

Final Prayer

It is wonderful, Lord Jesus, to know that You are willing to speak to us and through us prophetically. Make us worthy to be your servants, immersed in the service of the Kingdom, use us as prophets who convey Your truth to the world and the Church. Empower us for this task, Living Lord Jesus AMEN

Prayer

Praise You, Lord God; for You are always at work fulfilling Your plan.
Praise You, Lord God; for Your plan is always for our benefit.
Praise You, Lord God; for Your love for us is real and tangible.
Praise You, Lord God; for Jesus has opened up our way to heaven.
Praise You, Lord God; for we need have no fear in Your presence.
Praise You, Lord God; for Your plan is that we should be united in peace.
AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Babies

Pray for parents who are struggling with some of the difficult issues such as birth control and abortion given us by current medical practice. Pray for godly wisdom and guidance.

On-going prayers

- *Pray about the world economic downturn and its driving powers*
- *Give thanks for the joy of a good night's sleep*
- *Pray about magazines and their writers, editors and social influence*

Meditation

When the Lord lifts the soul, we see things afresh;
The world is different in the blessing of peace.

Colours have vibrancy, brightness and depth;
Vision is clearer, and sight is refreshed.

Horizons go further, the world has no bounds;
The sun ministers life and the blessing of warmth.

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is not weak;
For the love of the Saviour unburdens the heart.

Such times are precious but they need not be rare;
When open to Christ and His offer of love.

For our God is found in the world He has made;
And our faith in the Son is the treasure of life.

Bible Study - 2 Samuel 7:1-7

¹ Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from his enemies all around him, ² he said to the prophet Nathan, 'Here I am, living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God remains in a tent.'³ Nathan replied to the king, 'Go, do what is on our mind; for the Lord is with you.'

⁴ But that very night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: ⁵ 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?' ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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

'The king was settled in his house' (7:1) and David had at last secured the Kingdom of all Israel. Since bringing together the two halves of God's people (2 Sam 5:1-5), establishing Jerusalem as his capital (2 Sam 5:6-10) and securing the loyalty of Benjamin (5:17-25), David had reinforced the Kingdom by bringing up the Ark of the Covenant, the ancient symbol of Israel's history and the blessing of God's presence, to Jerusalem. The basic structure of the Kingdom was now in place. The rest of verse 1 describes a cessation of violence, but this simply reflects the close of the year when military activities ceased, and despite more needing to be done (see chapter 8 and following), the year closed with a united nation at peace with itself and in possession of a new capital city; it was a great achievement.

Our scripture today is all about David's thoughts, possibly in the winter months, concerning the future, and what to do about the Ark and its ancient tent, the 'Tabernacle' (tabernacle means 'dwelling'; that is, the dwelling place of God). He began with grand thoughts about housing the Ark, but the conversation was held with Nathan, the main prophet of the day. After giving David initial encouragement, Nathan had a dream, and after this he raised big questions about whether this was the right course of action for David.

A house for the Lord? David was conscious that he lived in a substantial 'house of cedar' (7:2), and at a time when he was attempting to establish permanency within Israel, and it was not at all surprising that he wondered about having a 'house' built for the Lord (meaning a Temple). Cedar was the great hardwood resource of the day, and it was a luxury, though great houses were probably made from a combination of wood and stone and it was likely that David's personal house was one he had taken from the people who lived in the city previously. David was right, however, to refuse to take over one of the many sanctuaries in the city which celebrated other Jebusite gods, realising this would be inappropriate for the Ark; hence his discussion with the prophet Nathan (7:2).

Nathan's dilemma This story is the first in which Nathan appears as a prophet close 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 who joined David in establishing the new capital city. His first reaction was to accept the new King's suggestion, but later that night, God spoke in a dream to Nathan, and he had to change his mind and his advice to the King. By the very nature of the first few verses of the dream found in our scripture today, it is clear that the Lord had a different plan than that envisaged by David. Nathan would have to challenge the King to accept his authority as a prophet to speak the Word of God, and after David's great success and personal standing in the country, this was very difficult to do. Having read the story of David ourselves, we might expect David to 'do the right thing', but that may not have been clear to the prophet Nathan. Prophets did not always get on with Kings, as the recent broken relationship between Saul and Samuel illustrates. Nathan, however, accepted the challenge to act on the word God had given him and reported the dream immediately. Fortunately, David showed his continuing humility in accepting the prophet's words (7:8f.), as we shall find out in coming studies.

God's Word What the Lord said to Nathan in his dream began with a question. Why would God need a house when he had survived perfectly well over three or four centuries (the dates between the Exodus and King David are unclear in scripture as well as archaeology), and He had not asked any of the previous rulers, such as Joshua or the

Judges, to build a Temple. It was a good question, and remains a good question today. Why do we need to tie God down to a specific place? In our passage, the Lord was determined to prevent David from thinking about making a permanent monument to His presence, and preserving the historic past. However, we shall see in the coming studies that the Lord had more to say to David of greater importance than the mere establishment of a temple to mark God's presence. We are on the brink of a profoundly important revelation in the scriptures.

The prophet's role in leadership This passage of scripture could be thought of as setting the scene for what was to come next, and this is largely true. Nevertheless, it does tell us something about the proper leadership roles of God's people, in which the ruler (King David) seeks out, listens to and accepts the advice of God's prophet (Nathan). In King Saul's day, the collapse of the kingdom was the result of the failure of this important leadership dialogue. David ruled under the authority of God, as expressed through the governance of the prophet Nathan, and his acceptance of this was a key factor in his success.

Scripture also illustrates how the Lord will provide a prophet when one is needed. The church 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 does not refrain from speaking to His people about the important things of the day and His plans for the future. The task of the Church is to ascertain and follow this. We will see what happens tomorrow as Nathan's dream unfolds.

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'. Is it useful or relevant?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I believe I am open to the Lord speaking to me through dreams, though this has only happened on a few occasions. On each of these the Lord has conveyed something personal and very important to me about my ministry; and He has spoken to me quite strongly about prophecy. Everything the Lord has said to me does, I believe, need to be tested by scripture, by sharing carefully with others and by studying what God has done in the church in the past. I would not say the things I do about prophecy unless what has been revealed to me has passed these tests over a considerable period of time.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- I suggest we ask ourselves, on the basis of this text, and ask whether we are open to the Lord's revelation to us in dreams. We should even ask ourselves how comfortable we are with the idea that the Lord might want us to be His prophet, as and when He requires this of us.
- Pray for those people you know who act as God's prophets in the church. They do not necessarily have an easy life, and are open to misunderstanding; so talk to them and pray for them as God's people.