

## *From the Monarchy of David to the Children of Israel: A Comparative Study of Family Values and Legacy*

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*The biblical tale, through the most rigorous economy of means, leads us again and again to ponder the complexities of motive and ambiguities of character, because these are essential aspects of its vision of man, created by God, enjoying or suffering all the consequences of human freedom. (Robert Alter)*

### **I: Introduction**

At first blush, the biblical figures Jacob and David seem to lead very disparate lives. After all, one is known primarily for his role as the head of a family, the other for his rule over a nation, remaining the embodiment of the Jewish monarchy for eternity. Despite their historic and political differences, however, a textual analysis of the lives of Jacob and David illustrates exceptional similarities within their lives. It also reveals peculiar language choices used to describe these men. Jacob's life, to recall, ends with his family by his bedside. His sons grow to become twelve tribes and remain united for over 1,000 years afterwards, and still identify as the *Benei Yisra-el* and *Bet Ya'acov* today. In contrast, only 40 years after David's death, his entire kingdom is ripped into two as tribes are forced to take sides against one another. The direct contrast between the prosperous legacy of Jacob and the legacy of David cannot be more profound. This essay analyzes why Jacob was able to keep his family together for such a long period of time, while so soon after, David was not. How did two extremely similar individuals produce such dissimilar legacies?

In his work *Maqbilot Nifgashot: Maqbilot Sifrutiyot Be-Sefer Shemuel*, Rav Amnon Bazak of Herzog College goes through the pieces of the text that discuss David's relationships with Michal and Saul. From those portions

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of the texts, he points out six instances in which David's life lines up with that of Jacob:

1) In both stories, the heroes are the groom (Jacob/David), the father-in-law (Laban/Saul), and his two daughters (Leah & Rachel/Merab and Michal).

2) In both stories, the father-in-law breaches a pledge that he had already made regarding the marriage of his daughter: Laban replaces Rachel with Leah (Gen. 29:23); and Saul, who had obligated himself to give his daughter in marriage to the man who kills Goliath (I Sam. 17:25), gives his daughter to another man.<sup>1</sup>

3) In both cases, the groom is asked to pay for the marriage, and in both cases he pays twice the amount that has been demanded at the outset. Jacob said to Laban: "I will serve you **seven years** for Rachel your younger daughter" (Gen. 29:18), but in actual practice, after Laban replaced Rachel with Leah, Jacob worked "**fourteen** years for your two daughters" (Gen. 31:41). Saul informs David that "The king desires not any dowry, but **a hundred** foreskins of the Philistines" (I Sam. 18:25), but in actuality: "David arose and went, he and his men, and slew of the Philistines **two hundred** men, and David brought their foreskins (I Sam. 18:27).

4) Scripture seems to allude to the correspondence between the two stories through the linguistic similarity between them. The book of Samuel relates that after David heard the condition set for his marriage to Michal: "...and the days were not expired (*male-u ha-yamim*)" (I Sam. 18:26. This wording is very reminiscent of Jacob's words "give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled (*male-u yamai*)" (Gen. 29:21).

5) The two stories also continue in parallel manner. The rift between son-in-law and father-in-law continues to expand, until in the end the son-in-law runs away from the father-in-law with the help of his wife, who cooperates with him against her own father: Jacob's wives join him in his flight (Gen. 31:14–17), and Michal saves David from Saul's men (I Sam. 19:11–17).

6) In both stories, a meeting occurs in the end between the father-in-law/pursuer and the son-in-law/pursued, and the two parties reconcile, swear to each other by the name of God, and set God as judge between them...(Gen. 31:53/I Sam. 24:15).<sup>2</sup>

Bazak's study goes through one short event in David's life chronologically—his relationship with Saul and Michal<sup>3</sup>—and connects it to six

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<sup>1</sup> I Sam. 18:19

<sup>2</sup> Amnon Bazak, *Maqbilot Nifgasbot: Maqbilot Sifrutiyot Be-Sefer Shemuel*, p. 109–121.

<sup>3</sup> I Sam. ch. 18–24.