

## **Question: Who was King David?**

**Answer:** Most people in the faith community have heard the name of King David whose lineage Jesus is traced through. The story of David and his life is another issue. Several books in the Old Testament tell the story of David. The account of his life begins in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. The story of David starts with the first king of Israel named Saul betraying his faith in God by not fulfilling a task God had asked of him (1 Samuel 15:11). Because of this inadequacy of faith, God asks his prophet and Judge Samuel to seek out the next king who will take Saul's place. By the direction of God, the prophet Samuel proceeds to the town of Bethlehem and to the house of Jesse a man with several sons, one of which would be the newly anointed king of Israel. Each of Jesse's sons were presented to Samuel, and as many as were presented were not seen fit to be the king. After all of Jesse's sons had been presented, Samuel asks, "Are these all the sons you have?" Jesse tells Samuel that there is one more, the youngest, still out in the field tending the sheep (1 Samuel 16:10-12). When David is finally summoned from the fields, Samuel, upon seeing him immediately realizes that he is the one God has chosen to be king. Immediately Samuel anoints David as king.

The transition to becoming king is easier said than done. Saul still claiming to be king himself calls David as his servant and armor bearer. Because he had fallen out of favor with God, Saul experiences an evil spirit that only the harp playing David can overcome (1 Samuel 16:23). Not only is David a harp player, he is also extremely keen with a stone and sling. Goliath, a Philistine and giant, challenges one man from Saul's army to fight until death. An agreement is reached in that whichever man is defeated, their entire army must submit to the victor and become their vassals (servants). Still only a boy, David volunteers for the bout against the large and decorated Philistine warrior Goliath. On his way down to meet Goliath, David picks up five smooth stones and prepares his sling for battle. As they approached each other, "David put his hand into the bag and took out a stone, hurled it with the sling, and struck the Philistine on the forehead" (1 Samuel 18:49). The stone was enough to knock Goliath down for David to proceed to cut his head off (1 Samuel 18:51).

By these actions, David attained legendary status as the boy who defeated the giant. It is because of this that Saul became jealous of David's glory and attempts to kill him. Unsuccessful in his attempts to kill David, Saul instead appoints him as a field officer. Because David has the favor of God, he succeeds in everything he battle campaign he undertakes. This in turn builds support and favor from the people to the cause of David. In a treacherous scheme, Saul tells David that if he is able to kill one hundred Philistines alone, he shall give David his daughter Michal. Thinking the task impossible, Saul is shocked when David returns with proof of his conquest. Saul's betrayals and plots become increasingly blatant and dangerous, yet David continues to escape seemingly more powerful and legendary in status. In two acts of betrayal, the tables are turned on Saul and his life is placed in the hands of David. Instead of killing Saul, David shows his mercy and compassion for the usurped king (1 Samuel 24:1-16, 26:1-12).

With the death of Saul, David is anointed as the king of the Judahites (2 Samuel 2:7). He begins his reign as king in the city of Hebron as there was much tension between David and the sons of Saul. In fact, a long war between David and the house of Saul is undertaken, all the while David's house grows stronger and Saul's weaker (2 Samuel 3:1). David eventually moves from Hebron to Jerusalem. He also brings the Ark of the Covenant with him. The author of 1 and 2 Samuel tells how David increasingly grows in favor in the Lord's eyes. Waging war against his enemies and laying them low, David seems to be at the height of his power. It is at this time that David missteps. Already having several wives and concubines of his own (2 Samuel 5:13-16), David tempts fate when out on a stroll on the roof of his palace he sees a very beautiful women bathing. Inquiring his servants to whom she is they tell him, "She is Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam, wife of Uriah the Hittite (2 Samuel 11:3). The fact that Bathsheba was married did not stop David, and he sent for the woman. Soon after the encounter, David was told that Bathsheba was with child. Coveting Uriah's wife, David ordered that the general be placed up front in the next battle where the fighting is most fierce. David further directed them, "Then, pull back and leave him to be struck down dead" (2 Samuel 11:15). Following David's orders the soldiers betrayed Uriah as directed. After Uriah's death, David took Bathsheba for a wife. God, speaking through the prophet Nathan to David said, "I will bring evil upon you out of your own house" (2 Samuel 12:11). As soon as David heard these words, he immediately repented of his sins saying, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Samuel 12:13). Hearing his repentance, Nathan told David that he would be forgiven, but because of his sins the son that Bathsheba bore would die as a young child. The child did die as foretold, but Bathsheba eventually would bear another child for David: Solomon.

David continued to rule Israel with military prowess and charisma. His last words of wisdom to his son and successor Solomon were these: "Take courage and be a man. Keep the mandate of the Lord, your God, following his way and observing his statutes, commands, ordinances, and decrees as they are written in the law of Moses ( ) and the LORD may fulfill the promise he made on my behalf when he said, 'If your sons so conduct themselves that they remain faithful to me with their whole heart and with their whole soul, you shall always have someone of your line on the throne of Israel.'"