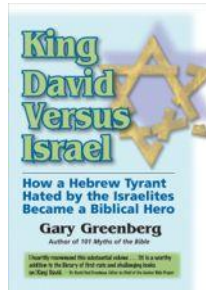


(Editorial Note: This is a pre-publication draft of the first chapter of *King David Versus Israel*. It may contain some typos and minor changes not present in the final printed copy.)



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Chapter 1

Good David and Bad David

But the word of the Lord came to me [i.e., David], saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight. (1 Chr 22:8.)

Modern impressions of King David depict him as a young boy of unsurpassed courage, a pious and humble man who triumphed over many adversities, a goodly king whose heart was with the Lord and compared to whom all other monarchs fall short. He is portrayed as the progenitor of a dynasty that would one day rule over the kingdom of God on earth. Many see in him history's first renaissance man: a poet of uncommon wit and intelligence, a musician of national renown, a diplomat of consummate skill, a politician of great wisdom, a brilliant military strategist, a master of martial weapons, a theologian who defined the basics of Jewish thought, and an inventor of Judaism's religious practices and institutions. These views have a long pedigree.

Following strict biblical chronology, King David came to the throne at about 1061 B.C.E., but the biblical data presents many problems, including textual contradictions and problematic synchronization with the dates of known events from non-biblical records. Most scholars propose moving the start of his reign forward about fifty or sixty years, somewhere between about 1010 and 1000 B.C.E.

David's predecessor on the throne was Saul, the first king of Israel, and David's successor was Solomon, his son. By convention, biblical scholars refer to the period from Saul through Solomon as the United Monarchy. It is usually thought of as ancient Israel's golden age and the three kings, according to the biblical chronology, had a combined reign of about one century. (Technically, as discussed in later chapters, there were four kings in this period. Saul was succeeded by his son Eshbaal as king over Israel while David ruled only in Judah. Following a two-year civil war David defeated Israel and became its king, reuniting Judah and Israel under his sole rule.)

David and Saul came from different families and rival political entities that shared territorial borders, Saul from the tribe of Benjamin and David from the tribe of Judah. When David succeeded to the throne, he founded a family dynasty that lasted over four hundred years, perhaps longer than any other known royal family. Although David's kingdom split in two after the death of Solomon, Israel in the north and Judah in the south (mirroring the earlier political divisions between Saul and David), his descendants on the throne of Judah outlasted the more popular and prosperous northern kingdom by almost one hundred and fifty years.

His dynasty ended in 587 B.C.E. when Babylon captured the Judaeen capitol of Jerusalem and destroyed the great Temple of Solomon, but Hebrew prophets believed and predicted that a future descendant of David would once again rule over the kingdom of God. (See, for example, Jer 23:5.) Christians saw the fulfillment of that promise in Jesus Christ while Jews continue to await the arrival of the Messiah.

In the second century C.E., after the Romans banished the Jewish people from Palestine, the Hebrew academy in Babylon emerged as the intellectual and spiritual center of Jewish culture throughout the Diaspora. For almost a thousand years a leader believed to be a descendant of David presided over that institution. As Christianity took hold in Europe, the ideology and theology surrounding King David inspired many Christian monarchs and religious leaders and triggered many political and religious struggles between Christian kings and the Popes.

These views of King David, burnished over millennia by armies of theologians and religious teachers, have made David the most beloved character in all of Jewish scripture, and, theologically, the most important. But how much do we really know about this man?

Archaeological Sources for David's History

Historically, we have not a shred of archeological or textual evidence contemporaneous with David showing that either he or his son Solomon ever even existed, let alone what kind of men they were. Neither David, nor Solomon, nor the kingdom of Israel over which they ruled, appear in any of the records recovered from the time of their reigns—not in Canaan or from the many nations and peoples with whom they interacted or over whom they allegedly ruled.

The earliest reference to directly mention David's name dates to sometime in the ninth century B.C.E. Found on a stone monument at Tel Dan, in the far north of ancient Israel, the partially readable Aramaic text appears to describe a victory by a king of Aram over both an Israelite and Judahite king, and also makes reference to a "House of David." Dating to at least a century after David's death, it doesn't directly prove that David existed, only that a House of David, whatever that was, did. But it provides strong circumstantial evidence for David's existence as it seems to imply the existence of a dynasty named after King David within one to two centuries after the time he may have ruled.

Kenneth Kitchen, a prominent Egyptologist, claims to have found an Egyptian text that contains the geographical name "The Heights of David" as one of the territories conquered by Pharaoh Sheshonk during his invasion of Judahite territories. His claim is controversial and his reading of "Heights of David" is widely challenged, but if he is correct, and the reference is to David, then the text would date to shortly after the reign of Solomon, because Pharaoh Sheshonk is identified with the biblical Pharaoh Shishak, who invaded Judah and Israel while Solomon's son was on the throne of Judah.

One other inscription, also dating to sometime in the ninth century B.C.E., notes the payment of three shekels to the House (or Temple) of Jahweh, which may be a reference to the Temple of Solomon, but might just refer to a local shrine or altar.

While there are other inscriptions from the ninth century B.C.E. and later that shed light on biblical history, they do not directly or even indirectly corroborate the existence of David or Solomon. This lack of evidence, however, should not be too surprising in that the time frame set by the bible for the United Monarchy falls into a historical dark age throughout the ancient Near East. From about 1100 to 900 B.C.E. we lack substantial material evidence throughout the region, from Greece to Egypt to Canaan to Mesopotamia, and historians have a good deal of trouble filling in the gap with substantive analysis.

Prior to the time of David, we have only one direct reference to Israel or biblical matters. It appears on an Egyptian stele erected at about 1220 B.C.E. by the Pharaoh Merneptah, son of Ramesses II. Generally known as the “Israel Stele” or “Merneptah Victory Stele,” the monument contains references to a number of military campaigns. Tucked away at the end is a victory hymn indicating that Merneptah defeated several powerful Canaanite peoples, and alleging that Israel is “desolated and has no seed.” Despite the references to numerous victories in the hymn, the consensus holds that the claims were fictitious and served only to praise Merneptah as a great leader.

It’s universally accepted among Egyptologists that the stele’s reference to Israel grammatically distinguishes it from the rest of the nations mentioned. Where the stele uses hieroglyph determinative signs to identify the other nations as people from a particular land, it designates Israel only as a people, unconnected to any territory. For this reason, many scholars believe that the Israel mentioned on the Merneptah stele depicts biblical Israel at a time not long after the Exodus from Egypt, and have dated the departure to sometime during the preceding sixty-six-year reign of Ramesses II. (This author has previously argued that the Exodus occurred a bit earlier, at about 1315 B.C.E., during the co-regency of Ramesses I and Sethos I, the grandfather and father respectively of Ramesses II. See my book *The Moses Mystery*, later reprinted as *The Bible Myth*.)

Other Sources for David’s History

The absence of archaeological or epigraphical evidence for the time of David and Solomon leaves the bible as our earliest, and for all practical purposes, only, meaningful source of information about their reigns. The biblical accounts of the United Monarchy come from 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, and 1-2 Chronicles. From a historian’s point of view, these biblical records present some difficult problems.

The books of Samuel (which contain the stories of Saul and David) and Kings (which tell of the transition from David to Solomon) are believed to be primarily the work of a single author or school of writers, who began the historical account with the Book of Deuteronomy, and continued through the biblical books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. Scholars refer to this set of biblical books as the Deuteronomist history, and the author or authors as the Deuteronomist or Deuteronomists.

The Deuteronomist history probably took near-final shape during the reign of King Josiah of Judah (639-609 B.C.E.), with a small addendum tacked on to cover the brief post-Josiah period leading to the capture of Jerusalem, and some possible additional editing in later years.

1 and 2 Chronicles, which also present a history of the United Monarchy, belong to a later literary cycle, and are generally dated to sometime after the Persians defeated Babylon and liberated Judah (539 B.C.E.)

Other than the Deuteronomist and Chronicles histories of David and Solomon, we have no other significant historical source, and it is these books that planted the seeds from which sprouted David's glowing reputation over the centuries. (Throughout the biblical period and into modern times, most religious followers of the Jewish scriptures have believed that the book of Psalms derives from David, and that work also contributed to his reputation and image, but few if any serious biblical historians believe that David wrote more than a few, if any, of the Psalms.) But the books of Samuel and Kings were written more than three hundred years after David's reign and Chronicles perhaps another century or two after Samuel and Kings, and all of the works are heavily biased in favor of David and Solomon. For the historian, therefore, the factual reliability of the bible for this period presents a number of difficult problems, not the least of which is the lack of contemporaneous corroborating evidence.

Interestingly, though, buried deeply within the Deuteronomist history we find another very different picture of David, far more negative and derogatory than the present view. Portions of this other Davidic image are sometimes explicitly set forth, such as in the story of how he arranged to kill Uriah the Hittite in order to cover up his adulterous affair with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, a crime so heinous that even biblical authors commented on it. For example, 1 Ki 15:5 says "David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, *save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.*" (Emphasis added.) On other occasions, some of David's alleged terrible sins are either dismissed as untrue, glossed over, explained away, covered up by obfuscation, or misrepresented as the acts of others. It is sometimes necessary to read between the lines to extract the truth.

The Negative Image of David in the Bible

At the head of each chapter, I have placed a biblical quote that preserves accusations against David in connection with that chapter's subject matter, and have collected these quotes together in Appendix A. While the collection is not exhaustive, it does reflect the hostility toward David's reign that existed among some of his enemies, and it might be useful to scan through them before continuing.

A careful reading of the biblical sources shows that David was never the widely popular monarch depicted in popular images and religious texts. On at least two occasions, popular rebellions nearly cost him his crown. One, led by his son Absalom, arose in David's southern home base of Judah and temporarily drove him out of Jerusalem. The other came from the north, led by followers of the House of Saul who held David responsible for Saul's death and many other wrongs.

The same studies will also show, contrary to the biblical image and popular belief, that Saul was not a manic-depressive paranoid, imagining false schemes by David to steal his throne, but a popular and well-balanced king who accurately understood what David was about and who took responsible actions to curtail David's treasonous and disloyal behavior to Israel.

In this book, I intend to examine this other history of David. This examination will show that David was a corrupt and ambitious mercenary who committed treason against Israel by working with its enemies to seize the throne from King Saul; an ambitious and ruthless politician

who initiated, sanctioned, or condoned murder and assassination as a way to eliminate political rivals, royal or otherwise; a Philistine vassal who used an army of malcontents to terrorize and conquer the Kingdom of Judah while Saul was still on the throne; a usurper who went to war against Israel after Saul's death and imposed himself as king over the nation of Israel by military force; a cruel and unjust tyrant who used foreign mercenaries to centralize power under his direct control and who oppressed the people of Israel with high taxes and forced labor; a military imperialist who waged wars of conquest against his neighbors and exposed the peaceful Israelites to military counter-attacks that left many dead, wounded, or widowed; and the beneficiary of tales and legends that made him the doer of other peoples' heroic deeds, such as the false claim that the youthful David slew the Philistine giant Goliath when in fact the original story told of a soldier in David's army doing the deed long after David had become king.

The Biblical Debate over David

Scholars have long noted what appear to be many "apologetic" portions of the David history in 1 and 2 Samuel, stories and comments designed to rebut or refute charges made against David by others, or to account for incriminating pieces of evidence (such as David having possession of Saul's crown and bracelet almost immediately after Saul is killed). I prefer to think of the Book of Samuel as the equivalent of a criminal defense lawyer's summation on behalf of a client, occasionally trying to explain away criminal evidence, citing testimony by character witnesses, impugning the integrity of hostile witnesses, and sometimes taking facts out of context or changing the order of events.

The central debate in the bible over King David revolves around his relationship to the House of Saul. From the northern Saulide perspective, David was thought to have betrayed King Saul by aligning himself with Israel's enemies in an effort to unseat Saul and take control over his kingdom. Subsequently, according to the northern accusations: David had Saul murdered; he waged war against the House of Saul after the king's death to prevent Saul's rightful heir from taking the throne; he authorized the murder of Abner, Saul's cousin and general of the Israelite army; he authorized the murder of Eshbaal, Saul's successor as king over Israel; he imposed his will over Israel by force after Eshbaal's death; and after becoming king, he carried on a systematic extermination of the House of Saul.

To this Saulide litany can be added some additional accusations of wrongdoing that can be corroborated by the biblical accounts, including: the adultery with Bathsheba; arranging for the death of Uriah, Bathsheba's husband; the failure of David to punish his son Amnon for raping Tamar; the general lack of justice from David's court, which resulted in the alienation of his home base in Judah; the murders of Absalom and Amasa by Joab, David's closest and most trusted aide; the taking of a census in Israel, a sin so theologically horrible that the Chronicler, a fanatical pro-David author, wrote that Satan, himself incited David to conduct the numbering of the people (1 Chr 21:1); and David's support for Solomon over Adonijah as successor on the throne, Adonijah being the rightful heir by the then-current standards.

While much of the evidence against David has no doubt been suppressed, some of it has survived in the biblical texts (for reasons explained below). It includes: the acknowledgement that David served a Philistine king and offered to join with him in the fight against Saul and Israel; the admission that David had good relations with Nahash, the king of Ammon, a man defeated by Saul and Israel's bitter enemy; Samuel's endorsement of David as Saul's

replacement while Saul lived; indications that David became king over Judah while Saul still ruled over Israel; David's possession of Saul's crown and bracelet immediately after Saul died; a full account of the Bathsheba and Uriah story; an account of the rape of Tamar by David's son Amnon and David's reaction; accounts of the murders of Abner, Amasa, and Absalom by Joab; the immediate appearance in David's court of Eshbaal's assassins with the murdered king's head; the execution of several of Saul's children by hanging; the story of Absalom's revolt against David's failure to provide justice in Israel; an account of David's census sin; and the story of Solomon's succession to the throne.

In response, the Deuteronomist historians argued that: God took the throne away from Saul and gave it to David so Samuel was justified in endorsing David as king over Israel; while Saul was alive David remained loyal to king and country but Saul had a paranoid and unjustified fear that David sought to displace him as king; twice David had the opportunity to kill Saul and failed to do so; David joined with Israel's enemies only because Saul drove him out of Israel and hunted him down and David needed protection from Saul's unwarranted persecution; Joab acted independently and without authorization in his various acts of murder; King Saul committed suicide after being wounded in battle and it was only by coincidence that someone found Saul dead and brought the crown and bracelet to David; David did not authorize the assassination of Eshbaal and he put the murderers to death; David loved his children too much and couldn't bring himself to punish them for wrongdoing, even when one of them rebelled against him; God wanted Saul's children executed in order to end a famine caused by wrongdoing in Saul's lifetime; David was not responsible for ordering the census in that God wanted it done as a punishment for Israel's wrongdoing; and David may have been unfairly taken advantage of by Solomon's supporters while he was sick and dying.

Before we begin our analysis of the charges, counter-charges, and evidence, let us first look at how evidence of David's wrongdoings came to survive in biblical accounts designed to present him as the ideal king.

Why the Negative Image of David Survived

Why do some negative images of David appear directly in the biblical text while others are so deeply buried, obscured, or hidden from view? To answer that question we must know something about the political and religious issues that divided Israel in the time of David and how the biblical stories came to be written. We will examine those issues in more detail in the subsequent chapters, but let me briefly summarize the political and religious schisms as they appear in the biblical accounts.

Prior to the institution of monarchy in Israel, the nation was governed by a priesthood centered in the city of Shiloh, located approximately in the central portion of Israel in the territory of Ephraim (later to become the capitol of the kingdom of Israel after the break with Judah). Many Israelites came to believe that the priesthood had become corrupt and demanded that a king be appointed to give them judgments and to defend them against aggressors. This caused a significant religious and political feud to break out between the Shiloh priesthood and other institutional forces in Israel.

The leader of the Shiloh priesthood at this time was Samuel. The pro-king, anti-priesthood faction supported Saul, a popular military hero. After much debate between the two sides, the pro-king faction won out and Israel chose Saul as its first king. This constituted a

major blow to the influence of Shiloh and cut into the many valuable perks they received for exercising judgments and guiding Israel's religious affairs.

Samuel, in an attempt to preserve Shilohite influence, proposed a compromise, suggesting that it would be proper for Israel to choose a king provided that the king would submit to the will of God as determined by the priesthood. This compromise failed to take hold when Saul appeared to ignore Samuel's advice. As a consequence, Samuel denounced Saul and charged that God had taken the kingdom from Saul and his descendants. The Shilohite prophet then sought out an ally to replace Saul as king who would follow the guidelines of the priesthood. That ally was David.

During Saul's reign, David of Judah had become a popular military hero among the Israelites, perhaps even more popular than Saul. The king perceived David as a threat to his rule (rightly or wrongly to be discussed in later chapters) and to his family dynasty and sought to kill him. David fled from Saul's camp and carved out an outlaw existence as Saul chased after him. What David did during this period will also be the subject of later chapters.

When Saul died in battle against the Philistines, civil war broke out between the forces of David and the House of Saul. After a period of conflict that saw David's chief opponents assassinated, David became king over a united Israel and Judah. As part of a political and religious compromise by David, the Shiloh priesthood had to share the role of chief priest with another religious faction that also supported David. In the meantime, the remnant of the House of Saul circulated the idea that David had been responsible for killing Saul and his sons and other opponents of David.

When David died the Shiloh priesthood backed the losing side in the struggle to succeed David, and when Solomon became David's successor the Shilohites were removed from power. This led them to once again look for an ally and they settled on a northern hero named Jeroboam. Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, but the king's rival fled to Egypt. When Solomon died Jeroboam returned to Israel and led the northern kingdom out of the coalition with Judah, splitting the nation into two rival kingdoms, each vying for domination over the other.

Again the Shilohites were disappointed. Jeroboam refused to recognize the authority of the priesthood and allowed almost anyone who wanted to become a priest to become one. Shiloh denounced Jeroboam and sought a new northern alliance.

Geo-political realities and some archaeological evidence indicate that the northern kingdom of Israel was the larger and more prosperous of the two Hebrew kingdoms. It served as a center of anti-Judah, anti-David, and anti-Solomon propaganda. The most influential of these intellectual forces, based on literary analysis of the Deuteronomist history, appears to have been the northern Shilohite prophets. But the Shilohites had a difficult position to defend among their northern colleagues.

Having worked with, supported, and endorsed David as king, the Shilohites had to defend themselves against northern attacks associating them with the crimes some influential northerners believed David had committed against the House of Saul. This required that the Shilohites tread a narrow path between the hostilities separating north and south. On the one hand they wrote about the weaknesses of David that demonstrated the need for a king to submit to God's will. On the other hand they erected an elaborate and sweeping defense against the anti-Saul crimes attributed to David, especially where the Shilohites were thought to have a role. As a by-product of the defense, it became necessary to cite some of the anti-David evidence that had to be refuted. In other instances they tried to recast old stories in a new light.

The literary layers of the Deuteronomist and Chronicles histories show that a variety of written accounts circulated throughout ancient Judah and Israel, some from the Judahite scribes defending David and/or Solomon, some from proponents of the Shilohite and northern prophets, some from those hostile to David and/or the Shilohite priests, and others from those hostile to Solomon. The Book of Chronicles, for example, cites such works as Samuel the Seer, Gad the Seer, and the Prophecy of Ahijah (a Shilohite priest). These works would have been well known to the intelligentsia in Israel and Judah.

With Israel in the north having the larger and more prosperous culture, David's reputation no doubt suffered from widespread antagonism to his reign from that community, as did that of the Davidic dynasty that followed in its wake and challenged the north for domination over the two kingdoms.

In 722 B.C.E., however, political realities changed. The Assyrians defeated and destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel. Some refugees fled south to Judah. The remainder (as corroborated by Assyrian records) were forcibly removed from their homeland and dispersed into the Assyrian empire, never to be heard from again.

The survival of Judah and the Davidic dynasty over Israel had the immediate effect of giving Judah the propaganda advantage over Israel. Not only did the center of anti-David and anti-Judah writing disappear, the survivors who escaped the Assyrian onslaught and relocation had to dwell under Judahite rule, further curtailing northern propaganda. In addition, the survival of the Davidic dynasty signaled that God preferred Judah to Israel, a point that may not have been lost on the northern refugees. This led to an enhancement and rehabilitation of David's reputation.

About a century after the disappearance of Israel, the Deuteronomists produced a history of Israel beginning with Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy and continuing through the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.

The inclusion of many of the negative materials in the Deuteronomist history strongly suggests that David's reputation must have still suffered significantly from the negative legacy passed on from the north. It's most likely that many of the facts underlying some of the charges against David were well known, to northerner and southerner alike, although disagreements over what those facts implied would have remained a lively source of debate.

At the same time, the Deuteronomists shared the Shilohite idea that a king's first duty was to God and that the king must yield to God's word. The Deuteronomists, functioning within a Davidic dynasty, had two major problems to tackle. As with the Shilohites, they needed to defend David against those charges that undermined his legitimacy as king and that also led to a divided kingdom, while at the same time demonstrating that even a good king had weaknesses that required him to be guided by the word of God.

In that context, they adopted many of the Shilohite arguments defending David against northern accusations and integrated them into their history of David's kingdom. At the same time, they preserved examples of how David's personal weaknesses led to wrongdoing when he failed to consult with the men of God. So, charges that David assassinated Saul and other political opponents were challenged with contrary evidence, while personal failings, such as in the incident with Bathsheba and Uriah, were kept as illustrations of how even a good king needs guidance from the prophets and priests.

In the Deuteronomist history of the kings that ruled over Judah and Israel, several key themes emerge. These include the central role of the Temple in Jerusalem, adherence to the Laws of Moses, God's punishment of Israel when it strays from these principles, and evaluation of

how well particular kings followed God's word and how well Israel did under those kings that walked in David's way. The northern kings of Israel invariably received poor grades while the southern kings of Judah received mixed reviews. The Deuteronomists considered David to be the role model compared to whom other kings were to be measured.

Perhaps twenty to thirty years after the Deuteronomist history of David had been written, the Hebrew nation suffered another blow. In 587 B.C.E. Babylon captured Jerusalem, destroyed Solomon's temple, and carried off many of the elite citizens of Judah to Babylon. Such a defeat carried with it an implication that God had deserted Judah because Judah had abandoned God.

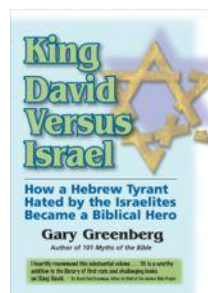
Some seventy years later, Persia defeated Babylon and liberated the Jewish people. In the Persian period the Jews began to believe in such ideas as the coming of God's kingdom on Earth, which would be ruled over by descendants of David. Sometime after the Persian liberation of Israel, how long after we can't say for sure but within a century or two, Chronicles appeared, presenting a history of the United Monarchy that portrayed David as the great heroic king of the Jews.

The Chronicles history almost completely whitewashed whatever remained of David's negative reputation, scrubbing out details that would reflect badly on their hero, adding material that would enhance his reputation, and occasionally contradicting the Deuteronomist version of events. For historical sources, the Chronicler often relied on the Book of Samuel, often sharing identically worded passages. But, the writing of Chronicles was also influenced by other source materials.

We should note that where the Deuteronomists were concerned with a theology that subjected the king to the word of God, the Chronicles theology saw David as the man chosen by God to forever lead the Israelites. It is probably fair to say that the cleaned-up image of David in Chronicles played a major role in transforming him into the all-purpose hero that transcended some of the hesitations present in the Deuteronomist account.

Subsequent to the writing of Chronicles Israel passed through a conquest by Greece, a period of liberation under the Maccabees, and then Roman domination. In the Roman period a messianic view of David's return took hold, continuing the trend of glorifying David and influencing the development of Christianity.

From then on, David's reputation flourished as his sins were ignored.



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The Argument Ahead

Because of the lack of contemporaneous corroboration, some scholars consider the biblical history of the United Monarchy useless for determining what happened and argue for a very late

writing for all of the biblical accounts, sometime well after the fifth century B.C.E. Most, however, find that literary and stylistic analysis of the bible, together with some of the corroborating archaeological and epigraphic finds and parallels, enables various textual strands and threads to be separated from others, occasionally providing chronological clues and sequences in their assembly. The political contexts and conflicts within many of these strands suggest that they must have been written within certain historical time frames as opposed to others, and indicate that some of the Davidic history may have been written close to, or not long after, David's reign, while other pieces appear to have been written much later.

This is not the place for a detailed scholarly analysis of the arguments involved. Many lengthy and complex treatises have been written on the subject and there is still a wide range of disagreement over what conclusions can be drawn. Therefore, let me set out my own perspective.

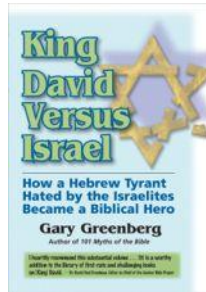
I am one of those who believe that there are many political layers of text in the histories of David, some of which, in context, would only have been written to serve certain political purposes, and that they would only have been relevant in certain historical circumstances. In my view, much of the Davidic history underlying the biblical sources was written during or shortly after the United Monarchy and reflected either accusations of wrongful conduct committed by various political factions or responses by those accused of such actions. The body of writings produced a mixture of truth, falsehood, and ambiguity. This collection of writings circulated throughout Israel and Judah, and the pros and cons were well-known by the educated elite through the centuries.

Over time, rival factions continued to argue and debate these issues, picking and choosing what they thought would enhance their own point of view, and applying personal political spin to make their case. By accident of history the particular texts that have been preserved in the bible, though reflecting the biases of the particular authors, maintained many of the opposing traditions. This no doubt occurred because polemic necessities often required that the writers cite the particular charges they wanted to refute.

For most of the last two thousand years, theologians, Christian and Jewish, ignored, dismissed, or reinterpreted those portions of the bible that showed David in a negative light. Driven by the idea that David was God's chosen king, a man after God's heart whose descendant would one day rule God's kingdom on Earth, efforts were made to purge all inconsistent images from the public mind. Even where the biblical authors acknowledged David's misdeeds, as in the Bathsheba affair, new extra-biblical ideas were introduced. One theologian, for example, concluded that David was morally right in killing Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, because Uriah disobeyed the king's command to return to his home and have relations with his wife. This general approach elevated David's reputation to its present misleading heroic status.

In the last century, however, a number of scholars belonging to what is called the Literary-Critical school of biblical analysis have taken a fresh look at the biblical stories of David, often examining some of the negative images in the bible, and frequently trying to unravel the written skeins that weave through the biblical texts. While for the most part they still give David the benefit of the doubt wherever possible, they have uncovered many useful insights into the origins of the biblical texts and the meanings of various puzzling passages. In many instances they are forced to admit, contrary to the popular impression, that much of David's image is mere myth, based on royal propaganda and inconsistent with the underlying truth. Unfortunately, these views are restricted mostly to scholarly journals. Such scholars rarely express such contrary opinions to the general public.

In the chapters that follow we will examine various claims and arguments made by different factions, rise above the special pleadings, and reconstruct a reasonably accurate history of King David and the United Monarchy. The history revealed will radically disagree with traditional religious teachings and standard academic treatments. It will show that David, Solomon, and the priest Samuel were not the heroic figures we thought they were, and it will rehabilitate the reputations of many of those falsely accused of wrongdoing, such as Saul, Absalom, and Jeroboam. By careful reading and logical analysis, we will separate much historical fact from a good deal of biblical fiction.



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