



David, King of Israel, and Caleb in Biblical Memory

By Jacob L. Wright



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Of all the Bible's personalities, David is the most profoundly human. Courageous, cunning, and complex, he lives life to the hilt. Whatever he does, he does with all his might, exuding both vitality and vulnerability. No wonder it has been said that Israel revered Moses yet loved David. But what do we now know about the historical David? Why does his story stand at the center of the Bible? Why didn't the biblical authors present him in a more favorable light? And what is the special connection between him and Caleb - the Judahite hero remembered for his valor during the wars of conquest? In this groundbreaking study, Jacob L. Wright addresses all these questions and presents a new way of reading the biblical accounts. His work compares the function of these accounts to the role war memorials play over time. The result is a rich study that treats themes of national identity, statehood, the exercise of power, and the human condition.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Another book on David? Yes, but definitely one of the best. Jacob Wright, a leading scholar of international renown, has written an erudite and eminently readable book. He offers fresh and new insights about the construction of the biblical figure of David but also about the composition of the David narratives. Wright masterfully demonstrates the ambiguity of the biblical portrait of David and how it reflects different political and ideological aspirations. The challenging confrontation between the figures of Caleb and David offers a better understanding of the biblical views about kingship and military courage. A must-read!"

- Thomas Römer, University of Lausanne and the Collège de France

"Jacob Wright combines a superb knowledge of the history of ancient Israel and a sensitive literary skill in reading the Bible to bring King David to life as a fascinating personality and extraordinary political leader. Beautifully written and with broad appeal, this is a landmark book in biblical scholarship."

- Susannah Heschel, Eli Black Professor of Jewish Studies, Dartmouth College

"Jacob Wright's erudite and illuminating book helps us understand the forces that shaped David's story, offering new and vivid readings of this most complex figure."

- Rabbi David Wolpe, author of the forthcoming David: The Divided Heart

"Jacob Wright has made a significant contribution to the lively ferment that is under way in the interpretation of the David narratives. His proposal concerning the linkage between David and Caleb is somewhat of a surprise, and has immense heuristic importance. This is a book to which future interpreters of David will pay attention, not least because of Wright's clear articulation of an on-going constructive tradition."

- Walter Brueggemann, William Marcellus McPheeters Professor of Old Testament, Columbia Theological Seminary

"With exquisite literary sensitivity, historiographic sophistication, and attention to questions concerning reception, political ideology, and cultural memory, Jacob Wright offers an original reading of the 'quintessential survivor,' David. Wright explores why and how biblical writers have framed and reframed not only the hero king himself but also his predecessor Saul, and Caleb, another hero of biblical tradition, whose depictions are relevant to a full appreciation of the portrayals of David."

- Susan Niditch, Samuel Green Professor of Religion, Amherst College

"An original overture to the formation of David's story, Wright's book is filled with sparkling observations and scintillating questions. No one undecided about the Biblical story should neglect this lucid volume."

- Baruch Halpern, author of David's Secret Demons

"Written in a highly engaging style and with many arresting contemporary comparisons, Jacob Wright's book on King David gives the most convincing answer to why the biblical authors produced a character of Shakespearean complexity. Drawing on the history of war commemorations, he argues brilliantly that much of the David story stemmed from the period of the exile, when the need to envision a nation without a state allowed for a royal founder who was fully human."

- David Biale, E. Ringelblum Distinguished Professor, Director, Davis Humanities Institute, University of California, Davis

"This bold and original work traces the development and growth of various Davids in the Hebrew Bible, showing how different stories reflect interests centuries after David's putative reign. It argues compellingly that we cannot construct the real David, but only different memories of him. This book is full of surprises, ranging from the importance of the relatively obscure Caleb for understanding David, to illustrating how modern modes of war commemoration help unlock the composition of these stories."

- Marc Brettler, Dora Golding Professor of Biblical Studies, Brandeis University

From the Back Cover

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About the Author

Dr Jacob L. Wright teaches Hebrew Bible and Jewish studies at Emory University, where he is a member of the faculty of distinction. His first book, *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah Memoir and its Earliest Readers*, was awarded The John Templeton Award for one of the best first books in religion and theology. For his research on war commemoration, he received a prestigious faculty fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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