

Solomon's temple

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[0 : 00] We're reading from 1 Kings, starting at chapter 7, verse 51. Thus all the work that King Solomon did on the house of the Lord was finished, and Solomon brought in the things that David his father had dedicated, the silver, the gold, and the vessels, and stored them in the treasuries of the house of the Lord.

Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers' houses of the people of Israel, with 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 of Athanim, which is the seventh month. And all the elders of Israel came to 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.

[1 : 38] 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 had 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.

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 regarded to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O Lord, my God.

[3 : 02] 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 towards 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 towards this place.

And listen to the prayer of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray towards this place. And listen in heaven, your dwelling place.

And when you hear, forgive. Well, good morning. Let me add my welcome to Simon's. It's great to sort of be together. Let's have a look at 1 Kings 5 to 8 together.

If I ask you, how do you imagine God? What comes to mind? How do you imagine God? I guess our answers might be broad.

Some of us will immediately think of all that we've heard at church and from the Bible. Some of us probably imagine him as a kind of far off dictator, a heavenly grandpa, if you like.

[4 : 09] For some, it's a bit of a stupid question because he doesn't exist. And perhaps some of us, well, we have all sorts of ideas about what God might be like, but we're just not really sure.

Well, the real question is, what has God revealed about himself? Because rather than simply leaving it to our imaginations, we want to grasp who the true God is as he has revealed himself.

Well, we're back in the book of 1 Kings, the topsy-turvy tale of God's people led through turbulent times by chaotic and broken leaders. Last week, we got a glimpse of Solomon, God's wise king, as he led God's people into justice, joy and rest.

And then we noted how Solomon pointed beyond himself to God's ultimate wise king, the Lord Jesus. Well, as we get to chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, we're very much still in the high point of Solomon's reign.

And running through these chapters is the story of Solomon building an enormous temple. Or to be more specific, building God's temple. All of Solomon's wisdom and wealth combines for this mammoth building project.

[5 : 34] But why? What's it for? Well, let's see. We're going to spend a bit of time in chapters 5, 6 and 7, and then settle for a bit of time in chapter 8.

What's the temple for? Firstly, God's temple displays his glory. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 give us a whistle-stop tour of the 11-year temple building project.

Through chapter 5, we see Solomon acquire the materials and gather the workforce. And then into chapter 6 and 7, we get intricate descriptions of all the fine details.

But why is all this here? Because it could have just said, and Solomon built God's temple. Why are there three chapters of building plans here in 1 Kings?

When I get to chapters like this in the Bible, my temptation is to just skip over them, get me back to the action. But God clearly has them in his Bible for a reason. And I'm more and more convinced these chapters are here so that we see the magnitude of the temple and how it displays God's glory.

[6 : 45] In our age of world travel of David Attenborough and Instagram, where we have access to the wonders of the world on our screens, description over a number of chapters can feel a bit dull.

But this stuff in these chapters is amazing. And so, as briefly as possible, I want us to see the wonder of the temple in these three chapters.

Seven quick things. I know that's ambitious. We'll rattle through. Hopefully it will help build a picture of the temple. Notice the scale of it. Chapter 5, verse 13, if you've got a Bible handy.

King Solomon drafted forced labor out of all Israel, and the draft numbers 30,000 men. And he sent them to Lebanon, 10,000 a month in shifts.

It'd be a month in Lebanon and two months at home. Verse 15, Solomon also had 70,000 burden bearers and 80,000 stonecutters in the hill country, besides Solomon's 3,300 chief officers.

[7 : 50] Think conscription or national service here rather than slave labor. This is Sue's church. And do some quick maths. Solomon gathers a team of more than 180,000.

Guess how many people built the shard? 2,000? You'd be right if you guessed about there. This project, this temple is enormous. Notice next then the foundations.

5, verse 17. At the king's command, they quarried out great costly stones in order to lay the foundations of the house with dressed stones.

This is no expense spared construction. But more than the stones they used, notice chapter 6, verse 1. In the 480th year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, going on, Solomon began to build the house of the Lord.

Why this interjection of dates and a flashback to Egypt? Well, because the true foundation of the temple is not stones dug out from a quarry.

[9 : 09] The true foundation of the temple is God's promises. When he brought his people out of slavery in Egypt, God promised to dwell with them. And here is the house of the Lord being built, fulfilling that promise.

Next, notice the silence. Chapter 6, 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.

Imagine all the normal building site noise, all the banging and clanging and cranes. There's none of that.

The stones are crafted at a quarry, then brought to the site, so that across the whole building site, there's an eerie quietness.

Why? Well, it's all about reverence. This is God's house. Silence. And next, notice the craft.

[10 : 18] 6, verse 15. Solomon lined the walls of the house on the inside with boards of cedar.

From the floors of the house to the walls of the ceilings, he covered them on the inside with wood,

and he covered the floor of the house with boards of cypress.

6, verse 18. The cedar within the house was carved in the form of gourds and open flowers. All was cedar. No stone was seen. And have a look on to verse 32.

He covered the two doors of olive wood with carvings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers.

There's more. If you've got a Bible, look at chapter 7, verse 17.

From 17 to 20 is the description of two pillars. They're eight meters tall. So think two double-decker buses stacked on top of each other, pretty high.

And at the top of them, there's 200 intricately carved pomegranates engraved. This is an apricot.

[11:26] Not the same, but hopefully you get the idea. Imagine sitting at the top of an eight-meter pillar, carving 200 of these pomegranates into each one.

The whole place is stunning. It's an absolute work of art. And it's a shimmering one. Because notice next, the gold.

6, verse 20. The inner sanctuary was 20 cubits long, 20 cubits wide, and 20 cubits high.

And he overlaid it with pure gold. He also overlaid an altar of cedar. 21, and Solomon overlaid the inside of the house with pure gold. And he drew chains of gold across it in front of the inner sanctuary and overlaid it with gold.

And he overlaid the whole house with gold until all the house was finished. Also, the whole altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary, he overlaid with gold. We could go on and on and on.

[12:24] Gold everywhere. Why? Because this is a house of the finest materials, because it is the finest house for the greatest God.

It's dazzling. And notice next, a contrast. This might seem a little less exciting compared to the gold. But notice at the start of chapter 7, a list.

Verse 1. Solomon was building his own house for 13 years. Verse 2. He built the house of the forest of Lebanon. Verse 6. He made the house of pillars.

Verse 7. He made the hall of the throne and the hall of judgment. And verse 8. Towards the end of verse 8, Solomon also made a house like this hall for Pharaoh's daughter.

This is a list of Solomon building all the royal buildings and government buildings. This is Buckingham Palace, the houses of parliament and all the rest.

[13:28] And it gets a meagre 12 verses. See, the emphasis of these chapters isn't government or Solomon's awkwardly large house.

The focus is clearly the temple. It gets all the airtime because it matters so much. Now, the eagle-eyed will have noticed that we skipped one in my list on the sermon outline.

That's because sitting at the heart of these three chapters about building regulations is a word from God. And right in the middle, God interjects.

He speaks. Notice the promise of his presence. Chapter 6, verse 12. Concerning this house that you are building, if you'll walk in my statutes and obey my rules and keep all my commandments and walk in them, then I will establish my word with you, which I spoke to David, your father.

And I will dwell. Among the children of Israel. And will not forsake my people Israel. This whole building project.

[14:38] It's all about relationship between God and his people. He promises to dwell with them a bit like he did in Eden back at the beginning of the Bible. So the scale, the foundations, the silence, the stunning craftsmanship, the clear contrast with all the surrounding infrastructure, the gold and the promise of God's presence.

It all paints the picture. This is a house like no other. I want to introduce you to my little friend, Anthony, the ant.

He's very small. I don't know if you can see him. He's just running around a little bit there. Just running around. I promise he's in there and I promise he's OK. And I promise that I'm going to put him back with his friends later.

That's Anthony. If you can, I want you to imagine that Anthony's been strolling around our flat. And then he goes back and he explains to his auntie friends what he saw.

He might describe some of the features. Oh, there's this wooden crafted bowl full of bright, squishy fruit. And there's this jar of the red sticky stuff that we all love.

[15:57] And there's this big white machine that whizzes and vibrates and rattles and makes things smell fresh and clean when they come out of it. And there's this war, big walls of whiteness.

And there's all this mess, depending on what day he came. But the more Anthony goes on describing to his aunt's friends, they're just left thinking, where's the mud tunnels?

Where's the single file lines and the order? This is a whole different world of house to the ones we know. Who lives there? And so as we read about the temple, its size, its beauty, its craft, its gold, we, along with God's people and the surrounding nations, we're supposed to see it and think, wow, who lives here?

And yet there's more to see. Because once the temple is finished, chapter 7, verse 51, things begin to heat up. Solomon gathers Israel, they feast and sacrifice, and then they bring the Ark of the Lord into the temple.

It's basically this box that contains the Ten Commandments written down by Moses, given to them by God. It reminds them that their God is a God who speaks.

[17 : 25] And so they put this box in the heart of the temple where it belongs. And the climax comes in chapter 8, verse 10. 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. Climax. God shows up. See, all the wonder and beauty.

And wow, isn't this building amazing? It's eclipsed. Dwarfed. By God's actual presence.

So the temple, therefore, is a huge banner in Jerusalem declaring the Lord is God and there is none like him. And when his visible presence is there, it's in no doubt.

Solomon says in 8, verse 23, O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath.

[18 : 35] The scale, the details, the glory of the Lord in the cloud, it all comes together to display, to reveal a God of matchless beauty and majesty. There is none like him.

He is entirely other. That's really what the word holy means. He is not like us. There is none like him.

And just imagine being there for a moment, the sight, the gold, the crowds, the sacrifices, the cloud of glory in the sky. What would you think? I think our main sense should be, wow, he is awesome. And I wonder if day by day, week by week, our view of God is actually just really small. When really, he's beyond our grasp.

And Solomon himself comes to that conclusion. 8, verse 27. But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you.

[19 : 49] How much less this house that I've built. It's a magnificent house, yes, but it cannot box in God. The God whose glory is revealed at the temple is beyond us.

Which begs the question, is he out of reach? Inaccessible? At a distance? And the second thing to see, God's temple brings access to him.

That's a huge claim, isn't it? That the enormous, unhouseable God we just got a teeny weeny glimpse of, he comes close. Have a look at verse 27 again.

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 towards this house. The place which you have said, my name shall be there. That you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers towards this place.

[21 : 10] Of course the temple can't contain God. But in a very real sense, he is there. His eyes are turned, his ears are attentive.

Night and day, his special attention is towards the temple. He's promised. His name is there. So the temple functions a bit like one of those red phones the army chief has.

You know, the one that gives a direct line to the prime minister when things are bad. Or it's a bit like having the queen's mobile number. You can't get hold of those people.

You can't. They are unavailable to you and me. unless you've been given special access. And so for his people, God is accessible here at the temple.

The immense God, he is intimate with his people at the temple. He's so big they can't get their heads around him but they can engage him because of his grace.

[22 : 16] His mighty magnificence should make us feel small compared to how big he is but he does hear the prayers of his people. The mighty God becomes close.

It would have been amazing to be there, wouldn't it? To be able to explain to your children our great God this is his house. Here you can hear him speak his word.

You can hear of his promises. Here you can pray to him. If it's true that we struggle to grasp the majesty and the glory and the bigness of God, I think it's probably also true that we struggle to appreciate God's availability to his people, his closeness to us.

I wonder if we take that for granted. That the great God is accessible. There's more though. There's always more. We could stay in One Kings for years.

We're not going to do that I don't think. Now, if the temple is a communication channel, that red telephone, what will most of the calls be about?

[23 : 35] Well, that becomes clear as we see God's temple is where forgiveness is available. After the wonder and the beauty of the temple and God's display of glory in the cloud, Solomon's prayer, well, it lands with cold, hard realism.

He knows, though he and his people have the huge privilege of access to God, he knows their huge problem is going to be their sin. So most of the calls to this temple are going to be asking God for forgiveness.

Have a look at 8 verse 30. Listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray towards this place and listen in heaven your dwelling place and when you hear, forgive.

Then on from verse 30, Solomon repeats the same phrase five times in total. Verse 30, verse 34, verse 36, verse 39 and verse 50.

when you hear, God, forgive us. And each time the circumstances get worse and worse, Lord, when we've messed up in this way or this way or even this way, when we've been carried off to a foreign land and we've been rejected by those people and we've rejected you, even then, forgive.

[25 : 11] But notice there's no flippancy about it for Solomon. It's not an automatic thing. Have a look at chapter 8, verse 48.

In the middle of the end of his prayer, Solomon says, if they, your people, repent with all their mind and with all their heart, he goes on, then forgive.

See, forgiveness is available at the temple. If God's people repent, if with all their heart and with all their soul they turn from their wickedness and rejection of God and come back to him for forgiveness.

forgiveness. The temple is an amazing blessing because it provides access to God so that the people who run away can come back and still access him and get forgiveness.

forgiveness. Now, as the people stood gazing at the temple and listening to Solomon pray, I wonder if they realised how much they'd need this.

[26 : 27] I wonder if more likely they felt Solomon's prayers were a bit much. Oh, Solomon, don't talk about sin, Solomon, you're spoiling this spectacle. But in just a few chapters time they will have rejected the Lord and they will need his gracious provision.

of the forgiveness of their sin. And because of his kindness they'll be able to go to God for forgiveness. I wonder if we feel a bit like them sometimes.

I talk of sin and judgement, it's not very wholesome is it? But we don't get to stroll up to God on our terms. To come to him requires humble acknowledgement of sin and a willingness to change.

God but whoever we are and whatever we've done we can come. Anyone can come.

Forgiveness is available to all. That the majestic mighty God who radiates beauty and goodness would forgive people who turn from him and reject him.

[27 : 38] That is a staggering thing. Something to celebrate. great. So what has God revealed of himself?

Well through his temple God displays himself to be a God of unmatched and immeasurable glory. He shows himself to be a God who comes near to his people.

He's immense and intimate with them. And he shows himself to be a God of generous grace, making forgiveness available. But the one king's temple is destroyed and we don't have one.

So are we stuck? Can we pray? How do we access God now? Do we need to find a holy building or go to a special church?

As we see all that the one king's temple was for, it should cause us to long for a temple of our own. Well if you've got a Bible handy, turn with me to John chapter one.

[28 : 57] John chapter one. As we draw things together, I want us to see how all the things we've highlighted about the temple in one king's are true of Jesus.

John chapter one, let's pick it up at verse 12. John speaking of Jesus says, but to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we have seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth.

Solomon in chapter eight, he exclaimed, will God indeed dwell on the earth? Answer, yes, Solomon, God will indeed dwell on the earth.

Jesus is God in the flesh, dwelling with his people. As he works miracles, heals the sick, cares for the needy, shows deep compassion and comfort, confronts wickedness, we see displayed the God of unmatched and immeasurable glory.

[30 : 22] As Jesus is born in Bethlehem, God takes on human form. As Jesus is baptised in the Jordan River, as he goes about eating and drinking with sinners and tax collectors and outcasts, he shows himself to be a God who comes near.

He is immense and intimate, Jesus. And as he's betrayed and arrested and mocked and tried and declared guilty and hung on the cross, dying to take the punishment we deserve for our sin, he shows himself to be a God of generous grace, securing forgiveness for all who trust in him.

Later in John's gospel, Jesus will refer to himself explicitly as God's temple, so that all of the things we've seen in 1 Kings 5 to 8, it's true of Jesus, it's fulfilled in him.

we really can say Jesus, the true temple, displays God's glory, Jesus, the true temple, brings access to God, Jesus, the true temple, is where forgiveness is available.

God's people back in 1 Kings, they took the temple for granted, they ignored the God it revealed, they turned away from him. 1 Kings 11 onwards paints a horrible, sad picture of them.

[31 : 56] And so as we see the glory of God in the face of Christ, the true temple, let's not take him for granted, let's treasure him and rejoice at all we have in him.

If I ask you, how do you imagine God? What comes to mind? Well, there's no need to simply imagine. God has revealed himself fully and finally in the person of Jesus Christ.

He's the God of unmatched glory, the God who comes near to forgive. If you want to know what God is like, just look to the true temple, feast your eyes on Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Our Father, we approach you, our great God, in the name of Jesus. Jesus, that is a wonderful thing, and we praise you that we can come to you, and we pray, please, that you would help us to treasure the Lord Jesus and enjoy him in all of life, and we pray in his name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.