

## “Solomon Dedicates the Temple”

**Devotional Reading:** Psalm 34:11-22    **Background Scripture:** 1 Kings 8:22-53

### 1 Kings 8:22–24, 37–39, 46, 48–50a (NIV)

<sup>22</sup> Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven <sup>23</sup> and said:

*“Lord, the 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. <sup>24</sup> You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it—as it is today.*

.....

<sup>37</sup> *“When famine or plague comes to the land, or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, or when an enemy besieges them in any of their cities, whatever disaster or disease may come, <sup>38</sup> and when a prayer or plea is made by anyone among your people Israel—being aware of the afflictions of their own hearts, and spreading out their hands toward this temple—<sup>39</sup> then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive and act; deal with everyone according to all they do, since you know their hearts (for you alone know every human heart).*

.....

<sup>46</sup> *“When they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you become angry with them and give them over to their enemies, who take them captive to their own lands, far away or near.*

.....

<sup>48</sup> *“And if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies who took them captive, and pray to you toward the land you gave their ancestors, toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name; <sup>49</sup> then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause. <sup>50</sup> And forgive your people, who have sinned against you; forgive all the offenses they have committed against you.”*

### LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Fact:** To summarize Solomon’s prayer of dedication for the Temple.
- **Biblical Principle:** To understand why Solomon also voiced the nation’s prayer for forgiveness.
- **Daily Application:** To always remember to pray to the One who keeps His promises.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Consecration? Dedication?

Years ago, a young preacher just out of seminary was setting up for an evening audio-visual presentation in the church sanctuary. He needed a place to put the equipment, and he eventually spotted the ideal place: the communion table. But as he began moving it into place, his wife warned him, “That’s the communion table.”

The self-confident preacher knew that, of course. But he also knew that, ultimately, the table was just an ornate piece of wood. So what if its normal use was to hold the trays of the communion elements? Couldn’t it serve other functions as well?

But his wife stepped up her caution by stressing again that *“That’s the communion table!”* In so doing, she recognized something that her husband hadn’t: the existence of a disposition of many in the congregation who considered some things to be consecrated (or set apart) for certain tasks only.

Various words describing the concept of consecration occur over 250 times in the Old Testament. It is an act by which a person or thing is set apart for service to God (examples: Exodus 29:44; Leviticus 8:10). In the New Testament era,

however, the idea of consecration applies to just people, not to things. Even so, there exist issues of conscience in this regard. So the preacher wisely heeded his wife's warning.

## LESSON CONTEXT

The ceremony in 1 Kings 8 consecrated the newly built temple in Jerusalem. Temple construction had begun in 966 B.C. and required seven years for completion (1 Kings 6:1, 38). That completion in 959 B.C. marked an important transition in Israelite history, as the location of encounter with the holy God became immovable, with the temple replacing the portable tabernacle. The first half of Solomon's 40-year reign was focused on building the temple and palace (9:10). The current lesson from 1 Kings 8 considers a portion of the dedication prayer at the ceremony for the finished temple, over which King Solomon presided.

Several preparatory elements led up to this prayer: the temple had been completely furnished (1 Kings 7:13–51), the ark of the covenant had been brought into the temple (8:1–9), and the king had “blessed all the congregation of Israel” (8:14). The prayer of dedication that followed (8:23–53) is the second longest prayer in the Bible—in the neighborhood of 1,000 words! (The parallel in 2 Chronicles 6:14–42 is of similar length.) Only the prayer in Nehemiah 9:5–38 is longer.

But the prayer's outsized length doesn't mean that King Solomon merely rambled on and on (compare Matthew 6:7). Quite the opposite: the prayer is clearly organized. We see that organization in 9 of the prayer's 31 verses selected for the lesson text.

### Impassioned Prayer: 1 Kings 8:22–24

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 (examples: 1 Chronicles 29:20; 2 Chronicles 29:29). And by the time Solomon concludes the prayer, he will have switched from standing to kneeling (1 Kings 8:54; the changeover is explained in more details in 2 Chronicles 6:12–13 where we learn that Solomon built a platform upon which he stood while addressing the people).

In both postures, the fact that Solomon *spread out his hands toward heaven* adds an aura of solemnity and earnestness (compare Exodus 9:29; Deuteronomy 32:40–41; Lamentations 3:41; Daniel 12:7). 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 (Deuteronomy 4:39).

Solomon voiced his prayer not just for his own benefit but on behalf of *the whole assembly of Israel*. These were especially those Israelites who were in attendance personally for the temple dedication (1 Kings 8:1–2). 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.

### 1. What was significant about Solomon's posture during his prayer? (1 Kings 8:22)

Verses 23 and 24 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, the God of Israel* brooks no rivals (Deuteronomy 4:15–20; 5:7; etc.).

One area of His uniqueness appears in keeping a *covenant* in His merciful love. Solomon here bears witness before the congregation that God keeps His word!

Solomon opened his prayer with praise to the Lord, saying, “there is no God like you” (v. 23; compare Exodus 15:11 and Deuteronomy 4:39). He then referred to God's covenant with his father, David, the covenant that appointed Solomon as David's heir and the builder of the temple which is now completed (2 Samuel 7), and evidence of God faithfulness.

In this excellent prayer, Solomon does as we should do in every prayer; he gives glory to God. Fresh experiences of the truth of God's promises call for larger praises. The experiences we have of God's performing His promises, should encourage us to depend upon them, and to plead them with Him; and those who expect further mercies, must be thankful for former mercies. God's promises must be the guide of our desires, and the ground of our hopes and expectations in prayer.

## **2. How did Solomon address the uniqueness of God in his prayer? (1 Kings 8:23-24)**

### **What Do You Think?**

Which of God's scriptural promises has He already fulfilled?

### **Digging Deeper**

How does recalling His fulfilled promises encourage your faithfulness in waiting for the fulfillment of the rest?

## **Oppressive Circumstances: 1 Kings 8:37-39**

Solomon wanted the temple to be continually remembered for God's grace, and under one word, "forgive," Solomon expressed all that he could ask on behalf of his people.

When his people repented, he asked that God would be quick to forgive and remove the drought and calamities that were so common to Israel. For as all misery springs from sin, forgiveness of sin prepares the way for the removal of every evil, and the receiving of every good thing from God. In addition to the teaching of the word of God, Solomon entreated the Lord himself to teach the people to profit by all, even by their chastisements (see v. 40, not in today's lesson).

## **3. What did Solomon ask of God? (1 Kings 8:37-39)**

### **What Do You Think?**

What are some examples of disasters or crises modern people fear and need God's help to withstand?

### **Digging Deeper**

When we pray to God for help with these kinds of issues, what is our responsibility to act? Consider James 2:16.

## **Defeat and Captivity: 1 Kings 8:46, 48-50a**

The pronoun "they" in verse 46 refers to the people of Israel, and Israel's history shows that the nation was prone to sin. All of us are sinners (Proverbs 20:9; Romans 3:23), but God's special blessings on Israel and His covenant with them made their disobedience that much more serious. By disobeying God's law and imitating the sins of their idolatrous neighbors, the Jews were sinning against a flood of light. In the covenant, God warned that repeated rebellion would lead to captivity (Lev. 26:27-45; Deut. 28:49-68).

The other disciplines took away from the Jews the blessings of the land, but captivity took them away from the land itself. The Jewish people did experience defeat and captivity. Assyria conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C., and Babylon conquered the southern kingdom of Judah in 606-586 B.C. and took the Jews captive to Babylon. This terrible event was predicted by Isaiah (6:11-12; 11:11-12; 39:6) and Micah (4:10), and Jeremiah revealed that the Babylonian captivity would last for seventy years (Jer. 25:1-14; 29:11-14). When the prophet Daniel understood what Jeremiah wrote, he began to pray that God would keep His promises (Deut. 30:1-10) and set the nation free (Dan. 9:1). No doubt many other believing Jews ("the remnant") also interceded, and God stirred Cyrus, king of Persia, to allow the Jews to return to their land and rebuild their temple (Ezra 1; 2 Chron. 36:22-23).

## **4. What did Solomon say in his prayer about being overcome by enemies? (1 Kings 8:46)**

## What Do You Think?

Is it possible to know that a hardship is God's judgment in your life? (personal question) Explain your answer with biblical evidence.

## Digging Deeper

What danger does assuming another person's hardship is God's judgment pose to presenting the gospel?

Solomon gave the Lord several reasons why He should forgive His people when they repented and returned to Him. After all, they were His people whom He had purchased and delivered from Egyptian bondage (v. 51, not in today's lesson). Israel was His special people, separated from the other nations to glorify God and accomplish His mission on earth. Again, Solomon revealed his knowledge of the Book of Deuteronomy (4:20; 7:6; 9:26-29; 32:9).

In verse 48 of today's lesson, Solomon also asked that when the prayers of God's people were directed to the Temple and when they were in captivity, they might be heard when they turn to Him "with all their heart and soul."

## 5. Why else did Solomon say God should forgive Israel of their sins? (1 Kings 8:48-50a)

### What Do You Think?

What does it look like to turn back to God with all your heart and soul?

### Digging Deeper

Who do you trust to help you identify when you need to repent and return to the Lord?

It's one thing to *hear*, but another thing to *heed* (see the distinction in Ezekiel 33:4–5). We see both elements in this prayer, with the request to *uphold 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 (Deuteronomy 7:6). 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!

God takes no pleasure in our suffering, even when we have earned it (Ezekiel 18:32; 33:11). 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 verse 50 nor any other Bible text implies that all suffering is deserved. Much is not (compare Luke 13:1–5; John 9:1–3).

### What Do You Think?

What gives you confidence that God has forgiven your sins?

### Digging Deeper

How do you offer the gift of forgiveness to others?

## POINTS TO PONDER

1. We should voice prayers not just for own benefit but also for others (1 Kings 8:22).
2. Don't forget to pray to the Lord who always keeps His promises (vs. 23-24).
3. Where do you turn first for help during a crisis? Do you turn to God? (vs. 37-39).
4. God remains just and punishes sin, but He also shows mercy (v. 46).
5. God is interested in the prayers of those seeking change and redemption (vs. 48-50a).

## CONCLUSION

### People as Sinners

One of the most puzzling features of prayer in the Bible occurs in this prayer at the dedication of the temple. Here, Solomon voiced the nation's prayer for forgiveness as part of its ongoing life together. In this case, Solomon prayed for forgiveness of sins that had not yet been committed!

In that regard, the prayer serves as a reflection on the entire history of Israel, from the time of the exodus of 1447 B.C. (481 years in the past as Solomon uttered this prayer) to Nebuchadnezzar's forced removal of the citizens of Judah in 586 B.C. (380 years after the prayer). For us to understand the prayer, we must place it within this larger context, the story of Israel in the promised land, covering the entire books of Joshua through 2 Kings. Both that history and Solomon's prayer reflect a realistic assessment of the human condition and the tendency of human beings to fail. The Bible does not try to pretend that a perfect, sinless time existed at some point after the Garden of Eden. Idolatry and oppression occurred regularly; they still do. Solomon's prayer foreshadowed the outcome found in 2 Kings 25. Even so, Israel's story, as recorded in the books of Joshua through 2 Kings, is not an obituary but a warning and an invitation to a better life.

### God as Defender

Solomon's prayer rests on the assumption that God seeks to heal and forgive, even when (or especially when) sins threaten to overcome the sinners. God defends penitent (remorseful) people from those who would oppress them—and even from themselves. The worship by Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church celebrates the expansive nature of God's mercy. We are thereby reminded to be thankful for it.

Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8 is, therefore, realistic but also hopeful. The dedication of the holiest spot on earth (at the time) was connected to the reality of unholiness. Solomon cast the nation of Israel as a whole on the mercy of God. In so doing, Solomon sought God's commitment to continue working with the people continuously as part of their centuries-long process of learning and obeying.

Today, the church would do well to recover the biblical practice of confession of sins, both of individuals and of the church as a whole. Part of that recovery would involve acknowledgment that the temptations to harm others or dishonor God do not go away. We will need forgiveness in the future, and we need humility in the present. Solomon's prayer shows us a way forward.

## PRAYER

God of mercy, Lord of love, hear the cries of all who need You. Even when our sins have trapped us in suffering, show us mercy. Do not let us be overwhelmed by our bad decisions or those of others. As Jesus called even those who betrayed Him to feed His sheep, call us into Your eternal kingdom. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

## THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

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

## ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson is **"Hezekiah's Prayer"** and explains the historical circumstance behind Hezekiah's prayer and God's response! Study 2 Kings 19:1-34.