

A Place for the Ark

Bible Background • 1 KINGS 8:1-13, 2 CHRONICLES 5:1-14

Printed Text • 1 KINGS 8:1-13 | Devotional Reading • DEUTERONOMY 31:7-13

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: CONSIDER the significance of Solomon's Temple dedication, CONTEMPLATE how the people of Jerusalem felt as the glory of God filled the Temple, and CELEBRATE God's presence among those who gather in the name of the Lord today.

In Focus

Marcus had prayed and prayed for this day to come. He grew up in a really rough neighborhood, and his family struggled. Some days he didn't know if he would live. He enjoyed the time he spent at church because he always felt safe there. Going off campus or just hanging out could be scary because he never knew what might happen. But today, Marcus stood proudly as his name was called and he walked across the stage to receive his college degree.

Marcus's parents had died two years apart before he finished junior high school. His Aunt Sheila and Uncle Michael raised him along with their three children. Marcus was grateful for his aunt and uncle's love and for his fun-loving cousins. They had been quite the crew when all four of them were in youth group at once for a couple of years. He couldn't believe how blessed he was. Before the graduation ceremony started, he cried as he wished his parents could have been there to see it. He was also grieved to not be joined by some friends who had not made it past their seventeenth birthdays because of drugs and gangs. Today was his day to show others the mighty work God had done through him.

When you reflect on the amazing things God does in your life? How do you say thanks to God for your many blessings?

Keep in Mind

"I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever" (1 Kings 8:13, KJV).

Words You Should Know

A. Heads (v. 1) ro'sh (Heb.) — Mature, older men who oversaw one of the twelve tribes

B. Oracle (v. 8) debir (Heb.) — The Holy of Holies

Say It Correctly

Cherubim. CHAIR-oo-bim.

Ethanim. ay-thaw-NEEM.

KJV

1 Kings 8:1 Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto king Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion.² And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto king Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month.

3 And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark.

4 And they brought up the ark of the LORD, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, even those did the priests and the Levites bring up.

5 And king Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel, that were assembled unto him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen, that could not be told nor numbered for multitude.

6 And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD unto his place, into the oracle of the house, to the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubims.

7 For the cherubims spread forth their two wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubims covered the ark and the staves thereof above.

8 And they drew out the staves, that the ends of the staves were seen out in the holy place before the oracle, and they were not seen without: and there they are unto this day.

9 There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt.

10 And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD,

11 So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD.

12 Then spake Solomon, The LORD said that he would dwell in the thick darkness.

13 I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in forever.

NLT

1 Kings 8:1 Solomon then summoned to Jerusalem the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes—the leaders of the ancestral families of the Israelites. They were to bring the Ark of the LORD's Covenant to the Temple from its location in the City of David, also known as Zion.² So all the men of Israel assembled before King Solomon at the annual Festival of Shelters, which is held in early autumn in the month of Ethanim.

3 When all the elders of Israel arrived, the priests picked up the Ark.

4 The priests and Levites brought up the Ark of the LORD along with the special tent and all the sacred items that had been in it.

5 There, before the Ark, King Solomon and the entire community of Israel sacrificed so many sheep, goats, and cattle that no one could keep count!

6 Then the priests carried the Ark of the LORD's Covenant into the inner sanctuary of the Temple—the Most Holy Place—and placed it beneath the wings of the cherubim.

7 The cherubim spread their wings over the Ark, forming a canopy over the Ark and its carrying poles.

8 These poles were so long that their ends could be seen from the Holy Place, which is in front of the Most Holy Place, but not from the outside. They are still there to this day.

9 Nothing was in the Ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Mount Sinai, where the LORD made a covenant with the people of Israel when they left the land of Egypt.

10 When the priests came out of the Holy Place, a thick cloud filled the Temple of the LORD.

11 The priests could not continue their service because of the cloud, for the glorious presence of the Lord filled the Temple of the LORD.

12 Then Solomon prayed, "O LORD, you have said that you would live in a thick cloud of darkness.

13 Now I have built a glorious Temple for you, a place where you can live forever!"

The People, Places, and Times

King Solomon's Temple. The blueprints for this magnificent structure are described in great detail in 1 Kings 5–6. Solomon strengthened his diplomatic ties with King Hiram of Tyre to use their lumber, labor, and craftsmen to complete the construction project. All the best materials of stone, precious gems, gold, and fine woods of cedar and olive were used to construct the Temple. The project took seven years total. While the blessing of a good king respecting and instituting the worship of the true God cannot be overstated, the knowledge that Solomon completed this great work must also be held with the knowledge that he used many slaves and foreigners to build it. Just as much literary attention is devoted to the building of the Temple as is given to the building of Solomon's palace, which took thirteen years and used all the same precious building materials. This Temple stood from around 970 BC until the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 587 BC.

Background

During his reign, King David declared that he wanted to build a house for the Lord. However, the Lord told David through the prophet Nathan that his son would build a house instead of him (2 Samuel 7:13). After Solomon became king, he proposed that he would build a house for the Lord. Solomon's building projects were extensive. Some scholars suggest that building the Temple lasted seven years. Solomon contracted with King Hiram to provide and cut the wood for the Temple because no one was skilled like the Sidonians, and Solomon wanted the best for the Temple. Solomon created a labor force of 180,000 men and 3,300 supervisors to work on all of the different aspects of the Temple project (1 Kings 5:5–18).

The Temple was huge. It was about 90 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 45 feet high. The grandeur of the Temple furnishings matched its size. This was particularly true for the inner sanctuary, the Most Holy Place. Not only were the floors and walls overlaid with gold like the rest of the Temple, but he also overlaid the altar and the cherubim in the Most Holy Place with gold (1 Kings 6:20–28).

God told David that his son would build a Temple. The word of the Lord came to Solomon emphasizing that God will fulfill the promise to dwell with the Children of Israel if he will be obedient (1 Kings 6: 11–13).

Why was obedience to God so important to the Temple project?

At-A-Glance

1. King Solomon Gathers the People (1 Kings 8:1–3, 5)
2. The Priests Bring the Ark to the Inner Sanctuary (vv. 4, 6–9)
3. God's Glory Fills the Temple (vv. 10–13)

In Depth

1. King Solomon Gathers the People (1 Kings 8:1–3, 5) This text marks the beginning of the dedication of the Temple as a sacred place of worship for the Lord. At the time of the dedication, there were many Israelites in Jerusalem because they had come for their national festival. King Solomon called upon all of the elders and leaders of the Israelites to come as the priests carried the Ark (v. 3). The leaders and the people joined Solomon in worshipping the Lord outside of the Temple. The sacrifices they made could not be numbered. We might imagine that the area was full like the National Mall during the Presidential Inauguration. Yet the symbolism of this event was even greater than our political celebrations. The celebration of Solomon and the nation was not about establishing a man as a national leader; it was about establishing a throne for the God of Israel on earth.

How do you think the Israelites felt about finally dedicating the Temple?

2. The Priests Bring the Ark to the Inner Sanctuary (vv. 4, 6–9) The construction of the Temple had been complete for nearly a year, but the project was not finished. The Ark of the Covenant was still in a tent sanctuary where King David placed it. Transporting the Ark from the City of David to the new Temple in Jerusalem was the focal point of this dedication. Every group of people including the elders and all of the leaders present had a role during the ceremony. The priests carried the Ark, and King Solomon and the people worshiped God before the Ark with many sacrifices as the Ark was placed in the Most Holy Place. The Ark made the Temple the center of their religious life. This ark contained the tablets that represent the covenant that God made with the Israelites when God delivered them out of bondage in Egypt.

What is the center of your religious life? What role does the church have in your walk with God?

3. God’s Glory Fills the Temple (vv. 10–13) The moment of truth finally arrived. Would the Lord choose to dwell in the Temple? Although Solomon spent a lot of resources building the Temple, hired the best people to work on the project, and sacrificed many animals for the dedication, none of that meant anything unless the Lord approved. As soon as the priests walked out of the holy place, God’s glory filled the entire temple. God’s glory came in the form of a cloud just as it did when God led the Children of Israel through the wilderness during the exodus and when God met them at Mt. Sinai before giving the Ten Commandments. God’s glory was so thick that the priests could no longer minister inside the Temple. Solomon then told the gathered people that “The Lord has said that he would dwell in thick darkness.” Solomon believed the thick cloud of darkness to be a sign of God fulfilling His promise to be with the Children of Israel. And now the Lord was present. Solomon’s project to build a house for the Lord was complete. God was with His people in His house.

Solomon’s final phrase sums up what this text means to the Children of Israel: “I have built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in forever.” The Children of Israel endured many times of instability: wandering in the wilderness, warring with other tribes to acquire the Promised Land, changing leadership during the time of the judges, warring during the times of Saul and David. Here at the Temple, they had finally arrived as a people. They had peace, their land, and a strong king. They only needed their God to dwell among them. With this dedication, God finally had a permanent residence amongst them.

How has God shown up in your life to confirm that He was moving on your behalf?

Search the Scriptures

1. What items are mentioned that were brought to the Temple? (1 Kings 8:4–5)
2. What was in the Ark and what was its significance? (v. 9)
3. Name in order the events that showed God’s approval of the Temple. (vv. 10–12)

Discuss the Meaning

1. Whenever the Temple is mentioned in this text, it is called “a house” (vv. 6, 11, 13). Solomon proclaims that he has built the Lord an exalted house. Why is it significant that the children of Israel understand the Temple to be “the house of the Lord” and not just a place to meet the Lord?
2. There were multiple items that the priest and Levites brought up from the City of David in addition to the Ark of the Covenant, yet the Ark is the only item placed in the Most Holy Place. Why is the Ark so significant?

Liberating Lesson

This text demonstrates a beautiful story of Israel’s true victory, restoration, and completeness. God is on their side. After everything they have experienced—all of the past sufferings and transgressions—God continues to choose them. Any community of people who have been neglected, abandoned, and exploited by the larger society needs to know that God is on their side, individually and collectively. Knowing God has chosen us and will remain with us as He did from slavery to freedom provides a message of hope, triumph, and truth that the people of the African Diaspora can embrace.

As believers, how can we be more intentional about sharing our testimonies of God’s redemption with the larger community?

Application for Activation

Sometimes when we suffer, it is easy to forget the redemption we experience through Jesus Christ and the hope we have on earth. Our collective worship in church allows us to remember God’s redemption and the hope we have in Him.

- During the next church celebration, designate a place where members can write about and then display their testimonies regarding critical times when God confirmed His love to members of the congregation.
- Create a display with drawings from the church youth depicting what their dreams are. Pray to God to help those children realize their dreams and to create a community where their dreams can thrive.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

1 Kings 8:1–13 1 Kings 8 records the high point of the reign of Solomon over Israel and his most noteworthy accomplishment as king. Having brought into the house of the Lord all the vessels and furnishings that David had set apart for this exact purpose, Solomon prepared to bring up the Ark into the Temple as well. This celebration included innumerable sacrifices by the elders, tribal heads, family leaders, and all the men of Israel Solomon had assembled in Jerusalem. Once the Ark was set in place, Solomon delivered a series of public prayers and blessings that recounted the past, the plans of David, as well as the future role of the Temple as a place toward which the people could pray.

1 Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto king Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion.

The Ark had previously been housed in Zion, the City of David. As a first step in bringing the Ark to Jerusalem, Solomon assembled every segment of Israelite leadership—the “elders,” the “heads,” and the “chiefs”—to participate in bringing the Ark to its new resting place in the Temple. The word “elder” (Heb. zaqen, zaw-KANE) reflects an ancient tribal league. The elders were older, respected leaders who advised the king on various national matters. The “heads” of the tribes were also mature, older men who oversaw one of the twelve tribes; and the “chiefs” of the fathers were leaders who administered the clans and villages within the tribes. The engagement of the entire community was important because the transfer of the Ark from the city of David to Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem was a change of the national religious center. The entire nation was on hand to recognize and enact this transfer.

2 And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto king Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month.

All the common men joined the procession indicating that Solomon had broad-based involvement in moving the heart of Israel's national worship to the new site. This important event took place during the celebration of the Feast of Booths in the month of Ethanim, the seventh month in the Hebrew calendar. It was a feast that commemorated the end of the wilderness wanderings and the fact that God had brought His people home into Canaan and given them rest (Deuteronomy 12:8–11). During this feast, Moses renewed the covenant with the second generation of freed Israelites. He also commanded that Israel read the Law every seven years during this observance (Deuteronomy 31:9–13). Solomon's choice of the Feast of Booths for the dedication was strategic in that it was a traditional time of gathering the nation for a time of religious renewal.

3 And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark. 4 And they brought up the ark of the LORD, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, even those did the priests and the Levites bring up.

The priests, who brought the Ark according to the Law, were followed by the elders who carried the tabernacle and all the holy vessels to Jerusalem. These items were carefully wrapped by the priests before the Levites carried them (Numbers 4:4–12). These vessels included the table for the shewbread, the altar of incense, the lampstand, and all the items needed to display and use them properly. The Levites were prohibited from directly touching the sacred items on pain of death. It is important to note that unlike David's decision to transport the Ark on a cart made for such occasions—something that resulted in a disaster (2 Samuel 6:3, 6–7)—the priests carried the Ark from the city to the Temple precinct on poles, reminiscent of the way the priests first carried it across Jordan as Israel entered the land (Joshua 3–4). An important lesson to learn here is that God's work must be done in God's way.

5 And king Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel, that were assembled unto him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen, that could not be told nor numbered for multitude.

During this occasion, King Solomon and the summoned congregation sacrificed before the Ark in the courtyard outside of the Temple. The joyous occasion of transporting the Ark was commemorated with sacrifices to provide both honor to God and a feast for his people. At the ceremony dedicating the Temple later that day, Solomon and the priests slaughtered about 144,000 sheep and oxen (1 Kings 8:63). It is unclear if the animals being sacrificed here as the Ark is moving are part of that estimated total or not. The point is to emphasize the extravagance of the event.

6 And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD unto his place, into the oracle of the house, to the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubims. 7 For the cherubims spread forth their two wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubims covered the ark and the staves thereof above. 8 And they drew out the staves, that the ends of the staves were seen out in the holy place before the oracle, and they were not seen without: and there they are unto this day.

The Ark was eventually installed in the inner sanctuary, "into the oracle of the house." "Oracle" here is *debir* (Heb. duh-BEER), which is related to the Hebrew for word or speech. This is why it is translated "oracle"; in context, however, it clearly simply refers to the room of the Holy of Holies. While the Ark itself had cherubim on each side of the mercy seat that acted as its lid, the "cherubims" mentioned here are the statues which Solomon had constructed within the Holy of Holies (1 Kings 6:23). These cherubim were half the size of the room (1 Kings 6:20), so it is easy to imagine their wings spreading over the place where the Ark stood. The description here also includes the staves that were placed through the rings and used to carry the Ark.

The priests partially drew out the staves through the rings so that someone standing inside the Holy Place directly in front of the doors to the holiest place could see the poles. They could not be seen from the outer courtyards, however. The poles were a reminder of what was inside the Temple. They were not removed completely because that was expressly forbidden (Exodus 25:15; Numbers 4:6).

9 There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt.

At an earlier point in Israel's history, there were three items in the Ark. They were the golden pot that had the manna (Exodus 16:33), Aaron's rod that budded (Numbers 17:6–11), and the tablets of the covenant (Exodus 25:16). This is confirmed by Hebrews 9:4, which says that the Ark "had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant." It is not clear what happened to the golden pot of manna and Aaron's rod, but they were not in the Ark when Solomon set it in the Most Holy Place. Scholars have suggested that although they were not actually inside the Ark of the testimony, they formed part of the witness during the days of Moses. These items also reminded Israel of their rebellious spirit and lack of trust in God while simultaneously testifying of God's provision, deliverance, and selection of the nation. However, the importance of the Ark did not lie in what it contained but in the fact that it signified the presence of God or, more precisely, the presence of God's glory with his people. Hence its loss to the Philistines in the time of Samuel was lamented with the words, "The glory has departed from Israel" (1 Samuel 4:21–22), and the psalmist records the same event by saying that God "delivered ... his glory to the hand of the foe" (Psalm 78:61).

10 And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, 11 So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD.

Once the Ark is placed, the Lord makes His presence known with the cloud of His glory, which fills the Temple so that the priests go out because they could not perform their service. The cloud, the symbol of the divine glory and presence, appears to have filled not only the holy of holies but the whole temple, court and all. All the people experienced it. The connection between the Ark and the presence of God's glory is evident in these verses.

12 Then spake Solomon, The LORD said that he would dwell in the thick darkness. 13 I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever.

When the thick darkness took abode in the magnificent Temple, Solomon recognized the glory cloud for what it was. The thick and dark cloud of glory made Solomon recall that the Lord said He would dwell in a dark cloud (cf. Exodus 19:7–9). This cloud of glory being too much even for God's ministers also happened before when the Tabernacle was completed (Exodus 40:34–35). Because of this, Solomon knew that God had honored the place with His presence and taken it for His habitation. He saw in it God's approval and His promised presence. Solomon's response to this gracious manifestation is to proclaim that he has built a house for the Lord so that he might sit enthroned in regal splendor as befits his majesty.

There is also a parallel to the presence of the Lord coming that is important to Christians today. It occurs in Acts 2:1–4 when God marks the inception of the church, as the Holy Spirit makes His presence known through the sound of a mighty rushing wind and by filling the people with the Holy Spirit.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Heavenly Vision of the Ark
(Revelation 11:15–19)

TUESDAY

An Orderly Worship Service
(1 Corinthians 14:26–33)

WEDNESDAY

The Law Is Read at Booths Festival
(Deuteronomy 31:9–13)

THURSDAY

Ark Brought to the Temple
(2 Chronicles 5:2–7)

FRIDAY

Priests Praise God with Music
(2 Chronicles 5:11–14)

SATURDAY

All Temple Furnishings Completed
(2 Chronicles 4:19–5:1)

SUNDAY

Preparing to Dedicate the Temple
(1 Kings 8:1-13)