

1 Kings 8:22-61 • The True Role of the Temple

Introduction

There's a lot of Scripture devoted to the Laws and workings of the temple and the priests and Levites supporting it. But it's important to note that the temple—along with its precursor the tabernacle—have only actually existed for a very small fraction of Israel's overall history, much less the entire history of mankind. For the vast majority of time, the temple has not existed. As there is a group in modern Israel that has reconstituted the Sanhedrin and is now purported to be planning to construct a 3rd temple—and as many believe another temple is part of the End Times signs and prophecies—what is the **biblical** purpose of the temple? This question is explored in detail in Solomon's dedication of the original temple. And considering that the New Testament tells us that **WE** comprise His temple, how might this apply to us?

²²Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven. ²³He said, "O LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing lovingkindness to Your servants who walk before You with all their heart, ²⁴who have kept with Your servant, my father David, that which You have promised him; indeed, You have spoken with Your mouth and have fulfilled it with Your hand as it is this day. ²⁵Now therefore, O LORD, the God of Israel, keep with Your servant David my father that which You have promised him, saying, 'You shall not lack a man to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your sons take heed to their way to walk before Me as you have walked.' ²⁶Now therefore, O God of Israel, let Your word, I pray, be confirmed which You have spoken to Your servant, my father David.

²⁷"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built! ²⁸Yet have regard to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to listen to the cry and to the prayer which Your servant prays before You today; ²⁹that 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. ³⁰Listen 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.

[Read v.22-26]

Q: According to v.23, with whom does God keep covenant?

A: "...Your servants who walk before You with all their heart..."

Q: According to v. 25, what is the condition of God's promise to David? On what is it predicated?

A: "...if only your sons take heed to their way to walk before Me as you have walked."

Q: So when Solomon states as in v.26, "let Your word, I pray, be confirmed", what is he really calling attention to in this introductory prayer?

A: Solomon is calling the attention of those present to their need and even responsibility to be completely obedient and wholly committed to God and His ways.

Q: Does the temple itself "guarantee" anything?

A: This would indicate "no". The only "guarantee" that man can have is that he will be rewarded according to his obedience.

[Read v.27-30]

Q: By what is stated here, does the temple actually contain God?

A: Absolutely not.

Q: Although this is called a house "of which You have said, 'My name shall be there'", where does Solomon state God actually resides?

A: "...in heaven Your dwelling place..." (v.30)

Q: What is it that Solomon is then asking for in regards to God's relationship with the temple?

1. "...that Your eyes may be open **toward** this house night and day..." (v.29)
2. "...to listen to the prayer which Your servant shall pray **toward** this place..." (v.29)
3. "Listen to the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray **toward** this place..." (v.30)
4. "...hear and forgive." (v.30)

Point: The temple is intended to be God's house of prayer.

³¹“If a man sins against his neighbor and is made to take an oath, and he comes and takes an oath before Your altar in this house, ³²then hear in heaven and act and judge Your servants, condemning the wicked by bringing his way on his own head and justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness.

[Read v.31-32]

Q: What group or circumstance is being addressed?

A: The prayers of the individual.

Q: From where will God hear the individual’s prayer in the temple?

A: “...hear in heaven and act...” (v.32)

Q: What is the result of an individual’s right heart committed to God in prayer?

A: “...justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness.” (v.32)

[Read v.33-34]

³³“When Your people Israel are defeated before an enemy, because they have sinned against You, if they turn to You again and confess Your name and pray and make supplication to You in this house, ³⁴then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You gave to their fathers.

Q: What group or circumstance is being addressed?

A: The prayers of the nation.

Q: From where will God hear the nation’s prayer in the temple?

A: “...hear in heaven, and forgive...” (v.34)

Q: What is the result of a nation’s right heart committed to God in prayer?

A: “...bring them back to the land...” (v.34)

[Read v.35-36]

³⁵“When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain, because they have sinned against You, and they pray toward this place and confess Your name and turn from their sin when You afflict them, ³⁶then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of Your servants and of Your people Israel, indeed, teach them the good way in which they should walk. And send rain on Your land, which You have given Your people for an inheritance.

Q: What group or circumstance is being addressed?

A: The prayers of the sinful.

Q: From where will God hear the sinner’s prayer in the temple?

A: “...hear in heaven, and forgive...” (v.36)

Q: What is the result of a sinner’s right heart committed to God in prayer?

A: “...teach them the good way in which they should walk. And send rain on Your land...” (v.36)

[Read v.37-40]

³⁷“If there is famine in the land, if there is pestilence, if there is blight or mildew, locust or grasshopper, if their enemy besieges them in the land of their cities, whatever plague, whatever sickness there is, ³⁸whatever prayer or supplication is made by any man or by all Your people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart, and spreading his hands toward this house; ³⁹then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive and act and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart You know, for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men, ⁴⁰that they may fear You all the days that they live in the land which You have given to our fathers.

Q: What group or circumstance is being addressed?

A: The prayers of the disobedient.

Q: From where will God hear the rebellious person’s prayer in the temple?

A: “...hear in heaven, Your dwelling place, and forgive and act...” (v.39)

Q: What is the result of the disobedient heart rightly committed to God in prayer?

A: “...render to each according to all his ways...that they may fear you...” (v.39-40)

⁴¹“Also concerning the foreigner who is not of Your people Israel, when he comes from a far country for Your name’s sake ⁴²(for they will hear of Your great name and Your mighty hand, and of Your outstretched arm); when he comes and prays toward this house, ⁴³hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name.

⁴⁴“When Your people go out to battle against their enemy, by whatever way You shall send them, and they pray to the LORD toward the city which You have chosen and the house which I have built for Your name, ⁴⁵then hear in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause.

⁴⁶“When they sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin) and You are angry with them and deliver them to an enemy, so that they take them away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near; ⁴⁷if they take thought in the land where they have been taken captive, and repent and make supplication to You in the land of those who have taken them captive, saying, ‘We have sinned and have committed iniquity, we have acted wickedly’; ⁴⁸if they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who have taken them captive, and pray to You toward their land which You have given to their fathers, the city which You have chosen, and the house which I have built for Your name; ⁴⁹then hear their prayer and their supplication in heaven Your dwelling place, and maintain their cause, ⁵⁰and forgive Your people who have sinned against You and all their transgressions which they have transgressed against You, and make them objects of compassion before those who have taken them captive, that they may have compassion on them ⁵¹(for they are Your people and Your inheritance which You have brought forth from Egypt, from the midst of the iron furnace), ⁵²that Your eyes may be open to the supplication of

[Read v.41-43]

Q: What group or circumstance is being addressed?

A: The prayers of the foreigner.

Q: From where will God hear the foreigner’s prayer in the temple?

A: “...hear in heaven...and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You...” (v.43)

Q: What is the result of a foreigner’s right heart committed to God in prayer?

A: “...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.” (v.43)

[Read v.44-45]

Q: What group or circumstance is being addressed?

A: The prayers of preparation for going to battle for the Lord.

Q: From where will God hear the warrior’s prayer in the temple?

A: “...hear in heaven...” (v.45)

Q: What is the result of a warrior’s right heart committed to God in prayer?

A: “...maintain their cause...” (v.45)

[Read v.46-53]

Q: What group or circumstance is being addressed?

A: The prayers of the repentant.

Q: It is acknowledged that because of their sin this group has been taken into captivity and has no direct access to the temple. How will they pray?

A: “...if they take thought in the land where they have been taken captive, and repent and make supplication to You in the land where they have taken them captive...and pray to You toward their land...and the house which I have built for Your name...” (v.47-48)

Q: What are the conditions the prayerful must first meet?

A: “...if they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul...” (v.48)

Q: From where will God hear the penitent’s prayer?

A: “...hear their prayer and their supplication in heaven Your dwelling place...” (v.49)

Q: What is the result of a sinner’s right heart committed to God in prayer?

A: “...maintain their cause, and forgive Your people...and make them objects of compassion before those who have taken them captive...” (v.49-50)

Q: In all these examples of prayer and the purpose of the temple, what is the obvious thing missing for which so much of the Law is written concerning the temple and why?

A: Solomon never once mentions anything about the sacrifices. This is because the sacrifices are the **END** of the process. Sacrifices do not, in and of themselves, remove or forgive anything. Each person is supposed to experience the knowledge and regret and guilt of having fallen short in

Your servant and to the supplication of Your people Israel, to listen to them whenever they call to You. ⁵³For You have separated them from all the peoples of the earth as Your inheritance, as You spoke through Moses Your servant, when You brought our fathers forth from Egypt, O Lord GOD.”

⁵⁴When Solomon had finished praying this entire prayer and supplication to the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread toward heaven. ⁵⁵And he stood and blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice, saying:

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 promised through Moses His servant. ⁵⁷May the LORD our God be with us, as He was with our fathers; may He not leave us or forsake us, ⁵⁸that 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. ⁵⁹And may these words of mine, with which I have made supplication before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, that He may maintain the cause of His servant and the cause of His people Israel, as each day requires, ⁶⁰so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no one else. ⁶¹Let your heart therefore be wholly devoted to the LORD our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments, as at this day.”

some way, revealed the sincerity of their changed heart through prayer, and concluded with a sort of celebration of God’s forgiveness by means of the sacrifices that also acted as a personal commitment **NOT** to engage in that sin again. In this last example in particular, people held in captivity in a foreign land can’t possibly initiate a temple sacrifice, but God is not requiring it; He requires a changed and submissive heart.

[Read v.54-61]

Q: How is the closing of Solomon’s prayer similar to the opening?

A: He is calling the attention of those present to their need and even responsibility to be completely obedient and wholly committed to God and His ways.

- “...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...”

Q: What is the main purpose according to v.60?

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

Q: What is the personal call to those that would use God’s temple properly?

A: “Let your heart therefore be wholly devoted to the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments, as at this day.” (v.61)

Q: What would you now say are the primary purposes of the temple?

A: Not just a house of prayer, but a symbol on which to focus one’s prayer from wherever they’re at, knowing that the One True God in heaven hears the sincere intercessions of a heart that does not merely seek Him but seeks to live according to **HIS** ways.

Overall Application

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

—Ephesians 2:19-22

- *What is **OUR** role as being the temple of God? How should prayer play a factor?*
- *What have you learned about the relationship between prayer and obedience? Do your prayers come from your desire to be committed to God's ways? Do you see from the examples provided that the answers all have to do with improving the quality of your spiritual life and not necessarily the physical?*
- *Have you ever considered that commitment to prayer is evidence to non-believers of the existence and power of God?*
- *Of all the associated activities of church—preaching, singing, worship, prayer, fellowship, etc.—is prayer really a top priority? How can we give it the proper emphasis and place in both our personal and corporate walk in Christ?*