

1 Kings 8: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] 1 Kings chapter 8. Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the farthest houses of the people of Israel, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David, which is Zion. And all the men of Israel assembled to King Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark. And they brought up the ark of the Lord, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent. The priests and the Levites brought them up. And King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who had assembled before him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted or numbered. Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim overshadowed the ark and its poles. And the poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the holy place before the inner sanctuary, but they could not be seen from outside. And they are there to this day.

There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses put there at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the people of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt. And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud. For the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. Then Solomon said, The Lord has said that he would dwell in thick darkness. I have indeed built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in forever.

Then the king turned around and blessed all the assembly of Israel, while all the assembly of Israel stood. And he said, Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who with his hand has fulfilled what he promised with his mouth to David my father, saying, Since the day that I brought my people Israel out of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel in which to build a house that my name might be there. But I chose David to be over my people Israel. Now it was in the heart of David my father to build a house for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. But the Lord said to David my father, Whereas it was in your heart to build a house for my name, you did well that it was in your heart. Nevertheless, you shall not build a house, but your son who shall be born to you shall build the house for my name. Now the Lord has fulfilled his promise that he made. For I have risen in the place of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the Lord promised. And I have built the house for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. And there I have provided a place for the ark, in which is the covenant of the Lord, that he made with our fathers, when he brought them out of the land of Egypt. Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and 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 beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart. You have kept with your servant David my father what you declared to him. You spoke with your mouth, and with your hand have fulfilled it this day.

Now therefore, O Lord God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father what you have promised him, saying, You shall not lack a man to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me. Now therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you have spoken to your servant David my father.

[3 : 37] But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built. Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant, and to his plea, O Lord my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you this day, that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, My name shall be there, that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. And listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive. If a man sins against his neighbor, and is made to take an oath, and comes and swears his oath before your altar in this house, then hear in heaven, and act and judge your servants, condemning the guilty by bringing his conduct on his own head, and vindicating the righteous by rewarding him according to his righteousness.

When your people Israel are defeated before the enemy, because they have sinned against you, and if they turn again to you, and acknowledge your name, and pray and plead with you in this house, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of your people Israel, and bring them again to the land that you gave to their fathers. When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against you, if they pray toward this place, and acknowledge your name, and turn from their sin when you afflict them, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel, when you teach them the good way in which they should walk, and grant rain upon your land, which you have given to your people as an inheritance. If there is famine in the land, if there is pestilence, or blight, or mildew, or locust, or caterpillar, if their enemy besieges them in the land at their gates, whatever plague, whatever sickness there is, whatever prayer, whatever plea is made by any man, or by all your people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart, and stretching out his hands toward this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and forgive and act, and render to each whose heart you know according to all his ways. For you, you only, know the hearts of all the children of mankind, that they may fear you all the days that they live in the land that you gave to our fathers.

Likewise, when a foreigner who is not of your people Israel comes from a far country for your namesake, for they shall hear of your great name, and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm, when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name, and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this house that I have built is called by your name. If your people go out to battle against their enemy, by whatever way you shall send them, and they pray to the Lord toward the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name, then hear in heaven their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause. If they sin against you, for there is no one who does not sin, and you are angry with them, and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near. Yet if they turn their heart in the land to which they have been carried captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captors, saying, We have sinned, and have acted perversely and wickedly, if they repent with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, who carried them captive, and pray to you toward their land, which you gave to their fathers, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name, then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause, and forgive your people who have sinned against you, and all their transgressions that they have committed against you, and grant them compassion in the sight of those who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them, for they are your people, and your heritage, which you brought out of Egypt, from the midst of the iron furnace. Let your eyes be opened to the plea of your servant, and to the plea of your people Israel, giving ear to them whenever they call to you, for you separated them from among all the peoples of the earth to be your heritage, as you declared through Moses your servant, when you brought our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord God. Now as Solomon finished offering all this prayer, and plead to the Lord, he arose from before the altar of the Lord, where he had knelt with hands outstretched toward heaven, and he stood and blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice, saying,

Blessed be the Lord who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant. The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers. May he not leave us or forsake us, that he may incline our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, his statutes and his rules, which he commanded our fathers. Let these words of mine, with which I have pleaded before the Lord, be near to the Lord our God day and night, and may he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel, as each day requires, that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God, there is no other. Let your heart therefore be wholly true to the Lord our God, walking in his statutes, and keeping his commandments, as at this day. Then the king, and all Israel with him, offered sacrifice before the Lord. Solomon offered as peace offerings to the Lord 22,000 oxen, and 120,000 sheep. So the king and all the people of Israel dedicated the house of the Lord. The same day the king consecrated the middle of the court that was before the house of the Lord. For there he offered the burnt offering, and the grain offering, and the fat pieces of the peace offerings. Because the bronze altar that was before the Lord was too small to receive the burnt offering, and the grain offering, and the fat pieces of the peace offerings. So Solomon held the feast at that time, and all Israel with him, a great assembly, from Lebo Hamath to the brook of Egypt, before the Lord our God, seven days. On the eighth day he sent the people away, and they blessed the king, and went to their homes joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the Lord had shown to David his servant, and to Israel his people. From the time of the battle of Aphek, the religious life of Israel had been divided. The tabernacle, minus the ark, was at

Gibeon, while the ark of the covenant was in the tent shrine that David had set up for it. Around the country were various high places of worship. Now, finally, in 1 Kings chapter 8, about a century later, the worship of Israel is going to be unified once more in the temple of Solomon. In Deuteronomy chapter 12, the Lord had charged Israel to establish a single central sanctuary when they were in the land.

[10 : 23] With Solomon's temple, such worship can finally be restored. The construction of the temple was completed in the eighth month. However, the dedication of the temple occurs in the seventh month, in association with the Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of Booths or the Feast of Ingathering. The connection with this feast can be seen in verses 2 and 65 of this chapter.

The Feast of Tabernacles memorialized Israel's following the Lord out into the wilderness, and their dwelling in tents, where the Lord would later dwell in their midst in the tabernacle. Now that period is definitively over, as the Lord moves out of his tent and into the permanent dwelling of the temple. It's also a harvest feast. It's the Feast of Ingathering. The dedication of the temple brings to completion the cycle that began with the Exodus. So it is fitting that it occurs in the feast that ends the festal calendar, a feast that is the mirror image of the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the first month. As the Feast of Ingathering was one of the three pilgrimage feasts in the year, it was also a convenient time for the dedication, when all of the congregation of Israel should assemble anyway. Also, as the Feast of Ingathering, it fittingly expresses the full harvest of the riches of which the Exodus was the firstfruits, especially as Gentiles are included. It is an anticipation of the final harvest of all things, the eschatological fullness. In the prophets we see it as a time associated with the ingathering of the Gentiles, which is already happening in some measure in the construction and the worship of the temple. In Deuteronomy chapter 31 verses 9 to 13, we discover that in every seventh year the Feast of Tabernacles was the time when the Book of the

Law would be read before the entire congregation in a sort of covenant renewal ceremony. It is likely that this was one of the things that occurred in the context of the dedication of the temple.

Solomon assembles the entire congregation of Israel for this event. The ark is brought to the temple from its former residence in the tent shrine in the city of David called Zion. The city of David or Zion is here the citadel. It's the Jebusite stronghold that had been taken by David in 2 Samuel chapter 5.

The term Zion is one that is used with different reference in scripture. Often it is used to refer to Jerusalem as a whole. Mount Zion is often spoken of as the mount of the Lord's dwelling. So here the ark is being brought up from what was currently called Zion to what would later be referred to as Zion. While the mishandling of the moving of the ark had resulted in tragedy back in 2 Samuel, as Uzzah had been struck down by the Lord, here it is successful. The ark is empty apart from the two tablets of stone of the covenant. It doesn't contain any relics, such as Aaron's budded rod or the jar of the manor, which are both mentioned in Hebrews chapter 9 verse 4. The ark is not a box containing God, but it houses a copy of the covenant. The ark is the footstool of the Lord's throne. It doesn't guarantee or contain his presence. Israel needed to beware of trusting the ark as if it were a sort of talisman. The Lord's acceptance of the temple as a site for his dwelling is also not something to be taken for granted. The temple was always in danger of functioning as a sort of an architectural idol, as if it were a device for controlling and summoning God. Perhaps the greatest challenge to such an attitude can be found in Jeremiah chapter 7 verses 1 to 14. The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, stand in the gate of the Lord's house and proclaim there this word and say, hear the word of the Lord, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words. This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the

[14:12] Lord. For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever. Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, we are delivered, only to go on doing all these abominations. Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord. Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel. And now, because you have done all these things, declares the Lord, and when I spoke to you persistently, you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer. Therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh.

In 1 Kings 8, the Lord accepts the temple as a place for his dwelling. The Lord enters the building in the glory cloud, in a manner that is reminiscent of the Lord's entering of the tabernacle in Exodus chapter 40 verses 34 to 35. Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting, because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. The Lord having entered the temple, Solomon blesses the people and blesses the Lord. In his blessings and his subsequent prayer, Solomon communicates the fact that the Lord cannot be contained by such a building, nor even the heavens and the highest heavens. The Lord's dwelling in the house is true in an analogical fashion. It is a dwelling that is real, but which needs to be understood in terms of the Lord's transcendence. The Lord is really present in, but not enclosed by the temple. The Lord dwells in thick darkness. His dwelling is mysterious and impenetrable. The temple retains something of this character. Solomon as the king represents the entire people. They will be blessed and judged on account of his actions. He is the chief worshipper. While the priests are stewards of the Lord's house, who perform gifts and sacrifices on behalf of the people with the authorisation of the Lord, Solomon is the preeminent man of the nation. He establishes the temple as a site of worship, as one acting on behalf of the nation. He also leads the people in their worship and in their prayer. Here he recalls the promises of the Davidic covenant, promises that are being brought to pass in the establishment and dedication of the temple. The Lord has fulfilled his promise to

David, as Solomon has built the temple as promised. With the establishment of the Davidic king, there can also be the establishment of Jerusalem as the city of the Lord's dwelling. Whereas the worship of Israel had formerly focused upon the Ark of the Covenant in the tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant becomes rather less important now. The focus now is upon the temple and the city as the place where the Lord is enthroned. In many respects, the footstool of the Lord is not just the Ark of the Covenant now, but the whole temple building, which is covered with gold inside, much as the Ark is.

And now holiness migrates further out to include the whole city. The city becomes the holy city and the Davidic king is now brought in to dwell in the realm of the Lord's own habitation, in the larger temple complex. The temple is a new and more glorious Eden in many ways, with a building with lots of arboreal and botanic imagery and elements, with cherubim with water flowing out, and a new Adam acting in the name of his heavenly father. The heart of the chapter is devoted to Solomon's prayer of dedication for the temple, within which are several petitions. He begins by praising the Lord for his incomparability and for his keeping of his covenant, praying that the promise of the Lord concerning David's throne would be established. In scripture, many things that are attributed to God are attributed to him in an analogical way, or in a manner accommodated to creaturely understanding. While he has spoken of the Lord dwelling in the temple, he is very well aware that this is only the case after a manner of speaking. Throughout his prayer, for instance, although the temple has earlier been spoken of as a dwelling place for the Lord, he speaks of the Lord hearing and answering from heaven. While the Lord is not contained by the temple, nor does he dwell in it in a full sense, the temple is a place where the name of the Lord dwells. Solomon speaks as follows in verses 27 to 29. But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you. How much less this house that I have built. Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O Lord my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you this day, that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, My name shall be there, that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. The temple is a site of the Lord's dwelling in his personal and purposive presence.

He acts from and identifies himself with the temple as a location in a unique way, much as formerly with the tabernacle. The temple is a sort of a face to which people can turn to address the Lord. Just as your face does not contain your personal presence, but manifests and communicates it and is the realm to which others can turn to address you, so the temple is a sort of face of the Lord to which all can turn. Throughout his prayer, Solomon focuses upon the temple's relationship to prayer. It is where the Lord manifests his purposive and personal presence, and it is to hear that people should turn to address him, to the place where he reveals himself.

[20 : 12] Jesus, of course, is the great temple of God, and many of the ways that Solomon speaks of the temple can inform our understanding of Christ, in whom God is personally present, known and addressed.

Solomon's prayer makes clear that the temple is principally a house of prayer. It is not a sort of occult technology for controlling God through sacrifice. It is not an idol for manipulating God.

It is not a talisman that guarantees that God is on your side. No, it is a divinely established building where the name of the Lord dwells, which orients and facilitates our personal address to him. The sacrifices serve a similar purpose. They are a sort of symbolically enacted mode of prayer.

In Isaiah chapter 56 verses 6 to 7, in a passage that our Lord later takes up in the Gospels, the temple is termed a house of prayer. And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath, and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant, these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. As Peter Lighthouse observes, 2 Chronicles chapter 6 verse 13 makes the connection between the temple and its sacrifices and prayer evident in the symbolism of the platform upon which Solomon kneels to pray. Solomon had built a bronze platform five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high, and had set it in the court, and he stood on it. Then he knelt on his knees in the presence of all of the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven. The dimensions of this bronze platform are precisely the same as the dimensions of the bronze altar of the Mosaic tabernacle in Exodus chapter 27 verse 1. Sacrifice is a mode of prayer, and prayer is a mode of sacrifice. Temple worship is not just going through the motions of ritual and sacrifice, but a sincere addressing of the self to God through symbolic means. In his prayer were seven key petitions. Solomon lists a number of potential occasions for such prayers. Verses 31 to 32, judgment in the case of a man who takes an oath. Verses 33 to 34, a need for deliverance in a situation of defeat and or of exile. In verses 35 to 36, in a situation of drought. In verses 37 to 40, in a situation of famine, blight, or siege. In verses 41 to 43, when a foreigner prays towards the temple.

[22 : 49] In verses 44 to 45, if they are sent out to battle. And in verses 46 to 50, if they are sent into exile. Commentators generally note the way that a number of these petitions relate to curses of the covenant listed in Deuteronomy chapter 28, specifically the second, third, fourth, and seventh petitions relating to defeat or exile, to drought, to famine, blight, or siege, and to exile respectively.

While the covenant curses in Deuteronomy are spoken of in ways that hold out limited hope of forgiveness, here Solomon prays that the temple would be a place towards which Israel and others can address the Lord, and where the Lord will make his presence manifest through blessing and forgiveness, a forgiveness that speaks mercy into his judgments. Lighthouse also suggests that the petitions of Solomon's prayer loosely anticipate the subsequent history of the nation. The judgment concerning the man who takes the oath before the altar relates to Solomon's own reign. The defeat by enemies relates to the period of the split of the kingdom. The drought relates to the days of Elijah. The famine, siege, and plagues relate to the siege and famine of Samaria. The prayer of the foreigner relates to the time of the fall of the northern kingdom. The prayer when sent out into battle relates to the last days of Judah. And the prayer from exile relates to the exile of Judah that followed that.

There is a special attention given to the figure of the foreigner here. The temple is not merely for Israel, but for all peoples. It is a house toward which the foreigners should turn, not just Jews.

God will hear them, and their inclusion among those who turn to him will be a sign of the fulfillment of the Lord's promise. Solomon began by blessing the people and the Lord, and now he concludes in much the same way. The Lord had promised all of these blessings through Moses long ago, and now Israel is experiencing their fulfillment. The Lord's good promises have not fallen to the ground. The Lord has been present with his people to bless them, and Solomon prays that this will continue into the future.

He recognizes the need for the Lord to preserve them in faithfulness. May he not leave us or forsake us, that he may incline our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, his statutes, and his rules, which he commanded our fathers. He prays that his prayer of dedication will always be before the Lord, as a sort of a memorial of the temple as a house of prayer, so that the Lord will always hear such petitions. He also charges Israel to guard their hearts in faithfulness. The chapter concludes with the consecration of the temple courtyard, from which Solomon offers an abundance of sacrifices that could not be accommodated by the bronze altar itself.

[25 : 30] Israel celebrates a glorious feast of tabernacles together, before being sent home with very great rejoicing. A question to consider, how might the temple help us to think about the incarnation?