

## Yeshiva vet aims to make King David must-see TV



Michael Green, creator of the new NBC series *Kings*, adds touches of sci-fi and fantasy in his contemporary biblical drama.

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Michael Green was walking down a street in Jerusalem in late 2006 when the concept of the new television series *Kings* came into focus.

“The idea had been roiling my brain for a while,” he said.

Green sat down to write the pilot for *Kings* while working as writer and co-executive producer for *Heroes*.

*Kings*, which launched Sunday on NBC with a special two-hour premiere, transports the biblical drama of young David, Goliath, King Saul and the prophet Samuel and transports to a contemporary city that looks a lot like a gleaming New York after a thorough scrubbing.

Don't look for a 21st century swords-and-sandals epic in the series. The political intrigue and corporate power plays have a distinctly Washingtonian ring, and part of the fun is looking for parallels to the last year of President George W. Bush's administration, the Cold War, Vietnam, Iraq, Middle East conflicts and even the kidnapping of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit.

Green, 36, who attended a yeshiva in New York and whose mother is Israeli, is a bit coy about drawing direct biblical-contemporary comparisons.

“It's not for me to say what the parallels are,” he said. “That's up to each viewer.”

However, the Jewish or Christian viewer who stayed awake in religious school should have no trouble identifying the TV protagonists with their biblical counterparts.

We meet King Silas Benjamin (King Saul of the tribe of Benjamin, first king of Israel), David Shepherd (David, the shepherd), the king's son Jack (Jonathan), the king's daughter Michelle (Michal), and the Rev. Ephraim Samuels (the Prophet Samuel).

Actors in the two key roles are Ian McShane (*Heroes*) as the king and Australian actor Chris Egan as David.

In the premiere episode, we find the king, in an expensive power suit, ruling over the prosperous Kingdom of Gilboa and ensconced with his queen in a mansion in the capital of Shiloh. He is also at war with neighbouring Gath and when his son is

kidnapped during a military skirmish, it is David, a fellow soldier, who frees Jack and earns the gratitude of the king.

To free the hostage, David has to do battle with Goliath, who appears in a rather unexpected form. At home, David becomes an instant media favourite.

Peace is made but soon broken, followed by new negotiations with prickly Gath officers, who look suspiciously like Russian generals, with square faces and jackets full of medals. On a softer touch, David and Michelle (the beautiful Allison Miller) begin to fall in love.

Green, as creator and executive producer of *Kings*, makes it even tougher to define the precise genre of the series by introducing touches of sci-fi and fantasy. For instance, the emblem of Gilboa is the orange monarch butterfly, and when a successor to the king is anointed, a swarm of butterflies form a crown around the chosen one's head.

The show's crew shot a season's worth of 14 episodes — the premiere contains two — in and around New York, studios in Brooklyn's Greenpoint and in a mansion on Long Island. With a large cast, opulent palace scenes and shooting in New York, it's an expensive production.

Green wouldn't provide an exact budget figure, but he put the cost of an average prime-time TV episode between \$2 million and \$4.5 million, with *Kings* definitely on the high end.

Green, a native New Yorker, has close ties to Israel. His Tel Aviv-born mother came to the United States after finishing her army service, met Green's father, and “has visited ever since,” Green said, adding, “most of my extended family lives in Israel.”

He is optimistic that *Kings* will be seen eventually on Israeli and British television, which usually happens after the second or third season of a series in the United States.

Green reinforced his boyhood yeshiva studies with a more academic perspective when he took a double major in human biology and religious studies at Stanford University. After college, his interest turned to story writing rather than religion or biology.

“I once created the character of a doctor in one of my shows,” he said, “but never became one myself — to the disappointment of my parents.”

## Jackie Mason headlines Maccabi Canada fundraiser

TORONTO — “There's nothing better than representing Canada in Israel as a Jew,” Allen Gerskup, president of Maccabi Canada, passionately declared. “To me, that's an amazing thrill. You take that with you everywhere.”

Legendary comedian Jackie Mason will be the main attraction at a Maccabi Canada gala fundraising dinner and auction next month at the Liberty Grand in Toronto's Exhibition Place. Ned Goodman, founder of the DundeeGroup of Companies, will deliver a state-of-the-market address.

Since its inception, Maccabi Canada — a volunteer-based, national, non-profit athletic organization that strives to promote Jewish identity and a strong bond with Israel through amateur sports — has sent thousands of Jewish youngsters and young adults to the Maccabiah Games, which takes place in Israel every four years. The Maccabiah, also known as the Jewish Olympics, is the third-largest sporting event in the world and the largest Jewish sports competition.

According to Gerskup, who became actively involved in Maccabi Canada in 1984, after being approached to organize its softball team, the Maccabiah is probably the only place where the younger players, ages 14-18, get the chance to meet Jewish teens from more than 50 countries. In most cases, it's their first trip to Israel, and the event isn't just about sports; it's also about Jewish pride and a love for Israel, he explained.

“The experience of putting Canada on their chest and marching into a stadium with 50,000 Jews in Israel, and hearing Hatikvah at the opening ceremonies, is a tremendous lift,” he said.

In fact, the Maccabi World Union, of which Maccabi Canada is a constituent member, has become one of the largest single groups to visit Israel.

The cost of sending an athlete to compete in the games is about \$7,500, including airfare, hotel, meals, uniforms, medical



ALLEN GERSKUP

and insurance needs, and social events. Maccabi Canada, therefore, launched this fundraising initiative so that no qualified athlete would miss this remark-

able, enriching opportunity due to financial need.

The Canadian team will include more than 450 athletes and 75 coaches, medical and support staff at this summer's 18th Maccabiah Games — also known as the Chai Games — which will be held July 12-23. Among the prominent Canadians scheduled to attend the opening ceremonies are renowned businessman Gerald Schwartz and award-winning film producer Robert Lantos.

Tickets for the gala event are \$1,000. A donation of any amount is welcome. Visit [maccabianada.com](http://maccabianada.com) for more information. Tax receipts will be provided.

## Olmert lauds his government's achievements

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Ehud Olmert said his government went further than any other in negotiations with the Palestinians.

Opening what will likely be his last cabinet meeting with a look at his government's highlights, the prime minister also referred Sunday to “two open and well-known war efforts, one in the North and one in the South” — the Second Lebanon War in 2006 and the recent Operation Cast Lead military operation in Gaza.

“The one in the North ended in an unprecedented achievement. The North is quiet. There is no firing. There is no threat. Many people are living quietly. The North is prospering,” Olmert told the cabinet.

“We made an important and successful effort in the South. It has yet to be finished. I hope that it will be finished. It has yet to reach full fruition vis-a-vis the achievements that we expected, but we reached significant, very significant achievements and restored the international awareness of the strength of the IDF and of the deterrent power of the state of Israel.”

Olmert said his contacts with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas will lead to the signing of a peace agreement.

“I have said previously and I do not hesitate to reiterate: The state of Israel will need to make unprecedented dramatic and painful concessions in order to reach peace,” Olmert said. “But if we have not reached it by now, this is — first and foremost — the result of the Palestinian leaders' weakness, lack of will and lack of courage in reaching an agreement. Everything else is excuses and attempts to divert attention from the main issue. We were ready to sign a peace agreement; the Palestinians, to my regret, did not have the courage to do so.”

Olmert also reviewed the government's achievements in the education and social welfare spheres, and commended the efforts of Education Minister Yuli Tamir and Social Welfare and Social Services Minister Isaac Herzog.

## Pesach comes to life

Jordan Mandel  
Correspondent

TORONTO — Moses, Pharaoh, Pyramids and Plagues have landed in Toronto for the Exodus Experience. From March 12 to March 31, visitors will be transported back 3,300 years to ancient Egypt, where an interactive re-enactment of the Passover story is brought to life.

The production, hosted by Tzivos Hashem Canada, is the most recent installment of a decade-old concept that has toured the world. Audiences from Australia to South Africa and California to Connecticut have been wowed by the engaging experience.

Last year's Exodus Experience occurred in New York City to the delight of more than 18,000 men, women, and children, who were immersed in their ancient ancestors' legendary experience.

“People are crazy about it,” remarked Rabbi Yonah Vilenkin, director of Tzivos Hashem Toronto.

For the Toronto iteration, sets have been constructed in partitioned rooms within a hangar at Downsview Park. The audience is literally led through the Pesach story beginning with the enslavement of the Jews, through Moses' demands to Pharaoh to let his people — in this case, the audience — go, all the way to the splitting of the

Red Sea and the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai.

The sets are remarkably detailed and exceed expectations of what one might encounter in such a setting. The acting is professional, the sets are elaborate and lighting and audio arrangements augment the experience.

Although it ostensibly may be geared towards a younger crowd, the show has a great deal of tongue-in-cheek humour clearly inserted for the accompanying parents.

“I think it's great,” said Daniel Delman, a parent at the Experience's March 12 debut. “The most I ever had was the story at school and watching the *Ten Commandments*. This takes

Passover to a whole new level.” By the looks and sounds of it, the kids loved it too.

The Exodus Experience is highly interactive and children constantly jeered Pharaoh and cheered Moses as they engaged in their frustrating and comedic back-and-forth. As there is no obvious ‘seating’ area, the audience is immersed right in the set of each scene.

At the end of the journey children are invited to participate in the Model Matzah bakery where they learn the intricate process involved in matzah-making. They thresh wheat, knead dough, and bake matzah in the same way it has been done for thousands of years.

The Exodus Experience is open to the Public for Sunday showings on March 15, 22, and 29 at 1:30 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. Midweek showings are reserved



A scene from the Exodus Experience for community groups. For reservations, call (416) 661-0650 or visit [www.exodus09.com](http://www.exodus09.com). Tickets are \$12.