

January 26 Lesson 9 (NIV)

SOLOMON ANTICIPATES PRAISE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 136:1–16, 23–25

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Kings 8:54–66; 2 Chronicles 7:4–9

1 KINGS 8:54–61

⁵⁴ When Solomon had finished all these prayers and supplications to the LORD, he rose from before the altar of the LORD, where he had been kneeling with his hands spread out toward heaven. ⁵⁵ He stood and blessed the whole assembly of Israel in a loud voice, saying:

⁵⁶ “Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses. ⁵⁷ May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. ⁵⁸ May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in obedience to him and keep the commands, decrees and laws he gave our ancestors. ⁵⁹ And may these words of mine, which I have prayed before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, that he may uphold the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel according to each day’s need, ⁶⁰ so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God and that there is no other. ⁶¹ And may your hearts be fully committed to the LORD our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time.”

KEY VERSES

May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in obedience to him and keep the commands, decrees and laws he gave our ancestors. —1 Kings 8:57, 58

HONORING GOD

Unit 2: Dedicating the Temple of God

LESSONS 6–9

HOW TO SAY IT

Canaan *Kay-nun*.

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

Leviticus *Leh-vit-ih-kus*.

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

patriarchs *Pay-tree-arks*.

Solomon *Sol-o-mun*.

tabernacle *tah-burr-nah-kul*.

Introduction

A. Remembering for the Future

In his 1990 remarks on the dedication of the Washington National Cathedral, President George H. W. Bush alluded to the initial laying of its cornerstone as well as to the future use of the building. He stated, “Eighty-three years ago on this spot, President Teddy Roosevelt said: ‘God speed the work begun this noon.’ And today I say: God speed the work completed this noon and the new work yet to begin.”

President Bush looked to the past and offered hope for the future. Solomon, in his dedication address for the temple in Jerusalem, likewise called Israel to look to the past while hoping for the future.

B. Lesson Context

The narrative of 1 Kings 8 is devoted to the greatest moment of Solomon’s reign: the dedication of the temple (about 960 BC). By that time Solomon was about 10 years into his 40-year reign. His fame had spread far and wide during that time (1 Kings 4:29–34). But the focus of the 10-year period was the construction of the temple. The required materials and manpower stagger the imagination (see 1 Kings 5:13–18; 2 Chronicles 2:1, 2, 17, 18).

The lesson text for this week comprises the final words of King Solomon’s dedicatory address. A parallel account is found in 2 Chronicles 5–7. The dedication ceremony closed with a 14-day celebration, an expansion of the great annual harvest feast known as the Festival of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:34; 1 Kings 8:2, 65).

Solomon’s opening and closing remarks demonstrate similarities that make them fitting bookends for his prayer. The narration of the transporting of the ark of the covenant to the temple (1 Kings 8:1–11, lesson 6) prefaced Solomon’s first oration (8:12–21) as the narration of the offering of dedicatory sacrifices (8:62–64) followed his final words. Solomon’s final blessing (8:55–61) focused broadly on Israel in a fashion similar to his opening blessing, which focused on David and Solomon himself (8:15–21, lesson 7).

I. Solomon’s Blessing

(1 KINGS 8:54–56)

A. For Israel (vv. 54, 55)

54. When Solomon had finished all these prayers and supplications to the LORD, he rose from before the altar of the LORD, where he had been kneeling with his hands spread out toward heaven.

Because the congregation of Israel is gathered within the temple courts, *the altar of the Lord* refers to the bronze altar of burnt offering located there (1 Kings 8:64; see commentary in lesson 8). Solomon has been kneeling on a special platform that is three cubits (four and a half feet) high (2 Chronicles 6:12, 13). *Kneeling* and offering *prayers* no doubt signify the king's respect and humble submission to the Lord (contrast 1 Kings 19:18; 2 Kings 1:13; Isaiah 45:14). The Israelites will also bow down in worship to God during this dedication ceremony (2 Chronicles 7:3; compare Psalm 95:6).

The king's stretching out *his hands ... toward heaven* further expresses an attitude of petition and supplication (compare Exodus 9:29, 33; 1 Kings 8:22; Psalms 63:4; 88:9; 143:6). This demonstrates not only a sense of need but also confidence that God can and will respond to his requests (compare Exodus 9:29, 33).

55. He stood and blessed the whole assembly of Israel in a loud voice, saying:

Arising from his position of kneeling, Solomon blesses *the whole assembly* as he did earlier (1 Kings 8:14). To bless a person or group is to express a desire that God's approval and goodwill would rest on them. It invites God to invest them with success, fruitfulness, or long life (examples: Genesis 24:60; 27:1–41; 48:9–49:28).

Usually a priest blesses the people (Numbers 6:22–27), but exceptions certainly exist. Solomon's blessing echoes that of Moses when the Israelites finished work on the tabernacle (Exodus 39:43). Solomon also mirrors King David's act of blessing the people after he brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:17–19).

Solomon's blessing of Israel not only recalls his father's blessing but builds on it now that the ark has been brought to rest in its new home (1 Kings 8:6, 7, 21). The congregation will reciprocate the king's action by blessing Solomon before departing (8:66).

B. Of the Lord (v. 56)

56a. "Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised.

Solomon's blessing on Israel actually begins with a pronouncement praising *the Lord*, the God of Israel. The Hebrew word translated *praise* here is the same word that is used to speak of people being blessed throughout 1 Kings 8. Whereas blessing a person expresses one's desire that God would esteem and benefit them, one praises the Lord by giving honor to him (Genesis 24:27; Exodus 18:10; 1 Samuel 25:32, 39; etc.). The fact that Solomon begins his blessing of Israel by praising God demonstrates the king's understanding that any blessings Israel experiences come from the Lord, the source of all blessings.

Solomon has previously spoken of how God fulfilled his promise that David's son would build a temple for the Lord (1 Kings 8:15–21, lesson 7). Here, he speaks of God's fidelity to the Israelites in providing them *rest* in the land of Canaan (Exodus 33:14). Through Moses, the Lord had *promised* to give Israel rest in Canaan from their enemies (Deuteronomy 12:9, 10). Joshua had subsequently referred to the conquest of Canaan as the Lord's act of giving Israel that promised

rest on every side (Joshua 1:13). The result was to be able to flourish as the people dwelled in security.

Solomon undoubtedly sees the completion of the temple as the fulfillment of the Lord's promise of that rest. The nation has become secure under the 40-year rule by his father, David, and by events at the beginning of Solomon's reign (2 Samuel 7:1; 1 Kings 5:4).

56b. "Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses."

Because the nation is experiencing the promised rest, Solomon can allude to Joshua's affirmation made centuries earlier: no good thing the Lord has promised *has failed* (Joshua 21:45; 23:14). Not only has the Lord been faithful to his promises to the house of David, he has kept promises he spoke to Moses regarding Israel. Indeed, the promises to David and that man's forefathers are integral to God's plan and purpose for Israel. Nevertheless, the rest Israel enjoys at this time is temporary. Israel's later sin will lead to two exiles after the nation divides (2 Kings 17:1–23; 25:1–21; 2 Chronicles 36:15–21).

The Lord always desires rest for his people (compare Jeremiah 29:10–14; 30:1–3, 8–10; etc.). The writer of Hebrews affirms that the ultimate rest will be experienced at the return of Christ (Hebrews 4:1–13).

II. Solomon's Desire (1 KINGS 8:57–61)

A. For the Lord's Presence (vv. 57, 58)

57. "May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us."

Having praised God for his past faithfulness to Israel, Solomon now voices desires for the future. The structure of 1 Kings 8:57, 58 pairs a stated desire with a purpose statement; the pattern repeats in the two verses that follow.

Solomon's desire is that the Lord's presence with Israel will continue. The king recognizes that Israel's special place as God's covenant people depends on God's continued willingness (Genesis 26:3; Deuteronomy 4:31; Joshua 1:5). It does not depend on any inherent entitlement the Israelites' may imagine.

The phrase *our ancestors* refers to the patriarchs as well as to the Israelites' leaders during the days of Moses and Joshua (Exodus 3:15; 1 Samuel 12:6). In the New Testament, the patriarch designation is applied specifically to Abraham, the sons of Jacob, and David (see Acts 2:29; 7:8, 9; Hebrews 7:4). We further think of Isaac and Jacob as members of this group. The Lord has surely kept his promises to them (see Genesis 26:3, 24; 28:15; 31:3; 46:1–4; etc.). God also kept the promise of his presence to Moses (Exodus 3:12; 33:14) as well as to Moses' successor, Joshua (Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; Joshua 1:9; 3:7).

As Solomon repeats this ancient promise, there can be little doubt that he recalls the words of his father, David. King David had promised Solomon that the Lord would not forsake him while Solomon worked on the temple's construction (1 Chronicles 28:20)—a promise obviously kept!

Later in the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah will reiterate the promise of God's attentive and loving presence with his people (Isaiah 41:10, 17; 42:16; 44:21; 49:14–16). The Lord also encourages Jeremiah with the assurance of his presence (Jeremiah 1:8, 19; 20:11).

Our Lord has given this same pledge to new-covenant believers. Centuries after Solomon's day, Jesus promises his disciples that he will not leave them as orphans (John 14:18). Before ascending to the Father, Jesus vows his constant presence (Matthew 28:19, 20). The author of Hebrews assures us that God will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5; compare Deuteronomy 31:6).

58. “May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in obedience to him and keep the commands, decrees and laws he gave our ancestors.

Moses had taught that a proper relationship with the Lord begins in the heart and then manifests itself *in obedience* (Deuteronomy 5:31–6:9; 11:18; 32:46). In that regard, Solomon desires that the Lord empower his people to obey him. If the holy God is to be present among the Israelites as Solomon desires (1 Kings 8:57, above), then they must conduct themselves in holiness (Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2).

The image of walking *in obedience* to the Lord highlights Israel's obligation. This image appears many times in the Old Testament (see Leviticus 18:3, 4; Deuteronomy 5:33; 8:6; 10:12; Psalm 119:105; etc.). Solomon equates such walking with keeping the Lord's *commands, decrees and laws* as Moses had also prescribed (Deuteronomy 26:17; 30:16). Specifying these three related categories emphasizes the need for total and unwavering obedience to God.

Even so, Solomon's previous acknowledgment that everyone sins and is in need of forgiveness (1 Kings 8:46) highlights Israel's inability to follow God's ways without his help. Scripture elsewhere testifies to the roles of both God and his people in faithfully keeping the covenant (compare Psalm 119:36 [where the word *statutes* refers to laws or decrees] and Joshua 24:23, respectively).

We see this similarly in the New Testament. For example, Paul's declaration “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith” (Ephesians 2:8) affirms that God's initiative in grace is the necessary precondition for our faithful response to him. Moses had used the image of the circumcision of the heart (Deuteronomy 30:6) to speak of this inclining of the will (see also Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26). Such a circumcision is made available in the new covenant brought by Jesus (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Luke 22:19, 20; Colossians 2:11, 12) through the work of the Holy Spirit (Romans 2:29; 8:1–11).

B. For the Lord's Help (vv. 59, 60)

59. “And may these words of mine, which I have prayed before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, that he may uphold the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel according to each day's need,

Moving to expressing his second desire, Solomon prays that God will hear his prayers and champion *the cause of his people Israel*. Solomon had earlier stressed the faithfulness of the Lord in keeping his word (1 Kings 8:20, 56). God's faithfulness in the past inspires faith and trust in Solomon for the present and the future.

The needs of Solomon and of God's people have been expressed, in one way or another, in all of Solomon's *words* to this point. His summary of his prayer invites Israel to remember what Solomon has requested of the Lord: the king previously had prayed that God's eyes would be open toward the temple “night and day” and that he would listen to his servant's prayer made toward

that place (1 Kings 8:29). Solomon prays now that God will hear his prayer on behalf of the people and will not forget.

The final phrase reminds God's people that in each day and in every way, we can depend on his faithfulness (compare Exodus 16:4; Matthew 6:11).

60a. "so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God"

Solomon's dedicatory prayer now reflects God's ultimate desire. Reaching the goal of *all the peoples of the earth* knowing *that the Lord is God* must include the Lord's attentiveness to the prayers of the Israelites and their obedience to him. That's how Israel will be an instrument of God's blessing in the world (Genesis 12:1–3; 22:18; etc.).

God's plan and purpose in choosing Israel as his people has always been that the nations would come to know him (examples: 1 Chronicles 16:23, 24; Psalms 72:19; 96:1–10). When Israel is properly obedient, non-Israelites will be attracted to the one true God (see 1 Kings 8:41–43; compare 2 Chronicles 6:32, 33).

60b. "and that there is no other."

The words *there is no other* stand in stark contrast to the many-gods outlook of the ancient world. Each people-group has its gods and worships them in vain attempts to address various needs. The Israelites acknowledge powers at work in the world other than God (Exodus 12:12; 15:11; 18:11; Psalm 82:1; etc.). But at their best, the Israelites worship no so-called god; they worship the Lord only. Solomon's affirmation echoes the assertions of Moses in Deuteronomy 4:35–39. It also anticipates similar statements by the Lord through the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 45:5, 6, 22).

C. For the People's Hearts (v. 61)

61. "And may your hearts be fully committed to the LORD our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time."

Whereas 1 Kings 8:58 spoke of God's initiative to empower Israel's holiness and obedience, this verse emphasizes Israel's side of the relationship that is made possible by God's initiative. Because there is only one God, Israel's devotion to him is to be total and undivided (Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; 6:5). Joshua had emphasized some 400 years earlier Israel's need to follow the Lord's commands so that blessings would continue in the land where God had granted the nation rest (Joshua 23:14–16; 24:14, 15, 20).

In biblical thought, the heart is the center of a person's character. It can refer to one's mind or will as the source of thoughts, words, actions, and feelings. Israel's obedience is to be complete and entire (Psalm 119:80), as is Solomon's (1 Kings 9:4; 1 Chronicles 28:9; 29:19).

Solomon himself eventually proves to be unable to stay wholly committed to the Lord. Although he had prayed for Israel's hearts to be turned toward God, Solomon's many wives eventually turn his heart after other gods (1 Kings 11:4). This faithlessness will lead to the fracturing of the nation of Israel (11:9–13).

Kings that follow him won't do much better. Though some kings will be wholly devoted to the Lord (examples: 1 Kings 15:14; 22:43; 2 Kings 20:3; 2 Chronicles 17:6; 25:2), many more will reign with divided loyalties or in outright rebellion (examples: 1 Kings 13:33, 34; 15:3; 16:18–20, 25, 26, 30–33; 2 Kings 1:1, 16, 17). The Israelites, like their kings, will fail to live up to their obligation; as a result, they lose their rest in the land (2 Kings 17:7–23; 24:14–16; 25:8–12).

The parallel account in 2 Chronicles 5–7 indicates that fire comes down from Heaven when Solomon concludes his words. The fire consumes the burnt offerings and sacrifices that had been

prepared (2 Chronicles 7:1). The glory of the Lord fills the temple (2 Chronicles 7:1–3) as it had earlier in the celebration (1 Kings 8:10, 11; 2 Chronicles 5:13, 14; compare Exodus 40:34–38). This signals the Lord’s approval of the building and the king.

Conclusion

A. Faithful to the Faithful One

The dedication of the temple was a time to remember the past, to celebrate the present, and to anticipate the future work of God for and with his people. The Lord had done great things for Israel, and he could be trusted to bless the nation in the future. These blessings would turn out for good—not only for Israel but also for those who came to know the Lord as the only true God. Given God’s past faithfulness and given the anticipation of his future faithfulness, Israel was reasonably called to have unswerving devotion to God.

The words of Solomon during the dedication of the temple highlight the loyalty God had demonstrated to his covenant people. Prayerful consideration of what God has already done for us in Christ, is doing for us in the present, and will do for us in the future likewise is to motivate us to lead holy, godly lives.

B. Prayer

Our Father, we praise you as the one who has never failed one word of all your good promises. We cherish your promise never to leave or forsake us. We praise you as the one who is faithful when we are not. Renew us by your Spirit so that we may have the desire and the power to walk in your ways. We pray this so that the world may know you and your Son. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Each day and in every way,
God is faithful.
Am I?¹
