

The Presence of God

June 9, 2024

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

1 Kings 6:11-16,37-38; 8:24-30

Session Outline

1. God's Promise (1 Kings 6:11-13)
2. Solomon's Response (1 Kings 6:14-16,37-38)
3. Dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8:24-30)

Theological Theme

God loves His people and dwells with us.

Call to Action

How do you limit God? What box do you try to put Him in? Pray and ask God to reveal His presence to you, even in the places where you do not expect to find Him.





Leader Guide

The Presence of God

Introduction

Most Christians have a moment or place they met with the Lord and experienced His presence in an unusual or powerful way. These are important experiences for Christ followers, but we also need to recognize that God is never restricted. There is no place He cannot go.

Too many times, we fall into the trap of thinking we must go back to a certain place or event to really experience the presence of the Lord. As we study today, we'll see that God came to dwell with His people, and all who are in relationship with Him can fellowship with Him anywhere at any time.

-  When was a “mountaintop moment” in your spiritual life? How have you tried to return to that experience seeking fellowship with God?
-  When was an “ordinary” moment you recognized God’s presence with you?

Session Summary

The work of building the temple had begun in Jerusalem. Built on the foundation of the covenant between the Lord and David, it reminded the people of the very character of the Lord and His love for them. Solomon prayed for God to come and dwell with them as He had promised. Yahweh is the one true God who resides with His people.


God promised Solomon that if he and the people would keep God’s commands and follow His ways, God would continue to bless them and Solomon’s reign would flourish. Our relationship with God is founded on His continual faithfulness, even when we are unfaithful. Yet, He calls us to pursue ongoing faithfulness to Him by the power of His Spirit who is with us each moment.

1. God's Promise (1 Kings 6:11-13)


Solomon had begun the task of building the temple to the Lord. Solomon followed specific details for the construction and used the most lavish and luxurious materials available. There was nothing spared in the process of establishing a permanent home for the ark of the covenant as the place the people would gather to worship the Lord and meet with Him.

Previously, Solomon's father David expressed his intent to build the temple, but God denied David because he was a man of war. God wanted the man responsible for constructing the temple be a man of peace. This is a reminder that as we follow God's will, we must obey His desires over following our own.

Every detail of the temple was carefully considered and often symbolic of the way the Lord loved His people or related to them. During the final stages of the construction, the Lord made a promise to King Solomon and his descendants about the temple. This promise was conditional on their obedience and required them to take the Word of the Lord seriously.

-  The details of the construction of the temple were precise, but today's passage reminds us that the ultimate matter was the hearts of the people. Why is our internal posture toward God more important than our external actions?

The Lord instructed Israel to keep His commandments and walk in His way. To obey God the people needed to know the Word of God. You can't obey what you've never heard. This is an important reminder for us. We may think we are following God's will for our lives but how does this align with what God has made clear in His Word. We must be careful that our ideas about obedience are driven by the revealed truth of God in His Word and not by our own desires and preferences.


-  Where are you tempted to follow your own way rather than obey God's Word? What makes this area a struggle for you?

The Lord wanted Solomon to remain faithful to Him and not forsake the law of His Word. Sadly, we know that "when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away to follow other gods. He was not wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord his God, as his father David had been. Solomon followed Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom, the abhorrent idol of the Ammonites. Solomon did what was evil in the Lord's

Temple Construction

The importance of this event in the life of Israel is indicated by the careful dating of the event and the elaborate description of the temple's architectural plan. The date is the fourth year of Solomon's reign (966 BC).


sight, and unlike his father David, he did not remain loyal to the Lord” (1 Kings 11:4-6). Though Solomon was unfaithful, God still honored His promise to David, but Israel would pay a heavy price for Solomon’s unfaithful behavior.

 Application: How has God been faithful to you in a time when you were unfaithful to Him?

2. Solomon’s Response (1 Kings 6:14-16,37-38)

In these verses, construction of the temple was completed under Solomon’s leadership. He paid attention to all the details and finished the task he had started. Studying this process gives us some valuable principles for our lives and relationship with God.

First, Solomon finished what he started. Many times, we recognize God has called us to a task and jump in then become distracted, bored, frustrated, or tired. Eventually, we give up before fulfilling what God has called us to do. Solomon may not have felt up to the task and all that it entailed, but God equips His people for what He calls them to do, and we can be encouraged by Solomon’s example. Even when the process is lengthy and difficult, it is worth completing what God calls us to for His kingdom’s sake.

 When have you been convinced of something God called you to only to grow discouraged as you faced obstacles in the process of pursuing the call?

We also see Solomon paid attention and followed the Lord’s instructions to the letter. Just as the tabernacle in the wilderness had specific instructions, so did the temple. It’s likely Solomon didn’t understand the significance of every detail and he may have been tempted to use lesser materials in places. The key is he didn’t. Scripture tells us that he completed it just as the Lord commanded. Even if He didn’t understand the reason for every detail, He trusted God and obey Him fully.

Solomon, in his vast wisdom, stayed completely true to God’s plans and so should we. If we want to represent the Lord well, it is important that we listen and obey, even in the details. The detailed nature of the temple pointed to the truth of who God is, matchless in splendor and beauty. Today, followers of Jesus are called to live together and individually in ways that do the same.

 How do the details of your life represent God to the people around you?

Solomon's strict adherence to God's instruction revealed Solomon's heart for following God. The process of building the temple didn't only impact the place of Israel's worship but the people who worshiped God. Every moment of our lives is meant to build us into the men and women of God we are meant to be.

- Application: Where might God be developing you further as His representative in the daily processes of life? How are you responding? What needs to change?

3. Dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8:24-30)

Most people take promises seriously. But the reality is people often break promises. One of the ways God is different than us altogether is He never breaks His promises. God's covenants with His people are sure and will never fail.

Once the construction of the temple was complete, Solomon dedicated the house of the Lord. His prayer pointed back to the promise God made to his father David as a remembrance of the trustworthiness of the Lord. Solomon proclaimed the faithfulness of the Lord for all Israel.

- We may only be familiar with the act of dedication in certain contexts, such as a child dedication. Why is it important to dedicate our whole lives and the individual pieces to the Lord? How can we do this intentionally?

Solomon pointed out the promises of God as well as the expectation and responsibility of the people to remain faithful and live in obedience before God. Solomon knew neither he nor the people could show perfect obedience to God and asked on God to keep His promises in those moments. Even when we sin, God is faithful to forgive us when we repent and turn to Him. This is not because of anything in us but because of who He is.

- Where do you need to ask God for forgiveness today?

Solomon asked God to come and fill the temple with His Presence. Although the presence of the Lord was in that place, God is never restricted to places or buildings. He is far too great to be confined to any one place on earth. This stood in contrast to the beliefs of the day regarding idols and false gods. Although the temple was complete and would be a place the people could meet with God, it was not restrictive of the Lord in any way.

Solomon also asked that God incline His ear to the prayers and cries of His people. We can follow Solomon's example and ask for God to hear our prayers so we can receive the forgiveness we need. Solomon recognized the greatest need of the people was to be made right with God. He boldly implored the Lord to continue showing them mercy and restore them. Our need is no different. God has answered our cries by sending His son, who has been perfectly faithful in all the ways we are not. When we trust Him, God has promised to be with us, not just in a building of worship, but everywhere we go and every moment of our lives.

- Application: Where this week do you need to remember that God is with you and working, even when you fail to recognize His presence and depend on Him?

Conclusion

Solomon completed the task he had undertaken to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. It was beautiful and impressive, and every detail mattered. We see strong leadership principles in the way Solomon handled the process of building the temple that can equip us in living out our faith today.

God is in the details of life and cares about not just the finished product but the process along the way. The way that we conduct ourselves with the tasks God gives us will either make us more like Him or more like the world. Solomon followed every detail God gave even if he didn't know the reason behind it. This is what every believer should do as we look to know God through His Word and follow His commands daily.

Once the temple was complete, Solomon dedicated it publicly. He prayed that God would come and dwell with them and that the Lord would hear their prayers and incline His ear to them. Although we may feel the presence of the Lord more strongly in certain places, there is nowhere He does not go with us. God is not limited by four walls or certain plots of ground. We can call out to Him at any point and any place and know we are not alone. By His Spirit, He continually dwells in our hearts and lives.

- Where are you prone to believe God is limited in certain ways? How does this impact your relationship with Him?
- Where is God calling you to pay attention to details in your life right now? What might you have overlooked where He is working?
- How can you seek a gospel conversation with another by sharing about God's purpose for His temple and the way He dwells with His people today?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for being with you and forgiving you when you fall short. Ask Him to reveal His presence to you and commit to obeying whatever commands He gives you completely.

Memory Verse

But will God indeed live on earth? Even heaven, the highest heaven, cannot contain you, much less this temple I have built. —1 Kings 8:27

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Kings* by Tony Merida
- *1 Kings: Power, Politics, and the Hope of the World* by John Woodhouse
- *Be Responsible* by Warren Wiersbe

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of 1 Kings

Purpose

The theological perspective of 1 and 2 Kings is expressed in a number of themes: (1) the sinfulness of the kings and the nation; (2) the conflict between the demands of practical politics and the demands of faith; (3) the glory that God gave to the obedient covenant kings; (4) God's harshness in judgment on some occasions and leniency on others; and (5) the conflict between the worship of the Lord and the worship of other gods.

Author

Scholars cannot identify the authors of any portions of these books. Traditional guesses such as Samuel and Jeremiah lack evidence, although a prominent worshiper of the Lord like Jeremiah would have been influential in the circles that produced these books. Since the books clearly incorporated many earlier documents, the complete authorship would include all writers who contributed to the source documents of this work. At some point, the Holy Spirit worked in the human authors to authenticate the inspired, inerrant books of 1 and 2 Kings. The final stage of composition or compilation had to come after the release of Jehoiachin from Babylonian imprisonment (ca 562 BC). That edition may have added only a postscript to a work completed years earlier, or it may have involved significant additions.

Setting

The history recorded in 1 and 2 Kings covers approximately 410 years. First Kings begins around 970 BC with the death of King David, and 2 Kings ends around 560 BC with the release of King Jehoiachin from prison. During this time, the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms (930 BC), and both kingdoms went into exile (Israel in 722 BC and Judah in 587 BC).

Special Features

The titles of these books are certainly descriptive of their contents: the history of the kings and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. First and Second Kings are part of the twelve Historical Books (Joshua-Esther) of the Old Testament. Originally, these two books were just one, but were divided by the translators of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament; aka LXX).

Extended Commentary

1 Kings 6:11-16,37-38; 8:24-30

6:11–13 God blessed the temple with the promise that he would dwell among the Israelites if they kept his commandments.

6:14–15 The interior walls were paneled with cedar, while the flooring was cypress wood, probably Phoenician juniper or some other evergreen. The Chronicles's account (2Ch 3:5) seems to use the word "cypress" as a general name for both cedar and cypress.

6:16–17 The inner sanctuary of the temple, the most holy place, was also paneled with cedar and separated from the rest of the temple by a cedar wall. This produced the common three-part plan: (1) the court, (2) the sanctuary (the holy place), and (3) the inner sanctuary (the most holy place or the holy of holies).

6:37–38 The temple was completed in the month of Bul, the eighth month of the Canaanite calendar (our modern October–November).¹

1 Kings 8:24-30

8:23–24 Solomon stated more foundational points of covenant theology. The God of the Hebrews is unique. There is no God like the Lord, God of Israel. Uniquely, he is a covenant-keeping God. That is, he observes (Hb berith chesed) covenant faithfulness, here translated as gracious covenant. Covenant faithfulness was a mutual responsibility for both parties.

8:25 God's covenant faithfulness guaranteed the permanency of the Davidic dynasty—but only if Solomon's sons take care to walk before the Lord.

8:26 Keeping his covenant promises expressed God's (Hb) chesed. Solomon asked that this gracious faithfulness would continue.

8:27–30 After acknowledging that this house could not contain God, Solomon stated the major theme of this prayer: that God would confirm his covenant by being attentive to the prayer of his people, directed to this temple for the following concerns. This attentiveness would lead to forgiveness and restoration, recurrent themes in the remainder of this prayer. In effect, this prayer argued that God's covenant response to prayer, directed to this house, guaranteed God's interest in all aspects of Israel's life.²

References

1. Andrew C. Bowling, "1 Kings," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 514-515.
2. Bowling, 519–520.