

The Covenant with David

King David's story contains all the elements of mankind's varied encounters with God. From shepherd boy to warrior



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king, from faith to rebellion, from power to dissipation – the one constant of his epic story is the purpose and faithfulness of God through everything. Our lesson begins “when the king was settled in his palace,” clearly the result of “the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies” (v. 1). Now, the trick is to move from a war economy to domestic stability, to move men from farm and build businesses, to build international relations with former enemies and to establish patterns for daily governing. David understands that he owes everything to God and he realizes that the future stability and prosperity of Israel requires God at the center of their individual lives and society. So David, thinking out loud, says to his trusted spiritual adviser, Nathan, “Look! I’m living in a cedar palace, but God’s chest (Ark of the Covenant) is housed in a tent!” (v. 2). Nathan, on the same wavelength, a bit hastily says, “Go ahead and do whatever you are thinking, because the Lord is with you” (v. 4).

This makes sense because Jerusalem is now the capital; peace has been won, so it is time to celebrate the presence of God as the center of Israel’s identity. At the heart of this nomadic people is God, and Nathan understands the importance of more than a monument, a temple reminding all that God is their ultimate King and Savior. Temples can be awe inspiring, but a building cannot substitute for trust in God. That very night God told Nathan, “Go back to David and tell him you [David] are not the one to build my temple” (v. 5).

Then follows a much more important promise from God. Yahweh reminds David of their long history, initiated by Yahweh: “I took you from the pasture ... to be leader over my people Israel” ... “I’ve been with you wherever you’ve gone, and I’ve eliminated all your enemies” (vv. 8-9). There follows an incredible covenant promise for David and his descendants. God is the subject of twenty-three verbs in this message,

because God is the true king over his people and the kingdom of God ultimately reaches beyond Jerusalem to the circle of the earth and stretches into eternity. It’s too easy for us to believe in ourselves and our abilities and forget we are not God. Nathan served God and he served David well by honestly delivering God’s truth to a king whose ego was over large at that moment.

Read ahead to verse 18 as David responds to Nathan’s message: “Then David the king went in and sat before the Lord, and he said, ‘Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house that Thou hast brought me thus far?’” In a life marked by remarkable feats and blessings from God, this is one of David’s best moments as he truly seeks the heart of God. There are times when we all need a “Nathan” to help us examine self and renew our faith in God.

What unfolds is a blessing and promise from God that staggers the mind. This covenant from God includes:

- 1) God will make David’s name great (v. 9)
- 2) God will secure a land for Israel and keep them safe from enemies (vv. 10-11)
- 3) God will create a dynasty for David and his descendants (v. 11)
- 4) God will establish one son as David’s successor (v. 12)
- 5) God would permit this son to build the temple (v. 13)
- 6) God will discipline this son but always love and lead him (vv.14-15)
- 7) God will secure David’s throne forever (v. 16)

We know the whole story: David’s sins, the flaws of his children, the rise of Solomon, the tragedies that marked his descendants in a divided kingdom. When David died it was obvious God kept his promises in spite of David’s failures. David’s final words at the end of his life reveal he knows the truth: “(God) has made an eternal covenant with me, laid out and secure in every detail. Yes, he provides every one of my victories and brings every desire to pass.” This is a testimony to grace in a world where punishment was expected for every failure. I Samuel 13:14 describes David as “a man after (God’s) own heart” (KJV). This does not ignore the realities of human failure but offers us all hope as we struggle, fail, learn and grow closer to God. We still thrill at the soaring words of David’s psalms and we celebrate those moments when he served God faithfully

Formations

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Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-16

and when he confessed his sins.

In the covenant God grants David there is a phrase we must not miss even though it is overwhelmed with the promises: “I will be a father to him (David’s successor) and he will be a son to me. Whenever he does wrong, I will discipline him with a human rod, with a blow from human beings” (v. 14). Being loved by God does not mean we can live as we please and expect immunity from responsibility, nor can we expect guaranteed success. The Old Testament stories are even-handed in balancing blessing and punishment, grace and judgment. For some reason we continue to struggle with the idea of trusting God with our lives and acting as a people who do not know God.

We can learn from David’s story. God is loving, faithful and generous. We do not deserve his grace, cannot earn his love and will fail to become all God created us to be if we choose to live apart from God. God’s covenant with David is as improbable as Jesus coming to be one with us, dying for us and inviting us to tell the world about his love. But that is God!

If you began every day by honestly asking God to help you live a positive witness wherever you go, how would it change your life? Would positive changes come if you faced your weaknesses and failures, asking God to help you change your thinking and behavior? We struggle to understand why bad things happen to good people. Why doesn’t God right every wrong, avenge every evil deed and insulate us from sadness? What if we begin to see in every shadow and heartache the quiet presence of Christ looking over us, his face and body still bearing the marks of his passion? God’s promise, like that to David, is not a life of easy times, but a life held secure in his unbreakable love. We have the advantage over David, who did not know about Jesus and “the new covenant.” Read David’s psalms and you will hear the voice of a man who knew his need for God and sought God’s face even when life seemed impossible.

Retired after more than 45 years in pastoral ministry, Michael K. Olmsted enjoys family, supply preaching and interim work, literature, history, the arts and antiques.