



This week in the Word

based on the International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching

Sponsored by - The First Seventh Day Baptist Church of Toronto



A Place for the Ark

Study Scripture: 1 Kings 8: 1 – 13
Background Scripture: 1 Kings 8: 1 – 13

Lesson 6 January 4, 2020

Key Verse

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

1 Kings 8:13

INTRODUCTION

Our Lesson Study Text raises the critically important question of the presence of God with the nation of Israel, a God who has taken them out of slavery in Egypt, protected them from Pharaoh's army, made a covenant with them on Mount Sinai and staying with them in the movable Tent sanctuary which confirmed the presence of God with the chosen people throughout their wilderness wandering.

Now the nation was no longer wandering nomads but established in their **own land** which God promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The first king of Israel Saul had disobeyed God and his position was taken away. God had raised up his successor David to unite the tribes and granted him power to defeat the countries surrounding Israel.

David had had problems within his own household but he wanted to build a Temple which would replace the movable tabernacle and which would stand before the nations as the sign of the presence of the LORD. From now on the LORD would be associated not with Mount Sinai but with Mount Zion the Temple Mount.

It is probably impossible to overemphasize the significance of the Temple and the city in which it was located, namely Jerusalem, to the nation of Israel. When we read Psalm 137 we see the exiles in Babylon longing for Jerusalem in deep distress.

At the same time though the Covenant at Sinai would still be in force but the emphasis would now in addition be with another, the Covenant God made with David to establish the line of David forever.

It is however to be carefully noted that David had established the nation and increased its size tremendously but he was a man of blood, and had done things as he rose to power and established the nation that without any doubt would cement his reputation as a dangerous king and not a man to be toyed with. God therefore would not allow him to build the Temple. That task would have to be carried out by his son.

We note therefore that the place where we expect that God would have His presence cannot be associated with certain activities and with certain people. A holy God, it would appear, guards His name which means His reputation and His character, and watches what His children do very closely. We might not think that some things are important to God but here it is revealed to us that one's behaviour and what one does is very important even when we are doing the work of God. There are boundaries that God established for our behaviour and so our achievements are going to be judged and our work determined to be of gold or stubble.

Note that there are also boundaries even when God employs pagans to do His bidding and discipline His children and when they violate the boundaries He has established He holds that disobedience against them and will punish them.

That of course does not mean that God will not exercise great mercy and grace to His faithful children but nevertheless God expects that we must fear Him and understand that there are consequences to our actions. David certainly understood this and when God extended His mercy to him and told him that He would establish a covenant with him so that the Messiah would come from his line, this astounded David.

So David showed humility, did not argue with God's decision, and begun massive preparation for a grand Temple which he himself would never build but would be built by his son. We learn from this as one writer notes:

“that God does not hold others responsible for our fathers’ indiscretions but sometimes he assigns us to carry on our fathers work . Solomon's legacy was to build the first Temple. He would complete his father's dream because David had too much blood on his hands to be worthy of the task”.

Note in addition that God insisted and emphasized that His presence did not depend on a grand Temple building. The important thing was that God be present with His people.

The lesson for us therefore is not that we should spend all we have on appearances, but that we should do what is necessary to be always in the presence of God and be accepted by Him.

As a matter of fact the building of the Temple in Jerusalem can be looked at as the start of a tragic tale where despite the grandiose nature and the elaborate expenditure on this project and as well as the clearly superior quality of this Temple building, the leaders of Israel and in fact the builder of the temple Solomon despite being given great wisdom slipped into gross misbehaviour, intermarriage with pagans despite God's clear instructions, and introduced idolatrous worship in Israel. So eventually this great and beautiful Temple went the way of many other Temples and buildings and was destroyed. God's presence would not stay with iniquity even if iniquity is practiced in a beautiful and elaborate building.

So beauty for the place where God is worshiped is fine, but what God wants is your heart to be in the right place. So one writer emphasizes what we already know even though we tend not to think about it:

“The last days of David are described in 1 Kings 1 and we have little idea how many years have separated the last story of David from this one: we are just told his is old and feeble. The infighting among his sons and retainers begin. We are told that Joab sides with Adonijah and Nathan the prophet sides with Bathsheba and her son Solomon. Both Bathsheba and Nathan go to see David and tell him what was happening. David calls Bathsheba in and reiterates his

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promise to her. He sends for his loyal leaders and instructs them to crown Solomon and set him on the throne. Solomon forgives Adonijah his attempt to seize the throne and respects the sanctity of the Temple where Adonijah has taken refuge...

Solomon begun his political alliances to cement the victories won by David in war. The first of these was a marriage alliance with Egypt by marrying one of Pharaoh's daughters. Solomon gained the favour of God by asking for the right things for his kingship-an understanding mind to govern and the ability to tell between good and evil”.

But throughout all of this slippage it is important to note that God is present with God's people and He hears prayers and will respond with mercy. God does not change and His faithfulness to His covenant with us does not change despite the things which come from our sin nature, our hypocrisy, and our dangerous behaviour. But there are consequences.

Remember that Heaven and God are very different from Earth and us. God is the only source of all we have and all we are. We therefore can only show wisdom by trusting in God and His truth. One writer therefore reminds us as he comments on our Lesson Study:

“The Israelites regarded the Ark as the throne of Yahweh. It was the place where He manifested His presence in a localized way and where He received the blood that atoned for the Israelites’ sins on the Day of Atonement. The ark had rested in David’s tabernacle in Zion since David had brought it from the house of Obed-Edom (2 Samuel 6:17). It was the only item in the Temple that was not new. Perhaps God did not change it to help the people realize that He, symbolized by the ark had not changed. His person and methods of dealing with them at the mercy seat were the same as they had been”.

THE TEXT

Verse 1. Close examination of the first chapters which precede our Study Chapter indicates that this massive preparation and building project took about seven years.

The first verse opens, informing us that the Ark is being moved from the tents where it had dwelled to the new Temple.

From the time David had removed it from the house of Obed-edom, the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord was now taken out of the city of David, the stronghold which is called Zion by David. It had dwelt in a tent until Solomon had proposed to bring it up to the newly built Temple on Mount Moriah.

This was a solemn observance in the transition of the place of the Ark.

Verse 2.

All the men of Israel, that is the heads of the tribes and families mentioned in 1 Kings 8:1 assembled together to the king in the month Ethanim, the seventh month, at the Feast. The public and formal inauguration of this place of worship did not take place till eleven months after the completion of the edifice. The delay, most probably, originated in Solomon’s wish to choose the most fitting opportunity when there should be a general rendezvous of the people of Jerusalem, and that was not until the next year. This also allowed to the rest of the furnishings of the temple to be completed.

The next year was a Jubilee year, and he resolved on commencing the solemn ceremonial a few days before the Feast of Tabernacles, which was the most appropriate of all seasons. That annual festival had been instituted in commemoration of the Israelites dwelling in booths during their stay in the

wilderness, as well as of the Tabernacle, which was then erected, in which God promised to meet and dwell with His people, sanctifying it with His glory. As the Tabernacle was to be superseded by the Temple, there was admirable propriety in choosing the Feast of Tabernacles as the period for dedicating the new place of worship, and praying that the same distinguished privileges might be continued to it in the manifestation of the divine presence and glory.

Remember therefore that the Temple though well constructed and beautiful, was not really ready for its operation until the Ark of the Covenant was set in the Most Holy Place, for the Ark was the most important item in the Temple.

Verses 3 & 4.

So just imagine this grand procession proceeding along the way with a slow march for priests were stationed along the way to offer an incredibly large number of sacrifices at various spots along the road where the procession must go. This of course repeated what was done when David was bringing the Ark from the house of Obed Edom into Jerusalem after the disastrous episode where a Levite was killed because he did not respect God's commandment not to touch the Ark. So now everything would be done in order taking no chances to offend God.

So after summoning the elders of Israel they came and then the dignitaries began to march slowly before the Levites carrying the Ark and the vessels and ornaments belonging to the old tabernacle so that they could be placed in the new house of the LORD.

After the arrival of all the elders, the priests carried the ark and brought it up into the Temple, with the tabernacle and all the holy vessels in it. The tabernacle with the vessels in it, to which, however, the Ark of the Covenant, had been separated from it since it now did not belong to it, was probably preserved as a sacred relic in the rooms above the Most Holy Place.

The Ark of the Covenant was carried by priests on all solemn occasions, according to the spirit of the law. The Ark of the Covenant and the rest of the sacred vessels would be carried by the Levites, after the priests had carefully wrapped them up and the Levites were prohibited from directly touching them, on pain of death. When, therefore, the Ark of the Covenant was carried in solemn procession, as in the case before us, probably uncovered, this could only be done by the priests, more especially as the Levites were not allowed to enter the Most Holy Place. Consequently, by the statement in 1 Kings 8:3, that the priests and Levites carried them, the objects mentioned before, we are to understand that the Ark of the Covenant was carried into the Temple by the priests, because there were staves going through the sides of the ark so that it could be carried, while the tabernacle with its vessels were carried by the Levites. For every priest was a Levite, though every Levite was not a priest, and the priests did at all times bear the ark.

Verse 5.

The Ark of the Covenant was carried up to the hill of the LORD, no doubt when it was brought into the courts of the Temple, and was set down there for a time either within or in front of the hall. In regards to the sacrifice, the sacrificing sheep and oxen that could not be told nor numbered for multitude, denoting a great number offered to the Lord God to bring honour and praise to God on this great Day. The will of the people was to do honour to the Ark, to pay respect to it, and testify their universal joy and satisfaction in its settlement. On this occasion, they determined they should consecrate not only their cheerfulness, but a part of their wealth, to God and His honour.

Verse 6.

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The priests do their part of the service. They carried the Ark to the Temple, as it was meant to be the last time that it would be moved. We are here told what was in the Ark, nothing but the two tables of stone, a treasure far exceeding all the dedicated things both of David and Solomon.

The pot of manna and Aaron's rod were by the Ark, but not in it.

The priests brought the Ark and all holy artifacts into the Temple, into the sacred interior of the house, to the Most Holy Place, that part of the house where the divine oracle was, the Holy of Holies. For though into it none but the High priest might enter, and he but once a year, yet in case of necessity, as for the repair of it, other priests might enter, as was the case now, as an High priest could not carry in the ark himself, and therefore it was necessary to employ others, and as yet the divine Majesty had not taken up His residence in it.

Verses 7 & 8.

In the oracle of the house, where in time they expected God to speak to them, even in the Most Holy Place, which was made so by the presence of the Ark, it was placed under the wings of the great cherubim which Solomon set up, signifying the special protection of angels, under which God's ordinances and the assemblies of His people are taken. The staves of the ark were drawn out, so as to be seen from under the wings of the cherubim, to direct the High priest to the mercy-seat, over the ark, when he went in, once a year, to sprinkle the blood there; so that still they continued of some use, though there was no longer occasion for them to carry it by.

Verses 9.

As mentioned previously the only object in the Ark was the two tables of stone, which Moses had put there at Horeb, when Jehovah concluded the Covenant with Israel.

This simply showed that the law holds firmly and time will not change that fact. The Ark would merely preserve the stone tables of the Covenant. The Ark and the tables both together was meant to signify the Covenant God had with His people in that He designed it that they should leave the land of Egypt.

Verses 10.

This was a magnificent sight and an extremely grand and solemn occasion. Just imagine the amounts of the priests and Levites, and a great throng of rulers and the King and his Court dressed in their finery standing before the glistening Temple with its covering of fine gold, silver, and bronze.

It is said, that at this time, the Levites, who were singers of the families of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, arrayed in fine linen, with their musical instruments in their hands, stood at the east end of the altar of burnt offering, and one hundred and twenty priests, blowing their trumpets, praised the Lord together with one sound, declaring His goodness and His mercy, which endure for ever.

It was then that the cloud (*Shechinah*) filled the house of the Lord; the whole Temple, both the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place, and the Court of the priests; so that it was visible to all, and was a token of the divine presence of God, of His taking possession of His house, and of His taking up His residence in it.

When the priests came out of the sanctuary, after putting the Ark of the Covenant in its place, the cloud filled the house of Jehovah, so that the priests could not stand to minister.

The cloud, stood as the visible symbol of the gracious presence of God, filled the Temple, as a sign that Jehovah the covenant-God had entered into it, and had chosen it as the scene of His gracious manifestation in Israel.

We should remember that this same cloud was really as one writer states

“a radiant outshining of His character and presence. Here it was manifested in a cloud.

This is the cloud that stood by Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 13: 21 -22).

This is the cloud of glory that God spoke to Israel from (Exodus 16: 10).

This is the cloud from which God met with Moses and others (Exodus 19: 9; 24: 15-18; Numbers 11: 25; 12: 5; 16: 42).

This is the cloud that stood by the door of the Tabernacle (Exodus 33: 9-10).

This is a cloud of God with the brightness of His glory (Ezekiel 10:4).

This is the cloud of glory that overshadowed Mary when she conceived Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35).

This is the cloud present at the transfiguration of Jesus (Luke 9:34-35).

This is the cloud of glory that received Jesus into Heaven at His ascension (Acts 1:9).

This is a cloud that will display the glory of Jesus Christ when He returns in triumph to this earth (Luke 21:27; Revelation 1:7).

By the inability of the priests to stand, we are not to understand that the cloud drove them away; for it was not till the priests had come out that it filled the Temple. It simply means that they could not remain in the Holy Place to perform service, such as to offer an incense-offering upon the altar to consecrate it, just as sacrifices were offered upon the altar of burnt-offering after the dedicatory prayer.

Verses 11. The explanatory clause, “ for the glory of the Lord filled the house of Jehovah, ” indicates in the most unmistakable terms that it was the vehicle of the glory of God, and therefore was no cloud of smoke formed by the burning sacrifices, but the cloud in which God manifested His invisible being to His people, - the very same cloud in which Jehovah was to appear above the Capporeth, when the high priest entered the Most Holy Place on the day of atonement, so that he was commanded not to enter it at all times, and, when he entered, to cover the Capporeth with the cloud of the burning incense (Leviticus 16:2, Leviticus 16:13).

Many important lessons came from the next events. By the visible emanation of the divine glory, God put an honour upon the Ark, and owned it as a token of His presence. He testified His acceptance of the building and furnishing of the Temple as good service done to His name and His kingdom among men. He struck an awe upon this great assembly; and, by what they saw, confirmed their belief of what they read in the books of Moses concerning the glory of God's appearance to their fathers, that hereby they might be kept close to the service of the God of Israel and fortified against temptations to idolatry.

He showed Himself ready to hear the prayer Solomon was now about to make; and not only so, but took up His residence in this house, that all His praying people might there be encouraged to make their applications to Him.

Note what we can learn from this incident. We know that God is good and that God is love. But we also know that when God presents Himself to His people they will also learn that He is holy and not at all like us. So when Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord in Isaiah 6: 8 he was stricken in the presence of God. When the beloved Apostle John saw the glory of Jesus in Revelation 1:17, he too was stricken in the presence of God.

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It is clear that human beings no matter how beloved they are cannot be comfortable when they sense the difference between their sinfulness and holiness of God.

The New Covenant however gives us a better access to God than the people had in the days of the Old Testament. But we should be careful for when Israel rejected God in the days of the late monarchy the prophet Ezekiel saw the glory of God apart from the Temple. See Ezekiel 10:18.

The warning therefore is that we should be cautious, understand that God is very different from us. He expects honour, respect, and worship for we are after all is said and done “unprofitable servants” saved and kept by the mercy and grace of God.

Verses 12.

Perceiving by this symbol that the Lord was come into His house, to take up His dwelling in it, and seeing the priests and people in consternation at it, he spake the following words to their comfort:

For the reassurance of the priests and people, the king reminded them that the dark cloud, instead of being a sign ominous of evil, was a token of approval. The Lord had approved of Israel and said this, not in expressed terms, but by a continuous course of action.

It was also reminded that God said this was done for the greater awe of the divine Majesty, and to denote the darkness of the former dispensation; reference may be had to Leviticus 16:2 or rather this was now said by the Lord, that is, it appeared to be His resolution and determination to dwell in this manner.

Verses 13.

He spoke according to the tenor of God's promise which was on the condition that they served Him correctly.

Solomon extols this marvellous proof of the favour of the Lord. Then spake Solomon, “Jehovah hath spoken to dwell in the darkness.”

“Solomon saw that the Temple was filled with a cloud, and remembered that God had been pleased to appear in a cloud in the tent of Moses also. Hence he assuredly believed that God was in this cloud also, and that, as formerly He had filled the tabernacle, so He would now fill the Temple and dwell therein” (Seb. Schmidt).

“I have built Thee a house to dwell in, a place for Thy seat for ever.”

We are not to understand this verse as signifying that Solomon believed that the Temple built by him would stand for ever; but it is to be explained partly from the contrast to the previous abode of God in the tabernacle, which from the very nature of the case could only be a temporary one, inasmuch as a tent, such as the tabernacle was, is not only a moveable and provisional dwelling, but also a very perishable one, and partly from the promise given to David in 2 Samuel 7:14-16, that the Lord would establish the throne of His kingdom for His seed for ever.

This promise involved the eternal duration of the gracious connection between God and Israel, which was embodied in the dwelling of God in the Temple. This connection, from its very nature, was an

eternal one; even if the earthly form, from which Solomon at that moment abstracted himself, was temporal and perishable.

Solomon had spoken these words with his face turned to the Most Holy Place.

CONCLUSION

There is a place for the Covenant of God, the Ark of God, but it is now to be in your heart. It is to be treated with respect. You are to come into His courts with praise and thanksgiving.

The Study therefore is of critical importance. There must be a place for the Ark of the Covenant in your heart.

This is a most important matter. It was important in the time of the Old Testament before the coming of Messiah and it is even more important today, especially as we approach the time of the end for we are advised and warned by the angel who spoke to the Apostle John in Revelation 22:

“Worship God.

And he said to me, Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book for the time is at hand.

He who is unjust, let him be unjust still;

he who is filthy let him be filthy still;

he who is righteous, let him be righteous still;

he who is holy, let him be holy still”.

Note iniquity will be tolerated in the place where the Ark of the Covenant is. Given that this place is now in your heart there should be no iniquity there. As the psalmist said in Psalm 24:

“Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?

Or who may stand in His holy place?

He who has clean hands and a pure heart,

Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol,

Nor sworn deceitfully.

He shall receive blessing from the LORD,

And righteousness from the God of his salvation.

This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him,

Who seek Your face.

Lift up your heads O you gates!

And be lifted up you everlasting doors!

And the King of glory shall come in.

Who is this King of glory?

The LORD strong and mighty,

The LORD mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, O you gates!

Lift up you everlasting doors!

And the King of glory shall come in.

Who is this King of glory?

The Lord of hosts,

He is the King of glory.