

1st KINGS

Week 11, chapters 6 and 7

We are in the middle of examining 1st Kings Chapter 6 concerning the building of the 1st Temple. This chapter and the next one are full of details especially about the interior of the Temple and we'll certainly look at that. Perhaps I should have titled this lesson: "Everything you've ever wanted to know about Solomon's Temple but were afraid to ask". However we're not going to spend an inordinate amount of time with it, first because it can become a bit tedious, and second because some of the wonderful artist's conceptions of what the items looked like can cut to the chase and help us to visualize the object but also because at times the words describing a building or object are so cryptic that there are numerous possibilities of what those words are meant to convey.

So we're going to approach this by concentrating more upon what some of those Hebrew terms that define the various objects actually mean (as opposed to the typical English translations of them), and upon the location of the Temple in relation to the structures that exist on the Temple Mount today. We'll talk about Solomon's Palace and then next week we'll look at the realities of what happened to Solomon's Temple over the decades and centuries, and how it more or less chronicles the activities of the various kings of Israel and Judah up to the time of its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar.

In the end we will see that it is the context of the Temple that is more important than the Temple itself. And the context of the Temple is that while God indeed ordained a place to be divinely designated for Him to dwell among His people, and that clearly He ordained a basic design that somehow mimics and illustrates heavenly and spiritual principles, "to dwell with His people" does NOT mean that He lives in that earthly place; rather, He lives in heaven. Even more, the Temple was not built for God's benefit; it was built for mankind's benefit (much like the Sabbath). And what is so interesting is that God does not ask for His people to build some opulent edifice for Him. He made it very clear to David that He was perfectly satisfied with a tent to meet in.

READ 2SAMUEL 7:1 – 7

This is why we ended last week by focusing on the matter of the Lord interrupting the Temple building process and re-establishing the proper context of the Temple with Solomon. Solomon was busily concentrating on building this wonderful and expensive house for God, when unexpectedly in 1st Kings 6:11 – 13 God's oracle comes to Shlomo that IF he will follow the Lord's regulations and obey the Torah commands THEN the Lord will bring about the promise that was made to David. And that promise was that Yehoveh would be Israel's God, and they would be His people, and that David's dynasty would rule forever.

What a great teaching moment that was, but tragically Solomon missed it. However I don't want us to miss it. The point being made was that while building a place of worship and meeting and sacrifice was needed and appropriate for Israel, it came in a distant second to Solomon's trust in, and obedience to, God. Therefore Solomon should not think that the degree of expense and perfection of the Temple he has under construction has anything to do with God's acceptance of the people of Israel, or whether His blessings for His people (and the King) are somehow tied to it. That is pagan thinking and it is not for a set-apart people.

Since time immemorial it has been that mankind (in a kind of knee-jerk reaction to the influence of our evil inclination) thinks that building fabulous structures of all kinds in the name of our god is for the sake of pleasing that god. Yehoveh makes it clear that while false gods seem to demand it, He does not. Besides; there is nothing on earth that mankind could ever conjure up in our minds and make with our hands that would be grand enough to properly house such a Holy God anyway; so the most magnificent Temple is not really any better than a simple tent. Solomon is not making something that will please the Lord any better than did the original Wilderness Tabernacle.

This principle is of the greatest importance for Christ's *ecclesia* (the Church) to grasp. We have always been in the habit of diverting our eyes from the Lord and onto building projects. We create amazing architectural works, ornate and decked out in the best and most expensive building materials and then claim that our whole intent is to honor God with them. We go so far as to regularly confer holiness upon those structures if they are grand enough and look upon them with reverent awe. In fact the subconscious human thought seems to be that if we do NOT build the building beautifully enough, we may be displeasing the Lord or the building might even wind up with a lesser degree of holiness than the one down the street that is bigger and better. The truth is that Yehoveh is not honored one whit by these structures; it's the

builders who are honored and this by other men. It's the donors who supplied the funds that receive praise and recognition from other men. It's the pastor or priest who presides over it all that is honored and held up high by men.

Although we would generally deny it, as worshippers of the God of Israel we may even harbor a subconscious expectation that our participation in constructing, or belonging to, such a spectacular meeting place of worship elevates **us** in God's eyes. Or that maybe our prayers are better heard there than someplace else. The reality is that by all Scriptural standards God is not seeking any such thing, but men certainly are. Rather He warns against that kind of mindset because while there is nothing inherently wrong or sinful with building a beautiful church or synagogue it is a nearly irresistible temptation to pride and haughtiness and to relying on the works of our hands for our righteousness. A building can easily become a substitute for a right relationship of love, trust, and obedience with God.

That said, a comfortable place for worship and meeting suitable for the purpose is of course reasonable and needed; but it is always for our benefit, not for God's, and we should not delude ourselves otherwise. Generally speaking the more modest and practical that a meeting place is, the better it reflects a true understanding and embracing of God's principles. Obviously there are variables, and we're not expected to operate out of sub-standard or over crowded facilities if we don't have to. However the Church and Synagogue should strive to be modest and pragmatic in our congregational requirements when it comes to our own personal comforts so that we can be about the Lord's work of ministering to others in whatever way He has assigned to us.

Let's re-read part of chapter 6 to get our bearings.

RE-READ 1ST KINGS 6:19 – end

In verse 19 the CJB says that "inner part" of the house was set up to accommodate the Ark of the Covenant. Other Bibles usually say "the oracle in the midst" or some such thing. The Hebrew word is **debir**, which is related to the root word **dabar**, which means "word" or "speech" so "oracle" is a good literal translation. But what we are seeing here is that **debir** has become a technical term for the Holy of Holies in these passages. And the Holy of Holies was constructed as a perfect cube: 20 by 20 by 20 cubits. Or in feet, about 35 feet long, wide and high. Much gold was used inside this room to adorn it.

The mention of a cedar wood altar is referring the Altar of Incense that would NOT be inside the Holy of Holies, but rather would be located inside the front room of the Temple, the Holy Place, just in front of the entry to the Holy of Holies.

In verse 23 we see the sculpting of two creatures called **K'ruvim** in Hebrew or Cherubim in English. Let me remind you that Cherubim are NOT angels; they are several kinds of mysterious spiritual beings listed in the Scriptures and angels are but one, with Cherubim another, and there are more. This is not the first use of these sculptures; in the instructions for the Wilderness Tabernacle and its furnishings, the lid (Kapporet or Mercy Seat) for the Ark of the Covenant had two Cherubim molded into it. But Solomon wanted to go one better and so ordered these two gigantic **K'ruvim** to be constructed and placed in the **debir**. It is interesting (if not an ominous sign) that it is the Cherubim that became the dominate feature of the room rather than the holy Ark of the Covenant (as was originally divinely intended). How easy it is for us to establish something great in our life that is supposedly FOR God, but it often comes close to replacing God, and at the least relegates Him to second place. That could be anything that we hold too high: from our jobs, to a house, to a hobby, to our family and children.

Briefly each Cherub had a total wingspan of 10 cubits from end to end (one half the width of the Holy of Holies). So they were placed in such a way that their wingtips touched; thus the left wing of one Cherub literally touched the room's wall, while the right wing of the other Cherub touched the opposite wall, and their inner wings also touched. Verse 29 now reverts from speaking only of the **debir**, and tells us that throughout the **bayith** (the house, the entire Temple) there was also liberal use of carvings of Cherubs in the wood paneling.

Verse 31 now deals with the entrance into what the CJB calls the sanctuary but other Bibles say shrine or oracle. Again the original Hebrew comes to our rescue because the Hebrew word is **debir** and we now we know that this is referring to the door into the Holy of Holies. So this passage is talking about the entranceway from the Holy Place into the Holy of Holies. In the Wilderness tent, this entrance was covered with a veil (in Hebrew **parokhet**) but here in Solomon's Temple there is instead an elaborate wooden doorframe with olive wood doors mounted in the frame. Cherubim and palm trees are carved into the massive doors (as they are also carved all over the interior of the Temple).

Verse 33 then speaks of the entrance into the Temple building (the **hekal**), which leads directly into the front chamber, the Holy Place. Unlike the doors between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies that were made out of olive wood, the main Temple door was made from fir or cedar.

On these doors were also carved Cherubim and palm trees.

Finally this chapter finishes with describing a courtyard that was built just outside of the Temple entrance, called the inner courtyard. The Mishnah says that actually there were two courtyards, the Courtyard of the **Cohanim** (the Priests) and the Courtyard of the Israel (meaning the common people), and likely this is what is being referred to here in 1st Kings 6. The Mishnah says that there was yet another courtyard called the Courtyard of the Women, but it was a little further away from the Temple entrance than the other 2 Courtyards so that is why the first courtyard was called “the inner” courtyard.

The last 2 verses embellishes the very 1st verse of this chapter, because here we’re told that it was the foundation of the Temple that was laid in the month of **Ziv** in the 4th year of Solomon’s reign. And that in the 11th year of Solomon’s reign in the month of **Bul** (which corresponds to **Heshvon**, an October/November time frame) the Temple was completed. This means it was completed shortly after the Feast of Tabernacles. It also means that it took 7 years and 6 months from the laying of the Temple foundation to completion. Notice that the final words of this chapter are that it took 7 years to build the Temple; this is an example of using round numbers especially when the number is a symbolic number like 7. These numbers are rarely meant to be rigid absolutes and we have to be careful not to consider them as such.

Let’s move on to chapter 7.

READ 1ST KINGS 7:1 - 26

This chapter is about building Solomon’s palace, or better, palace complex because it consisted of multiple buildings. It is interesting that the Book of Chronicles omits recording the construction of his palace. It was likely very near the Temple, just to the south of it, perhaps in the northernmost end of an area that today is called the Ophel. The Ophel is an area uphill and just outside the original walls of the City of David, that lay between the City of David and the Temple Mount. There are marvelously preserved ruins of this ancient area that one can stroll through to this day.

Apparently Solomon’s father’s palace wasn’t sufficient for Solomon’s growing family, harem, and the number of dignitaries that he entertained. Immediately we’re told that it took him 13

years to complete his new palace. This is intended to tell us that AFTER the Temple construction time of 7 years then Solomon's palace took an additional 13 years. So it wasn't until 20 years passed (about halfway through his reign) that **Shlomo's** Temple and Palace were completed. That doesn't mean that he had to wait until the completion of the entire complex before residing in it; no doubt he had moved in much earlier than when it was completed in its entirety.

In all, the palace complex consisted of 4 structures, the first of which is described in verse 2 and named the House of the Forest of Lebanon. There has been some controversy about this place because some scholars claim that it means that this was a summer house that Shlomo literally built up in the north, in Lebanon. But we can look for some context in other Bible passages and know that this wasn't the case at all. In fact, this section of Solomon's palace became so well known that at times it was just called "Lebanon".

One place in other Scriptures where this mention of Lebanon as part of the palace complex occurs is in Isaiah 10.

^{CJB} **Isaiah 10:34** *He will hack down the forest underbrush with an axe, and the L'vanon in its splendor falls.*

Without doubt, taken out of context this sure doesn't SOUND like Solomon's palace, but rather like Lebanon proper. So let's read a few verses before this one in Isaiah.

READ ISAIAH 10:23 -34

We are specifically told that all the action taking place is happening in "the land", and this land is the land of Zion, and then begins a listing of many known cities, all in the Promised Land. It is speaking about the loftiest ones being laid low (that is, the rich, the leaders, the aristocrats, the most important) and then speaks of the Lebanon being felled. This is of course speaking metaphorically of Solomon's palace which was renowned the world over and was a great point of national pride for Israel. And the palace structure called Lebanon (for short) was amazing.

The reason it was called the Forest of Lebanon is because of how it looked and how it was constructed. It was a maze of cedar beams and posts. And since the cedar came from Lebanon, no doubt it's name was both a euphemism and it was kind of an honorary name that would commemorate Lebanon's contribution to the Temple and to the palace. It was huge; 100 cubits long, 50 wide and 30 high. It was considerably bigger than the Temple. In feet this would have been around 175 feet by 88 feet wide, or about 15,400 square feet as compared with the Temple's 3700 square feet. One can understand why no remnant of this structure has ever been found: it was made totally out of wood. And that in itself is just remarkable and unbelievably expensive (which is why it was such a wonder to behold and so well remembered).

Stone was the usual building material of the Promised Land. It was plentiful, and it was long lasting. Wood deteriorated and the Promised Land had only smaller trees most of which weren't suitable for load bearing, and weren't big enough to make substantial planks or beams. The use of a tiny amount of wood in a structure was only for the wealthy; to build an enormous building entirely from wood was unheard of.

In verse 6 another building is described, called simply The Hall or the Pillar Hall. It seems to have been a kind of anti-chamber that served as an entrance to the building complex. It ran long the front of the Lebanon section.

In verse 7 is the 3rd wing of the palace complex that is called the Hall of the Throne and also known as the Judgment Hall. This is where Solomon's throne was located, and where the Sanhedrin likely eventually met (if the traditions are accurate), so it was where justice was dispensed. The walls of this hall were covered with cedar paneling, which means that it was of stone construction.

Verse 8 documents the 4th and final wing that was Solomon's personal residence and part of it was built for the Pharaoh's daughter, his most prized wife. Men and women inhabited separate quarters in general in that era and especially so for aristocracy because they often had several wives and concubines. Ever since chapter 3 we have been hearing of Solomon's wife, Pharaoh's daughter, and of all the connections **Shlomo** had with Egypt. This was no doubt a great political and economic coup for Solomon but it was also a disaster waiting to happen because the Lord had instructed in the Torah that Israel was NOT to re-establish ties with Egypt after their exodus, ever. Solomon had done so in spades and the Pharaoh's daughter was the linchpin and symbol of that alliance; so we read of the great lengths King **Shlomo** went to in order to honor and accommodate her. There is no mention of her being seen officially as a queen, but she couldn't have been too far short of that status.

Verse 9 explains that “all” of these buildings were made of expensive stone blocks. Here is another case where the word “all” (*kol*) is NOT an absolute but is meant in a general way because this certainly doesn’t include the all-wood House of the Forest of Lebanon. Even so stone blocks would have been employed with that building for a foundation.

But the idea is that the stone blocks used were mammoth in size (as much as 18 feet long meaning that they were perhaps 20 tons and more) and the quarried stones above them (meaning above ground and thus visible) were highly finished and precisely cut. That is what made them expensive. The idea that these were some kind of super expensive stones (like marble) or that it was gemstones (even semi-precious gemstones) is not the context. No doubt this was the typical limestone found in abundance in Israel. It was usual that foundation stones were essentially boulders that had been minimally altered since they were going to be under the building and hidden from view, and that the stones used above ground fit “well enough” and were filled with copious amounts of mortar. That was not the case for Solomon’s palace; rather ALL the stones were expertly hewn and had a snug fit and a pleasing look.

Verse 13 shifts the scene back to the Temple work. Remember, this book is not a daily journal but rather just a record of details of the building of the Temple and the palace. A fellow named Hiram is sent from Tzor; this is not King Hiram, but rather is a man of Israelite heritage. This was a skilled artisan brought in to direct the crafting of the most visible and most ornate parts of the Temple, and especially of things that involved metal casting in bronze. Rashi explains that Hiram’s father was from the tribe of Naphtali and his mother was of the tribe of Dan. It’s only that he was living in the country of Tzor, and essentially a citizen of that nation.

One cannot help but notice a striking parallel between the building of Solomon’s Temple and of the Wilderness Tabernacle. King *Shlomo* was from the tribe of Judah and he worked together with Hiram who had roots in the tribe of Dan. In the wilderness the chief builder of the Tabernacle was not Moses but rather they were *Bezalel* from the tribe of Judah and *Oholiav* from the tribe of Dan.

^{CJB} **Exodus 36:1** *"B'tzal'el and Oholi'av, along with all the craftsmen whom ADONAI has endowed with the wisdom and skill necessary to carry out the work needed for the sanctuary, are to do exactly according to everything ADONAI has ordered."*

And so verse 14 describes Hiram the metal artisan in exactly the same way as: “**a bronze-worker filled with wisdom, understanding and skill for all kinds of bronze craftsmanship.**”

And perhaps his biggest project is the two pillars that will grace the front entrance to the Temple. Verse 15 explains that he is going to cast in bronze two fabulous pillars each 18 cubits high and 12 in circumferences (that is about 32 feet high and 21 feet in circumference). That means that the diameter of each pillar was just under 7 feet. On top of each of these pillars sat a decorative capital that was 5 cubits tall (not quite 9 feet). However in 2nd Kings 25 the height of the capital is given as 3 cubits. It's hard to know if one or the other of these numbers is an error or merely a different way to measure the capital's height. Rashi says that an ancient Midrashic work explains that the total height of the capitals were indeed 5 cubits. But since the pillars were essentially hollow bronze tubes, 2 cubits of each capital stuck down inside of the hollow pillar for stability, leaving only the upper 3 cubits of the capital (the decorative portion) as visible. That's entirely possible but of course there is no way to prove that.

Anyway the capitals were ornate, shaped like opening flowers and cast with the images of pomegranates imbedded in them. Exactly where they stood is a bit questionable, but generally it seems that they were at the porch entry into the Temple. The columns were given names; the one on the right was called **Yakhin** and the one of the left **Bo'az**. **Yakhin** means “to be established”, and **Bo'az** means “strength is within”.

Next is the crafting of the Bronze or Molten Sea. This is essentially a giant water tank that equates to the Laver used with the Wilderness Tabernacle. From this tank the priests would wash their hands and feet before performing ritual animal sacrifices. Some Christian scholars (gentiles of course) taught this Sea was used for bathing and wonderful paintings were fashioned to show this. Naturally that's far off the mark.

This vessel was called the Sea (the **mare**) because of its enormity. This was a copper or bronze kettle made by sand casting (like the two pillars), probably accomplished in the desert area of Timna known for copper mines or Succoth known for its clay that is good for the molding process. The Molten Sea was 10 cubits in diameter (almost 18 feet) and 5 cubits (almost 9 feet) high. This giant pot rested on a dozen bronze oxen, with 4 groups of 3, and each group was said to point to one compass direction. So they were displayed much like during the exodus when the 12 tribes marched and encamped together in 4 groups of 3, each group occupying a compass direction. The oxen all faced outward and the “sea” rested on their hindquarters.

The weight must have been enormous as the thickness of the cast metal pot was a full handbreadth (about 4 inches). It contained about 12,000 gallons of water; about as much as in a small to medium sized home swimming pool. It is thought that the water was not put into it from buckets but rather by means of a pipe. Plumbing was not unknown in this era. In fact, I happened to have personally witnessed in Israel the discovery made less than 24 hours earlier of a section of baked clay pipe down by the Pool of Siloam at the bottom of the hill at the City of David. It was probably 5 inches in diameter and definitely dated from a strata of David's era or perhaps even a bit earlier. It was perfectly intact.

Water used for this vessel was for ritual purposes so it had to be of the type that the Scriptures called ***mayim chayim***: living water. This was water that came from a moving source like a river. It could not come from a well or from a pond. However an artesian spring where water comes up from underground under pressure was considered ***mayim chayim*** and we know that even today artesian springs operate under the Temple Mount. Ancient Hebrew documents claim that there were holes in the feet of the cast oxen that allowed for pipes to be inserted and connected to these artesian springs as a means to supply the Molten Sea with the large quantities of water used daily.

Let's stop here and next week we'll examine other of the objects used inside and outside of the Temple walls, and then we'll also look at the history of Solomon's Temple until its destruction.