

Solomon Dedicates the Temple

Devotional Reading: Psalm 34:11-22

Background Scripture: 1 Kings 8:22-53

Today's Scripture: 1 Kings 8:22-24, 37-39, 46, 48-50a

I. Impassioned Prayer

1 Kings 8:22-24

22 And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven:

23 And he said, LORD God of Israel, There is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keep-est covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart:

24 Who hast kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him: thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day.

22. The standing posture of prayer Solomon adopts is the most commonly seen in ancient Near Eastern art. Other postures, especially kneeling or prostration, were legitimate, of course. And by the time Solomon concludes the prayer, he will have switched from standing to kneeling; the changeover is explained more fully in 2 Chronicles 6:12-13.

In both postures, the fact that Solomon extended *his hands toward heaven* adds an aura of solemnity and earnestness. It reflects the idea of God as being far “above” creation, not just spatially but also figuratively. Humans look “up” to

God, seeking help during their hour of need.

Solomon voiced his prayer not just for his own benefit but on behalf *of all the congregation of Israel*. These were especially those Israelites who were in attendance personally for the temple dedication. Their presence is important partly because they must overhear the exhortations to avoid sin and partly because God wishes to emphasize the relationship with the people of Israel. They were united with each other and God by their history, present life, and hope for a blessed future. In a sense, they are being dedicated as much as the temple when we note the blessing mentioned in 1 Kings 8:14.

23. The following two verses are worded almost identically with 2 Chronicles 6:14-15. The confession emphasizes the uniqueness of God, an idea that appears in many biblical texts (examples: Psalms 115:3-8; 135:15-18). *The Lord God of Israel* brooks no rivals.

One area of His uniqueness appears in keeping a *covenant* in His merciful love. This language comes from Deuteronomy 7:9, 12, and it reflects the direction of that book. While Israelites were responsible for obeying God’s commandments, their relationship with God rested primarily upon His covenant promise. It was not earned by human merit.

Even so, the verse at hand emphasizes the attitude of the people. As indicated by “the Shema” (which means “hear”) in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, the people should hear and receive the Law of Moses with enthusiasm, commitment, and even rejoicing, as emphasized throughout Deuteronomy. Mindless, routine obedience cannot be the goal of the relationship because it is not sustainable.

24. The promise to *David* that his offspring would build the temple, now fulfilled, is evidence of God’s faithfulness. The eventual destruction of kingship and even that of the temple did not cancel God’s plan for Israel; rather, God used those events to symbolize His presence as they pointed to greater, eternal realities regarding spiritual and heavenly kingship and temple. God may carry out His promises in various ways, but the promises always remain just that.

II. Oppressive Circumstances

1 Kings 8:37-39

37 If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, or if there be caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness there be;

38 What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house:

39 Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men);

37. The Old Testament often summarizes the calamities that may befall God’s

people in terms of “sword,” “famine,” and “pestilence” (examples: 1 Chronicles 21:11-12; Jeremiah 14:12). These three general categories speak to oppression and/or fatalities caused by human adversaries, meager harvests, and disease, respectively. *Blasting* (blight), *mildew*, *locust*, and *caterpillar* result in famine as crops are destroyed.

38a. Solomon asks God to reply to any prayer offered by those either in the temple or mindful of it. You may notice that the word *or* is italicized in your edition of the *King James Version*. That’s how the *KJV* indicates that there is no word in the text of the Hebrew language being translated. Thus the word *or* is the translators’ best judgment for smooth reading.

On the other hand, the ancient Greek translation (the Septuagint) omits the phrase *by all the people Israel*. The prayer does envision Gentiles praying, beginning in 1 Kings 8:41. But here the focus remains on Israelites as those especially subject to the curses following a violation of the covenant.

38b. The phrase *the plague of his own heart* speaks to pangs of conscience. Each person knows his or her own troubles and can express them in prayer as *hands* are lifted *toward this house*. This may work on two levels: (1) the suffering of the people as a whole may be expressed in different ways by different individuals, and (2) each person should be aware of his or her details and ably communicate about them to God. In other words, prayer can take many forms. On the one hand, it depends partly on forms shared by the community as a whole over time. On the other hand, it depends partly on individual experience and perception.

39. Humans do well to know their own hearts and minds as God knows them. That’s an ideal to strive for, although it is impossible to attain since God knows

us better than we know ourselves. Indeed, we humans have a tendency toward self-deception. If God responds to prayer based on an assessment of need (and He does; see Matthew 6:8, 32), how much more are His responses in reaction to the direction of one's heart!

III. Inevitable Sin

1 Kings 8:46, 48-50a

46 If they sin against thee, (for there is no man that sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near;

48 And so return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name:

49 Then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling place, and maintain their cause,

50a And forgive thy people that have sinned against thee.

46. The prayer takes an important turn, assuming that the people may sin so grievously that the covenant might fail as the Israelites are removed from their promised land. This event did occur. However, the prediction goes beyond the curses for disobedience in Deuteronomy 28:15-68 to promises of prosperity in Deuteronomy 30:1-10. These envision the loss of the land as a punishment, and the return to it as an effect of God's mercy, respectively. The relationship between Israel and God was not based on human achievement but on God's love and kindness.

So the prayer ends with a request that

God will renew the people even after their communal sins have resulted in the curses of Deuteronomy 28:15-68. Even the collapse of their culture ought not to be the last word. God remains just and punishes sin, but He also shows mercy.

48. This part of Solomon's prayer assumes that suffering will cause people to reflect on their lives and amend them. It also assumes that God will hear their prayers of repentance when uttered in a land of exile. This means, in turn, that God's presence is universal and that He is interested in the prayers of people seeking change and redemption.

The verse also reveals the idea of praying toward the temple in Jerusalem. It may be the earliest evidence for that practice. Much later, Daniel prayed, facing Jerusalem while in Babylon (Daniel 6:10). This practice shows how posture indicates the direction of the heart. A good (and bad) example of this is Ezekiel 8:16, which describes "about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east."

49. It's one thing to *hear*, but another thing to *heed*. We see both elements in this prayer, with the request to *maintain their cause* as the heeding part. The "cause" has been given to the Israelites by God; it is the very reason for the existence of their nation. Thus, the prayer ultimately is that God's will be done as the nation of Israel fulfills its divine purpose. And God is certainly interested in having His will done!

50a. God takes no pleasure in our suffering, even when we have earned it. Spiritual reform sometimes results in suffering, since we need to eliminate certain attitudes and behaviors. But even the suffering draws the compassion of God and of righteous people. We hasten to add that neither this verse nor any other Bible text implies that all suffering is deserved.

Involvement Learning

Solomon Dedicates the Temple

Into the Lesson

Name things (not people) that are important to you. The responses can include physical items, good causes, intangible things that affect you, etc.

Key Verse

What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place.
—1 Kings 8:38-39a

Into the Word

Read 1 Kings 8:22-24. In what posture was Solomon praying?

What did Solomon confess about God?

Read 1 Kings 8:37-39. What did Solomon ask God to do in various circumstances?

What do these verses say about God's power?

Read 1 Kings 8:46, 48-50. Under what circumstances was God requested to act mercifully?

What do these verses say about God?

What do these verses say about the people's relationship with God?

Into Life

What elements in Solomon's prayer should we adopt into our own personal prayer lives?

Although our meeting places for worship are not parallel to the temple as the ancient Israelites' meeting place for worship, we can still dedicate our church buildings for holy purposes. Write a simple prayer in that regard.

Thought to Remember

Sin is real, but so is God's mercy.