

The Golden Legend or Lives Of The Saints
Compiled by Jacobus de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa, 1275
Englished by William Caxton, First Edition 1483
From the Temple Classics Edited by F.S. Ellis

THE HISTORY OF DAVID

Caxton added this life to his edition of the Golden Legend, but it was not a part of Voragine's original.

Here followeth how David reigned after Saul, and governed Israel. Shortly taken out of the Bible, the most historial matters and but little touched.

After the death of Saul David returned from the journey that he had against Amalek. For whilst David had been out with Achish the king, they of Amalek had been in Ziklag and taken all that was therein prisoners, and robbed and carried away with them the two wives of David. and had set fire and burnt the town. And when David came again home and saw the town burnt he pursued after, and by the conveying of one of them of Amalek that was left by the way sick, for to have his life he brought David upon the host of Amalek whereas they sat and ate and drank. And David smote on them with his meiny [retinue] and slew down all that he found, and rescued his wives and all the good that they had taken, and took much more of them.

THE TIDINGS OF SAULS' DEATH

And when he was come to Ziklag, the third day after there came one from the host of Saul, and told to David how that Israel had lost the battle, and how they were fled, and how Saul the king and Jonathan his son were slain.

David said to the young man that brought these tidings: How knowest thou that Saul and Jonathan be dead?

And he answered it was so by adventure that I came upon the mount of Gilboa, and Saul rested upon his spear, and the horsemen and the chariots of the Philistines approached to himward, and he looked behind him and saw me, and called me, and said to me: "Who art thou?" And I said, "I am an Amalekite," and then he said: "Stand upon me and slay me, for I am full of anguish, and yet my soul is in me." And I then standing on him slew him, knowing well that he might not live after the ruin. And I took the diadem from his head, and the armyle [bracelet] from his arm, which I have brought hither to thee, my lord.

David took and rent [tore] his vestment, and all the men that were him, and wailed and sorrowed much the death of Saul and Jonathan and of all the men of Israel, and fasted that day till even.

And David said to the young man: Of whence art thou?

And he said: I am the son of an Amalekite.

And David said to him: Why dreadedst thou not to put thy hand forth to slay him that is anointed of God?

David called one of his men, and bade him slay him. And he smote him and slew him. And David said: Thy blood be on thy head! thine own mouth hath spoken against thee, saying, "I have slain Saul which was king anointed of our Lord."

David sorrowed and bewailed much the death of Saul and of Jonathan. After this David counselled with our Lord and demanded if he should go in to one of the cities of Judah. And our Lord bade him go, and he ask and because God hath said thou shalt reign upon my people and be their governor, therefore we shall obey thee. And all the seniors of Israel came and did homage to David in Hebron, and anointed him king over them.

David was thirty years old when he began to reign and he reigned forty years. He reigned in Hebron upon Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years upon all Israel and Judah. David then made him a dwelling-place in the hill of Sion in Jerusalem. And after this the Philistines made war against him but he oft overthrew them, and slew many of them, and made them tributary to him, and after brought the ark of God in Jerusalem, and set it in his house. After this yet the Philistines made war again unto him and other kings were aiding and helping them against David, whom David overcame and slew and put under.

DAVID AND URIAH

And on a time when Joab was out with his men of war lying at a siege tofore a city, David was at home, and walked in his chamber, and as he looked out at a window he saw a fair woman wash her and bain her in her chamber, which stood against his house, and demanded of his servants who she was, and they said she was Uriah's wife. He sent for her and lay by her and gat her with child.

And when David understood that she was with child, he sent letters to Joab and bade him to send home to him Uriah; and Joab sent Uriah to David, and David demanded how the host was ruled, and after bade him go home to his house and wash his feet. And Uriah went thence, and the king sent to him his dish with meat [food]. Uriah would not go home, but lay before the gate of the king's house with other servants of the king's.

And it was told to the king that Uriah went not home, and then David said to Uriah: Thou comest from a far way, why goest thou not home?

And Uriah said to David: The ark of God and Israel and Judah be in the pavilions, and my lord Joab and the servants of thee, my lord, lie on the ground, and would ye that I should go to my house and eat and drink, and sleep with my wife? By thy health and by the health of my soul I shall not do so.

Then David said to Uriah, Abide here then this night, and to-morrow I shall deliver thee.

Uriah abode there that day and the next, and David made him eat tofore him and made him drunk, yet for all that he would not go home, but lay with the servants of David. Then on the morn David wrote a letter to Joab, that he should set Uriah in the weakest place of the battle and where most jeopardy was, and that he should be left there that he might be slain. And Uriah bare this letter to Joab, and it was so done as David had written, and Uriah was slain in the battle. And Joab sent word to David how they had fought, and how Uriah was slain and dead. When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned and wailed him; and after the mourning David sent for her and wedded her, and she bare him a son. And this that David had committed on Uriah displeased greatly our Lord.

Then our Lord sent Nathan the prophet unto David, which, when he came, said to him: There were two men dwelling in a city, that one rich and that other poor. The rich man had sheep and oxen right many, but the poor man had but one little sheep, which he bought and nourished and grew with his children, eating of his bread and drinking of his cup, and slept in his bosom. She was to him as a daughter. And on a time when a certain pilgrim came to the rich man, he, sparing his own sheep and oxen to make a feast to the pilgrim that was come to him, took the only sheep of the poor man and made meat thereof to his guest.

David was wroth and said to Nathan: By the living God, the man that hath so done is the child of death, the man that hath so done shall yield therefor four times double.

Then said Nathan to David: Thou art the same man that hath done this thing. This said the Lord God of Israel: "I have anointed thee king upon Israel, and I have kept thee from the hand of Saul, and I have given to thee an house to keep in thine household and wives in thy bosom. I have given to thee the house of Israel and the house of Judah, and if these be small things I shall add an l give to thee much more and greater. Why hast thou therefore despised the word of God and hast done evil in the sight of our Lord? Thou hast slain Uriah with a sword, and his wife hast thou taken unto thy wife, and thou hast slain him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. Therefore the sword shall not go from thy house, world without end, forasmuch as thou hast despised me and hast taken Uriah's wife unto thy wife." This said our Lord: "I shall raise evil against thee, and shall take thy wives in thy sight and give them to thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives tofore thine eyes. Thou hast done it privily, but I shall make this to be done and open in the sight of all Israel."

And then said David to Nathan: *Peccavi!* I have sinned against our Lord. Nathan said: Our Lord hath taken away thy sin, thou shalt not die, but for as much as thou hast made the enemy to blaspheme the name of God, therefore the son that is born to thee shall die by death. And Nathan returned to his house. And for this sin David made this psalm: *Miserere mei deus*, which is a psalm of mercy, for David did great penance for these sins of adultery and also of homicide.

(For as I once was beyond the sea riding in the company of a noble knight named Sir John Capons, and was also doctor in both laws, and was born in Malyorke, and had been viceroy and governor of Arragon and Catalonia, and that time counsellor unto the Duke of Burgundy, Charles, it happed we communed of the history of David; and this said nobleman told me that he had read that David did this penance following for these said sins, that he dolved him [buried

himself] in the ground standing naked unto the head, so long that the worms began to creep in his flesh, and made a verse of this psalm *Miserere*, and then came out, and when he was whole thereof he went in again and stood so again as long as afore is said and made the second verse, and so as many times he was dolven in the earth as be verses in the said psalm of *Miserere mei deus*, and every time was abiding therein till he felt the worms creep in his flesh. This was a great penance and a token of a great repentance, for there be in the psalm twenty-one verses, and twenty-one times he was dolven. Thus this nobleman told me, riding between the town of Ghent in Flanders and the town of Brussels in Brabant.)

Therefore God took away this sin, and forgave it him, but the son that she brought forth died. And after this Bathsheba, that had been Uriah's wife, conceived and brought forth another son named Solomon, which was well-beloved of God, and after David, Solomon was king.

ABSALOM'S REVOLT

After this David had much war and trouble and anger, in so much that on a time Amnon, eldest son of David, loved Thamar his sister. This Thamar was Absalom's sister by the mother's side, and Amnon forced and lay by her, and when he had done his pleasure, he hated her, and threw her out of his chamber, and she complained unto Absalom. David knew hereof, and was right sorry for it, but he would not rebuke his son Amnon for it, for he loved him because he was his first begotten son. Absalom hated Amnon ever after, and when Absalom on a time did do shear his sheep he prayed all his brethren to come eat with him, and made them a feast like a king's feast. At which feast he did do slay his brother Amnon.

And anon it was told to the King David that Absalom had slain all the king's sons. Wherefore the king was in great heaviness and sorrow, but anon after it was told him that there was no more slain but Amnon, and the other sons came home. And Absalom fled into Geshur, and was there three years, and durst not come home. And after by the moyen of Joab he was sent for, and came into Jerusalem, but yet he might not come in his father the king's presence, and dwelled there two years, and might not see the King his father.

This Absalom was the fairest man that ever was, for from the sole of his foot unto his head there was not a spot; he had so much hair on his head that it grieved him to bear, wherefore it was shorn off once a year, it weighed two hundred shekels of good weight.

Then when he abode so long that he might not come to his father's presence he sent for Joab to come speak with him, and he would not come. He sent again for him and he came not. Then Absalom said to his servants: Know ye Joab's field that lieth by my field?

They said yea.

Go ye, said he, and set fire in the barley that is therein, and burn it.

And Joab's servants came and told to Joab that Absalom had set fire on his corn. Then Joab came to Absalom and said: Why hast thou set fire on my corn!

And he said, I have sent twice to thee, praying thee to come to me that I might send thee to the king, and that thou shouldst say to him why I came from Geshur; it had been better for me for to have abiden there. I pray thee that I may come to his presence and see his visage, and if he remember my wickedness let him slay me.

Joab went in to the King and told to him all these words. Then was Absalom called, and entered in to the king, and he fell down and worshipped the king, and the king kissed him. After this Absalom did do make for himself chariots and horsemen and fifty men for to go before him, and walked among the tribes of Israel; and greeted and saluted them, taking them by the hand, and kissed them, by which he gat to him the hearts of the people; and said to his father that he had avowed to make sacrifice to God in Hebron, and his father gave him leave.

And when he was there he gathered people to him, and made himself king, and did do cry that all men should obey and wait on him as king of Israel. When David heard this he was sore abashed and was fain to flee out of Jerusalem. And Absalom came with his people and entered into Jerusalem into his father's house, and lay by his father's concubines, and after pursued his father to depose him. And David ordained his people and battle against him, and sent Joab, prince of his host, against Absalom, and divided his host into three parts, and would have gone with them, but Joab counselled that he should not go to the battle whatevener happed, and then David bade them to save his son Absalom.

And they went forth and fought, and Absalom with his host was overthrown and put to flight. And as Absalom fled upon his mule he came under an oak, and his hair flew about a bough of the tree and held so fast that Absalom hung by his hair, and the mule ran forth.

There came one to Joab and told him how that Absalom hung by his hair on a bough of an oak, and Joab said: Why hast thou not slain him?

The man said: God forbid that I should set hand on the king's son; I heard the king say: "keep my son Absalom alive and slay him not."

Then Joab went and took three spears, and fixed them in the heart of Absalom as he hung on the tree by his hair, and yet after this ten young men, squires of Joab, ran and slew him. Then Joab trumped and blew the retreat, and retained the people that they should not pursue the people flying. And they took the body of Absalom and cast it in a great pit, and laid on him a great stone.

And when David knew that his son was slain, he made great sorrow and said: O my son Absalom, my son Absalom, who shall grant to me that I may die for thee, my son Absalom, Absalom my son!

It was told to Joab that the king wept and sorrowed the death of his son Absalom, and all their victory was turned into sorrow and wailing, in so much that the people eschewed to enter into the city. Then Joab entered into the king and said: Thou hast this day discouraged the cheer of all thy servants because they have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and daughters, of thy wives and of thy concubines, thou lovest them that hate thee, and hatest them that love thee,

and shewest well this day that thou settest little by thy dukes and servants; and truly I know now well that if Absalom had lived and all we thy servants had been slain, thou haddest been pleased. Therefore, arise now and come forth and satisfy the people; or else I swear to thee by the good lord that there shall not one of thy servants abide with thee till tomorrow, and that shall be worse to thee than all the harms and evils that ever yet fell to thee.

Then David the king arose and sat in the gate, and anon it was shown to all the people that the king sat in the gate. And then all the people came in tofore the king, and they of Israel that had been with Absalom fled into their tabernacles, and after came again unto David when they knew that Absalom was dead.

DAVID AND GAD

And after, one Sheba, a cursed man, rebelled and gathered people against David. Against whom Joab with the host of David pursued, and drove him unto a city which he besieged, and by the means of a woman of the same city Sheba's head was smitten off and delivered to Joab over the wall, and so the city was saved, and Joab pleased.

After this David called Joab, and bade him number the people of Israel, and so Joab walked through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and over Jordan and all the country, and there were founden in Israel eight hundred thousand strong men that were able to fight and to draw sword, and of the tribe of Judah fifty thousand fighting men. And after that the people was numbered, the heart of David was smitten by our Lord and was heavy, and said: I have sinned greatly in this deed, but I pray the Lord to take away the wickedness of thy servant, for I have done follily.

David rose on the morn early, and the word of our Lord came to Gad the prophet saying: that he should go to David and bid him choose one of three things that he should say to him. When Gad came to David he said that he should choose whether he would have seven years hunger in his land, or three months he should flee his adversaries and enemies, or to have three days pestilence. Of these three God biddeth thee choose which thou wilt; now advise thee and conclude what I shall answer to our Lord.

David said to Gad: I am constrained to a great thing, but it is better for me to put me in the hands of our Lord, for his mercy is much more than in men, and so he chose pestilence.

Then our Lord sent pestilence the time constitute, and there died of the people from Dan to Beersheba seventy thousand men. And when the angel extended his hand upon Jerusalem for to destroy it, our Lord was merciful upon the affliction, and said to the angel so smiting: It sufficeth now, withdraw thy hand. David said to our Lord when he saw the angel smiting the people: I am he that have sinned and done wickedly, what have these sheep done? I beseech thee that thy hand turn upon me and upon the house of my father.

Then came Gad to David and bade him make an altar in the same place where he saw the angel; and he bought the place, and made the altar, and offered sacrifices unto our Lord, and our Lord was merciful, and the plague ceased in Israel.

SOLomon SUCCEEDS DAVID

David was old and feeble and saw that his death approached, and ordained that his son Solomon should reign and be king after him. Howbeit that Adonijah his son took on him to be king during David's life. For which cause Bathsheba and Nathan came to David, and tofore them he said that Solomon should be king, and ordained that he should be set on his mule by his prophets Nathan, Zadok the priest and Benaiah, and brought in to Sion. And there Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed him king upon Israel and blew in a trump and said: Live the King Solomon.

And from thence they brought him into Jerusalem and set him upon his father's seat in his father's throne, and David worshipped him in his bed, and said: Blessed be the Lord God of Israel that hath suffered me to see my son in my throne and seat.

And then Adonijah and all they that were with him were afeard, and dreading Solomon ran away, and so ceased Adonijah.

The days of David approached fast that he should die, and did do call Solomon before him, and there he commanded him to keep the commandments of our Lord and walk in his ways, and to observe his ceremonies, his precepts and his judgments, as it is written in the law of Moses, and said: Our Lord confirm thee in thy reign, and send to thee wisdom to rule it well.

And when David had thus counselled and commanded him to do justice and keep God's law, he blessed him and died, and was buried with his fathers.

This David was an holy man and made the holy psalter, which is an holy book and is contained therein the old law and the new law. He was a great prophet, for he prophesied the coming of Christ, his nativity, his passion, and resurrection, and also his ascension, and was great with God, yet God would not suffer him to build a temple for him, for he had shed man's blood. But God said to him, his son that should reign after him should be a man peaceable, and he should build the temple to God. And when David had reigned forty years king of Jerusalem, over Judah and Israel, he died in good mind, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David.

The [iconography of King David](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

Scanned by Robert Blackmon. bob_blackmon@mindspring.com.

This text was taken from the [Internet Medieval Source Book](#). The Sourcebook is a collection of public domain and copy-permitted texts related to medieval and Byzantine history.

Permission is granted for electronic copying, distribution in print form for educational purposes and personal use. If you do reduplicate the document, indicate the source. No permission is granted for commercial use.

E-text © Paul Halsall, September 2000
halsall@fordham.edu

Reformatted with paragraphs, rubrics, italics, and explanatory insertions by Richard Stracke, rstracke@aug.edu