

Lesson 11 | August 13, 2023

Dedicating the Temple

Study Text: 2 Chronicles 6:1 through 7:22

Central Truth: We must desire, prepare for, and make room for the presence of God in our lives.

Key Verse: 2 Chronicles 6:18

Will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built (KJV).

“Will God really live on earth among people? Why, even the highest heavens cannot contain you. How much less this Temple I have built” (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will note how the presence of God can help us better understand experiencing His presence.
- Students will seek to develop a deeper sense of reverence in His presence.
- Students will understand the significance of being the temple of God and respond with a renewed commitment to obedience.

Introducing the Study

Say: There are few realities in the Christian life that bring us more hope and peace in turmoil than the knowledge that the God of the universe wants to dwell with us.

Opening Activity—What Is Your “Happy Place”?

Ask. People often use the expression *happy place* to describe somewhere they go or something they do when they feel overwhelmed or troubled by life. What are some places you might go or things you might do to divert your attention from the cares of life? Examples include hobbies, taking a walk in a familiar place, and spending time with family. Certainly, we can also think of spiritual pursuits such as prayer and praise.

Say: Life can be overwhelming at times. Amid the worst of circumstances, however, believers have a hope and refuge unique to Christianity. We find rest in the presence of God. This reality didn't begin in the New Testament. God has always desired to dwell with His people, a fact that will become especially clear as we study the dedication of the temple in 2 Chronicles 6–7. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The two chapters in focus for this study offer a detailed look at what it means to dwell in the presence of God. In these verses we find both the glorious manifestation of God's presence as well as the human response to His presence. As New Testament believers who together make up the Church—the temple of the Holy Spirit—we can learn a great deal from the marvelous events of the temple dedication.

Part 1—Solomon’s Prayer of Praise

Praise God for His Faithful Promises

2 Chronicles 6:1–6

Say: It is sometimes easier to think of being “present with God” in a more abstract way. For example, people sometimes say they can find and experience God in nature, such as when they’re hiking or fishing. While there is certainly truth in this, since God can indeed be seen in His natural creation, Scripture reveals that God manifests himself to His people in very real, intimate ways. As believers, we experience God through sensing His love, hearing the voice of the Spirit, and even witnessing supernatural events. Today’s lesson explores a time in Scripture when God showed himself through a physical manifestation. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Resource Packet Item 1: The Presence of God

Distribute the information sheet and discuss its contents in class. Then invite students to respond to the reflection question. Emphasize that this information is helpful in understanding the scene in 2 Chronicles 6–7, giving insight into the heart of God for His people then and today.

As we begin this lesson, note that 2 Chronicles devotes more space to prayer and praise during the dedication of the temple than to the construction of the temple itself. The Books of Chronicles mirror 1 and 2 Kings but were written later (approximately 450–420 BC), after the return from the Babylonian Exile. Like 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles tell the history of Israel and Judah, but they focus on the people’s spiritual development and pay more attention to the Law and the priesthood than specific details about kings and governments. The Chronicles also focus on Israel’s great hope in God, specifically that His promises will endure and ultimately be fulfilled in the Messiah, a descendant of David. Solomon’s words of praise and prayer at the temple’s dedication reflect the hope of this great promise.

Several key events take place at the dedication of the temple, each helping us better understand what it means to be in the presence of God. Solomon began his expression of praise by responding to the presence of the cloud in 2 Chronicles 5:14 (see 6:1–2). God had manifested himself to His people in a cloud several times in the past (see Exodus 20:21; Deuteronomy 4:11; 5:22), but Solomon intended for this temple to be eternal.

As Solomon explained to the people, God’s presence filling the temple confirmed His promises to David (2 Chronicles 6:3–6). This passage doesn’t cite a specific Scripture of promise but rather reflects God’s ongoing choice of Israel, Jerusalem, and David (see 1 Chronicles 28:2–10; 2 Chronicles 33:7).

Discuss

? What are some specific reasons you can praise the Lord today?

? Some people encourage us to forget about our past, particularly the struggles, and only focus on the future. But why might it be helpful for us to reflect on the ways God has delivered us in the past?

Honor the Name of the Lord

2 Chronicles 6:7–11

Say: Solomon told the people, “My father, David, wanted to build this Temple to honor the name of the Lord” (2 Chronicles 6:7, NLT). We often use that terminology today, but what does it mean to praise or honor “the name of the Lord”? (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Hebrew word translated “name” means much more than a way to identify someone. It is directly connected to a person’s renown, fame, and reputation. When 2 Chronicles 6:7 speaks of honoring the name of the Lord, it includes the sense of proclaiming the excellence and praiseworthiness of the Lord and His superiority over all other gods (see Exodus 18:11; Psalm 135:5). This understanding of “the name of the Lord” can guide us in our praise and prayer, our service to the Lord, and even our understanding of Scripture. (For instance, think about how this understanding of name helps us to better grasp the Third Commandment found in Exodus 20:7—that we do not misuse the name of the Lord.)

As we read 2 Chronicles 6:8–11, we clearly see Solomon understood himself to be a part of the fulfillment of God’s promise to David (see 2 Samuel 7:5–16). God’s promise would unfold over the course of generations, and this is a key moment. The capstone of this great day is described in 2 Chronicles 6:11 when the ark of the covenant assumes its proper place in the temple. God would now dwell with His people, just as He had said.

We can learn much from this scene about how God fulfills His promises. We often forget that God’s understanding of time is far different from ours. Sometimes things do not happen the way we believe they should or wish they would. But that does not mean the promise is delayed. God’s plan unfolds according to His timing. Our role is to glorify and honor the name of the Lord with our words as well as our actions.

Discuss

? What do you think it means to honor the name of the Lord, and how can this understanding affect your prayer and worship?

? What are some ways Christians can honor the name of the Lord?

Part 2—Solomon’s Prayer of Dedication

Solomon Led the People in Prayer

2 Chronicles 6:12–21

Say: Prayer can occur in a variety of settings. We might pray as we drive to work, wait in line at a drive-through, or wash the dishes. Certainly, praying in those settings indicates a lifestyle of prayer. However, every Christian needs to devote time for specific, undivided focus on prayer, allowing our communication with the Lord to consume every bit of our attention and reflection. This kind of prayer is what we see happening in 2 Chronicles 6:12–21. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In 2 Chronicles 6:12–13, Solomon assumed a familiar pose while offering prayer to the Lord. Praying while standing, lifting hands, and kneeling is described elsewhere in the Old Testament, especially in corporate settings (see Nehemiah 9:1–3; Psalms 95:6; 141:2). These actions and postures projected attitudes of submission to God, respect for His power and glory, and recognition of Him as sovereign Lord. We can learn from Solomon's example. While we may not take the positions Solomon took, it is vital that we also convey respect for God and submission to Him.

Note Solomon's repetition in 2 Chronicles 6:14–17 as he led the nation in prayer. He recognized God's faithfulness to His promises and exalted Him for what He had done. He highlighted the ongoing nature of God's promises as something that continued to be fulfilled on that very day. And Solomon emphasized again that God keeps His covenant and shows unfailing love "to all who walk before [Him] in wholehearted devotion" (verse 14, NLT). Solomon later elaborated on this final point (verse 16). Guarding one's behavior and walking with God in faithfulness are consistent commands to God's people through both the Old and New Testaments (see Psalm 141:3; Proverbs 22:4–5; Isaiah 26:2–3; Ezekiel 18:5–9; Galatians 5:22–23; 2 Peter 3:17; 1 John 5:21; Revelation 2:10).

Solomon proceeded to ask an understandable question: "Will God really live on earth among people?" (verse 18, NLT). Surely, God cannot be confined to a building when, as Isaiah wrote more than two hundred years later, the heavens are His throne and the earth is His footstool (see Isaiah 66:1–2). Yet the king knew dwelling among His people was part of God's plan, as we see in the verses that follow 2 Chronicles 6:18. Note the humility of Solomon's words as he led the people in prayer. He asked the Lord to hear his and the people's "humble and earnest requests" (verse 21, NLT), and he sought forgiveness even in this public prayer. May we learn from Solomon's example and pray with earnest humility, recognizing our need for God's blessings, provision, and forgiveness.

Discuss

? While our chosen posture of prayer may not be critically important, what are some attitudes or actions that greatly affect the quality of our prayers?

? How prevalent is repentance in our corporate prayers today? What might be the value of regular corporate repentance?

"If . . . Then"

2 Chronicles 6:22–42

Say: We all understand the concept of cause and effect. Solomon’s prayer reminds us of the consequences resulting from our decisions and behavior. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In 2 Chronicles 6:22–39, Solomon’s prayer details how God’s people and other nations might act, followed by a prayer that they would seek God in response to the consequences of their actions. Numerous parallels exist among these seven scenarios. Several reference rebellion against God, while some note natural calamities resulting from rebellion. These disasters have a positive function, however, as they teach the people the right way to live (verse 27) and sanctify them before the Lord (verse 31). While two of the scenarios are unrelated to sin, all contain the same request of the Lord: “Hear from heaven.”

Here are the seven scenarios and Solomon’s subsequent requests:

1. If someone wrongs another and is required to take an oath of innocence, then may God judge between the guilty and the innocent (verses 22–23; see also Leviticus 19:12; Ezekiel 17:13–19). This is a prayer that God would maintain justice among the people.
2. If God’s people suffer defeat from enemy nations because of sin and they repent, then may God forgive and restore them to the land (verses 24–25).
3. If drought comes as punishment for sin and the people repent, then may God forgive them, teach them the right path, and bring rain (verses 26–27).
4. If any number of calamities come upon the people because of sin and the people repent, then may God forgive them but also give them what they deserve so they will fear Him and walk in His ways. This prayer is that God would teach the people through chastisement (verses 28–31).
5. If foreigners hear of Him and turn to Him in prayer, then may God hear and answer them so that all the earth may know and fear Him (verses 32–33).
6. If God’s people prayerfully go to war out of obedience to Him, then may God hear their prayers and give them success (verses 34–35).
7. If God’s people sin against Him and they are sent into exile but turn to God “with their whole heart,” then may God forgive them and uphold their cause (verses 36–39).

Key themes in these verses continue to be relevant today: the reality of sin, the need for repentance, the desire for God to hear and forgive, and God’s forgiveness extended to foreigners (Gentiles). Just as Solomon prayed these words and invited God to enter the temple, we would be wise to place great priority on prayer and invite Him to dwell in us.

Discuss

? Why do you think repentance and restoration were central to Solomon’s prayers?

? What are some ways (and reasons) God might chastise His people today, and what might He desire for us to learn from it?

Part 3— People Respond; God Speaks

The Glory of the Lord Filled the Temple

2 Chronicles 7:1–10

Say: The presence of God changes people. This simple statement has been the testimony of Pentecostals for generations. In 2 Chronicles 7 we find record of God’s presence manifested among His people. The impact was life-changing. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

At the conclusion of Solomon’s prayer, “fire flashed down from heaven” and consumed the sacrifices (2 Chronicles 7:1, NLT). The appearance of fire signified the sovereign power of God and was not unusual when God made His presence known at critical moments in the Old Testament (see Leviticus 9:23–24; 1 Kings 18:16–39; 1 Chronicles 21:26; see also Acts 2:1–4).

This appearance of fire was followed by the manifestation of God’s glory to such a degree that the priests could not enter the temple (2 Chronicles 7:2–3). Furthermore, merely witnessing this scene led all the people to fall on their knees in worshipful recognition of God’s goodness. Note that the word translated “faithful love” (2 Chronicles 7:6, NLT) or “mercy” (KJV) is an important Hebrew word that most often identifies God’s covenant love and faithfulness to His people. (The word is also translated “lovingkindness” and is common in these kinds of worshipful settings in the Old Testament.) God’s glory and presence reminds His people of His faithfulness, love, and mercy, inviting deep reflection upon who He is and what He does.

This scene was followed by sacrifices (verses 4–5,7), worship songs about His love and mercy (verse 6), and the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles—a seven-day harvest festival to honor to God for His provision (verses 8–9; see Leviticus 23:33–43). Afterward, the people traveled back to their homes rejoicing in the goodness of God (verse 10).

Resource Packet Item 3: God Speaks to People

Distribute the worksheet and discuss the passages, either in groups or individually. Note how God speaks to us through a variety of means. Invite students to share a time when they sensed the voice of God speaking to them.

Discuss

? How do we prepare for God’s presence?

? Read Ephesians 2:19–22. Knowing that we are God’s dwelling place now though we fall short of God’s glory and even succumb to temptation at times, what does this passage tell us about God’s grace?

Humble Yourselves and Pray

2 Chronicles 7:11–22

Say: Many Christians are familiar with 2 Chronicles 7:14, but it is vital to look at the verse within its context. Hard times would come to God's people because of their rebellion, but how would they respond? (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God's blessings upon Israel were contingent upon their faithful response to Him. We are the people of God today, representing Him in this world. And we are likewise called to faithfulness and obedience. When we stray from God, He will sometimes allow challenges in our lives to reset our focus and remind us of our dependence upon Him and love for Him. These can be difficult times, and sometimes it is hard to even admit we have strayed. But we know that through repentance we can be restored to Him.

Discuss

? What kinds of things might distract a Christian and lead him or her into sin?

? Do you think the kinds of temptations that lead Christians astray will always be obvious or could they be something more subtle? Explain.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: God calls us to experience His presence and cherish the fact that He is near us. Pray that God will reveal to you anything that might distract you from your relationship with Him.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Identify ways you can prepare for the presence of God.
- Encourage a fellow believer this week who is experiencing a challenge or trial. Spend time in prayer and worship with them, reminding them that God dwells in them.
- Help someone find a new place of ministry or purpose in the body of Christ. Perhaps discuss as a class if there are any who desire to use their gifts to embark on a new form of ministry. Find ways to help and equip them.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

A Plea for God's Presence.
Exodus 33:12–17

Tuesday:

Experiencing God's Presence.
Exodus 33:18–23

Wednesday:

Made Radiant by God's Presence.
Exodus 34:29–35

Thursday:

Joy in God's Presence.

Psalm 16:1–11

Friday:

With Two or Three.

Matthew 18:15–20

Saturday:

God Dwells with His People.

Revelation 21:1–5