

1ST KINGS

Week 14, chapter 8 continued

As we opened 1st Kings 8 last time, we witnessed a turning of a cosmic page in redemption history, and thus in Israel's history; and this is because Israel is the context through which God chose to bring about redemption on earth. The Temple was completed and about to be consecrated into service. And although it would be a few more years before Solomon's personal palace would be completed, it was under construction. Alfred Edersheim, that brilliant and insightful 19th century Jewish Believer whose thoughts and writings so heavily influences much of today's so-called Jewish Roots movement, makes the observation that the two dwelling complexes, the one for God and the one for the King (the Temple and the Palace), constructed on the Temple Mount were far from ordinary. The Temple and the Palace together had extra-ordinary symbolism that not only showed an organic connection between the two, but also the new reality of their very existence marked the end of the time of Israel being in an unsettled condition.

Until now whatever passed for priestly services over the past 3 or 4 hundred years was performed in the remnants of a tent, called the *mishkan* in Hebrew. We know of this place as the Wilderness Tabernacle. It was originally designed to be a mobile sanctuary for Yehoveh as Israel wandered and sought not only a permanent place of rest for the Hebrew people, but also a permanent place where God would choose to set His holy name over..... forever. And that place turned out to be Yerushalayim in the Land of Canaan, in the tribal territory of Judah. The combination of land and sanctuary is what the Bible calls the Kingdom the God.

God also demonstrated that He would govern and administer justice over His earthly kingdom by means of an earthly king. At the beginning of the book of Judges I made the claim that despite the nearly universal teaching within the Church that God did not want His people to have a king (that God was to be acknowledged as Israel's only sovereign), that in fact that is a mistaken belief. The Holy Scriptures make it crystal clear that part of the purpose of the period of the *Shofetim* (the Judges) was so that Israel would finally grasp that they could not function as intended without a king. The issue was never king or no king; the issue was what KIND of king Israel was to have and WHO would appoint him.

Thus we see in the model and pattern of the theocracy that was now Israel under King **Shlomo** that the anointed earthly king over God's Kingdom was **not** to be a monarch in the typical Middle Eastern or Oriental or even later European sense of it. That is, the earthly king over Israel was **not** to be seen as an autonomous dictatorial authority figure who would claim to be a kind of vice-king with the God of Israel being the higher king, but rather Israel's king was to be God's servant, set over Israel merely to carry out God's will. And God's will was that His covenants with Israel (which were the immutable documents that set out the terms and conditions for redemption of humanity using Israel as His earthly instrument) were to be carefully guarded and carried out by Israel's king at God's direction. And this is why the construction of Solomon's Palace immediately adjacent to the Temple was necessary in order to illustrate this special arrangement and connectedness between God and King.

In our last meeting we also discussed the timing of the dedication of Solomon's Temple and noticed two things: 1st that there was a very practical reason for the ceremony to happen in the 7th month of the religious calendar year. It was that on the 10th day of that month **Yom Kippur** occurred, and on this auspicious day alone could anyone ever enter into the Holy of Holies. And the only authorized person to do that was the High Priest. Since the Holy of Holies, and therefore the Temple, only became operable when the Ark of the Covenant was in it, it was necessary to wait until **Yom Kippur** so that the Ark could be placed into that innermost chamber of the **hekal**, the Temple.

The 2nd thing we noticed was that 5 days following **Yom Kippur** was the first day of the 7 day (technically the 8 day) Feast of Tabernacles, **Sukkot**. And this feast also played a vital role in the Temple dedication process.

We read the entire chapter last time, and this lesson we'll re-read it in bite-sized chunks.

RE-READ 1ST KINGS 8:1 – 21

In this chapter we are going to encounter some of the most profound God-principles concentrated into a single place that rivals any in the Bible. And some of these God-principles are of the kind that defies adequate human explanation by means of mere words; and yet

when we take the time to look at them closely, we are still left slack-jawed in awe and wonder. So we're going to take our time and extract as much as we can from these passages, so great is their value.

Verse 1 explains just who was invited to Jerusalem for the festivities. It is best if we look at the Hebrew words as they are translated somewhat differently by the various English Bible versions. It says that the **zaqen**, the **rosh**, and the **nasi** were all invited. **Zaqen** literally means old and is meant as "old ones" or as we say today, "elders". These were the people's representatives, usually the senior citizens of Israel, who were not hereditary tribal leaders or aristocrats. Since **Rosh** means head, this category is referring to the heads of the families and clans of Israel. And finally the **nasi** are the 12 tribal princes of Israel. These 12 tribal princes inherited their position. So what is being described by **zaqen, rosh and nasi** were the 3 major categories of dignitaries of Israel.

In verse 2, however, we are told that all the **ish** of Israel were assembled before King **Shlomo**. **Ish** means men in a very general way. There are some scholars who say that this is referring to the army or that it is merely throwing the **zaqen, rosh, and nasi** into one big bucket and together calling them all the **ish** of Israel. I think it is self-evident that is not the case; all one needs is to know the Torah and the issue disappears.

The information that this was occurring in the 7th month, and then later on in verses 65 and 66 in this chapter when we're told that there was a 7 day celebration, immediately followed by another 7 day celebration that actually included an 8th day, makes it clear that the 2nd celebration that was really 8 days is **Sukkot**. The Feast of Tabernacles is a **chag**; it is a pilgrimage festival that requires all adult males in Israel (regardless of social status) to journey to the Temple. Therefore all we have is that in the first verse we're told that all the dignitaries were present, and in the 2nd verse all the adult males of Israel were also present. All classes of society came to the Temple dedication and stayed for the Feast of Tabernacles.

One of the items brought to the Temple was the tent of meeting; in Hebrew **ohel mo'ed** (it also went by the name **mishkan**). This is not the special tent that David made for the Ark of the Covenant and placed in the City of David. Rather this is the remnant of the Wilderness Tabernacle that had been resting in Gibeon up to now. It, along with the location of Gibeon, was essentially being officially decommissioned as an authorized place of sacrifice and worship. What it looked like at this point is anyone's guess, but there couldn't have been much left of the original (if anything at all) since at least 400 years had passed since it was first assembled out in the Wilderness during the exodus from Egypt.

It is interesting that verse 5 speaks of the priests bringing the Ark to the Temple grounds and that King Solomon and the whole community of Israel were in front of it, making countless sacrifices. Then in verse 6 it says that the priests brought the Ark inside the sanctuary. First notice that it was the **priests** who transported the Ark; that doesn't seem correct according to Torah Law. It was the clan of **Kohath** (Numbers 7:9), common Levites who were not priests, who were the only people authorized to carry the Ark. The Hebrew sages say that the reason for the change was that it was ONLY during the Wilderness wanderings that the clan of **Kohath** was given this honor and once a Temple was built, this privilege ended. While there is no such Scriptural statement to that effect, I can easily see the Sages' logic in this conclusion. After all, theoretically once there is a permanent Temple, there will be no more need to transport the Ark; its journey is over. Once ensconced in the Holy of Holies it ought to never again be moved.

But also notice that FIRST all Israel assembled and sacrificed in front of the Ark, and next it was moved to inside the Temple. Therefore what happened is rather easy to timeline: on the 8th day of Tishri (the 7th month) the ceremonies began with a procession that brought the Ark of the Covenant from its special tent in the City of David up to the Temple Mount. On the 8th and the 9th days of the month the Ark sat in the courtyard and a huge amount of sacrifices were made. It was fine for the Ark to be sitting there as a kind of witness to the proceedings as long as it was covered (which no doubt it was) and the actual Golden Ark couldn't be seen by the people.

On the 10th day of the month (**Yom Kippur**) the Ark was moved a few feet and placed inside the front room of the Temple, and then it was carried further inside the Temple into the Holy of Holies and set down under the wings of the Cherubim. What happens for the remainder of this chapter occurred from the 10th day through the 14th day of Tishri (the 8th through the 14th is the 7 day Temple dedication festival as is spoken of in verse 65). Then on the 15th day of Tishri began the Biblical Feast of **Sukkot**, which lasted for 8 more days, through the 22nd day of the month. On the 23rd day of the 7th month the people began filtering back home after what would probably prove to be the most memorable 2 weeks of their lives.

Verse 9 makes a statement that has caused needless controversy; although it is more controversial for Christians than for Jews. Because there is says explicitly that the ONLY items inside that golden chest that was the Ark were the stone tablets from Mt. Sinai. Most Christian scholars dispute that as an error because they favor the New Testament Book of Hebrews 9:4 where it says that inside the Ark along with the stone tablets were the pot of manna and Aaron's budding staff. Thus it has been a standard Christian teaching that the tablets of the law, some manna and the staff were always inside the Ark. However Jews have never believed

that because that is NOT what the Torah says. Rather in Numbers 17:25 we're told that Aaron's staff was set BEFORE the Ark, not in it. And in Exodus 16:33-34 we're told that a pot of manna was also set BEFORE the Ark, not in it. Frankly, this is one of the many reasons that the Book of Hebrews has been held suspect since some of the earlier church fathers argued over whether it ought to be included as part of the New Testament. Over the centuries the Book of Hebrews has been added, removed, and added back in to our Bibles again, time after time.

In verse 10 a most awesome thing happens: the cloud that marks the presence of the Lord suddenly appears and fills the Temple. The cloud was so luminous that its presence felt as though it was pressing down with irresistible pressure and so forced the priests to leave. There is nothing to indicate that Solomon or the priests were expecting this; on the other hand it must have been so very welcomed especially by the king. After all King Solomon had expended years of effort and enormous sums of money on this house for the Lord. What if Yehoveh didn't accept it? But with the appearance of the cloud not only did Solomon and all who were there have validated that the Lord would dwell there, but this was also the real consecration of the facility. To consecrate means to set-apart for God; to set-apart for God means to make-holy. Only God makes holy; only God declares what IS holy. Man cannot confer or declare holiness on anyone or anything; that is in the sole province of the Lord and so the appearance of the cloud conferred holiness onto that newly built structure.

Verse 11 says that the cloud was the "glory" of Yehoveh. In Hebrew the word is **kavod** and we can get a little too rigid in assigning the word "glory" as the meaning of **kavod**. It more means "abundant presence". Then verse 12 has Solomon saying that although the Lord said that He would live in a thick cloud, now that a house has been built for Yehoveh this would become His dwelling place. This sentence has some very interesting nuances hidden within it, most revolving around the word "cloud".

There are several Hebrew words that mean cloud but they each mean something slightly different. The word used here is **araphel**. Many translations (as does the CJB) translate this word to "thick darkness" instead of "thick cloud" and I think while that isn't necessarily wrong, it gives the modern reader the wrong impression. For one thing the English word darkness, especially as used in the Bible, usually carries evil or fearful overtones with it. On a number of occasions we've looked at a typical Hebrew word for darkness, **choshek**, and learned that it indeed is meant to convey to us something that involves an evil and thus frightening spiritual nature.

The word **choshek** is not used here but rather **araphel**. A much better translation of **araphel** is

“a dense cloud”; something that is so thick that it completely obscures whatever is in it or above it. It acts as a covering and a barrier. So the cloud that appeared in the Temple was not meant to inspire terror but rather awesome reverence. We often hear of God appearing in a cloud (like the one that led Israel through the Wilderness) throughout the Holy Scriptures. When Christ ascended it was no cheap phrase to say that He rose into the clouds until He became obscured by them. So the idea of calling whatever this presence of God is in the Temple “a cloud” is to try and describe an indeterminate form. We can certainly see a cloud, but we can’t really touch it or even assign it a definite shape. For a moment it may remind us of something familiar, but in another moment the cloud is gone or its form has shifted to something else. In the end, using the term “cloud” to describe this particular presence of God is but a means to find a term to describe the indescribable. And this goes hand in hand with God refusing to allow manufactured images of Him, because unlike all the false gods populating the world’s societies that are either fashioned after humans or animals, Yehoveh bears no form whatsoever that could ever be captured or properly defined in human terms or even as something familiar within our 4 dimensional Universe.

Solomon ends his thought about the Temple being God’s dwelling place on earth by saying that it will be Yehoveh’s dwelling place **forever**. But we need to pause and understand something that is critical to our understanding of God: the Temple is but a conduit of sorts between man and God. It is merely a place and a means whereby God meets man for man’s benefit, and communication takes place. Thus the idea that the Temple is a place for God to dwell forever doesn’t mean the Temple as an earthly visible form made out of wood and stone, but rather this “forever inhabitation” is speaking of the ultimate divine substance that is God and is indicative of His presence with His people. The earthly form (in this case Solomon’s Temple) will change and decay, but the divine substance that inhabits and consecrates the building and MAKES it a Temple never changes. So it is the substance of God that is forever, not some earthly form of habitation and meeting.

For awhile God’s substance was present in this world in a number of forms: a cloud, the Angel of the Lord, the Shekinah, the Ruach (the Spirit), even the Glory (the Kavod) of God. Then with the advent of Yeshua, God’s substance was present on earth for awhile in human form. Then after Christ, God’s substance was made present in this world inside of humans and we call this the Holy Spirit. Later in the future, God’s substance will again be with mankind in the form of Yeshua returning as King. The form keeps changing, but the substance never does.

It is rightly said in the modern Church that the fleshly bodies of Believers amount to God’s Temples in this era. The substance of God that dwells in us is never ending or changing, but these imperfect fleshly Temples do change and decay. Further, just as God’s presence in Solomon’s Temple is what consecrated it and made it holy, so it is that God’s presence in His worshippers consecrates us and makes us holy. We can adorn ourselves with the finest

garments, wear the most beautiful and expensive religious icons, be able to say all the right things, and completely look the part. But unless God actually dwells within us, we possess no saving holiness; we are but empty shells. It matters not whether we are as a tattered, beaten-down or used-up tent, or as a magnificent shining new edifice; it is God's presence that makes holy and God's presence has no interest in or respect for the outward grandness or plainness of that Temple (whether made of fine building materials or of flesh).

At this point, in verse 14 the king turned from facing the Temple and said a blessing over the crowds of people. He pronounces that the promise made to David by the Lord has now been fulfilled. He also reminds the people that nowhere in the Torah did God inform His people in what city He would choose to put His name (meaning, to permit a Temple built for Him). However David was chosen of God, and in a sense David chose what city the Temple would be built. Yet, David would not get to build that building, that honor would go to his son. Shlomo was that son, he is now king, and the Temple has been built. All of God's promises in this regard have been brought to reality.

Let's read a little more.

RE-READ 1ST KINGS 8:22 – 30

This begins a long and moving prayer that can be rivaled in the entire Bible only by the one spoken by Jesus that we call The Lord's Prayer. Verse 22 begins by saying that Solomon stood before the Altar and before the congregation of Israel. He ascended the steps up to the Altar of Burnt Offering and then went to his knees. We don't see this act of kneeling here in chapter 8 but we do in the parallel account in 2nd Chronicles.

2Chronicles 6:12-13 CJB

¹² Then he stood before the altar of ADONAI in the presence of the whole community of Isra'el, spread out his hands-

¹³ for Shlomo had made a bronze platform eight-and-three quarters feet long, eight-and-

three-quarters feet wide and five-and-a-quarter feet high and had set it up in the middle of the courtyard. He stood on it, then got down on his knees before the whole community, spread out his hands toward heaven,

Depending on your English translation, the opening words of Solomon's prayer that begins in chapter 8 verse 23 go something like this: "God of Isra'el, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below. You keep covenant with your servants and show them grace, provided they live in your presence with all their heart." There is a great deal here and one way to peel the layers back a bit is to insert some of the original Hebrew words.

"Yehoveh, *elohim* of Israel, there is no *elohim* like you in *shamayim* or on *eretz*. You keep *b'rit* and *chesed* with your servants PROVIDED they live in your presence with all of their *leb*."

Solomon invokes God's formal name, YHWH, and acknowledges that He is Israel's god; and that there is no god comparable to Yehoveh in the spiritual sphere of heaven (***shamayim***) or in the physical sphere of land (the ***eretz***). He says that Yehoveh continues to honor the covenants (the ***b'rit***) He has made with His people and continues to show them loving kindness (***chesed***). But then Solomon's prayerful statement adds a caveat: the maintaining of these covenants and the kindness with His nation of Israel is **CONDITIONAL** on them living in His presence with all of their consciousness. As I have mentioned on numerous occasion, the Hebrew word ***leb*** literally means "heart", however all throughout OT and NT times, the heart was thought to be the seat of intellect and consciousness. That is that the heart possessed those functions that we now know is performed by our brains. So whereas modern Christianity has turned the word heart into something that has to do with feelings and emotions, in fact the sense of the word was always referring to our conscious thoughts and resulting actions and behavior.

Thus God will only show His kindness to Israel and bestow the blessings contained within those covenants to the nation of Israel provided they obey Him and walk in His ways. Cease doing so and the blessings are yanked, and God's kindness turns to strong discipline.

We have an almost exact parallel to this thought in the New Testament.

Romans 11:16-22 CJB

¹⁶ Now if the hallah offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole loaf. And if the root is holy, so are the branches.

¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you- a wild olive- were grafted in among them and have become equal sharers in the rich root of the olive tree,

¹⁸ then don't boast as if you were better than the branches! However, if you do boast, remember that you are not supporting the root, the root is supporting you.

¹⁹ So you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."

²⁰ True, but so what? They were broken off because of their lack of trust. However, you keep your place only because of your trust. So don't be arrogant; on the contrary, be terrified!

²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, he certainly won't spare you!

²² So take a good look at God's kindness and his severity: on the one hand, severity toward those who fell off; but, on the other hand, God's kindness toward you- provided you maintain yourself in that kindness! Otherwise, you too will be cut off!

One has to believe that St. Paul had Solomon's prayer in mind as he spoke these words to a group of gentiles in Rome. God's kindness towards His redeemed is conditional, based on maintaining oneself in a manner that merits His kindness. And what is it that merits such kindness? Trust and full devotion in Him. And how is trust in Him demonstrated? By putting it into action through obedience to His commandments. It's that simple.

Some will of course say, wait a minute I thought that in our era showing trust in God was accomplished by showing trust in Messiah? While that is certainly true on one level, St. Paul is here talking to Believers (those who have already put their trust in Yeshua). He is addressing those who have already been grafted in, not to those "seekers" who might want to be grafted in. He's talking to Believers. So this entire section of Romans 11 applies only to the redeemed in Christ, in the same way that Solomon's prayer applied only to the redeemed of Israel. So this blessing of Solomon's is also a not-so-veiled threat, just as was Paul's!

Solomon then asks the Lord to keep a prophetic promise that can only play out over centuries: that Yehoveh would maintain a descendant of David on the throne of Israel at all times. But that did not mean that a descendant of David who was doing wrong might not be removed (and many were). Solomon had many children, and so his children set up a number of family branches. All of them could legitimately stake claim as a blood descendant of King David. So there would be a number of men legally eligible to take the throne over the coming centuries; God's promise was NOT limited to only one specific descendant.

Verse 27 then opens up a conundrum that every thinking Christian wrestles with on a regular basis. Solomon says, God, on the one hand you say you dwell in the Temple up on Mt. Moriah; and yet on the other hand you live in heaven. In fact, in reality, to think about you dwelling in a heavenly Temple in heaven misses the mark because you are so magnificent and limitless that even heaven couldn't be sufficient to hold you. So how, exactly, O Lord, am I to understand your "dwelling in this Temple" in Jerusalem when this cannot be the case in the way that a human can conceptualize.

There are some God-principles alluded to here that I want to touch on. The first is the idea of omnipresence. Solomon recognizes that God is not a man who, because of being trapped in a physical body and in a physical sphere of space-time, can only be in one place at one time. God is everywhere at once. God doesn't pack His bags and travel down from heaven in order to visit the Temple on occasion (thus vacating his throne in heaven for a time).

It's like with His Believers: God is quite literally present with us, dwelling in us, and yet the "us" are millions of people spread all over this planet each having as much of "God" in us as any other. Even more, we know that He lives in heaven, and even The Lord's Prayer makes that clear (Our Father who art ...where?.....in heaven). Christ was God on earth for a time; so does that mean that God moved? If God relocated to earth then who was Christ praying to all the time? Did a part of God come down to earth and become Yeshua, and therefore an incomplete God remained in heaven?

It's this kind of thought process that Solomon is expressing as he speaks to Yehoveh. Lord, I know you're present (goodness, your cloud of glory just chased my priests right out of the Temple!), I just don't understand HOW you're present and what that means. But all that said, you have TOLD me, Lord, unequivocally that you will dwell in this Temple. So despite my inability to comprehend how this can be, and why you would even agree to live in such a lowly structure, I accept that it is true. Therefore, Solomon says that based on faith and trust, and not his own understanding, he is going to direct his prayers and the prayers of his people Israel towards the Temple; that conduit of communication and meeting between man and God. And

despite his ignorance in verse 28 all that Solomon asks is that God would choose to hear the prayers of his servant. The word used for asking God to hear is **shema**, and it means not to just passively listen and commiserate, but to act.

I will close with this thought; we don't have to understand how or even why God has chosen to dwell in these corrupt Temples that we call our bodies. We don't have to question or understand how He can be present with all Believers, everywhere, simultaneously, and be in heaven (or everywhere else He chooses) as well. Rather, we merely use these fleshly Temples as the place from which we direct our prayers; we use them as the place of meeting between us and God. Not because we chose it to be like this, or are able in our own will to make it so; but rather because the Lord did. Now we must believe Him and act upon that belief.

We'll continue with chapter 8 next week.