

The Covenant in the Time of David

2 Samuel 7:1-17; Westminster Confession of Faith 7.3-5

Studies in Covenant Theology #8

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ALL of our lives are like a story. We had a beginning, we will have an end, and in between are all the ups and downs. The story of each and every one of our lives is a timeline of events that stick out as defining moments making us who we are. The Bible is the same. It starts with “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” and ends with “then I saw a new heavens and a new earth.” And in between is that wonderful story of an infinite God who decided to share his life and love by way of covenants. These covenants are momentous moments: the command to Adam, the mother promise, the Flood, the calling of Abram, the Exodus, Mount Sinai, and tonight David.

David’s Plan: A House for the Lord

We see first of all here *David’s plan*, which was to build *a house for the Lord*. At some point after the Ark of the Covenant, that tangible expression of the Lord’s presence among his people, we read, **Now when the king lived in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I**

dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent” (vv. 1–2).

Circle that word “house” as it’s going to be the key. We’re not told David’s motivation for wanting to build the Lord a house other than his observation that he, the king, lives in a house of cedar, while the true King, the Lord, lives in a tent. We also know that the Lord said to Moses back in Deuteronomy 12 that one day the Lord would no longer dwell in a tent like his people but would be located in one place. Yet there, the Lord said *he* would choose the location. Here we have David doing this on his own initiative. The rest of the chapter is the Lord telling David that the Lord would be gracious to David first! So Nathan, whom we are introduced to for the first time, tells David, **“Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you”** (v. 3).

The Lord’s Promise: A House for David

The rest of this story is *the Lord’s promise* to David through Nathan the prophet that he would build *a house for David*. Notice the Lord’s response to David’s plan in verses 4–7. He says, **“Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house—there’s that word again—to dwell in?”** (v. 5) What we see here about our God is that he is totally sovereign and utterly free to do his will, and not be boxed in by David’s or our plans. “The God who made the

world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything” (Acts 17:24–25). If he wants a house, he will determine when and where! Who does David think he is to build anything for the Lord, as if the Lord needed the works of his hands? And the Lord asks, “**Would you build me a house,**” because as 1 Chronicles 28:3 the Lord tells David that he would not build a temple for the Lord because he was a man of war and blood.

The Lord then recounts that he has lived among his people in a tent just like them since the days of the exodus: “**I have not lived in a house—** again, that word—**since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house—that key word again—of cedar?”**” What an amazing thing for the Lord to say. He was willing and content to be with his people, humbled low like them in tents. Later in history this Lord stooped down again: “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a

thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:6–7). The Lord is Jesus Christ!

Now comes the heart of the Lord’s word to David in verses 8–16. He reminds David of his past faithfulness to him: **“I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel”** (v. 8). And his faithfulness to David continued all the way to the present: **“And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you”** (v. 9). If you know your Old Testament well you will recognize some of this language as fulfillment of the promises to the Lord’s people in the past. When he says again in verse 9, **“And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth,”** he is saying that his promise to Abram all the way back in Genesis 12 is coming true to David. Then listen closely to verses 10–11: **“And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies.”** That’s exactly what the Lord said back in Genesis 15.

What a God! Is he reliable? Will he be there for you when you need him? I think about this and contrast it with that caveat made by investments: “Past performance is not indicative of future returns.” There’s risk. There’s instability. But with God who loved David and loves us, his past faithfulness is the reason we can trust him now and in the future.

Finally the Lord comes to the astonishing promise using a play on words: **“The Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house”** (v. 11). David wanted to build the Lord a house, but the Lord says he is going to build a house, meaning, a dynasty, for David. And there are several guarantees the Lord makes about the house he is going to build for David.

First, not even death can annul this promise: **“When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house—now meaning a literal house as David desired—for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”**

The second guarantee is that not even sin can annul this promise: **“I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits**

iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you” (vv. 14–15). Note the contrast between **when** Solomon sins—and he will sin—the Lord would discipline him as a father does a son, **but** sin cannot annul the faithfulness of God: **but my steadfast love [*hesed*] will not depart from him.**

The third guarantee is that not even time can annul this promise. **“And your house and your kingdom—notice how the Lord defines what he means by “house” here—shall be made sure forever before me Your throne shall be established forever”** (v. 16). That **forever** aspect demonstrates that unlike the house of Saul, the house of David cannot forfeit the faithfulness of the Lord until the full coming of the kingdom in Christ.

Why is this story such a high point in the Lord’s story with his people? We see that original promise of a son back in Genesis 3:15 coming into its sharpest focus. Not only would the Lord bring a Savior to the world through one nation as promised to Abram; not only would the Lord bring a Savior to the world through one tribe as promised to Judah; but now the Lord focuses our eyes on one family. Thus Matthew’s Gospel opens, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David” (Matt. 1:1). Amen.