



First Chronicles - Chapter Seventeen

II 1 Chronicles 10:1-2 Chronicles 9:31 - The United Kingdom of David and Solomon (continues)

Summary of Chapter Seventeen

David's wish to build a house or temple for the Lord meets with refusal, but God promises that he will build a perpetual house or dynasty for David and that one of David's sons will build a temple for him. The promise to David has the nature of a covenant and is central to the message of Chronicles. The twofold manifestation of this covenant will be the Davidic dynasty and Solomon's temple, and henceforth the Chronicler will show that Israel's identity as God's people will be expressed through these two institutions.

The promise to David is similarly the seedbed of the OT's messianic hope, which the NT will show is fulfilled in Jesus as the descendant of David. The Chronicler's immediate interest, however, is more focused on Solomon as the chosen heir and temple builder.

II.c 1 Chronicles 17:1-27 - The Dynastic Promise to David

Refer to the chapter summary above.

II.c.i 1 Chronicles 17:1-15 - God's Covenant with David

David desired to build a temple for the Lord in Jerusalem but the Lord made it clear through the prophet Nathan that David would not build it for him but it would be one of David's sons who would have this honour. David would know great success as the shepherd of God's people and the Lord promised that it would be one of his descendants that would have eternal rule in the future.

¹ Now when David settled in his house, David said to the prophet Nathan, 'I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of

the Lord is under a tent.’² Nathan said to David, ‘Do all that you have in mind, for God is with you.’

1 Chronicles 17:1-2

Now when David settled in his house. Chronologically Chapter 17 came after the termination of the wars of Chapter 18 and it should be dated about 995 BC.

I am living in a house of cedar. Cedar wood was especially valued. This means that David lived in an expensive, beautiful palace. When he remembered that the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord was still under tent curtains, the contrast bothered him. David was troubled by the thought that he lived in a nicer dwelling than did the Ark of the Covenant, the presence of God on earth. It was common in the ancient Near East for a king to build a temple to honour his god.

Without saying the specific words, David told Nathan that he wanted to build a temple to replace the tabernacle. More than four hundred years before this, when Israel was in the wilderness, God had commanded Moses to build a tent of meeting according to a specific pattern; refer to Exodus 25:8-9. God never asked for a permanent building to replace the tabernacle, but now David wanted to do this for God.

The tent of meeting was perfectly suited to Israel in the wilderness, because they constantly moved. Now that Israel is securely in the land, and the ark is in Jerusalem in a tent and the tabernacle with its articles for worship in Gibeon, David thinks it would be better and more appropriate to build a temple to replace the tabernacle and house the ark more appropriately.

Do all that you have in mind, for God is with you. David’s desire to build a temple to house the ark appears as his own initiative, which Nathan the prophet supports until he is overruled by God. Nathan said this to David because it seemed good and reasonable. What could be wrong with David building a temple? The Chronicler omits: <<*the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him*>> (2 Samuel 7:1b), primarily, it seems, in order to contrast David’s reign as the time of subduing Israel’s enemies, which is 1 Chronicles Chapters 18-20, and Solomon’s as the era of peace and temple building: <<*See, a son shall be born to you; he shall be a man of peace. I will give him peace from all his enemies on every side; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days*>> (1 Chronicles 22:9).

Do all that you have in mind is often translated ‘Do all that you have in your heart.’ This shows that David’s heart was filled with this question: “What can I do for God?” He was so filled with gratitude and concern for God’s glory that he wanted to do something special for God.

³ But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying:
⁴ Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: You shall not build me a house to live in. ⁵ For I have not lived in a house since the day I brought out Israel to this very day, but I have lived in a tent and a tabernacle. ⁶ Wherever I have moved about among all Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people, saying, Why have you not built me a house of cedar? ⁷ 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 ruler over my people Israel; ⁸ and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies before you; and I will make for you a name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ⁹ 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 wear them down no more, as they did formerly, ^{10a} from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will subdue all your enemies.

1 Chronicles 17:3-10a

But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan. Nathan's response to David was presumptuous. He answered according to human judgement and common sense, but before the word of God came to him.

You shall not build me a house to live in. A temple does feature in God's plans for Israel, but it is not given to David to build it. The initiative lies with God, who chose David for leadership and will give him great renown in the world (v.8) and will give his people Israel a secure livelihood in the land (v.9). The Hebrew text says literally, 'build me *the* house.' The idea of there being such a house was legitimate, just that David was not the one to build it. David now knew that God did not want him to build the temple, but David did not respond by doing nothing. Instead of building the temple, David gathered all the materials for its construction so Solomon could build a glorious temple to God; refer to 1 Chronicles 29:2-9.

Charles Spurgeon commented, "Though the Lord refused to David the realisation of his wish, he did it in a most gracious manner. He did not put the idea away from him in anger or disdain, as though David had cherished an unworthy desire; but he honoured his servant even in the non-acceptance of his offer."

Why did God say, 'No' to David's offer? It was because David was a man of war, and God wanted a man of peace to build his temple. Scripture explains this:

<<*But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “You have shed much blood and have waged great wars; you shall not build a house to my name, because you have shed so much blood in my sight on the earth. See, a son shall be born to you; he shall be a man of peace. I will give him peace from all his enemies on every side; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for my name. He shall be a son to me, and I will be a father to him, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel for ever”*>> (1 Chronicles 22:8-10). The explanation to David recorded in 1 Chronicles 22:8 came years afterwards. It would have wounded David needlessly to have been told this at the time. Meanwhile, David lived with inner peace and said to himself, “God has a reason; I cannot understand it, but it is well with my soul.”

I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people Israel. God was about to make David an amazing promise - one that might be hard for David to believe. Therefore, he first reminded David of his past work in his life. The same God who was with David wherever he had gone would also fulfil this promise. God often reminds his people of what he has done in the past so that they can believe in the future with the same certainty.

I have been with you wherever you went. God protected David from all his enemies. God would lead David throughout his entire life and thus he could write: <<*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me*>> (Psalm 23:1-4).

I will make for you a name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. It was God who had made David’s name great throughout all the earth. His reputation as a great king, a brave warrior and a man of God went before him and has endured for more than 3,000 years.

I will appoint a place for my people Israel. God promised David that under his reign, God would establish a permanent, secure, Israel. God promised this first because he knew that David, being a godly shepherd, was first concerned about the welfare of his people. This was later surpassed by his greater Son: <<*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*>> (John 10:11).

I will subdue all your enemies. During David’s reign there would be peace as either all the nations were defeated in battle or they made peace treaties with David. This even applied to the Philistines, the perpetual enemy of Israel: <<*and the Philistines were subdued*>> (1 Chronicles 20:4c).

^{10b} Moreover, I declare to you that the Lord will build you a house.
¹¹ When your days are fulfilled to go to be with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹² He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne for ever. ¹³ I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from him who was before you, ¹⁴ but I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom for ever, and his throne shall be established for ever. ¹⁵ In accordance with all these words and all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

1 Chronicles 17:10b-15

Moreover, I declare to you that the Lord will build you a house. Rather than David building the Lord a house, God will build a house for David, in the form of a sure and perpetual dynasty. This was an enduring legacy for David long after his death. David wanted to build God a temple. God said, “Thank you David, but no thanks. Let me build you a house instead.” This was a greater promise than David’s offer to God, because David’s house would last longer and be more glorious than the temple David wanted to build.

I will raise up your offspring after you. In this, God specifically promised a hereditary monarchy for the house of David. It was important for God to repeat this promise specifically because there had never yet been a king succeeded by his son in Israel.

The Hebrew word *zera*, like its English equivalents of offspring or seed, can refer either to the dynasty as a whole or to individual members of the dynasty.

Your offspring after you refers to Solomon. As for the son who succeeds to the throne, God will establish his kingdom. The family of David did rule over Israel for more than four centuries, but was eventually removed because of evil added upon evil. Yet out of the stump of Jesse, God raised up a new branch that would reign forever and ever as foretold in Isaiah 11:1-2.

The declaration he shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne for ever suggests that building the temple is the act of obedience that will confirm or ratify the promise.

I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. This descendent of David would enjoy a special relationship with God. Hebrews 1:5 applies these words to Jesus, because as Messiah he inherits the role of David as representative of God’s people who are also called his son: <<*Then you shall say to Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord: Israel is my firstborn son. I said to you, ‘Let my son go that he may*

worship me.’ But you refused to let him go; now I will kill your firstborn son”>> (Exodus 4:22-23).

God’s steadfast love, Hebrew *hesed*, will never be withdrawn from him as it was from Saul, not because David’s successor will be without sin, for omitted by the Chronicler, it reads: <<*When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings*>> (2 Samuel 7:14b), but it is because God’s love for David’s house and his commitment to it will surpass its failings. In fact God says of the Davidic house and kingdom that it is my house and my kingdom: in other words, God’s eternal, heavenly kingdom: <<*The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all*>> (Psalm 103:19), and: <<*They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendour of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations*>> (Psalm 145:11-13a), will be actually present in and expressed through the Davidic kingdom: <<*And of all my sons, for the Lord has given me many, he has chosen my son Solomon to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel*>> (1 Chronicles 28:5), <<*And now you think that you can withstand the kingdom of the Lord in the hand of the sons of David, because you are a great multitude and have with you the golden calves that Jeroboam made as gods for you*>> (2 Chronicles 13:8).

Each of these great promises was partially fulfilled in Solomon, David’s son and successor to his throne:

- Solomon ruled on David’s throne.
- God’s mercies never departed from Solomon, even though he sinned.
- Solomon built God a magnificent temple.

Yet God’s promise to David was all the more important because of when the Chronicler wrote about it - after the exile, when there was no independent kingdom of Israel and the throne of David seemed vacant. The Chronicler had the faith to see that this promise was not broken even when it plainly seemed to be. He knew that the Messiah would indeed come from the seemingly dead line of David and reign forever. He had faith in what the prophets foretold as a greater fulfilment of these promises:

- <<*The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness’>> (Jeremiah 23:5-6).*

- *<<For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onwards and for evermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this>> (Isaiah 9:6-7).*
- *<<And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 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. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end>> (Luke 1:31-33).*

God did not want the earthly house built until the spiritual house was promised and established. The more important house had to be in place first, and that house was the dynasty that would result in the throne of God's Messiah.

As for David, God's blessing was upon him in a unique way. The NT identifies Jesus with David more than with any other human ancestor.

- *<<Hosanna to the Son of David!>> (Matthew 21:9b).*
- *<<The Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David>> (Luke 1:32b).*
- *<<I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star>> (Revelation 22:16).*

It also seems that David will be God's chosen prince over a restored Israel in the millennial earth. The prophet says: *<<Afterwards the Israelites shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; they shall come in awe to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days>> (Hosea 3:5).* Other passages which set forth this idea are Isaiah 55:3-5, Jeremiah 30:9, Ezekiel 34:23-24 and 37:24-25, and Micah 4:1-2.

II.c.ii 1 Chronicles 17:16-27 - David's Prayer

On receiving this response through the prophet Nathan, David came humbly before the Lord in a prayer of thanksgiving. He acknowledged all the blessings that the Lord had poured out on him, a humble shepherd boy, and also on his people Israel. He gave thanks to God for the promise he had made to David's descendants and asked the Lord to continue blessing them just as he had blessed David for so long.

¹⁶ Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and said, 'Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? ¹⁷ And even this was a small thing in your sight, O God; you have also spoken of your servant's house for a great while to come. You

regard me as someone of high rank, O Lord God! ¹⁸ And what more can David say to you for honouring your servant? You know your servant. ¹⁹ For your servant's sake, O Lord, and according to your own heart, you have done all these great deeds, making known all these great things. ²⁰ There is no one like you, O Lord, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears. ²¹ Who is like your people Israel, one nation on the earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making for yourself a name for great and terrible things, in driving out nations before your people whom you redeemed from Egypt? ²² And you made your people Israel to be your people for ever; and you, O Lord, became their God.

1 Chronicles 17:16-22

Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? When David received this spectacular gift, he did not think it made him any greater. In David's eyes it made God greater. David's attitude was not "I am so great that even God's gives me gifts." His attitude was, "God is so great that he gives even me gifts." Everyone should receive salvation and every blessing with the same attitude. God's giving reflects the greatness of the giver, not the receiver.

In spite of dramatic military success and the popular acclaim of the whole nation, David humbly considers himself unworthy of all the Lord's blessings, attributing his success instead to the Lord: <<Towards the scorners he is scornful, but to the humble he shows favour>> (Proverbs 3:34), <<But he gives all the more grace; therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'>> (James 4:6), and repeated in: <<In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'>> (1 Peter 5:5). He understands rightly that the covenant expresses God's faithfulness to his promises to his people.

David's humble reception of this gift is shown by the repetition of the phrase your servant used ten times in this prayer. It shows that David humbly accepted God's 'no' when he wanted to build the temple. Charles Spurgeon comments, "There are some professors who would do a great thing if they might, but if they are not permitted to act a shining part they are in the sulks and angry with their God. David when his proposal was set aside found it in his heart not to murmur, but to pray." And he did so with humility and gratitude!

²³ 'And now, O Lord, as for the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, let it be established for ever,

and do as you have promised. ²⁴ Thus your name will be established and magnified for ever in the saying, “The Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, is Israel’s God”; and the house of your servant David will be established in your presence. ²⁵ For you, my God, have revealed to your servant that you will build a house for him; therefore your servant has found it possible to pray before you. ²⁶ And now, O Lord, you are God, and you have promised this good thing to your servant; ²⁷ therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue for ever before you. For you, O Lord, have blessed and are blessed for ever.’

1 Chronicles 17:23-27

David’s prayer of wondering praise (vv.16-22) leads into a petition that God will confirm his covenantal promise so that David’s house will be established for ever. The enduring character of the Davidic covenant in the Chronicler’s own kingless day should inspire confidence and hope in the promises to which it testifies.

Let it be established for ever, and do as you have promised. David’s prayer boldly asked God to do what he promised. This was not passive prayer that said, “Well God, do whatever you want to do - I do not really care one way or another.” This was not arrogant prayer that said, “Well God, let me tell you what to do.” This was bold prayer that said, “God, here is your promise - now I trust you to fulfil it majestically and to be faithful to your word.”

The phrase therefore your servant has found it possible to pray before you emphasises this. David was saying, “I’m only praying because you promised. You told me that this is what you want to do.”

This kind of prayer appropriates God’s promise. Just because God promises does not mean that people possess. Through believing prayer like this, God promises and people appropriate. If people do not appropriate in faith, God’s promise is left unclaimed:

- **Christians may appropriate his promise for forgiveness:** <<*If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness*>> (1 John 1:9).
- **Christians may appropriate his promise for peace:** <<*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid*>> (John 14:27).
- **Christians may appropriate his promise for guidance:** <<*I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you*>> (Psalm 32:8).

- **Christians may appropriate his promise for growth:** <<*I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ*>> (Philippians 1:6).
- **Christians may appropriate his promise for help:** <<*Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*>> (Hebrews 4:16).

O Lord, you are God, and you have promised this good thing to your servant. This was David's foundation of faith. He knew that God was God, and that his promise was true. God can be trusted.

Again Spurgeon comments, "The great sin of not believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is often spoken of very lightly and in a very trifling spirit, as though it were scarcely any sin at all; yet, according to my text, and, indeed, according to the whole tenor of the Scriptures, unbelief is the giving of God the lie, and what can be worse?"

For you, O Lord, have blessed and are blessed for ever. When God blesses his people they are uplifted and strengthened but what happens when his people bless him? He is not uplifted or strengthened by the blessings he receives, he does not need them in the way people need his blessings. When people bless God it is an expression of their thanksgiving and recognition of him as the Almighty God, and that is pleasing to him.