

When Dreams Don't Come True

2 Samuel 7:1-17

Feminists were outraged when a certain reporter wrote a story on gender roles in Kuwait a few years prior to the Gulf War, noting then that, in traditional Islamic fashion, women customarily walked about 10 feet behind their husbands. The reporter returned to Kuwait years later and observed that the men now walked several yards behind their wives. At first, the reporter thought that this must reflect a great advance in the cause of women's rights. She approached one of the women for an explanation.

She asked, "What has enabled women here to achieve this reversal of roles?"

The Kuwaiti woman replied: "Land mines."

Sometimes, what we so passionately think needs to be accomplished is not at all what needs to be done. David longed to do one particular great thing for God. He wanted to build a temple. David had to come to grips with the fact that his dream was not in the best interest of his nation. Last week, we studied how David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem as a means of reestablishing the worship of *JEHOVAH* at the heart of Israel's national life. In today's text, he wishes to improve on what he has already done. He wants to give the Ark a permanent home.

I. A Glorious Dream (1-3)

¹After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent."

³Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you."

A. A Temple for God Seemed the Next Obvious Step for David

The kingdom of David is solidly established. He has finished the task of clearing Israel of Canaanites that was begun in the days of Joshua, but that had never been wholly completed until now. He is living in an elegant house, "a palace of cedar." This tells us that David has already entered into his alliance with King Hiram of Tyre, who provided him with workers and materials for his building projects. The people of Tyre had been far advanced beyond the Israelites in terms of construction and technology, but now, Israel was coming into her own.

David is settled, powerful and in every respect, a king - but something about all this troubles him. He looked at his palace and then, at the tent in which he had placed the Ark of God, that great symbol of *JEHOVAH*'s presence with Israel. He thought to himself, "Palace, tent - palace, tent - hmmm? And then, he concluded, "This ain't right!" Perhaps, he felt almost idolatrous when he discovered that while he was living in regal style, the sacred Ark was sitting in a tent. At this point in his career, there was nothing to stop him from building a proper temple for God.

B. David Sought Spiritual, not Secular Advice

When David first attempted to bring the Ark to Jerusalem, he consulted his best military minds, but he failed to consult the book of the Law. That oversight resulted in a mishandling of the Ark according to the Law of God, which in turn resulted in a man being struck down for touching the Ark. This time, David deserves some bonus points for not running straight to the royal architects and bean-counters, but to Nathan, the prophet. The king wanted to bounce his idea off of a man who knew the mind of God, so he summoned Nathan and asked, “Nate, what do you think?”

Nathan answered with his gut instinct, and he answered as any good, religiously-minded man might have. “That’s a great idea, king. You should go for it. It is obvious that you love the LORD, and clearly, the LORD has been in your corner up to this point. I’m sure He still is.” As a prophet, Nathan would happily surrender his gut instinct to some direct word from the Lord, but he had no reason to expect one. This was just too obvious. Building a temple to the LORD on a par with the royal palace was a “no-brainer.” Nathan just went home and went to bed.

It is possible that dreams, goals and ideas of things that we would like to do for God can spring forth from our love of God and from our passion for His glory. Even so, we must still measure all things by God’s Word to the extent that we can. The grandiose causes of our imaginations can blind us to simpler responsibilities all around us. Our feelings and enthusiasm are not reliable enough. Through prayer, through the sovereign circumstances of our lives, through the Bible and through the godly counsel of others, sometimes, we learn that a dream should not be pursued.

II. A Gentle Disappointment (4–11a)

With Nathan’s blessing in hand, David was doubtless frothing at the bit to get the ball rolling on his temple project. But, during the night, Nathan received a prophetic vision that he had not anticipated, and the gist of it was to let David know that God did not want for him to move forward in building a temple. I can only imagine how disappointed David was at first, but as God’s greater wisdom and purposes were unfolded before him, he grew to understand.

A. God Had Delighted in Sharing in Israel’s Wanderings verses 4–7

⁴That 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? ⁶I 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. ⁷Wherever 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?” ’

God’s question to David, “Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?” called for a negative answer. This is clearer in the parallel account where the LORD’s thoughts are worded quite bluntly: “You are not the one to build me a house to dwell in” (1 Chronicles 17:4). God goes on to explain that while His people were wanderers, it was appropriate that His house be portable. That is why He never asked any of them for a permanent dwelling.

The word for “rulers” in verse 7 can also be translated “tribes.” In different times of peril, rulers or judges from different tribes were called to lead the nation. Joshua was from Ephraim. Gideon and Jephthah were from Manasseh. Samson was from Dan. Ehud was from Benjamin. God never hinted that any of these men or tribes was to be established as a line of rulers over His people.

Now, the circumstances were different. David was to be known as the Shepherd-King over Israel. Judah, his tribe of origin, was to become the royal tribe. But all of this was still a work in progress. God had more work to do in building His nation.

B. A Temple Was a Noble Idea, but the Timing Was All Wrong verses 8-11b

⁸Now then, tell my servant David, ~This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. ⁹I 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 of the earth. ¹⁰And 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 ¹¹and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

David’s own experiences with God had been mostly through times of transition, wandering and even running for his life. God had called David away from his father’s flocks to fill a more significant role than that of a builder. He was to rule Israel by structuring her as a viable nation. This work would continue even after David was dead and gone. A great era of peace and prosperity was still to come. Only when the nation was at its zenith of power and influence under David’s son, Solomon, would the time be right for building a temple to remind a people prone to wander that God had faithfully established them and that He was abiding among them.

There is another reason David would not be the best choice of king to build a permanent temple. The Samuel account does not mention it, but years later, David shares with Solomon:

... ⁸But this word of the LORD came to me: ~You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight. - 1 Chronicles 22:8

To me, this is harder to swallow than when, in last week’s text, Uzzah was struck dead for trying to steady the Ark by touching it. Was it David’s fault that he was a man of war? Why should that disqualify him from pursuing his dream of building God’s temple? His reputation had been established against the Philistines and other Canaanite that had no business occupying Israel. He was what God had called him to be. Clearly, he loved the Lord. He was after all a man after God’s own heart. Why now was he being penalized for being exactly what God called him to be?

Sometimes, appearances do matter. Even today, the world’s political figures are judged by the most tumultuous events of their careers rather than by their more humanitarian accomplishments. It was one thing for the northern tribes to consent to have David rule over them. It would be quite another for those tribes to just blot out of their memories the bloody civil war that preceded the national unification. Jerusalem, the king who ruled there and the temple that resided there all needed to reflect throughout the world the peace that *JEHOVAH* brings. Regardless of his love for God and the authenticity of David’s heart, the world of his day saw him as a bloody warrior.

God cares about unnecessary barriers to His witness in the world. Paul refused to eat certain meats that he was perfectly free to eat just so that he would not offend others who saw things differently. He circumcised Timothy, a man who was Jewish by the faith and upbringing instilled in him by his mother and grandmother, but who was uncircumcised because he had a Greek father. Paul did this because of the Jews in the areas where he was preaching. Jesus endured all sorts of temptations, not because He otherwise would have been unable to understand our struggles, but because sinners like us would never be able to trust that He understand them unless He walked a mile in our moccasins. Fair or unfair, in God's sovereign wisdom, and for appearances sake, David did not have the right public image to be Jerusalem's temple-builder.

C. God Rejected David's Plan, but He Approved David

Twice in the vision Nathan received that put a halt to David's temple-building aspirations, the LORD called the king "my servant David." As New Testament believers, we are used to the language of servanthood, so we miss the significance of the label when it is used in the Old Testament. This designation is used of Moses in His capacity as Law-giver. It is used throughout the latter chapters of Isaiah to describe a great "Servant of the Lord" who is to come. In these contexts, a servant is one who comes with God's authority according to God's purposes. Such a servant is an emissary of the divine purpose. So, even as God was denying David's specific aspirations, He was reinforcing his special role in the scheme of God for His nation.

David's vision for the temple never diminished. He made extensive preparations for the project until the day of his death, and he handed those plans over to his son. Solomon is rightfully credited for the extravagant splendor of the finished temple, but much of the overall design must be attributed to David himself. Years later, when Solomon addressed the people on the occasion of the temple dedication, he shared something he could have only learned from his father.

¹⁷"My father David had it in his heart to build a temple for the Name of the LORD, the God of Israel. ¹⁸But the LORD said to my father David, "Because it was in your heart to build a temple for my Name, you did well to have this in your heart. – 1 Kings 8:17, 18

III. A Great Dynasty (11b -17)

" "The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: ¹²When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. ¹⁵But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. ¹⁶Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever. "

¹⁷Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation.

A. David's Immediate Dream Would be Fulfilled by His Son, Solomon

Nathan's prophetic oracle clearly anticipated Solomon, David's son and successor. Before David or any of his offspring could build a house for God, God must establish a house for David. Saul had been a one-generation dynasty. God would continue to build David's house even after his death. Under Solomon, the Lord expanded Israel's boundaries, power and influence. Solomon would build the temple. Solomon and David's later descendants would prosper whenever they served God and they would be severely disciplined whenever they did wrong. There was a conditional aspect to this covenant. The descendants of David must honor God to maintain the kingdom.

Of course, Solomon led his people into idolatry, and the nation was divided after his death. After a couple of centuries, the northern kingdom of Israel ceased to exist. David's line continued to rule the southern kingdom of Judah for another 150 years, but that nation was taken into captivity for the same offenses against God that had doomed the northern kingdom. However, even though there was a conditional aspect to this covenant with David, it was ultimately unconditional, for God was in the process of introducing to the world a new kind of Israel, a new kind of kingdom, a new kind of temple and, especially, a new kind of King.

B. God Had Something Far Greater than David's Dream in Store

This is one of those prophetic passages where we are able to see near events and distant events viewed side by side. There is no doubt that the prophecy pictures Solomon and his descendants. But, there is likewise no doubt that the prophecy anticipates a final "Son of David." God would preserve the line of David through that period of foreign captivity. The Jews would return to Jerusalem, and this covenant promise would give birth to all the messianic hopes of the Jewish nation. In fact, the very first words of the New Testament introduce us to this new King:

¹A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham ... - Matthew 1:1

In Luke's account of the story, the angel Gabriel announces the birth of a baby to a young virgin:

... "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. ³¹You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." - Luke 1: 30-33

This "Son of David" would bring a new understanding of the temple of God to us. His coming to us in human flesh was a kind of temple, for He God in the flesh. Jesus challenged His enemies: "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19). He was speaking of His physical death and bodily resurrection. After Jesus ascended into heaven, we began to understand the temple He was building in another new way. His church is the "body of Christ." In other words, we are God's temple, His holy dwelling place. Peter explained it this way:

⁴As you come to him, the living Stone - rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him - ⁵you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. - 1 Peter 2:4, 5

David wanted to build a temple to God as a means of adoring Him and honoring His holiness. He didn't realize it, and maybe we don't always realize it as we should, but together we are that temple. May our lives together reflect a similar passion for God's Name as we continue to build His temple.

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