

Former Prophets and Writings

**The Interrelationships between
Judges 19 and Genesis 19 and their Exegetical Implications
by Conrad Vine.**

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Date:

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Word count: 2203 words.

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Introduction

Genesis 19 and Judges 19 contain episodes that are both harrowing and thought-provoking: harrowing for the human degradation and suffering that is portrayed, and thought-provoking for those who wish to understand the purpose and interrelationship between the two chapters. Scholars have long recognized the striking similarities between the two chapters, particularly the accounts recorded in Gen 19:1-11 and Judg 19:10-30. Any attempt to understand the interrelationship between these two chapters must therefore be aware of the parallel use of similar motifs and themes, and seek to gain a fuller understanding of each chapter through careful comparative analysis.

Thematic Comparisons

Comparative analysis has focussed on the use of the theme of hospitality protocols. Matthews (1992, 3-11¹) argues that Judg 19 must be understood in the light of Gen 19, with the code of hospitality serving as the primary framework of reference and comparison. In each case a resident alien offers hospitality to a stranger, an action contrary to the then code of hospitality, and from this initial action there follows a series of increasingly divergent events. Lasine (1984, 37-59²) also utilizes the code of hospitality as a framework for his analysis, using the Gen 19 account to highlight how the actions of both the host in Judg 19 invert the actions of Lot, and the actions of the Levite guest are diametrically dissimilar to those of Lot's guests. Combined with analysis of the Levite's behaviour, Lasine concludes that when viewed in the light of Gen 19, the events

¹ Matthews, Victor H. 'Hospitality and Hostility in Judges 19 and Genesis 19', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 22 (1992), pp.3-11.

² Lasine, Stuart. 'Guest and Host in Judges 19: Lot's Hospitality in an Inverted World', *JSOT* 29 (1984), pp.37-59.

of Judg 19 show that a world in which ‘all the world did what was right in their own eyes’ (Judg 21:25) is ‘ludicrous, absurd and self-defeating’³.

Feminist writers have added their perspective. Tribble (1984, 65-87⁴) analyses the power dynamics between men and women in each account and shows the relative powerlessness of the women, a world where women may be sacrificed to resolve conflict between competing males. Woman today, as then, ‘as object is still captured, betrayed, raped, tortured, murdered, dismembered, and scattered’⁵, and to resolve this we are called, first and foremost, to ‘repent’⁶. Jones-Warsaw⁷ builds on Tribble’s work and seeks to reinterpret Judg 19 through the eyes of a person who has suffered multi-dimensional (sexual, racial and class related) rather than uni-dimensional discrimination. Taking Walker’s definition of a womanist as someone ‘committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female’⁸, Jones-Warsaw challenges us, and black women in particular, to re-evaluate concepts of victimhood and seek to develop hermeneutical principles that reflect our experience. Schneider (2000, 245-269⁹) however views the status and life-experience of women as a ‘barometer’¹⁰ of the way Israel is faring, and so the experience of Achsah in Judg 1 is compared with that of the nameless concubine of Judg 19. The actions concerning Achsah lead to a positive resolution of a problem for Israel, whilst the actions concerning the nameless concubine lead to civil war, mass abduction, and social anarchy, and thus this female orientated benchmark shows the rapid

³ Lasine, Stuart. ‘Guest and Host in Judges 19: Lot’s Hospitality in an Inverted World’, JSOT 29 (1984), pp.37-59.

⁴ Tribble, Phyllis. ‘Texts of Terror’, Fortress Press (1984), pp.65-87.

⁵ Tribble, Phyllis. ‘Texts of Terror’, Fortress Press (1984), p. 87.

⁶ Tribble, Phyllis. ‘Texts of Terror’, Fortress Press (1984), p. 87.

⁷ Jones-Warsaw, Koala. ‘Towards a Womanist Hermeneutic: A Reading of Judges 19-21’ in ‘A Feminist Companion to Judges’, ed. Brenner, Athalya, Sheffield Academic Press (1993).

⁸ Walker, A. ‘In Search of our Mother’s Gardens’, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (1983), p.xi

⁹ Schneider, Tammi J. ‘Judges’ in ‘Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry’, ed. Cotter, David (2000).

¹⁰ Schneider, Tammi J. ‘Judges’ in ‘Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry’, ed. Cotter, David (2000), p. 246.

moral declension and social disintegration of Israelite society over the period of the Judges.

The homosexual rape motif has also received much attention. Stone (1995, 87-107¹¹) focuses on an anthropological understanding of homosexual rape, viewing its purpose as establishing power and honour relationships rather than sexual gratification in which the perpetrator (the subject) imposes his will on the victim (the object) through the act of penetration. Heterosexual rape of a dependent may also be viewed as establishing relative power and honour relationships amongst men. Niditch (1982, 365-378¹²) however argues that homosexual relations are to be viewed within the overall context of the Levitical laws, and as such the contravention of these laws, including those relating to homosexual relations, leads to breakdowns in personal, family, community and national relationships. The Judg 19-21 pericope is therefore, in Niditch's view, concerned with ideals of family and community relationships and potential causes for the breakdown of these relationships.

Block (1990, 325-341¹³) analyses Niditch's assumption that Judg 19 is the primary and Gen 19 is the secondary text through use of direct comparative textual analysis. Through this textual analysis and the use of common motifs he concludes that the writer of Judg 19 utilizes a literary echo technique based on the textual or oral record of Gen 19. Block then argues that literary echo technique is significant as it allows the writer to portray an

¹¹ Stone, Ken. 'Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19: Subject-Honour, Object-Shame?', JSOT 67 (1995), pp. 87-107.

¹² Niditch, Susan. 'The "Sodomite" Theme in Judges 19-20: Family, Community and Social Disintegration', Catholic Bible Quarterly (1982), Vol. 44. pp. 365-378.

¹³ Block, Daniel I. 'Echo Narrative Technique in Hebrew Literature: A Study in Judges 19', Westminster Theological Journal (1990), pp.325-341.

Israelite community that has departed so far from the ideals of the Deuteronomic covenant that they are morally no different from the Caananite inhabitants of Sodom. Israel has completely departed from the Lord and is now indistinguishable from the nations around. Bressinger (1999, 192-218¹⁴) however provides a detailed exegesis of Judg 19-21 and addresses contemporary issues such as the failure of leadership, domestic violence, hospitality, sensitivity to suffering, and denominational divisions.

Contextual Comparison

Many commentators have seen a broad range of common themes in Gen 19:1-11 and Judg 19:10-30, and have drawn a wide range of theological, sociological and anthropological conclusions. The clear parallelism of motifs and themes strongly suggest that we seek to understand each passage in the light of the other. Not only is it clear that a full understanding of each passage is enhanced through such internal comparative analyses, but I believe that our understanding of the two passages can be further enhanced through a careful analysis of the context of each passage, with a special focus on Israel's covenant relationship with God, and the way in which judgements are implemented.

Covenant Relationships

Judg 19 may be viewed within the Judg 19-21 pericope, the chapters together forming a distinct and discrete component within the Book of Judges. Israel is operating under the Deuteronomic covenant with its blessings and curses, but throughout Judges the moral

¹⁴ Bressinger, Terry. 'Believers Church Bible Commentary – Judges', Scottdale/Waterloo, Herald Press (1999), pp.192-218.

condition of Israel degenerates, a change that is paralleled in increasingly ambiguous evaluations of the individual judges themselves. Judg 19-21 in particular show not only the existence of acts of personal evil, but the flawed manner in which Israel attempts to redress the individual acts of evil.

The Deuteronomic covenant reflects an eschatological worldview in which the ‘end, according to Moses, is a process rather than an event¹⁵’. If Israel obeyed God’s commands, so God would bless Israel spiritually and materially with national peace, agricultural productivity, wealth and status. ‘As Israel obeyed, God would gradually restore Canaan until it became like the garden of the Lord¹⁶’. Eden would be restored through the covenant relationship. However, as Israel fell away from God’s commands, so God would bring about the curses of the covenant, including invasion, economic, social and moral decline, and ultimately, exile. The covenant is between God and the nation of Israel, not with any particular individual, so the blessings and curses are to be experienced communally – a corporate covenant.

Gen 19 is also a distinct episode, but to understand the story fully, one needs to understand the context from Gen 18:16 onwards. God is engaged in an act of judicial judgement towards Sodom from Gen 18:16 onwards, and is acting within the context of a covenant. God’s covenant relationship with Abraham (Gen 15) incorporates three key elements: ‘He would receive a *land*, become a great *nation*, and become a

¹⁵ Paulien, Jon. ‘What the Bible says about the end-time’, Review and Herald Publishing Association (1994).

¹⁶ Paulien, Jon. ‘What the Bible says about the end-time’, Review and Herald Publishing Association (1994), p. 52.

*blessing*¹⁷(italics not my own). Gen 17 expands on the basic promise, and it is seen that God intends the covenant with Abraham to be the mechanism by which God can restore all mankind to communion with Himself. Thus whilst the Abrahamic covenant is effected between God and an individual, it has a corporate salvific purpose and effect for all nations, and as with the Deuteronomic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant envisages an eschatological process rather than discrete event.

Outworking of Judgement

As Gen 19 and Judg 19 both occur within the context of similar covenant relationships with God (Judg 19 operates within the Deuteronomic covenant, and Gen 19 within the Abrahamic covenant), it is helpful to look at the outworking of judgement in both pericopes. The destruction of Sodom and the virtual elimination of Benjamin can be best understood if we identify and compare the key factors in the judgement processes as follows:

¹⁷ Paulien, Jon. 'What the Bible says about the end-time', Review and Herald Publishing Association (1994), p. 46.

Descriptor	Gen 18:16 – 19:38	Judg 19:1 – 21:25
Initiator of judgement	God	Israel, in response to the Levite's speech
Concern to assess the facts	Full, (Gen 18:21, 'I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me' ¹⁸)	Partial. The evidence of one witness (Levite) is viewed as sufficient to reach a judicial verdict, contrary to the Levitical laws.
Objective assessment of evidence before a verdict is reached	Yes, (two non-human witnesses are dispatched to Sodom to assess the evidence).	No. A verdict is reached on the evidence of the Levite alone, with all communication with the Benjaminites being later.
Status of the legal verdict	The wicked are condemned based on verified judicial evidence and due legal process	The wicked are condemned following insufficient evidence and improper legal process
Impact on the righteous or innocent	The righteous (Lot) are saved	Almost no focus on the concubine, and the Levite disappears from view
Impact on the wicked	Final – the wicked are completely destroyed	Incomplete - the wicked (Benjamin – viewed as corporately responsible) are allowed to survive as a tribe
Executor of judgement	God	Israel
Relationship to covenant	God brings executive judgement on the wicked and redemptive judgement for the righteous. Gen 19:30 records that 'God remembered Abraham' ¹⁹ , and saved Lot from Sodom – the Abrahamic covenant is thus crucial to the judicial act.	Israel respond to human circumstances. The Deuteronomic covenant is alluded to, but events show Israel operating with no legal or moral absolute, best described in Judg 21:25 as 'In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes' ²⁰ .

¹⁸ New Revised Standard Version Bible, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America (1989).

¹⁹ New Revised Standard Version Bible, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America (1989).

²⁰ New Revised Standard Version Bible, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America (1989).

Through this comparison of the judgement process in Gen 19 and Judg 19, we gain a clearer understanding of the differences between judgement from God and judgement from Israel: God is depicted as verifying facts within a due legal process, whilst Israel act improperly and hastily in their legal review and judgement process; God's verdict is valid, whilst Israel's verdict is invalid; God acts to save the righteous – redemptive judgement, whilst Israel acts to bring retributive judgement on the wicked; God's judgement has a final and eternal impact on the wicked, whilst Israel's judgement ends up with a concern to preserve the wicked; God acts in mercy towards the righteous ('according to the agreed terms, Lot and his family should have perished in the flames²¹'), whilst Israel shows mercy towards the wicked.

It is illuminating to see how Ezekiel portrays the last days of the Kingdom of Judah under the Deuteronomic covenant. Ezekiel shows God coming to the temple in Jerusalem in ch. 1, where an investigation is conducted, after which God passes judgement on the inhabitants. The righteous and the evil are clearly identified, and then God is depicted leaving the temple in ch. 10, His judicial role completed. Judgement in the form of the Babylonians follows swiftly afterwards, and the ultimate penalty for disobedience, exile, is exacted. God is shown acting with due process strictly within the terms of the Deuteronomic covenant, but over 500 merciful years after the horrendous events of Judg 19.

²¹ Turner, Laurence, 'Genesis', Sheffield Academic Press (2000), p. 90.

Conclusion

The clear parallels between Gen 19 and Judg 19 in terms of the actual events recorded and the internal motifs and themes suggest that a full understanding of each text is enhanced when the texts are understood in the light of each other. An understanding of the contexts of each text leads to investigation of the terms of the covenants involved in each text, and to a subsequent comparison of the judgement motif within each text.

The covenants God entered into with Abraham and Israel had the defeat of sin and the restoration of the Edenic ideal as their ultimate purpose. Through the covenants, God acts in a redemptive rather than punitive manner. Within the covenants there is no place for a synthesis or cohabitation between good and evil. Good and evil are antithetical, and all actions by God within the context of these covenants need to reflect this antithetical relationship. And yet, God in His mercy allows for the realities of human nature, so the covenants envisage and allow for a gradual process of restoration rather than a single eschatological event.

A post-exilic Jewish reader, surveying the ruins of the Davidic monarchy, the collapse of the Deuteronomic covenant, and the flames over Jerusalem, would see in the comparison between the passages in Gen 19 and Judg 19 the way in which God had dealt more fairly with Israel than Israel has with God according to the terms of the Deuteronomic covenant. The failure of human leadership, whether from judges or kings, would be evident. God's mercy and long-suffering over and beyond the terms of the Deuteronomic covenant would be evident. Questions about God's sovereignty may have arisen, but the

reader no doubt would take comfort from David's words of 2 Sam 24:14, 'let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercy is great²²'. Would that the modern reader may understand likewise.

²² New Revised Standard Version Bible, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America (1989).

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