

(1 Kings) Dedicating the Temple

by David Guzik

The sermon explores the dedication of the temple in 1 Kings chapter 8, highlighting the significance of the ark of the covenant, the cloud of God's glory, and Solomon's speech.

Duration: 59:54

Topics: "Prayer And Worship", "Gods Faithfulness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses King Solomon's prayer of blessing and thanksgiving to God. The sermon focuses on the importance of prayer and the faithfulness of God in fulfilling his promises. The speaker highlights how Solomon acknowledged God's presence and faithfulness throughout Israel's history, particularly in giving them rest and fulfilling his promises through Moses. The sermon also emphasizes the need for repentance and prayer when facing defeat or sin, as demonstrated by Israel's history.

Transcript

1 Kings chapter 8, now if you remember where we left off from chapter 7, it described the building of the temple and the furnishing of the temple. Basically, chapter 8 has to do with the dedication of the temple. You know, any time you build a great building, you have a big dedication ceremony of some type or another, at least you would like to.

And so here is the dedication of the temple in 1 Kings chapter 8, so verses 1 and 2. Now Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel, to King Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord from the city of David, which is Zion. Therefore all the men of Israel assembled with King Solomon at the feast in the month of Ethanem, which is the seventh month. So Solomon intended this to be a spectacular, well, you might call it an opening ceremony for the temple.

If I could make an analogy or similarity between this and something we might be familiar with today, you know how they have the big extravaganza at the beginning of the Olympics, the big opening ceremony, and it's a whole elaborate show and display? This is what I picture in my mind that Solomon intended for the opening of the temple. He wanted an amazing program and show and something that he thought would really properly celebrate the dedicating of this very important building. And it also mentions in these verses, it says that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord.

You might say that the temple was not open for business until the ark of the covenant came in. It was the most important item in the temple representing the throne of God in heaven itself, which again is very interesting as we think about later developments with the temple, because when this temple was about to be destroyed, before the Babylonians came and finally conquered Jerusalem and took away the articles in the temple, fairly reliable legends tell us that the prophet Jeremiah took the ark of the covenant and hid it somewhere, which means that there was no ark of the covenant in the second temple. There was no ark of the covenant in the temple that Jesus visited.

And it seems remarkable to us, because to Solomon, to the rest of the people in those days, this was the most important piece of the whole temple, and in the second temple it was entirely missing. In any regard, they did it in the seventh month, and I think this is interesting, because 1 Kings chapter 6 tells us that Solomon finished the temple in the eighth month. So if he finishes in the eighth month and he dedicates the temple in the seventh month, it means there was eleven months between the finishing of the temple and the dedication of the temple.

It was probably so that Solomon could prepare properly for such a big display, such a big program, and so that the people of Israel knew about it far enough in advance so that they could plan their vacation schedules and be there at the proper time, and that as many people as possible could be a part of this big ceremony. So now in verses 3 through 9, they bring the ark of the covenant into the Holy of Holies. We read here, So all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark.

Then they brought up the ark of the Lord, the tabernacle of meeting, and all the holy furnishings that were in the tabernacle. The priests and the Levites brought them up. And King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who were assembled with him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen that could not be counted or numbered for multitude.

Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place into the inner sanctuary of the temple, to the most holy place, under the wings of the cherubim. For the cherubim spread their two wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubim overshadowed the ark and its poles. The poles extended so that the ends of the poles could be seen from the holy place in front of the inner sanctuary, but they could not be seen from outside.

And they are there to this day. Nothing was in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there at Horeb, when the Lord made a covenant with the children of Israel when they came out of the land of Egypt. The first thing I notice here in verse 3 is it tells us that the priests took up the ark.

Now, if you remember the last interesting time that the ark was transported, it was when David intended to bring the ark of the covenant up to Jerusalem. And do you remember what happened the first time he tried to do that? How did they want to transport the ark? They took the ark of the covenant and they set it upon a cart and had it pulled by an ox. I'm sure they got the best ox and the best cart that they could and it was being pulled.

And there were people around walking by the side of the ark to make sure that nothing happened to the cart that was pulling the ark of the covenant. Well, for some reason, maybe the ox took a funny step or the wheel of the cart went into a hole, but the cart sort of lurched in a particular way and it looked like the ark of the covenant might slide off the cart and fall to the ground. And what happened? A man named Uzziah reached forth his hand, he touched the ark of the covenant, and God struck him dead right then.

Now, there were several interesting things wrong with the whole situation that David constructed there. But one of the things that was wrong was that God commanded that the ark of the covenant never be carried by any sort of artificial transportation, but only by priests who would carry it by the poles that were through the ark. Here we find Solomon doing it the right way.

He learned from his father David's mistake. And he said, we're going to do it the proper way. Priests are going to carry the ark of the covenant into the temple.

By the way, if you really get interested in this, you can go back into the books of Exodus and Leviticus and notice that not only was a priest supposed to carry the ark of the covenant, but only special priests were supposed to carry it. A special family within the tribe of Levi was given the responsibility of transporting the ark of the covenant. And so they took the ark of the covenant.

It also says that they took all the holy furnishings that were in the tabernacle. You know, the ark of the covenant was the most important piece of furniture in there, but it wasn't the only piece of furniture. We discussed this last week.

You had the lampstand, which some people call a menorah. That was for the light in the temple. You had the table of showbread.

You had the altar of incense. You had these different furnishings that were also brought into the tabernacle at this time. And they made many sacrifices.

I find it very interesting here that it says that they were sacrificing sheep and oxen that could not be counted or numbered for multitude. Do you understand that? They had so many sacrifices that they could not count them. It's as if Solomon deliberately went over the top.

He went to the extreme in order to glorify God and to honor and praise him on this great day. So they brought in the ark of the covenant. And at the end of this section of verses, we find it interesting that it says that there was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there in Horeb.

Now, this is a great mystery in the Bible because prior to this, there were other things in the ark of the covenant. And we don't know what happened to them. I can think of many things that were in the ark of the covenant.

You had the two tablets of stone, right? We remember that. Does anybody remember what else was in the ark of the covenant? Well, you had Aaron's rod. That's correct.

Aaron's rod that budded, right? This was an amazing thing. It was a branch from an almond tree that was cut off and budded miraculously as an evidence of Aaron's authority to be the priestly family in Israel. What else was there? There was a jar of manna in the ark of the covenant.

Wouldn't that be amazing? That there was sustained to that time a jar of manna. Now, I can think of some other things. Those were the three things that I immediately think of.

The tables of the law, Aaron's rod that budded, and the jar of manna. But you know what else? Do you remember when the Philistines had the ark of the covenant in 1 Samuel and then they gave it back? They put within the ark of the covenant some golden rats and golden little models of tumors that they had as a way of sacrificing them to God. And so, you can kind of understand why they didn't leave those things in

there.

But you wonder, what happened to Aaron's rod that budded? What happened to the jar of manna? We don't know what happened to those things that were in the ark of the covenant at one time, but they were not in there when Solomon set it in the most holy place. And that would be one of the great detective stories of history to find out what happened to those things that once were in the ark of the covenant. I want you to notice something else here, and it's at the end of verse 9. It says, Nothing was in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there at Horeb, when the Lord made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt.

This is very interesting to me. It's a reminder of the deliverance from Egypt. There is a sense in which this event, which happened 500 years after the exodus, that's a long time, right? Think of, you know, the Zigerland 500 years ago.

Think of California 500 years ago. I mean, it's unbelievable to think of what a long period of time, 500 years. Well, this event of the dedication of the temple happened 500 years after the exodus.

I suggest to you that there is a sense in which this is actually the fulfillment of their deliverance from Egypt. You see, when Israel came out of Egypt and into the wilderness, they all lived in tents. That's all they could live.

You couldn't build a house in the wilderness because you were moving from place to place. But once they came into the promised land, they didn't live in tents anymore. They lived in houses.

Yet, the dwelling place of God was still a tent. Now, finally, after 500 years after the exodus, now they have built a proper house for the Lord. And the dwelling of God among Israel was a building.

It was a place of permanence and security. So look at what happens here in verse 10. It's beautiful to think about.

It says, And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud. For the cloud of the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. Then Solomon spoke, The Lord said, He would dwell in the dark cloud.

I have surely built you an exalted house and a place for you to dwell in forever. Think about that scene. Mentally picture it in your mind.

Here you have the cloud of God's glory filling the temple. Sometimes we call this, after the Hebrew name for this, the cloud of Shekinah glory. The Shekinah glory of God.

It's the glory of God in some physical form that can be seen and discerned. It just doesn't have a spiritual character. It has some sort of physical character as a cloud.

It's hard to define the glory of God. Have you ever thought about that? What is the glory of God? I can think of things that glorify God. But what is actually His glory? The best definition I could come up with, and I don't think this is very good, but the best one that I could think of was to say that it's the radiant outshining of His character and presence.

It's as if something just emanates from God and where He is. It's as if when God wants to show that He is especially present, then His glory is present because His glory is with Him wherever He goes. Maybe you've noticed this in a very, very much smaller way on a human level.

There are some people who just seem to have a glory about them. They walk into a room and everybody knows they're there. There's just sort of an electricity about them.

They just have this sort of, you know, you could call it an aura, you could call it a radiance, I don't know what you would call it, but there's something about that person that when they're around, people want to be around them and there's something attractive there. Now, if you could multiply that about one million times, I think you have something of the glory of God. And here, it's manifested in a cloud.

You know, this cloud is mentioned many times in the Scriptures. This is the cloud that stood by Israel in the wilderness in the form of a pillar. It's the cloud of glory that God spoke to Israel from.

It's the cloud from which God met with Moses and others. It's the cloud that stood by the door of the tabernacle in the wilderness. It's the cloud from which God appeared to the high priest in the holy place inside the veil.

It's the cloud of Ezekiel's vision. Ezekiel had a vision of the temple filling with the brightness of the glory of God and he saw this cloud. It's this cloud of glory that overshadowed Mary when she conceived Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It was the cloud that was present at the transfiguration of Jesus. It was the cloud of glory that received Jesus into heaven at His ascension. And it's the same cloud that will display the glory of Jesus Christ when He returns in triumph to this earth.

You want to do a fun word search and a little Bible study for yourself sometime? Just open up your Bible program. We used to say get out your concordance. But we just say open up your Bible study program now and type in the word cloud and do a word search.

It's beautiful. God wanted to show that His presence was there at the temple in a unique and powerful way. So much so that if you notice it there in verse 11 it says, so that the priest could not continue ministering because of the cloud for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.

This extreme presence of the glory of God made normal service impossible. Isn't it wonderful to think of this? You know, the priest had a whole program that they were supposed to follow. They had their duties.

They weren't just sitting there, you know, around tapping their feet. They all had work to do. But they couldn't do their normal work because there was something absolutely special about the presence of God on that day.

It was so intense that the priest felt like they had to get out of the building. I want you to think about that. Wouldn't you think that if the presence of God was so powerful and glorious inside the temple that the priest would just be like, I don't know, dancing around there.

Oh, isn't this wonderful? Isn't this great? Oh, just wash over me all of the glory, you know. I'm singing in the cloud, Lord. It's wonderful.

It's beautiful. I mean, you would almost think that, wouldn't you? No. For these priests, it was like, the glory of God is so real here.

I've got to get out of here. I have to leave. We know that God is good.

We know that God is love. Why should an intense presence of the goodness and the love of God make the priest feel like they had to leave? That they couldn't continue? I would answer it this way. God is not only goodness.

He's not only love. He's also holy. And it was the holiness of God that made the priest feel that they could no longer stand in His presence.

This intense sense of the presence of our holy God, it's not a warm and fuzzy feeling. It's not just goosebumps. Wow, isn't this wonderful? You know, when Peter felt it, he felt like he had to get away from Jesus.

When Isaiah felt it, and John felt it, their feeling was, this is too much for me. They felt stricken. They felt afflicted in the presence of God.

And it wasn't because God forced an uncomfortable feeling upon them. It wasn't like God said, I'm going to make these guys feel as uncomfortable as I possibly can to get them out. It wasn't that at all.

They just simply could not stay comfortable sensing the difference between their own sinfulness and the holiness of God. That's what they sensed. They sensed how pure and how powerful and how glorious the holiness of God was.

And so, an amazing experience. The glory of the Lord filled the temple. Then Solomon speaks, and he says, I have surely built you an exalted house and a place for you to dwell in forever.

I want you to notice this. I think Solomon only said this, and properly only said this, after the cloud of glory filled the temple. You see, he realized this was like God's mark of approval upon the temple.

This was if God was saying, I am pleased with this. Do you remember much later in Israel's history, when Elijah had this great confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, and he waited for the fire to come from heaven to consume the sacrifice? Well, you could say that this was the fire from heaven. Except it wasn't fire.

It was a cloud. But it was some unique aspect of the presence of God that made them say, God is particularly pleased with what we have here. And so now, beginning in verse 14, Solomon is going to make a speech.

You know, he's the king. You might say he's a politician. He can't get away from making a speech at a great event like this.

But it's a good speech. He says here in verse 14, Then the king turned around and blessed the whole assembly of Israel while all the assembly of Israel was standing. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel who spoke with his mouth to my father David.

And with his hand he has fulfilled it, Since the day that I brought my people out of Egypt, I have chosen no city from any tribe of Israel in which to build a house that my name might be there. But I chose David to be

over my people Israel. Now it was in the heart of my father David to build a temple for the name of the Lord God of Israel.

But the Lord said to my father David, Whereas it was in your heart to build a temple for my name, you did well that it was in your heart. Nevertheless, you shall not build the temple, but your son who will come from your body, he shall build the temple for my name. So the Lord has fulfilled his word which he spoke, and I have filled the position of my father David and sit on the throne of Israel as the Lord promised.

And I have built the temple for the name of the Lord God of Israel, and there I have made a place for the ark in which is the covenant of the Lord which he made with our fathers when he brought him out of the land of Egypt. I think it's wonderful this speech that Solomon makes, especially because it recognizes and gives honor to his father. We have to remind ourselves, even though Solomon built the temple, the temple did not begin with Solomon.

The temple began in the heart, in the mind, and you might say in the bank account of King David because he paid for so much of it even ahead of Solomon. Not that Solomon needed the help. Solomon was fabulously wealthy, but David set aside so much of the financial support for the temple because he knew that Solomon would build it.

And again, I want you to notice something that repeatedly in this passage, it's my people Israel out of Egypt, out of Egypt, out of Egypt. Several times in this passage, the idea of the deliverance from Egypt is stressed. And again, I think it's for two reasons.

I think very much so. They're saying 500 years after the Exodus, now we are completely in the land because now God no longer dwells in a tent. He has a house.

But there's another aspect to it as well. Please remember something. The Bible has within it two great acts of redemption.

In the Old Testament, the great act of redemption is Israel's deliverance from Egypt. So over and over again, God says to his people, I'm the God who brought you out of Egypt. Remember how I brought you out of Egypt.

Now, what's the central act of redemption in the New Testament? Or you really could say in the entire Bible because this is a greater act of redemption than the Exodus. It's what Jesus did on the cross. Just as much as the New Testament is always pointing to the cross, the Old Testament pointed to the deliverance that God made for Israel from Egypt because that was the central act of redemption.

What I'm trying to say is he didn't want to get far from the cross, so to speak, to use an expression. He's reminding them of the redemption that God made in their life over and over again. And so now in verse 22, Solomon is going to begin one of the great prayers in the Bible.

By the way, this may be, I can't say I remember for certain, this may be the longest prayer recorded in the Bible. You know, most of the prayers in the Bible are very, very short. But this is one of the longer prayers.

And even this prayer, even though it's long, if you were to just read it out loud, it would only take you, you know, four or five minutes to read. Which kind of tells you something maybe about our prayer life sometimes, right? You know, sometimes we bring too many words into prayer or we think that God hears us just for our many words in prayer. And, you know, listen, it's great to have the spirit of prayer and to be

exercised to prayer and to want to pray.

But, you know, sometimes I envision God in heaven looking down upon us when we pray and saying, would you please get to the point? Do you really have anything to say? You know, sometimes in our prayers we're preaching sermons to God. You know, I've already heard this sermon before, God says. And, you know, I mean, listen, it's good to pray, but you can't measure the quality or the effectiveness of a prayer by its length.

And so even though this is one of the longer prayers of the Bible, it's still not a terribly long prayer if you were to just read it. It reminds me of an old story they tell about D.L. Moody. One time he was having one of his great, you know, evangelistic campaigns and he liked to involve the local pastors and ministers.

And so he invited this one pastor up and this pastor's job was going to be to pray at that meeting. And wouldn't you know, this pastor, you started him praying and he was going on and on and on in prayer. And Moody's just going, oh my, you know, it's like the thing they say.

The first three minutes you pray, we pray with you. The second three minutes you pray, we pray for you. And the third three minutes you pray, we pray against you.

Well, this guy had gone long into the against you part and Moody's just wondering how's he going to do. So you know what D.L. Moody did? Was he got up, he put his arm around the brother and he said, while our brother is finishing his prayer, let's sing him number 149. And they continued on with the meeting.

Anyway, Solomon's prayer wasn't that long. Verse 22. Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel.

Now notice. He didn't dedicate the temple with this prayer from within the temple. Right.

He was before the altar that was outside of the temple. Solomon couldn't go in the temple. Can you imagine that? Here's a temple, Solomon.

You built it. You planned it. You paid for it.

You managed the project. You can't go in it because you're not a priest. And so he did it from outside the temple in front of the altar.

And then it says he spread out his hands towards heaven. Now, again, remember, this was the ancient Hebrew posture of prayer. Today, if there's any traditional posture of prayer, you know, it's to fold your hands, perhaps, and to close your eyes and maybe just slightly bow your head.

You know, that's a common modern posture of prayer. And there's nothing wrong with that. I mean, it's just a cultural expression of prayer.

In the Old Testament, the posture of prayer was to stand, was to lift your eyes up to heaven and to raise your hands. Again, I'm not trying to say that that's how we should pray, because I think these things are cultural. The Bible doesn't command that we pray in such a way.

But this was the ancient Hebrew cultural expression of prayer. And, you know, we have other ones. It is a beautiful idea, though.

When you spread out your hands towards heaven, when you look up to heaven, the idea is, first of all, well, you could say it suggests everything. It suggests surrender, right? I surrender. God, you know, I give up.

But it also suggests openness and readiness to receive, as if you're reaching out to heaven. And there's something beautiful about that, to reach out to heaven, to have that anticipation. And so he begins the prayer and he says, Lord God of Israel, there is no God in heaven above or on earth below like you.

The first thing he does is he recognizes that God is completely unique. All those pretended gods of the nations, they can't compare to the Lord God in any way. Now, in verse 24, he continues on in his prayer.

He says, you have kept what you promised your servant, David, my father. You have both spoken it with your mouth and fulfilled it with your hand, as it is this day. Therefore, Lord God of Israel, now keep what you promised your servant, David, my father, saying, you shall not fail to have a man sit before me on the throne of Israel, only if your sons take heed to their way, that they walk before me as you have walked before me.

And now I pray, O God of Israel, let your word come true, which you have spoken to your servant, David, my father. I think it's wonderful. First in verse 24, you see that Solomon first thanked God and praised him for the past fulfillment of his promises.

Isn't that appropriate? Anytime we want to come before God, it's right to say, Lord, first of all, I want to thank you for how faithful you have been towards me. Before I ask you to do anything else, God, I just want to say thank you for all the ways you've been good to me before. But I want you to see what he says now.

He says, and now I pray, O God of Israel, let your word come true, which you have spoken to your servant, David, my father. He says it again here in verse, where is it? 24 or 25, verse 25. He says now, therefore, Lord God of Israel, now keep what you promised.

I want you to notice that I think that that phrase right there is actually very key for understanding what effective prayer is all about. Solomon says, OK, God, you made a promise. Now I come before you in prayer and say, God, I call upon you to keep your promise.

You made the promise. Now keep it. This is the great secret, I believe, to power in prayer, to take God's promises to heart in faith and then boldly but reverently, not arrogantly, but boldly to call upon God to fulfill those promises.

I know that as a parent, I sometimes get annoyed with my children if they come to me and say, Daddy, you promised to do it. Daddy, you promised. I'm like, I know I promised, but it's a little hard right now.

I might get annoyed with it. God loves it. God loves it when we bring a promise that he has made to us and we come before him.

It's like taking something to the bank. You know, I write out a check to somebody and say, you know, to the bank, I'm saying to the bank, you know, give a hundred euros to this person and that person. That check is a promise, isn't it? And they go to the bank and they say, I want this promise to be made good.

And that's what you're doing when you come to God in this way. God wants to see us take his promise to lay hold of his promises. I want you to remember something.

Just because God promises something, it does not mean that we possess it. Our job is to take hold of the promise in faith. And it's through believing prayer like this that God promises and we take hold of it.

And if we don't appropriate it in faith, God's promise is left unclaimed. He says, yes, I promise it. But I want you to come and take the promise that I have made to you.

Now, verse 27. But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain you, how much less this temple which I have built. Yet regard the prayer of your servant in his supplication, O Lord my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which your servant is praying before you today, that your eyes may be open toward this temple night and day, toward the place of which you said, my name shall be there.

And you may hear the prayer which your servant makes toward this place. And you may hear the supplication of your servant, of your people Israel, when they pray towards this place. Here in heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.

I'm glad Solomon said what he said in verse 27. Now, he said, listen God, you can't dwell in any building. No building can contain you, much less the building that I have built right here.

You see, it's possible that Solomon might have started getting superstitious and believing that God actually lived in his temple. You know, like God didn't live in heaven anymore, now he lived in the temple. But no, no, no, here he's making it clear.

No, God, this temple cannot contain you. You're greater than this temple. You've given this temple a special figure of your presence in the cloud of glory, but you're too big to be restricted to this temple.

And he says, listen God, when your people pray towards this temple, I pray that you will hear these prayers. Now, this is the reason why many observant Jews today pray facing the temple in Jerusalem. It's really interesting on an aeroplane sometimes.

I've noticed this. Flying on an aeroplane and there'll be some Orthodox Jews on board. They have to take a few minutes out to figure the direction of the plane and sort of position on this.

And then when they go to have their prayers, they go and they face the direction that Jerusalem would be at. Because they believe that there's a special promise to them in the answering of this prayer. And so he says, Lord, when you hear our prayers, forgive us.

Hear our prayer. Really, that's going to be the theme of the next several sections. He says in verse 31, when anyone sins against his neighbor and is forced to take an oath and comes and takes an oath before your altar in this temple, then hear in heaven and act and judge your servants, condemning the wicked, bringing his way on his head and justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness.

They use the temple as a place to solve disputes. But when a dispute came down to one person's word against another person's word, they said, listen, when somebody comes to the temple and swears by the temple, then, Lord, I pray that you would enforce that oath that they make. And so he says, hear in heaven and act and judge your servants.

Solomon knew that God could see what man cannot see. And so if I make an oath, but I'm really lying, maybe you can't see it, but God can. He says, oh God, judge properly in those situations.

You know, when I'm teaching through a book like this, I'll read several different commentators. And one of the commentators I've come to really appreciate is an old Puritan guy named John Trapp. And he wrote in the 1500s, this old Puritan guy.

And he can't resist giving illustrations of modern day, modern for him, things that were fulfillment of this. And so he says, listen, I know this principle to be true. And he mentions a woman named Anne Averys, who she swore an oath in the year 1575 on February 11th at a shop on Wood Street in London.

And this was her oath. She says, Lord, kill me right now if I didn't pay for these things that I took from the store. And immediately she fell down speechless.

And then he says, this is John Trapp. And with horrible stink, she died. I don't know exactly what she died of, but he says, listen, this is being fulfilled today.

But this was Solomon's heart that God would judge in these cases of oaths. Verse 33, when your people, Israel, are defeated before an enemy because they've sinned against you. And when they turn back to you and confess your name and pray and make supplication to you in this temple, then here in heaven and forgive the sin of your people, Israel, and bring them back to the land which you gave to their fathers.

You know, many times in the history of Israel, they suffered defeat. And the only thing they could do was cry out to God. And it was even worse when they were defeated because they sinned against the Lord.

And he says, listen, hear their prayers. But did you notice this? He says it's really beautiful there in verse 33. He says, and when they turn back to you and confess your name and pray and make supplication in this temple, then here.

Solomon says, don't listen to them, God, when they don't turn back to you. Don't listen to them when they haven't humbled themselves before you. But when they have humbled themselves and they do turn back, then hear from heaven and restore them.

Verse 35. Again, another part of the section where he's asking God to hear their prayers. He says, when the heavens are shut up and there's no rain because they've sinned against you, when they pray towards this place and confess your name and turn from their sin because you afflict them, then here in heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people, Israel, that you may teach them the good way in which they should walk and send rain on your land, which you've given to your people as an inheritance.

When there's famine in the land or pestilence or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, when their enemy besieges them in their land of their cities, whatever plague or whatever sickness there is, whatever prayer, whatever supplication is made by anyone or by all your people, Israel, when each one knows the plague of his own heart and spreads out his hands towards this temple, then here in heaven, your dwelling place, and forgive and act and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart you know, for you alone know the hearts of the sons of men, that they may fear you all the days that they live in which the land that you gave to our fathers. So he says, oh Lord, when there's no rain. You know, this was a constant threat for the people of Israel, wasn't it? Their economy was mainly based on agriculture.

They had to grow crops and they didn't have any artificial irrigation. They didn't have the Nile that flooded every year and watered the crops. If it did not rain from heaven, then they starved.

And so he says, when there's no rain, hear the prayer of your people. When they confess, when they ask for forgiveness, then heal them and bring restoration. I'm very interested in the phrase that he uses here where he talks about the plague of his own heart.

Did you notice it there? It's in verse 38. He says, by all your people Israel, when each one knows the plague of his own heart. Isn't that an interesting phrase? How your own heart can have a plague.

You know, there's a such thing as a plague that comes upon the land. Plagues that comes upon many people. We think of the black death that struck down so many.

But here, other plagues come right from our own heart. It's like there's a sickness, a disease there in our heart. And many people are cursed by a plague that no one else can see.

But it lives there in our own heart. And God, Solomon, I should say, appeals to God. And he says, when you hear this man who has this plague in his own heart, then hear him and forgive him.

You know what else I think is wonderful about this? It shows us that a man did not have to be sinless. He did not have to be righteous to have his prayer answered at the temple. He just had to be honest.

He didn't have to come and say, God, I have no plague in my heart. Look how pure... No, he said, God, there's a plague in my heart. I'm sinful.

I'm wretched. Won't you please forgive me? If he came humbly and with repentance, God would hear even the sinner. But it wasn't just the sinner.

It was also the foreigner. Look at it there in verse 41. He says, Moreover, concerning a foreigner who is not of your people Israel, but has come from a far country for your namesake, for they will hear of your great name and of your strong hand and your outstretched arm when he comes and prays towards this temple here in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all which the foreigner calls to you, that all peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this temple which I have built is called by your name.

Again, the temple was built in Israel, but it was always intended to be a house of prayer for all nations. God intentionally made a section of the temple grounds a place where the Gentiles could come and pray. You know, it was the violation of that principle that made Jesus angry.

Jesus came to the temple one day and he saw that the outer courts, what we would call the courts of the Gentiles, the place where the Gentiles could come. All of a sudden, it wasn't a quiet place where a Gentile could come and pray. It was like a flomacht, it was like a bazaar, a place where people go out and trade and sell.

It was shouting and yelling and buying and selling, and Jesus drove out all the merchants and the money changers, not because it was wrong for them to do business there necessarily. What was really wrong was it spoiled the atmosphere of prayer for Gentiles who wanted to come and pray. You can think of a poor Gentile who comes to the courts and says, I just want to pray.

And all I hear is this shouting and this yelling all around. And he says, listen, when that foreigner comes, hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you. Solomon asked God to hear the prayer of the foreigner out of a missionary impulse.

He knew that when God answered the prayer of foreigners, it drew those from the other nations to the God of all nations. I do think it's significant. Sometimes we wonder if God answers the prayers of unbelievers.

I heard of an evangelistic technique once. It challenged people to take what it called a 30-day prayer experiment. To take somebody who wasn't a believer and say, listen, I want you to follow this experiment.

I want you to pray for 30 days and see what happens. And they told them to pray specifically. For example, pray for somebody that you don't like.

See what happens in that relationship. Pray for something you really need. See what happens.

And they gave them several things to pray for and say, you pray this way for 30 days and see what God does. And it would be amazing for that person to see. And it brought many, many people to Christ for them to see this.

You see, sometimes prayer is the way that people come to Jesus. Not just something for those who already have come to Jesus. Now, is God obligated to answer the prayer of an unbeliever? No, not at all.

But if he does, he does it just out of his grace and mercy. Now here starting at verse 44. He says, When your people go out to battle against their enemy, wherever you send them, and when they pray to the Lord towards the city which you've chosen, and the temple which I've built for your name, then hear in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause.

When they sin against you, for there is no one who does not sin, and you become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to the land of their enemy, far or near. Yet when they come to themselves in the land where they were carried captive and repent, and make supplication to you, in the land of those who took them captive, saying, we have sinned and done wrong, we've committed wickedness. And when they return to you with all their heart and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, who led them away captive, and prayed to you toward their land, which you gave to their fathers, to the city which you have chosen, and the temple which I've built for your name, then hear in heaven your dwelling place, their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause, and forgive your people who have sinned against you, and all their transgressions which they've transgressed against you, and grant them compassion before those who took them captive, that they may have compassion on them.

For they are your people and your inheritance, whom you brought out of Egypt, out of the iron furnace, that your eyes may be open to the supplication of your servant, and the supplication of your people Israel, to listen to them whenever they call to you. For you separated them from among all the peoples of the earth to be your inheritance, as you spoke by your servant Moses, when you brought our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord God." Now again, he also prayed with the idea that God would answer their prayers for victory made in foreign lands. They say, listen God, answer the prayer that we make in those situations.

Although I do think it's very interesting what he says there here. If you notice it in verse 44, he says, when your people go out to battle against their enemy, wherever you send them. It wasn't as Solomon was saying, O Lord bless the kingdom of Israel in whatever war they fight.

No, that wasn't it. It was wherever you send them. If they were doing what God wanted them to do, then Lord bless them.

If not, then Lord correct them. And so he says, when they sin against you, then please forgive them and listen to their hairs when they come to captivity in a foreign land. This is a really wonderful principle here.

Another theme through this prayer is that God is bigger than the temple. And so Solomon doesn't think that somebody has to be at the temple in order to be heard by the God of the temple. You can be in a foreign land, but if you direct your heart towards this God who dwells in this temple, then God will hear your prayer.

And so now Solomon has finished the part of the prayer where he's asking God to do things. Now, starting at verse 54, he's going to begin to bless the people. Look at it here.

It says, and so it was when Solomon had finished praying all this prayer and supplication to the Lord that he arose from before the altar of the Lord from kneeling on his knees and with his hands spread up to heaven. Stop right there. What does that say? Interesting about his posture.

He was on his knees. Now, when he started the prayer, he was standing at some time through the prayer. Solomon dropped to his knees before God in the midst of the prayer.

He stood when he standed. He was stood when he then whatever, you know what I mean, stood when he started. And then afterwards, sometime during the prayer, he went down to his knees.

He did it in reverence to God. I've got a challenge for you. Really, it's a challenge for me, too.

Do you ever pray on your knees? Ezra prayed on his knees. The psalmist told us to pray on our knees. Daniel prayed on his knees.

Jesus prayed on his knees. Stephen prayed on his knees. Peter prayed on his knees.

Paul prayed on his knees. And other early Christians prayed on his knees. You know, the Bible has enough prayer in the Bible that's not on the knees to show us that it's not a command.

It's not a secret or anything like that. But it also has enough prayer on the knees to show us that it's a good thing. Isn't it just a humbling thing to come before God and to kneel? I read this and I thought, when's the last time I just got down on my knees and prayed? I find, strangely, and I don't know if this is your experience, it's more common for me to go to my knees during a time of worship.

I may do that. But I'm thinking, it's been quite a while since I just got down on my knees in a time of prayer. I think I should.

Not as a law, not as a command, and not as something necessarily to do every time, but as something good as a reminder to say, this is my God, my Maker. I kneel before Him. So he says, listen God, you have fulfilled all your promises in the past.

And then he says, may the Lord our God be with us as it was with our fathers. Well, let's read this section here. Again, it starts after verse 54 where he was on his knees.

And then it says, verse 55, Then he stood and blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice saying, Blessed be the Lord who has given rest to His people Israel according to all that He promised. There is not failed one word of all His good promise which He promised through His servant Moses. May the Lord God be with us as He was with our fathers.

May He not leave us or forsake us. That He may incline our hearts to Himself to walk in all His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments which He commanded our fathers. And may these words of mine with which I have made supplication before the Lord be near the Lord our God day and night.

That He may maintain the cause of His servant and the cause of His people Israel as each day may require. That all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God. There is no other.

Let your heart therefore be loyal to the Lord our God to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments as at this day. It's a wonderful blessing that Solomon gave to the people. You know, first he reminded them of the great faithfulness of God.

Listen, God has blessed us. He's shown His presence here. He's been faithful to us as He's been faithful to our fathers.

But you have to love what He says in verse 60. That all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God. Do you understand that God gave a missionary purpose to Israel? You can say biblically that the Jewish people in Israel that they were a chosen people.

But God didn't choose them in this sense. He didn't say, I choose you Israel and I reject everybody else. It was, I choose you Israel to be the nation through whom I will reach the whole world.

You don't see very much of that missionary impulse in ancient Israel, do you? But it was reconfirmed with the church. Actually, it's wonderful to see how actually the church has taken the missionary impulse more seriously than ancient Israel did. Here is a statement of this often neglected principle that Solomon understood that this temple was here that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God.

Not just for Israel's blessing. God didn't want to bless Israel to just bless Israel. He wanted to bless the world through Israel.

That was His plan. And so, the prayer was over. Verse 62.

Then the king and all Israel with him offered sacrifices before the Lord. And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings which he offered to the Lord. 22,000 bulls and 120,000 sheep.

So, the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house to the Lord. On the same day, the king consecrated the middle of the court that was in the front of the house of the Lord. For there he offered burnt offerings, grain offerings and the fat of the peace offerings.

Because the bronze altar that was before the Lord was too small to receive the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the fat of the peace offerings. At that time, Solomon held a feast. And all Israel with him, a great assembly from the entrance of Hamath to the brook of Egypt before the Lord our God for seven days and seven more days.

Fourteen days. On the eighth day, he sent the people away and they blessed the king and went to their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the good that the Lord had done for his servant David and for Israel, his people. Of course, the first thing that we notice is the staggering amount of sacrifice.

22,000 bulls and 120,000 sheep. Well, they didn't just burn up all of those animals. They sacrificed them mostly in the terms of a fellowship offering.

Which would mean that they would kill the animal. They would take the parts that were unpresentable, you know, the hooves and the head and the things that couldn't be eaten and such. And they would burn those in another place.

And then they would take the best of the animal. The fat on the inside and the parts that were thought to be delicacies. And they would burn those on the altar before the Lord and the remaining portions of meat were given to the people.

This was a huge grill party. That's what it was. It was a huge barbecue that lasted for two weeks.

And they fed all the people. 22,000 bulls and 120,000 sheep. That's a lot of meat.

It was so much that they had to specially consecrate an area in front of the temple to receive the sacrifices. And so they had a feast all throughout the time. It was so good that they extended it another seven days.

And it was so great that everybody was happy and everybody was pleased with the whole thing. And they gave credit to David because it was his heart and his vision that started the whole work of the temple. Now, I want you to think of this time.

Apparently it wasn't done on one day but over a period of two weeks. But in this period of time, 22,000 bulls and 120,000 sheep sacrificed. That's a lot of work, right? What did they do the next day when the sun came up in Israel? Do you realize that as part of the commanded rituals for Israel, that every morning and every evening they had a sacrifice of an animal to atone for the sin of the nation.

Every morning, every evening. Now, after 22,000 bulls and 120,000 sheep, don't you think you could take a day or two off? They didn't. The next morning, the morning after, they resumed the morning sacrifice.

Why? Why would such an amazing number of sacrifices not last you for a few weeks or a few months, right? Because there's a very important biblical principle that an imperfect sacrifice and non-perfect sacrifice, it can never atone for sin. Therefore, if a sacrifice is not perfect, it must be repeated. A perfect sacrifice needs to be made only once.

Do you see what God was shouting to Israel through this? 22,000 bulls, 120,000 sheep, it's not enough. You haven't atoned for your sin. An imperfect sacrifice has to be continually repeated.

But a perfect sacrifice needs to be made only once, once for all. Isn't it wonderful to live under the new covenant? Isn't it wonderful to look back at what Jesus did on the cross and to say, that does it. Once for all.

There doesn't need to be any more sacrifice for sin. None. I don't have to sacrifice for my own atonement.

You know, sometimes we do that, don't we? We try to punish ourselves to atone for our sins. It doesn't work. If you think you can atone for your own sin, then walk up to Jesus, there He is hanging on the cross, and say to Jesus hanging on the cross, nice try, but it wasn't enough.

Because that's what you're saying to Jesus. When you feel that you need to add to His atonement, that you need to do something extra, then you're telling Him on the cross, it's not enough. And by the way, it also brings us back to the idea why there's only one way to come to God, and that's through Jesus on the cross.

This is a very unpopular thing for us to say in our world today. That there's only one way to come to God, and that's through the work of Jesus on the cross. And that if a person consciously rejects that work of Jesus on the cross, then there's no hope for them.

It's a very strong, it's a very unpopular thing to say. But do you realize what we say to Jesus when we say that there's other ways to Jesus? If you were to say Buddhism, or Islam, or something like that, then you go up to Jesus hanging on the cross, and you say to Him, Hey, uh, you know, thanks, Jesus. You didn't really have to, though.

It wasn't really necessary, because it's just as good if I come through Buddhism. It's just as good if I come through Islam. Thanks, I appreciate it, but you didn't have to.

I don't think we can look at Jesus on the cross and say that. No. No, we have the perfect atonement, a perfect new covenant, and now we just need to see its work done in our imperfect lives.

Well, God is not done with Solomon, of course. We come back to him the next time we get together in chapters 9 and 10, but this is a life that God is really dealing with. We're still at the high point.

He hasn't begun the decline yet, but even next week, we see more and more indications of this. Let's pray. Thank you, Lord, for our time together here tonight, this time that we can spend in your word.

We think, Lord, of how wonderful this event must have been, this great day, this opening ceremony for the temple. But, Lord, at the same time, we thank you for your even greater work by the Spirit of God in building us up as your temple, both as individuals and collectively together. We're so happy for that work, Lord.

We thank you and we praise you for it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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