

BOOK REVIEW

ANALOGIES AND PARALLELS IN THE BOOK OF SAMUEL

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Dr. Moshe Garsiel's book, written in Hebrew and recently published in English translation,* is an interesting and thought-provoking contribution to the study of the Biblical narrative. The author, who is head of the Department of Bible at Bar-Ilan University, proposes in this new book a method of literary research whose crux is the comparative structural analysis of literary material in the biblical narrative — in this case, in the First Book of Samuel — such as the comparison of Eli and his sons with Samuel and his parents, of Samuel's period with that of the judges and leaders who preceded it, of David with Samuel, and many others.

The technique of the comparison-sets as developed in the Biblical narrative has until now not been accorded systematic scholarly consideration. While the literary research of Perry and Sternberg,¹ Alter,² Gordon,³ and Miscall⁴ consider

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* Moshe Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies and Parallels*. Ramat-Gan: Revivim, 1985.

1. M. Perry & M. Sternberg, "The King through Ironic Eyes: the Narrator's Devices in the Biblical Story of David and Bathsheba and Two Excurses on the Theory of the Narrative Test" (Heb.), *ha-Sifrut* 1 (1968), pp. 281–283; M. Sternberg, "Delicate Balance in the Story of the Rape of Dinah: Biblical Narrative and the Rhetoric of the narrative Text" (Heb.), *ha-Sifrut* 4 (1973), pp. 228–231.

2. R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, 1981), pp. 21, 47–62, 88–113, 181.

3. R.P. Gordon, "David's Rise and Saul's Demise: Narrative Analogy on I Samuel 24–26," *Tyndale Bulletin* 31 (1979), pp. 37–64.

4. P.D. Miscall, "The Jacob and Joseph Stories as Analogies," *JSOT* 6 (1978), pp. 28–40.

literary comparisons in Biblical tales, they only deal with a selected few. What is unique about the present work is that it systematically examines all of the narrative sequences included in I Samuel.

In his first chapter, Garsiel brings out the antithetical comparison between the families of Samuel and Eli (pp. 32–44). This contrast already begins in the parent's generation: the author of the Book of Samuel compares Samuel's parents, who are outstandingly generous, with Eli, who is seen as extremely insensitive both in his attitude towards the unhappy Hannah and in his indulgent upbringing of his two sons. The principal contrast, however, is between Samuel's behavior and that of Eli's sons; here, too, the outcome is antithetical. Eli's sons' behavior led to defeat on the battlefield and the capture of the ark (I Sam. 4), while Samuel's, which persuaded the people to repent, led to a victory for Israel and the recovery of captured cities and territories (I Sam. 7).

Following Prof. Yehudah Elitzur, Garsiel shows that the stories compared contain many common expressions, which reinforce and confirm such an antithetical comparison (pp. 42–43). Among others, the following identical expressions are highlighted in Chapters 4 and 7: *va-yiqabzu* (assembled); *va-yishme'u* (heard); *va-yira'u* (afraid); *va-yoshi'enu* (saved); *va-tehom* (discomfort, terrify); *va-yinagfu* (routed); *yad* (hand). However, such expressions also appear in other biblical descriptions of wars and similar contexts, at least in part, so that they do not necessarily indicate any particular associative connection between the two chapters mentioned.⁵ At the same time, one cannot deny the connection established by the narrator between the two stories by means of the place-name, Eben ha-Ezer, which figures nowhere else in the Bible. This was already noted by Rabbi David Kimchi in his commentary to 4:1, and as followed by Elitzur.⁶ Garsiel has now added a further dimension to the comparison by stressing that the main point of the description in these chapters (4 and 7) is to bring out the contrast between the periods of Eli and of Samuel within the overall context of the complex of comparisons between them.

5. See, e.g., *va-yiqabzu* (they assembled) in Jud. 12:4; I Sam. 28:1, 4; 29:1; II Sam. 2:30; II K. 6:24; etc.; *va-yishme'u* (they heard) in Jud. 9:46; 20:3; *va-yishme'u Pelishtim* (the Philistines heard) in I Sam. 13:3; II Sam. 5:17; *va-yishme'u... va-yira'u* (they heard... and they were afraid) in I Sam. 17:11, 24; I Kings 3:28; *le-hoshi'a mi-yad* (to save from the hand of) in Jud. 2:18; 8:22; 13:5; I Sam. 9:16. The root *humam* (to discomfort, terrify) generally describes the salvation of God — in Ex. 14:24; Josh. 10:10–11; Jud. 4:15; I Sam. 14:20; II Sam. 22:14–15; I Kings 1:45; Ps. 144:5; Ruth 1:19; *le-hinagaf lifney* (to be routed before) in II Sam. 2:16; 18:7; II Kings 14:12; II Chron. 25:22; etc. The expressions *yad H'* (hand of God) and *le-hazil mi-yad* (to rescue from the hand of...) appear in similar contexts dozens of times in the Bible (see S. Mandelkern, *Veteris Testamenti Conkordantiae* [Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv, 1965], pp. 450–451).

6. Y. Elitzur, "Eben ha-Ezer" (Heb.), *Sefer Seidel* (Publications of The Israel Society for Biblical Research. 11 [Jerusalem, 1962]), pp. 111–118.

In the second half of Chapter 1, Garsiel shows how the author of the Book of Samuel depicts Samuel's leadership by means of analogy with those stories about leaders familiar to the people through tradition. He discusses the stories of Moses (pp. 45–51), Deborah and Barak (pp. 55–56), and Samson (p. 56), and also describes the analogy between the story here of the wanderings of the ark and the tradition regarding the Exodus from Egypt (pp. 51–54). This latter analogy has been noted in a number of studies,⁷ but it here acquires greater validity within the framework of Garsiel's general theory on the use of analogy in the Samuel narratives (Chapters 1–7).

In his second chapter, Garsiel treats the many comparisons made by the author of the Book of Samuel between the monarchical regime demanded by the people of Samuel and the previous regime of leaders and judges. In his opinion, the author of Samuel prefers the *ancien regime*, so to speak, of the kingship of God by the mediation of His leaders and agents, to a monarchy of flesh and blood. Thus, Garsiel notes that Samuel's oration to the people of Israel on the "manner of the king" (I Sam. 8) depicts a dictatorial, tyrannical regime. The comparison developed between Samuel's address and the subsequent behavior of the kings shows that the predictions made in this address became fully realized in the reign of Saul, and even more so in that of David. Saul indeed conducted himself like a tyrant, reaching his lowest point in the affair of the annihilation of Nob, the city of the priests (I Sam. 22:16–19). Saul's statement to his slaves, as cited by the author of Samuel, also pertains to the "manner of the king": "Saul said to the *courtiers* standing about him: 'Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give *field and vineyards* to every one of you? And *will he make you captains of thousands* or captains of hundreds?'" (I Sam. 22:6–8). Indeed, over the course of time Saul did appoint captains of thousands and captains of hundreds and gave them fields and vineyards, as anticipated in Samuel's speech (*Ibid.*, v. 8, 12, 14; see pp. 73–74). David was also guilty of a tyrannical act when he took possession of Mephibosheth's fields, later returning only half (II Sam. 16:4; 19:28–31).⁸ The custom of David's sons, Absalom and Adonijah, of driving chariots and horses preceded by runners (II Sam. 15:1–6; I Kings 1:5–6) is a realization of the passage in Samuel's oration in which the king would take the common people to run before his chariot (I Sam. 8:11; pp. 75–77).

7. See e.g., D. Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible* (London, 1963), pp. 73–88; and now Y. Hoffman, *Yezi'at Mizrayim be-Emunat ha-Miqra* [The Doctrine of the Exodus in the Bible (Heb.)] (Tel-Aviv, 1983).

8. The Sages already discerned the note of disparagement in this story, and considered that as additional reason for the division of the kingdom and even for the exile of Israel from its land (Shabbat 56b).

Like his predecessors,⁹ Garsiel views the leadership of Eli and Samuel as a transitional stage of “pre-monarchical leadership.” The failure of that leadership system lay in the principle of inheritance, which is a central element in any monarchical regime. Samuel and Eli failed when they sought to bequeath their posts to their sons, like kings. The kings who took Samuel’s place, on the other hand, failed in the arbitrary and high-handed manner in which they acted towards their subjects (pp. 60–61).

This conception presents a problem, for while the author of the Book of Samuel presents a number of leaders from the end of the era of the judges, not all of them fulfill the same functions.¹⁰ The prophet does not replace the priest, nor the king the prophet. Although all three act as judges, the priest’s world and role are primarily in the area of temple and ritual, and he naturally bequeathes the priesthood to “his seed after him,” such being the nature of the priestly dynasty. The priest is not conceived of as the agent of the Lord; Samuel, on the other hand, is not a priest, but a prophet-messenger who, by his prophetic function, attains sanctification and recognition as one who prays for his people to save them from the Philistines. Samuel did not bequeath prophecy to his sons, as this is not a privilege which can be inherited, but an obligation and a duty. Samuel thus appoints his sons as *judges* (in the town of Beersheba), but not as *prophets*. Beersheba), but not as *prophets*. Thus, Samuel and his sons do not compete with the king.¹¹ As the monarchy became established and the kingship became a permanent hereditary institution, the king needed the constant supervision of the prophets.

One of Garsiel’s key points in Chapter 2 is the negative attitude of the author of the Book of Samuel to the monarchical regime, opposing the generally accepted scholarly belief that the Book of Samuel favors monarchy.¹² As Garsiel does not

9. See S. Abramski, “The Leadership of Samuel and the Position of his Sons in Beersheba” (Heb.), *Beth Mikra* 21 (1976), pp. 596–597.

10. Like this study, the Sages considered each of these leaders as the successor to his predecessor. They thought of the priest Eli as a prophet as well: “‘And the sun rose and the sun set.’ [Eccles. 1:5] Before the Holy One, blessed be He, sets the sun of one righteous man He raises the sun of another. Before He set the sun of Moses, He raised the sun of Joshua; before the sun of Eli set, Samuel’s sun rose. And so it has been said, ‘And the lamp of God was not yet extinguished’ [I Sam. 3:3]” (Midrash Shmuel 8:16; Yalqut Shim’oni 2:97). Rabbi David Kimchi cites these words of the Sages, introduced by the phrase, *uve-derash amar*.

11. The reason given for the request made to Samuel to establish a monarchy, namely, that his sons did not follow in his path (I Sam. 8:5), seems illogical. The unsuitable behavior of Samuel’s sons is no reason to make a fundamental change in the institution of the judges. The corrupt sons should be removed, not the institution abolished.

12. See S. Abramski, *Malkhut Sha’ul u-Malkhut David* [The Kingship of Saul and the Kingship of David] (Jerusalem, 1977) pp. 12–17, 174–176, *passim*. For a summary of the thesis of this book, see above, pp. 7–21.

deal with II Samuel, the discussion of the author's view of the monarchical regime is incomplete, as he fails to clarify how one may explain David's military victories (II Sam. 8), or his achievements in the area of ritual by the transfer of the ark to Jerusalem (II Sam. 6). This omission results from the author's separation of the two parts of the book, and his very brief explication of his views concerning selected passages from II Samuel.¹³

In the third chapter, Garsiel notes Saul's degeneration following his first sin — sacrificing the burnt-offering too early, prior to Samuel's arrival (I Sam. 13:8–14) — and the contrast developed between Saul and Jonathan. Garsiel's innovation is in the point that this comparison is reinforced by the comparison between the story of the battle of Michmas and that of Gideon's war against the Midianites. Through columns of parallels, he shows that the story of the battle of Michmas — in its vocabulary, its motifs and even its main subject — is constructed on the model of the narrative of Gideon's war against the Midianites. In his opinion, the purpose of the analogy is to demonstrate that Jonathan acted in the Battle of Michmas as Gideon had earlier, both of them going to war with few men against many. On the basis of this analogy, Saul is the opposite both of Gideon and of Jonathan, for he put his trust in the size of his army, and even sinned in fearing its collapse. Moreover, at Gibeah he had six hundred men, that is, twice the number at Gideon's disposal earlier (Jud. 7:6–8; I Sam. 13:15), but he still did not attack the Philistine camp until he observed the panic there and the absence of Jonathan and his arms-bearer (I Sam. 14:16–23; pp. 90–98).

Chapter 4 deals with the description of Saul's decline and fall. Garsiel shows how the author of the Book of Samuel exploits comparisons from the narratives of the judges to intensify his criticism and enrich the perspective. In these descriptions, too, the Gideon stories serve as a convenient background for a critical, antithetical comparison with Saul (pp. 100–104). Garsiel shows how, according to the stories in the Book of Samuel, Saul resembles Abimelech: the evil spirit is mentioned in connection with both (Jud. 9:23; I Sam. 16:15); both of them caused a civil war, exterminating groups of people, and leaving only a small child to escape; and each of them, before his death, beseeched his arms-bearer to kill him with his sword (pp. 104–107). Garsiel believes that there is also a suggestion of an analogy between the two in the theme of the pursued, independent prophet, who climbs to the top of the mountain, declaring his rebuke against tyranny and ingratitude, and from there flees — Jotham at Mount Gerizim (Jud. 9:7–21) and David standing “on the top of a hill afar off” (I Sam. 26:14 ff.). This comparison seems less convincing than the others proposed by Garsiel, for this motif recurs in the Bible when Abner addresses Joab: “And they took up a position on top of a

13. E.g., pp. 75–76, 107.

hill. Abner then called out to Joab, ‘Must the sword devour forever...’” (II Sam. 2:25–26), so that it should be considered as a recurring literary theme, rather than as an analogy aimed at a specific comparison between two persons.

In the fifth and final chapter, Garsiel analyzes the comparisons drawn by the author between Saul and David. Like Jonathan, David is depicted as a contrast to Saul. While Jonathan embodies the thesis that, with God’s help, the few can overcome the many (as in the battle of Michmas), David represents the thesis that neither strength nor weapon lead to ascendancy when a man goes forth to fight Goliath (pp. 124–130). In both cases, Saul stands apart and represents the opposite approach. The contrast between them is more obvious in the affair of Saul’s pursuit of David. Here, David had the chance to slay his pursuer and did not do so. This comparison, as developed in the narratives of the Book of Samuel, clearly shows who the kingship was removed from the former and given to the latter (pp. 130–140). In this chapter, Garsiel points out many comparisons between Saul and David on the basis of plot and language. Some of the comparisons and implications were already noted by the Sages (Yoma 22b) or by other earlier commentators and scholars (such as the similarities between the stories of David and Joseph),¹⁴ but Garsiel here examines the entire complex of equivalences and implications extremely methodically, and so succeeds in discovering many interesting allusions unnoticed by his predecessors.

Of especial interest are his discoveries in the story of David and Nabal (I Sam. 25). A number of scholars have already noted that Nabal’s attitude to David cannot only be ascribed to the man’s miserliness and evil, but is an expression of the objections of the house of Caleb to the revolt of David’s family against Saul.¹⁵ Garsiel now supports this theory by means of hints in the narrator’s account of Nabal’s reaction to David, which contain word-plays and allusions inimical to David’s lineage (Peretz... Obed... Jesse...) and against the home-town of his family (Bethlehem). All these are emphasized in the statement: “Who is *David*? Who is the son of *Jesse*? There are many *servants* [*‘avadim* — pun on Obed] nowadays that *break away* [*ha-mitparzim* — pun on Peretz] every man [*ish* — pun on Jesse] from his master. Should I then take my bread [*lehem* — pun on Bethlehem]...” (I Sam. 25:10–11; pp. 138–141).

Unlike the methods usually applied to the study of the Book of Samuel, which distinguish a variety of literary sources and traditions,¹⁶ Garsiel assumes that its

14. See e.g., H.J. Stoebe, *Das erste Buch Samuelis* (Gütersloh, 1973), pp. 325–326; R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (op. cit.), p. 117.

15. See, e.g., H. Genizi, “Nabal the Carmelite and David” (Heb.), *Bar-Ilan Journal* (1973).

16. The various methods are briefly discussed on pp. 11–14.

author performed a masterful creative act with the earlier material at his disposal. He does not consider that author as an “editor” in “the restricted sense of one who performs a technical task of gathering material, adding transitional passages, arranging and explaining, but rather a creative artistic author in the full sense of the word. This author of course made use of early literary material of various kinds that were available to him, which he arranged, adapted and shaped in accordance with the literary and historical-philosophic conception which he set as the guiding principle of his work” (p. 14).

According to Garsiel’s study, the author of the Book of Samuel was familiar with considerable portions of the Book of Judges, particularly the narratives about Gideon, Abimelech and Jephthah.¹⁷ He was also familiar with parts of Exodus, especially the traditions concerning the Exodus from Egypt.¹⁸ It would also appear that he was familiar with parts of Genesis, especially the stories of Jacob and Esau, Jacob and Laban, and the Joseph narratives.¹⁹ Some of the correspondences between the Book of Samuel and these other works were known to earlier scholars, and are cited as such by Garsiel, but he added many others, and analyzed their significance in a much more systematic manner. The connection between the Book of Samuel and other biblical books is important, not only from the viewpoint of literary analysis, but from that of the history of literature — that is, in order to solve the problem of the date of those books which, according to Garsiel’s method, preceded the author of the Book of Samuel. The dating of the books of the Bible is among the most important problems of biblical research, and it is unfortunate that Garsiel was not more specific about the contribution of his method to the solution of these problems.

Garsiel’s new book is a product of scholarly research written in accordance with all the rules governing Bible scholarship. The writer shows thorough mastery of related studies that preceded it. Although he follows the trends evolved in biblical research in recent years, he is unique and independent in his method, his claims are generally valid, and his innovations interesting. He is aware of a number of weaknesses which appear at certain points in his research, but he considers the accumulated evidence to justify his conclusions.²⁰

One of the means of comparing narratives is that of comparison of their shared vocabulary. Garsiel presents many sets of correspondences in parallel columns, but some of these do not really prove the existence of deliberate analogies, as

17. See, e.g., p. 83–85, 94–99, 100–107.

18. See, e.g., pp. 47–54, 83.

19. See, e.g., pp. 131–132, 139, 142–144.

20. See, e.g., p. 43.

elements of the shared vocabulary also appear elsewhere in the Bible in relation to similar stories. Thus, these may be lexical items or typological motifs common to certain types of stories, and are not necessarily indicative of a connection between two particular stories.²¹

The author concludes that the network of comparisons and analogies extends throughout the Book of Samuel, although in fact he proves this thesis for I Samuel alone. That truncation is artificial. Garsiel defends himself on a “technical” ground — the quantity of material amassed — but to provide a complete picture he should have given at least a selection of samples of the application of his method to II Samuel, and not made do with hints and isolated examples from the second part of the book.²²

Although the main interest of Garsiel’s book is in the principle of comparison, he also provides more comprehensive literary analyses. Each of the literary discussions is interesting in its own right, so that even one who does not read the study as a whole can learn something from the comments and elucidations on various passages of I Samuel.

It is unfortunate that Garsiel did not provide his excellent book with indexes, for despite the quite detailed table of contents, a reader seeking specific information would benefit from an index of subjects and of verses to facilitate his search.

We may summarize by saying that Garsiel’s new book makes a significant contribution to biblical research and to the methods of literary study of the books of the Bible, opening new paths for the study of other biblical books.

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21. Examples of this criticism are given above, once in our discussion of Ch. 1 and once in our discussion of Ch. 4.

22. One of the consequences of this separation is pointed out in our discussion of Ch. 2.