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978-1-107-06227-6 - David, King of Israel, and Caleb in Biblical Memory

Jacob L. Wright

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## David, King of Israel, and Caleb in Biblical Memory

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.

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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### Advance Praise

“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, 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

“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

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32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

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It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107672635](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107672635)

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First published 2014

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Wright, Jacob L.

David, King of Israel, and Caleb in biblical memory / Jacob L. Wright,  
 Emory University.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-06227-6 (hardback) – ISBN 978-1-107-67263-5 (pbk.)

1. David, King of Israel. 2. Caleb (Biblical figure) I. Title.

BS580.D3W75 2014

222'.4092-dc23 2013049900

ISBN 978-1-107-06227-6 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-67263-5 Paperback

Additional resources for this publication at [www.kingdavidsreign.com](http://www.kingdavidsreign.com)

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

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*To the memory of Frank Moore Cross (1921–2012)*

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## Preface

This book exists in two versions. One version, with the title *King David and His Reign Revisited*, is available at the Apple iTunes store. As an iBook (for the iPad and Mac computers), it's the first of its kind in the humanities: a monograph that enhances the text in the style of medieval illuminated manuscripts, with hundreds of striking images, a fixed-page format, videos, audio clips, and an innovative new approach to footnotes. That version is focused on the figure of King David. The version you are now reading bears a different title (*David, King of Israel, and Caleb in Biblical Memory*) in keeping with the expanded nature of its contents: It includes several chapters, along with a discussion throughout, of the relationship between David and another Judahite luminary – Caleb, the warrior known for his intrepidity during Israel's wars of conquest. As I show, David and Caleb are two competing figures for the Judahite authors who were responsible for the final shape of the Hebrew Scriptures.

My work on David and Caleb began as chapters in a larger study that I conducted with the support of a Faculty Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 2011/2012. The aim of the project was to show how the political concerns that fuel war commemoration in ancient and modern societies are very similar to the forces that gave rise to many biblical texts as well as propelled Israel's ethnogenesis as a heterogeneous

people. As the book became too lengthy, we decided to break off the chapters that treat a corpus of Judahite texts. The remaining chapters, which treat war commemoration in the Hebrew Bible from a variety of perspectives related to Israel (rather than Judah), have been collected for a separate volume.

The time spent this past year preparing the present two volumes on King David has been a lot of fun thanks to the expertise and solicitude of my editors at Cambridge, Lewis Bateman and Shaun T. Vigil. I am beholden to the National Endowment for the Humanities for its generous support, and in particular for the encouragement of its officers, Claudia Kinkela and Mark Silver. My research was stimulated by many thoughtful conversations on the biblical texts with Zev Farber.

Finally, a comment about the book's dedication. The great biblical scholar Frank Moore Cross passed away as I was in the midst of this project, and his death provoked me to think about my own academic lineage. I was trained in a German tradition of biblical studies that sees the Bible's formation and Israel's history very differently from the views Cross presented in his various writings. Nevertheless I have, over the past decade, developed great respect for Cross, and especially for his extraordinarily gifted students, whose work I have come to value as indispensable conversation partners in this fantastic field of biblical studies.

Jacob L. Wright

September 24, 2013

(CH" M Sukkot 5774)

הרהרתי הוא יקים לנו את סוכת דוד הנפלת

Visit the website for this book at:  
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