



The Temple Dedicated: A House Of Prayer (1 Kings 8:22-53)

Notes: Week Five

New American Commentary¹

(3) Solomon's Dedication Prayer [8:22-53](#)

[8:22-26](#) Having encouraged the people by stressing God's past saving acts, Solomon now begins the process of asking the Lord to save Israel in the future. The whole prayer is grounded firmly in texts like [Leviticus 26](#) and [Deuteronomy 27-28](#), where Moses tells Israel that God will richly bless them for obeying the covenant but will punish severely all rebellion. This prayer takes on significance beyond its dedicatory context later in 1, 2 Kings, when it becomes a reminder of why the Lord allows the covenant nation to be defeated by Assyria and Babylon.

Solomon begins with a confession: God is unique in his unchanging faithfulness. God keeps the "covenant of love" with all who "continue wholeheartedly" in his ways. This affirmation mirrors [Deut 7:7-9](#), which focuses on the Lord's loving, gracious choice of Israel. Indeed, [Deut 7:9](#) reads, "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands." Not obligation, not legalism, nor a desire to control others for personal gain motivates God. Every miracle, saving act, or law flows from divine mercy and grace.

David's life illustrates this grace. God made him king, selecting him above all his brothers ([1 Sam 16:1-13](#)). Further, God made his son, Solomon, king in his place and allowed the temple to be built. Solomon now requests that the last part of the Davidic Covenant come to pass. He asks that their line never lose power. No doubt he could not fully conceive of an eternal kingdom, yet he knows that God can make even this promise come true.

[8:27-30](#) A crucial theological issue emerges before Solomon begins his specific petitions. If God is unique "in heaven above or on earth below" ([8:23](#)), and if "even the highest heaven cannot contain" the Lord, then Solomon correctly exclaims, "How much less this temple I have built!" Though Moses was a man "whom the LORD knew face to face" ([Deut 34:10](#)), he was not allowed to see all God's glory ([Exod 33:7-23](#)). God's magnitude would simply overwhelm a human's capacity to grasp it. Tokens of the Lord's presence, such as clouds and pillars of fire ([Exod 40:34-38](#); [1 Kgs 8:10-11](#)), appear, of course, and people cannot stay near *them*. On what basis, then, can Solomon hope that God will dwell on earth, in this temple? How will the Lord "live among the Israelites and ... not abandon" ([1 Kgs 6:13](#)) them?

Solomon's confidence in God's willingness to condescend to human level must ultimately emerge from four principles. First, he knows God has revealed himself in the past, particularly in the lives of Moses, Joshua, and David (cf. [1 Kgs 8:21-26](#)). Thus, Solomon does not pray for a brand new occurrence. Second, the king understands that the covenant described in written Scripture, in the Pentateuch, teaches that God desires a relationship with Israel as a nation and with individual Israelites (cf. [Deut 7:7-9](#); [1 Kgs 8:23](#)). He can approach God in prayer because he is the Lord's "servant" and because Israel is the Lord's people ([8:30](#)). Such assurance comes from the covenant itself.

1. Paul R. House, *New American Commentary – Volume 8: 1, 2 Kings*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1995), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 140-146.

Third, Solomon can expect God to fulfill the promise made in [Deut 12:4–11](#) to "put his Name" ([Deut 12:5](#)) in a central worship site. Fourth, he can hope for God's presence because of what he knows about God's character. Since God is loving ([1 Kgs 8:23](#)), faithful ([8:24](#)), consistent ([8:25](#)), and relational ([8:30](#)), it is reasonable to assume that he will continue to meet human beings where they live. God is lofty, holy, and mysterious, yet approachable and personal at the same time. The temple will serve as the physical symbol of these divine realities. Here the unapproachable Lord becomes approachable and ready to help those who worship, sacrifice, and pray.

8:31–32 This first specific petition focuses on the certainty of neighbor mistreating neighbor, in itself a violation of [Lev 19:18](#)—"Love your neighbor as yourself"—which Jesus calls the second great command ([Mark 12:28–34](#)). More specifically, the situation appears to be that one neighbor accuses another without any witnesses to confirm the accusation. It therefore becomes the Lord's sole responsibility to judge between the guilty and the innocent. So Solomon recognizes that the Lord, the heavenly King, must decide cases that he, the earthly king, cannot possibly solve. This is quite an admission from the man who settled the prostitute case in [1 Kgs 3:16–28](#)!

8:33–34 According to [Lev 26:17](#) and [Deut 28:25](#), one of the ways God will punish Israel is by allowing their enemies to defeat them. Israel's defeat by lowly Ai ([Josh 7:1–11](#)), constant losses in Judges, and humiliation at the hand of Philistia ([1 Sam 4:1–11](#)) illustrate this principle. Solomon knows both the teachings in the Pentateuch and the people's not-so-glorious past.

He understands that such national defeats are the result of rebellion against the covenant God. Solomon also knows that Moses teaches that military losses can either serve as warnings that remove pride and stubbornness ([Lev 26:18–19](#)) or as catastrophic defeats that lead to loss of land ([1 Kgs 8:34](#); [Lev 26:33](#); [Deut 28:36–37](#)). Deportation and exile were a fact in ancient military life. How Israel understands God's perspective on history will determine their response to their situation.

All Solomon can pray for is that the people will come to their senses after such catastrophes. He hopes they will "turn back," or repent, and "confess" their allegiance to their Lord. Such repentance and acknowledgment of God's lordship must come through prayer. The logical central place for these prayers is the temple. Surely the God whose character is so eloquently described in [8:14–30](#) will forgive the chosen people and restore them to the promised land.

8:35–36 Having concluded the last petition with a reference to the land God "gave to their fathers" ([8:34](#)), Solomon prays for the land itself. Reflecting on Moses' warning that national disobedience will force the Lord to "make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze" ([Lev 26:19](#); cf. [Deut 28:23](#)), Solomon prays for drought relief. As with the defeats in [8:33–34](#), the droughts he mentions are not normal, uncaused events. Rather, they are direct natural punishment from the Creator of heaven and earth for the people's rebellion.

Once Israel turns from its sin, forgiveness will come in the form of rain. Solomon hopes that such obvious correlation between human prayer and divine response will "teach them the right way to live." Thus, punishment will have a positive, not negative, function. God corrects in order to effect needed changes, not to vent personal anger. Throughout his prayer Solomon balances a sense of realism about sin and his desire that sin and the punishment that necessarily follows it never be the final word in Israel. As G. McConville notes, Solomon's basis for such cautious optimism probably derives from texts like [Deut 30:1–10](#), where Moses soberly warns the Israelites of that era about the harsh facts of punishment for sin. Solomon does hope, then, and his hope is founded on God's Word; but that hope is not wishful thinking or giddy optimism spawned by the excitement of the moment. Rather, it is the real hope that comes from applying the realistic word of a realistic God. Anything else is not true hope.

[8:37–40](#) Solomon continues the land motif in this fourth petition, yet he also includes the significant notion of individual forgiveness. Until now he has stressed humanly unresolvable cases ([8:31–32](#)) and national sin and correction ([8:33–36](#)). Here he again notes the many ills that can afflict the land, such as famine, plague, blight, mildew, insects, and enemies. Each of these could occur because of national sin, as has already been stated.

Unlike [8:33](#), [35](#), which emphasizes corporate repentance, this passage recognizes the importance of the prayers of every individual worshiper. Solomon asks God that "any of your people Israel," that is, anyone "aware of the afflictions of his own heart," may turn back the devastations [8:38](#) describes. The prayers of individuals matter in the Old Testament. Abraham's prayers save Lot's life ([Gen 18:22–33](#); [19:29](#)). Moses successfully intercedes on Israel's behalf after the golden calf incident in [Exodus 32–34](#). Elijah will stop a drought later in 1 Kings. In each of these cases the individual not only represents himself but humanity and all of Israel as well. The king hopes that such persons will always be heard.

As in [8:36](#), Solomon aims at an ongoing positive result. God's response to an individual prayer for the corporate body proves that God, and God alone, knows "the hearts of all men." Once this truth is understood, Solomon prays, Israel "will fear you all the time they live in the land you gave our fathers." Fear, or respect, will lead to obedience, love, and service ([Deut 10:12](#)). This basic attitude of worship should in turn guard against future rebellion.

[8:41–43](#) During this great moment of national significance it would be easy for Solomon to pray only for *his* people. Instead, he prays "for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel," for those who will be drawn to Jerusalem because of the Lord's fame. Perhaps he recalls that non-Israelites like Rahab and Ruth, both of whom accepted the Lord as their God ([Josh 2:11](#); [Ruth 1:16](#)), are his grandmothers. Maybe Jethro ([Exod 18:1–12](#)) or even Hiram affect his thinking.

Regardless of his personal motivation, Solomon knows that all nations need to know the Lord and that Israel must mediate this knowledge. Indeed, God envisioned this role for Israel when promising Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him ([Gen 12:2–3](#)). Knowledge of God includes grasping God's character and standards. This knowledge will lead to proper worship based on a healthy fear of the Lord. Therefore any lack of this active knowledge is dangerous, for it separates people of all nations from God (cf. [Hos 4:1–3](#); [Amos 8:11–12](#)). Rather than contributing to this disaster, Solomon prays that Israel and its temple will teach the nations God's will.

[8:44–45](#) The sixth petition is for the success of Israel's armies. Why should God "uphold their cause"? Because they are God's people praying toward God's city and God's temple. Apparently Solomon restricts his prayer to when Israel's cause is God's cause, as it was during the conquest of Canaan.

[8:46–51](#) For his last petition Solomon returns to an idea he mentions in [8:34](#). Again he recalls the ultimate punishment God may use against Israel—expulsion from the very land that the Lord has given the chosen people as a major proof of their favored status (cf. [Lev 26:27–35](#); [Deut 28:36–37](#), [49–68](#)). Again he asks that God forgive their sin and return them to the land if they recognize their errors and repent.

Besides its original significance as a warning to his own people, Solomon's prayer takes on particular importance for the author's audience. Remember that 1, 2 Kings was written for people who had lost the land in the very manner Solomon describes. For them, then, this seventh petition acts as a call to repentance and a program for prayer. It teaches the readers how to restore their relationship with God. At the same time, it provides hope that exile is not God's final word for Israel. The chosen people can return to the promised land when they return to the covenant Lord who gave them the land. In this way Solomon's prayer redeems the time for the book's original, hurting audience.

[8:52–53](#) Solomon's prayer concludes as it began, with hope for the present and future based on the Lord's past covenant loyalty to Israel. He asks that the Lord pay the utmost attention to his requests. Why? Solely because God "singled them out from all the nations of the world," then sealed the relationship through Moses' teachings and the exodus itself. Clearly, Solomon believes that Israel's past is a monument to God's grace, and any future benefits the people will receive must also come from their merciful Lord.

Understanding the Bible Commentary Series²

13. Solomon's Prayer ([1 Kgs. 8:22-53](#))

Solomon now turns to address God in a prayer that is of great importance for our understanding of the book of Kings as a whole. After further attention to the link between temple-building and Davidic promise ([vv. 22-26](#)), he offers us significant reflections on the nature of God's "dwelling" in the temple ([vv. 27-30](#); cf. [v. 13](#)), followed by a seven-fold petitionary prayer about the response of God to those who will approach through this new medium ([vv. 31-51](#)), and a brief summarizing tailpiece ([vv. 52-53](#)).

[8:22-26](#) / The main concern of the first part of the prayer is to pick up the third part of the divine promise to David that has already been alluded to in [verses 15-21](#): the promise of an eternal dynasty. The incomparable God (**there is no God like you**; cf. [Exod. 15:11](#)) has thus far kept covenant with David ([vv. 23-24](#)), and Solomon asks that God would now fulfill the promise about the dynasty: **You shall never fail to have a man to sit before me on the throne of Israel**. We last came across this promise, with its conditional form, in [1 Kings 2:4](#), and we noted there the curious way in which its terms do not, in fact, match up with the terms as described in [2 Samuel 7:11-16](#). By this point in the story the reader has had several hints that Solomon himself sits on the throne by grace and not because he has continued **wholeheartedly** in God's way ([v. 23](#); cf. [3:1-3](#); [4:26](#); [6:38-7:1](#)). The repetition in [8:25](#), then, of the Davidic promise as phrased in [1 Kings 2:4](#), serves only to heighten the tension between its conditional and unconditional aspects that we first noted in [2:4](#). The basis upon which God deals with the Davidic dynasty seems at one level clear enough, and God will emphasize the importance of obedience in [9:3-9](#). Yet God's graciousness is as incomparable as any of God's other attributes. Thus, we shall hear in passages such as [2 Kings 8:19](#) of the Davidic promise *delaying* God's judgment and in this prayer ([vv. 31-51](#)) of the possibility of forgiveness *after* judgment. God's choices are always in the end more important than the choices made by mere mortals, in all their frailty and sinfulness.

[8:27-30](#) / Having completed the line of thought begun in [8:15](#), Solomon now turns his attention to the temple's broader significance as a focal point for prayer. [Verses 27-30](#) help us with the transition in thought, in advance of the petitions that the king will make in [verses 31-51](#), each with their plea that God should "hear from heaven" ([vv. 8:32, 34, 36, 39, 43, 45, 49](#)). The main purpose of [8:27-30](#), indeed, is to emphasize that this *is* (if anywhere is) the "place" from which God hears. God cannot **dwell** on earth ([v. 27](#)). The temple—in spite of the statement of [verse 13](#)—is not to be thought of as a place where *God* is but only as a place where God's *Name* is, a place towards which God's **eyes** are **open** ([v. 29](#); cf. [Isa. 66:1-3](#)). The hearing of prayer is done **from heaven** ([v. 30](#)). This is (if anywhere is) the **dwelling place** of God. Even then, however, God cannot, strictly speaking, dwell in **even the highest heaven** ([v. 27](#)). Being utterly transcendent, God cannot be "placed" at all; all human language about **dwelling** must be qualified constantly, so that attempts to describe do not in fact minimize. One consequence of divine transcendence, of course, is that people do not have to be in one designated place in order to pray. As God's eyes are open **toward** the temple rather than *in* it ([v. 29](#)), it is sufficient for people to pray **toward** the temple rather than be physically in it ([vv. 29-30](#); cf. [John 4:21-24](#)).

2. Iain W. Provan, *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series – 1 & 2 Kings*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "13. Solomon's Prayer (1 Kgs. 8:22-53)".

8:31-51 / With these explanatory words about God, temple, and prayer ringing in our ears, we come to the seven specific petitions. The first ([vv. 31-32](#)) concerns a legal case where difficulties over evidence or witnesses make resolution in any normal way impossible (cf. [1 Kgs. 3:16-28](#)). A priestly ritual is in view (cf. [Num. 5:11-31](#)); God is invoked as a judge to condemn the **guilty** and clear the **innocent** individual.

The second, third, and fourth petitions concern various disasters that might befall the people of Israel more generally: defeat in battle and subsequent exile from the **land** ([vv. 33-34](#)); drought ([vv. 35-36](#)); and assorted perils such as **famine, plague, and siege** ([vv. 37-40](#)). In each case the cause of the problem is sin, and the main requirement of the situation is forgiveness, although divine instruction is also requested ([v. 36](#)).

From the Israelites we move next ([vv. 41-43](#)), to the foreigner who has heard of the LORD's **great name ... mighty hand ... outstretched arm** ([Deut. 4:34; 5:15](#)) and prays towards the temple. Solomon is concerned that this person, too, would know answered prayer and that **all the peoples of the earth** would **know God's name and fear him** (cf. [Isa. 2:1-4; 56:6-8; Luke 7:1-10](#)). The sixth petition ([vv. 44-45](#)) is, like the second, concerned with war. However, this time the focus is not upon defeat as a result of sin but upon victory in God's cause (**wherever you send them, v. 44**)—the army fighting as the executive arm of God's justice on the earth. The seventh petition ([vv. 46-51](#)) returns to the question of defeat and exile. Its length, and the fact that it returns to a topic already dealt with, identifies this as the major concern of the prayer. If exile should take place, and if the people should **repent** and pray towards **land, city, and temple** ([vv. 47-48](#); cf. [Dan. 6:10](#) for the practice), then God is asked to regard them once more as God's people and **uphold their cause** ([v. 49](#), cf. [v. 45](#)). They are, after all, the LORD's **inheritance** ([vv. 51](#)), the people **brought out of Egypt, out of that iron-smelting furnace** ([vv. 51](#); cf. [Deut. 4:20](#)). Surely a second Exodus, from a different land, is not beyond the bounds of possibility!

What is striking about these seven petitions is how different they are in atmosphere from the first part of the prayer in [verses 23-26](#). There the stress was upon the necessity of obedience. Here, however, human disobedience is simply presupposed (esp. in [v. 46](#): **there is no one who does not sin**), and the prayer moves beyond God's judgment to dependence upon divine forgiveness and grace. It does so hinting that it is God's choices, and not Israel's, that are the crucial element in the God-Israel relationship. The **land** is the land given to the **fathers** (i.e., the patriarchs, [vv. 8:34, 40](#)), the land given as an **inheritance** ([v. 36](#); cf. [Deut. 4:37-38](#))—statements that remind us, like the case of the foreign worshiper in [verses 41-43](#), of the divine promise to Abraham in [Genesis 12:1-3; 17:1-8](#). The **people ... brought out of Egypt** are Abraham's descendants, delivered from oppression not because of their ability to keep the law but simply because of the promise.

8:52-53 / It is to this question of gracious election that Solomon returns as he brings his prayer to a close, again emphasizing the choice of Israel as the LORD's **inheritance**, the people **brought ... out of Egypt**. The repetition simply underlines the reality of the way in which grace always underpins law and provides it with its broader context.

Solomon's prayer is of the utmost importance, for it places both the temple and the law in wider perspective. The temple is an important building, to be sure. For much of the remainder of Kings it will play a central role in Israel's story, as bad kings corrupt its worship and good kings seek to reform it. But God, who is not confined by a building and who is certainly not dependent upon it, will survive even its destruction and hear the people's prayers in exile. Likewise, obedience to the law is very important. In Kings, monarchs are judged good or bad in terms of their adherence to the law, particularly on matters of worship. Yet Solomon holds out hope for restoration beyond failure, for he holds out hope that grace will have the last word. It is a prayer upon which we shall have cause to reflect further before the story is finished.

Additional Notes

8:33 / Defeated by an enemy: It seems certain that the woes in Solomon's seven petitions have been chosen because they appear in the list of covenant curses for disobedience in [Deut. 28:15-68](#) (cf. esp. [28:21-25](#), [36-37](#)). Our Kgs. passage looks for a removal of these curses after repentance. What is particularly striking, however, is the way in which [1 Kgs. 8:46-53](#) quite consciously uses the language and ideas of [Deut. 29:17-27](#) to evoke this idea of reversal of fortunes in the case of exile in particular. See further J. G. McConville, "[1 Kings 8:46-53](#) and the Deuteronomic Hope," *VT* 42 (1992), pp. 67-79, although his assertion that the Kgs. passage and [Deut. 30:1-10](#) differ in their view of Israel's future must surely be modified if [1 Kgs. 8:33-34](#) and [46-53](#) are read as part of the same text. [First Kings 8:34](#) is quite explicit about Israel's restoration to the land.