

Solomon Dedicates the Temple

Devotional Reading: 2 Chronicles 6:12, 14-27

Background Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:1-20

2 Chronicles 7:1-7, 11

¹ When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. ² The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it. ³ When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying,

“He is good;
his love endures forever.”

⁴ Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD. ⁵ And King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand head of cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats. So the king and all the people dedicated the temple of God. ⁶ The priests

took their positions, as did the Levites with the LORD’s musical instruments, which King David had made for praising the LORD and which were used when he gave thanks, saying, “His love endures forever.” Opposite the Levites, the priests blew their trumpets, and all the Israelites were standing.

⁷ Solomon consecrated the middle part of the courtyard in front of the temple of the LORD, and there he offered burnt offerings and the fat of the fellowship offerings, because the bronze altar he had made could not hold the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the fat portions.

¹¹ When Solomon had finished the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the LORD and in his own palace,

Key Text

When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, “He is good; his love endures forever.” —2 Chronicles 7:3

Costly Sacrifices

Unit 3: Special Offerings and the Sanctuary

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize what happened when Solomon finished praying.
2. Explain the idea of “dedicating” or “consecrating” something.
3. State how one can respond to God’s presence and love with worship and sacrifice.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Finishing a Father’s Legacy
- B. Historical Context
- C. Literary Context

I. Glory of God (2 Chronicles 7:1-3)

- A. Fire Comes Down (vv. 1-2)

A Third Kind of Fire

- B. People Bow Down (v. 3)

Powerful Love

II. Worship by People (2 Chronicles 7:4-6)

- A. Sacrifices (vv. 4-5)
- B. Music (v. 6)

III. Actions by Solomon (2 Chronicles 7:7, 11)

- A. Consecration (v. 7)
- B. Completion (v. 11)

Conclusion

- A. Seeking God’s Goodness
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Finishing a Father’s Legacy

From 1927 until his death in 1941, Gutzon Borglum, along with numerous assistants, carved the sculptures of four American presidents into the side of Mount Rushmore, located in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Borglum chose the 60-foot sculptures to represent 150 years of American history. Borglum worked on the project until his death, mere months before its completion. His son completed the project.

Today’s lesson, regarding the construction of the temple, is both similar to and different from the Borglums’ project. They are similar in that neither man who envisioned the projects in the first place lived to see their respective completions. They are different in that while the father oversaw almost all the work in the Borglums’ project, the opposite was true regarding the temple construction. King David wanted to build a magnificent temple for the Lord, but the honor went to his son Solomon instead. While David laid the groundwork, it was to be Solomon’s legacy to oversee and complete the project.

B. Historical Context

The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles emphasize the importance of the reigns of David (1010–970 BC) and Solomon (970–930 BC) as their lives related to the temple’s coming into existence. The chronicler explains how those kings instituted most of the ongoing practices of the temple, especially those of sacrifice, prayer, and singing. All three of those elements are present in the parallel books of 1 and 2 Kings, but much more so in the Chronicles.

In 1 Chronicles 22:8, King David explained to his son Solomon that God had forbidden David from building the temple due to the amount of blood he had shed. After David’s extensive preparations (22:5), the honor was to fall to Solomon instead. He spent seven years completing the temple his father dreamed of building (1 Kings 6:38). The year of its completion was, therefore, 963 BC. The book of 2 Chronicles links father and son in several passages not included in 1 Kings (examples: 2 Chronicles 2:3, 7; 3:1; 6:42; 7:10; 8:14).

The dedication ceremony for the temple included a lengthy and eloquent prayer by the king (2 Chronicles 6). In that prayer, Solomon asked the Lord to remember his covenant with his people and his promise to David. He prayed for forgiveness of future sin. He pled for the temple to be a beacon of God's great name and mighty hand. He closed his prayer by inviting everyone else to celebrate the same divine mercy that he had recognized. Solomon thereby challenged himself and his hearers to a life of worship and sacrifice.

C. Literary Context

The first nine chapters of 2 Chronicles are commonly recognized as a literary sub-unit of the book as a whole. One reasonable outline of these nine chapters is:

- A. Solomon's Kingship (1:1-17)
- B. Temple's Construction (2:1-5:1)
- C. Temple's Dedication (5:2-7:22)
- D. Solomon's Other Activities (8:1-9:31)

Another way to show the inner dynamics of 2 Chronicles 1-9 is with this arrangement:

- A-Solomon's wisdom and wealth (1:1-17)
- B-He prepares temple construction (2:1-18)
 - C-He builds the temple (3:1-5:1)
 - C'-He dedicates the temple (5:2-7:22)
 - B'-He completes the temple, etc. (8:1-16)
- A'-Solomon's wisdom and wealth (8:17-9:28)

Notice the repetition of themes in a parallel "inverse pyramid" arrangement.

The powerful conclusion to Solomon's prayer, which immediately precedes today's lesson text, is reflected in a psalm:

"Now arise, LORD God, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. May your priests, LORD God, be clothed with salvation, may your faithful people rejoice in your goodness. LORD God, do not reject your anointed one. Remember the great love promised to David your servant."

—2 Chronicles 6:41-42

"Arise, LORD, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. May your priests be clothed with your righteousness;

may your faithful people sing for joy.' " For the sake of your servant David, do not reject your anointed one. —Psalm 132:8-10

The parallel account to today's text is 1 Kings 8:62-66. Compared to that earlier account, today's passage is the longer version; it includes additional details.

I. Glory of God

(2 Chronicles 7:1-3)

A. Fire Comes Down (vv. 1-2)

1a. When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices,

See Literary Context, above, regarding the content of Solomon's *praying*. As we read about the *fire that came down from heaven* to consume *the burnt offering and the sacrifices*, we're naturally inclined to compare and contrast this event with other such episodes in the Bible. Fire of divine origin was often for the purpose of judgment. Examples of this kind of fire stated in a personal way as being from the Lord are Leviticus 10:2; Numbers 11:1; 16:35; and Psalm 21:9. Examples of judgmental fire more generally said to be from Heaven are 2 Kings 1:10-14; Luke 9:54; 17:29; and Revelation 20:9. But the fire in the lesson text at hand is in the minority of cases that are not judgmental, but showing divine favor instead (compare Leviticus 9:24; Judges 6:21).



Visual for Lesson 11. Display this visual as you ask the following question: "How have you experienced the Lord's love and goodness?"

Burnt offerings were a specific type of sacrifice whereby the entire offering was consumed by fire on the altar (Leviticus 1). By making such an offering, the people acknowledged their sin and the need for its removal. In the context at hand, it should have convicted the original audience of the need to enter the temple with holy attitudes and intent if they were to live in a healthy relationship with God and each other (contrast Jeremiah 7:30; Luke 19:46). The dramatic descent of the fire signaled that God was watching.

What Do You Think?

Without fire from Heaven, how can your congregation know whether someone's sensing of God's presence is genuine?

Digging Deeper

What can happen if proper discernment is lacking in that regard?

A Third Kind of Fire

Have you ever seen a “fire tornado”? These can form when a large forest fire heats the air so much that weather patterns begin to self-generate. The result may be a towering vortex of spinning flames connecting earth and sky, inspiring awe and terror.

I imagine that the descent of fire from Heaven at the dedication of Solomon's temple looked something like this kind of tornado. And yet, there is no record of fear on the part of those present! The fire was one of approval, not judgment.

But between the two fires of approval and judgment stands a third type of fire: the fire of testing. We all have to undergo certain trials of fire that test our faith (1 Peter 4:12). These can serve to cleanse us from unholiness (compare Proverbs 25:4; Malachi 3:2-3). We serve the Lord with the realization that the quality of our work will be tested by fire on the last day (1 Corinthians 3:12-13). Wouldn't it be better to embrace the testing now so we have time to repent before that final audit? —A. W.

1b. and the glory of the LORD filled the temple.

The intensity of the fire from Heaven, just con-

sidered, was enhanced (if that were possible!) when *the glory of the Lord filled the temple*. The concepts of fire and *glory* are combined in several places in the Bible (examples: Exodus 24:17; Deuteronomy 5:24; Isaiah 4:5; Zechariah 2:5; 1 Peter 1:7).

The manifestation of God's glory occurred also at the dedication of the tabernacle, which was the forerunner to the temple (Exodus 40:34-35). On that occasion, the glory happened in conjunction with a cloud rather than fire. This same combination had also occurred in the account of Solomon's bringing the ark of the covenant to the temple (2 Chronicles 5:13b-6:1; 1 Kings 8:10-12; compare Exodus 16:10). The combination of glory and cloud will occur yet again when God's glory departs the temple some 366 years after its dedication (Ezekiel 10:4, 10). Thus, God's glory is regularly connected with vital turning points in ancient Israel's focus on expressions of worship. The purpose of the glory is consecration or sanctification (Exodus 29:43).

2. The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it.

At first glance, 1 Kings 8:11 seems parallel to the verse before us because the idea conveyed is identical. But 1 Kings 8:11 is actually parallel to 2 Chronicles 5:11, 13b-14 in the flow of events. All are similar in outcome to what we see here: *the priests could not enter the temple of the Lord*, with echoes of Exodus 40:35, as noted above.

B. People Bow Down (v. 3)

3. When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, “He is good; his love endures forever.”

The text shifts its focus to those gathered, *the Israelites*. Their experience of seeing *the fire* that came *down* and *the glory of the Lord* prompted them to renew their life of worship. (“Renew” is the right word because they had prayed and sacrificed before, but henceforth they would do so in a more profound way.)

The people sang an often-repeated phrase found also in Psalm 136. The song also preceded Solomon's prayer (2 Chronicles 5:13). It was part of the

singing when the ark of the covenant was brought to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 16:34). It was sung again centuries later as the altar was being rebuilt following return from exile (Ezra 3:11). The event of the consecration of the temple was a reminder of God's goodness and *love* in the past and for the future.

What Do You Think?

What changes might you experience by being more mindful of God's goodness, mercy, and love?

Digging Deeper

How can we gain that greater mindfulness?

Powerful Love

Most kids of Lavonte's age didn't watch their dads play pro football on TV. But Lavonte did—his dad was a 6'7", 360-pound offensive tackle. He was intimidating and didn't have to do much to keep Lavonte in line. Just the deep rumble of Dad's voice calling Lavonte from the back porch was enough to make the youngster freeze in his tracks and rapidly reconsider his intentions!

Would it be fair to say Lavonte feared his dad? Well . . . *yes* and *no*. He knew his father was a firm and strong man. Yet Lavonte also knew with absolute certainty that his dad would never hurt him. Because the same voice that growled out his name like a lion had talked as softly as a cat's purr to him every night at bedtime. And he knew he had a standing invitation to curl up next to his dad on the couch to watch replays of his dad's last game.

God inflicts powerful acts of judgment. His enemies don't stand a chance against his wrath. Yet when his people witness the consuming fire falling from Heaven, their response is not one of terror but one of love, awe, and admiration: "He is good; his love endures forever!" (2 Chronicles 7:3). —A. W.

II. Worship by People

(2 Chronicles 7:4-6)

A. Sacrifices (vv. 4-5)

4. Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD.

The *sacrifices* that followed differ from those incinerated by fire from Heaven (burnt offerings) in that some of the sacrifices in view here could be eaten. After God put his stamp of approval on the temple by consuming the initial sacrifices, the people joined in.

There are usually clear delineations of the duties of the three offices of *prophet*, *priest*, and *king* in ancient Israel. In the laws of sacrifice in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, the king had no role—indeed, there was no provision for ancient Israel even to have a king in those three books (compare 1 Samuel 8). The story of King Uzziah's leprosy after his attempted sacrifice (2 Chronicles 26:16-23) reveals that a king was not to usurp the role of a priest. But there were some exceptions, and that seems to have been the case here as *the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the Lord*. The sheer number of sacrificial animals may have overwhelmed the number of priests available. If so, a practical adjustment was made (compare 30:2-3).

We might easily misunderstand the purposes of sacrifice and dismiss the practice as barbaric or see it merely as a way of appeasing God's anger. Sacrifice was a form of worship. The people had to take something that was valuable to them and either give it over to God entirely or to both God and other people.

What Do You Think?

In what circumstances should our actions as living sacrifices be visible to all? In what circumstances visible only to God?

Digging Deeper

How do Matthew 5:13-16 and 6:1-4 influence your answers?

5. And King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand head of cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats. So the king and all the people dedicated the temple of God.

The number of animals would have fed many thousands of people, making this event a celebration for a large percentage of Solomon's subjects.

The dedication ceremony was designed to shape the life of the entire kingdom, including those not able to be present in Jerusalem. Solomon rightly understood that celebrating such an important event as the dedication of the temple in grand style should bring the people together in more ways than one.

It is interesting to compare the numbers of animals sacrificed in this verse to the Passover sacrifices later offered under Kings Hezekiah (reigned 716–687 BC) and Josiah (reigned 641–609 BC) centuries later, according to 2 Chronicles 30:24; 35:7-9:

King	Oxen/Cattle	Sheep and Goats
Solomon . . .	22,000	120,000
Hezekiah . . .	2,000	17,000
Josiah	11,100	37,600

The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles measure kings by how they treat the temple in Jerusalem and facilitate worship there. By that measure, Solomon was a model king, at least at this point in his life.

B. Music (v. 6)

6a. The priests took their positions, as did the Levites with the LORD’s musical instruments, which King David had made for praising the LORD and which were used when he gave thanks, saying, “His love endures forever.”

This verse stands on the shoulders of 1 Chronicles 15:3-22. That passage describes in great detail how *King David* organized *the Levites* as temple musicians in conjunction with his second (and successful) attempt at bringing the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem. The musical instruments mentioned there are “lyres, harps and cymbals” (1 Chronicles 15:16). These instruments were also present at the first (and failed) attempt to relocate the ark, with two additional instruments mentioned in that context: timbrels and trumpets (13:8). The Old Testament mentions at least 14 distinct musical instruments a total of over 200 times.

Singing isn’t mentioned in this verse. But since the first attempt to relocate the ark involved singing (1 Chronicles 13:8), as did the second attempt

(15:22), it’s more than reasonable to presume that singing also occurred here.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you better incorporate music as part of your private worship?

Digging Deeper

How will your decisions in that regard differ in your “good” times from that of your “bad” times? Why?

6b. Opposite the Levites, the priests blew their trumpets, and all the Israelites were standing.

Priests are associated with *trumpets* about a dozen times in the Old Testament. There were two kinds of trumpets used for different purposes. First were the trumpets of silver; these were for calling the people to assemble, for setting out, to announce times of rejoicing at festivals, and for signaling in battle (Numbers 10:1-10). These are the trumpets in view here.

The second kind was trumpets made from rams’ horns. These are mentioned in dozens of places, but in connection with priests only in Joshua 6.

III. Actions by Solomon

(2 Chronicles 7:7, 11)

A. Consecration (v. 7)

7. Solomon consecrated the middle part of the courtyard in front of the temple of the LORD, and there he offered burnt offerings and the fat of the fellowship offerings, because the bronze altar he had made could not hold the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the fat portions.

The horizontal surface of the altar Solomon had built measured 20 cubits by 20 cubits, or about 900 square feet (2 Chronicles 4:1). Although it was quite large, it was not large enough for the work of that day of dedication. Thus, Solomon needed a plan to deal with this. So, with priestly help, he *consecrated the middle part of the courtyard* to be suitable as an over-

flow altar. This practice was not provided for in the Law of Moses, but 2 Chronicles sees it as an appropriate emergency measure. The aim of the event was more important than the silence of the law in this regard.

Three types of offerings are noted. *Burnt offerings* were characterized by being totally consumed by the fire; regulations are in Leviticus 1 and 6:8-13. Regulations for *the grain offerings* are in Leviticus 2 and 6:14-23. *Fellowship offerings* were offerings of thanksgiving or are connected with the taking of vows; regulations are in Leviticus 3 and 7:11-21. The Law of Moses forbade the eating of the *fat* of animals that were candidates for sacrifice (Leviticus 7:22-27; compare Exodus 29:13).

What Do You Think?

What steps do you need to take for greater consecration since 1 Corinthians 6:19 establishes that your body is now the temple of the Holy Spirit?

Digging Deeper

What superficial efforts have you seen others make in this regard?

B. Completion (v. 11)

11. When Solomon had finished the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the LORD and in his own palace,

The passages 2 Chronicles 5:3; 7:8-10 indicate that the temple dedication occurred during the Festival of Tabernacles, one of the three annual pilgrimage festivals (Deuteronomy 16:13-17; 31:10). Solomon had committed himself fully to the completion of the temple, focusing all his resources to that effort. But more than it being about a building, it was also about a people. He recruited many artisans and craftsmen to help as they used their skills for God's glory.

Solomon, like any other king, also built a *royal palace*. His palace had a footprint more than four times that of the temple (11,250 square feet and 2,700 square feet, respectively; see 1 Kings 6:2 and 7:2). Compared to the seven years it took to

build the temple, the 13 years to build his palace is understandable!

The palace had to be larger than the temple because it needed to house the king, his numerous wives, many officials, etc. A palace was not just a grandiose house but a small city within the city.

Conclusion

A. Seeking God's Goodness

The temple became the center of ancient Israel's religious life. It was the place where they could meet God. Sacrifices and prayers would occur at that temple for generations. While Solomon could not have foreseen the details of the long history of worship that followed his actions, his trust in God was proven by his prayer, worship, and actions. These reflected confidence in God's holiness, power, and enduring love.

Solomon prayed to God to remember his promises to his father and to previous generations. The king's prayer was integral to his worship. His focus on completing the temple *before* he started his own house showed his heart (contrast Haggai 1:2-4).

Unfortunately, this interconnection of faithful prayer, worship, and actions would not last. It didn't last for the people (2 Chronicles 36:15-21), and it didn't last for Solomon himself (1 Kings 11:4-11). Will it last for you?

B. Prayer

O God our Father, may we always praise you for your merciful love and goodness. Renew in us a life of worship. Strengthen our dedication to your holiness and help us to love others as you see them. May we be living sacrifices for your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Respond to God with worship.

How to Say It

Hezekiah	Hez-ih-kye-uh.
Josiah	Jo-sigh-uh.
Uzziah	Uh-zye-uh.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Have the phrase *Spontaneous Songs* written on the board as learners arrive. Ask your learners to name songs (religious or secular) that people might sing spontaneously right after a startling experience, either good or bad. The song could be sung in a context that the songwriter did not envision. Jot responses on the board.

Alternative. If you think the above will be too difficult, research such songs yourself and write their titles on the board before class begins; **do not** write the title *Spontaneous Songs* on the board. That theme is what the learners are to guess based on the song titles you list. Just two examples of songs that might be sung spontaneously are “We Are the Champions” by Queen (in reacting to a positive event) and “I Won’t Back Down” by Tom Petty (in reacting to a challenging event). Have at least four songs on the board. Ask what the songs have in common.

Make a transition by saying, “Today, we’re going to consider an event that resulted in spontaneous singing. Let’s see how the ancient Israelites connected singing to a major positive event in their nation’s history.”

Into the Word

Before the Scripture for the lesson is read, distribute handouts (you prepare) titled “Since, Cents, Sense, or Scents?” Below the title, draw a pie chart divided into five segments or “slices.” Label the five segments *Touch*, *Taste*, *Sight*, *Sound*, and *Smell*, one label for each segment.

Tell the class that you will read the lesson text of 2 Chronicles 7:1-7, 11 aloud twice. As you do, participants are to jot verse numbers in the five segments of their pie charts according to which of the five senses would have been most activated by the verse you are reading at the moment. (Responses can vary, but expect the following as likely, per the verse numbering: 1–sight, 2–

sight, 3–sight, 4–touch, 5–smell, 6–sound, 7–smell, 11–sight.)

As you read the text, be sure to read the verse numbers as well. After you finish, do so again so participants can review their decisions. In the ensuing whole-class discussion, compare and contrast the responses. Draw a grid on the board that has eight horizontal rows and five vertical columns. Put the numbering of the eight verses of the lesson at the beginnings of the eight rows, one each; put the five senses as headers of the five columns, one each. Fill in the intersections as appropriate as participants respond with their choices.

Into Life

Form learners into small groups to compare and contrast the events of the text with the worship experiences they have had. To prompt discussion, distribute these questions on a handout (you create):

- 1–What elements of the worship in today’s text give us valid ideas for our own worship?
- 2–What are some ways to respond best to God’s presence and love with worship and sacrifice?
- 3–What are some specific things we can do on Saturday night to prepare ourselves better for worship on Sunday morning?

Option. Distribute copies of the “Whose To-Do List?” exercise from the activity page, which you can download, to one-on-one study pairs for completion as indicated. This activity recognizes the fact that in the dedication of the temple, there was a part for the people to play and a part for God to play.

Option. Distribute to study pairs or triads copies of the “God’s Greatest Hits” exercise from the activity page, to be completed as indicated. If time is short, this can be a take-home exercise. To help ensure completion, state that you will begin class next week by discussing results.