

## How many brothers did King David have?

David, Israel's second king, was the youngest son of Jesse from Bethlehem. In 1 Samuel 17:12-14, Scripture plainly states that Jesse had eight sons, of which David was the youngest. But in 1 Chronicles 2:12-16, the account of David's family lists only seven sons of Jesse. So, did David have six or seven brothers?

The narrative of David's anointing by the prophet Samuel supports the reasoning that Jesse had eight sons, and thus David had seven brothers: "Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, 'The LORD has not chosen these.' So he asked Jesse, 'Are these all the sons you have?' 'There is still the youngest,' Jesse answered. 'He is tending the sheep.' Samuel said, 'Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives. So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the LORD said, 'Rise and anoint him; this is the one.' So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah" (1 Samuel 16:10-13).

The Bible gives us the names of David's brothers:

Eliab is David's oldest brother (1 Samuel 16:6; 17:13, 28; 1 Chronicles 2:13). The second born is Abinadab (1 Samuel 16:8; 17:13; 1 Chronicles 2:13). David's third oldest brother is Shimea (1 Samuel 16:9; 1 Chronicles 2:13). Shimea is alternately spelled Shammah (1 Samuel 17:13) and Shimeah (2 Samuel 13:3). The fourth brother is Nethanel, the fifth Raddai, and the sixth Ozem (1 Chronicles 2:14-15). The chronicler also names two sisters of David: Zeruiah and Abigail (1 Chronicles 2:16). Mysteriously, however, one brother is missing from this list of names, and David—again listed as the youngest

here—is called “the seventh” (verse 15).

One possibility for the missing brother could be Elihu, who is identified in 1 Chronicles 27:18 as the chief officer over the tribe of Judah and “a brother of David.” But most scholars tend to believe the name Elihu is a variant of Eliab, who was David’s oldest brother. Elihu and Eliab are the same person.

Skeptics point to this discrepancy in the number of brothers David had as proof that the Bible has errors and contradictions, and therefore is not to be trusted as reliable. The argument neglects the reality that biblical genealogies often did not include every ancestor in a family line. For example, when a child died without leaving any children, he or she was usually omitted from the record.

The passage in 1 Samuel was written in the early days of David’s life, but the genealogy in 1 Chronicles was recorded much later. The chronicler’s primary concern was to preserve Israel’s family records for verifying tribal identity and inheritance rights. Therefore, most Bible scholars deduce that one of David’s seven brothers must have died at a young age without producing any heirs, and was therefore not accounted for in the later genealogical register.

So, David had seven brothers and at least two sisters. One of his brothers most likely died before having children.