

A Temple for the Lord

The building of Solomon's Temple, while impressive, is not the apex of the unfolding of God's grace. Yet this is a very significant milestone in the ebb and flow of our spiritual history.



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From Abraham of Ur, to the nomadic tribal years, Egyptian slavery, exodus drama, Israel becoming God's covenant people, the period of the kings, Babylonian exile and the long conflicted years until Jesus was born, the building of the Temple in Jerusalem offers a brief insight to the true shape of our faith.

Symbols are important to us, and this Temple pictures our faith, with God as our center, and the reminder that we can only be complete or whole because God has chosen to love us and offers us forgiveness. The design of the Temple and all its rituals and sacrifices calls us back to God's promise of grace.

Solomon understood this Temple represented the presence of God and that he was privileged to build it. 1 Kings 5 offers a glimpse of the complex planning, gathering of the finest materials and organization of a massive labor force. Construction began in the fourth year of Solomon's reign and ended in the eleventh. Solomon's Temple, built on the highest point of Jerusalem, was known in that day as a "wonder."

As building progressed, God reminded Solomon that Israel's covenant relationship with God was more important than a building. Faith finds its foundation and expression not in a building, ceremonies or traditions but in a relationship with God and a commitment to live out that faith in the real world.

The Apostle Paul, certainly knowledgeable of God's laws and Israel's traditions, rephrased God's reminder to Solomon: "I urge you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice to God, which is your spiritual service of worship" (Romans 12:1 NAS).

When the Temple was complete, Solomon ordered an impressive procession of all Israel's leaders to bring the Ark of the Covenant (the chest

containing the tablets of God's Law) for installation in the Holy of Holies (1 Kings 8:1). The ark was a reminder of God's presence with Israel dating back to their wilderness wanderings, a reminder they were to always live as God's covenant people.

Can you imagine the tearful memories and overwhelming joy of the people standing before their Temple for the first time? Solomon stood before the Lord's altar, with all of Israel gathered, lifted his arms and face heavenward and poured his heart out to God.

Judson Edwards, in the Formations Commentary for this lesson, divides Solomon's prayer into six components.

Solomon begins with **praise** (8:23). There is no god to compare to God. God chose this people, loved them through every day of their history and brought them to this awesome day. Prayer should always begin with praise as Jesus teaches us in his model prayer: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name" (Matthew 6:9).

Then follows **gratitude** (v. 24) as Solomon speaks of God's faithfulness in his keeping the covenant with Israel and his promise to David that the Temple would be built. God used Solomon and the people gathered there to make this dream come true. The work of God's kingdom is not mysteriously accomplished by angels but by people who truly love God and serve him.

Solomon voices his first **petition** (v. 25) to God as he asks God to continue his promise to David that David's descendants will sit on the throne of Israel as long as they are faithful to God. These words are a timely reminder that the other side of God's promises is our willingness to love God above all else and seek his guidance in our choices.

The wise king celebrates the **mystery** of God (vv. 27-28). If highest heaven cannot contain God, how can a temple built by human hands ever be an adequate throne? Our words, traditions, thoughts and imaginings cannot begin to capture God. We are reminded that all existence and all truth is built upon the unfathomable person of God. Mystery!

Solomon requests the **presence** of God in this Temple (v. 29). This

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Scripture: 1 Kings 6:1, 11-13, 37-38; 8:1-12, 22-30

petition reminds us that we should never presume God will automatically appear and perform what we expect. The Temple announces that God is accessible, cares and will respond to their prayers because he has chosen to love them. It took seven years to build the Temple, but God loved them generations before this day and God will continue to love those who trust life to him for eternity. A temple, music, worship and ministries in the world are opportunities where we may experience God.

Then comes the key element of **confession** (v. 30). Solomon asks God to forgive his people as they come to worship at the Temple. The elaborate rituals and sacrifices were designed to show us our need for God's forgiveness, and that forgiveness leads to a new beginning.

Israel had moved beyond the constant wars and divisions of David's reign to a new era of prosperity and stability with Solomon. But they would suffer from spiritual apathy and face new challenges. We always need God: his love, forgiveness, strength and guidance.

The glory of that Temple dedication did not last. Solomon, for all his wisdom, became caught up in his own successes and power. The Temple was plundered five years after his death (1 Kings 14:24-26). Later the Babylonians destroyed it and the people were exiled. But in the years of prosperity we catch a glimpse of what can be when God's people love God and serve him.

We can learn from their mistakes, that a building, organization, charismatic leader, wealth or power can never substitute for a relationship with the God who loves us and promises to be our companion. "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

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