

# 1 Kings 8:22-61 // The Prayer God Always Answers

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[0:00] It will appear on the screens behind me, but if you want to follow along in the pew NIV translation, it is on page 345.

He said, Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you. There is no God like you in heaven above or on the earth below. You make agreements with your people because you love them, and you keep your agreements with those who truly follow you.

You have kept the promise you made to your servant David, my father. You made that promise with your own mouth, and with your great power you have made it come true today.

Now, Lord, God of Israel, keep the other promises you made to your servant David, my father. You said, your sons must be careful to obey me as you have obeyed me.

If they do this, there will always be someone from your family ruling Israel. Again, Lord God of Israel, I ask you, please continue to keep that promise you made to my father.

[1:30] But God, can you really live here on earth? Even the sky and the highest place in heaven cannot contain you. Certainly this house which I have built cannot contain you either.

But please, listen to my prayer and my request. I am your servant, and you are the Lord my God. Hear this prayer I am praying to you today.

In the past, you said, I will be worshipped there. So please, watch over this temple night and day. Hear the prayer I pray to you here. Hear my prayers and the prayers of your people Israel.

Please hear us when we pray facing this place. Hear us from your home in heaven. And when you hear us, forgive us. There we go, that's it.

Sorry, I didn't turn it on before I stood up. Morning, everyone. My name is Robbie. I am the pastor for youth and children here at St. Silas. And it's a privilege to come and share God's word with you. This morning is an all-age service, as we've heard.

[2:46] And what that means is we don't have any youth zone groups or kids zone groups. And we do that partially to give everyone a rest from the leading. But we also do it because theologically here at St. Silas, we believe that God's word is for absolutely everyone.

We don't change the meaning of God's word for the kids in kids zone. Instead, they hear the same thing we all do together. So this morning, we're going to be teaching God's word. It's the same point you would get if this was an all-adults-only sermon.

But we're doing it in a way that every member of our church family can understand and apply it to their life. So that's the only difference you're going to hear between this morning and next Sunday's sermon, for example. So in Big Church, we've been looking at 1 Kings for the past few weeks.

We've been seeing and learning all about King Solomon, the greatest king of Israel. He did many amazing things. And a few weeks ago, we heard all about the temple that he built to worship God. And it was huge. It was massive. It was this beautiful, brilliant building that was made so they could go and worship this big, brilliant God. And after Solomon finished building his temple, he turned around and he prayed.

[3:50] He prayed this big, long prayer that we're looking at this morning. Now, Solomon's prayer is really helpful because it teaches us something about prayer. It helps us understand. And if we ask a few questions of Solomon's prayer, it's going to shape our prayer life going forward.

So the way it's going to work this morning is we're going to have four big questions. We're going to answer two. Then we're going to have a song. Then another reading. Then we're going to answer

two more questions. That's how this morning is going to look.

And we're going to see that Solomon's prayer helps us answer all these big questions. So the first question we are asking of Solomon's prayer is, who is the God that we pray to? Well, Solomon's prayer tells us that God is a one-of-a-kind, promise-keeping God.

If you've got your Bibles open, that would be really helpful. I'm speaking from the ICB, but having the NIV is just as helpful in front of you, right? So this is verse 23. Solomon prays this. Lord God of Israel, there is no God like you.

There is no God like you in heaven above or earth below. God is one-of-a-kind. He is huge. He is powerful. There is no one, nothing anywhere that can compare to this God.

[5:03] There's no football team that could ever be as good. No singer that is ever as glorious. No politician who knows more. Nothing. No one. If you ever play top trumps, the God card will always win.

Because there is no one like God. Whatever game of top trumps you are playing, God is going to come out on top. Israel's God that Solomon is praying to is phenomenally big and brilliant and loving and kind and merciful.

And that is who Solomon prays to. The amazing thing is that this isn't just a great big God who is one-of-a-kind. But this God also cares for his people.

We see that because so much of Solomon's prayer is Solomon remembering the promises that God has made. Because God loves making promises with his people.

God made a promise to Abraham. He made a promise to Moses and to David. God promised to all of these men that he would be Israel's gods. That God would be with them and care for them if they remained close to him.

[6:11] Now this, these big promises, they are the foundation of what Solomon is praying. Solomon keeps coming back again and again to say to God, God keep your promises to us.

Now this God, he's one-of-a-kind. And he has a pretty good track record so far of promises. He promised Abraham that his small family would become a great nation. And as Solomon prays, there are millions of people in Israel.

This God, he promised Moses that he would rescue his people from Egypt and their slavery. And in Solomon's time, there they are. They have their own country.

And they now have this temple to worship gods. God even promised David that David's son would build him a temple. And look at it. He's done it.

It is big, shiny, golden, glorious temple where God can dwell. And God kept that promise. There it is. Solomon did it. All those promises he's made thousands of years ago, God will always keep.

[7:16] I find it hard to remember promises I've made to people last week. But God is so much bigger and better than I am at keeping promises. God will never forget. He is a one-of-a-kind promise keeper.

That is the God that we pray to. Now, our second question. It's a pretty big question. Where is the God that we pray to? I wonder how you might answer this question.

Where is God? It might seem simple, but it's a little bit harder than you think. If I ask you all, right, here we go. Where are the drums?

Anyone know where the drums are? The band knows. Can anybody else see where the drums are? No one's willing to point. Thanks, Simon's over here. The drums are here. You know that because you can see the drums.

Everyone, where's the piano? The band are doing it. Come on, you can all do this. I believe in you. Where's the piano? Where's the keyboard? Here. You can see there is this lovely keyboard.

[8:17] Phil was playing it earlier. When I ask you where it is, you see it, you can point to it. But if I ask you where's God, well, there's nowhere for us to point to. You know, God is invisible.

Now, there were some special occasions when God made himself visible. He appeared in a pillar of cloud and fire to the Israelites on their way out of Egypt. But in Solomon's day, there was no specific place where they could see God.

But God wanted to be close to his people. So he promised to dwell specially in this temple that Solomon built. The glory cloud filled this temple.

There was a visible moment when all of Israel could see that God has moved in to the temple. And he did it. God moved in so that Israel could speak to him whenever they wanted.

So they could know exactly where to find him. If Israel wanted to speak to God, well, boy, there's a big old temple that's going to help us find him. So that means, right, if we're trying to figure out, well, what is the temple doing?

[9:22] Solomon goes on to say that this temple, it's amazing, but it's never going to contain God. God cannot fit. The heavens cannot fit God in this temple.

So what's going on here, right? I think the temple is a little bit like a landline telephone. I bought this on Amazon. I thought it was going to be bigger.

But it's a landline telephone, right? The thing about landlines is they are stuck in one place. I have not plugged it in because that would kind of be a waste of time because we're not using it as a phone.

But here we go. The landline telephone, you put it in one place in your house, and that is the only place you can use your phone. If I want to call someone on my landline, I need to go to the landline. I need to pick up the other number, and that's how I can speak to someone. The temple is a little bit like that because if Israel wanted to speak to God, they had to go to their big landline. The landline phone gives us direct access to speak to people.

[10:20] The temple gives Israel direct access to speak to God. But they had to stay close to him and obey him. That was the promise he made. He would always be there to talk to them if they stayed close to him.

What that means is if you ask an Israelite in Solomon's time, well, where is God? They would point to their landline and say, he's in the temple. He promised that he would specially dwell there forever. In verse 28, Solomon prays that God would hear his people, that God would keep his promise in that temple, and that he would watch over his chosen people.

And because Solomon knew that God is a one-of-a-kind promise keeper, Solomon could be confident that their prayers were going to be heard. Now, for us today, the big question is, do we need a landline?

Do we still need to go to a specific place to hear God? Is that why we come to church? Is God specifically in this building like he was in the temple? Well, the answer is no.

We have a much better way to talk to God. And that's pretty helpful because there isn't a physical temple anymore. The one in Jerusalem was destroyed. Thankfully, we don't need one.

[11:31] In John chapter 2, Jesus says, his body is the temple. What that means is, instead of needing to find this brick and mortar building in Jerusalem, we can go through Jesus.

Rather than being stuck in one place like a landline, Jesus could move about, speak to people a little bit more like a mobile phone. Wherever God's people were, they could speak to Jesus.

Wherever we are, we can pray to God because Jesus died, rose again, and now sits with God in heaven. He promised us in John chapters 15 and 16 that he would send his helper, the Holy Spirit, to dwell in our hearts.

That he would never leave us and be with us forever, helping us as we live for him. So rather than needing to go and find God to speak to him, we have God living in our hearts always, wherever we are.

You could be in the furthest away reaches, the middle of the Amazon, the middle of the Antarctic, and no matter what your phone signal is, we can speak to God.

[12:43] Solomon and Israel, they needed to look to the landline because that's where God dwelled for them. But we have something so much bigger and better. Wherever we are, we have Jesus. And be confident that because we have Jesus, God hears our prayers.

It is a great privilege to pray, isn't it? Doesn't this fact mean that we have a God close to us, always hearing us make you want to pray more? We can speak to the God who made us, who made Everest, who made the forests, who made the deepest oceans.

He wants to hear what we have to say. Later, we're going to pray all together. We're going to have somebody lead us in prayers. Because it's such a wonderful thing to get to do. But just now, we're going to sing a song about how God keeps all of his promises.

And it is an absolute brilliant song. So please do stand and the band will lead us. Thank you so much. Thank you.

Oh God, he always keeps his promises. He said the sons of Abraham could be more than the queens of sin.

[14:11] And so his family grew underneath the Pharaoh's roof. Oh God, he always keeps his promises.

He set the blood upon the door, keeping Israel secure. So he stayed his hand and led them to the promised land.

Our God is good and true. He cannot lie to me and you. We can be sure of this.

God always keeps his promises. Oh God, he always keeps his promises.

He gave us laws to be open. We broke everyone he made, but when we ran from him, God said he'd take care of our sin.

[15:24] Our God is good and true. He cannot lie to me and you. We can be sure of this.

God always keeps his promises. Oh God, he always keeps his promises.

He said the son would set us free. Through his death at Calvary, he suffered in our flames. And then he rose up from the grave.

Our God is good and true. He cannot lie to me and you. We can be sure of this.

God always keeps his promises. Our God is good and true. He cannot lie to me and you.

[16:34] We can be sure of this. God always keeps his promises. God always keeps his promises.

Fantastic. Do sit down there. So we've asked two big questions so far. We've learned that Solomon is praying to the God of Israel, who is the one-of-a-kind promise keeper.

And we've seen that God has promised Solomon and his people that he will dwell in the temple specially. He will be there certain if they want to speak to him. But for us, we have even greater access in Jesus.

I'm going to invite Kay up, who's going to read the second part of our reading for this morning. And as Kay reads it out, especially the first section, I want you all to be listening carefully to hear where Israel are praying from and where they're praying to.

So go on, Kay. Take it away. Thank you. Our second reading today picks up later in Solomon's prayer.

[17:45] We will read 1 Kings chapter 8, verses 35 to 40, and then verses 52 to 61, still in the International Children's Bible Translation, which is on page 345 in the Pew Bible.

So 1 Kings chapter 8, beginning at verse 35. Sometimes when they sin against you, you will stop the rain from falling on their land.

Then they will pray facing this place. They will praise you. They will stop sinning when you make them suffer. When this happens, please hear their prayer in heaven.

Then forgive the sins of your servant, and forgive the sins of the people of Israel. Teach them to do what is right. Then please send rain to this land you gave them.

At times the land will become so dry that no food will grow, or a great sickness will spread among the people. Sometimes all the crops will be destroyed by locusts or grasshoppers.

[18:57] Your people will be attacked in their cities by their enemies. Your people will become sick. When any of these things happen, the people will become truly sorry.

If any one of your people Israel spreads his hands in prayer towards this temple, please hear his prayer. Hear it from your home in heaven.

Then forgive the people and help them. Only you know what people are really thinking, so judge each person and do to him what is right. Do this so your people will respect you all the time they live in the land.

This is the land you gave to our ancestors. We're now jumping to verse 52. Please give your attention to my prayers, and please give your attention to the prayers of your people Israel.

Listen to their prayers any time they ask you for help. You chose them from all the nations on earth to be your very own people. This is what you promised through Moses, your servant.

[20:03] You promised it when you brought our ancestors out of Egypt, Lord God. Solomon prayed this prayer to the Lord. He had been kneeling in front of the altar, and his arms had been raised toward heaven.

When Solomon finished praying, he stood up. Then, in a loud voice, he blessed all the people of Israel. Solomon said, Praise the Lord.

He promised he would give rest to his people Israel, and he has given us rest. The Lord has kept all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses.

I ask that the Lord our God be with us. May he be with us as he was with our ancestors. May he never leave us. May he cause us to turn to him and follow him.

May we obey all the laws and commands he gave our ancestors. I ask that the Lord our God always remember this prayer. I pray that he will help his servant and his people Israel.

[21:07] I pray he will help us every day as we need it. Then all the people of the world will know the Lord is the only true God. So you must fully obey the Lord our God.

You must follow all his laws and commands. You must continue to obey in the future as you do now. Thanks, Kay.

So our next big question is, what should we pray to God? What should we say to God? What should our prayers look like? You might have noticed that in that reading, the first half of that reading, there were a few repeated phrases.

And if you glance through verses 31 to 50 of this passage, you'd notice that there were seven little situations that Solomon prays about. Each of these situations are possible things that might cause Israel to need to pray to God.

Now, the interesting thing is, all seven of these things are going to happen to Israel and the rest of 1 and 2 Kings, right? So you can maybe go home and read through it, see where that happens.

[22:14] What does God do? How does God respond? But what Solomon's doing in this prayer is modeling how we should pray to God when things go wrong in our life. We're going to just look at one of these situations, right?

We're going to look at verses 35 and 36. So here you go. This is the little section. And I'm just going to highlight what the repeating phrases are that you'll be able to notice in all seven sections.

So first off, in our highlighted yellow, we have the thing that's gone wrong. The people have sinned against God and there's a big drought. Now, a drought is where there's no rain for a very long time and where there's no rain, there's no food.

And where there's no food, there's, well, a lot of problems. Drought is one of the consequences of Israel's sin that God mentioned way back when he made the promise to Moses in Deuteronomy 28. We know that when we do wrong things, we have to face up to the consequences. If you're in school and you hurt someone, you're going to face the consequences. You might lose some of your lunch break, you might get detention or lose golden time.

[23:21] Well, for Israel, drought is one of those consequences. One of the things God said was going to happen if they did not live for him, if they sinned against him. So in every one of these seven sections, you get the situation, the problem.

And then you get how Israel should respond. So the next one, please, Grace. There we go. What should Israel do? Well, then they will pray, facing this place, meaning the temple.

And they will praise you. Israel, when they realize they're sinning, are to turn back to God. And in this case, it means like literally turn back to God.

We often talk about repentance as turning back to God. And for us, it's a heart posture. For Israel, it meant they literally had to turn back and face the temple. They had to face their landline to show they were trusting in God and God alone.

But notice how it's, so often it says, hear us from your home in heaven. Where's that? Is that the next bit? Yeah, if you do the next highlight, please, Grace. There you go. When this happens, please hear them in heaven.

[24:27] Hear them from your home in heaven, God. He's in the temple. He's directing towards the temple because he's promised to be there. But God is so much bigger. He will hear them wherever they are.

So the next part of our prayer is, well, sorry, so go back, go back, go back. Don't worry, there you go. There's three bits of this prayer that if we wanted to imitate Solomon, there's three things here. We're gonna pray that God would hear our prayer, hear us from heaven, forgive us from turning away from you and teach us to do what is right.

That's what Solomon says. Hear us, forgive us, help us. That's the pattern of Solomon's prayers. That's what Israel needs to do. Whenever they realize they've turned from God, they're to say, hear us, forgive us, help us.

Help us. And it's interesting. As you work through these seven little stories, you might notice that Israel actually get further and further away from God.

They physically are moved further away. If you go to the next slide now, Grace, that'd be really helpful. So here are all the location markers of where they're to turn when they're turning back to God. And you'll notice that they kind of get further away.

[25:40] So verse 31, we're gonna, the landline is our temple, isn't it? So we're gonna imitate. The first one, they're to go to the altar. The altar is inside the temple. So when they sin, they're to go in the temple.

Then you get, when they sin and lose their names, they'll pray in the temple. So maybe not as close as in the altar, but they'll be in the building, praying to God, hear us, forgive us, help us.

Then things get a bit worse. They keep sinning. The drought happens. Then they're to pray facing the temple. So they're right further away. They're not in the temple anymore. They've sinned.

They're further away from God. But they're to turn to God and pray in the temple. Then verse 38, they're to spread their hands towards the temple. That implies they're even further away. They're to direct themselves in the direction.

Then verse 44, if they're fighting God's enemies, they're to face the city. And in verse 48, where the worst thing happens, where they've been exiled from their promised lands, they're to face the country that they used to live in.

[26:41] So see how they get further away. The worse the sin gets, the further away they are from God. But no matter what, they can turn back towards the temple. Whether they're in the temple, in the city, in the country, or in a foreign country.

The worse that God's people treat God, the further away they end up from his presence. Literally, in the case of Israel. And yet, no matter how far away they are, God has promised them, if they turn back to him, he will hear their prayer from his home in heaven.

He will forgive their sins and he will help them to live for him. So Israel had this amazing connection through the physical temple. But if that temple is like a landline, we have a mobile phone.

We have Jesus. It doesn't matter where we are. We can always speak to God through Jesus. It might feel like we are too far away from God.

It can sometimes seem like when we're living life and we realize that we've not lived it God's way, that we've taken ourselves miles away from where God is. We don't feel his presence.

[27:51] Life just isn't going the way we thought it would when we trusted God. When we see just how sinful we are, we can sometimes feel like God would never want us near him again.

Like Israel, it feels like we're in a completely different country. We've been exiled from his presence and we have no hope. And so rather than turning towards God, we think, I'm just, I'm so awful, I'm going to keep going away from him.

I'm going to put distance between us. The best thing we can do if we feel like that is not to hide from God. It's not to move ourselves further away.

The best thing we can do is turn back to God and say, God, help me. Hear my prayer. Forgive my sins. Help me to live for you. When Israel wanted to speak to God, they would turn to the temple and say, God, we trust your promises.

So please hear us. For us today, we don't have to look to a temple in a faraway country. We don't have to pray in a specific direction.

[29:02] We just get to close our eyes and pray in Jesus' name. Because when we pray in Jesus' name, we are holding fast to the promises he's given us, that he's died for us, forgiven our sins, and given us immediate access to God.

God. We are trusting the promise that we are forgiven and in God's presence, that the Spirit is within us. We can do that wherever we are.

However far away you feel, God is there waiting to hear your prayers, waiting to forgive you, and waiting to help you. So our last question is this.

How does God answer that prayer? If we look at the last little section, Solomon's praying in verse 51 to 53. He ends at how he begins it, by focusing on the promises God has already kept.

He's rescued them from Egypt. He's made Israel his chosen people, and now he's given them rest with the temple. And because God has kept his promises so far, he trusts that he will keep them going forwards.

[30:14] Because that's what God does. He is a one-of-a-kind promise keeper. It's easy for us to think, well, yeah, sure. He kept it for Israel. He keeps it for other people.

But I have sinned more. I am worse. No one knows what I'm like in sight. I am probably the first Christian that God will reject and not keep his promise to. Because I feel so dirty in sight.

He won't. God is a bigger promise keeper than you are a promise breaker. He will not break his promise to forgive you and to draw you close, to help you and teach you.

We have one better than a physical temple in Israel. We have a person who has taken our sins away from us, who has died for us.

We have established facts that we can rely on. It doesn't matter how you feel or where you are. We can look to the cross of Christ and trust what he has done for us and that he's risen to make way for us to keep living God's way.

[31:26] Maybe you're still unsure. Well, I found these words by a guy called Peter Adam, an Australian who wrote a book called Prayerfulness that many of us in church have read. He said these words about how God answers this prayer.

It will come up on the screen. Peter Adam says this, God loves you before you repent and he loves you when you repent. And though we may grow tired of confessing our sins, especially when we confess the same sin again and again, God is never tired of forgiving us.

Please forgive me is a prayer that God always answers with a yes, immediately, absolutely, and cheerfully. So if we pray like Solomon has modeled, Lord, hear my prayer, forgive my sins, help me live for you, God will always look upon you with a smile on his face and say, yes, I hear you, I forgive you, I will help you.

We don't have to be like Israel, running from God, hiding from God, in a different country from God. we can trust that he's with us now, always, forever. And there's nothing we can do to change that. Praise God. Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you that we don't have to look to a specific place. Lord, thank you that you are so big, you are bigger than the heavens and the earth, nothing can contain you.

[33:00] And yet you have still chosen to dwell in our hearts by your Holy Spirit. Lord, help us to trust your promises, knowing that you have kept every promise you've made and nothing will change that.

Lord, we pray now that you would hear our prayer, forgive our sins and help us to live for you. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.