



Jonathan Loved David: Manly Love in the Bible and the Hermeneutics of Sex (Bible in the Modern World)

Anthony Heacock

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The relationship between the Hebrew heroes David and Jonathan has caught the attention of popular and scholarly writers alike. Yet there is little agreement about the nature of this relationship that speaks of a love between two men that 'surpasses the love of a man for a woman' (2 Sam. 1.26). Weighing the arguments of scholars including Nissinen, Stone and Zehnder, Heacock produces a meta-critical analysis of the many interpretations of the relationship between David and Jonathan, identifying three dominant readings: the traditional political-theological interpretation, the homoerotic interpretation, and the homosocial interpretation. After outlining the three interpretive approaches, Heacock considers the evidence cited to support each: namely, themes in the David and Jonathan narrative and related biblical texts, ancient political treaties, laws pertaining to homogenital behaviour in the ancient Mediterranean world, and the heroic tales of the Gilgamesh Epic and Homer's Iliad. By applying recent epistemological shifts in knowledge as developed in the interdisciplinary fields of sexuality studies, queer studies and ancient studies, Heacock emphasizes the inescapability of the modern reader's cultural context when reading the narrative, particularly the influence of modern discourses of sexuality. Rather than suggest an alternative historical reading, Heacock turns the debate on its head by abandoning claims to historical veracity and embracing the input of the contemporary queer reader. Using queer theory and reader-response criticism, he offers a reading of the relationship between David and Jonathan through the lens of contemporary gay male friendships. This queer reading not only celebrates manly love in its numerous forms, but also adds a self-critical voice to the discussion that exposes the heteronormative assumptions underlying the questions often asked of the narrative.

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