

God's Game of Thrones: *Building God's House* 1 Kings 8 various

We are winding down the God's Game of Thrones Sermon series. Next week we will explore some writings on romantic love attributed to King Solomon as the finale. But today we look at the dedication of the first Temple in Jerusalem, built over 11 years under King Solomon. Solomon shows his wisdom right at the beginning of construction by negotiating with neighboring countries for the finest materials. His diplomacy is so effective that he is able to convince those nations to have their finest workman - who live near the wood and stone being used, to shape the materials before shipping them to Jerusalem.

We can only imagine what this enterprise was like for the people. For hundreds of years, they had been a people whose connection with God was in a tent, where the Ark of the Covenant held the tablets of Moses. The Ark as the symbol of God's presence was with them throughout their wandering the desert; conquering the promised land; the time of the Judges- Samson, Deborah and Barak, Gideon; and finally the consolidation of the North (the 10 Tribes) and South (the Tribes of Judah and Benjamin) under King David. But now under wise King Solomon, a permanent home - a Temple to God is built.

Solomon's prayer of dedication tells us much about why Israel wants to build the Temple. First, Solomon says that the Temple makes clear that there is No God like Yahweh. It is built in beauty to worship the One God who has been so good to the people. It is an act of gratitude. Second, though it is called "the house of the Lord," Solomon knows that God does not live there. Solomon says, "*But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!*" The Temple is instead a place where the people pray and connect with God. Solomon asks that the prayers in and sent toward the Temple be heard in God's dwelling place (heaven for Solomon). So the temple is where the people can find God and receive forgiveness and guidance. Finally Solomon makes clear his belief that the Temple is not just for the people of Israel, but it is to be a beacon to the whole world of the one true God. And he prays

for those of other lands who will come to worship there, asking God that “*when a foreigner comes from a distant land because of your name and prays toward this house, then hear in heaven, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name.*” For Solomon this is a place of worship, of prayer and connection to God, and a place of bringing good news to the world - a wonderful tool of sharing the good news that God cares about humanity.

Estimates say Solomon’s Temple stands 410 years until the Babylonians burn it to the ground, during the time of exile – 587 BCE. 40 years later Babylon had been overthrown by Persia, and its Leader, Cyrus the Great, [called the Messiah in scripture], allows the people to return to Jerusalem. Working in fits and starts the second temple is rebuilt from the rubble of the first by 516 BCE. Historian Josephus records that this temple stands as is until 20 BCE when Herod the Great (yes, the Herod we read of in the Christmas story) expands the temple, almost completely rebuilding it. The renovated Temple became known as Herod's Temple. This is the Temple the Romans destroy in 70 CE. The lower levels of the Western Wall remain and form what we now call the Wailing Wall – a Holy place for the Jewish people.

Houses of God, whether they be Temples or Synagogues, Churches or Mosques or Shrines or Altars, are still important today. And I think it is for the same reasons that Solomon gives in his prayer. We build places dedicated to God out of thanksgiving to God’s faithfulness. The reason some religious leaders get into trouble for financial mismanagement is people have a desire to do tangible things to thank God. And religious leaders begin to get mixed up about both who the gift is for and the notion that just because people give you money for God’s work, doesn’t mean your every thought, whim and fancy are God’s will. Second, we build God’s Houses as places to talk to God, to feel God’s presence – Like Solomon we know that God is in every place in the world, and so we can experience and communicate with God anywhere. But there is something about having a special place dedicated to connection with God. And even today we come here for the most significant events in life – dedicating and naming children, confirming them in their faith, and

then seeing weddings where new families form, and finally we come here to seek comfort when a loved one dies and even lay to rest the earthly remains of our spouses, parents or grandparents and even children. But it is not just the major moments in life that make this House of God important. We come here every week to touch and be touched by God again, to remember who we are as God's children and to find the path of faithfulness again. And this place is holy not only because God is here, but our loved ones are here; we can still see our children when they were small here in the Sunday School room or as we unpack the costumes for the Christmas pageant, we can even see our younger selves when walls are being painted over or as we reminisce about events here, as we did with Deborah and Cindy about their wedding at Dinner and Dessert on Friday. We transcend time in this holy place and so we can still see those who are with God now, those who inspired and taught us with their faith. We see Betsy Biro arranging the guestbook, and Jack Williams moving every one of these chairs a hundred times or more and John Potts looking in these offering plates hoping there will be enough to cover this month's expenses. This House of God is also our family house. Several people have moved since I have come, some because of failing health or loss of a spouse or other change in situation, but no matter how difficult that transition for them, this House of God has stood as a rock of stability and promise and a connection to the past for them – even if they can't get here very often.

And as Solomon prayed, we pray this House of God is a place where foreigners; both those who come from other cultures or sides of the tracks, and those who have been made foreigners through rejection by some in God's Houses claiming to speak for God. We pray that all people may come to experience the wonder and grace and love and acceptance of our marvelous God here.

Knowing the power of this small church for us, can we even begin to imagine what it must have been like for King Solomon to see the Ark, which hold the tablets of Moses, which had been carried over the Jordan River out of the desert where the people had wandered, which had been captured and retrieved, which his own

Father, King David, had brought into Jerusalem with ecstatic religious dancing, now entering into the House built just for it over 11 years. And what about the people who know the struggles of the past, how must it feel to live in a time of peace and see the Ark of God which their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents have carried over deserts and rivers and into wars and hostile territory carried now into a Great Temple in the promised land. A Temple where you will worship the God of your Ancestors and be declared free of sin and worthy of God's love and favor. The Temple of Solomon and all Houses of God, assures them and us that God's faithfulness will last beyond our lives for our children and grandchildren. For here we declare with assurance and hope that God's love endures forever. AMEN

1 Kings 8:(1, 6, 10-11), 22-30, 41-43

Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David, which is Zion.

Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.)

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven. He said, "O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand. Therefore, O Lord, God of Israel, keep for your servant my father David that which you promised him, saying, 'There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children look to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me.' Therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you promised to your servant my father David. But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! Regard your servant's prayer and his plea, O Lord my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive. Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name — for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm — when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built."