



The True Role of the Temple

“But who is able to build a house for Him, for the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain Him? So who am I, that I should build a house for Him, except to burn incense before Him?”

2 Chronicles 2:6

A lot of time and energy is spent producing models of the temples which once existed in Jerusalem, along with their associated activities overseen by the priesthood relating to sacrifices, offerings, and celebrations. But when it came time for Solomon to dedicate the temple as recorded in 1 Kings 8 and 2 Chronicles 6, he never once mentions these things. His entire dedication focuses on the true role of the temple in the form of prayer. He realized this before he'd even laid the first stone, and this is what he meant by stating that the most he could hope to do is “burn incense before Him.”

Some call it the “church growth movement”, but in reality this is but the latest niche in a whole field of study called “ecclesiology”. What is the theological basis for a church’s structure, operation, and associated activities? It embodies a huge number of works throughout the centuries, most often beginning with the study of the book of Acts, although I’ll admit there have been a LOT of contributions to the field these past 30 years. Quite often the discussion begins with the question, “How did the early church do it?” But we have examples we can look to even in the Old Testament.

I know that we don’t build literal temples any more, but I’m sure you’ve noticed the repeated references in the New Testament which

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specifically state that we, His church, are the temple. (1 Co. 3:16; 1 Co. 6:19; 2 Co. 6:16; Eph 2:21; 1 Pe. 2:5) And I can't help noticing how Solomon established the theological foundation of the temple as something based on prayer. Why is it that most books, web sites, and articles undertaking to provide a biblical basis for how the New Testament temple should look and act rarely give prayer more than a passing mention? In fact, why is it that the centerpiece of modern worship – the Sunday morning service – gives prayer the smallest amount of time and emphasis over everything else?

The fact that Solomon's dedication omitted so many of the "things" of God one normally associates with the temple is a powerful statement in itself of seeking something greater: God's eyes and ears.

*that Your eyes may be open toward this house night and day, toward the place of which You have said, 'My name shall be there,' **to listen** to the prayer which Your servant shall pray toward this place. Listen to the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place; hear in heaven Your dwelling place; **hear and forgive.***

1 Kings 8:29-30

In Solomon's dedication of the temple, he provides 7 specific examples of prayer. He sees the temple as but a focusing point for directing prayer to God's actual dwelling place in heaven. Solomon creates no illusion that there's inherent power in the temple itself, but acts as a visible reminder of the right way to approach and engage in prayer. And some of his examples specifically address the situation when you can't physically visit the temple, further reinforcing the fact that the most important "place" of worship is where the human heart happens to be at the time. There is no substitute for a sincerely committed heart regardless of its present geographical location.

Verse	Group or Circumstance Addressed	From Where Will God Hear?	The Desired Result
2 Ki. 8:31-32	The prayers of the individual	"...hear in heaven and act..."	"...justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness."
2 Ki. 8:33-34	The prayers of the nation	"...hear in heaven, and forgive..."	"...bring them back to the land..."
2 Ki. 8:35-36	The prayers of the sinful	"...hear in heaven, and forgive..."	"...teach them the good way in which they should walk..."
2 Ki. 8:37-40	The prayers of the disobedient	"...hear in heaven, Your dwelling place, and forgive and act..."	"...render to each according to all his ways...that they may fear you..."
2 Ki. 8:41-43	The prayers of the foreigner	"...hear in heaven...and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You..."	"...that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You...and that they may know that this house...is called by Your name."
2 Ki. 8:44-45	The prayers before going into battle for the Lord	"...hear in heaven..."	"...maintain their cause..."
2 Ki. 8:46-53	The prayers of the repentant	"...if they take thought in the land where they have been taken captive and repent and make application to You...and pray to You toward...the house which I have built for Your name...hear their prayer and supplication in heaven Your dwelling place..."	"...maintain their cause and forgive Your people...and make them objects of compassion before those who have taken them captive..."

Am I the only one who sees the plethora of suggestions of how to accomplish these things with tools *other* than prayer? It's disturbing to me that in the name of making church services "seeker sensitive"

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that many of these topics would never be broached in the first place for fear of making someone uncomfortable. And yet, if God's temple isn't going to be the visible model for prayer, what realistic hope do we have that *anyone* will engage in meaningful prayer activities the rest of the week?

Amongst Solomon's closing remarks in his dedication, he ties prayer to the other essential ingredients composing a whole, mature believer's spiritual walk.

*"May the Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers; may He not leave us or forsake us, that He may incline our hearts to Himself, **to walk in all His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His ordinances**, which He commanded our fathers.*

2 Kings 8:57-58

And he concludes that such a commitment to prayer will not only produce God's desired results for the quality of the individual believer by its encouragement of obedience to His Word and will, but that it will even accomplish what church-growth strategies seem to desire most, an effective, visible witness to the world.

so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no one else.

2 Kings 8:60

I can't help but come to the conclusion that if His temple made it their priority to talk with Him consistently and in depth, that all the other components of ecclesiology would fall into their proper place.

In His Love,

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