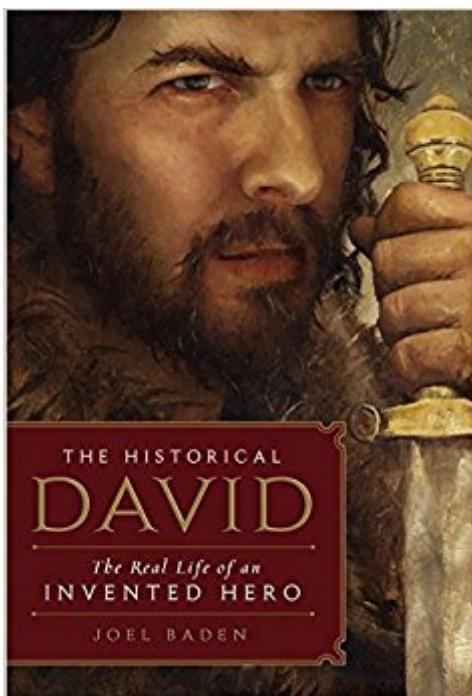


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# The Historical David: The Real Life Of An Invented Hero



## **Synopsis**

Joel Baden, a leading expert on the Old Testament, offers a controversial look at the history of King David, the founder of the nation of Israel whose bloodline leads to Jesus, challenging prevailing popular beliefs about his legend in *The Historical David*. Baden makes clear that the biblical account of David is an attempt to shape the events of his life politically and theologically. Going beyond the biblical bias, he explores the events that lie behind the David story, events that are grounded in the context of the ancient Near East and continue to inform modern Israel. *The Historical David* exposes an ambitious, ruthless, flesh-and-blood man who achieved power by any means necessary, including murder, theft, bribery, sex, deceit, and treason. As Baden makes clear, the historical David stands in opposition not only to the virtuous and heroic legends, but to our very own self-definition as David's national and religious descendants. Provocative and enlightening, *The Historical David* provides the lost truth about David and poses a challenge to us: how do we come to terms with the reality of a celebrated hero who was, in fact, similar to the ambitious power-players of his day?

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

“Reading between and behind the lines of the biblical text and its silences, Baden gives an engaging reconstruction of who the true David may have been. This is a brilliant synthesis, with some unexpected and even daring twists of interpretation. A tour de force!” (Michael Coogan, Harvard Divinity School lecturer, Director of Publications for the Harvard Semitic Museum

and editor of *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*)“This revisionist take on King David—“as brilliant politician but despicable human being”—combines the best of historical study and literary imagination. Baden’s challenge to traditional understandings of Israel’s king is always provocative, often compelling, and completely fascinating.” (Amy-Jill Levine, Professor of New Testament and Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt University and author of *The Misunderstood Jew*)“An invigoratingly grown-up reading of the Bible, taking it seriously but not literally.... David emerges no longer as the author of the Psalms or the slayer of Goliath, yet Baden’s scholarly analysis leaves the usurper-King as one of the most crucial shapers of world history.” (Diarmaid MacCulloch, Professor of the History of the Church, University of Oxford, author of *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*)“[Baden] succeeds positively, powerfully, and persuasively in locating Israel’s once and future king as an actual historical figure. The multiple layers of fact and fiction, history and theology are cleanly and clearly distinguished but without either modern apologetics or contemporary polemics.” (John Dominic Crossan, author of *The Historical Jesus*)“Lively. This is a provocative book that raises questions about the nature of biblical narrative and also about the historical continuity of the Davidic line.” (John J. Collins, Holmes Professor of Old Testament, Yale University)“All praise be—again—to those biblical studies scholars who can make ancient history matter and can shed light on long-cherished beliefs. In clear prose and with a documented command of what others have said before him, Baden offers a provocative reinterpretation of one of Western culture’s heroes.” (Publishers Weekly)“For readers open to debating this beloved biblical figure, *The Historical David* will make compelling reading.” (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette) Utterly fascinating and written with sublime lucidity. (Booklist, starred review)

A Publishers Weekly Best Book of 2013 How the Bible Covered Up the True Story of Israel’s Beloved King For all the glory we attribute to David’s legend, the historical reality is both fascinating and disturbing. Through deep textual analysis, Baden brings the historical David vibrantly to life and ultimately reveals that the flesh-and-blood man was far more complex and interesting than the mythical king.

Joel Baden does an excellent job of reading between the lines of the David stories in the Hebrew Bible. Using historical, literary, sociological and psychological insights, he paints a picture of what the historical David might have been like, and how the stories that have come to us in the Bible

should not be read as literal accounts of David's life and activities. Far from the idealized portrait that sees David as an especially courageous, poetic, and righteous model for all to follow, Baden teases out the intrigue, double-dealing, and opportunistic maneuvering of King David. In addition to stripping off the legends and apologetics that have been woven around David in the stories of 1 and 2 Samuel, Baden also argues forcefully for the actual existence of an historical David, noting that if writers had created him out of whole cloth the traces of a different David would not show through the narrative as we have it. Those who consider the Bible to be a perfect source of historical information will not be pleased with this book, but those who are interested in understanding how one goes about detecting historical details behind a sacred story and what one does with what is uncovered will enjoy this book. Baden writes clearly, knows his subject, and offers an unusual perspective on how the royal version of David's rise creates a legendary hero.

As a Presbyterian pastor of long service and the author of *David Lion and Lamb* (available on ) I have long been fascinated by King David. Dr. Joel Baden, a Jewish scholar of the Old Testament who teaches at Yale Divinity School has produced a new and controversial book on the shepherd king. Baden states his purpose is to draw a portrait of David in which the mythical and ecclesiastical view of David is scraped clean of centuries of adulation to discover the real man beneath the paint! Among the assertions made by Dr. Baden are: "a. David murdered and manipulated his bloody climb to the kingship of Israel. Along the way he dispensed with Israel's first king and his chief rival King Saul. b. David is important for uniting the twelve tribes of Israel. The ten northern tribes would later break away from Judah following the death of the aged David. c. In a radical view he believes that Solomon was the son of Uriah and not David! d. Whether or not you buy the professor's liberal interpretations any person interested in the historical narrative of David and his times would benefit by reading this absorbing book.

The author postulated many ideas that bear reflecting on. His presentation of background on the historical period of David and the cultural mores of the time is both informational and intriguing. This book will deserve a 'return visit' to savor more closely.

I liked how the author provided a critical analysis of the Bible but still retained his reverence and respect for its teachings. Although I would have liked to see more emphasis on actual historical facts, overall I felt like I learned a lot more about not only David, but the authors of his story as well, without feeling like my faith had been diminished or attacked (as can often happen with books in this

genre).

This commentary was recommended by the Jewish Book Council. I purchased it to use in conjunction with other books in preparation for teaching a study of the wives of King David. It is very readable and presents a different side of David.

I was entranced with this book and read it several times. I had never grasped the true story in the book of Samuel and 1st Kings and of David's role there. This is a fascinating book and opened many windows for me. I highly recommend it.

This book is great read. . . .

Minus one star for several conclusions which seem to me too bold, but my impression on the whole - a good critical approach practically everywhere.

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