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Some of David's Kith and Kin

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A casual reading of the events in the life of David, the quintessential king of Israel, fails to appreciate the relational aspects of his reign. While many of the people around David were drawn to him for political or even spiritual reasons, some of his closest confidants were actually members of his family. These royal relationships remind us that the events in the Bible didn't take place in a vacuum, but were woven into a verifiable historical context.

Jonathan, David's Uncle

David was the son of Jesse, though his mother's name is never mentioned in the Bible. In a brief reference to David's royal court, 1 Chronicles 27:32 says that one of David's uncles, Jonathan, was a counselor, "a man of insight," as well as a scribe. The Hebrew word *dod*, translated "uncle" in this passage, could in fact refer to other family relationships.¹ For this reason, some suggest that this Jonathan was actually David's nephew who is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 20:7.² However, it makes sense to view Jonathan the counselor as David's uncle.

Eliab, David's Brother

According to 1 Samuel 17:12 David had seven brothers (compare 1 Samuel 16:10-11), although 1 Chronicles 2:13-15 lists

only six brothers. It is likely that one of the brothers died before the list in 1 Chronicles 2:13-15 was composed.³ David's oldest brother served as an officer over the tribe of Judah. He is called Elihu in 1 Chronicles 27:18, which may be an alternate form of the name Eliab used in 1 Chronicles 2:13. According to 1 Samuel 16:6-7, Eliab was tall and had a commanding appearance. However, the Lord "looks at the heart." Later, Eliab joined King Saul's army. Before witnessing his little brother's faith and courage in slaying Goliath, Eliab had rebuked David for his seeming insolence (1 Samuel 17:28-30). Apparently there were no hard feelings, since David eventually appointed Eliab to a high position in his royal government.

Jonathan, David's Nephew

Jonathan was a son of David's brother Shimea (Shimeah, Shammah) Jesse's third son (1 Samuel 16:9; 1 Chronicles 2:13). He was a warrior in David's army, and killed a fierce Philistine fighter (2 Samuel 21:20-21; 1 Chronicles 20:6-7).

Jonadab, David's Nephew

Jonadab, another son of David's brother Shimea, was a schemer. He helped David's son Amnon rape Amnon's half sister, Tamar (1 Samuel 13:3-5), bringing trouble on David's household. Tamar's full brother, Absalom, killed Amnon in revenge. Jonadab then reported the news of Amnon's death (2 Samuel 13:32-35).

Joab, David's Nephew

Joab was the most powerful of David's relatives. David appointed Joab to be the commander of his army (1 Chronicles 27:34). He was a son of David's sister Zeruihah and had two brothers, Abishai and Asahel (1 Chronicles 2:16). Among his accomplishments, Joab defeated the armies of King Saul's son Ish-Bosheth, who stood in opposition to David's claim to the throne of Israel (2 Samuel 2:12-17). Ish-Bosheth's military commander Abner killed Joab's brother Asahel at that time (2 Samuel 2:18-28). When Abner tried to defect to David's side, Joab disobeyed David's intentions and killed Abner in order to avenge his brother's death (2 Samuel 3:26-27).

Because Joab later led the way in capturing Jerusalem as David's new capital, he was appointed commander-in-chief of

David's army (1 Chronicles 11:4-6). Joab completed the defeat of the Edomites that David had begun (1 Kings 11:15-16), and he led in the defeat of a coalition of Ammonite and Aramean forces (2 Samuel 10:7-14). Joab conspired with David to cover up David's sin with Bathsheba, making sure that Bathsheba's husband Uriah would die in battle (2 Samuel 11:14-21). Joab was careful to let David take credit for military accomplishments (2 Samuel 12:26-29). He also tried to restore the broken relationship between David and his son Absalom (2 Samuel 14:1, 19), but defended David when Absalom tried to take over the throne.

However, Joab went beyond David's expressed wishes by killing Absalom (2 Samuel 18:14), instilling lasting animosity between David, Joab, and Joab's brother Abishai (2 Samuel 19:21-22). Joab also murdered his cousin Amasa, the military commander of Absalom's army (2 Samuel 17: 25).

Later, when David decided to conduct a census to evaluate his military strength (as opposed to trusting in God's strength), Joab tried to dissuade him from this act (2 Samuel 24:1-10). Eventually, when David was dying, Joab attempted to install David's son Adonijah on the throne instead of David's choice, Solomon (1 Kings 1:7). Solomon had Joab killed for this and other insolent acts based on David's advice (1 Kings 2:5-6, 28-34). Joab was ruthlessly loyal to David unless his loyalty would threaten his own position of leadership. Joab wasn't afraid to inflict revenge or to take matters into his own hands in order to preserve his own power.

Abishai, David's Nephew

Abishai was the son of David's sister Zeruah, and a brother to Joab and Asahel (1 Chronicles 2:16). While David was hiding from King Saul's anger, Abishai volunteered to enter Saul's camp and pressed David to kill Saul (1 Samuel 26:6-9). With his brother Joab, Abishai pursued Abner who had just killed their brother Asahel (2 Samuel 2:24-28), and eventually shared in the murder of Abner (2 Samuel 3:30). Abishai served under his brother's command, and helped defeat the Ammonites and Arameans (2 Samuel 10:9-14). He also offered to kill Shimei, one of David's opponents during Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 16:9-12). Abishai contributed to the defeat of Absalom's army (2 Samuel 18:2) and later David

commissioned him to put down another rebellion led by Sheba (2 Samuel 20:6-7). In addition, Abishai rescued David from a fierce Philistine fighter (2 Samuel 21:15-17). On one occasion, probably earlier in his career, Abishai killed 300 soldiers single handedly, gaining a reputation as a mighty warrior (2 Samuel 23:18-19). First Chronicles 18:12 attributes the defeat of the Edomites to Abishai, though 2 Samuel 8:13 gives the credit to David. "It is hence probable that the victory was actually gained by Abishai, but is ascribed to David as king and commander."⁴

Asahel, David's Nephew

Asahel was the son of David's sister Zeruah, and a brother to Joab and Asahel (1 Chronicles 2:16). He gained a reputation as a mighty warrior (2 Samuel 23:24) and served in a rotation of military commanders (1 Chronicles 27:7). Asahel, a fast runner, pursued Abner who reluctantly killed him (2 Samuel 2:18-23). Asahel's brothers, Joab and Abishai, avenged Asahel's death by killing Abner.

Amasa, David's Nephew

Amasa was the son of David's sister Abigail (1 Chronicles 2:17). Absalom appointed Amasa as commander of his army in his rebellion against his father David (2 Samuel 17:25). Because Joab killed Absalom against David's wishes, David expressed his intention to replace Joab with Amasa (2 Samuel 19:13). Later, when Amasa was unable to gather Israel's troops fast enough to put down the rebellion of Sheba, Abishai was granted the task. When Amasa finally arrived at the battle, Joab murdered his cousin (2 Samuel 20:4-10).

¹ Koehler, Ludwig and Baumgartner, Walter. *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958, p. 204.

² Unger, Merrill F. *Unger's Bible Dictionary*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1966, p. 603.

³ Youngblood, Ronald F. "1 Samuel" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 3. Frank E. Gaebelien, editor. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992, p. 684.

⁴ Unger, p. 7.