

He Asked for a House & Was Given a Promise

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Annette Hill Briggs

Did you ever get a present from someone and think, “he/she gave me this because HE/SHE wanted it?” Like when Carl really, really, wanted me to have a certain new video camera. Imagine something like that happening here, in 2 Samuel 7.

David is no longer the *new* king of Israel. He is just THE king. The legitimacy he sought in Chapter 6 was now his. He had well-established, well-defended borders, a tax base, government infrastructure, a cabinet of advisors, a great house made of imported cedar, and, I think he had some breathing room. Some space to think not just about what Israel needed, but what he wanted. What he wanted Israel to have.

Other kings had temples, shrines. His God lived in a tent. He called Nathan, spiritual counselor, prophet, “I have a great idea. We should build a house for the ark of God.” Nathan, new to the job, spoke before he had prayed, “Yes, go for it!” But see, a spiritual advisor’s main job is to tell folks what God wants, not tell God what people want. He went home, prayed, and came back the next day with the right words.

“What do you mean, you want to build me a house! I don’t live in houses. I live in a tent; a tent that moves around. In fact, from Egypt to Israel and everywhere in-between. When did I ever say to anybody, “Please build me a cedar house”?”

And God’s word, through Nathan to David, shifts from scold to promise. Here is some of it.

I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I will make for you a great name, and I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more. Moreover, I will make you a house. I will raise up your offspring after you, and establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

Not like Saul, who had God’s blessing revoked. God will remain no matter what. David, or his descendants, might be punished but never abandoned. Nor Israel. Obedient or disobedient, the house of David shall be God’s venue upon the earth. Not house as bricks and mortar, but sons, grandsons. Forever.

The birth of messianism in the Old Testament is here in 2 Samuel, chapter 7. Once Israel went sideways: Assyrians, Babylonians. Once they lost everything a remnant of them, the religious, held on to this promise. They believed when it was near impossible to believe, that God would raise up a Messiah out of the line of David who would restore everything they’d lost. Everything. Religious Jews still wait. And they still tie that hope, that expectation of Messiah, back to this promise made to David early in his kingship.

Then Jesus came, claiming to be the fulfillment of that same promise. Some believed it, believed him. Jews at first, but then mostly Gentiles who believed he was the One. Who believed that in Him, His death and resurrection, the world was and has been since set to

rights. That He lived, died, and lives again once and for all people. For all time. We believe messianism is complete, just not completely known.

Like a book published few have read. A check written but never cashed.

Oh, that such were the end of the story. That all was well enough for this to be the end of the story. That life, faith, was that easy, that simple.

I don't know all the reasons spiritual or political David asked for a Temple, but I know how satisfying it can be to have a project with well-defined tasks all listed out in front of me. See, I think David's idea of building the house preaches to how hard it can be to keep believing promises that are so old and gauzy and insubstantial, when we are sick or afraid or in trouble. Or simply as David might have been here: bored. I can see how tempting, how normal it would be to think up a project to get busy with. To organize the jumble within us we call faith, which is also doubt and suspicion. That lurking anxiety I sometimes notice that asks in a quiet, quiet voice, "Do I believe this because I really believe it's true? Or because I need to, because without it life is just too borderless?"

They are such old, old, old words.

In a world that doesn't believe them. A world that believes in strength. In armies. In money. In force. In extremely pliant definitions of right and wrong. In whatever doesn't require too much mental or moral effort. We live in it day in and day out, maybe praying, maybe not. The less we pray, the softer, the flimsier the promise sounds. The less they seem to have to do with these lives. With this world.

I don't care to guilt you or myself about how much we do or don't pray. And I don't care to live in a borderless world. I care to feel better and to be better. To be less anxious. To be more at peace in my own skin. To love this life and our life together more minutes of the day than I don't. I care to believe the promise made to David that Greg read and the promise to the church that Tucker read.

You were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵ He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. ¹⁷ So he came & proclaimed peace to you who were far off & peace to those who were near; ¹⁸ for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers & aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

Can I guarantee you that of all that might be true, this is? Of course not, no, but I do not care to live in a borderless world. I care to believe that this is the border of my life. This is what I choose. This is what my prayers tell me is true. This is what I catch a glimpse of in the sky, in

the air, in the nursing home day room and on the page of commentary.....in a memory. When this present time and place opens up just for a moment into what, I suppose, can only be eternity. Often enough to believe it another day, another week, and to live like I do on the days in between resisting the temptation to ask for a project, to be busy. To be relieved of the burden of trusting the promise already kept in Christ Jesus.

Would you pray with me?