

## THE TEMPLE OF THE LORD

1 Kings 8:1–13, 62–66

We saw last week that Solomon was an inconsistent character, wise and yet foolish, loving and worshipping God and yet loving foreign wives and making provision for pagan worship, spending seven years building God's temple but nearly twice as long building his own palace.

However, for the historian of the book of Kings the main focus of interest was not Solomon but the LORD. He was more interested in the LORD's temple than Solomon's palace, and in chapter 8 of this record the building is complete and the temple is consecrated.

It's a long chapter but we can summarise the main points. We need to start at the end of the previous chapter.

**1. Solomon finished the temple.** 7:51 'All the work King Solomon had done for the temple of the LORD was finished.'

**2. Solomon furnished the temple.** 7:51 'He brought in the things his father David had dedicated —the silver and gold and the furnishings —and he placed them in the treasuries of the LORD's temple.' There have already been detailed and lavish descriptions of the temple furnishings. Even the door sockets were of pure gold. But in chapter 8 only two pieces of furniture are featured, the ark of the covenant and the bronze altar.

Verse 6 says, 'The priests brought the ark of the LORD's covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place.' The ark was a wooden box overlaid with pure gold. At each end of its cover were cherubim, winged angelic figures made of gold, overarching the ark with their wings. Inside the ark were the tablets of stone on which God had written the ten commandments. It was called the ark of the covenant because the commandments were the basis of God's covenant with his people.

At the heart of true worship – true holiness – was a requirement to live life God's way. Worship is not an isolated event that you get done so that you can live the rest of your life any old way. It's a focus that directs the rest of your life in very practical ways. It has always been a temptation to forget that, to think, 'I've given God his hour on Sunday; now the rest of the week is mine.' That's not worshipping God. That's insulting him.

Verse 9 says, 'There was nothing in the ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt.' The ark was a symbol of God's presence with his people but it was only a symbol. God was not in that box like some kind of genie in a lamp.

The other piece of furniture that features at this high point in the story is the bronze altar. Verses 63, 64: 'Solomon offered a sacrifice of fellowship offerings to the LORD: twenty-two thousand cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats. So the king and all the Israelites dedicated the temple of the LORD. On that same day the king consecrated the middle part of the courtyard in front of the temple of the LORD, and there he offered burnt offerings, grain offerings and the fat of the fellowship offerings, because the bronze altar before the LORD was too small to hold the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the fat of the fellowship offerings.'

Before the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place he had to offer sacrifice on the altar. We've seen that true worship of God involves a commitment to live the whole of life on his terms. It also involves a recognition that we have failed to do so and we need forgiveness for our sins. The altar of sacrifice reinforces a vital principle: that

we cannot approach God unless our sins have been forgiven and the only way they can be forgiven is through sacrifice, through the shedding of innocent blood.

**3. Solomon offered sacrifices before the temple.** Verse 5 says, 'King Solomon and the entire assembly of Israel that had gathered about him were before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and cattle that they could not be recorded or counted.'

**4. Solomon blessed the people at the temple.** Verse 14: 'While the whole assembly of Israel was standing there, the king turned around and blessed them.'

**5. Solomon addressed the people.** The main feature of Solomon's message was that God keeps his promises. Verse 15: 'Then he said: Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who with his own hand has fulfilled what he promised with his own mouth to my father David.' Verse 20: 'The LORD has kept the promise he made.'

God is a faithful God. God is true to his word. When he makes a promise he keeps it. This is something we can depend on. It's so contrary to the spirit of the age we live in, where there's almost an inevitability that promises will be broken. Some of these covenant promises are high profile. They fill the pages of gossip magazines: Paul McCartney, Britney Spears, Chris Tarrant. It's almost taken for granted that promises are made to be broken but that's not what God is like and that's not what God wants.

**6. Solomon prayed to the LORD at the temple.** Verses 22, 23: 'Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven and said: O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below —you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way.'

At this point Solomon's wisdom shines through. He had the sense to recognise the greatness of God and his need of God, verses 27 to 29. First, the greatness of God: 'But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!'

Then his need of God: 'Yet give attention to your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy, O LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day. May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, "My Name shall be there," so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place.'

**7. Solomon made intercession for the people at the temple.** Between verses 31 and 51 there are seven petitions. They envisage a variety of circumstances including crime, drought, famine, plague, blight, foreigners, warfare, defeat and captivity. The overriding atmosphere of these petitions is one of failure. It's summed up in Solomon's words to God in verse 46: 'When they sin against you —for there is no one who does not sin —and you become angry with them...' *When they sin against you — not if. There is no one who does not sin. That's the sad reality that has to be faced.*

Alongside this dismal prospect of future failure Solomon's prayer has a recurring refrain. We hear it first in verse 30: 'Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.' It's there again in verses 34, 36, 39, and 50: forgive, forgive, forgive, forgive.

Having prayed for the people Solomon blessed them again. Then he offered more sacrifices and all Israel observed the feast of Passover, remembering God's blessings in the past and rededicating themselves for the future.

All this took place nearly 3000 years ago and thousands of miles away. What relevance does it have for us today?

In John chapter 2: verses 19 and 21 Jesus said, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.' And John comments: 'The temple he had spoken of was his body.' So in the glory of the temple we can see glimpses of the glory of Jesus.

Firstly, it was an earthly structure. It brought the reality of God's presence right here, right down to earth. In a similar way Jesus took on himself a human body and lived on earth, revealing God's glory.

The account of the temple emphasises its holiness. Only the priests could carry the ark of the covenant. Only the best materials were used for the utensils and furnishings of the temple. We read in 1 Kings 8 verses 10 and 11, 'When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple.'

At the transfiguration of Jesus his face shone like the sun, his clothes became as white as the light and he was hidden from view by a cloud. John's Gospel chapter 1 verse 14 says, 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.'

At the heart of the temple structure was the Most Holy Place and within it the Ark of the Covenant and within that God's word to his people. God spoke through the prophets in the past at many times and in various ways, but in Jesus he spoke to us by his Son. Jesus is the Word of God. He brings us God's message.

At the heart of the temple are God's holiness and God's commandments but they only show up our sinfulness and failure to keep God's commandments. So God provided a way of atonement, an altar of sacrifice, a means of forgiveness through the shedding of blood. That points to the precious blood of Christ our Saviour who died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins.

The writer to the Hebrews puts it like this: 'Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God' (Hebrews 10:11, 12). He goes on to say (verse 19), 'We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus.'

The building of the temple confirmed God's promises to David and to Solomon. In the same way the coming of Jesus confirms God's promises through the ages, from the Garden of Eden through all the Old Testament prophets. In 2 Corinthians 1:20 Paul writes, 'No matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him we say "Amen" to the glory of God.'

Solomon assembled the people at the temple and blessed the people. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, says, 'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.'

Right at the start the temple was associated with prayer and intercession and through Christ, in his name, we make our petitions to God. This is what Jesus said in John 15 verse 7: 'If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.'

Solomon interceded for the people and one greater than Solomon has come. John tells us in his first letter, 'My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One' (chapter 2 verse 1). Romans 8:34 'Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.'