



# Grand Chaplain's Corner

By RW Grand Chaplain Pat Thompson



July 19, 2021

*But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? (2 Samuel 7:4-5)*

Religious communities are used to referring to their unique place of worship as “the house of the LORD.” But one ought to be cautious in using such language, for it implies a static *place of residence* for the High and Holy One. It’s part of the tendency for humans to make God in *our* image, rather than the other way around. If the Deity “lives” anywhere, it is a pervasive and transcendent existence in the Universe. God is everywhere if God is anywhere.

In our text, King David relates his concern to the prophet Nathan: “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent” (v. 2). David refers, of course, to the Ark of the Covenant as the essential representation of the LORD’s presence. (Royal Arch Masons know the story well.) The text then says that the LORD instructs Nathan to inquire of David if indeed he is the one to “build me a house to live in” (v. 5). Masons know that the actual builder turns out to be David’s son and successor, our esteemed Grand Master, King Solomon.

The notion of the LORD’s presence becomes significant to the Israelites living in exile in the sixth century, BCE. Their suffering was exacerbated by the presumption that the Deity lived back home in Jerusalem, even as they eventually came to understand that the LORD was anything but some local deity whom they had been forced to abandon as they had been forced march to Babylon. It was a pivotal moment—a gradual one, to be sure—when they realized that Yahweh was in fact *with them in their exile*. God’s home was indeed among them, and his presence was not confined to some geographical locale. That was huge, and it continues to inform our current understanding of God’s Providence and Omnipresence.

Out of the Babylonian Exile experience comes the essential understanding of the Israelite people as “Jews”—the identifier itself arises out of the post-exilic period. It was in this same period that the Hebrew Bible also came into existence, such that the Jewish people came to deepen their understanding of their relationship to Yahweh as a deity who was not some local god, but the Lord Almighty—the Supreme Architect and the Sustainer of his people.

And though God cannot be contained by any “house,” we do construct temples where the Lord’s presence (Heb., *shekinah*) is felt most poignantly. It behooves a Mason to respect that each time one sets foot in any building that houses one of our lodges.

Faithfully and fraternally,

*Pat*