

I Kings – Part 4

Dwelling in Jerusalem – I Kings 7-9

How much do you give God compared to how much you give yourself? Was God Solomon's priority? Is He yours? As we look at the comparison between the building of the Temple and Solomon's palace, what conclusions can we draw?

Because his reign was one of peace, King Solomon was able to dedicate himself to many construction projects during his lifetime. The seven-year construction of the Temple was the height of Israel's unity and worship. Following its completion, Solomon began construction on his Palace Complex, which he built next to the Temple. This required thirteen years to complete. (I Ki. 7:1-12).

Obviously, the time it took to construct the Palace Complex is much greater, almost double the length of time it took to build the Temple. I Kings 7:1 emphasizes that the palace is four times larger than the Temple. But were there as many workers on the project? This contrast is made even more noticeable because the information follows immediately after I Kings 6:37. Remember, the verse and chapter divisions of Scripture are put there by man, not God.

As you read I Kings 6 and 7 notice that a description of Solomon's Palace Complex falls between the Temple and the details of the Temple's completion. (I Ki. 7:13-51). This may have been because it was all located within the wall of the Great Court (7:9, 12). But what does God want us to learn from these building projects? Is Solomon trying to make a statement about himself and his wealth, or is God using this as a "type" of God's kingdom, or is it something simpler than that?

I. Solomon's Palace Complex

Buildings have long memories. They are intimate witnesses to virtually all our lives. Even after decades of use, they have stories to tell...especially the old ones. Architecture can give a picture of what we value or celebrate, like the Biltmore Mansion, built by George Vanderbilt, the largest privately-owned home, or Independence Hall in Philadelphia, where the Declaration of Independence was signed, or the home designed by Frank Lloyd Wright that was built over a waterfall that was celebrated for its integration with nature. The luxurious palace complex of King Solomon would have ranked alongside these. What would it have shown about the things that were valued?

Solomon's palace complex was divided into sections, probably housed under one roof. Entry to the complex was from the south side through the House of Pillars, where people waited for an audience with the king. From there, entry could be made into the impressive 150' x 75' x 45'-high House of the Forest of Lebanon. This was aptly named because its four rows of huge cedar pillars resembled a cedar forest. These pillars supported the cedar roof and possibly a second story. The walls were also paneled in cedar with gold shields and targets hung on them. The cedar, of course, was supplied by Hiram, King of Tyre. (I Ki. 10:16-17). This impressive building dwarfed the Temple. It likely served as a military headquarters and weapons storehouse, as well as a royal reception area.

On the opposite side of the House of Pillars, whose pillars represented the strength and stability of the government, is the Hall of Justice. This hall, or porch, held Solomon's throne from which he would judge and dispense justice. This was also paneled with cedar but overlaid with gold.

Beyond and to the north, set back from the palace and the Temple, Solomon built his own living quarters in a similar design. Attached to these, he built spacious living quarters for Pharaoh's daughter, his Egyptian wife. Because of her status as queen, it would have been necessary for her to have her own special apartments, although parts of Solomon's harem were, no doubt, also housed nearby. All this construction used the finest cedar and costly, high-grade stone, cut into 12' or 15' slabs. No expense was too great. So, the central royal residence and administrative heart of the united monarchy during King Solomon's reign was completed.

II. A Temple and a Palace

While the royal residence provided a luxurious and secure home for Solomon and his family, it also served as a seat of governance, hosted many visitors and diplomats, and showcased Israel's prosperity and Solomon's wisdom through its extensive use of cedar, gold, and costly stones. While Solomon probably wasn't bragging about himself or what he had, he was likely wanting others to see how God had blessed them by creating such beauty and magnificent buildings.

First, this record is the historical record of Solomon's palace and Temple and how they anchored the political, administrative, and religious life in Israel. But secondly, God wanted to include the details of Solomon's palace because they linked God's presence with His royal authority. The Temple, built for God to "dwell among the children of Israel," anchored Israel's religious life, but the palace represented the "justice and judgment" of God's throne. (Ps. 89:14).

While God had given David the blueprint for the Temple, it was Solomon's vision to combine it with his palace and form one continuous construction project on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem—God's house first, the king's house next.

The two buildings reflected each other yet were intertwined. The king's throne in the "Hall of Justice" echoed the Ark's cover, the Mercy Seat, where God reigned. (Ex. 25:22; I Ki. 8:6-11). The cedar paneling, "from floor to ceiling," mirrored the temple walls, clothed in cedar and carvings. (I Ki. 6:15-18). The earthly throne, which would be used to execute justice, reflected the heavenly throne, which defined that justice. (Ps. 89:14).

Judgment and worship were also intertwined yet one was earthly and the other spiritual. While Solomon judged Israel in the Hall of the Throne, the priests offered sacrifices for sin in the Temple. Palace judgments were meant to maintain obedience to societal rightness, but the temple sacrifices brought atonement with God. (Deut. 17:8-13; Lev. 16). It wasn't until the prophet Isaiah that judgment and worship would be merged in the people's minds, "For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us" (Isa. 33:22).

Both were symbolic of God's covenant with Israel and God's promise to dwell among them. He had made a covenant with David that: "He shall build an house for My name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom forever" (II Sam. 7:12-13). By constructing both houses, Solomon displays that promise: dynasty and worship. They

will stand or fall together. Psalm 132:11-14 ties the Davidic throne together with God's chosen dwelling in Zion/Jerusalem.

III. Filling the Temple

After a brief description of Solomon's palace and grounds, Scripture returns to Solomon's preparations for the Temple. While the structure is complete, the furnishings are not. If you will remember in Exodus 35:30-33, God had chosen Bezalel, a skilled craftsman (Ex. 31:1-11; 35:30-35), to head up the building of the Tabernacle and all its furnishings. Now, Solomon sends for Hiram (Hiram in the KJV), a man of Tyre, a worker in brass. Much like Bezalel's qualifications, Hiram is described as being "filled with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass" (I Ki. 7:14).

But the differences between these two men are significant: Bezalel was called by God, but Solomon sent for Hiram. Bezalel was an Israelite, but Hiram was only half-Israelite: his mother was an Israelite widow, and his father was a man of Tyre. While Bezalel is described as "filled with the Spirit of God," there is no mention of the Spirit in Hiram's life.

Bronze would make up all the furnishings found on the outside of the Temple. This was an alloy made of copper and tin, valued for its strength, durability, and workability, as well as being visually striking. It was ideal for large, intricate objects like the Temple's furnishings. In addition, it mirrored the enduring nature of God's covenant and the seriousness of the sacrifices made on the altar. Contrasted with the gold of the interior, bronze represented the earthly, functional, and sacrificial aspects of worship. These pieces were used for the offerings presented by and for the people and the cleansing of the priests before they entered the holy space.

Hiram set up shop in the Plain of Jordan, likely in a large workshop or foundry, away from the Temple, so no sound would be heard. Here, the metals used to make the bronze could be melted and shaped by hand or poured into molds in the clay ground to meet the required specifications. The items were then polished to a high sheen.

To begin his work, Hiram cast two mammoth pillars of brass, 27' high, with a 7½' chapter (capital, crown, or head) to sit on top. These were 6' thick, free-standing, pillars adorned with elaborate decorations, with the capitals shaped like lilies, symbolizing purity, and decorated with 200 pomegranates and chains. These large, impressive pillars stood at the threshold of the Holy Place, symbolically marking the separation between the sacred and the profane/secular, and serving as witnesses to those who entered.

These two pillars were so important that they were given names: Jachin (pronounced Yakin) on the right, meaning "He shall establish," and Boaz on the left, meaning "in Him is strength." Nathan's prophecy to David, "I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom." These pillars may have been intended to be a proclamation that David's house was "established—with strength" from God. Notice as you read how the pomegranates, lilies, gourds (knops/ornamental buds), and palm trees all draw attention back to creation. (I Ki. 7:15-22).

Next came the molten sea, a large, round bronze basin/laver. It was 15' across and could hold about 12,000 gallons of water for the priests' ritual purification before entering the sanctuary. This sea rested on twelve bronze oxen, representing each of

the twelve tribes. Three oxen faced in each direction as the tribes had done around the Tabernacle when they were traveling.

The basin, along with ten smaller bronze basins, or lavers, that could each hold about 240 gallons of water to wash the animals that would be sacrificed, as well as moveable carts, and wheels, shovels and bowls were all highly decorated with lions, oxen, and cherubim. They were made with bronze as thick as a person's hand.

Verses 41-45 summarize, like a laundry list, all that Hiram made for Solomon for the house of God. It was impossible to weigh them because there were so many. All were polished to a high sheen, like burnished brass.

"And Solomon made..." directed the furnishings for use inside the Temple. (v. 48-50). All were pure gold: the altar of incense, table of showbread, lampstands, and all the vessels that were needed for service. Even the hinges on the doors that allowed entry into both the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place were gold. Instead of a single lamp-stand like the Tabernacle had used, there were ten lampstands. Five were set on each side of the Holy Place. Each day, the gold wick trimmers were used to trim the candle wicks, so the lamps burned with no smoke. These provided the only light in the room.

While the Temple was unquestionably splendid and beautiful, a testament to God's glory and far grander than the Tabernacle, it was not the picture that God had prescribed with the gradual progression from bronze to silver to gold. Attention to details is worth noting. God deserved all the glory, but in the recording of it, the glory was shared by Solomon; little reference is given to God. Outward show and excessive displays seemed to be of more value than obedience.

An interesting verse concludes this chapter: "So was ended all the work that King Solomon made for the house of the Lord. And Solomon brought in the things which David his father had dedicated; even the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, did he put among the treasures of the house of the Lord" (I Ki. 7:51). Weren't these things supposed to be used for the Temple itself? Yes, but this may have been what was leftover from the excess he provided. It also may mean that Solomon had used all his own wealth to build the Temple, and since David's had been dedicated to the Lord, he put in the Temple treasury so it would eventually be used as such.

Solomon no doubt felt very satisfied that he had done all that could be expected of him. One piece of furniture, the most important, was absent. Solomon assembled all the elders, heads of the tribes, and all the leadership to dedicate the Temple and rededicate themselves to God's service, after bringing up the Ark of the Covenant from the Tabernacle that David had prepared within his palace complex in Jerusalem. (I Ki. 8:1-4, 57-61; II Sam. 6:17). This dedication coincided with the Feast of Tabernacles that represents God's provision and protection. After spending so much on making this marvelous Temple, Solomon determined to dedicate it to God with equal splendor.

After arranging the Temple furnishings, the priests carried the Ark of the Covenant and all its holy vessels from the Tabernacle to the new Temple. With sacrifices so numerous they could not be counted, the Ark was placed in the "oracle," the Holy of Holies, setting it in place before the tall "guardian" cherubim that stretched their wings over it. (I Ki. 6:23-27; 8:7-8). Nothing remained in the Ark but the two tables of stone that Most had put there in Horeb when God made His covenant with the

children of Israel. The jar of manna and Aaron's rod that budded had been removed at some point, possibly when the Philistines had captured it and replaced it with the golden tumors and mice before returning it to Israel. (I Sam. 6:1-5; Heb. 9:4).

"And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the Holy Place that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, 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" (I Ki. 8:10-11). By manifesting Himself to the people in the cloud, God showed His approval and fulfilled His promise to dwell among His people. He would dwell there as long as the people obeyed. (I Ki. 6:12-13).

The Lord of heaven is a holy, glorious God whom man must not dare to trifle with. His glory is described as like a "devouring fire" (Ex. 24:17) and like a "consuming fire" (Deut. 4:24). No one is worthy of standing in the Lord's presence in His Temple because their sin makes them unworthy. Until we receive our glorified, sinless bodies, like the priests, we "could not stand to minister" before Him.

In his prayer, Solomon praised the "Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath..." He looks at God in the past, "Who hast kept with thy servant David...and hast fulfilled," the present, "Therefore, now...keep with thy servant David my father that Thou promised him" and looks forward to the future, "Let Thy Word be verified." Solomon acknowledges that, while this Temple is awesome, "Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" (I Ki. 8:23-27).

During the dedication, Solomon reflected on how his father, David, had longed to build the Temple, but God had forbidden him to do so. That privilege had been passed down to Solomon. He prayed before the people, offering a prayer of thanksgiving for God's faithfulness in keeping His covenant promises, and then he prayed for the nation. Remembering God's past mercies, Solomon ended his prayer by reminding the LORD that He had chosen Israel, "for they be Thy people, and Thine inheritance," and He had led the people out of Egypt under "the hand of Moses Thy servant" (I Ki. 8:51-53).

Conclusion:

We can learn much about God by examining the construction of this Temple. The detailed descriptions emphasize the beauty of order and design. From its location to the pillars to the sea of cast metal, everything was meticulously planned. Just as God's creation was planned and designed down to the tiniest detail, so was this place where He would dwell. God is a God of order. "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace" (I Cor. 14:33). This same characteristic should be reflected in our lives.

God's provision in the building provided more than enough materials, even to the point that there were leftover items of value that could be put into the treasury for future necessities. When we are aligned with God's will, He provides for "all our needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).

The temple reflected God's glory, with its grandeur and beauty. Jesus told His disciples that we are also to reflect God's glory, "Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:15-16).

My challenge to you, then, is “How can your life become more like Christ?” Are you living an ordered life, or just haphazardly throwing things together the best you can, which only creates chaos? Are you relying on God to provide your needs, or are you worrying about each little thing that comes your way? Are you putting God’s glory first, or are you wanting some for yourself as well? We mustn’t rob God of His glory.

Solomon attempted to take some of God’s glory for himself. His own wisdom, wealth, and reputation became so great that they overshadowed God’s name in the eyes of many. In the beginning, his devotion to the Lord was evident, but his personal achievements began to shift the people’s focus to him rather than to God. This would have long-term spiritual implications for his reign and the kingdom. Everything we do must promote God’s name as the most important.

While the temple was a magnificent structure more permanent than the Tabernacle, it was ultimately only a temporary dwelling. Our life here may feel important to us. We may even feel that the need to build for our future is our priority. While this is important, our focus should have an eternal perspective, focusing on the things of heaven rather than the temporary things of earth. Our efforts should be on the things of and for God. We should dedicate our lives to serving Him.

“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (II Cor. 4:18). Where are your eyes looking?

The Fall of Solomon (I Kings Part 5)

1) Read I Kings 9-11. What cautions (if...then) do you see in chapter 9? Highlight those words so you notice the contrasts. As you read the portions of Scripture this week, make note below of the downfalls that show how Solomon fell away from God.

2) On a separate piece of paper, keep a running journal this week. Examine each activity that you do to see if your actions glorify God or glorify yourself. This does not mean that you need additional activities in your already busy schedule, but to examine your mindset regarding your current daily routine. What did you discover? What did you change/keep about your reason for doing things?

3) What had Solomon promised Hiram for the things he provided for the Temple and his palace? What did Hiram think about them? What was right/wrong with them?

4) What addition did Solomon add to the things he accomplished or put in place during the years after the Temple and palace were built?

5) Why did the Queen of Sheba come to Jerusalem? What did she discover?

6) How did Solomon's wealth increase? How did this affect the people of Israel?

7) How did Solomon's heart get turned from God? What was the result? How did God do to prevent Israel from completely being torn apart?

8) How did God break up the tribes to punish them for their disobedience? Highlight the word “adversary” in I Kings 11. Who was the adversary and how did God use them?

9) What part did the prophet Ahijah play in God’s plan?

Conclusion:

Turning away from God isn’t usually an abrupt change. It begins with the little things: compromise, almost getting it right, standing on the fence instead of staying on your side of it. Solomon’s change from striving to please God was no different. He married an unbeliever from Egypt; he sought the glory for his building of the palace and the Temple for himself; he gave less than he promised to repay King Hiram; and the list goes on.

Are you slipping in your walk with God? It may not even be that noticeable yet. Maybe it seems easier to stay home from church Sunday night because it’s summer...after all, you went to church once already. Maybe your days have gotten so busy that you skip devotions and Bible study because there are sooo many things you want/need to do. Maybe it is just an attitude thing. Did you see my beautiful (dish of food, flower garden, craft???) that I made, instead of giving God the glory? How about an attitude that needs to be changed about taking care of your children, or house, or husband? Has it become a drudgery, instead of doing it “as unto the Lord?”

There are so many subtle ways that our lives can slip away from the Lord. Hopefully, your journal this week can bring those things to light, and you can correct them before God has to exact the punishment!

“Your iniquities have turned away these things [the blessings, goodness, and provision that God desires to give His people], and your sins have withholden good things from you” (Jer. 5:25).