

# David #3 • Covenant king, Part 1

## Reading

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

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

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

*‘Go and tell my servant David, “This is what the LORD says: are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? 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. 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?’”*

2 Samuel 7:1-7

In the previous talk we looked at how the Bible treats the theme of kingship, and how Saul’s and particularly David’s path to becoming a king are a pattern for Jesus’s journey to becoming the ‘king of kings’.

In particular how the sequence of being anointed, receiving the Spirit, winning a battle and being crowned as king can be observed in the lives of Saul, David and Jesus.

Today we are going to look at another Bible theme that David’s life illustrates, covenant.

A covenant is a promise, agreement or social contract between two individuals or groups of people.

It is not merely a business contract, like a bank loan. It is more like a marriage, or an adoption. The promise that two parties will maintain a

relationship with one another, based on a mutually agreed set of guiding principles.

Today's reading is from a time in David's life when God has helped him become king and to establish Israel as a powerful nation enjoying a rare time of peace and prosperity.

A palace has been built for David, and his thoughts turn to the Ark of the Covenant.

The Ark of the Covenant was a gold-plated wooden box built in the time of Moses. It was about the length of a large coffee table (130cm) and it contained a golden pot of manna, Aaron's staff and the stone tablets on which the ten commandments were written.

The Ark of the Covenant was the symbol of God's presence among the Israelites and it had recently been brought to Jerusalem.

Sitting in his newly-built palace, David, a man who has spent his whole life living in tents (and caves, and worse), realises that his residence is a lot posher than the tent where God's ark has been parked.

He mentions this to the court prophet Nathan, with the implication being that a temple should be built to house the ark.

Nathan's initial response is positive, but...

### ***Slide - 2 Samuel 7:4-7***

*...that night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying:*

*'Go and tell my servant David, "This is what the LORD says: are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? 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. 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?'"*

2 Samuel 7:4-7

This is God reminding David that he is not like the other nations' gods. He has no need of a human-built palace in which to live.

As, centuries later, the prophet Isaiah wrote... (see also Acts 7:48-51)

***Slide - Isaiah 66:1-2***

*This is what the LORD says:*

*'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.*

*Where is the house you will build for me?*

*Where will my resting-place be?*

*Has not my hand made all these things,  
and so they came into being?'*

*declares the LORD.*

Isaiah 66:1-2

There may even be a hint of rebuke in the wording of the text...

*After **the king** was settled in his palace... he said to Nathan...*

*'Here I am, living in a house of cedar...*

*Nathan replied to **the king**...*

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

*'Go and tell **my servant David**...*

2 Samuel 7:1-4

David may be **king** of Israel, but only because he is the **servant** of God.

*'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. 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. 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 shall not oppress them any more,*

*as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.”*

2 Samuel 7:8-11a

He reminds David that it is God who has made David who he is. And it is only God’s ongoing blessing of David and his kingdom that will ensure security and prosperity for the Israelite people.

God uses wordplay to highlight what he is saying.

The Hebrew word for ‘house’ is *bayit*, but it’s the same word used to describe a ‘temple’ or a ‘palace’ (like the ‘house of cedar’ that David is living in).

And as God continues his message, the ‘house’ theme is expanded...

*“The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a **house** for you: 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. He is the one who will build a **house** for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.”*

2 Samuel 7:8-11b-16

God is going to establish a ‘house’ for David. Not a literal house or palace, David is already sitting in one of those, but the House of David, a family line that God promises will be established forever.

And David’s offspring (Solomon) will be the one to build a ‘house’ (a temple) for God’s Name, a place that represents God’s dwelling among his people.

This is God making a covenant with David.

A covenant can be spoken or written, and can be between humans (Genesis 14:13; 31:44–55; Joshua 9:15–20) or between God and humans, as is happening here.

The first God to human covenant in the Bible is the one God gives to Noah after the flood (Genesis 9), where God promises to Noah that there will never again be a deluge of this magnitude.

*(There's an ark in that one too... a structure made to protect his chosen people... and when Moses' mum floated baby Moses out into the Nile, the word used to describe the basket he was in is 'ark').*

He makes covenants with Abraham (Genesis 15 & 17), Moses (Exodus 19-20) and Phinehas (Numbers 25), all of them moving towards fulfilling God's plan for his blessings to be extended to all nations.

When God made covenants with his people, he used language and structures that were familiar to them.

Covenants usually started with an introduction listing the achievements of the dominant party.

And this covenant follows this pattern, beginning with a review of God's past relationship with David, highlighting how God lifted David from obscurity and helped him to defeat his enemies, illustrating why David can confidently enter into a covenant with God.

*'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. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you.'"*

2 Samuel 7:8-9a

Covenants would go on to promise that the stronger party would protect the weaker party. Once again, it is a relational agreement, like a marriage, with mutual trust and benefit being the aim.

God gives promises of continued blessing to David, including national security for Israel...

*“Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. 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 shall not oppress them any more, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.”*

2 Samuel 7:9b-11a

and in addition to the promise of Israel's security is the promise of an enduring legacy for David.

*“The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: 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. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.”*

2 Samuel 7:11b-13

Typically covenants contain examples of the kind of behaviour that is expected from the beneficiary, along with warnings of what will happen if the relationship is not honoured.

There is one line that fits this,

*When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands.*

2 Samuel 7:14b

but this particular covenant is notable for being based on God's perfect character, not on David's obedience.

Upon hearing these words from Nathan, we get a glimpse of why God declared David as being 'a man after his own heart'. (1 Samuel 13:14)

Rather than organise a huge party to celebrate, David goes to the tent where the Ark of the Covenant is, walks in, sits down and prays...

This may be just me, as 'your servant' is a phrase regularly used by David, and throughout the Old Testament, but see how many times he uses it in his prayer, along with addressing God as 'Sovereign LORD'.

It seems to me that David wants to let God know that Nathan's message has sunk in! God is LORD, and David, even as king, is God's servant.

*'Who am I, **Sovereign LORD**, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, **Sovereign LORD**, you have also spoken about the future of the house of **your servant** – and this decree, **Sovereign LORD**, is for a mere human!'*

*'What more can David say to you? For you know **your servant**, **Sovereign LORD**. For the sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to **your servant**.'*

2 Samuel 7:18b-21

This is David at his best, humbly acknowledging his unworthiness to the God who has raised him from shepherd to king.

The rest of the prayer is equally beautiful...

*'How great you are, Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears. And who is like your people Israel – the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself, and to make a name for himself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations*

*and their gods from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt? You have established your people Israel as your very own for ever, and you, LORD, have become their God.'*

2 Samuel 7:22-24

Having acknowledged his unworthiness, David praises God for his greatness, and his goodness to Israel.

And David goes on to acknowledge that he understands what the primary reason for this covenant is, not that David will be great, but that the world will acknowledge that Israel's God is the one true God.

*'And now, LORD God, keep for ever the promise you have made concerning **your servant** and his house. Do as you promised, so that your name will be great for ever. Then people will say, "The LORD Almighty is God over Israel!" And the house of **your servant** David will be established in your sight.'*

2 Samuel 7:25-26

And he concludes by accepting God's covenant while continuing to ramp up the 'Sovereign LORD' and 'your servant' word count!

*'LORD Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to **your servant**, saying, "I will build a house for you." So **your servant** has found courage to pray this prayer to you. **Sovereign LORD**, you are God! Your covenant is trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to **your servant**. Now be pleased to bless the house of **your servant**, that it may continue for ever in your sight; for you, **Sovereign LORD**, have spoken, and with your blessing the house of **your servant** will be blessed for ever.'*

2 Samuel 7:27-29

Sadly, as we know, David did not always keep his side of the covenant. And neither did Solomon, or his successors.



And the history of the kings of Israel describes how their violation of their relationship with God led them to being defeated by their enemies, resulting in beatings, floggings and much worse!

But, despite all of this, God promises that unlike Saul, David's house, kingdom and throne will endure forever. Thankfully, God's covenant faithfulness does not ultimately depend on human obedience.

We know from the history of the kings of Israel that while his bloodline was preserved, David's earthly house, kingdom and throne were destroyed many centuries ago.

But God's promises were not.

God is like a marriage partner who honours their vows even when their partner is unfaithful (cf. Hosea)

Yes, God punishes Solomon for his sins

*When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands.*

2 Samuel 7:14b

But God's love for David's house continues...

*But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever."*

2 Samuel 7:15-16

David's earthly royal line ended with Zedekiah. He died in exile in 586BC, 350 years after David's reign.

Israel had to wait another 600 years to see the final 'son of David', Jesus, king of kings, born in David's home town, Bethlehem.

600 years! 6 centuries! And I get impatient when I don't see my prayers answered in 6 days.

And we, as Christians are heirs of Jesus, son of David. Adopted into his royal family.

Next time we'll take a closer look at how the covenant God made with David in 2 Samuel 7 is picked up elsewhere in the Bible, and how those promises come to their ultimate fulfilment in Jesus.

Meanwhile, let's rejoice in the knowledge that God is faithful even when we are not, and that his love will never be taken away from us.

Hallelujah!