

Will God indeed dwell on the earth?

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[0 : 00] Now let's turn back to 1 Kings chapter 8. And let's look at these words in verse 27. 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. Now if you had to choose a point in biblical history that you could go back and be there and witness the event, I wonder what event you would choose in the Bible.

I think this chapter, 1 Kings chapter 8, the dedication of the temple, it must be one of the greatest moments in biblical history. It must have been an incredible sight, it must have been an amazing thing to be at, full of glory and splendour.

The context, of course, is that the Israelites had been slaves for 400 years in Egypt and they had been nomads for many, many years wandering around the wilderness.

They had no homeland, they had no capital city and they had no temple. And it must have been an incredible moment, if you're an Israelite, after nearly a thousand years to suddenly see a permanent home for God in the temple.

[1 : 36] Their kingdom finally becomes permanent. They finally have a place where they can meet with God, a trusting place where sinful man can meet a holy God.

We read in verse 5 that they sacrificed sheep, goats and cattle that could not be counted or numbered.

If you go to the end of the chapter, I think it's verse 63, it says that this festival took place over two weeks and they sacrificed 22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep and goats as a fellowship offering. This event is in such a grand scale, it's hard to get our heads around it. There must have been so much glory and splendor. There must have been a lot of blood as well as all these animals were sacrificed and offered up as burnt offerings.

And as Solomon, really at the high watermark of the history of Israel, gazes at this temple, which has now been filled with the glory of God and the priests have withdrawn from it.

[2 : 55] As he gazes at the glory-filled temple, he asks this incredible question in verse 27, But will God indeed dwell on the earth?

Or as the corresponding chapter in 2 Chronicles 6, verse 18 says, But will God indeed dwell with man on the earth?

Solomon cuts to the very heart of why God created man. God didn't create us to park us in some distant world.

He created us so that he could dwell with us and fellowship with us. And Solomon is grappling with this great issue of why God would dwell with man.

He is looking at the holiness of God in this temple and he is saying, Will this holy God dwell with sinful man? Will this omnipotent God who dwells everywhere and anywhere, will he dwell in this one place in the temple?

[4 : 08] And I think Solomon is also grappling with the whole issue of will God dwell with us permanently? Or will God withdraw his presence from us?

Of course, the glory of the gospel is that God did indeed dwell with man in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I want tonight to look at this question that Solomon asks under four headings.

The glory of God in the covenant, the glory of God in the incarnation, the glory of God in the believer, and the glory of God in the church.

So let's first of all look at the glory of God in the covenant. What is the great theme of Solomon's prayer as we read it there? Well, there are two themes really.

The first theme is, up until verse 30, the great theme is of thankfulness for God's covenant faithfulness in the past. And if we had read on the rest of the chapter, Solomon pleads for future mercy.

[5 : 17] Those are the two great themes of his prayer. Thankfulness for covenant faithfulness and a plea for future mercy. This moment in Israel's history is the fulfillment of God's covenant promises.

And isn't it wonderful how the Holy Spirit descends to our level to help us to understand who God is and what God does.

And in verse 24, he uses this wonderful anthropomorphic language. He gives God human attributes.

He gives God a mouth and he gives God hands. As it says in NIV, You have kept your promise to your servant David, my father. With your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it.

And we could spend years and years studying covenant theology. But covenant theology is essentially that what God says with his mouth, he does with his hands.

[6 : 26] God is a God who keeps his promises. That is fundamentally what covenant theology is. And what did God promise David back in 2 Samuel?

Well, he promised David that he would cut off his enemies. That David's name would be great. That God would appoint a place for Israel where they would be settled.

That his son would build a house for God. And he makes this incredible promise to David that his kingdom would be established forever.

His kingdom would be established forever. And as Solomon looks out on this glorious site of the completion of this glorious temple, he sees God's covenant faithfulness in the past.

He sees that God will always be with his people because God is covenanted to them. And the great answer to the question is, does God dwell on the earth?

[7 : 34] Is, well, God has always dwelt with his people. He dwelt with his people in what theologians call theophanies and Christophanies. He dwelt with his people in appearances to Noah and to Abraham and to Jacob.

Joseph, God appeared to these men. He appeared to Moses again and again. Remember he said to Moses that he would speak to him face to face like no other man.

And then, of course, he was with his people in the Exodus. A cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He was with them in the wilderness, in the tabernacle.

Wherever they went, he went. God was with them in the roughest of places. He was with them in the most difficult of circumstances. He was with them in the faintest of battles.

God was always in their midst. Everything they experienced, God experienced. He was with them in their weaknesses. And he was with them in their triumphs.

[8 : 42] Where he led, they followed. He was with them in their triumphs. But now, in this point in Israel's history, God has decided that Solomon should build a permanent building.

A glorious temple. A huge and glorious building. Overlaid with gold and full of imagery. And we see in verse 6 that the glory of the Lord filled the temple.

Sorry, in verse 6, the priests brought the ark of the Lord in. And verse 10, when the priests came out of the holy place, the cloud filled the Lord's temple.

And because of the clouds, the priests were not able to continue ministering. For the glory of the Lord filled the temple. Without the presence of the Lord, the building was just a shell.

And I wonder if there were one or two priests holding their breath to see if the Lord's glory would indeed fill this house. So this house symbolizes God's covenant faithfulness in the past.

[10 : 03] And the answer to Solomon's question, will God dwell on the earth, is yes, he has. He has dwelt in shadows, in types, in appearances to Adam and to Abraham and to Jacob and to Moses.

And now he dwells in this spectacular and glorious temple. God has dwelt with his people in covenant faithfulness. And shouldn't that bring us huge comfort tonight?

That God is a God who dwells with his people in covenant faithfulness. God is a God that if you commit your life to him, he is faithful.

He fulfills all his promises, however long they may take. God is with us in the roughest wilderness, in the brightest days. He is with us in life and he will be with us in death.

So the first thing we see is that God dwells with his people in the glory of the covenant. But then secondly, we see that God is with us, dwells with us in the glory of the incarnation.

[11 : 20] Remember we said that the second theme of Solomon's prayer was a plea for future mercy. As we go down the prayer, we see time and time again that Solomon uses this phraseology.

Verse 31, when a man sins against his neighbour. Verse 33, when your people Israel are defeated before an enemy. Verse 35, when there is famine in the land, when there is drought.

Sorry, verse 37, when there is a famine in the land. Verse 44, when the people go out to fight.

Verse 46, when they sin against you, for there is no one who does not sin.

Solomon is looking down the corridor of history and what does he see? He sees famine, he sees defeat, he sees declension. And what does he ask for?

He asks for mercy. Over and over again he asks and pleads for future mercy. When your people Israel are defeated before an enemy because they have sinned against you and they return to you and praise your name and they pray and plead with you for mercy in this temple.

[12 : 38] May you hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel. May you restore them to the land you gave to your ancestors. Solomon is saying to God, he says, when the people sin in the future, when they are defeated by their enemies, when there is a famine, when they fall out with their neighbours and their families, he says to God, here in heaven your dwelling place.

Remember the name that you have placed on the temple and forgive your people. You see, this glorious temple was not meant to be just a spectacle.

It was meant to be a meeting place between God and man where the sins of the people were forgiven. It was meant to be a place of mediation, a place of atonement, a place where animals were sacrificed.

Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. Of course, as we know with our New Testament eyes, as we look back, the temple was just a shadow.

It was a symbol. How far would God go to dwell on the earth? What does John tell us?

[14 : 08] The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. That Word that was from the beginning, from before the foundation of the world. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and apart from him, not even one thing came into being that has come into being. The glory of God breaks into a sinful world in the incarnation.

Will God dwell on the earth? He will dwell in the person and work of his Son. The glory of the incarnation.

It's amazing, isn't it, that John doesn't even say the Word became a man. He says the Word became flesh. God was so determined to be identified with his creation, he says the Word became flesh.

God wanted to be flesh and bones, to identify with his creation in the incarnation. Now there is great mystery in the incarnation, and I'm not the person to unfold all that mystery.

[15 : 24] How can we understand the immutable God taking on flesh, taking into union with himself a true humanity without in any way altering his deity?

It is beyond our understanding. Colossians 2 verse 9 says, For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him who is the head of all rule and authority.

Christ stands as a man amongst men, but yet he is head and shoulders above us. The whole Christ is contained in the body of Jesus, but yet the whole body of Jesus cannot contain the whole Christ.

Jesus is the Son of Mary with brothers and sisters, but truly he was the Son of God, as the centurion said at the cross. How far would God go to dwell on the earth?

He would go all the way to Bethlehem, and he would go all the way to Calvary. How can we understand the immutable God dwelling in the arms of a virgin, a Jewish virgin?

[16 : 41] Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Yes, says the gospel. He will dwell as a baby in Bethlehem. He will walk on earth healing and doing good, and ultimately he will go to the cross for his people.

And the great question tonight is, can we dwell with him in heaven? And the great answer is yes, because he dwelt with us on this earth.

What happened at the cross? Well, we've sung about it, haven't we, in Psalm 85. Truth met with mercy. Righteousness and peace came mutually.

The righteous demands of the law were satisfied by Christ's active obedience. And his substitution satisfied in his passive obedience.

Christ satisfied the just demands of the law. No longer is there a flaming cherubim. No longer is the cherubim guarding over the law of God.

[17:50] They are gone in Christ. No longer are thousands of animals being slaughtered in front of the temple. No longer do we have to sacrifice animals to atone for God's people.

Christ is the sacrifice. Christ came to be the meeting place between God and men, and he is now the place of reconciliation. And one day for the believer, there will be no barrier.

Between us and our mediator. When John sees a new Jerusalem in heaven in Revelation 21, we read, I did not see a temple in it, because the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb are its temple. There will be no temple in heaven. It will be all Christ, all church. Heaven will be all Christ. There will be no barrier between us and our Saviour.

There will be no sin, and no sorrow, and no tears, and no darkness, and no death. The lamp is the Lamb, and the glory of God illuminates it.

[19:08] The temple was glorious. How much more glorious will heaven be? Uninterrupted fellowship with God. No barriers, no ruptures, no sin, no famine, no battles, no need for future mercy.

Christ will be everything. everything. We will be basking in the glory of God for all eternity. What about now?

You see, it's all very well talking about heaven. But what about now? You've got no idea what I'm going through in my life. You have no idea what family troubles that I have, the tragedies, the challenges that I have at work.

But the great thing tonight is that not only does God's glory dwell in Christ and the incarnation, but the glory of God dwells in the believer tonight, as we see thirdly.

The amazing thing is that God hasn't just dwelt with his people in the past, in the covenant. He hasn't just walked on this earth in the person of Christ. He promises to dwell in our hearts right now, today.

[20:36] Isaiah 57, verse 15 says, For thus says the one who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit.

Who does Christ indwell tonight? Well, he doesn't indwell the proud. He indwells those who have a contrite and lowly spirit.

God dwells in those who have emptied themselves of self. God indwells those who see no good in themselves, who fall before a holy God and cry out, What must I do to be saved?

Donald MacDonald, the minister of Greyfriars who died in 1977, has got a lovely sermon called The Dwelling Place of God. And he says in that sermon, As I go along on the stream of time to eternity, this is one of my greatest comforts, that I know perfectly well when I come into the presence of God or come to him in prayer, that I come with empty hands.

God dwells with those who are broken, who are humble, and those who are lowly.

[22:06] The saint who is indwelt is the one who has seen his sin and his great need for the mercy of God. God dwells in the hearts of the hungry.

He tabernacles in our hearts. What did Christ say in his farewell discourse in John 14? Jesus answered him, If anyone loves me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him.

The Trinity comes to encamp in the hearts of believers. Great God of heaven tabernacles encamps in our hearts.

Just stop and think for a moment that the high and lifted one is dwelling in your heart tonight if you are a believer. Richard Sibbes has got an amazing sermon about entertaining the Holy Spirit.

He says, There is nothing in the world so great and sweet a friend that will do us so much good as the Spirit if we give him entertainment. How do we entertain the Spirit in our hearts?

[23:22] Entertaining involves sharing, doesn't it? It involves preparation. It involves receiving our guest. When was the last time we shared things with God?

When God comes into our hearts he brings all his riches with him, doesn't he? He's like a king that comes with all his armies to protect us.

He comes with all his riches to enrich us and he comes with all the perfumes of his palace to sweeten our every sorrow.

We become, as 1 Corinthians 6 says, the temple of the living God. God. And that's why when we look at a Christian, what we should see is the beauty of holiness shining out.

When we look at a Christian, we shouldn't see twistedness and anger. We should see beauty, we should see glory as we as Christians go on in the Christian life.

[24 : 34] Calvin said, no one ought to be reckoned among the disciples of Christ unless we perceive the glory of God impressed on him as with a seal by the likeness of Christ.

The likeness of Christ should be the seal of our union with Christ. Will God dwell on the earth? Yes, he will in the hearts of his people.

And then fourthly and lastly, God dwells on the earth in the glory of the church. It says in Ephesians 3, to me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

What is the church? Is it a place for religious bureaucracy? Is it a place for orthodox belief?

Well it is these things but ultimately the church is the place of the living God. It is the place where God's presence and power are manifest to the world.

[26 : 04] When we read about the early church in Acts 2 we're told that they all gathered together they were organising and forming the early church and we read that the glory of God came down and breathed life into that church.

The spirit of God came like a mighty rushing wind. The church is more than orthodox belief. It's more than theology. It's more than strategy.

As Professor John Murray said while Pentecost cannot be repeated neither has it been withdrawn. And that's why we must pray for Pentecost power in our midst.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom but in demonstration of the spirit and of power.

Every preacher in the world or most preachers I think get in from the pulpit very often and say I'm never going to preach again. We feel so unworthy but we don't preach with enticing words we preach in the demonstration of the Holy Spirit and that's why some of us get back into the pulpit because the spirit can take our feeble efforts and can bless them to people who hear us.

[27 : 31] Paul didn't come with enticing words he came with the power of the Holy Spirit and the church's power is not in human wisdom it's not in clever strategies it's in the manifestation and the power of the Holy Spirit and we see so many preachers and we see so many churches who are full today of their own wisdom the glory and their enticing words we have these celebrity preachers who are built up and who so often fall what the church needs today is the power of God to bless our feeble efforts to accompany the preaching of the gospel and to radiate the glory of God in our lives to our friends and to our families what's the secret of the church's success utter dependence on God and God alone the parallel passage to 1 Kings 8 and 2 Chronicles 6 and 7 this is what

God says to Solomon if my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land that was God's response to Solomon's great prayer and that's what we need to do in this day and age we need to humble ourselves we need to pray and seek the face of God the great problem in our country is not out there it's in here it's in the church we need to humble ourselves we need to call on God God comes in revival what is one of the first marks of revival people start to delight in worship again the courts of God become amiable again Psalm 126 when the children of

Israel were brought back from exile were told that they sang and in verse 2 it says and filled with laughter was our mouth our tongue with melody they among the hear and said the Lord great things for them hath wrote the people of Israel were filled with singing again as they were revived isn't it interesting in Psalm 40 verse 3 he put a new song in my mouth for God to magnify many shall see it and shall fear it on the Lord who lie why is it they see it and don't hear it if they're singing it's because in times of revival when people are converted when the church is revived people see people singing again worship becomes animated that's what happens in revival in God is all we want my very heart and flesh cry out oh living God for thee will God dwell on the earth yes he will

dwell in his church what can we say just by way of conclusion will God dwell on the earth yes he did yes he does and yes he will in the new heavens and the new earth and the great question for us does God dwell with us does God dwell with us as individuals does God dwell with us as a church there are many churches that meet where God is not present what we need and what we want more than anything else is the presence and the power of

God in this place if you're a believer tonight thank God that God's glory came to earth that he dwells in your heart and that one day you will dwell with him forever in the new Jerusalem let me just finish by reading some words in Revelation 21 and I saw no temple in the city for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb and the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it for the glory of God gives it light and its lamp is the Lamb by its light will the nations walk and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it and its gates will never be shut by day and there will be no night there they will bring into the glory and the honour of the nations but nothing unclean will ever enter it nor anyone who does not just does what is detestable or false but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life will you be in the place tonight where there is no temple is your name written in the Lamb's book of life we'll give thanks tonight that God did dwell on the earth he dwelt in covenant he dwelt in incarnation and he is dwelling in our hearts and in our church today so that one day we can be in a place which has no temple may God bless these thoughts to us let us pray our gracious God we thank you that you are all the glory in Emmanuel's land we thank you oh Lord that you indeed came down to dwell with sinful man on this earth we thank you that as Solomon gazed on that glorious temple and asked that great question will God indeed dwell on the earth we thank you oh Lord that everything was pointing to a greater reality to the Lord

[33 : 40] Jesus Christ coming in all his glory in all the mystery and beauty of the incarnation and we thank you Lord that you are now dwelling in our hearts and oh Lord how we pray that your glory and the beauty of Christ would shine out from us give us oh Lord that it shines so dimly and Lord we pray that once again you would come to dwell in your church in Scotland that Lord you would pour out Pentecost power and that Lord you would convict us of our sins and our great need of you we pray for that power to come in our communities we long and pray oh Lord that men would cry out what must I do to be saved Lord we see no men around us and women have no sense of their needs we pray oh God that you would come and convict and convert Lord we thank you for the riches of your word we thank you for the beautiful imagery of the Old

Testament and we thank you oh Lord that that temple has now become Christ a meeting place a place of mediation a place of atonement a trusting place for you and your people and Lord we pray that you would give us a great hope for heaven we don't think much on heaven Lord we are sorry but we thank you oh God that one day we will be in that place where there is no temple and Lord we long for that day and Lord we pray that you would remind us of how short life is and how long eternity is and that Lord you would help us to live useful and fruitful lives be with us Lord as we close in prayer in praise and we pray that you would go with us into this new week that you would bless us and keep us in whatever lies ahead of us for all we ask is in Christ's name Amen Amen