

## David Remembers

My name is David. I was King of Israel and Judah for 40 years, 7 in Hebron and 33 in Jerusalem. I understand that in your day I am remembered as “a man after God’s heart.” But if that is all you know, you have missed everything of importance, both to me and to you.

I lived in turbulent times and caused a lot of the turmoil myself. I started well, before the temptations of power and fame got to me. And I fell by the unexpected – isn’t that the way it always happens?

As Saul was assuring his doom by consulting a medium after Samuel died, I was on the run from him, living among the Philistines. I ingratiated myself to Achish even after having convinced him that I was insane. I was given a city and continued raiding the Amalekites but made Achish believe it was the Israelites. I almost got to march with him against Saul, but the generals got suspicious and I was sent away. The LORD continued to give me success, including the recovery of our women and children after a raid by the Amalekites.

Jonathan, son of Saul, became my best friend. We were kindred spirits, close to the same age, brave and skilled in combat, impulsive and resourceful. He should have hated me as a rival to his succession as king, but instead he loved me as a brother. He saved my life a number of times by warning me of his father’s plans to kill me.

Even though Saul was an enemy most of the time, I could not rejoice in his death. And, of course, it took place at the same time as Jonathan’s death. But it meant that I was officially anointed as king, first over Judah, then also over Israel. Joab and his brothers had been my generals all the time of my conflict and competition with Saul. They were effective warriors and loyal to me. But Joab, especially, brought me much heartache because of his violent ways. Abner, Saul’s general, tried to form a rival kingdom with Ish-Bosheth, son of Saul. Joab killed Abner and two of Ish-Bosheth’s own men killed him. I had promised Jonathan to take care of his family and took in and protected his crippled son, Mephibosheth.

I conquered Jerusalem – the city that “even the lame and blind” could defend. The secret was entering via the water shaft. But there was a learning curve to kingship. Bringing the ark to Jerusalem led to disaster – the men guiding the cart that carried it, touched the ark to steady it and were struck dead! I was angry at the LORD until I realized that we had broken the Law. Only the Levites could move the ark and only by carrying it with poles in the prescribed manner.

I asked the LORD for permission to build a Temple and was denied. But, amazingly, the LORD promised me, “Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me; your throne shall be established forever.” I believe the expression in your language would be, “It blew me away!” How could I be selected by the LORD Almighty? I bowed in humble gratitude. I ignored all the parts about punishments for disobeying the Law.

There were long strings of unbroken success militarily and I did not attend the campaign against the Ammonites. I not only reneged on my responsibility as king, I opened myself to spiritual danger. I spotted Bathsheba bathing on her roof, sent messengers to bring her to me. Well, one thing led to another and when I sent her home, although I did not know it right away, she was pregnant. I tried to cover it up by getting her husband, Uriah, back from the battle, but he refused to go home to his wife when his colleagues were at war. Even getting him drunk did not work.

Plan B was to get him killed in battle – which I arranged with Joab by sending the order to put Uriah in the front then fall back. Joab realized, I am sure, that for some reason I wanted Uriah to die. Next I married Bathsheba. It looked like I had covered my tracks. How foolish could I be? The prophet Nathan came to me with a story. It was about a rich man who took the ewe lamb of a poor man when he had many sheep of his own. I immediately saw the point and condemned that rich man, in the “hypothetical story.” But then Nathan made the application when he said, “You are the man!” I got it, and to my credit, I did not execute Nathan, although the thought crossed my

mind. Maybe repenting is what made me “a man after God’s own heart.” I have done a lot of repenting in my life. Bathsheba gave birth, but the baby sickened and died.

Bathsheba conceived again and Solomon was born. Let me jump ahead to the amazing fact that he was the choice of the LORD God of Israel to be the next king. In this we see the grace of the LORD. My own family tree included Rahab and Ruth who were Gentiles. But it also raises the “what if” questions. If I had followed the Law, would Uriah have died honorably in battle and Bathsheba honorably marry me in order to fulfill the genealogy? It seems that we can never unravel the purposes and plans of the Almighty.

But the after-effects of the sin did not stop with the death of the illegitimate child. No, my entire family deteriorated, and I completely failed in my role as a father. Amnon raped his half-sister, Tamar. I did not talk to him. Absalom murdered Amnon. I did not talk to him. Joab, violent man that he is, was sensitive enough to recognize the importance of getting me together with Absalom but I still did not talk to him. If you have children, have you found it difficult to talk to them about their failings if they are too much like your own failings? It is often like this when it ought to be the exact opposite. In fact, our own failings ought to make us warn our own children ahead of time regarding the dangers they are likely to face.

Absalom began to win the hearts of the people with the goal of proclaiming himself king. He even got my key advisor Ahithophel to join him. At that point things looked pretty bleak and I prepared to flee. My only hope was to ask my other counsellor, Hushai the Arkite, to confound the advice of Ahithophel, which he did so successfully that Ahithophel committed suicide when his wise advice was contradicted.

So, as I had begun my career on the run from Saul, I nearly ended my career on the run from Absalom. Yet when Absalom was killed, I mourned. Bloody Joab had dispatched him when he was hanging helplessly in a tree, caught by his curly hair. It was the end of a victorious battle against my enemies but the death of another son. Joab told me if I did not get out and congratulate the soldiers, I might lose the kingdom. I forgave a number of people who had insulted me but not Joab, even though he ended another plot against me by murdering Sheba, the Benjamite who conspired to take 10 tribes.

I had a few more sins to complete the set. I took a census of the fighting men, something forbidden by the Law. Why, you might ask? Because if we win a battle it is not our strength but the LORD who gives us the victory. Even Joab recommended against the census, but I did it anyway, maybe for bragging rights with other kings? I don’t even know. But the whole nation had to suffer because of the choices I made. Choices have consequences – far beyond anything you can see at the time.

I arranged to offer a sacrifice to end the resulting plague and bought a field from Araunah the Jebusite. He offered to give it to me, but I said, “I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.” That statement is more profound than I could have thought up myself – it had to be from the LORD.

In old age, I had trouble keeping warm and they found me a young woman, Abishag, who did nothing but keep me warm. Adonijah tried to set himself up as king, with the help of, guess who? Joab. The LORD had chosen Solomon. I had to take action, calling in Nathan the prophet, Zadok the priest and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, putting Solomon on my mule and having him anointed in Gihon. I charged him to follow the Law of Moses and extend mercy to some but not others. I had provided materials for the temple which Solomon would build.

I hope Solomon will be more careful to follow the LORD with his whole heart, soul and strength than I was.

1 Samuel 27 - 31, 2 Samuel 1 – 24, 1 Kings 1 – 2, 1 Chronicles 10 - 22