

A Place to Dwell

Today In Your Reading...

We saw on display the wisdom with which God blessed King Solomon, as he settled difficult disputes with uncommon ease and as he prepared for the construction of the Temple. "I am about to build a Temple," he wrote King Hiram, "to honor the name of the Lord my God. This will be a magnificent Temple because **our God is an awesome God, greater than any other**. But who can really build Him a worthy home? Not even the highest heavens can contain Him!" (2 Chronicles 2:4, 5).

The Lord was pleased with Solomon's plans and efforts. As a result, He made a covenant with Solomon, saying, "Concerning the Temple you are building, if you keep all of My laws and regulations and obey all of My commands, I will fulfill through you the promise that I made your father David. I will be among My people and never forsake them" (1 King 6:12, 13).

Remember, the Temple, like the Tabernacle before it, was only meant to represent God's presence with His people, for as Solomon said, "Who can really build Him a worthy home? The highest heavens cannot contain Him!" **He did not need a Temple, but the people did**. They needed a place where they knew He dwelt, a place where they could go to worship Him with sacrifices and offerings, as well as a place where they knew He would answer their prayers.

However, from the beginning, **it has always been God's desire to dwell with His people**. Remember, He used to walk with Adam in the Garden and make frequent visits to Abraham. It was His idea for Moses and the Israelites to build a Tabernacle in the desert, so that He could be in their midst. Of course, one day He would walk among His people in bodily form through Jesus Christ, who was called *Emmanuel*, "God with us" (John 1:1, 14). Today, God dwells

within His people by way of the Holy Spirit. We are His earthly temples (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Daily Reflection

Did you know that, if you are a follower of Christ, **the Spirit of God dwells in you**, the same God who created the heavens and the earth, the same God who performed all of the miracles of the Bible, the same God who walked the earth through Jesus Christ, and the same God who raised Him from the dead lives in you? What an awesome thought that is!

What are some of the implications of this amazing truth, of having God's presence within you?

Because the Lord lives in you, He is with you at all times. He will never leave you or forsake you. Because the Lord lives in you, you are constantly in His presence. You do not need to go anywhere in particular. **Where you are, He is**. Because the Lord lives in you, you can worship Him at all times, and He will always hear your prayers; and, because the Lord lives in you, you have His power to overcome the world, the sinful flesh with its temptations, and the Devil.

As God's temple, you, like Solomon's structure, are to reflect the glory of the Lord to those around you, to honor the name of the Lord before others. They should see in you the difference that God has made in your life. **Others should be able to look at you and listen to you and know our God, for His glorious presence dwells in you!**

Two Pillars

Today In Your Reading...

King Solomon built his impressive palace and finished the details of the Temple. In the process, he spared no expense. He hired a skilled artist from Tyre, named Hiram, to complete all of the intricate bronze work. While the Temple took seven years to complete, it took thirteen years to finish Solomon's palace.

It was easy to get lost in all of the details today, especially since they were recorded in *1 Kings* and in *2 Chronicles*. However, I don't want us to miss something significant here. One of Solomon's final touches on the front of the Temple was to add "two pillars that were 27 feet tall, each topped with a [beautifully decorated] capital extending another seven and a half feet. He named the one on the south 'Jakin' and the one on the north 'Boaz'" (*2 Chronicles 3:15-17*).

Why in the world would anyone name pillars? Had King Solomon lost his mind? Did the people think that was weird? I don't know; but, even if they did, I'm sure no one would've said anything. The reason that Solomon named these pillars was to remind him of two important promises. **Jakin**, which means "He establishes," reminded Solomon of God's promise to his father David, that he would always have a descendant on the throne (*2 Samuel 7:12-16*). It is God who established the Davidic line of kings.

The second pillar was named **Boaz**, which means, "In Him is strength." This pillar reminded Solomon of the charge his father David gave to him when he was crowned as his successor. "Be strong and courageous and do the work. Don't be afraid or discouraged by the size of this task, for the Lord God is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you" (*1 Chronicles 28:20*). The Boaz Pillar also reminded Solomon of some of his father's last words to him, "Observe the requirements of the Lord your God and follow all

of His ways. Keep all of the commands and regulations written in the law of Moses so that you will be successful in all you do and wherever you go" (*1 Kings 2:1-3*). *It was in the strength of God that Solomon would be an effective king.*

Daily Reflection

Let these two pillars also be a reminder of two essential truths in your life. First, Jakin — "He establishes" — *your salvation is in God's hands!* **It is He who has established a covenant with you through Christ.** Without this pillar, you would never be allowed into God's presence, to have right standing with Him, to be forgiven of your sins, or to have eternal life.

Second, Boaz — "in Him is strength" — **the Christian life is a supplied life.** *You cannot live it in your own strength but you must rely upon the Spirit of God to help you.* The flesh is weak and unreliable. To resist temptation, to overcome sin, to understand God's Word, to serve and share Christ with others, and to remain faithful to God through difficult times, *you will need supernatural help.* Thank God He has given you this power, this strength, through the Holy Spirit in you (*Acts 1:8*).

What other pillars are there in your life? Are they able to withstand the test of time?

"Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy and that is what you are" (*1 Corinthians 3:16*).

Turn to the Temple

Today In Your Reading...

After the Temple was completed, Solomon gathered all of the leaders of Israel together and had the Ark of the Covenant moved into the Holy of Holies. As soon as the Ark reached its new residence, the Lord filled the Temple with a cloud, symbolizing both His presence and His pleasure. Did you notice that Solomon described the cloud as “thick darkness” (2 Chronicles 6:1). Contrast this Old Testament visual to the way John describes the coming of Jesus in the New Testament, “In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men” (John 1:4).

After Solomon blessed the people, he prayed a prayer of dedication. His long dedication could be summarized in two sentences, “May you watch over this Temple both day and night... and may You hear the humble and earnest prayers from me and your people Israel when we pray toward this place” (1 Kings 8:29, 30).

In his dedication, Solomon described several scenarios in which the people could find themselves in the future — committing wrong against others, needing forgiveness for sin, battling against their enemies, suffering droughts and famines or defeat and exile; then, he directed the people to pray towards the Temple.

While facing towards the Temple might sound to us to be an unnecessary requirement for God to hear the prayers of His people, **Solomon, by pointing people to the Temple, was pointing people to God.** We know today that God is both omnipresent and that He dwells in us through the Holy Spirit, which means that *we can pray wherever and whenever we wish and the Lord will hear us.* We do not have to face a city, a temple, a church, or a cross. **Wherever we are, God is there; He hears our prayers at all times.**

Daily Reflection

Even though we know that we do not have to face a temple when we pray, I like what Solomon did in His dedication. In every scenario that he described, He reminded the people that **the answer to their problems was the Lord.**

Is God your first resort when you are facing difficulties in your life, or are there other things or people to whom you turn? Explain.

The Lord desires to sustain you. He wants to be your strength, your hope, and your help in time of need. He should be your first resort. However, much of the time, His help is given through His people, and His people are found in the Temple, the Church. *In the Church, you should find those who will comfort you, encourage you, pray for you, speak truth to you, and point you in the right direction.*

Are you making yourself available to God’s people in a local church? If not, why not? If so, describe how God has used His people to help you in times of need.

Are you providing comfort, encouragement, direction, and prayer for others in your church?

Fire from Heaven

Today In Your Reading...

Solomon and the people of Israel finished dedicating the Temple and giving prayers, offerings, and sacrifices. The Lord responded by sending fire from heaven to consume the offerings and sacrifices, and, then, He filled the Temple with His glorious presence. When the people saw that the Lord was with them, they fell to the ground and worshiped and praised Him. What a scene that must have been!

It is important to note that this event highlighted Solomon's twentieth year as King (*2 Chronicles 8:1*). So far, he had followed in his father's footsteps and led Israel to follow God. We shall see what Solomon chooses to do in the second half of his reign. However, since this event marked the midway point, the Lord visited him a second time and gave him a stern warning. "If you follow Me with integrity and godliness, always obeying My commands and keeping My laws and regulations, then I will establish the throne of your dynasty forever... But, if you abandon me and disobey My commands, and if you go and worship other gods, then I will uproot the people of Israel from this land, reject this Temple, and make Israel a mockery among the nations" (*1 Kings 9:1-9*). These words were very similar to the Lord's warning to Israel through Moses (*Deuteronomy 29:24-28*).

We will follow Solomon's fateful decisions another day. Today I'd like to reflect on the prayer that he made at the Temple (*1 Kings 8:54-61*). In it are some truths about our God that I think are encouraging. First, **God is utterly reliable**. "Not one word has failed of all the wonderful promises God gave to Moses" (v.56). Second, **God's past faithfulness gives us confidence for the future**. "May the Lord our God be with us as He was with our ancestors" (v.57). Third, **the motivation to follow God comes from Him not us**. "May He give us the desire to do

His will..." (v.58). Next, **we need the Lord's help every day**. "The Lord our God fulfills our daily needs" (v.59). Finally, **our walk with Him is not about gaining attention for ourselves but for Him**. "May people all over the earth know that the Lord is God and that there is no other" (v.60).

Daily Reflection

Look back over these five truths. Which one resonates with you most today? Explain why.

While I love and appreciate all of these truths, the one that resonates with me is that my motivation to follow and serve the Lord must come from Him and not me. Just as He had to give me the faith to believe in Him, and just as He has given me a love for Him, His Church, and His Word, so also must *He give me the passion or the desire to carry on*. Sometimes, I must admit, I grow weary of living the Christian life, of pouring into others, of doing the Lord's work. I may even experience near burn out, but as I pray and seek His face, as I spend time with Him, **He has always been faithful to "send fire from heaven" and rekindle my flame**.

Solomon finished his prayer of dedication, "May you, His people, always be faithful to the Lord your God" (v.61). Knowing these five truths about your God, what is your response to Him?

Building a Kingdom

Today In Your Reading...

Solomon's wealth and wisdom were put on display as the Queen of Sheba and other notable dignitaries came to visit. "When the Queen saw the palace that Solomon had built, she was breathless" (1 Kings 10:5). Solomon "made a huge ivory throne and overlaid it with gold... No other throne in all the world could be compared with it!" (v.18, 20). Solomon also "made silver as plentiful in Jerusalem as stones" (v.27). He was "richer and wiser than any other king in all the earth" (v.23).

Though the Queen of Sheba was impressed with the splendor of Solomon's kingdom, she traced it all to the right source. She said, "*The Lord your God is great indeed! He delights in you and has placed you on the throne of Israel. Because the Lord loves Israel with an eternal love, he has made you king so you can rule with justice and righteousness*" (v.8, 9).

The Lord blessed Solomon so that He could glorify Himself. At first, Solomon had this same perspective. He knew that "his reputation brought honor to the name of the Lord" (v.1). People were flocking to Jerusalem to see the King and the splendor of his kingdom, *which gave him opportunities to put God on display.*

However, before long, his thirst for money and magnificence became insatiable, so much so that "all of his drinking cups and eating utensils were solid gold. They were not made of silver because silver was considered of little value" (v.21). In the end, Solomon became so ensnared by his love of money that he began to disobey God's commands. For example, "he built up a huge force of horses and chariots" (v.26), something the Lord had commanded not to do (Deut. 17:16, 17). **Solomon became more interested in the building of his own kingdom and, thus, neglected the kingdom of God.**

Daily Reflection

Having money is not sinful. However, God has plenty of negative things to say about it. At what point can having money hurt you?

How can you avoid the dangers of greed?

Solomon was guilty of building his own kingdom on earth rather than focusing on the kingdom of God. What does that mean exactly? Have you ever been guilty of this sin?

Solomon had a tremendous platform from which to glorify the Lord but he used it, instead, to glorify himself. What are you doing with the platforms and opportunities that God has provided for you? Are you using them to draw attention to Him or to yourself?

When Much Is Nothing

May 26 — 1 Kings 4:1-34; Psalms 72, 127

Day 146 — 219 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We were given an inside look at the details of Solomon's kingdom and what it was like to live during his reign. His administration was very organized and efficient, and "the people were very contented, with plenty to eat and drink... Throughout his lifetime, all of Judah and Israel lived in peace and safety... Each family had its own home and garden" (1 Kings 4:20, 25).

We can gather from *Psalms 72* that Solomon ruled justly, that he treated the poor fairly, that he defended the less fortunate, that he punished the oppressors, and that he blessed the godly. We also learned that "God gave Solomon great wisdom and understanding and knowledge too vast to be measured. In fact, he spoke with authority about all kinds of plants, animals, birds, reptiles, and fish. He was wiser than anyone else. Kings from every nation sent ambassadors to listen to his wisdom" (1 Kings 4:29-34).

However, after all of this praise of Solomon and his kingdom, the king himself identified the root cause in *Psalms 127*, as well as an unfortunate side effect if this cause were neglected. **Unless our efforts are rooted in and directed by the Lord, they are a waste of time and energy.** Solomon said it this way, "Unless the Lord builds a house, the work of the builders is useless. Unless the Lord protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good" (v.1).

There is a saying, "Little is much if God is in it." But, the reverse is also true, **"Much is nothing if God is not in it."** We can set out on all sorts of projects, as vast as our minds can imagine, but, while they may be impressive or instructive, *if they are not vines grounded in the Lord, they will wither and die.* As the missionary C.T. Studd wrote, "Only one life, 'twill soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last."

Daily Reflection

Solomon applies this truth to four areas — construction, defense, employment, and family. How do you see this truth playing out in your daily work? What are the consequences if this truth were ignored?

How do you see this truth playing out in parenting? What are the consequences if this truth were ignored?

How do you ensure that God is central to all your plans and efforts? What steps do you take so that you don't proceed without Him in mind?

Much is nothing if God is not in it. Are you wasting your time and energy? **It's better to have little with God than much of yourself.**

In Pursuit of Wisdom

May 27 — *Proverbs 1:1-4:27*

Today In Your Reading...

We began the book of *Proverbs*. Solomon's purpose was "to teach people wisdom" (1:2). It is obvious that wisdom played an important part in his life. He asked the Lord for it (1 Kings 3) and he wrote two books about it (*Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*), but the question is why? Perhaps it was because his father, David, impressed upon him the significance of having wisdom. "Learn to be wise," he said, "and develop good judgment. Don't turn your back on wisdom... Getting wisdom is the most important thing you can do" (4:4-9).

So then, wisdom is important, but what is wisdom, where does it come from, and how do we attain it? Obviously, I don't have space here to answer these questions fully, but let's consider a few simple truths to get us started.

First, what is wisdom? Noah Webster defined wisdom as "the right use of knowledge," but **the most important knowledge we can acquire is that of God**, the origin of knowledge. That's why Solomon wrote, "Knowledge of the Holy One is the beginning of understanding" (9:10). Insinuated here, in Solomon's sound words, is the belief that **one cannot be truly wise without knowledge of and reverence for the Lord**. Therefore, *we must acquire as much accurate knowledge of God as possible*, in order to rightly perceive the world around us.

Second, where does wisdom come from? Again, Solomon wrote, "The Lord grants wisdom! From His mouth (His Word) come knowledge and understanding" (2:6). **God is not a source of wisdom; He is the Source of wisdom**. Everything and everyone else is a re-source of God's wisdom. We must keep this truth in mind when we read books, hear sermons and speeches, watch the news, or consider the sage advice of a prominent figure.

While truths may be gathered from many sources, *they must all be weighed against the Truth*, that is God's nature and character, which have been revealed to us in His Word, the Bible, and through His Son Jesus Christ. While God created men to think, to reason, and to postulate on any given subject, men are flawed. **We do not filter God's Word through man's reasoning, but rather we filter man's reasoning through God's Word.**

Third, how do we attain wisdom? While fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, *it is through the diligent intake of Scripture that our knowledge of God increases* and our opportunity for true wisdom improves. So then, let's add a few words to Webster's definition of wisdom: **wisdom is the right use of the knowledge of God**. The more knowledge that we acquire of the Lord and apply in our lives, then the more visible the benefits of wisdom will become.

Daily Reflection

Here are some benefits you will discover when you acquire and apply the knowledge of God in your life. You will grow to love Him more. You will live in obedience to His expectations. You will begin to think more like Him; and, you will be able to identify truth and error more readily.

Do you see these benefits in your life? Are you pursuing wisdom? Are you pursuing God?

"Don't be impressed with your own wisdom; instead, fear the Lord..." (3:7).