

Solomon Dedicates the Temple

Devotional Reading: 2 Chronicles 6:12, 14-27

Background Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:1-20

Today's Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:1-7, 11

1. Glory of God

2 Chronicles 7:1-3

¹ When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. ² The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it. ³ When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying,

"He is good;
his love endures forever."

1a. As we read about the *fire that came down from heaven* to consume *the burnt offering and the sacrifices*, we're naturally inclined to compare and contrast this event with other such episodes in the Bible. Fire of divine origin was often for the purpose of judgment. Examples of this kind of fire stated in a personal way as being from the Lord are Leviticus 10:2; Numbers 11:1; 16:35; and Psalm 21:9. But the fire in the lesson text at hand is in the minority of cases that are not judgmental, but showing divine favor instead (compare Leviticus 9:24; Judges 6:21).

Burnt offerings were a specific type of sacrifice whereby the entire offering was consumed by fire on the altar (Leviticus 1). By making such an offering, the people acknowledged their sin and the need for its removal. In the context at hand, it should have convicted the original audience of the need to enter the temple with holy attitudes and intent if they were to live in a healthy relationship with God and each other. The dramatic descent of the fire signaled that God was watching.

1b. The intensity of the fire from Heaven, just considered, was enhanced (if that were possible!) when *the glory of the Lord filled the temple*. The concepts of fire and *glory* are combined in several places in the Bible.

The manifestation of God's glory occurred also at the dedication of the tabernacle, which was the forerunner to the temple (Exodus 40:34-35). On that occasion, the glory happened in conjunction with a cloud rather than fire. This same combination had also occurred in the account of Solomon's bringing the ark of the covenant to the temple (2 Chronicles 5:13b-6:1; 1 Kings 8:10-12; compare Exodus 16:10). The combination of glory and cloud will occur yet again when God's glory departs the temple some 366 years after its dedication (Ezekiel 10:4, 10). Thus, God's glory is

regularly connected with vital turning points in ancient Israel's focus on expressions of worship. The purpose of the glory is consecration or sanctification.

2. At first glance, 1 Kings 8:11 seems parallel to the verse before us because the idea conveyed is identical. But 1 Kings 8:11 is actually parallel to 2 Chronicles 5:11, 13b-14 in the flow of events. All are similar in outcome to what we see here: *the priests could not enter the temple of the Lord*, with echoes of Exodus 40:35.

3. The text shifts its focus to those gathered, *the Israelites*. Their experience of seeing *the fire* that came down and *the glory of the Lord* prompted them to renew their life of worship. ("Renew" is an appropriate word because they had prayed and sacrificed before, but henceforth they would do so in a more profound way.)

II. Worship by People

2 Chronicles 7:4-6

⁴ Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD. ⁵ And King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand head of cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats. So the king and all the people dedicated the temple of God. ⁶ The priests took their positions, as did the Levites with the LORD's musical instruments, which King David had made for praising the LORD and which were used when he gave thanks, saying, "His love endures forever." Opposite the Levites, the priests blew their trumpets, and all the Israelites were standing.

4. The *sacrifices* that followed differ from those incinerated by fire from Heaven (burnt offerings) in that some of the sacrifices in view here could be eaten. After God put his stamp of approval on the temple by consuming the initial sacrifices, the people joined in.

There are usually clear delineations of the duties of the three offices of *prophet*, *priest*, and *king* in ancient Israel. In the laws of sacrifice in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, the king had no role—indeed, there was no provision for ancient Israel even to have a king in those three books (compare 1 Samuel 8). The story of King Uzziah's leprosy after his attempted sacrifice (2 Chronicles 26:16-23) reveals that a king was not to usurp the role of a priest. But there were some exceptions, and that seems to have been the case here as *the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the Lord*. The sheer number of sacrificial animals may have overwhelmed the number of priests available. If so, a practical adjustment was made (compare 30:2-3).

We might easily misunderstand the purposes of sacrifice and dismiss the practice as barbaric or see it merely as a way of appeasing God's anger. Sacrifice was a form of worship. The people had to take something that was valuable to them and either give it over to God entirely or to both God and other people.

5. The number of animals would have fed many thousands of people, making this event a celebration for a large percentage of Solomon's subjects. The dedication ceremony was designed to shape the life of the entire kingdom, including those not able to be present in Jerusalem. Solomon rightly understood that celebrating such an important event as the dedication of the temple in grand style should bring the people together in more ways than one.

6a. This verse stands on the shoulders of 1 Chronicles 15:3-22. That passage describes in great detail how *King David* organized *the Levites* as temple musicians in conjunction with his second (and successful) attempt at bringing the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem. The musical

instruments mentioned there are "lyres, harps and cymbals" (1 Chronicles 15:16). These instruments were also present at the first (and failed) attempt to relocate the ark, with two additional instruments mentioned in that context: timbrels and trumpets (13:8).

6b. *Priests* are associated with *trumpets* about a dozen times in the Old Testament. There were two kinds of trumpets used for different purposes. First were the trumpets of silver; these were for calling the people to assemble, for setting out, to announce times of rejoicing at festivals, and for signaling in battle (Numbers 10:1-10). These are the trumpets in view here.

The second kind was trumpets made from rams' horns. These are mentioned in dozens of places, but in connection with priests only in Joshua 6.

III. Actions by Solomon 2 Chronicles 7:7, 11

⁷ **Solomon consecrated the middle part of the courtyard in front of the temple of the LORD, and there he offered burnt offerings and the fat of the fellowship offerings, because the bronze altar he had made could not hold the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the fat portions.**

¹¹ **When Solomon had finished the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the LORD and in his own palace,**

7. The horizontal surface of the altar Solomon had built measured 20 cubits by 20 cubits, or about 900 square feet (2 Chronicles 4:1). Although it was quite large, it was not large enough for the work of that day of dedication. Thus, Solomon needed a plan to deal with this. So,

with priestly help, he *consecrated the middle part of the courtyard* to be suitable as an overflow altar. This practice was not provided for in the Law of Moses, but 2 Chronicles sees it as an appropriate emergency measure. The aim of the event was more important than the silence of the law in this regard.

Three types of offerings are noted. *Burnt offerings* were characterized by being totally consumed by the fire; regulations are in Leviticus 1 and 6:8-13. Regulations for *the grain offerings* are in Leviticus 2 and 6:14-23. *Fellowship offerings* were offerings of thanksgiving or were connected with the taking of vows; regulations are in Leviticus 3 and 7:11-21. The Law of Moses forbade the eating of the *fat* of animals that were candidates for sacrifice (Leviticus 7:22-27; compare Exodus 29:13).

11. The passages 2 Chronicles 5:3; 7:8-10 indicate that the temple dedication occurred during the Festival of Tabernacles, one of the three annual pilgrimage festivals (Deuteronomy 16:13-17; 31:10). Solomon had committed himself fully to the completion of the temple, focusing all his resources to that effort. But more than it being about a building, it was also about a people. He recruited many artisans and craftsmen to help as they used their skills for God's glory.

Solomon, like any other king, also built a *royal palace*. His palace had a footprint more than four times that of the temple (11,250 square feet and 2,700 square feet, respectively). Compared to the seven years it took to build the temple, the 13 years to build his palace is understandable!

The palace had to be larger than the temple because it needed to house the king, his numerous wives, many officials, etc. A palace was not just a grandiose house but a small city within the city.

Involvement Learning

Solomon Dedicates the Temple

Into the Lesson

List songs (religious or secular) that people might sing spontaneously right after a startling experience, either good or bad. The song could be sung in a context that the songwriter did not envision.

Today, we're going to consider an event that resulted in spontaneous singing. Let's see how the ancient Israelites connected singing to a major positive event in their nation's history.

Key Verse

When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, "He is good; his love endures forever."

—2 Chronicles 7:3

Into the Word

Read 2 Chronicles 7:1-7, 11. As you read, write down verse numbers in one of the following categories, according to which of the five senses would have been most activated by the verse you are reading at the moment.

Touch

Taste

Sight

Sound

Smell

Into Life

Compare and contrast the events of the text with the worship experiences you have had. What elements of the worship in today's text give us valid ideas for our own worship?

What are some ways to respond best to God's presence and love with worship and sacrifice?

What are some specific things we can do on Saturday night to prepare ourselves better for worship on Sunday morning?

Thought to Remember

Respond to God with worship.