

The Ideal United Kingdom (1 Chronicles 9:35 – 2 Chronicles 9:31)

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David Prepares for the Temple, part 2: David Accepts
Commission to Prepare for Solomon (1 Chronicles 17:1-27)

David Accepts Commission to Prepare for Solomon (17:1-27)

In this passage, David began his devotion to the temple by accepting his divinely ordained role. David was not to build the temple, but he was to prepare for its construction.

Comparison of 17:1-27 with 2 Sam 7:1-29

For the most part, the Chronicler merely copied this material from 2 Sam 7:1-29. Most differences are minor and stem from stylistic variations or problems in transmission (see *Introduction: Translation and Transmission*). Nevertheless, several variations reveal the Chronicler's intentional changes.

First, the Chronicler omitted "and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him" (17:1 // 2 Sam 7:1). In all likelihood, this omission was designed to remove any confusion brought about by the accounts of David's wars in the following chapters (18:1-20:8).

Second, 2 Sam 7:5 reads, "Are you the one to build me a house..?" but 1 Chr 17:4 substitutes, "**You are not the one to build me a house...**" The pronoun "**you**" is emphatic in the Hebrew text of 17:4. The Chronicler portrayed God prohibiting David specifically from building the temple to make it clear that temple construction itself was not forbidden.

Third, "I will also give you rest from all your enemies" (2 Sam 7:11) was changed to "**I will also subdue all your enemies**" (17:10). This variation also anticipated the battles mentioned in the following chapters (18:1-20:8).

Fourth, 2 Sam 7:16 reads, "*Your [David's] house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever*" (italics added). 1 Chr 17:14 reads, "**I will set him [Solomon] over my [God's] house and my [God's] kingdom forever; his [Solomon's] throne will be established forever**" (italics added). These changes diminished the focus on David and emphasized God's kingship as well as the importance of Solomon.

Fifth, the Chronicler omitted 2 Sam 7:14b. "When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men." These words refer to the sins of Solomon. They are omitted because they do not fit well with the Chronicler's presentation of Solomon as an ideal king (but compare 28:9).

Sixth, in the Hebrew of the last verse (17:27 // 2 Sam 7:29) the focus of the verb "to bless" have shifted. As the variety among English translations indicates, the precise meaning of these variations is difficult to determine (compare NAS, NRS, NKJ).

Structure of 17:1-27

This chapter divides into five symmetrical steps (see figure 16). The uneven sizes of the steps of this material hide its conceptual balance. The alternations of main characters, however, reveals the overarching structure. The sequence consists of David (17:1), Nathan (17:2), God (17:3-14), Nathan (17:15), and David (17:16-27). David wanted to build (17:1) and Nathan agreed (17:2). Yet, because of divine revelation at night (17:3-14), Nathan instructed David not to build (17:15). David joyfully accepted his role as the one who prepared for his son to build (17:16-27).

David Expresses His Plan (17:1)

This narrative begins with a very admirable desire on David's part. Having settled into a palace, he wanted to build a permanent structure for the **ark of the covenant** (17:1; for the significance of this designation see *Introduction: 13) Covenant*). This desire parallels royal ideology in surrounding ancient Near Eastern cultures. The inscriptions of kings and emperors around Israel demonstrate that one way monarchs proved their success was to build temples for their gods. It was expected that all good and powerful kings would build temples. David had reached the point in his life when it was time for him to take this step.

Nathan Responds Favorably to David (17:2)

Nathan's initial response to David was to be expected because it was considered customary for a king to build a temple. It should be noted that there is no indication that Nathan consulted or inquired of the Lord in this matter. His first response was not revelation; it was little more than common sense based on the fact that **God is with** David (17:2). In the Chronicler's vocabulary, for God to be "with" people meant that God fought for them and gave them victory over struggles (see 2 Chr 13:12; see also *Introduction: 10) Divine*

Activity). Nathan had seen God fighting for David and assumed divine approval of the king's plan.

God Reveals the Divine Plan to Nathan (17:3-14)

Despite Nathan's initial reaction, he received instructions from God to the contrary. David was *not* to build the temple of God.

God revealed himself to Nathan during the night. Revelation at night is common in Scripture (see Gen 15:12-21; 20:3-7; 26:23-25; 28:10-17; 46:1-4; 1 Sam 15:10-11; 1 Kgs 3:5-14; Dan 2:17-23; 7:1-28; Zech 1:7-6:15). The Chronicler himself referred to it elsewhere (see 2 Chr 1:7-12; 7:11-22). Here divine revelation was designed to put a stop to David's plan.

Twice God commanded, "**tell my servant David**" (17:4,7). These words divide Nathan's revelation into two main parts: divine denials (17:4-6) and divine promises (17:7-14).

In 17:4-6 the Lord denied that he ever asked David to build a temple. At first glance, it may appear that God entirely rejected the idea of Israel having a temple. He had been with his people throughout their wanderings and never asked for a **house of cedar** (17:6). As noted above, however, the Chronicler rephrased 17:4 (// 2 Sam 7:5) to make God's desire as clear as possible. The Chronicler's emphatic Hebrew construction may be translated, "You, specifically you, are not the one..." (17:4). This construction clarified that the Lord did not entirely reject the idea of a temple. A temple for Israel's God was a central theocratic ideal. God merely revealed that Solomon was to build instead of David. As indicated later, David's involvement in warfare disqualified him from being the one to establish the temple (see 22:8; 28:3). (For the Chronicler's use of the terminology **this day** [17:5] see comments on 4:41.)

The divine promises given to David were numerous (17:7-14); they appear in two groups separated by the expression, "**I declare to you that the Lord will build a house for you**" (17:10b). The first section begins with a brief reminder of past blessings given to David as **ruler over** [God's] **people Israel** (17:7). God promised to **make** [David's] **name like the names of the greatest** (17:8b), **provide a place for** [his] **people** (17:9), **plant them** (17:9), and **subdue all** [of David's] **enemies** (17:10b). God reminded David that he had been **with** him, fighting against David's opponents (17:8; see 2 Chr 13:12; see also *Introduction: 10 Divine Activity*). Each of these promises focuses on national security against enemies. Their fulfillments appear in the chapters which follow (see 18:1-20:8).

The second set of promises concerned how God **will build a house for** [David] (17:10b). This passage depends on the flexibility of the Hebrew word translated "house." The same word appears twice in 17:1 as **palace** ("house" NAS NKJ NRS). In these cases, the

term referred to David's *palace* of cedar and his proposed *temple* for God. In 17:10c, however, the same term is used to denote David's **house** or *dynasty*.

God made five promises regarding David's dynasty. He would **raise up** [David's] **offspring** (17:11), **establish his throne** (17:12), **be his father** (17:13), **never take** [his] **love away** (17:13), and **set him over** [God's] **house and** [God's] **kingdom forever** (17:14). David received the promise that his dynasty would be the permanent royal family for Israel.

The familial language of this passage (**his father ... my son** [17:13]) indicated a special adoption of the Davidic king (see Ps 2:7; 89:27). Unlike other ancient Near Eastern cultures, Israel did not believe her king was divine or shared in divinity. Israel's kings were brothers of their citizens (see Dt 17:15). The language of sonship here indicates that the Lord adopted the king of Israel to be his special son among all of his sons and daughters in Israel.

New Testament writers indicate that these words about Solomon foreshadowed Christ, the final Davidic king (see Mk 1:11; Lk 1:32-33; Heb 1:5). Of course, Christ was not the Son of God simply because he was the son of David. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit (see Lk 1:35) and is the second Person of the Godhead (see Jn 1:1-18; 17:1). Jesus is the Son of God like no other. Nevertheless, it is Jesus' special royal sonship rooted in the promise to David that is often in view in the New Testament.

God promised that David's line would be the permanent dynasty over God's people. Unlike Saul's family (see 1 Chr 10:1-14), God will **never take** [his] **love away** from David's descendants (17:13). 2 Sam 7:14b indicates that David's descendants would be chastised when they sinned, but God would always raise up another son of David to continue the line. The Chronicler omitted this mention of sin in 1 Chr 17:13 (compare the same in Heb 1:5) to sustain his positive outlook on the reign of Solomon. Despite the troubles which the house of David brought on the people of God, the Chronicler asserted that David's house was still the only family with rights to the throne of Israel.

This promise was especially important for the Chronicler's post-exilic community. Post-exilic Israel hoped for national security against her enemies. It was through David and his seed that God promised such security. These promises served the Chronicler's purpose of turning attention to the house of David as the permanent hope for Israel.

As noted above, the Chronicler shifted the wording from "*your [David's] house and kingdom*" (2 Sam 7:16) to "**my [God's] house and kingdom**" (17:14). The Chronicler drew a close connection between the human throne of Israel and God's throne because the sons of David ruled as God's vice-regents. In an ultimate sense the kingdom did not belong to David but to God. This aspect of the Chronicler's viewpoint on David's throne provides an essential background for understanding the New Testament teaching on the Kingdom of God (Heaven). With the re-establishment of the Davidic throne in Christ, the reign (Kingdom) of God was re-

established (see Matt 12:22-28; Acts 2:22-36; 7:45-50; see also *Introduction: 8) Divine Kingship*).

Nathan Reports the Divine Plan to David (17:15)

In balance with Nathan's earlier words to David (17:2), the Chronicler reported that Nathan spoke to David once again (17:15). According to the command of God (see 17:4,7), Nathan did not keep this revelation to himself. He told David **this entire revelation** (17:15).

David Accepts God's Plan (17:16-27)

Following the account of Samuel, the Chronicler set David's prayerful response immediately after God's promises to David. In effect, this prayer reveals that the king was willing to comply with the plan of God. His prayer divides into two parts: praise for blessings (17:16-22) and petitions for blessings (17:23-27).

David began his praise with the admission that neither he nor his family had been worthy of the divine grace shown to them up to that point (17:16). Then he expressed astonishment that God had promised more blessings in the future (17:17). David was left speechless ("**what more can David say**" [17:18]) by the fact that God, knowing David as he did, would bless so richly (17:18-19). David closed his praise by exalting the Lord above all (17:20) and praising him for Israel's great deliverance from Egypt (17:21-22).

David's praise for God's blessings displayed tremendous humility (17:16-22). He began his prayer with a rhetorical question, "**Who am I?**" (17:16). These words appear again in David's later prayer (see 29:14) and Solomon's letter to Hiram (see 2 Chr 2:6). They indicate the speaker's awareness that he was undeserving of the benevolence he was receiving. As a result, David's opening words set the tone of his entire prayer. He was astounded to receive such great blessings from God.

Contemporary readers often have difficulty appreciating the extent of David's humility because we have little sense of the cultural implications of his prayer. Royal propaganda in the ancient Near East often focused on temple construction as evidence of a king's success. For this reason, the prohibition against David building a temple threatened to bring him great shame. Nevertheless, David humbly submitted to God's pleasure.

The Chronicler included these words from David's prayer to encourage similar attitudes within his readers. The post-exilic community needed to humble itself before God. They too were unworthy of divine grace. Moreover, as they had seen the promises to David fulfilled time and again throughout history, their praise should have been even more exuberant

than David's. David praised God for redeeming Israel from Egypt; the Chronicler's readers had much reason to praise God for returning them from captivity in Babylon.

Following his praise, David petitioned the Lord for future blessings (17:23-27). The expression **and now** (17:23) indicates that the king was drawing a conclusion from what had preceded. On the basis of God's goodness toward his people in the past, David determined to pray for the future of his house.

David referred directly to divine promises just given through Nathan in two ways. First, he prayed **that** [God's] **name will be great forever** (17:24). This petition alluded to the earlier divine promise to make David's name great (17:8). David wanted his house to be established, but in the hope that God's Name would be great as well. He desired for all the people to say, "**The Lord Almighty, the God over Israel, is Israel's God!**" (17:24). Second, David also referred to Nathan's prophecy when he said, "**You, my God, have revealed to your servant that you will build a house for him**" (17:25). This phraseology stems from the promise of a permanent dynasty in 17:10-14.

As noted above, at the end of the king's petitions (17:27 // 2 Sam 7:29), the Chronicler shifted the focus of the verb "to bless." The Chronicler substituted the past tense **you ... have blessed it** (17:27) to sum up David's attitude toward the blessings he had received. The final clause - **it will be blessed forever** - may be translated either as an imminent future (NIV, NKJ) or as the present tense (NRS, NAS).

The NIV translation suggests that the Chronicler drew his readers' attention to two similarities between David's situation and their own. They and David had been the recipients of magnificent blessings in the past. At the same time, their past blessings gave them hope for the future. As David anticipated the grace of God, so post-exilic Israel could look forward to a bright future as they followed David's example of prayerful devotion to God and his temple (see *Introduction: 17) Prayer*).