

1 KINGS 8

8:1–2

After the Babylonian exile the month Ethanim's name changed to Tishrei. The month falls in autumn, and the feast referred to is Sukkot, the festival of booths or tabernacles. Beginning on the fifteenth day of Ethanim/Tishrei, it is a harvest festival that also commemorates the Exodus. On the holiday Jews build a temporary structure that they sleep and eat in for the week. In a way, holding the dedication on this holiday symbolizes the structure the Israelites built for the Lord to live in. Although the Israelites did not intend the temple to be temporary (see 2 Kings 8:13), it ended up being temporary as it was ultimately destroyed by the Babylonians. Calling the holiday the Feast of the Tabernacles also brings to mind the tabernacle itself as a temporary structure for the Lord's house. Tishrei also contains Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year.

8:3–6

David brought the ark and tabernacle to Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 6 in preparation for building the temple. Before that, the tabernacle was kept at Gibeon (where Solomon was granted wisdom), Kirjath-jearim, Nob, and Shiloh.

8:7

Inside the holy of holies was the ark of the covenant, which was topped with two winged cherubim with wings facing each other. Free-standing and separate from the ark were two other cherubim, fifteen feet tall and facing the entrance of the holy of holies, each with a wing covering the ark. The word *cherubim* is already plural. The single instance is *cherub*. The form of these statues is unknown—whether they resembled people, animals, or a combination, like a beast with human face. There is some speculation that one cherub was male and the other female, either representing the female and male aspects of God

or the male and female aspects of humanity. If the cherubim did represent God, they were not idols standing in place of God but represented the earthly dwelling place of God, as does the temple as a whole. The Hebrew word for *temple* is the same word for *palace*.

8:8

The staves were used to move the ark and were not needed otherwise, so they stayed in the holy place on the other side of the veil. “Until this day” refers to when this text was written, which must not have been during or shortly after the dedication, otherwise there wouldn’t be any use in stating the staves were still there. However, the text had to have been written before the temple was destroyed for the first time in 586 BC.

8:9

At one time, the ark had a bowl of manna (see Exodus 16:33–34), Aaron’s budding staff (see Numbers 17:10), and the book of Deuteronomy (see Deuteronomy 31:24–26). How those went missing is not explained. Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai.

8:10–13

A cloud descended upon the temple—similar to the cloud that followed the tabernacle during the Exodus. Solomon seems to have been quoting some statement of the Lord’s about dwelling in “thick darkness,” perhaps relating to the phrase appearing in Exodus 20:21. The Septuagint has a slightly longer passage here about God creating the sun but choosing for Himself to dwell in thick darkness, and it cites the Book of Jasher. See also 2 Samuel 1:18.

8:14–22

What follows is the dedicatory prayer for the temple. It’s the second longest prayer in the Bible after Nehemiah’s prayer in Nehemiah 9. As it begins, verse 22 indicates that Solomon stood before the altar, but when the prayer ends in verse 54, Solomon was kneeling before the altar. It’s possible that the phrase from verse 22 means only that Solomon was before the altar, not specifically his posture. The Bible frequently uses the word *stand* figuratively in the sense of being near or in front of an object.

8:23–30

Prayer is obviously one of the key purposes of the temple both anciently and in modern times. Solomon specified that Israelites should pray toward the temple, similarly perhaps to the way Muslims pray toward Mecca. The Talmud, an ancient collection of Jewish oral law, says that when they are throughout the world Jews should pray toward Israel, when in Israel they should pray toward Jerusalem, and when in Jerusalem they should pray toward the temple. For Jews in Europe that meant facing east. Many Christian churches also face east, symbolically pointing toward the rising sun, which represents the resurrection.

8:31–36

This part of the prayer prefigures or foreshadows the drought brought on at the time of Elijah (see 1 Kings 18). After Elijah's triumph over the priests of Baal, all the people who saw fell on their faces and said, "Yahweh he is the God, Yahweh he is the God" (18:39, translation mine), literally confessing the name of the Lord.

8:37

"Blasting" refers to the east wind. The winds in the Holy Land predominantly come from the west and bring with them evaporated water from the Mediterranean Sea. As the west wind rises at the Judean hills, the resulting precipitation waters the land. The east wind comes from the Judean Desert, one of the driest places on earth with an annual rainfall as low as 47 mm (1.85 inches). Wind from that direction not only doesn't bring rain but also drastically increases the temperature and, thus, can destroy crops. It's an eastern wind that Joseph interpreted from Pharaoh's dream that would cause famine in Egypt.

Too much rain is also harmful. Mildew has the opposite effect, caused by too much rain. Although rare in the Holy Land, mildew can cause a greenish-yellow growth on the crops. "Locust" refers to the desert locust, which can swarm. When locusts swarm, they look like a different insect, and that is most likely what Solomon meant by "caterpillar." The Hebrew word translated in the King James Version as "caterpillar" might better be translated as "ravager," an insect that destroys every bit of green in the path of its swarm.

8:38–43

Even non-Israelites can come to the temple to pray and expect God to hear their prayers. An analogy in our time might be that God will still listen to our prayers even if we aren't worthy to enter the temple. The important thing is acknowledging Him and asking. As the Lord said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find" (Matthew 7:7).

8:44–48

As verses 35–36 prefigure the drought of Elijah, these verses seem to prefigure the captivity of Babylon. The word for captive, *shabah*, mirrors the word for repent, *shub*. The book of Lamentations probably best represents this supplication to the Lord to return the Jews to their land.

8:49–53

Twice Solomon referred to the Israelites as the inheritance of the Lord. Often, *inheritance* in the scriptures refers to God's granting the righteous an inheritance of eternal life. In this case Solomon was pointing out that the Israelites belong to God, that He inherited them by rescuing them from Egypt. By so doing, God separated or set apart the Israelites as His own. On the high priest's headband were written the words "holiness to the lord." A better translation for "holiness" in that context might be "dedication" or

“belonging”—the implication being that the priest belongs to God just as the house belongs to God and (as Solomon said) the people of Israel belong to God. This is also a better meaning for the term “saints.” The term doesn’t mean “holy ones,” implying all saints are or should be perfect and holy, but rather means “being dedicated or belonging to God.” In the same way, God inherited the Israelites through the Exodus, and Christ inherited us through His Atonement. As a reminder from verse 2, this is occurring near Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

8:54–55

Now standing at the end of his prayer of dedication, Solomon blessed Israel. In a way this is a continuation of the dedicatory prayer.

8:56–63

The total number of sacrifices Solomon gave, 22,000 oxen plus 120,000 sheep, is 142,000, which is close to the significant 144,000 (12,000 times 12, as in Revelations 7 and 14). Perhaps this is a good reminder that just because a number is mentioned in the Bible doesn’t mean that it holds any special hidden significance. The sacrifices in verse 5 seem to have been for the ark alone. These sacrifices, however, were for the temple.

8:64–65

Most Israelite feasts either were single-day events or lasted seven days. This feast, however, lasted fourteen days. If the 142,000 animals were sacrificed within that fourteen-day period, that works out to 423 animals that were sacrificed every hour—assuming the priests performed sacrifices twenty-four hours a day for fourteen days. Taking into consideration that Yom Kippur is close to the fall equinox, if the priests sacrificed just during daylight hours, that would be 845 animals per hour. In fact, the Hebrew day was always divided into twelve hours regardless of the length of the day; the length of their hours differed from season to season. If we calculate the number of animals per minute based on sacrifices during daylight hours, it works out to fourteen, or as verse 65 says, “seven and seven.” Perhaps 142,000 is a significant number after all. Regardless, we can see why Solomon needed to dedicate the whole court of the temple for sacrificing.

“Hamath unto the river of Egypt” is one of the border descriptions for the land of Israel. Another is “Dan to Beer-Sheba.” A modern person might similarly describe the United States as “New York to LA.”

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