

**“God’s House”**  
**1 Kings 6-9**  
**February 12, 2017**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

The attention given by the author of 1 Kings to the construction of the temple is surprisingly large. Chapter 5 begins with a description of the preparations Solomon made for the temple. Chapter 6 describes the construction itself, including myriad details about the temple. Chapter seven begins with an interlude about Solomon’s house and then concludes with elaborate and tedious details about the furnishings of the temple. Chapter 8 speaks of the dedication of the temple and Solomon’s lengthy prayer on that occasion. Chapter 9 concludes the temple material with a warning to Solomon about idolatry, telling him that this temple that was just built would be destroyed if Israel’s kings began to worship other gods.

It took seven years to build the temple, which seems like a long time for such a small structure. According to 6:2, it was 60 cubits in length. Since a cubit was equivalent to about 18 inches, that means that it was only 90 feet long. By way of comparison, our sanctuary is about 75 feet from front to back, so this temple was only fifteen feet longer than our sanctuary. Even more surprising, it was only 30 feet wide, compared to our sanctuary’s 45 feet. So it was quite a narrow building, with overall square footage smaller than our sanctuary by almost 700 square feet. Equally surprising was its height, about 45 feet, compared to our ceiling height at the peak of 36 feet. So this was an oddly shaped building, very narrow and very tall. The reason for those dimensions was the fact that it was proportionally the same as the tabernacle built during the days of Moses, but four times its size.

Why does the temple get such attention in the text? There are at least two reasons. The first is that the author is writing at a time after the destruction of this temple, trying to explain this tragedy to his readers. How could God have allowed the destruction of the temple? What had happened to his promises to Abraham and David? Had God abandoned his covenant and his people? His answer is going to be that God has not abandoned his people, but his people have abandoned him. The second reason for such emphasis on the temple is that it summarizes the heart and purposes of God for all of mankind. God’s idea in creating humanity has been to dwell with us, and the temple is where God dwells. The whole Bible can be read as the story of God’s building of a temple. And, as we sang earlier, one day in God’s courts, his temple, is better than thousands elsewhere. We were made to dwell with God, and we do so in his temple. So in studying this temple, we learn about the joys of living with God. Let’s explore these things by looking at Solomon’s temple.

## I. The Significance of the Temple

God has always wanted to be near men and women created in his image. The temple is where God lives, and, surprisingly, God wants us to be with him in his house. He wants to be near us. There is a big difference between visiting someone and living with someone. You can get to know some things about people by visiting them in their homes. But if you really want to know them, live with them. God wants us to know him, that we might be filled with joy, and he welcomes us to live with him in order that we might know him better.

God has always wanted this. It is possible to read the Bible as a story about God's determination to establish a temple, a place where he can dwell with his people. The Garden of Eden is the place God created to live with his people. Adam and Eve walked with God there in the cool of the afternoon, just like you would sit on your deck after work and enjoy conversation with a good friend. Amazingly, God did not give up on his purpose of living with his people after Adam and Eve's rebellion. When he called Abraham, he made it clear that he would give Abraham a land, a land God would make holy by living on it with his people. When Israel lived in Egypt, God delivered his people from their bondage in order that they might worship him. As we learn in the book of Exodus, that worship was to be located in the tabernacle God told Moses to build. God was visibly present with his people there. But the tabernacle was just a tent, an appropriate place for God while his people were living in tents during their wilderness years. But now his people are living in permanent homes in the Promised Land, and it is time for God to move out of his tent into a permanent structure. That's what the temple is.

There are many details given regarding the construction of the temple, because much about its construction teaches us about what it means for us to live with God in his house. Let me mention just two of these details. The first is the carvings present throughout the temple. 6:29 records that the walls of the temple included carvings of **“cherubim and palm trees and open flowers.”** The same carvings were on two sets of doors, one into the inner sanctuary (6:32) and the other on the main doors into the temple (6:35). These carvings were intended to remind people of the Garden of Eden, where God placed trees that were **“pleasant to the sight and good for food”** (Gen. 2:9). God has created us to live with him in a garden paradise. There is something deep inside us all that longs for a return to Eden, a place of abundance, beauty, safety and joyful relationships. Such a place comes from living with God in his temple.

A second detail about the temple's construction is described in verse 7. **“When the house was built, it was with stone prepared at the quarry, so that neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron was heard in the house while it was being built.”** There was silence on the jobsite. Why was that

important? Part of it undoubtedly was because of the need for reverence. The prophet Zephaniah tells us to **“Be silent before the Lord God”** (1:7). Those things that inspire awe in our hearts have the effect of shutting our mouths. But I think there is another reason for silence associated with the temple. This reason is found in Psalm 131 where the psalmist says, **“O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother.”** This is a wonderful psalm describing the quiet of soul when we are in the presence of God. Why are our souls often so noisy? It is because we are taking on God’s role in our lives. In the words of the psalmist, we are raising our eyes too high and occupying ourselves with things too great for us. In short, we are attempting to control things we cannot control, and it leads to disquiet in our souls.

When we come into the presence of God, we learn to rest content in his running of the universe. Your fifteen year old son gets his learner’s permit and it is your job to take him out for his first driving lesson. For those of us who have been through that experience, it’s not something that leaves you with a quieted heart. Our son had six accidents during his first year of driving, and to ride with him was to be anxious. But he has now grown up, and turned into a very good driver. I am able to rest content while riding with him now, even to the point of letting him drive my car when we ride together. When you run your own life, it is like an inexperienced, overconfident 15-year-old getting behind the wheel of a car. But when we come into the presence of God, we learn to give up control and rest in his expert running of our lives. We become like the **“weaned child with its mother”** that the psalmist speaks of. Have you seen what a baby does before it’s weaned but in its mother’s arms. The baby starts rooting around looking for his next meal. But now this baby in the psalm has been weaned, and its behavior in the arms of its mother is different. It no longer roots around for that which it used to consider essential. The baby is able to rest content. Being in the presence of God has this effect upon us.

Have you learned to quiet your soul in the presence of God? Have you learned to receive with gratitude what he gives to you and to be at rest concerning what he chooses not to give? I have had to learn that as a pastor, and am still learning in many ways. I need to remember this regarding who God chooses to bring to this church. I used to get very anxious about this, fearing the wrong kind of people (the troublemakers) and coveting the right kind. But I am learning to rest in God’s greater wisdom about this, and it brings a quiet to my soul, like the weaned child with its mother.

## **II. Praying Toward the Temple**

Chapter 8 contains a prayer Solomon offered at the dedication of the temple. If a temple is God’s dwelling with us, then it makes sense that Solomon

would pray on this occasion, since prayer is one of the chief activities we engage in to be near God. Solomon's prayer contains seven petitions, and I would like us to consider two truths we learn from these petitions.

The first thing we learn is that the kind of prayer that brings us near to God is prayer marked by the quality of a childlike helplessness. We tend to pray when we are desperately needy. Note how many of these petitions envision a situation of desperation. The first one deals with a matter of justice in which a matter comes before a court for which there is insufficient evidence to decide the matter. How should a judge decide in such a case? In their weakness and need, Israel's judges were to pray toward the temple, asking God to acquit the innocent and condemn the guilty precisely because the judge was unable to do so. The second petition deals with military defeat that is due to Israel's sin. In their desperation as a defeated people, they are to call to the Lord. The third petition concerns drought and the fourth famine, two more situations in which we are powerless to deliver ourselves. Parents, do you ever feel that way about parenting? A feeling of helplessness is God's call to us to pray. Prayer is just like the gospel. In the gospel, we can only come to God with empty hands. In prayer, we come to God as helpless and desperate.

The second feature of Solomon's prayer is its focus on sin. Five of his seven petitions assume that Israel will fall into sin. Solomon's final petition even confesses, **"there is no one who does not sin"** (8:46). He then asks that God would forgive that sin and restore his people when they humble themselves and confess their sin. The temple is the place of forgiveness, the place where the sacrifices of atonement were made. Based on that sacrifice, the worshipers at the temple asked for God's forgiveness. Both of these points are essential for drawing near to God—confessing one's sin and asking for God's forgiveness based on the blood of an innocent sacrifice. We live in a day when seemingly everyone is willing to acknowledge sin, at least in a generic way. "Sure, I'm a sinner. Isn't everyone?" If acknowledgement of sin is as far as your spirituality goes, it is nothing more than cynicism. Cynics see the dark side of everyone and everything. Cynicism is one of the primary sins of our age. The cynic believes that everyone is working an angle, and attempts to derive some comfort from the thought of sin's universal nature. But that is nothing more than a form of proud unbelief, of attempting to deal with our sins apart from God. The idea of the universality of sin is not designed to bring us comfort. If you derive comfort from that, then you are being cynical and quite possibly have your guilt still upon you because you are trying to deal with sin on your own. The temple says that you cannot deal with sin on your own. It must be dealt with through blood sacrifice. That is God's way, shown here in the temple. There should be no comfort to us in the universal extent of sin. But there is comfort here, and it is found in God's forgiveness.

### **III. Warning About the Temple**

Chapter 9 reports a second appearance God made to Solomon. In it, he tells Solomon that if he remains faithful and obedient to God, his throne will be established forever. But if he falls into idolatry, Israel would be sent into exile and the temple would be destroyed. But as we are going to see in the books of Kings, when God's people give themselves over to idolatry, they make it clear they don't want to live with God. So God leaves this temple. Thankfully, the story doesn't end there. Notice what God says of the temple in verse 3. **"My eyes and my heart will be there for all time"** (9:3). Solomon's temple may have been destroyed 350 years after it was built, but God didn't give up on dwelling with his people. His heart beats with a passion to live with his people, but sin stands in the way.

So God sent a different kind of temple. He sent his Son, who identified himself as God's temple when he said, **"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"** (John 2:19). John then adds that Jesus spoke this about his own body. He is God's temple. Sacrifice was made by him and in him that allows for forgiveness. And it is through him that we can draw near to God. The Bible ends as it began, by talking about God's dwelling with man. The next to the last chapter of the Bible has these words: **"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place [lit. tabernacle] of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God'"** (Rev. 21:3). It goes on to say later in that chapter that there was no temple in the new city of Jerusalem. That is because God has turned the entire earth into a temple. The Garden of Eden has returned. The tree of life is accessible once more for us to eat freely of it.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Let's close with an application. God's heart is with his temple because he wants to be with his people. He doesn't want us just to visit. He wants us to move in permanently with him. His is the opposite of the role of parents who raise their kids to see them leave the home and establish their own. God is all about gathering his children into his home forever. You can start to live that already, and we do so through a childlike faith that is willing to be helpless and pray continually. I am amazed and saddened by how easily I forget this. Let's pray and ask God to help us to remember that our needs, which are abundant, are the opportunities we have to draw near to God.