

1ST KINGS

Week 15, chapter 8 continued 2

We'll spend today with yet another section of 1st Kings Chapter 8 that revolves around the Temple dedication ceremony and features King Solomon's magnificent and profound prayer that illuminates a number of God-principles. But we'll need yet another lesson to finish.

One of the major themes of Shlomo's prayer is revealed in verse 23 and it is that God's kindness to His worshippers is dependent upon their obedience and devotedness to Him. Such a thought was not out of line with the ancient Middle Eastern mindset about human relationships with their gods so it was rather easy for the Israelites to accept this notion. However for some reason, Christianity for centuries has developed a doctrine that a Believer's behavior or degree of faithfulness plays little to no role in how God deals with us. In other words once we have Salvation all divinely directed consequences for our sinning and bad behavior ends; all linkage between our actions and what we can expect in response from God is severed. Ultimately the thought is that Believers have the right to expect nothing but God's mercy and kindness no matter how far away from God's ways and commands that we might wander, no matter how rebellious we might become.

I have on many occasions challenged this dangerous and erroneous doctrine because it has been one of the primary reasons for a steady erosion in the power and victory that was always intended for the Church. It is a common but light-hearted metaphor that gaining Salvation in Christ is equivalent to the purchase of heavenly fire insurance. We can silently chuckle at such a thought, but in reality it is reinforced from most pulpits and thus subconsciously lived-out in the lives of Believers worldwide.

We looked at the precise New Testament equivalent of Solomon's statement regarding the conditional nature of God's kindness as we read Romans 11. There in verse 22 (in no matter what Bible version you might use) Paul states to a group of gentile Believers as forthrightly (and in context) as is possible, that we of course remain subject to God's punishments if we choose to be disobedient enough.

^{CJB} **Romans 11:22** *So take a good look at God's kindness and his severity: on the one hand, severity toward those who fell off; but, on the other hand, God's kindness toward you- provided you maintain yourself in that kindness! Otherwise, you too will be cut off!*

To be cut-off means to be separated from God at God's choice. However it doesn't mean that if that separation occurs that it must be permanent, but almost without fail there will be punishments and dire consequences. The punishments are meant for a two-fold purpose: first, as a proper carrying out of God's justice. And second as a means to drive the rebel back towards harmony with God. So this particular portion of Solomon's prayer naturally is as true today as it was when he uttered it.

Another God-principle was addressed beginning in verse 27 when King **Shlomo** acknowledged that despite the Lord saying that He would dwell in the Temple Solomon has built for Him, it must be that God's concept of "dwelling" and of the purpose for a Temple was not typical of what was universally accepted in the 10th century B.C. Rather God's true home was heaven. And yet God's earthly presence was obvious and even visible (in this case in the form of a cloud that literally drove the priests out of the sanctuary building). Further the Lord's definition of a Temple was in many ways an enormous divergence from what humans of that era imagined. It was thought by one and all that a Temple virtually housed and even shut-in the gods who chose to reside there. A Temple for a god was akin to a bottle that imprisoned a genie. But Solomon realized that for Yehoveh, and for His worshippers, the Temple was merely a place of meeting and even that was not something that could be well-defined. While the Torah Law had requirements for attendance at the Temple on certain occasions, prayers directed from anywhere TOWARDS the Temple were just as effective as if one were standing in its courtyards.

Let's continue in our study of this illuminating prayer and extract all that we can from it.

RE-READ 1ST KINGS 8: 31 – 53

This prayer has been rather general up to now, in that we have seen a handful of fundamental God-principles spoken that undergird every facet of our relationship with God. But here we

have a series of 7 specific petitions to the Lord that are of special importance to Solomon. These are quite practical matters and they all express an understanding of the Law of Moses as the basis for Israel's existence and **Shlomo's** rule.

Before I go on I want to say something that I hope will not disappoint or offend any of you. Solomon's prayer, as is the Lord's Prayer, a prayer model that is timeless. It certainly was never intended as something that we mouth mindlessly, or is it something that we use as though it were a blank form and when we come to a certain part we just sort of fill in the blanks with our particular concerns. On the other hand these prayers, as do all other prayers in the Bible, show us that we are to petition the Lord as specifically as we know how. Among certain denominations and Christian groups an interesting habit of requesting others to join you in an "unspoken request", and at times even for an "unidentified person" is put forth. There is not a doubt in my mind that from a Scriptural and spiritually rational viewpoint an unspoken request is no request at all. For His own good reasons, the God who already knows all things insists that we form our concerns into words and direct those words in the form of prayerful petitions towards Him.

Thus Solomon's first petition in verse 31 concerns oaths and vows that are sworn in the Temple and the Lord is being asked to remain as the guarantor of those promises. In fact this petition is even more specific as it relates to monetary disputes whereby the appointed judges who hear the evidence also impose an oath on the accused party (that is, if they maintain their innocence they must invoke Yehoveh's name in vow that they are blameless). The situation refers to the laws of Exodus 22:6-12 and Leviticus 5:21-24.

Exodus 22:6-12 CJB

⁶ ***"If a person entrusts a neighbor with money or goods, and they are stolen from the trustee's house, then, if the thief is found, he must pay double.***

⁷ ***But if the thief is not found, then the trustee must state before God that he did not take the person's goods himself.***

⁸ *In every case of dispute over ownership, whether of an ox, a donkey, a sheep, clothing, or any missing property, where one person says, 'This is mine,' both parties are to come before God; and the one whom God condemns must pay the other one double.*

⁹ *"If a person trusts a neighbor to look after a donkey, ox, sheep or any animal, and it dies, is injured or is driven away unseen,*

¹⁰ *then the neighbor's oath before ADONAI that he has not taken the goods will settle the matter between them- the owner is to accept it without the neighbor's making restitution.*

¹¹ *But if it was stolen from the neighbor, he must make restitution to the owner.*

¹² *If it was torn to pieces by an animal, the neighbor must bring it as evidence, and then he doesn't need to make good the loss.*

Lev 5:21-24 CJB

²¹ *"If someone sins and acts perversely against ADONAI by dealing falsely with his neighbor in regard to a deposit or security entrusted to him, by stealing from him, by extorting him,*

²² *or by dealing falsely in regard to a lost object he has found, or by swearing to a lie- if a person commits any of these sins,*

²³ *then, if he sinned and is guilty, he is to restore whatever it was he stole or obtained by extortion, or whatever was deposited with him, or the lost object which he found,*

²⁴ *or anything about which he has sworn falsely. He is to restore it in full plus an additional one-fifth; he must return it to the person who owns it, on the day when he presents his guilt offering.*

The idea is that a person who is summoned to the Temple (where the court was usually convened in the courtyard) and then denies the accusations against him is forced to swear an oath of innocence because it may be impossible to convict due to lack of eye witnesses or

evidence. However God knows the hidden truth and so by the accused swearing an oath in God's name, God is being asked to protect His holy name and to be the ultimate judge by punishing the wrong-doer and vindicating the victim (especially if the accused is also a liar). And this punishment will be in the form of divinely ordered consequences as opposed to a humanly imposed sentence. This could amount to illness, a shortened life span, childlessness, failed crops, any sort of thing that can be seen as supernaturally directed towards that person. So the bottom line is that this petition is all about societal justice being carried out in accordance with God's laws and commands even if the judges are unable to convict due to lack of evidence or by falsehoods being stated by the parties involved.

The 2nd prayerful petition in verses 33 and 34 concerns what happens when Israel as a nation is threatened with exile and oppression by a foreign enemy. And the cause of this oppression is that **as a nation** Israel has sinned against God. This is referring to the laws of Leviticus 26:17 and Deuteronomy 28:25.

Lev 26:17 CJB

17 I will set my face against you- your enemies will defeat you, those who hate you will hound you, and you will flee when no one is pursuing you.

Deut 28:25 CJB

25 "ADONAI your God will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will advance on them one way and flee before them seven. You will become an object of horror to every kingdom on earth.

The thought is that if the nation turns their back on Yehoveh, and a large amount of Israelites are hauled off to a foreign land as prisoners, then those who remain will see the sin of their nation, go to the Temple, pray for forgiveness and the Lord will hear and show mercy. Then He will deliver them from their conquerors and bring the exiles home. What a prophecy wrapped up in a prayer this is! And yet that is because in several places in the Torah, and in Joshua and Judges, there is a warning that in the future it is inevitable that the Israelites will commit national sins, will be defeated by an enemy and carried off as a result, and that their only remedy is to repent and seek God.

In fact the modern English hides a tone and context that most any Israelite would have instantly recognized; a tone that reminds them of an awesome and terrible time in their distant past. In verse 33, where it says in the CJB that Israel will be defeated in consequence of their national sin (and other Bibles say they will be “smitten”), a Hebrew word that we haven’t heard in a while is used; the word is **nega**. **Nega** is the Hebrew word that figures prominently in the Book of Exodus, because it is typically translated to plague. That’s right, the various plagues visited upon Egypt and Pharaoh are in Hebrew **nega**. So the idea is that God will visit upon His own people the same sorts of supernatural consequences that He visited upon Egypt in consequence of their national sins against Him.

As the modern redeemed of God, many of us are quite concerned with this same prospect. Day by day as the horrific national sins of our country mount up, whether we agree with our leaders and those who willingly follow them into these sins or not, we will be (and currently are) caught up in the consequences. In our era when the globe has seemingly shrunk and national boundaries are dissolving, it may not be that people will be physically and forcibly taken from their homeland to another place in consequence of their iniquities, as what eventually happened to the Israelites. Rather as our international economic and financial institutions become more and more enmeshed and interdependent, one nation can conquer another simply through the control of the flow of money and goods; a sort of coup by purchase. And suddenly we find ourselves as exiles and prisoners within our own homes and land, every facet of our lives and our daily survival placed into the hands of an absentee foreign government. Our ability to buy and sell completely tied to our acquiescence to the demands of foreigners who do not know God, and have only their own agendas in mind.

There is only one remedy and one hope for our condition: prayerful confession, sincere repentance and change of direction back to ways of God, and then petitioning Him to see our revived devotion as reason to show us mercy and forgiveness. Unfortunately this process won’t be like a TV program that in but one hour presents a dilemma, takes us through the heartache and pain, and then is happily resolved. We will go through great challenges and testing along the way for extended periods of time because the Lord wants to build our faith through perseverance.

Solomon’s 3rd petition is in verses 35 and 36 and it refers to remission of the penalty of drought (again for national sins). So this is the 2nd petition that deals with a national judgment of Israel, the first being subjugation by foreign powers as a punishment and now it is in the form of the lack of rain. These are outlined in the Torah in Leviticus 26:19 and Deuteronomy 11:16 -17.

CJB **Leviticus 26:19** *I will break the pride you have in your own power. I will make your sky like iron, your soil like bronze-*

Deut 11:16-17 CJB

¹⁶ *But be careful not to let yourselves be seduced, so that you turn aside, serving other gods and worshipping them.*

¹⁷ *If you do, the anger of ADONAI will blaze up against you. He will shut up the sky, so that there will be no rain. The ground will not yield its produce, and you will quickly pass away from the good land ADONAI is giving you.*

Verse 36 again gives instruction in how God operates in such matters, and so explains that because the Lord teaches His followers by punishments then He also forgives when His people finally realize their sin, confess, repent, cease their bad behavior and change direction and return to the ways outlined in the Holy Scriptures. Nowhere do we find that simply BEING the redeemed of God is sufficient reason for the Lord to relent on His punishments due to our transgressions.

The 4th petition is in verses 37 -40 and it deals with the matter of plagues such as famine or pestilence or sickness. These are in response to God's regulations of Leviticus 26.

Leviticus 26:21-26 CJB

²¹ *"Yes, if you go against me and don't listen to me, I will increase your calamities sevenfold, according to your sins.*

²² *I will send wild animals among you; they will rob you of your children, destroy your livestock and reduce your numbers, until your roads are deserted.*

²³ *"If, in spite of all this, you refuse my correction and still go against me;*

²⁴ *then I too will go against you; and I, yes I, will strike you seven times over for your sins.*

25 I will bring a sword against you which will execute the vengeance of the covenant. You will be huddled inside your cities, I will send sickness among you, and you will be handed over to the power of the enemy.

26 I will cut off your supply of bread, so that ten women will bake your bread in one oven and dole out your bread by weight, and you will eat but not be satisfied.

And of course the Hebrew word **nega** is being translated more properly here in 1st Kings as plague, and indeed the idea of famine, pestilence, and sickness is the sort of thing inflicted upon the Egyptians. Here is yet the 3rd time that a petition is asking for restoration because of nation-wide trespasses; only the 1st petition so far deals with the sins of individuals. So, if by rebelling Israel is going to behave like Egypt then they are going to be punished like Egypt with **nega**, plagues.

And yet as we move into the second part of the 4th petition there is an interesting nuance that deals with matters of individuals in the midst of national catastrophes. What is a national sin except the sins of many individuals acting in concert? And it will never be that all of these individuals agree to STOP sinning and accept their error. So Solomon asks that as each individual repents (or not), God will determine who is sincere and who is not, and then act on an individual by individual basis based upon their own conduct. I don't think there is a more revealing aspect of the mysterious duality in which our Lord deals with mankind when it comes to redemption. On the one hand He deals with us each as a unique person, and on the other He deals with humanity as unique nations of people. Salvation and its attendant forgiveness is person by person; deliverance from national oppression is a group response. And one of the reasons that Solomon is asking the Lord to respond in this manner is because from it God's chosen people will learn to fear and obey Him.

The 5th petition makes a sharp turn and deals not with Israelites but with foreigners. The word for foreigners is **nokri** and it is quite different from the more familiar **ger**. A **nokri** is one who is a visitor to Israel, and is in no way part of Israel or by definition do they desire to be. A **ger** is a foreigner who has attached him or herself to Israel voluntarily. So these **nokri** that Solomon is praying about are NOT worshippers of Yehoveh, nor are they residents of the Promised Land. However because they have heard of the greatness of the God of Israel, and they venture a long distance to come to the Temple in Jerusalem to acknowledge Yehoveh's holiness and glory, then Solomon is asking that the Lord would hear their prayers even though they're not His people. And just like in the earlier petition when Solomon's reason for asking this is so that **Israel** will fear and obey God, so it is here that God will hear the prayers of these **foreign visitors** so that all the gentile pagan world will know who God is and fear Him.

This is in perfect alignment with Isaiah 56:7 when God says:

CJB Isaiah 56:7 *I will bring them to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples.*"

King **Shlomo's** petition on behalf of foreigners presents a sort of dual-edged sword. It is rightly said by preachers that it is the job of the church to spread the Gospel to every distant and remote place on this globe. And while there is joy in that thought, in some ways the knowledge of the God of Israel and His Son Yeshua is going to become a deadly curse. The joy is that many will hear of His greatness and become one of His. The curse is that the many others will hear of His greatness and reject it. I often tell groups I speak to that I've done them no favors in informing them of the Gospel because now they can't plead ignorance before the Lord; they are without excuse if they choose to ignore God's calling to them. The foreigners who come to the Temple in Jerusalem and worship YHWH as one among many gods, or worship Him but do not want to be part of His chosen people, or worship Him and do not see any connection between that and committing themselves to God's ways and commands, are dooming themselves to destruction, and they are without excuse.

King Shlomo's 6th petition to God is in verses 44 and 45; it has to do with Israel being engaged in war. When in verse 44 the expression is "no matter which way you send them", it is not speaking of their marching route. Rather the emphasis is that YOU sent them, meaning that Yehoveh has ordained they should go to battle, meaning that this is Holy War with the Lord God as their warrior chief. Thus they must observe the rules of Holy War and the Law of Herem (the spoils of war) if they want victory.

And since they are by definition away fighting an enemy, then Solomon's request is that when the soldiers merely pray TOWARDS the Temple in Jerusalem (from wherever they are) that their prayers will be heard NOT from inside the Temple, but as it says in verse 45, from heaven (yet another acknowledgment that God lives in heaven not in the Temple building). This passage is the primary reason for modern Jews having determined that no matter where they are in the world that they need to direct their prayers towards Jerusalem. Of course the real issue is not Jerusalem the city, but rather the Temple that is in the city; and as of now there is no Temple. So the direction of prayers towards Jerusalem contains the thought of remembering their homeland from wherever they are and showing God their desire to once again dwell there, and also the hope of looking towards the prophesied day when a new Temple will arise atop Mt. Moriah, signaling the coming of Messiah.

The 7th and final petition is still dealing with Israel's military, and it takes up the case of the army sinning, losing Yehoveh's protection, and thus also losing the battle and (worse yet) being captured and carried away to foreign soil as prisoners. We can only understand the nature of the "sinning" as having to do with violations of the law of Holy War. And just as Solomon asked for the civilian population of Israel as a whole congregation to be forgiven if they sin as a group (as a nation), now he asks the same for the army as a group (and a "group" points mainly at its leadership). And this is because obviously not every soldier is going to behave the same way; some might deliberately ignore God's Holy War laws while others don't. But all will be defeated and taken prisoners due to their leadership either fostering or condoning this wrong behavior, so all will feel the same consequences.

But if while they are still being held captive in a far-away land, the soldiers as a group see their wrong (meaning that their leadership is leading them in a repentant attitude), and they pray towards the Temple and ask for forgiveness, then FROM HEAVEN God is asked to hear and act (to **shema**) by showing compassion in influencing their captors to show mercy to these Hebrew soldiers. And one of the reasons that Solomon thinks that God should respond in **chesed**, loving kindness, towards these repentant soldiers is that they are part of Yehoveh's inheritance who God rescued so many centuries earlier from the oppressive hand of Egypt.

Verse 52 continues this same thought by asking that God hear the soldiers from wherever they are. This may seem like a minor thing to a modern day Believer, but to the mind of an ancient Hebrew this is something they would hope for but how much they believed it could happen is another matter. And this is because the entire world held to the precept that gods were territorial and nationally based. Therefore if a soldier was carried away captive to a foreign nation, there was NO chance for his personal god to ever hear him because that god was limited to operating within his own territory. That is why soldiers carried god idols with them so that if they should be captured, they could pray to that god idol and their god might be able hear them no matter where they were. It's also why it was common for the victorious army to confiscate the defeated army's idols in order to further demoralize them and end all hope.

But then verse 53 says something that I wish modern day Jews would remember, because I've met so many who deflect or deny it; it is that the Lord makes a distinction between the Hebrews and all other people on this planet. It is the Hebrews who the Lord chose as His inheritance and that distinction was cemented when Moses was given the covenant on Mt. Sinai. But many modern Jews don't want to be God's special people because to their way of thinking this has generally brought them nothing but trouble and destruction for centuries. They don't want to be thought of as exceptional, or as set-apart, they just want to be like everybody else. As **Tevye** says in that fabulous film *Fiddler on the Roof*, when his Jewish family and local

community has suffered from yet another indignation as a result of Russia's anti-Semitic bigotry and persecution: "God, I know, I know.... we are your chosen people; but once in a while couldn't you choose someone else?"

We'll finish up chapter 8 next week.