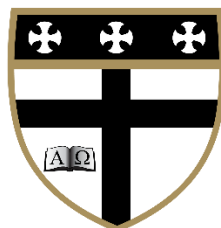


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A HISTORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

“The Prophet Nathan, King David, and the Building of the First Temple: A Prologue to the New Testament”¹

by

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¹ Roderick O. Ford, *The Apostolate Papers* (unpublished research papers, 2015 to 2022). www.roderickford.org.

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Introduction

In the two Books of Samuel, the Prophet Nathan is described as one of King David's seers and spiritual advisors.³

After King David had attained some measure of respite from his many wars, and after having established his own palace at Jerusalem, he informed the Prophet Nathan of his desire to build a Temple for the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD and for God.

In the second Book of Samuel, the Prophet Nathan provided David with a response from God (i.e., Nathan's prophecy). This prophecy would eventually become a major cornerstone of Christian and Reformed hermeneutics regarding Jesus Christ's ultimate and eternal heirship of the promised eternal throne of King David that is mentioned in the Book of Samuel, to wit:

5 "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? 6 I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. 7 Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'"

8 "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. 9 I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. 10 And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning 11 and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders[a] over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

³ The Prophet Gad is named as another such seer and prophet who often counseled King David.

“The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: 12 **When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.** 14 I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. 15 But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me[b]; your throne will be established forever.”⁴

This paper thus explores the theological implications of the fact that, *first*, in this passage, the LORD God *did not* direct King David or King Solomon to build the First Temple— this alone was David’s idea, not God’s!

And, *second*, the LORD God responded to King David’s idea to build a temple, through Nathan the Prophet, who informed King David that God Himself would build “a house for you [i.e., David],”⁵ and that God Himself would do so *after* King David was deceased, at which time he would “raise up” King David’s own “offspring.”

In Reformed theology, this divine prophecy of Nathan points us **not** to King Solomon, who built the First Temple at Jerusalem, but it instead points us **to the ministry of Jesus Christ** (i.e., King David’s “seed” and “offspring”), and to the founding of His church (i.e., “a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices...”).⁶

⁴ 2 Samuel 7: 5-16 [NIV].

⁵ 2 Samuel 7: 11 [NIV].

⁶ 1 Peter 2:5-9; See, also, St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 587 – 590.

Chapter One:

“The First Temple: King David’s Idea, *Not* God’s”

It does not appear, from the text of the Sacred Scriptures (2 Samuel 5: 5- 7), that the LORD God (Jehovah/ Yahweh) ever desired that the ancient Hebrews or the tribe of Judah to build Him a physical Temple upon the earth.

Clearly, the building of the First Temple was David’s idea. 2 Samuel 7: 1-2 (David said to Nathan the prophet, “Here I am, living in a place of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.” David had resolved within himself that the Ark of the Covent, like the king of Israel, should reside in a palatial Temple.

In response, the LORD God sent King David the following message, to wit:

“Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? 6 I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. 7 Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, **did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”**”

The interpretation of this passage is affirmed by Augustine of Hippo in *The City of God*, where he writes, “[w]hen many things had good prosperously with king David, he thought to make a house for God, even that temple of most excellent renown which was afterwards built by king Solomon his son.”⁷

Hence, the building of the First Temple (i.e., Solomon’s Temple) was the *original* idea of King David’s— the building of this temple was not initiated or directed by the LORD God.

⁷ St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 587.

Chapter Two:

“Nathan’s Prophecy on the Builder of the House of God”

When King David informed the Prophet Nathan about David’s desire to build a Temple or a House for the LORD God, the said prophet received the following response from God, to wit:

“The Lord declares to you that **the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.** I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me[b]; your throne will be established forever.”⁸

Here, the LORD God informed King David that God Himself “will establish a house for you [i.e., King David].”

In other words, King David did not need to build the First Temple or a House of God—the LORD God himself would do that for him.

When would the LORD God build this house?

The prophecy of Nathan answered that question, stating,

“[w]hen your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will **raise up your offspring to succeed you**, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of **his kingdom forever.**⁹

⁸ 2 Samuel 7: 11-12 (NIV).

⁹ 2 Samuel 7: 12-13 (NIV).

According to Augustine of Hippo, the words “[w]hen your days are over and you rest with your fathers,” necessarily excludes King Solomon as the builder of Temple or the House of God that is referenced in Nathan’s prophecy.

In *The City of God*, Augustine of Hippo reasons that Solomon was enthroned as king of Israel while David was still alive, stating: “[n]or was it for any other reason that, **while his father David was still living, Solomon began to reign**,¹⁰ which happened to none other of their kings, except that from this also it might be clearly apparent that it was not himself this prophecy spoken to his father signified beforehand, saying, ‘And it shall come to pass when **thy days be fulfilled**, and **thou shalt sleep with thy fathers**, that I will **raise up thy seed** which shall proceed out of thy bowels...’¹¹

Therefore, according to Augustine, the Builder of the LORD’s House would *not* be King Solomon, but rather one would come after King David had already died (i.e., “[w]hen your days are over”), i.e., “I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”¹²

In Reformed theology, the “offspring” or the “seed” mentioned in 2 Samuel 7:12, is Jesus Christ: “For however long the interval of time might be before Jesus Christ came,” writes Augustine, “beyond doubt it was after the death of king David, to whom He was so promised, that He behooved to come, who should build an house of God, not of wood and stone, but of men... For to this house, that is, to believers, the apostle said, ‘The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.’”¹³

Here, Augustine’s theological interpretation of “temple,” which Jesus Christ would build for king David, in fulfilment of Nathan’s Prophecy (2 Samuel 7:8-16) is reinforced by the Apostle Peter’s theology, at 1 Peter 2: 5-9, to wit: “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up **a spiritual house, an holy priesthood**, to offer up **spiritual sacrifices**, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”

Finally, as Augustine notes in *The City of God*, King Solomon’s kingdom did not last forever, as it became sinful, apostate, and divided; and it eventually split into to separate kingdoms: Judah and Israel. (1 Kings 11: 26-40; 12: 1-33).

¹⁰ See, e.g., 1 Chronicles 23:1 (“When David was old and full of years, he made his son Solomon king over Israel.”)

¹¹ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, supra, p. 588.

¹² 2 Samuel 7:23-13 [NIV].

¹³ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, supra, pp. 588-589, quoting the Apostle Paul at 1 Corinthians 3:17.

Chapter Three:

“The Builder of the House (Christ) is also the House Itself (the Church)”

Finally, the prophecy of Nathan describes the Builder of the LORD’s House as imperfect, where it states, “[w]hen he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you.”¹⁴

To resolve this theological problem, and in Reformed theology, we are to understand that the word “Christ” is to be interpreted as consisting mystically of two components, as follows:

- **Jesus Christ**— Head of the Church
- **Church of Jesus Christ**— the Body of Christ

To this very point, Augustine of Hippo thus explained:

For of Christ Himself, who is the head of the Church, there could not be found any sins which required to be divinely restrained by human correction, mercy being still continued; but they are found in His body and members, which is His people. Therefore in the Book of Samuel it is said, ‘iniquity of Him,’ but in the psalm, ‘of His children,’ that we may understand that what is said of His body is in some way said of Himself. Wherefore also, when Saul persecuted His body, that is, His believing people, He Himself saith from heaven, ‘Saul, Saul, why persecutes thou me?’¹⁵

Therefore, the churches of Jesus Christ—and (or) the individual Christian members who comprise those institutions and, indeed, even anonymous Christians who belong to no official church—are the proverbial “temples” or “houses” of the LORD God which were promised to King David in Nathan’s prophecy. This is the mighty throne of King David which the LORD God “established forever.”¹⁶

¹⁴ 2 Samuel 7: 14-15 [NIV].

¹⁵ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, supra, p. 590, quoting Acts 9:4.

¹⁶ 2 Samuel 7:16 [NIV].

CONCLUSION

In Reformed theology, the prophecy of Nathan (2 Samuel 7:5-16), which was given in response to King David's idea on building a Temple to house the Ark of the Covenant, sets forth God's covenant and promise to build a house on his behalf and to establish the eternal throne of King David.

According to Reformed theology, the offspring, seed, and heir of King David, who would build this house, was Jesus Christ Himself; and the house or temple that Christ built was His spiritual body, the Church.

Therefore, in Reformed theology, the Church of Jesus Christ (i.e., the several universal and catholic churches around the world) is, in essence, the body of Christ and that eternal throne of King David that is referenced in the prophecy of Nathan.

THE END

