21-27 July 2024 Let God be God

2 Samuel 7: 1-14a

**7**After the king was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, **2**he said to Nathan the prophet, “Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.”

**3**Nathan replied to the king, “Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you.”

**4**But that night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying:

**5**“Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? **6**I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. **7**Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”’

**8**“Now then, tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. **9**I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. **10**And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning **11**and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Samuel+7%3A1-14&version=NIV#fen-NIV-8192a)] over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

“‘The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: **12**When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. **13**He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. **14**I will be his father, and he will be my son.

**Bible notes**

David built his city as a centre of unity and identity for the one people of Israel. He had built a palace and a walled stronghold. Now, he wanted to build a temple for God to dwell in, like the temples that housed the deities of other nations. He planned an extravagant house built of costly cedar, a fragrant wood imported from Lebanon. He demonstrated his wisdom, as king, by consulting with the prophet Nathan, now appearing for the first time in the narrative. Nathan would play a major role in David’s life, encouraging and challenging when necessary.

Nathan offers his own advice, which is then corrected by God’s voice. It’s important to notice the prophet’s humility as a marker of an authentic servant of God. God takes the initiative by making it clear that homelessness is the right choice for now, maintaining the itinerant identity shaped during the years in the wilderness. The leaders of those years were wandering shepherds of their people, and David is also the ‘shepherd king’.

The Lord developed the prophecy, expanding promises to David. There is an expectation that David was prepared to trust God for the future on the basis of his previous experience of support. This sits within the covenant relationship within which God holds David, as David holds the people. God makes three promises, as was the case for Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). First, there is the promise of a name, a kingly reputation during Israel’s golden age. Secondly, God promises a safe place and rest for the people, which the prophets would rephrase as shalom. Third, there was the promise of a ‘house’ for David. This is an ironic reversal of God’s refusal to allow David to build a temple. At the same time, it carries the deeper meaning of a dynasty, successors for David for ever. This prophecy will be fulfilled in the history recorded in 1 and 2 Kings, which forms a continuous narrative and identifies the son who will be permitted to build a house for the Lord.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

We are so often preoccupied with the structures and institution of the Church that we fail to reflect the living and dynamic presence of God in the way we do our mission. God’s activity in relationship with the people of God was not confined to words on a page but was to be written on their hearts. God’s presence was with the people of God in the Ark, but the people also learned that God’s presence was living and active and that (to quote Godly Play), ‘all of God was with them in every place’. How can we be sure that our plans for our church communities are not limiting what God can do? Do our mission statements reflect a God who can do ‘abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine’ (Ephesians 3:20)? Or do we tend to write statements that reflect a sense of limited resources?

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**Questions**

* How would you feel about staying in a place like this?
* What about living here permanently? What would be the pluses? And the minuses?
* What kind of house do you think would be fitting for God?

**Prayer**

Adapt to your local context.

God of the past and the future;
of our present questions and our future hopes:
help us to rest in your call to us,
in whichever season we find ourselves in;
and help us to trust that you will provide for us
in the future as you have in the past.
**Amen.**

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

God of all our days,
our beginning and our end,
help us to walk with you;
to trust you at every turning of the way;
to follow where you lead us;
and to go where you send us.
In all the ups and downs of life,
in times when we are certain about what we need to do
and in times when we doubt that you are with us,
open our ears to hear your voice;
open our eyes to see you at work,
and open our hearts to trust you in every step of our journey.
**Amen.**

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