

The Most Important Building in the History of the World_1 Kings 5:1-8:21

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[0:00] Our first Bible reading is from 1 Kings chapter 6 and can be found on page 340 of the church! We will be beginning at verse 1. 1 Kings chapter 6 beginning at verse 1.

! In the 480th year after the Israelites came out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the Lord. The temple that King Solomon built for the Lord was 60 cubits long, 20 wide, and 30 high. The portico at the front of the main hall of the temple extended the width of the temple, that is 20 cubits, and projected 10 cubits from the front of the temple. He made narrow windows high up in the temple walls. Against the walls of the main hall and inner sanctuary, he built a structure around the building in which there were side rooms. The lowest floor was five cubits wide, the middle floor six cubits, and the third floor seven. He made offset ledges around the outside of the temple so that nothing would be inserted into the temple walls. In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel, or any iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built. We'll now skip ahead to verse 11. The word of the Lord came to Solomon. As for the temple you are building, if you follow my decrees, observe my laws, and keep all my commandments and obey them, I will fulfill through you the promise I gave to David your father, and I will live among the Israelites and will not abandon my people Israel. So Solomon built the temple and completed it. He lined its interior walls with cedar boards, paneling them from the floor of the temple to the ceiling, and covered the floor of the temple with planks of juniper. He partitioned off 20 cubits at the rear of the temple with cedar boards from floor to ceiling to form within the temple an inner sanctuary, the most holy place. The main hall in front of this room was 40 cubits long. The inside of the temple was cedar, carved with gourds and open flowers. Everything was cedar. No stone was to be seen. He prepared the inner sanctuary within the temple to set the ark of the covenant of the Lord there. The inner sanctuary was 20 cubits long, 20 wide, and 20 high. He overlaid the inside with pure gold, and he also overlaid the altar of cedar. Solomon covered the inside of the temple with pure gold, and he extended gold chains across the front of the inner sanctuary, which was overlaid with gold. So he overlaid the whole interior with gold.

He also overlaid with gold the altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. The reading is 1 Kings chapter 8, beginning at verse 1, on page 344.

[3:47] 1 Kings chapter 8, verse 1. Then King Solomon summoned into his presence at Jerusalem the elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families, to bring up the ark of the Lord's covenant from Zion, the city of David. All the Israelites came together to King Solomon at the time of the festival in the month of Ephraim, the seventh month. When all the elders of Israel had arrived, the priests took up the ark, and they brought up the ark of the Lord, and the tent of meeting, and all the sacred furnishings in it. The priests and Levites carried them up, and King Solomon and the entire assembly of Israel that had gathered about him were before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and cattle that they could not be recorded or counted. The priests then brought the ark of the Lord's covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the most holy place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim.

The cherubim spread their wings over the place of the ark, and overshadowed the ark and its carrying poles. These poles were so long that their ends could be seen from the holy place in front

of the inner sanctuary, but not from outside the holy place, and they are still there today. There was nothing in the ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt. When the priests withdrew from the holy place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple. Then Solomon said, The Lord has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud.

I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever. While the whole assembly of Israel was standing there, the king turned around and blessed them.

Then he said, Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who with his own hand has fulfilled what he promised with his own mouth to my father David. For he said, Since the day I brought my people Israel out of Egypt, I have not chosen a city in any tribe of Israel to have a temple built so that my name might be there, but I have chosen David to rule my people Israel. My father David had it in his heart to build a temple for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. But the Lord said to my father David, You did well to have it in your heart to build a temple for my name. Nevertheless, you are not the one to build the temple, but your son, your own flesh and blood. He is the one who will build the temple for my name.

The Lord has kept the promise he made. I have succeeded David my father, and now I sit on the throne of Israel just as the Lord promised. And I have built the temple for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. I have provided a place therefore the ark in which the covenant of the Lord that he has made with our ancestors when he brought them out of Egypt. This is the word of the Lord.

[7:32] Thanks, Innes, for reading those passages. And we have a huge chunk of One Kings before us this morning.

So let's bow our heads and pray to God for his help. Holy Spirit, living breath of God, speak into our souls. Cause your word to come alive in us.

Grant us faith to see what you would reveal to us. And we ask, living God, that you would reveal something of your majesty, something of your glory to us today. For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, every building tells a story. Every building tells a story. Some buildings tell the stories of the architects who designed them. Other buildings tell the stories of those who lived in them.

The most interesting buildings tell layers of story. And you could say that the building we're looking at today, you could say it tells the story of the whole Bible. Because from beginning to end, the Bible is the story of God building a place where he will dwell with his people. A place where heaven and earth meet. And so that raises a question for us. Is there really such a place? Is there somewhere on earth where we could honestly say, God is here? The Bible's answer, of course, is yes. So come back with me.

[9:19] 3,000 years and stand at the construction site and watch the building go up. The most important building in the history of the world. So firstly, it's a house built for God. Now the writer wants us to see just how important this moment is. So look how the story begins in chapter 6, verse 1.

Not once upon a time, but in the 480th year after the people of Israel came out of Egypt. That's oddly specific. He could have just said in the fourth year of Solomon's reign. But instead of that, he counts all the way back to the Exodus. Now he's doing that deliberately. He wants us to see that what you're about to read is the most important moment since God rescued his people from Egypt. In fact, this building only exists because God first rescued his people from slavery. Now you can hear that purpose all the way back in Exodus chapter 15, the song that they sing after they've been brought through the Red Sea. They sing, you will bring them in and plant them on the mountain, the place, Lord, you made for your dwelling. See, even back then, the destination was clear. God didn't just rescue them from slavery. He rescued them for something. He rescued them so that they might live with him. That's why this building matters so much. Now from verse 2, we get a detailed description of the temple. All those cubits, about half a meter, all those cubits can feel a little bit dry, even for a former architect. But this is the description of the most significant building ever built. And the first thing to notice is that you enter through the front, verse 2.

So the temple that King Solomon built for the Lord was 60 cubits long, 20 wide, and 30 high. The portico at the front of the main hall of the temple extended the width of the temple, that is 20 cubits, and projected 10 cubits from the front of the temple. So what you've got, those are the proportions. You've got this long, thin, narrow building with an entrance portico, a porch, basically, that draws

you in. Now there's this incredible Baroque church in Rome by Bernini, Sant'Andrea al-Criale, and the entrance reaches out like a giant pair of arms, gathering you in, giving you a great big hug. Well, Solomon's Temple is doing something similar. It invites you in.

And everything about this building draws you forward, draws you to the back of the building. But it's not just about what the building looks like. It's about how it was built.

[12:27] Now, chapter 5, which we didn't ask Innes to read for us, it tells of skilled craftsmen, costly materials, timber floated all the way down from Lebanon. This is a project of immense care, because how this building is built matters.

I once visited a chapel, and by the way, you're getting a kind of architectural tour thrown into this, Simon. But I once visited a chapel by the Swiss architect, Peter Zumthor.

Now, from the outside, it's kind of unassuming. It looks a bit like a standing stone in a field. But here's how it was made. It was amazing construction. First, they built this kind of teepee out of tree trunks, and then they set the concrete against those tree trunks.

And when the concrete had set, they set fire to the wood, and the whole building was on fire for days on end. And what's left is a hollowed, blackened interior.

The process of making the building became part of the building itself. And something similar is happening here. The writer wants us to notice how it was built.

[13:38] And in chapter 6, verse 7, we're told something quite astonishing. When the house was built, it was with stone prepared at the quarry.

So no hammer, axe, or iron was heard on site. Extraordinary. Think how noisy construction sites are. Even back then, without pneumatic drills or pile drivers.

We've heard of silent disco. I want to ask for a show of hands to see who's been to our silent disco.

You know, people dancing around in silence with their headphones on. A really strange site.

That's silent disco. This is silent construction. Just imagine being there. A building site with no noise. It's how strange that would be. Every stone shaped elsewhere, then brought to the site, ready to be placed.

This is prefabrication before prefab buildings existed. I remember visiting in Provence, the 11th century Cistercian monastery of Le Thoronet.

[14:46] And the stones there, it's an incredible building. The stones there are cut so precisely that stone sits on stone without any mortar.

Well, the temple builders for Solomon's Temple are doing something even more exacting. Every stone prepared off-site so that the house of God could rise in reverent silence.

There's another detail. Look back at verse 5. Around the temple is a side structure. A kind of lean-to wrapping around the temple.

And we're told the rooms get wider as they go up. And that sounds odd. Well, actually, it's not all that unusual. For structural reasons, the wall is often thicker at the bottom and thinner at top.

So if you live in a Victorian house, maybe that's the case for you. The walls are thicker at the bottom, thinner at top. So as the wall steps in, the rooms get wider.

[15:51] But here's the striking detail in verse 6. Because the beams, the floor beams, were not to be inserted into the temple walls. So how do you support the floors?

Well, here's where the step wall construction comes into its own. The structure is able to hold together without penetrating the walls because the beams sit on those steps.

Now, why is this important? Why do we need to know this? Because there's something that's so sacred, so set apart, so holy about this house that its integrity must not be compromised.

This isn't just clever engineering. This is theology in stone. Then verse 9 tells us, He built the temple and completed it.

Now, completed or finished is a key word in this chapter. So, God had given Solomon rest back in chapter 5, verse 4.

[16:53] And now the work is finished. Chapter 6 ends by telling us it took seven years. Right in the middle of the construction story, almost interrupting it in verse 11, God says to Solomon, Concerning this house that you are building, if you will obey my rules and keep all my

commandments and walk in them, then I will dwell with you.

So, this is never just about a building. God had promised David that your son will build a house for my name.

But now we see the promise comes with a condition. The king must walk in God's ways. The house matters. But the right kind of king matters more.

We'll come back to that. But hold on to that thought. And just imagine stepping inside this building. I think something surprising happens. Verse 15, you go in and there's wood everywhere.

There's cedar on the walls. There's juniper on the floor. And verse 18 says the wood was carved in the form of gourds, basically cucumbers and open flowers.

[18:12] Later we're told about carved palm trees and hundreds of carved pomegranates. So there's flowers, there's fruit, there's trees. It's like stepping into a botanical garden.

And perhaps the eagle-eyed among you may have noticed on your way into church this morning a poster for a Scottish Chamber Orchestra concert called The Language of Eden.

Well, Solomon's Temple got there first because this building is speaking the language of Eden. And then to just add into the mix the gold.

There's gold absolutely everywhere. Gold, gold, gold, gold, gold, gold, gold, gold. And so if you know the way that the Bible begins, your mind might start going back there because the parallels between Eden and Solomon's Temple are striking.

In Genesis chapter 2, God finishes his work of creation on the seventh day. And in 1 Kings chapter 6, we're told emphatically it is finished.

[19:21] In both cases, it's done in seven units of time. Eden is filled with gold. Solomon's Temple gleams with gold.

And of course, Eden is full of trees and fruit. And so when you discover that the Temple is a sort of a garden, its walls carved with flowers and pomegranates, and in both places, the man in the garden must obey God's law.

Suddenly you realize the Temple is deliberately echoing Eden. Garden sanctuary, a place where God will dwell with his people.

Almost like the beginning again. But as you move further in, as you go further into the Temple, you realize that there's something not quite right.

You see, the building keeps drawing you forward through the entrance into the main hall. And then at the far end, the most holy place, verse 20. The inner sanctuary was 20 cubits long, 20 wide, and 20 high.

[20:26] A perfect cube, the place of God's presence. You think to yourself, that's it. That's where I need to go. That's where I need to be.

But as you approach the inner room, you see them, verse 23. In the inner sanctuary, he made two cherubim, these guardian angels, each 10 cubits high, that's about 5 meters high, wings stretching across the room, towering cherubim.

Not cute little cherubs. Think more guard dogs than greeting cards. Standing guard over the entrance. Now, when I was younger, and here you're going to get an insight into a misspent youth, but when I was younger, there was a nightclub bouncer in Edinburgh called Anton.

Anton the Bouncer. And he was built like Hulk Hogan, even wore a bandana. And he was the bane of many a sixth former in the 1990s.

If Anton was on the door, you knew one thing. You were not getting in. No matter how good your laminated fake ID might have been, you're not getting in.

[21:42] The cherubim are like that. And what they're saying is very simple. You cannot come in. And again, we've seen this before. Back in Genesis chapter 3, when Adam and Eve are driven out of Eden, cherubim are placed at the entrance with flaming sword to guard the way back.

And from that moment on, humanity is shut out of God's presence. And so the temple is basically telling the same story. It looks like Eden again, but the door is still shut.

Sinful people simply cannot walk into the presence of the Holy God. And so the question hangs in the air. This magnificent temple has been built, but will God actually come and dwell there?

In chapter 8, we find out. So we read earlier of the ark being brought into the temple. At the center of Israel's life was a wooden box, the ark of the covenant.

Now, you might know it from Indiana Jones, but the film admittedly takes a few liberties when it comes to the ark. Inside the ark were the stones of the law, the tablets, the covenant between God and his people, the terms of their relationship.

[23:07] And now this ark is brought into the most holy place. The priests carry it on these long poles into the most holy place. And then something extraordinary happens.

So listen to chapter 8, verse 10 again. When the priests withdrew, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests couldn't perform their service because of the cloud.

For the glory of the Lord filled the temple. Now here in Glasgow, we know a thing or two about clouds, but this is something different.

This is the cloud of God's glory, the visible sign of God's presence. And we've seen it before as well. Back in the Exodus, God led his people through the wilderness by a pillar of clouds by day and a pillar of fire by night.

And later, when the tabernacle, the kind of precursor to the temple, the tent back in Exodus, when it was built, the same thing happened. A cloud came and filled it.

[24:17] And now, centuries later, Solomon finishes the building. The ark is in place and the cloud comes again. Strikingly similar language.

The building is complete and God moves in. What a day! Well, Solomon says in verse 13 of chapter 8, I have indeed built a magnificent temple, a place for you to dwell in forever.

In verse 16, he describes it as a temple so that my name might be there. Verse 19, you build the temple for my name.

Verse 20, I've built a temple for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. Again and again in this chapter, he calls it a temple for the name of the Lord. This is the moment that God had promised to David way back in 2 Samuel 7 that his son would build a house for his name, for God's name.

Now, finally, it's happened. God's presence fills the temple. God is dwelling among his people. Just imagine what that must have been like.

[25:34] Imagine arriving here this Sunday. You walk up to St. Silas and those big red doors are shut, not because the service is cancelled, but because the cloud of glory is filling the place.

No one can go in. You wouldn't be annoyed. You'd be amazed. God is here, really here, present with his people, tangibly, physically, visibly, powerfully present.

How amazing would that be? Can you imagine? You see, there's a problem because it's not safe for sinful people to dwell in the midst of a holy God.

The real issue isn't the building. It's sinful hearts. And that's why this chapter, like at the beginning of chapter 6, this chapter, chapter 8, keeps taking us back to the Exodus.

Again and again, Solomon reminds us, God brought Israel out of Egypt because the only reason Israel can live near God at all is by sheer grace.

[26:45] Once they were far from him, enslaved, helpless, that God, in his mercy, rescued them. He saw them.

He forgave them. He made them his people. And now, by grace alone, he comes to dwell among them. But as we read this, perhaps another question presses in.

What about us? Have we missed it? Are we 3,000 years too late? Wouldn't you love to have been there and to see the cloud filling the temple like that, to experience God's presence in that way?

It can feel like we've missed the moment, perhaps. But the first readers of Kings didn't feel like that because by the time this book was published and they read the book, the temple, it was already gone.

It was destroyed. The Babylonians had come and torn it down. The glory had departed. The gold long since stripped away. The building lay in ruins.

[27:59] So the people reading this story for the first time were living in exile, far from Jerusalem, far from the temple, far from home. So as they read this story, they didn't feel envy so much. They felt a sense of longing, a deep sense of hollowness.

Once we had this, once God dwelt among us, once we knew his presence, but we lost it. And so the question hanging over the whole story is this.

Is there any way back? Is there any hope that God will dwell with his people again? But what if? What if the temple was always pointing beyond itself? What if it was never the final destination at all, but merely a signpost?

What if there is a king greater than Solomon, a king who truly keeps God's law? What if that king steps into our place and bears the judgment we deserve as if a cherubim's sword falls on him so it doesn't fall on us?

[29:09] And what if that king should take you by the hand and lead you in, into the holy place, through the entrance, past the cherubim, because the sword has already fallen.

And he brings you into the presence of God. That's exactly what we have in Jesus. The one who says to the dying criminal on the cross beside him, today you will be with me in paradise.

Back in the garden, back in the presence of God. Today you'll be there. The one who cries out with his dying breath, it is finished.

The work complete, the temple finally built. The one who said to those who were about to kill him in John chapter 2, destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it again.

And he was speaking about his body because the true temple of God is not a building but a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. And it doesn't stop there because after rising from the dead he pours out his Holy Spirit so that now the New Testament can tell us something astounding.

[30:20] God does not dwell in a building of stone but in his people. Not a cloud filling a house but the presence of God in our lives. Living stones we are being built together.

People made in the image of God bought by the blood of Christ more precious to God than silver or gold. And God cares how this temple is built.

We are a holy construction site building one another up in God's words in the power of the Spirit.

And God is at work even now forming and shaping a people among whom he dwells.

Do you not realize Paul writes to the Corinthian church that you are a temple of the Holy Spirit? And even more than that as Hebrews teaches us Christ has entered the true temple the one not made by human hands and he brings us with him into the presence of God.

So this means Solomon's temple magnificent as it was was only ever a shadow a shadow of a reality that we now have in Jesus Christ a place that was once filled with a cloud of God's glory now surpassed by a people filled by the Holy Spirit.

[31:43] And one day even that will not be the end because the Bible gives us a glimpse of the future Revelation chapter 21 pictures the new creation as a perfect cube.

The only other cube in the Bible the shape of the most holy place as if to say in the end the whole world becomes the most holy place. The whole world becomes filled with the presence of God the whole creation God dwelling with his people which means this was always the plan just as Israel was rescued from Egypt to live in God's presence so we have been rescued through Christ from slavery to sin to live with him.

So let's bring this home. What if this ordinary gathering at St. Silas in an ordinary building with no gold no towering cherubim is something far more glorious than it looks.

A place where the living God Father Son and Holy Spirit dwells among his people where we can stand and sing in his presence where we can pray and he hears where we are built up in his word where we are worshipping our worshippers accepted because of the Lord Jesus Christ wouldn't that be something wouldn't that be glorious this isn't just a nice idea this is reality this is what God says is true so even as we struggle to read about all these details as we struggle to read about cubits and measurements we're not just reading ancient architecture we're seeing a shadow a shadow of the reality we now have in Christ do you realise how glorious this is and if you're here and you wouldn't yet call yourself a

Christian this is what's being offered to you the doors are open and the Lord Jesus himself invites you in why not take that step today come in and see for yourself the glory of the gospel every building tells a story the temple told the story of God dwelling with his people but in the Lord Jesus Christ that story reaches its fulfilment because now God is building something more glorious by far and he invites you to be part of that story thanks be to God and let's pray heavenly father what an

incredible truth that you have made a way to dwell among us thank you Lord Jesus that you died in our place so that in you we need not fear but can approach with confidence and enter your courts with praise and so living

[35:03] God as we come to sing in response to your word and then to share in the Lord supper together we pray that your glory would fill this place we pray that the Holy Spirit would make your presence manifest among us and may we know your presence with us as we go from here about our daily lives in the week in Jesus holy name we pray!

Amen!