

SOLOMON DEDICATES THE TEMPLE

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

2 Chronicles 7:1–20

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed down on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” (2 Chron. 7:3)

Daily Bible Readings			
M	May 5	Ezra 6:14–22	A Joyful Celebration
T	May 6	Ps. 18:1–12	God Heard Me in My Distress
W	May 7	Acts 7:2–16	God in Mesopotamia
Th	May 8	Acts 7:30–41	God in the Wilderness
F	May 9	Acts 7:42–50	God Needs No Temple
Sa	May 10	2 Chron. 6:12, 14–27	Hear Our Prayers, O God

STEPPING INTO THE WORD

Where we worship matters. There are “thin places” where the space between earth and heaven seems to collapse. These may be places of stunning natural beauty where we are confronted with how small we are compared to the vastness of creation. It could be a prayer corner where one’s spirit feels attuned to God’s Spirit. Often “thin places” are the buildings where God’s people gather for worship.

You can tell a lot about a faith community’s beliefs by the design of its worship space. Gothic cathedrals were designed to inspire awe. They gave a foretaste of the heavenly city described in the book of Revelation to congregations that consisted largely of people who lived in medieval poverty. A clapboard church on a New England village green, with clear windows and unadorned walls, focuses worshipers on the pulpit where God’s Word is read and proclaimed, testifying to the centrality of Scripture for their Puritan forebears.

Worship spaces shape our faith. They are places where we step away from what is routine and mundane and incorporate our senses into praise. But as with all the gifts God gives us, our buildings can interfere with our call to discipleship if we don’t pay attention to how we use them. A common discussion among church councils is about spending money on

building maintenance as compared to outreach. When does a building stop being a tool for ministry and become a drain on resources? Many congregations with dwindling participation struggle to discern ways to convert beloved worship spaces into additional uses that further the reign of God.

The wealth expended on Solomon's temple could have been used for other things, but worship is not a disembodied activity. It involves beauty and celebration. In worship we bring our best, both spiritual and material, to God.

Holy God, help us encounter your Spirit in the sacred spaces you give us. Amen.



SCRIPTURE

2 Chronicles 7:1-7, 11

7:1 When Solomon had ended his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. ²The priests could not enter the house of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled the LORD's house. ³When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed down on the pavement with their faces to the ground and worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."

⁴Then the king and all the people offered sacrifice before the LORD. ⁵King Solomon offered as a sacrifice twenty-two thousand oxen and one hundred twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the people dedicated the house of God. ⁶The priests stood at their posts, the Levites also, with the instruments for music to the LORD that King David had made for giving thanks to the LORD—for his steadfast love endures forever—whenever David offered praises through their playing. Opposite them the priests sounded trumpets, and all Israel stood.

⁷Solomon consecrated the middle of the court that was in front of the house of the LORD, for there he offered the burnt offerings and the fat of the offerings of well-being because the bronze altar Solomon had made could not hold the burnt offering and the grain offering and the fat parts. . . .

¹¹Thus Solomon finished the house of the LORD and the king's house; all that Solomon had planned to do in the house of the LORD and in his own house he successfully accomplished.

Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

RESPONDING TO GOD'S GLORY

Church architects give careful thought to creating spaces that enhance worshipers' encounters with God. Many congregations proudly offer brochures describing features of their sanctuary, symbolism of the stained glass, or specifications of the organ. Knowing something about the design of a church helps us recognize how the space where we gather contributes to our praise and awareness of God's Spirit among us.

Second Chronicles devotes six chapters to the design, building, and dedication of the Jerusalem temple. Such detailed description testifies to the importance of the temple to the people of ancient Israel. God showed dramatic approval of the work. After Solomon finished his prayer of dedication, God sent fire from heaven to consume the offering. The glory of the Lord filled the temple. Usually when the Bible refers to glory it means the presence of God. Sometimes it is seen in natural wonders like storms or earthquakes. Elijah experienced the glory of God in sheer silence (1 Kgs. 19:11). In Jesus, we have seen the fullness of God's glory (John 1:14). However it showed itself, "the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house." The people responded by bowing down in awe and reverence.

Priests and Levites responded to God's glory with music. Music has always been a way that people express their deepest joy and praise. Scholars believe that the oldest passage in the Bible is a song sung by Miriam after God drowned Pharaoh's army in the sea (Exod. 15:21). David was renowned for his music, as we know from reading many psalms attributed to him. The instruments David made were used in the temple dedication.

It's hard to comprehend the number of animals that Solomon sacrificed after God endorsed the temple as the place where God would encounter God's people. It is likely that the meat, as well as the grain offerings, were distributed among the people. This celebration spanned the entire country and lasted for seven days. The fellowship they shared around the table is closely associated with praising God. There is something significantly different about a meal shared compared to one eaten alone. Thankfully, we no longer sacrifice animals on an altar, but the food we bring to a church supper can be an offering of praise.



How do you experience God's glory in the place your community worships?

GOD'S ENDURING PROMISE

How many times do we find ourselves in a situation that makes no sense until much later? And how often do we rely on our understanding of what has already happened to us to understand what is happening today? The authors of 1 and 2 Chronicles were recounting the story of ancient Israel to people who were at a turning point in their history. They were interpreting what God had done in the past in order to give hope for the future.

God had entrusted David with the welfare of God's chosen nation. As long as David's descendants were faithful to God, they would rule the land and God would bless ancient Israel. The dedication of Solomon's temple was the culmination of that covenant. The temple stood as testimony to the relationship between ancient Israel and their God.


The conundrum facing the authors of Chronicles was how to explain the destruction of the temple that took place in 586 BCE. During the time that the people were exiled to Babylon, it seemed that God had abandoned Israel, yet 2 Chronicles ends with Cyrus, king of Persia, sending God's people back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

Second Chronicles 7 assures those who had returned from exile that God's promises are secure, while at the same time reminding them that a relationship with the living God is not something to be taken lightly. At the conclusion of the temple dedication, the Lord appeared to Solomon at night and assured him that the prayer he made in chapter 6 was heard. God would make the temple a place where the people could come to encounter God, receive forgiveness, and ask for blessing. But if they took God's graces for granted, if they turned away from God as they did before the exile, then God would bring destruction on them. This covenant agreement provided a theological explanation for the suffering and humiliation that Israel endured in exile.

Nevertheless, the steadfast love God showed to ancient Israel never ended from the time God chose Abraham, through the covenant with Moses, continuing with the promises to the house of David. It endured through Israel's disobedience and exile. Now, God had restored the people to Jerusalem with the promise that the temple would be rebuilt.

The temple continued to play an important role in ancient Israel's relationship with God after their exile, but the hope of

the people became more firmly grounded in the promise of the Messiah, the one whom God would send to restore the glory of Israel and make Jerusalem the place where all nations would come to worship God.

 **How does God's promise of faithfulness help you through difficult times?**

STEPPING INTO THE WORLD

There is a school of thought that says a congregation needs a capital campaign every so often. When you give to a building fund, you can literally see the concrete results. You may even be able to memorialize your gift with a plaque or your name inscribed on a roll of donors. According to this rationale, when a congregation's giving starts to sag, a building project can stir up enthusiasm.

Most church building projects have broader justification than getting the members to juice up their giving. The project may be in response to growing membership, or it could be the result of a new ministry focus like an expanded educational program or a day shelter for unhoused neighbors. Over the years, the needs that the building was designed to address may change. Many congregations are wrestling with the challenge of maintaining properties that no longer serve their current situation. They want to respect the love and sacrifice previous generations poured into the buildings, but they don't have the resources they need for repairs and maintenance.

God reminded Solomon that the temple was not an end in and of itself. Yes, God was pleased with the majestic structure. God filled it with glory and sent down fire from heaven to consume the offering. God encountered the people in that holy place not just to fill them with awe but to make a difference in the ways they lived. Their encounter with God was intended to bolster their faith and lead them to commit themselves to keeping God's statutes and commandments. If they strayed from God's ways, God would remove the blessing from the temple, and its destruction would become a testimony to the unfaithfulness of the people.

Most church buildings were constructed to enhance the congregation's witness. Perhaps it was a new sanctuary where people could "practice for heaven" with their worship and praise.

Perhaps it was a social hall where the community could gather for fellowship, or classrooms to teach young Baby Boomers. If the building no longer meets the need, we can ask God to show us how this tool can best be used now to bear witness to the reign of God. Maybe it can be reconfigured for a different purpose, or rented to a nonprofit organization that serves the community. For some churches, the best stewardship may be selling the property and redirecting the proceeds to different ministries with the presbytery or diocese. Remembering that our facilities are tools for ministry helps us be good stewards of them.

? If your congregation owns a building, how does it enhance your ministry? Are there ways that the building is interfering with your mission?

SCRIPTURE NOTES

The following notes from the Uniform Series provide additional information about today's Scripture.

1. Fire from heaven functions as God's seal of approval and the divine blessing of the Jerusalem temple as the center of Israel's worship (compare Lev. 9:23–24; 1 Chron. 21:26).
2. The glory (*kavod*) of the Lord fills the temple, even to the extent that the priests are unable to enter because of the presence of the glory of the Lord. The concept of the glory of the Lord was developed, in part, to explain God's presence in the temple while acknowledging that the fullness of God's being was not bound to a physical location.
3. As a fitting response, the Levites and priests celebrate with music. David is attributed as the source of the instruments, which coheres with the portrait of David as a musician that we see elsewhere (1 Sam. 16:14–23 and throughout the Psalms).
4. Solomon's completion of the Lord's house fulfills the prophecy outlined in 1 Kings 8:19, where the Lord assures David that his son will build a house/temple for the Lord.