

PSALM 89

A Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite.

¹ I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever;
with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

² I declare that your steadfast love is established for ever;
your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

³ You said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
I have sworn to my servant David:

⁴ "I will establish your descendants forever,
and build your throne for all generations."'

Selah

⁵ Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD,
your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones.

⁶ For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD?
Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD,

⁷ a God feared in the council of the holy ones,
great and awesome above all that are around him?

⁸ O LORD God of hosts,
who is as mighty as you, O LORD?

Your faithfulness surrounds you.

⁹ You rule the raging of the sea;
when its waves rise, you still them.

¹⁰ You crushed Rahab like a carcass;
you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm.

¹¹ The heavens are yours, the earth also is yours;
the world and all that is in it—you have founded them.

¹² The north and the south—you created them;
Tabor and Hermon joyously praise your name.

¹³ You have a mighty arm;
strong is your hand, high your right hand.

¹⁴ Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.

¹⁵ Happy are the people who know the festal shout,
who walk, O LORD, in the light of your countenance;

¹⁶ they exult in your name all day long,
and extol your righteousness.

¹⁷ For you are the glory of their strength;
by your favor our horn is exalted.

18 For our shield belongs to the LORD,
our king to the Holy One of Israel.

19 Then you spoke in a vision to your faithful one, and said:
'I have set the crown on one who is mighty,
I have exalted one chosen from the people.
20 I have found my servant David;
with my holy oil I have anointed him;
21 my hand shall always remain with him;
my arm also shall strengthen him.
22 The enemy shall not outwit him,
the wicked shall not humble him.
23 I will crush his foes before him
and strike down those who hate him.
24 My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him;
and in my name his horn shall be exalted.
25 I will set his hand on the sea
and his right hand on the rivers.
26 He shall cry to me, "You are my Father,
my God, and the Rock of my salvation!"
27 I will make him the firstborn,
the highest of the kings of the earth.
28 For-ever I will keep my steadfast love for him,
and my covenant with him will stand firm.
29 I will establish his line for ever,
and his throne as long as the heavens endure.
30 If his children forsake my law
and do not walk according to my ordinances,
31 if they violate my statutes
and do not keep my commandments,
32 then I will punish their transgression with the rod
and their iniquity with scourges;
33 but I will not remove from him my steadfast love,
or be false to my faithfulness.
34 I will not violate my covenant,
or alter the word that went forth from my lips.
35 Once and for all I have sworn by my holiness;
I will not lie to David.
36 His line shall continue forever,
and his throne endure before me like the sun.
37 It shall be established for ever like the moon,
an enduring witness in the skies.'

Selah

38 But now you have spurned and rejected him;
you are full of wrath against your anointed.

³⁹ You have renounced the covenant with your servant;
you have defiled his crown in the dust.
⁴⁰ You have broken through all his walls;
you have laid his strongholds in ruins.
⁴¹ All who pass by plunder him;
he has become the scorn of his neighbors.
⁴² You have exalted the right hand of his foes;
you have made all his enemies rejoice.
⁴³ Moreover, you have turned back the edge of his sword,
and you have not supported him in battle.
⁴⁴ You have removed the scepter from his hand,
and hurled his throne to the ground.
⁴⁵ You have cut short the days of his youth;
you have covered him with shame.
Selah

⁴⁶ How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever?
How long will your wrath burn like fire?
⁴⁷ Remember how short my time is—
for what vanity you have created all mortals!
⁴⁸ Who can live and never see death?
Who can escape the power of Sheol?
Selah

⁴⁹ Lord, where is your steadfast love of old,
which by your faithfulness you swore to David?
⁵⁰ Remember, O Lord, how your servant is taunted;
how I bear in my bosom the insults of the peoples,
⁵¹ with which your enemies taunt, O LORD,
with which they taunted the footsteps of your anointed.

⁵² Blessed be the LORD forever. Amen and Amen.

2 Samuel 7.1-17

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²the 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.' ³Nathan said to the king, 'Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you.'

⁴ But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: ⁵Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶I 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. ⁷Wherever 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?' ⁸Now 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;⁹and 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. ¹⁰And 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, ¹¹from 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. ¹²When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings.¹⁵But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established forever. ¹⁷In accordance with all these words and with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

SERMON

I promised I'd let you all know throughout this sermon series as books came to mind that you all might appreciate, and I'm happy to let you know, there's one this week! "The Secret Chord" by Geraldine Brooks is a fictional recounting of the life and times of King David, and it's totally worth your attention. I listened to the audio book a few weeks ago, and it's stunning. Brooks faithfully follows the Biblical stories of David's life, but she also fleshes out the family and courtiers and warriors and wives and prophets who orbited around David with such care and compassion. She won the Pulitzer for another of her books, so you know she's got writing chops. Anyway, I just wanted to mention it, as we'll be stopping by to say hi to King David today, and you, like me, may have mixed feelings about him. Her book gave me a little more imagination and perspective than I had previously thought through.

Anyway, we're dropping in on King David a few years after he's taken the throne, and things are going pretty great for David and the wandering people of Israel. David is charismatic and handsome, a stellar singer and composer on the harp, he's beloved by both men and women, and has a reputation of sorts with both. The Bible isn't exactly direct about either, but in addition to his many wives and concubines, the Hebrew used to describe the ongoing relationship between David and his best friend, the former King Saul's son, Jonathan is, well, amorous to say the least. They're widely considered to be one of the most iconic gay couples of all time, for whatever that's worth.

On top of his curb appeal and musical talents, David was also a warrior. He fought with passion and intelligence, he was trusted by his men and we know from scripture that by the end of his reign he had not only conquered vast territories, but had also brought in

whole units of mercenary soldiers from the neighboring tribes he conquered. And they weren't just indentured servants, they were loyal to him, choosing his side again and again when they were given other, appealing options. David showed real political prowess, making friends and establishing peace with not only the tribes he conquered, but the stronger neighbors all around. He moved the capital of his empire to Jerusalem, which became the City of David, and the people of the land knew they could appeal directly to David with their disputes, if the local magistrates weren't satisfactory.

And, of course, David was known as a man after God's own heart. He wrote a vast number of the psalms, certainly not all of them, but more than a few, which we still read and sing today. Nathan was his lifelong confidante and companion, and when Nathan spoke hard truths, he really was the only person David would listen to. David retrieved the ark of the covenant, which had wandered around in a desert tabernacle for so many generations, and he brought it into Jerusalem with singing and dancing and wild abandon. So much so that his wife, Michael, scolded him for dancing naked through the streets.

His wives were the place, along with his children and the children of King Saul, perhaps, where David had a bit of a blind spot. While we often tell the tales of Abigail and Bathsheba and even Michael as love stories: one brought to David as a wife when her own husband was slayed at David's own hand for his evil choices, another captured him with her beauty, according to the Leonard Cohen song, as she bathed on a roof, the third given as a great prize, the daughter of the King, when the handsome young David defeated the giant Goliath. The sound swoon worthy, but they probably weren't. What choice would a woman have if her husband was killed? And can a neighbor really refuse the call of the King, when he demands she show up for a little late-night meeting? And since when has a marriage of political convenience ever been a romance for the ages? And Michael, poor Michael, cursed with barrenness when she scolded David. I doubt it was anything medical or magical, but simply the true banishment of her to some far off, distant corner of the palace where she was summarily forgotten.

The sons of David displayed all the hallmarks of children raised in privilege without discipline. Wonton living, cruelty and violence, fratricide, assault, and for many of them, death. Their stories of selfish, thoughtless evil are among the worst in the Bible. And then there are the children of Saul, threats to David's kingship, all killed.

David, for being a wonderful King, a stable and good ruler, a fierce and determined warrior, a man after God's heart. He certainly left a wake of broken people in his trail.

But, to a certain degree, that's almost why this passage for today is all the more shocking. David says, "I will build you a house, a great temple, your own palace, my God." And God, of course, says no. Not you. But it's not a hard "no." God follows up, through the voice of Nathan, saying that David's son, the young one, Solomon, he will build the temple. And the house and line of David will rule forever. All of those words, "house, temple, line, lineage, dynasty," they all come from the same word, in Hebrew, *beyit*. You've seen this word before, you just don't know it. Hospital names, like Beth Israel, "house of Israel."

The city, Bethlehem, bet l'hem, the "house of bread." Synagogues, like "Temple Beth el," literally "the house of the Lord."

The entire passage for today, so central to both Jewish and Christian theology, it's word play. God is promising a house, a line, a lineage, a dynasty. The House of David, the House of the Lord. They're twined together. And what's beautiful is that it's not conditional. It's not "if you stay good, if you're moral, if you're kind, if you do what I say." No. God's promise is unconditional—you house, your line, it will be established forever.

This is the root of our hope, as well as the root of hope for the Jewish people. It's not that Israel, as we know it today, the modern nation, has God's great stamp of approval. Let's be clear about that. It's that God has made a promise, first to the Jewish community, to never abandon them. That through God's blessing, they will continue, and God will be with them.

As Christians, we branch off at a point in history with the story of Jesus, the one whom we believe was the branch from that root of Jesse, the father of David, the one who comes to establish God's peaceful reign forever.

These two promises can both exist. God will not abandon the first covenant by establishing a second. And the second is not more important than the first. This declaration of God is vast and echoes throughout time: I will not take my steadfast love from you [...] ¹⁶Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

And for me, there is something profound and hopeful in this arc of David's story. That a man as wonderful and talented and flawed and horrible as David could be loved by God, could become the trunk of the tree which grows into such a vast and wild promise. To me, it is a reminder that God works through and within our flaws, not in spite of them, and that in this promise, what matters most is God's steadfast assurance that this kingdom, the peaceful Kingdom of God, will be established forever.