

### Prayers

#### To God

Weekly theme: the glory of God

We praise You Lord God of glory, whose magnificence fills the entire universe, and whose power and authority puts demons to flight! We are swept up in your wondrous majesty as we praise and honour Your almighty Name, and as we wonder at the glorious truths of the Gospel and the beauty of fellowship in Your Church. Lord God of glory, show Yourself that we might reflect Your glory to the world, right now: **AMEN**

#### For myself

*Pray about your habits and routines. Ask the Lord to reveal in you any habits or routines that are not helpful to your spiritual life and should perhaps be changed. Ask the Lord for His help to do what He requires of you. He is ready.*

#### For others

*Pray for families of innocent people caught up in events that make the news headlines and for people whose lives are ruined by malicious allegations in the press or by the evils prevalent in your country.*

### Meditation

The days when we could 'eat, drink and be merry',  
For all who now live on this planet,  
and are remotely aware of a little more than self interest,  
Are well and truly gone.

**Lord have mercy.**

The days of plenty are giving way to famine ...  
The food industry makes us sick with preservatives,  
The forest lungs of hurting earth are stripped  
In search of land in search of beef in search of profit.

**Lord have mercy.**

The day will come when 'the sun will turn to darkness ...'  
For while drinks have made some immeasurably rich,  
The teenage drinker sells his youth for poverty at the bar;  
So the rich get richer and the poor get poorer ...

### ***Lord have mercy.***

The days of innocent family entertainment have died,  
Defeated by an industry demanding payment for emotions,  
Its worlds of moral laxity, death and gun power reign supreme  
Reality, they think, is generated by computer!

### ***Lord have mercy.***

We only come to know there is a problem deep within when  
A real life psychopath no longer copes and we blame him!  
So when we lock our doors in fear of the world we have made,  
Surprise, surprise, we buy more entertainment!

### ***Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Christ, have mercy.***

## **Bible Passage**

### **2 Samuel 7:1-7**

<sup>1</sup> Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from his enemies all around him, <sup>2</sup> he said to the prophet Nathan,

*"Here I am, living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God remains in a tent."*

<sup>3</sup> Nathan replied to the king,

*"Go, do what is on our mind; for the Lord is with you."*

<sup>4</sup> But that very night the word of the Lord came to Nathan:

***<sup>5</sup> Go and tell my servant David: This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build a house for me to live in? <sup>6</sup> I have not lived in a house since the day I brought the Israelites up from Egypt, but I have been moving about in a tent as a dwelling. <sup>7</sup> Wherever I moved about with the people of Israel, 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?"***

## **Review**

David had at last secured Israel, and with a little help from friendly neighbours in Tyre (5:11), we are told that David was 'settled in his house' (7:1). But was everything indeed settled? If we pause to reflect, we will realise that 2 Samuel has just begun, and an immense story is about to unfold. God had empowered David to do much, but why, and for what? There must be more. Today, we are led to glimpse what comes next, which is very important. By the end of this chapter the whole Old Testament world will have been radically altered!

David had brought all Israel together (2 Sam 5:1-5), secured the loyalty of Benjamin (5:17-25), established Jerusalem (2 Sam 5:6-10), and set up the Ark, the symbol of Israel's history and the presence of her God, in Jerusalem. What more could he do? In the absence of other action (7:1), David had an idea. He now had a pleasant home made with the finest materials, 'a house of cedar' (7:2), but the Ark was sited in a tent, not even its original dedicated tent (see Exodus 38f.). This was something David could rectify (7:2)

Our passage today consists mostly of the story of David's exploration of his idea with the prophet Nathan. This is the first time we meet Nathan, one of Israel's truly great prophets, who modelled the relationships between prophet and king for future generations. Nathan gave David initial permission to proceed with his idea (7:3), but then God spoke to him decisively, in the night (7:4). The prophecy we now begin to read is one of the most important in the Bible, though many do not remember it. God had something very important to say; David was on the right track, but had not yet understood the promptings of his heart, and it was the job of Nathan to reveal God's will to the triumphant and eager new king.

## Going Deeper

### ***Peace from enemies ... at a certain time of the year?***

As we will find in the coming chapters of 2 Samuel, much remained to be done to evict the Philistine overlords from the northern territories of Israel, and to secure the borders of all Israel with her neighbouring states, preferably with treaties or trade. However, the first verse of this passage reads like this, *'and the Lord had given him rest from his enemies all around him'*, which seems somewhat strange when we know what is coming in chapter 8, for example, with its records of wars with the Philistines, the Ammonites, the Amorites, and more.

The truth is that in those days, wars were fought seasonally. Battles were just not fought during the winter months (see 2 Samuel 11:1f.) Our passage simply reflects the close of the year when military activities ceased, and despite more needing to be done, relative peace had been established and this was a great achievement. David had time to think of other things.

One other point is worth considering. Here, peace is assumed to be the best time for considering attending to religious duty. In the same way, the New Testament mostly advocates peace as a time when the Gospel can most effectively be communicated. Paul certainly assumes this when in Romans 13, he asks Christians to be submissive to the state. The point is also echoed in the writings of Peter, see 1 Peter 2:13-18.

### ***David's house, inspiration for building a Temple?***

The Ark of the Covenant was intended to be placed within a tent structure called the Tabernacle, which if you analyse this from the descriptions provided in Exodus 35-40, was not unlike the temples typically made to house national gods in ancient times. Most nations and city states had such temples in which gods were kept, and David was probably thinking about the suitability of building one when he spoke to the prophet Nathan (7:2).

Daavid had the luxury of living in the most elaborate and expensive type of dwelling available in the day, a house *'built of cedar'* (7:2), and he began to feel perhaps a little guilty that his dwelling was more magnificent than that of the God he worshipped! There were probably various sanctuaries in the city celebrating the Jebusite gods of the previous occupants, but David correctly did not reckon that any of these would be appropriate for the Ark. Israel's national treasure was a very different object.

The Tabernacle which once housed the Ark, meant 'dwelling place', and was itself similar in general design to a temple, but it was a tent, and a magnificent and complex tent structure of unique proportions and designed for travelling. It had long been lost. However, the Ark itself, the wooden box containing the Ten Commandments, was supposed to be so holy it was shrouded in the inner tent of the Tabernacle tent complex, the 'Holy of Holies' or 'most holy place' (Exodus 26:33f. 39:1f. Etc.), and it was never usually seen. But the Ark had been left lying around by the Philistines, exposed in an ox-cart (6:13), and the families who looked after it when it was returned to Israel did no more for it. David rightly felt it proper to give it

some dignity by placing it in a tent again (6:17). He wanted to 'do the right thing', and needed the advice of a man of God.

### ***Israel's next prophet - Nathan - where did he come from?***

Nathan appears for the first time in this story as the prophet closest to King David. We have no history of where he came from, whether he was a southerner like David, or one of the northern prophets from the group who knew Samuel (1 Sam 10:5f.), who now joined David in the united Israel with its capital of Jerusalem. His initial reaction was to accept the idea within David's comment (7:3) and encourage the King to do as he wished; to build a house or Temple for the Ark of the Covenant which would serve as a new national focus for the worship of God. As we would expect of a wise man, his reply was logical, but Nathan was a prophet and good reason was not what was required!

So God spoke to Nathan that night in a dream, as reported in 2 Samuel 7:4-17. We will look at the incredibly important second half of the vision tomorrow, and today's passage sets the scene. By the very nature of what we read today, it is clear that the Lord was challenging David's wishful thinking. By reporting the vision, Nathan had to challenge King David's authority at the height of his powers! In those days, minions who dared to do such things were often slaughtered! Yet Nathan spoke believing that David, as a respecter of God's ways, would listen and accept the vision even though it was contrary to the King's thinking.

Of course, Nathan was right. He took the vision to the king immediately (see 7:17) and in Scripture's estimation, David showed himself to be a 'good' king in God's eyes because he accepted the Lord's Word from the prophet Nathan. He would have to do this on more than just this occasion (see 2 Sam 12, and Nathan's famous confrontation of David after his crimes of adultery and murder).

### ***Nathan's message***

God's message to Nathan in his dream begins with a question. Why would God need a house when he has survived perfectly well over three or four centuries (the dates between the Exodus and King David are not set out in Scripture in a way that can easily be determined). He had not asked any of the previous rulers, such as Joshua or any of the Judges, to meddle with the Ark or to build a Temple!

It remains a good point today. Why do people see the need to tie God down to a building, to a specific place? But David thought that now there was a capital city in Israel this was the place for the Temple! Of course, he was right, but in our passage today, the Lord seems very determined to prevent David from thinking about his own grand designs and focussing rather on what it meant for God to be with His people in past years. He says to David - I can look after myself and you must learn the lessons of my presence with Israel in the past before we can look at what comes next.

The point is this, God's will was working on a different level to David's will. David was trying with all the humility a victorious king could muster, to do his best, but God wanting something else of David. He had something far more important to reveal to him and we will discover this in tomorrow's reading. David is not actually being rebuked, he is being set up for something unimaginable!

## **Discipleship**

### ***Application***

#### ***Doing what God requires***

It may often seem that all we must do to fulfil what God requires of us is to follow His ways as we know it, from our knowledge of Scripture and the history of Christian people, and the rest will follow. God's will is done. Today's study says this is not the case. With all humility, those who surrender themselves to God place themselves in the position of people who must be ready to respond to His prophetic Word as delivered on the spot, whether by prophets or by any other of the direct means God has said He will use in the New Testament. This includes speaking directly to us as well as revealing prophetic words, words of spiritual wisdom, and the guidance of faith. Today, there are many other ways in which the Spirit works.

Those who seek to do God's will are not unwise to try and picture in their minds what God might want to do with them, as David did, but if they then focus on their plans and fail to listen to the often far greater things God wants of them, then they are lost. In a world in which the prophetic gift is often limited to particular words (often of encouragement) spoken at church services, we can fail to understand how God is wanting to reveal His will to people today. In the nitty gritty of life and the work of the Gospel, God wants to speak His Word to His people to guide them specifically in the service they must do. It may well be related to what they are thinking about, but it is often startlingly different.

### ***Leadership***

Although it seems as if this passage is little more than a 'setting of the scene' exercise, it does tell us about the proper leadership of God's people, in which the ruler (King David) seeks out, listens to and accepts the advice of God's prophet (Nathan). This failed to happen in Saul's day, and his kingdom fell apart. David ruled under the authority God, as expressed through the governance of the prophet Nathan. His acceptance of this prophetic guidance was a key factor in his success.

The scripture also illustrates how the Lord will provide a prophet when one is needed. I am of the opinion that the church today is never without its prophets, it is just that they are frequently ignored or prevented from speaking God's word by those who wield power, whether ordained or lay. God is always speaking to His people about the important things of the day, and what the Church is up to in His name!

### ***Ideas for what to do***

- I suggest we ask ourselves, on the basis of this text, whether we are open to the Lord speaking His Word to us in prophecies or in dreams. We should even ask ourselves how comfortable we are with the idea that the Lord might want us to be His prophet, on this occasion or that?
- Pray for the Lord's prophets in the church today, sometimes ordinary people who have the gift of speaking God's timely word to His servants.

### ***Questions (for use in groups)***

1. David begins with the principle that the Lord should have as grand a house as he, if not better. Is this a good workable principle for the Christian church?
2. How often has the Lord given important messages to you, or anyone you know, in a dream? How would you know?
3. In what ways can we remember and celebrate the history of God's people as a 'wandering people in the desert' today. Is it useful, understandable or relevant?

## Final Prayer

It is wonderful, Lord Jesus, to know that You are willing to speak Your words prophetically, even through us. Make us worthy to be your servants, and as we are immersed in the service of the Kingdom, use us as prophets who convey to the church and the world Your truth about what is happening, and the consequences this will have for both the immediate future and the eternal future. Empower us for this task, Living Lord Jesus AMEN

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