

**1 Kings 8:1-13**

Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers' houses of the people of Israel, 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. <sup>2</sup> And all the men of Israel assembled to King Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. <sup>3</sup> And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark. <sup>4</sup> And they brought up the ark of the LORD, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent; the priests and the Levites brought them up. <sup>5</sup> And King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who had assembled before him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted or numbered. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim overshadowed the ark and its poles. <sup>8</sup> And the poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the Holy Place before the inner sanctuary; but they could not be seen from outside. And they are there to this day. <sup>9</sup> There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses put there at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the people of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt. <sup>10</sup> And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> Then Solomon said, "The LORD<sup>[a]</sup> has said that he would dwell in thick darkness. <sup>13</sup> I have indeed built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in forever."

**Introduction to God's Movement in the Old Testament**

If you've been following our series "God on the Move" over the last few weeks, you're aware that we've been exploring God's movement throughout the Old Testament. We've observed how God has consistently sought to dwell among His people, starting from creation.

Our journey began with the story of Adam and Eve. God placed them in the Garden of Eden, instructing them to cultivate the garden and multiply, thereby spreading His glory across the face of the earth. However, the familiar story takes a turn when Adam and Eve, tempted by the serpent, eat from a forbidden tree, leading to their exile from Eden. Despite this, God promises a way back, immediately drawing our attention to His desire for fellowship with humanity. This theme is central to the Bible.

**The Continuity of God's Character Across Testaments**

This year our church committed to reading through the Bible. I recognize the temptation to think that the God of the Old Testament is somehow different from the God of the New Testament, however as we consider the theme of this series together I hope you will begin to see that He is unchanging, and always moving towards His people from the very first pages of scripture.

What I want to impress upon your hearts as we look at this passage is that God has given us His word.

As we dive into Genesis, we see God reaffirming His commitment not only to Adam and Eve but also to figures like Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and later to Moses. Following the Exodus, God establishes Israel as His nation, giving them the Ten Commandments and instructions for building a tabernacle where He could dwell among them, signifying His holiness and the holiness He expects from His people as an example to the nations surrounding them.

### **The Journey the Ark of the Covenant**

Today, we focus on the transition from the tabernacle to Solomon's Temple, a grander and more permanent dwelling place for God. It's important to remember that over 500 years have passed since God's covenant with Moses on Mount Sinai. During the temple's dedication, which coincided with the Festival of Booths, a key element was missing: the Ark of the Covenant. The absence of the Ark, representing God's presence, rendered the magnificent temple useless.

The Ark's journey is a story in itself. From residing in the Tabernacle at Shiloh under King Saul, to its capture by the Philistines and subsequent return, to its storage and eventual relocation to Jerusalem by David, the Ark symbolizes God's enduring covenant and presence. Solomon actually expanded the city borders and placed the temple on Mount Moriah. The innermost part of the temple, where the ark resided was known as the foundation stone and is still in place today. By placing the Ark in the Temple on Mount Moriah, God's covenant with both Abraham and David was fulfilled, marking the first time in 100 years the Ark was where it was supposed to be, at the very center of Israel worship. This event, accompanied by the descent of God's glory in the form of thick dark cloud, reaffirms God is a faithful keeper of His word.

We must grasp the significance of what unfolds in this chapter, which represents a pinnacle moment in the Old Testament, if not the apex of Israel's history. This event symbolizes the fulfillment of God's promises: to Abraham of becoming a great nation, to

Israel a land of their own, and to David of a lasting dynasty through his son who would build the temple.

What could possibly go wrong?

Interestingly, in the verses detailing the temple's dedication, the temple itself is scarcely mentioned. This omission highlights a crucial point: without God's presence, the temple is merely a structure.

### **The Role of Communal Worship in Manifesting God's Presence**

In the verses we're examining today, we encounter both a scene reminiscent of earlier Biblical moments and also a familiar picture of what we are doing now. Beginning with verse 1, we see Solomon gathering the people for a worship service.

Reflecting on last week's tour of the tabernacle, I was struck by God's holiness. The materials used in the tabernacle were designed to echo the Garden of Eden. Even the angels guarding the Ark, parallel the angels stationed outside Eden. It's awe-inspiring to consider God's presence, once dwelling above the tabernacle in a cloud, visible to all His people. The assembly led by Moses at Mount Sinai and Solomon during the temple dedication are like our church services, though it seems we've lost sight of God's glory in our modern worship.

With this context, let us reflect on a passage familiar to many, Hebrews 10:19-25, which underscores the importance of our communal worship.

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers,<sup>[a]</sup> since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,<sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,<sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God,<sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.<sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.<sup>24</sup> And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,<sup>25</sup> not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

This scripture reminds us that gathering as believers is not optional but expected. It's in these gatherings that God's presence is made manifest to the world. It's no wonder Jesus was angry in the temple, declaring it a "den of robbers" instead of a house of prayer. This emphasizes the temple's intended role as a place where all nations could come and worship the Living God.

## **Worship and Repentance: Lessons from the Temple Dedication**

This brings our attention to another important aspect of worship, repentance. The temple dedication highlights the importance of the sacrificial system. Hebrew 9:22 reminds us that without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness of sins. As God's people, we are called to be holy, yet often in modern church services, we seek comfort rather than facing the reality of our sin and the need for repentance.

Sacrifice, though a harsh aspect of worship, is fundamental. The extensive sacrifices made by Solomon, numbering thousands of oxen and sheep, were not just grand gestures but reflected a deep understanding of God's glory. These acts were an attempt by Solomon and all of Israel to approach God's presence acknowledging that even such innumerable sacrifices were insufficient without God's grace.

Solomon knew what the writer of Hebrews tells us earlier in chapter 10, "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, when Christ<sup>[a]</sup> came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me;<sup>6</sup> in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.<sup>7</sup> Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'" <sup>8</sup> When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), <sup>9</sup> then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. <sup>10</sup> And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

## **The Primacy of Scripture in Faith and Worship**

Finally, I want to focus on the contents of the Ark of the Covenant. We learn that the Ark held only the tablets. The fate of the other items traditionally believed to be within the Ark remains unmentioned, but the presence of the tablets alone is significant. Inside the Ark, situated in the temple's Most Holy Place, were the words of God. This fact is pivotal to our faith and the essence of our current series: we worship a God who has communicated with us through His word.

The significance of this cannot be overstated. Why would the universe's Creator reveal Himself to those who have defied Him? The answer lies in the fact that our knowledge of God comes exclusively through His self-revelation in His word. Consider the Gospel of John, where Jesus is referred to as the Word. He embodies God's spoken word and fulfills the promise made to Adam and Eve at the outset. I cannot stand before you and offer anything of value that does not stem from God's word. Many pastors and teachers

attempt to preach everything but God's word, sometimes even distorting it to suit their purposes or claiming new revelations from God. However, a straightforward preaching from the Scriptures reveals a God who has indeed spoken. He has provided us with His word and His promise, fulfilling that promise. At the heart of our faith is this very word, this promise, that He has bestowed upon us.

Although there is much more to glean from this passage, the key takeaway for today is that God has given us His word. His glory is manifest in the world when we, as God's people, gather together, repent, and place His word at the center of our worship.

Again King Solomon in all of his wisdom knew of a future when Israel would fail to keep up their end of the covenant. He continues in chapter 8 with a prayer for Israel to pray for forgiveness and he prays something that is key and crucial for us even today and I want to pray that for us as we close.

1 King 8:51-61