

January 19 Lesson 8 (NIV)

SOLOMON SEEKS GOD’S BLESSING

DEVOTIONAL READING: 1 Timothy 2:1–6

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Kings 8:22–53; 2 Chronicles 6:12–42

1 KINGS 8:22–30, 52, 53

²² Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven ²³ and said:

“LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way. ²⁴ You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it—as it is today.

²⁵ “Now LORD, the God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father the promises you made to him when you said, ‘You shall never fail to have a successor to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your descendants are careful in all they do to walk before me faithfully as you have done.’ ²⁶ And now, God of Israel, let your word that you promised your servant David my father come true.

²⁷ “But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! ²⁸ Yet give attention to your servant’s prayer and his plea for mercy, LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day. ²⁹ May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, ‘My Name shall be there,’ so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place. ³⁰ Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.

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⁵² “May your eyes be open to your servant’s plea and to the plea of your people Israel, and may you listen to them whenever they cry out to you. ⁵³ For you singled them out from all the nations of the world to be your own inheritance, just as you declared through your servant Moses when you, Sovereign LORD, brought our ancestors out of Egypt.”

KEY VERSE

Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive. —1 Kings 8:30

HONORING GOD

Unit 2: Dedicating the Temple of God

LESSONS 6–9

HOW TO SAY IT

Deuteronomy *Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.*

Egypt *Ee-jipt.*

exile *eg-zil-ik.*

Leviticus *Leh-vit-ih-kus.*

Moses *Mo-zes* or *Mo-zez.*

Shema (Hebrew) *She-muh.*

Solomon *Sol-o-mun.*

Introduction

A. Gateway to the West

Where is the Gateway to the West in the United States? While the young country was still struggling to spread westward, the Cumberland Gap was one of the easiest land crossings through the Appalachian Mountains into the wild frontier of Tennessee. On the other hand, Pittsburgh's location at the meeting of three rivers made it a great place to begin a westward journey down the mighty Ohio River. Fort Wayne, Indiana along with St. Louis and Kansas City have also been acclaimed as the Gateway to the West. None of these today is the nationally recognized Gateway to the West.

In a similar way, Israel lacked one place that was *the* gateway to God. Where could they go to connect with him?

B. Lesson Context

First Kings 8:1–21 narrates the initial stages of the dedication ceremony Solomon orchestrated for the temple he had built in Jerusalem for the God of Israel (see commentary lessons 6, 7). The priests carried the ark of the covenant to the temple and placed it within the temple's innermost chamber, the Most Holy Place. The Lord's glory then filled the temple, signaling God's approval of Solomon and the temple.

Solomon related to the congregation of Israel the story of the Lord's covenant faithfulness to David. The evidence for this was Solomon's coming to the throne in the place of his father and in the completion of the temple.

I. God in Israel (1 KINGS 8:22–26)

A. Past Faithfulness (vv. 22–24)

22. Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven

The *altar* that *Solomon* stands in front of is most likely the bronze altar of burnt offering in the temple courts (1 Kings 8:64). If it were a different altar, he would be standing in the temple, out of sight from *the whole assembly*.

Solomon’s posture is one of prayer. Whereas we traditionally pray with folded hands and closed eyes, the ancient Israelites typically look up *toward heaven* or toward the temple, God’s house on earth (1 Kings 8:29, 30). Their lifted, empty *hands* express petition and supplication (Exodus 9:29, 33; Psalm 143:6). This stance demonstrates both their need and their confidence that they will receive from God (1 Kings 8:38, 54; Psalms 63:4; 88:9; 143:6). Though the temple was built as God’s home on earth, Solomon recognizes that the Lord’s true home is in Heaven rather than in any one location on the earth (see on 1 Kings 8:27, below).

23a. and said: “LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—

Solomon continues to address God as the *Lord ... God of Israel* (1 Kings 8:15, 17, 20, 25; see commentary lesson 7). He calls on the powerful, transcendent deity who is also near to Israel and keeps covenant with the nation. Solomon’s affirmation of the Lord’s uniqueness *in heaven and on earth* echoes Moses’ words: “The Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other” (Deuteronomy 4:39; compare Exodus 15:11; Deuteronomy 7:9, 12; Nehemiah 1:5).

23b. “you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way.

The Hebrew word translated *love* further highlights God’s fidelity as it denotes loyalty and faithfulness to covenant obligations. The same word is translated “kindness” (Joshua 2:12; 2 Chronicles 24:22; etc.) and even “unfailing kindness” (Jeremiah 31:3). The Lord is loyal to his servants who demonstrate fidelity to him by walking before him *wholeheartedly* (Daniel 9:4). To *continue in God’s way* suggests walking the correct path, a frequent biblical metaphor that designates one’s conduct or process of living (Deuteronomy 8:6; Micah 6:8; etc.). The heart speaks to what is in the core of one’s being; it designates one’s intellect, emotion, or will (1 Samuel 2:1; 1 Chronicles 16:10; Psalm 9:1). Solomon calls the people to be wholly devoted to the Lord.

The command to love the Lord with all one’s heart is part of the ancient prayer called the *Shema* (Hebrew for “hear”) passage of Deuteronomy 6:4, 5. It constitutes Israel’s central obligation to the Lord within the covenant (Deuteronomy 10:12; 26:16; Joshua 22:5; 1 Samuel 7:3). Solomon had been specifically charged by his father, David, to love the Lord with all his heart so that David would never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel (1 Kings 2:1–4). Jesus later will declare the *Shema* to be the greatest commandment. Together with Leviticus 19:18, these two summarize the Law and Prophets (Matthew 22:34–40).

24. “You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it as it is today.

Three references to *your servant David my father* punctuate 1 Kings 8:24–26. Referring to King David as a *servant* contrasts David’s role in Israel with the Lord’s. Though David was the earthly leader of Israel, he was always subordinate to God. Earlier, the Lord had used the phrase “my servant” to refer to Moses (Numbers 12:7, 8; Joshua 1:2, 7) and Caleb (Numbers 14:24) while Joshua was designated as the Lord’s servant (Joshua 24:29). Solomon also will speak of himself as the Lord’s servant (1 Kings 8:28, 29, 52). This further ties Solomon to his father not just by blood but by acceptance of his role under God.

Solomon celebrates the Lord’s covenant faithfulness to David. Solomon’s place on the throne and the temple’s completion represent the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise to David found in 2 Samuel 7:13. The king had earlier praised God for establishing with his *hand* what he had promised (1 Kings 8:15). Hand is an image of God’s power and authority (Exodus 13:3; 2 Chronicles 30:12; Isaiah 41:10; etc.). That God had spoken the promise to David by means of his own *mouth* testified to God’s intimate involvement in the promise and to its reliability. Solomon praises the Lord as the one who had committed himself to David and who had been able to perform what he had promised in establishing Solomon on David’s throne. God has empowered Solomon to complete the temple.

B. Future Faithfulness (vv. 25, 26)

25. “Now LORD, the God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father the promises you made to him when you said, ‘You shall never fail to have a successor to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your descendants are careful in all they do to walk before me faithfully as you have done.’”

The word *now* signals a transition in Solomon’s prayer: he seeks God’s present and future faithfulness (compare 1 Chronicles 17:10–14, 23; 2 Chronicles 1:9). The Lord had promised David that he would establish David’s dynasty and throne forever (2 Samuel 7:15, 16). Solomon echoes the words David used as recorded in 1 Kings 2:1–4 to recount to his son that covenant promise. In that recollection, David had highlighted a conditional element within the Lord’s covenant. In order to enjoy its benefits, David’s descendants must walk in God’s ways (1 Kings 2:3). If David’s descendants follow the Lord fully, then David will never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel (2:4).

The phrase *if only* indicates the conditions under which Solomon can expect the Lord to continue to honor the promises he made. When David’s descendants *are careful in all they do*, they will be established on his throne. When they are not, they will face God’s judgments.

26. “And now, God of Israel, let your word that you promised your servant David my father come true.”

Solomon anticipates God’s future faithfulness to the *word* he had spoken to *David* (2 Samuel 7:25). The ultimate fulfillment of the Lord’s gracious promise will come in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who will be born from the house of David (Luke 1:27, 69; Acts 2:29, 30) and be given “the throne of his father David” (Luke 1:32).

II. God in Heaven

(1 KINGS 8:27–30)

A. Praise of Sovereignty (v. 27)

27. “But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!”

Having restated highlights from God’s covenant with David, Solomon proclaims the wonder of the *God* who has established that covenant. Solomon contrasts the limits of the *temple* he built with the limitless God for whom it has been built (compare Psalm 139:7–16; Jeremiah 23:24). There is no God like the Lord in *the heavens* above or on the *earth* beneath (1 Kings 8:23), and both Heaven and earth belong to him (Deuteronomy 10:14). Not even the *highest heaven* can contain the Lord.

In Israelite thought, there exist three layers of heavens above the earth (compare 2 Corinthians 12:2). Beneath the earth can be found the abode of the dead. All of these tiers belong to the Lord, and not even the most magnificent of them can be said to contain God. Consequently, the newly constructed temple certainly cannot confine him (2 Chronicles 2:6; Isaiah 66:1; Acts 17:24).

The Israelites will err if they think they can confine God within a temple and use it to manipulate him the way neighboring nations seek to manipulate their gods (compare 1 Kings 18:26–29). Indeed, Stephen will quote both Solomon and Isaiah when he condemns the Jewish leaders for their reliance on the law and the rebuilt temple in their rejection of Jesus (Acts 7:47–53). This building represents the dwelling of the Lord among his people, but it will be a blessing for them only if they humbly obey the God who dwells among them (compare Jeremiah 7:1–15).

B. Prayer for Attention (vv. 28–30)

28. “Yet give attention to your servant’s prayer and his plea for mercy, LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day.”

Solomon now begins to apply the title *servant* to himself as he links himself to God’s promise and faithfulness (see commentary on 1 Kings 8:24, above). The king realizes that he has no claim on the *God* of Heaven. Solomon cannot force the almighty *Lord* to do anything. Yet God had made promises to David and to Israel, and Solomon could depend on the Lord’s own word.

The nouns *prayer*, *plea*, and *cry* overlap greatly in meaning, each one offering a different emphasis. The first is the most generic, referring to any kind of praying to God. This word occurs over 70 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. *Plea* refers to prayers for God’s intervention and assistance; it occurs only 25 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. *Cry* can refer to a ringing, emotional calling out to God either in joy or in pain, occurring 33 times in the Hebrew Old Testament.

29. “May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, ‘My Name shall be there,’ so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place.”

Solomon has clarified that the transcendent God cannot be confined within the temple. The king nevertheless prays that God will honor the newly constructed *house* as a place where the Lord can be approached.

The sensory metaphors of the Lord’s seeing and hearing emphasize the receptivity that Solomon hopes and expects God will have toward his prayers (compare 2 Kings 19:16; Nehemiah 1:6; Psalms 34:15; 101:6). Solomon does not just want God to see and hear; rather, Solomon wants God to act on behalf of his praying people on the basis of seeing and hearing (102:17). God promises that he will do so (2 Chronicles 7:15).

Solomon asks for God's constant attention *night and day* to the appeals of his people (compare Psalm 138:2; Daniel 6:10). God does not sleep; he is able to *hear* prayers always (Psalms 34:17, 18; 121:3–8). Furthermore, the Lord has provided his *Name* to Israel so that the people can know him (Exodus 3:13–15). They are to call on his name in praise, prayer, and trust (1 Kings 8:33, 35; 1 Chronicles 16:8; Psalm 9:10; etc.). God's name being associated with the temple conveys the idea of his possession of that space. Israel belongs to God as the nation called by God's name (Deuteronomy 28:10; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Isaiah 43:1; see lesson 7).

30. “Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.”

Solomon's requests recognize God's openness and receptivity to prayers. Solomon previously had asked the Lord to hear his own prayer; now Solomon explicitly includes the *people of Israel* among those to whom the Lord should listen. Israel will pray toward the temple, but God will hear from Heaven (1 Kings 8:32, 34, 36, 39, 43, 45, 49).

Solomon's specific requests that follow imply that Israel will pray in repentance (1 Kings 8:39, 47; compare Exodus 34:9; Leviticus 26:40–42). Solomon pleads that the Lord not only will hear Israel, but that he also will *forgive* Israel (1 Kings 8:34, 36, 39, 50). Elsewhere, God promises that he hears the prayers of his repentant people (Exodus 34:7; Jeremiah 29:12).

It is significant that Solomon links forgiveness to the Israelites' prayers rather than to their sacrifices—acts normally associated with temples. The temple is certainly the place for sacrifices (Deuteronomy 12:1–18), but sacrifices are offered in the context of prayer (Psalm 141:2; Isaiah 56:7). This distinction will be important for the future exilic and post-exilic communities that will experience disruptions in their ability to offer sacrifices after the temple is destroyed. While the nation might worry that God will not hear their prayers without sacrifice, Solomon's words serve as reassurance that the prayers behind the sacrifice are pleasing to God.

III. God in All the Earth

(1 KINGS 8:52, 53)

A. Summary of Requests (v. 52)

52. “May your eyes be open to your servant's plea and to the plea of your people Israel, and may you listen to them whenever they cry out to you.

In 1 Kings 8:31–51 (not in today's text), Solomon offers seven petitions to God concerning various circumstances his people may experience. These specific petitions will be very reassuring to the generations that will live during and after the Babylonian exile. Despite the judgments to come, Solomon expectantly prays that God will continue to care for his people.

First Kings 8:52 picks up key elements from previous portions of Solomon's prayer. Just as Solomon has prayed that God's *eyes* will be open toward the temple (8:27, 28), the king now prays that God's *eyes* will be *open* to his *plea* and to that of *Israel*, and that God will hear them (8:28, 29).

B. Reason for Requests (v. 53)

53. “For you singled them out from all the nations of the world to be your own inheritance, just as you declared through your servant Moses when you, Sovereign Lord, brought our ancestors out of Egypt.”

Solomon is confident that the Lord will be attentive because the Israelites are his people whom he has rescued from Egyptian slavery (8:51; compare Psalm 3:4; contrast Job 30:20; Psalm 22:2). God has proven himself to Israel time after time.

Solomon began his prayer in 1 Kings 8:23 by addressing the *Lord*, the God of Israel. He now ends by appealing to the *Sovereign Lord* who had brought Israel *out of Egypt*. As he has done in the first part of his prayer (1 Kings 8:15, 16), Solomon connects the fulfillment of God’s promises to David with the story of *Moses* and the exodus. Calling Moses a *servant* connects both David and Solomon to the earlier leader of Israel (8:28, 29, 30, 52; see commentary on 8:24).

God had chosen Israel *from all the nations of the world* to be his inheritance and special possession (Exodus 19:5, 6; 34:9; Deuteronomy 4:20; 7:7, 8; Psalm 33:12). He had delivered Israel in order for that nation to be a blessing in and to the world (Genesis 12:2; 22:17, 18; Exodus 19:5, 6). God has been faithful to his people, and he will fulfill his purposes for them. Those purposes are ultimately fulfilled in his Son, Jesus, and in the ministry and message of reconciliation he commits to Christ’s church (2 Corinthians 5:14–19).

Conclusion

A. Access in Christ’s Name

Solomon’s temple-dedication prayer highlights the Lord’s faithfulness to his covenant with David. The establishment of Solomon as king and the completion of the temple bore witness to God’s faithfulness to David and to Israel. That past faithfulness formed the basis for Solomon’s expectation of and his petition for the Lord’s continued covenant loyalty. He prayed that the Lord would hear his people when they prayed toward the temple Solomon had built for the Lord’s name (1 Kings 8:29). God agreed to use the temple as a gateway to him.

Jesus, the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant promises to David, spoke of himself as a temple (John 2:19, 21). Believers have access to God through Christ (Ephesians 2:18), and in his name we are able to approach God boldly and to pray in confidence that God will hear (John 14:13, 14; 15:16; Ephesians 3:12; Hebrews 4:16).

B. Prayer

Our Father, we praise you for your faithfulness to your people throughout all generations and to us in our time. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God is faithful to hear us when we pray.¹

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