

# David Becomes King Over Israel

Notes for 2 Nov

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Read: [2 Samuel 5](#)

Looking at this week's texts it seems as if the writer is itching to get on with it. These few short verses deal with David becoming king over both Judah and Israel, his establishment of Jerusalem as his new capital, and his victory over the Philistines, whom, lest we forget, were his allies in the discussions of a few weeks back.

We are at the end of the long narrative of the rise of David, from shepherd boy to king. The story that started way back in [1 Samuel 16](#) has come to a climax.

## An aside...

We start with the elders inviting David to be king over Israel. Oh, that choosing the leader of a nation were so straightforward! The old men (and they would all have been men) decide that David is the chap for them and that's that.

It wasn't too long ago that we Brits had an election in which we all (not just the old men) had a say in who should be running things. Next week our American cousins go through what has been described as the most important US election in years. And yet, in the UK, the US, and many other countries, the process is fraught with difficulties, not least of which is the fact that the people who want to be in charge are often the last people who should be in charge.

- What do you think about going back to the process of 2 Samuel 5 and letting the elders decide...???

## ...back to 2 Samuel 5:1-4

Saul, Abner, Jonathan and Ish-bosheth are no more (note that David has had no part in their demise - he is blameless). The very short experiment of having a king hasn't worked out terribly well for Israel. So, the elders of Israel, the old Saul party, come to David with an invitation.

- What does 'flesh and bone' mean in v1?
- In v2 we read that "...when Saul was our king, you were the one who really led the forces of Israel. And the Lord told you...". Brueggemann says that the Hebrew here is emphatic - "the Lord told *you*"
- Is 'shepherd' in v2 the first reference we have to David's old job and his perfect metaphor for God in Psalm 23?
- The word at the end of v2, translated variously as 'ruler', 'leader' and 'prince', is the Hebrew word "*nagid*". Its meaning is much disputed but it seems clear that the elders of Israel deliberately did not use the word "King". Brueggemann suggests that the use of this word leaves room for the kingship of Yahweh. "This *nagid* is one way out of the

vexed notion that human kingship is a rejection of the kingship of Yahweh" (Br p238). What do you think of this subtle choice of wording? Are the elders trying to say something profound to David? Even though they are asking him to be king (perhaps for purely practical reasons?), their true allegiance is elsewhere?

- What do you make of the 'covenant' of v3? Compare with, say, the acts of Abner in 2:9 wherein he made Ish-bosheth king. Here we have a covenant. There we have a simple unilateral act. Is this difference important?
- v4 is clearly written from a distance of at least 33+ years. Can we conclude that the Books of Samuel were all written some time after the events described therein? Does it matter that these might not be contemporaneous accounts?

## Jerusalem, vv6-8

Brueggemann declares these verses to be "among the most difficult in the books of Samuel". The purpose is straightforward - David is taking the city of Jerusalem to be *his* new capitol. But...

- What's with all the references to the 'lame' and the 'blind'?
- In modern-speak: Is David [ableist](#)?
- Is it important for David's kingship that his new 'safe place' is neither with Judah nor with 'Israel'? v9 says he called it the 'City of David'.
- Why does this matter?
- Do we see a modern equivalent with, say, the choices of Washington DC, Brasilia or Canberra in modern times? Or the placement of so many international bodies in [Geneva](#)?

Our author makes clear in v10 that all this is the Lord's doing - "And David became more and more powerful, because the Lord God of Heaven's Armies was with him." Brueggemann considers the end of v10 to be the end of the 'Rise of David' and the beginning of the 'Reign of David'.

David starts work on the city of Jerusalem, building terraces and doing the place up. The rulers of adjoining nations start sending him gifts (v11) along with workmen to help with the renovations. He moves in (v13) and claims the trappings of power - more wives and more concubines. And many sons and daughters.

He is no longer a warrior but now a statesman.

## Philistines (again), vv17-23

The [entente cordial](#) between David and the Philistines is over. Not so long ago (1 Sam 27) David was trying to ingratiate himself with them, but now they seem to view him as an important new enemy. An enemy to be stamped out quickly.

Verses 19 to 25 are another of those simple-to-read but hard-to-understand stories where David seems to be in direct contact with God. He asks the Lord direct and detailed questions and the Lord replies with direct and detailed answers.

- Discuss!

## Aside #2: The Robots Overlords Will Kill Us In Our Beds

For a bit of fun this week I asked ChatGPT to summarise 2 Samuel 5 for a modern reader, taking note of the writings of Walter Brueggemann, and to then provide some discussion questions. Here's what it came up with:

Brueggemann brings valuable insights to texts like 2 Samuel 5, emphasizing the theological and social implications of David's kingship and the establishment of Jerusalem. Here are some reflections on the chapter inspired by Brueggemann's work:

1. **David as a Leader of Covenant and Identity:** Brueggemann sees David's kingship as central to the formation of Israel's identity as a covenant people. For Brueggemann, David is more than a political leader; he embodies a covenantal vision that resonates with the people. His rule is a direct extension of God's promise to Israel and serves as a unifying force. For a modern reader, Brueggemann's perspective suggests that true leadership should go beyond political power, inviting leaders to inspire a shared commitment to purpose and identity grounded in justice and covenant.
2. **The Choice of Jerusalem as a "Neutral" Capital:** Brueggemann emphasizes the strategic and symbolic importance of Jerusalem as a choice for the capital, noting that it did not belong to any particular tribe. By making Jerusalem a political and spiritual center, David creates a shared, neutral space for the tribes, effectively uniting the nation. This insight offers a lesson for modern society on the importance of inclusive spaces that can foster unity across diverse groups. In today's world, the idea of a shared "center" — whether a city, institution, or set of values — can serve as a rallying point that transcends individual interests.
3. **The Role of Divine Agency in David's Success:** Brueggemann highlights that David's rise is attributed to divine favor rather than mere military skill or political savvy. He interprets David's success as an example of how God's purposes often unfold in surprising and unconventional ways. For a contemporary audience, this perspective encourages humility in leadership, reminding us that success often results from factors beyond human control, and a higher calling can infuse ordinary actions with extraordinary impact.
4. **Violence and Divine Guidance in the Conquest of the Philistines:** Brueggemann doesn't shy away from addressing the troubling elements of violence in biblical texts. He suggests that these stories of conquest, especially David's reliance on God's guidance, reveal a deeper struggle between human power and divine authority. In consulting God before battle, David models a dependence on divine guidance that stands in contrast to self-assured or impulsive aggression. Brueggemann invites readers to consider how, even in complex or morally ambiguous situations, seeking ethical and spiritual discernment can lead to responsible action rather than reckless assertion of power.
5. **Kingship as a Paradox of Power and Service:** For Brueggemann, David's role represents the paradox of kingship — both a figure of power and a servant of God's will. David's position is not simply one of privilege but a calling that brings with it profound responsibilities. This view encourages modern readers to consider the concept of "servant leadership," where true authority comes not from dominating others but from serving them in line with a greater purpose.

Discussion Questions Inspired by Brueggemann:

1. Brueggemann emphasizes David's kingship as covenantal. How can modern leaders cultivate a sense of purpose and unity in their communities, beyond just political or organizational goals?
2. By choosing Jerusalem as a neutral capital, David fostered unity among the tribes. What are examples of inclusive spaces today that promote unity, and what role do they play in bridging divisions?
3. Brueggemann views divine agency as essential to David's success. In what ways might people today recognize or acknowledge factors beyond their control as contributing to their success or purpose?

4. How does David's reliance on divine guidance before confronting the Philistines challenge our understanding of responsible and ethical decision-making, even in complex situations? Can modern leaders apply similar practices of discernment?
5. Brueggemann's "paradox of kingship" suggests that true authority lies in service. How does this perspective challenge conventional views of leadership, and what examples can we see of "servant leadership" in contemporary contexts?

Phew! Make of that what you will...!