

# Home Sweet Home

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 | Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 | Romans 16:25-27 | Luke 1:26-38

## 2 SAMUEL 7:1-11, 16

<sup>1</sup> Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, <sup>2</sup> 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.' <sup>3</sup> Nathan said to the king, 'Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you.' <sup>4</sup> But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: <sup>5</sup> Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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?' <sup>8</sup> 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; <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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, <sup>11</sup> 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. ... <sup>16</sup> Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest homecoming stories ever written was composed in Greek in the 8th century BCE, and it is the story of Odysseus. Having finished his heroic duty in the Trojan War, Odysseus attempted to return home as king of Ithaca in a journey so epic, and long (taking 10 years), that we now refer to such voyages, such excursions, by his name: odyssey. And it was not an easy journey. Shipwrecks, mutinies, imprisonments by gods, a trip to the underworld. And yet he never lost his hope, a hope he described this way:

Nevertheless I long—I pine, all my days—  
to travel home and see the dawn of my return.  
And if a god will wreck me yet again on the wine-dark sea,  
I can bear that too, with a spirit tempered to endure.<sup>1</sup>

"I long. I pine." There is something about home, something about being home, that speaks to all of us. It represents comfort, safety, familiarity, warmth, joy at a deep and profound level. Even despite sometimes hard circumstances and difficult people at home, with long and complicated histories, home somehow still draws us. It is no wonder that this is a major theme of Christmas stories and movies and songs over and over again. Home is worth the journey.

As we turn to our reading from 2 Samuel, we find King David turning his attention to his home and the idea of being at home, only to be surprised in a series of interactions with the prophet Nathan. And here is what David needed to learn: *Rest is not secured in a place, but by a person: a*

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<sup>1</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey* (Trans. R. Fagles; New York: Random House, 1996), 173.

*promised king*. And I think it is what we need to learn: *Rest is not secured in a place, but by a person: a promised king*. Let's take a look.

### 1. THE HOUSE DAVID WILL BUILD

The passage begins with King David experiencing an unprecedented peace in his kingdom. Notice how the narrator frames it: The king is 'settled in his house' and 'the Lord has given him rest.'<sup>2</sup> After decades of turmoil, running for his life from his predecessor, King Saul, David ascends the throne only to then have to immediately fend off the Philistines. Once Jerusalem is safe again, he brings the Ark of the Covenant back to the city. The ark, for those of you who are not familiar with the story, is a gold-covered box with a delicate lid featuring golden cherubim—a box that housed the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments inscribed on them that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai. This ark is the most sacred artefact of the Israelite people because it was the focal point of God's physical presence among his people. The tabernacle, an elaborate portable tent, 14 meters long and 4.5 meters wide, was constructed to house the ark, which then became the centre of all sacrifices, including the Day of Atonement sacrifices.<sup>3</sup> Having established peace, and having brought the tabernacle and the ark back to Jerusalem, David is finally able to stop, take a deep breath, and reflect upon all that has happened.

There is one other detail that is important. If we look back just a couple chapters, we will read that when David became king, carpenters and masons built him a permanent home of cedar in Zion.<sup>4</sup> It is from this house that David looks upon the tabernacle and determines that it is time to build a permanent home for the ark, a permanent home for God's presence: a Temple. Interestingly, this was always the plan. Going back to the time of Moses—somewhere between 300 and 400 years earlier, it was always the plan that God's people would settle in the Promised Land and eventually find a time of rest.<sup>5</sup> When this time of peace arrived, God would finally establish a dwelling place for his name, a place where the people of Israel could bring their tithes and offerings and make their sacrifices. It took a few hundred years to establish such a peace, but King David determined it was now the time to build this Temple. And so, he declared to the prophet Nathan that he shall build a house for the Ark of God. Nathan, for his part, encouraged David.

### 2. THE HOUSE GOD WILL BUILD

But that very night, Nathan received a word from the Lord. And he returned to David with a rather different idea. The Lord's message is quite clear and comes in the form of a question: "*Are you the one to build me a house to live in?*"<sup>6</sup> God then rehearsed both his own history and David's personal history to make a rather definitive point: 'I'm God. I've never needed a home. My work was always to establish a home for my people, a place where they would be at rest, a place where they would be free from the tyranny and exploitation of their enemies. And I plucked you, David, up from the fields to lead my people to this place. You can go ahead and build a Temple for my ark, but make no mistake, I'm the one building a house.' It's a powerful message.

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Sam 7:1.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the tabernacle, see Exodus 25-31 and 35-40.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Sam 5:11.

<sup>5</sup> See Deut 12:10-11.

<sup>6</sup> 2 Sam 7:5.

And bafflingly, our lectionary reading skips some important verses in which God then tells David how he will build him a house.<sup>7</sup> He will raise up David's offspring after him and establish his throne for all eternity. This is why the reading ends this way: "*Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.*"<sup>8</sup> And this, God did. Solomon was David's son and he did, in fact, build the Temple. And Solomon had a son who had a son who had a son... and so on, all the way down several more generations—all written down in a genealogy in Matthew's Gospel, by the way—until a man named Joseph also had a son, a son he claimed through marriage and naming, a son called Jesus.<sup>9</sup>

This promise made by God to David that day, that he—God—would build David a house, an everlasting kingdom on an eternal throne, is what is called the Davidic covenant. And from this promise emerged the hope of a Messiah—a king in the line of David who would ultimately set things right and bring about the peace that God was establishing, bring about the salvation of God's people. This was not just peace and salvation in the sense of being saved from enemies, but true peace. The primary barrier to peace with God, from the very beginning, was the rebellious and sinful spirit of God's people. Much like the sadness, frustration, and dysfunction we experience at home, it starts at home. There is a sinful tendency in each of us that makes it impossible for us to achieve true peace on our own. And so, God promised that this Messiah, this son of David, would come and bring about true peace and salvation.

And this Messiah was always associated with this promise. Whether it was the prophet Amos preaching about the restoration of David's booth, or the prophet Isaiah talking about the establishing of David's eternal throne or the righteous judge who will come from the root of Jesse (David's father), or David's key who will rule from this throne, or the prophet Jeremiah referencing David's righteous branch that will reign in wisdom and establish safety.<sup>10</sup> All of these Messianic promises come about, they are fulfilled by that distant son, that son of Joseph, that son of David. This is why the angel Gabriel tells Mary, as we heard in our Gospel reading: "*He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.*"<sup>11</sup> The birth of Jesus was the birth of the Messiah, the one who would finally establish peace for God's people, a peace he established through not just being born in a manger or ruling from a throne, but by dying on a cross so that peace with God might be accomplished, that sins might be forgiven because Jesus took on the punishment we deserve, giving us salvation and peace beyond measure.

## CONCLUSION

As we bring Advent to a close and turn our attention to Christmas, let us reflect one last time on what it means that Christ Jesus was incarnated, that he came to his people. Today, I hope the point of this promise in 2 Samuel is clear: *Rest is not secured in a place, but by a person: a promised king.* As we ponder our own sin and need for redemption, the challenges and difficulties of our own homes, as we long for and pine for a place of true peace, true rest, a place where we are

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Sam 7:12-15.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Sam 7:16.

<sup>9</sup> See Matt 1:6-25.

<sup>10</sup> Amos 9:11, Isa 9:7, Isa 11:1-5, Isa 22:22, Jer 23:5-6.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 1:32.

free from both the punishment for our sins and the sins themselves, a home worth living in— let us take comfort in the promised king who brings about this salvation. Let us believe in Christ Jesus, that messianic ruler, who came and died and rose again that we might have peace.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free  
thine own from Satan's tyranny;  
from depths of hell thy people save,  
and give them victory o'er the grave.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.<sup>12</sup>

Let me pray. *Heavenly Father, thank you promising us true rest, and then sending a promised king, your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, to die that we might have this peace. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

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<sup>12</sup> *"Veni Emmanuel"* (trans. J.M. Neale), ~8th cent.