A Son Builds the Temple

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: The temple pointed God's people and the world around them to God.

MAIN PASSAGES: 1 Kings 8:10-14,20-21,54-61

On April 27, 2006, construction began on a new office building in New York City; nothing unusual about that. But this new office building was like none other, not because of a new, state-of-the-art design or even how the offices would be used but because of its name: the Freedom Tower, later renamed One World Trade Center.¹

Because of September 11, 2001, nothing built at this site could ever be “just” a building. For many people, this relatively modest patch of ground in the middle of the sprawling metropolis of New York City is considered holy ground. This new office building would not be merely a place for business to be transacted; it would be a symbol of the resilience of a city and a nation and a tall-standing memorial to those who lost their lives on 9/11.

What have you considered “sacred space” or “holy ground”? Why?
Point 1: The temple hosts God’s presence (1 Kings 8:10-14).

10 When the priests came out of the holy place, the cloud filled the LORD’s temple, and because of the cloud, the priests were not able to continue ministering, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple.
11 Then Solomon said: The LORD said that he would dwell in total darkness.
12 I have indeed built an exalted temple for you, a place for your dwelling forever.
13 The king turned around and blessed the entire congregation of Israel while they were standing.

After the temple was completed, God’s presence, represented by a thick cloud, filled the temple. The temple wasn’t just another building, another construction in a long list of monuments to Solomon’s fame. The temple was built to add to God’s fame in the world, a tangible symbol of God’s presence with His people. And this presence was so overwhelming that the priests couldn’t even continue ministering.

Why was God’s presence with His people in Israel so significant?

When Moses received the Ten Commandments, he entered into the total darkness on Mount Sinai where the Lord was, but the people stood at a distance (Ex. 20:21). This was probably what Solomon had in mind in verse 12. The Lord is unapproachable in His glory and holiness, yet the Lord invites people, always and only by His grace, into His presence, and He chooses to dwell among His people. This is the glorious picture of the cloud-filled temple. This is also the picture of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus.

God Is Immanent: When we say that God is immanent, we mean that God is personable and ________________ to those made in His image, while remaining completely ________________ and unique from all of His creation. God is not a ________________ deity.
Point 2: The temple declares God’s faithfulness (1 Kings 8:20-21).

20 The Lord has fulfilled what he promised. I have taken the place of my father David, and I sit on the throne of Israel, as the Lord promised. I have built the temple for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. 21 I have provided a place there for the ark, where the Lord’s covenant is that he made with our ancestors when he brought them out of the land of Egypt.

The promises God made years before to Solomon’s father, David, form the background for his prayer of dedication for the temple (1 Kings 8:22-61)—this was all a fulfillment of God’s faithful promises. As at the time Solomon requested wisdom from God, here he humbly acknowledged that his ascension to the throne over Israel was not because of his own strength or wisdom but because God was keeping His promises to David: to establish a house for David and to raise up the one to build the Lord’s house.

What would be some implications for life if God were not faithful?

Solomon had no illusions about the purpose of the temple he built. The temple was not designed to provide a place for God to live, as if He could be contained within its walls. Instead, the temple, like the tabernacle, was to reveal to the Israelites, and the world, that God was not absent from the earth. He may have seemed far off, but He is not. The temple filled with God’s glory communicated His desire to dwell with His people, but the Lord does not require a temple to be faithful and present with His people.

How would you describe your awareness of God’s faithful presence in your life?

Non-Existent  Sparse  Moderate  Abundant

Voices from the Church

“Knowing that God always does what he says is very reassuring. He will remain faithful even when we are no longer on earth and unable to witness the accomplishments of his promises. Just as God is faithful, he expects us to be faithful ... Let us be faithful in serving God, giving to his work, witnessing to and loving others, and proclaiming his faithfulness.”

—Africa Study Bible
Point 3: The temple advances God’s mission (1 Kings 8:54-61).

54 When Solomon finished praying this entire prayer and petition to the LORD, he got up from kneeling before the altar of the LORD, with his hands spread out toward heaven, 55 and he stood and blessed the whole congregation of Israel with a loud voice: 56 “Blessed be the LORD! He has given rest to his people Israel according to all he has said. Not one of all the good promises he made through his servant Moses has failed. 57 May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors. May he not abandon us or leave us 58 so that he causes us to be devoted to him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commands, statutes, and ordinances, which he commanded our ancestors. 59 May my words with which I have made my petition before the LORD be near the LORD our God day and night. May he uphold his servant’s cause and the cause of his people Israel, as each day requires. 60 May all the peoples of the earth know that the LORD is God. There is no other! 61 Be wholeheartedly devoted to the LORD our God to walk in his statutes and to keep his commands, as it is today.”

Solomon praised God for giving rest to his people. But Solomon wasn’t merely talking about the seven years of peace it took to build the temple. He had a much greater rest in mind. The completion of the temple, as he saw it, was not just a fulfillment of God’s promises to David; it was also a fulfillment of God’s promises through Moses (v. 56), that God would lead His people out of Egyptian captivity into a land “flowing with milk and honey” (Ex. 3:8).

? How have you experienced God’s keeping His promises?

Verses 57-60 serve as the benediction of Solomon’s prayer of dedication. His petitions taught the Israelites three critical truths, which are just as important for us today:

1. God’s people need His presence (v. 57).
2. The ability to be devoted to God comes from God (v. 58).
3. All people need to know the Lord is God (v. 60).

? How do these critical truths from Solomon’s prayer speak to what is going on in your life today?
My Mission

Because we know God dwells with us in Jesus Christ, we live in devotion and obedience to God so that the original purpose of the temple can be fulfilled: the people of the earth will know our God is King.

- How will you respond to God’s desire to dwell among His people?
- What steps can your group take to be involved in God’s mission to bless all the peoples of the earth with the gospel of Christ?
- To whom will you declare God’s faithfulness this week? How will you tell of His glory in Christ among the nations?

Voices from the Church

“Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man.”

—John Piper

Notes
When you compare Solomon’s building the temple to Moses’ constructing the tabernacle, one difference stands out: Moses crafted the tabernacle according to very specific instructions, spelled out in minute detail in Exodus 25–30. Moses followed the directions God had given him to the letter (Ex. 36–40). In chapters 39–40, the phrase “just as the Lord had commanded Moses” is used multiple times.

But while the description of the building of the temple is just as detailed in 1 Kings, the description relates to the completed temple—you won’t find God giving the blueprints for it anywhere. In fact, the only instructions from God are found in 6:12: “As for this temple you are building—if you walk in my statutes, observe my ordinances, and keep all my commands by walking in them, I will fulfill my promise to you, which I made to your father David.”

The specific design of the temple didn’t seem to matter to God as much as the condition of Solomon’s heart. Perhaps the lack of specific directions in this passage should point us toward the day when there would be no temple building but that our very bodies would be temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20), temples that exist only because of the gospel’s change of a person’s heart.

When you gather with others to worship as a church, do you tend to be more concerned with the state of the building, the state of music, the state of the sermon, or the state of your heart? Why?
Day 2: Read 1 Kings 7:1-51

Much might be made of the fact that Solomon took almost twice as long to build his own house as he did to build the temple (thirteen years according to 1 Kings 7:1, compared to seven years for the temple in 1 Kings 6:38). However, we have to be cautious in going further than the text itself does. First Kings doesn’t give any specific evaluation of this fact one way or the other. But after the exiles returned to Jerusalem, God rebuked them for “liv[ing] in your paneled houses, while this house [the temple] lies in ruins” (Hag. 1:4). David, the man after God’s own heart, had also lamented that he lived in a cedar house while the ark of God sat in a tent (2 Sam. 7:2).

God does not condemn people for living in nice houses. But He always challenges us to seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33). The shift from the account of building the temple to describe Solomon’s palace may serve to highlight Solomon’s divided priorities, and if so, let it be a warning to us. Many of us enjoy prosperity beyond what most of the rest of the world can even imagine. May we be a people who steward God’s provisions well, always using our possessions for His glory and to advance His kingdom, not our own.

In what ways might you need to seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness rather than your own?

Day 3: Read 1 Kings 8:1-13

Verse 9 emphatically states that “nothing was in the ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had put in there at Horeb.” While this seems to contradict Hebrews 9:4, which says the ark also contained a jar of manna and Aaron’s staff, the apparent contradiction can be cleared up by pointing out that the writer of Hebrews is referring to the tabernacle, not the temple (Heb. 9:2). Additionally, the jar of manna (Ex. 16:32-34) and Aaron’s staff (Num. 17:10-11) were to be placed before the ark, not inside it.

The fact that the only items in the ark were the stone tablets containing God’s Ten Commandments is illustrative of the preeminence of God’s word. After all, it’s not called the “ark of the covenant and manna and staff.” God’s word alone had a place in the ark. In the same way, God’s Word alone should be what we place in our hearts. It should be our sole source for understanding God’s will and work in our lives.

In what ways do you hide God’s Word in your heart? If you do not, how can you start?
Day 4: Read 1 Kings 8:14-53

In Solomon’s prayer of dedication, he was, in many ways, fulfilling the role of the priest, making seven petitions to God on behalf of the people. He prayed for a man who sins against his neighbor, an army that is defeated, crops that fail, foreigners that call on God, and exiles that are dispersed.

The king typically was forbidden to step into the role of a priest (see 1 Sam. 13:10-13; 2 Chron. 26:18-19). But Solomon wasn’t making sacrifices for the people; he was interceding for them. Still, this is a good reminder that on this side of the cross, we have a better mediator than Solomon: the perfect prophet, priest, and king in Jesus. As our great High Priest, Jesus makes constant intercession for us, and we are invited to take all our petitions to Him (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25).

What have you been holding back from taking to God that you can bring to Him today through Christ?

Day 5: Read 1 Kings 8:54-66

After the temple was dedicated, the people of Israel feasted, but the celebration wasn’t confined to Jerusalem; it extended to all of Solomon’s empire (v. 65). The offering made during this multiple-day feast was staggering: twenty-two thousand oxen and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats were sacrificed to the Lord. No wonder, then, that when the feast was over, the people “went to their homes rejoicing and with happy hearts for all the goodness that the Lord had done for his servant David and for his people Israel” (v. 66). The natural response to God’s extravagant blessing should be our extravagant worship, although no worship we might offer God should ever feel completely satisfactory.

When was the last time you worshiped God extravagantly? When have you experienced God’s extravagant blessing—which is made known to us most in the gospel—and were compelled to worship in response to such a degree that it could not be contained? May this be the regular posture of our hearts. May our worship not be contained to an hour or two as a gathered church, nor a single day. May we worship in such a way that we cannot stop—that as we gather, we come with hearts overflowing with gratitude, and as we scatter, we do so with hearts and lips overflowing with praise.

What can you do this week to extend your worship beyond your worship gathering?
Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- The temple hosts God’s presence (1 Kings 8:10-14).
- The temple declares God’s faithfulness (1 Kings 8:20-21).
- The temple advances God’s mission (1 Kings 8:54-61).

How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?

Why do you think the idea of a temple seems foreign and strange in our current culture? How does a biblical understanding of the temple’s purpose show how it is relevant to all of us?

In what ways does looking at the church as a temple help us see that evangelism is a community project shared by believers?

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UNIT 10

SESSION 1

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

UNIT 11

SESSION 1

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

SESSION 4

SESSION 5

SESSION 6

UNIT 12

SESSION 1

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

SESSION 4
3. Martin Luther, *Luther’s Large Catechism*, trans. John Nicholas Lenker (Minneapolis, MN: The Luther Press, 1908), 44.
In this volume of *The Gospel Project*, we cover the roughly one hundred and twenty years of Israel’s heyday: the united monarchy. After decades of the devastating cycle of sin and deliverance and being ruled by a series of judges, the Israelites called on Samuel to appoint a king for them—one like those of the nations around them. God warned His people that what they were requesting would lead to heartache and trouble, but they insisted. So God, in His kindness, gave them what they wanted in order to teach them to trust Him.

What followed was a series of three kings: Saul, David, and Solomon, each ruling for about forty years. In some ways, these kings provide us with examples to follow: the fierce determination of David not to stand for anyone impugning God’s character; the mercy and kindness David showed to a foe and his family; the wisdom of Solomon. But we also discover that each of these three men fell woefully short of being the king God’s people wanted and needed, each one proving God’s warnings true. Bookending God’s people crying out as one for a king at the start of this volume, by the time we finish, we encounter God’s people being divided into two kingdoms.

Our takeaway is clear: The hope of humanity does not rest in any human king or leader but is fixed solely and securely in the King of kings, Jesus Christ. But at the same time, we see that God delights in using His people despite their failings. God would fulfill His covenant with David, even though he committed adultery and murder. This reaffirmed the promises God had made to Abraham generations before. And though Solomon would succumb to polygamy and idolatry, God used him to build the temple, a place for God’s people to worship and be in relationship with God.

So consider as you study: What might God do through us?