

## **Biography of King David (c.1040 - c.970 BCE)**

The biblical King David of Israel was known for his many skills as a musician, a warrior, a King, a poet and writer of psalms. In his 40 years as ruler, between approximately 1010 and 970 B.C.E., he united the people of Israel, led them to victory in battle, conquered land and paved the way for his son, Solomon, to build the First Temple. Almost all knowledge we have of him is from the Biblical books of Prophets and Writings: *Samuel I and II, Kings I and Chronicles I*

### **David's Early Life**

David was the eighth and youngest son of Jesse from the kingly tribe of Judah. He began his life as a shepherd in Bethlehem. One day, the Lord directed the prophet Samuel to "fill his horn with oil" and go to Jesse the Bethlehemite (from the town of Bethlehem), "for I have provided for myself a king among his sons" (1 Samuel 16:1). When Samuel appeared before Jesse and his sons, the Lord pointed Samuel's eyes to David, Jesse's youngest son. The prophet anointed the boy with oil, so that "the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward" (Samuel 16:13). David simply returned to tending his sheep. This proclamation by the prophet Samuel happened without the knowledge of the current king, Saul.

David the shepherd was known to be fearless and became a legend during one memorable time of combat when the Israelites were being subjected to their domination and bullying. David's brothers were doing battle against the Philistine tribes and were at a standoff at a ravine. The Philistine commander suggested staging a battle between each camp's top warrior but then he sent out the nine and a half foot tall Goliath who shouted, "Choose one of your best men and let him come down against me!" For days no Israelite wanted to confront him in battle. When David goes to the nearby battle site to bring his older brothers' food, he is shocked by how demoralized the troops have become because of Goliath's taunts. So young David decides to confront Goliath. He refuses the offer of King Saul's heavy armor, and instead places a single large, smooth stone in his sling. He lets it fly strong and fast and it knocks down and kills the giant with a single stone to his head.

After this act of bravery, Saul took David on as commander of his troops and David formed a close friendship with Saul's son, Jonathan. However, as King Saul heard the new song being sung by Israelite women, "Saul has slain his thousands, David, his tens of thousands...." He stops seeing David as a loyal warrior, and instead as a potential threat.

### **David as King**

David's success in battle soon made him more popular than King Saul, which made the King jealous. As Saul's jealousy of David grew he asked his son Jonathan to kill David. Jonathan was a friend of David's, however, and hid David instead. He then went to his father and convinced Saul to promise not to kill David. He promised, and David returned to his service. But this promise did not last and, after Saul attempted to kill David a second time, he ran away. In the course of his flight, David gained the support of 600 men, and he and his band traveled from city to city. In Ein Gedi, David crept up on Saul while he was in a cave, but instead of killing him, cut a piece from his cloak and



confronted Saul. Saul broke down and admitted that David would one day be king and asked David to swear that he would not destroy Saul's descendants or wipe out Saul's name. David swore to this, but it did not stop Saul from continuing to pursue him.

While David was out battling a tribe called the Amalekites, Saul and Jonathan were killed on Mt. Gilboa in a fight with the Philistines. David mourned their loss, but then it was time for David to step up as King of Judah and begin a new stage in his life.

David's first action as king was to capture what is now the City of David in Jerusalem, fortify it and build himself a palace. Once David had established the safety of his kingdom, he brought the Holy Ark, which had been passed from city to city, to Jerusalem. David then began fighting wars against Israel's neighbors on the east bank of the Jordan. He defeated the Moabites, the Edomites, the Ammonites and the Arameans.

Despite his strength, David confronted many challenges in his personal life. While the men were at war, David spied a beautiful woman, Bathsheba, from his rooftop. When he discovered that she was married to Uriah the Hittite, David sent him into battle where he was killed. This wrongful deed caused David to be reprimanded by the prophet Nathan. As was the custom in that time, men often had multiple wives. King David and Bathsheba married and soon give birth to their son Solomon, who would be the next King of Israel. Bathsheba remained his favorite wife.

### **Life in Israel**

During David's rule, the Jerusalem became the vibrant capitol of the Kingdom of Judea. Each district paid taxes to Jerusalem and the people made pilgrimages to Jerusalem each year on the holidays of Passover, Shavout and Sukkot.

As the Kingdom grew strong, King David grew older and he knew he would have to choose who would succeed him as King. David had difficulty deciding which of his sons would be the next King. Eventually, with the help of the Prophet Nathan, he publicly proclaimed that Solomon would continue as King of Israel as he was the most wise.

David delivered a last set of instructions to Solomon, telling him:

**"I am going the way of all the earth; be strong and show yourself a man. Keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in His ways and following His laws, His commandments, His rules, and His admonitions as recorded in the Teaching of Moses, in order that you may succeed in whatever you undertake and wherever you turn."**

David died in 965 B.C.E. after 40 years as king. He left a legacy of leadership, poetic verse that make up the biblical Book of Psalms, and a plan for the second Temple which he passed on to Solomon to build.

### **Sources:**

[www.taggedtanakh.org/Chapter/Index/english-1%20Kings-2](http://www.taggedtanakh.org/Chapter/Index/english-1%20Kings-2)

Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy*, 1991

Sol Scharfstein, *Understanding Jewish History 1*, 1996, pages 28-33

*King David*, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/David.html>



