

## Divergence on the Lectionary - Proper 11, Year B (track one)

### First Reading

2 Samuel 7:1–14a

Now when the king lived in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.” And Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you.”

But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, “Go and tell my servant David, “Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? I 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 for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”” 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, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And 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. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from 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. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. (ESV)

### Second Reading

Ephesians 2:11–22

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both

one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (ESV)

### Gospel Text

Mark 6:30–34, 53–56

The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.

When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well. (ESV)

### Comments and Questions for Discussion

#### First Reading

This story of Nathan’s prophetic response to David’s plan to build a temple is somewhat truncated in the reading assigned for this Sunday. It is missing the following verses, which complete it:

2 Samuel 7:14–17

*I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.... When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David. (ESV)*

These final verses aren't necessary to discern the compositional layers of the prophecy, but they do help make some of them a little clearer, so I include them for you here.

What is clear to me is that there are, indeed, compositional layers to these words of Nathan's that represent the theologies of different periods of Israel's history. Perhaps that isn't a surprise to some of you, as Nathan is quick to contradict himself at one point, and the language keeps shifting in its emphasis, sometimes first person, sometimes third, sometimes favoring the building of the temple, sometimes opposing it, sometimes speaking of God's favor to David, sometimes of God's favor to the people. If we read it carefully as a unified text, all those differences become confusing. If we read it as a text that has undergone editing - redaction - over centuries, they begin to make sense.

First, we have the original oracle of Nathan, probably written by a member of the royal court some time from the late 9th century to the beginning of the 7th century BC. (Long after David's reign.) This layer idealizes David and his dynasty and probably served to undergird that dynasty during a time of upheaval. (Two Davidic kings were assassinated during that period.) This earliest layer would read this way:

Now when the king lived in his house.... the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent." And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you."....Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ( 7:1a, 2-3, 11b)

This reads smoothly and lacks the sudden shift in voice from first to third person.

Beginning with verse 1b we see insertions from the Deuteronomist, the "D" layer in source critical studies of the Hebrew Scriptures. The phrase "rest from his enemies" is a theme unique to the Deuteronomist, as are the dual emphases on the monarchy *and* the temple as centers of Jewish identity. The Deuteronomist, writing in the royal court during the period of the Davidic dynasty *prior* to the conquest by Babylon and the end of the dynasty, writes to 1) establish right-worship as a condition of God's continuing favor for the people and 2) to explain why David didn't build the temple without undermining the dynasty.

So we find these additions:

...and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies,...

But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day...

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, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And 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.

...from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel...

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

(7:1b, 4-6a, 8-9, 11a, 12-16)

These verses reflect those concerns of the Deuteronomist, the confirmation of the Davidic line, and the centrality of worship/temple. They also provide David with an “out” for not having constructed the temple. He had not yet received rest from all his enemies and so lacked time to build it. It also portrays God as the primary builder of the temple. God will have it built in a way that permits Them to have a residence for Their *name*, but not one in which God will actually dwell, limiting God’s ability to move with the people, as happened in the wilderness and which will be important to Jewish identity in the Babylonian exile.

Then we come to the verses added in the post-Deuteronomic period. The people have returned from exile and the Davidic monarchy is not and will not be restored. The

theological shift comes from the Priestly, the “P” source, and replaces the dual emphasis of the Deuteronomist on temple *and* monarchy with a sole emphasis on God’s presence with the people. These Priestly insertions include:

...but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”

And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, (7:6b-7, 10)

Here God shifts from the emphasis on blessings for David’s line to favor on the people and is dependent not on any one structure for God to be present with the people.

I have done the article from which I learned all this poor service in compressing it so. If you’d like to read it in its entirety, [here’s a link to it](#). (As often, I remind you that you can read these articles for free, one need only set up an account and read up to 100 articles a month.)

Now the questions have to be asked, “What are we to do with all this? If this isn’t a record of the words out of Nathan’s mouth, what do we learn from it?” Here are my answers.

To believe in the inspiration of Scripture is not to believe that God was not involved in the evolution of the text. That is to say, what the pre-Deuteronomist wrote can have been inspired by God *for that period* of the history of God’s people. But so also can each of the additions. God adapted the text through D and through P to suit the needs of the people in each era.

What this says to me is that we worship a God who does not change, but whose responses to us change according to our needs, and hallelujah for that! And this desire of God to meet us where we are and to shift responses when our need shifts is encoded for us right there in the Bible, if we will but read it carefully enough.

So yes, all this study is difficult. (Take it from me!) But it is worth it. As we read in Scripture itself, “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, it is the glory of kings to search them out.” (Prov. 25:2)

Second Reading

Our text from the second chapter of Ephesians selected for the lectionary this week has been the recipient of a good deal of scholarly ink over the years. I will highlight here what appear to me to be two major points of discussion that I've noticed.

First is the question of the place of Israel in relationship to the church. Is there a basic continuity or discontinuity? On the one hand there are those who have argued that Ephesians evinces a fundamental continuity, that, akin to the image of grafting a branch onto the tree of Israel from Romans 11, the new identity that Christ followers enjoy is an extension of the one that Israel has historically enjoyed.

On the other hand, there are those who think that in Ephesians (and especially these verses) we find a discontinuity, that the new identity Christians experience is something new and different from that which has characterized Israel.

It appears to me that this second approach is often rejected because it contributes to the kind of "replacement" theology that undergirds a good deal of anti-semitism. By affirming this discontinuity, the validity of continuing, historic Judaism is rendered meaningless. In the three quarters of a century that have followed the Holocaust, such a theology has become increasingly subject to criticism.

In the latter decades of the 20th century the "new perspective on Paul" championed initially by Stendahl and Sanders and developed more fully by writers like Nanos restored our appreciation for Paul's Jewishness, his Jewish sensibilities. That Paul continued throughout his life to perceive himself as a Jew makes the idea that he saw a fundamental disjunction between Israel and the church difficult to defend.

And yet there are those who maintained that the author of Ephesians (Paul, for my purposes) speaks of Israel not in its historic capacity, but symbolically, as a realm of salvation in the present. It is noted here that Christ preached peace *both* to those who were "far off" and those who were "near," that is, Israel. Both Gentiles *and* Israelites receive this preaching, bringing something new out of both.

Finally, though, this theology of discontinuity fails under the weight of the material that depicts Israel as "citizens" and Gentiles as "sojourners." It also demonstrates that the authors who maintain this disjunction have not themselves experienced the new life that being "in Christ" adds to one's self-understanding without eradicating the old.

The second element I found in writings on this part of Ephesians is the way that language of citizenship and non-citizenship (aliens) carried deeper meaning in first century Roman lands than I had realized. As this portion of the letter seems mostly

clearly to have been addressed to Gentile believers in Ephesus, the Roman notions of the value of citizenship versus alien/sojourner status is worth noting.

There is no mercy for the “alien among us” in Roman thought, as the Hebrew Scriptures require. To be a non-citizen in the empire was to live a life not worth living, a life that was a “disgrace.” While modern politics in many nations today may increasingly reflect that same rejection of the alien, I think that among the readers of these Divergences, a gentler understanding of what it means to be an alien, a sojourner, probably prevails. We do well then to be reminded that for Paul’s Gentile readers, such an idea would have been “foreign.” (pun intended)

It is also worth mentioning here, that among Roman writers on citizenship, one’s primary identity as a Roman citizen did not eradicate one’s identity also as a citizen of a smaller city or country. So for Paul and the Ephesian readers, a new citizenship in Christ would not have ended a Jew’s status as a citizen of Israel.

Finally, I would address one other feature of Ephesians that is only somewhat reflected in our text for this week, but one that has contributed, I think, to the rejection of Pauline authorship. That is the absence in the letter of any of the “anti-Judaizing” sentiment that is characteristic of much of Paul’s writing.

I would argue that Paul’s concern for “the Law” that we find in other letters is simply not in play in Ephesians. In last week’s Divergence I suggested that the primary concern of the letter is that of unity between Gentile and Jewish Christians. While the source of disunity in Galatians is clearly the preaching of some who have come to Galatia requiring law observance and especially circumcision, this is simply not the case in Ephesus. Paul’s weighty discourse of the Gentiles’ former alien standing suggests to me that his concern is not the imposition of law that drains the Cross of its power, but a kind of discontinuity like that mentioned above that is being taught by Gentile believers.

So while the emphases of Ephesians differ from that of other of Paul’s letters, I don’t find that they differ any more than say, Galatians does from Romans. It certainly is not a reason to treat this epistle as non-Pauline.

### Gospel Text

Our excerpts from Mark appointed for today make little sense to me. We begin with the introduction to the story of the feeding of the 5000, off in the “desolate place.” We get as far as Jesus’ compassion on them, but as soon as it begins to get late and the people hungry, we teleport to Jesus’ healing of the sick in Gennesaret, skipping over the feeding as well as the second story of Jesus walking on the water.

So read without the intervening verses, our text appears to blend two different voyages by boat into one, but they're not the same. One is to an unnamed desert place, the other to Gennesaret. In one Jesus takes compassion on a great crowd, in the other Jesus heals all those who are brought to Him when He's recognized.

Perhaps you can find something better, but the only theme I can find that ties the two short excerpts together in the determination of a great many people to seek Jesus out. We might make something of His compassion in the first section, and read that as a motivation for the healing in the second section, but I can't make that work. There is too much story, too much narrative in between those bits to connect them that way. (if you see a better reason to use these texts side by side on a Sunday, please mention it in the comments!)

I'll be doing supply work in a parish on this Sunday, and I have to admit. At this point I can't find a good starting point for a sermon in the texts they've given us at all.