

Hi Everyone,

Hope you are keeping well.

Please find attached the last of the Reflections for the Bible Study which we will discuss on Monday 14th at 7pm and Tuesday 15th December at 1.30pm (link below if you are able to attend)

Next week will be back to my reflections, which will continue into the New Year.

Remember that Jacky and I are holding all of the churches and your members and friends in prayer as these are very uncertain and often difficult times and we are available to support you as you need.

Keep safe

Ruth

Here is the link for the Bible Study

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84209708539?pwd=b1Y4TFhpQ3YxdzJQRjBscjJsWDRsdz09>

Meeting ID: 842 0970 8539

Passcode: Bible

One tap mobile

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Week 4: Developing a Listening Heart Reflection on 2 Samuel 7:1 - 11 and Luke 1:26 - 38

The two passages that we read invite us into an uncomfortably deep place, where we have to listen with our hearts, not just our ears. Reading, hearing and understanding are not enough. We have to be willing to surrender our heart's desires to God. Listen to what Solomon prayed, when he was made king while still a child in 1 Kings.

"Here's what I want: Give me a God-listening heart so I can lead your people well, discerning the difference between good and evil. For who on their own is capable of leading your glorious people?" 1 Kings 3:9 (The Message Bible)

2 Samuel 7:1 - 11

At this point in the book, it appears that King David had been meditating on his achievements and decided to put building a house (bayit) i.e. a temple for God, on his to do list. Of course, God cannot be contained in any temple, shrine or structure. The Ark of the Covenant was a physical reminder for the people of Israel and their enemies, of the holy presence of God that was abiding with them.

It seems that the Temple in Shiloh (1 Samuel 1 - 3) was overlooked by both King David and God in this conversation. When God relayed his message to David, via the prophet Nathan, it was to inform him that building a temple for God was not his calling (verses 5 - 7).

In the Ancient Near East, kings were often referred to as shepherds. David was reminded that God took him from shepherding actual sheep to become King Designate i.e. prince, over Israel. God was still King of Israel: present with them in all their journeys. He had not only defended the nation, but also saved them from all of their enemies. David had been divinely appointed by God and physically anointed as earthly ruler by the prophet, Samuel. And although the world saw King David as the highest authority in the land, God was still King of Israel. And God viewed David as a servant.

Nathan told David that the plan to build a temple for God was not divinely approved. But Nathan was able to soften the blow to David's ego, by revealing that God's plan was way better than David's.

God planned to do two things. Firstly, God would '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' (verse 10). Israel would have a place of their own and they would live in peace.

Secondly, God planned to make David's name great – putting him in the premier league of the 'great ones of the earth' (verse 9). And if that was not enough, Nathan announced that instead of David building God a house (bayit), he declared that God would build David's dynasty (verse 11).

Luke 1:26 - 38

Six months after John the Baptist was conceived, God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in southern Galilee called Nazareth to speak to a young woman, called Mary. She was engaged to be married.

Gabriel's opening words, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you" were doubtless meant to make Mary aware of her standing with God and of God's active presence in her life. But instead of putting her at ease, the message threw her mind into confusion. While Mary was wondering what on earth Gabriel was on about, the angel tried to replace her obvious fear at his presence, with a word of encouragement, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God." Before Mary could ponder what the angel was on about, Gabriel delivered the punch line, "And no, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." (verses 31 – 33). Her son's name, the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, means 'God has saved'

At this point, Mary reportedly found words which gave voice to her bewilderment and confusion. Even in her youth Mary knew that it was physically impossible for a virgin to get pregnant. And the answer came back, explaining that the birth of her son would have nothing to do with human will or desire. Her son would be conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and will be called Son of God. I am not sure if God's pronouncement made Mary's future any easier, but the angel Gabriel continued to show Mary that impossible is not in God's vocabulary.

I know that we are not privy to the timescale of this conversation, but what is most astounding to me, is that after all that was said, Mary accepted God's plan for her life. Mary's

response appears to be directed to God: "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."