

Emmanuel: The Temple of the LORD

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Scripture 1: (2 Sam. 7:1-17 ESV)

Now when the king lived in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent."

And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you."

But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, "Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? 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 for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"' 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, that you should 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 dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men 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. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.'"

In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

Scripture 2: (1 Ki. 6:1, 6:11-14, 6:37-38, 8:6, 8:10-11 ESV)

In the four hundred and eightieth year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the house of the LORD.

Now the word of the LORD came to Solomon, "Concerning this house that you are building, if you will walk in my statutes and obey my rules and keep all my commandments and walk in them, then I will establish my word with you, which I spoke to David your father. And I will dwell among the children of Israel and will not forsake my people Israel."

So Solomon built the house and finished it. In the fourth year the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid, in the month of Ziv. And in the eleventh year, in the month of Bul, which is the eighth month, the house was finished in all its parts, and according to all its specifications. He was seven years in building it.

Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the Most Holy Place, underneath the wings of the cherubim..And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

Sermon:

The Jewish Temple in Jerusalem was the greatest symbol of the LORD dwelling in the midst of His people. It was large. It was solid. It was built with stone, wood, precious metals and jewels. It was beautiful. It was meant to last forever as the permanent home for God, in the capital city of His chosen people, in the land He had given them, a land and home received by their faith in the LORD's promises.

But why did they need a Temple? God already had a dwelling place among His people, the Tabernacle.

Solomon's Temple was necessary for the Israelites, because of the progressive, dwindling of their faith, and confidence in God, while their confidence of self and pride steadily increased. They needed the constant reminder of His presence, a reminder of Who they believed in, even as their faith was slowly being transformed into a “religion”. Still, God was with them.

Our relationship of faith in God began back in the Garden of Eden, where He would walk in the “cool of the day” with Adam and Eve. They had a physical and spiritual relationship with Him, based on their intimate knowledge and faith; no further or greater revelation was required. Unfortunately, after the exile from Eden our relationship was broken; mankind lost their faith, and gradually forgot about God.

Throughout the book of Genesis, the LORD revealed Himself and His will to the patriarchs: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They each trusted Him and His promises, obeying His commands in faith. Unfortunately, beyond a few people, no one knew the LORD and no one else had a relationship with Him; so these faithful few lived in the world as strangers, different from everybody else.

Later, when the descendants of Israel had grown to a great quantity and were oppressed by the Egyptians, they remembered the faith of their ancestors and cried out for help (Exodus 2:23-25). So, God revealed Himself to Moses, a man whom He knew “face to face”, as a friend (Exodus 33:11). the LORD entered into a relationship with Moses and brought the people into a good relationship with Him once more. The LORD set this people, Israel, apart from everyone else in the world. He made them to be different; made them holy; made them truly unique and unlike all others, because He promised them that His presence would dwell in their midst. But these people, now free from their bondage in Egypt, wanted to be just like everybody else; they didn't want an “invisible God” to believe on in faith, they wanted a golden idol that they could see, and touch, and carry before them like all the other “civilized nations”; but since when has doing what everybody else is doing, been a good thing? *{I'm thinking about certain proverbial cliffs that parents would ask children about.}*

So, the LORD punished them for their idolatry but He did not destroy them, because God is gracious. When they entered into the Promised Land and conquered it, His presence still went with them, and dwelt among them in the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle traveled with them everywhere they went. It was erected at the center of their camp, with every family and clan equally close to the LORD's presence. It served as a constant reminder that “God is with us”. The Tabernacle was something unique, among all the other nations. They each had their idols and temples, fixed in place and beautiful in construction, but no one else had a portable sanctuary dedicated solely to the One True Living God, to serve at the center of their faith.

Once they were in the land of Canaan, while the Israelites were still getting settled and established as a nation, again the people again desired to be like the other nations. Now that the LORD's promises were being fulfilled, having Him dwell in their midst was not good enough. Now, they also wanted a powerful and mighty king to stand against their enemies and rule over them. Before this, all their important decisions were made by consulting God *{through the priests in the Tabernacle}*: whether to go to battle, whom to trust, what to plant, when to reap, and so forth, because the LORD was their King and Sovereign. Predicted by Moses

(Deuteronomy 17:14-20), their demand for a human king was another rejection of the LORD (1 Samuel 8:5), just like the incident with the Golden Calf (Exodus 32), and was as damaging to their relationship with Him.

However, God is gracious and He gave them a king, he gave them the king they asked for (1 Samuel 12:12): King Saul, to teach them what a king should not be; then He gave them King David, who was God's choice for king, a man after the LORD's heart (1 Samuel 13:14), to be their godly king. Under David, the whole land of Canaan was finally conquered, the Promised Land was now fully under the control of Israel, and there was peace in the land. Israel had *shalom* and could now rest.

Which catches the story up to our text this morning.

God has dwelt among His people for some four hundred years, moving from place to place with them, but now they are settled in the land, and the Tabernacle is settled at Shiloh. The Israelites are established. They have homes and cities, farms and barns, and burial places where their recent ancestors lay, but from the people's perspective God did not have that same kind of permanency.

So, King David got it into his mind that since he was settled, and enthroned in a palace in the city of Jerusalem, then God should be too! David had spent most of his life in the wilderness, on his many military campaigns or shepherding his father's flocks as a boy, which was well and good for those times and places; but now that he was king, he did not think that he should have a home better than God. David wanted to build God a Temple.

Remember, David was a man after God's own heart: he had good intentions in this, he was not being self-aggrandizing, he did not want to elevate himself or to be elevated above God. Even though David is king over Israel, he knew that the LORD is still his Sovereign. His desire to build a Temple for the LORD is not a competition with, or comparison against Israel's pagan neighbors (he was not trying to “keep up with the Joneses”). His only desire here is for God, and God's Glory. Building the Temple was not about David. If anything, to David the Temple would be a beacon of light before the whole world, proclaiming God's Glory and His favor upon Israel, like a spotlight shining on clouds at night, like a great big Neon Sign proclaiming, GOD IS WITH US!

David wanted to build the Temple because of his faith, he wanted to boast in the LORD (Psalm 34:2). The people wanted to build the Temple for their glory as well, it's construction would be their crowning achievement, the capstone to their religion. It would be a place high and glorious, which they could point to and say “The Temple of the LORD”; the ultimate symbol showing that they had “ARRIVED”. How often do some people today think this way about our church buildings? {*I'm thinking about perhaps the Congregational Church down the street...*}

However, in our relationship with Emmanuel, the Temple of the LORD is not meant to be about a specific building, in a specific city, in a specific country. The Temple of the LORD is actually a tale of two “houses”: a house built out of stone, and a house built of flesh and spirit; a house which man has built for God, and the house which God has built for man; one a solid structure of wood and stone as a throne for divinity, and the other an everlasting Kingdom and the family of God.

After David expressed his desire to build a temple for God {*to the prophet Nathan*}, the LORD spoke to him about these two different houses.

God asked them, “Why do you want to build me a house? Have I asked you to build me a house? No. Instead **I** will build **you** a house, **I** will establish for **you** a dynasty.”

It is interesting that this is where God leads their relationship. David only wants to glorify God, but instead God promises glory for David, offering him surety of his kingdom for generations to come. However, this dynasty is not compensation for David's worship, instead it is a gift of God's sovereign grace and election. David is not asking for his posterity or for himself, because those are not his principal concern; yet that is what God freely promised him, because it was not his concern.

Today, whenever we consider “dynasties” we often think of powerful or influential people, like our modern political families (the Bush's, the Clinton's, {*early American history: the Adams [John and John Quincy]*}, the Kennedy's, and the Trump's) who immediately upon their election, begin their re-election campaign and set up their family members and friends into positions of authority to solidify their political power; or perhaps we think of some example of European royalty from history, like the English King, Henry the VIII; but the European royalty system is a better political comparison to Biblical times in this situation.

Typically, whenever such a king came to power, the first thing they did was get married and start having kids, to build their dynasty, to establish an heir, and make their hope for the future secure. Henry the VIII's whole problem, the reason for his multiple marriages and his split from the Pope {*leading to the English and Scottish Reformations, to Scottish Presbyterianism, to Puritan Colonialism, to the American Revolution and our modern USA*} was his lack of a male heir: first Catherine of Aragon bore him a daughter, Mary the future Queen of Scots; next came Anne Boleyn who bore him his second daughter, Elizabeth I; then came Jane Seymour who finally bore him the coveted male heir, Edward VI. Even after Edward's birth, Henry still continued trying for more sons with his various mistresses and three later wives, to try and make his throne more secure.

Why was Henry so fervent about establishing his dynasty? He had been elevated to the throne soon after the “War of the Roses”¹, a conflict over possession of the English throne that devastated several noble families {*particularly the Lancasters and the Yorks*}, and his political position was not secure without a male heir. When he assumed the throne of Israel, King David found himself in similar circumstances, following King Saul and the executions of Saul's sons (1 Samuel 31, 2 Samuel 21); but David's chief concern was for the True King of Israel, the Sovereign over him, the LORD God Almighty, and not for himself or his dynasty.

This is an example of why David is called a man after God's own heart: because his first desire was for what God wanted, his first concern was for God, instead of his own sinful inclinations, although he indulged them too {*Bathsheba*}. David believed God, and trusted the LORD; he had faith, and received God's blessing despite his many imperfections.

So, instead of accepting this well intentioned act of devotion: the building of the Temple; the LORD reminded David of what God has already done for him and Israel through him.

“I raised you up from being a simple shepherd, from guarding livestock, to be the king over my people. I have been with you, and I will always be with you. I have defeated your enemies, because they are my people's enemies, therefore they are my enemies.”

Then God continues with a unilateral promise, following the traditional format of covenant, with David being the mediator for Israel {*like Moses before him*}.

“You, David, are going to be famous. Remembered for all time, as one of the greatest men who ever lived. Israel, as a people, is established. I'm going to make their roots strong and deep, their home will be theirs forevermore, and they shall have peace unending.”

1 <https://www.britannica.com/event/Wars-of-the-Roses>

Echoing the first messianic prophecy of Genesis 3:16, God next lays out for David, the promise of Messiah, of the Christ to come.

“I, the LORD, will make you a house. I will establish your dynasty forever, you need not worry about the future of Israel. I will raise up children from you, a child of your flesh. He is the one who will build the house, a Temple for My Name. He will be the King. I will establish his kingdom and his throne forever.”

David surely liked the sound of this, every king and ruler would love to hear God say this to them, but then He carries on with, “That's not all...”

“I will be his Father and he shall be my son. I have chosen him, I am claiming him as my own. I will discipline him in love, like every good father, but though punishment might sometimes be harsh or seemingly cruel, he will always have my love, and will receive my mercy.”

The key part of this covenant of promise, the greatest comfort for Israel and the Church today is this, “*And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.*” David and his family, his dynasty, his heir and all those folks united under and with him, will be part of a kingdom, in the presence of God forever. David's heir would sit upon the throne and rule. He would have authority in the presence of the LORD, and he would be their King forever. While the Jews are still waiting, even now, we know who David's true heir is, Jesus.

Now historically, whenever a covenant was established, between a sovereign and their servant, it was bi-lateral *{where the servant does something for the king, and then the king gives them or does something for the servant in return}*: the servant would be obligated to do something to earn or justify receipt of their lord's blessing; but not here, this is not a “law covenant” like the one given Israel at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20), this is another “promise covenant” like the one given to Abraham (Genesis 15). It is an expansion of the covenant of grace. Yes, work was commanded. A son of David would build a Temple for the LORD, but this work was not so that the rest of God's blessings would flow, but instead the building of it would be a sign of God's blessing upon the people; evidence that what the LORD has promised was coming to pass.

This sign first came to pass in David's son by Bathsheba, Solomon. Now David had several sons, and over the years he had rival sons lay claim to the throne (1 Kings 1-3), both during his rule and as his death neared; so the line of succession was not initially clear. Providentially, Solomon was established by David and the LORD as the unquestioned king of Israel, while David died in peace. He began his reign during an extended time of peace and prosperity, both of which increased under his rule. So, Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem *{the First Temple}*; the LORD blessed Israel, His promises to David were proven to be true, and the glory of the LORD's presence filled the Temple and dwelt there.

During the dedication of the Temple, “*...a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.*”(1 Kings 8:10-11)

Emmanuel had taken up His residence in Jerusalem, the Holy City. The Temple became the symbol of the LORD's favor upon the people. The Temple, containing God's Presence, became their source of comfort and hope. There was now no doubt in Israel that the LORD God was with them; but “no doubt” does not mean an abundance of faith.

Through Solomon, David's line was secure; his House and his dynasty was established. Solomon built God's house in Jerusalem, and it was a wonder to behold. He spent seven years building it. People came from all around to see the Temple, to worship the LORD, and to hear the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kings 10:1-13). The nation of Israel had finally “ARRIVED”.

BUT...

But, there is a great difference between the houses of men and the House of God.

Solomon spent seven years building God's House, yet then he spent thirteen years building his own palace. His house was bigger and grander than the Temple. He built his house better than “God's house”. Solomon, although he began his reign well, did not follow in his father David's ways. He made treaties with the nations of the world; he had seven hundred wives and had three hundred concubines. Henry the VIII with his many wives, and his politicking couldn't hold a candle to him. Solomon's wives led him into idolatry, worshiping their god's instead of the LORD alone.

After Solomon died, the kingdom was divided into Israel and Judah: ten tribes in the north, and the remaining two tribes of Judah and Benjamin in the south, with the Levites split between them both. Only the Kingdom of Judah was faithful to the line of David; one of his descendants always sat on the throne in Jerusalem until the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, came, conquered the land, and destroyed the Temple in 586 BC.

The house built by man, by our own strength and power, could not stand. It did not stand the test of time, nor could it withstand the test of faith. Judah had some good and faithful kings *{these five were: Asa, Jehosaphat, Uzziah, Jotham, Hezekiah, Josiah}*, but it also had many more evil and wicked kings. The northern kingdom of Israel, later called Samaria, only ever had wicked and evil kings, they never did what was right in the eyes of the LORD; the northern kingdom was destroyed in 720 BC and those ten tribes were exterminated. Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel have been extinct for twenty seven hundred years.

But God's House remains.

The Temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt during the days of the governor Zerubbabal, *{the grandson of one of the last Davidic kings}*. It was completed seventy years after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the first Temple in 516 BC (*Ezra 6:13; the sixth year of Darius' reign in Persia*) in fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy (Jeremiah 29:10-14). Later, the Temple was refurbished and expanded by Herod the Great, beginning somewhere around 20 BC; to become the Temple where Jesus taught (John 2:18-22). This Temple was finally and utterly destroyed in 70 AD by the Roman General and later Emperor, Titus, following a revolution of the Jews. *{A prophecy made by Jesus (Matthew 24:1-34) ordinarily considered to be fulfilled in the first part (like many Old Testament prophecies which found their greater fulfillment in Christ), as we anticipate a future, greater fulfillment.}*

The Temple is gone but still, God's House remains; because “God's House” is not a temple built by men; the infinite God cannot be contained within a construction of men. Truly, the LORD's Temple is in heaven *{see Hebrews and Revelation}* and is of His own creation and construction; it is incorruptible and indestructible. The works of men will always fail, but the promises and will of God lasts forever.

The true Temple of the LORD is where ever the family of God gathers together in worship; where the House and dynasty built by God for King David, by the spirit of adoption (Romans 8), where God's chosen people, the Elect, are gathered together, and where one day we will all be gathered, before the Throne of Christ and the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7, Revelation 7).

The LORD kept His covenant promise to David. He preserved him a dynasty: through King Solomon to King Jehoiakim; to his grandson, the Persian Governor Zerubbabel; through ten more generations unto a carpenter named Joseph, the earthly, adopted father of Jesus Christ our Lord.

God the Son, He Who is our eternal King, David's Son (Matthew 1:1).

Although this verse is often taken out of its original context, it is still true regarding our gathering together in worship; Jesus said, “*For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.*” (Matt. 18:20 ESV) Whenever believers gather together, in Jesus' Name, His presence is with us; our Emmanuel. When we gather together for worship in His presence, we are transported spiritually into the heavenly Temple, standing before the throne of our LORD, with our prayers and praises going up before Him as incense (Revelation 5:8), as a “pleasing aroma” (Leviticus 1:9; 2 Corinthians 2:15-17).

We do not need a beautiful building to worship God in for the strengthening of our faith, but it is very nice to have, and something we must always remain grateful for. However, we must never forget that the **building** is not what is important, **Who** we worship here is. The building is not the church, we are the Church (capital C church); all believers, together across the world and time, who are united in Christ, are the Church. We are the living expression of God's Holy Temple in the world; so, He is with us wherever we are.

The houses of men cannot stand, they will always fail and fall because of our sinfulness, but the House of the LORD, the family of God, and His promises will never fail.

Come, my brothers and sisters in Christ, let us enter together and remain in His presence, forever. Enjoy and rest in the promise that your spirit will be raised up to the heavenly Temple not built with human hands, to the eternal dwelling-place of our Emmanuel, until Christ comes once more.

Hallelujah, AMEN.