

May 14

1 Kings 8 and 2 Chronicles 5 and 6

In the fourth year of Solomon's reign, which began about 971 B.C., the building of the Temple had begun. Now in the 12th year of Solomon's reign, it is complete and the Temple is dedicated! When the day of dedication finally arrived, the great convocation was scheduled for the seventh month of the year, the time of the Feast of the Tabernacles. Everyone was there. The whole nation turned out for this one because nothing like it had been seen since the day the tabernacle itself had been dedicated. The priests began a procession that brought the earlier tabernacle and its furnishings to the new site. Many of the utensils for worship had been preserved from it. All the furnishings were replaced with newer and grander ones -- every piece of furniture, that is, except the Ark.

The importance of the Ark is self-evident. It is the most important thing in the whole nation of Israel -- the most important thing in their history. The account tells us that it contained the Ten Commandments, Aaron's staff and the tablets that God had given Moses on the mountain. Just as David had brought the Ark to Jerusalem a generation before, with a wonderful celebration, and all the pomp and circumstance that could be mustered, so the Ark is moved from the place where David had placed it and brought now to its final resting place inside the Temple, which has been built to house it, and to house the worship of the One True God.

There is an interesting comment made in the text about the length of the poles. Perhaps that is there in order for us to understand that all the rules that have been laid down by Moses were still being kept. This is especially important considering what happened to Uzzah when he decided to use a cart instead of poles! The rule was actually extended from Moses law so that not only would the poles be used to carry the Ark, but also they should remain in the rings of the ark and not be removed from it.

After the Ark had been installed, the cloud of the glory of the Lord filled the house! That visible symbol of the presence of God confirmed to Solomon and the people that the Lord was pleased with what they had done. If you remember, this very same thing had happened when the tabernacle had been dedicated back in the Book of Exodus (However, that cloud didn't stay visible to the people). So on that special day of dedication, the glory of God, the Shekinah Glory of God, filled the temple, and the people saw it. As for after the dedication, it was able to be seen only by the High Priest when he entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement.

Interestingly enough, 1 Kings doesn't tell us much about the response of the people, but the parallel account in Chronicles does, telling us that all the Levitical singers, and Asaph and Heman and Jeduthun, and their sons and kinsmen, were clothed in fine linen, with cymbals and harps and lyres. They were standing east of the altar, 120 priests blowing trumpets in unison. The singers made themselves heard with

one voice to praise the glorify God. There was a fantastic celebration and a great spectacle when the Temple was dedicated.

Solomon's prayer is the centerpiece of the account that is given us in I Kings chapter 8. It deserves our careful attention. I'm sure you took some note of the content of that prayer, in which Solomon talked about the greatness of God and worshipped Him. He described God's uniqueness and His faithfulness. He talked about God's infinity. Verse 27 is an important verse of Scripture. "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this Temple I have built!" Not only did Solomon clearly understand the infinity of God -- the fact that God is not bound by any place but is bigger than all places -- but he also understood that the Temple, while it focused the attention of the nation of Israel upon their God, was not intended to house their God. God was never meant to "live in the box"!

He describes God's compassion and concern, and then turns in his prayer from worship to intercession. That same pattern is there in many of the prayers of Scripture, and we might learn much from it about prayer. First worship, then intercession, then petitions. Solomon asks God for many things.

There are three different expressions for prayer in verse 28. The word translated "prayer" denotes prayer in general; the word "plea," sometimes translated "supplication," is a specific kind of prayer -- a call for help. Then comes the third word, "cry," literally a "ringing cry."

It is clear from a consideration of Solomon's prayer, that in his mind at least, and therefore in the minds of all of Israel, prayer is the central part of the worship of God. That is important to us, because in all of our readings through the books of Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers, through all of our understanding thus far of the sacrificial system, we could be distracted from that. All of the sacrifices that were made (and the number of sacrifices made on this particular day in Israel's history was absolutely enormous) -- but all the sacrifices made were simply ways of underscoring and highlighting the understanding that prayer is the centerpiece of the worship of God. The subject of this prayer of Solomon IS prayer. There is this understanding that prayer is going to be the vital ingredient of the relationship that is going to exist between God and Israel. It is the active ingredient, and it is prayer that somehow activates the promises of God. The first thing that Solomon asks for in his prayer is that God would remember and fulfill the promises made to his father David and to the people of Israel. But there is in that request the understanding that it is prayer that somehow functions as the trigger. That is a very biblical concept. We find it not only in the Old Testament, but also all through the New Testament. Prayer is the way by which the promises of God become activated in the lives of His people.