

January 5 Lesson 6 (NIV)

SOLOMON SUMMONS THE ARK

DEVOTIONAL READING: Deuteronomy 31:7–13

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Kings 8:1–13; 2 Chronicles 5:1–14

1 KINGS 8:1–13

¹Then King Solomon summoned into his presence at Jerusalem the elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families, to bring up the ark of the LORD's covenant from Zion, the City of David. ²All the Israelites came together to King Solomon at the time of the festival in the month of Ethanim, the seventh month.

³When all the elders of Israel had arrived, the priests took up the ark, ⁴and they brought up the ark of the LORD and the tent of meeting and all the sacred furnishings in it. The priests and Levites carried them up, ⁵and King Solomon and the entire assembly of Israel that had gathered about him were before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and cattle that they could not be recorded or counted.

⁶The priests then brought the ark of the LORD's covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim. ⁷The cherubim spread their wings over the place of the ark and overshadowed the ark and its carrying poles. ⁸These poles were so long that their ends could be seen from the Holy Place in front of the inner sanctuary, but not from outside the Holy Place; and they are still there today. ⁹There was nothing in the ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt. ¹⁰When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. ¹¹And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple.

¹²Then Solomon said, "The LORD has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud; ¹³I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever."

KEY VERSE

I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever. —1 Kings 8:13

HONORING GOD

Unit 2: Dedicating the Temple of God

LESSONS 6–9

HOW TO SAY IT

Araunah *A-raw-nuh*.

BulBool.

Ethanim *Eth-uh-nim*.

Horeb *Ho-reb*.

Kiriath Jearim *Kir-ih-ath Jee-uh-rim* or *Jee-a-rim*.

Kohathite *Ko-hath-ite*.

Obed-Edom *O-bed-Ee-dum*.

tabernacle *tah-burr-nah-kul*.

Introduction

A. Dedication Ceremony

Crowds numbering more than 150,000 assembled on the National Mall in Washington, DC, on May 29, 2004. They had gathered for the dedication of the National World War II Memorial. The service was a time to remember the courage and sacrifice of 16 million men and women who served in the U.S. armed forces during World War II, especially that of the 400,000 who died. The millions who supported the war effort from home were also recognized. The service further celebrated the completion of 11 years of work on the memorial, which had begun in 1993 and involved thousands of individuals and many corporations throughout the country.

Celebrating the completion of massive projects is nothing new. First Kings 8 is an example of that fact as it narrates the dedication of the temple, which Solomon completed in about 959 BC. It was a time to celebrate! More importantly, it was a time to recall the truths and commitments that initiated the project in the first place.

B. Lesson Context

After King David's death, the Lord established Solomon on the throne in Israel (1 Kings 2:12). The new king attended to the mission his father, David, had given him: building a temple. David had streamlined the process by stockpiling materials Solomon's builders used for the awe-inspiring structure (1 Chronicles 22:2–6).

In addition, David had purchased the land for the temple, which had been Araunah's threshing floor (2 Samuel 24:18–25; 1 Chronicles 21:22–22:1; see lesson 3). This plot of land was north of the king's palace, in the ridge of hills known as Mount Moriah (2 Chronicles 3:1). This was the

place where Abraham, in obedience to God's command, would have sacrificed Isaac as a burnt offering had the Lord not intervened (Genesis 22:2, 10–14).

The magnificent temple was completed in the eighth month of the eleventh year of King Solomon's reign. Skilled builders and artisans had labored on it for seven years (1 Kings 6:38). What David had proposed to do many years earlier had been accomplished by his son Solomon just as God instructed.

Today's lesson text picks up after the completion of the temple. Second Chronicles 5:2–6:2 contains a parallel account. The key difference between these two texts is found in 2 Chronicles 5:11–13, which adds details about the priests and musicians who were present.

I. The Ark on the Road

(1 KINGS 8:1–5)

A. The Assembly (vv. 1, 2)

1a. Then King Solomon summoned into his presence at Jerusalem the elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families,

The phrase *elders of Israel* is a broad term, referring to the informal heads of the various *Israelite families* (compare Numbers 7:2). The other two phrases refer to positions of authority of a more official nature within the clans and *tribes*.

1b. to bring up the ark of the LORD's covenant from Zion, the City of David.

Solomon summons these influential leaders to celebrate the ark's journeying to the newly finished temple. *The ark of the ... covenant* is a gold-covered wooden box with an ornamented lid known as the atonement cover. Two golden cherubim are mounted on the lid (Exodus 25:17–22). The box is two and a half cubits (three and three-quarter feet) long and one and a half cubits (two and a quarter feet) high and deep. The ark signifies the throne of God or his footstool on earth (1 Samuel 4:4; 1 Chronicles 28:2; Psalms 99:1, 5; 132:7, 8). Though the ark is now lost to history, John saw it in his vision of Heaven, once again housed in the temple (Revelation 11:19).

David had previously brought the ark to the city of Jerusalem but not the tabernacle, which housed it; instead, David had erected a tent for the ark within the old Jebusite fortress of *Zion* (2 Samuel 5–7; 2 Chronicles 1:3, 4). The designation *Zion* is often used in poetry to refer to Jerusalem (examples: Isaiah 1:8; 3:16; Lamentations 2:10; 4:2).

The leaders' gathering to *bring up the ark* from *Zion* indicates that the temple has been built outside the original confines of David's Jerusalem. The term *Zion* will come to designate the temple area as a whole (Isaiah 8:18; Amos 1:2) and then the entire city of Jerusalem (Isaiah 10:24; Amos 6:1). To refer to *Zion* as *the City of David* highlights God's choice of both.

2. All the Israelites came together to King Solomon at the time of the festival in the month of Ethanim, the seventh month.

The festival that occurs in *the seventh month* is the Festival of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:34). It commemorates God's provision during the Israelites' wilderness wanderings as well as his giving them rest in Canaan (23:42, 43).

The fact that 1 Kings 6:38 says the temple is finished in "the month of Bul, the eighth month" creates an uncertainty when compared with the timing of the dedication in the seventh month. Many scholars propose the solution that the verse before us refers to the Ethanim of the year that follows. Eleven months thus pass between the end of construction and the dedication.

Others propose that the extended, 14-day celebration (1 Kings 8:65) begins in the seventh month and ends at the beginning of the eighth month. But this interpretation requires the feast to start later than the prescribed “fifteenth day” of that month (see Leviticus 23:34; Numbers 29:12). An extended application of the exception in Numbers 9:9–13 regarding Passover might allow this, however (compare 2 Chronicles 30).

We must not lose sight of the fact that the feast emphasizes the Lord’s faithfulness to Israel. He has kept his promises to Abraham (Genesis 17:4–8). Now, the temple testifies to God’s faithfulness to David as well (1 Chronicles 17:11, 12; see lesson 3). After the exiles return from Babylon, the feast will be celebrated again with great joy (Nehemiah 8:17).

B. The Procession (vv. 3, 4)

3. When all the elders of Israel had arrived, the priests took up the ark,

Although *the elders of Israel* represent the nation in the procession, *the priests* actually transport *the ark*. The Kohathites, a branch of the priestly tribe of Levi, have the exclusive responsibility of transporting the holy articles pertaining to the tabernacle, including the ark of the covenant (Numbers 4:1–5). They carry the ark on their shoulders, using two staves running through the four rings on the corners of the ark (Exodus 25:12–14; contrast 2 Chronicles 35:3).

David had reminded the levitical priests of the critical need to abide by this regulation (1 Chronicles 15:11–15). Unfortunately, David only reminded the priests of their duty after Uzzah, a non-priest, died during the first attempt to transport the ark from Kiriath Jearim to Jerusalem (13:5–10).

4. and they brought up the ark of the LORD and the tent of meeting and all the sacred furnishings in it. The priests and Levites carried them up,

Although the Kohathites bear *the ark*, other Levites apparently carry *the tent of meeting* and its furnishings. The division of labor and means of transporting the ark are both important for showing proper respect to God and avoiding his anger (1 Chronicles 15:13).

Solomon has constructed new furnishings for the temple (1 Kings 7:48–51). Among the tabernacle’s original furnishings, only the ark remains in use because of its importance as a symbol of God’s throne and reign.

C. The Gathering (v. 5)

5. and King Solomon and the entire assembly of Israel that had gathered about him were before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and cattle that they could not be recorded or counted.

Having arrived at the temple grounds, the people gather around the king. Their position *before the ark* signifies the status of both *Israel* and *Solomon* as the Lord’s subjects (see commentary on 1 Kings 8:1). God is their real king; Solomon is but his representative (see 1 Samuel 8:6–9).

The offering of a large number of sacrifices echoes at least two earlier events in Israel’s history. Sacrifices were offered at the dedication of the tabernacle (Exodus 40:29), and David had sacrificed a bull and a calf after every six steps the priests took as they bore the ark from the house of Obed-Edom to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:9–15). Moreover, the fact that *so many* sacrifices are made *that they cannot be recorded or counted* echoes Solomon’s description of Israel’s population (1 Kings 3:8).

II. The Ark at Home

(1 KINGS 8:6–13)

A. In the Most Holy Place (vv. 6–8)

6. The priests then brought the ark of the LORD’s covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim.

The priests place the ark in the inner sanctuary of the temple as it had been in the tabernacle (Exodus 26:33; 2 Samuel 6:17). Because the ark is the symbol of God’s presence, the temple could not be considered God’s dwelling place until the ark was situated in *the Most Holy Place*. *The cherubim* are made of gold and figuratively guard the ark (Exodus 25:18, 19).

The word translated *temple* in this chapter is also appropriately translated “house” (examples: 2 Samuel 7:2, 16, 29). This marks the first of 21 times the underlying Hebrew word is used in this chapter. Its repetition highlights the Lord’s promised presence. It also evokes memories of God’s twofold promise that he would build David a “house” (dynasty) and that David’s son would build the house for God (2 Samuel 7:11–13). Referring to the temple as a house implies that God has chosen to dwell in Israel.

7. The cherubim spread their wings over the place of the ark and overshadowed the ark and its carrying poles.

Within the Most Holy Place, *the ark* is placed under two large *cherubim* whose *wings* span the width of the chamber (1 Kings 6:23–30). In Ancient Near Eastern thought and art, cherubim are celestial beings who guard sacred spaces (compare Genesis 3:24). They commonly are depicted with the body of a lion, the wings of a bird, and the face of a human (Exodus 25:20; 37:7–9; contrast Ezekiel 1:6–11; 10:20–22). Whereas the cherubim on the atonement cover face each other (Exodus 25:17–20), these cherubim look out from the “innermost room of the temple” to face the places where the priests most frequently minister (1 Kings 6:27).

The ark’s presence in this chamber makes it the most sacred space in Israel. Because the ark signifies the throne of God or his footstool (see commentary on 1 Kings 8:1), it also transforms this space into an earthly representation of God’s heavenly throne room (Psalm 11:4). Only the great high priest can enter the Most Holy Place, once a year on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16; compare Hebrews 9:1–10).

8. These poles were so long that their ends could be seen from the Holy Place in front of the inner sanctuary, but not from outside the Holy Place; and they are still there today.

Even though the ark is now in its permanent location, *the poles* remain in place (Exodus 25:13–15). These poles can be seen by priests when the veil into *the Holy Place* is open, but not from outside. The statement that the poles *are still there today* implies that this section of 1 Kings was written before the temple was destroyed in 586 BC (2 Kings 25:8–15).

B. With Glorious Memories (vv. 9–12)

9. There was nothing in the ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt.

At one time, the ark contained Aaron’s budding staff (Numbers 17:10) and a jar of manna (Exodus 16:33, 34) as well as *the two stone tablets* that bear witness to the covenant God had made with Israel (24:12; 1 Kings 8:9; Hebrews 9:4). By this time, the pot of manna and Aaron’s staff have gone missing. The Philistines may have removed them when they captured the ark during the

days of Samuel (1 Samuel 4:1–11). The ark now contains only the two stone tablets of the law that God gave to *Moses* (Exodus 25:16).

Nevertheless, the presence of the two stone tablets represents the *covenant* relationship God initiated with Israel and the obligations Israel has as his covenant people. The Lord made this covenant with Israel *at Horeb*, also commonly called Mount Sinai (compare Exodus 19:20–20:21; Deuteronomy 5). The ark's moving to the temple represents God's continued, faithful presence with Israel.

10. When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD.

Allusions to the exodus and the dedication of the tabernacle at Horeb abound at the temple dedication. The first direct link between the two events is a physical sign. While the nation walked in the wilderness, Israel had been guided by a pillar of *cloud* filled with God's glory (Exodus 13:21, 22; 33:9, 10). When Moses ascended the mountain to receive the law, the cloud of God's glory looked like "consuming fire" (24:17). A cloud also filled the tabernacle during its dedication and stayed over it by day throughout Israel's wilderness sojourn (Leviticus 16:2; Numbers 9:15–23).

Later biblical texts will also employ images of the cloud of God's glory and presence. Unfortunately, the prophet Ezekiel will have a vision of the glory of God leaving the temple in response to Judah's sin (Ezekiel 10:3–5, 18, 19; 11:22, 23). This clearly represents God's removing his presence from the temple (contrast 43:1–5). On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John will be covered by a cloud from which the Father speaks (Matthew 17:1–7). These signs of God's presence reassure his people that he is not far away. He chooses to be near his people, so near that he will choose to take on flesh (Hebrews 2:17).

11. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple.

The experience of *the priests* in the Lord's *temple* further alludes to the days of Moses. Not even that great prophet could enter the tent because *the glory of the Lord* descended on it and filled it (Exodus 40:34, 35). It took only the afterimage of God's glory to overwhelm the Israelites when they saw Moses' face after he received the law (34:29–35).

In a similar fashion, John's future vision will reveal servants of the Lord being prevented by the smoke of the glory of the Lord from ministering in God's heavenly temple (Revelation 15:8). From the days of Moses and Solomon until eternity, God's glorious presence overwhelms his servants.

12. Then Solomon said, "The LORD has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud;

Solomon's statement serves to link again the temple he has built with memories of Israel's formation and the subsequent construction of the tabernacle (compare 2 Samuel 22:10). The statement in this verse is similar to the description of God's presence when Moses approached him to receive the law (Exodus 20:21).

While *a dark cloud* represents God's presence with Israel, it also stresses his holy hiddenness or otherness. A thick darkness engulfed Mount Sinai as God gave Israel the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 4:11; 5:22) and was one of the many phenomena that evoked great fear among Moses and the Israelites (Exodus 20:18; Hebrews 12:18–21). This display of God's power and majesty reminds the Israelites that the loving God who is near to them is also holy and transcendent above them. They must not treat him lightly. Remembering God's holiness will help Israel guard against sin, knowing that God's presence is both a comfort and a terror (Exodus 20:20).

C. In a Permanent House (v. 13)

13. “I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever.”

Long before this dedication celebration, Moses had celebrated that God would establish himself among the people in the promised land (Exodus 15:17). Solomon’s words connect the temple’s completion to David’s desire to build a *temple* for the Lord and God’s promise that David’s son would build it (2 Samuel 7:1–3, 12, 13). Solomon has been faithful to provide Israel a place for worshipping God. The Lord has been faithful to honor David’s desire and the king’s effort. Later generations will continue to celebrate God’s presence at Zion (Psalms 132:13; 135:21; etc.).

First Kings 8:27, 28 makes clear that Solomon does not believe that God can be contained in and confined to the temple or that God even needs the temple (compare Acts 17:24). Rather, the temple with the ark situated within reassures Israel of God’s presence among them as their king. Centuries later, Jesus will make a similar point when he declares that anyone who swears by the temple really swears by God (Matthew 23:21). The temple in and of itself has no significance; the presence of the Lord in the temple means everything.

Conclusion

A. God Dwells Among His People

The procession of the ark into the temple of Solomon marked a central truth in Israel: the God of the universe was also the faithful God who had called the Israelites into covenant. He dwelled among them as king. The God whose presence was with Israel dwelled among us in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14). He now indwells us through his Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:1–4; etc.). May we also celebrate that our God keeps his promises and stays close to his people!

B. Prayer

Lord, we praise you as our king who keeps his promises. We thank you that you dwelled among us in Jesus and dwell with us today in the Holy Spirit. We thank you as we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God still chooses to live among his people.¹

¹