

King David: A Biography by Steve McKenzie
Book Review by David M. Weatherspoon (McAfee '03)

Imploring the use of an archaeological background and comparing other Middle Eastern monarchies, Steve McKenzie brilliantly interacts with the Biblical text to foster a realistic understanding of the historical King David of Israel. Whereas commentaries and Christian and Jewish traditions have tended to glorify the person of David, McKenzie seeks to look behind the apologetic for the ancient king found in the Biblical text.

McKenzie presents an objective and a welcomed critique of the writers of the Davidic story to demonstrate clearly an agenda to sustain the monarchy and instill David as the ultimate example of a good monarch. After presenting the agenda of the Biblical writers, McKenzie transitions into painting a truer picture of the historical David. He begins by examining closely the socio-economic background from which David was born, establishing evidence that David probably came from an affluent and prominent family in Bethlehem.

McKenzie then delves into reconfiguring David's rise to military and political strength. In doing so, he unearths the cunning and strategic David who is able to leave home as the youngest son and find a place of power within the military and the royal family of Israel. With the great ambition to be king governing David's every move, McKenzie reveals the ruthless side of the would-be king. David will use anyone and anything in his power to manipulate his way into the throne including members of the royal household and the arch-enemy of the Israelite nation—the Philistines.

Ultimately, David achieves the goal of becoming king in overthrowing Saul. However, McKenzie then opens the eyes of the reader that David does not stop at gaining the throne, but he presses onward to expand his kingdom and squelch any possible opposition from Saul's heirs, the once Philistine allies, and even his own sons. McKenzie concludes the biography of David with an analysis of why the editor of the Davidic writings portrayed David in such a positive light. It was done in order to promote the editor's own personal theology.

This biography of David is a must read. McKenzie directly engages the Biblical text to state his case that the traditional views of David need to be reevaluated. Anyone who is interested in studying the Biblical King David needs to read the objective critique offered by McKenzie. His exegetical attempt to examine the real historical David equips the reader with tools necessary for unpacking language and rhetoric used in the Biblical text to convey particular beliefs and ideals, and therefore, the biography of David offered by McKenzie should be read by those wanting to study the Bible critically.