



David being made King of Judah.

in the book of Ecclesiastes. There have been moments in my life when I have pondered the meaninglessness of my life and the apparent absence of God from it. No matter how hard or how frequent I tried to pray for help, no answer ever came.

We pray for justice. We want justice. But today, justice is rare, even for the innocent. Given today's sociohistorical context, Ecclesiastes speaks to me. I am naturally a pessimistic person. I always plan for the worst. I realize that punishment and justice do not always come to those who deserve them. And justice is not always given to the righteous.

I love the ideal in Ecclesiastes of not worrying about things, but rather accepting them for what they are (5:8-6:12). For everything there is a season. For everything there is a reason. This simple truth can save us much stress and heartache. Acceptance is the key to surviving hard times.

Finally, there is a core truth behind all: Everything is meaningless. At first, this declaration may sound extreme. But the author makes a valid point. Isn't it true that God above is what's important? What about faith? Why care about the wisdom and pleasure of the world? What can these things gain a person?

Because of these insightful statements and ideas, I must say that I now prefer Ecclesiastes.

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## A Play on the Word *House*

2 Samuel 7:1-17

By Rosezanne DaKanay

It is a wonder how a Bible author comes up with a theme for a Bible passage. It is indeed only through the wonder of the Spirit. Such is an example found in the book of 2 Samuel. In 2 Samuel 7:1-17, the author plays with the word *house*, which carries different meanings in different parts of the passage—from being a palace, to being a temple, to being a dynasty.

In this passage, King David is enjoying the fruits of his labor and wishes that the ark of the covenant be given a permanent home. The ark has been carried from one place to another. King David feels it isn't right for him to live in a "house of cedar" while the "ark of God stays in a tent" (verse 2).

If I were in David's position, I would certainly wonder about where the ark of the covenant should be placed. I would feel, no doubt, a sense of duty—as he did—to the ark of the covenant, a powerful symbol of the presence of God.

Being in a close relationship with God, as David was, God was able to converse with him. In verse 8, God gives David an answer: "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel." God tells David directly that he has made it possible for David to be king. It was God's doing that made it possible for him to live in a house of cedar. God puts David in his place.

In verse 5, God questions David about his desire to build a house for the ark of the covenant. "Are you the one to build me a house to live in?" seems like a sarcastic question from God. David is climbing the ladder of success. God questions David effectively and reminds him of the fact that it is God who establishes and destroys kingdoms.

It is within this context that the author wonderfully interweaves plays on the word *house*. In the first two verses of the chapter, the word represents a palace. In verses 5, 6, 7, 9, and 13, *house* is a temple. In verses 11 and 16, the word refers to a dynasty.

It is important to remember that, upon the establishment of a kingdom, the ruling party naturally wants it to last. David equates the lasting of his kingdom with the presence of God. So long as God is in the midst of the kingdom, the kingdom that he has allowed to come into existence will continue. The author is trying to stress a significant thought by playing with the word *house*. To a king, it is important



to know that he has established a kingdom that will last. Ultimately, though, it is God who has the final say. He cannot be subjected to dwell in a house/temple because he is God.

Although it can be confusing to a modern person to understand different meanings of the word *house*, the word can be easily understood as a symbol of power. David felt it was his duty to look over the ark. This is a noble thought. However, it is God who establishes kingdoms and destroys them. After all, he is God, and God can take care of himself.

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## Falling Gods

1 Samuel 5:1–6:18

By Ryan Dingman

I was holding back laughter as I read 1 Samuel 5:1–6:18. I smiled to myself from the very beginning of this passage, when the Philistines captured the ark and Dagon was on the floor. I was still laughing as the Philistines failed to realize God's power even as they moved the ark to three different cities and only then realized that God was punishing them. Sometimes God shows us his will in no uncertain terms, yet we fail to recognize these most obvious signs.

The first incident was entertaining to me because Dagon was on the floor the morning after the Philistines captured the ark. The Philistines had no idea why this was so. I was thinking that Dagon had probably never fallen off its pedestal before. Also, I was thinking that this idol was a large one. It couldn't simply fall on its own. Yet the Philistines still did not make the connection. To prove his point, God acted again, and the next morning Dagon was on the ground once more, only this time his head and hands were cut off. It seems that God had to go the extra mile for the Philistines to show the fall was his doing.

I find it interesting that the word *cut* instead of *broken* is used to explain why Dagon's hands and head were on the ground. These two words imply completely opposite intentions. For something to be cut off suggests that someone intervened intentionally. However, when something breaks off it is not necessarily due to interference, but instead due to a fall or some other accident. It seems that it took a lot of convincing before the Philistines figured out that God was the force behind these events.

Next, God had to bring tumors on the people in the city of Ashdod, where Dagon dwelled, in order for them to fear him. The lords of the Philistines got together and decided that the ark of God would not affect the people in Gath, so the lords sent it there. As soon as the ark reached Gath people there were also struck with terrible tumors. It did not take the people of Gath long to fear God and rid themselves of the ark. They sent it straight to Ekron, where the people cried out before it even got there. They demanded that the lords get rid of the ark as soon as possible. The lords of the Philistines were so persistent and so sure that they could outsmart God that they did not see they could not have peace until the ark was out of their possession.

The Philistines were so horrified that they sent a guilt offering with the ark to make sure that the agony would leave them. I find it interesting that they were so terrified of the ark that they sent it back unaccompanied. My guess is that they couldn't find anyone who wanted to take it back. This could be a reason they decided to return it and not to hide it: They were afraid that if the ark was in their control the horrors they were experiencing would not diminish until they returned the ark to its rightful protectors.

This story reminds me of wanting something much, but when you finally get it, it often turns out to be different from what you had imagined. I believe this is how the Philistines viewed the ark. They thought that if they could only steal the ark they would have the power of God with them. How wrong they were.

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