

LIFE & TIMES OF KING DAVID from Sefer Shmuel

David lived 3000 years ago. He was a red-haired shepherd boy, the youngest of 8 sons of Yishai. He lived in Bethlehem, about 6 miles south of Jerusalem, in the tribe of Judah, just west of the Dead Sea.

David's biography is comprised of a sequence of episodes:

In the first episode, he was tending sheep when his father called him into the house. There, he met the Shmuel Hanavi, the prophet Samuel, who told David "The current king, Saul, who Gd, through me, had previously appointed to be king, is not working out. And I already informed King Saul that when I he dies, someone other than his son will succeed him on the throne. And Gd now informs me that that other person is you David." In a private ceremony that even the current king was unaware of, the prophet Samuel anointed David become king when Saul dies.

The next episode is about the giant, Goliath (Goliath): At the time, David's brothers were serving in the Jewish army against the Philistines (Plishtim) along the Mediterranean Sea coast. David was sent by his father to the battle front with a care package for his brothers. When he arrived there, he saw that the Jewish and Philistine armies were in a standoff, and the giant Philistine Goliath challenged any Jew brave enough to a 1-on-1 duel. Although David was not a soldier, he accepted the challenge. Using a slingshot, David shot a rock at Goliath's forehead and knocked him out. Then David used Goliath's own sword to cut off his head. David gave Goliath's head to the king and gave Goliath's sword to the priests (kohanim). This panicked the Philistines and enabled the Jews to route them. King Shaul was so impressed, that he appointed David as general over his army. David was so successful in subsequent battles that Shaul gave David his daughter Michal to marry, so David became the king's son-in-law. When Shaul started to suffer bouts of depression, David was chosen to compose and sing songs to Saul to lift the Saul's spirits.

David was so successful in battle that he became more popular than king Shaul himself. Shaul became jealous of David, and at some point started to realize that David was the one appointed by Gd to succeed him as king. Shaul tried to kill David. In a couple of instances, Saul through a dagger at David but missed. Saul's son Yonatan was David's best friend. When Saul tried to convince his son Yonatan to assassinate David, but Yonatan refused and asked "Why do you hate David so much? He is a good man." Saul angrily scolded Yonatan, saying "You are an embarrassment to yourself and to your family. Don't you realize that as long as this man David is alive, you can never be king?" Yonatan informed David that his father, the king, was out to kill him.

David fled to Judean desert, which was dry, desolate and sparsely inhabited. On his way there, David stopped briefly at a village inhabited by 85 cohanim and their families to obtain provisions for the trip. David lied to the head cohanin, saying "I am on a secret mission from the king, and the king sent me so urgently that I didn't have time to take food. Do you have any food? And the head priest gave David bread. David said the king sent me so urgently that I forgot to take my sword. Do you have an extra sword? The priest answered "the only sword we have is Goliath's sword that you yourself gave us. Here, you can have it." And David ran off. When King Saul heard that the priest had given food and a weapon to a fugitive from the king, he ordered every man, woman, child and animal of that village killed.

The following months were spent with Shaul and David playing a cat-and-mouse game. A couple times, Shaul almost caught and killed by David. A couple times, David had an opportunity to kill Saul, but didn't. Throughout this episode of David fleeing from Shaul, David always referred to treated Saul with great respect. Saul gave David's wife, who was Saul's own daughter, to another man.

David was very charismatic. In the Judean desert, David assembled around him a militia of 600 ruffians that defended the Jews against enemy armies and marauders. One might cynically consider David a warlord. The militia was supported from 2 sources of income: They plundered the enemy armies that they defeated. And they accepted gifts from the local Jewish residents, which might be considered as "protection money", since they provided protection to the local Jewish residents from foreign marauders.

And that leads us to how David met his second wife, Avigail (Abigail): One very wealthy and boorish landowner, Naval (whose name actually means "boor"), when asked by David's men for a handout, turned them away with insults. When David heard about this, he assembled his men and started walking toward Naval's home to kill him. Midway, he encountered a beautiful woman riding toward him on a donkey and bearing lavish gifts. She explained that she was Naval's wife, Abigail, and that she heard what her husband did, and that she came without her husband's knowledge. She begged David to take the gifts and not kill my husband. David took the gifts and returned to camp. Soon afterward, Naval died of natural causes, and David took Avigail for to be his second wife.

When King Saul's army was the Judean desert searching for David, David's militia fled to the Philistines, in what is now the Gaza strip. The Philistines had 5 kingdoms, and the king (Achish) of one of them (Gat) assumed that since David and his

men were on the run from the Jewish king, that David must be a turncoat against the Jews. That Philistine king took David under his wing and gave David safe haven and even gave David his men a village, Tziklag, to live in.

One day, that Philistine king told David “we are preparing for major battle with the Jewish army and I want you and your men to join me in battle. David and his men left their village, Tziklag, to join the Philistine army, and was probably wondering “how am I going to get out of this one”. But after a couple days, the other 4 Philistine kings (who didn’t trust that David was a really a turncoat) insisted that David go home. So David and his men returned home to Tziklag, to find that their village had been burned to the ground by Amalekite militia and that children and wives (including David's two wives, Abigail and a newer one) were carried off as captives probably to become slaves. David and his men tracked down the Amalekite raiders and killed them and rescued their women and children.

In that major battle (that I mentioned above the Philistines were preparing for), King Shaul and his son Yonatan were killed in battle. David heard the news of Shmuel's death and publicized his sorrow and publicly eulogized Shaul.

David was accepted as king only by his own tribe, Judah. The other 11 tribes accepted Shaul's grandson as their new king. So Israel was divided into a northern kingdom ruled by Shaul's grandson, and a southern kingdom ruled by David. David moved his headquarters to Chevron (which you hear about in the news now-a-days). David was 30 years old.

Seven years later, when David was 37, the other 11 tribes got tired of being ruled by Shaul's grandson, who was a nice man but a weak leader, and agreed to accept David as their king. So David became king over all the tribes. David wanted his capitol moved to a more central location. He picked the city of J'lem, which at that time was still a totally gentile city. It was on a high hill and surrounded by an impenetrable wall, but that was no problem for David, because his men were able to enter it through a man-made water shaft that extended from outside the city into the city. You can see that water shaft now-a-days, 3000 years later, if you take a tour of J'lem. David made J'lem his capital, but let the gentiles stay there, and he even befriended them.

Once David was in his new capital, J'lem, he did several things: He brought the tabernacle, mainly the aron kodesh, to J'lem. He built up a strong army of 30,000 soldiers. He defeated several neighboring kingdoms, including Plashet (Philistines) in the west, Edom in the south, Amon and Moav across the Jordan River in the east, and Aram in the north, and even

captured Rabat (which is currently the capital of Jordan), and even Damascus (which is now the capital of Syria). David replaced the king of each kingdom he conquered with a governor under his control and arranged for them to pay tribute. Other countries, perhaps to avoid being attacked, signed peace treaties with David and sent gifts, which David donated to Gd. King Chiram of Tzor (Tyre Lebanon, which is often in the news nowadays) was a good friend of David and sent artisans and building materials to J'lem to build David's palace.

The next episode is how David met his 3rd wife, Bathsheba (Batsheva). J'lem is built on a long sloping hill. David's palace was located almost on the top. One day, when looking from his palace down over the city of J'lem, David saw a beautiful woman, Bathsheba (Batsheva) bathing on her rooftop. He found out her husband, Uriah, was away from home, serving in the Jewish army. David had an affair with her. When she became pregnant, he realized he had a problem. When people realize she is pregnant with her husband having been away from home for a long time, they will start asking questions, and that could lead to a scandal. So David summoned her husband, Uriah, to return home from the army, and told him to take a vacation from the army and spend time with his wife. But the soldier refused, saying “How can I take a vacation when my comrades are out in battle”, and the soldier returned to his unit at the battle front. So David sent orders to the soldier's commander saying “when you are passing out assignments to the soldiers, give the more dangerous assignment to this man Uriah.” Uriah was killed in battle, and David took his widow, Batsheva, as his 3rd wife. The prophet Nathan admonished David, saying Gd knows what you did, and you will have 3 punishments 1) the son that will be born from your affair will become sick and die, 2) someone will have an affair with your wives, and 3) although your descendents will be kings of Israel, their reign will always be in crisis. David had another son with Batsheva, Shlomo (Solomon).

The next episode was about the rebellion of his son Absalom. Since David had 18 wives, he had a lot of children in his palace who were half-brothers and half-sisters to each other. One of David's sons raped his half-sister Tamar. So Avshalom, her full brother, killed the rapist brother. Avshalom fled from J'lem to avoid David's wrath, but David forgave him and he returned after 3 years, and.

Avshalom was very ambitious. He became very popular and attracted a large following of admirers. He went to Chevron to appoint himself king, and then travelled back to J'lem with his followers. David realized his son Avshalom would be coming to kill him. So David fled J'lem, with a large entourage of loyal

servants and soldiers into the Judean desert and even crossed the Jordan River to stay far away from Avshalom's army. After David's army gained strength, it crossed the Jordan River back into Israel and fought and defeated Avshalom's army. Avshalom was riding on his donkey through a thicket and his long flowing hair got tightly tangled in branches. Avshalom's donkey kept moving, and Avshalom slipped off the donkey. He was left dangling from the tree by his hair. Some of David's soldier's encountered him and stabbed him to death, despite David's orders before the battle not to hurt Avshalom. David returned to J'lem and everyone was falling all over themselves to ingratiate themselves to him. It seemed as though this episode of almost losing the thrown actually made him more popular.

David's tribe of Judah had a specially connection to David through this episode. This made the other 11 tribes jealous and resentful. They seceded from the union by picking their own king, Sheva ben Bichri, and assembling their own army. There was a brief civil war, and Sheva was killed. So the union was restored.

Then there was a drought for 3 years. David was told that it was divine retribution for Shaul having once massacred residents of the gentile city of Givon. David asked the surviving Givonites what would satisfy them, and they asked that 7 descendents of Saul be hanged. David gave 7 of Saul's descendents to the Givonim, who hung all 7, and the drought ended.

In another episode, David took a census of all adult men in Israel. He was warned that it was against Jewish law to count Jews directly but he did it anyway. He found that there were 500,000 adult males in the tribe of Judah, and 800,000 in the rest of the tribes. As divine punishment for taking a direct census, a plague killed 70,000 Jews.

Just before David died, he was frail and bedridden. One of David's many sons, who was very popular and had many followers among the people and army, tried to pull a fast one by having himself appointed king, hoping his David would not find out or at least let it ride. But David, under urging of the prophet Nathan and Batsheva, appointed his Batsheva's son Shlomo as successor. David died at the age of 70.

This story of King David's life is recounted in the Bible, in the Book of Samuel. It is amazing how imperfect King Saul and King David were, in view of them having been chosen by Gd and especially David being revered in Jewish folklore and in the Talmud as a tzadik (exceptionally righteous man) who wrote the holy Psalms. Despite having done many good things for their people, their lives included offensive

instances of corruption and sin. This illustrates two things: 1) If even these revered tzadiks were so imperfect, then Judaism expects no one to be perfect, only to aim for perfection. 2) The stories of the Book of Samuel could not have been fabricated by ancient Jews, because if it were, it wouldn't have included so many embarrassing stories about our revered Jewish heroes.