A native of Ghana and a priest of the Archdiocese of Cape Coast, Ghana, Afoakwah completed the underlying PhD thesis at Tübingen in 2014. His somewhat exuberant and florid prose style can sometimes distract from his argument. He employs too many unnecessary idiomatic expressions and at times uses the wrong word to convey his meaning. For example, he writes that “Solomon inherited David as king” rather than succeeded him (15, 70, and 272); on page 281 he has “exudes” rather than “elicits,” while “escape goat” for “scapegoat” recurs. I mention this not to denigrate Afoakwah or his thesis, but to suggest that publishers should within the editing process assist authors who may not be completely familiar with the language in which their work is being published to avoid such infelicities. The publisher might also note that the size of the Hebrew font used in the book is inadequate.

In a brief introduction, Afoakwah states his interest in “the intriguing manner in which the Deuteronomist (dtr) author uses the prophet Nathan in his development of the character and story of David” (1). The contrast between the ideal of David expressed at 1 Kgs 9:4 and the denigration he suffers when confronted by Nathan is also among his interests as he develops his investigation over the next six chapters. A brief seventh chapter provides some general conclusions.
The first chapter discusses what Afoakwah terms the “mediate” (the Ammonite campaign) and “immediate” contexts (the David-Bathsheba-Uria sequence) into which the confrontation is set. An “archival Davidic war document” (10:1–11:1 and 12:26–31) has been used to provide a framework into which the intervening material has been inserted. With respect to immediate context, he notes that 12:1–15a can be lifted out of the narrative without causing a disruption between 11:27b and 12:15b, so these verses are a later insertion by the Deuteronomistic writer “to give meaning to the events that will develop later in the narrative future (2 Sam 13–19)” (13). David, he argues, is portrayed as “a culprit caught in a tight corner” rather than a “despot” (15); indeed, he is “a very pious servant of God who knows when and how to bow to the divine ruling and is acceptable to God” (16), although he cannot escape punishment for his sins. The section 12:1–15a was possibly taken from a prophetic source and reworked. Afoakwah stoutly defends the notion of a Deuteronomistic writer (or writers) who has incorporated a preexisting Succession Narrative that he has edited. The notion of David as humble and pious also recurs, and although Afoakwah does not seek to diminish his crimes, I find references to the adultery with Bathsheba as a “palace romance” jarring. Whatever it was, it was not that; the term is far too euphemistic.

In the second chapter, “Status Questionis,” Afoakwah discusses a range of scholarly opinion on the Deuteronomistic History and Succession Narrative so far as these impinge on the questions that concern him. Under the heading “The Literal Critical Approach (Diachronic) to 2 Sam 12:1–15a” (he favors this unusual term rather than source, historical-critical, or the like), the contributions of Wellhausen, Gressmann, Rost, and Wührthwein are introduced. The question whether the Succession Narrative is anti- or pro-monarchical provides the focus of the following section, where Afoakwah argues that these positions should be resisted. He concludes that 2 Sam 10–12 is a carefully constructed “composite block of three separate and coherent narratives” that acquire their meaning “only as part of the whole DtrH” (50).

The third chapter offers a discussion of the Deuteronomistic History hypothesis as proposed by Noth, through the respective revisions of Cross and Smend down to more recent discussions of its development. Afoakwah ventures that it may have been conceived as propaganda for the Josianic reform before receiving its final form at the hand of an exilic author. The debate whether the Succession Narrative is pro- or antimonarchic fails to distinguish between the original purpose of the work and the intention of the final editor: while it could have originated as Solomonic apologetic, such a purpose was of no interest to “the fourth century author,” who, “with a few interventions” presents the inherited traditions to show the “divine hand that guides a frail human institution through turbulent times to its fulfilment” (70). Such times are explored in the material inserted between 2 Sam 10–12 and 1 Kgs 1–2 that provide them
with a framework, while the David of the DtrH, if portrayed without his faults and not as a penitent and recipient of divine mercy, would have failed as a paradigm for the exiled reader.

Chapter 4 discusses the text of 12:1–15a. Afoakwah prefers to begin from 12:1 rather than 11:27b and treats the text in a number of short sections: “story” (vv. 1–4); “judgment” (vv. 5–6); “prophetic word” (vv. 7–12), divided into “prologue” (vv. 7, 9) and “oracle of doom” (vv. 10–12); and “concluding words” (vv. 11–14). In each the text in Hebrew and English is followed by analysis and interpretation; here I would question the notion that 2 Sam 11 depicts “David’s bid to broaden the base of his house and dynasty through violence” (131).

In “The David of the Dtr and the Parable of Nathan” (ch. 5) Afoakwah contrasts the editorial techniques employed by the Chronicler and the Deuteronomist, arguing that “the Chronicler has definitely summarized the dtr historian by leaving out the part of the latter’s narrative that would not serve his purpose” (139). Here one would have hoped for some dialogue with Auld, who has long argued for a different view on these matters, but references to Auld are entirely lacking. The biblical account of leadership from the period of the Judges through to the rise of kingship prefaces discussion of David’s kingship in the light of Nathan’s oracle, with considerable attention being paid to Nathan’s first oracle in 2 Sam 7, which for Afoakwah constitutes the summit of David’s rise to power. Sections on “The Height of David’s Reign” (2 Sam 8–20) and his “Final Days” (1 Kgs 1–2) follow, giving rise to the sad conclusion that at the end of his life “David is portrayed as old, feeble, indecisive and even malleable, at the mercy of Nathan and Bathsheba” (178). The chapter ends with a brief account of the Deuteronomist’s representation of David’s character.

With the lengthy chapter 6, one senses that Afoakwah has arrived at his goal, not only to study the confrontation narrated in 2 Sam 12:1–15a, but to bring out what he considers to be the importance of all three Nathan episodes, particularly as used by the Deuteronomist. In the first episode (2 Sam 7) David is promised an eternal kingdom, but because of the subsequent divine refusal to let him build a temple, a separation is forced between dynasty and temple (David founds the dynasty; Solomon builds the temple), so that the dynastic promise was not dependent on the existence of the temple. This theme reverberates throughout the subsequent discussion, with the eventual conclusion that for the exiles “the destruction of the temple does not negate the promise of an eternal dynasty” (286). Before that, in discussing 2 Sam 12, Afoakwah argues for a balance between “the double oracle of salvation” he finds there and “the double oracle of doom” in 7:5–16, suggesting that their “unity … will give meaning to the events of 1 Kings 1.”
In a brief account of 1 Kgs 1, as elsewhere in his book, Afoakwah strenuously resists Van Seters’s position before providing an overview the story, from its disclosure of David’s impotence to Adonijah’s capitulation. In a brief synthesis, he emphasizes Nathan’s role at three important junctures, limiting succession to the sons of David (2 Sam 7), renaming Solomon Jedidiah (2 Sam 12:25), and initiating events leading to Solomon’s accession (1 Kgs 1). Besides emphasizing the significance of the role played by Nathan through these episodes, Afoakwah notes how in each of them David is represented as praying—in thanksgiving, intercession, and worship. This leads him to conclude that the Nathan pericope “presents a very fine image of David” (278).

There is a bibliography but no indices. I will not list misspellings, except that the phrase “the joke of David’s adultery (283, where “yoke” should be read) is particularly unfortunate.

I conclude with two remarks. First, although Afoakwah cannot be faulted for referring to the case Nathan brings to David as a “parable”—the term is widely used in scholarly literature—I would suggest that the story Nathan brings is a “fictitious case” rather than a parable. The king sits in his capacity as judge, hears the presentation of a case, and delivers his judgment. That is to say, not recognizing it as fiction, David receives the story as he would any other case brought to him. It is not the story that condemns him—he is blind to its application to his own situation—but Nathan who turns his judgement against him. Second, despite reservations expressed above, there is much for which the author should be commended. Perhaps he is too confident about the processes he believes gave rise to the text as we have it now, but his thesis will commend itself to those who take a similar approach and in certain respects will give those who do not something to think about.