

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.¹

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).²

Bazak's study goes through one short event in David's life chronologically—his relationship with Saul and Michal³—and connects it to six

¹ I Sam. 18:19

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

³ I Sam. ch. 18–24.

different aspects of Jacob's life. He uses these to pinpoint the main distinction between the personalities of Jacob and David. In order to present some clarity as to why the Davidic structure did not last nearly as long as that of Jacob, we will proceed chronologically through the text concerning Jacob's life, from his conception all the way through until his death. We will compare and contrast those episodes to the texts surrounding David and the stories that concern him in order to expound upon the nuances in the text and the proper context in which to view their lives. From there, we will be able to see with more clarity why these two texts may have been written in this manner.

II: Side-by-Side Analysis: Jacob and David

I Samuel 16:11

כח וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶת-עֵשָׂו, כִּי-צִיד בְּפִיו; יֵאָמֵר שְׂמוּאֵל אֶל-יִשְׂרָאֵל, הֲתַמּוּ הַנְּעָרִים, וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד לְשָׂר הַקֶּטָן, וְהַגָּד רָעָה בְּצֹאן; וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂמוּאֵל אֶל-יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁלַחָה וְקַחנּוּ.

¹¹ Then Samuel asked Jesse, "Are these all the boys you have?" He replied, "There is still the youngest; he is tending the flock." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send someone to bring him."

Genesis 25:28

²⁸ Isaac favored Esau because he had a taste for game; but Rebekah favored Jacob.

I Samuel 16:12-13

א וַיִּקְרָא יִצְחָק אֶל-יַעֲקֹב, וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ ... ד יב ... וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה קוּם מְשַׁחְהוּ, כִּי-זֶה הוּא. וַיִּמָּשַׁח אֹתוֹ אֶת-בְּרִכַת אַבְרָהָם, לְךָ וּלְנֹרְעָדָךְ יג וַיִּקַּח שְׂמוּאֵל אֶת-קַרְנֵי הַשֶּׁמֶן, וַיִּמָּשַׁח אֹתוֹ אֶת-אֶרֶץ מִגְרִיד, אֲשֶׁר-נָסַן אֱלֹהִים לְאַבְרָהָם.

¹² ...And the Lord said, "Rise and anoint him, for this is the one." ¹³Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord gripped David.

¹ So Isaac sent for Jacob and blessed him...⁴ May He grant the blessing of Abraham to you and your offspring, that you may possess the land where you are sojourning, which God assigned to Abraham."

From his very birth into the world and into the text of Genesis, Jacob is portrayed grasping onto the heel of his older twin brother Esau as they come out of the womb (Gen. 25:26). Jacob's father loves Esau more,⁴

⁴ Gen. 25:28.

which causes Jacob to feel overshadowed throughout his adolescent years. Later on, he is climactically chosen by Isaac to take on the covenant of Abraham, before fleeing his father's house from Esau.⁵ Accepting the covenantal responsibility, he later acquires the name Israel,⁶ and inaugurates the Nation of Israel.

The first reference to David in the text is comparable. When God tells the prophet Samuel that He rejected Saul, He commands him to find Jesse of Bethlehem in order to anoint Jesse's son as the next king over Israel. Samuel, however, is not told which son to anoint. He heads to Bethlehem, where Jesse gives over his seven oldest sons to Samuel, without considering that his eighth and youngest son, David, might be the one chosen by God. In a very 'Cinderella-esque' manner, David remains in the field herding sheep, while the older sons are allowed to meet with the prophet of God, hoping to be chosen as the next king of Israel. When none of the other sons are chosen by God, Samuel sends Jesse to retrieve David from the pasture. Through an unexpected turn of events, David is, much to the surprise of all, chosen and anointed as the next king of the Land of Israel.⁷ Like Jacob, David is overshadowed by his father and brothers, and is not given attention until Samuel specifically asks whether Jesse has any more sons. Here, David emerges and is chosen by God to lead the nation.

I Sam 17:26-30

לא ויאמר, יעקב: מכרה כיום את-בכרתך, לי. כו ויאמר דוד, אל-האנשים העמדים עמו לאמר, מה-יעשה לאיש אשר יכה את-הפלשתי הלז... ל ויסב מאצלו אל-מול אהר, ויאמר כדבר הזה.

Genesis 25:31

²⁶David asked the men standing near him, "What will be done for the man who kills that Philistine... ³⁰And he turned away from him toward someone else; he asked the same question, and the troops gave him the same answer as before. ³¹Jacob said, "First sell me your birth-right."

⁵ Gen. 28:1–4. Immediately prior to Jacob's leaving his father's house to Paddan-aram, Isaac gives him a second blessing and commands him to accept the covenant of Abraham.

⁶ Gen. 32:29; 35:10.

⁷ I Sam. 16:3–13.

Returning to the Jacob narrative, the first words the text records in Jacob's name have great significance. In chapter 25 of Genesis, Esau—a skillful hunter and man of the outdoors⁸—comes in from the field and sees Jacob cooking a stew. He is tired and asks Jacob for some stew. Seeing his exhausted brother pleading for some food after a long day in the field, Jacob offers Esau to complete a transaction for the stew in exchange for his birthright.⁹ The unequal exchange is apparent from Esau's desperate plea towards Jacob *'ki 'ayef anokhi'*—'because I am tired'; as well as from the words *'va-yibeṣ 'esav et ha-bekhora'*—'And Esau rejected the birthright.' Esau shows a complete disregard for the birthright in his willingness to forfeit it for sustenance. This offer of soup is the first documented words from Jacob's perspective. In his commentary on Genesis, Nahum Sarna points out that the text mentions Esau's sale of the birthright, rather than Jacob's purchase of it. This is contrary to the usual biblical style, which always emphasizes the purchase.¹⁰ By reversing the order, the language of the text reinforces how Jacob was able to feed into Esau's desperation for sustenance to get what he desired most. Rabbi Shmuel Klitsner, author of *Wrestling Jacob: Deception, Identity, and Freudian Slips in Genesis*, highlights the strange language used to describe Jacob cooking the stew: *'va-yazēd ya'aqov naṣīd*.¹¹ While *va-yazēd* here refers to cooking, elsewhere throughout the *Tanakh*, it carries a very different meaning. In the nine other instances the word is used in verb form, it refers to "an act with malice aforethought,"¹² rather than the more innocent "cooking" of Genesis 25. Klitsner writes that there is an underlying message in the text in which Jacob seems to be 'maliciously' concocting a plan to gain power over his brother by seizing the birthright.¹³ In his commentary on verse 25:26, *Rashi* refers to a *midrash* that dates Jacob's quest for the birthright even earlier, to when Jacob struggled to emerge first before his twin from his mother's womb. This *midrash* illustrates the depth of Jacob's passion for the birthright, and foreshadows his future struggle. Indeed, it is hinted at in the verse that explains Jacob's name, as he grasps Esau's heel as Esau exits Rebekah's womb.

David's first words portray similar intentions as well. As Goliath is terrorizing the nation of Israel, King Saul announces:

⁸ Gen. 25:27.

⁹ Gen. 25:29.

¹⁰ Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p. 182.

¹¹ Gen. 25:31.

¹² Related to the oft-used term *mezīd*, which also means 'of malicious intent.' For examples, see Exodus 21:13-14 and Deuteronomy 18:20.

¹³ Shmuel Klitsner, *Wrestling Jacob: Deception, Identity, and Freudian Slips in Genesis*, p. 61.

The man who kills [Goliath] will be rewarded by the king with great riches; he will also give him his daughter in marriage and grant exemption to his father's house in Israel. (I Sam 17:25)

Upon hearing this proclamation of the king, David immediately becomes intrigued by the reward and asks—the first documented words from David's perspective—what the reward will be for the man who kills Goliath the Philistine. The troops reiterate the reward. Once again, David asks what the reward will be, and the troops, again, repeat their response. With this threefold iteration of the reward, David immediately gears up for battle, kills Goliath, and seeks to collect his reward.¹⁴ David's first words represent his quest for kingship, paralleling Jacob's fervor for the birthright.

I Samuel 18:20	Genesis 29:18-20
<p>כ וּמִיָּחָב מִיכָל בַּת-שָׂאוּל, אֶת-דָּוִד; וַיִּגְדוּ לְשָׂאוּל, וַיִּשַׁר הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינָיו.</p>	<p>יח וַיִּנָּחֵב יַעֲקֹב, אֶת-רָחֵל; וַיֹּאמֶר, אֶעֱבֹדָה שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים, בְּרַחֵל בְּתוּדָה, הַקַּטְנָה... כ וַיַּעֲבֹד יַעֲקֹב בְּרַחֵל, שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים; וַיִּהְיוּ בְּעֵינָיו כְּיָמִים אֶחָדִים, בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ אֹתָהּ.</p>
<p>²⁰ Michal daughter of Saul loved David; and when this was reported to Saul, he was pleased.</p>	<p>¹⁸ Jacob loved Rachel; so he answered, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel."...²⁰ So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her.</p>

At this point in the story, Rebekah sends Jacob to her brother Laban's house. When he arrives, the text immediately reveals Jacob's love for Laban's daughter Rachel (Gen. 29:18). Within the verses that introduce Laban's daughters, the text repeatedly reminds us that Jacob loves Rachel, and that the seven years of hard work that he performed for Laban in exchange for marriage to Rachel "seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her" (Gen. 29:20).

When the verses introduce David's relationship with Michal, his feelings for her are mysteriously nonexistent in the story. To encourage the reader to pick up on this missing element of the relationship, the author emphasizes the inverse dynamic, namely, that "Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David." This is the only instance in the entire *Tanakh* in which a

¹⁴ I Sam. 17:26—end of chapter.

woman explicitly loves a man.¹⁵ Not only that, when David refers to *his own* relationship with Michal, he cuts her out of the picture and instead refers to his marriage as *hatan la-melekh*,¹⁶ referring to himself as the son-in-law of the king without a hint of consideration or affection for Michal. To David, her very existence seems to matter only because of her political association. Here David is depicted with an ‘eyes on the prize’ mentality, where his eyes are not on Michal, but on her connection to the throne. Bazak goes so far as to highlight this as the main difference between the two stories, which we will discuss later.¹⁷

I Samuel 19:17

יז וַיֹּאמֶר שָׂאוּל אֶל-מִיכָל, לָמָּה כָּכָה רַמִּיתָנִי,
וַתְּשַׁלְּחִי אֶת-אֹיְבִי, וַיִּמָּלֵט...

¹⁷Saul said to Michal, “**Why did you deceive me** and let my enemy get away safely?”

Genesis 29:25

כָּה וַיְהִי בַבֶּקֶר, וַהֲגִהָהּ-הוּא לְאָה; וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-
לְבָן, מַה-זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי--הֲלֹא בְרַחֵל עֲבַדְתִּי
עֶמְדָה, וְלָמָּה רַמִּיתָנִי.

²⁵When morning came, there was Leah! So he said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? I was in your service for Rachel! **Why did you deceive me?**”

I Samuel 19:13

יג וַתִּקַּח מִיכָל אֶת-הַתְּרָפִים, וַתְּשֵׂם אֶל-
הַמִּטָּה, וְאֵת כְּבִיר הָעֵצִים, שָׂמָה מְרֹאֲשֵׁתָיו;
וַתִּכַּס, בַּבִּגְדִים.

¹³ Michal then took the **idols**, laid it on the bed, and covered it with a **cloth**; and at its head she put a net of **goat’s** hair.

Genesis 27:15-16; 31:34

טו וַתִּקַּח רֵבֶקָה אֶת-בְּגָדֵי עֵשָׂו בְּנֵהּ הַגָּדֹל...
טז וְאֵת, עֶרְת גְּדֵי הָעֵצִים, הַלְּבִישָׁה, עַל-יָדָיו
לְדַן וְרַחֵל לָקְחָה אֶת-הַתְּרָפִים, וַתְּשֵׂם בְּכַר
הַגָּמֶל.

¹⁵ Rebekah then took the **clothes** of her older son Esau ... ¹⁶ and she covered his hands...with the skins of the **goats**. ³⁴ Rachel, meanwhile, had taken the **idols** and placed them in the camel cushion...

¹⁵ I Sam. 18:20. The direct contrast wording in the verses by Jacob and Michal’s love for their spouses is explicit.

By Jacob: *va-ye-ehav ya’aqov et rabel* – וַיֵּאָהֵב יַעֲקֹב אֶת-רָחֵל

By Michal: *va-te-ehav mikhal bat sha-ul et david* – וַתֵּאָהֵב מִיכָל בַּת-שָׂאוּל אֶת דָּוִד

¹⁶ I Sam 18:18, 22, 23, 26, 27.

As Rabbi Shmuel Klitsner notes, not only does David not show affection for Michal, he does not show love for *anybody* in the text. Even in the case of Jonathan, Jonathan is repeatedly said to love David with all his heart and soul, but David’s feelings remain mysteriously absent.

¹⁷ Amnon Bazak, *Maqbilot Nifgasbot: Maqbilot Sifrutiyot Be-Sefer Shemuel*, pp. 118–120.

After working seven years for Rachel's hand in marriage, Jacob is tricked by Laban and is instead given his older daughter, Leah, to marry. Upon realizing this, he asks Laban:

What is this you have done to me? I was in your service for Rachel!
ve-lama rimitani?—Why did you deceive me?¹⁸

David, running for his life from Saul, hides with his wife Michal. When they receive word that Saul's men will attack their house to capture David, Michal helps David escape through the window, and places *teraphim* in the bed with the hair of a goat at the head to resemble David covered by a cloth; this is meant to forge the appearance of David sick in bed (I Sam. 19:11-16). When Saul finds out that Michal has tricked him, his response is nearly identical to Jacob's:

"lama kakha rimitani?"—“Why did you deceive me?”¹⁹

This terminology, while not a unique *dis legomenon*²⁰ to these two instances, is mentioned only one other time in the entirety of the *Tanakh*, that being in a narrative concerning Saul.

The parallels in this episode are even stronger, with Michal tricking her father through the use of *teraphim*,²¹ and Rachel, a few chapters later, tricking her father and stealing his *teraphim*.²² Additionally, the use of a goat—*'izim* and cloth—*begeg* by Michal²³ to deceive her father is a strategy that also appears earlier in the Jacob narrative, when Jacob deceives Isaac into giving him the blessing originally intended for Esau (Gen 27:16).

I Samuel 22:17

כ וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ... סָבוּ וְהָמִיתוּ פְּהַנֵּי יְהוָה, כִּי
גַם-יָדָם עִם-דָּוִד, וְכִי יָדְעוּ כִּי-בָרַח הוּא, וְלֹא
גָלוּ אֶת-אֲזוּנָיו אֲנִי...

¹⁷ And the king commanded... “Turn about and kill the priests of the Lord, for they are in league with David; they knew **that he had fled** and they did not inform me.”

Genesis 31:20

כ וַיִּגְנוּב יַעֲקֹב, אֶת-לֶב לָבָן הָאַרְמִי--עַל-פְּלִי
הַגִּיד לוֹ, כִּי בָרַח הוּא.

²⁰ Jacob kept Laban the Aramean in the dark, not telling him **that he had fled**.

¹⁸ Gen. 29:25

¹⁹ I Sam. 19:17.

²⁰ A *dis legomenon* is a word or phrase that occurs only twice in a given corpus. We will touch on several of them throughout this study.

²¹ I Sam. 19:13.

²² Gen. 31:34.

²³ I Sam. 19:13,16.

I Samuel 25:27

כּוּ וְעַתָּה הַבְּרָכָה הַזֹּאת, אֲשֶׁר-הֵבִיא שְׁפָתַיךָ
לְאֵלֹהֵי יְשׁוּעָה, לְנַעֲרִים, הַמְתַּהַלְכִים, בְּרִגְלֵי
אֲדֹנָי.

²⁷ Here is the **present** which your maid-
servant has brought to my lord; let it be
given to the young men who are the fol-
lowers of my lord.

Genesis 33:11

יֵא קח-נָא אֶת-בְּרִכְתֵּי אֲשֶׁר הִבָּאת לִּי, כִּי-חַנּוּנִי
אֱלֹהִים וְכִי יְשׁוּעָה לִּי-כָל; וַיִּפְצַר-בּוֹ, וַיִּקַּח.

¹¹ Please accept my **present** which has
been brought to you, for God has fa-
vored me and I have plenty.” And when
he urged him, he accepted.

The phrase *ki boreah hu*²⁴—‘that he had fled’—is used in the cases of both Jacob and David to depict them fleeing their fathers-in-law. This phraseology constitutes a *dis legomenon* in the Tanakh and does not appear anywhere else. Upon Laban’s departure, Jacob sends messengers to Esau, potentially in an attempt to rekindle his relationship with his brother by clearing the air of any tension between them. Esau is approached by these messengers and begins a journey to greet Jacob, with 400 of his men in tow. When Jacob discovers this, he is petrified. He is unsure whether Esau’s journey represents peace or war. Accordingly, Jacob prepares for battle and begins to pray to God. He also sends an enormous amount of presents ahead of him. When the brothers finally meet, they emphatically jump into each other’s arms, kiss each other, and weep (Gen. 33:4). At this point, Jacob uses an unusual terminology to describe the gifts he was ready to give to his brother. He tells Esau:

“*Kah na et birkhati asher boovat lakh*”—‘Please accept my **present** which has been brought before you.’ (Gen. 33:11)

The word used to refer to a present here is a conjugation of the word ‘*berakha*’ (blessing), which is not the commonly used word for present, ‘*minha*.’

In the midst of David’s fleeing for his life from Saul, the beginning of chapter 25 of I Samuel records the death of Samuel. Immediately after this, the text describes an interaction between David and a couple, a man named Nabal and his wife, Abigail. From the outset, Nabal is described as an evil man (I Sam. 25:3). When David sends his men to ask Nabal for food, he hastily rejects their request, mockingly asking, “Who is David?... Should I then take my bread and my water, and the meat I slaughtered for my own shearers, and give them to men whom I do not know?!” (I Sam 25:10-11) David hears about Nabal’s response and immediately gathers

²⁴ Gen. 31:20; I Sam. 22:17.

400 men to battle him.²⁵ When Abigail learns of her husband’s belligerent attitude towards David, she gathers a surplus of food and approaches David behind Nabal’s back, pleading with him not to kill Nabal. Amidst her pleading, Abigail refers to her presents and says:

Ve’atah ha-berakha ha-zot asher bevi shiphatekh la-adoni—“Here is the **present** which your maidservant has brought to my master.”²⁶

Here, too, Abigail uses the same word “*berakha*” to refer to a present. Last but not least, Abigail—like Jacob towards Esau—bows before David, who is the recipient of the *berakha*.

II Samuel 13:14

יד ולא אָבָה, לְשִׁמְעַ בְּקוֹלָהּ; וַיִּחַזֵּק מִמֶּנָּה וַיַּעֲנֶהָ, וַיִּשְׁכַּב אִתָּהּ.

¹⁴ But he would not listen to her; he overpowered her **and lay with her by force**.

Genesis 34:2

ב וַיֵּרָא אֶתְהָ שָׁכֶם בֶּן-חָמוֹר, הַחִוִּי--נָשִׂיא וַיִּקַּח אֶתְהָ וַיִּשְׁכַּב אִתָּהּ, וַיַּעֲנֶהָ.

² Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her, and took her **and lay with her by force**.

II Samuel 13:12

יב וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ, אַל-אָחִי אַל-תַּעֲנִי--כִּי לֹא-יַעֲשֶׂה כֵן, בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: אַל-תַּעֲשֶׂה, אֶת-הַנְּבִלָה הַזֹּאת.

¹² But she said to him, “Don’t, brother. Don’t force me. Such things are not done in **Israel!** Don’t do such a **disgusting deed!**”

Genesis 34:7

ז וּבְנֵי יַעֲקֹב בָּאוּ מִן-הַשָּׂדֶה, כְּשִׁמְעָם, וַיִּתְעַצְּבוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים, וַיִּסְרוּ לָהֶם מְאֹד: כִּי-נְבִלָה עָשָׂה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, לְשָׁכַב אֶת-בֶּת-יַעֲקֹב, וְכֵן, לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה.

⁷ Meanwhile Jacob’s sons, having heard the news, came in from the field. The men were distressed and very angry, because he had committed a **disgusting deed in Israel** by lying with Jacob’s daughter—a thing not to be done.

At the conclusion of this episode, Esau and Jacob peaceably turn their separate ways: Esau to Seir and Jacob to Succoth, eventually reaching Shechem. Jacob and his children then establish their presence in Shechem,

²⁵ Note that this is the same number of men that accompanied Esau on his journey to Jacob.
²⁶ I Sam. 25:27.

buying land and erecting an altar.²⁷ The events now take a dramatic turn:

“Va-yar otab Shechem ben Hamor Ha-Hivi, nesi ba-arez. Va-yiqa otaH, va-yishkav otaH, vay’aneha.”—“Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her. And he took her **and lay with her by force.**”²⁸

Shechem’s rape of Jacob’s daughter, Dinah, leaves the entire family unsettled; a *nevalab*—“a disgusting deed” has been committed in the family of Israel. Hamor, Shechem’s father, pleads with the men to allow her to marry into their family, but their answer remains a strong no: they cannot allow their sister to marry someone who isn’t circumcised. The only way that the marriage can be permitted is if all the males in the city undergo circumcision, thus permitting Dinah to marry within them, and them within the family of Jacob. Acknowledging this request, the citizens of the town circumcise themselves. At the height of their discomfort, Simeon and Levi—Dinah’s brothers—take matters into their own hands and slaughter every male in the city.

Likewise, a similar incident of sexual assault takes place in the house of David. David’s son Amnon longs for his own sister, Tamar, and devises a plan.²⁹ He pretends to be sick and requests that Tamar bring him cake so that he may regain his strength. When she enters the room, Amnon asks her to sleep with him. Tamar pleads with Amnon, exclaiming that this is not done among Israel, and begs him not to do *ba-nevalab hazot*—“this disgusting deed.” He refuses to listen to her, the verse informing us:

“Ve-lo aba lishmo’a’ be-golaH; Va-yebezaq mimenah vay’aneha va-yishkav otaH”—“But he would not listen to her voice; he overpowered her **and lay with her by force.**”³⁰

Like Simeon and Levi, Absalom—the brother of Tamar—decides to take matters into his own hands and becomes responsible for the murder of his brother Amnon.

With nearly identical language used to depict the rapes, similar responses from the brothers, and the same word “*nevalab*” used to describe

²⁷ The end of Genesis, ch. 33.

²⁸ Gen. 34:2.

²⁹ It’s no coincidence that the only two individuals with the name Tamar in the *Tanakh* are mentioned here and with regards to Jacob’s son, Judah. Both Tamars, moreover, are introduced in the story only as a result of the sexual appetite of Judah and Amnon.

³⁰ II Sam. 13:14.

both incidents, the two stories exhibit many distinct parallels. Yet these parallels do not end here. The infamous³¹ *Ketonet passim* (ornamented coat) that Jacob makes for his son Joseph³² later resurfaces on the body of Tamar in this chapter, following her abuse by Amnon. She rips the coat, puts dust on her head, and cries.³³

Upon learning of the rapes of Dinah and Tamar respectively, Jacob and David both have the same unexpected response: silence.³⁴ In his *Recalling the Covenant*, Rabbi Moshe Shamah writes that Jacob, as opposed to his sons who are “distressed and very angry, because he [Shechem] had committed a disgusting deed in Israel,”³⁵ is unable to express his inner feelings about the matter. Rabbi Shamah picks up on the way Jacob’s sons speak to Shechem and his father Hamor; “*be-mirmah*,” “with guile.”³⁶ This is the same word used by Isaac to explain Jacob’s trickery in obtaining the blessing of the firstborn: “your brother came *be-mirmah*, with guile, and took your blessing.” These are the only two times the word *mirmah* is used in the Five Books, and seem to point to an association.³⁷ Jacob is struggling with his conscience here. He remembers the very *mirmah* to which he had been a party, and is paralyzed because of it. Consequently, he cannot bring himself to outwardly condemn this new *mirmah*. With Amnon, David’s anger is mentioned in the text,³⁸ but he, too, does not say a word about it. Robert Alter connects this episode to David’s affair with Bathsheba, writing that “the catastrophic turn in David’s fortune began when he saw a beautiful woman and lusted after her. Now, the curse pronounced by Nathan on the house of David begins to unfold through the

³¹ The word ‘infamous’ is used here because while the *Ketonet passim* symbolizes prestige and kingship in the eyes of those who are affiliated with them [this is implied from Jacob’s singling out Joseph as his ‘favorite son’ (Gen. 37:3)] and giving him the coat, as well as the description in II Sam. 13:18 that this *Ketonet passim* was customarily worn by princesses), in the two instances they are brought up in the *Tanakh*, they are associated with jealousy, rape, mourning, and death. The *Ketonet passim*, which is so lauded by its beholders, wreaks nothing but havoc in every place it shows up. In fact, at the end of its tenure in the text, the *Ketonet passim* is ripped and destroyed, representing the sexual abuse of a half-sibling.

³² Gen. 37:3.

³³ II Sam. 13:19.

³⁴ Gen. 34:5; II Sam. 13:20–27.

³⁵ Gen. 34:7.

³⁶ Gen. 34:13.

³⁷ Moshe Shamah, *Recalling the Covenant: A Contemporary Commentary on the Five Books of the Torah*, pp. 161–163.

³⁸ II Sam. 13:21.

very same mechanism: a sexual transgression within the royal quarters.”³⁹ David cannot respond to Amnon’s sin, when he had so recently taken Bathsheba, a married woman, merely two chapters earlier.⁴⁰

When Jacob and David hear about the barbarous actions of their sons, their reactions are in direct polarity. Jacob, on his part, gets upset and rebukes his sons for their actions. The text specifies why he’s rebuking them—he’s worried that the neighboring cities will gang up against *ani u-beti, me and my family*.⁴¹ As the specification ‘and my family’ indicates, Jacob’s worries are not only for his own well-being but for the well-being of his entire family. Even Simeon and Levi, after their heinous crimes, get to remain part of the family fold. Jacob appears to forgive his sons for what they’ve done, and is moving on.

In the case of David, when Absalom flees the city after murdering Amnon, David hardly acknowledges him. Only after three years is David able to be consoled over the death of his son, allowing Absalom to enter the city of Jerusalem. Nevertheless, he still refuses to see him. It takes another two years of Absalom living in the capital alongside David for him to get fed up and make his anger known to David by instructing his servants to burn down one of Joab’s fields.⁴² Finally, when Absalom commits these crimes, David agrees to see him. David’s primary focus here is on kingship, not fatherhood. Jacob, in direct contrast, is altruistically concerned with keeping his family intact.⁴³ David appears to be monarchy-driven, willing to allow for the excommunication of his own child for the sake of preserving the kingdom.⁴⁴ He cannot embrace his son after the transgression. Rather than trying to strengthen his family and nation, David focuses on those who betrayed him personally, which results in the destruction of his family. In fact, when the *Tanakh* brings up David in relation to Absalom, it merely refers to him as “*ha-melekh*”⁴⁵ —the king,

³⁹ Robert Alter, *The David Story*, p. 265.

⁴⁰ David’s sin with Bathsheba is in II Sam. chapter 11.

⁴¹ Gen. 34:30.

⁴² II Sam. 14:30.

⁴³ Our intention here is not to ‘whitewash’ Jacob. It is apparent that he made mistakes, including cultivating the jealousy between his sons by giving Joseph the *Ketonet passim* (as we will bring up in the next comparison). His intentions, however, are otherwise pure, with his primary goal being to raise his family as best as possible.

⁴⁴ While this does come back later in a measure-for-measure fashion, with Absalom attempting to usurp the throne, David clearly does not anticipate this course of action.

⁴⁵ II Sam. 14:28.

rather than the more intimate, “his father.” Even *before* Absalom commits this act, David is referred to as the king.⁴⁶

II Samuel 13:31, 37

Genesis 37:34

לד ויקרע בעקב שמלתיו, וישם שק במתניו; לא ויקם המקור ויקרע את-בגדיו, וישכב ויתאבל על-בנו, ימים רבים. וקרעו נצבים, קרעו בגדים... לז ויתאבל על-בנו, כל-הימים.

³¹ At this, **David rent his garment** and lay down on the ground, and all his courtiers stood by with their clothes rent...³⁷**and [King David] mourned over his son a long time.** ³⁴ **Jacob rent his clothes**, put sackcloth on his loins, **and mourned over his son many days.**

In a sense, Jacob and David are both responsible for, and underestimate, the conflicts that occur among their children.⁴⁷ It is Jacob who sends Joseph, presumably in his infamous *Ketonet passim*, to inquire how his brothers are faring with the flocks of sheep (Gen. 37:14). Even before Joseph approaches his brothers, they conspire to kill him, but instead defer to selling him off to a group of Ishmaelites. They dip his coat in goat blood, so that Jacob will think that his son has been killed. His mourning is described: “Jacob rent his clothes, put a sackcloth on his loins, and observed mourning for his son many days” (Gen. 37:34).

In a similar incident, David gives his son Absalom permission to bring Amnon (who had raped Absalom’s sister Tamar) to a sheep shearing ceremony (II Sam. 13:24). David’s response to hearing about the death of his children is nearly identical to that of Jacob. David’s response to the death is described: “David rent his garment and lay down on the ground...and mourned over his son a long time” (II Sam. 13:31,37). As Robert Alter notes in *The David Story*, David, similar to Jacob, “flings himself into extravagant mourning over a son supposed to be dead who is actually alive.”⁴⁸ The extreme reaction by both figures could be in response to their roles in these deaths, as Jacob incited jealousy through his favoritism

⁴⁶ II Sam. 13:23

⁴⁷ For Jacob, these are the conflicts between Joseph and his brothers, which he never attempted to resolve. For David, this is the aforementioned conflict between Absalom and Amnon.

⁴⁸ Robert Alter, *The David Story*, p. 279.

of Joseph; and David failed to intervene when Amnon raped Tamar. At the end of these episodes, each guilty brother, Judah⁴⁹ and Absalom, leaves his respective family—for an extended period of time.

II Samuel 16:22

כב ויזהו, בשפן ישראל בארץ יהוא, וילך כב ויטו לאבשלום האהל, על-הגג; ויבא ראובן וישכב את-בלהה פילגש אביו, וישמע אבשלום אל-פילגשי אביו, לעיני כל-ישראל. פ

Genesis 35:22

²² So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, **and Absalom lay with his father's concubines** with the full knowledge of all Israel. ²² While Israel stayed in that land, **Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine**; and Israel found out.

Several chapters after Absalom and David reunite, Absalom gains a following and attempts to usurp the kingship from his father. Fearing for his life, David runs away.⁵⁰ To show his dominance over his father and assert his place on the throne, Absalom takes David's concubines to the roof⁵¹ of the house, and sleeps with them publicly for everyone to see.⁵² Recall that Jacob's firstborn son, Reuben, also sleeps with his father's concubine Bilhah.⁵³ Rabbi Shamah explains that "it is well substantiated that in many areas of the ancient Near East, having sexual relations with the wife or concubine of a...ruler...establishes one's claim to the mantle of leadership." According to this interpretation, Reuben's motive, like Absalom's, is to secure the leadership claim over the family.

⁴⁹ While Judah may not have been the only guilty one among the brothers, he certainly did partake in the plot. Notably, when Judah leaves the family fold, he engages with a woman named Tamar, who shares her name with Absalom's sister, who was raped by Amnon. See footnote #40.

⁵⁰ II Sam. 16:13.

⁵¹ The detail concerning the roof is not arbitrary. This appears to be measure for measure, referring to when David takes Bathsheba upon seeing her bathing from his rooftop—likely the same rooftop as Absalom!

⁵² II Sam. 16:22.

⁵³ Gen. 35:22.

[Note: While many traditional commentaries interpret the story of Reuben and Bilhah allegorically, the fact that the text portrays it in this manner still holds significance in our comparison to Absalom.]

I Kings 2:1

א וַיִּקְרָבוּ יְמֵי-דָוִד, לְמוֹת; וַיִּצַו אֶת-שְׁלֹמֹה לְיוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִם-נָא מְצֵאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ, בְּנֹו, לֵאמֹר.

¹ **And the time approached for David to die, he instructed his son Solomon as follows:**

Genesis 47:29

כֹּס וַיִּקְרָבוּ יְמֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, לְמוֹת, וַיִּקְרָא לְבְנוֹ לְיוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִם-נָא מְצֵאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ, שִׁים-נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת יְרֵכִי; וְעָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד וְאֱמֻת, אֵל-נָא תִקְבְּרֵנִי בְּמִצְרָיִם.

²⁹ **And the time approached for Israel to die, he summoned his son Joseph and said to him, “Do me this favor, place your hand under my thigh as a pledge of your steadfast loyalty: please do not bury me in Egypt.**

Turning to the ends of their lives, just before Jacob and David are about to die, there is yet another *dis legomenon* in the text. The verse says:

“*Va-yiqrevu yeme yisra-el lamut*”—“And the time approached for Israel [Jacob] to die.”⁵⁴

“*Va-yiqrevu yeme david lamut*”—“And the time approached for David to die.”⁵⁵

This exact choice of words occurs only twice in the *Tanakh*, seemingly to underscore the parallels and contrasts in the legacies of Jacob and David. Interestingly, these verses are both followed by the respective fathers calling on only one of their sons (Joseph and Solomon), whom they command to perform their last will and testament. With their deaths nearing, they each recite a poem: Jacob’s includes blessings and rebuke to his children; and David’s recaps many of the successes of his life, and offers praises to God. There is an important distinction between them, however. While Jacob gathers all of his children around his bedside prior to his death, David calls only upon one son, Solomon, whom he instructs to take over the kingship.

III: Family or Monarchy?

These correspondences between Jacob and David display a very interesting trend. In identifying most of the instances in which their lives ‘cross paths,’ we mentioned only three direct contrasts between them. By revisiting each contrast in greater depth, we may be able to pinpoint a common

⁵⁴ Gen. 47:29.

⁵⁵ I Kings 2:1.

denominator that distinguishes the long-term, family-driven success of Jacob from the rather short-term success of the kingdom of David.

The first contrast we mentioned was the deep love portrayed by Jacob towards Rachel, as opposed to the absence of affection from David towards Michal. David seems to be using Michal **for her relationship to the throne**, while Jacob has genuine affection for Rachel from the moment he meets her. Our second contrast was Jacob's decision to keep his sons Simeon and Levi within the family fold following their heinous crimes,⁵⁶ a response to Dinah's rape; compared with David's refusal to even see Absalom, following his murder of his brother. Jacob finds it crucial to reprimand his children, while still keeping them within the family. David, however, **is focused on the monarchy rather than his own fatherhood**, in which he distances himself from his son Absalom, and focuses on the monarchy instead. The third contrast does not arise until they're on their deathbeds. Jacob's final words occur when he gathers all of his sons around his bed to bless and rebuke them. In contrast, David neglects *all* his children on his deathbed, until finally Nathan the Prophet and Bathsheba are able to convince him to call in *one* of his sons, Solomon, in order to anoint him **to take over the kingship**. David does not call in all of his sons prior to his death, nor is he motivated to control the craze for power by his son, Adonijah.⁵⁷

The common overarching theme in these three contrasts is that the decisions of David surround issues relating primarily to the monarchy, while Jacob's decisions are family-centric. The key difference between the life of Jacob and that of David appears to be the presence of kingship; Jacob was able to build what he did because his goals were different from those of David. In these contrasts, David does three very small and seemingly insignificant things that a reader would be unlikely to pick up on. If not for their direct contrast to Jacob, they would remain insignificant and would hardly be worth discussing. Nevertheless, the *Tanakh* leaves them as hints to the contrasts between Jacob's attentiveness in raising his family, and David's focus on his kingship.

Regarding the contrast between their relationships with their respective wives, Rachel and Michal, Bazak notes that the relationship between David and Michal began with one-sided love on the part of Michal and consent to marry on the part of David based on the opportunity afforded to him to become the king's son-in-law. Without a doubt, this imbalance

⁵⁶ Even after Reuben slept with Jacob's own concubine, and Jacob learned of it, he allowed him to remain in the family fold as well (Gen. 35:22).

⁵⁷ I Kings chapter 1.

was not a good situation, and is the root of all the problematic proceedings that transpired in the future.⁵⁸ Amongst these problematic proceedings were the David and Bathsheba story.⁵⁹ David was scolded by Nathan the Prophet and punished for it severely, including the death of the child conceived from those actions. It is important to note that Solomon, the living child of this relationship, is later anointed as David's successor to the throne. We will discuss the significance of this soon.

On Jacob's part, from the moment he marries, there is one running theme throughout his life: to raise his family. And he does so to the best of his ability. Jacob is a man who suffers hardships throughout his entire life, overcoming challenge after challenge. Nevertheless, he puts his children first, and makes sure to be an example before his family that "family first" is of utmost importance. Obviously, as mentioned earlier, Jacob makes mistakes in his overt favoritism of Joseph by giving him the *Ketonet passim*,⁶⁰ and has several other downfalls in his life. But each time it happens, he is able to pull himself up, brush himself off, and better himself as a person and as a parent. This is precisely why, after his interaction with the angel, his name is changed to Israel. The verse states that the reason Jacob's name is changed is because he has struggled with God and with man, and has still prevailed.⁶¹ Jacob is constantly undergoing transformation after transformation, which allows him to build himself up over time and build his family in the process. Thus, the Children of Jacob become referred to as the *Benei Yisrael*—the Children of Israel; the reason they prevail for so many years is because they uphold the values of Jacob.

David's inattention to imparting these 'Jacobic' values to his children leads them—especially his son Solomon, who assumes the monarchy—to go about their lives without integrating these values; as opposed to Jacob, who instills them into his own children. Even though one of a monarchy's defining qualities is its ancestral rulership, David does not cultivate his child for the job, and only upon his deathbed does he appoint Solomon as his successor. Even then, he had to be coaxed into it by Nathan the Prophet and Bathsheba. Solomon, the product of David's relationship with Bathsheba, is immediately thrown into this position of leadership by his father (unlike David, who is handpicked for the job by God himself), and must figure out on his own how to lead a people. Later on, when the people rebel against David's grandson Rehoboam and the House of Judah, in I Kings chapter 12, the text does not tell us that they rebel against

⁵⁸ Amnon Bazak, *Maqbilot Nifgasbot: Maqbilot Sifrutiyot Be-Sefer Shemuel*.

⁵⁹ 2, ch. 11.

⁶⁰ Gen. 37:3.

⁶¹ Gen. 32:29.

the house of Rehoboam, the house of Judah, or even the house of his father, Solomon. Instead, the text states, “Israel rebelled against the house of **David**” (I Kings 12:16). This reference to the house of David does not restrict the blame specifically to Rehoboam, but shines the light upon David, who began the unfortunate trajectory that leads to this split in the kingdom.

In order to better understand the ideal role of a king from a Biblical point of view, let us turn to Deuteronomy 17, which relates God’s laws to Israel if they choose to appoint a king: “If, after you have entered the land...you decide ‘I will set a king over me, as do all the nations around me’” (Deut. 17:14), then Israel should appoint a king, but it must be one that God chooses. The king must also follow a specific set of rules pertinent only to a king.⁶² These rules are written in order to ensure that the king remains focused on the people without getting too involved in himself, his possessions, or his own ego. This will allow the king to rule with a just heart and with God in mind.

When we view Solomon’s inauguration into the throne in the context of the laws of Deuteronomy, we can see why the monarchy begins its decline here. Solomon, we are told, has 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots (I Kings 5:6), loves many foreign women, and has 700 wives and 300 concubines (I Kings 11:3). Additionally, the book of Kings does not spare any detail describing Solomon’s great wealth, his many gold and silver possessions,⁶³ and the thirteen years he spends building his palace.⁶⁴ He is, the text states, the richest king on earth at the time.⁶⁵ His heart is turned after other gods, and he is not whole with God, as his father was.⁶⁶ Clearly, this is not in accordance with the writings in Deuteronomy. Solomon may have transgressed these laws because his father did not focus on raising him as the next king of Israel.

⁶² These rules are documented in Deut. 17:15–20. The king is instructed to do as follows:

- 1) God must choose the king.
- 2) The king may not have too many horses.
- 3) The king may not bring the nation back to Egypt.
- 4) The king may not have a lot of wives.
- 5) The king may not have a lot of money.
- 6) The king’s heart should not be lifted up above his brethren.

⁶³ These are sprinkled throughout the Book of I Kings. See, for instance, chapter 10.

⁶⁴ I Kings 7:1.

⁶⁵ I Kings 10:23.


⁶⁶ I Kings 11:4.

In chapter 3 of I Kings, at the very beginning of the reign of Solomon, the verse tells us, “And Solomon allied himself by marriage with Pharaoh, the king of Egypt” (I Kings 3:1). We understand this to mean that he married Pharaoh’s daughter in order to create an allegiance with the nation of Egypt. At this point, the law in Deuteronomy regarding bringing the people back to Egypt begins to break down. Making the reference to Egypt painstakingly clear, the text states, “*Va-yithaten Shelomo et phar’oh mel-ekh mizrayim*” (I Kings 3:1), which can very literally be translated to mean, “And Solomon married Pharaoh, the king of Egypt.”

While we are not told explicitly that Solomon’s heart is “lifted up above his brethren,” as Deuteronomy forbids, Yoram Hazony posits in *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* that a king such as Solomon who cannot drink from a silver vessel because it is too lowly, probably does not know much of the sufferings of his people.⁶⁷ It’s very difficult to say that he has great concern for the burdens imposed on the people when he builds himself a palace larger than the Temple he builds for God. Solomon’s actions are in direct contrast to each of the laws mentioned in Deuteronomy.

As we see throughout the rest of the book of Kings, this monarchy ends up leading to the breakdown of the core values of Jacob, and thus the desecration of the commandments of God. From there, a colossal rift is formed between the tribes associated with Judah and those of Israel. Many tribes eventually assimilate and are lost into other nations, followed by the destruction of the holy Temple.

IV: Conclusion

The unfortunate decline of the monarchy was due to its being built without the “family first” foundations that previous generations had instilled. This theme is a constant throughout the text: it is apparent from the minute David speaks his first words, and it is apparent from when we learn of his primary intentions for marrying Michal. It is important to learn, through the life of David, where the ‘Jacobic’ values are exceptionally strong. Jacob’s absolute commitment to his family is what pulls him through his challenges and allows him to succeed as a leader. It is for this reason that the Jewish people are referred to as the *Benei Yisrael*—The Sons of Israel [Jacob]—until today. As Sir Winston Churchill put it, “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” Jacob’s utmost devotion to his family is what allowed him to create the legacy that he did. 

⁶⁷ Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, p. 157.

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