

**March 29, 2009**

## **Claiming God's Promise**

To help us become more aware of and thankfully accept God's promises to us

Key Bible reference: 2 Samuel 7

Key Verse: 2 Samuel 7.25

### **Biblical Background**

Second Samuel 7 is one of the most important chapters in the Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament. It is the foundation text for the establishment of the Davidic dynasty, and thus it is the foundation text for the hope of a Messiah from the Davidic line. No wonder that the community of those who followed Jesus used this text to talk about and understand their Lord.

At the time of the events recorded in Chapter 7, David's rise to power is complete. His reign has been securely established over all Israel (2 Samuel 5:1-5). He has made Jerusalem his capital and has built a palace there for himself (2 Samuel 5:6-12). And he has brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem and, with great pomp and celebration, enshrined it in a tent that he had pitched for it (2 Samuel 6). Now, in Chapter 7, we find an expression of the theological basis for the Davidic dynasty.

As the chapter opens, David is considering the possibility of building for the Lord "a house," that is, a temple (2 Samuel 7:1-3). We read that David has become conscious that while he as king dwells in a fine house of cedar, the ark of God resides in a tent. In conversation with the prophet Nathan, David suggests that he plans to build a fitting house for God; and in response, the prophet advises him to proceed with his plans.

However, that night God instructs Nathan to speak again with the king. Nathan is to tell David that God does not want the king to build him a house. However, in a play on words that serves as the key to understanding this entire chapter, the Lord promises to build "a house" for David—that is, to establish a dynasty. The following three verses summarize God's message to David:

Verse 5. "Are you the one to build me a house to live in?"

Verse 11. "The Lord will make you a house."

Verse 16. "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever."

Using the multiple meanings of the word house, Nathan, speaking the word of God, promises David that the Lord will build a house for David, not the reverse. The promise of God to David spoken through the prophet reaches a climax in verse 16 where the Lord declares that from David's kingdom and "house," that is, from David's dynasty, will emerge an everlasting dynasty, an everlasting kingdom. God is realistic about the human propensity for sin; however, when the Davidic descendants do sin, God will chastise them but not abandon them. Nathan's prophetic message to David voices God's irrevocable commitment to David and his descendants.

In a sense, 2 Samuel 7 is the culmination of the entire story of David. It looks back to the account of David's rise to power and looks forward to the reign of David's immediate successor, Solomon, and beyond—beyond Solomon to a glorious, eternal, divinely appointed kingdom that will be fulfilled in the person and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the one Christians acknowledge as King of kings and Lord of lords, the messianic king of the line of David.

2 Samuel 7:1-3. With victory over the Philistines behind him and a royal palace built of fine Tyrian cedar wood by Phoenician carpenters (2 Samuel 5:11), David was finally able to enjoy the "rest" that "the LORD had given him" (2 Samuel 7:1). As David sat in his palace, he seems to have felt a bit guilty that he had not built as fine a house for God as he had built for himself. Instead, as David points out, "the ark of God stays in a tent" (verse 2). This verse alludes to the "tent that David had pitched" for the ark of the covenant (2 Samuel 6:17).

David shared with the prophet Nathan his concern that God did not have a house. And, initially, Nathan approved of David's plan to build a house for God. It is only in subsequent revelation that God informs Nathan that the divine will is that David not build a house for God.

We meet the prophet Nathan for the first time in this passage. Nathan was the court prophet to King David. Court prophets had direct access to the kings of ancient Israel. These prophets offered advice to the kings and delivered divinely inspired oracles to them. The court prophets were characteristically blunt and "up-front" with the kings. When the monarchs strayed from the ways and will of God, the prophets boldly condemned them for their

actions. A good example of this prophetic role is Nathan's rebuke of David after David entered into an adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and then arranged to have her husband, Uriah, killed in battle (2 Samuel 12).

It is interesting to note that David's son Solomon is the only king of Israel who seems not to have had a court prophet. Who knows what turns history might have taken if Solomon had had input on the will of God from a trusted prophet?

After the opening three verses, 2 Samuel 7 divides into two halves:

(1) Verses 4-17: the prophet Nathan's oracle to David announcing God's promise that David is not going to build the Lord a house; but rather, the Lord is going to build David an eternal house, an everlasting kingdom. Nathan also declares that, while David will not build a house for the Lord, David's offspring will. This announcement foreshadows the construction of Solomon's temple.

(2) Verses 18-29: David's prayer in response to the promises of God spoken through the prophet Nathan.

Verses 4-17. Nathan receives an oracle from God rejecting David's idea that he build a house for God. God has not "lived in a house" up to the time of David and has been satisfied "moving about in a tent and a tabernacle" (verse 6). God has never complained to "any of the tribal leaders of Israel" about not having a house in which to live (verse 7). For reasons given in the biblical text to explain why God did not want David to build the Temple, see 1 Kings 5:3 and 1 Chronicles 22:8. The problem was that temple and ark contradicted one another. God's freedom as symbolized by the ark was

challenged by God's permanent dwelling, the Temple.

In 2 Samuel 7:8, the image of the shepherd emerges side-by-side with the image of prince. God declares to David, "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel." The story of David's anointing in 1 Samuel 16 is set in the pasture, in the context of David shepherding sheep. And at the time of David's acclamation by the people as ruler over Israel, the people affirmed to David, "The LORD said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel" (2 Samuel 5:2; see also Psalm 78:70-72). Indeed, from Babylon to Egypt, it was common in the ancient Near East to think of kings and other government officials as shepherds.

God reverses the king's intention by promising David "a house" (verse 11). As mentioned earlier, the key to understanding 2 Samuel 7 is found in a word play on the various meanings of "house" (in Hebrew bayith or beth). At first, in 2 Samuel 7, the word house means David's residence, the palace (verses 1-2). But soon the text begins to play on two other meanings of the word house. In verses 5, 6, 7, and 13, the word house refers to a temple, a "house" that David wants to build for God. In verses 11, 16, 18, 19, 25, 26, 27, and 29, however, the word house is used to refer to a dynasty, a "dynastic house" that God promises to build for David.

Verse 12 records God's promise of a royal dynasty through the line of David. The Lord declares that one of David's own offspring will be his successor on the throne. A new line, a new family, will not be chosen to rule over God's people.

While the language in verses 5-7 seems to imply that God was completely rejecting the idea that a "house" be built for the Lord, verse 13 reveals that David's successor would be granted permission to build such a "residence." Verse 13 also reinforces the notion that through this offspring of David, the kingdom, the throne of the Davidic dynasty, will be established "forever."

Verse 14 uses covenant adoption terminology to refer to the relationship that will exist between God and the Davidic king. God will be "a father" to the king, and the king "shall be a son" to God. The idea that God is "adopting" the Davidic king also appears in Psalm 2, a psalm used at the enthronement of Israel's kings. In Psalm 2:7, God says to the new king: You are my son; today I have begotten you.

This verse from Psalm 2 is a part of the declaration that the "voice from heaven" utters at Jesus' baptism (see Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). What is the significance of the quote from Psalm 2 at Jesus' baptism? It suggests that Jesus' baptism was our Lord's enthronement: It was the moment of his anointing as the messianic king of the Davidic line.

Verse 16 is the climax of Nathan's oracle to David. It announces, once and for all, that a member of David's "house," a member of the Davidic line, will reign forever over the people of God.

Verses 18-29. The second part of 2 Samuel 7 contains David's prayer to God in response to God's promise offered to David through the prophet Nathan. Nathan's oracle combines theological insight and political pronouncement; David's prayer combines reverent deference and bold demand.

In the first part of the prayer, verses 18-24, David shows deep humility as he approaches God in prayer. The king humbly affirms the greatness of God and confesses that as wonderful as the deeds are that God has done on behalf of him and his house, such deeds are small and inconsequential from God's perspective. David expresses deep appreciation to God for blessing him and his "house" and for offering the wonderful promise that Nathan had conveyed. The king confesses that all that he is, he owes to God; all that he will be, he owes to God; all that his "house," his line, will become will come from God; and that all that the people of God are and will become, God has established for his own glory.

In the second part of the prayer, verses 25-29, David shows great boldness as he approaches God in prayer. The king confidently claims the promise that God had made to him through Nathan.

As recorded in 2 Samuel 7:25, David prays, "As for the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, confirm it forever; do as you have promised." David repeats his claim of God's promise in verses 28-29, praying that since God has spoken a promise and since God's "words are true," may the provisions of God's promise be fulfilled. David thankfully and boldly claimed God's gifts and promises in an intense prayer. He did not hesitate to ask God to keep God's promises to him. This prayer of David's can remind us, as beloved of God, to do the same.

### **Prayer**

O God of blessing, help us to embrace our own blessedness and to help others embrace theirs.

May we be empowered to accept your promises and go boldly into the future with hope and action for a better world. In the name of Jesus, who is God's blessing for us, we pray. Amen.