

# David the Shepherd King

2 Samuel 5:1–5, 9–10

David is a key Old Testament figure:

- His life story is great reading, and keeps children's attention in Sunday School ...
- The Bible does not ignore his flaws ... but shows his weaknesses ... how his ability to follow God's will was clouded at times ... how he strayed into disobedience ... but that ...
- What redeems David is that he follows God "with all his heart" (1 Kgs. 14:8; 15:3).
- His long reign as Israel's premier king also establishes the lineage through which the even greater king, Jesus Christ, emerges (Matt. 1:1–17; Luke 2:4).

Throughout Israel's history, many of its great leaders were shepherds before they became leaders:

- Rebekah (Gen. 29:9), Joseph, the son of Jacob (Gen. 37:2), Moses (Exod. 3:1)
- ... and David (1 Sam. 16:11).

David's rise and elevation to the throne began improbably.

- He was the eighth, and youngest, son of Jesse. He was a shepherd boy (1 Sam. 16:11; 17:15), but ...
- He is transformed into the "shepherd of my people Israel" (2 Sam. 5:2).

To get our heads around David's rise, we need to talk about the politics of ancient Israel ... (Politics in a sermon ... now there's an explosive mix!)

- The twelve tribes didn't always get along with each other ... relations were often strained between the northern majority and the southern minority.
- Before he was killed in battle, King Saul had ruled over the northern tribes and territory.

David was a Judean, a “southerner,” and had served as an officer in Saul’s army. The people of Judah had come to him to offer him the throne.

- “Look, we are your bone and flesh”. This expression denotes blood kinship, which establishes David as truly “one of us,” in the eyes of the people he will govern.

Seven years later, elders of the northern tribes come to David and ask him to become their king. To make this work, they need to heal some old wounds.

- They do this by establishing a covenant ... a binding contract, sworn by oath ... which would remind both parties that they had pledged loyalty to one another.

David then makes a shrewd move ...

- He had, until then, ruled Judah from the town of Hebron.
- Now he takes the Jebusite city of Jerusalem, the “stronghold of Zion,” and renames it “the city of David.”
- He makes it his seat of governance in order to counter charges of favoritism toward any one tribe, and to transcend local and regional tribal politics.

This act of peacemaking calls to mind Nelson Mandela emerging from twenty-seven years of prison to lead the nation of South Africa to a multiracial democracy.

- It testifies to the possibility that, despite all appearances to the contrary, peace may come in any war-torn part of the world.
- It reminds us that our God is a God of reconciliation and healing, and the reuniting of the tribes of Israel is a hint that even after generations of bloodshed, peace can be achieved.

The covenant between David and the elders of the northern tribes was not long-lasting ...

- In David's lifetime, the northern tribes took part in a revolt led by David's own son, Absalom <sup>(2 Sam. 16-19)</sup>, and a second revolt of the northern tribes was spearheaded by Sheba <sup>(2 Sam. 20)</sup>.
- The kingdom splits apart after the death of David's son Solomon ... the north with its capital in Samaria ... their descendants were known in Jesus' time as "Samaritans" ...
- This breakup reminds us that the task of peacemaking is never finished ...
  - As we see in the European Union today ...
  - And as the USA still struggles to heal a century-and-a-half after the Civil War ...
  - But also reminds us that we are not free to walk away from this work of reconciliation ... "Blessed are the peacemakers."

This morning we have remembered David ...

- the shepherd boy with a heart for the Lord ...
- who was chosen to unite and lead God's people ...
- who, despite his failings, is remembered as Israel's greatest king ... and "poet laureate" (because of the Psalms attributed to him)
- and whom the Gospels portray as the greatest ancestor of Jesus the Messiah.

To the Lord our God, Alpha and Omega,  
be all glory and honor forever. Amen.