



CAN AN ORPHANED WOMAN AND A
PHILISTINE EXILE DEFEND AN
AGING KING WHO CANNOT
CONTROL A REBELLIOUS SON?

DEFENDING DAVID

~ITTAI'S JOURNEY~

BARBARA M.
BRITTON

Defending David

Barbara M. Britton

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Defending David
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What Readers Are Saying About "Defending David."

Ms. Britton drew me in on page one. Rimona's and Ittai's story of love, faith, and valor still lingers in my mind today. *Defending David* is definitely a jewel.

~ **Olivia Rae, award-winning author of the Secrets of the Queens series**

Barbara M. Britton's best yet! Readers will fall in love with loyal Ittai and strong Rimona as they work separately and together to support the anointed king of Israel and uphold the sovereignty of the Most High God in the midst of turmoil and unrest while also seeking shelter from their own enemies. Their story is intertwined with thorough Biblical research on the life and times of King David, and shows the complexities of his character as well as the faith that made him a man after God's own heart. Add suspense, wit, wisdom, and characters whose struggles are real and relatable even thousands of years after the historical events they experience, and you get a masterful and inspirational exploration of the events of Absalom's rebellion in II Samuel. *Defending David* turns the Psalms into battle cries, reveals the warrior within the psalmist, and reminds us all exactly where our help comes from in times of trouble.

~ **Jenna Van Mourik, author of *Jerusalem's Daughter*.**

Step back in time to the days of King David when

he's lost control of his family and a foreigner is his staunchest ally. Britton brings the Bible to life with strong characters, recognizable names, and the thrill of sharing a faith in the One True God.

~ **Terri Wangard**, author of *Roll Back the Clouds*

Dedication

For my family and friends who have been with me
through the ups and downs of life.

“A man of many companions may come to ruin, but
there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”

Proverbs 18:24

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Books by Barbara M. Britton

Tribes of Israel Series

Providence: Hannah's Journey
Building Benjamin: Naomi's Journey
Jerusalem Rising: Adah's Journey
Defending David: Ittai's Journey

Daughters of Zelophehad

Lioness: Mahlah's Journey
Heavenly Lights: Noah's Journey
Claiming Canaan: Milcah's Journey

*The Children of Jesse noted in
I Chronicles 2:13-17:*

Sons:

Eliab
Abinadab
Shimea
Nethanel
Raddai
Ozem
David

Daughters:

Zeruiah
Abigail

*The notorious sons of Zeruiah; David's
nephews:*

Abishai
Joab
Asahel (deceased at the time of this story)

Prologue

Ziklag, a Philistine town

Ittai calculated every footfall so as not to spook the piglet. The young animal chewed leaves off of a bramble bush oblivious to its stalker. Ittai had seen older boys wrestle livestock, and if he and his mother were to eat this day, he would need to be quick to subdue the runt. His hands grew slick, but he would not wipe them on his tunic and chance missing a meal.

The piglet ravaged another branch. How could the animal be hungry? The Hebrew warrior David and his men had conquered many villages before the sun thought to grow tired. Surely, the owner had slopped pens earlier this morning. Ittai hadn't been slopped in two days.

Below him, along the slope of the rolling hills, men drank and boasted of their spoils. No one mentioned a missing sow or her babe.

His prey chewed, and chewed some more, heedless to the noise all around and to the rumblings of Ittai's belly.

Nearer and nearer he prowled using other bushes

for cover. He may not have fought with the Hebrews, but he would fight this pig and bring his mother some meat.

His heartbeat surged as he drew closer. The pound echoed through his bones and filled his throat. His nostrils feasted on the dank of the pig's hide. One swift lunge, and he and his mother would sup for days.

Ready, and—

"You're a Gittite." A deep voice spooked the pig and Ittai's feast fled.

Ittai whirled around, fire racing through his veins. A Hebrew man smirked at him. Ittai would bet the man's belly was stuffed full. Why did the stranger have to speak before Ittai caught his food? He fisted his hands in case the foreigner wanted some sport. A boy may not win a battle, but he could kick and bite.

Straightening to his full height, Ittai glared at the man's waist and lifted his chin higher. His mouth stung making it hard to swallow, let alone answer the stranger. Someone owed Ittai a pig even if it wasn't fully grown.

"You—"

"Of course, he's a Gittite. Why would any of our men chase unclean animals?" A second warrior approached and laughed, but not like an enemy. He laughed as a friend, as friendly as one could be after slaying a town. "The battle is over, Joab."

Ittai had heard of this second man and glimpsed him from a distance. He had slayed tens of thousands, or so the women sang. If their songs were true, one day this man would be a king of the neighboring land. All

the women whispered about David, son of Jesse, camped in Ziklag, far from his own people, but not far from Ittai's hut. Would this David have food to share?

Swallowing, Ittai coughed as saliva clogged his throat.

Joab bent and glared at him.

Now, Ittai had become the small animal being hunted.

"He's a spy." Joab crossed his thick arms. "I'll wager on it."

Ittai's stomach cramped. How would he explain where he lived? He understood Hebrew better than he could speak the dialect.

"You've lost your gold," David said. "If he's a spy, he'd be whispering to his king at the moment. The boy is still with us and not in the northern foothills with Achish."

Nodding, Ittai agreed with the man in the songs.

"Why isn't he fighting with his father?" Joab pushed Ittai closer to the bush. "Answer me. Did your voice take off with that pig?"

Pressing down a remark that may get him whipped or beaten, Ittai remembered his upbringing. He was a Philistine. An enemy of the Hebrews until recently. Until King Achish allowed the man, David, to settle in Ziklag.

Ignoring the mean warrior, Ittai focused on David. "Mm...my father is dead." Ittai's temples pulsed with his confession. "And my king doesn't always win. You do." That was the truth. Truth he would never say to his king. Not if he cared to live.

“What makes you think I always win?” David swaggered toward the bramble bush and twisted a leaf clean off a spindly branch.

David’s companion jabbed a finger into Ittai’s chest. “Spy, he’s waiting for your wisdom?”

Ittai shrugged and tried to ease the sting of the Hebrew’s poke. Puffing out his chest, he dipped his head in a show of respect to David and spoke the tale he had heard since he was old enough to understand why he and his mother were alone. “My mother saw you. You killed our fiercest fighter. When you were young. Like me.” He pointed to himself. “She said you killed Goliath...with a stone. No sword or arrow.”

David’s gaze became like that of a swooping hawk. “That Philistine Goliath made a mistake no man should make if he desires to live.”

Should I ask? Ittai’s heart boomed louder than the raucous army camped below. Curiosity bubbled on his lips. He wanted to learn to fight well so his mother would always have enough to eat. From the looks of the men celebrating in the valley, David provided for his men, unlike the King of Gath who left Ittai’s family to starve. What could the men take from him now? His pig had fled. He didn’t have any coin or even a blade. “Tell me, lord. Tell me how not to be foolish like Goliath so I can become a great warrior like you.”

David knelt in the dirt, barely a footfall from Ittai. A slight breeze brought a waft of David’s breath to Ittai’s nostrils. The warrior’s breath held a hint of cloves and honey. The Hebrew commander had filled his belly. If it were any other warrior, Ittai would have

sprinted into the bramble bushes, but something, something about this man, held him fast like a curse. David's smile was as big as Ittai's mother's when her oil jar overflowed.

"Uncle." The mean man sighed. "Send the boy home. We have battle plans to make ready."

"In time, Joab." David untied a satchel on his belt and took out a piece of bread. A big piece. He held it out. "It's not as big as the piglet."

Ittai almost fainted. His belly roared as he took the bread. He hid some in his palm for his mother and bit into the food. He almost swallowed his bite whole. The bread was the best he'd ever tasted.

David grinned. His eyes creased on the sides. "Goliath mocked my God. The God of my forefathers. That is why I fought him. For his offense."

"My father is dead. He fought against Hebrews." Ittai didn't know why he shared this truth, but the truth burst forth with some spittle. He stared at the wide brown eyes beholding him. "Your king gave the order. Now, you're here. Hiding."

"Saul won't harm us." Joab stroked the hilt of his sword. "Not as long as I have breath and a weapon."

Ittai wished the scar-faced young man would leave. He didn't mind David though. On his hip, Ittai placed the fist holding his mother's bread and pushed inward, protruding a tiny bump of flesh. "I will kill your Saul."

"Do not speak of such." David furrowed his brow at Ittai and regarded Joab with the same scowl. "No one will harm Saul. He is God's anointed king. He was

anointed long before I was.”

Joab shrugged and gave a slight nod. His lips pressed thin as if he agreed with David’s answer, but his nose wrinkled like an empty sack.

“I’m s-s-sorry.” Ittai’s words stuck to his tongue. “Is that why you are here? Instead of in your land?” He stuffed another piece of bread in his mouth.

“I’m here for a time,” David said. “I’m waiting on God.”

“Your God?” Would he be struck for not knowing the Hebrew God?

At the mention of his God, David’s shoulders fell, and the lines vanished from his forehead.

“The One True God. Though, he is not solely my God.” David laid his hand on Ittai’s shoulder. “Remember that, son.”

Son. He couldn’t remember anyone calling him son. He couldn’t remember his father’s voice. Or for that matter, his father’s face. Tears welled in Ittai’s eyes.

“What is your name?” David rose and, with sunlight sparking in his brown eyes, beheld Ittai.

“It-tai.” His teeth chattered on a name he had spoken for years.

The man that women sang about squeezed Ittai’s shoulder. “Ittai the Gittite. That is a name to be proud of.” David released Ittai’s tunic and strode down the slope toward his men. Turning, he said, “Do you know where the mules are tied, Ittai the Gittite?”

Ittai nodded. “I filled waterskins before.”

“Good.” David smiled like Ittai’s mother again.

“Tell the tall, bushy haired man that his commander has awarded you a dressed lamb. If he squawks like a hen, tell him he can find me near the washing basin.” The future king untied the satchel from his waist and tossed it in the air. The bag landed at Ittai's feet in a puff of dust. “Have him fill that with more bread. Go in peace Ittai the Gittite. And do not speak about our raids.”

“I won't.” His voice squeaked as if he had caught the piglet. Ittai took a step backward and gripped the soft leather satchel in his hand. David's words echoed in his head. Go in peace? How could a warrior go anywhere in peace?

Someday, he hoped to be half the warrior David had become. He'd be strong and have lots of gold. He might even be a man about whom women sang.

1

Thirty years later

Beersheba, south of Hebron, in the land of Judah

Rimona clutched the tunic of her elderly neighbor and nearly ripped the embroidered cloth. "Let me stay with you, Leah. I will gut fish, bring you water, anything you see fit for me to do."

"You know I cannot take you into my household when you have kin," her friend's voice quivered, but she did not remove Rimona's fingers from her garment.

Welcoming the old woman's callused-hand caress, Rimona leaned against the small stone home she had shared with her mother for twenty-four years before her mother had passed away. Rimona cradled her confidante's hand close. "Why didn't my uncle come to mourn his sister? He could have claimed me after her burial." Rimona's lungs became as tiny as an unopened bud. Thirty days was not long enough to mourn a mother. Or mourn the loss of the life she knew.

"I would beg you to stay if there was no other," Leah whispered. "Your mother's brother will welcome you to Jerusalem. Think about your life in a palace. You will not have to work so hard every day." Leah's

eyes grew wide, but they held no hint of glee. She shook her head. "Be brave. It is not safe for you here without a protector. The elders have arranged an escort for you. Jerusalem is only a few days' ride." Leah stepped away from the wall and pulled gently on Rimona's arms. "Come along now."

What choice did an unmarried orphan have? Shuffling her sandals, Rimona followed her neighbor away from the familiarity of her home and into the trampled dirt road. Jerusalem may be only a few days' ride, but the ride was one Leah, a widow, could hardly manage at her age. This was another burial. A farewell to a woman who had become like a beloved aunt.

Tears welled in Rimona's eyes.

Leah leaned closer. "Your escort awaits. If he keeps pacing, he will dig a ravine with his feet."

"Eglon is always impatient." Rimona swept her grief from her face. "I hope the collection of coins bestowed by the elders was sufficient, or he will complain at every hoofbeat." Why couldn't she have a kinsman closer in blood than Eglon?

"Do not mind him. You are going to the king's palace. Your mother would be pleased to see you in the City of David." Leah rested her head against Rimona's shoulder.

The scent of wisdom and wildflowers comforted Rimona's angst.

"Seek out a scribe or a nobleman to wed while you are there."

"I am too weary to seek out a man. A quiet room with food that I do not have to roast would be a