



NEW TESTAMENT
CHRISTIAN CHURCHES OF AMERICA, INC.

THE LIFE OF KING DAVID



*King David Playing a Psaltery
Fra Angelico, c. 1430*

David (Well-beloved)

The son of Jesse. His life may be divided into three portions:

1. His youth before his introduction to the court of Saul
2. His relations with Saul
3. His reign

I. The Early Life of David

The early life of David contains the beginning of his future career. It appears that David was the youngest son, probably the youngest child of a family of ten, and was born in Bethlehem in 1085 B.C.

The first time that David appears in history introduces us to the whole family circle. The annual sacrificial feast was being held when Samuel appears; sent by God to anoint one of Jesse's sons as they pass before him, 1 Samuel 16:6-10, Samuel sends for the youngest, David, who was "keeping the sheep," and anoints him. 1 Samuel 16:11-13.

As David stood before Samuel, he was described as short in stature, with red or auburn hair, such as is seen in his countrymen of the East sometimes. In later life, he wore a beard. His bright eyes are specially mentioned in 1 Samuel 16:12, and generally he was remarkable for the grace of his figure and countenance ("fair of eyes," "comely," "goodly"), 1 Samuel 16:12; 16:18; 17:42, and well made and of immense strength and agility. His swiftness and activity made him like a wild gazelle, his feet like hart's feet, and his arms strong enough to break a bow of steel.

Psalm 18:33-34.

After David's anointing, he resumes his customary duties, and the next we know of him, he is summoned to the court to chase away the king's madness by playing music, 1 Samuel 16:14-19. In

the successful effort of David's harp, we have the first glimpse into his genius for music and poetry which was afterwards consecrated in the Psalms.

After this, he returned to the shepherd life again. One incident alone of his solitary shepherd life has been revealed to us — his fight with the lion and the bear in defense of his father's flocks.

1 Samuel 17:34-35. It was some years after, that David suddenly appears before his brothers in the camp of the army, and hears the defiant challenge of the Philistine giant, Goliath. With his shepherd's sling and five small pebbles, he goes forth and defeats the giant. 1 Samuel 17:40-51.

II. Relations with Saul

We now enter on a new aspect of David's life. The victory over Goliath had been a turning point of his career. Saul inquired his parentage, and took him finally to his court. Jonathan was inspired by the friendship which bound the two youths together to the end of their lives.

Unfortunately, David's fame proved the foundation of Saul's jealousy towards him. Which mingling with the king's constitutional sickness, poisoned his whole future relationship to David. His position in Saul's court seems to have been first, an armor-bearer, 1 Samuel 16:21; 18:2, then, captain over a thousand, 1 Samuel 18:13, and finally, on his marriage with Michal, the king's second daughter, he was raised to the high office of captain of the king's body-guard. Second only, if not equal to Abner, the captain of the host, and Jonathan, the heir apparent.

David was known for his successful exploits against the Philistines, by which he won his wife, and drove back the Philistine power. With a single blow it only rallied at the disastrous close of Saul's reign. He also still performed from time to time the office of minstrel; but the attempts of Saul on David's life convinced him that he was in constant danger.

He had two faithful allies, however, in the court — the son of Saul, and his friend, Jonathan, and the daughter of Saul, his wife Michal. Warned by the one and assisted by the other, he escaped by night, and was from thenceforward, a fugitive.

He at first found a home at the court of Achish among the Philistines; but his stay was short. Discovered possibly by "the sword of Goliath," his presence revived the national enmity of the Philistines against their former conqueror, and he only escaped by feigning madness, 1 Samuel 21:13.

His first retreat was the cave of Adullam. In this vicinity, he was joined by his whole family, 1 Samuel 22:1. He was also joined by a motley crowd of debtors, discouraged, and discontented men, 1 Samuel 22:2. This formed the nucleus of his army.

David's life was a succession of startling incidents. He secures an important ally in Abiathar, 1 Samuel 23:6. His band of 400, at Adullam, soon increased to 600, 1 Samuel 23:13, while he was hunted by Saul from place to place like an animal. 1 Samuel 23:14; 23:22; 23:25-29; 24:1-22; 24:26.

He marries Abigail and Ahinoam. 1 Samuel 25:42-43. Then comes the news of the battle of Gilboa and the death of Saul and Jonathan. 1 Samuel 31. The reception of the tidings of the death of his rival and of his friend, the solemn mourning, the vent of his indignation against the bearer of the message, the pathetic lamentation that followed, will close the second period of David's life.

2 Samuel 1:1-27.

I. David's Reign

David reigned as king of Judah at Hebron for 7 1/2 years. 2 Samuel 2:1; 5:5. Here David was first formally anointed king. 2 Samuel 2:4. To Judah, his dominion was nominally confined. Gradually, his power increased, and during the two years which followed, the elevation of Ish-bosheth a series of skirmishes took place between the two kingdoms. Then rapidly followed the successive murders of Abner and of Ish-bosheth. 2 Samuel 3:30; 4:5.

The throne was now vacant, and the united voice of the whole people at once called him to occupy it. For the third time, David was anointed king, and a festival of three days celebrated the joyful event. 1 Chronicles 12:39. One of David's first acts after becoming king was to secure Jerusalem, which he seized from the Jebusites and fixed the royal residence there. Fortifications were added by the king and by Joab, and it became known by the special name as the "City of David."

2 Samuel 5:9; 1 Chronicles 11:7.

The Ark was now removed from its obscurity at Kirjath-Jearim with marked solemnity, and moved to Jerusalem. The erection of the new capital at Jerusalem introduces us to a new era in David's life and in the history of the monarchy. He became a king on the scale of the great Oriental sovereigns of Egypt and Persia, with a regular administration and organization of court and camp. He also founded an imperial dominion; which for the first time realize the prophetic description of the bounds of the chosen people. Genesis 15:18-21.

During the succeeding ten years, the nations bordering on his kingdom caused David trouble, but, during this time, he reduced them to a state of permanent subjection. Boundaries were the Philistines on the west, 2 Samuel 8:1, the Moabites on the east, 2 Samuel 8:2, by the exploits of Benaiah, 2 Samuel 23:20, the Syrians on the northeast as far as the Euphrates, 2 Samuel 8:3, the Edomites, 2 Samuel 8:14, on the south; and finally the Ammonites, who had broken their ancient alliance, and made one grand resistance to the advance of his empire, 2 Samuel 10:1-19; 12:26-31.

Three great calamities may be selected as marking the beginning, middle and close of David's otherwise prosperous reign, "a three-years famine, a three-months flight or a three-days pestilence."

Of these, the first (the three-years famine), introduces us to the last of David's relations with the house of Saul, already referred to, 2 Samuel 21.

The second group of incidents contains the tragedy of David's life, which grew in all its parts out of the polygamy, with its evil consequences, into which he had plunged on becoming king. Underneath the splendor of his last glorious campaign against the Ammonites was a dark story, known probably,

only to a very few — the double crime of adultery with Bath-sheba and the virtual murder of Uriah, 2 Samuel 11-14.

The clouds, from this time, gathered over David's fortunes, and henceforward, "the sword never departed from his house." 2 Samuel 12:10. The outrage on his daughter Tamar, the murder of his eldest son Amnon, and then, the revolt of his best-beloved Absalom, brought on the crisis which once more sent him forth as in the days when he fled from Saul, 2 Samuel 15:18.

The final battle of Absalom's rebellion was fought in the "forest of Ephraim," and ended in the accident which led to the young man's death; and, though nearly heartbroken at the loss of his son, David again reigned in undisturbed peace at Jerusalem, 2 Samuel 20:1-22.

The closing period of David's life, with the exception of one great calamity, may be considered as a gradual preparation for the reign of his successor. This calamity was the three-days pestilence which visited Jerusalem at the warning of the prophet Gad. The occasion which led to this warning was the census of the people taken by Joab at the king's orders, 2 Samuel 24:1-9; 1 Chronicles 21:1-7; 27:23-24, which was for pride and sinful in God's sight. 2 Samuel 24.

A formidable conspiracy to interrupt the succession broke out in the last days of David's reign; but the plot was stifled, and Solomon's inauguration took place under his father's auspices.

1 Kings 1:1-53. By this time, David's infirmities had grown upon him. His last song is preserved — a striking union of the ideal of a just ruler which he had placed before him and of the difficulties which he had felt in realizing it. 2 Samuel 23:1-7. His last words to his successor are general exhortations to his duty. 1 Kings 2:1-9. He died, according to Josephus, at the age of 70, and "was buried in the City of David." He also wrote at least 77 of 150 Psalms found in the Bible.