of God's intervention than a pagan city.

In other words, while the author of Judges 19 uses Genesis 19 to COMPARE the residents of Gibeah with those of Sodom, he uses Genesis 22 to CONTRAST the lack of God's intervention in Gibeah with His intervention in Jebus-Jerusalem. This contrast is also seen in the three key linguistic points of contact between Judges 19 and Genesis 22: (1) the *ma'ăkelet* is not used against Isaac, who is alive, but is used against the concubine, who is dead; (2) the chiasmic relationship of one ass and two servants in Genesis 22 to two asses and one servant in Judges 19; (3) the two WALK together in Genesis 22, while the two SIT and EAT together in Judges 19.

Since Judges 19 is influenced by two different stories from the Abraham cycle, it cannot be, in its current form, a story from the early days of the period of Judges. Additionally, if we claim that it is written against the House of Saul, then a period after the time of David makes little sense for its origin. Furthermore, since both Jebus-Jerusalem and Bethlehem appear in the story as places far more worthy than Gibeah, and since Jebus-Jerusalem is David's capital and Bethlehem his birthplace (wherein a visitor is given superior hospitality — Judg 19:3-9 — in an obvious contrast to Gibeah), the logical conclusion is that the "Outrage of Gibeah" was composed during the time of David's reign.<sup>8</sup>

8. In agreement with Luria (1966, pp. 478-479).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Auerbach, E. 1953. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Princeton.
- Güdemann, M. 1869. "Tendenz und Abfassungszeit der Letzten Capitel des Buches der Richter." *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 18:357-368.
- Luria, B. 1966. "Paršat pilegeš bə gīḇ'a." *Iyyunim bə seper šopəṭim*, pp. 463-494.
- Weiss, R. 1962. "'Al haḳi'asmus bammiqra." *Beth-Mikra* 7:46-51.
- Zeidel, M. 1956. "Maq̄bilot beyn seper yə ša'yahu lə seper tə hillim." *Sinai* 38:149-172, 229-242.