



First Kings - Chapter Eight

I 1 Kings 1:1-11:43 - The Reign of King Solomon (continues)

Summary of Chapter Eight

Solomon gathered all the elders and tribal leaders to witness the Levites bring the Ark of the Covenant and all the associated elements into the temple. When everything was in place the presence of the Lord descended into the temple in a cloud that prevented the priests from ministering and they had to leave.

Solomon then recounts the promises of God he had made to his people and to David, and how the promise was now fulfilled with Solomon as king. Solomon then publically prays thanking God for keeping his promises and asking that he always keep his ear tuned to the prayers and petitions of his people as they make them from his temple, and to act upon them as he deems appropriate.

He prays that the Lord will forgive the transgressions of his people when they come before him in the direction of the temple and acknowledge their sin. He asks God to hear and answer the prayers of Gentiles who also come to the temple because of the name of the one true God. He asks that God will uphold the cause of his people when he calls them into battle and he prophetically asks God to listen to those whom he has carried away into captivity because of their sin that, if they are truly repentant, he will restore them.

Solomon then turns to the people with a blessing, reminding them of the goodness and faithfulness of God and the trustworthy nature of his promises. He then exhorts them to always seek the Lord and follow his commandments.

The ceremony concluded with mass sacrificial offerings to the Lord and a seven day festival of celebration for all the people. On the eighth day they departed.

I.g 1 Kings 8:1-21 - The Ark brought to the Temple

The Ark of the Covenant of God, the great symbol of the Lord's presence with his people and the place where the tablets of the law were kept, as detailed in Exodus 25:10-22, Deuteronomy 10:1-5, and Joshua Chapters 3-6, had hitherto remained in a tent sanctuary somewhere in the old city of David, having been brought there by King David himself, (2 Samuel 6:16-17 and 7:2 and 1 Kings 3:15), apart from the brief trip when David was escaping Jerusalem ahead of Absalom as described in 2 Samuel 15:24-29. The temple was now ready to receive it.

I.g.i 1 Kings 8:1-13 - Dedication of the Temple

This subsection describes the gathering of all the elders and leaders to witness the Levites bringing the Ark of the Covenant into the temple. Once it is in place the glory of the Lord descends and fills the temple so that the priests cannot minister.

¹ Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites, 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. ² All the people of Israel assembled to King Solomon at the festival in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month.

1 Kings 8:1-2

Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites. Solomon intended this to be a spectacular opening ceremony for the temple. It was probably on the scale of the large productions seen in events like the modern Olympic Games and Football World Cup opening ceremonies.

To bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord. The temple was not ready to function properly until the Ark of the Covenant was set in the most holy place. The ark was the most important item in the temple, except of course for the name of God that the temple represented.

The festival in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month is the Festival of Tabernacles or Booths as described in Leviticus 23:33-43, during which the Israelites had been instructed to live in temporary shelters as a reminder of the exodus. It was observed in September/October. The temple had actually been completed in the eighth month, almost a year earlier but Solomon needed time to plan the celebration and to gather the people at a convenient time for them. The men were called to attend the Festival of Tabernacles or Booths by law and this was an appropriate time to dedicate the temple.

³ And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests carried the ark. ⁴ So 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.

1 Kings 8:3-4

The priests carried the ark. Not even the elders of Israel are safe in the immediate proximity of the ark, as seen in Joshua 3:1-4 and 2 Samuel 6:1-7, and only priests could have taken it right into the inner sanctuary of the temple (v.6). The moving of the ark, along with the tent of meeting, i.e. the tabernacle, symbolised the moving of the 'name' of the God of the exodus from a temporary to a more permanent dwelling: <<*I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle*>> (2 Samuel 7:6).

Solomon was careful to obey what God commanded about transporting the Ark of the Covenant, for it was only to be carried by the Levitical priests. He would not repeat the error of his father David in 2 Samuel 6:1-8.

And all the holy vessels that were in the tent. The Ark of the Covenant was the most important item in the temple, but not the only item. They also brought the lampstand, the table of showbread, and the altar of incense from the tabernacle into the temple. It is generally agreed that there were now two tabernacles, the original one at Gibeon, and the other that David had established in Jerusalem, which he had constructed as a temporary residence for the ark.

⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim made a covering above the ark and its poles. ⁸ The poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the holy place in front of the inner sanctuary; but they could not be seen from outside; they are there to this day.

1 Kings 8:5-8

Sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted or numbered. Solomon went far beyond custom and expectation in his effort to honour and praise God on this great day.

For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim made a covering above the ark and its poles. The cherubim filled the most holy place and provided a protective cover over the ark as they were intended to do from the day that God had shown Moses the initial design for the tabernacle.

They are there to this day. This phrase appears a number of times in 1-2 Kings when connections are being made between past and present. Since the Ark of the Covenant had disappeared long before the period in which the Book of Kings reached its final form, however, the phrase represents here a survival either from the source documents used when the books were put together or from an earlier pre exilic version that was later expanded.

⁹ There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses had placed there at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites, when they came out of the land of Egypt.

1 Kings 8:9

At an earlier point in Israel's history there were three items in the Ark of the Covenant. Although the ark had once contained the jar of manna (Exodus 16:32-34) and Aaron's rod that budded (Numbers 17:10-11), as confirmed in the NT: <<*In it stood the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which there were a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant*>> (Hebrews 9:4), there was now nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments. Nothing in the ark may also anticipate the later observation that nothing on earth can 'contain' the Lord (v.27). The ark was simply a witness to God's covenant and a symbol of his real presence; it could not contain him - nothing can!

At Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites, when they came out of the land of Egypt. The reminder of the deliverance from Egypt is significant, because there was a sense in which this, some five hundred years after the Exodus, was the culmination of the deliverance from Egypt. Out of Egypt and into the wilderness Israel, out of necessity, lived in tents, and the dwelling of God was a tent. Now, since Solomon had built the temple, the structure representing the dwelling of God among Israel was a building, a place of permanence and security. It was also a place of magnificence, fit to represent the name of God.

¹⁰ And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, ¹¹ 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.

1 Kings 8:10-11

A cloud filled the house of the Lord. This was the cloud of glory, seen often in the Old and New Testaments, sometimes called the cloud of *Shekinah* glory. It is hard to define the glory of God; it could be called the radiant outshining of his character and presence. Here it was manifested in a cloud:

- This is the cloud that stood by Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22).
- This is the cloud of glory that God spoke to Israel from (Exodus 16:10).
- This is the cloud from which God met with Moses and others (Exodus 19:9 and 24:15-18, Numbers 11:25, 12:5 and 16:42).
- This is the cloud that stood by the door of the original Tabernacle (Exodus 33:9-10).
- This is the cloud from which God appeared to the High Priest in the Holy Place inside the veil (Leviticus 16:2).
- This is the cloud of Ezekiel's vision, filling the temple of God with the brightness of his glory (Ezekiel 10:4).
- This is the cloud of glory that overshadowed Mary when she conceived Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35).
- This is the cloud present at the transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:5, Mark 9:7 and Luke 9:34-35).
- This is the cloud of glory that received Jesus into heaven at his ascension (Acts 1:9). The cloud in which Daniel had a vision of this event from the perspective of heaven more than four hundred years earlier (Daniel 7:13).
- This is the cloud that will display the glory of Jesus Christ when he returns in triumph to this earth (Luke 21:27, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and Revelation 1:7).

There is a parallel to this event in Acts 2:1-4 in which God marks the inception of the church as the temple of the Holy Spirit by making his presence known through the sound of a mighty rushing wind and by filling those present with the Holy Spirit.

The priests could not stand to minister. The extreme presence of the glory of God made normal service impossible. The sense of the presence of God was so intense that the priests felt it was impossible to continue in the building. This also occurred with the consecration of the original tabernacle: <<***Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle***>> (Exodus 40:35), and it will be seen again as this present age draws to a close: <<***Then one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever; and the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were ended***>> (Revelation 15:7-8).

It is intrinsically known that God is good and that God is love; why should an intense presence of goodness and love make the priests feel they could not continue? Because God is not only goodness and love, he is also holy - and it was the holiness of God made the priests feel that they could no longer stand in his presence.

The intense sense of the presence of a holy God is not a warm and fuzzy feeling. Men like Peter in Luke 5:8, Isaiah in Isaiah 6:5, and John in Revelation 1:17 felt stricken in the presence of God. This was not because God forced an uncomfortable feeling upon them, but because they simply could not be comfortable sensing the difference between their sinfulness and the overpowering holiness of God.

The priests can also be thought of as those who ministered unto God under the Old Covenant. The New Covenant - the covenant of grace and truth because of Jesus: <<*The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*>> (John 1:17) - offers believers a better access to God.

This glory remained at the temple until Israel utterly rejected God in the days of the divided monarchy. The prophet Ezekiel had a vision of the glory departing from the temple: <<*Then the glory of the Lord went out from the threshold of the house and stopped above the cherubim*>> (Ezekiel 10:18). Thankfully, God also gave Ezekiel a vision of the glory returning: <<*As the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east, the spirit lifted me up, and brought me into the inner court; and the glory of the Lord filled the temple*>> (Ezekiel 43:4-5), as it did with the First Coming of Christ: <<*In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified*>> (Luke 2:8-9), and it will shine even brighter at his Second Coming: <<*And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb*>> (Revelation 21:23).

¹² Then Solomon said,

‘The Lord has said that he would dwell in thick darkness.

¹³ I have built you an exalted house,
a place for you to dwell in for ever.’

1 Kings 8:12-13

The coming of the ark into the temple and the appearance of the cloud of God’s glory are sure signs that the new worship arrangements have the divine blessing; notice the connection to the thick darkness in Exodus 20:21, Deuteronomy 4:11 and 5:22. The God of the exodus and Sinai has come to dwell in his temple.

I have built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in for ever. Solomon rightly sensed that the presence of the cloud meant that God dwelt in the temple in a special way. As long as this did not slip into a superstitious misunderstanding, it was good to recognise a special place to come and meet with God. Language experts say the poem is incomplete and fragmented, and that it apparently had another opening line in its original form.

I.g.ii 1 Kings 8:14-21 - Solomon's Speech

Solomon reminds the people that this is a fulfilment of the promises God has made to his people in general and the line of David in particular, outlining why it has fallen upon him to build the temple.

¹⁴ Then the king turned round and blessed all the assembly of Israel, while all the assembly of Israel stood. ¹⁵ He said, 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who with his hand has fulfilled what he promised with his mouth to my father David, saying, ¹⁶ "Since the day that I brought my people Israel out of Egypt, I have not chosen a city from any of 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." ¹⁷ My father David had it in mind to build a house for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. ¹⁸ But the Lord said to my father David, "You did well to consider building a house for my name; ¹⁹ nevertheless, you shall not build the house, but your son who shall be born to you shall build the house for my name." ²⁰ Now the Lord has upheld the promise that he made; for I have risen in the place of my father David; I sit on the throne of Israel, as the Lord promised, and have built the house for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. ²¹ There I have provided a place for the ark, in which is the covenant of the Lord that he made with our ancestors when he brought them out of the land of Egypt.'

1 Kings 8:14-21

Who with his hand has fulfilled what he promised with his mouth to my father David. Solomon recognised that the temple was the fulfilment of God's plan, more than David's or Solomon's. David and Solomon were human instruments, but the plan and the work were God's.

"Since the day that I brought my people Israel out of Egypt," when he brought them out of the land of Egypt. Solomon pressed the remembrance of the exodus. Although it had happened five hundred years earlier, it was just as important and real for Israel as the day it had happened.

The name of the Lord. In Solomon's speech (vv.16-20), and also in the prayer that follows (vv.22-53), the word 'name' is used to avoid saying that God himself actually dwells in the temple. God's presence in the temple was real for God's 'name' represents all that he is, and the people would get his attention by calling his name, but he was not to be thought of as 'living' in the temple, as was imagined of the false gods of other nations, in any sense that would detract from the reality of his transcendence.

In biblical usage a person's name represents the person's character, everything that is true about the person. The name, i.e. character and attributes, of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is the same as the name, i.e. character and attributes, of Jesus Christ. In fact, in Matthew 28:19, the word name, the Greek word *onoma*, is singular, indicating that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share one name, i.e. one character and set of attributes.

I.h 1 Kings 8:22-53 - Solomon's Prayer of Dedication

The Ark of the Covenant has arrived in the temple (vv.1-13), and Solomon has addressed the people about the meaning of the event (vv.14-21). He now turns to address God, reflecting on the nature of God's 'dwelling' in the temple and offering a sevenfold petitionary prayer, with each section involving a plea that God should 'hear from heaven' for those who will approach him in the temple.

The prayer is important for understanding the Books of Kings as a whole, for it places both the temple and the law in wider perspective. The temple is an important building, but God is not confined by a building and is certainly not dependent on it. He will survive even its destruction, and will hear his people's prayers when they go into exile. Likewise, obedience to the law is very important, but Solomon holds out hope for restoration, even when the people fail to obey.

²² Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven. ²³ He said, 'O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, ²⁴ the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand. ²⁵ Therefore, O Lord, God of Israel, keep for your servant my father David that which you promised him, saying, "There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children look to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me." ²⁶ Therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you promised to your servant my father David.

1 Kings 8:22-26

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord. Solomon did not dedicate the temple from within the temple. It would be inappropriate for him to do so, because he was a king and not a priest. The holy place and most holy place were only for chosen descendants of Aaron: *<<Aaron and his sons shall wear them when they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister in the holy place; or they will bring guilt on themselves and die. This shall be a perpetual ordinance for him and for his descendants after him>>* (Exodus 28:43).

And spread out his hands to heaven. This was the most common posture of prayer in the OT. Many modern people close their eyes, bow their head, and fold their hands as they pray, but the OT tradition was to spread out the hands toward heaven in a gesture of surrender, openness, and ready reception.

Charles Spurgeon commented concerning this prayer, "It is worthy of remark concerning this prayer that it is as full and comprehensive as if it were meant to be the summary of all future prayers offered in the temple," and again, "One is struck, moreover, with the fact that the language is far from new, and is full of quotations from the Pentateuch, some of which are almost word for word, while the sense of the whole may be found in those memorable passages in Leviticus and Deuteronomy."

There is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart. Solomon recognised that God was completely unique. The pretended gods of the other nations could not and must not be compared to him in any way. Scripture often reminds the people of God's covenant keeping qualities: *<<If you heed these ordinances, by diligently observing them, the Lord your God will maintain with you the covenant loyalty that he swore to your ancestors>>* (Deuteronomy 7:12), *<<I said, 'O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments'>>* (Nehemiah 1:5), and: *<<I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, 'Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments'>>* (Daniel 9:4).

In bringing the temple to completion, the Lord has kept the promise he declared to his servant David: *<<He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever>>* (2 Samuel 7:13). Solomon rightly first thanked and praised God for his past fulfilment of promises. Solomon called upon God to keep the promises that he has made. This is the great secret to power in prayer - to take God's promises to heart in faith, and then to boldly and reverently call upon him to fulfil the promises.

It should always be remembered that no one can command God to fulfil a prayer request nor should they ever expect him to answer a prayer that is not within his will.

‘God sent the promise on purpose to be used. If I see a Bank of England note, it is a promise for a certain amount of money, and I take it and use it. But oh I my friend, do try and use God’s promises; nothing pleases God better than to see his promises put in circulation; he loves to see his children bring them up to him, and say, “Lord, do as thou hast said.” And let me tell you that it glorifies God to use his promises’ (Charles Spurgeon).

This kind of prayer lays hold of God’s promise. Just because God promises does not mean that the promise is possessed by the believer. Through believing prayer like this, God promises and the believer appropriates. If they do not appropriate in faith, God’s promise is left unclaimed.

²⁷ ‘But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! ²⁸ Have regard to your servant’s prayer and his plea, O Lord my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; ²⁹ that your eyes may be open night and day towards this house, the place of which you said, “My name shall be there”, that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays towards this place. ³⁰ Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray towards this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling-place; heed and forgive.

1 Kings 8:27-30

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Although God will dwell in the temple, it is not to be thought of as the only place where God is, but as a special place where his name is, a place toward which his eyes are open: <<*Thus says the Lord: Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is my resting-place? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things are mine, says the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word. Whoever slaughters an ox is like one who kills a human being; whoever sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog’s neck; whoever presents a grain-offering, like one who offers swine’s blood; whoever makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol*>> (Isaiah 66:1-3a).

Much less this house that I have built! Christians should be glad that Solomon said this. From his statement in vv.12-13 it might have been thought that he drifted towards a superstitious idea that God actually lived in the temple to the exclusion

of other places. It was important to recognise that, although God had a special presence in the temple, he was far too great to be restricted to the temple.

Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray towards this place. Solomon asked God to incline his ear towards the king and the people when they prayed towards the temple. For this reason, many observant Jews still pray facing the direction of the site of the temple in Jerusalem.

The **hearing** of prayer is done **in heaven**, which is (if anywhere is) the **dwelling-place** of God. Even then, however, God cannot be limited to any one place; he cannot, strictly speaking, dwell in even **the highest heaven**. He cannot be confined by space. In fact, God is not bound by any dimensions.

Heed and forgive. Solomon knew that the most important thing Israel needed was forgiveness. This was the greatest answer to prayer Israel could expect from God.

³¹ ‘If someone sins against a neighbour and is given an oath to swear, and comes and swears before your altar in this house, ³² then hear in heaven, and act, and judge your servants, condemning the guilty by bringing their conduct on their own head, and vindicating the righteous by rewarding them according to their righteousness.

1 Kings 8:31-32

If someone sins against a neighbour. This is the first of seven specific petitions. It concerns a legal case in which difficulties over evidence or witnesses make it impossible to resolve the case in any normal way; refer to 1 Kings 3:16-28. A priestly ritual is involved here, similar to that recorded in Numbers 5:11-31. God himself is invoked as judge to condemn the **guilty** and clear the **righteous** individual, i.e. **hear in heaven, and act, and judge your servants.** Solomon asked the God who can see what man cannot - who knows the hidden heart of man - and to enforce from heaven the oaths made at the temple.

And comes and swears before your altar in this house. The temple grounds were used as a place to verify and authorise oaths. When a dispute came down to one word against another, Solomon asked that the temple would be a place to properly swear by. However, Jesus may have taught against such oaths being taken: <<*Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.” But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King*>> (Matthew 5:33-35), although it is the city and not the temple that he specifically refers to. He does however state that: <<*whoever swears by the sanctuary, swears by it and by the one who dwells in it*>> (Matthew 23:21).

³³ ‘When your people Israel, having sinned against you, are defeated before an enemy but turn again to you, confess your name, pray, and plead with you in this house, ³⁴ then hear in heaven, forgive the sin of your people Israel, and bring them again to the land that you gave to their ancestors.

1 Kings 8:33-34

When your people Israel, having sinned against you, are defeated before an enemy. The second, third, and fourth petitions concern defeat in battle, and subsequent exile from the land, drought (vv.35-36), and assorted perils such as famine, pestilence, and siege (vv.37-40). In each case the cause of the problem is sin, and the main requirement of the situation is forgiveness, although divine instruction is also requested (v.36). Many times in their history, Israel suffered defeat and could only cry out to God. It was even worse when the defeat was because they had sinned against the Lord himself: *<<And those of you who survive shall languish in the land of your enemies because of their iniquities; also they shall languish because of the iniquities of their ancestors>>* (Leviticus 26:39), and: *<<Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgement>>* (Psalm 51:4).

But turn again to you, confess your name, pray, and plead with you in this house, then hear in heaven. Solomon asked God to hear the prayers of a defeated, yet humble and penitent Israel. God answered this prayer of Solomon, and he forgives and restores his defeated people when they come in humble repentance.

³⁵ ‘When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against you, and then they pray towards this place, confess your name, and turn from their sin, because you punish them, ³⁶ 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 on your land, which you have given to your people as an inheritance.

1 Kings 8:35-36

When heaven is shut up and there is no rain. Drought was a constant threat for the agriculturally based economy of Israel. If there was no rain, there was no food.

And then they pray towards this place, confess your name, and turn from their sin, because you punish them, then hear in heaven. Solomon does not take it for

granted that God would forgive and hear his repentant people. God's good response to repentance comes from his grace and mercy, not from justice.

Teach them the good way in which they should walk. God has already done this by giving them the Scriptures to obey: <<*He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord*>> (Deuteronomy 8:3), <<*But this command I gave them, 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you'*>> (Jeremiah 7:23). Ultimately, those who abide by the teaching of God walk in the truth: <<*Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free'*>> (John 8:31-32). This was something that John admired in others: <<*I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we have been commanded by the Father*>> (2 John 4), and: <<*I was overjoyed when some of the friends arrived and testified to your faithfulness to the truth, namely, how you walk in the truth*>> (3 John 3).

³⁷ 'If there is famine in the land, if there is plague, blight, mildew, locust, or caterpillar; if their enemy besieges them in any of their cities; whatever plague, whatever sickness there is; ³⁸ whatever prayer, whatever plea there is from any individual or from all your people Israel, all knowing the afflictions of their own hearts so that they stretch out their hands towards this house; ³⁹ then hear in heaven your dwelling-place, forgive, act, and render to all whose hearts you know – according to all their ways, for only you know what is in every human heart – ⁴⁰ so that they may fear you all the days that they live in the land that you gave to our ancestors.

1 Kings 8:37-40

All knowing the afflictions of their own hearts. Solomon recognised that some plagues are easily seen, but other plagues or afflictions come from within the heart. Many are cursed by a plague that no one else can see, but lives in their own heart. Solomon asks God to answer such a plague-stricken person when they humbly plead at the temple. A person does not have to be sinless or righteous to have their prayers answered at the temple. They could be a guilty, stricken by the plague of their own heart and still find a gracious God when if they come in true, humble repentance.

Charles Spurgeon commented, “A great many men think they know the plague of other people’s hearts, and there is a great deal of talk in the world about this family, and that person, and the other. I pray you let the scandals of the hour alone, and think of your own evils”. Jesus teaches something similar: <<*Why do you see the speck in your neighbour’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbour, “Let me take the speck out of your eye”, while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour’s eye*>> (Matthew 7:3-5).

⁴¹ ‘Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name ⁴² – for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm – when a foreigner comes and prays towards this house, ⁴³ then hear in heaven your dwelling-place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built.

1 Kings 8:41-43

The fifth petition turns from Israelites to the foreigner or Gentile who has heard of the Lord’s great name, mighty hand, and outstretched arm, qualities seen in: <<*Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by terrifying displays of power, as the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?*>> (Deuteronomy 4:34), and: <<*Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day*>> (Deuteronomy 5:15), and prays toward the temple. Solomon desires that this person, too, would know answered prayer and that all the peoples of the earth should know God’s name and fear him; refer to Isaiah 2:1-5 and 56:6-8, and Luke 7:1-10.

The temple was in Israel but it was always intended to be a house of prayer for all nations. God wanted the court of the Gentiles to be a place where the nations could come and pray. The violation of this principle made Jesus angry. When he came to the temple and found the outer courts - the only place where the Gentile nations could come a pray - more like a market place than a house of prayer, he drove out the moneychangers and the merchants; refer to Matthew 21:12 and John 2:15.

Solomon asked God to hear the prayer of the foreigner out of a missionary impulse. He knew that when God mercifully answered the prayers of foreigners, it drew those from other nations to the God of all nations.

⁴⁴ ‘If your people go out to battle against their enemy, by whatever way you shall send them, and they pray to the Lord towards the city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for your name,
⁴⁵ then hear in heaven their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause.

1 Kings 8:44-45

If your people go out to battle. The sixth petition, like the second, is concerned with war, but this time the focus is not on defeat as a result of sin but on victory in God’s cause, i.e. by whatever way you shall send them. Solomon prayed with the idea that God should answer the prayers for victory made in foreign lands towards the temple, but only when they battle where God has sent them, as in the case of the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh: <<*and when they received help against them, the Hagarites and all who were with them were given into their hands, for they cried to God in the battle, and he granted their entreaty because they trusted in him*>> (1 Chronicles 5:20). This was not a blanket request for blessing on every military campaign. The army is envisaged as fighting to bring God’s justice to the earth.

⁴⁶ ‘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; ⁴⁷ and if they come to their senses in the land to which they have been taken captive, and repent, and plead with you in the land of their captors, saying, “We have sinned, and have done wrong; we have acted wickedly”; ⁴⁸ if they repent with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies, who took them captive, and pray to you towards their land, which you gave to their ancestors, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name; ⁴⁹ then hear in heaven your dwelling-place their prayer and their plea, maintain their cause, ⁵⁰ 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 their captors, so that they may have compassion on them ⁵¹ (for they are your people and heritage, which you brought out of Egypt, from the midst of the iron-smelter). ⁵² Let your eyes be open to the plea of your servant, and to the plea of your

people Israel, listening to them whenever they call to you. ⁵³ For you have separated them from among all the peoples of the earth, to be your heritage, just as you promised through Moses, your servant, when you brought our ancestors out of Egypt, O Lord God.'

1 Kings 8:46-53

If they sin against you – for there is no one who does not sin. This is a succinct OT statement of the principle most clearly stated by Paul: <<*since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*>> (Romans 3:23).

So that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy. The seventh petition returns to the question of defeat and exile, the major concern of the prayer. If exile should take place, and if the people should repent and pray towards their land, the city of Jerusalem, and its temple, i.e. the house, then God is asked to regard them once more as his people and maintain their cause. They are the Lord's heritage or inheritance, the people God brought out of Egypt; Solomon implicitly looks for a 'second exodus,' from a different land, to match the first one.

A great example of this in practice is seen in the case of the exiled Daniel, who put his own life at risk to pray to God: <<*Although Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he continued to go to his house, which had windows in its upper room open towards Jerusalem, and to get down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God and praise him, just as he had done previously*>> (Daniel 6:10).

I.i 1 Kings 8:54-9:14 - The Temple Narrative Ended

The authors now tell of Solomon's second address to the people (vv.54-61), of the conclusion of the festivities associated with the temple's dedication (vv.62-66), and of God's second appearance to Solomon, in which he responds to Solomon's prayer with some solemn words about dynasty and temple, people and land (1 Kings 9:1-14).

I.i.i 1 Kings 8:54-61 - Solomon Blesses the Assembly

Solomon once again celebrates the fulfilment of God's promises, although this time more broadly than in vv.15-21. He refers here to the promises given through Moses, alluding in the word 'rest' to the establishment of Israel within the land of Canaan. The ultimate purpose of Israel's walking in God's ways is that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God: <<*there is no other*>> (Deuteronomy 4:35b). This idea of Israel's role in the world (vv.41-43) goes all the way back to Genesis 12:1-3 and is found also in passages such as Exodus 19:6, where Israel is to be a 'kingdom of priests,' mediating from God to his world. Israel's calling is to be a light for the Gentiles: <<*he says, 'It is too light a thing*

that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth’>> (Isaiah 49:6), bringing God’s salvation to the ends of the earth.

⁵⁴ Now when Solomon finished offering all this prayer and this plea to the Lord, he arose from facing the altar of the Lord, where he had knelt with hands outstretched towards heaven; ⁵⁵ he stood and blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice:

⁵⁶ ‘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 through his servant Moses. ⁵⁷ The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our ancestors; may he not leave us or abandon us, ⁵⁸ but incline our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, his statutes, and his ordinances, which he commanded our ancestors. ⁵⁹ Let these words of mine, with which I 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; ⁶⁰ so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no other. ⁶¹ Therefore devote yourselves completely to the Lord our God, walking in his statutes and keeping his commandments, as at this day.’

1 Kings 8:54-61

He arose from facing the altar of the Lord, where he had knelt with hands outstretched towards heaven. Verse 22 states that Solomon began this prayer standing, but some time before he finished, he fell to his knees in reverence to God. Ezra prayed on his knees (Ezra 9:5), the Psalmist calls believers to kneel (Psalm 95:6), Daniel prayed on his knees (Daniel 6:10), people came to Jesus kneeling (Matthew 17:14 and 20:20, and Mark 1:40), Stephen prayed on his knees (Acts 7:60), Peter prayed on his knees (Acts 9:40), Paul prayed on his knees (Acts 20:36 and Ephesians 3:14), and other early Christians prayed on their knees (Acts 21:5). Most importantly, Jesus prayed on his knees (Luke 22:41). The Bible has enough prayer not on the knees to reveal that it is not required, but it also has enough prayer on the knees to show that it is a way to come before a holy God.

Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke through his servant Moses. Since Solomon prayed often appealing to God’s promises, it makes sense that he praised God for the past fulfilment of his promises. Knowing this gave Solomon confidence in prayer.

One of the great things about Scripture is it shows that God has kept his promises time and time again. Therefore, Christians can have faith that he will do so again.

The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our ancestors. God promised to be with Israel, but Solomon knew it was important to ask God to fulfil his promise. He comes pleading for the promises of God to be fulfilled again and again.

So that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no other. Solomon again shows the often-neglected missionary impulse God wanted in Israel. Blessing to Israel was not meant to end with Israel; God wanted to bless the world through Israel.

I.i.ii 1 Kings 8:62-66 - Solomon Offers Sacrifices

The chapter concludes with details of the great sacrificial offerings made by Solomon and the week-long public festival that followed.

⁶² Then the king, and all Israel with him, offered sacrifice before the Lord. ⁶³ Solomon offered as sacrifices of well-being to the Lord twenty-two thousand oxen and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the people of Israel dedicated the house of the Lord. ⁶⁴ The same day the king consecrated the middle of the court that was in front of the house of the Lord; for there he offered the burnt-offerings and the grain-offerings and the fat pieces of the sacrifices of well-being, because the bronze altar that was before the Lord was too small to receive the burnt-offerings and the grain-offerings and the fat pieces of the sacrifices of well-being.

1 Kings 8:62-64

Then the king, and all Israel with him, offered sacrifice before the Lord. Chapter 8 closes with an account of the sacrifices offered in the course of the dedication of the temple – so many that the bronze altar outside the temple was not sufficient for the task. Part of the courtyard in front of the temple had to be consecrated for use as well.

So the king and all the people of Israel dedicated the house of the Lord. Amongst all the celebrations the people did not lose sight of their objective and that was to dedicate the temple to the Lord. These same joyous scenes are witnessed at the rebuilding of the temple following the return of the people from Babylon: <<*The people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy*>> (Ezra 6:16).

Solomon offered as sacrifices of well-being to the Lord twenty-two thousand oxen and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep. This was a staggering - almost grotesque - amount of sacrifice. Each animal was ritually sacrificed and a portion was dedicated to the Lord, and the remainder was given to the priests and the people. It was enough to feed a vast multitude for two weeks.

It is almost certain that Solomon paid for the sacrificial animals himself or that they were supplied from his own herds and flocks, for: <<*this shall be the obligation of the prince regarding the burnt-offerings, grain-offerings, and drink-offerings at the festivals, the new moons, and the sabbaths, all the appointed festivals of the house of Israel: he shall provide the sin-offerings, grain-offerings, the burnt-offerings, and the offerings of well-being, to make atonement for the house of Israel*>> (Ezekiel 45:17).

⁶⁵ So Solomon held the festival at that time, and all Israel with him – a great assembly, people from Lebo-hamath to the Wadi of Egypt – before the Lord our God, for seven days. ⁶⁶ On the eighth day he sent the people away; and they blessed the king, and went to their tents, joyful and in good spirits because of all the goodness that the Lord had shown to his servant David and to his people Israel.

1 Kings 8:65-66

So Solomon held the festival at that time, and all Israel with him. From the time of year and the length of this festival, it is generally understood that this was the seven days of Tabernacles or Booths, extended beyond its normal seven days for a second week on this special occasion. The Festival of Booths was in itself a grand occasion for rejoicing and for an enhanced spirit of community among all Israelites as they celebrated God's provision for his people during the wilderness years. The dedication of the temple made this occasion all the more joyful and memorable, and the time of the celebration was suitably extended.

From Lebo-hamath to the Wadi of Egypt. This phrase designates the whole Solomonic empire and is analogous to similar phrases in: <<*from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines, even to the border of Egypt*>> (1 Kings 4:21), and: <<*from Tiphseh to Gaza*>> (1 Kings 4:24). Presumably Lebo-hamath, which means 'entrance to Hamath,' therefore lay to the north of Hamath itself in central Syria on the river Orontes. This picture of a happy, unified kingdom stretching from Egypt to the Euphrates, i.e. went to their tents, joyful and in good spirits, very much corresponds to the picture given in 1 Kings Chapter 4.

Lebo-hamath was the furthest point north that the twelve spies reached early on during the exodus: <<*So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, near Lebo-hamath*>> (Numbers 13:21). See below.



The Journey of the Spies

Because of all the goodness that the Lord had shown to his servant David and to his people Israel. This account of the dedication of the temple ends where the story of the temple began - with David, not Solomon. The writer remembers that it was David's heart and vision that started the work of the temple. How joyful these people must have been, and how prosperous, when their king continued to walk righteously before God! But sadly, when King Solomon fell, the nation followed his example.