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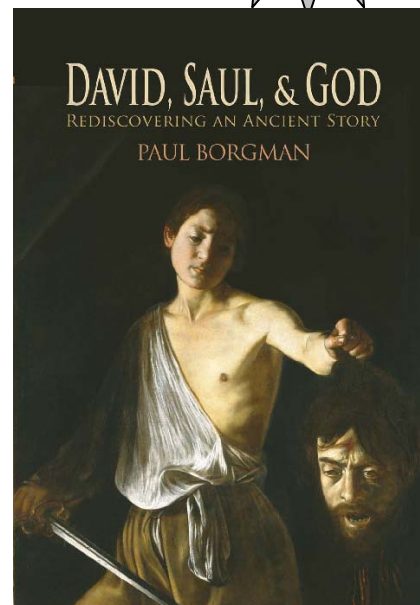
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## DAVID, SAUL, AND GOD REDISCOVERING AN ANCIENT STORY

Paul Borgman

The biblical story of King David and his conflict with King Saul (1 and 2 Samuel) is one of the most colorful and perennially popular in the Hebrew Bible. In recent years, this story has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention, much of it devoted to showing that David was a far less heroic character than appears on the surface. Indeed, more than one critic has painted David as a despicable tyrant. Paul Borgman provides a counter-balance to these studies through an attentive reading of the narrative patterns of the text.

Borgman focuses on one of the key features of ancient narrative poetics — repeated patterns — taking special note of even the smallest variations each time a pattern recurs. He looks, for example, at the three times that David spares an enemy's life, the three times that Saul is anointed or proclaimed King, the four times that David is introduced to the narrative, and David's thrice-repeated failure as father. He argues that such "hearing cues" would have alerted an ancient audience to the answers to such questions as "Who is David?" and "What is so wrong with Saul?" The narrative insists on such questions, says Borgman, slowly disclosing answers through repeated scenarios and dominant motifs that yield, finally, the supreme work of storytelling in ancient literature. Borgman concludes with a comparison to Homer's storytelling technique, demonstrating that the David story is indeed a masterpiece and David, as Baruch Halpern has said, "the first truly modern human."



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**Paul Borgman** is Professor of English at Gordon College. He is the author of *Genesis: The Story We Haven't Heard* and *The Way according to Luke: Hearing the Whole Story of Luke Acts*.



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## *Praise for DAVID, SAUL, AND GOD*

"In an era of numerous deconstructions and reconstructions of the Hebrew Bible's David, Paul Borgman has produced a detailed and thoughtful close reading of the accounts found in Samuel and the opening of Kings. Acknowledging the veneration and vilification applied to 'Israel's greatest, if massively flawed, king' by traditional and recent interpreters, Borgman seeks to unravel the mystery of who David is, making pointed use of the text's significant patterns of repetition. While engaging fully with recent literary scholarship on Saul and David, Borgman sets out in a fruitful direction of his own, examining the larger sweep of the narrative and fully incorporating such oft-misunderstood sections as the 'appendix' of II Sam. 21–24. In helping us to see David in both his unabated complexity and his ability to grow morally, Borgman makes new sense of texts which are often viewed as ambiguous or contradictory. His reading illuminates Saul, David, and above all, the God of the Bible."

—Everett Fox, Allen M. Glick Professor of Judaic and Biblical Studies, Clark University, and author of *The Five Books of Moses: A New English Translation with Commentary and Notes*

"In a literary reading of the books of Samuel, Borgman makes special use of both small and large patterns of repetition to develop his view of David. He sets it over against other depictions of David, especially those presenting a dark, questionable David. His book is an excellent introduction to the complexity of the biblical portrait of David and to the contemporary study of biblical narrative."

—Peter D. Miscall, author of *1 Samuel* and *Reading Isaiah*

"Borgman undertakes an important study of the narratives in which he lays out, in an astute way, the artistic patterns that shape the narrative in quite intentional ways. While Borgman of course cannot offer any 'final interpretation,' his scholarship opens new ways of seeing and reading, and is a welcome contribution to a growing literature."

—Walter Brueggemann, Professor Emeritus, Columbia Theological Seminary, and author of *First and Second Samuel*