

BARNARD COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
Department of Religion  
The Sacrifice of Isaac and Jephtha's Daughter Compared<sup>1</sup>

Judges 11:

1. Jephtha the Gileadite makes a vow to make a burnt offering of the first to greet him to God if he is granted a victory.
  2. God grants Jephtha victory
  3. By implication, Jephtha plans to sacrifice an animal.
  4. God intervenes (?) in the form of chance imposing the substitution whereby Jephtha must sacrifice his virgin daughter.
- OUTCOME: JEPHTHA HAS NO DESCENDANTS OF ANY KIND

Genesis 22:

4. God requires Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac as evidence of faith and obedience
  3. Abraham demonstrates his obedience
  2. As Abraham prepares to obey, God imposes a substitution whereby Abraham in fact sacrifices an animal in fulfillment of the command.
  1. God makes a vow that Abraham shall have countless descendants.
- OUTCOME: ALL THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL CLAIM DESCENT FROM ABRAHAM

Endogamy:

Genesis 34: The Dinah story affirms unambiguously the sinfulness of allowing an Israelite girl to cohabit with a foreigner (in this case a Shechemite-Canaanite), even if the foreigner is prepared to adopt the Israelite faith. (political difficulties)

Judges 9: Abimelech is a half-blooded Israelite by a Shechemite mother. On the death of his father he joins his mother's people, kills all his pure-blooded half-brothers except one, and is himself killed.

Judges 11: Jephtha is also a half-blooded Israelite by a foreign mother. On the death of his father he is chased away by his father's people but eventually is called back to be their leader. His pure-blooded relatives are thereby saved but his only daughter is sacrificed and hence he dies without descendants.

Judges 13f: Samson is a pure-blooded Israelite hero who has a series of sexual liaisons with foreign (Philistine) women, interspersed with battles against Philistine men. The women are consistently treacherous and bring about his downfall. (The treachery of the foreign women is here the counterpart of the dishonorableness of the foreign men in the Dinah story.

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1. Adapted from Edmund Leach, "The Legitimacy of Solomon," *Genesis as Myth*