

1 Kings 7: 13-51

This can seem a very long tedious chapter to our ears. Lists of temple furnishings do little to engage our minds. Should we care how many pomegranates decorated the pillars? Is the design of the stands important? These though maybe the wrong questions. Clearly the details mattered to the writer of Kings and by implication to the Holy Spirit. Dale Ralph Davis has written “Is he not implying that nothing can be too good, too lavish, too well done for such a marvellous God? We must never offer slop to him. Who would have thought that the Holy Spirit might use 1 Kings 7 to convict us of the flippant and casual procedures we sometimes call ‘worship’.” (The Wisdom and the Folly, an exposition of the Book of First Kings)

Two details point beyond themselves. The bronze sea (23-26) measured 4.5m across. It had a capacity of 11,000 gallons and all rested on the haunches of twelve bulls. The ‘sea’ represented the forces of chaos subdued and brought to order by the Lord. A number of the psalms pick up this theme, among them Psalm 93. Science Fiction imagines evil arriving from space, the Bible describes sinister forces emerging from the sea. (Dan 7:2,3; Rev 13:1) It is for that reason that the sight of Jesus walking on the lake is so significant. Here is the one who rules over the churning of the waves.

The stands with their basins were used to rinse off the animal parts being prepared for sacrifice as burnt offerings. Yet for all the care and ceremony involved, the immediate outcome of these offerings was limited. Hebrews rejoices to tell us that: *‘The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more then will the blood of Christ....cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we can serve the living God!’* (Hebrews 9:13,14)

- Worship is the whole of our lives but corporate worship, what we do together on a Sunday has a special importance. How do we play our part in that process?
- Detail matters to God. Does getting the small things right matter to us?
- These things represent the ‘shadows’. The reality they point to is Christ. Give thanks to God that we get to see the finished picture.

1 Kings 8:1-21

Chapter eight describes the installation of the ark in the temple. We are not allowed to think of this as some piece of antique furniture being given a place of honour in the new building. The ark represents Gods throne, the location of his presence on earth. The temple is not significant mainly for its architecture or its lavish furnishings. It is the one place on the planet where Gods presence maybe accessed by humankind. This point is made in a number of ways.

The care with which the ark is brought to the temple.

The passage begins by informing us Solomon gathered the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families to bring up the ark... (1) But these are not the people who will carry out the move. It is the priests who transport the ark and the Levites who bring the sacred furnishings. We are reminded of David’s abortive earlier attempt which ended in the death of Uzzah. *When they came to the threshing floor of Nakon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God.....The Lord’s anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act.* (2 Samuel 6:7) Gods holiness is not symbolic it is a threat to everything marred and defiled.

The cloud filled the temple.

Israel were accompanied by the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night as they travelled through the desert. When Moses met with God the cloud settled on the tent of meeting. When the tabernacle was completed the cloud filled the Most Holy Place. And now as the ark is put in place we read: *When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord (10)* This development is connected to what has gone before. As the Lord was with Moses and the tribes, as he was with David and his people so his presence will be with Solomon and the nation under him.

The writer draws attention to the protruding poles (8) Perhaps it was intended to serve as a reminder of the mobile nature of Gods throne. They were not to forget that he was their Lord not their servant. Significantly by the time 1&2 Kings has been published the nation will have gone into exile (the final paragraph of 2 Kings was composed sometime after the midpoint of the exile) In other words the temple has been destroyed and the ark gone. It posed the question whether God has abandoned them for good. Solomon's prayer stresses the faithful nature of their God who fulfils his promises (16,20) The ark maybe gone but the covenant remains. *I have provided a place there for the ark in which the covenant of the Lord that he made with our ancestors when he brought them out of Egypt. (21)* In that there is hope.

- *But just as he who called you is holy so be holy in all you do. For it is written: 'Be holy because I am holy.' (1 Peter 1:15,16)* Do we take Gods holiness seriously?
- *And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Eph 2:22).* Take a moment to reflect on the great privilege of this statement.
- In all the ups and downs of our lives it is God's faithfulness to his covenant promises that bring stability and hope. *Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. (Deut 31:6)*

1 Kings 8:22-40

Solomon doesn't organise an open day for the dedication of the temple. He is not found glowing with pride alongside his glittering creation. Solomon seeks to put the temple in its place. *But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! (27)*

The God whose temple this is cannot be confined within four walls. His presence may be there but his being is not limited to this place on the map. This will be crucial for Israel to understand in the wider story of Kings. The temple will be destroyed and they will be removed far from their land but the Lord's power and ability to fulfil his promises will not be affected by these things.

God defeats our efforts to describe and confine him. He is greater than our best thoughts. And yet he makes himself available to us. The emphasis of Solomon's prayer is access. The temple is the place where the God who cannot be contained in heaven can be accessed. There are 7 requests each containing the phrase 'Hear from heaven' (32,34,36,39,43,45,49) Note though God is said to hear from heaven rather than in the temple.

There is a large dose of realism in this prayer. Schools and universities hire speakers for special occasions who inform the young people how amazing they are and how they are set to do wonderful things. Solomon highlights personal disputes, defeat in battle, drought as a consequence of sin and natural disasters, all prefaced by the word 'when'. *When the people of Israel have been defeated by an enemy ... (33) etc.* These are the things that will feature in Israel's national life. But here is the great news announced by the temple.

The God who can't be contained by the highest heaven is ready to meet his people in mercy when they come to him in their need.

- One reason we are tempted to take prayer lightly is because we fail to appreciate God's grandeur. Read Isaiah 40 and ask God to restore your perspective.
- Our place of access is not the temple but the cross. Sense the amazement of the writer who informs us that we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus.
- Does Solomon hold a mirror up to us when he describes patterns of behaviour that will characterise his people? We will sin and fail. Thank God there is a place of mercy and restoration.

1 Kings 8:41-66

Solomon's glory will mesmerize the Queen of Sheba when she arrives to inspect his kingdom. (chap 10) But here we are left in no doubt where true greatness resides. Solomon the King has prayed this extended prayer on his knees before the altar with his hands raised towards heaven. (54) The prayer expresses the utter dependence of this nation on their God.

It is a prayer of faith. (41-43) Foreigners will come and pray to the Lord at this temple because they hear of God's great name. Solomon asks that their prayers be heard so that *all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you (43)*

It is a prayer for the crisis. (44,45) King Solomon knows the truth of Psalm 33. *No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance, despite all its great strength it cannot save. (Ps 33:16,17)* He knows where matters are decided.

It's a prayer full of reality. (46-51) *When they sin against you for there is no one who does not sin (46)* Its quite a note to strike on such a joyful occasion. Solomon foresees the exile! But he points to a place of hope beyond defeat and departure. *And if they turn back to you... and pray towards the land you gave their ancestors.... then from heaven hear their prayer and uphold their cause. (48,49)* These words might have gone over the heads of Solomon's immediate audience but to the first readers of the book of Kings, now in that place of exile, they would have proved a lifeline.

- Do we share Solomon's broad missionary concern that 'all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you'?
- Do we share his sense of utter dependence on God?
- God's word has provision for people in their sin. Is this where I head when I am struggling with myself and my guilt?

1 Kings 9:1-9

Chapter 8 ends in high spirits with the people celebrating the dedication of the temple for 7 days which quickly turns into 14. (8:65) These events are followed by the Lord appearing for a second time to Solomon. God appears at two important moments in Solomon's life. When he takes the throne there is the possibility that the young king will feel overwhelmed by the responsibility laid upon him. God offers to resource his reign and Solomon ask for wisdom to rule.

This second appearance maybe even more significant. It comes '*When Solomon had finished building the temple of the Lord and the royal palace and had achieved all he had desired to do (1)* The NT alerts us to the ongoing spiritual battle. *Therefore put on the*

full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground and after you have done everything to stand. (Eph 6:13) The King is being reminded of the central importance of God's decrees and laws. There are no holidays from the school of obedience because there is no let up in the spiritual battle. However our plans may succeed and no matter what stage of the Christian life we may be at, the word of God has to occupy that place of central importance.

But if you or your descendants turn away from me.... (6) The Lord lays out the consequences of disobedience. *I will cut off Israel from the land.....This temple will become a heap of rubble.* By the time these books of Kings are composed these things will have happened. The first readers may be those exiles in Babylon. These words of God to Solomon (6-9) provide the diagnosis of the problem and his earlier prayer (8:47-49) shows them where help is to be found.

- Difficulty attends both the beginning and the end of our Christian lives. At both stages God's help is available. Are we clear how dependent we are on that help?
- The law of God is a product of the character of our God. It is part of his provision for his people. How do his commandments seem to us: an unfortunate chore or loving direction?

1 Kings 9:10-28

This section serves to emphasise Solomon's royal status. We live in the day of the constitutional monarch. This what a real king looks like.

Solomon gifts Hiram 20 towns in Galilee as part payment for his temple supplies. Hiram is thoroughly unimpressed by his 'present'. He refers to them as the Land of Kabul (NIV footnote: Kabul sounds like the Hebrew for 'good for nothing') But Solomon neither apologises nor improves his offer. And by the end of the chapter it's clear Hiram is still content to co-operate with the King. (27) In addition Solomon receives a wedding gift from Pharaoh (16), subjugates the Canaanites, and engages in highly lucrative trading (28)

King Solomon points us to Christ, the ultimate Son of David. At a time when we can often feel small and vulnerable in the face of aggressive secularism it's good to be reminded where true power resides. As King Solomon ruled over this region so our Lord Jesus Christ rules over his world and brings about his great plans. *The seas have lifted up, Lord, the seas have lifted up their voice....Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea - the Lord on high is mighty. (Psalm 93:3,4)*

However two questions hang in the air. Is Solomon entitled to give away the land the Lord has given his people. Where does this leave the residents of these Galilean towns - the subjects of a foreign king?

And whilst v25 records the three annual feasts that are held each year and fulfil the temple obligations, as Dale Ralph Davis comments, verses four and five sit over this passage like Mount Rushmore (may be Ben Nevis). *As for you if you walk before me faithfully with integrity of heart and uprightness.... (9:4)* The crucial area is always what is going on in our hearts.

- As you read your Bible (and the Psalms in particular) look out for the way it likes to remind us who is really in charge.
- Our hearts are the command and control centre of our lives. Peter urges us: *Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened. But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. (1 Peter 3:14,15)*

1 Kings 10:1-13

In the reign of King Solomon we are given a preview of the coming Kingdom of the Lord our God. The first part of the Bible may focus our attention on the nation of Israel but God's mission is not narrow or nationalistic. As this Queen travels north from what today is the land of Yemen, she provides a preview of those from every nation, tribe, people and language who will one day stand together before God's throne.

She comes because of what she has heard about Solomon's fame. But this can't be reduced to fascination with intelligence or wealth. The Queen understands that the King is more than a very successful monarch. *When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relationship to the Lord... (1) She summed up her visit with the words: Praise be to the Lord your God who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of the throne of Israel. (9) We are invited to look beyond Solomon to the giver of all this lavish goodness.*

The characteristic of this kingdom is one of joy. Back in 4:20 the situation is summarised as: The people of Judah and Israel were numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy. Here the queen comments: *How happy your people must be! How happy your officials who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! (8).* Would those who visit our churches be amazed at our joy?

The passage stresses the queen's determination to find out for herself the truth of the claims she had heard. (7) At the end of a section of Matthew's Gospel where Jesus highlights the unbelief of the Jewish nation he references this visit of the queen of Sheba (South) *The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom and now something greater than Solomon is here. (Matt 12:42)* Jesus warns us that the Queen will be present at final judgment convicting those who knew something of his wisdom and fame but didn't bother to engage with these things themselves.

- Don't forget that like the Queen we are Gentiles and it is a miracle of grace that we get included in these blessings
- Don't make the mistake Israel made of failing to appreciate that increased privilege brings increased responsibility.
- Tune into Jesus' wisdom. Living under his wise rule is a source of great joy.

1 Kings 10:14 - 29

We have come a long way from 'the days of the Judges' when Israel was easy prey for their near neighbours. *King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. The whole world sought an audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart. (23,24)*

The city sparkles with an extraordinary lavishness. New ways are found to showcase these riches; in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon, two hundred full body shields made out of pure gold; a vast gold throne mounted on six steps and accompanied by twelve lions; all the king's household articles and goblets are manufactured out of pure gold. Little wonder people came from all parts to witness such a sight.

It is worth noticing that only one of the many foreign visitors is mentioned by name. That may be because of the perspective the Queen of Sheba brought. She sees beyond Solomon's gold and ivory throne to the Lord who has placed him there and granted him all this wealth. She also reminds him what he is there for: *he has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness. (9)*

It is that divine angle that this section seems to lack. Deuteronomy 17: 14-20 defines the conduct required of Israel's king. Moses wrote: *The king moreover must not acquire great*

numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the Lord has told you, "You are not to go back that way again." (Deut 17:16) v28 suggests this restraint is being ignored.

Deuteronomy also urges the king to regularly read the law 'that he may revere the Lord his God and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites' (18-20) Was Solomon attempting to impress the wrong audience? God's word would remind us: *These are the ones I look on with favour: those who are humble and contrite in spirit and who tremble at my word. (Isa 66:2)*

- Solomon's kingdom underlines God's ability to deliver on his promises. Let it encourage you as you consider the great promises associated with the coming of the Kingdom of God.
- The Queen of Sheba is part of God's provision for Solomon. She may have come to listen to his wisdom but he needed to heed her insight. Are there unlikely people whose views we need to consider carefully.
- No matter how successful we may become we remain dependent on God's daily grace. His word is central to that provision. Is the Bible shaping our view of ourselves?

1 Kings 11:1-25

Ultimately the great king Solomon becomes a dire warning to us all. *King Solomon however loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter.....he held fast to them in love....As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods (1-4)* Perhaps the king told himself these were merely diplomatic arrangements, being put in place for the good of Israel. Or maybe that his rule had established a new order and these old hatreds needed to be repented off. And what better way to do it than by entering into a marriage covenant.

In one sense this is all very modern. We live at a time when we are regularly urged 'to go with our heart'. Solomon's heart is the focus of v4. Jeremiah wrote, *The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? (Jer 17:9)* The message is clear. We can't trust our own internal hunches and inclinations. We need something better. And of course in God's word we have something better. This was not an issue over which the Bible was unclear. Deut 17:17 forbade the king from taking many wives and Deut 7:3 forbade marriage with these Canaanite nations. If everyone is coming to listen to our wisdom it's hard to recognise we need to defer to a higher authority.

As Solomon grew old, his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God as the heart of David his father had been. (4). David was by no means perfect. He too has some serious failures and the last chapter of his life is unimpressive. But he remained devoted to the Lord. The first commandment: *You shall have no other gods before me* controlled his affections at all times.

For someone endowed with such wisdom the King proves to be extremely foolish. He chooses to please his foreign wives with their useless gods and consequently deeply offends the one true God upon whom his life depends. The Lord raised up enemies and this sparkling kingdom will be reduced to microscopic proportions in a short order.

- Who controls our behaviour? Do we 'go with our heart' or submit to God's word?
- Are we tempted to modify the warnings of the Bible?
- We are not perfect and we will get things wrong. We need though to attend to the underlying loyalty of our hearts. *You shall have no other gods before me?*

1 Kings 11:26-43

The previous section mentions two of Solomon's enemies but his most dangerous foe will come from within. Jeroboam is one of the Kings most significant and competent officials. He encounters the prophet Ahijah who ruins his new cloak to convey that God is tearing the kingdom out of Solomon's grasp in order to give it to him.

He is not to receive it all. One tribe will be left with Solomon's dynasty. He will retain the tribe of Judah for David's sake. (32)

Jeroboam is left in no doubt why this is coming about. *I will do this because they have forsaken me and worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites and Molek the god of the Ammonites. (33)* Nor is he left to guess what his own success depends on. *If you do whatever I command ... I will build you a dynasty. (37)*

The first verse of the section (26) informs us of Jeroboam's response to the prophecy. It proves to be a false start and he has to flee to Egypt to avoid being killed. In one sense Solomon's end is unexceptional. He has a couple of wars and an internal revolt to manage. But he reigns for forty years and then appears to die a peaceful death. (43) You can imagine the list of dignitaries queueing up to pay their respect. And what eulogies would have been composed for the occasion. But the verdict passed in the most important area of all was thoroughly negative.

- We need to remind ourselves that it is the unseen realm that really matters. What is going on under the surface in our lives is of paramount importance to the invisible God.
- Sometimes setbacks have no clear significance. But could Solomon have discerned God's displeasure at his behaviour in the attacks of Hadad and Razon? Could he have repented rather than sending out his army? Could we?