**History Crash Course #18: David: The King**by [Rabbi Ken Spiro](http://www.aish.com/search/?author=48865437)

**David established Jerusalem as Israel's capital over 3,000 years ago.**

King David is one of the most important figures in Jewish history. Born in 907 BCE, he reigns as king of Israel for 40 years, dying at age 70 in 837 BCE.

There is so much that can be said about him. Some people like to focus on the warrior aspect -- the chivalrous warrior fighting for God -- but when his persona and accomplishments are considered as a whole, it is his spiritual greatness that shines most of all.

David's first and foremost drive is to have a relationship with God. We get the glimpse of the beauty of his soul when we read the Psalms, most of which he wrote. Who doesn't know:

*The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want ... (Psalm 23)  
The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom should I fear ... (Psalm 27)  
I lift my eyes to the mountains -- from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, Maker of heaven and earth ... (Psalm 121)*

Even when we consider his military conquest, we see that the driving force behind them was his attachment to God. The hereditary bloodline of King David will become the only legitimate royal bloodline in Jewish history. From David will come all the future kings of Judah and ultimately, at the end of history, the Messiah. This idea of a God-ordained monarchy will be copied by many other nations throughout history and will serve as the basis for the concept of "the divine right of kings" in Medieval and Renaissance Europe.(1)

**THE CONQUEST OF JERUSALEM**

We know historically that the story of Israel during this entire period of time -- from the Exodus onward -- is the story of a tiny nation sandwiched between the two great ancient civilizations, Egypt and Mesopotamia (which was ruled at various times by the Assyrians, Babylonians or Persians).

When David takes the throne, Egypt and Assyria are both on a significant decline. They're not in any position to expand, which leaves a vacuum in the middle where Israel is located, and Israel is allowed to expand unmolested by these other great empires.

Thus David is able to subdue, at long last, the Philistine threat and to conquer the remaining Canaanite city-state -- Jerusalem -- that the Israelites have thus far not been able to conquer.

(For the 440 years since the Jewish people first entered the Land of Israel until the time of King David, Jerusalem has remained an unconquered non-Jewish city in the heart of a Jewish country. It is a city-state inhabited by Canaanite tribe called Jebusites (the Arab village of Silwan, just south of the walls of the Old City, is located there now). It is heavily fortified, yet despite its seemingly impregnable appearance, Jerusalem has one weakness -- its only source of water is a spring outside the city walls. The spring is accessed from inside the city by a long shaft carved into rock.

**THE SITE OF THE TEMPLE**

King David wastes no time bringing the Ark to Jerusalem. And it is an occasion of great communal happiness. In ecstasy David dances wildly at this celebration. For this he is condemned by his wife Michal, the daughter of Saul, who had stuck with him through thick and thin and who even saved his life when King Saul wanted to kill him. But now Michal attacks David, ridiculing his behavior (2 Samuel 6:16-23):

*"How glorious was the king of Israel today, who was exposed today in the eyes of the maidservants of his servants, as one of the boors would be exposed!"*

David -- who had thought nothing of his own honor in his gladness that he had made a special connection with God, -- responds in astonishment:

*"Before the Lord I will make merry. And I shall behave even more humbly than this, and I shall be lowly in my eyes; and of the maidservants of whom you have spoken, by them shall I will be held in honor."*

The story concludes with the punishment visited on Michal for her harsh condemnation of the man chosen by God to be Israel's king:

*And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.*

Although David brings up the Ark of the Covenant to Mount Moriah, he is not allowed by God to build the Temple. A number of reasons are given. One is that the Temple is a house of God and a house of peace and David has a lot of blood on his hands from subduing the enemies of Israel. However, he is promised that his son will build it.

Now David has a number of sons by several wives, some of whom give him serious trouble. One, Amnon, rapes his sister, Tamar. Another, Absalom plots against David and tries to have him deposed. But there is one special boy, Solomon, born from David's relationship with the beautiful Bathsheba.

**DAVID AND BATHSHEBA**

The story of David's relationship with Bathsheba (II Samuel Chap. 11) is one of the most misread stories in the Bible, and we have to be careful in reading it as if it were some kind of soap opera. In summary, however, this is what happens.

Restless one night, David is pacing the roof of his palace from where he has a view of the homes and gardens in the city below(3). And there he spies a beautiful woman bathing. She is the wife of one of his generals, Uriah, the Hittite, who is away at war.

David sends for Bathsheba and spends the night with her. When she becomes pregnant, he commands that Uriah be placed on the front lines, where he dies in battle. David then marries Bathsheba.

At this point, the prophet Nathan is sent by God to reprove David. (See 2 Samuel 12.) He says that he has come to inform the king of a great injustice in the land. A rich man with many sheep, stole the one beloved sheep of a poor man, and had it slaughtered for a feast.

Furious at what he hears, King David, declares, "As God lives, the one who has done this deserves death."

Responds the prophet, "You are that man!"

David is humbled. "I have sinned before God," he says.

This is an enormously complex story and there is much more here than meets the eye. Technically, Bathsheba was not a married woman since David's troops always gave their wives conditional divorces, lest a soldier be missing in action leaving his wife unable to remarry.(4) However, the Bible states clearly that David acted improperly, and the Sages explain that while David did not commit adultery in the literal sense, he violated the spirit of the law(5).

As noted in earlier installments, the Bible takes a hyper-critical position of Jewish leaders. It never whitewashes anyone's past, and in that it stands alone among the records of ancient peoples which usually describe kings as descendants of gods without faults.

David's greatness shines in both his ability to take responsibility for his actions and the humility of his admission and the repentance that follows. This is part of the reason that the ultimate redeemer of the Jewish people and the world will descend from David's line -- he will be "Messiah son of David."

Shortly thereafter, Bathsheba gives birth, but the child becomes deathly ill as the prophet Nathan had predicted. David goes into a period of prayer and fasting, but the child dies nevertheless. David realizes that the death of the baby and later the revolt of his beloved son, Absalom (II Samuel 15-19), were divine punishment and also served as atonement for his actions. David "pays his dues," repents for many years and is ultimately forgiven by God.

Before long Bathsheba is pregnant again. And this time, she bears a healthy child -- who is named Solomon, and who will be the golden child, gifted with unusual wisdom.

1) Many peoples around the world have taken this idea one step further and actually claim that their royal family and even they, themselves, are actual descendants of the ancient Hebrews. One fascinating example are the Makuya sect in Japan who claim that there is an ancient connection between the Japanese and the Jews and that the Royal family of Japan is actually descended from King David.  
Another example is the British. For seven hundred years, every king and queen of England was crowned king while sitting on a throne mounted on a large block of limestone. The stone is called the "Stone of Scone King Edward I (1239-1307) stole the stone from the Scots (It was returned to Scotland in 1997). Scottish tradition held that the stone was the "pillow" that Jacob rested his head on when he had his dream. It was used as a coronation stone by the early Hebrew kings and was kept in Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem After the destruction of the First Temple in 422 BCE, the stone eventually found its way first to Ireland and later to Scotland, . As outrageous as this idea may sound it shows us the centrality and importance of the Davidic line in history.   
2)It is often mentioned that the Western Wall is the holiest spot in the world for the Jews. This is simply not true. The Western Wall is merely a retaining wall built around Mt Moriah by Herod the Great more than 2,000 years ago. The holiest spot is Mt Moriah itself. Today this holiest of places is hidden behind the Western Wall and under the Moslem shrine called the Dome of the Rock. 3) For more details see Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 107a  
4)Talmud, *Shabba*t 56b  
5) See Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 107b. As a prophet, David saw that Bathsheba was destined for him. (Solomon's birth and kingship are proof of this point). The issue was not that Bathsheba was meant to be his wife, but rather how he acquired her.

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