

A Promise of Home

2 Samuel 7:1-14a

¹ Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ² the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." ³ Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you."

⁴ But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: ⁵ Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶ I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. ⁷ Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" ⁸ Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; ⁹ and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰ 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, as formerly, ¹¹ from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ¹² When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.

A number of phrases in English demonstrate just how much "home" means to us. We indicate that we are comfortable by saying that we "feel right at home." We hear that "home is where the heart is." Everyone from John Howard Payne to L. Frank Baum has reminded us that "there is no place like home." Home is where we feel comfortable and safe; it is where we belong, where we fit.

Charles Dickens's experience of domestic instability in his childhood influenced not only his writing but his adult life. Walking with his father through the countryside of Kent, he saw a grand house—Gad's Hill—and it became the icon for the life he should have and sought. It was a great moment for Dickens when he

had made his fortune and risen by his writing to the point where he could purchase that very house and finally be a gentleman. **Steven A. Peay**

Houses may be a suburban ranch-style home or a seaside villa. It may be a seedy motel room or a cardboard box. It may be a trailer or a tent or a tin shanty. It may be a roundel in Africa or a compact condo in Tokyo. Home is where we rest our heads. Home is where we get our bearings. Home is where we live and move and have our being. Whether it is a castle or a cave, home may be the most primal of all our desires. **Rebecca Button Prichard**

David has known instability. At home with his family, then drawn into the court of King Saul and a relationship with the king's son Jonathan that is closer than he had with his siblings, he experiences belonging. That life is disrupted, and David is cast out of the court and ends up running like a criminal, with Saul in hot pursuit. David triumphs, and the shepherd boy, the harpist, the good friend is now the king in Saul's stead.

David has experienced the good times and the bitter ones, and now he has come to a moment of stability. He is at God-given rest and dwelling in comfortable surroundings. King David is at home. He lives in a house of cedar. Solid. Substantial. The God of Israel is homeless—or so David imagines. The well-established earthly ruler decides that the ruler of heaven and earth needs a home, a place to stay, a residence. The new home he wants to build is a house for God, a great house that will honor the God who has been faithful to him. David is used to getting his own way, and Nathan sees nothing amiss with this plan to honor God's faithfulness and build a suitable home. David points out to the prophet Nathan that even though he has built a palace for himself, no temple has been built for God. At first Nathan blesses his intention, but that night God countermands this royal offer and makes a counteroffer. God, who has found a tent perfectly adequate for centuries, does not need to be housed by humans. Unlike David, God is free from

the trappings of power, free to roam, free to tread lightly. The owner of the cedars of Lebanon is no more honored when they are cut down than when they grow.

God does not share David's vision and reminds David through Nathan,

I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. 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, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. (vv. 8-11)

It will not be David who establishes God, but God who will establish David—and this is not for David's sake. Rather, God has given him peaceful sovereignty for the sake of the nation. In other words, God has been with David, not because of the virtues he brings to leadership, but so that God's hopes for the people, great and small, might come to fruition. This had not happened when they entered the land, when judges ruled them, or when King Saul spent his energy chasing David.

Throughout that time, they had continued to be ravaged from within and attacked from without. David's vocation is to provide sanctuary for his people. That, rather than a nicer sanctuary for the ark, was God's hope. **Patricia K. Tull**

What David learns is what many of us need to learn as we walk our spiritual journey: our plan for home and God's plan are often quite different. To put it rather bluntly, it is not about us. David wants to do something for God, to demonstrate to God just how much gratitude he has for what has been done. All well and good, but that is not what is important. God seeks bigger, better things, so that David's

house will become a home encompassing all of humanity. God does not desire a house, but a heart. God does not want a dwelling, but David's obedience. When the heart and actions are aligned, then they find their fit, and one is, finally, at home.

Steven A. Peay

This passage helps us to think about the meaning of home and about the security, stability, and spiritual presence that result from abiding in God. First home is about *security*. "*Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with human hands*" (Acts 7:48). King David feels safe and secure in his cedar palace. This sturdy home represents security for the royal household but also for the nation. Such a home keeps enemies at bay. The people of God have found a secure home and they want God to settle in with them. Home is where we feel safe. The locks on our doors protect us. Our home is our castle. If we could just get God to move into the neighborhood, all would be well.

Home helps us feel safe and secure, but the God of creation cannot be contained or domesticated. Our churches are houses of worship, but God does not reside even inside the grandest cathedral. David's desire to build a house for God corresponds to our desire to tame God with words and doctrines and platitudes.

William Placher has argued that the language of modern theology has tended to domesticate transcendence: "Transcendence that fits our categories has been domesticated." When the mystery of God is tamed, when the Holy One resides in our neighborhood, we come to claim divine sanction for our thoughts and actions. "Most of us have causes we believe in with some passion. We like to think that God is on our side. It is therefore tempting if we are told that we can design God to fit our specifications." Just so, the walls we build with words tend to exclude grace and to shore up our own feelings of control and dominance, giving us a false sense of security.

Second, home is about *stability*. "*My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people*" (Ezek. 37:27). When we read the whole sweep of holy history, we see that God's people have rarely stayed put. Abram was a wandering Aramean. The tribes of Israel dwelt in the house of bondage in Egypt. In exodus and in exile, the Hebrews were rootless, homeless, aliens, refugees. The Davidic reign was a time of peace and stability for the nation. In salvation history, David is seen as a paradigm for just rulers, good shepherd kings who provide for the well-being of the people. We know now that the Davidic reign lasted only a few generations at most. Nevertheless, the cedar house and Solomon's temple are signs of permanence in a world of change.

Third, home is about *Shekhinah/Spirit*. "*See, the home of God is among mortals*" (Rev. 21:3). Ultimately, God promises to make a home in our midst, with us, within us. Wholeness cannot be tamed, nor can it be exiled from faithful sojourners. Divinity chooses to dwell (*shakan*) with God's people; we are the tabernacle (*mishkan*) of God. David wanted to build God a house, but God dwells in a tent or a tabernacle, a mobile home that moves with wanderers, exiles, and sojourners. God does not settle down, but neither does God desert the wayward pilgrims.

When God says to David, "I will make you a house," there is a promise of posterity and heritage—the house of David. There is also a promise to be a dwelling, a refuge for the people of God. In these words, there is also a promise to dwell with the people. Michael E. Lodahl connects the holy presence of God (*Shekhinah*) with the Holy Spirit (*Ruach, Pneuma*). Spirit, according to Lodahl, is "God's own personal presence and activity in the world." Mystery and glory are not tamed or domesticated, but immanent, available, numinous. **Rebecca Button Prichard**

As a result of David's obedience, God kept the promise and established David's house forever, but not in the way David or the people of Israel expected. At a time when it seemed God would not keep the promise, especially in the face of the Roman conquerors, the God who had dwelt among the chosen people in a tent "pitched his tent" in a most unlikely way. Jesus of Nazareth was of the "house and family of David" ([Luke 2:4](#)). We know now that the Christ was not a political ruler, but that Jesus was a good shepherd. The shepherd imagery connected with David and with Jesus reminds us that we are God's flock, sheep of the pasture. Life with God is more a sojourn than a settlement. A sojourn makes sense in this postmodern moment, as it did in exodus and exile. Cedar houses and stone temples, churches and cathedrals, tend to tie us to tradition, engendering nostalgia and tightening our grip on the status quo. In a time when nothing seems certain or predictable, we do well to abide in the steadfast love of God, *hesed* ([v. 15](#)). Our God is far from homeless; our God is our home. In a world where change is the only constant, we do well to remember that the journey is home. God became one of us. Thus, John would write, "The Word became flesh and lived [Gk. literally "pitched a tent"] among us" ([John 1:14](#)). This is why the early church saw the foreshadowing of the coming Christ in this prophetic word of Nathan. The coming One will bring that reality of home, of fit, of comfort, for which we long.

We all have our visions of our ideal home. God's word to David reminds us that God's own vision for our home is more intimate, greater, and more real than our own. David knew God's faithfulness. If we respond as he did, we will find our way home. **Steven A. Peay**

Home is where we live and move and have our being.

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