

## Who was David in the Bible?

We can learn a lot from the life of David. He was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:13-14; Acts 13:22)! We are first introduced to David after Saul, at the insistence of the people, was made king (1 Samuel 8:5, 10:1). Saul did not measure up as God's king. While King Saul was making one mistake on top of another, God sent Samuel to find His chosen shepherd, David, the son of Jesse (1 Samuel 16:10, 13).

David is believed to have been twelve to sixteen years of age when he was anointed as the king of Israel. He was the youngest of Jesse's sons and an unlikely choice for king, humanly speaking. Samuel thought Eliab, David's oldest brother, was surely the anointed one. But God told Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Seven of Jesse's sons passed before Samuel, but God had chosen none of them. Samuel asked if Jesse had any more sons. The youngest, David, was out tending sheep. So they called the boy in and Samuel anointed David with oil "and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David" (1 Samuel 16:13).

The Bible also says that the Spirit of the Lord departed from King Saul and an evil spirit tormented him (1 Samuel 16:14). Saul's servants suggested a harpist, and one recommended David, saying, "I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the lyre. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the LORD is with him" (1 Samuel 16:18). Thus, David came into the king's service (1 Samuel 16:21). Saul was pleased with young David, and he became one of Saul's armor-bearers.

Saul's pleasure in David vanished quickly as David rose in strength and fame. In perhaps one of the best known biblical accounts, David slew the giant Goliath. The Philistines were at war with the Israelites and taunted Israel's military forces with their champion, Goliath from Gath. They proposed a dual between Goliath and whoever would fight him. But no one in Israel volunteered to battle the giant. David's older brothers were part of Saul's army; after Goliath had been taunting the Israelites for forty days, David visited his brothers at the battlefield and heard the Philistine's boasts. The young shepherd asked, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Samuel 17:26). David's oldest brother became angry and accused David of pride and coming only to watch the battle. But David continued to talk about the issue.

Saul heard what David was saying and sent for him. David told Saul, "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him" (1 Samuel 17:32). Saul was incredulous; David was not a trained soldier. David provided his credentials as a shepherd, being careful to give the glory to God. David had killed lions and bears that went after his sheep, and he claimed the Philistine would die like them because he had "defied the armies of the living God. The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:36-37). Saul acquiesced, provided that David wear Saul's armor into the fight. But David was not used to the armor and left it behind. David took with him only his staff, five smooth stones, his shepherd's bag, and a sling. Goliath was not intimidated by David, but neither was David intimidated by the giant. "David said to the Philistine, 'You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have

defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands" (1 Samuel 17:45-46). David's trust in God and his zeal for God's glory are remarkable. David did kill Goliath. He also entered into Saul's service full-time, no longer tending his father's sheep.

It was at this time that Saul's son, Jonathan, "became one in spirit with David" (1 Samuel 18:1). David and Jonathan's friendship is instructive to friendships today. Though his father was king and Jonathan would have been a natural heir to the throne, Jonathan chose to support David. He understood and accepted God's plan and protected his friend from his murderous father (1 Samuel 18:1-4, 19-20). Jonathan demonstrates humility and selfless love (1 Samuel 18:3; 20:17). During David's reign, after Saul's and Jonathan's deaths, David sought out anyone who remained of the house of Saul to whom he could show kindness for Jonathan's sake (2 Samuel 9:1). Clearly, both men greatly cared for one another and honored one another.

After the incident with Goliath, David continued to grow in fame. The chant in the camp of Saul was taunting as the people sang out the praises of David and demeaned King Saul, causing a raging jealousy in Saul that never subsided (1 Samuel 18:7-8).

Saul's jealousy of David turned murderous. He first tried to have David killed by the hand of the Philistines by asking David to become his son-in-law. The king offered his daughter in return for David's military service. David, in humility, refused, and Saul's daughter was given to another (1 Samuel 18:17-19). Saul's other daughter, Michal, was in love with David, so Saul asked again. David again refused due to his lack of wealth and inability to afford the bride price for the daughter of a king. Saul asked for a hundred Philistine foreskins, hoping David would be slaughtered by the enemy. When David killed two hundred Philistines, doubling the required payment, Saul realized he was outmatched,

and his fear of David increased (1 Samuel 18:17-29). Jonathan and Michal warned David of their father's murderous intent, and David spent the next years of his life fleeing from the king. David wrote several songs during this time, including Psalms 57, 59, and 142.

Although Saul never stopped pursuing him with the intent to kill him, David never raised a hand against his king and God's anointed (1 Samuel 19:1-2; 24:5-7). When Saul eventually died, David mourned (2 Samuel 1). Even knowing that he was God's anointed, David did not force his way to the throne. He respected God's sovereignty and honored the authorities God had currently in place, trusting that God would fulfill His will in His timing.

While on the run, David raised up a mighty army and with power from God defeated everyone in his path, always asking God first for permission and instructions before going into battle, a practice he would continue as king (1 Samuel 23:2-6; 9-13; 2 Samuel 5:22-23). Once king, David remained a powerful military commander and soldier. Second Samuel 23 recounts some of the exploits of David's so-called "mighty men." God honored and rewarded David's obedience and gave him success in everything he did (2 Samuel 8:6).

David began to take other wives. He married Abigail, a widow of Carmel, during the time he was fleeing from Saul (1 Samuel 25). David had also married Ahinoam of Jezreel. Saul had given David's first wife, Michal, to another man (1 Samuel 25:43-44). After Saul's death David was publicly anointed king over the house of Judah (2 Samuel 2:4), and he then had to fight against the house of Saul before being anointed king over all of Israel at the age of thirty (2 Samuel 5:3-4). Now king, David took Michal back to be his wife again (2 Samuel 3:14). David also conquered Jerusalem, taking it from the

Jebusites, and became more and more powerful because the Lord Almighty was with him (2 Samuel 5:7).

The Ark of the Covenant had been previously captured by the Philistines (1 Samuel 4). Upon its return to Israel, the ark was housed at Kiriath Jearim (1 Samuel 7:1). David wanted to bring the ark back to Jerusalem. But David omitted some of God's instructions on how to transport the ark and who was to carry it. This resulted in the death of Uzzah who, amid all the celebrations, reached out to steady the ark with his hand. God struck Uzzah down, and he died there beside the ark (2 Samuel 6:1-7). In fear of the Lord, David abandoned the moving of the ark and let it rest in the house of Obed-Edom (2 Samuel 6:11).

Three months later, David resumed the plan to bring the ark to Jerusalem. This time, he followed instructions. He also "dance[ed] before the LORD with all his might" (2 Samuel 6:14). When Michal saw David worshiping in that way, "she despised him in her heart" (2 Samuel 6:16). She asked David how he, as king, could have acted so undistinguished in front of his people. "David said to Michal, 'It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD's people Israel—I will celebrate before the LORD. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes' (2 Samuel 6:21-22). David understood that true worship is intended for God alone. We do not worship for the benefit of the perceptions of others but in humble response to God (John 4:24).

After David was settled in his palace and had peace with his enemies, he wanted to build a temple for the Lord (2 Samuel 7:1-2). The prophet Nathan first told David to do as he wanted. But then God told Nathan that David would not be the one to build His temple.

Instead, God promised to build a house for David. This promise included a prediction that Solomon would build the temple. But it also spoke of the coming Messiah, the Son of David who would reign forever (2 Samuel 7:4-17). David responded in humility and awe: "Who am I, Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?" (2 Samuel 7:18; see 2 Samuel 7:18-29 for David's entire prayer). Before he died, David made preparations for the temple. God's reason for not allowing David to build the temple was that he had shed so much blood, but David's son would be a man of peace and not a man of war. Solomon would build the temple (1 Chronicles 22).

Much of David's shedding of blood had been a result of war. But, in a sordid incident, David also had one of his mighty men killed. Though David was a man after God's own heart, he was also human and sinful. While his armies were at war one spring, David remained home. From his rooftop he saw a beautiful woman bathing. He found out that she was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of his mighty men who was at war, and David sent messengers for her. David slept with Bathsheba, and she became pregnant. David called Uriah back from battle, hoping he would sleep with his wife and believe the child to be his, but Uriah refused to go home while his comrades were at war. So David arranged for Uriah to be killed in battle. David then married Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11). This incident in David's life shows us that everyone, even those we highly esteem, struggle with sin. It also serves as a cautionary tale about temptation and the way sin can so quickly multiply.

The prophet Nathan confronted David about his sin with Bathsheba. David responded in repentance. He wrote Psalm 51 at this time. Here we see David's humility and his true heart for the Lord. Though Nathan told David that his son would die as a result of his sin, David pleaded with the Lord for his son's life. David's relationship with God was

such that he was willing to persist in faith and to hope that God might relent. When God enacted His judgment, David accepted it completely (2 Samuel 12). In this story we also see God's grace and sovereignty. Solomon, David's son who succeeded him and through whom Jesus descended, was born of David and Bathsheba.

God had also told David, through Nathan, that the sword would not depart from his house. Indeed, David's household had much trouble from that time on. We see this among David's children when Amnon raped Tamar, leading to Absalom's murder of Amnon, and Absalom's conspiracy against David. Nathan had also told David that his wives would be given to one who was close to him; this would not occur in secret as had David's sin with Bathsheba, but in public. The prophecy was fulfilled when Absalom slept with his father's concubines on the roof for all to see (2 Samuel 16).

David is the author of many of the psalms. In them we see the way he sought after and glorified God. He is often thought of as a shepherd king and a warrior poet. Scripture calls him "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Samuel 23:1). David's life seemed filled with the range of human emotions—a common shepherd boy with great confidence in God's faithfulness who honored authorities, fled for his life, and became the king against whom all future kings of Israel would be measured. He saw many military victories. He also fell into grave sin, and his family suffered as a result. But through it all David turned to God and trusted Him. Even in the Psalms when David is downcast or despondent, we see him lift his eyes up to his Maker and give Him praise. This reliance on God and continual pursuit of relationship with God is part of what makes David a man after God's own heart.

God promised David a descendant to rule on the throne forever. That everlasting king is

Jesus, the Messiah and Son of David.