25-31 August 2024 Making space for God to turn up

1 Kings 8: (1,6,10-11), 22-30, 41-43

**The Ark Brought to the Temple**

**8**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, to bring up the ark of the Lord’s covenant from Zion, the City of David. …

**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. …

**10**When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. **11**And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple.

**Solomon’s Prayer of Dedication**

**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…

**41**“As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your name— **42**for they will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm—when they come and pray toward this temple, **43**then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name.

 **Bible notes**

The newly completed Temple (see 2 Chronicles 3-4 for a description of its grandeur) is now consecrated for the exclusive use of the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. Until now, Israel’s worship was fragmented. The Ark of the Covenant, which contained the tablets bearing the Ten Commandments, resided in the city of David, and the Israelites under Solomon continued to worship at the grandest high place of other deities.

This chapter graphically depicts the transition and consecration of a place Israelites recognised as their place of worship. More importantly, God also recognised it as his home and dwelling place. Here gathered the leaders of the ancestral tribes of Jacob’s 12 sons (Gen 49:28; Exodus 24:4). The priests who brought the Ark from Jerusalem also came from a long line of Levites, descendants of Aaron, Moses’ brother. Here it was not the pageantry or symbolism that mattered; it was following the statutes and stipulations of God on their preparation for handling the sacred things and entering the Holy of Holies.

God was supposed to show up there, on the mercy-seat above the Ark. However, the whole Temple belongs to God, who would not be confined to the Holy of Holies or restricted to the prescribed orders and rituals.

The king deployed God’s gift of wisdom and understanding (1 Kings 3.9) to take charge of the ceremony. He acknowledges God’s greatness as incomparable (v.23) and his faithfulness both to the covenants and his father, David (vv.23-26). Covenants also entail answers to prayers – those directed towards the Temple. He dedicates three verses to foreigners (vv.41-43); these are not the foreigners who resided in Israel, but those who travel from afar – their prayers should also be answered. Then they will know that the God of Israel is above all other gods.

**Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

Let the Bible speak by retelling the ancient narrative of the Temple’s dedication. The focus could be on how the priests’ instructions and guidelines were set aside when God shows up. Remind the congregation that they are the temple God now calls home. The role of the gathered Church, and this congregation, is to remind those outside that they are welcome here to meet with God. Highlight Solomon’s prayer for foreigners, those who come from afar (1 Kings 8:41-43). But there may be others dwelling among us who also await our welcome.

 Questions for reflection

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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| Festival crowd |  |

**Questions**

* What kind of spaces help you to worship?
* How does being in a different place (e.g. outdoors, at a festival, in a quiet space) affect your worship?
* Are there any changes you could make to your current space to help more people to worship freely?

##  Prayer

*Adapt to your local context.*

O Holy God, here in this place we worship together,
and we feel your presence bringing joy to our hearts.
May this time together remind us of your promise that
you are with us, always, to the end of time.
**Amen.**

**A prayer to end the Bible study**

Go out in peace:
may the presence of the God you have experienced here
travel with you into the world and bring peace to others.
*Share a simple act of shalom*
*(hands together and bow to another individual)*
**Amen.**