

Solomon's Temple

Because we live in a world defined by touch, taste, smell, and measurable time, we naturally conclude that this present is reality. Then there are questions about any reality beyond the tangible.



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The setting of today's study is the dedication of the magnificent temple representing God's presence and promises, a testimony to God's love

and provision for his people. In King Solomon's prayer of dedication he reminds Israel that there is no comparison of a building to the reality of God: "But will God indeed reside with mortals on earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built!" (6:18). If you compare this key event to the gospels it is very clear that Christ is the amazing presence of God. He fulfills all that the temple symbolized: the destructive power of sin, the provision of God's love and grace, and the ultimate gift of eternal life beyond the limited reality of this world.

The temple was a physical reminder of God's faithfulness and promises that Israel had learned through years of failure and success. Israel knew years of wilderness wandering as well as slavery in the powerful pagan culture of Egypt with its grand temples and multiple gods. With the military successes of David and now the splendor of Solomon's reign, they saw themselves as independent and powerful. It's all too easy for success and prosperity to become a foundation for pride and self-satisfaction.

Solomon's prayer is an explicit reminder that Israel's success and prosperity depend on God's presence and blessing. "Regard your servant's prayer and his plea, O Lord my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you" (v. 19). Solomon has a clear understanding that God has not left the throne of eternity to be kept in a man-made temple or confined to rituals and sacrifices in public ceremonies: "May your eyes be open day and night toward this house ... hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel; when they pray toward this place, may you hear from heaven your dwelling place; hear and forgive" (vv. 20-21).

One of the many pronounced differences between pagan religions and the worship of Jehovah is the complete "otherness" of God and his choice to love, forgive, and

bless those who choose to love him and live morally and generously. Solomon is praying to God, who cannot be contained in a temple structure, but chooses to live in the temple called the human heart. Solomon's petition for God to "hear and forgive" displays the graphic reality that we too often turn away from God's love and guidance, so we need his gracious attention and forgiveness.

The temple becomes a visual reminder of God's presence and grace in a flawed world. When Solomon refers to "O Lord my God" (v. 19), he is not claiming an exclusive ownership of God, but, rather the opposite: that Israel and he are chosen by God. Comparable examples (see Psalm 86:6; 102:1; 143:1) reflect a dependence on and trust in God as their Savior. Solomon's prayer is that of a servant who has learned to love and trust God above all else.

When we move on to 2 Chronicles 7:12, the temple dedication has passed and Israel's security and prosperity are established. "The Lord appeared to Solomon in the night" affirmed his promise that the temple would be his chosen "house of sacrifice" (v. 12). God promises if there is no rain, locusts devour the land, or pestilence strikes the people, the temple will remind them that God is near and will hear their prayers. Note the language describing drought, locusts, and pestilence as coming from God.

Even when we may deserve punishing circumstances, "if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (v. 14). Grace has always been the key ingredient of faith in God, even before the coming of Christ. The lands that became Israel, the temple Solomon built, all the history of the people who first left Ur of the Chaldeans (Genesis 11) is an epic saga, not just about a struggling people, but the unfolding revelation of the God of love and grace who longs for us to choose the way of life.

The key to this gift of spiritual life is for Solomon, Israel and us to "walk before (God)" (v. 17). To "walk" is a metaphor for following a definite way of life, just as we often refer to the Christian life as a "journey." The idea is commitment, purpose, and direction, a life in which we trust God in every circumstance, seek his will in each challenge, and share his grace with those around us.

The building and dedication of the temple was not the terminal event in the life of Israel, just as our acceptance of Christ is not the single event of our life of faith in God. There is a beginning, then there are the challenges and milestones as we grow in faith, confront our failures, deepen in our understanding, and find new joy in God's love. The temple was Solomon's greatest attainment, but sadly he built for himself a greater palace, gathered hundreds of wives and concubines in political agreements, amassed an army, gained a reputation for wisdom, only to leave behind a kingdom torn by immorality and political infighting.

What happened to the impressive reminder of God's love and promises, the history of God's blessings and military victories, the call to be God's special people? God did not hear the prayers of his people because they were too preoccupied with living their dreams and enjoying their prosperity. The dedication of the temple and the prayer of Solomon were forgotten. The people did not "humble themselves, pray, and seek God's face."

We look back at the days of Solomon and those who followed him as a time of selfish choices and spiritual ignorance among God's "chosen" people. But what about us? Are we really any different? We build our denominations, construct impressive buildings, create great events and media programs – but those "monuments" cannot replace having simple faith in the God of grace whose Son died and arose from the grave for us. God cannot be relegated to any building, organization, or program. God is not the property of any nation, race, or political organization. God "hears from heaven," not from a politician or denominational executive.

God made a covenant with Israel that as his people they would live in faith, with integrity and with compassion for the world around them. God could not be real in Israel's temple ceremonies if God was not real in their daily lives. Faith in God is conditional; in other words, it requires something from us – our prayers, seeking God's face, and turning from our wicked ways (v. 14). The Davidic throne ended because Israel strayed from God. The magnificent temple was destroyed by pagan enemies. But generations later, the ultimate promise of God's love came to the world in Jesus Christ. God's hope is real and God's grace is ours if we choose to believe and follow.

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