



King David: The Real Life of the Man Who Ruled Israel

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David, King of the Jews, possessed every flaw and failing of which a mortal is capable, yet men and women adored him, and God showered him with many blessings. A charismatic leader, exalted as “a man after God’s own heart,” he was also capable of deep cunning and bloodthirsty violence. Weaving together biblical texts with centuries of interpretation and commentary, as well as the startling discoveries of modern biblical archaeology and scholarship, bestselling author Jonathan Kirsch brings King David to life with extraordinary freshness, intimacy, and vividness of detail, revealing him in all his glory and fallibility. At the center of this taut, dramatic narrative stands a hero of flesh and blood—a man as vibrant and compelling today as he has been for millennia.

King David: The Real Life of the Man Who Ruled Israel Details

Date : Published August 28th 2001 by Ballantine Books (first published 2000)

ISBN : 9780345435057

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Format : Paperback 402 pages

Genre : History, Religion, Biography, Nonfiction, Literature, Jewish, Judaism



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Jeff says

This has been a really interesting read so far. One theme the author touches on is how much of scripture before and after David may have been crafted by writers and theologians seeking to position David's legacy. I like the fact that the book notes the many contradictions in the bible and offers reasons why those contradictions may exist.

OK finished now - very worthwhile for anyone interested in the role of the bible in religion or life, which to my mind is anyone who considers him or herself to be an educated person. Hard to pick a money quote - there are many memorable passages - but here's one from the appendix:

"By almost any measure, David is the most commanding figures in the Hebrew Bible. His name is mentioned more than a thousand times, and more space is devoted to him than to any other biblical figure. Although the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and Moses are crucial to both biblical narrative and biblical theology, it is David who may have inspired the writing of the Bible in the first place. Indeed, David is present in the Bible even in passages where his name is never mentioned."

Paul says

This book provided far more depth on the life of King David than I knew previously as it took info from many different Bible versions. I believe the main point of the book is that David was not some god-like figure, but actually extremely human. Simply put, if God could favor and accept a man like David then we can all be saved. David was clearly an old-school monarch who killed to enhance his power. Lastly, the book provided me perspective on when David lived and how the Israeli nation was initially formed.

Sven says

This engaging read combines history, literature, religion, and Biblical scholarship to make a steamy story arise from Judges, Kings, and Chronicles.

I recommend this for anyone who would like to see the very human side of a icon - a bloody, passionate, lying, conniving, attractive, lovable and hateful man. This takes the Bible stories and extracts the very real person who became a legend, changing the history of the whole world, even 3000 years later.

Brandon says

This book was exactly what I expected - the story of King David written as biography as opposed to theology or religious history. King David was the man who taught the world how to be King. A Warrior, poet and

statesman chosen by God to rule over his people. The story of King David is the stuff of history, mythology, empire and salacious palace intrigue all mixed together in an epic story. But too often the focus has been on David's relationship to God and not on the captivating story of his life. Johnathan Kirsch has certainly covered that area and told the story of David with a sense of objectivity and scholarly insight despite that his only source of reference is a series of books from the Hebrew Bible. David's relationship to God, of course, is explored in this book but it does not overwhelm. Something that is fitting because the relationship between the two was hands off at best and - as this book points out - the best known stories about David do not involve any input from his God. His battle with Goliath and Absalom and his affair with Bathsheba where all David and not encouraged or even commented on by God. These facts show that though David was anointed by God he was still his own man, often leading to tragic results.

This is why the angle of biography works so well with this biblical character. The presence of God is still a strong force in this book by the piety and theology had been toned down and instead, the reader is presented with the story in a highly readable and well-researched style that fills in the missing parts while still acknowledging the Biblical and religious elements. In this book we learn more about life in the time of David and how astonishing his tale really is. The seventh son of a shepherd who becomes a fugitive and mercenary before claiming the crown this book explores each aspect of a complicated man who left a trail of blood in his wake but is now just as remembered for the song of his poetry than the blood on his hands.

The picture painted of King David is not the warmest and fuzziest image. He is seen as arrogant and self-serving by the writer but these claims are all well defended and plausible even if they do not adhere to the image of David as God's chosen one. At the end of this book I was left with an image of David, not as a vassal of God but more as a man of God who was flawed in many ways both moral and mortally but he was also a man who knew how to be King and was worthy of the superstar status he enjoys in the Bible, secular history and the hearts of man.

Anthony Keys says

This is an intriguing look into the life of King David which goes well beyond the Goliath story that we hear in Sunday school. In church, I believe we are thwarted away from stories like this, but I think that is a myopic approach. To learn that one of God's chosen people could be so flawed and so "human" gives us all hope as we struggle day to day with temptations.

I recommend this book to someone who is looking for a deeper understanding of the Bible from an historical and anthropological perspective. Purist, please read with an open mind.

Janet Wilcox says

This book isn't exactly a page-turner but is insightful and interesting to read. It poses many contradictions about King David, and also the various authors who wrote about him. I think I'll finish it, but it's on the back burner. I'm about 1/2 through.

I hope I finish it before we get to David in OT Sunday School class...

Well--I didn't finish it before then, now I have no motivation to do so. I prefer gardening to reading this

book...if I were a Bible Scholar and it were winter...I'd finish it!

Pat Padden says

I'm listening to this book on CD during my commute. David has all of the best ripping yarns in the Bible, I think. Stories about gorgeous girlfriends, beautiful boyfriends, other peoples' wives, treasonable intrigues, military campaigns, hand-to-hand combat with a giant, life as an outlaw and a brigand, murder, and mayhem. He's got musical talent, poetic chops, courage, sex appeal, and, ultimately, God's special grace and favor. And the funny thing about him is that through it all you can recognize yourself in him - both your occasional moments of nobility and grace, and your all-too-frequent fits of pique, anger, jealousy, covetousness, envy, excess, lack of humility... all your - and his - everyday sins of omission and commission. I guess that's why the Bible is still a best-seller after a few thousand years, and why it should be included in every one of those time capsule sorts of things that we send into outer space in hopes of its being found by alien life forms - it's a handbook about what it is to be human.

Stacey says

If you had asked me before I read *King David*, how familiar I was with all the Biblical David stories, I would have told you I knew them all. After all, having been raised on daily bible study, as a fundamentalist christian, who read propaganda religious literature for entertainment, I'm certain I've read through the books of I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings, and I Chronicles, II Chronicles maybe a dozen times in entirety, and who knows how many times in selection.

Naturally, fundamentalists get many of their ideas and attitudes from the Old Testament, no matter how they give lip service to being bound only by the words of Christ in the New Testament. (New Covenant, Fulfillment of the Law, and all that rubbish.) The fact is, King David features most prominently in their Old Testament dogma, and some of the fundamentalists refer to Christ as the Greater David, tying more sacrosanct lore from Davidic mythology to Messianic prophecy.

If you had asked me, I would have told you that I was aware of all the cherry-picking that the leaders in my faith had done to present just a mesmerizing person of loyalty and fealty to God.

Kirsch's book was a champ for me, because he sets the narrative in its proper time-frame, supported by what we actually know about the history of circa-1000 BCE, against all the things we *don't* know about David. In fact, there is almost no archaeological support for the life of David and his court. What little there has been dug up, (in some of the most sifted soil in the entire world,) is speculative at best. What we know about David comes exclusively through the pages of the Old Testament – a document that – once examined with clear eyes – is seen to be more legend than chronicle.

This makes David no less fascinating as a possibly historical individual. He certainly deserves mythological status. No story of Hercules can best the legends of David – who appears to be a marauding mercenary with royalist ambitions, a man of great charisma and passion, who was able to manipulate such fanatical support from Israelite and non-Israelite that he may have shaped the course of a real nation. Mixed in with political intrigue, conquests and treason, are very human stories of passion and excess, indulgence of favored children, pragmatism, and even David's possible interfaith – a concept that is most assuredly glossed over by

most Bible literalist christians, who would have one believe that David was ever-faithful only to Yahweh.

Kirsch does a splendid job of crafting the many and contradictory stories of David into a comprehensible whole. He deftly credits mainstream and lesser known biblical historians' ideas regarding authorship of the many sections that speak of David, and lets us know why it matters, by briefly linking David to the Christ-narrative, and modern day emphasis on the search for proof of Biblical veracity.

I loved this book.

Although I have long ago left behind my fundamentalist roots, I have retained a deep and abiding fascination with the mythology of the Bible, and the degree to which its influence reaches out to so many aspects of life in this country. And yet, the vast majority of us know only what we've been spoon fed by a man standing at a podium, lecturing us on Sunday mornings about faith, purity, and the Vengeance of the Lord. How many of us ever take the time to examine those born-in, osmotic "truths" we accept so easily?

This is why examinations like this have great value, they challenge our perceptions and knock on the door to the closets of deeply held beliefs.

4.5 stars: 5 for being fascinating and engaging, 4 for occasionally being as speculative as the source material itself.

Eileen Stoecklin says

If you really want to know who King David the man was and what he was really like, you have to read this book. Jonathan Kirsch tells the true and exact story of King David, but in plain English and in a style that everyone can understand. This book was so captivating,I read it while on vacation and it's the only thing I remember about the whole trip.

Jim Berkin says

Excellent & thorough analysis of the biblical David stories, comparing the "rough & honest" account in the Books of Samuel to the "cleaned up" version of Chronicles. A great way of seeing how the Ancient Israeli kingdom compared to political intrigues of its contemporary societies, via careful and logical interpretation of the bible's language. Kirsch always does a good job with this kind of material.

Raymonds009 says

This is the stuff I never got in sunday school. David is so outrageous it is amazing that the story of his life was even reported in the bible. I really do not want to say more as the book needs to be taken in as a whole to get the scope of the man who would be king and change Israel forever. This is heady stuff. See for yourself.

Lindalee says

I liked this book way more than I thought I would. It is all the gory and glorious details that make David so fascinating, plus the surrounding scholarly debate about its accuracy.

Michelle says

Primer on David of the Bible

Bart Breen says

Entertaining and Educational - To a point

I listened to this book on tape as read by the author himself.

This is one of what appears to be a significantly developing genre of books in the area of theology and Biblical History, designed to be read by the general populace to put in their hands what modern scholarship is saying.

This book does this reasonably well for anyone who is unfamiliar with such terms as Modern Biblical Criticism, J theory, Court Historian etc.

What is not so clear to the average listener is that the primary sources drawn from such as Howard Bloom, Wellhausen and company are considerably from the more liberal and secular camps and that there exists a large body of more conservative material that deals with these issues with somewhat different conclusions.

There's nothing wrong with that in and of itself. What I find disturbing in these types of Historical Overviews - turned novel is that the hybrid product, while purporting to be factual, uses the change in genre to present the material as somehow more certain or less controversial than is really the case. What's wrong with being a little more deliberate in making the source literature drawn upon a little more diverse and truly allowing the reader to enter into the dialogue and interact with the issues, rather than being led to believe that things are as neat and tidy as a reading of this book would seem to indicate to a reader otherwise unfamiliar with the field?

Those concerns expressed, I did find this to be an interesting and worthwhile listen (read). Old Testament history has been a weakness for me and this did help to fill in some gaps in terms of the what some of the modern scholarship has been giving. In addition, it did present David in terms that helped to place him historically and, as much as the author's approach could allow for with all of its provisos and doubts, somewhat personally.

Listen critically to this work. It seeks, in my opinion, to gloss over some of the omissions in terms of conflicting material, by making the format flow like a historical novel and a reader can be carried away with that and walk away feeling they have a strong grasp on all that is available in this field. They will not.

Life of David by Arthur Pink would be a good contrast work to see some of the other camp and provide

some balance.

Interesting read, but again, read critically and ask yourself what you're not being told in the midst of it.

Cara says

This is the third biblical history I've read by Kirsch (the others are *Moses* and *The Harlot by the Side of the Road*). Kirsch is an engaging writer who uses his imagination to help the reader enter into an ancient world that might not have existed at all, and almost certainly didn't exist as depicted in the Bible. Kirsch's theme is that David is a fully-realized human being, perhaps the first such being described in the Bible. David is cunning but at times obtuse, brave but sometimes cowardly, honest but, when his back is against the wall, prone to deceit. What Kirsch fails to illuminate, however, is the David of the Amnon/Tamar/Absalom tales. Why did this great king let the rape of a daughter by her half-brother go unpunished? Why didn't he see that Absalom would revenge himself on Amnon? How did he lose control of his family? Kirsch doesn't provide a plausible reason for the David of the earlier narrative to be so ineffectual with his own children. Nor does he suggest that these may be stories related to another person that were later attached to David. So, this biography doesn't accomplish a key goal of any biography: explaining the events of someone's life (or how that person reacts to events) by reference to that individual's character or personality.
